



A Colombian Nun and the Love of God and Neighbour

The Spiritual Path of María de Jesús (1690s-1776)

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**To my mother, my father and my grandmother.
My examples of charity.**

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Introduction

The pursuit of a spiritual calling, entering a convent and becoming a nun, often resulted in fascinating spiritual writings. Certain nuns were ordered to write about their spirituality, and the purpose of some of these writings was for them to be testimonies of the favours of God. One nun who can be counted among the writers of *diarios espirituales* (spiritual journals), is María de Jesús. Like the *vidas espirituales* (spiritual autobiographies), these writings can be included in the genre of female confessional writing.¹

María de Jesús (1690s-1776) was a white-veiled Discalced Carmelite nun of the San José convent in Santa Fe de Bogotá, founded in 1606. She professed in the year 1714, and her spiritual journal was printed in a chronicle about the convent in the 1940s.² In the hierarchy of the convent, the white-veiled nuns were below the black-veiled. They helped with the hardest manual work, they didn't have voting rights in the convent, they didn't have to be educated, and they brought a smaller dowry when they entered the convent.³ It can thus be concluded that María de Jesús did not come from a wealthy family. But her spiritual journal, unlike what is common in spiritual autobiographies, lack a narration of her life before entering the convent.

The aim of this study is to examine the love of God and of neighbour, as expressed in the spiritual journal of María de Jesús. In this study I will proceed from the understanding of love as charity. In Christian thought God Himself is love, and its source.⁴ Charity, the third, and greatest, of the theological virtues, is a state of being in and responding to God's love and favour. This way of loving consists in loving God wholeheartedly and loving our neighbour as ourselves.⁵ Included in loving our neighbour are acts related to his or her spiritual benefit and salvation.⁶ These are all present themes in María de Jesús' text, but my aim is to examine how she incorporates these themes in her spiritual testimony by analyzing the imagery she uses, and the affective language in her spiritual journal.

¹ Lundberg 2015, p 38.

² Lundberg 2015, p 88.

³ Lavrin 2008, p 122, 52.

⁴ *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 2002, vol. 8, s.v. "love".

⁵ *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 2002, vol. 3, s.v. "charity".

⁶ Lundberg 2015, p 70.

I will also seek to understand her way of writing by analyzing her text against the background of the tradition of women's spiritual writings.

To study her love of God, it is important to understand the way in which she encounters him. In the case of María de Jesús it is most often through visions. Mystical unions are ineffable and accompanied by suspension of elements of the human being like: memory, will, and understanding. Visions are on the contrary not part of the unitive stage, according to Lavrin⁷, but in María de Jesús' case they certainly are a place for encounter with God. I propose that she also has mystical experiences since she sometimes mentions a dearth of words, and visions that leave her with a loss of her senses. Therefore, she not only encounters God, she also unites with him, at times. The type of union she experiences is that of "union of spirits", in which the Divine Spirit and the finite created spirit always maintain their ontological distinction.⁸ The reason I choose this definition is because when María recounts these experiences there seems to be two subjects present, her and the Divinity.

Being a Discalced Carmelite, it will also be interesting to discover the Teresian presence in María de Jesús' text, i.e. the influence of her predecessor and the reformer of the order, Teresa of Ávila (1515- 1582).⁹ I suggest that this can be noticed in certain rhetorical techniques. I also aim to examine if there are any similarities and differences in their expressions of love of God and of neighbour. This I will do mainly by a reading of her book, *The Interior Castle* (1577).¹⁰ The reason is that this is the principal source of Teresian thought on the spiritual life¹¹, and it is where her understanding of the road towards divine union is most elaborate.¹² I will be using Edgar Alison Peer's translation, originally published in 1946-1951 and republished in 2004, but I will also compare certain themes by taking some examples from her books, *Vida* (1562) and *The Way of Perfection* (1566).¹³ The comparisons with Teresa of Ávila will not constitute the largest portion of this study since its major aim is to uncover the spirituality of a fairly unknown nun, María de Jesús.

This study will give some insight into the 18th-century, colonial Carmelite spirituality in the writings of a white-veiled nun. Her spiritual journal can be seen

⁷ Lavrin 2008, p 108.

⁸ McGinn 2006, p 428.

⁹ *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 2002, vol. 13, s.v. "Teresa of Avila, St".

¹⁰ Ahlgren 1996, p 3.

¹¹ *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 2002, vol. 13, s.v. "Teresa of Avila, St".

¹² Lundberg 2015, p 71.

¹³ Ahlgren 1996, pp 3, 45.

as an optimistic declaration of love towards God and neighbour. A closer analysis of the themes of love and its imagery in the text of María de Jesús has never been done before. My contribution in the study of this nun will be to give more insight into her spirituality. I will not be focusing on how her social condition has affected her spirituality, nor will I trace its deepest origins and theological influences. As a nun of the Discalced Carmelite order, I will situate her within that tradition, but I will not go further than to comparing the themes of love of God and neighbour, and certain aspects of the rhetoric, with Teresa of Ávila. Throughout the study, I will sometimes refer to María de Jesús and Teresa of Ávila by their first names, so as to make the reading easier and more harmonious.

The questions I seek to answer are: What can be known about María de Jesús as a writing subject, i.e. how does she represent herself? How does she depict her union with God, and by which terms does she describe her love towards Him and his love towards her? How does she manifest her love towards her neighbour? What similarities with Teresa of Ávila can be found in María de Jesús' text, and what similarities and differences are there in their expression of love towards God and neighbour?

I will answer these questions mainly by a scrupulous reading of María de Jesús' spiritual journal, but also with the help of secondary texts, in which are included the works by Kristin Ibsen, Magnus Lundberg, Alison Weber and Gillian Ahlgren. The translations of María de Jesús' text from Spanish to English are my own. Her journal is from the eighteenth century and she writes in a colloquial manner, at times noticed in her syntax, so it is possible that a different translation of her text could lead to slightly different interpretations.

Previous research on the text of María de Jesús aren't many. Two studies about her have been done in greater depth, one by Clara E. Herrera (2013), and the other one by Magnus Lundberg (2015). In *Las místicas de la Nueva Granada: Tres casos de búsqueda de la perfección y construcción de la santidad*, Herrera traces the influence of the writings of earlier European saints in the text of María de Jesús. She also studies her subjectivity, but her study focus is put more on María's social condition. In *Mission and ecstasy: Contemplative Women and Salvation in Colonial Spanish America and the Philippines*, Lundberg analyzes, amongst other things, the missionary themes that can be traced in the writings of seventeenth and eighteenth century religious women. Amongst these women María de Jesús can be found. Because of his contribution to the understanding of

charity in the realm of the contemplative religious life, his research will especially be consulted in this study's examination of the love of neighbour.

To better understand the writing of María de Jesús, I will also use *Women's Spiritual Autobiographies in Colonial Spanish America* (1999), written by Kristin Ibsen. Ibsen's research has amongst other things a linguistic focus. She studies how the expectations of the audience shaped these texts and the writer's self-representation within them. When analyzing Teresa of Ávila's and consequently María de Jesús' writing style, I will consult Alison Weber's *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity* (1990). I will use the help of Gillian T. W. Ahlgren's *Entering Teresa of Avila's Interior Castle* (2005), to better understand the theological language in the said work.

In the first chapter I will try to answer the question about what we can know about María de Jesús as a writing subject. Here I will position her in the tradition of women's spiritual writings. This will contribute to answer part of the last question concerning the similarities with Teresa of Ávila that can be found in María de Jesús' text. In the second chapter I will study her view of the Eucharist as a way of encountering the Divinity. This will give insight into her notion of God, and how she describes Him. In chapter three, I will analyze how she depicts her union with God, and the affective language she uses. The fourth chapter will deal with the theme of love towards neighbour, taking examples from the most recurrent manifestations of this theme in the text of María de Jesús. Chapter five will consist of a brief summary of the conclusions I have arrived to in the previous chapters. The aim of chapters two through five is to answer the questions: How does María de Jesús depict her union with God, and by which terms does she describe her love towards Him and his love towards her? And: How does she manifest her love towards her neighbour?

The findings herein will also help in the comparisons between her and Teresa of Ávila in the chapters that follow. In chapter six, I will make an exposition on the theme of love of God and of neighbour in the *Interior Castle*. This will help in the comparisons between María de Jesús and Teresa of Ávila. The aim in chapter seven is to answer the last question, by uncovering the differences and similarities in the expressions of love towards God and neighbour, in the selected texts of Teresa of Ávila and in María de Jesús' spiritual journal. The eighth chapter is the conclusion of the study.

1. María de Jesús as a Writing Subject

Following the model of spiritual autobiographies, the act of writing is often depicted as a strenuous and anguishing experience, by the writing- subject. In the shadow of the Counter Reformation, the roles of religious women became more restricted. Nuns were required to take a vow of perpetual enclosure, and the orthodoxy of their spirituality, depicted in the form of a written confessional account, was determined by their confessor or by another clergyman.¹⁴ Many of these women wrote on the instigation of their confessors, but the act of writing could be construed as a violation of authority. It was thus important to justify this act by framing it as the will of God and the confessor.

