



## Mystique and prophecy in the Christian spirituality. Saint Teresa of Jesus' testimony

Mística e profecia na espiritualidade cristã. O testemunho de Santa Teresa de Jesus

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### Abstract

This paper deals with the interrelation between mystique and prophecy in the Christian spirituality. It intends to face dualisms, observed in the past and also in the current Christianity, between these terms. It presents Saint Teresa of Avila's testimony as a way for overcoming the dichotomy between mystique and prophecy by means of a procedural integration. The foundation for the needed relation between the terms concerned is the existence of Jesus of Nazareth itself, which may be regarded as prophetic-mystic. It means that there's an interrelation between prayer and action, contemplation and mission. However, the modern and postmodern subject has difficulties in this integration, such as letting himself be transformed by prayer, overcoming the tendency to control and effectiveness. Saint Teresa of Jesus, in this context, is a testimony to mystique and prophecy, mediated by a discretion which goes through daily perceptions. The book *Foundations* contributes to illustrate this discretion.

**Keywords:** Mystique. Prophecy. Discretion. Saint Teresa of Jesus.

### Resumo

Este artigo trata da inter-relação entre mística e profecia na espiritualidade cristã. Pretende enfrentar dualismos, observados no passado e também no presente do cristianismo, entre esses termos. Apresenta o testemunho de Santa Teresa de Ávila como caminho de superação da dicotomia entre mística e profecia através de uma integração processual. O fundamento da necessária relação entre os termos em questão é a própria existência de Jesus de Nazaré, que pode ser considerada profético-mística. Isso significa que há uma inter-relação entre oração e ação, contemplação e missão. No entanto, o sujeito moderno e pós-moderno apresenta dificuldades nessa integração, como o deixar-se transformar pela oração, superando a tendência ao controle e à eficácia. Santa Teresa de Jesus, nesse contexto, é testemunho de mística e profecia, mediadas por um discernimento que passa por percepções cotidianas. O livro *Fundações* contribui para ilustrar esse discernimento.

**Palavras-chave:** Mística. Profecia. Discernimento. Santa Teresa de Jesus.

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## Introduction

One of the great features of the Teresian spirituality is boldness. Saint Teresa herself will recognize it, not only as a personal characteristic, but as a God's action on her. In the beginning of the book *Foundations*, chapter 2, paragraph 7, she'll manifest this gift in a tasty expression: "Oh, greatness of God! How thou manifested Thy power providing an ant with boldness!" (TERESA 1995a, p. 603)<sup>1</sup>.

The whole life of Teresa of Avila expresses this boldness. We know how she got to the limits of a woman's possibilities in the 16th century, in many aspects (PEDROSA-PÁDUA; CAMPOS, 2011)<sup>2</sup>. She was a reading girl in a context of illiterate women; a writer by vocation and obedience. A master, she was aware of practicing a professorship on prayer and on the God's pathways within a human being. In a world which "burned with fire", Teresa de Jesus (1995b, p. 303) had a word to give to the Church, with her proposal for reforming and founding of the Discalced Carmelites Order. Criticizing the honor system, she advocated for fraternal communities; by refusing the machismo found in the Church, she was a herald of the dignity and capacity of women and, at the same time, she was a voice denouncing the men who qualified them and turned them into judges (TERESA, 1994, chap. 4, § 1). Yes, Teresa was bold, she had that prophetic boldness which can't contain itself in silence. An operating boldness, active, which doesn't wait for.

What's the source of this boldness? According to Teresa, it's God himself, in his disconcerting and gratuitous love for us. A praying woman, master in the art of discerning, she states it's impossible to accomplish great things if the person doesn't sees to be loved in a gratuitous manner (TERESA, 1995c, chap. 10, § 6). By mystical experience, Teresa was taken to the abysses of herself and bathed in the deepest fountains of her own being. She met God in the act of venturing to love and let herself be loved. In this experiment, Teresa is cleansed, changed in her relations

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<sup>1</sup> The quotations in this paper will follow the Brazilian translation of Saint Teresa's books.

<sup>2</sup> Especially the chapter "Life and meaning of Saint Teresa of Jesus".

with everybody, with herself, and with God himself.

