

## ST. TERESA OF AVILA'S TRANSFORMATION OF THE SYMBOL OF THE INTERIOR CASTLE

MARY C. COELHO

The scholarly effort in recent decades to find the source(s) of St. Teresa of Avila's symbol of the interior castle has faced a persistent, major incongruity. Luce López-Baralt has found the fully developed symbol of seven concentric mansions in Islamic writings<sup>1</sup> but she points out the obvious difference in comparison with St. Teresa's castle symbol: « St. Teresa seems to have changed the multicolored castle of the Islamic symbol to diamond and clear crystal »<sup>2</sup>. E.W.T. Dicken suggests that the Castillo de la Mota in Medina del Campo influenced St. Teresa's conception of the symbol but he observes « admittedly it is an odd sort of fortress which is presented to us in the *Mansions*, made of a diamond and very clear crystal »<sup>3</sup>. This same incongruity would apply to the suggestion of Prof. Robert Ricard that the walled city of Avila is the castle in *The Interior Castle*<sup>4</sup>. The possible antecedents that have been found in Spanish literature are also not structures made entirely of diamond or clear crystal nor do they show as much parallelism in the structure of the image as do the Islamic sources, although the castle image as an image of the soul is found<sup>5</sup>. There is a possible influence from Bernardino de Laredo on St. Teresa's conception of the castle as made of diamond or clear crystal because portions of the image of building the new Jerusalem in his *Ascent of Mount Sion* are of

---

<sup>1</sup> Luce López-Baralt, « Santa Teresa de Jesús y el Islam », *Teresianum*, XXXIII (1982), I/II, p. 653.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, « Una diferencia obvia entre los castillos teresianos y los arabes son los materiales preciosos que los constituyen. Interesantemente Santa Teresa parecería haber tornado diamantinos y transparentes los castillos multicolores del símbolo islámico ». p. 655.

<sup>3</sup> E.W.T. Dicken, « The Imagery of the Interior Castle and Its Implication », *Ephemerides Carmeliticae*, XXI (1970), p. 202.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Ricard, « Le symbolisme du 'chateau interieur' chez sainte Theresse », *Bulletin Hispanique*, Tome LXVII, Jan.-June 1965.

<sup>5</sup> Dicken, *op.cit.*, p. 200, 201.

these materials<sup>6</sup>. But his total symbol is only distantly related to St. Teresa's. One of these sources or several of them most likely influenced her conception of the symbol in *The Way of Perfection* 28.9 (quoted below) where the castle is made of gold and precious stones, but they are not adequate antecedents to the final, mature image of a castle made of a diamond or of a very clear crystal as found in the saint's last work. It is to the source and meaning of the significant change in the symbol from her first use of it in *The Way of Perfection* to its final form in *The Interior Castle* that we turn our attention. Her great contribution to mystical literature lies not in the original conception of the castle symbol which apparently was an image of the soul enjoying some currency in a country with numerous castles, but in the transformation the symbol underwent as the author of the changes herself evolved in the mystical life.

In addition to the change in the material of the castle from her description of it in 1566<sup>7</sup> when she wrote *The Way of Perfection* and the description in *The Interior Castle* written in 1577 there are other significant alterations dependent on the change from gold and precious stones to diamond or clear crystal. We quote first from *The Way of Perfection*:

Well, let us imagine that within us is an extremely rich palace, built entirely of gold and precious stones; in sum, built for a lord such as this. Imagine, too, as is indeed so, that you have a part to play in order for the palace to be so beautiful; for there is no edifice as beautiful as is a soul pure and full of virtues. The greater the virtues the more resplendent the jewels. Imagine, also, that in this palace dwells this mighty King who has been gracious enough to become your Father; and that He is seated upon an extremely valuable throne, which is your heart (C 28.9)<sup>8</sup>.

---

<sup>6</sup> Bernardino de Laredo, *Subida de Monte Sion, Místicos franciscanos españoles* (Madrid, BAC, 1948) pp. 270-274. Quoted extensively in Luce López-Baralt, *op.cit.*, pp. 651-652, footnote 37.

<sup>7</sup> Although some have suggested the work was composed between 1562-1564, Kieran Kavanaugh believes from internal evidence the date was more likely 1566. Kieran Kavanaugh, « Introduction », *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, Vol. II (Washington, D.C., ICS Publications, 1980).