The confessor's task was to value the writing because to do it one's own valuation could be interpreted as excessive pride. Women could therefore not admit to writing on their own initiative.¹⁵ In her study of Teresa of Avila's narrative technique, Alison Weber identifies what she calls a *rhetoric of femininity*, which is a strategic way of writing that exploits certain stereotypes about women's character and language. This is a rhetoric in which humility, which encompasses self-depreciatory comments and feigned ignorance and incompetence, is of great importance. This was a necessary technique employed by Teresa of Avila so as to escape charges of Illuminism, a type of mysticism considered unorthodox.¹⁶

Ibsen states that: "In baroque Spain and Spanish America, hagiographic literature and women's life stories are intimately intertwined, with autobiography borrowing patterns, rhetorical strategies, and even passages from earlier works".¹⁷ This brings us much closer to understanding the adoption of such patterns even in the text of a white-veiled Carmelite nun, living in 18th-century New Granada (present-day Colombia). Studying the romantic discourse and its interaction with social practices, in the mystical writing of Colombian nun Francisca Josefa de Castillo, Osorio portrays her as heiress of the Occidental-Spanish literary tradition by identifying amongst other things the Teresian presence in her text.¹⁸ Encountering these patterns and rhetorical devices in María de Jesús' text make her an heiress as well, but this doesn't mean that the reading of her journal

¹⁴ Myers 2003, p 10.

¹⁵ Ibsen 1999, p 22.

¹⁶ Weber 1990, pp 11, 34, 103, 159.

¹⁷ Ibsen 1999, p 63.

¹⁸ Osorio 2006, p 72.

becomes less of an interesting task since the uniqueness of a character still manages to surface. When describing her visions she uses an affective language and metaphors that tend to become very personal. It is by paying attention to this language that we come closer to understanding her affective discourse.

María de Jesús describes the commences of her writing by narrating a vision in which she sees Jesus, Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph, each one holding a quill in their hands. She writes that she had many doubts before the task of writing and that it still takes her time to obey her confessor and her inner force. This is accompanied by a feeling of fear, and she states that she entrusted this task to the saints so that they would mediate this to the Holy Trinity. María experiences a suspension in the first Aguinaldo Mass where she has the following vision:

Whilst being in this immensity of God, I suddenly saw inside of my heart Jesus, Mary and Joseph, seeing them like guests in my heart, I said to them: "Beloved of my soul, I am in this endeavour of giving this recount in writing, that is if it is to be your highest honour and glory, so that everything be run by you, and there ought to be no more thing than that which you would want. And from here this your horse will not move without you giving me a solution for this". When I saw all three of them with the quill in their hand, as if they wanted to write but they did not have paper. By this I got to know that they wanted me to write. I was left without fear and with peace in my soul, and embraced to Jesus, Mary and Joseph.¹⁹

She continues by explaining that despite having this vision she didn't put the order of writing into action because she had too many chores within the community. It is upon returning to her cell after a liturgical prayer, that she starts feeling an inner force that compels her to start writing. María describes this feeling as being accompanied by crying and trembling. She then proceeds to tell her confessor, whom she addresses as *Your Paternity*, that her only consolation is him seeing her narration, and that if he thinks that punishment is necessary she admits to it since she is a vile creature. She also implores him to help her decipher if these things come from her beloved God, so that she can give him infinite gratitude. She ends the narrative by excusing the lack of chronological order in

¹⁹ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 219-220: "Con que estando en la Inmensidad de Dios, de repente, ví dentro de mi corazón a Jesús, María y Joseph, como viéndolos huéspedes en mi casa, les dije: "Queridos de mi alma, yo estoy en este empeño de dar esta cuenta por escrito; esto es si ha de ser tu mayor honra y gloria, así todo corra por tu cuenta y no ha de haber otra cosa más que lo que Vos quisieres; y de aqui no se bulle este tu caballo, sin que me den solución para esto; cuando los vi a todos tres, cada uno con la pluma en su mano, como que querían escribir aunque no tenían papel y en esto, conocí que querían que yo escribiese; quede sin temor y con paz en mi alma, y abrazada de Jesús, María y Joseph."

her writing, the cause being the disordered manner in which the experiences will come to her remembrance.²⁰

It is the confessor that commands her to write, but it is clear that María de Jesús through this vision frames the act of writing as the will of Jesus and the saints Mary and Joseph. They are the ones that give her the final sanction. Although it takes her some time to act upon this commandment, it is indeed this vision that gives her the impetus to start recording her experiences in writing. A way—and by no means the only way—of understanding the inclusion of God in the visions that justify the act of writing is understanding the space of action that was permitted to religious women in Europe and in viceregal Spanish America. As Ibsen points out, women could not engage in theological discourse, therefore access to knowledge had to be through the affective and not the intellectual realm. Knowledge of forbidden texts or of the Bible could be credited to the intervention of God, and experience of God in visions was an important means of defending the act of writing.

The access that religious women had to devotional books and the Bible makes their vocabulary also an intellectual one. It was thus the synthesis of the affective and the intellectual vocabulary that permitted women to assert their voices and sometimes wrest interpretative authority from their confessors.²¹ Despite having asked her confessor for help in interpreting the origin of this vision, María has nonetheless taken upon herself the right of interpreting its meaning.

To cloak a potentially precarious interpretation of a vision required certain rhetorical strategies. Expressions like: *yo entendí*, and *me parecía* (I understood; it seemed to me), were commonly used in narratives of visionary experiences, and protected, women authors from being accused of excessive pride.²² Weber takes notice of similar expressions in Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle*, and comes to the conclusion that they stress the hypothetical nature of her assertion that in the end is nevertheless resolved into a certainty, with expressions like: *he entendido* and *cierto veo* (I came to understand; certainly I see), which underscore the role of personal experience.²³

²⁰ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 220.

²¹ Ibsen 1999, pp 23, 116, 120.

²² Ibsen 1999, pp 24-25.

²³ Weber 1990, pp 106- 107.

María de Jesús uses the verb *entender* (to understand) when she interprets her visions and colloquies without the benefit of the confessor. In a passage where she offers a mass to The Holy Trinity for the soul of a deceased nun, she receives an answer from God in which he says: "Daughter, everything is already replaced". Using the expression "I understood", she interprets that the mass she has offered in honour of the nun, has been accepted and that her María (the deceased nun) is now in peace.²⁴ In another passage she has a vision of the Virgin Mary and Jesus sitting tightly beside each other. She struggles with force to place herself between them, and finally manages to do so. She interprets this vision as following: "But I understood that to be in between Jesus and Mary, it is necessary to use force so as to overcome passions and vices".²⁵ What is striking is that María de Jesús doesn't express uncertainty. Her assertions do not seem hypothetical, and she doesn't insinuate wanting any help with the interpretation. The fact that the expression "I understood" can be taken as a sign of humility doesn't necessarily mean that the nun is uncertain about the truthfulness of her own interpretation.

The description of a vision wasn't something that was taken lightly, since it said a lot about the character of the woman writing. It was thus not an easy task to represent oneself as humble and at the same time assertive. How a vision is experienced is often associated with the context in which it is received. María de Jesús recounts of a vision she received on one occasion when she and the other nuns were disciplining themselves. There she saw that a deceased nun, for whom she had had great affection, was blessing her. She recalls of seeing her not with the eyes of the body, but with the imagination, since this vision didn't impede her from chanting and whipping herself.²⁶

After having been in a quite happy mood, María receives another vision. This time it is in the context of a mass, just before receiving the Eucharist. In this vision she sees the priest transformed into the Virgin Mary, holding the child Jesus in his arms. This time she is left so bewildered to the degree that the other nuns have to help her get back to the upper choir. María writes that only this time has she seen Jesus with the eyes of the body.²⁷ Here, she employs the distinctions Teresa of Ávila makes between different types of visions: imaginary visions (seen

²⁴ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 246-247.

²⁵ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 226.

²⁶ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 249.

²⁷ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 225-226.

with the "eyes of the soul") and corporeal visions (seen with "the eyes of the body").²⁸

Being perceived as humble is important, therefore the use of rhetorical strategies. But making own interpretations can be seen as a way of challenging the confessor's authority. Despite using expressions of humility she appears assertive of her own interpretations. María de Jesús certainly implements the rhetoric of femininity in her writing, but what lies behind it isn't easy to say. What we will know about her is ultimately decided by how she writes and by what she decides to write.