It's surprising to realize the impossibility of separating the contemplative and mystical Teresa from Teresa in action. Prayer and mission require each other and they impregnate each other. And this mission is daring, prophetic. In the book *Dwellings*, she'll express the intimate relation between prayer and action: Martha and Mary must always walk together (TERESA, 1995d, Dwelling 7, chap. 4, § 12)<sup>3</sup>. The Teresian spirituality is always mystic-prophetic. Such as that of her master, Jesus.

This paper develops this mystic-prophetic nature of the Christian spirituality and proposes Teresa of Avila as the testimony which illuminates this reality. It is situated, thus, in the universe of Christian theology, and there it develops an aspect of relational mystique.

The paper begins by presenting the interrelation between mystique and prophecy in Jesus' spirituality. Subsequently, it outlines some difficulties for this integration faced by our contemporary fellows, while it observes the urgency of this attempt. Then, it starts presenting Saint Teresa of Jesus' spirituality, the mystique of Avila (Spain), who lived in the 16th century, the first woman declared Doctor of the Church. Prayer is emphasized as friendship and the process of integration between prayer and action in the Teresian experience is observed, not free from conflicts. Finally, it presents an analysis on the book *Foundations* from the perspective of the theme *discretion*, a crucial mediation to establish the relation between prayer and the hopeful and daring mission.

Let's begin with Jesus of Nazareth's spirituality.

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<sup>3</sup> Referring to the biblical text of Luke 10,38-42.

## 1 The relation between mystique and prophecy is part of Jesus' spirituality itself

We know that Jesus was recognized as a *prophet* and he saw himself this way. One day, he himself said that “no prophet is accepted in his own country” (Luke 4,24). As a prophet, he spoke clearly, criticizing his own country, society, and religious institutions. Jesus knew how to read the signs of the times and, unlike the religious leaders, he knew how to realize the situation of workers from the countryside and the cities, as well as the suffering of the poor people, who got poorer day after day. And he wasn't naïve about this, he was aware of the tension and conflict he provoked. But this conflict is experienced as blessedness: “Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company” (Luke 6,22-23). He's also aware of the violent and misunderstood fate of the prophets (Matthew 23,29-35) (NOLAN, 2009).

All this shows us Jesus as a man in a constant and daring mission, at the service of people; his followers learn, as their Master, to boldly speak and act.

But the *mystical* Jesus is as strong as the prophet Jesus. His activity and mission are supported by a life of constant prayer and deep contemplation. His experience with regard to the one he called Father presupposes prayer. Jesus prayed because he needed, indeed, the light, strength, and discretion coming from God (AZEVEDO, 1988; ESPEJA, 1995; GARCIA RUBIO, 2010; NOLAN, 2009; PAGOLA, 2010).

The disciples recall the image of seeing Jesus often in prayer. The evangelist Luke, in particular, emphasizes Jesus' prayer. Sometimes, he pulls away to pray (Matthew 26,36; Luke 22,41.11,1). There's a lot of biblical support indicating that Jesus took every possible opportunity to withdraw and dedicate himself to prayer and reflection (Mark Mc 1,35.6,46; Luke 4,42.5,16; Matthew 14,23). And he did so regularly, as Luke observes that he “he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed” (Luke 5,16). Moreover, Jesus admonished the private prayer in the

intimacy of one's room, not as the hypocrites, who love to be seen by others (cf. Matthew 6,5-6). So, we can be certain that Jesus spent much time praying in a hidden place.

Jesus' prayer is lived in relation to the most significant events of his life. The gospels show us Jesus praying after his baptism (Luke 3,21); at the beginning of his mission (Luke 4,1); in days of intense activity (Mark 1,35; Luke 5,16; Matthew 14,23); preceding several significant moments, such as the election of the apostles (Luke 6,12); Peter's profession (Luke 9,18); Lord's Prayer (Luke 11,1); Lazarus' resurrection (John 11,41); his passion and death (Jonah 17,1-26). Jesus prays in Gethsemane, before his death (Matthew 26,36-44; Mark 14,32-34; Luke 22,32.41.44); in the transfiguration (Luke 9,28-29); in the cross, where he keeps offering forgiveness and surrenders his life (Mark 15,34; Matthew 27,46; Luke 23,34.46).

