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TERESA OF JESUS (MARCHOCKA), POLISH DISCALCED CARMELITE SISTER (1603–1652): LIFE AND MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

Teresa of Jesus (Marchocka) belonged to the first generation of Polish Discalced Carmelite Sisters. The social, cultural, and religious environment, as well as the historical moment in which she lived, were for her, as it seems, especially favorable. This was the Post-Tridentine period, in which Catholicism was victorious in its battle against Protestantism, and this brought with it a renewal of religious life in Poland. She lived at a time of a multi-faceted development of the country, in the “golden” age of Poland and of the Carmelite reform. This in turn meant a great religious fervor. At home, Teresa received a diligent religious education. As a religious, she lived in the first convent of Carmelite sisters established on Polish soil, and was counted among the nuns who personally knew the eminent spiritual daughters of St. Teresa, such as Anne of Jesus (Lobera) and Blessed Anne of St. Bartholomew (García). The direction of the Polish Carmel was entrusted to Discalced Carmelite Fathers who were truly exceptional in their knowledge of theology, spirituality, and sanctity of life (Fr. Mikołaj Opacki, Fr. Stefan Kucharski, Fr. Giovanni Maria Centurioni, Fr. Hieronim Cyrus and others).

In accord with what the title indicates, we will briefly present the life of the celebrated Polish Carmelite nun, citing the most important historical and personal data, and then we will present her written accounts or confessions, fundamental for becoming acquainted with her spiritual life, but we will focus our attention above all on her mystical experience, drawing from it the references to the Holy Scripture and the sacraments, in order to point out in conclusion its specific traits.

1. THE LIFE OF TERESA MARCHOCKA

Teresa of Jesus Marchocka was born on June 25, 1603 in Stróże near Zakliczyn on the Danube River, the daughter of Paweł and Elżbieta Modrzejowski.¹ Her father served several times as a deputy in the Parliament. As far as her mother is concerned, she was a woman exceptional in the religious upbringing of her children, as we learn from the testimony of Teresa of Jesus herself. Teresa was the youngest daughter and at baptism she received the name Marianna (cf. A I, 38). She had an elder sister, but nothing is known for certain about her brothers, including whether there were any.

She made her first confession very early, when she was only five years old, and received her first Communion two years later (cf. A II, 40). The year 1615 was very important for her. First, because her sister entered the convent of the Poor Clares in Stary Sącz (cf. A IV, 46). Second, because just at that time, she became aware of the mysterious voice of Christ calling her to Carmel (cf. A IV, 48). These are important facts, because on the one hand she received from Christ a direction for her vocation and at the same time had the opportunity to visit her sister in the convent of the Poor Clares, which, in addition, was not the only convent she visited at that time. It was there, in Stary Sącz, that she met a Discalced Carmelite priest, Fr. Piotr of St. Andrew (Kordoński; 1582–1642), who together with Fr. Kazimierz of St. Anne (Tarnowski; 1595–1641) served as a confessor for the nuns at the convent of the Poor Clares. She made a general confession before Fr. Piotr and received from him the book *Vida* [Life] by St. Teresa, edited by Ribera, as well as the Rule and Constitutions of the Discalced Carmelite Sisters. This was probably in the year 1618, before Christmas (cf. A VI, 59).

On April 26, according to the book of professions, she received the Carmelite habit and began the novitiate. After completing it, she made her religious profession on April 26, 1621. In the year 1630, probably in February, she was elected Subprioress and after three years was re-elected for the following three years, that is, until February of 1636. In these six years, she also served as Mistress of Novices. From April 1637 until April 1640 she held the office of Prioress in her mother-house in Cracow.

During her time as Prioress, she undertook the construction in brickwork of the Church of St. Martin in Grodzka street.

¹ Cf. *Księgi, w których są krótko opisane żywoty y cnoty zmarłych Zakomiczek Bossych zakonu Najświętszej Panny Mariew z Gury [Góry] Carmelu w klasztorze krakowskim Św. Marcina. Od Roku Pańskiego 1627*, Discalced Carmelite Archive in Wesoła, ms. 253, p. 207. For a detailed documentation concerning the facts of her biography, we refer the reader to our thesis: J.W. GOGOLA, OCD, *Droga mistyczna Teresy od Jezusa (Marchockiej), karmelitanki bożej 1603–1652*, Kraków 1990.

In 1641, a foundation of Carmelite sisters was organized in Lviv. Two nuns from Cracow were assigned there: Teresa of Jesus and her former novice Teresa Maria of St. Joseph (princess of Bavaria). They stayed in Lviv from June, 1642 until September, 1648, when they were forced to return to Cracow because the Cossack and Tartar forces attacked the city.

