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## Mysticism rooted in the liturgy : based on the spiritual experiences of St Teresa of Jesus

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WACŁAW ŚWIERZAWSKI, KRAKÓW

## MYSTICISM ROOTED IN THE LITURGY

Based on the spiritual experiences  
of St Teresa of Jesus

"For many things depend on our understanding and knowledge of these matters, because, when we receive Holy Communion, great mysteries occur within our soul."

St Teresa of Avila, *The Relation* 57

The topic of the following article is intended to be a transposition and completion of the ancient and venerable saying *Legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*<sup>1</sup>, which has been circulating in a well-known abbreviated form: *Lex orandi — lex credendi*. Liturgy is the source of faith. Faith, ingrained in the soil of grace bestowed in liturgy, is the root of mysticism<sup>2</sup>, that mysterious divine-human plenitude within a man who, by the total offering up of himself, has opened himself to receive the love of Triune God, has accepted it and allowed it to conquer and transform him. Mysticism, then, is the fullness of faith. The lack of it indicates an incomplete immature faith, weak and infirm belief which might almost imply un-belief. In the history of the Church you can come across both of the above-mentioned phenomena, which occur in both the individual and social aspect. In certain periods the living faith can be felt pulsating in the veins of the Church, while in others the crisis of faith appears to be a serious disaster.

<sup>1</sup> *Indiculus „De gratia Dei“*, Denzinger 246.

<sup>2</sup> L. Bouyer, *Mystique, essai sur l'histoire d'un mot*, La Vie Spirituelle, Suppl. 9(1949)3—24. The adjectival expression for mystical experience (*mystikos*) has been changed into the nominal one by J. Görres (†1848). Since then "mysticism" has denoted THEORIA and PRAXIS=TECHNE, i.e., the very experience of God and the reflection upon that experience, philosophy or theology of mysticism. In the related branch the situation is terminologically better, where ascetism refers to the practical experience and ascetical theology deals with the theory of that experience. We are also familiar with early Christian liturgical terms TA MYSTYKA, indicating either the rite itself or the ritual objects, and 'OI MYSTIKOI — initiation into rites, which is subordinated to the process of mystagogy. Nowadays, some attempts of terminological systematization have been made, giving rise to the following terms: MYSTICISM — an experience, MYSTOLOGY (mystography) — a reflection or description, MYSTAGOGY — theoretical and practical initiation into mystical experience. Cf. I. Behn, *Spanische Mystik. Darstellung und Deutung*, Düsseldorf 1957, 8.

In order to support the Church during a great collapse of belief, St Teresa of Avila, who undertook the reform of the Carmelite Order, considered that the most efficient remedy consisted in the renewal of the real spiritual life. The *Mater spiritualium* not only herself, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, matured as ripe fruit in the garden of the Church, but "under the special guidance of God she was called to explain the secrets of mystical theology" (Benedict XIII) and "with the crown of holiness she interweaved the crown of wisdom" (Benedict XV). She saw her mission as pointing out that the Christian faith should be dynamic, full of light and power, that it must ascend mystical summits. She also used to share her experiences. She had a direct influence upon her spiritual daughters in the Carmelite Order, which developed so much owing to the reform she introduced. This influence has continued due to her presence in the Communion of the Saints and due to her numerous treatises which have been read for over 400 years since her death. What were roots of her ripe fruit? From what soil and what spring did that stream of living water flow, the stream which she had dreamed of since her childhood like the Samaritan woman of the Gospels, and which accomplished the miracle of divinization in her? How did Teresa achieve mature mysticism that brought about in her "this polyphonic, constantly rising song of glory to God in the Trinity, the Creator, Redeemer and Master"? (E. Stein).

In the homily promulgating St Teresa the Doctor of the Church (27 September, 1970), Pope Paul VI said: "She comes to us at a moment of tremendous effort of carrying out the reform and renewal of liturgical prayer". It seems a truism to say after the Pope's words that her mysticism, as any mysticism in the Church, was ingrained in the liturgy. But the suggestive remark made by the Pope arose perhaps from the awareness that the question is not so obvious. The problem is well known to the experts of mystical theology dealing with 16th and 17th century Spanish mystical works. They realize that such a formulation of the topic leads to a very serious theological problem. It refers to the very nature of spiritual life, in particular the link between these peaks of mature faith and sanctity. If we now quote the well-known contemporary theologian K. Rahner, that "the faithful of the future must be mystics; otherwise they will lose their faith", our problem acquires a fundamental importance.

However, many theologians do not agree with the statement that St Teresa's mysticism is rooted in the liturgy<sup>3</sup>. There has been

<sup>3</sup> For similar opinion see: A. Stolz, *Theologie der Mystik*, Regensburg 1936, 190; L. C o g n e t, *La Spiritualité moderne*, I. *L'essor: 1500—1650*, Paris 1966, who says: „Centrée sur l'expérience mystique, la spiritualité thérésienne tend à se réaliser d'abord dans la vie d'oraison, et elle accorde peu d'attention à d'autres formes de piété, par exemple à la liturgie". H. F i s c h e r (*Mystik in Sacramentum Mundi*, Freiburg, III, 1969, 658) blames Spanish mysticism for narrowing („unnötig und ungerechtfertigt eingeengt") caused by subjective psychologism.

almost nothing written from the academic point of view that could support the claim that St Teresa herself considered the liturgy as the source of her mystical experience and, hence, that she advised others to continue the inquiry in this direction.

Therefore, this seemingly individual problem, examined on the material of her own works, achieves a symbolic aspect. It implies a wider sense of the question, namely: is all Christian mysticism of every period, inspired by the liturgy? Do mystical treatises allow us to make such assumptions? In order to provide an adequate answer, we must first of all explain the basic terms of our thesis, because, as has already been shown by experience, misunderstandings often originate in the field of terminology. Subsequently, I should like to present the problem using the mystical theology of St Teresa as an example.