His prayer was connected to his life, it's never an alienation or escape. Prayer and life mutually enrich each other, prayer is related to the mission, and the latter is related to prayer. Jesus went through moments of joy and hardship, courage and crisis, success and failure, acclaim and pursuit to death. In all of these moments there's prayer, always as a dialogue, as a personal relationship with God as agape, gratuitous and close (GARCIA RUBIO, 2010).

The prayer which best translates the relationship between Jesus and his Father is Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6,9-12; Luke 11,1-3). It's also the model for our prayer. In it, Jesus teaches us to call God *abba*, which could be translated as *daddy*. It reveals the relationship between Jesus and his Father. The disciples recall seeing Jesus talking to God with this familiar word, and that he taught them to do the same. It was certainly an unconventional word and, thus, in the New Testament it was kept in the original Aramaic, even in the Greek context: "*Abba-Father*" (Mark 14,36; Galatians 4,6; Romans 8,15).

*Abba* expresses intimacy. It reveals a loving father who embraces, welcomes, and protects his son or daughter. It's an unconditional love, it's possible to trust it without any reservation. The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15) is the most revealing description of the meaning of *abba*, whose forgiveness is unconditional. The feminist theology, by criticizing the patriarchal context of Jesus, observes how this image is better associated to an affectionate mother, especially in contexts marked by oppressive patriarchy. Jesus forgiveness, compassion, and love to enemies and persecutors (Matthew 5,44-45) are expressions of this experience of *abba*. It's the source of Jesus' wisdom, discretion, confidence, and freedom, without which one can't understand his love for everyone, even his enemies, and the reason of his actions.

The core of Lord's Prayer is the *Kingdom of God*, which we ask for and with which we are committed to forgiveness and sharing of bread. But Jesus seriously criticizes the praying forms which don't lead to the Kingdom. Prayer without coherence to life (Matthew 6,5); mechanic, without commitment, which multiplies words (Matthew 6,7); separate from concretely welcoming God's will (Matthew 7,21-23: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord..."); and the arrogant and full of self-contemplation prayer (Luke 18,11-12) don't establish a dialogue which opens to God's gift but, instead, reinforce the closure of the human being in itself. Lead to narcissism and self-deception.

Nowadays, one can see prayers unilaterally seeking self-satisfaction, interior comfort, well-being. However, they lack coordination to the love-service, core of Jesus of Nazareth's existence. And, also, meditation techniques used for the sole purpose of reducing stress and increasing work productivity.

Would these prayers be "from the Kingdom"?

In Jesus' life, prayer-mystique and mission-prophecy unite in an extraordinarily simple way. An inseparable whole. Therefore, naming the Christian

spiritual tradition mystical-prophetic tradition is a way to overcome the antagonisms from the past and from nowadays.

## **2 A difficult, but needed, relation between prayer and action in spirituality, nowadays**

For our contemporary fellows, the relation between prayer and mission, mystique and prophecy isn't something apparent at all (MOLTMANN, 2012). Our society is marked by effectiveness, by outcome, and by success. All this unilaterally drives to activity, which runs the risk of turning into activism. Prayer, regardless of how lauded it is, remains useless and superfluous.

Certain spiritualities have employed meditation in a "useful" way, as a practice able to resume the balance of nervous activists or exhausted executives. Yoga techniques are used to increase the yield. We can't deny that there's an increased sensitivity to the interiorization, but a market-driven and pragmatic use of meditation should be duly criticized. Meditation, born in the great religious traditions, has meeting as its crucial focus, simultaneously, with the best of oneself and with the reality transcending and enabling everything, God.

Although a person may have certain perceptions in prayer, she/he not always gets involved with what is realized nor attributes a special importance to it. One can see the beauty of a flowery silk floss tree, for instance, but, then, one passes in front of it at many miles per hour and thinking of a thousand things. Deeper dimensions in ourselves are intuited, but we run to work, totally forgotten about that. There's no time to interiorize the perceptions, starting from the interiorization of our self-discoveries.

We prefer objective knowledge, controlled, which leads us to master the object. However, in sincere prayer, the opposite happens – that's the challenge. In

it, we start participating in what we contemplate. This is a different knowledge, in which we don't control what's contemplated, nor modify it. Rather, we are the modified ones. A knowledge which changes the one who knows; she/he starts participating in the beauty of the silk floss tree, the sunset, the experience of another person, God.