<sup>8</sup> All the translations to English will be taken from *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, Vol. I and II, translated by Otilio Rodríguez O.C.D. and Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. (Washington, D.C., ICS Publications, 1976 and 1980). Abbreviations used for citations are: M for *Las Moradas*, (The Interior Castle); V for *La Vida* (The Life of St. Teresa of Jesus); C for Camino de Perfección, (The Way of Perfection).

When St. Teresa reintroduces the castle image in 1577 in Book I of *The Interior Castle* it is significantly changed.

It is that we consider our soul to be like a castle made entirely out of a diamond or of very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwelling places. For in reflecting upon it carefully, Sisters, we realize that the soul of the just person is nothing else but a paradise where the Lord says He finds His delight (M I.i.1). Well, let us consider that this castle has, as I said, many dwelling places: some up above, other down below, others to the sides; and in the center and middle is the main dwelling place where the very secret exchanges between God and the soul take place (M I.i.1).

We have some additional information about St. Teresa's conception of the symbol for *The Interior Castle*, from her biographer confessor and loyal supporter, Fray Diego de Yepes<sup>9</sup>. Her last book was half complete when St. Teresa and three companions were traveling from Toledo to Avila. They met Fray Diego in an inn. He gave the women his room where they stayed that night and the next day because they were detained by snow. Fray Diego de Yepes spoke with Mother Teresa in the afternoon and she told him about her conception of the symbol for her work in progress. Yepes' account includes a slight variant in the information describing the castle, telling us she saw « a most beautiful crystal globe like a castle in which she saw seven dwelling places ». Also Yepes' description adds further material not directly given in *The Interior Castle*: « While she was admiring this beauty which the grace of God communicates to souls, the light suddenly disappeared and, although the King of Glory did not leave the castle, the crystal was covered with darkness and was left as ugly as coal with an unbearable stench, and the poisonous creatures outside the wall were able to get into the castle. Such was the state of a soul in sin »<sup>10</sup>. St. Teresa wanted everyone to understand this vision because it seemed to her that no one who saw the beauty and splendor of the soul in grace would dare to offend God by sin. Although this account of the darkening of the castle is not directly described in *The Interior Castle*, her reflections on the consequences of sin (M I.ii.1-4) undoubtedly refer to this aspect of her vision.

---

<sup>9</sup> P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, C.D., Introducción, *Obras de Sta. Teresa de Jesús*, Toma IV (Burgos, Biblioteca Mística Carmelitana, 1917) p. viii.

<sup>10</sup> Kieran Kavanaugh, translation, « Introduction », *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 268,269.

There are three ways that the symbol remain the same between her early and later use of the symbol and three major differences. The ways the symbol remains the same are: the soul is symbolized as a castle, God dwells in the center of the castle and there are a number of dwelling places. Although the early use of the image just quoted does not specifically mention a number of dwelling places nor that there are seven, it is likely she already had in mind a castle with many dwelling places. In *The Way of Perfection* 20.1, Teresa alludes to the many dwelling places in the soul. Also because St. Teresa mentions that the castle is made of a number of materials, of gold and precious stones, in a way similar to the descriptions of the castle image from Islamic sources<sup>11</sup>, it is likely that when she describes the symbol in *The Way of Perfection* she already has in mind a number of dwelling places. The specific number seven may or may not have been a subsequent addition but the number only becomes important in the final elaboration of the symbol enabling St. Teresa to describe three stages of preparation, transition dwelling places and three stages of union. It was only possible for her to describe these stages in her full, spiritual maturity.

As to the significant differences, the first and most obvious is that in *The Way of Perfection* the castle is built of gold and precious stone while in *The Interior Castle* it is made of a diamond or of very clear crystal. A second difference is that in the earlier work the virtues become part of the jewels of the castle whereas this dimension is not part of the actual image in *The Interior Castle* since the castle is now a whole crystal. However, her idea about the part we play in building God's dwelling place is found in the later work in relation to the silkworm image in the fifth dwelling place. And finally, the blocking of the light from the interior of the castle with the covering of the glass of the castle by sin is a new dimension of the symbol as a crystal castle.