### 1. Mysticism — mystery — liturgy

Mysticism is not a biblical term. It simply does not appear in the Scriptures. This does not mean, however, that one cannot come across anything that refers to the nature of mysticism. The whole Bible is permeated with mystical interpretation<sup>4</sup>. God is described as the One who leaving man full freedom has given him the possibility of meeting God personally, experiencing Him, and, consequently, unveiling the mystery. The word and the act of God become attributes of the Person Incarnate, His Thou, revealing Himself to His friends. The whole Bible is a description of this divine theophany.

The true theology of mysticism has started with the first man, Adam. In the paradise God is close to the man created in His image and after His likeness (Gen 1:27). The encounter of man and God achieves its apogee in the Covenant (Gen 15:18), which becomes *consortium sermonis Dei* (cf. Exod 34:29; 2 Pet 1:4). Mystical traces can be observed in the encounter of God and Abraham (Gen 12:22), in Jacob's vision (Gen 32:25—31), in the revelation of JHWH: I AM THAT I AM (Exod 3:14), in the dialogue between God and Moses (Exod 33:7—11), in the further communication of the Word (Deut 1—6), in the Lord's words to Elijah (Kgs 19:8—14), in theophanies of JHWH to the prophets, in the Psalms or in the Canticles of Canticles, which with its poetic form has become the favourite motif of the bride-mysticism (*Brautmystik*).

In the New Testament what was only a shadow becomes transformed into reality. The epiphany of the Incarnate Logos is a fulfilment of the experience of the union with God in faith. This is foretold by the scenes in which Christ meets Nicodemus and the

<sup>4</sup> On this subject cf. H. Fischer, art. *Mystik*, *op. cit.*, 654—656.

Samaritan woman and by His constant referring to "I AM", Ego EIMI (Jn 4:26; 8:24,28,58; 13:19; 15:1) which calls for an answer from His partners. The summit of the mystical encounter with God is revealed by Jesus in the words: "I am the bread of life, the light of the world, the resurrection, the way, the truth and the life" (cf. Jn 6:35; 8:12; 11:25; 14:6).

The experience of God's self-imparting must take place in a thanksgiving humble acceptance and constant readiness. Synoptics wrote about knowing in ignorance, seeing in not seeing, finding in losing. "Anyone who finds his life will lose it", says the Lord; "anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it" (Mt 10:39). Anyway, the essential thing is to distinguish between the transient and that which "remains for ever" (1 Pet 1:23—25), to choose and to decide. One must come to know the secret of the Kingdom (Mk 4:11) hidden in the symbol of a letter, an image or a parable. And above all, one must recognize, with the living faith, the King and Lord Himself. Faith understood as knowledge would be mere information unable to cause conversion (*metanoia*) which results from the encounter with the Risen Lord. That meeting of His Person can be called an experience of faith through love. In other words, it is mysticism.

St Paul's teaching of the mystery has contributed to the introduction of that term to Christianity<sup>5</sup>. He was also the first to outline the shape of true mysticism, in which the notion "mystical", referring to human experience, was to acquire its meaning in accordance with the "mystery" conceived as the work of God. St Paul's *mysterion* means the fulfilment of God's design, which formerly was concealed, then in Christ revealed to people and during the times of the Church hidden again until the apocalyptic fulfilment of times. The goal and task of this design is to create close bonds between people and God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. The desire of God meets the desire of people. When they are eager to cooperate with Him, God enlightens and strengthens them with faith forming in them a response of gratitude — thanksgiving, while active Christlike love is being awoken in them. Here is the encounter of Christ and His Church in the living faith that incorporates the mystery into the interior of man, bringing about the continuous passage with Christ through death into the sphere of God.

Christian maturity, as presented in the Bible, has been more specified by the Fathers of the Church. The term *mystikos* — *mysticus* always appears as a correlate of the mystery and has its source in the economy of salvation performed by Christ in the mys-

<sup>5</sup> L. Cerfaux, *Mystique paulinienne*, La Vie Spirituelle, Suppl. 23(1952) 413—426; J. Coppens, *Le „Mystere" dans la théologie paulinienne et ses parallèles Qumraniens*, in: A. Descamps, *Littérature et théologie pauliniennes*, Tournai 1960, 142—165.

tery of Passover, which, for Him and for us, is a climactical experience<sup>6</sup>. What is more, the possibility of being brought closer to the mystery is explicitly connected with the liturgy of the Eucharist. That mystery is always made present during the celebration of the Eucharist, and this was not yet to be found in the teaching of St Paul. O. Casel († 1948)<sup>7</sup>, a monk of the Benedictine Order, has brought that teaching to light from the tradition of the Church and officially it was done by the Second Vatican Council: "Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister, «the same one now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross», but especially under the Eucharistic species. By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes. He is present in His word since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the church. He is present, finally, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised: «Where two or three are gathered together for my sake, there am I in the midst of them» (Mt 18:20). Christ indeed always associates the Church with Himself in the truly great work of giving perfect praise to God and making men holy. The Church is His dearly beloved Bride who calls to her Lord, and through Him offers worship to the Eternal Father" (SC 7).

For many theologians of the patristic age, mystery is associated with the spiritual sense of the Bible, the word of God. In biblical exegesis this means a transitus from the literal sense, also accessible to the nonbelievers, to the grasp of the mystery of Christ. It is, first of all, liturgy that deals with the spiritual exegesis; in the liturgy Christ reveals His presence through the words uttered. In the mysticism so defined, the dominant role falls to the theology, dogma and kerygma elicited from the biblical history of salvation. This objective dimension of the mystery models our faith being the object of faith as well as the norm and dynamic principle of its full maturity.

Pseudo-Dionisios Areopagite (505) was the first to speak of mystical theology as a synonym to mysticism. He emphasized the mystical character of theology, demanding thus that theologians should be involved in love and contemplation, beside intellectual cognition<sup>8</sup>. The shift of focus from the objective to the subjective

<sup>6</sup> L. Bouyer, *Mysterion, La Vie Spirituelle*, Suppl. 23(1952)397—413.