These same nuns of Lviv were later able to go to Warsaw for the foundation, which began solemnly on June 2, 1649, with the participation of King Jan Kazimierz and the apostolic nuncio. At the convent in Warsaw, sister Teresa of Jesus also fulfilled the office of Prioress, practically until her death. Beginning in the year 1650, she was constantly ill. On May 15, 1651, she was stricken with partial paralysis and from that moment on, her life became one long agony. She died on April 19, 1652. After the suppression of the convent in Warsaw in 1818, her incorruptible body was transferred to the convent of the nuns in Cracow, where it remains up to this very day.

2. THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF TERESA MARCHOCKA

To become acquainted with the mystical experience of Teresa Marchocka, we have to refer to her written accounts, which were published in 1939 under the title *Autobiografia mistyczna...* [Mystical autobiography]. *Autobiografia* is a document of supreme importance for Polish spirituality. For this reason, we take this opportunity to say something about its origin, characteristic traits, and authenticity. A commentary of a sort is formed by *Zywot* [Life] written on the basis of this document by Fr. Ignatius.² There is also a version of this book in French.³

Origin. She began to write on May 3, 1647 in Lviv (cf. A I, 37), at the command of her confessor, the aforementioned Fr. Ignatius, expressed in the words: "Beginning from birth, write down everything that the Lord has done with you" (A XLV, 217). And she wrote periodic accounts, whose number must have ranged from at least six to over ten. Fr. Ignatius put them together, conferring on them a certain unity. After having received a portion of the accounts, Fr. Ignatius asked her to complete them, or he suggested that she order her prayer according to a certain pattern, of which we have no knowledge today, because she did not carry out this command, judging it to be too difficult. At times, Mother Marchocka herself took

² Cf. *Zywot y Wysokie Cnoty W. Matki Teresy od Pana Jezusa Marchockiej, Klasztorów Karmelitanek Bosych we Lwowie i w Warszawie Fundatorki, Manuskryptu Dziejopisa W. Oycy Ignacego od św. Jana Ew., Tey Wielebney Matki Spowiednika, Zebrane Roku Pańskiego 1654. Do druku podane 1752, Dnia 11 Marca*; cf. U. BORKOWSKA, *Hagiografia polska (wiek XVI–XVII)*, in: *Dzieje teologii katolickiej w Polsce*, II, part I, Lublin 1975, p. 496.

³ Cf. *Vie et Vertus heroiques de la Mère Thérèse de Jesus (Marchocka)*, Lille – Paris – Bruges 1905.

the initiative in writing down what was happening inside her, in order to receive some advice and discernment from her confessor. We can conclude this from an analysis of *Autobiografia*.

Characteristics. *Autobiografia* is not a work composed harmonically, like that of *Vida* of St. Teresa, for example. It is difficult to perceive in it a conscious structure other than that of a chronology, if only a partial one at that, and not always clear. Only the first 27 chapters (of the total 60) have a certain chronological and editorial unity. Moreover, regarding some spiritual matters, it is difficult to know with certainty to which periods she is referring. Still, we can ascribe the most important spiritual occurrences to specific periods of time, even if we cannot always do so with great precision.

The first to give an assessment of *Autobiografia* were: Fr. Sebastian of the Mother of God, who divided into chapters the accounts received from Fr. Ignatius, and then Fr. Ignatius himself.

Fr. Sebastian writes, among other comments, that “everything that she wrote pierced my heart like a flaming arrow shot down from heaven to enflame the coldness of my soul, and for this reason I can say that these are not words that came from her but from Him who hides such things from the clever and the wise of this world, but reveals them to the little ones.”⁴

The judgment of Fr. Ignatius is similar:

“After reading her writings several times, I could never be satiated by a mysterious taste of the Spirit of God which emanated from them. At times it seems to me that these are the words of the Holy Spirit and no longer those of Mother Teresa. I arrived at such a conclusion as much from the simplicity and the wisdom with which she expounds upon matters difficult to understand and to explain, as from the fire which is enkindled in the heart of the one who reads them.”⁵

The authors of these testimonies greatly esteem the accounts of Teresa Marchocka for their charismatic character and for the quality of their content.

We wish to convey also an opinion expressed in our own age by Professor K. Górski, the editor of *Autobiografia*:

“*Autobiografia* of Mother Teresa Marchocka can without doubt be numbered among the very tiny group of this literary genre in the whole world. I say this

⁴ *Aprobacja*, in: TERESA OD JEZUSA MARCHOCKA, *Autobiografia*, ed. K. Górski, Poznań 1939, p. 236–237.