The primary change in the symbol and the one that will be the

---

<sup>11</sup> López-Baralt, *op.cit.*, p. 654. López-Baralt has found the symbol of the castle fully elaborated in the 9th century by Abū l'Hasan al-Nūrī de Bagdad in his *Maqāmāt al-qulūb (Moradas de los corazones)*. It comprises seven castles made of corundum, gold, silver, iron, copper, alum and adobe. As this includes precious stones and precious metals, it suggests that St. Teresa may have had an image like this Islamic one in mind. While this very early Islamic work would not have been an immediate source to St. Teresa, it indicates the type of full elaboration of the symbol in Islamic works at this early date. The symbol has also been found in later works. See Miguel Asin Palacios, « El simul de los castillos y moradas del alma en la mística islamica y en Santa Teresa » (Al-Andalus II, 1946).

focus of our attention is the change in the material of the castle. With this change and dependent on it, the possibility of blocking or not blocking the light from the center is added to the image as well as the impossibility of adding jewels since it is a complete, whole crystal. The central continuous elements are the soul symbolized as a castle with many dwelling places, with the centermost one as the dwelling place of the Father.

### *Sources of the Change in the Symbol*

We turn now to look for the sources of the crystal and diamond image in the castle symbol. It is to be found within the saint's own accounts of two particular unitive experiences. They are intellectual visions recorded in chapter 40 of the *Life*. They demonstrate her use of the diamond and crystal image before she uses it again in the final form of the castle image.

St. Teresa describes in the *Life* an experience where her soul seemed like a brightly polished mirror:

Once while I was reciting with all the Sisters the hours of the Divine Office, my soul suddenly became recollected; it seemed to me to be like a brightly polished mirror, without any part on the back or sides or top or bottom that wasn't totally clear. In its center Christ, our Lord, was shown to me, in the way I usually see Him. It seemed to me I saw Him clearly in every part of my soul, as though in a mirror. And this mirror also — I don't know how to explain it — was completely engraved upon the Lord Himself by means of a very loving communication I wouldn't know how to describe. I know that this vision is very beneficial to me each time I remember it, especially after receiving Communion. I was given understanding of what it is for a soul to be in mortal sin. It amounts to clouding this mirror with mist and leaving it black; and thus this Lord cannot be revealed or seen, even though He is always present giving us being (V 40.5).

In the same chapter of her *Life*, St. Teresa describes another experience:

Once while in prayer I was shown quickly, without my seeing any form — but it was a totally clear representation — how all things are seen in God and how He holds them all in Himself. How to put this in writing, I don't know. But it was deeply impressed upon my soul, and it is one of the great favors the Lord has granted to me

and one of those that have most embarrassed me and made me ashamed when I recalled the sins I committed (V 40.9).

St. Teresa tells us she can't affirm that she saw anything during this experience as it was not an imaginative vision but an intellectual vision, seen in a subtle and delicate manner. But, she tells us something must have been seen since she draws the following comparison:

Let us say, to make the comparison, that the Divinity is like a very clear diamond, much greater than all the world; or like a mirror, as I said referring to the soul in the other vision<sup>12</sup> except that it is a mirror in so sublime a way that I wouldn't know how to exaggerate this. And we could say that everything we do is visible in this diamond since it is of such a kind that it contains all things within itself; there is nothing that escapes its magnitude. It was a frightening experience for me to see in so short a time so many things joined together in this diamond, and it is most saddening, each time I recall, to see appearing in that pure brilliance things as ugly as were my sins (V 40:9).

*Meaning of the symbol of a very large diamond or crystal globe*

In the unitive experience described in *Life* 40.9 the central understanding that St. Teresa tells us she derived was « how all things are seen in God and how He holds them all in Himself » (V 40.9). Then in the following paragraph, to describe the experience she uses the image of a clear diamond much greater than all the world which contains all things within itself. Through the encompassing unity of the crystal globe or the large diamond, St. Teresa is attempting to communicate her experience that nothing is outside God but all is contained within that Unity. With regard to the crystalline or diamond aspect, St. Teresa tells us: « It (the soul) is as capable of enjoying His Majesty as is crystal capable of reflecting the sun's brilliance » (M I.ii.1). She tells us the same thing in the experience in *Life* 40.5, calling the soul a brightly polished mirror completely engraved upon the Lord Himself. As the sun gives the diamond brilliance, the soul enjoys God if the light from the center is not obscured. God is not separate from the soul behind

---

<sup>12</sup> St. Teresa is referring to the vision of the soul just quoted from paragraph 5 of chapter 40 of the *Life*.

a dividing wall or a barrier, but both contains the soul and gives it Himself to enjoy. Using an image to show God holding all things in Himself and the soul enjoying His Majesty, St. Teresa is describing the meeting of the human and the divine.