<sup>7</sup> O. Casel OSB, *Das christliche Kultmysterium*, Regensburg 1960, and *Die Liturgie als Mysterienfeier*, Freiburg in Br. 1923, and *Glaube, Gnosis, Mysterium*, Münster 1941. This subject was worked on by A. Mayer—B. Neunheuser, *Vom christlichen Mysterium*, Düsseldorf 1951.

<sup>8</sup> H. de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum, L'Eucharistie et l'Église au Moyen Age*, Paris 1949. Cf. also W. Świerzawski, *Mysterium Christi*, Kraków 1975, 223—229.

had considerable consequences — in the Middle Ages and later on — for the understanding of mystical experience. The testimonies of mystics contain fewer and fewer descriptions of the object of mystical experience. Since St Augustine, who coined the term *docta ignorantia*, the knowledge of God is understood as incomprehensible unity achieved by the silence of mind and loving confidence. Mystics do not tell who God is, but record their experiences and leave the mysterious person of Ineffable God to theologians who, as a tool for their research, introduce philosophy.

The following résumé may, as any rough summary, have a number of blanks and is incapable of grasping the whole truth. One should not forget, however, that the golden period of the Middle Ages prolonged the continuity of the biblical theology with its profoundly elaborated mysticism based on St Paul's theology of the mystery<sup>9</sup>. We can come across organic syntheses of such a view in *Summa aurea* by William of Auxerre (1231), in *De Sanctissimo corpore Christi* by St Bonaventure (1274), *Summa theologica* and *Compendium Theologiae* by St Thomas Aquinas, in *Opus Tertium* and *Philosophia Moralis* by Roger Bacon (1294). They treat the Eucharist as the source of all mystical experiences, which often occur during the Holy Mass, especially in the very act of Communion. "During the Holy Mass in Naples", K. Michalski, CM, wrote about St Thomas Aquinas' experience, "he had, as it were, pierced with his thought the border-line between the two worlds, so that thereafter he rather belonged to the other one"<sup>10</sup>. The biographies of his contemporaries — theologians and mystics — contain a large number of such accounts.

Nevertheless, starting with the late Middle Ages the views began to change, especially under the influence of non-Christian mysticism, popular in the Renaissance, such as: Greek, Jewish, Arabic or that of the Far East — "christened" by theologians, though not quite consequently. Mysticism became *cognitio Dei experimentalis* — the empirical knowledge of God. The stress is put on the transformation of the soul opened to the action of God. However, instead of reading the Bible, people got fascinated by that learned ignorance, *docta ignorantia*. In the history of the spiritual life, there

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<sup>9</sup> It is worth reminding here that the word "mysticism" originates from the Greek MYEIN — i.e., to shut one's eyes and mouth in order to achieve a proper distance to the external phenomena and be able to focus the inner sight on the person of Christ living in one's heart.

<sup>10</sup> E. Longpré, *Eucharistie et expérience mystique*, in: *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, IV, 1960, 1586—1621. Cf. also St Thomas Aquinas about the Mystery in: M. J. de Guillaou, *Le Christ et l'Église. Théologie du Mystère*, Paris 1963, and W. Świerzawski, "God and the Mystery of His Wisdom in the Pauline Commentaries of Saint Thomas Aquinas", *Divus Thomas* (Piacenza) 4(1971)466—500.

are such mystical masterpieces and their interpretations according to which it is not necessary to begin with reading and understanding the Bible in order to achieve a spiritual change resulting in the divinization of man. They suggest just the opposite, namely, that owing to the spiritual experience one obtains the comprehension of the Word of God. Is Teresa not said to have known the Bible from liturgical readings only? Indeed, you can be immersed in the mystery of death and resurrection by humility and the poverty of obedience as deep as by great theology, but on one condition: that you take the Word of God and the presence of Christ in the Eucharist from the hands of the Church as a real fact.

Here we have arrived at the gist of the matter. True Christian mysticism is built on the Gospel and the eucharistic liturgy, and that is why it is always closely connected with the congregation of the Church and the Communion of Saints. Did, then, the Spanish mysticism of the 16th century, by scrutinizing the inner life of the individuals, narrow the evangelic and theological outlook down to the individualistic model rather than the communitarian, which it has been accused of by some theologians, e.g., A. Stolz OSB, L. Cognet, H. Fischer? Even though, they claim, this experience consists in meeting Christ, the place of the encounter seems to be the soul of an individual rather than the community of the Church. On the other hand, can we say that making such a clear-cut border-line and antinomy between the theology of mysticism and mystical theology has contributed to the grasping of real mysticism? To approach it properly, another distinction should be made, i.e., that between the theology of mysticism and the psychology of mysticism. The subject of the psychology of mysticism is experience, while, in theology it is the history of salvation with its crucial event of the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Exaggeration in examining the psychological side can be disastrous, since it may shadow the evangelic sense of meeting God.

Modern theology of mysticism is unanimous in admitting that perfection on the way from faith to its mystical completion can be measured not by the experience of being united to God but by obedience, which maintains the unity even in the state of being apparently abandoned by God. In addition, the theology claims that the nature of mystical experience goes beyond the psychological dimension and can be neither described nor explained by means of the phenomenological method. It remains unexpressed and unexplained<sup>11</sup>. It is worth mentioning here that the followers of the Master have not been promised mystical experience. The Church and every Christian within her body participate in Christ's lot. Any

<sup>11</sup> W. Beierwaltes — H. U. von Balthasar — A. M. Haas, *Grundfragen der Mystik*, Einsiedeln 1974.

member of the Church is crucified with Christ, buried with Him, co-risen from the dead and lives with Him the life of heaven (cf. Rom 6:4—5; 1 Cor 11:26). The acceptance of God's will is then the essential criterion of Christian perfection.