⁵ *Zywot y Wysokie Cnoty W. Matki Teresy od Pana Jezusa Marchockiey...*, p. 4–5.

with conviction, since the precise character of *Autobiografia* makes it a psychological and spiritual source of the highest quality.”⁶

If we then wish to speak of the form of these accounts, we must point out that the Author does not possess a particular literary talent. Simplicity is one of the fascinating attributes of this spiritual journal. We might add in conclusion that the accounts manifest to some degree the Spanish influence on the Polish mentality.⁷

3. THE MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE OF TERESA MARCHOCKA

Mystical experience is rooted in the Sacred Scripture and in the liturgy.⁸ The Scriptures, the liturgy, and mysticism form a triple reality which is mutually conditioned and has the same Author, that is, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, who permeates the Scriptures and the liturgy, is also the Author of the insertion of man into their profound reality. It is the Holy Spirit who bestows a deep experiential knowledge of the mystery of Christ. We can speak precisely of the Christian mystical experience only in relation to the mystery of Christ. This experience should not be treated in the abstract, without taking into account that which maintains and nourishes it, that is, it should not be separated from its connection with this mystery and with faith.

Faith, in fact, not only at its beginning but also in its development, is the fruit of grace, which internalizes the presence of the mystery in the believer. The Christian, whether more or less of a mystic, cannot merely be placed alongside the mystery and alongside faith.⁹ Participation in the mystery carries with it a twofold advantage: knowledge of the mystery and the sanctification of the person. The mystic experiences in himself or herself the very richness of the mystery of Christ. There are three factors of which mystical experience is constituted: the object of mystical experience, that is, the mystery; the subject of the experience, that is, the believer; and a new relation between them.¹⁰ The subject can intuit (“percevoir”) the object and become aware of it. The nucleus of the mystical experience consists precisely in this. Man can experience in himself the mystery of Christ or His action. Mystical experience is therefore the mystery of grace which envelops the entire human being.¹¹ We can say furthermore that mystical experience is a particular human

⁶ K. GÓRSKI, *Zarys dziejów duchowości w Polsce*, Kraków 1986, p. 1370–138.

⁷ Cf. K. GÓRSKI, *Przedmowa*, in: *Autobiografia*, p. 9.

⁸ Cf. L. BOUYER, *Mystique. Essai sur l'histoire d'un mot*, „La vie spirituelle. Supplement” 3(1949), p. 3–23.

⁹ Cf. P. AGAESSE, M. SALES, *Mystique*, DSAM 10(1980), p. 1940; cf. J. LOPEZ-GAY, *Mystique*, *ibid*, p. 1893.

¹⁰ Cf. J. LOPEZ-GAY, *Mystique*, DSAM 10(1980), p. 1893.

¹¹ Cf. L. BOUYER, *Wprowadzenie do życia duchowego*, Warszawa 1982, p. 197.

experience in which we take into account (some more, some less) that God has intervened in the spiritual life in a direct way. Mystical experience therefore can in no way be obtained by one's own effort.

3.1. The sources of the mystical experience of Teresa Marchocka

When speaking of sources, we refer to the Holy Scripture and the liturgy, in accordance with what was said above.

3.1.1. *The Word of God*

Since the beginning of the Church, the whole community of believers has been nourished by the Word of God. We wish, however, to attain a reading of the spiritual meaning. The external history of the people of the Old Covenant must become a spiritual history, the history of the salvation of every believer. This is possible thanks to the gift of the Holy Spirit, which gives life to what at first was only a symbol. This spiritual doctrine is found in the Scriptures, but the Holy Spirit turns it into a property of the soul.

The accounts written by Teresa Marchocka have a character of very personal confessions which take into consideration above all the psychological aspect of spiritual experience. Often, as has been said, Mother Marchocka presents some interior difficulties in order to obtain specific advice from her confessor. As a result, she does not speak directly of the Word of God in her spiritual life; at any rate, the allusions to the Bible which we find are not many.

We can place the approximately 20 allusions to episodes and words of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament in the whole of *Autobiografia* in four groups:

- The Word of God is the point of departure for prayer or the theme of her prayer;
- The Word of God makes her aware of certain matters;
- She makes her own the experience of some words or Biblical events;
- She experiences in herself some aspect of the mystery of Christ.

