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The Metamorphosis of the Silkworm into a Butterfly: A Teresian Model of Formation

**We have agreed not to share Fr. Daniel's presentation
beyond the USA/Canada before November, 2017**

The theme of my conference is: “The Metamorphosis of the Silkworm into a Butterfly: A Teresian Model of Formation.” As you recognize, my theme is based on St. Teresa’s metaphor of the silkworm and the butterfly in the Fifth Dwelling Places of the *Interior Castle*. My starting point is the theme of formation presented in section 5 of the *Apostolic Constitution: Vultum Dei Quaerere*, which is the longest part that addresses the essential elements of the contemplative life. However, initial formation is not the primary focus of my reflection, because we have had endless discussions on initial formation, but rather the intrinsic relationship between initial and continuing formation which has become central in contemporary writings and reflections on the subject of formation.

One of the complaints I have heard since the publication of *Vultum Dei Quaerere* is that it lacks a Carmelite spirit, that is, themes such as the eremitical spirit are missing. We must remember that VDQ is a generic document that presents the essential elements of the contemplative life for all Orders of women’s contemplative life. Therefore, to supplement the missing Carmelite perspective, I will include in my presentation a Carmelite Teresian/Sanjuanist theme. I will also refer to your *Ratio Institutionis for Nuns’ formation in the Teresian Carmel* published in 2003, a document that I believe has much to contribute to my topic.

Formation: A Life Process of Integration and Transformation

In the *Apostolic Constitution*, Pope Francis begins by affirming the fundamental purpose of formation by quoting from *Vita Consecrata*, 65. Chapter one of your *Ratio* also begins with the same text:

“The primary objective of the formation process is to prepare people for the total consecration of themselves to God in the following of Christ, at the service of the Church's mission. To say

"yes" to the Lord's call by taking personal responsibility for maturing in one's vocation is the inescapable duty of all who have been called. One's whole life must be open to the action of the Holy Spirit, travelling the road of formation with generosity, and accepting in faith the means of grace offered by the Lord and the Church. Formation should therefore have a profound effect on individuals, so that their every attitude and action, at important moments as well as in the ordinary events of life, will show that they belong completely and joyfully to God. Since the very purpose of consecrated life is conformity to the Lord Jesus in his total self-giving, this must also be the principal objective of formation. Formation is a path of gradual identification with the attitude of Christ towards the Father. (VC. 65)

Precisely because it aims at the transformation of the whole person, it is clear that the commitment to formation never ends. Indeed, at every stage of life, consecrated persons must be offered opportunities to grow in their commitment to the charism and mission of their Institute. For formation to be complete, it must include every aspect of Christian life. It must therefore provide a human, cultural, spiritual and pastoral preparation which pays special attention to the harmonious integration of all its various aspects." (VC, 65)

One of the richest characteristics of *Vita Consecrata* is its Trinitarian perspective of consecrated life. It offers a biblical icon of formation: Christ offers himself out of love for the Father to his brothers and sisters in the self-emptying event (*kenosis*) of his passion. The purpose of formation is to help those in formation enter into a process of formation and freedom by which they progressively identify with the attitude of Christ's self-gift to the Father. (Phil. 2:5)

However, I would like to say something about the English translation of number 65. In my perception, the English translation differs from the Italian, French, and Spanish translation and lacks the nuanced richness of the Italian French and Spanish editions. If I were to translate their text into English ("by which they progressively identify with the attitude of Christ's self-gift to the Father"), I would translate as "*a progressive appropriation (assimilation) of Christ's attitudes towards the Father.*" In other words, there is more than just identification here, but an assimilation, an appropriation of Jesus' inner attitudes (sentiments) towards the Father.

Through the action of the Holy Spirit, the Father forms us into the image of Christ. We are gradually transformed to re-present the life that Christ lived, not only in his apostolic life, but to assimilate his same attitudes towards the Father: his passionate love for the Father, his poverty, chastity, obedience, humility, loving surrender to the Father's will even in the face of death, his love for the poor and marginalized, his compassion and mercy for the sick and sinners. True formation is not a series of external dispositions, but a quality of the heart that involves a change in our way of thinking and loving (*metanoia* in the Gospel sense of a change of mind and heart). It draws us into a progressive process of transformation of our desires (emotional life) and our

way of relating to God, others, and the world. I think that St. Elizabeth of the Trinity has expressed the goal of formation beautifully in her prayer to the Trinity: “*O Consuming Fire, Spirit of Love, “come upon me” and make my soul another incarnation of the Word so that I can be another humanity in which he renews his mystery.*” Formation is allowing the Holy Spirit, the primary agent of formation, to transform us into another humanity of Christ (to radiate Christ) in order to renew Christ’s redemptive mission of compassion and love in our world.