Women and men living nowadays need a balance in the relation between prayer and action. The utilitarian and dominating form of knowledge has clear limits. Living together with others, with nature, and with her/himself poses limits from which the destruction of life, human relations, and, especially, the relation with one's own interiority. There's no lack of prayers wishing to dominate God himself<sup>4</sup>.

A few words on the relationship with oneself. The prayerful knowledge of oneself leads to a new self-understanding. In it unite realism, increasing inner freedom, sensitization with regard to the ability of loving and embracing love. It's a land for discovering limits and weaknesses, as well as for acceptance and conflict. Sincere prayer strengthens human consistency.

The current unilateral escape for activities, whether productive or playful, for social or even political practice, for relations, even if they're "liquid"<sup>5</sup>, indicate a degree of conflict of people with themselves. The problem is when the person don't stand being alone. Silence is unbearable and isolation is regarded as social rejection. What can the person, poor in inner consistency, give to others? How will he be able to fill his inner emptiness acting on behalf of others? What will he do in the face of disappointment and failure?

The Gospels invite us, first of all, to a new way of being, rather than to a mechanical act, domineering or legalistic. Jesus does know that we operate in the world less through what we say and do than through our existence and way of

<sup>4</sup> In some Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal discourses, one evidences the wish to "dominate" the divine action, "control" and "determine" grace.

<sup>5</sup> Reference to well-known nomenclature by Z. Bauman (2004), especially chapter 3: "On the difficulty for loving the other".



being. In another case, figuring to provide help to others, we can only communicate them the virulence of our selfishness, the aggressiveness of our anxieties and the prejudices of our ideologies (MOLTMANN, 2012). However, to appreciate this input in the abysses of our inner world, we must redeem the positive meaning of solitude, silence, inner emptiness, poverty, and humility. And that the mystiques, such as Saint Teresa, did.

This is the paradoxical dimension of the relation between prayer and action: only humility before oneself, the world, and God will provide propheticism, boldness, and effectiveness in the mission.

### **3 Teresian prayer: friendship agreement which changes friends**

By virtue of her experience, Teresa of Jesus becomes aware of the needed prayer for a life consistent and full of meaning, grounded on the relational human “truth”. Such that, for her, “walking on truth” is “humility”, as we are always related (TERESA, 1995d, Dwelling 6, chap. 10, § 7). Teresa will dedicate herself, on her works, to witness the importance of this conscious relationship with God, in prayer.

Therefore, she'll make an original contribution to the professorship on the Christian life, with the statement of prayer as *friendship*, as love *relation* in response to the One who loved us first. God is fundamentally friend. As it's well known, the text of the *Book of Life* summarizes this notion of prayer: “[...] it's to address friendship –often addressing alone – with someone we know to love us” (TERESA, 1995c, p. 63).

Prayer-friendship isn't a technique, but a way of life in humble and permanent *relation* with God, source of life and love.

The Teresian pedagogy of prayer is fundamentally a development of the relation with Christ, “sacred Humanity”. There's a coherency between what Teresa

teaches and her personal pathway, Teresa speaks from experience. In this pedagogy, “loving a lot” has priority over “thinking a lot” (TERESA, 1995d, p. 473).

In this kind of loving, there’s a movement in which Teresa is drawn into Christ’s history and person. Look at Jesus, fall in love with him, consider him according to his humanity, contemplate Jesus in the gospels, internalize the prayer he taught, don’t draw apart from the Master... these are some of the innumerable advices one finds on her works.

Teresa meets herself in Christ’s history. She learns to express her own desires and needs, to face everyday life through the life of Christ. A transformation happens in Teresa, which liberates her, in a process, to the concrete love proposed by Jesus, the *Kingdom of God*. The friendship with Christ is deeply cleansing, reconciling, and affectionate. It causes transformation and potentiation of capacities to love and receive love. And love rather than determination and works rather than emotions and words.

