



FACULTAD DE TEOLOGÍA

INSTITUTO UNIVERSITARIO DE ESPIRITUALIDAD

“Siempre acabéis en propio conocimiento”

Self-knowledge in the process of union with God

according to St. Teresa of Jesus

Author: Nguyen Tu Chuong OCD

Director: Dr. Juan Antonio Marcos Rodríguez OCD

Madrid

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ABBREVIATIONS

WORKS OF SAINT TERESA OF JESUS

C	=	Camino de Perfección (Valladolid)
CE	=	Camino Escorial
CC	=	Cuentas de conciencia
Cta	=	Cartas
E	=	Exclamaciones
F	=	Fundaciones
M	=	Moradas (1M, 2M, 3M, 4M, 5M, 6M y 7M = primeras moradas, segundas moradas, etc. 7M 4, 8 = séptima morada, capítulo 4, número 8)
MC	=	Meditaciones sobre los Cantares
P	=	Poesías
V	=	Vida

The works of Teresa de Jesús will be taken from: *Santa Teresa de Jesús. Obras completas. 6^a ed.*, directed by Alberto Barrientos. Burgos: Grupo Editorial Fonte, 2016.

WORKS OF SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS

CB	=	Cantico espiritual, segunda redaction
D	=	Dichos de luz y amor
LB	=	Llama de Amor Viva, segunda redacción
N	=	Noche oscura
S	=	Subida del Monte Carmelo

The works of Juan de la Cruz will be taken from: *San Juan de la Cruz. Obras completas. 9^a ed.*, edited by Eulogio Pacho. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2010.

OTHER ABBREVIATIONS

BAC	=	Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos.
GS	=	Constitucion Pastoral Gaudium et spes.

The abbreviations that we will use to designate biblical books are adopted from *The New American Bible (Revised Edition) (Nabre)*, Washington, D.C.: Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, 2010.

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INTRODUCTION

Self-knowledge holds immense power for personal and spiritual growth and serves as a central tool. It is a crucial element in the development of a balanced and mature individual, for without an awareness of our weaknesses and strengths, we can hardly address them effectively and strive to reach our full potential. For this reason, from the dawn of human history to the present day, people have continuously explored and shared teachings and writings on the subject.

While self-knowledge is of paramount importance in the ethical and moral realm, its significance extends deep into the spiritual realm as well. It is a tool that enables us to enter into the depths of our own souls and become one with the indwelling God. Indeed, this is the very reason for our creation, as St. Augustine says in his first book of *The Confessions*: “Thou hast made us for Thee and our heart is unquiet till it finds its rest in Thee”¹. On this path to union with God, however, we often find ourselves prisoners of ourselves, the world, and the devil, as many spiritual writers commonly understand it, because of our lack of self-knowledge. Indeed, without self-knowledge, growth in both human and spiritual dimensions remains unattainable.

St. Teresa of Jesus, a great mystic and founder of the Discalced Carmelites, also made union with God the ultimate goal of her life and teachings. Consequently, she offers profound insights into the importance of self-knowledge in the spiritual journey toward that union. She believed that self-knowledge serves as a transformative tool, enabling individuals to embark on an inner journey of self-exploration and encounter the presence of God dwelling within their own souls. Within the context of St. Teresa’s teachings, this thesis explores the multifaceted aspects of self-knowledge that contribute to the process of union with God. The purpose of this study is to facilitate both human and spiritual growth by providing guidance for those who seek to deepen their self-knowledge according to the wisdom of St. Teresa of Jesus.

And to conduct this investigation, we will employ a research methodology centered around bibliographical review or literature review. This approach involves extensively reading, analyzing, and evaluating relevant works and articles related to the subject of self-knowledge. Given the focus of our research on the role of self-knowledge in the process of union with God according to Teresa of Jesus, we will primarily emphasize studying Teresa’s own works, along with the writings of other scholars who have explored this theme within Teresa’s teachings.

¹ Saint Augustine. *Confessions* (The Fathers of the Church, Volume 21). Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010, 4.

We will also refer to various dictionaries and Teresian concordances. This will allow us to have a broader and more systematic understanding of the subject.

This research is structured into four chapters, with the first chapter devoted to exploring the sources and significance of self-knowledge in the spiritual life. Specifically, this chapter examines how the biblical and Christian traditions address this topic and emphasize its importance. In the biblical tradition, we will examine several biblical texts on the subject to see how the biblical authors treat the role of self-knowledge in both the moral and spiritual life. In the Christian tradition, we will examine the teachings of three important groups: the Fathers of the Church, the medieval authors, and the spiritual authors of modern times, that is, the time of St. Teresa of Jesus. Through this examination of diverse sources, our intention is to demonstrate that throughout history, biblical and Christian authors have consistently regarded self-knowledge as the foundation of the spiritual life and the crucial means of attaining perfection and union with God.

In the second chapter, we examine various facets of self-knowledge according to St. Teresa. We begin by analyzing some spiritual authors who played a significant role in shaping Teresa's perspective on self-knowledge. Subsequently, we delve into Teresa's own concept of self-knowledge, examining her unique insights and teachings on the subject. Furthermore, we explore how the significance of self-knowledge evolved throughout Teresa's life. We observe a transformation in her understanding, progressing from a negative to a positive outlook as she matured in both age and grace. This transition holds valuable insights into the development of her thoughts on self-knowledge. Lastly, we delve into Teresa's doctrine concerning self-knowledge. We discuss the significance she attributes to it, recognizing its vital role in personal and spiritual growth. Additionally, we also explore the obstacles that individuals may encounter on their path towards attaining self-knowledge, as elucidated by Teresa.

Continuing the exploration of Saint Teresa's teachings on self-knowledge in chapter two, in chapter three we will discuss the means of attaining self-knowledge. Since there are two forms of self-knowledge—acquired and infused—various approaches are required to attain them. Regarding acquired self-knowledge, which can be achieved through personal efforts, we delve into three means of acquiring it: through the relationship with oneself, through the relationship with God, and through the relationship with others. Each of these avenues contributes to the acquisition of self-knowledge through different aspects of our existence. On the other hand, infused self-knowledge is a pure gift bestowed upon the soul by God through supernatural

favors. To attain this form of self-knowledge, one must cultivate a disposition that is open and receptive to God's divine blessings. Typically, infused self-knowledge is bestowed upon those who have reached a certain level of proficiency in prayer. Therefore, our examination of the means to attain infused self-knowledge will focus primarily on exploring the levels and conditions under which God imparts infused self-knowledge, starting from the fourth dwelling places onward.

Finally, in light of Teresa's emphasis on the ultimate goal of union with God, which represents the culmination of man's love relationship with his Creator, the final chapter of our research focuses on the importance of self-knowledge in the process of achieving this union. This chapter serves as a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted role of self-knowledge in this transformative journey. We begin by examining how self-knowledge serves as a powerful tool for overcoming self-deception, which is a major obstacle to our journey toward that union. Next, we examine the crucial role that self-knowledge plays in the cultivation of virtues, which are also means to help us unite with God, the goal of our spiritual life. Specifically, we explore how self-knowledge contributes to the development of three fundamental virtues: love, detachment, and humility, which are the foundations for a life of prayer and authentic holiness². Finally, we explore the importance of self-knowledge in prayer life, which serves as the primary means of achieving union with God. In this part, we will show that self-knowledge is not only an indispensable component of prayer, but also a great help in the spiritual life.

² Cf. John Welch. *Carmel Notes - A Compendium of Carmelite Spirituality*. Illinois: Carmelite Media, 2022, 47.

CHAPTER I

THE SOURCES AND THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Introduction

Self-knowledge is a very powerful means to reform one's moral life and to advance in perfection. Thus from the very early day of human history, man has been teaching and writing about this subject. And one of the indispensable figures of this theme is obviously Socrates. He cited a dictum in the temple Delphi: "Know thyself" to debate with Euthydemus about self-knowledge³. Then before his death, he uttered a famous dictum: "The unexamined life is not worth living" as recorded by Plato in his *Apology* (38a5–6). In fact, according to Piat,

"Socrates made 'know thyself' the fundamental rule of his ethics [...]. Thus, he went from door to door among the politicians, the poets and the artists of Athens, to teach them that they were ignorant even of their own ignorance. His goal was to raise them above routine and instinct, to reveal to them that man is what he should be insofar as he knows himself, that one becomes all the wiser as one becomes more capable of understanding the infinite price of wisdom, that the art of growing in goodness consists in developing our power to know the truth"⁴.

Following the steps of Socrates, myriad of philosophers and psychologists have investigated on this theme and have suggested various ways to achieve it. However, due to the limit of our thesis, here we just focus on the sources and the importance of self-knowledge in spiritual life. Particularly, in this chapter, we will take a look on how the biblical tradition and Christian tradition discuss about self-knowledge and its necessity in the spiritual life.

³ Cf. Xenophon. *Conversations of Socrates: Memoirs of Socrates IV, 2* (Trans. Hugh Tredennick; Robin Waterfield). London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1990, 185-186.

⁴ Louis de Bazelaire. "Connaissance de soi". En *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, dirigido por A. Derville, P. Lamarche, y A. Solignac, 1511-1543. Vol. 2. Paris: Beauchesne, 1990, 1512-1513. The original text is as follow: «Socrate faisait du «connais-toi toi-même» la règle foncière de son éthique...Voilà pourquoi Socrate allait de porte en porte chez les politiciens, les poètes et les artistes d'Atliènes, pour leur apprendre qu'ils ignoraient jusqu'à jour propre ignorance. Son but était de les élever au-dessus de la routine et do l'instinct, do leur révéler que l'homme est e qu'il doit être dans la mesure où il se sait lui-même, que l'on devient d'autant plus sage que l'on devient plus capable de comprendre le prix infini de la sagesse, que l'art de grandir en bonté consiste à développer notre puissance de connaître la vérité» (Cl. Piat, *Socrate*, Paris, 1900, p. 98-99).

1. Biblical sources

The biblical authors, especially those of the Old Testament, rarely mention directly to self-knowledge.⁵ They focus more on the knowledge of God because for them this knowledge is the highest good and the most exalted goal that a human person can obtain as J. I. Packer confirmed in his book *Knowing God*:

“What makes life worthwhile is having a big enough objective, something which catches our imagination and lays hold of our allegiance, and this the Christian has in a way that no other person has. For what higher, more exalted, and more compelling goal can there be than to know God?”⁶

In fact, through the prophet Jeremiah, God also declares that man should consider the knowledge of Him as his boast and greatest pursuit:

“Thus says the Lord: Let not the wise boast of his wisdom, nor the strong boast of his strength, nor the rich man boast of his riches; But rather, let those who boast, boast of this, that in their prudence they know me” (Jer. 9:22–23)⁷.

The knowledge of God is the most important because “no se trata de un conocimiento teórico acerca de Dios, sino del amor a Dios, que implica el cumplimiento de su voluntad. Quienes reconocen a Yahvé, esos lo buscan, se convierten, practican el derecho y la justicia”⁸. Furthermore, the knowledge of God implies the living experience of Him⁹ which ultimately lead to eternal life as Jesus once said: “Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ” (Jn. 17: 3).

Though the biblical authors emphasize on the knowledge of God in their writings, they nevertheless also see the importance of self-knowledge in their relationship with God. Particularly, on the necessity of self-knowledge, the author of the book of *Proverbs* claimed that in order to attain justice and goodness, there is no other way but seeking the knowledge of the soul, without which good does not exist, even with a great zeal: “Without knowledge even

⁵ Cf. Watchman Nee. *Conocimiento de uno mismo y la luz de Dios*. Anaheim, California: Living Stream Ministry, 1998, 4.

⁶ James I. Packer. *Knowing God*. Great Britain: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973, 34.

⁷ All of the biblical citations will be taken from *The New American Bible (Revised Edition) (Nabre)*, Washington, D.C.: Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, 2010.

⁸ “Conocimiento de Dios”. En *Diccionario de la Biblia*, dirigido por Franz Kogler, Renate Egger-Wenzel y Michael Ernst. Maliaño (Cantabria): Editorial Sal Terrae, 2013, 155.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 156.

zeal is not good; and he who acts hastily, blunders” (Prov. 19:2). On the other hand, the Prophets, by tracing before the eyes of Israel and Judah the double picture of the divine promises and of the punishments which await the unfaithful people, vigorously urge man to self-knowledge, so that he becomes aware of his ingratitude¹⁰ and thus lead him to true repentance: “For our transgressions before you are many, our sins bear witness against us. Our transgressions are present to us, and our crimes we acknowledge” (Is. 59:12). Like Isaiah, Jeremiah on behalf of his people also acknowledged their sins and humbled themselves before God: “We recognize our wickedness, Lord, the guilt of our ancestors: we have sinned against you” (Jer. 14:20). The acknowledgement of one’s own sin, misery and weakness collectively as well as individually is very important because it is “the first step to healing and recovery”¹¹ and the “ground for cleansing”¹² and forgiveness. This is the reason why the psalmist by acknowledging his sin and transgressions, he immediately begs God to cleanse it from him:

“Thoroughly wash away my guilt; and from my sin cleanse me.

For I know my transgressions; my sin is always before me” (Ps. 51:4-5).

Self-knowledge not only leads man to repentance but also to the dependence on God. When man recognizes his “insignificance and transitoriness”¹³, nothing but a “breath,” a mere “shadow” that quickly passes away, in contrast to God’s majesty and gracious care for him, he is overwhelmed with wonder and gratitude¹⁴ and put his trust completely on God. After contemplating God’s greatness and his own littleness, man now begs God to deliver him from his treacherous enemies:

“Lord, what is man that you take notice of him; the son of man, that you think of him?

Man is but a breath, his days are like a passing shadow.

Lord, incline your heavens and come down; touch the mountains and make them smoke.

Flash forth lightning and scatter my foes; shoot your arrows and rout them.

Reach out your hand from on high; deliver me from the many waters; rescue me from the hands of foreign foes” (Ps. 144:3-7).

¹⁰ Cf. Louis de Bazelaire. “Connaissance de soi”. En *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, 1513.

¹¹ Donald M. Williams; Lloyd J. Ogilvie. *The Preacher’s Commentary Series, Volume 13: Psalms 1-72*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1986, 388.

¹² *Ibid.*, 388.

¹³ James E. Smith. *The Wisdom Literature and Psalms*. Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub. Co., 1996, 447.

¹⁴ Cf. Donald M. Williams; Lloyd J. Ogilvie. *The Preacher’s Commentary Series, Volume 14: Psalms 73-150*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1989, 498.

Furthermore, self-knowledge also helps man to find wisdom as well as to live according to ways of God. The author of the psalm 118 also confirms this fact: “I have examined my ways and turned my steps to your testimonies” (Ps. 118:59). Therefore, Ben Sira praises those who reflect and examine their hearts:

“Happy those who meditate on Wisdom, and fix their gaze on knowledge;
Who ponder her ways in their heart, and understand her paths” (Ben Sira 14: 20-21).

And the Lord through the prophet Haggai tirelessly urges his people “to examine their hearts and to search out the direction of their lives”¹⁵: “Now thus says the Lord of hosts: Reflect on your experience!” (Hag. 1: 5)¹⁶.

On the contrary, the lack of self-knowledge will lead to the judgement of others unjustly, which Jesus calls “hypocrisy”: “Why do you notice the splinter in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye?” (Mt. 7:3). Thus he advises each man to look within himself in order to see his defects and sins and thus be more tolerate to his neighbors: “You hypocrite, remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother’s eye” (Mt. 7: 5).

However, it is very difficult to know oneself as Jeremiah says: “More tortuous than anything is the human heart, beyond remedy; who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9). Indeed, “the human heart has an unlimited capacity for wickedness and deceit so that human resources are incapable of dealing with it (Mk. 7:21–23; Gal. 5:19–21)”¹⁷. Because of this difficulty, the psalmist asks God to grant him self-knowledge so that he will not be boastful but be humble before Him:

“Lord, let me know my end, the number of my days, that I may learn how frail I am.
To be sure, you establish the expanse of my days; indeed, my life is as nothing before you.
Every man is but a breath” (Ps. 38:5-6).

Furthermore, he also begs God to examine and test him so that he can know himself properly:

“Examine me, Lord, and test me; search my heart and mind” (Ps. 26:2).

¹⁵ Walter C. Kaiser Jr.; Lloyd J. Ogilvie. *The Preacher’s Commentary Series, Volume 23: Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1992, 258.

¹⁶ In fact, the book of *Haggai* has only thirty-eight verses, but the phrase “Reflect on your experience!” is used four times (1:5, 7; 2:15, 18).

¹⁷ F.B. Huey Jr. *Jeremiah, Lamentations* (The New American Commentary 16). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, 174.

“Probe me, God, know my heart; try me, know my thoughts.
See if there is a wicked path in me” (Ps. 139:23, 24a).

Under the thorough probing of God on his being, man would see clearly what challenge his faith and lead him into sin¹⁸.

Another means to obtain self-knowledge is to let the Word of God penetrates to the depths of our being as the author of the book *Hebrews* says:

“Indeed, the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart. No creature is concealed from him, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account” (Hb. 4: 12-13) .

Since the Word of God can penetrate one’s thoughts and emotions, even the deepest ones, it allows him to examine him, to see what is within him, both good and evil. Thus by sincerely studying the Word of God, man can see himself clearly both morally and spiritually¹⁹.

In short, though the biblical authors focus more on the knowledge of God, they also acknowledge the importance of self-knowledge in the moral and spiritual life. Through their writings, they show that self-knowledge leads to repentance, humility and dependency on God. Furthermore, for them, self-knowledge is necessary for man to avoid transgressions and walk always in the ways of God.

2. The Church Fathers

One of the first fathers of the Church, Origen (185-255), has affirmed the necessity of self-knowledge. He first gave a twofold explanation of the self-knowledge, of which the soul may obtain by one hand examining its own actions and seek after its own progress or guard against vices, and by another hand acknowledging its own nature and substance²⁰. For him, self-knowledge is particular important because without it, the soul is in danger:

¹⁸ Cf. Donald M. Williams; Lloyd J. Ogilvie. *The Preacher’s Commentary Series, Volume 14: Psalms 73-150*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1989, 475.

¹⁹ Cf. Bruce B. Barton; David Veerman; Linda Chaffee Taylor; Philip Wesley Comfort. *Hebrews* (Life Application Bible Commentary). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1997, 56.

²⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar. *Origen, Spirit and Fire: A Thematic Anthology of His Writings* (Trans: Robert J. Daly, S.J.). Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984, 38.

“Because it is neglectful of “knowing itself” and of inquiring what it is and how it should act and what it ought to do or not do, it is told: “Go out”, as if, because of the guilt of this slothfulness, it were being cast out by the one in charge. Thus it is a terribly great danger for the soul to neglect the study of itself and its self-knowledge”²¹.

Furthermore, if the soul does not know itself, it cannot follow the way of the Holy Spirit, and thus it cannot be united with God:

“Unless it (the soul) comes to know itself, through the things I have mentioned, and becomes proficient in the WORD of God and the divine law, it will suffer the fate of taking in various of these opinions and of following men who have said nothing of note, nothing from the Holy Spirit”²².

Like Origen, Saint Basil (330-379) in the *Homily on the Words “Give Heed to Thyself”*²³ also considers self-knowledge as a vital means to ascend to God or to the knowledge of God²⁴:

“Scrupulous attention to yourself will be of itself sufficient to guide you to the knowledge of God. If you give heed to yourself, you will not need to look for signs of the Creator in the structure of the universe; but in yourself, as in a miniature replica of cosmic order, you will contemplate the great wisdom of the Creator”²⁵.

For Basil, the self and the soul are identical²⁶. Thus the knowledge of self is the knowledge of the soul which is made in the image of God. On the contrary, our body is not part of the self but only our possession:

“We are soul and Intellect in that we have been made according to the image of the Creator. Our body is our own possession and the sensations which are expressed through it, but money, crafts, and other appurtenances of life in this world are extraneous to us”²⁷.

²¹ Ibid., 39.

²² Ibid., 39.

²³ Saint Basil. *Ascetical Works* (The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 9), translated by Sr M. Monica Wagner. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999, 431-446.

²⁴ Cf. Olga Alieva. “Protreptic Motifs in St Basil’s Homily On the Words ‘Give Heed to Thyself’”. In M. Vinzent (Ed.), *Studia Patristica LXII, Volume 10: The Genres of Late Antique Literature; Foucault and the Practice of Patristics; Patristic Studies in Latin America; Historica*. Leuven - Paris - Walpole, Ma: Peeters Publisher, 2013, 72.

²⁵ Saint Basil. *Ascetical Works*. 443-444.

²⁶ Cf. Olga Alieva. “Protreptic Motifs in St Basil’s Homily On the Words ‘Give Heed to Thyself’”. 71.

²⁷ Saint Basil. *Ascetical Works*. 435.

And thus according to him “it is the soul we should care for, not our body or possessions”²⁸:

“Give heed to thyself”, that is, to your soul. Adorn it, care for it, to the end that, by careful attention, every defilement incurred as a result of sin may be removed and every shameful vice expelled, and that it may be embellished and made bright with every ornament of virtue”²⁹.

Furthermore, Basil also urges his readers to examine their nature so that they may know how to take care of their souls and despise what are temporal:

“Examine closely what sort of being you are. Know your nature that your body is mortal, but your soul, immortal; that our life has two denotations, so to speak: one relating to the flesh, and this life is quickly over, the other referring to the soul, life without limit. “Give heed to thyself” cling not to the mortal as if it were eternal; disdain not that which is eternal as if it were temporal. Despise the flesh, for it passes away; be solicitous for your soul which will never die”³⁰.

And finally, for Basil, true knowledge of self not only helps man ascend towards the knowledge of God but also “leads him ultimately to doxology, and never to doubt or despair”³¹.

“When you have gone over all these points with suitable reflections upon each [...], you will be able to say with the Prophet: “Thy knowledge is become wonderful” (Ps. 138: 6) from the study of myself. Give heed, therefore, to thyself that you may give heed to God, to whom be glory and empire for ever and ever. Amen”³².

Along with other Fathers of the Church, St. Gregory of Nyssa (335-395) also firmly believes that man is made in the image and likeness of God. Thus, for him, in order to know and love God, the soul needs to know itself first. By perceiving its own beauty and greatness, it will be conquered by the splendor of Him whom it reflects within itself:

“Know how much you have been honored by the Maker above the rest of the creation. Heaven did not become the image of God, nor the moon, nor the sun, nor the beautiful stars—nor a single other one of the things that appear in the created order. Only you came into existence as a copy of the Nature that transcends every intellect, a likeness of the incorruptible Beauty, an

²⁸ Olga Alieva. 71.

²⁹ Saint Basil. 435.

³⁰ Ibid., 435.

³¹ Trakatellēs, Dēmētrios. “Encyclical of Archbishop Demetrios for the Feast of the Three Hierarchs and Greek Letters Day: January 30, 2017”. *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, vol. 62, no. 1/2, 2017, 131.

³² Saint Basil. 446.

impress of the true Deity—a model of that true Light in the contemplation of which you become what it is, imitating that which shines within you by the ray that shines forth in response from your purity”³³.

Moreover, by knowing itself, its beauty and greatness, the soul will always fix its eyes on God and live a godly life:

“If, then, you know yourself, O beautiful one among women, you will look down on the whole cosmos, and fixing your gaze in all circumstances on the immaterial good, you will be watchful concerning the error of the ways of this life. So always take heed to yourself, and you will not be led astray regarding the flock of goats or be shown up as a goat rather than a sheep at the time of judgment or be exiled from the station at the right hand”³⁴.

In the same mind with St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Ambrose (339-397) also considers self-knowledge as the awareness that each one is created in the image and likeness of God and as a result this knowledge obliges him to live a life worthy of his dignity:

“Jesús respondió: *A no ser que te reconozcas hermosa entre las mujeres. ¿Qué es reconocerse, sino ser cada uno consciente de que ha sido creado a imagen y semejanza de Dios, dotado de razón; que debe cultivar su tierra como un buen campesino con el arado y la hoz de la sabiduría, ya sea para ablandar el terreno duro, ya sea para arrancar el que produce en exceso; que está obligado a gobernar la parte inferior de sí mismo, poniéndola a las órdenes del alma?*”³⁵

And for him, if man does not know the beauty and nobility of his nature, this fact does not support him at all, that is he would live as if he was not born in the image and likeness of God:

““If you do not know yourself”, that you are fair, unless you maintain the beauty of your nature, and the allurements of the body do not overwhelm you and its impediments do not keep you back, the nobility of a better creation will give you no support at all”³⁶.

Therefore, he urges his readers to know their nature and beauty so that they can live according to their dignity that God has granted them:

³³ Gregory of Nyssa. *Homilies on the Song of Songs* (Trans: Richard A. Norris Jr.). Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012, 75.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁵ Ambrosio de Milán. *Exposición del Salmo 118* (Tr. Agustín López Kindler). Madrid: Editorial Ciudad Nueva, 2020, 60.

³⁶ Saint Ambrose. *Isaac, or the Soul, in Seven Exegetical Works* (Trans: Michael P. McHugh). Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003, 21.

“Therefore know yourself and the beauty of your nature, and go forth as if your foot had been freed of bonds and were visible in its bare step, so that you may not feel the fleshly coverings, that the bonds of the body may not entangle the footstep of your mind, that your foot may appear beautiful”³⁷.

Moreover, for the bishop of Milan, self-knowledge also means to know oneself to be mortal, to confess one’s faults and to accuse one’s weakness³⁸:

“A no ser que te reconozcas mortal, racional, y te apresures a confesar tus pecados, a enumerar inmediatamente tus injusticias, de manera que seas justificada; a no ser que te conviertas y te adelantes a admitir tus culpas, llega el día de la muerte y ya no tendrás ninguna oportunidad más de convertirme”³⁹.

In conformity with other Fathers of the Church, St. Augustine (354-430) also affirms that the knowledge of self will ultimately lead to the knowledge of God because man is made in God’s image:

“You are going astray, wandering around like that. Return. Where to? To the Lord. He is ready: return, first of all, to your heart. You are wandering about outside, exiled from yourself. You do not know yourself, and you are looking for the one by whom you were made! [...] Return to the heart; see there perhaps what you may sense about God, because that is where God’s image is. Christ is dwelling in the inner self; in the inner self you are being renewed after the image of God; in his image get to know its author” (Homily 18, 10)⁴⁰.

In addition, according to him, the process of obtaining knowledge always “ir de las cosas que son externas a las cosas que son internas, y de las cosas que son inferiores a las cosas que son superiores” (*en*. Ps. 145.5). Therefore, it is necessary to seek self-knowledge first for it is the essential element to ascend to the knowledge of God⁴¹.

Furthermore, for Augustine, the cause of all errors, especially the error of denying the power of divine providence come from the lack of self-knowledge. And the means to overcome this

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁸ Cf. Louis de Bazelaire. “Connaissance de soi”. *En Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, 1517.

³⁹ Ambrosio de Milán. *Exposición del Salmo 118* (Tr. Agustín López Kindler). Madrid: Editorial Ciudad Nueva, 2020, 61.

⁴⁰ Saint Augustine. *Homilies on the Gospel of John 1-40* (Trans: Edmund Hill, O.P.). New York: New City Press, 2009, 330-331.