All exaggerated forms in the descriptions of mystical experience and the reflections upon it, so much popularized due to the influence of Plato, Plotyn, his disciples and Filo, and introduced to the theology of mysticism by Orygenes, St Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionisios, might well be questioned then. We should be also critical about certain suggestions of Carmelite theologians that a really perfect man must die in the ecstasy of love. Bernanos in his *Dialogues des Carmelites*, as it was mentioned by H. Urs von Balthasar, wrote that a mystic might also die in fear. Since the Christian never has his cross behind himself, he cannot be sure whether the dark night of the spirit will not come and threaten him with despair — "death-sickness", as Kierkegaard would say.

The ideal of Christian perfection involves constant vigilance<sup>12</sup>. This means readiness to accept the will of the Father by following Christ and being open to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The shift of the emphasis from experience to readiness is responsible for a slight change in the character of mysticism. First of all, from this viewpoint the phenomenon of experience is ascribed relative value to, or rather it is handled with more precision. This is what Thomas Aquinas, the great mystic and theologian, managed to do. He reminded us that a man of faith who follows Christ, receives the gifts of the Holy Spirit and collaborates with them achieves the empirical knowledge of God, especially through the gift of wisdom, perfecting all other gifts (*sapere* — to taste). Maturity so conceived means the love of God and brothers, without which everything is like „sounding brass" (cf. 1 Cor 13:1); it means pure intention expressed in action or contemplation, it also means the primacy of the mystery, into which we are introduced by the gifts of knowledge and understanding and which transforms the readiness of our faith into a specific experience of participation in the mystery of the Cross, Resurrection and Pentecost.

Such mysticism develops according to the logic of faith. It lives on food other than analyses of human interior life. It lives on the mystery — not only that expressed in words, but chiefly that based on experience. Hence, true mysticism requires liturgy, whereas participation in liturgy requires mystical depth. Here is the core of the problem. Authentic mysticism always acquires a trinitarian aspect. Therefore it is also christological, pneumatological and sacramental

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<sup>12</sup> A. Stolz, *Theologie der Mystik*, op. cit., 191.

— built up on the liturgical life<sup>13</sup>. Extra-sacramental influence of the Holy Spirit without implantation in the eucharistic and ecclesial Body of Christ is impossible in the Church, because the actual relationship between God and man is not obtained by thinking about Him, creating intellectual or emotional constructions, even poems or psalms, but by ontological union with Christ, who remains in the Son's obedience to the Father. Mysticism then is rooted in the Eucharist. However, mysticism is not only to induce in man praise and thanksgiving, it should also create and prepare people for the moment when in New Jerusalem "we shall rest and watch, watch and love, we shall love and adore. That is what shall be in the end but without end. Since we have no other end as to reach the Kingdom that has no end"<sup>14</sup>.

Mysticism, then, is a kind of "transpsychological experience" of being immersed in the stream of God's life owing to the sacraments, especially the Eucharist<sup>15</sup>. Everybody may desire such an experience of God, because mysticism is not an extraordinary way to sanctity reserved only for a few chosen persons. As we read in the documents of the Second Vatican Council (*Constitution on the Church* 11), perfect sanctity is the destination of all the baptized, which implies that the mature faith must be based on sacramental and liturgical grounds and it must be organically connected with active love embodied in everyday life. The love constitutes a necessary completion of the partaking in the Body of the Eucharist.

The essential peculiarity of the mature faith, e.i., mysticism, lies in stressing neither the advantage of the communication with Christ nor the way it is experienced, but the important fact is whether He will find in man what He wants to find — the fulfilment of God's will. *Mystikos* becomes ingrained in the objective *mysterion*, from which it takes its origin. As a stream of living water flowing with tremendous energy out of the hidden source, it becomes the principle of life — this was particularly distinct in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the archetype of any mature faith. She is wholly the answer given to God. With Her immense humility and simplicity She is a figure beyond Hegel's system of logic. This type of mysticism is expressed in the language of the Incarnation, the Cross, the Descension to the inferos, the Ascension, the sending of the Holy Spirit and eschatology; the language of God's revelation — of God's Word, which comes so close to silence! (Cf. the prayer of the Lord's sage — Wis 18:14—15.) This is the outline of our problem, which can be summed up: mysticism rooted in the liturgy.

<sup>13</sup> H. U. von Balthasar, *Zur Ortsbestimmung christlicher Mystik*, in: *Grundfragen der Mystik*, op. cit., 39—71. H. de Lubac, Introduction to the monography by A. Ravier, *La Mystique et les mystiques*, Paris 1965, 21—27.

<sup>14</sup> St Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* XX, 30, 4.

<sup>15</sup> A. Stoiz, *Theologie der Mystik*, op. cit., 246.

Does the Spanish mysticism of the 16th and 17th centuries, particularly that of St Teresa of Avila, conform to such a framework? Does it meet the above mentioned criteria? This is the subject matter of the second part of the argument, which is based on the writings of St Teresa and some commentaries of the Carmelite school.

## 2. The liturgy as the source of St Teresa's mystical experience

In the 16th century, to which St Teresa belongs, liturgy was understood in accordance with the Trent tradition. It was synchronized in a way, with the contemporary concept of spiritual life. Still not long before that time mysticism had been regarded as the most ambiguous and instable term in theology<sup>16</sup>. A similar opinion concerning liturgy existed in many circles. In order to maintain that liturgy was the source of Teresa's mystical experience, we must, with all possible caution, highlight the actual contents of her writings. We should not, then, expect to find in her works a dynamic aspect of liturgy, as the one presented by the Second Vatican Council. What we can see here is rather a static model, more like a heavy altar retable of the baroque churches than like a modern table of one Bread — facing the people in front of it. However, this is not yet the point.