Furthermore, your *Ratio 26*, as well as VC, remind us that formation (both initial and ongoing) concerns the integration of the whole person that takes place throughout the various stages of personal maturity and frees one to offer one’s whole life to God. St. Teresa states the goal of all formation in the *Way of Perfection*, which is her *Ratio* of formation: “*Because everything I have advised you about in this book is directed toward the complete gift of ourselves to the Creator, the surrender of our wills to His, and detachment from creatures.*” (W.32.9)

Vita Consecrata emphasizes that the transformation process never ends. “The formation process is not limited to the initial phase. Due to human limitations, the consecrated person can never claim to have completely brought to life the “new creature” who, in every circumstance of life, reflects the very mind of Christ. *Initial* formation, then, should be closely connected with *continuing* formation, thereby creating a readiness on everyone's part to let themselves be formed every day of their lives.¹

Continuing formation, therefore, is not something that only follows initial formation: the postulancy, novitiate, temporary profession, and solemn profession. Rather, continuing formation understood as ongoing conversion and transformation of the whole person is the goal of religious life: to assimilate the attitudes of Jesus Christ (his way of being, loving and relating), and his self-offering to the Father for the good of humanity.

The 2002 document *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium* highlights the intrinsic relationship between initial and ongoing formation:

15. The times in which we are living call for a general rethinking of the formation of consecrated men and women, which is no longer limited to one period of life. Not only to enable them to become better able to insert themselves into a reality which changes with a rhythm which is often frenetic but also and more importantly because consecrated life itself, of its nature, calls for constant openness of those who are called to it. In fact, consecrated life is in itself “a

¹ VC, 69.

progressive taking on the attitude of Christ,” it seems evident that such a path must endure for a lifetime and involve the whole person, heart, mind, and strength (cf. Mt 22:37) reshaping the person in the likeness of the Son who gives himself to the Father for the good of humanity. Thus, understood, formation is no longer only a teaching period in preparation for vows, but also represents a *theological* way of thinking of consecrated life which is in itself a never “ending formation “sharing in the work of the Father who, through the Spirit, fashions in the heart the inner attitudes of the Son.”

This text makes an interesting clarification: more than just pedagogical, formation is *theological*. It is a theological way of thinking and living, a Trinitarian experience.

Chapter 3 of your *Ratio*, entitled “Formation a Life Process,” makes reference to the same document:

“Religious formation is at the service of the person and the grace of her vocation throughout her life. It respects and stimulates the progression and the rhythms of growth in each person, and helps her to leave aside whatever may prevent her from reaching the prize of the heavenly call...to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. (Phil. 3:12-16; Eph 4:13) While it is true that this formation, particularly at the beginning, involves a certain amount of doctrinal and spiritual instruction, it consists above all in introducing a person into the living reality of Carmel. This was the way that the Lord acted with his disciples when he invited them to come and see, and to experience what he himself was living.” (23)

A Teresian model of formation

Initial and continuing formation as a life-long process of transformation into Christ has deep resonances in our Carmelite tradition. Transformation lies at the heart of our charism. Our Carmelite saints witness to the power of God’s transforming love at work in our minds and hearts, dispelling the interior darkness that prevents us from embracing the light of God’s unconditional love, freeing us from addictive behavior, purging us of selfishness, awakening us to the awesome beauty of God’s creation, opening our eyes to the dignity of each person, and enlarging our capacity to love as God loves.

To speak of transformation into Christ draws us into a reflection on the purpose of our creation and our divine vocation to union with God through love. Every human being longs for God, whether or not we are conscious of it. The source of our longing for God comes from God. We were created out of love and for love, created for an intimate loving relationship with God, others and creation. To quote St. John of the Cross, “*What God seeks, he being God by nature, is to make us gods through participation, just as fire converts all things into fire.*” (M.107) This is a powerful assertion. In other words, we were created to share in divine life (divinization) and

thus to radiate God's life, love, and beauty in this world. Again, from the *Spiritual Canticle* of St. John of the Cross, we bear within us a "certain sketch of love," the image of Christ the Beloved and we will never know full health of satisfaction of heart until this sketch is completed.² (SC.11.11) Our vocation, therefore, is to grow in the image and likeness of Christ the Beloved. Drawing from the language and symbols of our Carmelite tradition, we can say that the purpose of our religious life, and thus the purpose of initial and ongoing formation (all of Christian life), is the life-long process of the completion of the "sketch of the Beloved" that we bear within us by our very creation and by the Sacrament of Baptism. Our vocation as Christians and Carmelites is to make space for God so that the Holy Spirit can transform us into the image and likeness of Christ and thus participate in divine life and radiate God's redeeming love in this world.

Another dimension of our vocation to union with God is that we are already in union with God by our very creation. God dwells in the depths of our being. As St. Paul tells us, "*In Him we live, move, and have our being.*" (Acts) St. Teresa's fundamental mystical experience is the deepening awareness of the indwelling of the Trinity in the depths of her heart that healed and transformed her into a new person. Her experience of God's indwelling presence becomes the center of her life and doctrine, explained so profoundly in all her works, especially the *Interior Castle*.