⁴¹ Robert Crouse. “Conocimiento”. *En Diccionario de San Agustín*, dirigido por Allan D. Fitzgerald, O.S.A, 314-318. Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2001, 314.

error is the recollection: “The main cause of this error (the denial of Divine Providence) is the lack of knowledge of self. In order to know oneself it is most necessary to get out of the life of the senses into one’s interior, and there recollect oneself”⁴².

In short, according to the Fathers of the Church, man is created in the image and likeness of God. Thus it is necessary to know himself in order to ascend to the knowledge of God. Furthermore, knowing his beauty and greatness, man must strive to live a life worthy of his dignity.

3. Medieval authors

Many years after the fathers of the Church, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) revives the importance of self-knowledge in the journey towards God by consistently stressing on its role. Bernard considers self-knowledge as a foundation of a structure, without which the whole building of the spiritual life will collapse:

“Though you know all mysteries, though you know the breadth of the earth, the height of the heavens, the depth of the sea, if you know not yourself, you will be like a man building without a foundation, and will succeed not in rearing an edifice, but in making a ruin. Whatever structure you raise outside yourself will be like a heap of dust before the wind [...] Let, then, your consideration begin at yourself; and not only so, let it end there [...] To yourself be first, to yourself be last”⁴³.

Indeed, for him, self-knowledge is the initial step of man in his quest for God. It is also the very object of the monastic life because on it rests the whole ascetic and mystical edifice:

“Here you have no worry about children to feed or cares about pleasing a wife. There is no need to think about business transactions or worldly affairs or even worries about food or clothing. The greater part of today’s evils and the cares of this life are truly far from you. God has hidden you *in the secret part of his tabernacle (Ps 30:21)*. Therefore, my most beloved brothers, *be still and see that it is God himself (Ps 45:11)*. In order for you to be truly capable of this, you must first look to yourself in order to see what you are, and, according to the voice of the same prophet, *Let the nations know they are but mortals (Ps 9:21)*. May all your free time be given

⁴² Saint Augustine. *On Order [De Ordine]* (Trans. Silvano Borruo). South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 2007, 5.

⁴³ Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. *Treatise on Consideration* (Trans: A Priest of Mount Melleray). Dublin: Browne and Nolan Limited, 1921, (Republished in Kindle Edition by Aeterna Press, 2014), 40-41.

to this double contemplation, like the saint who prayed, ‘God, may I know myself, may I know you’” (Augustine, *Soliloquies*, 2.1)⁴⁴.

The reason for the affirmation of St. Bernard that self-knowledge is a foundation, the initial step and the final step in man’s journey towards God is explained clearly in his *Sermon 37 on the Canticle*. In it, he affirms that self-knowledge is indispensable for the salvation of man:

“No one is saved without knowledge of self; from it comes forth humility which is the mother of salvation, and the fear of the Lord which itself is as much the beginning of wisdom as it is of salvation [...] Know yourself then, that you may fear God; know God that you may also love him [...] Beware then, both of ignorance of yourself and ignorance of God since there is no salvation without the fear and the love of God. Everything else is indifferent”⁴⁵.

Indeed, without self-knowledge, one cannot obtain humility which is the necessary condition to be saved:

“If we are ignorant of ourselves, how can we have humility, since we shall think ourselves to be something, whereas we are nothing, as the Apostle speaks? And we know that without humility and hope we can have neither lot nor fellowship in the inheritance of the saints”⁴⁶.

Furthermore, for him, the lack of self-knowledge will lead to pride and pride will lead to sin, which obviously make us impossible to unite to God:

“Just as the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, so pride is the beginning of all sin; and just as the love of God is the way to the beginning of wisdom, so despair leads to the committing of every sin. And as the fear of God springs up within you from knowledge of self and love of God from the knowledge of God, so on the contrary, pride comes from want of self-knowledge and despair from want of knowledge of God [...] See how great the evil that springs from our want of self-knowledge: nothing less than the devil’s sin and the beginning of every sin, pride” [Sir 10:15]⁴⁷.

⁴⁴ Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. *Monastic Sermons* (Trans: Daniel Griggs), Collegeville, Minnesota: Cistercian Publications, 2016, 12.

⁴⁵ Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. *Sermons on the Canticle of Canticles*, Vol. I. (Trans: A Priest of Mount Melleray), Dublin: Browne and Nolan Limited, 1920, (Republished in Kindle Edition by Aeterna Press, 2014), 436.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 441.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 441-442.

This theme of self-knowledge continues to be expounded profoundly by St. Bonaventure (1221-1274). Already in the first lines of *The Soliloquy*, St. Bonaventure has affirmed that by the knowledge of oneself, man may ascend to the knowledge of God:

“¡Oh Alma!, ‘tu consideración, como dice San Bernardo *al Papa Eugenio*, ha de comenzar de ti, no sea que, distraída vanamente en las cosas de fuera, de ti misma te descuides’. Y en las *Meditaciones*: ‘Hay muchos que saben muchas cosas y de todo en todo se ignoran a sí mismos, estudian a los demás y de sí mismos no hacen caso; buscan a Dios fuera de sí y no ponen los ojos en su interior, donde Dios asiste. Quiero, pues, recogerme del mundo exterior al centro de mi alma, y desde aquí subir a lo alto, para conocer de dónde vengo y adónde voy, qué es lo que soy y por quién soy, y de esta suerte por el conocimiento propio venir al conocimiento de Dios’” (Sol. 1, 2)⁴⁸.

Thus he resolves to seek to know himself first of all:

“Guarda, pues, ¡oh Alma!, estos saludables consejos de los santos y pon desde luego el rayo de la contemplación en la región oriental, es decir, en la consideración de tus dotes naturales, ponderando atentamente cuán liberal se mostró el soberano Artífice en la formación de tu naturaleza, cuán viciosamente te deformaste por tu voluntad con el pecado y cuán graciosamente fuiste muchas veces reformada por la divina misericordia mediante la gracia” (Sol. 1, 2)⁴⁹.

Then in his famous book, *The Journey of the Mind into God*, St. Bonaventure urges us to move inwards to ourselves and study the three powers of the soul in order to reach God in ourselves:

“Enter therefore yourself and see, that your mind most fervently loves itself; nor can it love itself, unless it knows; nor does it know itself, unless it remembers itself, because we can sieze nothing through understanding, that is not present among our memory; and from this you advert, that your soul has a threefold power, not in the eye of the flesh, but in the eye of the mind. Therefore, consider the activities and characteristics of these three powers, and you can see God through yourself as through an image, which is to see Him through a mirror in mystery”⁵⁰.

⁴⁸ San Buenaventura. *Obras de san Buenaventura*, Tomo Cuarto, Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1947, 179.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 179-181.

⁵⁰ Saint Bonaventure. *The Journey of the Mind into God* (Trans: Philotheus Boehner, O.F.M). Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993, 18.

Finally, this theme of self-knowledge is presented beautifully with fervor and devotion in his book *Holiness of Life* addressed to religious women, in which he dedicates the whole first chapter on “true self-knowledge”. For him, the first step to become perfect or holy is self-knowledge. And this self-knowledge can be acquired only by entering one’s own self:

“The spouse of Christ who longs to become perfect must begin with her own self. She must put aside and forget everything else, entering into the secrecy of her own self. When she has done this, let her sift thoroughly all her weaknesses, habits, affections, actions and sins. She must weigh everything carefully, and make a complete examination of past and present. Should she discover even the least imperfection, let her weep in the bitterness of her self”⁵¹.

Thus he earnestly appeals them with the words of St. Bernard:

“O handmaid, beloved of God, if perfect self-knowledge is your aim, reflect! ‘Enter into your self and learn to value yourself at your proper worth. Discuss with yourself what you are, what you were, what you ought to be, and what you can be. Note what you were originally, what you are now through your own fault, what on the contrary good efforts ought to have made you, and what you still may be by correspondence with grace’ (St. Bernard, *The Inter. Dwelling*, c. 36, n. 76)⁵²[...] ‘If you are earnestly desirous of uprightness and perfection, examine continually and think well on your way of living. Notice how much you advance in virtue and how much you fall away. Examine your conduct and the sentiments that inspire you. Look and see how like to God you are, and how unlike! How near to God, and alas, how far away from Him!’” (S. Bernard, *Meditations*, c. 5, n. 14)⁵³.

According to him, it is so dangerous and a great blindness for a religious who knows so many things but not know himself:

“Oh, how dangerous a thing it is for a religious to wish to know much and yet not to know himself! How near death and perdition is that religious who is keenly interested in getting to the bottom of things, or who as a spiritual guide lives to solve the doubts and perplexities of distressed souls, yet does not know himself nor his own state! O my God, whence comes such blindness in a religious?”⁵⁴

⁵¹ St. Bonaventure. *Holiness of Life* (Trans: Laurence Costello O.F.M.). St. Louis, Missouri: B. Herder Book Company, 1928, (Republished in Kindle Edition by Aeterna Press, 2015), 1.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

And for this, Bonaventure ends the chapter on “true self-knowledge” with the prayer of St. Bernard on the importance of self-knowledge: “God, grant that I may know nothing if I do not know my own self” (S. Bernard, *Serm. de Diversis*, I)⁵⁵.

Another important author on self-knowledge in the medieval time is saint Catherine of Siena (1347-1380). She realizes that in order to know God, one needs to dwell in the “cell of self-knowledge”. She tells of her own experience in the third person:

“She has for some time exercised herself in virtue and has become accustomed to dwelling in the cell of self-knowledge in order to know better God’s goodness toward her, since upon knowledge follows love. And loving, she seeks to pursue truth and clothe herself in it”⁵⁶.

This conviction of her that the search for the truth about God requires first coming to terms with the truth about oneself is confirmed by the Truth Himself:

“And you ask for the will to know and love me, supreme Truth. Here is the way, if you would come to perfect knowledge and enjoyment of me, eternal Life: Never leave the knowledge of yourself. Then, put down as you are in the valley of humility you will know me in yourself, and from this knowledge you will draw all that you need”⁵⁷.

In summary, the medieval authors consider self-knowledge as a foundation of the spiritual life. Without which man cannot obtain neither humility nor salvation. For them, to know God, to love God and to be united with Him, one must always travel on the path of self-knowledge. If not, the whole building of the spiritual life will collapse.

4. The spiritual authors in modern time

The spiritual authors of the sixteenth-century insistently speak of the need for self-knowledge in the process of union with God. Here we just discuss the three Spanish authors who were more or less contemporary with St. Teresa and had some influences on her life and her teachings.

The first one is Bernardino de Laredo (1482–1540). He discusses the role of self-knowledge mainly in his famous book *La Subida del Monte Sion*. This book was divided into three parts

⁵⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁶ Catherine of Siena. *The Dialogue* (Trans: Suzanne Noffke, O.P.). Broadway, New York: Paulist Press, 1980, 25.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 29.

in conform with the three ways: *Purgative Way, Illuminative Way and Unitive Way*⁵⁸ in which the first part is dedicated to self-knowledge, the second deals with the following of Christ, and the third is dedicated entirely to contemplation. Furthermore, as a physician who knows well the stages of man's development, Bernardino also compares man's spiritual development with his physical development. For him, just as each person needs to pass the four stages of life which are *infancy, childhood, adolescence, young manhood* in order to reach maturity, so in the spiritual life which leads to perfection each of us has to pass through four separate periods, during which we grow and make progress⁵⁹. In the first stage, man practices self-knowledge and self-humiliation which are the foundations without which he cannot reach union with God:

“En el espiritual intento diremos que alguno está en la infancia cuando en su conocimiento y en su propia humillación emplea su aprovechamiento. Donde se note que así como aquesta primera edad en lo material es comienzo de aquestas otras edades, o si esta falta o se acaba antes de su henchimiento no es posible que preceda a las otras edades, así se entienda ser cierto que, si la edad espiritual no se funda en nuestro conocimiento y humillación, no será cosa durable, antes será edificar sin cimiento”⁶⁰.

Self-knowledge not only is the foundation for all other stages of spiritual life but also must be present always because it is both the beginning and the means to reach the perfect contemplation as Bernardino affirms:

“Cuanto quiera que el alma sea puesta en quieta contemplación, en tanto que está en la tierra de este cuerpo, nunca se debe olvidar del conocimiento propio y seguir la cruz de Cristo, porque este es principio y medio para venir a este fin”⁶¹.

The second one is Francisco de Osuna (1497-1541). In the same line with other Spanish spiritual writers in the 16th century who divide their spiritual journey into three stages which are self-knowledge, meditation of the Passion of Christ and transformation of the soul into God⁶², Osuna also divides the prayer of recollection into three steps which are the prayer of self-knowledge or annihilation, the prayer of following Christ, and the prayer of union or transformation⁶³.

⁵⁸ Cf. Bernabé de Palma; Bernardino De Laredo. *Via Spiritus - Subida del Monte Sion* (Coor. Teodoro H. Martín). Madrid: Editorial Biblioteca Autores Cristianos, 1998, 151.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 161-162.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁶² Cf. Melquíades Andrés. “La vía espiritual del recogimiento”. *Salmanticensis* 20/3 (1973), 658.

⁶³ Cf. Mariano Quirós García. “El itinerario del recogimiento en la quinta parte del *Abecedario espiritual* de Francisco de Osuna”. *Revista de Lexicografía*, Vol. 5 (1999), 121.

The aim of prayer of self-knowledge is to help man recognize his misery, corporal and spiritual due to the fact that his soul “has gone out of itself” (*se fue para sí mesma*) by obeying its own will. Thus, man must enter within himself, detach himself from all external obstacles, and rediscover his own sinful essence. And once the reality of his misery has been verified, he must “flee from himself” (*huír de sí mesmo*) until he reaches the infinite mercy of God⁶⁴.

In other words, in the journey toward union with God, man must procure to know himself by entering into himself or descending into himself (*entrar dentro de sí, bajar a sí*), so that he may recognize his sinful essence and overcome it through the mercy of God and the imitation of Christ. Only then he can be elevated to the quiet contemplation of God⁶⁵.

The third one is Juan de Avila (1499-1569). The fact that he dedicates 11 chapters (chapters 57-67) in his famous book *Audi, filia* to self-knowledge is a solid proof that for him, self-knowledge places an important role in the spiritual life. In these chapters, he first points out the necessity of self-knowledge. Then, he offers some practical ways to obtain it. In particular, for Juan, without self-knowledge, man will be despised and cast out by God: “la causa por que el benigno Señor se torna riguroso en echar de casa sus hijos, es porque no se conocen, pensando ser algo, y estribando sobre sus fuerzas”⁶⁶. On the contrary, with self-knowledge, man will be drawn toward God and vice versa: “por el humilde conocimiento de sí es una ánima semejante a los buenos ángeles, que se arrimaron a Dios y se desasieron de sí; porque se veían ser caña quebrada; y túvolos Dios, y confirmólos”⁶⁷.

Because of this importance of self-knowledge, the first thing man must do is look at himself in order to know himself, know his sinfulness and unworthiness before God:

“Tendréis, pues, esta orden en el mirar: que primero os miréis a vos, y después a Dios, y después a los prójimos. Miraos a vos para que os conozcáis y tengáis en poco; porque no hay peor engaño, que ser uno engañado en sí mismo, teniéndose por otro de lo que es. Lodo sois de parte del cuerpo, pecadora de parte del ánima”⁶⁸.

Furthermore, for Juan de Ávila, self-knowledge will ultimately lead to humility which is the foundation of all other virtues⁶⁹. Therefore, for him, it is a real jewel of great value that man needs to dig deep into himself in order to find it:

⁶⁴ Ibid., 122.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 129.

⁶⁶ Juan de Ávila, *Audi, filia* (Ed. A. Granado Bellido), Madrid: San Pablo, 2013, 265.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 267.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 263.

⁶⁹ Cf. Ibid., 269.

“Y si me dijéredes: ¿Dónde hallaré esta joya del propio conocimiento?, dígoos que aunque es de mucho valor, en el establo, y entre el estiércol de vuestra poquedad y defectos la habéis de hallar, quitando los ojos de las vidas ajenas. No os entremetáis en saber cosas curiosas; volved vuestra vista a vos misma, y perseverad en examinaros; que aunque al principio no halléis tomo en conoceros, como quien entra de la claridad del sol a una cámara oscura; mas perseverando en sosiego, poco a poco veréis con la gracia de Dios lo que en vuestro corazón hay, aunque sea en los muy secretos rincones”⁷⁰.

In short, like the medieval authors, the spiritual authors in modern time also consider self-knowledge as the foundation of spiritual life and as the condition to attain humility. And for them to acquire self-knowledge, one needs not to find outside but enters and digs deep into himself. By entering himself and looking at his sinfulness and unworthiness before God, man will gain self-knowledge.

Conclusion

Upon looking on the sources of self-knowledge in spiritual life, we can see its importance lie in the fact that it is the foundation as well as an indispensable means to reach perfection and union with God. First of all, self-knowledge helps one reform his moral life because it allows him to see his infirmity and vicious inclinations and thus helps him to stop the fire of passions at its beginnings. Second, it is an efficient means to obtain humility which is the foundation of spiritual life and the essential condition for one to be united with God. Third, since the soul is the image of God, the more one gets to know oneself, the better he will know and love God. Finally, self-knowledge is important because it allows one to see clearly what he is before God as well as his relationship with Him, that he is a mere creature coming from God and destined to be united with Him. In short, self-knowledge helps one to see his actual moral and spiritual state and the requirements that he needs to do achieve ultimate vocation and destination which is union with God.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 269-270.

CHAPTER II

SELF-KNOWLEDGE ACCORDING TO SAINT TERESA OF JESUS

Introduction

In the first chapter, we explore the various sources of self-knowledge from biblical times to the time of Saint Teresa of Jesus, as well as its significance in spiritual life in general. In this chapter, we examine all the aspects of self-knowledge according Teresa. We will first analyze some authors from the above sources who had a significant impact on her life and thinking about self-knowledge. Afterwards, we will delve into her own concept of self-knowledge. Then, we will examine the changing significance of self-knowledge in Teresa's life, transitioning from a negative to a positive understanding as she matured in both age and grace. Finally, we will discuss her doctrine on self-knowledge, including its significance and the obstacles to achieving it.

1. The sources influencing St. Teresa's thinking on self-knowledge

Saint Teresa was an avid reader and this passion for reading left a great mark on her thinking as well as on her doctrine⁷¹. Indeed, her insistence on self-knowledge not only came from her personal experience but also from her contact and readings of the works of the great masters of spirituality both of the old as well as of her contemporaries. They guided her in her spiritual life and helped her overcome her many doubts and troubles that she encountered in her prayer life. Although there were many spiritual figures who impacted Teresa's life and beliefs, based on her writings, we would like to highlight some sources that had a clear influence on her self-knowledge.

1. 1. Saint Augustine

Saint Augustine had a powerful influence both in the life as well as in the doctrine of Saint Teresa. In the *Book of Her Life*, she described how the reading of the *Confessions* of St. Augustine helped her overcome her divided heart and paved the way for her definitive conversion⁷²:

⁷¹ Cf. Julio Escribano Hernández. "Santa Teresa de Jesús, una mujer en sus cartas". *Cuadernos para investigación de la literatura hispánica*, Nº 41 (2015), 111.

⁷² Cf. Félix Carmona Moreno, OSA. "Santa Teresa, las agustinas y la influencia de San Agustín. Los agustinos". *Santa Teresa y el mundo teresiano del barroco. XXIII Simposium. San Lorenzo de El Escorial, 3 al 6 de septiembre 2015*. Ed. Campos y Fernández de Sevilla, Francisco Javier, OSA. Instituto Escorialense de Investigaciones Históricas y Artísticas; 49. San Lorenzo de El Escorial: Ediciones Escorialenses, 2015, 812.

“Como comencé a leer las *Confesiones*, pareceme me veía yo allí. Comencé a encomendarme mucho a este glorioso Santo. Cuando llegué a su conversión y leí cómo oyó aquella voz en el huerto, no me parece sino que el Señor me la dio a mí, según sintió mi corazón. Estuve por gran rato que toda me deshacía en lágrimas, y entre mí misma con gran aflicción y fatiga. ¡Oh, qué sufre un alma, válgame Dios, por perder la libertad que había de tener de ser señora, y qué de tormentos padece! Yo me admiro ahora cómo podía vivir en tanto tormento” (V 9, 8).

Because of this influence, Teresa confessed: “Yo soy muy aficionada a San Agustín” (V 9, 7). This fondness of her toward the holy bishop of Hippo as she explained not only came from the fact that she used to stay in his Order⁷³, but she also found in him some similarities in his early life which gave her so much consolation and inspiration⁷⁴. Indeed, there were astonishing similarities in the lives of the two saints as Etchegoyen pointed out in his study on the sources of Saint Teresa:

“Antes de su conversión, dice el autor, los dos experimentan con igual docilidad las influencias buenas y malas, y se entregan con el mismo entusiasmo a las lecturas profanas. Muestran el mismo calor de amor filial y de amistad ardiente. ¿Han conocido en su adolescencia tentaciones semejantes? Teresa desearía hacérselo creer. Y después ¿cuál de esas dos almas ha puesto más ardor y angustia en la búsqueda del amor divino? Finalmente, a lo largo de esta crisis dolorosa, los dos reciben el aviso de la muerte, San Agustín a través de la agonía de su amigo, Santa Teresa a la cabecera de su padre. Después de su conversión, los dos desarrollan de manera similar el sentimiento de la acción, es decir, del apostolado”⁷⁵.

Indeed, the *Confessions* and the *Book of Her Life* are the candid and honest acknowledgements of the sins of their authors so that their readers can be moved to praise the Lord and his mercy as well as to animate those who are overwhelmed with their sins never losing their hope in God:

“What shall I render unto the Lord because, while my memory recalls these things, my soul is not terrified at them? I will love Thee, O Lord, and thank Thee and confess unto Thy name, because you have forgiven me these great sins and these evil doings of mine. To your grace I owe it, and to

⁷³ Cf. Teresa de Jesús. *Vida* 9, 7. Teresa was put in the convent of the Augustinian nuns of Our Lady of Grace, where she was greatly helped by Doña María de Briceño y Contreras. This took place about 1531, when Teresa was sixteen.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Vida* 9, 7.

⁷⁵ Citado por José Luis Cancelo García. “La Influencia De San Agustín En Santa Teresa”. *Revista Agustiniiana* 53 (2012), 82.

your mercy, that you have melted away my sins like ice. And to your grace too I owe the not doing of whatever evil I have not done” (Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Book II-7, 15).

“Pues para lo que he tanto contado esto es, como he ya dicho, para que se vea la misericordia de Dios y mi ingratitud; lo otro, para que se entienda el gran bien que hace Dios a un alma que la dispone para tener oración con voluntad, aunque no esté tan dispuesta como es menester, y cómo si en ella persevera, por pecados y tentaciones y caídas de mil manera que ponga el demonio, en fin tengo por cierto la saca el Señor a puerto de salvación, como -a lo que ahora parece- me ha sacado a mí. Plega a Su Majestad no me torne yo a perder” (V 8, 4).

In terms of doctrine, according to Saint Augustine, one cannot find neither the truth of himself nor the truth of God in exterior things. Therefore, one must find himself and God in the deepest of his heart (*Conf.* 7.10.16)⁷⁶. This concept of seeking God and the self in the interior was adopted by Saint Teresa in her major works. In the *Book of Her Life*, she advised:

“Paréceme provechosa esta visión para personas de recogimiento, para enseñarse a considerar al Señor en lo muy interior de su alma, que es consideración que más se apega, y muy más fructuosa que fuera de sí -como otras veces he dicho- y en algunos libros de oración está escrito, adónde se ha de buscar a Dios. En especial lo dice el glorioso San Agustín, que ni en las plazas, ni en los contentos ni por ninguna parte que le buscaba, le hallaba como dentro de sí. Y esto es muy claro ser mejor. Y no es menester ir al cielo, ni más lejos que a nosotros mismos, porque es cansar el espíritu y distraer el alma y no con tanto fruto” (V 40, 6).

The same advice was repeated in the *Way of Perfection* (CE 46, 2) as well as in the *Interior Castle*:

“Cuando no hay encendido el fuego que queda dicho en la voluntad ni se siente la presencia de Dios, es menester que la busquemos; que esto quiere Su Majestad, como lo hacía la Esposa en los *Cantares*, y que preguntemos a las criaturas quién las hizo -como dice San Agustín, creo, en sus *Meditaciones o Confesiones*-, y no nos estemos bobos perdiendo tiempo por esperar lo que una vez se nos dio” (6M 7, 9).

⁷⁶ Cf. Robert Crouse. “Conocimiento”. En *Diccionario de San Agustín*, dirigido por Allan D. Fitzgerald, O.S.A, 314-318. Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2001, 314.

1. 2. Bernardino de Laredo

We know for certain that St. Teresa read the celebrated work the *Ascent of Mount Sion* of Bernardino de Laredo and this work had guided her in the prayer of union as she told us:

“Mirando libros para ver si sabría decir la oración que tenía, hallé en uno que se llama *Subida del Monte*, en lo que toca a unión del alma con Dios, todas las señales que yo tenía en aquel no pensar nada, que esto era lo que yo más decía: que no podía pensar nada cuando tenía aquella oración; y señalé con unas rayas las partes que eran, y dile el libro para que él y el otro clérigo que he dicho, santo y siervo de Dios, lo mirasen y me dijese lo que había de hacer” (V 23, 12).

This book came to her rescue when she was in deep anguish and fear:

“Comenzó Su Majestad a darme muy ordinario oración de quietud, y muchas veces de unión, que duraba mucho rato. Yo, como en estos tiempos habían acaecido grandes ilusiones en mujeres y engaños que las había hecho el demonio, comencé a temer (V 23, 2). [...] Como yo vi iba tan adelante mi temor, porque crecía la oración, parecióme que en esto había algún gran bien o grandísimo mal” (V 23, 5).

The Saint not only took advantage of this book to explain to her confessors the way of her prayer in difficult moments but also made use of the metaphors such as the castle, the butterfly, the bee, etc., from this work of Laredo for her own books⁷⁷. Furthermore, she also benefited from the book of devotion written by him as an appendix to the *Ascent of Mount Sion* in honor of the glorious patriarch St. Joseph. In this edifying booklet in praise of St. Joseph, Laredo reminds us that St. Joseph is the greatest saint, after the Blessed Virgin, and the most powerful intercessor⁷⁸. Teresa repeated this fact in the *Book of Her Life*:

“A otros santos parece les dio el Señor gracia para socorrer en una necesidad, a este glorioso Santo tengo experiencia que socorre en todas (V 6, 6) [...] Sólo pido por amor de Dios que lo pruebe quien no me creyere, y verá por experiencia el gran bien que es encomendarse a este glorioso Patriarca y tenerle devoción. En especial, personas de oración siempre le habían de ser aficionadas; que no sé cómo se puede pensar en la Reina de los ángeles en el tiempo que tanto

⁷⁷ Cf. Antonio Royo Marín, OP. *Los grandes maestros de la vida espiritual*. Madrid: BAC, 1990, 304.