2. The Blessed Sacrament as Path

María de Jesús shows great devotion to the sacrament of the Eucharist. Her encounters with God and the saints occur most frequently during mass, often in the context of this sacrament. Very early on in her spiritual journal, she writes of a vision that leaves her with the knowledge that the Blessed Sacrament is her path. During fervent prayer, after the None, María suddenly sees a path of light coming out of her chest and going all the way to the sanctuary. The Host turns into light and she is left astonished and stupefied to the degree that she believes she is ill. She writes that it is after having a similar vision four or five years later, that she understands that the Blessed Sacrament is her way. In another passage she writes: " [---] I have experienced that during mass his mercies towards me are greater [---]".²⁹ At one point, upon hearing the mention of Saint Thomas Aquinas's name during mass, María has a vision in which she sees herself being elevated by the Saint as is done with the Host by the priest in the moment of the consecration of the Eucharist.³⁰

María de Jesús' Eucharistic piety is a recurrent theme throughout her text. Through Eucharistic visions she experiences God, encounters Him and unites with Him. In one episode, after Vespers, María has a mystical experience of recollection that starts with her feeling as if she has the Host in her mouth, and ends leaving her with a loss of her senses. Explaining the reason for this

²⁸ Santa Teresa de Jesús 1954, pp 257, 259.

²⁹ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 117, 241.

³⁰ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 250.

experience María writes: "Since I had not communicated that day, he wanted to come at that hour, and I said: Life of my soul, well how is this paid, how is this gratified?"³¹

In this passage the Host, or in other words, God, searches for her when she hasn't taken communion. In another vision, in the context of the mass, she is on the contrary reminded by God that she has communicated. This time it starts with her having a desire to see God, when suddenly instead she sees a finger pointing towards her chest, telling her that since she has communicated, she has God's body in her heart and in her soul. María then uses self-depreciatory language as she expresses her displeasure for forgetting to see God within herself. In one narrative, after having taken communion, she even hears the voice of God coming from the Blessed Sacrament that she has in her chest.³² María clearly has the view of meeting God in the Eucharist. In The act of taking communion she locates the place for this encounter within of herself, in her chest, in her heart. In the following passage María has a vision in which she uses the metaphor of a hill to illustrate this:

I was looking all over the hill, and I did not have where to descend, because descending meant falling into the abyss. So I started to fear, and then they said: sink into yourself! I did my effort and I began to enter in the heart of my hill, of my soul, of my life, of my heart, because this hill is the Blessed Sacrament of the altar. And being in the heart of this hill one does not have to fear what is outside, if one does not step out of it.³³

In her book *Holy Fast and Holy Feast*, Bynum draws a connection between female inedia (i.e. not eating) and Eucharistic piety in medieval Europe. Hunger meant suffering: "to eat God, therefore, was finally to become suffering flesh with his suffering flesh; it was to imitate the cross", and this was done with the Eucharist. The Eucharist was a vehicle for the effort to become Christ. Christ could be met at the moment of consecration, not only in the moment of communion. The *Imitatio Christi*, participating in the suffering physicality of

³¹ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 260.

³² María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 224, 223.

³³ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 220: "Yo miraba todo el cerro y no tenía por dónde bajar, porque bajar era caer al profundo, con que empecé a temer, y entonces dijeron: súmete para dentro; fui haciendo mi diligencia y me fui metiendo en el corazón de mi cerro, de mi alma, de mi vida, de mi corazón, porque este cerro es el Santísimo Sacramento del Altar, y estando uno en el corazón de este cerro no hay que temer de afuera si uno mismo no se sale del."

Christ: "was considered an effective activity, which redeemed both individual and cosmos".³⁴ Another form of imitating Christ's suffering was through flagellation. This form of bodily mortification also served to purge the body from sin.³⁵ In mysticism, the body is thus seen as a vehicle for salvation.³⁶

Self-mortification and abstinence from food is not perceived as the central-foci in the religious practice of María de Jesús. Reference to self-flagellation occurs only one time in her text, and she mentions it in a swift manner without going into any detail. The language in her text isn't the grotesque language of bleeding wounds and flesh, the result of which is the scarce mention of these motifs of corporeal suffering. The conclusions that can be drawn when analyzing the narrative of suffering in the text of María de Jesús, is that suffering is most present in the episodes when she falls ill, when she knows she's misbehaving, in empathizing with the afflictions of others, and in her distress about peoples idleness and ignorance in their effort to find God.³⁷

As mentioned earlier, María sees a ray of light in her Eucharistic visions. The effect that the metaphor of the ray of light that comes from the sanctuary has in her, is that it alleviates her afflictions. In one passage where she expresses fear of death she writes the following:

Another time, I was so afflicted, that I could not even see light because of what my heart was feeling. Being like this, without knowing what I should do nor where to find remedy, I remembered the Blessed Sacrament. So I went to the choir and screaming I said to him: Life of my soul, look at how I am because of this fear of death. And I prostrated myself, crying, in the midst of the choir, and as soon as I did this, all the darkness, fears and other things that were oppressing my heart disappeared. With that ray of light that came out of the Sanctuary, I was left good and well, and in utmost peace. From then on I did not have these afflictions any more [---].³⁸

³⁴ Bynum 1987, pp 53-54, 207, 256-257.

³⁵ Lavrin 2008, pp 178, 180.

³⁶ Ibsen 1999, p 109.

³⁷ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp, 224, 251, 258- 259, 268.

³⁸ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 242: "Otra vez estuve yo tan afligida, que ni aún luz vía, según estaba mi corazón; pues estando así sin saber que había de hacer ni topar remedio me acordé del Santísimo Sacramento, y me fui al coro y a gritos le dije: Vida de mi alma, mirá, cómo estoy deste miedo de la muerte; y me postré llorando en medio del coro; y en cuanto hice esto desapareció toda aquella oscuridad, temores y demás cosas que oprimía mi corazón, con aquel rayo de luz que salió del Sagrario quedé buena y sana y en suma paz. Desde entonces no me dieron las aflicciones más [---]."

María states that, whosoever she sees this light go to in her visions, come out well from whatever hardship they're in.³⁹ Thus, the ray of light doesn't only alleviate her own afflictions.

In one of the many mentions of this light, María describes it as being quite different from the other occasions. This time, the light that comes from the Sanctuary and goes to her chest is like a mirror, and the light is opaque. As in many other entries she describes this light as a path, and in this particular passage she comes to the conclusion that this path of light is the Divinity, it is the path to the eternal abysses.⁴⁰

The narrative of suffering is not central in the text of María de Jesús. It is present, but it is not connected to bodily mortification or to abstinence from food. Her Eucharistic piety in the sense of imitation of the physical suffering of Christ can only be supported by the episodes in which she falls ill. Since she doesn't mention abstaining from food, the association between female inedia and Eucharistic piety cannot be drawn. María de Jesús reiterates in many passages that God remediates everything, that he alleviates her suffering, and that he never lets her suffer more than twenty-four hours for a committed sin.⁴¹

The Eucharist is a communicative act for María. It is in the context of the Eucharist and through the Eucharist that she meets the Divinity, and she does this through visions. The metaphor of the light has a central aspect in these visions, since it connects her with the consecrated God whom she can also find inside of herself. The light is thus a path to the Divinity, to the redemptive act that is implied with the Eucharist, and this divinity alleviates her afflictions.

3. Love of God

In her spiritual journal, María de Jesús recurrently positions God as the highest authority in her life. In one quite long passage, María writes of a dilemma she has concerning the choice of confessor. It all starts after Your Paternity, her regular confessor, has to leave for another city. This causes instability and worriedness in her life. She receives a vision while praying about the choice of confessor, before

³⁹ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 237.

⁴⁰ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 261.

⁴¹ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 216, 219, 228.

the Blessed Sacrament. In this visions she finds herself in the hill, that represents the immensity of God. Around this hill there is a trench that represents hell. On the hill she sees three little houses, each one of them representing a confessor. According to her these houses look more like shacks, and they are sustained by the hill so as not to fall into the trench. María hears voices that tell her that all priests can fall into the trench if they don't stay in God. Walking up the hill, María is accompanied by a voice that tells her that the houses are meant to be sought for when there are great tempests. María suddenly sees one of the priests walking far behind her and asks the voices the reason for this. She receives the answer that he is there in case she would fall, unto which María replies: "God will help me, he [the priest] is too far behind".⁴² With the metaphor of little houses that look like shacks, María underscores the humanness of the priests. Even they can fall into sin. God, being the hill, sustains them all.

In one of the passages where María writes about her eagerness to unite with God, she has a vision in which she sees her parents and the Virgin Mary. Knowing how brief visions can be, she runs to God and only stops in front of her parents and the Virgin to make a curtsy and then continues on.⁴³ But how does she illustrate her relationship with God?