The living faith is the gate to mysticism, i.e., the experience of God's intimacy. For Teresa faith is a spiritual and personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Her mysticism is christologically oriented, but, as she understands it, also eucharistocentric and trinitarian. We admit that the topic of our investigation could be limited to the eucharistocentric dimension, just because of the kind of the data collected from her writings. The subject would be as follows: Holy Communion as the source of St Teresa of Jesus' mystical experience. The reason of my going beyond this frame lies in the fact that Teresa, in her mystical experience, acknowledged not only the importance of the Eucharist but also that of the Liturgy of the Hours. The Carmelite and the Benedictine traditions alike, not only place *opus Dei* in the focus of each day but also regard it as a school of zealous prayer. Teresa herself described the event when „after the Matins the brothers did not leave to have a rest but stayed until the Prime so deeply immersed in prayer that when they were leaving for the Prime, their frocks were all covered with snow, although they did not even notice that”<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> M. Grabmann, *Wesen und Grundlagen der katholischen Mystik*, München 1923, 20. K. Rahner, *Die ewige Bedeutung der Menschheit Jesu für unser Gottesverhältniss*, in: *Schriften zur Theologie*, III, Einsiedeln 1961, 47—61.

<sup>17</sup> F 14,7 (II, 437). Teresa's texts are quoted from the two-volume collection translated by Bishop H. P. Kossowski, Kraków 1962, and marked according

In her autobiography we read: "It was during saying the Hours when You, Lord, answered me: «Be My servant and do not care for others!» These were the first words I heard from You and this was the first time I heard You speak to me"<sup>18</sup>. During the liturgical prayer Christ would speak to Teresa<sup>19</sup> and come into her sight. With His image before her eyes she often received Holy Communion: "This vision, I assure you, brought me great advantage then and it still does — whenever I look back on it, especially after Holy Communion"<sup>20</sup>. Hence, the Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Letter of September 27, 1970 — the day of her proclamation as Doctor of the Church — wrote: "Christ is the centre of her spiritual teaching — He who reveals the Father and joins us to Him and makes us one with Himself. The union with Christ is achieved at the table of the Word of God through constant meditation on the Gospel and at the table of Christ's Body and Blood during the sacrificial meal of the Eucharist. At those two tables the humanity of Christ introduces a man who gives himself utterly to Christ into the mystery of death, resurrection and glorious life with the Father. For this reason the holy Humanity of Christ is all our good and salvation. The highest perfection is reached only by a man who is able to say: To me to live is Christ".

Before we immerse ourselves in the detailed presentation of Teresian material, let us return to the reproach mentioned in the first part of this essay. If A. Stolz, OSB, puts in opposition the Spanish introspective mysticism of 16th and 17th century<sup>21</sup> and the sacramental mysticism, and V. Breton is surprised that theoreticians of contemplation do not appreciate the importance of the Eucharist as the way to contemplation<sup>22</sup> and union with God — on what grounds are their assumptions made? Indeed, St John of the Cross did not write about the influence of the Eucharist upon mystical experience, even though he had great devotion for the Blessed Sacrament and used to spend hours before the altar<sup>23</sup>. Nevertheless, the mystical itinerary of St Teresa begins with her belief in the presence of Christ's Humanity in the Blessed Sacrament and with her union with Christ in the Eucharist. The itinerary is completed by the union with the Trinity, the Living God, but this always through the Word

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to the key used there: L — *Life*, R — *Spiritual Relations*, W — *The Way of Perfection*, I — *The Interior Castle*, C — *Conceptions on the Love of God*, E — *Exclamations of the Soul to God*, F — *Book of Foundations*.

<sup>18</sup> L 19,9 (I, 221).

<sup>19</sup> L 34,2 (I, 397).

<sup>20</sup> L 40,5 (I, 485).

<sup>21</sup> A. Stolz, *Theologie der Mystik*, op. cit., 190.

<sup>22</sup> V. Breton, *La vie de prière*, Paris 1948, 106.

<sup>23</sup> St. Jean de la Croix, *Quelques traits de sa vie d'après le témoignage de ses contemporaines*, Nova et Vetera 32(1957)61—63.

Incarnate: man should become one with Christ in order to return to the Father in the Holy Spirit.

Even rough introductory acquaintance with St Teresa's writings proves that apart from the rich material regarding this subject in every book of hers, from her *Life, Spiritual Relations* (a treatise on graces and enlightenments), *The Way of Perfection* (an ascetic treatise), *The Interior Castle* (mystical treatise), *Conceptions on the Love of God* up to the *Book of Foundations*, apparently the most distant from our subject, she wrote a separate treatise, *Exclamations of the Soul to God*, which is a series of meditations inspired by Holy Communion (1579).

Her great adventure of having intimate contact with her Beloved takes place mainly before, during or after Holy Communion. She wrote: "The Eucharistic daily Bread is to give us strength for a more generous life, and the moment of Holy Communion is the most precious occasion for entering close and intimate friendship with God"<sup>24</sup>. The most essential point, which sets the mystical experience in an objective light, is the living faith in the presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. It is He who leads man to sanctity — He coming in Holy Communion and present there. "I have seen the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament living among us"<sup>25</sup>. "When on receiving the Eucharist I remember that the same magnificent Majesty whom I have seen is present there, in the Eucharist, or when the Lord — which often happens — deigns to appear to my eyes in the Host, I am terrified and I feel as if I did not exist. And when I see such grand Majesty hidden in such a tiny thing as the Host, then my soul really stops in admiration for wisdom so immense"<sup>26</sup>.

This vivid awareness of Christ being present in the Eucharist is expressed most explicitly in the following words: "God has given her (Teresa is speaking about herself) such an intense faith that, when she sometimes heard others express their wish to have lived in the times of Christ, she smiled at that, because having the Lord in the Eucharist as true as when he was still in his mortal body, she could not imagine what else might still be desired"<sup>27</sup>. Here is the cornerstone of Teresa's experience. All that she experienced and wrote down for the future generations was not only a truth about her but it was also gazing upon the One who was all to her. "He Himself, in His divine grace, was a real book for me in which I saw His truths recorded. Blessed be that book which engraves in the

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<sup>24</sup> From Teresa's meditation on "Give us this day our daily bread". W 33, 34,35 (I, 752--764).