If God were not the ground of our being, we would fall out of existence. Yet, we are not always consciously aware of this essential union (God's presence by creation), nor do we always experience its transforming power. Only the grace of God can "awaken" us, grace us with a conscious experience of God's divine presence, an experience that will transform our hearts and minds. (SC.11.3) This is mystical experience. Mystical experience is not about mystical phenomenon (visions, locutions, ecstasies), rather mystical experience is a personal encounter with God through faith. The mystics tell us that the mystical life rests on the originating mystery of God's presence within the heart of each person and in reality. This Mystery is not a concept or

² It should be known that love never reaches perfection until the lovers are so alike that one is transfigured in the other. And then the love is in full health. The soul experiences within herself a certain sketch of love, which is the sickness she mentions, and she desires the completion of the sketch of this image, the image of her Bridegroom, the Word, the Son of God, who, as St. Paul says, *is the splendor of his glory and the image of his substance* [[Heb. 1:3](#)]; for this is the image referred to in this verse and into which the soul desires to be transformed through love. As a result she says: For the sickness of love is not cured except by your very presence and image. (SC.11.12)

inert object, but a living Presence who offers and gives itself in loving relationship. The mystics have made contact with this Presence by entering into a personal relationship with this Living Presence. Faith is the response to this Presence. St. John of the Cross tells us in the *Spiritual Canticle*, “faith gives and communicates God himself.” (SC.12.4) In this sense, mystical experience takes place through faith. Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis remind us in *Deus Caritas Est*, and *Lumen Fidei*, that faith is not a lofty idea, or dogma, but “*is born from an encounter with the living God who calls us and reveals his love.*” (*Lumen Fidei*, 4) This encounter in faith transforms us; therefore, mystical experience is a personal and transforming encounter with the divine mystery.

Therefore, another way to articulate a Carmelite conception of initial and ongoing formation (of our vocation as religious and our journey of transformation) is an ever-deepening personal relationship with God through faith who awakens us (graces us) to his loving and transforming presence in our hearts and in all creation, an experience that will transform us and change our way of knowing, loving and being in this world. This awakening to God’s presence is beautifully and profoundly expressed in the *Living Flame of Love*:

How gently and lovingly
 You wake in my heart,
 Where in secret you dwell alone;
 And in your sweet breathing,
 Filled with good and glory,
 How tenderly you swell my heart with love.

However, to ponder the meaning of transformation is to tread upon sacred ground. Transformation is a mystery. In the *Living Flame of Love*, John tells us that “*transformation of the soul in God is indescribable.*” (LI 3:8) This is why our saints resort to poetry and metaphors to speak of the mysterious process of change that takes place in our lives under the influence of God’s grace. Fire that penetrates a log of wood and gradually transforms the log into fire is only one of the many metaphors John of the Cross uses to describe the process of deepening union with God through love. (*The Dark Night* and *The Living Flame of Love*)

The silkworm and butterfly: A Teresian Model of Formation

In the *Interior Castle*, Teresa explains the journey of deepening union with Christ as a process of dying and rising analogous to a silk worm that undergoes a mysterious metamorphosis

in a cocoon and emerges as a butterfly (5M). I believe this symbol in the Fifth Dwelling Places offers us an evocative model (metaphor) for initial and ongoing formation.

Scholars are not sure where Teresa learned about the silkworm, perhaps in Andalucia, because she wrote the pages of the Fifth Dwelling Places shortly after her return from there. As you recall, the Fifth Dwelling Places are the dwelling places of the mystical prayer of union. Therefore, the theme of union with God is central to her reflection.

In chapter two of the 5th dwelling places, Teresa describes the Christian journey symbolized as a process of metamorphosis, the transformation of a silkworm into a butterfly. Teresa discerns three stages in this process.

The first stage is the little silkworms, which are born like the size of little grains of pepper, begin to nourish themselves. When the weather becomes warm, little silkworms nourish themselves on mulberry leaves. Enclosed within the cocoon the worm dies, and eventually a little white butterfly emerges from the cocoon. (5D.2.2)

Teresa elaborates and explains her metaphor. The silkworm represents each one of us as we begin our spiritual journey. We begin to live by the heat of the Holy Spirit (the inspiration of the Holy Spirit). We make use of the help given us by God and the Church: The Sacraments (confession and spiritual direction which helps us to grow in self-knowledge), good reading (Scripture, lectio divina, theology, and spiritual books), hearing sermons (the liturgy, listening to the Word of God) - all of these means enlighten us, feed our mind and heart, and help us to grow in the life of the Spirit.

This is a good explanation of not only initial formation, but of the pedagogical and intellectual dimension of formation we need at every stage of formation, depending upon our needs, interests, and our stage of life. I am impressed by your *Ratio* and the sections on the instruction recommended for the various stages in formation, beginning with postulancy and continuing to formation after solemn profession. The *Ratio* stresses the importance of the study of Sacred Scripture, the art of lectio divina, formation in contemplative prayer, a progressive reading of the writings of our Saints, theology, and other spiritual authors.

The *Appendices* propose programs for study from postulancy to solemn profession, a table of program that extends over four years. Of course, as in all *Ratios*, (including the friars), it is impossible to study all that the *Ratio* recommends, but the *appendices* offer direction, and so

with creativity and the interests and particular needs of the sisters, you can prepare a solid program for all stages of formation.