It is likely that her recourse to the fairly common mirror and crystal images to describe the unitive experiences in chapter 40 of the *Life* was suggested to her from her readings. We've mentioned the possible influence from Bernardino de Laredo. In a work written after St. Teresa's death, St. John of the Cross describes union using the analogy of a crystal and light in *The Living Flame of Love*<sup>13</sup> but the crystal is not described as a castle.

The experiences of union are recorded in the chapters of the *Life* added in 1565. If this dating is correct and *The Way of Perfection* was written the following year<sup>14</sup> it might be argued that the image of the castle as used in *The Way of Perfection* might already reflect the influence of the unitive intellectual visions described in chapter 40 of the *Life*. However, St. Teresa uses the castle symbol in *The Way of Perfection* to teach active recollection. She writes a little about union in *The Way of Perfection* but the major insights from her unitive experiences are only found fully described and integrated in her writing in dwelling places V through VII of *The Interior Castle*.

### *The castle symbol in The Interior Castle*

We believe the final form of the castle image is a conflation of the original castle image from the *The Way of Perfection* with the diamond or crystal globe image used to try to communicate her understanding derived from the unitive experiences we've quoted and her continual experience of the unitive state when she was actually writing *The Interior Castle*. We believe the change in the material

---

<sup>13</sup> « In this state the soul is like the crystal that is clear and pure; the more degrees of light it receives, the greater concentration of light there is in it, and this enlightenment continues to such a degree that at last it attains a point at which the light is centered in it with such copiousness that it comes to appear to be wholly light, and cannot be distinguished from the light, for it is enlightened to the greatest possible extent and thus appears to be light itself ». « *The Living Flame of Love*, Redaction A, I:12. Translation E. Allison Peers, Image Books Edition, 1962.

<sup>14</sup> Kieran Kavanagh gives the probable date of writing *The Way of Perfection* as 1566 although others have suggested 1562-1564. « Introduction », *Collected Works*, Vol. II, p. 17.

of the castle was a spontaneous change occurring when she was preparing to write her final book. It reflects St. Teresa's long experience in prayer in the unitive state and the nature of her relationship with God in that state. Her sense of her relationship to God had been so profoundly altered by the five years of spiritual marriage and a longer period of unitive experiences which began in 1554-1556, that the change in the image occurred spontaneously when it came to her again. This is an example of the evolution of a living symbol that could have only happened in a person long accustomed to the unitive state of consciousness.

If it is true that the castle symbol as described in the beginning of *The Interior Castle* is a spontaneous conflation of symbols with which the saint already had considerable familiarity, there should be internal evidence in the content of her writings to support this contention. The evidence is abundant. Our procedure will be to describe the meaning of the castle symbol in the form found in *The Way of Perfection* and then indicate further the meaning of the crystal/diamond symbol. We will then cite the evidence that the final form of the castle symbol is used by St. Teresa to carry both meanings simultaneously. By doing this we will not only hope to have shown that St. Teresa herself is responsible for the transformation of the symbol but also we hope to illustrate that the evolution of the image parallels the evolution of her consciousness or the state of her soul in relation to God. The earlier form of the symbol of the soul as a castle made of gold and precious stones is an image pertaining to the early stages of spiritual development prior to union whereas the image as found in *The Interior Castle* reflects the stage of the prayer of union where the soul is conscious of dwelling in God. It is the change of the material of the castle to crystal that is expressive of this change while other aspects of the image remain constant as we have indicated.

*The symbol of the castle in The Way of Perfection and the first four dwelling places of The Interior Castle*

We turn first to consider the state-of-being represented by the symbol of the interior castle from *The Way of Perfection*. The condition the symbol depicts is that of a person whose consciousness is distant and separate from God although searching to be related to the reality of God which the person believes or perhaps knows from brief experience is to be found immanently as the innermost



reality of the person. She advises her sisters in chapter 28 of *The Way of Perfection* when teaching them active recollection to not forget the truth that the Lord is within us and that we must be there with Him (C 28.3). Her teaching is focused instruction on finding God by withdrawing into the inmost center of the self. « All the harm comes from not truly understanding that He is near, but in imagining Him as far away » (C 29.5). She marvels that a King so great dwells in the little palace of her soul (C 28.11). Adding in the Escorial text: « Just as He was pleased to dwell within the womb of His most Holy Mother! » St. Teresa returns to this same theme in *The Interior Castle*: « You have already heard in some books on prayer that the soul is advised to enter within itself; well that's the very thing I'm advising » (M I.i.5).