<sup>25</sup> L 36,6 (I, 423).

<sup>26</sup> L 38—19—21 (I, 458).

<sup>27</sup> W 34,6 (I, 760).

soul the knowledge of what to read and what to do so deeply that what was once acquired cannot be forgotten"<sup>28</sup>.

Speaking about Christ present in the Eucharist and revealed through faith, St Teresa clearly emphasized: "Almost every time I saw Jesus as the risen Lord; He appeared as such in the Host as well. Occasionally, to strengthen me when I was in tribulation, He showed His wounds to me; sometimes, but seldom, I saw Him on the cross, in Gethsemane, wearing a crown of thorns; several times, but always — as I said — for supporting me in my needs or for the consolation of other souls, He stood in front of me with the burden of His cross; each time, however, He appeared in the risen glorified body"<sup>29</sup>. "Here you have Him", she wrote, "free of torment, full of glory, giving might to some and stimulating others before His Ascension. You have Him here, in the Blessed Sacrament, since He has made Himself our companion, as if unable, so to say, to bear being away for a single moment"<sup>30</sup>.

As we can see in the texts quoted above, to Teresa the Eucharist was all: it was the burning centre of her fervent engagement. "Everything only through the hands of this holy Humanity (...), through this gate we are to enter (...), along this way you can proceed safely (...), study His life (...)"<sup>31</sup>. It should also be said, however, that Teresa considered the Eucharist to be the place of Christ's and our sacrifice — to be a presence dynamic and, consequently, closer to the organic unity of Christ's presence at Mass, at Communion and in the soul. "Once, after Communion, I was revealed how our Father receives the sacrifice of Christ's holiest Body in our souls. As far as I could comprehend and see, the Three Persons of the Trinity are present there and the sacrifice of His Son is unutterably pleasant to the Father; He rejoices in Him and He has a delight in Him here, on earth, since then not only His Humanity but also His Divinity is living in our souls. Therefore this sacrifice is so pleasing and delightful to Him that He works such marvels for us"<sup>32</sup>. "In order that the Lord could come to the soul and make it one with Himself, the soul should — with all her courage — try to become similar to Him and, after Him, ready to make a sacrifice of herself in many things, denying her rights"<sup>33</sup>.

Thus, the static aspect of the Eucharist referring to adoration is completed by Teresa with the dynamic process. The starting point

<sup>28</sup> L 26,5 (I, 302).

<sup>29</sup> L 29,4 (I, 331).

<sup>30</sup> L 22,6 (I, 254). Jesus' Humanity seen by St Teresa in the Eucharist was revealed to her as the glorified body: "During the Holy Mass on the day of St Paul I saw the blessed Humanity of Christ as it is represented on pictures — risen, full of unutterable grace and majesty". L 28,3 (I, 318).

<sup>31</sup> L 22,6 (I, 255).

<sup>32</sup> R 57 (I, 582).

<sup>33</sup> L 31,22 (I, 368).

is the love of the Lord present in the Eucharist<sup>34</sup>. This awareness arising from the deeper and deeper knowledge of the mutual bridal relation with Christ takes on the form of an appeal to man for offering oneself as a sacrifice. Teresa knew very well that true perfection consists in devotion full of readiness. The proof of love is to follow Christ the Lord in His torment and self-sacrifice. One must give oneself up to the Lord offering Himself to us; give one's part, but accept His as well. To give oneself up without retaining anything means to desire suffering and to accept it. "As long as there is still a little life left, which for some of us may be even shorter than we expect, let us do our best in offering a sacrifice up to the Lord with our soul and body. And the Lord will join it to the great sacrifice which He offered for us to the Father on the cross — in order that our sacrifice may acquire full value and merit thereby, not according to the scantiness of our deeds but due to the good will and love which underlay our sacrifice"<sup>35</sup>. Helpless by way of poverty and humility, Teresa says: "What else can I do, o Lord, than offer You this Holy Bread — and having received it from You, give it back to You?"<sup>36</sup>. These texts begin to expose the basic thread connecting the Eucharist with the passive mystical states. In the feeling of the soul's passivity Teresa saw the essential feature of contemplation. Making an outline of the proper area of mysticism the Saint applied a psychological — an empirical — test: thus, contemplation is the state of prayer in which the soul totally open and ready is experiencing God's action.

Such a state of being open to the word of God and accepting it is just the main act of the Church's liturgy, in which two phases can be distinguished in this respect: receiving the Word as the word and receiving the Word that has become the Body. The first occurs in the Liturgy of the Word, which consists of readings from the Scriptures, and the second takes place during Communion. The central and most important function of the Holy Mass, i.e. of the memory of our Lord (*memoria, anamnesis*) — not only the memory of His Passion but also the memory of His whole life and existence — consists in the fact that all we describe as the paschal mystery, though this is not called so by Teresa, is made present not only objectively on the altar but also subjectively within our souls. If "there is a preparation such as required for proper receiving of Him"<sup>37</sup> — if, then,

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<sup>34</sup> "I can see this clearly and cannot deny that You, my Beloved, are all given to me. You came to the world for me, for me You have gone through such toil and pain, for me You have given Yourself to such a cruel torment, for me You have remained to live in the Blessed Sacrament and now You impart so unutterable a delight to me!" I 4,10 (II, 284).

<sup>35</sup> I 4,15 (II, 235).

<sup>36</sup> W 35,5 (I, 767).

<sup>37</sup> W 34,5 (I, 757).

a proper reception of the Lord occurs, the Eucharist becomes a sacrament of Christ's interior revelation.