The second stage: With this nourishment, the silkworm becomes fat and ugly, and it settles on some twigs, and begins to spin the silk and make little cocoons in which they enclose themselves. She writes:

“Well once this silkworm is grown -- in the beginning I dealt with its growth^[2] -- it begins to spin the silk and build the house wherein it will die. I would like to point out here that this house is Christ. Somewhere, it seems to me, I have read or heard that our life is hidden in Christ or in God (both are the same), or that our life is Christ... Therefore, courage, my daughters! Let's be quick to do this work and weave this little cocoon by getting rid of our self-love and self-will, our attachments to any earthly things, and by performing deeds of penance, prayer, mortification, obedience, and of all the other things you know. Would to heaven that we would do what we know we must; and we are instructed about what we must do. Let it die; let this silkworm die, as it does in completing what it was created to do! (5D.2:4,6)

How do we weave the cocoon? Teresa tells us that we weave the cocoon by “getting rid of our self-love and self-will, our attachment to any earthly thing, and by performing deeds of penance, prayer, and mortification, obedience, and of all other things you know.” (6) We could say that this is the primary work of the first four dwelling places of the *Interior Castle*, although this is the work of a life time for we will always be striving to get rid of self-love. We do our part to dispose ourselves for our desired union with God and deeper transformation. I think Teresa would tell us that main way we weave the cocoon is striving to live the fundamental virtues of love of neighbor, detachment and true humility that she teaches in the *Way of Perfection*. The *Way of Perfection* is Teresa's *Ratio*, her formation manual. When writing the *Way of Perfection* for the young community of St. Joseph's, Teresa was interested more in forming women of prayer than teaching them a method of prayer. She was concerned about their “being,” the quality of their daily lives and relationships and living the Gospel as perfectly as possible.

Teresa knew from personal experience that to be “a servant of love,” (L.11.1) a person of prayer, we need a formation in these three fundamental virtues.

“Before I say anything about interior matters, that is, about prayer, I shall mention some things that are necessary for those who seek to follow the way of prayer; so necessary that even if these persons are not very contemplative, they can be far advanced in the service of the Lord if they possess these things. And if they do not possess them, it is impossible for them to be very contemplative. And if they think they are, they are being highly deceived. (W.4.3)

“It is very important that we understand how much the practice of these three things helps us to possess inwardly and outwardly the peace our Lord recommended so highly to us. The first of these is love for one another; the second is detachment from all created things; the third is true humility, which, even though I speak of it last, is the main practice and embraces all the others.” (W.4.4)

Three important words: love, freedom, and humility (truth). We can see them as dispositions of the heart we need to cultivate constantly in our daily lives. Striving to grow in these virtues draws us into a path of transformation, conversion, of human and evangelical maturity. Fr. Saverio has spoken about the need for “a Teresian formation of the person” and a “school of Teresian humanity.” With these virtues, we enter into “the school of Teresian humanity” because they transform our relationships to God, others, creation, and ourselves. They transform us into loving, free, and authentic people. They free us and make us more mature and relational. They are the foundation of human and Christian maturity because they conform us to Jesus Christ. They create an environment in which prayer can blossom and deepen. We know from experience that we cannot pray in an atmosphere where there are unresolved interpersonal conflicts, when material things or other people enslave us, or when we are not striving to grow in self-knowledge and mutual respect, which are signs of true humility. Contemplative living requires an atmosphere of peace.

It is not enough for us to study these chapters in the *Way of Perfection* in the novitiate. Growing in these virtues are a way of life, for we are always in the process of becoming more loving, freer, and humble. They become the litmus test of an authentic contemplative life. “*So necessary that even if these persons are not very contemplative, they can be far advanced in the service of the Lord if they possess these things. And if they do not possess them, it is impossible for them to be very contemplative. And if they think they are, they are being highly deceived.*” (W.4.3)

Weaving the cocoon and then enclosing ourselves in the cocoon means becoming interior and doing the inner work of self-knowledge. Teresa compares this inner work of self-knowledge to the “*bee making honey in the beehive.*” (1D.2.8)

The third stage of this metamorphosis process is dying. When we enclose ourselves in the cocoon we enter into the Pascal mystery of Jesus Christ wherein we undergo a death to the old self and rise to new life in Christ. Teresa writes: “*Let it die, let this silkworm die, as it does in*

completing what it was created to do.” What is the worm that must die in order to rise to new life as a butterfly? Teresa gives us some idea of what has to die in her *Soliloquies*: *“May this “I” die, and may another live in me greater than I and better for me than I, so that I may serve Him. May He live and give me life. May He reign, and may I be captive, for my soul doesn't want any other liberty.”* (S.17.3)

The “I-worm” that must die is our egotism (selfishness) that manifests itself in so many ways in our relationships with God and others. I mentioned the “inner thief” in Chapter 10 of the *Way of Perfection*. When Teresa speaks of detachment she gives us a wonderful parable of the meaning of true detachment and the inner work involved in becoming free.