⁷⁸ Cf. Teodoro H. Martín. “Introducción”, en *Via Spiritus* de Bernabé de Palma / *Subida del Monte Sión* de Bernardino de Laredo. Madrid: BAC (Clásicos de Espiritualidad), 1998, XLIII.

pasó con el Niño Jesús, que no den gracias a San José por lo bien que les ayudó en ellos” (V 6, 8).

Since Saint Teresa took advantage so much from reading the *Ascent of Mount Sion*, it is logical to believe the Saint also benefited from reading the first part of the book where Laredo deals with the purification of the senses, self-knowledge and meditation⁷⁹.

1. 3. Francisco de Osuna

The influence of Francisco de Osuna on Saint Teresa mostly came from her reading of the *Tercer abecedario espiritual*, a manual par excellence of the prayer of recollection, as she told us:

“Cuando iba, me dio aquel tío mío que tengo dicho que estaba en el camino, un libro: llámase *Tercer Abecedario*, que trata de enseñar oración de recogimiento; y puesto que este primer año había leído buenos libros (que no quise más usar de otros, porque ya entendía el daño que me habían hecho), no sabía cómo proceder en oración ni cómo recogerme, y así holguéme mucho con él y determinéme a seguir aquel camino con todas mis fuerzas. Y como ya el Señor me había dado don de lágrimas y gustaba de leer, comencé a tener ratos de soledad y a confesarme a menudo y comenzar aquel camino, teniendo a aquel libro por maestro” (V 4, 7).

Teresa not only applied this book for her own life, but also taught her readers this prayer of recollection later on as we can find it in the *Book of Her Life* (12-15), the *Way of Perfection* (26-29) and the *Interior Castle* (4, 3). Furthermore, she also adopted and assimilated the specific terms and expressions used by Osuna to express her own mystical experiences and those of others, such as “teología mística, contemplación, gustos, gusto espiritual, mercedes, regalos, recogimiento, quietud, experiencia, huerto de regadío, castillo interior, embarazar y desembarazar el palacio-corazón”⁸⁰. Indeed, Osuna had a strong influence on teresian prayer⁸¹. According to Daniel de Pablo, Osuna puts his efforts to show the importance of interiority and its role in the union of friendship between man and God⁸², and self-knowledge for Osuna is an

⁷⁹ Cf. Antonio Royo Marín, OP. *Los grandes maestros de la vida espiritual*. Madrid: BAC, 1990, 303.

⁸⁰ Daniel de Pablo Maroto. “La oración de ‘recogimiento’ en el Camino de Perfección. Franciscanismo y teresianismo”, *Revista de Espiritualidad* 70 (2011), 537.

⁸¹ Cf. Tomas Álvarez. “Osuna, Francisco de”. En *Diccionario de santa Teresa de Jesús*, dirigido por Tomas Álvarez. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2001, 1058.

⁸² Cf. Daniel de Pablo Maroto. “La oración de ‘recogimiento’ en el Camino de Perfección. Franciscanismo y teresianismo”. *Revista de Espiritualidad* 70 (2011), 519-546.

important element in this process of interiority⁸³. Therefore, it is very likely that Teresa was also influenced by this doctrine of Osuna.

1. 4. San Juan de Ávila

Self-knowledge is an important doctrine of Juan de Ávila. In fact, he dedicated 11 chapters (chapters 57-67) of his famous book *Audi, filia* to self-knowledge. But the question is how did he influenced Saint Teresa on this matter?

In his study on the relationship between Juan de Ávila and Teresa, F. Javier Díaz Lorite affirms that the two saints never met in person due to their age difference and the places where they moved around, and because no personal encounter was recorded by either of them or witnesses⁸⁴. However, the two saints did communicate with each other through letters, most significantly Juan de Ávila's letter number 158 of 1568 in which he approved the *Book of Her Life* and offered Teresa some wise counsels for the future:

“Vuestra merced siga su camino, mas siempre con recelo de los ladrones y preguntando por el camino derecho; y dé gracias a nuestro Señor, que le ha dado su amor y el propio conocimiento, y amor de penitencia y de cruz. Y de esotras cosas, pues hay señales que muy muchas de ellas son de parte de nuestro Señor, y las que no son, con pedir consejo no le dañarán”⁸⁵.

Teresa received this letter with great joy as she expressed through a letter to D^a Luisa de la Cerda:

“Lo del libro trae vuestra señoría tan bien negociado que no puede ser mejor, y así olvido quantas rabias me ha hecho. El maestro Ávila me escribe largo, y le contenta todo; sólo dice que es menester declarar más unas cosas y mudar los vocablos de otras, que esto es fácil. Buena obra ha hecho vuestra señoría [...] Harto me he holgado de ver tan buen recaudo, porque importa mucho; bien parece quién aconsejó se enviase” (Cta 14, 2).

Her joy and consolation came from her great esteem for “el Padre Maestro Ávila”⁸⁶ which manifested in the fact that as soon as she finished writing the *Book of Her Life*, she ardently desired that it to be read and approved by him:

⁸³ Cf. Mariano Quirós García. “El itinerario del recogimiento en la quinta parte del *Abecedario espiritual* de Francisco de Osuna”. *Revista de Lexicografía*, Vol. 5 (1999), 129.

⁸⁴ Cf. Francisco Javier Díaz Lorite. “San Juan De Ávila, Maestro De Santa Teresa De Jesús”. *Estudios Eclesiásticos. Revista de investigación e información teológica y canónica* 90 (2015), 509.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 516.

⁸⁶ *Vida*, Epílogo, 2.

“Yo deseo harto se dé orden en cómo lo vea, pues con ese intento lo comencé a escribir. Porque, como a él le parezca voy por buen camino, quedaré muy consolada, que ya no me queda más para hacer lo que es en mí” (*Vida*, Epílogo, 2).

Furthermore, according to Tomás Álvarez, it is most probably that Teresa had read the *Audi, filia*: “Es casi seguro que Teresa ha leído el *Audi, filia*, de San Juan de Ávila, aunque nunca lo menciona expresamente”⁸⁷. Tomás Álvarez’s assertion is well-supported as the *Audi, filia* circulated widely even before its publication in 1556⁸⁸. On the other hand, starting from 1554, Teresa maintained close relationships with Juan de Ávila’s disciples and friends, including Francisco de Borja, Baltasar Álvarez, Luis de Granada, and Pedro de Alcántara⁸⁹. They likely shared information about Juan’s famous book with her.

Among the disciples of Juan de Ávila, Luis de Granada was most probably one of the persons who has influenced powerfully in the prayer life of St. Teresa, as evidenced by her letter to him from Beas in 1575:

“De las muchas personas que aman en el Señor a vuestra paternidad por haber escrito tan santa y provechosa doctrina, y dan gracias a Su Majestad, y por haberla dado a vuestra paternidad para tan grande y universal bien de las almas, soy yo una” (Cta 82, 1).

Her esteem for Luis de Granada and his doctrine was so great that she recommended that all his books be kept and read in her newly founded monasteries as stipulated in the *Constitutions* of 1562: “Tenga cuenta la Priora con que haya buenos libros, en especial... los de Fray Luis de Granada” (Cst 1, 13). Clearly, Teresa had read many books of Luis de Granada, and among which were the *Libro de oración y meditación* (1554) and the *Guía de pecadores y de la vida cristiana* (1556) which contain both the doctrine of the *Audi, filia* and the teachings of Juan de Ávila⁹⁰. In conclusion, Teresa must have been influenced by the teachings of Juan de Ávila, among which is the doctrine on self-knowledge contained in the *Audi, filia*.

⁸⁷ Tomás Álvarez. “Lecturas teresianas”. En *Diccionario de Santa Teresa de Jesús*, dirigido por Tomas Álvarez. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2001, 897.

⁸⁸ Cf. Francisco Javier Díaz Lorite. “San Juan De Ávila, Maestro De Santa Teresa De Jesús”. *Estudios Eclesiásticos. Revista de investigación e información teológica y canónica* 90 (2015), 517.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 505.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 531.

2. Teresa's concept of self-knowledge

The idea of self-knowledge can vary in definition and interpretation across disciplines, including philosophy, psychology, theology, and morality. Here, we will focus solely on self-knowledge in spiritual life. According to Louis de Bazelaire, the spiritual authors throughout the history of the Church often consider self-knowledge from the perspective of moral psychology⁹¹. After summarizing and examining various spiritual perspectives on self-knowledge, Bazelaire distilled them into a twofold definition:

“To know oneself is first of all to know what there is in man, his nature, his value, his place in the scale of beings, his origin and his destiny, it is to judge him according to the perspective in which Pascal showed the inherent contradiction of man, and the irreducible opposition that he carries within him; in short, it is to confess his greatness and his misery. His greatness with God, his greatness as a son of God, as an *imago Dei*, as the ancients said. His weakness without God, his fragility under the weight of sin, which made St. Paul feel so violently the intimate struggle where two men - the spiritual man and the carnal man - confront each other tirelessly.

To know oneself is also to know, not only what there is in man, but what there is in this concrete man that I am. It is to make an inventory of the psychological and moral riches for which he knows he is responsible, as well as the weaknesses of which he recognizes himself guilty”⁹².

This twofold aspect of self-knowledge, that is, recognizing both our fallen, sinful nature and our great dignity as creatures made in God's image, is also embraced by Teresa. In particular, for Teresa, self-knowledge is the recognition of our true self, our most authentic condition. This implies, first of all, the recognition of our own weakness and misery, that is, “reconocer al inicio la presencia de la suciedad, bestias, ponzoña ... que no dejar ver la claridad: el pecado, o el estar demasiado atado a las cosas del mundo, o al propio ego”⁹³:

⁹¹ Cf. Louis de Bazelaire. “Connaissance de soi”. En *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, dirigido por A. Derville, P. Lamarche, y A. Solignac, 1511-1543. Vol. 2. Paris: Beauchesne, 1990, 1526.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 1526-1527. The translation is ours. The original text is as follows: « Se connaître, c'est d'abord savoir ce qu'il y a dans l'homme, sa nature, sa valeur, sa place dans l'échelle des êtres, son origine et sa destinée, c'est le juger soi-même suivant la perspective où Pascal a montré la contradiction inhérente à l'homme, et l'opposition irréductible qu'il porte en lui; bref, c'est avouer sa grandeur et sa misère. Sa grandeur avec Dieu, sa grandeur do fils de Dieu, d'imago do Dieu, comme disaient les Anciens. Sa faiblesse sans Dieu, sa fragilité sous le poids du péché qui faisait sentir si violemment à saint Paul la lutte intime où deux hommes, — l'homme spirituel et l'homme charnel —, s'affrontent inlassablement.

Se connaître, c'est savoir aussi, non seulement ce qu'il y a dans l'homme, mais ce qu'il y a dans cet homme concret que je suis. C'est faire l'inventaire des richesses psychologiques et morales dont il se sait responsable, comme également des faiblesses dont il se reconnaît coupable ».

⁹³ Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín. “Una puerta para la esperanza: el conocimiento de sí y la oración en el Castillo Interior.” *Las Moradas del Castillo Interior de Santa Teresa de Jesús. Actas del IV Congreso Internacional*

“Habéis de notar que en estas moradas primeras aún no llega casi nada la luz que sale del palacio donde está el Rey; porque, aunque no están oscurecidas y negras como cuando el alma está en pecado, está oscurecida en alguna manera para que no la pueda ver -el que está en ella digo- y no por culpa de la pieza -que no sé darme a entender-, sino porque con tantas cosas malas de culebras y víboras y cosas emponzoñosas que entraron con él, no le dejan advertir a la luz. Como si uno entrase en una parte adonde entra mucho sol y llevase tierra en los ojos, que casi no los pudiese abrir. Clara está la pieza, mas él no lo goza por el impedimento o cosas de esas fieras y bestias que le hacen cerrar los ojos para no ver sino a ellas. Así me parece debe ser un alma que, aunque no está en mal estado, está tan metida en cosas del mundo y tan empapada en la hacienda u honra o negocios -como tengo dicho- que, aunque en hecho de verdad se querría ver y gozar de su hermosura, no le dejan, ni parece que puede descabullirse de tantos impedimentos. Y conviene mucho, para haber de entrar a las segundas moradas, que procure dar de mano a las cosas y negocios no necesarios, cada uno conforme a su estado; que es cosa que le importa tanto para llegar a la morada principal, que si no comienza a hacer esto lo tengo por imposible; y aun estar sin mucho peligro en la que está, aunque haya entrado en el castillo, porque entre cosas tan ponzoñosas, una vez u otra es imposible dejarle de morder” (1M 2, 14).

The purpose of this recognition of our own misery, according to Sancho Fermín, is to “purifica el ego de su amor propio y abre los ojos a la gratuidad del don de Dios y de reconocimiento de su misericordia”⁹⁴:

“Porque muchas veces quiere Dios que sus escogidos sientan su miseria, y aparta un poco su favor, que no es menester más, que a osadas que nos conozcamos bien presto. Y luego se entiende esta manera de probarlos, porque entienden ellos su falta muy claramente, y a las veces les da más pena ésta de ver que, sin poder más, sienten cosas de la tierra y no muy pesadas, que lo mismo de que tienen pena. Esto téngolo yo por gran misericordia de Dios; y aunque es falta, muy gananciosa para la humildad” (3M 2, 2).

However, we run the risk of becoming paralyzed, discouraged or sinking into our own weakness if we simply immerse ourselves in our own misery. Moreover, misery does not exhaust what we are, nor does it define us⁹⁵. In fact, for Teresa, our self-knowledge will never

Teresiano, celebrado en Ávila del 3 al 7 de septiembre de 2013, en preparación del V Centenario de su nacimiento (1515-2015). Eds. Sancho Fermín, Francisco Javier, OCD and Cuartas Londoño, Rómulo Hernán, OCD, 1948-2021. Claves. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2014, 332.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 333.

⁹⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 333.

be complete if we do not know that we are created in the image and likeness of God and that our soul has great dignity and beauty:

“Pues ¿qué tal os parece que será el aposento adonde un Rey tan poderoso, tan sabio, tan limpio, tan lleno de todos los bienes se deleita? No hallo yo cosa con que comparar la gran hermosura de un alma y la gran capacidad; y verdaderamente apenas deben llegar nuestros entendimientos, por agudos que fuesen, a comprenderla, así como no pueden llegar a considerar a Dios, pues El mismo dice que nos crió a su imagen y semejanza.

Pues si esto es, como lo es, no hay para qué nos cansar en querer comprender la hermosura de este castillo; porque puesto que hay la diferencia de él a Dios que del Criador a la criatura, pues es criatura, basta decir Su Majestad que es hecha a su imagen para que apenas podamos entender la gran dignidad y hermosura del ánima” (1M 1, 1).

Knowing our soul’s great dignity and beauty will help us learn to act out of that boundless positivity that defines us, instead of remaining limited by our own wretchedness⁹⁶:

“¡Oh que si es en el propio conocimiento! Que con cuán necesario es esto (miren que me entiendan), aun a las que las tiene el Señor en la misma morada que El está, que jamás -por encumbrada que esté- le cumple otra cosa ni podrá aunque quiera; que la humildad siempre labra como la abeja en la colmena la miel, que sin esto todo va perdido. Mas consideremos que la abeja no deja de salir a volar para traer flores; así el alma en el propio conocimiento, créame y vuele algunas veces a considerar la grandeza y majestad de su Dios. Aquí hallará su bajeza mejor que en sí misma, y más libre de las sabandijas adonde entran en las primeras piezas, que es el propio conocimiento; que aunque, como digo, es harta misericordia de Dios que se ejercite en esto, tanto es lo de más como lo de menos -suelen decir- Y créanme, que con la virtud de Dios obraremos muy mejor virtud que muy atadas a nuestra tierra” (1M 2, 8).

Furthermore, this knowledge will also help us to achieve humility and gratitude towards the great mercy of God: “quiere nuestro Señor que no pierda la memoria de su ser, para que siempre esté humilde, lo uno; lo otro, porque entienda más lo que debe a Su Majestad y la grandeza de la merced que recibe, y le alabe” (7 M 4, 2).

⁹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 334.

However, according to Teresa, one cannot know himself fully if he does not strive to know God. In other words, one can only define the self in the light of who God is⁹⁷, or only by knowing God in his great attributes can one adequately know himself⁹⁸:

“Créame y vuele algunas veces a considerar la grandeza y majestad de su Dios. Aquí hallará su bajeza mejor que en sí misma, y más libre de las sabandijas adonde entran en las primeras piezas, que es el propio conocimiento” (1M 2, 8).

“A mi parecer jamás nos acabamos de conocer si no procuramos conocer a Dios; mirando su grandeza, acudamos a nuestra bajeza; y mirando su limpieza, veremos nuestra suciedad; considerando su humildad, veremos cuán lejos estamos de ser humildes. Hay dos ganancias de esto: la primera, está claro que parece una cosa blanca muy más blanca cabe la negra, y al contrario la negra cabe la blanca; la segunda es, porque nuestro entendimiento y voluntad se hace más noble y más aparejado para todo bien tratando a vueltas de sí con Dios; y si nunca salimos de nuestro cieno de miserias, es mucho inconveniente” (1M 2, 9-10).

In short, self-knowledge according Teresa as Sam Anthony Morello puts it “is not introspective or centered in the incomplete self; rather it is God- and Christ-centered. From learning to look at God in truth we discover the truth about the self. Only in the benevolent presence of the redeeming Lord can we safely descend into the compulsive, wounded, and sinful self”⁹⁹. Indeed, for Teresa, we cannot define or speak of self-knowledge apart from the knowledge of God.

3. Teresa’s lived self-knowledge

Aside from reading the spiritual books and her conversations with the theologians of her time, many teachings of Teresa come from her own experiences, including the teaching on self-knowledge as she once affirmem: “No diré cosa que no la haya experimentado mucho”¹⁰⁰. Teresa’s self-knowledge evolved as her spiritual life matured. It started with a negative self-knowledge in the *Book of Her Life* and progressed to a highly positive self-knowledge in the *Interior Castle*.

⁹⁷ Cf. Robyn Wrigley-Carr. “The Butterfly and the King. Self-Knowledge in Teresa of Avila’s *Interior Castle*”. *Studies in Spirituality* 19 (2009), 115.

⁹⁸ Cf. Oswaldo Escobar. “Conocimiento propio según Santa Teresa de Jesús”, 1. Consultado el 12 de enero de 2023. <https://delaruecaapluma.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/conocimiento-propio-segun-santa-teresa-de-jesus-2.pdf>

⁹⁹ Sam Anthony Morello. *Lectio Divina and the Practice of Teresian Prayer*. Washington: ICS Publications, 1995, 17.

¹⁰⁰ V 18, 8.

3.1. Teresa's negative self-knowledge

In the *Book of Her Life*, Teresa made a profound analysis of her life from childhood until her first years in the newly established monastery of San Jose in which she candidly recounted her sinful past to demonstrate God's mercy and greatness:

“Y plega a vuestra bondad, Señor, que sea yo sola la ingrata y la que haya hecho tan gran maldad y tenido tan excesiva ingratitud: porque aun ya de ella algún bien ha sacado vuestra infinita bondad; y mientras mayor mal, más resplandece el gran bien de vuestras misericordias” (V 14, 10).

“Plega a Su Majestad sea alguna parte la grandísima largueza que con esta miserable pecadora ha tenido, para que se esfuercen y animen los que esto leyeren a dejarlo todo del todo por Dios” (V 21, 12).

In fact, she had expressly desired to tell her readers in detail and with clarity her wretchedness and miseries right in the very first line of the book:

“Quisiera yo que, como me han mandado y dado larga licencia para que escriba el modo de oración y las mercedes que el Señor me ha hecho, me la dieran para que muy por menudo y con claridad dijera mis grandes pecados y ruin vida” (V Prólogo, 1).

In this book, Teresa's negative self-knowledge is reflected clearly through the language she used to describe herself. She considered herself as “un muladar tan sucio y de mal olor” (V 10, 9) “pecina tan sucia” (V 19, 2), “un gusano tan podrido” (V 20, 7), “tan pecadora” (V 28, 16). Particularly Teresa consistently referred to herself as “ruin”¹⁰¹ in the *Book of Her Life* as well as in the other books.

It seems that Teresa had a negative assessment of self-worth or self-deprecation. But in reality it was not so as she explained to us. For her, the more the soul comes close to God, the clearer it sees its filthiness and misery, just as when the sunray shines through the glass of water, all the dirty particles will be exposed with clarity:

“Es como el agua que está en un vaso, que si no le da el sol está muy claro; si da en él, vese que está todo lleno de motas. Al pie de la letra es esta comparación. Antes de estar el alma en este éxtasis, parecele que trae cuidado de no ofender a Dios y que conforme a sus fuerzas hace

¹⁰¹ In 209 times she described herself as “ruin” in all her works, 76 times was found in the *Book of Her Life*. Véase en Cf. Luis Astigarraga, Agustín Borrel. *Concordancias de los escritos de Santa Teresa de Jesús*. Vol. 2, Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2000, 2405-2408.

lo que puede; mas llegada aquí, que le da este sol de justicia que la hace abrir los ojos, ve tanta motas, que los querría tornar a cerrar; porque aún no es tan hija de esta águila caudalosa, que pueda mirar este sol de en hito en hito; mas, por poco que los tenga abiertos, vese toda turbia” (V 20, 28).

This is the reason why Teresa often used the negative language to describe herself whenever she was so closed to God and received the favor from Him. Indeed, in the presence of God, by seeing His greatness and mercy, Teresa could not help but saw only her filthiness and wretchedness:

“Sea bendito por todo y sírvase de mí, por quien Su Majestad es, que bien sabe mi Señor que no pretendo otra cosa en esto, sino que sea alabado y engrandecido un poquito de ver que en un muladar tan sucio y de mal olor hiciese huerto de tan suaves flores” (V 10, 9).

“Que estando en mí, sin Vos, no podría, Señor mío, nada, sino tornar a ser cortadas estas flores de este huerto, de suerte que esta miserable tierra tornase a servir de muladar como antes” (V 14, 11).

“¡Bendito seáis, Señor mío, que así hacéis de pecina tan sucia como yo, agua tan clara que sea para vuestra mesa! ¡Seáis alabado, oh regalo de los ángeles, que así queréis levantar un gusano tan vil!” (V 19,2).

From her own experience, Teresa advised her readers to consider the great attributes of God in order to see one’s lowliness and misery. Only then one is able to have true self-knowledge:

“A mi parecer jamás nos acabamos de conocer si no procuramos conocer a Dios; mirando su grandeza, acudamos a nuestra bajeza; y mirando su limpieza, veremos nuestra suciedad; considerando su humildad, veremos cuán lejos estamos de ser humildes” (1M 2, 9).

In brief, Teresa’s negative self-knowledge wasn’t negative in essence, but rather a reflection of her true self seen in the light of God’s grandeur. This aligns with what Jan van Ruusbroec stated two centuries earlier: “If you have self-knowledge you should always descend in a sense of unworthiness and self-disdain”¹⁰².

¹⁰² “Spiritual Abandonment and Consolation” in *John Ruusbroec: The Spiritual Espousals and Other Works* (ed. and trans. J. A. Wiseman, O.S.B). Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1985, 196.

3.2. Teresa's positive self-knowledge

Teresa's positive self-knowledge progressed gradually from the feeling of God's presence in her interior to seeing herself inhabited by the Most Holy Trinity in the center of her soul. According to Oswaldo Escobar, Teresa discovered herself inhabited by God for the first time in her prayer of recollection¹⁰³:

“Tenía yo algunas veces, como he dicho, aunque con mucha brevedad pasaba, comienzo de lo que ahora diré: acaeciame en esta representación que hacía de ponerme cabe Cristo, que he dicho, y aun algunas veces leyendo, venirme a deshora un sentimiento de la presencia de Dios que en ninguna manera podía dudar que estaba dentro de mí o yo toda engolfada en Él” (V 10, 1).

Then from the time of her conversion onward, the period that she considered not only the new stage but also a new life - a life transformed by grace¹⁰⁴, Teresa frequently experienced the presence of Jesus Christ in all parts of her soul:

“Estando una vez en las Horas con todas, de presto se recogió mi alma, y parecióme ser como un espejo claro toda, sin haber espaldas ni lados ni alto ni bajo que no estuviese toda clara, y en el centro de ella se me representó Cristo nuestro Señor, como le suelo ver. Parecíame en todas las partes de mi alma le veía claro como en un espejo, y también este espejo -yo no sé decir cómo- se esculpía todo en el mismo Señor por una comunicación que yo no sabré decir, muy amorosa” (V 40, 5).

Finally, the culminating awareness of God's presence in her soul took place when she had an intellectual vision of the Blessed Trinity in the monastery of San José in Ávila on May 29, 1571 as she told us:

“El martes después de la Ascensión, habiendo estado un rato en oración después de comulgar con pena, porque me divertía de manera que no podía estar en una cosa, quejábame al Señor de nuestro miserable natural. Comenzó a inflamarse mi alma, pareciéndome que claramente entendía tener presente a toda la Santísima Trinidad en visión intelectual, adonde entendió mi alma por cierta manera de representación, como figura de la verdad, para que lo pudiese

¹⁰³ Cf. Oswaldo Escobar. “Conocimiento propio según Santa Teresa de Jesús”, 1.

¹⁰⁴ *Vida* 23, 1: “Quiero ahora tornar adonde dejé de mi vida, -que me he detenido, creo, más de lo que me había de detener-, porque se entienda mejor lo que está por venir. Es otro libro nuevo de aquí adelante, digo otra vida nueva. La de hasta aquí era mía; la que he vivido desde que comencé a declarar estas cosas de oración, es que vivía Dios en mí, a lo que me parecía”.

entender mi torpeza, cómo es Dios trino y uno; y así me parecía hablarme todas tres Personas, y que se representaban dentro en mi alma distintamente, diciéndome que desde este día vería mejoría en mí en tres cosas, que cada una de estas Personas me hacían merced: la una en la caridad y en padecer con contento, en sentir esta caridad con encendimiento en el alma. Entendí aquellas palabras que dice el Señor: que estarán con el alma que está en gracia las tres divinas Personas, porque las veía dentro de mí por la manera dicha” (CC 14, 1).

Teresa described this intellectual vision of the Trinity almost in similar language when she discussed about the union between the soul and the Trinity in the last dwelling place of the *Interior Castle*:

“Aquí es de otra manera: quiere ya nuestro buen Dios quitarla las escamas de los ojos y que vea y entienda algo de la merced que le hace, aunque es por una manera extraña; y metida en aquella morada, por visión intelectual, por cierta manera de representación de la verdad, se le muestra la Santísima Trinidad, todas tres personas, con una inflamación que primero viene a su espíritu a manera de una nube de grandísima claridad, y estas Personas distintas, y por una noticia admirable que se da al alma, entiende con grandísima verdad ser todas tres Personas una sustancia y un poder y un saber y un solo Dios; de manera que lo que tenemos por fe, allí lo entiende el alma, podemos decir, por vista, aunque no es vista con los ojos del cuerpo, porque no es visión imaginaria. Aquí se le comunican todas tres Personas, y la hablan, y la dan a entender aquellas palabras que dice el Evangelio que dijo el Señor: que vendría El y el Padre y el Espíritu Santo a morar con el alma que le ama y guarda sus mandamientos” (7M 1, 6).