The Word of God is the point of departure for prayer or the theme of her prayer. A salient theme of her prayer both in her secular life as well as in Carmel was that of the passion of Christ (cf. A XVI, 89). While still living in the secular world, she was able, as she tells us, to meditate even several hours without distraction. Above all, she liked to take walks among the tombs in the cemetery (cf. A X, 68). The fruits of such prayer were the following: desire for God, the willingness to abandon the world with its vanities, and interior recollection (cf. A X, 68).

She manifests the same predilection for the passion of Christ in Carmel:

“I imagined Christ, my Crucified Lord, and I wept at His feet for those sins of mine of which He made me aware. In His presence, I begged pardon for all those whom I may have saddened, scandalized, or displeased. I sincerely asked the Lord to pardon all those who may have offended Him through my fault.” (A XI, 70–71; also A XXII, 106–107)

The Word of God makes her aware of certain matters. *Autobiografia* contains approximately five such references (cf. A XXXII, 129–30; XXVIII, 120; XXXIV, 140–141; XXXVI, 151–152; XLVIII, 200). For example, she asks the Lord why someone whom she knew to be spiritually not well was not able to rise up from his failings even if he put much effort into it. The Lord made her understand this by referring to the example of the workers called to work in the vineyard at different hours of the day (cf. A XXVIII, 120). Another time, the matter regarded Teresa herself. It happened that Fr. Stefan Kucharski, Provincial at that time, had forbidden her to practice any type of mental prayer, and then permitted her to do so again. In the meantime, however, she suffered much on this account and the Lord reminded her of the words: “Whoever hears you, hears me” (Lk 10:16) and reassured her that anyone who lets himself be guided by faith in the matter of obedience will surely not suffer any harm (cf. A XXXIV, 140–141).

She makes her own the experience of some words or Biblical events. On August 15, 1629, she emerged from long interior tribulations which lasted for almost eight years. In the midst of these trials she received her first extraordinary grace in the year 1624. This grace was linked to the Gospel scene which tells of the son of a royal official who was sick (cf. Jn 4, 46). She sees in this sick person her own soul, which is afflicted and almost dying for the Lord. He enlightened her in an instant, showing her the evil which was within her. She confesses that this was not a matter of knowledge coming forth from the intellect (cf. A XVIII, 93–94). Further, we have some texts which refer to her most difficult trials. And so it happened that she saw herself spiritually in the situation of Job (cf. A XIX, 102), or that in her spiritual abandonment she cried out with the words of King Saul when he was about to die and asked the squire to kill him (cf. 2 Sam 1: 9). She explains immediately, however, that she was not asking for physical death, but only to be able to die to all that was not from God so that she could live for Him alone (cf. A XXXII, 137). Some years later, when she was in Lviv, she experienced in herself the reality expressed in the psalm *De profundis*, which at that time was sung during the Mass. In other words, she had the experience of what it meant to live without God. She adds that she is not capable of expressing this in words (cf. A XLV, 185).

On another occasion, she feels spiritually like the woman in the Gospel who for 18 years could not stand up straight until Jesus healed her. Teresa in a similar

way could not raise the eyes of her soul until the Lord made her recognize her own goodness, charity, and the necessity of turning her gaze to Him and not to herself (cf. A XLV, 182–183).

There is also another example. She experienced in herself a Biblical event on the very liturgical feast when that event is recounted. In this case, it was the liberation of Peter from prison (September 1). Just as the Church prayed to the Lord to free Peter, in the same way Teresa turned to the Lord in order that He might free her from her interior chains and imperfections. And so it happened (cf. A XVIII, 95).

She experiences in herself some aspect of the mystery of Christ. The majority of the texts in this group refer to the feeling of abandonment of Jesus in Gethsemane and on the Cross (approximately six texts). She testifies that God had granted her the grace to look upon and comprehend the sense of abandonment which Jesus felt on the Cross and in Gethsemane. This did not take place by means of her intellect but was given to her passively (cf. A XXXV, 144 and also XXXVII, 116; LII, 209–210).

3.1.2. *The sacraments*

Progress in the mystical life is a consequence of a deeper participation in the mystery of Christ. For this reason, the believer should strive to have recourse to the sacraments. In fact, the whole spiritual life in its substance depends on the objective operation of the sacraments because our participation in the mystery of Christ is accomplished in the first place through the sacraments.