“Once we have detached ourselves from the world and from relatives and have enclosed ourselves here under the conditions that were mentioned, it seems that we have done all there is to do and that we don't have to struggle with anything. Oh, my Sisters, do not feel secure or let yourselves go to sleep! By feeling secure you would resemble someone who very tranquilly lies down after having locked his doors for fear of thieves while allowing the thieves to remain inside the house. And you already know that there is no worse thief than we ourselves. For if you do not walk very carefully and if each Sister is not alert in going against her own will as though doing so were more important than all else, there are many things that will take away this holy freedom of spirit by which you can fly to your Maker without being held down by clay or leaden feet.” (W.10.1)

This parable is rich in meaning because it tells us that the true thief is the one who lives in our heart, our psyche. It is the egotistical self who wants to impose itself on others, the egocentric self who wants to be the center of attention and who doesn't want to cooperate with the prioress or the community. It is the thief that always has to have the last word or dominate community recreation, or who has “the habit of speaking and complaining about everything,” (W.11.2). The thief may be the one who clings to thoughts such as “I have seniority;” “I am older;” “I have done more work;” “The other is treated better than I;” “I was right; they had no reason to do this to me; the one who did this to me was wrong.” (W.12.4; 13.1) The inner thief is our tendency to work against authority or the community and cause divisions. We all know how such divisions in a community, or conflictive relationships in the enclosure can divide and even destroy a community. Teresa warns us against self-preoccupation and selfish pride. She tells us that we have to remain vigilant. The grille, the habit, and the enclosure do not spare us from the interior work that our religious life demands. They should not give us the illusion that we are serving God when we lose sight of our personal issues and where we must grow.

The well-ordered souls abiding in the Third Dwelling places gives us another idea of what needs to die: the ego that holds a tight control over its life. The description of the people in these dwelling places refers especially to people living religious life. Teresa herself resided in these dwelling places for years. Teresa praises the spiritual progress of these people: their dedication to prayer, their acts of charity towards their neighbor, their balanced use of speech and how they govern their business. But she also fears for them because they live on the superficial level with their “little acts of virtue.” Their lives are too controlled; they live too much “by their reason.” They think that their well-ordered and balanced spiritual lives and their efforts will transform them. They are unconscious of their fragility and deeper poverty and how dependent they are on God’s grace. It is for this reason that Teresa writes: *“Let us prove ourselves, my sisters, or let the Lord prove us, for He knows well how to do this even though we often don't want to understand it.”* (7) These third mansion dwellers need humility: “Oh, humility, humility!” St. Teresa loudly proclaims - humility in the sense of knowing the truth of who they are, their dark and fragile selves, and how dependent they are on God’s grace in order to grow in holiness.

Holiness, transformation, is not the fruit of the “I”, (the ego) who thinks it can force God’s hand. It is for this reason that God must try us through the trials that reveal the deeper places of our heart – our weaknesses and miseries. Teresa speaks of trials the nuns would not expect: a rich person who suffers financial loss, and becomes overwhelmed by worry as though he had no bread to eat; a person who is overcome by sadness because they have lost some of their honor and good reputation. The reaction of these people reveals that they are not as detached and free as they imagined.

Teresa gives these examples to show that trials come to us unexpectedly and can be a salutary means to our growth because they reveal our fragility, woundedness, where we are enslaved, where we need conversion. Trials and temptations reveal how radically dependent we are on God’s grace for growth in holiness. Transformation is God’s work, not the result of our ego, of our reasoning and little acts of virtue.

Another poignant text is in the 5th Dwelling Places. You recall that the 5th Dwelling Places are those of the prayer of union. Teresa begins the first chapter by reminding us of our call to prayer and contemplation.

So, I say now that all of us who wear this holy habit of Carmel are called to prayer and contemplation. This call explains our origin; we are the descendants of men who felt this call, of those holy fathers on Mount Carmel who in such great solitude and contempt for the world

sought this treasure, this precious pearl of contemplation that we are speaking about. Yet few of us dispose ourselves that the Lord may communicate it to us. In exterior matters we are proceeding well so that we will reach what is necessary; but in the practice of the virtues that are necessary for arriving at this point we need very, very much and cannot be careless in either small things or great. (5D.1.2)

Having reminded her sisters of the call to contemplation, this pearl of great price we carry within us, she makes a profound and insightful observation:

Nonetheless, take careful note, daughters, that it is necessary for the silkworm to die, and, moreover, at a cost to yourselves. In the delightful union,^[7] the experience of seeing oneself in so new a life greatly helps one to die; in the other union,^[8] it's necessary that, while living in this life, we ourselves put the silkworm to death.

But alas for us, how few there must be who reach it; although whoever guards himself against offending the Lord and has entered religious life thinks he has done everything! Oh, but there remain some worms, unrecognized until, like those in the story of Jonah that gnawed away the ivy,^[9] they have gnawed away the virtues. This happens through self-love, self-esteem, judging one's neighbors (even though in little things), a lack of charity for them, and not loving them as ourselves. For even though, while crawling along, we fulfill our obligation and no sin is committed, we don't advance very far in what is required for complete union with the will of God. (5D.3.5-6)