Imagery of familial relations play a central role in María de Jesús' descriptions of her relationship with God. Bynum notes that the reason for the more experiential style of women's writings has partly to do with their use of the vernaculars.⁴⁴ Throughout her spiritual journal, María alternates between the words father and the more colloquial form *taita* and *taitica* (dad; daddy), when referring to God. Her conversations with Christ, as Lundberg has observed, were rendered in a quite informal manner.⁴⁵ María also implements the use of the Spanish diminutives *-ica/-ita/-ito*, which function as a means of increasing the familial and affective aspect of her language.⁴⁶

When narrating about her visions, María often expresses a longing of being in the "bosom of her daddy". This is an expression she uses to express the desire

⁴² María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 221- 222.

⁴³ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 238.

⁴⁴ Bynum 1989, p 172.

⁴⁵ Lundberg 2015, p 89.

⁴⁶ According to the *Gramática Descriptiva de la Lengua Española* (1999) diminutives are restricted to the realm of the family, and they possess an affective value. See *Gramática Descriptiva de la Lengua Española* 1999, vol. 1, s.v. "diminutivos".

of being embraced by God. In one vision God responds to her love by extending his arms like a “loving father”. María writes that every time she does something absurd she runs to her father’s bosom so that he may defend her and alleviate all of her troubles.⁴⁷ María not only describes God as a loving father, but also as a beautiful and very gallant father. She describes him in this manner after having a vision when she is praying for the other nuns of the community. In this vision she sees her sisters in the following way:

[---] And I suddenly saw all of them with wings, but some of them had open wings as if they wanted to fly. It gave me such pleasure and joy because they were truly beautiful, and with a gallantry that does not exist here, because it is only in God that one can be with such liberty and ease, that even moving is elegance and grace that cannot be said nor explained [---].⁴⁸

María sees God possessing only good characteristics, but sometimes words to describe all the aspects of God fall short. María refers to her soul as a “little girl” (*niña chiquita*). In one passage she writes of feeling a peace or a recollection in which she sees this little girl standing beside Jesus’ bosom. The little girl is crying because of her own and everybody else’s transgressions. The girl cries for forgiveness and asks the “daddy of her soul” to alleviate her and help her never to offend him again. The narrative ends with God blessing the girl and consoling her by embracing her against his heart.⁴⁹

In another one of her experiences of recollection, she sees a choir made up of the Carmelite saints standing before the Holy Trinity. The little girl stands before them and makes a curtsy, only to then go back into her father’s arms. Her descriptions become even tenderer when she depicts this little girl being covered with two blankets up to her head, as is done with babies. The two blankets represent the Divinity, and while God is embracing her, an interchange of affection, tenderness and kisses takes place.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 228, 241.

⁴⁸ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 243: “[---] y de repente las vide con alas a todas, pero unas tenían la salas abiertas, como que querían volar; dióme tal gusto y alegría, porque verdaderamente estaban lindas, y con una bisarria que no hay acá; porque solo en Dios puede estar uno con tal libertad y desenfado, que solo el bullirse es donaire y gracia que no se puede decir ni explicar [---]”.

⁴⁹ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 252.

⁵⁰ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 251, 266.

When María de Jesús writes about difficult and sad experiences in her life, she tends to immediately contrast them with narratives of joyous and gratifying experiences of God's love and mercy. After being severely reprimanded by God for refusing to stand up during the Liturgy of the Word, María states that it is an amorous severity. The reprimand affects her senses, leaving her seated during the rest of the mass, undone by love and feeling strong and pleasant odours. It is not only her father that holds the little girl in his arms and against his heart, but also the Virgin Mary and Saint Anne. In one vision, during mass, with the desire to offer the *Te Deum* to the Holy Trinity as an act of thanksgiving for its mercies towards the Virgin Mary and Saint Anne, María suddenly sees the Saint holding the little girl in her arms only to later put her in María's own heart. María feels ineffable joy for having the little girl in her heart, and she says to the Saint "My life, my soul, my little daughter, my little grandmother, my little sister, my consolation, what embraces with this tender little girl".⁵¹ A possible interpretation of this vision is that the Saint puts the little girl in María's heart to thank her for her offering.

After hearing a priest talk about the necessity of having hearts soft as wax so that the seal [God] could be impressed upon them, María suddenly sees a light, so soft and amorous, melting the hearts of stone.⁵² According to Lavrin, it was Saint Teresa's transverberation that fixed the human heart as a place where some of the most exquisite experiences of religious life took place. Lavrin writes: "The heart acquired a double meaning as a locus where the professed could experience emotions as expressions of God's love to her, as well as the centre of her love for him [---]".⁵³ The imagery of the heart is indeed implemented by María in the way that Lavrin suggests. With images of the heart, God answers, and these answers are often connected to María's missionary desire. The role of this imagery will thus be more examined in the following chapter, in its relation to the love of neighbour.

Lamm observes that since Christian mystics understand God as being the living God who is love, their knowing is not separated from loving.⁵⁴ Descriptions

⁵¹ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp, 247, 250, 257.

⁵² María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 255-256.

⁵³ Lavrin 2008, p 103.

⁵⁴ Lamm 2013, p 12.

of the mystical encounter as consciousness of God, as suggested by McGinn, thus involves a personal language with metaphors from personal, intimate human relationships.⁵⁵ For María God is a father, she is his daughter, her soul is a little girl, and Christ is a child.

While experiencing a recollection during the Liturgy of the Hours, María hears God's voice telling her that he wants the others to praise him, but he wants her to lull him. This passage is reminiscent of a mother lulling her child to sleep. This could be viewed as an illustration of María being set aside from the other nuns by being given a different purpose than theirs. She continues this passage by saying that she has gotten to know that God wants her to love him and embrace him inwardly, because every time that the community praises or chants, she gets a recollection that impedes her from keeping up with them.⁵⁶ María is clearly referring to the prayer of recollection which in short terms can be described as a way of interior abstraction from everything earthly to contemplate or meditate. Here, according to Teresa of Ávila, the soul feels quietude, but its faculties do not cease to function.⁵⁷

María has visions in which she sees Jesus as a dancing twelve- year old, as a six- year old embracing her soul (the little girl), and she also sees him being inside of her heart, having been put there by the angels Saint Michael and Saint Gabriel. María writes that every time she misbehaved the image of the child Jesus in her heart became more blurry.⁵⁸ This vision functions as an indicator as to how María stands before God.

The interchange of love that María experiences with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is to a certain extent ineffable. She writes of tenderness and caresses that can't be explained. Apart from embraces, we don't get a description of the nature of these caresses. She usually stops the illustration of these expressions of love with the formula: that can't be said (*que no se puede decir*), or, there are no words with which to describe them (*que no hay palabras con qué explicarlas*).⁵⁹ At one point, she does write that the embraces that her friend, her Father and companion give her, leave her throwing sparkles, to the degree that she

⁵⁵ McGinn 2006, p xvi.

⁵⁶ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 225.

⁵⁷ Poitrey 1983, p 594. Teresa de Jesús 1987, p 140.

⁵⁸ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 224- 225.

⁵⁹ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 221, 235, 265.

has to say: "Leave me dad, because I am dying".⁶⁰ María tries to convey the image of the high degree of intensity that the interchange of affections can reach, but she doesn't provide many details. Two possible reasons for this is that she really thinks they are difficult to articulate, or that she is afraid of a possible repercussion of a language of affection that can border to a high sensuality. In one passage, María expresses great horror towards being married to Christ. She has a vision in which she sees herself getting married to him, and she writes the following:

Since I have always felt horror to this getting married thing, I was frightened and I trembled, and I said: No, Life of my soul, Dad yes, spouse not. Father, whatever you want. Then he answered me: with this you will not step away from me, you will be united with me. This consoled me [---].⁶¹

María also writes that she feels displeasure every time she remembers this vision.⁶² According to Osorio, the mystic tries to translate her experience into words, but the language often becomes insufficient. In her study of the Colombian nun Francisca Josefa de Castillo, Osorio makes comparisons between the writings of love epistles and the mystical discourse. Her analysis can be implemented in the study of other mystics. She supports her conclusions on Violi's (1987) study of the love epistle. According to Osorio, just as the author of a love epistle, the mystic tries to evoke the presence of the beloved who is absent. The mystical discourse tries to reflect the testimonies of an enamoured subject with its exalted and often contradictory feelings. She writes that the mystical discourse doesn't presuppose an answer.⁶³

It does presuppose an answer in my point of view, but it is not an answer in the form of a letter written by God to the writing subject. The answer she expects are the things that she experiences being manifestations of God in her life, whether that be in form of visions, colloquies or answers to her prayers. The

⁶⁰ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 250.

⁶¹ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 244: "Yo como siempre he tenido horror a esto de casarse, me asusté y temblé y dije: no, Vida de mi alma, Taita si, esposo no; Padre cuanto quieras; entonces me respondió: 'Con eso no te apartarás de mi estarás unida conmigo'; y con esto me consolé [---]."

⁶² María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 244.