This awareness of the dwelling of the Trinity in her inner most being according to Oswaldo Escobar made her grow “en su dimensión de creyente, así mismo en su visión antropológica y como consecuencia lógica en el conocimiento propio”¹⁰⁵.

Furthermore, in another vision of the Trinity which took place in Sevilla in 1575, God showed Teresa her great dignity as a creature made in His image¹⁰⁶:

¹⁰⁵ Oswaldo Escobar. “Conocimiento propio según Santa Teresa de Jesús”, 2.

¹⁰⁶ Robyn Wrigley-Carr observes that “The *imago Dei* is virtually absent from the Teresian corpus before 1575. When she speaks of self-knowledge before this, Teresa is usually framing it in negative terms, emphasizing the distance between herself and God”. But after this vision of the Trinity, Teresa sees and understands clearly man is made in God’s image. According to Robyn, this is “a crucial part of Teresa’s understanding of herself [...] that in spite of her wretchedness, she is made ultimately for union with God”. Robyn Wrigley-Carr. “The Butterfly and the King. Self-Knowledge in Teresa of Avila’s *Interior Castle*.” *Studies in Spirituality* 19 (2009), 123-124.

“Estaba una vez recogida con esta compañía que traigo siempre en el alma, y parecióme estar Dios de manera en ella, que me acordé de cuando San Pedro dijo: “Tú eres Cristo, hijo de Dios vivo” (Mt 16,16); porque así estaba Dios vivo en mi alma”.

“Esto no es como otras visiones, porque lleva fuerza con la fe, de manera que no se puede dudar que está la Trinidad por presencia y por potencia y esencia en nuestras almas. Es cosa de grandísimo provecho entender esta verdad. Y como estaba espantada de ver tanta majestad en cosa tan baja como mi alma, entendí: *No es baja, hija, pues está hecha a mi imagen*” (CC 41, 1-2).

In short, Teresa’s positive self-knowledge came from two sources: her discovery of God’s presence in the center of her soul and her awareness of being made in God’s image and likeness¹⁰⁷. Indeed, Teresa, as Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín puts it well, “vive convencida de la gran dignidad del ser humano”¹⁰⁸. And from this “fruto de su propia experiencia, de que Dios habita en el centro del alma”¹⁰⁹, she urged her readers also consider the beauty and greatness of their souls like her:

“Que es considerar nuestra alma como un castillo todo de un diamante o muy claro cristal, adonde hay muchos aposentos, así como en el cielo hay muchas moradas [...] No hallo yo cosa con que comparar la gran hermosura de un alma y la gran capacidad; y verdaderamente apenas deben llegar nuestros entendimientos, por agudos que fuesen, a comprenderla, así como no

¹⁰⁷ In Teresa’s experience of the presence of Christ, there was an increase in degree and intensity as she grew in age and grace, as Juan Antonio Marcos well observed (cf. Juan Antonio Marcos. *Teresa de Jesús. La transparencia del Misterio*. Madrid: San Pablo, 2015, 41-43). Specifically, at the age of 28, she had the experience of Christ as a visitor who came to her from time to time to teach or correct her: “quiso el Señor darme a entender que no me convenían aquellas amistades, y avisarme y darme luz en tan gran ceguedad: representóseme Cristo delante con mucho rigor, dándome a entender lo que de aquello le pesaba. Vile con los ojos del alma más claramente que le pudiera ver con los del cuerpo, y quedóme tan imprimido, que ha esto más de veinte y seis años y me parece lo tengo presente. Yo quedé muy espantada y turbada, y no quería ver más a con quien estaba” (V 7:6). When she was about 45, she experienced the constant presence of Christ at her side: “estando un día del glorioso San Pedro en oración, vi cabe mí o sentí, por mejor decir, que con los ojos del cuerpo ni del alma no vi nada, mas parecíame estaba junto cabe mi Cristo y veía ser El el que me hablaba, a mi parecer. Yo, como estaba ignorantísima de que podía haber semejante visión, diome gran temor al principio, y no hacía sino llorar, aunque, en diciéndome una palabra sola de asegurarme, quedaba como solía, quieta y con regalo y sin ningún temor. Parecíame andar siempre a mi lado Jesucristo, y como no era visión imaginaria, no veía en qué forma; mas estar siempre al lado derecho, sentíalo muy claro, y que era testigo de todo lo que yo hacía, y que ninguna vez que me recogiese un poco o no estuviese muy divertida podía ignorar que estaba cabe mí” (V 27:2). Finally, at the age of 50, she experienced the presence of Christ within her: “Otra noche después, leyendo en un libro otro dicho de San Pablo que me comenzó a consolar, estaba pensando cuán presente había traído de antes a nuestro Señor, que tan verdaderamente me parecía ser Dios vivo. Pensando en esto, me dijo y parecióme muy dentro de mí, como al lado del corazón, por visión intelectual: ‘Aquí estoy, sino que quiero que veas lo poco que puedes sin Mí’. Luego me aseguré y se quitaron todos los miedos” (CC 44: 3-4).

¹⁰⁸ Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín (coord.). *La meditación teresiana*. Ávila: Universidad de la Mística – CITEs, 2012, 63.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

pueden llegar a considerar a Dios, pues El mismo dice que nos crió a su imagen y semejanza” (1M 1, 1).

And she emphasized that in the center of the soul is the main dwelling place where God himself dwells and where He and the soul exchange very secret things:

“Pues consideremos que este castillo tiene -como he dicho- muchas moradas, unas en lo alto, otras embajo, otras a los lados; y en el centro y mitad de todas éstas tiene la más principal, que es adonde pasan las cosas de mucho secreto entre Dios y el alma” (1M 1, 3).

4. Self-knowledge in Teresa’s teachings

Teresa’s doctrine on self-knowledge stems from her contacts with the spiritual masters as well as from her own personal experiences. In her spiritual journey, she observes how important it is self-knowledge in the practice of virtues and the spiritual growth. Additionally, she also acknowledges the hindrances to self-knowledge, but offers remedies and means to obtain it. The topic of the importance and obstacles to self-knowledge will be addressed in this chapter, while the means for obtaining self-knowledge will be discussed in the following chapter.

4.1. The importance of self-knowledge

Teresa always reminds her readers of the importance of self-knowledge throughout all her major works. In the *Book of Her Life*, she insists that one should always walk in self-knowledge no matter how advanced one is in the spiritual life:

“Y aunque esto del conocimiento propio jamás se ha de dejar, ni hay alma, en este camino, tan gigante que no haya menester muchas veces tornar a ser niño y a mamar¹¹⁰ (y esto jamás se olvide, quizás lo diré más veces, porque importa mucho); porque no hay estado de oración tan subido, que muchas veces no sea necesario tornar al principio, y en esto de los pecados y

¹¹⁰ According to Teresa, spiritual growth is not like physical growth: physically, an adult cannot turn into a baby, but spiritually, this is what usually happens. Therefore, self-knowledge is necessary not only in the first stage, but in all stages of spiritual life, so that one can know the real stage of one’s soul and act accordingly for its good: “Que, como ya he dicho y no querría esto se olvidase, en esta vida que vivimos no crece el alma como el cuerpo, aunque decimos que sí, y de verdad crece. Mas un niño, después que crece y echa gran cuerpo y ya le tiene de hombre, no torna a decrecer y a tener pequeño cuerpo; acá quiere el Señor que sí, a lo que yo he visto por mí, que no lo sé por más. Debe ser por humillarnos para nuestro gran bien y para que no nos descuidemos mientras estuviéremos en este destierro, pues el que más alto estuviere, más se ha de temer y fiar menos de sí. Vienen veces que es menester, para librarse de ofender a Dios estos que ya están tan puesta su voluntad en la suya, que por no hacer una imperfección se dejarían atormentar y pasarían mil muertes, que para no hacer pecados -según se ven combatidos de tentaciones y persecuciones- sea menester aprovecharse de las primeras armas de la oración y tornen a pensar que todo se acaba y que hay cielo e infierno y otras cosas de esta suerte” (V 15, 12).

conocimiento propio, es el pan con que todos los manjares se han de comer, por delicados que sean, en este camino de oración, y sin este pan no se podrían sustentar; mas hase de comer con tasa, que después que un alma se ve ya rendida y entiende claro no tiene cosa buena de sí y se ve avergonzada delante de tan gran Rey y ve lo poco que le paga lo mucho que le debe, ¿qué necesidad hay de gastar el tiempo aquí?, sino irnos a otras cosas que el Señor pone delante y no es razón las dejemos, que Su Majestad sabe mejor que nosotros de lo que nos conviene comer” (V 13, 15).

In the *Way of Perfection*, she maintains that self-knowledge should be present all throughout the prayer: “Y tened este cuidado: que en principio y fin de la oración, por subida contemplación que sea, siempre acabéis en propio conocimiento” (C 39, 5). In the *Interior Castle*, Teresa insists that one should never relax on the path of self-knowledge: “No sé si queda dado bien a entender, porque es cosa tan importante este conocernos que no querría en ello hubiese jamás relajación, por subidas que estéis en los cielos” (1M 2, 9). Even when she deals with quite advanced souls in the fifth dwellings, Teresa still reminds them that they should always go forward in self-knowledge: “Siempre se entiende que ha de procurar ir adelante en el servicio de nuestro Señor y en el conocimiento propio” (5M 3, 1). And finally, in the *Book of Foundations*, Teresa stresses the importance of self-knowledge by considering it even more superior to prayer, the theme with utmost importance for her: “Y tengo por mayor merced del Señor un día de propio y humilde conocimiento, aunque nos haya costado muchas aflicciones y trabajos, que muchos de oración” (F 5, 16). But why does Teresa consider self-knowledge so important?

The first reason is that self-knowledge is fundamental and principal element in the spiritual journey¹¹¹. First, self-knowledge is necessary to help the soul get to the door of its interior castle: “es gran cosa el propio conocimiento y ver que no van bien para atinar a la puerta” (1M 1, 8). Second, self-knowledge is the indispensable condition for the soul to be united to God: “primero da el Señor un gran conocimiento propio que hace estas mercedes” (6M 9, 15). In fact, for Teresa, it is not possible to enter heaven if one is lacking in the knowledge of the self: “Pues pensar que hemos de entrar en el cielo y no entrar en nosotros, conociéndonos y considerando nuestra miseria y lo que debemos a Dios y pidiéndole muchas veces misericordia,

¹¹¹ Ibid., 57.

es desatino” (2M 1, 11). In short, if one wants to reach God and enter into a lasting and authentic mystical experience, one must know oneself¹¹².

The second reason is that self-knowledge leads to humility, which, according to Teresa, is the foundation of spiritual life. Without it, the entire spiritual structure will crumble: “Y como todo este edificio va fundamentado en humildad, cuanto más nos vamos acercando a Dios mayor ha de ser esta virtud y si no, todo se viene abajo” (V 12, 5). Furthermore, humility is the essential condition for the soul to enter the dwelling places of supernatural prayer¹¹³: “Y con esto (la humildad) este estado es excelentísimo; y si no, toda nuestra vida nos estaremos en él y con mil penas y miserias (3 M 2, 9). But according to Teresa, humility is not self-contempt nor self-abasement but rather “andar en verdad” (6M 10, 7). To walk in the truth means to aware of the infinite greatness of God and to know who we are in our relation to Him, that before God we are nothing but misery: “que lo es muy grande no tener cosa buena de nosotros, sino la miseria y ser nada” (6M 10, 7). This is where self-knowledge comes in because self-knowledge for Teresa is “a realistic view of oneself before God”¹¹⁴. In other words, man’s knowledge of his own truth, that is his lowliness and littleness, before the greatness of God, will make him humble as the consequence. This is the reason why Teresa dedicates the first two dwelling places of the *Interior Castle* on self-knowledge as a preparation for the virtue of humility where she will deal with in the third dwelling place as well as the remaining dwelling places¹¹⁵.

In short, for Teresa, self-knowledge is so important because it is not only a means to obtain humility but also an indispensable element in the spiritual journey without which man cannot be united to God. Despite its significance, Teresa is also aware of the obstacles that distort and prevent man from self-knowledge. Thus, before exploring her teachings on gaining self-knowledge, we first examine its hindrances.

¹¹² Cf. *Ibid.*, 57.

¹¹³ Cf. Robyn Wrigley-Carr. “The Butterfly and the King. Self-Knowledge in Teresa of Avila’s *Interior Castle*.” *Studies in Spirituality* 19 (2009), 125.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 124.

4.2. Obstacles to Self-knowledge

The obstacles to self-knowledge can vary psychologically from self-deception, fear of facing the truth, distorted thinking patterns, or societal and cultural conditioning, etc. However, based on the writings of Teresa, they can be grouped into three categories: the devil, the concern for false honor, and the focus too much on one's own miseries.

a. Devil

The presence of the devil is so evident in both the life and the teachings of Teresa¹¹⁶. She mentions the word “demonio” as many as 611 times in all her works¹¹⁷. For her, the devil is the hater of all that is good and the deceiver par excellence¹¹⁸: “Mas cosa que pone el demonio, como él es todo mentira” (V 15, 10), “Es amigo de mentiras, y la misma mentira; no hará pacto con quien anda en verdad” (V 25, 21). Thus, he will use all his tricks and devices to deceive those who wish to walk in the truth of himself, in self-knowledge: “Terribles son los ardidés y mañas del demonio para que las almas no se conozcan ni entiendan sus caminos” (1M 2:11). In other words, the devil “tuerce el propio conocimiento” (1M 2:11). But in which ways does the devil distort self-knowledge?

¹¹⁶ When confronting this aspect of the devil, it is important to acknowledge that Teresa lacked the understanding of modern psychology. Consequently, she sometimes interpreted psychological weaknesses as demonic influences, as highlighted by John Welch in his book *Spiritual Pilgrims: Carl Jung and Teresa of Avila* (Cf. John Welch. *Peregrinos espirituales: Carl Jung y Teresa de Jesús*. Bilbao: Desclée De Brouwer, 2001, 163-174). Welch believed that Teresa's belief that demons tempted the sisters to excessively focus on the faults of others and attempt to correct them, thereby diminishing love and charity among them (Cf. 1M 2, 17), was actually a psychological issue known as projection, as defined by Carl Jung. According to Jung, the unconscious part of our psyche, known as *the shadow*, comprises the aspects of ourselves that we reject or deny. At times, we project these undesirable qualities onto others, perceiving them as possessing traits that we refuse to acknowledge within ourselves.

Nevertheless, we must also acknowledge the real presence of the devil in Teresa's life and teachings, as she did indeed have direct encounters with him on several occasions (V 31:9-11; 38:24). In addition, Antonio Moreno notes that Teresa also recognized that apparent demonic manifestations often resulted from mental illness or melancholy. She understood that demons exploit human weaknesses and adverse mental states to carry out their temptations (Cf. Antonio Moreno. “Demons According to St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross”. *Spirituality Today: A Dominican Quarterly Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (1991), 258–270). In fact, Teresa considered melancholy to be the devil's most effective means of possessing a person (Cf. María Jesús Zamora Calvo. “Misticismo y demonología: Teresa de Jesús”. *Alpha: revista de artes, letras y filosofía*, Nº. 31 (2010), 158). Consequently, distinguishing between seemingly demonic temptations that are purely psychological and those that have both psychological and demonic elements becomes a challenging task.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Luis Astigarraga, Agustín Borrel. *Concordancias de los escritos de Santa Teresa de Jesús*. Vol. 2, Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2000, 720-729.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Tomás Álvarez. “Demonio”. En *Diccionario de Santa Teresa de Jesús*, dirigido por Tomas Álvarez. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2001, 481.

First of all, he inculcates false humility. This false humility which the devil invents is to steal the soul's peace as well as to make it despair in the face of its wickedness and miseries¹¹⁹: “Esta es una humildad falsa que el demonio inventaba para desasosegarme y probar si puede traer el alma a desesperación” (V 30, 9). Teresa herself was also a victim of this distortion in her first years of religious life. The devil tempted her to abandon prayer under the pretext of her unworthiness¹²⁰, of which she considers the most terrible deception because for her, giving up prayer means a “pitfall for spiritual life”¹²¹: “Este fue el más terrible engaño que el demonio me podía hacer debajo de parecer humildad, que comencé a temer de tener oración” (V 7, 1); “Y no le tiene el demonio por la manera que a mí, a dejarla por humildad” (V 8, 5). From her own experience, she advises her sisters to be on their guard against this trick of the devil: “Pues guardaos también, hijas, de unas humildades que pone el demonio con gran inquietud de la gravedad de nuestros pecados, que suele apretar aquí de muchas maneras, hasta apartarse de las comuniones y de tener oración particular por no lo merecer” (C 39, 1).

Secondly, the devil can deceive the soul by making it believe that it has obtained the virtues while in reality it does not, and this is a clear sign of the lack of self-knowledge¹²²: “Adonde el demonio puede hacer gran daño sin entenderle, es haciéndonos creer que tenemos virtudes no las teniendo, que esto es pestilencia (C 38, 5). Teresa considers this deception of the devil as “pestilencia” and “hace mucho daño” because “por una parte enflaquece la humildad, por otra descuidámonos de adquirir aquella virtud, que nos parece la tenemos ya ganada” (C 38, 5).

In short, the devil, the hater of all good, will always interfere in the process of man's spiritual life¹²³. He prevents the soul from walking in the path of truth by using his “grandes ardidés” (5M 3, 9) and his “muchas sutilezas” (C pról. 3) to make the soul not knowing and understanding itself. And according to Teresa, without self-knowledge, we cannot walk freely in the spiritual journey: “si nunca salimos de nosotros mismos, no me espanto, que esto y más se puede temer (1M 2, 11).

¹¹⁹ Cf. Oswaldo Escobar. “Conocimiento propio según Santa Teresa de Jesús”, 3.

¹²⁰ Cf. Tomás Álvarez. “Demonio”. En *Diccionario de Santa Teresa de Jesús*, dirigido por Tomás Álvarez. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2001, 482.

¹²¹ Lisa Fullam. “Teresa of Avila's Liberative Humility”. *Journal of Moral Theology*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2014): 175-198, 183.

¹²² Cf. Oswaldo Escobar. *Manual de discernimiento teresiano*. Bogotá: San Pablo, 2015, 121-122.

¹²³ Cf. Tomás Álvarez. “Demonio”. En *Diccionario de Santa Teresa de Jesús*, dirigido por Tomás Álvarez. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2001, 482.

b. The concern for false honor

The word “honra” has different meanings in the writings of Teresa¹²⁴. For her, true honor is “la que hace provecho al alma” (C 36, 3). Furthermore, true honor always stands with the truth: “la verdadera honra no es mentirosa, sino verdadera, teniendo en algo lo que es algo, y lo que no es nada tenerlo en nonada” (V 20, 26). On the contrary, the honor of the world which she calls “la negra honra” (V 31, 23; C 36, 7) is false honor. It is nothing but a total deception, the greatest lie and falsehood: “Fatígase del tiempo en que miró puntos de honra y en el engaño que traía de creer que era honra lo que el mundo llama honra; ve que es grandísima mentira” (V 20, 26). It is the greatest lie because the one who concerns for worldly honor does not seek his true self with his misery and greatness, weakness and strength, sin and grace¹²⁵ but instead he always seeks his false self in the opinion of others¹²⁶. In other words, he becomes an “esclavo de los demás, al depender en la más sensible de sus fibras vitales de la opinión, del qué dirán”¹²⁷. Indeed, the concern for false honor is “lo que bloquea el movimiento de perfección del hombre, lo que le esclaviza y se opone a su realización”¹²⁸. Therefore, for Teresa, “provecho del alma y esto que llama el mundo honra nunca puede estar junto” (C 36, 3). According to her, this concern for false honor not only cause damage to all the virtues: “si no quitan esta oruga, que ya que a todo el árbol no dañe porque algunas otras virtudes quedarán, mas todas carcomidas” (V 31, 21), but also is a great harm in the path of prayer: “Y es cosa que en todas partes hace harto daño al alma, mas en este camino de oración es pestilencia” (V 31, 21).

But how is this concern for false honor an obstacle to self-knowledge?

For Teresa, “el concepto de honra siempre lleva inherente el de mentira”¹²⁹. Indeed, the one who concerns for false honor is not walking in the truth of himself and of God¹³⁰. His main preoccupation is to seek esteem and recognition from other people and thus he ignores looking at the reality of his weakness, miseries and sinfulness. Or even worse, he uses “aquel supuesto

¹²⁴ Cf. Tomás Álvarez. “Honra”. En *Diccionario de Santa Teresa de Jesús*, dirigido por Tomas Álvarez. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2001, 768.

¹²⁵ Cf. Maximiliano Herraiz. “La humildad es andar en verdad”. *Revista de Espiritualidad* 50 (1991), 252.

¹²⁶ Cf. Secundino Castro. “Teología teresiana del mundo”. *Revista de Espiritualidad* 40 (1981), 395.

¹²⁷ Teófanos Egido López. “Ambiente histórico”. *Introducción a la lectura de Santa Teresa*. Dir. Alberto Barrientos Merino. Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 2002, 97.

¹²⁸ Maximiliano Herraiz García. *Solo Dios Basta. Claves de la espiritualidad teresiana*. Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 2000, 237.

¹²⁹ Castro. “Teología teresiana del mundo”. 395.

¹³⁰ Cf. Herraiz. *Solo Dios Basta*. 238.

código de honra servía de máscara para encubrir la propia realidad”¹³¹. In other words, he neither wants himself nor others to know his whole truth. Therefore, the concern for false honor is a clear obstacle to self-knowledge.

c. The fixing on one’s earthly miseries

According to Robin Wrigley-Carr, “we flee authentic self-knowledge, either by decking ourselves in imaginary grandeur in denial of our sinfulness, or by adopting a false humility that focuses only upon our wretchedness without an awareness of God’s grace”¹³². The first case is the concern for false honor as we mention in the previous obstacle. The second one is the too much focus upon our negative side of self, or the fixing on “la miseria de nuestra tierra” (1M 2, 10) as Teresa puts it. For Teresa, if we focus solely on our miseries without paying attention to the grace of God, we will be covered with fears, faintheartedness and cowardice: “así acá, metidos siempre en la miseria de nuestra tierra, nunca la corriente saldrá de cieno de temores, de pusilanimidad y cobardía” (1M 2, 10). Fears will ultimately distort self-knowledge; faintheartedness and cowardice will make us feel unworthy to pray or even to practice virtues¹³³: “si es bien que una persona tan miserable trate de cosa tan alta como la oración; [...] que no son buenos los extremos, aunque sea en virtud; que, como soy tan pecadora, será caer de más alto” (1M 2, 10). Therefore, Teresa advises her daughters that instead of fixing on their earthly miseries, they should set their eyes on Christ and his saints in order that they may obtain true humility and self-knowledge: “pongamos los ojos en Cristo (cfr. Heb 12, 2), nuestro bien, y allí aprenderemos la verdadera humildad, y en sus santos, [...] y no hará el propio conocimiento ratero y cobarde” (1M 2, 11).

Conclusion

In short, Teresa’s understanding of self-knowledge is not only a matter of personal experience but also coming from her contacts and readings of various spiritual masters of the old as well as of her own day. For her, self-knowledge is the awareness of one’s miseries as well as one’s great dignity as God’s image and likeness. A novelty of her concept of self-knowledge is that one cannot fully know oneself if he does not strive to know God¹³⁴. This novelty comes from

¹³¹ Tomás Álvarez. “Honra”. En *Diccionario de Santa Teresa de Jesús*, dirigido por Tomas Álvarez. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2001, 772.

¹³² Robyn Wrigley-Carr. “The Butterfly and the King. Self-Knowledge in Teresa of Avila’s *Interior Castle*.” *Studies in Spirituality* 19 (2009), 128.

¹³³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 124.

¹³⁴ It is striking that this teaching of Teresa on self-knowledge in the light of knowledge of God is later confirmed by the Second Vatican Council in its document *Gaudium et Spes*, when it says: “The truth is that only in the

her own experience. In the beginning, she only sees her own miseries and sinfulness which we call her negative self-knowledge. But later on, through her intense prayer life as well as through the revelations of God, she comes to discover the great dignity of her soul which is not only made in God's likeness and image but also capable of containing God within. This is called her positive self-knowledge.

From her own experience, Teresa insists on the importance of self-knowledge in all her major works. For her, self-knowledge is so important that it should be present in all stages of prayer, for without it, one can neither attain humility nor be united with God. Despite of its importance, self-knowledge is not easy to obtain because there are various obstacles. The first obstacle is the devil who always find ways to distort self-knowledge by inculcating false humility or making the soul thinks that it has obtained the virtues. The second obstacle is the concern for false honor because those concern for it only look for the approval from others without looking into the reality of his whole self. The third obstacle is the fixing on one's earthly miseries which will make one overwhelmed with fears, faintheartedness and cowardice which finally leads to the distortion of self-knowledge because one does not see God's grace as well as one's great dignity as God's children. However, by pointing out these obstacles, Teresa also provides the remedies as well as the means to attain self-knowledge which will be the content of the next chapter.

mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. [...] Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. It is not surprising, then, that in Him all the aforementioned truths find their root and attain their crown" (GS 22). Only in Christ, the Truth, can man truly know the truths of himself.

CHAPTER III

MEANS OF OBTAINING SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Introduction

In this chapter, we continue exploring Saint Teresa's teachings on self-knowledge, focusing on how to obtain it. According to Robyn Wrigley-Carr, there are two forms of self-knowledge that correspond to two types of prayer¹³⁵. The first is active self-knowledge, which requires a person's effort to understand their true self and identify obstacles to their personal and spiritual growth¹³⁶. The second is infused self-knowledge, in which "by means of supernatural favors, God gives greater insight into his grandeur and infuses us with a richer, deeper self-knowledge"¹³⁷. For Robyn, this supernatural self-knowledge comes only to those who are more proficient in prayer, beginning with the fourth dwelling places onward¹³⁸. Therefore, in what follows, we will first examine how to achieve self-knowledge as a human effort, and then we will explore the conditions under which God imparts self-knowledge.

1. Acquired self-knowledge

Acquired self-knowledge is the knowledge achieved through one's own efforts as mentioned above. It can be obtained through a variety of means, but we would like to classify them into three means, which are through the relationship with oneself, through the relationship with God, and finally through the relationship with others. We choose relationship as the means to achieve the acquired self-knowledge because relationship reveals who we are and who the other is. This will be explained in more detail in the following.

1.1. Relationship with oneself

According to Julienne McLean, a renowned English psychologist and Teresian expert, the basis of self-knowledge depends on "la comprensión correcta de nuestras fuerzas, debilidades y posibilidades en las distintas áreas de la vida"¹³⁹. And to have this correct understanding of

¹³⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 120.

¹³⁶ Cf. Fco. Javier Sancho Fermín. "El conocimiento de sí: el primero y principal provecho de la noche (1N 12, 2)". *Revista de Espiritualidad* 78 (2019), 70.

¹³⁷ Robyn Wrigley-Carr. "The Butterfly and the King. Self-Knowledge in Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle*". *Studies in Spirituality* 19 (2009), 120.