In this text, we have a clear idea of the interior worms that must die. We may avoid serious sin and imperfections; we observe the community horarium, e.g. the hours of prayer and the external observance. We diligently fulfill our community assignments; nevertheless, all is not well under the surface. We may have stopped growing; we may be in the grips of *acedia*. There may exist within us areas of sin and imperfection of which we are unconscious and wound our relationships with others: *“a certain self-love, judging others even in little things, a lack of charity for them, not loving them as ourselves”* – jealousy, envy, pride, an unforgiving spirit toward our neighbor, a lack of generosity. These are the worms that erode the ivy of our interior lives and stunt our growth in evangelical love. We must recognize these worms and expose them to the Lord's purifying and healing gaze. This is the level of self-knowledge and inner work of ongoing formation that never ends. Ongoing formation is education (*educare*). In Latin *educare* means “to draw out that which lies within,” the depths of our heart. Teresa insists on this self-knowledge:

“This path of self-knowledge must never be abandoned, nor is there on this journey a soul so much a giant that it has no need to return often to the stage of an infant and a suckling. And this should never be forgotten. Perhaps I shall speak of it more often^[10] because it is very important. There is no stage of prayer so sublime that it isn't necessary to return often to the beginning. Along this path of prayer, self-knowledge and the thought of one's sins is the bread with which

all palates must be fed no matter how delicate they may be; they cannot be sustained without this bread.” (L.13.15)

Teresa challenges us to know and understand our human dignity as a dwelling place of God, our gifts and talents, our deeper motivations, behavior, relationships, antipathies, the way we speak to others, or choose not to speak to others, and the way we relate to authority. Such self-knowledge helps us to grow in true humility (the truth of who we are) which is the foundation of the spiritual life.

Teresa touches on the heart of our religious life: love of God and love of neighbor.

Here in our religious life the Lord asks of us only two things: love of His Majesty and love of our neighbor. These are what we must work for. By observing them with perfection, we do His will and so will be united with Him. But how far, as I have said, we are from doing these two things for so great a God as we ought! May it please His Majesty to give us His grace so that we might merit, if we want, to reach this state that lies within our power. (5D.3.7)

True union with the will of God is a matter of love, living the great commandment of love of God and neighbor.

In the House of Christ

Teresa tells us clearly that true union with the will of God is that we do our part to put the silkworm to death by striving to grow in virtue and thus become loving people. However, we know from our experience, and Teresa would agree with us, that putting the worm to death is not the result solely of human effort. In St. John of the Cross’ prayer of “*A Soul Taken in Love*,” we hear this cry: “*Who can free themselves from lowly manners and limitations if you do not lift them to yourself, my God, in purity of love? How will human beings begotten and nurtured in lowliness rise up to you, Lord, if you do not raise them with your hand that made them?*” (M.26)

Teresa lived many years in a state of mediocrity and broken fidelity. She tasted the dregs of her own fragility and incapacity to free herself from her affective attachments. It was the Lord who freed her progressively, in Lent of 1554 before the image of the wounded Christ, then two years later in 1556 by the power of the Holy Spirit. “*May God be blessed forever because in an instant He gave me the freedom that I with all the efforts of many years could not attain by myself, often trying so to force myself that my health had to pay dearly.*” (L.24.8) True conversion is a grace, not the result of human effort. John of the Cross stresses that purification and transformation is ultimately beyond human effort: “*In this cure God will heal them of what*

through their own efforts they were unable to remedy. No matter how much individuals do through their own efforts, they cannot actively purify themselves enough to be disposed in the least degree for the divine union of the perfection of love. God must take over and purge them in that fire that is dark for them.” (1N.3.3)

Once the silkworm is grown, it begins to spin the silk and build the house wherein it will die; this house is Christ. The Pascal Mystery of our dying and rising takes place in Christ, in our intimate friendship with Christ.

It is in our relationship with Christ through prayer understood as an “intimate sharing between friends, spending time alone with the one whom we know loves us,” (L.8.5) that we are transformed and learn how to love as God loves. God’s love heals and transforms us. This is the central message of Carmel: prayer transforms us into new people, and transforms the world. In chapter 8 of the *Life* Teresa tells us that because our will is not in accord with God’s will, and because we don’t yet love Him as He loves us, we will have to endure the pain of spending a long time with the one who is different from us. But if we endure patiently this difference and remain faithful to prayer, the Lord will purify and heal us, and conform us more and more to Himself.

“I can speak of what I have experience of. It is that in spite of any wrong they who practice prayer do, they must not abandon prayer since it is the means by which they can remedy the situation; and to remedy it without prayer would be much more difficult... How certainly You do suffer the one who suffers to be with You! Oh, what a good friend You make, my Lord! How You proceed by favoring and enduring. You wait for the others to adapt to Your nature, and in the meanwhile You put up with theirs!” (L.8.5.6)

In the book of her *Life*, Teresa tells us that she became a very different person as a result of the graces of contemplative prayer. (L.27.1)³

Prayer as a path of transformation requires a serious commitment and fidelity to contemplative prayer. The temptation to activism and to flee from dry and difficult prayer can assail us and we fail to remain faithful to the hours of contemplative prayer the Church asks of us. On the other hand, we have to avoid rigidity because life makes its demands and there are days when we are unable to remain peacefully with the Lord as we would like; for instance, when we need to assist a sick sister, see a physician, or attend to an urgent material need of the monastery

³ I saw that I was a completely different person. I could not desire another path, but I placed myself in the hands of God that He would carry out His will completely in me; He knew what suited me. (L.27.1)

like when the basement floods or the plumbing shuts down. St. Teresa tells us in the *Foundations* that when it comes to obedience and charity, we leave God for God. (F.5) As we know, prayer is a way of being, not simply an exercise we engage in two hours a day.