The emphasis of her teaching in this entire early period preceding union is on the building up and suckling of the soul such that it may be prepared to have a different relationship with God. Following her description of the soul as a castle in *The Way of Perfection*, St. Teresa teaches that the Lord enlarges the soul little by little (C 28.12). Describing active recollection she writes: « It seems that without any contrivance the edifice is being built, by means of this recollection... » (M IV.iii.1) Describing the prayer of quiet in the fourth dwelling place, St. Teresa writes: « In this prayer the soul is not yet grown but is like a suckling child. If it turns away from its mother's breasts, what can be expected from it but death? » (M IV.iii.10). Throughout this early period the divine activity is to enlarge the capacity of the soul but we must also build the castle (M V.ii.5). One of her teachings as she discusses the silkworm image is to admonish her reader to be industrious as the silkworm whose work as a worm is to grow and then weave the cocoon (M V.ii.4 & 8). She is referring to the practise of the virtues and to learning humility, detachment and self-knowledge as described throughout dwelling places I through IV and in *The Way of Perfection*. This period of nurturing and preparation of many years precedes the prayers of union.

It is significant that the period of building up and preparation is symbolized by a castle. M. Esther Harding<sup>15</sup>, John Welch<sup>16</sup> and others influenced by Carl Jung tell us the symbol of the place of

---

<sup>15</sup> M. Esther Harding, *Psychic Energy* (Princeton, N.J., Bollingen Paperback Series, Princeton University Press, 1973).

<sup>16</sup> John Welch, *Spiritual Pilgrims, Carl Jung and Teresa of Avila* (Ramsey, N.J., Paulist Press, 1982).

individuation might be a city, or a castle or a temple. « A widespread intuition represents the place of individuation as a city. For a city must not only be built, but being built, must be kept in repair »<sup>17</sup>. Also St. Teresa describes the 7th dwelling place of *The Interior Castle* as the temple of God (M VII.iii.11). This observation about the type of symbol used to indicate the place of individuation is congruent with the meaning of the castle symbol we have just outlined from the *The Way of Perfection* and *The Interior Castle*, as depicting the building and preparation process.

*The symbol of the diamond or clear crystal*

Following the period of preparation during which the person experiences himself as separate from God, there is a radical change in experience of God. Teresa writes: « He brought me *into the wine cellar* ». (M V.i.12) (emphasis added). In another place she writes: « With this favor, the soul, while it is made one with God, is placed *in this room* of the empyreal heaven that we must have interiorly » (M VI.iv.8) (emphasis added). A sure sign of union she says is « God so places Himself in the interior of that soul that when it returns to itself it can in no way doubt that *it was in God* and God was in it (M V.i.9) (emphasis added). St. Teresa is describing a profoundly changed relationship with God.

Once St. Teresa has been brought into the wine cellar, especially when she continually dwells in God and enjoys God in spiritual marriage, her relationship to God is profoundly altered and the image of the soul in that relationship reflects that change. She is no longer seeking an inner, still separate, reality. She had found it. From the perspective of dwelling in the « empyreal heaven » or in the « wine cellar » or in the seventh dwelling place she will « see » differently and offer another symbol of the soul in grace. We've already quoted two of her experiences of union from chapter 40 of the *Life* and discussed the symbol St. Teresa used to describe her experience of being contained in God in the interior of the soul. The symbol of God in the unitive experience is then the large diamond or very clear crystal in which everything we do is contained.

---

<sup>17</sup> Harding, *op.cit.*, p. 414.

*Meaning of the symbol of a very large diamond or crystal globe*

We've seen that St. Teresa uses the diamond image to describe God's penetration of the world such that nothing is outside God. It depicts the state of the soul where it is no longer separate from God. Jan van Ruysbroeck uses a similar image to describe the experience of unity: « Such enlightened men are, with a free spirit, lifted up above reason into a bare and imageless vision... they pass through all works and all exercises, and all things, until they reach the summit of their spirits. There, their bare understandig is drenched through by the Eternal Brightness, even as the air is drenched through by the sunshine. And the bare, uplifted will is transformed and drenched through by abysmal love, even as iron is by fire »<sup>18</sup>.