¹³⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 122.

¹³⁹ Julienne McLean. *Hacia la unión mística. Comentario al Castillo Interior de santa Teresa de Ávila*. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2006, 114.

oneself, one needs to refine the ability to “reflexionar, sentir, articular y responder convenientemente a lo que sucede en nuestra psique, tanto a nivel consciente como a nivel inconsciente”¹⁴⁰. This process of familiarization with oneself is what Teresa urges her readers to do in the first dwelling places:

“No habéis de entender estas moradas una en pos de otra, como cosa en hilada, sino poned los ojos en el centro, que es la pieza o palacio adonde está el rey [...] Esto importa mucho a cualquier alma que tenga oración, poca o mucha, que no la arrincone ni apriete. Déjela andar por estas moradas, arriba y abajo y a los lados, pues Dios la dio tan gran dignidad; no se estruje en estar mucho tiempo en una pieza sola. ¡Oh que si es en el propio conocimiento! Que con cuán necesario es esto (miren que me entiendan), aun a las que las tiene el Señor en la misma morada que Él está, que jamás -por encumbrada que esté- le cumple otra cosa ni podrá aunque quiera” (1M 2, 8).

By learning to go within ourselves, to observe our limitations and abilities, our emotions and feelings, both negative and positive, “desembocará poco a poco en una comprensión y un conocimiento de ese centro interior que guía, ordena y conecta todas las ramas de nuestra psique”¹⁴¹. In other words, by observing our inner selves, we will become familiar with who we are and where we come from, both consciously and unconsciously. This method of observing and studying the inner self as a means to self-knowledge is also suggested by Gregory of Nyssa, many centuries before Teresa:

“Nuestra mayor protección es el conocimiento propio. Tenemos que evitar la ilusión de creer que nos estamos viendo a nosotros, cuando la realidad es que estamos viendo otra cosa distinta. Esto pasa con quienes no acostumbran a observarse a sí mismos. Éstos ven fuerza, belleza, estatura, salero y cosas parecidas, y piensan que eso es lo que son. Son muy malos para mirarse bien, ya que están absorbidos por otras cosas. Así que no saben fijarse en lo que realmente son y lo tienen olvidado. ¿Cómo puede alguien proteger algo que no conoce? La protección más segura de nuestro tesoro es el conocernos bien; cada uno debe conocerse tal como es y debe saber distinguir eso de lo que uno no es en realidad; de otra manera, uno protegería lo que no es propio pensando que lo es. Quien admira las cosas y la vida de este mundo, o piensa que vale la pena proteger lo mundano, no sabrá distinguir lo que él es de lo que él no es. Ninguna cosa pasajera es verdaderamente nuestra”¹⁴².

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 114.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 115.

¹⁴² Citado por Julienne McLean. *Hacia la unión mística. Comentario al Castillo Interior de santa Teresa de Ávila*. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2006, 120.

For both Teresa and Gregory of Nyssa, if we do not observe and reflect upon ourselves, we will become ignorant “sobre el qué y el quiénes somos, sobre las auténticas posibilidades de crecer que podemos tener, sobre lo que se necesita para conseguirlo”¹⁴³. And with this profound ignorance, it is impossible for us to advance far in the spiritual journey, because we will be held back by many deceptions, confusions, lies and vanities that the soul often encounters in the first dwellings, as Teresa points out:

“No es pequeña lástima y confusión que, por nuestra culpa, no entendamos a nosotros mismos ni sepamos quién somos” (1M 1, 2).

“Que aquí, como aún se están embebidas en el mundo y engolfadas en sus contentos y desvanecidas en sus honras y pretensiones, no tienen la fuerza los vasallos del alma (que son los sentidos y potencias) que Dios les dio de su natural, y fácilmente estas almas son vencidas” (1M 2, 12).

Furthermore, according to Teresa, the spiritual journey must be built on what is real and true. In other words, it must be based on the truth of God and of oneself. Thus, she urges her readers to reflect on their own wretchedness and misery in order to discover the truth about themselves as sinners, and to consider God’s majesty, mercy, and greatness in order to become aware of His infinite goodness: “siempre, mientras vivimos, aun por humildad, es bien conocer nuestra miserable naturaleza” (V 13, 1); “Representátese aquí nuestra miseria, y muy claro el gran poder de Dios” (V 17, 6); “Por eso, hermanas, tengo por mejor que nos pongamos delante del Señor y miremos su misericordia y grandeza y nuestra bajeza” (6M 6, 9). And for Teresa, the more we come to know the greatness of God, the more we know the truth about our misery: “Como va más conociendo su grandeza, tiénese ya por más miserable” (4M 3, 9).

Moreover, when we reflect and see the great contrast between God’s mercy and greatness and our own sins and lowliness, we will not boast of our good works but humble ourselves before God and beg for His mercy:

“Mirando lo que Su Majestad hace con ella y tornándose a mirar a sí, cuán poco sirve para lo que está obligada, y eso poquillo que hace lleno de faltas y quiebras y flojedad, que por no se acordar de cuán imperfectamente hace alguna obra, si la hace, tiene por mejor procurar que se le olvide y traer delante sus pecados y meterse en la misericordia de Dios, que, pues no tiene con qué pagar, supla la piedad y misericordia que siempre tuvo con los pecadores” (6M 5, 5).

¹⁴³ Ibid., 122.

This is precisely the relationship between self-knowledge and humility in Teresa's teaching. For her, the more one knows the truth about God and about oneself, the more humble one becomes. And the more humble one becomes, the further one will grow in the spiritual journey, because for Teresa, humility is the foundation of the whole spiritual building: "todo este edificio -como he dicho¹⁴⁴- es su cimiento humildad; y si no hay ésta muy de veras, aun por vuestro bien no querrá el Señor subirle muy alto, porque no dé todo en el suelo" (7M 4, 8).

In short, in order to attain self-knowledge, it is necessary for us to enter within ourselves and reflect on the truth of God and the truth of ourselves. This process of self-observation and reflection will help us grow in humility and spiritual life, because walking in truth is what pleases God, for He is the supreme Truth as Teresa points out:

"Porque Dios es suma Verdad, y la humildad es andar en verdad, que lo es muy grande no tener cosa buena de nosotros, sino la miseria y ser nada; y quien esto no entiende, anda en mentira. A quien más lo entienda agrada más a la suma Verdad, porque anda en ella. Plega a Dios, hermanas, nos haga merced de no salir jamás de este propio conocimiento, amén" (6M 10, 7).

1.2. Relationship with God

For Teresa, relationship with God is established mainly through prayer. And for her, prayer is the moment when one can see the truths of God and of oneself¹⁴⁵. This fact is clearly evident in both her life and her teachings. When she recalled her early life, she saw clearly that prayer helped her to see the truths: "Pues teniendo oración y lección -que era ver verdades y el ruin camino que llevaba- e importunando al Señor con lágrimas muchas veces" (V 19, 12). These truths, according to Maximiliano Herráiz, are nothing other than "el 'quien' de Dios y el 'quien' del hombre"¹⁴⁶. From this experience, Teresa taught her daughters in the *Way of Perfection* that "Esta es oración mental, hijas mías, entender estas verdades" (C22, 8). She explained further this teaching in the *Book of Foundations*: "la oración -que es adonde el Señor da luz para entender las verdades" (F 10, 13). And from her own experience, Teresa saw that the more advanced she was in her prayer life, the more evident these truths become to her. That is to say, the deeper and clearer her understanding of who God was and who she truly was before Him: "Todas las cosas de esta suerte y de muy subida perfección parece se me imprimen en la

¹⁴⁴ In the *Book of Her Life*, Teresa wrote: "Todo el bien de la oración fundada sobre humildad" (V 10, 5).

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Maximiliano Herráiz. *La oración historia de amistad*. Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 2014, 56.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

oración, tanto, que me espanto de ver tantas verdades y tan claras” (CC 1, 18). In short, for Teresa, prayer is a privileged moment for gaining knowledge of God and of self.

But what does one discover about the truths of oneself in prayer? In prayer, according to Teresa, man will discover both his miserable condition and his great dignity. First of all, prayer helps one to examine one’s life carefully and as a result one can discover one’s faults with clarity: “Pasaba una vida trabajosísima, porque en la oración entendía más mis faltas” (V 7, 17). This knowledge of one’s own wickedness intensifies and becomes more radical in mystical prayer¹⁴⁷ that according to Teresa, “toda se ve muy turbia” (V 20, 28) to the praying person and that “ve tanta motas, que los querría tornar a cerrar” (V 20, 28). Under the “gran microscopio”¹⁴⁸ of prayer, the praying person even finds “tantas faltas e imperfecciones” (V 39, 14) in one’s good works. Because of this relentless exposition of the sins and brokenness of the one who prays, the praying person sometimes stops praying out of shame, guilt, or fear resulting from facing the truth about himself. Even Teresa also succumbed to this temptation¹⁴⁹, which she later greatly regretted: “estuve un año y más sin tener oración, pareciéndome más humildad. Y ésta, como después diré, fue la mayor tentación que tuve, que por ella me iba a acabar de perder” (V 7, 11). This fact was so painful to her that she lamented it time and time again in other places: “pasé tanto en parecerme poca humildad tenerla, siendo tan ruin, que, como ya he dicho, la dejé año y medio -al menos un año, que del medio no me acuerdo bien- Y no fuera más, ni fue, que meterme yo misma sin haber menester demonios que me hiciesen ir al infierno. ¡Oh, válgame Dios, qué ceguedad tan grande!” (V 19, 4). For Teresa, giving up the practice of prayer is the greatest evil (cf. V 19, 10). Therefore, she advises those who practice prayer to never give it up: “De lo que yo tengo experiencia puedo decir, y es que por males que haga quien la ha comenzado, no la deje, pues es el medio por donde puede tornarse a remediar, y sin ella será muy más dificultoso” (V 8, 5).

Secondly, the one who prays discovers his great wealth within¹⁵⁰, that he is not hollow inside (cf. C 28, 10) but “hay otra cosa más preciosa, sin ninguna comparación, dentro de nosotras

¹⁴⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Oswaldo Escobar. “Conocimiento propio según Santa Teresa de Jesús”, 9.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Maximiliano Herráiz. *La oración historia de amistad*, 55. We should keep in mind that the prayer Teresa gave up for a year and a half was mental prayer because, as she indicated, she did not give up her obligatory vocal prayers: “Ahora me santiguo y no me parece que he pasado peligro tan peligroso como esta invención que el demonio me enseñaba por vía de humildad. Poníame en el pensamiento que cómo cosa tan ruin y habiendo recibido tantas mercedes, había de llegarme a la oración; **que me bastaba rezar lo que debía, como todas**; mas que aun pues esto no hacía bien, cómo quería hacer más; que era poco acatamiento y tener en poco las mercedes de Dios” (V 19, 10). (la negrita es mía).

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Maximiliano Herráiz. *La oración historia de amistad*, 54.

que lo que vemos por de fuera” (C 28, 10). This inner wealth is so great that it seems impossible for Teresa to fully understand or even explain it: “No hallo yo cosa con que comparar la gran hermosura de un alma y la gran capacidad; y verdaderamente apenas deben llegar nuestros entendimientos, por agudos que fuesen, a comprenderla [...] basta decir Su Majestad que es hecha a su imagen para que apenas podamos entender la gran dignidad y hermosura del ánima” (1M 1, 1); “Hay tantas y tan delicadas en lo interior, que sería atrevimiento ponerme yo a declararlas” (7M 1, 11). That is why Teresa wants to compare our soul to a great castle made entirely of diamond, the most precious stone for her: “que es considerar nuestra alma como un castillo todo de un diamante o muy claro cristal, adonde hay muchos aposentos, así como en el cielo hay muchas moradas”.

In short, in establishing relationship with God in prayer, one will gradually discover the great dignity of his soul and the great wealth it contains. He will see, as Teresa says, “un mundo interior, adonde caben tantas y tan lindas moradas” (7M 1, 5). This awareness of the inner richness and beauty, according to Teresa, will make us turn our attention away from worldly things and pay more attention to God: “que tengo por imposible, si trajésemos cuidado de acordarnos tenemos tal huésped dentro de nosotras, nos diésemos tanto a las cosas del mundo, porque veríamos cuán bajas son para las que dentro poseemos” (C 28, 10).

1.3. Relationship with others

Although it is important to establish a relationship with oneself and with God in order to acquire self-knowledge, it is not enough. To really know ourselves, we must also establish a relationship with others, as Juan Antonio Marcos observes:

“El propio conocimiento no se adquiere solo buceando en la propia interioridad (dimensión concéntrica), ni basta la sola apertura a Dios (dimensión vertical). La apertura a los otros (dimensión horizontal) es también clave. Necesitamos a los demás para mejor conocernos, para conocernos de verdad”¹⁵¹.

Indeed, if we rely solely on our own perspective, we may have blind spots or biases that prevent us from seeing ourselves accurately. Other people can provide an objective perspective that helps us see ourselves more clearly. Their feedback, whether negative or positive, can always help us better know our strengths and weaknesses. This fact is proven by the life and teachings

¹⁵¹ Juan Antonio Marcos. *Teresa de Jesús. La transparencia del Misterio*. Madrid: San Pablo, 2015, 182.

of Saint Teresa of Ávila. She shows us that feedback from others, especially criticism and praise, are powerful tools for gaining self-knowledge.

First of all, criticism can help individuals become more self-aware of their actions, thoughts, and behaviors. Even if they are not given constructively and with good intentions, they always reveal some personal limits and shortcomings. Teresa was well aware of this, so instead of putting herself in a defensive mode in front of criticism, she always received it in a positive way, even if sometimes it was not entirely true. For her, “nunca nos culpan sin culpas” (C 15, 4). Therefore, when she received sharp critiques and wrong accusations, instead of being upset, she was happy because they gave her opportunities for self-examination to see how she had offended God:

“Nunca oí decir cosa mala de mí que no viese quedaban cortos; porque, aunque no era en las mismas cosas, tenía ofendido a Dios en otras muchas, y parecíame habían hecho harto en dejar aquéllas, y siempre me huelgo yo más que digan de mí lo que no es, que no las verdades” (C 15, 3).

Because those who criticized her and falsely accused her were helping her to come to know the truths about herself, Teresa did not hold a grudge against them, but rather she defended them:

“Comenzó la murmuración y persecución de golpe y, a mi parecer, con mucha causa; y así no tomaba con nadie enemistad, sino suplicábaos a Vos miraseis la razón que tenían. Decían que me quería hacer santa y que inventaba novedades no habiendo llegado entonces con gran parte aun a cumplir toda mi Regla, ni a las muy buenas y santas monjas que en casa había (ni creo llegaré, si Dios por su bondad no lo hace todo de su parte), sino antes lo era yo para quitar lo bueno y poner costumbres que no lo eran; al menos hacía lo que podía para ponerlas, y en el mal podía mucho. Así que sin culpa suya me culpaban. No digo eran sólo monjas, sino otras personas; descubríanme verdades, porque lo permitíais Vos” (V 19, 8).

From Teresa’s experience, we can conclude that criticism, if well received, can truly become “una escuela en donde aprendemos de nosotros mismos”¹⁵², as Oswaldo Escobar well puts it.

Second, praise can also be a great tool for self-knowledge because it helps us to recognize our virtues, gifts, and talents. But according to Teresa, we should never attribute these to ourselves,

¹⁵² Oswaldo Escobar. “Conocimiento propio según Santa Teresa de Jesús”, 11.

but to God. He gives us these gifts so that we will be awakened to love Him more by recognizing the contrast between our own weaknesses and limitations and His great gifts:

“Entendamos bien, bien, como ello es, que nos lo da Dios sin ningún merecimiento nuestro, y agradezcámoslo a Su Majestad; porque si no conocemos que recibimos, no despertamos a amar. Y es cosa muy cierta que mientras más vemos estamos ricos, sobre conocer somos pobres, más aprovechamiento nos viene y aun más verdadera humildad” (V 10, 4).

Therefore, when we receive praise from others, it is an opportunity for us to recognize our own nothingness and the greatness of God who wants “que resplandezcan sus obras en gente flaca, porque hay más lugar de obrar su poder y de cumplir su deseo que tiene de hacernos mercedes” (MC 3,6) so that others will give Him glory¹⁵³.

However, the knowledge of one’s own weakness and imperfection, and the acceptance of praise from others, sometimes makes one fear that one lacks humility or is deceiving others. Teresa, too, suffered from this scruple:

“Otras veces me atormentaba mucho y aún ahora me atormenta ver que se hace mucho caso de mí, en especial personas principales, y de que decían mucho bien. En esto he pasado y paso mucho” (V 31, 12).

“Procedía esto no de humildad, a mi parecer, sino de una tentación venían muchas. Parecíame que a todos los traía engañados y, aunque es verdad que andan engañados en pensar que hay algún bien en mí, no era mi deseo engañarlos, ni jamás tal pretendí, sino que el Señor por algún fin lo permite” (V 31, 16).

This fear or scruple was removed only when God revealed the truth to her:

“Mucho me quitaban la libertad del espíritu estos temores, que después vine yo a entender no era buena humildad, pues tanto inquietaba, y me enseñó el Señor esta verdad: que yo tan determinada y cierta estuviera que no era ninguna cosa buena mía, sino de Dios, que así como no me pesaba de oír loar a otras personas, antes me holgaba y consolaba mucho de ver que allí se mostraba Dios, que tampoco me pesaría mostrarse en mí sus obras” (V 31:14).

¹⁵³ Jesus also revealed to Paul that He desires to manifest His power in human weakness: “He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness’. I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Later, Teresa realized that it was a sign of serious imperfection and very little humility¹⁵⁴, if she still cared about what people said about her, whether positive or negative:

“Todos estos temorcillos y penas y sombra de humildad entiendo yo ahora era harta imperfección, y de no estar mortificada; porque un alma dejada en las manos de Dios no se le da más que digan bien que mal, si ella entiende bien entendido -como el Señor quiere hacerle merced que lo entienda- que no tiene nada de sí. Fíese de quien se lo da, que sabrá por qué lo descubre” (V 31,16).

A truly humble person should always think that if others criticize him, they have all the reasons to do so, and if they praise him, he should be aware that all the good things in him come from God, because by himself he has nothing good at all, as Teresa also saw by herself: “yo tan determinada y cierta estuviera que no era ninguna cosa buena mía, sino de Dios” (V 31, 14). With this attitude toward criticism and praise, he has nothing to lose and everything to gain.

On the other hand, from her own experience, Teresa also highlights two groups of relationships with others that contribute much to the process of self-knowledge: the circle of prayerful friends and the relationship with learned spiritual directors.

a. The circle of prayerful friends

As the saying goes: “Birds of a feather flock together”, this is a natural human tendency that people tend to seek out and form relationships with others who are like-minded and have similar interests. One reason is that people feel more comfortable around others who share their interests and values. Additionally, people may find it easier to communicate and relate to others who are similar to them. This is the reason why Teresa also likes to interact with those who devote themselves to prayer like her: “páreceme que quien me da algún alivio y con quien descanso de tratar son las personas que hallo de estos deseos” (V 21,7). In fact, she would like to form her own circle of prayerful friends to help each other grow in the love of God and in self-knowledge:

“Este concierto querría hiciésemos los cinco que al presente nos amamos en Cristo¹⁵⁵ [...], procurásemos juntarnos alguna vez para desengañar unos a otros, y decir en lo que podríamos

¹⁵⁴ Oswaldo Escobar. “Conocimiento propio según Santa Teresa de Jesús”, 16.

¹⁵⁵ Se refiere al primer grupo de oración teresiana fundado por Teresa, habían en él laicos, sacerdotes, una viuda. Eran ellos: Gaspar Daza, Francisco de Salcedo, Doña Guiomar de Ulloa, y el P. García de Toledo o el P. Pedro Ibáñez. (véase: Oswaldo Escobar. “Conocimiento propio según Santa Teresa de Jesús”, 11).

enmendarnos y contentar más a Dios; que no hay quien tan bien se conozca a sí como conocen los que nos miran, si es con amor y cuidado de aprovecharnos” (V 16, 7).

And from her own experience, she urges those who give themselves to prayer should seek friendship among themselves:

“Por eso aconsejaría yo a los que tienen oración, en especial al principio, procuren amistad y trato con otras personas que traten de lo mismo. Es cosa importantísima, aunque no sea sino ayudarse a uno a otros con sus oraciones. ¡Cuánto más que hay muchas más ganancias! Y no sé yo por qué (pues conversaciones y voluntades humanas, aunque no sean muy buenas, se procuran amigos con quien descansar, y para más gozar de contar aquellos placeres vanos) no se ha de permitir que quien comenzare de veras a amar a Dios y a servirle deje de tratar con algunas personas sus placeres y trabajos, que de todo tienen los que tienen oración” (V 7, 20).

This forming of prayerful friendship has a number of benefits. First, it is a great help in gaining self-knowledge. Out of mutual trust, the prayerful friends often let themselves to be known by others by telling their defects or limitations to other people. And out of love for one another, they also offer one another fraternal correction and valuable feedback that sometimes one does not know about oneself¹⁵⁶. Secondly, it is a great support and encouragement for those who are dedicated to prayer, because, according to Teresa, there are few of them who give themselves to prayer and to the service of God: “porque andan ya las cosas del servicio de Dios tan flacas, que es menester hacerse espaldas unos a otros los que le sirven para ir adelante” (V 7, 22).

b. Relationship with spiritual directors

Spiritual direction is a great tool for deepening self-knowledge because through it individuals can explore their deepest desires, fears, and beliefs, and gain insight into the ways in which these shape their lives. This process can lead to a deeper understanding of oneself, one’s strengths and weaknesses, and one’s purpose in life. Teresa is well aware of this fact and thus in her quest for self-knowledge, “she believed that she needed the right spiritual guides to assist her in this task—companions learned in the faith to prevent her from going off course, experienced in prayer in order to help identify pitfalls and false directions, and discerning of the movements both of the Holy Spirit and of the individual human hearts of flesh-and-blood

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Oswaldo Escobar. “Conocimiento propio según Santa Teresa de Jesús”, 11.

people”¹⁵⁷ Therefore, according to Joseph Chalmers, Teresa always “considered spiritual direction as a means of primary importance for making progress in the ways of the Spirit and a significant help in avoiding the dangers and overcoming the difficulties inherent in striving for the goal of the spiritual life—union with God”¹⁵⁸. For her, a spiritual director is not just a human guide, but a minister¹⁵⁹ who speaks “in the name of the Lord, Who sends him by means of the missioning Church”¹⁶⁰. For this reason, she vows not to hide anything from her confessors¹⁶¹ and teaches her nuns to do the same: “Lo que es mucho menester, hermanas, es que andéis con gran llaneza y verdad con el confesor” (6M 9, 12). Teresa’s openness and absolute obedience to her confessors came not only from her own conviction, but also from what God was telling her:

“Lo más seguro es (yo así lo hago, y sin esto no tendría sosiego, ni es bien que mujeres le tengamos, pues no tenemos letras) y aquí no puede haber daño sino muchos provechos, como muchas veces me ha dicho el Señor, que no deje de comunicar toda mi alma y las mercedes que el Señor me hace, con el confesor, y que sea letrado, y que le obedezca. Esto muchas veces” (V 26, 3).

“Siempre que el Señor me mandaba una cosa en la oración, si el confesor me decía otra, me tornaba el mismo Señor a decir que le obedeciese; después Su Majestad le volvía para que me lo tornase a mandar” (V 26, 5).

However, Teresa’s relationship with her confessors was not always good. In fact, she had suffered much at the hands of incompetent spiritual directors as she confessed: “la tengo de

¹⁵⁷ Mark O’Keefe. *Learned, Experienced, and Discerning: St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross on Spiritual Direction*. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press. 2020, 36.

¹⁵⁸ Joseph Chalmers. *Traditions of Spiritual Guidance. St. Teresa of Avila and Spiritual Direction*, 330. Accessed January 31, 2023: <https://www.theway.org.uk/back/26Chalmers.pdf>. (Teresa explained the importance and the need for a spiritual director in one’s spiritual life, especially for beginners, in the *Book of Her Life*, Chapter 13, Numbers 14-20).

¹⁵⁹ St. John of the Cross also considered spiritual direction an essential part of the spiritual life. On the *Ascent to Mount Carmel*, he insisted on the need for spiritual directors: “En todo nos habemos de guiar por la ley de Cristo hombre (y de su Iglesia y ministros, humana y visiblemente, y por esa vía remediar nuestras ignorancias y flaquezas espirituales; que para todo hallaremos abundante medicina por esta vía. Y lo que de este camino saliere no sólo es curiosidad, sino mucho atrevimiento. Y no se ha de creer cosa por vía sobrenatural, sino sólo lo que es enseñanza de Cristo hombre) como digo, y de sus ministros, hombres” (2S 22,7). He goes even further to say that without a spiritual guide, one’s spiritual life will die out just like a single burning coal: “El alma sola, sin maestro, que tiene virtud, es como el carbón encendido que está solo: antes se irá enfriando que encendiendo” (D 7).

¹⁶⁰ Thomas Dubay. *Fire Within: St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and the Gospel—on Prayer*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989, 298.

¹⁶¹ In Teresa’s time, the confessor had a double function: he was both the dispenser of the sacrament of forgiveness and a spiritual director. (Cf. Mark O’Keefe. *Learned, Experienced, and Discerning: St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross on Spiritual Direction*. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press. 2020, 37).

unos medioletrados espantadizos, porque me cuestan muy caro” (5M 1, 8). She went on to clarify the damage these incompetent spiritual directors did to her¹⁶²:

“Estotros tampoco me debían de querer engañar, sino no sabían más. Yo pensaba que sí y que no era obligada a más de creerlos, como era cosa ancha lo que me decían y de más libertad; que si fuera apretada, yo soy tan ruin que buscara otros. Lo que era pecado venial decíanme que no era ninguno; lo que era gravísimo mortal, que era venial. Esto me hizo tanto daño que no es mucho lo diga aquí para aviso de otras de tan gran mal” (V 5, 3).

On the other hand, Teresa also had the encounter with many good and competent spiritual directors who were of great help to her:

“Yo he tratado hartos, porque de unos años acá lo he más procurado con la mayor necesidad, y siempre fui amiga de ellos, que aunque algunos no tienen experiencia, no aborrecen al espíritu ni le ignoran; porque en la Sagrada Escritura que tratan, siempre hallan la verdad del buen espíritu. Tengo para mí que persona de oración que trate con letrados, si ella no se quiere engañar, no la engañará el demonio con ilusiones, porque creo temen en gran manera las letras humildes y virtuosas, y saben serán descubiertos y saldrán con pérdida” (V 13, 18).