The temptation of acedia knocks at the door of everyone who strives to live an intense spiritual life and who undergoes the desert of interior trials. This is why it is important to provide for a good formation in contemplative prayer on the anthropological and theological level so that we will grow into a mature faith life and remain faithful to prayer in difficult times. Numbers 71, 72, and 91 of your *Ratio* address the need for accompaniment during the “desert” experiences in initial formation and later on.

Teresa hopes that our prayer will become more contemplative, more passive. This is especially her desire beginning in the 4th dwelling places where she explains the prayer of quiet which is the beginning of passive prayer. From the 5th to the 7th dwelling places she is very much at home and teaches about passive prayer, the prayer she desires for us. When she explains the prayer of union in the 5th dwelling places she offers two images of prayer that can inspire and help us in our prayer and daily life: the inner wine cellar and the soft wax and seal.

Haven't you heard it said of the bride -- for I have already mentioned it elsewhere here but not in this sense[9] -- that God brought her into the inner wine cellar and put charity in order within her?[10] Well, that is what I mean. Since that soul now surrenders itself into His hands and its great love makes it so surrendered that it neither knows nor wants anything more than what He wants with her (for God will never, in my judgment, grant this favor save to a soul that He takes for His own), He desires that, without its understanding how, it may go forth from this union impressed with His seal. For indeed the soul does no more in this union than does the wax when another impresses a seal on it. The wax doesn't impress the seal upon itself; it is only disposed -- I mean by being soft. And even in order to be disposed, it doesn't soften itself but remains still and gives its consent. Oh, goodness of God; everything must be at a cost to You! All You want is our will and that there be no impediment in the wax. (5D.2.12)

First of all, in the house of Christ where we undergo our own Pascal mystery, it is God who puts “charity in order in us.” God infuses love within us and teaches us how to love. John of the Cross describes contemplation as a “science of love.” In prayer God teaches how to love, communicates love within us in silence, calmness, and stillness. Both Teresa and John counsel us to adopt in our prayer an attitude of deep listening, stillness, calm, tranquility and openness, even though we feel nothing and seem to be wasting our time. In this solitude and silence, God is quietly infusing love within us. For John of the Cross, God’s language is “silent love.” *“Wisdom enters through love, silence, and mortification. It is a great wisdom to know how to be*

silent.” “*What we need to make progress is to be silent before this great God with the tongue and the appetites, for the only language he hears is silent love.*”

In a conference on contemplative prayer, Raimondo Pannikaar gave this image: "The person who wants to be lightening must be a cloud for a long time: soft, waiting, driven by the wind, dependent upon the temperature. When the conditions are right the lightening will come with force and energy." (Raimondo Pannikaar)

This is how we must be in prayer- quiet, open, surrendered, waiting, peaceful, dependent upon God. This is the teaching of St. John of the Cross in the *Living Flame*, stanza 3, 28-67, and Teresa's counsel in the *Way of Perfection*, chapter 31.

Secondly, in the house of Christ we become more and more passive, open, surrendered, still, soft, and malleable so that the Lord can configure us to His life. In the silence of contemplative prayer, we make space for God to work within us and conform us to Christ.

Learning to become like soft wax, surrendered, open and still is both an art, and a fruit of God's grace. It is also a call and challenge, not only in quiet prayer but in daily life because continuing formation takes place in daily life. Your *Ratio* emphasizes in several places that formation takes place in daily life.⁴

Fr. Amedeo Cencini, a priest professor in Rome who has written several books on initial and ongoing formation, uses a Latin term to explain the attitude required for formation: "*docibilitas.*"⁵ "*Docibilitas*" means more than just *docilitas* (docility), which is a common word for a person who is docile and adheres freely to the will of another and collaborates easily. *Docibilitas* means the personal attitude to assume responsibility for one's growth that takes place in daily life. It is a positive and receptive attitude toward life, an openness of heart and mind, a willingness to allow oneself to be formed by life and others, and to learn from every situation and person, from the positive experiences in life as well as from the negative. This attitude begins in the novitiate and must continue throughout life.

⁴ For instance: in Chapter 2, The Agents of Formation, we read: "It is through the community, and in its midst, far more than by beautiful ideas, that the candidate will have the lived experience of the Teresian charism." (13) See also: chapter 6, #69-70, chapter 8, Creative Fidelity.

⁵ Amedeo Cencini's writes about an "integration" model of formation. Central to his integration model is the flexible and open attitude to learn from all of life. *Docibilitis* is the Latin word he uses to describe this willingness to learn and be formed by life. Amedeo Cencini, *Il respiro della vita: La grazia della formazione permanente*, San Paolo, Roma, 2002. *L'Albero della vita: Verso un modello di formazione iniziale e permanente*, San Paolo, Roma, 2005, pp. 125-134.