The pedagogy of prayer-friendship will also involve other elements, such as the practice of *withdrawal* – there’s a need for entering one’s own “inner castle”<sup>6</sup>. This is an interiorization which potentiates the capacity of a person to knowingly put her/himself before God. There’s a progressive education of look, listening, and speaking inwardly with Christ. In the practice of withdrawal, the ability to empathize with the feelings of Christ is expanded and, simultaneously, the ability of self-expression. At the same time, there’s a need for cultivating some attitudes, in a very special way *humility*, *detachment*, and *love*. They’re the basis of this prayer pathway and, without them, prayer doesn’t find a solid ground (TERESA, 1995b, chap. 4-10, 26-29).

This praying practice, inseparable, we repeat, the new attitude of life, *sets* the person to deeper prayers, in which God makes his presence felt. Teresa even

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<sup>6</sup> Her mature life’s work, *Inner castle or dwellings* (TERESA, 1995d), consists in the entry adventure itself, “castle”, symbol of a new way of being before herself, God and the world.

states that the one who goes through the withdrawal pathway “goes through an excellent pathway and he’ll drink the water from the fountain” (TERESA, 1995b, p. 382).

By narrating her experience of the mysteries of God-Trinity-Love acting on her, Teresa is also *mystagogue*. Thus, Saint Teresa is a pedagogue and a mystagogue. In the first case, she teaches to pray; in the second, she introduces the reader to the *mysteries* of his own experience, and he participates in some way in the author’s experience.

With all this, Teresa leaves no room for doubt: more important than the experience of prayer is the experience of love, “love of God and the other” (TERESA, 1995d, p. 501), the purpose of every prayer. It’s concrete love, ultimately, the true union to God.

#### **4 Relation between prayer and action in Saint Teresa: tension and integration process**

It could seem that prayer and action were naturally harmonious in Saint Teresa’s life. But it wasn’t exactly this way. She experienced the tension between them, showing how this tension is real and how the integration is done in a process. In a few moments, she’d like to run away from people and unite to those who lived in the deserts and, at other times, she’d like to “introduce herself in the world”, something which, unfortunately, wasn’t allowed to women (TERESA, 1995d, Dwelling 6, chap. 6, § 3). This tension between prayer and action, if not addressed, can lead to the “escape from the world” or a tiring and sterile activism.

The tension, however, is positive. This is the dynamics which will lead the person to tune, in a thinner manner, with God’s will, amidst life with its numerous possibilities and risks. On the other hand, it powerfully expands the inner and outer capacity of service to God, knocking down fears and prejudices.

Saint Teresa's final word concerns the integration between *action* and *prayer*. For her, actions are criteria for recognition of the legitimacy of prayer, because, as the Saint reminds us, the love to God may be ambiguous, but the love to brothers is immediately known (TERESA, 1995d, Dwelling 5, chap. 3, § 8). Just as there're prayers which aren't true because they aren't accompanied by life coherency, there're also works which don't come from God, although they're good, because the person is inwardly away from him and his love intentionality (TERESA, 1995d, Dwelling 2, chap. 2, § 1).

In a special way, the book *Dwellings* reveals that the spiritual life has no purpose in itself, it's a mediation of transformative actions. It's in the seventh dwellings that we meet the vigorous Teresian advice that one has prayer to be able to serve with fortitude and love: "Tell me for what that inspirations are for", she asks; and goes on: "Will it be for you to lie down to sleep?"; then, she forcefully answers: "No, no, no!" (TERESA, 1995d, p. 584). The purpose of prayer is on love-service – so that "always born works from them, always works" (TERESA, 1995d, p. 583). The needed relation between prayer and action is radicalized in the biblical typology of Martha and Mary, as mentioned above. They have to walk "always together, in order to welcome Lord" (TERESA, 1995d, p. 585).

Martha prepares food. That is, she remains alert and with an industrious disposition, undertakes what is at her reach, feasible things – according to Teresa, God understands that the person would make a lot more if she/he could when he sees that she/he does what she/he can accomplish.