In Teresa’s experience, learned spiritual directors had never misguided her: “Y buen letrado nunca me engañó” (V 5, 3). Therefore, she advised every Christian to seek out learned men as spiritual directors:

¹⁶² St. John of the Cross was also an outspoken critic of incompetent spiritual directors: “muchos maestros espirituales hacen mucho daño a muchas almas, porque, no entendiendo ellos las vías y propiedades del espíritu, de ordinario hacen perder a las almas la unción de estos delicados ungüentos con que el Espíritu Santo les va ungiendo y disponiendo para sí, instruyéndolas por otros modos rateros que ellos han usado o leído por ahí, que no sirven más que para principiantes. Que, no sabiendo ellos más que para éstos, y aun eso plega a Dios no quieran dejar las almas pasar, aunque Dios las quiera llevar, a más de aquellos principios y modos discursivos e imaginarios, para que nunca excedan y salgan de la capacidad natural, con que el alma puede hacer muy poca hacienda” (*Llama de amor viva*, canción 3, 31). And for him, even the spiritual directors, though with good will, lead the souls wrongly because of his ignorance, he cannot escape the punishment for the harm he has caused: “Pero éstos por ventura yerran por buen celo, porque no llega a más su saber. Pero no por eso quedan excusados en los consejos que temerariamente dan sin entender primero el camino y espíritu que lleva el alma, y, no entendiéndola, en entremeter su tosca mano en cosa que no entienden, no dejándola a quien la entienda. Que no es cosa de pequeño peso y culpa hacer a un alma perder inestimables bienes, y a veces dejarla muy bien estragada por su temerario consejo. Y así, el que temerariamente yerra, estando obligado a acertar, como cada uno lo está en su oficio, no pasará sin castigo, según el daño que hizo. Porque los negocios de Dios con mucho tiento y muy a ojos abiertos se han de tratar, mayormente en cosa de tanta importancia y en negocio tan subido como es el de estas almas, donde se aventura casi infinita ganancia en acertar, y casi infinita pérdida en errar” (*Llama de amor viva*, canción 3, 56).

“Mi opinión ha sido siempre y será que cualquier cristiano procure tratar con quien las tenga buenas, si puede, y mientras más, mejor; y los que van por camino de oración tienen de esto mayor necesidad, y mientras más espirituales, más” (V 13, 17).

And she also exhorted her nuns, especially the prioresses, to always seek out and consult with learned confessors:

“Siempre os informad, hijas, de quien tenga letras, que en éstas hallaréis el camino de la perfección con discreción y verdad. Esto han menester mucho las preladadas, si quieren hacer bien su oficio, confesarse con letrado, y si no hará hartos borriones pensando que es santidad, y aun procurar que sus monjas se confiesen con quien tenga letras” (F 19, 1).

In short, our relationships with others are a crucial part of gaining self-knowledge. Through the circle of praying friends and spiritual directors and through their feedback, whether negative or positive, whether criticism or praise, one can gain a deeper understanding of oneself. Indeed, we always need others to know ourselves better, as Marcos points out: “mientras vivimos, nunca termina el propio conocimiento, abierto ahora a la necesaria alteridad y al discernimiento de los demás”¹⁶³.

2. Infused self-knowledge

Infused self-knowledge is the knowledge gained not through human effort, but as a result of supernatural prayer in which God bestows self-knowledge through supernatural favors. Through her experience, Teresa came to believe that this kind of self-knowledge is better and deeper than the acquired self-knowledge:

“Estando una noche en oración, comenzó el Señor a decirme algunas palabras trayéndome a la memoria por ellas cuán mala había sido mi vida, que me hacían harta confusión y pena; porque, aunque no van con rigor, hacen un sentimiento y pena que deshacen, y siéntese más aprovechamiento de conocernos con una palabra de éstas que en muchos días que nosotros consideremos nuestra miseria, porque trae consigo esculpida una verdad que no la podemos negar” (V 38, 16).

The superiority of infused self-knowledge also lies in the fact that although it is given in an instant, it is much better and clearer than acquired self-knowledge, which may take many years to attain: “Pónela (el Señor al alma) de presto junto cabe sí y muéstrale en un punto más

¹⁶³ Juan Antonio Marcos. *Teresa de Jesús. La transparencia del Misterio*. Madrid: San Pablo, 2015, 182.

verdades y dala más claro conocimiento de lo que es todo, que acá pudiéramos tener en muchos años (CV 19, 7).

And Teresa also observed that the more she progressed in her life of prayer, the more the Lord would enlighten her in her self-knowledge¹⁶⁴: “Y aun procuraba Su Majestad darme a entender cosas para ayudarme a conocerme, que yo no las supiera imaginar” (V 22, 11). Moreover, for her, in the supernatural prayer, “Dios es el que lo hace todo, que es cosa suya, sobre nuestro natural” (CE 41, 3), that is, the understanding and knowledge are imparted to the soul without its efforts and diligence¹⁶⁵:

“Cuando Su Majestad quiere que el entendimiento cese, ocúpale por otra manera y da una luz en el conocimiento tan sobre la que podemos alcanzar, que le hace quedar absorto, y entonces, sin saber cómo, queda muy mejor enseñado que no con todas nuestras diligencias para echarle más a perder” (4M 3, 6).

From her own experience, Teresa outlined the different levels of infused self-knowledge and the conditions under which God imparts it. And as we mentioned earlier, infused self-knowledge is usually given to those who are more proficient in prayer¹⁶⁶. Therefore, in the following, we will only examine the levels and the conditions under which God imparts infused self-knowledge, beginning with the fourth dwelling places and onward.

2. 1. Infused self-knowledge in the fourth dwelling places

According to Juan Manuel Morilla Delgado, the infused self-knowledge of the fourth dwelling places is granted in the prayer of supernatural or mystical recollection, in which “el intelecto permanece sujeto, pasivamente, a la acción de Dios (cf. 4M 3, 6) [...], gracias a la cual

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Oswaldo Escobar. “Conocimiento propio según Santa Teresa de Jesús”, 10.

¹⁶⁵ In *The Dialogue* 85, the Lord also explained to Catherine of Siena clearly why one has a greater knowledge of oneself and of God as one progresses in prayer life, especially in mystical union: “I have told you this, my dearest daughter, to let you know the perfection of this unitive state in which souls are carried off by the fire of my charity. In that charity, they receive supernatural light, and in that light they love me. For love follows upon understanding. The more they know, the more they love, and the more they love, the more they know. Thus, each nourishes the other” (Catherine of Siena. *The Dialogue*, 85 (Trans. Suzanne Noffke, O.P.). New York: Paulist Press, 1980, 157).

¹⁶⁶ Robyn Wrigley-Carr. “The Butterfly and the King. Self-Knowledge in Teresa of Avila’s *Interior Castle*”. *Studies in Spirituality* 19 (2009), 122.

comprende propios medios”¹⁶⁷. With this grace, the soul will discover within itself a whole new world¹⁶⁸ that it has never seen before, which really amazes it:

“Veo secretos en nosotros mismos que me traen espantada muchas veces. Y ¡cuántos más debe haber! ¡Oh Señor mío y Dios mío, qué grandes son vuestras grandezas!, y andamos acá como unos pastorcillos bobos, que nos parece alcanzamos algo de Vos y debe ser tanto como nonada, pues en nosotros mismos están grandes secretos que no entendemos” (4M 2, 5).

In short, by supernatural grace, God grants to the soul a new and deeper knowledge of Him and of itself, a knowledge previously unknown to it and which it could not attain by its own efforts.

As for the conditions for receiving this grace, according to Teresa, although God is not obliged to grant us supernatural favors (cf. 4M 2, 9), in these fourth dwelling places it is necessary to practice humility in order to dispose oneself for God’s favors, in addition to doing what is required in the previous dwellings: “Después de hacer lo que los de las moradas pasadas, ¡humildad, humildad! Por ésta se deja vencer el Señor a cuanto de él queremos” (4M 2, 9). Along with humility, detachment is another requirement for receiving the supernatural favor or infused self-knowledge in these dwelling places:

“Bien creo que quien de verdad se humillare y desasiere (digo de verdad, porque no ha de ser por nuestros pensamientos, que muchas veces nos engañan, sino que estemos desasidas del todo), que no dejará el Señor de hacernos esta merced y otras muchas que no sabremos desear” (4M 2, 10).

2. 2. Infused self-knowledge in the fifth dwelling places

Infused self-knowledge of the fifth dwelling places is granted in the prayer of union, in which “la persona empieza a tener un nuevo conocimiento de sí misma, contemplando en el Tú de Cristo, como en un espejo, la propia dignidad y belleza”¹⁶⁹. In this prayer, God is “tan junto y unido con la esencia del alma” (5M 1, 5) that the soul can attain a knowledge far superior to that which we can obtain through the senses:

¹⁶⁷ Juan Manuel Morilla Delgado. *Conócete en mí. Itinerario Místico Experiencial en Teresa de Ávila*. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2015, 155-156.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 171.

“Entiende el alma, por una manera muy fuera de entender con los sentidos exteriores, que está ya junto cabe su Dios, que con poquito más llegará a estar hecha una misma cosa con El por unión” (C 31, 2).

This infused self-knowledge has the power to transform the soul to the point that it cannot even recognize its former self:

“No tiene en mucho lo que pasaron los santos, entendiendo ya por experiencia cómo ayuda el Señor y transforma un alma, que no parece ella ni su figura. Porque la flaqueza que antes le parecía tener para hacer penitencia, ya la halla fuerte; el atamiento con deudos o amigos o hacienda (que ni le bastaban actos, ni determinaciones, ni quererse apartar, que entonces le parecía se hallaba más junta), ya se ve de manera que le pesa estar obligada a lo que, para no ir contra Dios, es menester hacer” (5M 2, 8).

As far as the conditions for receiving this grace are concerned, according to Teresa, we can in no way obtain it by our own efforts, no matter how much diligence we put into it: “Es ya cosa sobrenatural y que no la podemos procurar nosotros por diligencias que hagamos” (C 31, 2). Indeed, entering into this prayer of union and receiving this infused self-knowledge is a free gift from God:

“Esta entiendo yo es la bodega adonde nos quiere meter el Señor cuando quiere y como quiere; mas por diligencias que nosotros hagamos, no podemos entrar. Su Majestad nos ha de meter y entrar El en el centro de nuestra alma” (5M 1, 12).

What we can do in this prayer of union according to Teresa is to dispose ourselves like a soft wax:

“Porque verdaderamente el alma allí no hace más que la cera cuando imprime otro el sello, que la cera no se le imprime a sí, sólo está dispuesta, digo blanda; [...] Sólo queréis nuestra voluntad y que no haya impedimento en la cera” (5M 2, 12).

Therefore, the condition to dispose ourselves for the supernatural grace in the fifth dwelling places is to conform our will to God’s will¹⁷⁰: “la verdadera unión se puede muy bien alcanzar,

¹⁷⁰ Another condition for preparing oneself for union with God in these dwellings, according to St. John of the Cross, is to die to everything that lives in the soul and to remain without desire for anything: “Para que entendamos cómo, para entrar en esta divina unión, ha de morir todo lo que vive en el alma, poco y mucho, chico y grande, y el alma ha de quedar sin codicia de todo ello y tan desasida, como si ello no fuese para ella ni ella para ello” (1S 11, 8).

con el favor de nuestro Señor, si nosotros nos esforzamos a procurarla, con no tener voluntad sino atada con lo que fuere la voluntad de Dios” (5M 3, 3).

2. 3. Infused self-knowledge in the sixth dwelling places

The infused self-knowledge of the sixth dwelling places is granted in two ways. First, through the dark night of the spirit, in which the soul, through the terrible trials, “adquiere un verdadero conocimiento de su nada, de su mísera naturaleza, de su culpabilidad e impenitencia en relación al amor de Dios”¹⁷¹. Second, through the prayer of rapture¹⁷², “adonde le da el Señor a entender grandes secretos, que parece los ve en el mismo Dios” (6M 10, 2).

In the first case, in the dark night of the spirit, the soul finds no remedy for the terrible trials it suffers. Therefore, its only hope is the mercy of God. Then, suddenly God comes and takes away all its trials and darkness. This intervention of God makes the soul aware of its nothingness and misery and realizes that without God it can do nothing. Indeed, this knowledge of its own nothingness lead the soul to true humility:

“En fin, que ningún remedio hay en esta tempestad, sino aguardar a la misericordia de Dios, que a deshora, con una palabra sola suya o una ocasión que acaso sucedió, lo quita todo tan de presto, que parece no hubo nublado en aquel alma, según queda llena de sol y de mucho más consuelo; y como quien se ha escapado de una batalla peligrosa con haber ganado la victoria, queda alabando a nuestro Señor, que fue el que peleó para el vencimiento; porque conoce muy claro que ella no peleó; que todas las armas con que se podía defender le parece que las ve en manos de su contrario, y así conoce claramente su miseria y lo poquísimo que podemos de nosotros si nos desamparase el Señor” (6M 1, 10).

In the second case, with the supernatural grace of rapture, the soul can see itself and everything else as if with the eye of God:

“Se le descubre cómo en Dios se ven todas las cosas y las tiene todas en sí mismo. Y es de gran provecho, porque, aunque pasa en un momento, quédase muy esculpido y hace grandísima

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 186.

¹⁷² Teresa speaks of prayer with rapture or ecstasy or transport, which she considers all the same, especially in the *Book of Her Life*, chap. 20, and in the *Interior Castle*, VI. chaps. 4-5. With regard to this particular form of supernatural grace, St. John of the Cross, in his work *The Spiritual Canticle*, considered that St. Teresa of Avila had described and explained it well: “Lugar era éste conveniente para tratar de las diferencias de raptos y éxtasis y otros arrobamientos y sutiles vuelos de espíritu que a los espirituales suelen acaecer; mas porque mi intento no es sino declarar brevemente estas canciones, como en el prólogo prometí, quedarse ha para quien mejor lo sepa tratar que yo; y porque también la bienaventurada Teresa de Jesús, nuestra madre, dejó escritas de estas cosas de espíritu admirablemente, las cuales (espero en Dios) saldrán presto impresas a luz” (C 13, 7).

confusión, y vese más claro la maldad de cuando ofendemos a Dios, porque en el mismo Dios -digo, estando dentro en El- hacemos grandes maldades” (6M 10, 2).

The first thing the soul sees, according to Teresa, is that Christ is clearly present at its center:

“Parecióme ser como un espejo claro toda, sin haber espaldas ni lados ni alto ni bajo que no estuviese toda clara, y en el centro de ella se me representó Cristo nuestro Señor, como le suelo ver. Parecíame en todas las partes de mi alma le veía claro como en un espejo, y también este espejo -yo no sé decir cómo- se esculpía todo en el mismo Señor por una comunicación que yo no sabré decir, muy amorosa” (V 40, 5).

This awareness of Christ’s presence at its center makes the soul realize that sins, especially mortal sins, obscure the vision of God within it. And as a result of this self-knowledge, the soul is deeply repentant for its past sins:

“Dióseme a entender que estar un alma en pecado mortal es cubrirse este espejo de gran niebla y quedar muy negro, y así no se puede representar ni ver este Señor, aunque esté siempre presente dándonos el ser [...]. Mas hame hecho mucho provecho y gran lástima de las veces que con mis culpas oscurecí mi alma para no ver este Señor” (V 40, 5).

The second thing that the soul sees under the light of God, which Teresa compares to the “sun”, is all of its sins and faults, no matter how small or insignificant they may be:

“Aquí no sólo las telarañas ve de su alma y las faltas grandes, sino un polvito que haya, por pequeño que sea, porque el sol está muy claro [...]. Antes de estar el alma en este éxtasis, parecele que trae cuidado de no ofender a Dios y que conforme a sus fuerzas hace lo que puede; mas llegada aquí, que le da este sol de justicia que la hace abrir los ojos, ve tanta motas, que los querría tornar a cerrar” (V 20, 28).

The third thing the soul sees is its own weakness and misery, that if it has done anything good, it was done by God’s power:

“[El alma] ve entonces que, si para algo le ha tenido, ha sido de Su Majestad, con una claridad que la deja aniquilada a sí y con mayor conocimiento de la misericordia de Dios y de su grandeza, que en cosa tan baja la ha querido mostrar” (6M 6, 5).

With regard to the conditions for the reception of this infused self-knowledge, as in the case of the dark night of the spirit, according to Teresa, the soul cannot do much, but tries to engage itself in external works of charity and to place its hope in the mercy of God:

“El mejor remedio -no digo para que se quite, que yo no le hallo, sino para que se pueda sufrirse entender en obras de caridad y exteriores, y esperar en la misericordia de Dios, que nunca falta a los que en El esperan” (6M 1, 13).

And as in the case of receiving the rapture, the more the soul sees that it can do nothing to obtain it: “ve claro que para aquella excesiva merced y grandiosa no hubo diligencia suya, ni fue parte para traerla ni para tenerla” (V 19, 2). However, according to Teresa, great courage is necessary to receive this sublime grace, without which it would be impossible for the soul to receive it. And this courage comes to the soul, or rather, is given to the soul, by enduring the sufferings and tribulations that God allows to come to it:

“Su Majestad, como quien conoce nuestra flaqueza, vala habilitando con estas cosas (trabajos) y otras muchas para que tenga ánimo de juntarse con tan gran Señor y tomarle por Esposo. Reiros heis de que digo esto y pareceros ha desatino, porque cualquiera de vosotras os parecerá que no es menester y que no habrá ninguna mujer tan baja que no le tenga para desposarse con el rey. -Así lo creo yo con el de la tierra, mas con el del cielo yo os digo que es menester más de lo que pensáis; porque nuestro natural es muy tímido y bajo para tan gran cosa, y tengo por cierto que, si no le diese Dios, con cuanto veis que nos está bien, sería imposible” (6M 4, 1-2).

2. 4. Infused self-knowledge in the seventh dwelling places

Infused self-knowledge of the seventh dwelling places “se encuentra en el matrimonio espiritual”¹⁷³. This spiritual marriage takes place when in a “visión intelectual, por cierta manera de representación de la verdad, se le muestra la Santísima Trinidad, todas tres personas” (7M 1, 6). This vision, first of all, makes the soul see and understand with clarity the mystery of the Trinity:

“Estas Personas distintas, y por una noticia admirable que se da al alma, entiende con grandísima verdad ser todas tres Personas una sustancia y un poder y un saber y un solo Dios; de manera que lo que tenemos por fe, allí lo entiende el alma, podemos decir, por vista” (7M 1, 6).

Second, in the case of rapture in the sixth dwelling places, the soul knows that it is united with God, but “ninguna cosa entiende, que las potencias todas se pierden” (7M 1, 5). Conversely, in intellectual vision, the soul sees and understands the nature of the vision: “quiere ya nuestro

¹⁷³ Juan Manuel Morilla Delgado. *Conócete en mí. Itinerario Místico Experiencial en Teresa de Ávila*. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2015, 209.

buen Dios quitarla las escamas de los ojos y que vea y entienda algo de la merced que le hace, aunque es por una manera extraña” (7M 1, 6).

Third, in this vision, God reveals to the soul its great value and dignity because it is made in the image of God and the Trinity is fully present in it. And because of this great dignity of the soul, God makes the soul understand that He is more pleased to be with souls than with other creatures:

“Esto no es como otras visiones, porque lleve fuerza con la fe; de manera que no se puede dudar que está la Trinidad por presencia y por potencia y esencia en nuestras almas. Es cosa de grandísimo provecho entender esta verdad. Y como estaba espantada de ver tanta majestad en cosa tan baja como mi alma, entendí: “No es baja, hija, pues está hecha a mi imagen”. También entendí algunas cosas de la causa por qué Dios se deleita con las almas más que con otras criaturas, tan delicadas que, aunque el entendimiento las entendió, de presto no las sabré decir” (CC 41).

In short, as Juan Manuel Morilla Delgado well states, with the spiritual marriage in the seventh dwelling places, “el alma es enteramente transformada por este amor-conocimiento, y queda toda iluminada y vivificada por este amor de las Tres Personas divinas”¹⁷⁴.

As for the conditions for receiving this grace of spiritual marriage, in which God reveals the truth of the Trinity and the great dignity of the soul, according to Teresa, it depends purely on the mercy of God. When God sees that the soul has suffered many trials in the dark night of the spirit for love of Him, He will have pity on it and bring it to “aquella morada, por visión intelectual” (7M 1, 6):

“Cuando nuestro Señor es servido haber piedad de lo que padece y ha padecido por su deseo esta alma que ya espiritualmente ha tomado por esposa, primero que se consuma el matrimonio espiritual métela en su morada, que es esta séptima” (7M 1, 3).

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 210.

Conclusion

In short, there are two forms of self-knowledge: acquired self-knowledge and infused self-knowledge. And to attain them, a variety of means is required.

As for acquired self-knowledge, which can be attained by one's own efforts, the means to attain it are through the relationship with oneself, through the relationship with God, and through the relationship with others. First, in the relationship with oneself, self-knowledge can be attained through a process of self-observation and reflection to discover the truth of God and the truth of oneself. Second, in the relationship with God, it is done through prayer. In prayer, one will gradually discover the great dignity of one's soul and the great wealth it contains. Finally, in our relationship with others, through the circle of praying friends and spiritual directors and through their feedback, whether negative or positive, whether criticism or praise, one can gain a deeper understanding of oneself.

And as for the infused self-knowledge, which is a pure gift of God bestowed upon the soul through supernatural favors, the means to attain it is through the proper disposition of one's self for God's favors. This form of self-knowledge is usually given to those who are more proficient in prayer, that is, those in the fourth dwelling places and above. Specifically, in order to have a proper disposition for God's favors in the fourth dwelling places, one must practice humility. In the fifth dwelling places, it is the conformation of one's will to God's will. In the sixth dwelling places, it is to engage in external works of charity and to place one's hope in the mercy of God. In the seventh dwelling places, it is to persevere in the many trials of the dark night of the spirit for the love of God. Finally, according to Teresa, the more one progresses in the life of prayer, the better and clearer one would know oneself, because the more the Lord would enlighten one in one's self-knowledge.

CHAPTER IV

TOWARD UNION WITH GOD THROUGH SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Introduction

According to Teresa, man's destiny is the union of love with God, his Creator (cf. 5M 3, 7-8), and so she always tries to lead her readers to this union¹⁷⁵. And to reach this union, there is no other way but walking in the truth of oneself and of God because "Dios es suma Verdad" (6M 10, 7)¹⁷⁶. For this very reason, self-knowledge plays an important role in Teresa's teaching. Indeed, she urges her sisters, and every human being who seeks to encounter and be united with God, to always walk in the truth of oneself:

"Saquemos de aquí, hermanas, que para conformarnos con nuestro Dios y Esposo en algo, será bien que estudiemos siempre mucho de andar en esta verdad. [...] que andemos en verdad delante de Dios y de las gentes de cuantas maneras pudiéremos, en especial no queriendo nos tengan por mejores de lo que somos, y en nuestras obras dando a Dios lo que es suyo y a nosotras lo que es nuestro, y procurando sacar en todo la verdad, y así tendremos en poco este mundo, que es todo mentira y falsedad, y como tal no es durable" (6M 10, 7).

Therefore, in this final chapter, our focus will be on examining the significance of self-knowledge in the process of achieving union with God. Initially, we will explore how self-knowledge can aid in overcoming self-deception, which can impede the attainment of truth and, consequently, union with God. Subsequently, we will consider the role of self-knowledge in cultivating virtues, specifically the three most essential virtues of love, detachment, and humility. Lastly, we will delve into its significance in the practice of prayer.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín. "Una puerta para la esperanza: el conocimiento de sí y la oración en el Castillo Interior". *Las Moradas del Castillo Interior de Santa Teresa de Jesús. Actas del IV Congreso Internacional Teresiano*, celebrado en Ávila del 3 al 7 de septiembre de 2013, en preparación del V Centenario de su nacimiento (1515-2015). Eds. Sancho Fermín, Francisco Javier, OCD and Cuartas Londoño, Rómulo Hernán, OCD, 1948-2021. Claves. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2014, 341.

¹⁷⁶ St. Edith Stein, in a letter to Sister Adelgundis Jaegerschmid, also expressed the same thought as Teresa about the relationship between God and truth: "God is truth. All who seek truth seek God, whether this is clear to them or not". (Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. *Self-Portrait in Letters, 1916-1942* (Translated from the German by Koepfel). Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1993. *Letter 259*).

1. Overcoming self-deception with self-knowledge

For Teresa, self-deception occurs when one does not truly live the spiritual life, that is, when one does not center one's life on God but on one's ego, on the world and its vanities. The damage of self-deception to one's spiritual life is that it prevents one from reaching the ultimate goal of union with God. For this reason, in her works, Teresa has tried to unmask the self-deception so that one can truly live the spiritual life¹⁷⁷. And for her, self-deception has a variety of meanings.

The first form of self-deception is the belief that one can find fulfillment and true happiness in the things of this world. This deception is caused by one's unawareness of God and of the finiteness of the world. This self-deception leads to two harms in the spiritual life. First, instead of seeking God, his true happiness, one only immerses oneself in the vanities of the world. Teresa also experienced this first form of self-deception when she was a teenager (Cf. V 2). It was not until she met Doña María de Briceño y Contreras, a nun at the convent of Nuestra Señora de Gracia in Ávila, that Teresa became aware of this deception:

“Aunque fueron los días que estuve pocos, con la fuerza que hacían en mi corazón las palabras de Dios, así leídas como oídas, y la buena compañía, vine a ir entendiendo la verdad de cuando niña, de que no era todo nada, y la vanidad del mundo, y cómo acababa en breve, y a temer, si me hubiera muerto, cómo me iba al infierno” (V 3, 5).

Second, one believes and trust in the values of the world, such as honor, reputation, wealth, etc., and consequently forms an inordinate attachment to them. Looking back on her life, Teresa denounced this self-deception:

“Fatígase del tiempo en que miró puntos de honra y en el engaño que traía de creer que era honra lo que el mundo llama honra; ve que es grandísima mentira y que todos andamos en ella; entiende que la verdadera honra no es mentirosa, sino verdadera, teniendo en algo lo que es algo, y lo que no es nada tenerlo en nonada, pues todo es nada y menos que nada lo que se acaba y no contenta a Dios. Ríese de sí, del tiempo que tenía en algo los dineros y codicia de ellos, aunque en ésta nunca creo -y es así verdad- confesé culpa; harta culpa era tenerlos en algo” (V 20, 26-27).

According to Teresa, in order to overcome these first form of self-deception, an awareness of

¹⁷⁷ Cf. M^a Teresa Gil Muñoz. *La noche oscura de Teresa de Jesús* (Tesis para la obtención del grado de Doctor). Madrid: Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2016, 168.

our own and the world's finitude is necessary, for it will help us detach from our ego and the vanities of the world¹⁷⁸:

“Toda es corta la vida, y algunas cortísimas. ¿Y qué sabemos si seremos de tan corta, que desde una hora o momento que nos determinemos a servir del todo a Dios se acabe? Posible sería; que, en fin, todo lo que tiene fin no hay que hacer caso de ello; y pensando que cada hora es la postrera, ¿quién no la trabajará? Pues creedme que pensar esto es lo más seguro” (C 12, 2).

“Cosa es de gran lástima que está el mundo ya con tanta desventura y ceguedad, que les parece a los padres que está su honra en que no se acabe la memoria de este estiércol de los bienes de este mundo y que no la haya de que tarde o temprano se ha de acabar. Y todo lo que tiene fin, aunque dure, se acaba, y hay que hacer poco caso de ello” (F 10, 9).