As in the case of her references to the Sacred Scripture, so also we do not find in *Autobiografía* an exposition of the role of the sacraments in her spiritual or mystical experience. We will find some assertions on this topic in the context of her experience, of which she writes above all. For this reason, we need to take into account the environment in which she lived. The Carmelite sisters met in choir at different hours of the day (in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament) in accord with their daily religious schedule, without counting individual prayer, that is, beyond the prescribed hours. In addition, they participated each day in the Holy Mass and Holy Communion, and went to confession at least twice a month. Having said this, we cannot be surprised if what Teresa Marchocka says about the Eucharist in *Autobiografía* does not perhaps adequately represent the role of the sacraments in her mystical life; however, her observations are a precious confirmation of what we know about the connection between the sacraments and mysticism.

We recount a curious detail from the beginning of her Carmelite life, that is, when she prepared herself for death by means of the sacrament of penance, the anointing of the sick, and viaticum (cf. A XVI, 85). She recalls that she felt at that time in her spirit a great desire for God. The Blessed Sacrament was still in her cell, and from that desire for God there came over her a fervent wish to steal the Lord;

she advances the proposition that perhaps she would have done so if she had had the strength to move herself (cf. A XVI, 85).

Another detail is worth mentioning, regarding more or less the same time period. A few months after Teresa's profession of vows, a series of terrible interior tribulations began in her spiritual life; above all, at the beginning, she suffered very great temptations against chastity for three years. Not having adequate instruction in this regard, she judged herself culpable even where there was not even the slightest shadow of fault, to the point of refraining from Holy Communion. In this turbulent situation, she met Father Provincial Giovanni Maria Centurioni, who, having known her for a long time, ordered her after her confession to receive Holy Communion always, even without recourse to the sacrament of penance (cf. A XVII, 90). After that confession, they spoke together again, and later she participated in the Mass which he celebrated and she renewed her vow of obedience, her abandonment to God in spite of anything that might happen in the future. That episode must have been truly important for her, since she constantly recalls the anniversary of that day when she took part in the Eucharist and renewed her vows (cf. A XVII, 91).

During those most difficult years, she obtained from her superiors the permission to visit the Blessed Sacrament at night (since she was not able to sleep) to find there a moment of peace (cf. A XVII, 91).

However, what is of most interest to us at this point is her mystical experience in the context of the Eucharist. The most expressive testimonies refer to the periods when she was already close to death. During her final illness in Warsaw she longed for the Holy Eucharist. She therefore wrote to the superior of the Discalced Carmelites to receive permission from him to be able to receive Holy Communion. But immediately she believed herself to be egotistic in this regard and in expiation for this gesture, an egotistic one according to her, she wanted to renounce the possibility of receiving extraordinary Holy Communion (cf. A LI, 207–208). What was the end of this episode? Later we find in her accounts the description of a particular grace. It is one of the most impressive testimonies to the experience of the Eucharist:

“It so happened that on Friday, the feast of St. Joseph, I went to Holy Communion as usual. That day, I felt very recollected interiorly and rejoiced in the presence of God. [...] After Communion, during the time of thanksgiving, the Lord said to me in spirit: ‘O Blood of mine, My ransom, My property.’ Regarding the first words ‘My Blood,’ I began to think, but how, what is it? He answered me at once: ‘Was it perhaps too little that I poured out for you? Was it not in fact all of it? Did I not pour this blood out till the last drop only for you?’” (A LII, 209)

Even if the testimonies to the presence of the sacraments in the mystical experience of Teresa Marchocka are not abundant, those that we have already cited are sufficient to place that experience in the context of the Scriptures and the sacraments.

3.2. The psychological level of the mystical experience of Teresa Marchocka

There are three levels in the process of sanctification: 1) grace, which cannot be an object of study in a direct way; 2) the level of psychological repercussions, which the mystic can, if he or she wishes, communicate or describe; 3) the moral level.¹² The last two levels are accessible. From them, we can know something of the particular action of God and its fruits. The Church, when she wishes to proclaim a Christian a saint, is interested above all in the heroic degree of theological and moral virtues in that person, and she can verify this by basing herself on the moral level. The psychological level of the process of sanctification, although it is not the most important element for canonization, is however of supreme importance for spirituality, since this knowledge has a didactic and practical character.

We will concern ourselves at this point only with the psychological level of the mystical experience of Teresa Marchocka. The moral level has been studied elsewhere.¹³ The psychological repercussions interest us not as an abstract phenomenon, but as the expression of her mystical life, of her participation in the mystery of Christ.

The mystical experience of Teresa Marchocka, whose specific character we wish to grasp in some way, is the same experience of which we spoke in the Biblical and sacramental context. There is a twofold aspect of mystical experience: positive and negative. The experience of our Carmelite sister corroborates the existence of these two aspects separately and contemporaneously. We wish to give a proof of this.