Mary is always at Jesus' feet, that is, contemplating him. In Teresa of Avila's hermeneutics, erroneous, as we know nowadays, the Biblical figures of Mary, Mary Magdalene, and the sinful woman of Luke's Gospel are the same person. In this scenario, Teresa explains to us how contemplation, as "best part", wasn't delivered to Mary for nothing. She went through many works, serving Lord by washing his feet and drying them with her hair, by going alone through the streets and getting

into the house where she had never been before, also suffering the murmurings of the pharisee and other shames. She changed her life, changed her dress, and everything else. But she was also disregarded and ill spoken due to her past life. Seeing her Master hated and killed was a true martyrdom to her, which followed when she recalled Lord during her absence. After all, contemplation, as the best “part” of Mary, is part of a humanization process accomplished through friendship with Jesus, which isn’t done without an inner and social transformation, which includes enjoyment and suffering.

Mary’s peace isn’t disrupted, but fueled by Marta’s activity. Action feeds contemplation. Contemplation feeds action. And both go together, in order to “house Lord”, forming the true Christian spirituality.

## **5 The book *Foundations*: discretion and prophetic boldness in the mission**

Constant *discretion* accompanies the relation between mystique and prophecy. A privileged book for us to learn about this is *Foundations* (TERESA 1995a). We know, through the Teresian writings, that the foundations of new convents occur through a deep Christological and Trinitarian experience of God, which inexorably sends it, in the manner of the great biblical prophets. This transmission force gives a direction, but it doesn’t aligns, as we know, to the concrete pathway. This is done on a daily basis.

In the first foundation, Saint Joseph, Saint Teresa had no notion at all of what was yet to come. Five years after this first foundation, she tells us to be visited by Fray Alonso Maldonado, Franciscan, follower of Bartolomeu de Las Casas, inflamed defender of the cause of Indians in Madrid and Rome (TERESA 1995a, chap. 1, § 7). Teresa refers to him as “servant of God, moved by the same wishes” that her. Through him, she knew the violence of the conquest of America (“Indians”). Intense sorrow, pain, and prayer resulted in an extremely strong

missionary and martyr-like wish. Shortly after this intense experience, the subsequent foundations began following the first one, the convent of Saint Joseph.

We see, in this event, an admirable integration of Teresian spirituality. Here, *attention to reality* (not alienation) joins an *attitude of indignation and criticism*, an *entrusted prayer* and an *action initiative*.

Having received the patents for the foundation, even this way, the pathways are established in walking itself. There's a need for deciding to start. There won't be much to transcribe, here, her words, for us to touch, at least a little, in the feeling of Saint Teresa. Let's see, here, how the transformative prayer underlies the daring and prophetic mission:

And here we have a poor barefoot nun, without help from anyone but Lord, full of patents and good wishes, without any possibility of achieving them. There I lacked neither courage nor hope, because, after giving something, Lord also gives another one. As if everything seemed possible to me, I started acting. Oh, Greatness of God! How to manifest Thy power providing an ant with boldness! (TERESA 1995a, p. 603).

Every foundation, many decisions were needed. Decisions requiring creative freedom and responsibility. Discretion isn't related to abstract issues, but to the prosaic world, which forms the infrastructure that makes life possible. Starting from the search of patents, passing through the choice of the houses – price negotiation and evaluation of the minimum housing conditions, such as the presence of water, hay for bedding, humidity, light... – without taking into account the community's organization and the monitoring of persons involved in them.

Teresa had to be alert to opportunities for foundation, which always involved some discretion. Where should one found? Should invitations to a foundation be accepted? Foundations in the cities of Valladolid and Beas clearly show this discretion (TERESA 1995a, chap. 10, § 1, chap. 22, § 1). And there were many times when a given decision had to be reevaluated and changed. A brave discernment process is found in the decision to purchase the house of Palencia. Decided by a

property, Teresa had a “restlessness” during the mass, and a “great concern” whether her action was good, and she decided to change her decision, something which brought her a great peace (TERESA 1995a, chap. 29, § 18).

So many thoughts populated her mind, sometimes encouraging her, sometimes questioning her activities. She herself demonstrates her concern with “good start”, so that the principle wasn't a failure (TERESA 1995a, chap. 3, § 11). Starting well meant establishing bases of mutual trust between the sisters, the multiple ecclesiastical instances and civil population. Moreover, there's a healthy doubt which makes Teresa wonder: what if she was wrong? (TERESA 1995a, chap. 3, § 11).