Moreover, the awareness of the infinite and ever faithful God, in Whom one finds all one's wealth and happiness, will make one cling more to God. This is what Teresa wants to remind us in her famous poem *Nada te turbe*:

Nada te turbe,
nada te espante;
todo se pasa,
Dios no se muda.

La paciencia
todo lo alcanza.
Quien a Dios tiene
nada le falta.
Sólo Dios basta.

The second form of self-deception is false humility, in which one considers oneself unworthy of a relationship with God because of one's sins and miseries. Teresa also suffered from this self-deception, as she told us:

“Pues así comencé, de pasatiempo en pasatiempo, de vanidad en vanidad, de ocasión en ocasión, a meterme tanto en muy grandes ocasiones y andar tan estragada mi alma en muchas vanidades, que ya yo tenía vergüenza de en tan particular amistad como es tratar de oración tornarme a llegar a Dios.[...] Este fue el más terrible engaño que el demonio me podía hacer debajo de parecer humildad, que comencé a temer de tener oración, de verme tan perdida” (V

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Juan Antonio Marcos. *Teresa de Jesús. La transparencia del Misterio*. Madrid: San Pablo, 2015, 98.

7, 1).

This self-deception is a great hindrance to one's spiritual growth, because in Teresa's experience, once one gives up prayer, one's spiritual life only goes from bad to worse:

“Digo que no desmaye nadie de los que han comenzado a tener oración, con decir: ‘si torno a ser malo, es peor ir adelante con el ejercicio de ella’. Yo lo creo, si se deja la oración y no se enmienda del mal; mas, si no la deja, crea que la sacaré a puerto de luz. Hízome en esto gran batería el demonio, y pasé tanto en parecerme poca humildad tenerla, siendo tan ruin, que, como ya he dicho, la dejé año y medio -al menos un año, que del medio no me acuerdo bien- Y no fuera más, ni fue, que meterme yo misma sin haber menester demonios que me hiciesen ir al infierno. ¡Oh, válgame Dios, qué ceguedad tan grande! ¡Y qué bien acierta el demonio para su propósito en cargar aquí la mano!” (V 19, 4).

From this painful experience, Teresa earnestly urged her Carmelite nuns to be on guard against this self-deception:

“Pues guardaos también, hijas, de unas humildades que pone el demonio con gran inquietud de la gravedad de nuestros pecados, que suele apretar aquí de muchas maneras, hasta apartarse de las comuniones y de tener oración particular por no lo merecer, les pone el demonio; y cuando llegan al Santísimo Sacramento, en si se aparejaron bien o no, se les va el tiempo que habían de recibir mercedes. Llega la cosa a término de hacer parecer a un alma que, por ser tal, la tiene Dios tan dejada, que casi pone duda en su misericordia” (C 39, 1).

As for this form of self-deception, self-knowledge will help one realize that this is only a temptation from the devil to rob him of his relationship with God:

“Miren esto, por amor de Dios, todos los que tratan oración. Sepan que el tiempo que estuve sin ella era mucho más perdida mi vida; mírese qué buen remedio me daba el demonio y qué donosa humildad” (V 19, 11).

Moreover, self-knowledge also helps one to attain true humility by accepting his miseries and becoming more careful not to offend God. He also realizes that only by cultivating his relationship with God through prayer can he overcome his weaknesses and build a better relationship with God:

“Y si por su flaqueza y maldad y ruin y miserable natural cayeren, como yo hice, siempre tengan delante el bien que perdieron, y tengan sospecha y anden con temor (que tienen razón de tenerle) que, si no tornan a la oración, han de ir de mal en peor. Que ésta llamo yo verdadera

caída, la que aborrece el camino por donde ganó tanto bien, y con estas almas hablo; que no digo que no han de ofender a Dios y caer en pecados, aunque sería razón se guardase mucho de ellos quien ha comenzado a recibir estas mercedes, mas somos miserables. Lo que aviso mucho es que no deje la oración, que allí entenderá lo que hace y ganará arrepentimiento del Señor y fortaleza para levantarse; y crea que, si de ésta se aparta, que lleva, a mi parecer, peligro” (V 15, 3).

The third form of self-deception is to believe that one has virtues when in fact one has not:

“Así digo de la humildad también y de todas las virtudes. Son grandes los ardides del demonio, que por hacernos entender que tenemos una, no la teniendo, dará mil vueltas al infierno. Y tiene razón, porque es muy dañoso, que nunca estas virtudes fingidas vienen sin alguna vanagloria, como son de tal raíz; así como las que da Dios están libres de ella ni de soberbia” (5M 3, 9).

Teresa also speaks of this kind of self-deception in *The Way of Perfection*: “Adonde el demonio puede hacer gran daño sin entenderle, es haciéndonos creer que tenemos virtudes no las teniendo, que esto es pestilencia” (C 38, 5). It is “muy dañoso” and “pestilencia” because, first of all, it causes one to become arrogant, thinking that he has accomplished a lot and therefore God should pay him for his services¹⁷⁹: “Porque en los gustos y regalos parece sólo que recibimos y que quedamos más obligados a servir; acá parece que damos y servimos y que está el Señor obligado a pagar, y así poco a poco hace mucho daño” (Ibid.). Second, it causes one to become complacent and thus neglect one’s ongoing spiritual growth and development: “Que por una parte enflaquece la humildad, por otra descuidámonos de adquirir aquella virtud, que nos parece la tenemos ya ganada” (Ibid.).

A good way to overcome this form of self-deception, according to Teresa, is to recognize our wretched nature and to test oneself on these virtues. In fact, Teresa considered a humble self-knowledge of our lowliness and wretchedness as a great favor from God to counteract this self-deception:

“¡Oh válgame Dios, si entendiésemos cuánta miseria es la nuestra! En todo hay peligro, si no la entendemos. Y a esta causa nos es gran bien que nos manden cosas para ver nuestra bajeza. Y tengo por mayor merced del Señor un día de propio y humilde conocimiento, aunque nos haya costado muchas aflicciones y trabajos, que muchos de oración” (F 5, 16).

And because of one’s awareness of one’s wretchedness, one will not readily believe that one

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Oswaldo Escobar. *Manual de discernimiento teresiano*. Bogotá: Editorial San Pablo, 2015, 129.

has virtues, but rather will first test them:

“No piense, aunque le parezca que sí, que está ya ganada la virtud, si no la experimenta con su contrario. Y siempre hemos de estar sospechosos y no descuidarnos mientras vivimos; porque mucho se nos pega luego, si -como digo- no está ya dada del todo la gracia para conocer lo que es todo, y en esta vida nunca hay todo sin muchos peligros” (V 31, 19).

And for Teresa, testing our virtues “se nos da a entender quién somos y hasta dónde llega nuestra virtud” (F 5, 15). And so we will overcome this self-deception.

Finally, according to Teresa, another effective way to avoid this self-deception is to always doubt that we possess some virtues and to learn to appreciate the virtues in others¹⁸⁰:

“Mas tórnoos a avisar que, aunque os parezca la tenéis, temáis que os engañáis. Porque el verdadero humilde siempre anda dudoso en virtudes propias, y muy ordinariamente le parecen más ciertas y de más valor las que ve en sus prójimos” (C 38, 9).

Finally, the fourth form of self-deception, according to Teresa, is believing that one is holy and has reached spiritual maturity when in fact one has not. This causes one to self-canonize and deceive others into believing so¹⁸¹. Teresa tells us some cases of this self-deception in the *Foundations* (cf. F 6, 9-13. 18-19) as well as in the *Meditations on the Song of Songs* (cf. MC 2, 23-24). They appeared to be very holy but in fact they were self-seeking. Indeed, holiness is not a matter of looking good or holy to others, but of growing in the virtues of detachment, humility, and love¹⁸². Lack of these virtues is nothing but self-deception: “Es imposible si no las¹⁸³ tienen ser muy contemplativas, y cuando pensaren lo son, están muy engañadas” (C 4, 3). Thus, of the above cases, Teresa comments:

“Traíame desatinada, y casi todos la tenían por santa. Puesto que vi que de las persecuciones que ella contaba debía tener alguna culpa, y no tuve envidia su modo y santidad; sino que ella u otras dos almas que he visto en esta vida que ahora me acuerde, santas en su parecer, me han hecho más temor que cuantas pecadoras he visto, después que las trataba” (MC 2, 24).

However, Teresa does not consider those who suffer from this form of self-deception to be intentionally deceiving themselves and others, but rather due to their imagination and the

¹⁸⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁸¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 316-318.

¹⁸² Cf. *Ibid.*, 318.

¹⁸³ C 4, 4: “La una es amor unas con otras; otra, desasimiento de todo lo criado; la otra, verdadera humildad”.

weaknesses of their psychology:

“Y como esto entiende, creo no hace tanto mal como nuestra imaginación y malos humores, en especial si hay melancolía; porque el natural de las mujeres es flaco, y el amor propio que reina en nosotras muy sutil. Y así han venido a mí personas, así hombres como mujeres, muchas, junto con las monjas de estas casas, adonde claramente he conocido que muchas veces se engañan a sí mismas sin querer” (F 4, 2).

To overcome this last form of self-deception, Teresa suggests that her nuns reflect and examine themselves to see if they are following their own will or the will of God. If they follow their own will by refusing to obey their superiors, they are still far from spiritual maturity:

“Helo dicho aquí, porque las prioras estén advertidas, y las hermanas teman y consideren y se examinen de la manera que llegan a recibir tan gran merced. Si es por contentar a Dios, ya saben que se contenta más con la obediencia que con el sacrificio” (F 6, 22).

And for her, if there is a lack of obedience, even if one receives the grace of suspension, he is not yet advanced in his spiritual life, because he is not seeking God, but only himself: “Mas si después de esa suspensión queda poca obediencia y propia voluntad, unida con su amor propio me parece a mí que estará, que no con la voluntad de Dios” (F 5, 13). In short, according to Teresa, obedience is a great test to know whether one is spiritually mature or not.

Moreover, this form of self-deception can also be detected by observing the growth of the virtues: “Y así no hay en esto por qué aprobar ni condenar, sino mirar a las virtudes, y a quien con más mortificación y humildad y limpieza de conciencia sirviere a nuestro Señor, que ésa será la más santa” (6M 8, 10). Indeed, in Teresa’s experience, no matter how holy a person seems to be and how advanced he is in his spiritual life, if he lacks the virtue of love (cf. F 6, 19) or is still attached to his own honor and reputation (cf. MC 2, 24), he is only deceiving himself and others about his holiness, because the one who truly loves God cannot be self-seeking and love vanities such as honor or reputation:

“¿Pensáis que es posible quien muy de veras ama a Dios amar vanidades? Ni puede, ni riquezas, ni cosas del mundo, de deleites, ni honras; ni tiene contiendas ni envidias. Todo porque no pretende otra cosa sino contentar al Amado. Andan muriendo porque los ame, y así ponen la vida en entender cómo le agradarán más” (C 40, 3).

2. Self-knowledge and the practice of virtues

Self-knowledge plays an important role in our pursuit of the virtues, a notion strongly emphasized by Teresa. Therefore, we will explore the impact of self-knowledge on the cultivation of the virtues, with a particular focus on love, detachment, and humility. But before we delve into this topic, let us first understand Teresa's definition of the virtues and the crucial role they play in attaining union with God.

2.1. Virtues according to Teresa

According to Tomás Álvarez, Teresa never defines virtues as “hábitos operativos” as proposed by theologians, but rather sees them as “empeños de vida de cara a Dios”¹⁸⁴. In other words, for her, virtue is “todo lo bueno que se haga o se sufra por Dios”¹⁸⁵. For this reason, Teresa affirms that the virtues are means to help us unite with God, the goal of our spiritual life: “Guardándolas con perfección, hacemos su voluntad, y así estaremos unidos con El” (5M 3, 7).

For Teresa, the practice of virtues is important because, first of all, “las virtudes son la puerta de entrada en *el Castillo*, para iniciar la oración”¹⁸⁶. Put another way, they prepare and make prayer possible. Secondly, our virtues are also an object of joy for God¹⁸⁷, because God comes “a deleitar muchas veces a esta huerta y a holgarse entre estas virtudes” (V 11, 6). For these reasons, Teresa did not like the kind of prayer that does not help one to grow in virtues, as she wrote to Father Gracian, her spiritual director as well as a close friend: “Yo no desearía otra oración sino la que me hiciese crecer las virtudes” (Cta. 136, 5).

It is therefore necessary to acquire virtues in order to be united with God. But in order to acquire virtues, it is necessary to have self-knowledge, because without it, how can one know one's own strengths and weaknesses in order to work on cultivating virtues? In fact, according to Javier Sancho Fermín, self-knowledge is not only necessary for the cultivation of virtues, but also the “fundamento de la auténtica virtud”¹⁸⁸.

¹⁸⁴ Tomás Álvarez. *100 fichas sobre Teresa de Jesús*. Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2010, 343.

¹⁸⁵ Félix Mála. *Virtudes en Diccionario de Santa Teresa*, (Tomas Alvarez dir.). Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2006, 638.

¹⁸⁶ Tomás Álvarez. *100 fichas sobre Teresa de Jesús*. Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2010, 344.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Félix Mála. *Virtudes en Diccionario de Santa Teresa*, (Tomas Alvarez dir.). Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2006, 641.

¹⁸⁸ Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín. “El conocimiento de sí: el primero y principal provecho de la noche (1N 12, 2)”. *Revista de Espiritualidad* 78 (2019), 84.

2.2. The role of self-knowledge in the practice of virtues

For Teresa, the awareness of our weakness and misery will help us not to trust in ourselves, but always to proceed carefully in the practice of the virtues:

“La diligencia que a mí se me ofrece más cierta (después de pedir siempre a Dios en la oración que nos tenga de su mano, y pensar muy continuo cómo, si Él nos deja, seremos luego en el profundo, como es verdad, y jamás estar confiadas en nosotras, pues será desatino estarlo), es andar con particular cuidado y aviso, mirando cómo vamos en las virtudes: si vamos mejorando o disminuyendo en algo, en especial en el amor unas con otras y en el deseo de ser tenida por la menor y en cosas ordinarias” (5M 4, 9).

Among the many virtues, three great virtues stand out because of their importance and the extent to which Teresa emphasized them. These virtues are detachment, fraternal love and humility, which are the foundation of a life of prayer and authentic holiness¹⁸⁹: “solas tres [virtudes] me extenderé en declarar [...]: la una es amor unas con otras, otra, desasimiento de todo lo criado; la otra, verdadera humildad, que aunque la digo a la postre es la principal y las abraza todas” (C 4,4). Of these three main virtues, we will first discuss the role of self-knowledge in attaining the virtues of detachment and humility, because according to Teresa these two virtues always go together: “Aquí puede entrar la verdadera humildad, porque esta virtud y estotra paréceme andan siempre juntas. Son dos hermanas que no hay para qué las apartar” (C 10, 3). These virtues go together because, according to Maximiliano Herraiz, they both have a liberating power, that is, they have the power to “descentrar al hombre de sí mismo, en su relación con todo, y, correlativamente, para centrarlo en Dios, su verdad y, por ello, su liberador”¹⁹⁰. Finally, we will discuss the role of self-knowledge in the attainment of the virtue of fraternal love.

The first is the role of self-knowledge in the practice of the virtue of detachment. For Teresa, detachment is necessary in the spiritual life because it allows one to love God wholeheartedly, Who is all one’s happiness and blessing: “Y pues en él están todos los bienes, como digo, alabémosle mucho, hermanas, que nos juntó aquí adonde no se trata de otra cosa sino de esto” (C 8, 1). That is why Teresa wants her sisters and all those who walk the path of prayer to detach themselves from everything and to attach themselves only to God: “va muy fuera del espíritu de descalzas ningún género de asimiento, aunque sea con superiora, ni medrarán en

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Tomás Álvarez. *100 fichas sobre Teresa de Jesús*. Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2010, 343-344.

¹⁹⁰ Maximiliano Herraiz. “La humildad es andar en verdad”. *Revista de Espiritualidad* 50 (1991), 256.

espíritu jamás. Libres quiere Dios a sus esposas, asidas a sólo El” (Cta. 451, 8). According to Teresa, the awareness of all the vanity of the world and the finiteness within oneself will help one grow in the virtue of detachment: “El comenzar a aborrecer el mundo, el ver muy claro su vanidad” (V 19, 2); “Gran remedio es para esto traer muy continuo en el pensamiento la vanidad que es todo y cuán presto se acaba, para quitar las afecciones de las cosas que son tan baladíes y ponerla en lo que nunca se ha de acabar” (C 10, 2). Furthermore, the awareness of the great beauty and dignity of our soul in which God dwells also helps us to detach from “las cosas del mundo”:

“Hay otra cosa más preciosa, sin ninguna comparación, dentro de nosotras que lo que vemos por de fuera. No nos imaginemos huecas en lo interior. Y plega a Dios sean solas mujeres las que andan con este descuido; que tengo por imposible, si trajésemos cuidado de acordarnos tenemos tal huésped dentro de nosotras, nos diésemos tanto a las cosas del mundo, porque veríamos cuán bajas son para las que dentro poseemos (C 28, 10).

Lastly, it is through self-knowledge that one becomes more aware of the attachments in one’s life and, as a result, can address them accordingly.

The second is the role of self-knowledge in the practice of the virtue of humility. For Teresa, “humildad es andar en verdad” (6M 10, 7). The truth here is the truth of God’s greatness and mercy and of our misery and nothingness as Teresa further explains: “que lo es muy grande no tener cosa buena de nosotros, sino la miseria y ser nada” (6M 10, 7). In other words, humility, as Maximiliano Herraiz puts it, is “afirmar a la vez quién es Dios en mí, con la comunicación de sus dones, y quién soy yo en mi debilidad constitutiva”¹⁹¹. Teresa insists that humility is the foundation of the spiritual life, without which the whole spiritual edifice will crumble:

“Y como este edificio todo va fundado en humildad, mientras más llegados a Dios, más adelante ha de ir esta virtud, y si no, va todo perdido” (V 12, 4).

“Y si a esto no se determinan, no hayan miedo que aprovechen mucho, porque todo este edificio -como he dicho- es su cimiento humildad; y si no hay ésta muy de veras, aun por vuestro bien no querrá el Señor subirle muy alto, porque no dé todo en el suelo” (7M 4, 8).

In fact, for her, humility underlies and presupposes prayer: “porque es el ejercicio principal de oración y, como he dicho, cumple mucho tratéis de entender cómo ejercitaros mucho en la

¹⁹¹ Maximiliano Herraiz. “La humildad es andar en verdad”. *Revista de Espiritualidad* 50 (1991), 252.

humildad” (C 17, 1). Furthermore, in the way of prayer, if one walks with humility, one walks safely:

“Si hay humildad, no creo yo saldrán peor libradas al cabo, sino muy en igual de los que llevan muchos gustos, y con más seguridad en parte; porque no sabemos si los gustos son de Dios o si los pone el demonio” (C 17, 3).

On the other hand, humility is a necessary condition for receiving graces from God. From Teresa’s experience, she sees that before God granted her supernatural graces, He made her aware of her misery and nothingness:

“Es muy ordinario, cuando alguna particular merced recibo del Señor, haberme primero deshecho a mí misma, para que vea más claro cuán fuera de merecerlas yo son; pienso lo debe el Señor de hacer” (V 38, 17).

Moreover, it seems to Teresa that the virtue of humility is so powerful that it even obligates God to do what we want, just as the queen checkmates the king in the game of chess: “La dama es la que más guerra le puede hacer en este juego, y todas otras piezas ayudan. No hay dama que así le haga rendir como la humildad” (CE 24, 2). In a different way, she repeats this idea of winning God through the virtue of humility in the *Interior Castle*: “Después de hacer lo que los de las moradas pasadas, ¡humildad, humildad! Por ésta se deja vencer el Señor a cuanto de él queremos” (4M 2,9). Indeed, according to Teresa, if one is truly humble and detached, God will not fail to favor him: “Bien creo que quien de verdad se humillare y desasiere, que no dejará el Señor de hacernos esta merced y otras muchas que no sabremos desear” (4M 2:10). Thus, she repeatedly reminds her readers to cultivate the virtue of humility: “que la humildad siempre labra como la abeja en la colmena la miel, que sin esto todo va perdido” (1M 2, 8), and “mientras estamos en esta tierra no hay cosa que más nos importe que la humildad” (1M 2, 9).

On the other hand, Teresa believed that humility and self-knowledge were closely interconnected to the point where she occasionally regarded humility as synonymous with self-knowledge. This is evident when she defines humility as “andar en verdad” and immediately urges her sisters to stay on the path of self-knowledge: “Plega a Dios, hermanas, nos haga merced de no salir jamás de este propio conocimiento” (6M 10, 7). In another place, she also sees self-knowledge as “un espejo para la humildad, mirando cómo cosa buena que hagamos no viene su principio de nosotros” (1M 2, 5).

In fact, according to Sancho Fermín, “la humildad teresiana es una virtud asentada sobre el conocimiento de sí”¹⁹², because humility comes directly from the knowledge of one’s own misery and nothingness: “la humildad es andar en verdad, que lo es muy grande no tener cosa buena de nosotros, sino la miseria y ser nada; y quien esto no entiende, anda en mentira” (6M 10, 7). In other words, self-knowledge is the necessary condition for humility. On the other hand, humility is also a fruit of self-knowledge¹⁹³. According to Teresa, pride disappears and true humility is attained when the soul sees the greatness and mercy of God in contrast to its own poverty and misery:

“La humildad más crecida; porque ve claro que para aquella excesiva merced y grandiosa no hubo diligencia suya, ni fue parte para traerla ni para tenerla. Vese claro indignísima, porque en pieza adonde entra mucho sol no hay telaraña escondida: ve su miseria. Va tan fuera la vanagloria, que no le parece la podría tener, porque ya es por vista de ojos lo poco o ninguna cosa que puede” (V 19, 2).

“Y es cosa muy cierta que mientras mas vemos estamos ricos, sobre conocer somos pobres, mas aprovechamiento nos viene y aun mas verdadero humildad” (V 10, 4).

In short, self-knowledge is the foundation and the cause of humility, because by recognizing one’s lowliness and misery before the greatness of God, one becomes both humble and more dependent on God.

The third is the role of self-knowledge in attaining the virtue of fraternal love, which is the most important of all because, according to Teresa, fraternal love is the manifestation of our love for God and the fulfillment of His will. For Teresa, the will of God is that “vivamos unidos a Él en perfección de amor”¹⁹⁴:

“¿Qué pensáis, hijas, que es su voluntad? Que seamos del todo perfectas; que para ser unos con

¹⁹² Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín. “El conocimiento de sí en la meditación teresiana.” *La Meditación Teresiana. Características fundamentales y su práctica*. Ed. Sancho Fermín, Francisco Javier, OCD. Colección Estudios Teresiano-Sanjuanistas; 1. Ávila: CITEs. Universidad de la Mística, 2002, 86.

¹⁹³ St. John of the Cross also affirms this relationship between self-knowledge and humility. For him, through the dryness and emptiness of the night of appetite, the soul sees its misery and, as a result, acquires humility: “Saca también el alma en las sequedades y vacíos de esta noche del apetito humildad espiritual, que es la virtud contraria al primer vicio capital que dijimos ser soberbia espiritual; por la cual humildad, que adquiere por el dicho conocimiento propio, se purga de todas aquellas imperfecciones en que caía acerca de aquel vicio de soberbia en el tiempo de su prosperidad. Porque, como se ve tan seca y miserable, ni aun por primer movimiento le parece que va mejor que los otros, ni que los lleva ventaja, como antes hacía; antes, por el contrario, conoce que los otros van mejor” (1N 12:7).

¹⁹⁴ Oswaldo Escobar. *Manual de discernimiento teresiano*. Bogotá: Editorial San Pablo, 2015, 18.

El y con el Padre, como Su Majestad le pidió (Jn 17, 22), mirad qué nos falta para llegar a esto. [...] Acá solas estas dos que nos pide el Señor: amor de Su Majestad y del prójimo, es en lo que hemos de trabajar. Guardándolas con perfección, hacemos su voluntad, y así estaremos unidos con El” (5M 3, 7).

Therefore, for her, this double commandment of loving God and loving one’s neighbor can also serve as a measure of one’s holiness and perfection: “Entendamos, hijas mías, que la perfección verdadera es amor de Dios y del prójimo, y mientras con más perfección guardáremos estos dos mandamientos, seremos más perfectas” (1M 2, 17). On the other hand, in her opinion, it is difficult to know if one really loves God, so the measure of one’s love for God can be based on one’s love for one another:

“La más cierta señal que, a mi parecer, hay de si guardamos estas dos cosas, es guardando bien la del amor del prójimo; porque si amamos a Dios no se puede saber, aunque hay indicios grandes para entender que le amamos; mas el amor del prójimo, sí (1 Jn 4, 20). Y estad ciertas que mientras más en éste os viereis aprovechadas, más lo estáis en el amor de Dios” (5M 3, 7).

And the measure of one’s love for others is based on the measure of one’s love for oneself, because God requires us to love others as ourselves: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22, 39). This is where self-knowledge comes in, because if we do not know ourselves, how can we love others as ourselves? Or in the words of Sancho Fermín: “¿Cómo puede amarse quién no se conoce o no se acepta? ¿Cómo será su amor al otro? ¿Con qué medida se enfrentará a él?”¹⁹⁵ Above all, Teresian self-knowledge enables us to recognize our own great dignity as created in the image and likeness of God and inhabited within by the very presence of God¹⁹⁶:

“No hallo yo cosa con que comparar la gran hermosura de un alma y la gran capacidad; y verdaderamente apenas deben llegar nuestros entendimientos, por agudos que fuesen, a comprenderla, así como no pueden llegar a considerar a Dios, pues El mismo dice que nos crió a su imagen y semejanza” (1M 1, 1).

It is this recognition of our own great dignity that leads us to love and respect others because, as human beings, they also have the same dignity as we do¹⁹⁷. This is the reason why, when Teresa heard of the atrocities committed against the Indians, she immediately pointed out the

¹⁹⁵ Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín. “El conocimiento de si en la meditación teresiana.” 58.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Maximiliano Herráiz García. *Solo Dios basta. Claves de la espiritualidad teresiana*. Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 2010, 218-219.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín. “El conocimiento de si en la meditación teresiana.” 79-80.

cause, which was our ignorance of the great dignity of our souls, as she wrote to her brother Lorenzo:

“Que esto es lo que mucho me lastima, ver tantas [almas] perdidas, y esos indios no me cuestan poco. El Señor los dé luz, que acá y allá hay harta desventura; que, como ando en tantas partes y me hablan muchas personas, no sé muchas veces qué decir, sino que somos peores que bestias, pues no entendemos la gran dignidad de nuestra alma, y cómo la apocamos con cosas tan apocadas como son las de la tierra. Denos el Señor luz” (Cta. 24, 13).