3.2.1. *The experience of the loving presence of God*

The conscious and direct feeling of the presence of God, received in a passive way, is the heart of the mystical experience,¹⁴ at least in the spiritual tradition of the West. In such an experience, the powers of the soul are suspended and the mode of knowledge is not ordinary, that is to say, one comes to knowledge not by the way of discourse and reasoning; the soul passively undergoes the action of God and the will can only give its own consent.¹⁵

It is not difficult to single out all of these constitutive elements of mystical experience in the numerous descriptions of Mother Marchocka.

¹² Cf. J. CASTELLANO, *Guiones de doctrina teresiana*, Valencia 1981, p. 37.

¹³ Cf. *Zywot y Wysokie Cnoty W. Matki Teresy od Pana Jezusa Marchockiej...*, part III; *Wielebna Matka Teresa od Jezusa Marja Anna Marchocka, karmelitanka bosa (1603–1652)*, Kraków 1931, part III; J.W. GOGOLA, *Droga mistyczna...*, chapter V, p. 3.

¹⁴ Cf. F. NAVAL, *Curso de teología ascética y mística*, Madrid 19558, p. 776–777.

¹⁵ Cf. P. AGAESSE, M. SALES, *Mystique*, DSAM 10(1980), p. 1953.

The texts which we are about to present refer to the period when their Author was between 40 and 45 years old. They are only examples.

Completing a previous description about ways of prayer “when the presence of God is loving and clear,” she writes in Chapter 42:

“Within that way of the prayer of the presence of God [described earlier, A XLII, 170–171], there is still another one: There is neither a concept nor a theme, but the soul stands fully in the presence of the Majesty of God, before His dignity, or better, they place the soul before Him (because by itself it would never be able to do it), and in this way it spends the whole time, even an hour. At times, words escape her: Holy, Holy, etc. I say words, because I don’t know how to say it otherwise (but they are not words spoken with the mouth). The effect of this is that I do not understand anything of that Divine Abyss, and yet this is enough for me and I feel fulfilled.” (A XLII, 171)

It is possible to establish that these ways of praying took place in the period when she experienced numerous ecstasies, that is, around the year 1640 and afterward.

Of this positive experience we find yet one more eloquent example:

“There comes also a way in which God draws the soul tenderly and clearly to Himself and vice versa, accompanied by a great love of God, with happiness and consolation for the soul. This happens most often after Communion and at times comes after a time of suffering and a feeling of abandonment, when the souls fears God and feels itself afflicted. This calms it down, even if it lasts only briefly.” (A XLII, 171–172)

Here she is concerned not only with a simple feeling of the presence of God but with a tender embrace associated with a great love for God.

We recount still another description regarding the period in which she wrote her *Autobiografia*. It concerns the third way of prayer. The three ways of prayer described in that context were considered by Fr. Ignatius as the highest in her spiritual life. Wishing to speak about the degrees of prayer at which she had arrived in her spiritual life, he recounts precisely these three ways of prayer. Here is the third one:

“The third way, that is, when there is a clear presence of God in the soul, conscious and loving, does not occur often. It seems that I have already described it, but now there is this change, that I feel everything more intensely (the soul is joyful at feeling closer to God), not however by way of the senses in bringing that joy along with it, but in a substantial truth, and in its content. This is not lived out as a liberation from the darkness and there is no awareness that darkness will not return again. Nothing of the sort occurs either in the senses

or in the memory. The soul surrenders in everything to God, and so neither laments nor suffers. And there is nothing that the soul can do by itself, for it is only the Lord who instructs, illuminates, or consoles and fills with peace. And what can the soul do of itself? It can do nothing but that which is given it to do.” (A XLVI, 190)

As can be seen, in the texts cited, the feeling of the presence of God is not presented separately. Rightly was it said above that this feeling is the heart of the mystical experience, but it is understood that the heart does not live without the rest of the body. And in this way, the aspect of passivity is clearly seen, the fact that the will of itself is not capable of doing anything, but only that which is granted to it; then we have the suspension of the senses and the cognitive powers, and obviously the feeling of the presence. But not only this. The Author acknowledges that there are moments in which God lovingly draws the soul to Himself.

3.2.2. The experience of aridity, abandonment by God, and fear

At this point, what is of interest to us is the experience of passive purifications which are characteristic of Teresa Marchocka. In Chapter 32, the Author describes five modes of aridity and abandonment by God, adding separately the description of three modes of fear (Chapter 35). Aridity, abandonment by God, and fear are perhaps the most representative of her passive purifications.