⁶³ Osorio 2006, pp 97, 110, 112.

mystic writes to “someone” as well as being herself the responder of her writing. By the variations of pronouns, names and expressions, this someone is sometimes the confessor, God, a saint, an angel, or in the case of rhetorical questions, herself. Her writing becomes a testimony of God in her life and her life in God. But the role of the confessor as a receiver and as the examiner of the text can’t be denied. His response to what is being written affects the degree to which the writing subject wants to take her description, of for example, an interchange of love.

In one passage, María abandons the familial language, and instead she describes God as a square castle or tower surrounded by little chapels that go from his feet up to his bosom. While she climbs up this tower she notices that its mansions are empty. She arrives to God’s chest and she describes it as the home and nest of the Supreme peace. God tells her that the reason the mansions are empty is because nobody searches for him. María realizes how unworthy she is of being there, while God says to her that he wants her to live stucked to his heart. While María writes of feeling despair for not having found anyone in the mansions, she has also placed herself as the only one in the castle, but she nonetheless expresses a desire to go throughout the world to find souls that can occupy these chapels.⁶⁴

María de Jesús exalts God over everyone. She describes him as a loving father that alleviates her troubles, that reaches out to her soul with embraces, and expresses his wish of having her close to him. It is in his bosom that the little girl, that is her soul, finds refuge. The interchange of love between them can’t always be explained. Since María is hugely devoted to the Virgin Mary and to Saint Anne, her love towards them is also expressed in familial terms. She refers to God in a loving and tender language, but expresses discomfort towards having him as a husband, thus preferring having him as a dad. The metaphor of the intimate human relationship of spouses is not one she uses much. God’s favours are manifestations of his love towards her, and María is to love him inwardly, with recollection. In her visions, God is in María’s heart and she is in his. God is also a castle occupied by her, but with the need of more souls.

⁶⁴ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 231.

4. Love of Neighbour

María de Jesús writes that the first mercy she receives from God is seeing her heart as big as the world. Reiterating the benevolence and the mercifulness of her Sacramental Beloved, she is filled with a desire to go throughout the world, the streets and the towns to attach all the disconsolate, the afflicted, the poor, the sinners, and the tempted, to the Blessed Sacrament, so that also they will know of his solace.⁶⁵

María's consideration of her closest neighbours, i.e. her sisters of the convent, can be perceived when she is given the role of the prioress in a role reversal, common on the day of the Massacre of the Innocents. She takes this role very seriously, and she mentions having given her heart to the entire community. According to María, she has always felt love for her sister, but it is after having been given this role that she begins to see them as "daughters of her soul". She remembers their good acts towards her and she begs to God that those of them who are deceased, not be in Purgatory.⁶⁶

In a quite dramatic narrative about an earthquake, María acts as a consoler not only to the sisters of her community, but also to the priests. This gives her great joy because having survived the earthquake they now had more time to repent for their sins. On one occasion during prayer, she finds herself in a field. This time her soul is a little ant that climbs up the cross of the crucified Christ and enters his open side. She describes his side as a "door to eternal life", and ends the narrative by saying: "If only everybody dwelled here, that would be my greatest consolation".⁶⁷

María states that the salvation she wishes for herself, she also wishes for everybody. María de Jesús ends almost all of the entries of her visions with a formulaic statement of her desire that everybody get to know the goodness and mercifulness of God, and that everybody be saved. María is keen to underscore that to come close to God and be saved by him requires a conscious decision of

⁶⁵ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 215, 219.

⁶⁶ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 230.

⁶⁷ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 227- 228, 232- 233.

wanting to come close to him. She wishes that the merits of Christ's blood don't be lost, and she cries for the salvation of everybody.⁶⁸ The conclusion to be drawn here is that María believes in the third theological virtue of loving our neighbour as ourselves.

In one vision, María sees the Holy Spirit as a dove whose feathers look more like fuzz. In between this fuzz she sees some of her sisters and also a priest who looks very tired and who appears to be drowning. This same priest later begs her to pray for him since he feels he is about to condemn himself. María then tells him: "God did not raise anyone to condemn, if he himself does not want to be condemned. Since Your Paternity does not want anything else than to please God and to serve him faithfully, then why are you to condemn yourself?" María continues the narrative by saying that the priest felt consoled when she told him that she had seen him in the Holy Spirit. In the end she implements humility in her text, as she writes that she feels ashamed of what she told the priest, her being such a vile and ignorant creature. Notwithstanding she continues by saying that charity and pity is what forces her to console the afflicted, and that her desires to do good to her neighbour are sometimes so vehement that she feels she's about to burst.⁶⁹

The ray of light is also present in the theme of her love towards neighbour. On one occasion after having received communion, and while seeing the Lord (the Host) in her chest she suddenly sees the ray of light go all the way to the fairly distant cell of one of the nuns of the convent. By means of this light she's able to see everything that is happening in the cell. María sees this nun lying on her bed, but she doesn't make it clear whether this nun is ill or not. Though it can be assumed that the nun finds herself in some sort of distress, since María states that, whosoever she sees this light go to in her visions, come out well from whatever hardship they're in.⁷⁰

The concept of the Church as tripartite, helps in the understanding of María's expressions and acts of love towards neighbour. According to this belief, the Church is divided into three parts: the *triumphant* in heaven, the *expectant* in

⁶⁸ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 265, 268, 270.

⁶⁹ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 242.

⁷⁰ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 236-237.

Purgatory, and the *militant* on earth.⁷¹ The three parts are part of a spiritual economy. The church militant exchanged, amongst other things, prayers, merits and indulgences. Between the church expectant and the militant, it was the intercessions and the invocations that played important roles.⁷²

María makes it clear that she wants to be a mediator, just like the Virgin Mary. On one occasion when María is very ill and finds herself near death, her prioress orders her not to die because it would leave the community very disconsolate. María posits the prioress' demand to God and includes a petition of her own:⁷³

Well, my Prioress does not want me to die, for your greatest honour and glory, leave me like Our Lady was left, for the consolation of The Apostles and the whole Church. For this same reason, and as she did, and to pray that everybody be saved.⁷⁴

In the vision that follows, María understands that this petition was pleasing to Christ, and the episode ends with an interchange of affection between him and the girl (her soul).⁷⁵ In this passage María appears to have had an important role in the convent. The order of the prioress functions as an affirmation of this in her narrative. Christ's willingness to meet her desire supports her role as mediator.

María's desire to be like the Virgin Mary is further illustrated in another passage. After reading the writings of the Spanish mystic María de Ágreda, about the Virgin having hairs of gold so that her thoughts wouldn't depart from God's divinity, María gets anxious of having these hairs of gold. When she asks the community to pray for this, they laugh at her petition. But while praying for her close sister who is newly deceased, this sister appears to her in a vision and tells her that she is negotiating the hairs of gold for her. María continues the narrative by referring to earlier occurrences which have the function of supporting her special relationship to God, as mediator of souls. Here she writes of God confirming to her that the mass she has offered in honour of a deceased nun has

⁷¹ *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 2002, vol. 4, s.v. "communion of saints".

⁷² Lundberg 2015, pp 98- 99.

⁷³ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 266.

⁷⁴ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 266: "Pues mi Prelada no quiere que muera, por tu mayor honra y gloria, dejame como Nuestra Señora se quedó para consuelo de los Apóstoles y de toda la iglesia; por esta misma intención y como lo hizo y pedir que todos se salven."

⁷⁵ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 266.

been accepted by him. When María shares this with a nun who is near the end, she feels consoled and asks María to do the same for her after her passing.⁷⁶

Death, and alleviation to the souls in Purgatory, is a recurrent theme in María's relationship to neighbour. On one occasion she receives a vision in which she not only foresees the death of two nuns, but also the order of their demise. In this vision, she sees the two nuns walking beside each other, when suddenly one of them makes a little jump and is thus one step ahead of the other. When a few days later, the nun who in the vision made a little jump, dies before the other nun, María concludes that the jump was a sign of the order in which they would die.⁷⁷ McKnight observes the gift of prophecy by foreseeing deaths, also in the writings of Francisca Josefa de Castillo. According to her, the foreseeing of deaths in visions is a result of the mystic process that, by being submitted in writing, to the examination of a confessor, proves that the knowledge is God given, since these are exterior signs that can be verified by others. Castillo is given the knowledge of the status of the souls' salvation⁷⁸, this also occurs in the narrative of María de Jesús.

While praying for the deceased bishop Quiñones, she sees Christ with an open chest, like a nest, waiting for the bishop. On another occasion, praying for another soul, she sees this soul entering the church where Christ is standing, waiting to give her the embrace of sublime peace.⁷⁹

In her visions, María also receives signs of gratitude from the souls she has prayed for. After entrusting the soul of a deceased nun to Saint Anne, María has a vision in which she sees both of them thanking her and standing before her while making a deep curtsy, all the way to the floor. María recalls not having seen this nun again, and by this she understands that the nun has been accepted into heaven.⁸⁰

Ibsen notes that the ability to intervene with God to save another person's soul affiliates these visionary women with the saintly model of the Virgin Mary, and in addition to this it also implies that they exercise powers in the visionary

⁷⁶ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 246- 247.