In short, according to Teresa, the great problem of humanity is that we do not know who we are and therefore we are not able to consider the value and the greatness of the other. If we really know the great dignity of ourselves and of every human being, we would not do injustice to anyone, but would have a great esteem and respect for every human life, as Teresa observes in *the Interior Castle*:

“Harta misericordia nos hace que haya comunicado estas cosas a persona que las podamos venir a saber, para que mientras más supiéremos que se comunica con las criaturas, más alabaremos su grandeza y nos esforzaremos a no tener en poco almas con que tanto se deleita el Señor, pues cada una de nosotras la tiene, sino que como no las preciamos como merece criatura hecha a la imagen de Dios, así no entendemos los grandes secretos que están en ella” (7M 1, 1).

On the other hand, the knowledge of our own misery also increases our love for our neighbors, because it makes us less judgmental and more charitable toward them. In fact, knowing the truth of our misery teaches us charity because it opens our eyes to the misery of our neighbor¹⁹⁸. And as a result, we will not look at him with a judgmental eye, but rather with the same positive compassion that God looks at him¹⁹⁹:

“De la que no está en gracia yo os lo confieso, y no por falta del Sol de Justicia que está en ella dándole ser; sino por no ser ella capaz para recibir la luz, como creo dije en la primera morada, que había entendido una persona que estas desventuradas almas es así que están como en una cárcel oscura, atadas de pies y manos para hacer ningún bien que les aproveche para merecer, y ciegas y mudas. Con razón podemos compadecernos de ellas y mirar que algún tiempo nos

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Louis de Bazelaire. “Connaissance de soi”. En *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, dirigido por A. Derville, P. Lamarche, y A. Solignac. Vol. 2. Paris: Beauchesne, 1990, 1520.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín. “Una puerta para la esperanza: el conocimiento de sí y la oración en el Castillo Interior.” *Las Moradas del Castillo Interior de Santa Teresa de Jesús. Actas del IV Congreso Internacional Teresiano*, celebrado en Ávila del 3 al 7 de septiembre de 2013, en preparación del V Centenario de su nacimiento (1515-2015). Eds. Sancho Fermín, Francisco Javier, OCD and Cuartas Londoño, Rómulo Hernán, OCD, 1948-2021. Claves. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2014, 340.

vimos así y que también puede el Señor haber misericordia de ellas” (7M 1, 3).

3. Self-knowledge and prayer life

Teresa emphasizes the profound importance of self-knowledge in the prayer life. She sees it as an indispensable and fundamental element that should never be disregarded or underestimated in one's journey of prayer. Consequently, in this final section we will explore the paramount importance of self-knowledge in the life of prayer. Initially, we will investigate self-knowledge as a vital and essential component of prayer, acknowledging its irreplaceable nature. Subsequently, we will explore how self-knowledge can serve as a valuable instrument in aiding and fostering one's prayer life.

3.1. Self-knowledge as an indispensable component of prayer

According to Teresa, self-knowledge is of immense importance in the life of prayer and in the process of union with God. She considers it indispensable, like “el pan”, which is the essential and fundamental thing that must never be forgotten or abandoned in the journey of prayer:

“Y aunque esto del conocimiento propio jamás se ha de dejar, ni hay alma, en este camino, tan gigante que no haya menester muchas veces tornar a ser niño y a mamar (y esto jamás se olvide, quizás lo diré más veces, porque importa mucho); porque no hay estado de oración tan subido, que muchas veces no sea necesario tornar al principio, y en esto de los pecados y conocimiento propio, es el pan con que todos los manjares se han de comer, por delicados que sean, en este camino de oración, y sin este pan no se podrían sustentar” (V 13, 15).

This conviction of Teresa on the importance of self-knowledge in the life of prayer is deepened even more in her last work, *the Interior Castle*, where she already had a complete knowledge of the whole spiritual path and of prayer, which enabled her to design the whole process, paying attention to the fundamental and principal elements of the process. In particular, at the beginning of her great synthesis on the life of prayer, she declares that self-knowledge “es lo que más nos importa” (1M 2, 13). Then, toward the end of the book, she again emphasizes the centrality of self-knowledge in the spiritual life by affirming that without self-knowledge there is no possibility of entering into a lasting and authentic mystical experience²⁰⁰: “primero da el Señor un gran conocimiento propio que hace estas Mercedes” (6M 9, 15). Indeed, if prayer is not grounded in the reality and authenticity of one's own life, in what one really is, how can

²⁰⁰ Cf. Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín. “El conocimiento de si en la meditación teresiana.” *La Meditación Teresiana. Características fundamentales y su práctica*. 57.

one expect one's life to be truly transformed in the encounter with God? For this reason, self-knowledge is an indispensable element in the journey of prayer, which ultimately leads to union with God.

In fact, based on Teresa's two definitions of prayer, we can clearly see that self-knowledge is one of the main components of authentic prayer. First, we will take a look at the first definition:

“A cuanto yo puedo entender, la puerta para entrar en este castillo es la oración y consideración, no digo más mental que vocal, que como sea oración ha de ser con consideración; porque la que no advierte con quién habla y lo que pide y quién es quien pide y a quién, no la llamo yo oración, aunque mucho menee los labios” (1M 1, 7).

According to Sancho Fermín, the word “consideración” that Teresa uses in this definition implies awareness²⁰¹. For prayer to be true and authentic, for Teresa, one must be aware of the three main components: “con quién habla”, which is the knowledge of God; “lo que pide”, which is the content of the prayer; and “quién es quien pide y a quién”, which is the knowledge of oneself²⁰². If one of these components is missing, there will be no prayer at all, no matter how much “menee los labios”. In short, self-knowledge is an “elemento esencial para poder vivir y crecer en una oración auténtica”²⁰³.

Second, in the *Book of Her Life*, Teresa defines mental prayer, or prayer in general, as a relationship of friendship, a relationship of love with God, who we know loves us: “no es otra cosa oración mental, a mi parecer, sino tratar de amistad, estando muchas veces tratando a solas con quien sabemos nos ama” (V 8, 5). Any relationship of friendship or any human relationship always implies self-knowledge, because for the relationship to be true, it always requires the gift of self. In prayer, as a relationship of love, it is logical that one should first know what one is giving oneself, so that the gift of self can be something free, voluntary and conscious²⁰⁴. In short, in order for friendship with God to be true and prayer to be authentic, it is essential to

²⁰¹ Cf. Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín. “Una puerta para la esperanza: el conocimiento de sí y la oración en el Castillo Interior.” 321.

²⁰² Juan Antonio Marcos points out that these three components of authentic prayer are actually the fundamental elements found in all forms of human communication, especially linguistic communication: “emisor, receptor y mensaje” (Cf. Juan Antonio Marcos. *Teresa de Jesús. La transparencia del Misterio*. Madrid: San Pablo, 2015, 154). This observation underscores Teresa's consistent view of prayer as a dialogue of friendship (V 8, 5; C 22, 1; 24, 2).

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 322.

²⁰⁴ Cf. Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín. “El conocimiento de si en la meditación teresiana.” *La Meditación Teresiana. Características fundamentales y su práctica*. 74.

have knowledge of oneself, as Maximiliano Herráiz affirms: “Conocer a Dios y conocerse a sí mismo hará que el encuentro sea real, que la oración sea auténtica”²⁰⁵.

3.2. Self-knowledge as an aid to prayer life

According to Teresa, self-knowledge is not only an essential element, an indispensable component of prayer, but also a great help in the spiritual life. First, self-knowledge helps us avoid sins. For Teresa, sin is one of the greatest obstacles for us to be united with God, because it is a great offense that cuts off our friendship with Him: “que en arrepintiéndonos de veras y determinándose a no le ofender, se torna a la amistad que estaba” (V 8, 5). It is a great offense because, first of all, in committing sin we are seeking our own will rather than the will of God, which is the foundation of our true relationship with Him: “para ser verdadero el amor y que dure la amistad, hanse de encontrar las condiciones: la del Señor ya se sabe que no puede tener falta, la nuestra es ser viciosa, sensual, ingrata” (ibid.). Second, according to Teresa, it has the power to kill even God, so she cries out with a deep sense of horror: “¡Oh, oh, oh, qué grave cosa es el pecado, que bastó para matar a Dios con tantos dolores!” (Excl. 10, 1). And again:

“¡Oh mortales, volved, volved en vosotros! Mirad a vuestro Rey, que ahora le hallaréis manso; acábase ya tanta maldad; vuélvanse vuestras furias y fuerzas contra quien os hace la guerra y os quiere quitar vuestro mayorazgo. Tornad, tornad en vosotros, abrid los ojos, pedid con grandes clamores y lágrimas luz a quien la dio al mundo. Entendeos, por amor de Dios, que vais a matar con todas vuestras fuerzas a quien por daros vida perdió la suya; mirad que es quien os defiende de vuestros enemigos” (Excl. 12, 4).

Because sin is a “gran mal” (V 2, 11) and the root of our misery²⁰⁶, Teresa wishes that not even the venial sin would be committed :

“Tened esta cuenta y aviso -que importa mucho- que no os descuidéis hasta que os veáis con tan gran determinación de no ofender al Señor, que perderíais mil vidas antes que hacer un pecado mortal, y de los veniales estéis con mucho cuidado de no hacerlos” (C 41, 3).

On the other hand, Teresa also recognizes and asserts that the reason we commit sin or are negligent in protecting and nurturing the beauty of our soul is due to a lack of self-knowledge:

²⁰⁵ Maximiliano Herráiz García. *La oración historia de amistad*. Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 1995, 53.

²⁰⁶ Cf. Miguel Angel Díez. “Pecado”. En *Diccionario de Santa Teresa – 3ª Edición*, dirigido por Tomás Álvarez. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2018, 885-886.

“No es pequeña lástima y confusión que, por nuestra culpa, no entendamos a nosotros mismos ni sepamos quién somos. ¿No sería gran ignorancia, hijas mías, que preguntasen a uno quién es, y no se conociese ni supiese quién fue su padre ni su madre ni de qué tierra? Pues si esto sería gran bestialidad, sin comparación es mayor la que hay en nosotras cuando no procuramos saber qué cosa somos, sino que nos detenemos en estos cuerpos, y así a bulto, porque lo hemos oído y porque nos lo dice la fe, sabemos que tenemos almas. Mas qué bienes puede haber en esta alma o quién está dentro en esta alma o el gran valor de ella, pocas veces lo consideramos; y así se tiene en tan poco procurar con todo cuidado conservar su hermosura: todo se nos va en la grosería del engaste o cerca de este castillo, que son estos cuerpos” (1M 1, 2).

For her, if we truly know the immense beauty and the great dignity of our soul, we will be more careful and diligent in preserving it. For this reason, we can say that self-knowledge is a great help for us in avoiding sins, because sin is the greatest destroyer of the beauty of our soul, as well as one of the greatest obstacles on the path to union with God²⁰⁷.

Second, self-knowledge helps us to begin and to persevere in the life of prayer. According to Teresa, self-knowledge helps us to see what prevents us from entering the castle or from entering ourselves²⁰⁸, and consequently it facilitates our entry into the castle through the door of “la oración y consideración” (1M 1, 7):

“Con otras almas que, en fin, entran en el castillo; porque aunque están muy metidas en el mundo, tienen buenos deseos, y alguna vez, aunque de tarde en tarde, se encomiendan a nuestro Señor y consideran quién son, aunque no muy despacio; alguna vez en un mes rezan llenos de mil negocios, el pensamiento casi lo ordinario en esto, porque están tan asidos a ellos, que como adonde está su tesoro se va allá el corazón, ponen por sí algunas veces de desocuparse, y es gran cosa el propio conocimiento y ver que no van bien para atinar a la puerta. En fin, entran en las primeras piezas de las bajas; mas entran con ellos tantas sabandijas, que ni le dejan ver la hermosura del castillo, ni sosegar; harto hacen en haber entrado” (1M 1, 8).

Furthermore, our awareness of God’s presence within us helps us to proceed correctly in the path of prayer, that is, not to seek God elsewhere, but always to seek Him within ourselves.

²⁰⁷ St. John Paul II, in his homily given in Fatima, Portugal, on May 13, 1982, considers sin not only one of the greatest obstacles, but actually the greatest obstacle on the path to union with God: “The greatest obstacle to man’s journey towards God is sin, perseverance in sin, and, finally, denial of God”. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/homilies/1982/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19820513_fatima.html

²⁰⁸ For Teresa, the castle is the symbol of the person or the soul, and the door is prayer and consideration: “a cuanto yo puedo entender, la puerta para entrar en este castillo es la oración y consideración, no digo más mental que vocal, que como sea oración ha de ser con consideración” (1M 1, 7).

According to Teresa, this self-knowledge is very beneficial because it teaches us to “considerar al Señor en lo muy interior de su alma” (V 40, 6), knowing that “ni en las plazas, ni en los contentos ni por ninguna parte que le buscaba, le hallaba como dentro de sí. Y esto es muy claro ser mejor. Y no es menester ir al cielo, ni más lejos que a nosotros mismos” (Ibid.). Indeed, one does not have to go to heaven to look for God, because heaven is actually within us. We only need to go within ourselves and we will find Him:

“Adonde está Dios, es el cielo. Sin duda lo podéis creer que adonde está Su Majestad está toda la gloria. Pues mirad que dice San Agustín que le buscaba en muchas partes y que le vino a hallar dentro de sí mismo. ¿Pensáis que importa poco para un alma derramada entender esta verdad y ver que no ha menester para hablar con su Padre Eterno ir al cielo, ni para regalarse con El, ni ha menester hablar a voces?” (C 28, 2).

Moreover, this awareness of God as a great Guest within us also invites us not to leave Him alone, but to stay with Him and talk to Him:

“¡Donosa humildad, que me tenga yo al Emperador del cielo y de la tierra en mi casa, que se viene a ella por hacerme merced y por holgarse conmigo, y que por humildad ni le quiera responder ni estarme con El ni tomar lo que me da, sino que le deje solo. [...] No os curéis, hijas, de estas humildades, sino tratad con El como con padre y como con hermano y como con señor y como con esposo; a veces de una manera, a veces de otra, que El os enseñará lo que habéis de hacer para contentarle” (C 28, 3).

On the other hand, the knowledge that man, no matter how much he sins, never loses his dignity, nor does God leave him²⁰⁹, makes us not fall into despair, but try to persevere in prayer, which we believe to be the remedy for all our evils, as Teresa teaches us: “Lo que aviso mucho es que no deje la oración, que allí entenderá lo que hace y ganará arrepentimiento del Señor y fortaleza para levantarse; y crea que, si de ésta se aparta, que lleva, a mi parecer, peligro” (V 15, 3).

²⁰⁹ Teresa teaches us this truth in several places: “Es de considerar aquí que la fuente y aquel sol resplandeciente que está en el centro del alma no pierde su resplandor y hermosura que siempre está dentro de ella, y cosa no puede quitar su hermosura. Mas si sobre un cristal que está al sol se pusiese un paño muy negro, claro está que, aunque el sol dé en él, no hará su claridad operación en el cristal” (1M 2, 3); “Dióseme a entender que estar un alma en pecado mortal es cubrirse este espejo de gran niebla y quedar muy negro, y así no se puede representar ni ver este Señor, aunque esté siempre presente dándonos el ser” (V 40, 5); “entendí que también recibe este sacrificio aunque esté en pecado el sacerdote, salvo que no se comunican las mercedes a su alma como a los que están en gracia: y no porque dejen de estar estas influencias en su fuerza, que proceden de esta comunicación con que el Padre recibe este sacrificio, sino por falta de quien le ha de recibir; como no es por falta del sol no resplandecer cuando da en un pedazo de pez, como en uno de cristal” (R 57).

Third, self-knowledge awakens our love for God²¹⁰. According to Teresa, the knowledge of our misery and nothingness, and the awareness of the great gifts of God that we receive unmeritedly, makes us love God more:

“Es cosa muy clara que amamos más a una persona cuando mucho se nos acuerda las buenas obras que nos hace. Pues si es lícito y tan meritorio que siempre tengamos memoria que tenemos de Dios el ser y que nos crió de nada y que nos sustenta y todos los demás beneficios de su muerte y trabajos, que mucho antes que nos criase los tenía hechos por cada uno de los que ahora viven [...]. He aquí una joya que, acordándonos que es dada y ya la poseemos, forzado convida a amar [...]. Pues ¿qué será cuando vean en su poder otras joyas más preciosas, como tienen ya recibidas algunos siervos de Dios, de menosprecio de mundo, y aun de sí mismos? Está claro que se han de tener por más deudores y más obligados a servir, y entender que no teníamos nada de esto, y a conocer la largueza del Señor” (V 10, 5).

She also asserts that this self-knowledge is very pleasing to God, and in fact He desires it from us, because it helps us both to attain the virtue of humility and to love and praise Him more²¹¹: “quiere nuestro Señor que no pierda la memoria de su ser, para que siempre esté humilde, lo uno; lo otro, porque entienda más lo que debe a Su Majestad y la grandeza de la merced que recibe, y le alabe” (7M 4, 2).

Conclusion

In short, according to Teresa, the way to union with God is the way of self-knowledge. This is the reason why she does not want us to have any relaxation in it, no matter how advanced we are in the spiritual life: “No sé si queda dado bien a entender, porque es cosa tan importante este conocernos que no querría en ello hubiese jamás relajación, por subidas que estéis en los cielos” (1M 2, 9). Therefore, throughout this chapter, we have tried to emphasize, based on the teachings of Teresa, the profound importance of self-knowledge in the journey toward union with God.

Firstly, we look at various forms of self-deception that prevent us from truly living the spiritual life, which are great hindrances to our journey toward our ultimate goal: union with God. We

²¹⁰ This is important because, according to Teresa, loving God is the true perfection that opens us to union with Him: “Entendamos, hijas mías, que la perfección verdadera es amor de Dios y del prójimo, y mientras con más perfección guardáremos estos dos mandamientos, seremos más perfectas” (1M 2, 17).

²¹¹ Cf. Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín. “Una puerta para la esperanza: el conocimiento de sí y la oración en el Castillo Interior.” 334.

then discuss how these forms of self-deception are unmasked and overcome by different forms of self-knowledge accordingly.

Secondly, we delve into the significance of self-knowledge in acquiring virtues, which are also means to help us unite with God, the goal of our spiritual life. We recognize that all virtues are important because they all prepare and enable prayer as well as an object of joy for God. However, due to the limit of this paper, we just discuss the role of self-knowledge in the practice of the three great virtues of detachment, fraternal love and humility, because they are the foundation of a life of prayer and authentic holiness, without which one cannot be united with God.

Lastly, we examine the role of self-knowledge in our prayer life, which serves as the primary means of achieving union with God²¹². In this part, we pointed out that self-knowledge is not only an indispensable component of prayer, but also a great help in the spiritual life. In fact, because of this extremely important role of self-knowledge in the life of prayer, Teresa urges us to always maintain self-knowledge in the process of prayer: “tened este cuidado: que en principio y fin de la oración, por subida contemplación que sea, siempre acabéis en propio conocimiento” (C 39, 5).

²¹² For Teresa, prayer is the royal way to heaven, that is, to be united with God, and a great means of obtaining the riches of heaven: “No os espantéis, hijas, de las muchas cosas que es menester mirar para comenzar este viaje divino, que es camino real para el cielo. Gánase yendo por él gran tesoro, no es mucho que cueste mucho a nuestro parecer. Tiempo vendrá que se entienda cuán nonada es todo para tan gran precio” (C 21, 1).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research has explored in depth the theme of self-knowledge in the process of union with God according to St. Teresa of Jesus and has revealed a number of significant findings.

The first chapter focused on examining the sources of self-knowledge in the spiritual life in both the biblical and Christian traditions, from biblical times to modern times. The study reveals that self-knowledge is consistently seen as both the foundation and an indispensable means of achieving perfection and union with God. A crucial aspect of self-knowledge is its ability to provide a clear understanding of one's identity before God and the nature of one's relationship with Him. It underscores the realization that individuals are mere creatures, originating from God and destined to be united with Him. This awareness inspires a relentless pursuit of God and fosters humility, which serves as the foundation of spiritual life and an essential prerequisite for union with God. In addition, self-knowledge illuminates the realization that individuals are created in the image and likeness of God. This knowledge enables them to appreciate their inherent beauty and greatness and leads them to live a life that honors their inherent dignity. Finally, self-knowledge plays a crucial role in the reformation of one's moral life. By recognizing personal weaknesses and inclinations toward vice, individuals can address these aspects of themselves and strive to realize their full potential, in essence, to strive for perfection.

After laying the groundwork in chapter one by exploring the historical sources of self-knowledge in spirituality up to the time of St. Teresa, our subsequent chapters focused on St. Teresa's life and teachings on self-knowledge and its role in the journey toward union with God.

In chapter two, we delved into St. Teresa's personal understanding of self-knowledge, which she derived from her reading of spiritual books as well as her interactions with various spiritual masters of her time. However, her unique experience led her to a groundbreaking realization: true self-knowledge cannot be attained without a sincere effort to know God. This is the novelty of her concept, which suggests that introspection or psychological tools alone are not sufficient to fully know oneself. Our findings in this chapter have also shown that, according to St. Teresa, self-knowledge is not only significant but indispensable. It is the key to achieving humility and union with God, making it an essential element in every stage of prayer, from the

first to the last. In addition, we discovered that it is not an easy task to attain self-knowledge, since there are many obstacles to overcome. Based on the teachings of St. Teresa, we focused on three primary obstacles: the influence of the devil, the preoccupation with false honor, and the fixation on earthly miseries.

In chapter three, our exploration of Saint Teresa's teachings on self-knowledge continued, this time focusing on the means to attain it. Our findings in this chapter highlight the existence of two forms of self-knowledge: acquired self-knowledge and infused self-knowledge, with the latter being considered superior and more profound. Acquired self-knowledge, as the name suggests, can be obtained through one's own efforts. Saint Teresa explains that this type of self-knowledge corresponds to the self-knowledge acquired from the first dwelling to the third dwelling, as described in her book *The Interior Castle*²¹³. Acquiring this knowledge involves utilizing three different means that correspond to three dimensions of one's relationships: the relationship with oneself (concentric dimension), the relationship with God (vertical dimension), and the relationship with others (horizontal dimension)²¹⁴. On the other hand, infused self-knowledge is described as a pure gift from God, bestowed upon the soul through supernatural favors. This form of self-knowledge corresponds to the self-knowledge received from the fourth dwelling to the seventh dwelling in Teresa's teachings. However, it is important to note that to receive these supernatural favors, one must possess a proper disposition. This includes practicing the virtue of humility, striving to align one's will with God's will in all things, engaging in acts of external charity, placing hope in God's mercy, and unwavering perseverance through spiritual trials.

In the previous two chapters, we discussed the importance, obstacles, and means of achieving self-knowledge. Together with Teresa, we realize that the way to union with God is the way of self-knowledge. Without it, there is neither spiritual life nor union with Him. In the last chapter of our thesis, we focus more on the application of St. Teresa's teachings on self-knowledge in the journey to union with God. In exploring the role of self-knowledge in this chapter, several key findings have emerged. First, while there are various forms of self-deception that are major obstacles to our journey toward union with God, they can be exposed and overcome through appropriate forms of self-knowledge. We have also illustrated the use of various forms of self-knowledge to effectively counter corresponding forms of self-deception. Second, self-

²¹³ Cf. Antonio Mas Arrondo, *Acercar el cielo. Itinerario espiritual con Teresa de Jesús*. Santander: Sal Terrae, 2004, 53.

²¹⁴ Cf. Juan Antonio Marcos. *Teresa de Jesús. La transparencia del Misterio*. Madrid: San Pablo, 2015, 182.

knowledge plays a crucial role in the acquisition of the virtues because it is the foundation of authentic virtue²¹⁵. In our research, we show how self-knowledge facilitates both the acquisition and practice of three key virtues: detachment, fraternal love, and humility-virtues that St. Teresa considers fundamental to a life of prayer and authentic holiness. By embracing self-knowledge, we empower ourselves to cultivate and embody these virtues, thereby furthering our journey toward union with God. Lastly, self-knowledge is not only an indispensable component of prayer, but also a great help in the spiritual life. According to Teresa, prayer without self-knowledge is not prayer at all, because self-knowledge is one of the three main components of authentic prayer: knowledge of God, knowledge of oneself, and the content of the prayer²¹⁶. We also pointed out how self-knowledge becomes a great help in the spiritual life, showing how it helps us to avoid sin, which is a significant obstacle on the path to union; how it helps us to begin and persevere in prayer; and finally, how it awakens our love for God. In summary, our findings in this final chapter demonstrate the transformative power of self-knowledge in our spiritual journey. It helps us overcome self-deception, acquire and embody virtues, and enrich our prayer life. We have concluded that self-knowledge is an essential component of the spiritual life, without which there is no union with God.

Based on the findings presented above, the following conclusions can be drawn. The thesis provides a comprehensive examination of self-knowledge in the process of union with God according to St. Teresa of Jesus. It establishes the significance of self-knowledge as both a foundational element and an indispensable means for achieving perfection and union with God. The research also explores different approaches to attaining self-knowledge and demonstrates the practical application of St. Teresa's teachings in the journey toward union with God.

However, it is acknowledged that the thesis primarily relies on textual analysis and interpretations of St. Teresa's teachings. While valuable, incorporating empirical studies or qualitative research involving individuals practicing St. Teresa's spirituality would provide additional insights. Conducting interviews, surveys, or case studies could help illuminate the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals who have applied self-knowledge in their spiritual journey. Additionally, it is recognized that although the thesis focuses on St. Teresa's teachings, conducting a broader comparative analysis with other mystics or spiritual figures

²¹⁵ Cf. Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín. "El conocimiento de sí: el primero y principal provecho de la noche (1N 12, 2)". *Revista de Espiritualidad* 78 (2019), 84.

²¹⁶ Cf. Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín. "Una puerta para la esperanza: el conocimiento de sí y la oración en el Castillo Interior." 321-322.

who have explored the concept of self-knowledge would be beneficial. This would foster a more comprehensive understanding of self-knowledge across different traditions and perspectives.

Based on these gaps, several proposals for future research can be suggested to deepen and broaden the understanding of self-knowledge and its role in the journey toward union with God:

1. **Comparative Analysis:** Conduct a comparative analysis of self-knowledge in St. Teresa of Jesus' teachings with those of other Christian mystics or spiritual traditions to identify commonalities and differences. This approach would provide a broader perspective on the concept of self-knowledge in relation to union with God.
2. **Psychological Dimensions:** Explore the psychological dimensions of self-knowledge in the spiritual journey, investigating the potential overlap or divergence between introspection, psychological tools, and St. Teresa's understanding of self-knowledge. Collaboration with experts in psychology and spirituality could enhance this research.
3. **Contemporary Relevance:** Investigate the relevance of self-knowledge in the modern context and its application in addressing the challenges faced by individuals seeking union with God. This research could involve qualitative studies or surveys to gather insights from individuals practicing spirituality or engaged in religious communities.
4. **Pastoral Guidance:** Develop pastoral guidance or exercises based on St. Teresa's teachings on self-knowledge to assist individuals in their spiritual journey. This could involve creating workshops, retreats, or resources that help individuals cultivate self-knowledge and integrate it into their daily lives.

By pursuing these avenues for future research, a deeper and broader understanding of self-knowledge within the context of union with God can be achieved. This expansion of knowledge will offer practical insights and guidance for individuals on their spiritual journeys.

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