Initial and continuing formation takes place in community life. It is in community life where we are challenged to become open and receptive like soft wax – willing to learn from every experience of life. This is clearly part of the teaching of our Saints. St. John of the Cross teaches us in the *Precautions and Counsels to a Religious* that the members of the community form us. Community members are the artisans placed by God expressly to purify, “chisel,” “polish,” and form us. I am convinced that the dark night experience of John of the Cross comes primarily to us through our relationships with others, through the joys, complexities, stresses and sufferings of community life. John views this “chiseling,” as mortifications and annoyances we need to support with inner patience. He is convinced that we come to religious life to be worked on, to grow and mature, and made worthy of heaven. Community is the “Schola amoris” where we learn to grow in love for God and our neighbor; community is the fertile ground for human growth.⁶

In the Seventh Dwelling Places, St. Teresa warns her sisters against “building castles in the air” through unrealistic fantasies and desires to serve others. Rather than living outside the monastery in a fantasy community and ministry, she tells them they must concentrate on those in their own their community.

Do you think such deep humility, your mortification, service of all and great charity toward them, and love of the Lord is of little benefit? This fire of love in you enkindles their souls, and with every other virtue you will be always awakening them. Such service will not be small but very great and very pleasing to the Lord. By what you do in deed -- that which you can -- His Majesty will understand that you would do much more. Thus, He will give you the reward He would if you had gained many souls for Him. (7D.4.14)

Community becomes for Teresa the locus where we grow in love, detachment, and humility and where we benefit the Church by the love we show to one another and in all we do. “*The Lord doesn’t look so much at the greatness of our works as the love with which they are done.*” (7D.4.15)

Every event of life has a meaning: positive or negative. Our human and spiritual growth depends upon how we respond to these experiences. For instance, rejection is a painful experience, but it can become positive for my formation if I choose to use the experience for freedom from self. Whether people speak well or ill of me, God is the source of my esteem. This is just one example among many.

⁶ *Fraternal Life in Community*, 35.

The emergence of the butterfly

The final stage of this process of metamorphosis is the emergence of the butterfly. *“Now, then, let's see what this silkworm does, for that's the reason I've said everything else. When the soul is, in this prayer, truly dead to the world, a little white butterfly comes forth. Oh, greatness of God! How transformed the soul is when it comes out of this prayer after having been placed within the greatness of God and so closely joined with Him for a little while.”* (5M.2.7) The butterfly represents the transformation and freedom to which God has destined us and that we desire in our hearts. There is so much we can say about effects of transformation and the freedom this butterfly represents, but it would take us beyond the limitations of this conference. One of the signs of this freedom is less preoccupation with self, the desire to praise God, the pain of seeing God offended, and the desire to help others. (5M.10-11.) *“Oh, greatness of God! A few years ago -- and even perhaps days -- this soul wasn't mindful of anything but itself. Who has placed it in the midst of such painful concerns?”* (11) Another area of transformation is in the ability to forgive others, to let go of bitterness from offenses from others. In chapter 36 of the *Way of Perfection* where Teresa comments on the Our Father: “Forgive us our trespasses,” she tells us that the ability to pardon others is the sign of authentic prayer. Furthermore, the freer we become, the more sociable, related to others in an affable and natural way. (W.41). *“This is very important for religious: the holier they are the more sociable they are with their Sisters.”* (41.7)

In the seventh dwelling places, Teresa writes about the freedom that comes from transformation and the reason why God grants so many favors us this life: to live in imitation of the life Jesus Christ lived.

It will be good, Sisters, to tell you the reason the Lord grants so many favors in this world. Although, if you have paid attention, you will have understood this in learning of their effects, I want to tell you again here lest someone think that the reason is solely for the sake of giving delight to these souls; that thought would be a serious error. His Majesty couldn't grant us a greater favor than to give us a life that would be an imitation of the life His beloved Son lived. Thus I hold for certain that these favors are meant to fortify our weakness, as I have said here at times,^[4] that we may be able to imitate Him in His great sufferings. (7M.4.4).

Teresa explains what it means to be truly spiritual: “Keep in mind that I could not exaggerate the importance of this. Fix your eyes on the Crucified and everything will become small for you. If His Majesty showed us His love by means of such works and frightful torments, how is it you want to please Him only with words? Do you know what it means to be truly spiritual? It means

becoming the slaves of God. Marked with His brand, which is that of the cross, spiritual persons, because now they have given Him their liberty, can be sold by Him as slaves of everyone, as He was.” (7M.4.8)

The freedom we are called to is to become a slave of God, which is a life of self-giving love and service to our brothers and sisters in imitation of Jesus Crucified. The death of the “I-worm” means freedom from forms of “selfishness” that erode our relationships with God and others. It is death to the false self, the old self, and resurrection to new life in Christ - a life of mercy, compassion, forgiveness, and of loving service. This is the purpose of initial and ongoing formation: a process of identifying with the attitudes of Christ in his self-offering to the Father for the salvation of humankind.

I believe that the metamorphosis process of the silkworm and butterfly, weaving the cocoon and dying and rising is unending throughout our lives. It is not a one-time process of formation, but a process we go through over and over in life. We are constantly dying and rising, weaving the cocoon, and rising to new life, becoming more and more free until the day the butterfly itself dies and lives forever in Christ.