⁷⁷ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 220.

⁷⁸ McKnight 1997, p 155.

⁷⁹ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 239, 241- 242.

⁸⁰ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 226- 227.

realm, that exceed those of their confessors.⁸¹ This can be further observed in María's narration about her experiences surrounding the death of the archbishop. Three days before his demise, she sees herself carrying the archbishop and embracing him against her heart. His weight constrains her to ask her Dad (God) to make him smaller. God grants her wish, and María continues, three days, seeing the archbishop in her arms like a baby that is being lulled. After his death, she sees him strolling happily and laughingly on a path of light, and when approaching María he calls her: "Servant of God".⁸² One of the purposes of these visions is that they consolidate her role as a mediator. She not only expresses her desire to be like the Virgin, but she also receives attestation of the efficacy of her role.

María continuously highlights the theme of intercession throughout her spiritual journal, but on one occasion she writes of experiencing doubt concerning the belief that God by means of intercessory prayer releases souls from Purgatory. As a result of this doubt, God responds: "Would I be wicked and not give it [the soul] to you?"⁸³ What is implied with this answer is that she should not doubt this belief.

Ethnic prejudices can be observed in the writings of the nuns of the colonies in Spanish America.⁸⁴ What is striking in the text of María de Jesús is her inclusivism. She repeatedly manifests her desire that everybody be saved, both those currently living and those who will walk the earth until the end of time.⁸⁵ After seeing the entry into heaven of an Indian who had been a servant in the community, she writes that God doesn't despise anyone, that he hears everyone, and that he forgives whosoever asks for his forgiveness.⁸⁶ On one occasion, after having prayed for the salvation of all the souls in the world, María sees creatures coming out of Christ's open chest.⁸⁷ She writes the following:

Dad of my soul, well since all of us stem from there, no one should be despised; blacks, Indians, mulattoes, we all stem from there. There is nothing more to do than to love them,

⁸¹ Ibsen 1999, p 32.

⁸² María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 252.

⁸³ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 257.

⁸⁴ Osorio 2006, p 74.

⁸⁵ Lundberg 2015, p 89. María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 262, 265, 271.

⁸⁶ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 247.

⁸⁷ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 250.

esteem them, do them well [---], and since we all stem from there, let us return to that beloved Heart, and praise you forever.⁸⁸

María's distress about humanity's idleness and ignorance in its effort to follow God, and consequently be saved, is a theme that permeates her spiritual journal. She uses the imagery of blood to illustrate her desire that everybody be saved. In one of her visions of The Holy Trinity, she sees Christ with an open chest, pouring blood from his flayed heart. María tells him that she is the cause of this and asks him to forgive her and all the sinners. She often expresses her desire that everybody be washed in the blood of Christ,⁸⁹ and in this particular passage she writes:

Afterwards, I saw an ocean of blood, like a lagoon, and few were immersed in this blood. I, crying that everybody in this world would immerse themselves and wash themselves in this blood, and if I could elevate all of them who are capable of seeing God and praise him, and enjoy so much felicity and happiness. Truly, I do not know how I can live with the feeling of seeing that there is no one who wants to benefit from this medicine, with so little work, and so cheaply, only by wanting.⁹⁰

Here she expresses her discontentment against people not following the path of God, and she reiterates that it is a decision that requires will.

The Archangels and the Virgin Mary also have a role in the washing away of sins of everybody, including the souls in Purgatory. María writes that she asks them daily, during the consecration of the Chalice to wash all the souls with the blood of Christ. María has a vision in which she sees the Virgin spilling the blood of Christ all over the world, penetrating all the way to the Purgatory.⁹¹ Lundberg

⁸⁸ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 251: "Taita de mi alma; pues si todos salimos de ahí no hay que despreciar a ninguno; negros, indios, mulatos, todos salimos de ai, que no hay sino quererlos, estimarlos, hacerles bien [---] y que como todos salimos de ai todos volvamos a ese Corazón amantísimo y para siempre te alabemos."

⁸⁹ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 269, 243, 244.

⁹⁰ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 269: "Después vide un mar de sangre, como una laguna, y unos poquitos metidos en esta sangre; yo, clamores porque todos los que hay en este mundo se metieran y se lavaran en esta sangre, y si pudiera alzarlos a todos los que son capaces de ver a Dios y alabarlo y gozar de tanta dicha y felicidad; verdaderamente no se como vivo del sentimiento de ver que no hay quien se quiera aprovechar desta medicina, tan sin trabajo, y tan a poca costa; no mas que querer."

⁹¹ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 243- 244, 248-249.

observes that María, with this vision, is pointing to the universal effects of redemption.⁹²

While at mass, praying for the salvation of the souls, María experiences a recollection and she sees a river of blood flowing from the throne of The Holy Trinity with great impetus and velocity. She calls this an *ocean of mercies*, and she sees herself immersed in it up to her throat while she's crying out: "Come, Christians, come infidels, come gentiles, come righteous, come all ye creatures who exist in this world! Come, immerse yourselves here, because here there is remedy for all [...]" When Maria sees that nobody approaches the river, she starts gulping the blood and says.⁹³

This one is for those who are in mortal sin, this one is for the infidels, this one is for the just, this one for the Prelates, ecclesiastics and seculars, this one is for those who have interceded for me, and this one is for the souls in Purgatory.⁹⁴

As Lundberg points out, what María de Jesús is doing in this vision is that she is vicariously drinking Christ's blood for all types of people.⁹⁵

María demonstrates that she truly believes in her role as a mediator of the souls. Her wish for the salvation of her neighbour is further highlighted with the imagery of the heart. María not only has a vision in which she sees Christ giving her his heart, but on one occasion she sees him nesting his heart with hers. Christ opens his heart and puts it over hers, and presses them together until they become one heart surrounded by a circle of light. María states that she after this nesting of hearts is left with an ardent desire for everybody's salvation.⁹⁶ The meaning behind the vision of being given Christ's heart is further explained towards the very end of her journal. When María after having taken the communion begins to pray for the salvation of everybody, God says to her: "Well, have I not already given you my heart? And I put it in your hands so that you may do whatever you

⁹² Lundberg 2015, p 90.

⁹³ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 250.

⁹⁴ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 250: "Éste por los que están en pecado mortal, éste por los infieles, éste por los justos, éste por los Prelados, eclesiásticos y seculares, éste por los que me han encomendado, éste por las ánimas del Purgatorio."

⁹⁵ Lundberg 2015, p 90.

⁹⁶ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 218, 270-271.

please”, to which Maria answers: ”Life of my Soul, is it possible that you have put your heart in the hands of this devil?”⁹⁷

Being a nun and living in enclosure, the community becomes María’s closest neighbour, and their wellbeing in this life and in the other, her great concern. María acts as a mediator and as a consoler in the convent. Through visions and colloquies with God and the departed souls, she supports and finds support for these roles and for her prophetic abilities, as these visions often become narratives of the efficiency of her prayers. To do good to her neighbour and to please God are her primordial concerns.

The importance of the Eucharist is further attested with the imagery of the ray of light and its effects. The ray of light is an indicator of alleviation and a premonition of salvation. Her apostolate is further consolidated by the emphasis of being a mediator of the souls, in the likeness of the Virgin Mary. God approves of her petition of being left in the world as the Virgin Mary and responds to it with affection. God gives her the souls she asks for in the sense that they are freed from Purgatory and accepted into heaven.

María de Jesús’ charity spreads over the walls of the convent as she desires and prays for the salvation of all of humanity. Familial language and metaphors are present in her love to others. She refers to her sisters, the nuns, as daughters of her soul, and she sees herself carrying the archbishop in her arms as if he were being lulled like a baby. Although some of the narratives in her text- as when she’s giving words of consolation and when she’s is being thanked by a saint- can be interpreted as a sign of lack of humility, her concern for neighbour and the self-depreciatory language undermine this perception.

Lundberg has rightfully observed that in María de Jesús’ charity, the heart is the centre and love and blood are the medium.⁹⁸ Christ awakens her desire for everybody’s salvation by nesting his heart with hers. She drinks Christ’s blood for the salvation of all, and he puts his heart in her hands as approbation of her apostolate.

⁹⁷ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 271.

⁹⁸ Lundberg 2015, p 91.

5. María de Jesús: A Summary

María de Jesús can be considered an heiress of the Occidental-Spanish literary tradition. The Teresian presence in her text can be perceived in her employment of the rhetoric of femininity. María defends the act of writing through a vision, and although she uses expressions of humility in her text she nonetheless shows confidence in her interpretations. She can thus be perceived as humble but secure.

It can be observed that María de Jesús teaches throughout her *Spiritual Journal*. She proposes the Blessed Sacrament as a path to God, she states that salvation is for everybody to be aspired, and that knowing God requires will, without so much suffering or effort.