Aridity

The Author knows this term, as we can assume, from reading the Spanish mystics: St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross.¹⁶

We will try to present the content of this experience on the basis of the description of the first mode of aridity (cf. A XXXII, 128–129).

Teresa feels aridity, “dryness,” because she cannot pray by forming concepts, she cannot make use of the imagination, she cannot arouse any emotion, nor can she concentrate on a subject she has chosen of her own volition. The distractions in the memory and in the imagination are not voluntary, and therefore it is not possible to control them in any way. The feeling of the absence of God and of His “not giving Himself to the soul” is added, and then also fear and the feeling of abandonment. The torment is intensified by the fact that she cannot perform any act on her own. In her description, aridity is never alone, but is always accompanied by other phenomena such as: fear, anxiety, boredom, weakness in the head, etc.¹⁷

¹⁶ The mediators of these transpositions of terms are the translations of the works of the Spanish mystics, confessors, lecturers, and fellow sisters.

¹⁷ In the description of aridity in St. John of the Cross, we have a very similar situation (cf. LUIS DE LA TRINITÉ, *Nuit de la foi*, EtCarm [1937, IV], p. 217).

Abandonment by God

Two of the remaining modes of aridity and abandonment by God, the second and the fifth, described in Chapter 32, are particularly significant.

In the center of the *second mode* (cf. A XXXII, 131–132), we find the concept of abandonment. This concept brings to mind the feeling that someone experiences when a person who is very dear becomes very distant from him. In the case of the spiritual experience of abandonment, this obviously can only be considered a subjective feeling, and not an objective reality. The phenomena that accompany abandonment in the description of Mother Marchocka are: profound obscurities that conceal God from her, a great heaviness, seeing only the vindictive justice of God without seeing His mercy, fear, the sensation of having lost the friendship of God, and His just distancing from her. All of this taken together is the source of torment. The Author also points out to us the difference between the experience of some years before and the present experience of this phenomenon.

Earlier, she had felt as if she were lost, but now she was afraid of being lost; earlier, she had felt the fear of just abandonment by God; now she felt the fear of a love which does not wish to diminish the grace of God and His love, etc.

From the description of the *fifth mode of abandonment* (cf. A XXXII, 135), chronologically the last, we can deduce that this abandonment was provoked by the sense of obscurity. This obscurity arises from the depths of the soul and in a way puts it to sleep; it suspends all the senses and the capacity to reason, so what remains is a spiritual nakedness. A great sense of recollection and immersion of the spirit into profound depths is associated with this. At the moment of such an experience the soul does not know it is immersed in God. But at the moment of her writing, the Author already knew it.

Fear

Fear is a very characteristic sentiment for Teresa Marchocka. If St. John of the Cross uses the term “fear” rather sparingly (43 times), she describes to us in detail its three modes.

The three modes of fear that we are about to present should be understood as an integral part of the phenomena already mentioned, that is, aridity, abandonment by God, etc.

Fear is a concept which obviously expresses a feeling of a person, and not an objective reality. Fear is attached to something good. It becomes present in the consciousness of that person whenever this good is, or can be, threatened.

The material object of the *first mode of fear* (cf. A XXXV, 148–149) is the goodness of God, His grace. The reason why fear arises consists in the fact that the goodness of God is hidden, and therefore the person is afraid; he or she is conscious of own sins but not of the divine goodness.

The fear described in the indicated text is a state of the soul which feels deprived of the grace of God. The soul does not see the goodness of God but only its own sins. It is a state entirely independent of the will. It is not a continuous experience. At times, the Lord makes the soul see His goodness.

The material object of the *second mode of fear* (cf. A XXV, 149–50) is the possession of God, being together with Him. The reason for this mode of fear, however, is incertitude: is she deserving of the grace of God or of His anger? Is she numbered among those deprived of His grace and condemned to perdition or not?

The fear described in the second mode is a state of the soul which is afraid, according to it not without cause, of the possibility to be deprived of God forever. The feeling is more painful through the fact that the soul clearly experiences with the intellect and its emotions what it means to be without God, and cannot imagine anything more terrible. Its greatest good is threatened. However, it is a passive state, so nothing can be done. It is a fear of something which could happen and not a fear of something which has already happened.

The element of incertitude is very characteristic in this second mode of fear.

The material object of the *third mode of fear* is the dignity and majesty of God (cf. A XXXV, 150). The source or cause of fear is the contrast between the greatness of God manifested to the soul, and its own unworthiness. In gazing on the worthiness of God, the soul sees its own unworthiness. This momentary self-giving of God to the soul arouses fear in it, but this fear is pleasant, it brings a sense of calmness, and the soul desires to be able to take joy in it always. This fear is a type of fright. There exists a type of this fright which is close to the feeling of terror (cf. A, XXXV, 151).