Teresa is a strategist. She prioritizes, takes steps. Contrary to those who want it all at once and the easiest way; or those who make themselves comfortable (most people, within the Teresian context). They have nothing, keep turning around, often because they begin through something too large or difficult. To these, Teresa states: “The devil provides us with great desires to [...] content ourselves favoring those who are impossible” (TERESA, 1995d, p. 586).

The Teresian foundations clearly show how inner organization, patience, strategy, rollback, reduced expectations and, also, the courage to move forward and take advantage of opportunities are crucial for action. Each step brings along a series of decisions, choices, and consequences. It brings self-knowledge, knowledge on the world and on the various people. But it isn't possible to do and know everything at the same time.

## 6 For the discretion of the mission, nowadays: some recommendations from *Foundations*

We won't deepen on the copious and diverse doctrine found in the book *Foundations*, nor in the "great sufferings underwent along the pathways" (TERESA 1995a, p. 671). Here, we offer just some elements which, perhaps, can contribute to the discretion of God's life on the lives of so many people, in Christian communities, called to experience Baptism.

The first thing to highlight would be the wisdom to discover that "even in the kitchen, among the pans, Lord is helping you" (TERESA 1995a, p. 615). Context: to dispel the unease of some nuns forced into active life, Teresa didn't opt for active or contemplative life – the mediation between them will be provided by obedience.

Wouldn't this be a great wisdom to everyone who needs to meet-obey unpredictable situations in the family, work, and political world? How many times have the needs of life disrupted schedules and times of prayer-meditation? And do they force to needed activities? Teresa teaches this wisdom: finding God in the pans, the work and service instruments in society. In the stethoscope, the departments, the designs of buildings, the classrooms, or the care for children is the mysterious power of the Spirit of Christ, in an irrepressible dynamism of turning into "meat".

These mediations can be – and they are – the mediations of love. Teresa reminds us that employing time well helps to light love, more than many hours of prayer-meditation. She warns with regard to the meaning of everyday work.

A second element is that, in discretion, Saint Teresa invites us to hear the thought and the heart. As she did.

Teresa had to pay attention to her thoughts, to the point of also need to organize them, because many times they came in an overwhelming manner, along with insights not yet realized. A clear example of this is her decision to found, also,



men's monasteries: "I didn't stop thinking of the friars' monasteries... Then, I decided to quietly deal with the case with the prior of Medina...!" (TERESA 1995a, p. 609).

At the same time, she invites for listening the heart, since Lord also says through it: "Our majesty, whenever in want that something is done, puts it in his heart" (TERESA 1995a, p. 664).

We could ask in what sense social, educational, and pastoral practices lead to an audacity in thinking and a heart's listening. To trust feelings. To become aware of the movement of feelings and intuitions as a mediation of God's within the human being. There's a need for "reading" oneself, since the Master inhabits us.

The third element is to undo the traps of fear. If there's something that the Gospels attest is Jesus' invitation to "being not afraid". Christianity is an invitation for fortitude and love. Jesus never promised protection! He promises his presence and strength to live life amidst the calm and the storms.

It's worth checking how Saint Teresa reacts to the words of a religious woman from the same Order, at the night of the foundation of the convent in Salamanca. In the dawn of All Souls' Day, the sister asks Teresa what she, Teresa, would do if she dies. Fears weren't lacking, according to the Teresian report. But the answer reveals a brave administration of her own fear: "Sister, if this happens, I will think about what to do; now, let me sleep" (TERESA 1995a, p. 676). Teresa opted for joy and freedom: "Life is to live without fear of death neither the events of existence, and having this usual joy that all of you have now, as well as this prosperity that doesn't fear poverty, but even wants it" (TERESA 1995a, p. 719).

The oppositions to the Teresian reform were quick and they were almost proportional to the greatness of her work. Saint Teresa was forbidden to found and even leave the convent. She had to stay in Toledo "by way of jail" (TERESA 1995a, chap. 27, § 19). The Nuncio Felipe Segá didn't help her; rather, he chased her and

her collaborators (TERESA 1995a, chap. 28, § 3). There was a need for separating the Discalced Order from the “Calced” one, in the chapter in Alcala, one year before the Saint’s death, in 1581 (TERESA 1995a, chap. 29, § 30-31). It wasn’t the desired outcome, but rather the feasible one. The divorce made possible the continuation of the reform, the buds of new life found peace to develop themselves. In this context, a breath of youthfulness leads the already weakened Teresa to state and advice: “Now, we begin; seek for getting always better from the beginning” (TERESA 1995a, p. 747).

