



# THE TERESIAN DYNAMISM OF THE TABLE OF CONTENTS (NOVEMBER, 2025)

## THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE REVISION OF THE CONSTITUTIONS

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Our Constitutions are the expression and translation of the Teresian charism in juridical language. The constitutional text makes it possible to transmit the charism from generation to generation, organizing the concrete and normative forms in which it can be expressed, lived and followed on all continents. It is important for us to share the Teresian resonance and dynamism of the draft Table of Contents of our Constitutions, and we will do so from two perspectives: *form* and *content*.

### FORM: A DIALOGIC DIMENSION

At first glance, the Table of Contents we have presented offers a **dialogic structure**: each major part, each chapter is, in a certain sense, a response to a demand of Our Holy Mother Teresa of Jesus. In fact, *the Teresian quotations* that precede each chapter are placed there as if they were saying to each sister: "Listen to the call of Saint Teresa, let her take you by the hand to be, day by day, a Discalced Carmelite who puts into practice, with her sisters, what the Church gives you through these Constitutions: to follow Jesus Christ."

This dialogical structure that we have chosen in the Commission has a **strong resonance with the Way of Perfection**, which also bears witness to the conversation between Teresa and her sisters.

### CONTENT: A TERESIAN BREATH

In the spirit of Teresa, the proposed Table of Contents has been opened with *an interior appeal* to welcome the charism received as a call to live in truth, in prayer, in sisterly communion, and on mission: "What do you think we must be like?" (C

4, 1)<sup>1</sup>. And the Table of Contents develops into a *path of learning* to discern, to allow oneself to be formed and grow, step by step, in a “*determined determination*,” faithful to the following of Christ that integrates the whole person. Finally, it takes root in a *lasting communion*: forms of government and of service offered by the Church, are transformed into places where sisterly love and fidelity to Jesus become reality and remain.

Thus, the Teresian dynamism that runs through the Table of Contents is recognized in several signs: **it begins with interiority**, as a grace that must be welcomed; **it grows through sisterly life**, as a love that must be learned; **it is fulfilled in communion**, as a fidelity that must be lived for the Church and for the world.

## The Primacy of the Interior Encounter with Jesus Christ

This is the foundation of Saint Teresa's spiritual journey, corresponding to the first part of the Table of Contents: *charismatic foundation*. The first chapter, “*I was thinking about what I could do for God...*” (V 32, 9), places Teresian identity as an answer to the love of God. It is the foundational experience that Teresa of Jesus relates in the *Book of Her Life*: the awakening of the desire *to do something for God*. The Teresian charism is not born of an abstract idea, but of the loving impact of Jesus Christ in the heart of *la Santa*. It is an experience of interior conversion, of a dynamic of transformation. This develops within the depths of a divine friendship in which prayer is the foundation of the community bond and the ecclesial mission.

The first chapter also highlights the Virgin Mary, “*Mother and Sister*,” and the prophet Elijah, the inspiring figure of Carmel; thus, contemplation is rooted in the history of salvation. Carmel is a Marian and ecclesial space, a “little dovecote of the Virgin” (F 4, 5) where, like her, we carry the world within our prayer.

The following chapter, “*Divine and Human Together*” (VI M 7, 9), conveys one of the most profound aspects of the Teresian experience. In this divine-human unity, Saint Teresa contemplates the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history as the model of the spiritual life. For her, the divine does not cancel what is human but

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<sup>1</sup> C = Way of Perfection; V = Life; M = Interior Castle; F = Foundations.

rather transfigures it. This perspective of Teresian humanism underlies the presentation of the following of Christ and of the evangelical counsels through the articulation of the theological life and human maturity.

*The “Teresian Life”* in Chapter 3 reflects the dynamic identity developed in *The Way of Perfection*, gathering the three fundamental virtues of the interior journey—love, detachment and humility — which strongly link sisterly life with the life of prayer. Indeed, for the Holy Mother, friendship is a pedagogical and charismatic instrument. God educates through sisterly relationship. Thus, Teresian dynamism roots the individual process *in community life*: we do not move toward God alone, but with the others and for the others. The latter is particularly expressed in Chapter 4, which presents “*Our Mission*.”

In chapter 5, the expression “...do that which best stirs you to love” (IV M 1, 7) reveals the movement of grace acting in the hearts of Teresa and her sisters: it is God who awakens love, and the soul cooperates with freedom of heart. The life of solitude and silence, the enclosure, are privileged means for promoting the contemplative life. They are, in themselves, a space of interior transformation that favors the unification of our being and inserts it into the mystery of Christ, in the heart of the world. In legal language, the enclosure is a constitutive element of the nuns' own right. In the Teresian perspective, it ensures the scope and the continuity of the interior movement in which the soul walks inwards, where the living God dwells.

“*What do you think we must be like?*” This quote, which expresses the spiritual search for vocation in *The Way of Perfection*, becomes here the **juridical principle of identity**. The life of prayer, sisterly life and mission, the essential triad of the Teresian charism, are expressed as **constitutive elements of the Order's own law**. The canonical translation is carried out through the complementarity of grace with the norm: prayer is no longer just an experience, but a vocational commitment; sisterly communion implies a way of life; mission, a goal recognized by the Church. Thus, the first part of the Table of Contents establishes the spiritual source of the Teresian charism legally, guaranteeing its **institutional recognition**.