3.2.3. *The experience of the presence of God and of His abandonment simultaneously*

The experience of mystics shows not only that there is the interplay of light and darkness, certainty and uncertainty, the feeling of the presence and of the absence of God, but also that these phenomena, at first sight and by their very nature contradictory to each other, can be present in the mystic at the same time. Here is an eloquent example of this from the experience of Teresa Marchocka:

“I feel God in the soul, but in a manner so hidden that it cannot be said that I feel Him but that I am abandoned by Him. On the other hand, I feel God in the soul with such certitude that I could swear that God is present in me. This is also inexplicable and incomprehensible for me. I would not be able to explain it to anyone because on the one hand I demonstrated the abandonment by God with my laments, with the desire for God, and on the other hand, in the midst of these laments and desires I experienced Him in me and I found Him. And abandonment of this type does not frighten me... Finally by chance I was reading the

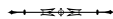
Sixth Mansion, second chapter, of the books of our Holy Mother, and I understood that I was experiencing everything that she describes.” (A XXXII, 133)

To clarify such an experience, there is nothing more simple than to go to the Sixth Mansion of *The Interior Castle* and see what it is about. The great Reformer speaks to us of the state elicited by the love of the Beloved, which cannot be explained with analogies from this earth (cf. M VI 2, 3). For this reason, there is nothing strange in the fact that Teresa Marchocka had confronted the same difficulty. The cause of such a state of the soul is, according to St. Teresa, the wound of love. The principal characteristics of this are: wonderment, the coexistence of acute suffering and of sweetness; and certitude.¹⁸ Wonderment is not emphasized in the description of Teresa Marchocka and this should not surprise us. This characteristic of grace as described there can be singled out, so it seems, rather by way of interpretation and no longer by simple observation. Teresa Marchocka does not interpret, for she does not consider herself capable of it, but rather describes. She does not say in what way this happens to her but describes how she feels when it happens. However, the other characteristics are evident in her description.

Sister Teresa of Ávila explains the phenomenon:

“[The soul] is conscious of having received a delicious wound but cannot discover how, nor who gave it... The soul makes amorous complaints to its Bridegroom, even uttering them aloud; nor can it control itself, knowing that though He is present He will not manifest Himself so that it may enjoy Him. This causes a pain, keen although sweet and delicious.” (M VI, 2, 2–3)

The brevity of the visit of the Beloved does not leave space for the soul to enjoy His presence for long, and yet it is very sure of His presence. The Lord has passed into it like an arrow of love and the soul feels abandoned because it becomes aware of the grace received when this grace no longer endures but only its effect remains.



On the basis of the example of the mystical experience of Teresa Marchocka, we can see that the process of sanctification does not have the character of stages clearly separated from one another. It is instead a very complex process, consisting of various interspersed elements: aridity, obscurity, abandonment, fear, illuminations, feelings of the presence and of the absence of God, love, etc. All of this enters into a continuous reciprocal relationship.

¹⁸ Cf. A. CABASSUT, *Blessure d'amour*, DSAM 1(1937), p. 1725.

410 years have passed since the birth of Teresa of Jesus Marchocka and she is still not well known, not even in Poland. However, saints' causes fortunately do not fall into decay. Even if witnesses of the marvels done by the Lord like Teresa Marchocka are not canonized – they shine upon our spiritual heaven with a light that is never extinguished.

Translated from Italian by Michael Gibson

STRESZCZENIE

JERZY WIESŁAW GOGOLA OCD

*Teresa od Jezusa (Marchocka),
polska karmelitanka bosa (1603–1652):
życie i doświadczenie mistyczne*

Artykuł składa się z trzech części: życie, autobiografia i doświadczenie mistyczne Teresy od Jezusa (Marchockiej). Była ona wybitną przedstawicielką pierwszej generacji polskich karmelitanek bosych. Jej autobiografia zaś stanowi pomnik literatury mistycznej na skalę co najmniej europejską. Na przykładzie jej życia mistycznego możemy się przekonać, że proces uświęcenia nie ma charakteru jasno oddzielonych od siebie okresów. Jest to proces bardzo złożony, w którym przeplatają się ze sobą różnorakie czynniki i fenomeny: oschłość, ciemność, opuszczenie, nadzwyczajne oświecenia, poczucie obecności i nieobecności Boga, doświadczenie Jego miłości i bojaźni odrzucenia.