It is most frequently in the context of the mass that her visions occur. María de Jesús is devoted to the Blessed Sacrament, and she states that it is her path. Her Eucharistic piety is a recurrent theme throughout her text. Through Eucharistic visions she experiences God and unites with him. María meets God in the Eucharist, and she locates the place of this encounter within of herself, in her chest, in her heart. The Blessed Sacrament is also described as a hill, and this hill she also finds within of herself after having received communion.

The theme of corporeal suffering is not highlighted by María de Jesús. To know God doesn't require so much suffering, but mainly the will to know him. The imagery of the ray of light has the function of pointing to a pending salvation and it is an indicator of the alleviation of afflictions. The path of light is the Divinity, and the metaphor of the light connects her with the consecrated God whom she can also find inside of herself.

María is not only eager for her own union with God, but with everybody else's. Her love of God, the saints, and neighbour is expressed in familial terms. She uses an affective and tender language that doesn't want to fall into the erotic. The metaphor of matrimony isn't much explored, and its main function in the text is to depict the desire of eternal union with Christ.

The father and daughter relationship is the one María prefers when illustrating her relationship to God. She experiences God in recollection, and with the image of being in the bosom and embrace of her dad and their interchange of

affection, she illustrates their mutual love for each other, as well as conveying her desire of living for him and serving him.

Through visions, she understands how she and everybody else stand before God. Visions, including the prophetic ones, become proof of the efficiency of her intercessions and of her closeness to God.

Her love of neighbour is expressed in her ardent desire that everyone be saved. God is depicted as a good God that never lets her suffer for more than twenty-four hours, and his goodness is also illustrated in him meeting her wishes. The imagery of the heart plays an important role in her spiritual journal, since it becomes a sign of God's love and benevolence towards her. It functions as a symbol of an answered prayer and as a consent to an expressed desire, as well as being a confirmation of her role as mediator and of her missionary zeal. A role and a zeal that she practices within the confines of contemplation.

6. Teresa of Ávila's Love of God and of Neighbour in The Interior Castle

In *The Interior Castle*, Teresa of Ávila presents prayer as a way of achieving union with God. Teresa likens the soul to a castle made of diamond or crystal, in which there are many dwelling places. With the image of a *palmito*, a shrub with many layers, she illustrates this castle as being made up of seven concentric circles, each one harbouring dwelling places. God dwells in the centre of the castle, and it is there that the much secret things between God and the soul take place.⁹⁹

According to Teresa, true perfection consists in the love of God and of our neighbour. The more a person follows these two commandments, the nearer she will be to perfection. The love of God and of neighbour is comprised, in what she calls, the greatest perfection, which is to bring the will into conformity with the will of God. That is all that the beginner in prayer should strive for.

When Teresa poses a rhetorical question, to her daughters, about what they suppose is his will, she answers: "That we should be altogether perfect, and be

⁹⁹ St. Teresa of Avila 2004, p 3, 5, 13. Lundberg 2015, p 71.

one with Him and with the Father, as in His Majesty's prayer".¹⁰⁰ To understand what Teresa means by, being altogether perfect, it is necessary to examine her understanding of *love*.

Teresa writes that love: "consists, not in the extent of our happiness, but in the firmness of our determination to try to please God in everything, and to endeavour, in all possible ways, not to offend him [---]".¹⁰¹ It is true humility that gives peace and resignation to His will. This humility is thus necessary to become more perfect. Teresa emphasizes the importance of humility, very early on in *The Interior Castle*. It is the lack of this virtue that prevents the individual from making progress in its path to enter into deeper intimacy with God. The journey towards union requires great humility, which amongst other things includes the desire to be considered worse than anybody else. The first sign of possessing humility is to think of oneself not deserving of this merit, nor of the Lord's favours and consolations, or expect to receive them in one's lifetime.¹⁰² Teresa describes humility very clearly in a passage, where she explains why God loves this virtue:

[...] God is Sovereign Truth and to be humble is to walk in truth, for it is absolutely true to say that we have no good thing in ourselves, but only misery and nothingness; and anyone who fails to understand this is walking in falsehood. He who best understands it is most pleasing to Sovereign Truth because he is walking in truth. May it please God, our sisters, to grant us grace never to fail to have this knowledge of ourselves. Amen.¹⁰³

The notion of humanity's misery and nothingness, is an important part in self-knowledge. This is a sign of humility, which means to walk in truth, which in turn means to walk in God who is the Sovereign Truth. Ahlgren observes that, the person gains more self-knowledge gradually, while concurrently gaining knowledge of God-in-self.¹⁰⁴ In Christian mysticism, the movement towards an interior way of knowing God, also leads to an opening and a new understanding of one's relationality towards the other.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ St. Teresa of Avila 2004. pp 19, 28, 102.

¹⁰¹ St. Teresa of Avila 2004. p 57.

¹⁰² St. Teresa of Avila 2004. pp 41, 46, 66.

¹⁰³ St. Teresa of Avila 2004 p 196.

¹⁰⁴ Ahlgren 2005, pp 22-23, 27.

¹⁰⁵ Lamm 2013, p 11.

Love towards God can be seen in love towards neighbour. The farther advanced a person is in love towards neighbour, the greater the love she will have for God. God rewards love towards neighbour by increasing the love a person has towards him, according to Teresa.¹⁰⁶ Ahlgren states that the expansion of the affective potential is the form of devotion that God desires, and that Teresa promises that the soul will continue to grow if it perseveres in love.¹⁰⁷

The favours God grants in this life, are according to Teresa, given to strengthen a person's weakness so that she can imitate Christ in His great suffering. To be granted favours by God, means in turn that the person is even more obliged to serve. The nature of love is to work, to serve, and she exhorts her daughters to prove their love by works. Teresa points out to them that God has no need for their works, but what he needs is the resoluteness of their will. It is by engaging in prayer that the person acquires strength to serve.¹⁰⁸ Teresa writes of works:

[...] what the Lord desires is works. If you see a sick woman to whom you can give some help, never be affected by the fear that your devotion will suffer, but take pity on her: if she is in pain, you should feel pain too; if necessary, fast so that she may have your food, not so much for her sake as because you know it to be your Lord's will.¹⁰⁹

Following God's will in the contemplative life leads to good works and active life of service towards neighbour.¹¹⁰ Teresa mentions the discontent that the soul feels in the fifth dwelling place, caused by the things of the world, and the sorrow it feels for not having the capacity to do more. It also feels grief when engaging in prayer, the causes of which, are according to Teresa, seeing how often God is offended and how little esteemed he is in this world; how many souls are lost, heretics and moors, and especially Christians.¹¹¹

Teresa uses the Sacrament of Matrimony, as a metaphor to describe how God spiritually betroths himself to souls. Teresa is keen to underscore that it is

¹⁰⁶ St. Teresa of Avila 2004 p 103.

¹⁰⁷ Ahlgren 2005, pp 58- 59.

¹⁰⁸ St. Teresa of Avila 2004. pp, 40, 191, 192, 231- 232, 236.

¹⁰⁹ St. Teresa of Avila 2004. p 105.

¹¹⁰ Astell & Cavadini 2013. p 34.

¹¹¹ St. Teresa of Avila 2004. p 95.

very different from corporeal union, since there is nothing in this union that is not spiritual. She writes: "It is a union of love with love, and its operations are entirely pure, and so delicate and gentle that there is no way of describing them; but the Lord can make the soul very deeply conscious of them."¹¹² In the Spiritual Marriage, union takes place in the deepest centre of the soul, where God dwells. It is through an intellectual vision that God appears in its centre. Through this union God also shows his love for his creatures. The aim of prayer is for the soul to show God how much it loves Him, this in turn is the purpose of the Spiritual Marriage, of which good works are born.¹¹³

Ahlgren observes that the use of the Sacrament of Matrimony, and the allusions to the Song of Songs, in Teresa's descriptions of union in the fifth and in the sixth dwelling places, have erotic connotations. To understand the inherently erotic dimension of mystical union, *eros*, is to be understood as holistic, not asexual but not "merely" sexual. The erotic dimension of God's love can be understood insofar as *eros* is the creative and connective energy that fuels all movement in relation to God. When Teresa refers to the expansion of the heart it signifies that it is entering its erotic potential. Ahlgren refers to Nakashima Brock (1988) to illustrate this further, and she writes: "[...] *eros* connotes intimacy through the subjective engagement of the whole self in a relationship".¹¹⁴

The language Teresa uses to describe the ecstatic effects of the union in the sixth dwelling place, can be perceived as erotic. Teresa mentions shortness of breath and the doors of the Castle being shut.¹¹⁵ The use of the Song of Songs by Christian mystics expresses the affective dynamics of a life lived in union with Christ,¹¹⁶ but it also describes the desire for God in the language of sensual activity.¹¹⁷

Love consists in the determination to try to please God wholeheartedly and not to offend Him. It is by loving your neighbour and doing good works, that your love towards God is measured. Love towards God can thus not be separated

¹¹² St. Teresa of Avila 2004. p 108.