## Formation, a Spiritual Pedagogy

The second part, *Formation and Admission*, is structured entirely according to the formula of the book of *The Foundations*: “...the foundation for those who are to come.” (F 4, 6). Formation is described as an ongoing process, reflecting Teresa's firm determination to always move forward: “Now we are beginning, and ... strive to advance always from good to better.” (F 29, 32). Here we have the expression of an explicitly Teresian pedagogy: to begin and to begin always.

This part of the Table of Contents introduces us to a dynamic community of formation, which is understood as integral, human, and spiritual development within a sisterly setting. For Saint Teresa, the community is precisely the place for spiritual growth through friendship, dialogue, and accompaniment.

The last chapter of this second part, “*Fidelity to the Charism*,” echoes like a juridical translation of the “*determined determination*”: “*They must have a great and very resolute determination to persevere until reaching the end*” (C 21, 2). This expression is like the center of the Teresian dynamism: an active perseverance that increases the grace received. The Table of Contents translates this as “*remaining*,” a sign of creative fidelity. The obligation to “*observe the Constitutions*” then becomes, not a restriction, but an act of faithful love, a living response to charismatic grace.

Thus, the second part, *Formation and Admission*, is the juridical translation of the process of spiritual growth. That which in Teresa of Jesus is an inner learning of fidelity, is expressed in the Table of Contents in the conjugation of the different canonical stages of initial formation (aspirancy, postulancy, novitiate, profession) and ongoing formation. Inner freedom becomes ecclesial commitment, and mystical fidelity to the call received becomes juridical stability.

## Government, a Communion in Progress

In addressing structures of government, relationships of authority, and the management of goods, the third part of the Constitutions, “*Communion and Government*,” expresses a spiritual movement of ecclesial communion. In St. Teresa, communion is not merely an organizational outcome, but a mystical experience. It is the fruit of union with Christ that flows within and among the

sisters. The Table of Contents emphasizes this by stating that internal government should be developed “in a harmonious manner, favoring the integral growth of each sister and of the community as a whole.” This principle of “harmony” is the juridical transcription of Teresa’s words in *The Way of Perfection*: “...*all must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, all must be helped.* (C 4, 7).

The chapter on the prioress, the council, and community chapters follows this logic: responsibility takes the form of service, and obedience is understood as shared discernment. For Teresa, authority is not opposed to freedom. It is a ministry of love that seeks the good of the other. Thus, Teresian dynamism expresses: hierarchy in communion of responsibilities, and government in the exercise of charity.

The opening chapter of the third part, on “Canonical Status,” quotes the words of Our Holy Mother: “...*with me it was like being in glory to see the Blessed Sacrament reserved*” (V 36, 6). This phrase indicates that the foundation of a monastery was only complete once the Eucharist had been celebrated, as the Eucharist is the center of sisterly life and government, and organizes the space and time of Carmel. “Communion and government” are not two distinct realities: Eucharistic unity becomes the principle of the common life and the norm for all authority.

The following chapters, on collaborative relationships with the Federations and Associations, and governmental relationships with the Superiors of the Order and the Bishops, reflect a widening of communion: an ecclesial openness. For the Holy Mother, the Church is the living Body of Christ, where each vocation is integrated as service. In this spirit, the Table of Contents considers these instances of government as an act of communion with superiors that also expresses a juridical relationship.

The last chapter on the “*administration of goods*,” “*Your eyes on your Spouse! He will sustain you*” (C 2, 1), links the economic dimension with evangelical poverty: all goods belong to God, the source and the fulfilment of the community. Poverty becomes the concrete expression of a communion that trusts in God, that converts into a norm for management and a visible sign of dependence on God. Here the Teresian echoes of chapter 2 of the *Way of Perfection* are evident.

The *epilogue* to the Table of Contents takes up the promise of the *Way of Perfection* (cf. 4, 1): *If, with the favor of Our Lord and the glorious Virgin Mother of God, we strive to observe our Rule and Constitutions very carefully, I hope in the Lord that our prayers will be heard.* St. Teresa does not separate fidelity to the Rule and the Constitutions from the life of prayer. For her, the law is not a limitation, but a space of growing in love. To be faithful is to walk: fidelity to the charism is a fidelity in progress, a communion that is constantly renewed and deepened, at the very rhythm of grace.

## FROM TERESIAN SPIRIT TO JURIDICAL FORM

The Table of Contents reveals a profoundly ecclesial vision. Law is not alien to charism but rather offers it a visible form in time. Each part of the Table of Contents translates an essential aspect of charismatic grace: **contemplative source** (Part I) becomes juridical identity, **spiritual pedagogy** (Part II), canonical processes and **mystical communion** (Part III), structures of government. This movement inscribes in law the dynamic of a grace received by Teresa, a grace that never ceases to engender life. The inner breath of Teresa of Jesus is transformed into a **lasting ecclesial form**. The juridical text sustains the spiritual dynamic, framing and protecting it.

The Table of Contents is like a living mirror of this Teresian path, where the institutional form becomes *a space of grace and hope* for each community, each sister. This is reflected in the Teresian Dynamism of the Table of Contents of our Constitutions: *to begin from within, to move forward together, and to go always from good to better.*

The International Commission