St Teresa saw a very important problem: not everyone of those who receive Communion is aware of this inconceivable miracle of meeting the Living God, the Bridegroom. "And although You, my Lord, are living in the Blessed Sacrament in Your whole Majesty, they, lacking the living faith, cannot see You but in the humiliation of the species of bread, and You do not speak to them, since they are not worthy of hearing Your words"<sup>38</sup>. She suffered when she saw the fruitless Communions received frigidly, by routine: "O miserable world", she wrote, "veiling the eyes of your inhabitants so much that they cannot see the riches for which they could obtain eternal treasures"<sup>39</sup>.

The living faith as an obvious criterion of the authenticity of a mystical experience is the meeting point of the objective presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the subjective perception of Him in the soul of the faithful. Such a faith is the beginning of all that is done in a man receiving Christ. "I also know", Teresa wrote, "about the soul who for many years, though she was not so perfect yet, at the moment of receiving Holy Communion felt the presence of the coming Christ so vividly as if she had Him before her eyes. Awakening deep faith she greeted Him who was descending into a poor dwelling of her soul and, having abandoned all external things, she hid herself with Him in her heart. There, very much collected, she gathered all her senses in order that they could also feel the great good and would not disturb the soul in its enjoyment. She knelt and wept at the Lord's feet as Magdalene had done, as if she could see Him with her bodily eyes in the house of the Pharisee. And even though she could not feel piety, her faith was telling her that her comfort was there"<sup>40</sup>.

For Teresa, the Eucharist became the school of that profound "understanding without understanding"<sup>41</sup>, the *Biblia pauperum*, the source of interior life ascending the summits. Once she understood that „since the moment of His Ascension, He (Christ) has never descended to the earth and imparted Himself to anybody but in the

<sup>38</sup> C 1,10—11 (II, 248).

<sup>39</sup> C 3,13 (II, 277).

<sup>40</sup> W 34,7 (I, 760).

<sup>41</sup> L 18, 14 (I, 213). Teresa wrote a lot about the influence of the Eucharist on one's understanding of faith. Cf. also: "After Communion today the Lord has given me a grace of this kind of prayer (prayer of rest) and, as it were, He locked me within it so that I could not proceed any further. He gave me the idea of those comparisons, taught me how to express them and what the soul should do then, so that I got surprised and terrified that I could comprehend all this in one moment". L 16,2 (I, 196). We may presuppose here the influence of St Thomas Aquinas, whom she may have known being under spiritual guidance of Father Bañez, a well-known theologian and tomist.

Blessed Sacrament"<sup>42</sup>; the time of the Holy Mass or of the Liturgy of the Hours became not only a gate to heaven for her but even "the open heaven"<sup>43</sup>. That is why she proclaimed with such a great emphasis that "the holiest Humanity of Christ should on no account be considered as an obstacle for contemplation"<sup>44</sup>. She taught her sisters: "When you have received Holy Communion and have the Lord really in your soul, try to close your bodily eyes and open the eyes of your soul — look at Him living in your heart. I have already told you and I repeat this and shall be constantly repeating that if you acquire this holy custom to cling to Christ whenever you receive Him in the Eucharist and if you are eager to have such a pure conscience that will allow you to rejoice in this holiest gift frequently, be sure that the Divine Bridegroom will not come hidden so much that He would not be recognizable to you in some way or other, in accordance with the ardour of your desire to see Him. And even more, your desire can increase to such an extent that He will show Himself to you without a veil"<sup>45</sup>.

Entering the deeper and deeper intimacy with Christ received in the Eucharist, which is so much like entering heaven, Teresa experiences closer unity with Him. "My soul is becoming one with the Holiest Body of the Lord, whom I have really seen with my eyes. This has very much affected me and has caused great spiritual progress"<sup>46</sup>. Even her spiritual father's advice to receive the Eucharist less frequently (sometimes once a fortnight only) did not worry her; for the sake of obedience she willingly confined herself to spiritual communion<sup>47</sup>. That even intensified her spiritual desires, multiplied her longings and also contributed to Teresa's constantly accompanying her Beloved, already present in her soul. The Lord living in heaven, present in the tabernacle, present in the Host is now present in man. The awareness of the "new location" of Christ brings about the phenomenon called introspective mysticism, which focuses its attention on the object of knowledge hidden in the subject pursuing the knowledge, that is on God living in man. "In the spiritual communion the love of Jesus is being embedded unusually deep in the soul and whenever you prepare yourself to receive Him, He will not fail to bestow His graces and gifts by various means, incomprehensible for us.

<sup>42</sup> R 15 (I, 551).

<sup>43</sup> L 39,22 (I, 479).

<sup>44</sup> L 22,8 (I, 256). More on this subject: M. Buisson, *La présence du Christ dans l'oeuvre et la mystique de sainte Thérèse*, Paris 1963 and E. del Sagrado Corazon, *Doctrina y veneración de santa Teresa sobre el misterio de Cristo*, *Revista de espiritualidad* 22(1963)773—812.

<sup>45</sup> W 34,12 (I, 763).

<sup>46</sup> R 49 (I, 578).

<sup>47</sup> F 6,22 (II, 391).

Our Lord is like a fire, which though big and strong, will not warm you if you keep far from it, and you will get cold, though perhaps less than if you could not see it at all; but when you come near and hold out your hands towards it, the cold will cease: you will be refreshed and pervaded with delightful warmth. Thus, Jesus the Lord is a great fire spreading the warmth of His love around, but only one who approaches that fire closely will be warmed by it. When the soul is well prepared by the desire to receive Him and achieve union with Him, a single spark of that fire falling upon her will light her all and a single moment spent with Him will leave the soul fervent for long hours<sup>48</sup>.