¹¹³ St. Teresa of Avila 2004. pp 215-216, 233.

¹¹⁴ Ahlgren 2005, p 64.

¹¹⁵ St. Teresa of Avila 2004. p 149.

¹¹⁶ Astell & Cavadini 2013, p 27.

¹¹⁷ Saliers 2013, p 77.

from love towards neighbour. To bring the will into conformity with the will of God is the greatest perfection, but the path towards perfection requires humility. Through prayer, union with God is achieved progressively but it requires self-knowledge. It is also through prayer that the strength to serve God is acquired.

7. Love of God and of Neighbour According to Teresa of Ávila and María de Jesús

Like Teresa of Avila, María de Jesús is also eager for union with God. Her great desire to encounter God can be seen in her visions. Her experiences of their briefness hinders her, at times, from longer interactions with anybody else she might meet in the visionary realm. When referring to God, María uses a familial language more reminiscent of the one that a child uses when addressing his or her parent. God is her dad, and her soul is a little girl. Their relationship is that of a father and a daughter, which is also reflected in her affective narrative. María de Jesús depicts God as a doting father, and she presents herself as a little girl constantly seeking her father's shelter and affection. In her visions, María sees Christ as a child, and she expresses aversion towards describing their union with the metaphor of matrimony.¹¹⁸

Consequently, her language does not become erotic. Teresa of Ávila, on the other hand, uses this metaphor to describe the mystical union with God.¹¹⁹ Teresa also refers to God with an affective language but not with the tenderness prominent in María's journal. Throughout the *Vida* and *The Way of Perfection*, Teresa refers to God as: Your Majesty; Eternal Father; Lord; Your Divine Majesty; Husband; and, My Creator.¹²⁰

Both María de Jesús and Teresa of Ávila use the image of the Castle, but in different ways. To Teresa the Castle represents the Soul, and God dwells in its centre. To María, on the other hand, the Castle is God and the chapels surrounding it are spaces that need to be filled with souls. María uses the imagery of the Castle

¹¹⁸ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 224-225, 238-239.

¹¹⁹ St. Teresa of Avila 2004. pp 108, 215.

¹²⁰ Santa Teresa de Jesús 1954, pp 62, 209, 222, 249, 251, 263. Teresa de Jesús 1987, pp 25, 48, 82, 87, 236, 430.

to illustrate her missionary desire of others' salvation, while Teresa uses it to describe the progressive union with God through prayer.¹²¹

María also shares the concept of God's indwelling deep within the soul. This conclusion can be drawn from reading the narratives of her Eucharistic visions. The ray of light from the altar, which is the Divinity, points to her chest where she can find the Host. It is thus an indicator of where God is. When receiving communion, she locates the place of the encounter with God, within of herself. The Blessed Sacrament as path to encounter God within the soul can be connected to the prayer of recollection she refers to in the passage where she states that she is to love God inwardly.¹²² This form of prayer turns the soul inward, where it is to seek God.¹²³ Teresa writes that she during recollection united the will with God.¹²⁴ Prayer is thus for María an important means for encountering God.

A similar reference to the Blessed Sacrament as an alleviator of afflictions in María de Jesús' narrative, can also be found in Teresa of Ávila's *Way of Perfection*. Here Teresa mentions that the soul can find savour and consolation in the Most Blessed Sacrament.¹²⁵

The humility that Teresa very much insists upon in the *Interior Castle*, can be perceived in the text of María de Jesús by the use of self-depreciatory expressions.¹²⁶ A similarity between María and Teresa is that their visions often come when they receive communion. Examples of this in the case of Teresa can be found in her *Vida*.¹²⁷

Being nuns in enclosure, their serving is more immediately directed towards their fellow sisters in the convent, but it is also done through their prayers for the salvation of others. Although in the case of the *Interior Castle*, Teresa is writing to the nuns of her convent and instructing them on how to love God and neighbour, she also appears concerned for the salvation of those outside of the convent walls.¹²⁸ María de Jesús shares this concern. She expresses that her

¹²¹ St. Teresa of Avila 2004. pp 3, 5. María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? p 231.

¹²² María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 217, 223- 225.

¹²³ *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 2002, vol. 11, s.v. "recollection".

¹²⁴ Teresa de Jesús 1987, pp 139- 140.

¹²⁵ Teresa de Jesús 1987, p 707.

¹²⁶ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 224, 242.

¹²⁷ See Teresa de Jesús 1987, pp 381- 382, 457, 479.

¹²⁸ St. Teresa of Avila 2004. pp 95, xxix.

biggest consolation is that everybody be saved,¹²⁹ and both Teresa and María write of the displeasure of seeing how little God is loved in this world.¹³⁰

Another similarity between these Discalced Carmelites is that they both write of foreseeing somebody's death, and they both, through visions, are given knowledge of the state of salvation of a soul. In her *Vida*, Teresa mentions getting the knowledge that her sister is going to die. She later has a vision in which she sees the Lord taking her sister up to heaven. When praying for a Provincial's release from Purgatory, Teresa sees him ascending to heaven happily, and this consoles her. On one occasion she sees a friar of her order, entering heaven without passing through Purgatory, and concludes that he has taken advantage of the Sabbatine Privilege.¹³¹

Amongst other things, it is by prayers of intercession that María de Jesús and Teresa of Ávila show their love towards neighbour. Both desire the salvation of their neighbour, but what is different is that María stresses the temporal dimension, i.e., she also wishes the salvation of those who yet haven't been born.¹³²

María does not mention self-knowledge, and her theological explanations are not as elaborate as Teresa's. The *Interior Castle* is an instructive treatise in prayer, while María's spiritual journal is a self-written narrative over her spirituality, its purpose isn't explicitly that of teaching. But a scrutiny of the visions of the Blessed Sacrament and the ray of light shows nonetheless that theological depth can be found in María's narrative.

The Teresian presence in María's text can't be denied, and it shouldn't come as a surprise since María was a nun of the order founded by Teresa, and the works of Teresa and of other saints were widely distributed and read in the homes and the convents of Spanish America.¹³³

¹²⁹ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 232- 233.

¹³⁰ St. Teresa of Avila 2004. p 95. Teresa de Jesús 1987, p 73. María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 268-270.

¹³¹ María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 239, 241- 242. Teresa de Jesús 1987, pp 400- 401, 459-460, 462.

¹³² María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950? pp 262, 265, 272.

¹³³ Ibsen 1999, p 62.

8. Conclusion

María de Jesús follows the model of women's spiritual autobiographies when it comes to describing the act of writing as an anguishing task. By means of a vision, María frames this act as the will of Jesus and the saints, Mary and Joseph. Although María throughout her journal employs the rhetoric of femininity and addresses her confessor with respect, she still makes own interpretations of her visions, and some even with great assertiveness. Even though she refers to higher authority i.e. priests, with respect, she's nonetheless not afraid to underline their humanness. As a writing subject she implements humility in her text and stays within the parameters of orthodoxy, however, she displays bravery in making her own interpretations and also by stressing her role as a mediator of the souls.

María de Jesús unites with God through the reception of communion. For her the Blessed Sacrament is an opportunity of encounter with God. When communicating she experiences that God is inside of her, and with the imagery of the ray of light she illustrates the aspects and results of this union, and God's benevolence. God is a good god that never lets her suffer for more than twenty-four hours. He gives her what she asks for, whether that be holding her in his arms or alleviating her or somebody else's suffering, or by releasing souls from Purgatory.

María describes her relationship to God in familial terms. God is her dad, her soul is a little girl, and Christ is a child. The language she uses to describe their relationship is very affectionate and tender. The relationship between God and María is reminiscent of that of a parent and his child. Familial language is also present in her love of neighbour. With the imagery of the heart, María expresses her love of Christ and of humanity. The heart is also an approbation of her apostolate.

The continuing mystical experiences are to María the greatest example of God's love towards her. It is through visions that María is let known if someone has been saved, and it is also through this medium that her role as an intercessor is recognized. María's love towards neighbour can be seen in her desire that everybody be saved, and also in her role as a consoler.

There is a strong Teresian presence in her text. This can be observed in her use of certain rhetorical strategies of humility, for example her use of self-depreciatory language, and expressions like “I understood”, when interpreting a vision. Both María de Jesús and Teresa of Ávila share the belief of God’s indwelling in the soul. Their affective language towards God differs. Teresa addresses God in a more formal manner and she also incorporates a higher degree of sensuality in her language by the use of the metaphor of matrimony and the allusions to the Song of Songs. María, on the other hand, addresses God and the saints in a more informal and colloquial manner. She describes their relationship in familial terms. Her affective language is tenderer. God is preferably a dad than a spouse. María de Jesús’ and Teresa of Ávila’s love towards neighbour can be observed in their desire for others’ salvation, but María also wishes the salvation of those who yet haven’t been born.

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