In Unity, as described by Evelyn Underhill, the Deity penetrates through the soul and dwells in the soul, yet the soul does not comprehend the Deity but the Deity comprehends the soul but does not alter it<sup>19</sup>. This description corresponds well with St. Teresa's description of the unitive intellectual visions we have quoted from the 40th chapter of the *Life*. It is not an arrogant claim of identification with God but as it were a transfusion of their selves by His Self<sup>20</sup>. It is the experience of being comprehended in God which St. Teresa attempts to describe with her images of a crystal globe or large diamond.

*The castle made of diamond or very clear crystal*

The remarkable thing St. Teresa has done in the symbol of the interior castle for her last work is to offer a symbol that depicts the mystery that God is both in us and we are in God or comprehended by God. The original form of the symbol found in *The Way of Perfection* which, as we have indicated, is probably derived directly or indirectly from other sources, is more limited. Its meaning is restricted to God dwelling in the soul, in an interior place approached through several dwelling places of increasing worth as one moves inward to the most interior dwelling place of greatest value where the King dwells. St. Teresa's final image retains these

---

<sup>18</sup> *Diálogo* lxxviii. Quoted by Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (Cleveland, Ohio, Meridian Books, The World Publishing Company 1965) p. 422.

<sup>19</sup> Underhill, *op.cit.*, p. 421.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 420.

aspects but with the change in the composition of the castle to diamond, she incorporates the unitive experience from the perspective of the 7th dwelling place.

We need now to determine if her actual use of the symbol in *The Interior Castle* is consistent with our contention that the final form of the castle symbol has the meaning that God dwells in the soul and the soul dwells in God. We will cite first examples not immediately related to the castle symbol itself to show that following the onset of her unitive experiences, her theology was that God dwells in the soul and simultaneously we dwell in God. There is a marked change from the theology of *The Way of Perfection* where St. Teresa teaches « that the Lord is within us and we should be there with him » (C 28.3). If her theological position changed to this new understanding with her unitive experience, then it becomes almost self-evident given her separate use of the diamond symbol and the early castle symbol that the final conflated symbol corresponds to this theological meaning.

#### *God dwells in the soul and we dwell in God*

Following St. Teresa's conversion in 1554 before the wounded Christ, she began to experience the first inpouring of mystical graces. These included experiences recorded in the tenth chapter of the *Life*. She wrote: « It used to happen, when I represented Christ within me in order to place myself in His presence, or even while reading, that a feeling of the presence of God would come upon me unexpectedly so that I could in no way doubt He was within me or I totally immersed in Him » (V 10.1). This shows the early emergence of the theology the symbol of the crystal globe in the form of a castle will express.

In *Spiritual Testimony* § 14 (June 30, 1571) St. Teresa describes her habitual experience of the presence of the indwelling Trinity<sup>21</sup>. She writes: « I also heard the words: ' Dont't try to hold Me within yourself, but try to hold yourself within Me '. It seemed to me that from within my soul — when I saw these three Persons present — these Persons were communicating themselves to all creation without fail, nor did they fail to be with me »<sup>22</sup>. Here she describes

<sup>21</sup> St. Teresa describes her initial experience of the indwelling Trinity in the 7th dwelling place of *The Interior Castle* (M VII.i.6).

<sup>22</sup> *Spiritual Testimonies* §14, (Volume I, *Collected Works, op.cit.*), pp. 327,328.

another unitive experience. The words « Don't try to hold Me within yourself, but try to hold yourself within Me » clearly indicate the shift in this unitive experience to a sense of being in God. But the fact that the three Persons don't fail to be with her and communicate themselves to all creation, indicate she assumes God is still also within her.

We quote again a passage from the Fifth Dwelling Places that also shows her theology in this regard. She writes in the first chapter that a sure sign of union is: « God so places Himself in the interior of that soul that when it returns to itself it can in no way doubt that it was in God and God was in it ».

In a passage in chapter 39 of the *Life*, St. Teresa tells us « His Majesty, showing me deep love, often speaks these words to me: ' Now you are Mine, and I am yours ' » (V 39.21). Although such words do not use the spatial metaphor of being comprehended in God who dwells in the innermost reality of the soul, the meaning is the same. This passage was written at the same time as the unitive experiences from chapter 40 of the *Life* and illustrate the development of her theology at that time.