Brave wisdom: without dramatizing the crises, changes, and even ruptures. It’s important to bet in the future which God always opens, because “even from a suffering to another, a change is always a relief” (TERESA 1995a, p. 702), and the best is saying, every moment: “Now, we begin”. Youthfulness and flexibility are signs of God’s gratuitousness, “grace”.

Just in the epilogue of the book *Foundations*, one finds the narrative of a substantial change in the jurisdiction of the nuns in the convent of St. Joseph of Avila, passing from the Ordinary to the Order. The fact that something seems to be good at a time, but, at another, something different is needed, “is clearly seen to be true in an extremely large number of things” (TERESA 1995a, Epilogue, § 3).

In the account of the last Teresian foundation, Burgos, in which one can detect lapses in our author’s memory and weakness in the hand which holds the pen, we find, however, the same fruitful inner dialogue, that enabled such a prophetic and daring mission. The empowering Beloved’s voice echoes inside Teresa, before the opposition and demands of the Archbishop: “Now, Teresa, be strong” (TERESA 1995a, p. 762). And, in the purchase of the house, too expensive for Teresa, the same voice illuminates the decision’s direction: “*Does cash withhold thou?*” (TERESA 1995a, p. 765). Indeed, through the mystery of Incarnation, which characterizes Christianity, God gets into everything...

## By way of conclusion

This short route sought to clarify a key point for Christian spirituality, especially the one lived as lay men and women in society: the intrinsic relation between mystique and prophecy.

We may highlight some key ideas of our journey, by way of conclusion:

1. In Saint Teresa's life and doctrine, it's impossible to separate the contemplative and mystical Teresa from the Teresa in mission. Prayer and mission are mutually required and impregnated. And this mission is bold, daring, and prophetic.
2. The relation between mystique and prophecy is part of Jesus' own spirituality. Thus, Christian spirituality requires this relation, and it's for EVERYONE. There's the warning from the Gospels themselves, that prayer may be experienced as narcissistic closing and self-deception, unilateral pursuit of well-being, and domination of God himself, going away from Jesus of Nazareth's life and proposal.
3. The inseparability between prayer and action is a challenge for our time, marked by effectiveness, success, and individualism. In true prayer, the dominating trend (mastering the object) is replaced by the knowledge which transforms the praying subject himself. There's a need for humility before the world, other people, one's own limits, and God's otherness. It becomes needed to appreciate and rediscover the mystical attitudes of silence, solitude, poverty, emptying.
4. The Teresian prayer is transformative because it establishes a gratuitous friendship with Jesus. There's an entry into Christ's history, an entry motivated by "loving a lot" rather than by "thinking a lot". Teresa participates in this history, and, thus, she's changed.

Her simple and harmonious pedagogy offers us a wise form of prayer – withdrawal – in which one learns to get into Christ's feeling and to allow being transformed by it.

5. In the Teresian experience, prayer and mission mutually harmonize in a process. This can illuminate the religious pathway of integration, which is made in the tension of both poles. It isn't worth, here, idealizing the praying experience, but, rather, a maturity which assumes conflicts and integration processes.
6. In the relation between prayer and mission, discretion is a must. The mission's discretion is fueled by observation of life, listening to the situations, and clear consciousness of personal limitations, as well as appreciation of one's thoughts, concerns, and feelings. It isn't possible to separate concrete life circumstances from the relation between prayer and mission. The book *Foundations* clearly shows how prayer, mission, and discretion in the face of concrete situations are inseparable, and that it's paradigmatic for the maturity of every Christian's spirituality.

One hopes that Christian spirituality may pay attention to the fact that mystique and prophecy aren't dissociate, in faithfulness to Jesus' life. As a response to disruptive and even destructive spiritualities of the human being, one hopes that the relational testimony of mystical men and women, such as Saint Teresa, can illuminate this maturing process. Prayer and daring mission are dialectically inter-related, mediated by rich discretion. Christ's liberating grace drives us to this, and he wishes to get involved in this integration process.

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