The Eucharist is also the spring from which the mystical river of Teresa's unusual paramystical experience flows out, more connected with matter, picture and imagination — and also controversial in evaluation. Some, such as Butler and Saudreau, regard these phenomena as a normal stage in the development of spiritual life. Others, e.g., Poulain or Richstätter, see a difference between the development of grace and extraordinary experience. Teresa did not know such arguments. In the eucharistic encounter with Christ she simply became enriched with the experience of faith pregnant with love; through this experience she could participate in the mystery of the Cross, Resurrection, Pentecost and also in the interior life of the Holy Trinity. She described this in the following words: "Perhaps only one who deliberately wants to be blind and deprives oneself of one's reason cannot see the obvious truth that this is not only creating a picture of the Lord in one's imagination, as when, for example, we imagine Him crucified or in other mysteries of His Passion, but that He really lives in us after Communion and we need not look for Him in any distant place. So, if we know that, as long as our natural body warmth does not consume the sacramental species, sweetest Jesus is with us, do not let us then waste those precious moments but let us try to become one with Him as much as possible.

If during His life on the earth a mere touch of His cloak cured the sick, who can doubt that, if we only believe, He will work marvels in us and, in turn for it that we have received Him in our house, He will give us everything that we ask for. For His Divine Majesty is never stingy in paying for our inn when He finds cordial reception there<sup>49</sup>.

Among the miracles that God performs in us we may probably also count the imaginary visions of Christ. There are three kinds of visions and supernatural voices distinguished in mystical theology, namely: those addressed to the senses, to the imagination and to

<sup>48</sup> W 35,1 (I, 765).

<sup>49</sup> W 34,8 (I, 760).

the mind, i.e., intellectual, purely spiritual ones. They intensify our love for the Present One. "After this vision the soul remains transformed and, as it were, constantly permeated with God. It begins to love God anew — with a very intense living love"<sup>50</sup>. About her vision of Christ of the second kind Teresa said: "If the image appears, this is an image of a living man and not a lifeless picture. This is living Jesus Christ, who is man and God at the same time, not as He was in the grave but as He is after the Resurrection. He sometimes comes with such dignity that it is hardly possible to doubt that it is He, the Lord Himself. This happens especially after Communion, when faith alone assures us of His presence in us. Then He proves to be the Lord of His mansion in such a way that the soul, as it were, becomes annihilated before Him and feels all absorbed in Christ"<sup>51</sup>.

After Holy Communion she once reached the climax of mystical experience: an intellectual vision of the Holy Trinity. "After Communion on St Augustine's day", Teresa wrote, "in a way which is beyond my power to express (I only know that it was an intellectual vision and it disappeared in a moment) I was given an insight into the way in which the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity, whose image is engraved in my soul, are one being. This knowledge came to me in such an extraordinary image and in light so brilliant that the impact of this vision was quite different from the knowledge given by faith. Since then I have never been able to think about one of the Three Persons and not see Them all in one spirit. After such a vision", says the saint, "the soul gets more advantage — neither knowing nor understanding how it happens — than after years of meditation"<sup>52</sup>. She ascribed these enlightenments to the power of the Word of God, who not only penetrates the soul with His voice but also enlightens the mind to enable it to know the truth and instigate the will to eager action"<sup>53</sup>. Teresa's activity found its expression in contemplation — on the ways of prayer, described in *The Interior Castle* — and also in numerous foundations for religious communities<sup>54</sup>.

This was the way in which she was growing to the accomplishment of mystical maturity. Seeing Christ with the eyes of faith she allowed the Lord to lead her to the highest summits of sanctity. Looking at the Host and, later, at the Face of the Beloved in her soul with the same disposition, immersed in light and Love, she was

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<sup>50</sup> L 28,9 (I, 323). About the relation of the Eucharist to spiritual visions, see: P. de Juvigny, *Sainte Thérèse de Jesus à l'école du Christ*, Paris 1947; M. Le pée, *Sainte Thérèse d'Avila. Le réalisme chrétien*, Paris 1947.

<sup>51</sup> L 28,2 (I, 322).

<sup>52</sup> R 47 (Graces and Enlightenments) (I, 576—577).

<sup>53</sup> F 28,15—16 (II, 563).

<sup>54</sup> F 29,6 (II, 584).

gradually becoming the One whom she received. She wrote her works minded in this way. "Since today's Communion I have had the feeling as if it were not me who utters the words I write; it seems to me I see in a dream what I see and I wish I could see around me only such people who suffer from the same disease that I am now affected by. I entreat you", she wrote to her spiritual son Garcia of Toledo, "let us all be fools for the love of Him who, for us, let others take Him for a fool"<sup>55</sup>.

Carmelite theologians responded to St Teresa's appeal: influenced by her material, they worked out theories of mystical experience as connected with the Eucharist and, in a wider sense, with the liturgy. To those belong, first of all, Philip of the Holy Trinity († 1671) and Anthony of the Holy Spirit († 1674). The former, who had not only deep knowledge of theology but also good acquaintance with mystical phenomena, in his work *Summa Theologiae Mysticae*, attempted to present a synthesis of mysticism rooted in the liturgy, and he dilated upon the role of the Eucharist, during which "celebratur matrimonium spirituale"<sup>56</sup>. The latter, in his *Directorium mysticum*, wrote upon this matter similarly: "Bibunt namque amici, sed solum charissimi inebriabuntur"<sup>57</sup>.

Today, following the words of Paul VI uttered when he proclaimed St Teresa of Jesus Doctor of the Church: "She is coming to us at a moment of tremendous effort of carrying out the reform and renewal of liturgical prayer", we should pay more attention to the mutual relations between liturgy and mysticism. The Church needs their organic synthesis, in which, due to contemplation, the liturgy acquires spiritual depth, and its spirit, the spirit of prayer arising from the dynamic mystery of the Present Lord, can be embodied in everybody's life more easily, confessing, in the heart of the world, that Jesus is God.

<sup>55</sup> L 16,6 (I, 199).

<sup>56</sup> Philip of the Holy Trinity, *Summa Theologiae Mysticae*, Freiburg in Br. 1874, III, 326—364.

<sup>57</sup> Anthony of the Holy Spirit, *Directorium mysticum*, Venezia 1679, 99—102, Tract. 4, n. 518—540.