#### *St. Teresa's use of the castle image in The Interior Castle*

We turn now from her general theological position to look at examples where this theological meaning is found in direct and specific reference to the castle made of a very large diamond. We find one example in the 10th chapter of the Sixth Dwelling Places. In paragraph three she refers to the unitive experience we have already quoted from the *Life* 40.9. When she described the experience in the *Life* she made the comparison of the Divinity to a very clear diamond. But when St. Teresa describes this same vision in *The Interior Castle* she writes: « Let's suppose that God is like an immense and beautiful dwelling or palace and that this palace, as I say, is God himself » (M VI.x.3). Here she has substituted the palace or dwelling image for the diamond image with no explanation. The fact that she could make this substitution indicates that the image of the physical structure, the palace or beautiful dwelling, now symbolizes for her the unitive experiences. Likewise the castle of diamond, itself made of many dwellings, is now intended in her mind to incorporate the unitive experiences.

In chapter 10 of the Sixth Dwelling Places, St. Teresa describes the same intellectual vision from *Life* 40:10 where the soul sees

secrets in God himself (M VI.x.2). Given the placement of this vision in the sixth dwelling place, she is assuming the person is approaching the center of the soul and simultaneously is being shown secrets in God himself. Since she depicted this intellectual vision as a diamond, it would indicate the final form of the castle image is describing both the penetration deep into the soul to find God and the experience of being in God.

In the third chapter of the Seventh Dwelling Place, St. Teresa beautifully describes living in this temple of God, in this His dwelling place where « He alone and the soul rejoice together in the deepest silence » (M VII.iii.11). We have noted the similarity of the significance of the temple image and the castle image. Here God brings the soul to Himself where it delights in God's tabernacle (M. VII.iii.13). We can assume that the bringing of the person into the tabernacle (the 7th dwelling place) where it remains to rejoice together with God is describing the same idea she intends with the castle image.

#### *Further Evidence*

There is further evidence that the large crystal globe in the form of a castle is a conflation of the castle image in *The Way of Perfection* and the diamond image used to describe unitive experiences in the 40th chapter of the *Life*. When Helmut Hatzfeld discusses the Sixth Dwelling Place in his book *Santa Teresa de Jesus*, he says St. Teresa reverses the central image: « Now the soul lives in God as her palace, as at outset God lived in the soul's palace »<sup>23</sup>. In the light of the interpretation offered in this paper, there is a reversal of the original castle image of *The Way of Perfection* but not a reversal of the image as it is given in *The Interior Castle*. Given the meaning of the castle made of a diamond, it is not a reversal to say the soul now lives in God. Since St. Teresa herself does not indicate it is a reversal, she is assuming the enlarged meaning of the symbol.

A further indication of the dual origin of the final castle image is that St. Teresa describes the light permeating all the rooms of the castle as if they were already existing, while she is also teaching

---

<sup>23</sup> Helmut A. Hatzfeld, *Santa Teresa de Avila* (New York, Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1969) p. 55.

the soul-castle must be built and prepared. Both this and the previous « contradiction » suggest the image was certainly not logically constructed but was indeed a spontaneous vision conflating two images describing distinct stages of spiritual growth. It is because she had conflated images from two distinct stages that the apparent « contradictions » arise.

### *Discussion*

The discerning reader will notice that the diamond image in the *Life* 40.10 is a symbol of God whereas the castle-of-diamond image in *The Interior Castle* is an image of the soul in grace. Is it possible to contend that the diamond image, originally an image of God can become an image of the soul? When St. Teresa writes in the beginning of *The Interior Castle* of the magnificent beauty of the soul saying we can't comprehend it just as we can't comprehend God, she adds: « He Himself says that He created us in His own image and likeness » (M I.i.1). In the epilogue she writes: « Although no more than seven dwelling places were discussed, in each of these there are many others, below and above and to the sides, with lovely gardens and fountains and labyrinths, such delightful things that you would want to be dissolved in praises of the great God who created the soul in His own image and likeness » (Epilogue 3). St. Teresa does not seem to worry about an image of the soul that would suggest the likeness of the soul to God to the extent of using the same diamond image for the soul and for God. If « the spirit is made one with God » (M VII.ii.3), it isn't surprising the image of this unitive state involves an image used for both God and the soul. She writes: « The union is like what we have when rain falls from the sky into a river or fount; all is water, for the rain that fell from heaven cannot be divided or separated from the water of the river » (M VII.ii.4). But as we have indicated earlier, it is a union in God, in which God comprehends the soul and the soul enjoys God, and the soul as a created reality acts out of the union and lives in it but is not to be equated with God.

This inquiry into the source of St. Teresa's image in *The Interior Castle* sheds light on Yara Gonzalez-Montes' contention that St. Teresa chose the imagery of a diamond for the castle because of its qualities of indestructiveness, hardness, brilliance and beauty<sup>24</sup>. He

---

<sup>24</sup> Yara González-Montes, « Mística Bélica de Santa Teresa de Jesús », *Santa*

points out St. Teresa's frequent use of military terms in reference to both the inner battle against all kinds of wild beasts and the Devil, and the external battle against enemies of the reform. He quotes Allison Peers who wrote: « The sister of soldier brothers, she thought of life in general, and in particular of the religious life and of her own Reform, in terms of warfare »<sup>25</sup>. While we believe Gonzalez-Montes and Peers are perceptive in their identification of St. Teresa's aggressive, determined spirit with the spirit of the age of the conquistadores, we do not think her use of the diamond as the material of the castle is an element of the military imagery. Gonzalez-Montes has not adequately traced the origin of that element of the symbol in St. Teresa's own works. Her use of the image to describe her intellectual visions of unity is not at all compatible with Gonzalez-Montes' attempt to make the diamond imagery part of the military imagery of her writing.

### *Conclusion*

We have indicated we believe this conflation of two images originally used separately by St. Teresa occurred spontaneously in 1577. This would account for the impression she gives that the symbol was new to her and given to her as an answer to prayer. It was new to her in that she conceived of a « most beautiful crystal globe like a castle ». It was indeed a quite radically different conception of the symbol not looking at all like the original castle of gold and precious stones. Part of her excitement was that no doubt she immediately realized the significance of the change in the image and that she had not consciously constructed the image in its new form. It was indeed a gift and it was indeed a new symbol. The newness of the image and her amazement at it are also suggested by the energy it gave her to write again when she had written in the Prologue that she had been experiencing for three months such great noise and weakness in her head that she found it a hardship even to write concerning necessary business matters (Prologue 1). She realized the profound worth of the new image and was anxious to describe it, a task she accomplished in an astoundingly short few

---

*Teresa y La Literatura Mística*, Manuel Vriado de Val, dirección, (Madrid-6, EDI-6.S.A., 1984) p. 123.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125. From E. Allison Peers, *St. Teresa of Jesús* (London, Faber and Faber, 1953) p. 89.



months of a very busy life. The symbol contains meaning about the mystical life not contained in her original symbol or in contemporary symbols, and it is a great, creative contribution to the mystical tradition.

St. Teresa's castle symbol contains an image of both the pathway and its fulfillment. Initially the castle symbol in the *The Way of Perfection* and in the first three dwelling places of *The Interior Castle* is of the created soul, separated from the Creator (M I.i.1). It is an image of the creature journeying to its innermost, central Reality. But in union the person has entered into God's tabernacle. There is a sense of fulfillment because « He gives from what He has, which is what His Son had in his life » (M V.ii.13). When the divine and human are joined, the person walks continually in an admirable way with Christ (M VI.vii.9). The fulfillment is participation in the Divine as « His majesty Himself becomes the dwelling place we build for ourselves » (M V.ii.5). Her remarkable image symbolizing the entire spiritual life could only have been conceived from the perspective of the unitive state which St. Teresa knew so long. It is an example of how the state of mind of the observer influences the way in which the observed, in this case the relation between God and the soul, is seen. Only a person of enormous spiritual maturity could create a symbol expressing the state of the observer in the unitive life.

The genius of the image is that with it St. Teresa holds together the mystery that so often confuses and divides religious people. She holds the infinite and transcendent aspects of God together with the personal and immanent. The simultaneous immanence and transcendence of God is beautifully expressed in one symbol. God is known immanently in the bridal chamber of the soul where the soul knows it is comprehended in God as transcendent. Because the union is in the innermost center of the person, it does not take the person from the world to an exclusively transcendent reality. But because it is also a union with God who is also transcendent, the goal of the inner journey is infinitely more than simply one to a person's inner, private subjectivity. The symbol is a gift for all of us to enjoy and in which to find hope and theological instruction.