
The Spiritual Doctrine
of
SISTER ELIZABETH
OF THE TRINITY

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BY

M. M. PHILIPON, O. P.

Translated by

A BENEDICTINE OF STANBROOK ABBEY

The Newman Press
Westminster, Maryland

1951

THIRD PRINTING, 1951.

NIHIL OBSTAT

E. A. CERNEY, S. S., D. D.
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Archbishop of Baltimore and Washington

March 29, 1947

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WESTMINSTER, MD.

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TO
JANUA CAELI—GATE OF HEAVEN
THROUGH WHOM SOULS ASCEND TO THE
TRINITY
FILIAL HOMAGE

In conformity with the decrees of Pope Urban VIII, and other Sovereign Pontiffs, we declare that, in making use of the word "Saint," we do so only in the sense commonly understood among the faithful, without desiring to anticipate the official judgment of the Church, which alone is competent to pronounce upon the holiness of her children. We unreservedly submit to her judgment in advance.

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PREFACE

“ This mystery of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in the depths of her soul was the great reality of her interior life.” (Garrigou-Lagrange)

The most elementary truths of Christian faith, such as those expressed in the *Our Father*, are, we find, the most profound truths when we have meditated upon them long and lovingly; when, through the years, we have lived with them, while carrying our cross, and they have become the object of almost continuous contemplation.

To be led to the heights of sanctity, it would be enough for a soul to live intensely but one of these truths of our Faith.

One of the most important of these truths is that of the special presence of God in the souls of the just, according to the words of Our Lord: *If any one love Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and will make Our abode with him. (John XIV, 23)* By these words and by the promise of His Holy Spirit, Christ taught us that the most fundamental vocation of every baptized soul is to live in fellowship with the very Persons of the Blessed Trinity. Hence, according to St. Thomas' frequently repeated words, the Christian life even here on earth is, in a sense, eternal life begun: *quaedam inchoatio vitae aeternae*. The grace of Baptism makes us truly partakers of the divine nature even as it subsists in the bosom of the Trinity. God has so loved us in His Son as to will to make us share in the very principle of His intimate life, the principle of the immediate vision He has of Himself, which He communicates to the Word and to the Holy Ghost. Thus the just enter into the family of God and into the life-cycle of the Trinity. Living faith, enlightened by the Gift of Wisdom, assimilates them to the light of the Word;

infused charity assimilates them to the Holy Spirit. In them the Father begets His Word; in them the Father and the Son breathe the Personal Love that unites Them. In each of them the Trinity dwells, whole and entire, as in a living temple; here below It dwells as in a darkened temple, but in heaven in a light that knows no shadow and in an unchanging love.

The servant of God, Elizabeth of the Trinity, was one of those enlightened and heroic souls able to cling to one of these great truths, which are both the simplest and the most important, and, beneath the appearance of an ordinary life, to find therein the secret of a very close union with God. This mystery of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in the depths of her soul was the great reality of her interior life. As she herself said: "The Trinity! there is our dwelling, our 'home,' the father's house that we must never leave. . . . It seems to me that I have found my heaven on earth, for heaven is God and God is in my soul. On the day I understood that, everything became clear to me. . . ."

Obviously the foundation of this supernatural life is the practice of the theological virtues. Faith is the supernatural light through which we receive the revelation of this divine world. Our hope, upheld by the omnipotence of God, Whose hand is ever stretched out to help us, enables us to tend surely toward eternal happiness. Charity establishes us permanently in the friendship and fellowship of the Divine Persons, according to the teaching of St. John the Evangelist: "God is charity: and he that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him" (*I John IV, 16*). In essence, there is but the one supernatural life; it begins on earth with our Baptism and it will reach its full development in heaven with the vision of God face to face.

Faith is the root of all this new activity. It is "the substance," the principle, the germ "of things hoped for," things which we shall one day behold unveiled. The least light of faith is thus infinitely superior to the natural intuitions of the greatest genius and the highest angel. It belongs to the same essentially supernatural order as the beatific vision. Living faith, enlight-

ened by the gifts of understanding and wisdom, is, accordingly, the only light proportionate to this life of intimate communion with the Divine Persons.

Hence, above all else, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity stands before us as a soul of faith, living in ever more perfect communion with the invisible world while, under the hand of God, sense and spirit were being purified through the events of her daily life. Like a true daughter of St. John of the Cross, she was aware of the primary importance of faith in the supernatural life. "In order to draw near to God," she wrote, "we must believe. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things that appear not. St. John of the Cross says that it serves us as feet to go to God, that it is possession in an obscure manner. It alone can give us real light upon Him Whom we love; our soul should choose it as the means of reaching the blessed union. . . ."

Without neglecting the practice of the moral virtues, she was seen to apply herself more and more to the interior activity of the theological virtues. "My only practice is to enter into myself and lose myself in Those Who are there."

The perfect flowering of faith, hope, and charity demands special assistance from God, and it is precisely by an increasingly predominant activity of the gifts of the Holy Ghost that the mystical life is characterized. Although the theological virtues are actually superior to the gifts that accompany them, they receive a new perfection from the gifts, just as a tree is more perfect with its fruit than without it. According to St. Thomas, a soul that only *imperfectly* possesses a principle of action cannot act as it should unless it is helped by a higher agent. In the spiritual life, the beginner needs the guidance of an experienced master, just as the student of medicine or surgery needs the direction of his professor. Now, by means of the theological and moral virtues, the just man as yet possesses only *imperfectly* this divine life of grace which introduces him into the family of the Trinity. Hence, the Divine Persons must Themselves come to his aid, according to St. Paul's words to the Romans: "Whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are

the sons of God." (*Rom. VIII, 14*). He must live, not in the manner of a human creature, but *in God's manner*, in the intimacy of the Divine Persons, in order that he may be "perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect." How is anyone to judge of all things, both human and divine, after the manner of God Himself unless divine knowledge and wisdom are specially imparted to him? In the midst of the frequently insoluble situations of human life, how is he to make a swift decision that will coincide with the plan of divine Providence without a special operation of the gift of counsel? Finally, how is he to remain immutably attached to the divine will amid the difficulties—at times, terrible difficulties—of life, without the special assistance of the divine fortitude itself, which alone can triumph over all the powers of evil?

In the manifestation of these gifts of the Holy Ghost in the world of souls, however, the greatest variety is apparent, according to the circumstances in which God places them and according to their mission. The intellectual gifts are more readily discerned in some souls; in others, the gifts of fear, piety, and fortitude. There is an infinite range of subtle distinctions. Even the same gift assumes diverse forms in the different saints. In some, as in St. Augustine, wisdom appears primarily in a contemplative form; in others, as in St. Vincent de Paul, it appears in a practical form, wholly given to works of mercy. To the former, the Holy Ghost gives the ability to penetrate and to savor the deep things of God and to speak of them in glowing terms; He makes the latter see, as in a diffused light, the suffering members of Christ and the means by which they may work effectively for their salvation.

In the case of the servant of God considered in these pages, we are impressed by the high degree of her possession of the gifts of understanding and wisdom by means of which she was able to penetrate so deeply into the mystery of the Trinity and to feel its effects profoundly, and almost continuously. Even before she entered Carmel, it was obvious that she was powerfully gripped by this presence of the Divine Persons in the depths of her soul. Toward the end of her life, on the feast of

the Ascension—the last time she celebrated this feast on earth—she felt the Blessed Trinity take possession of her soul to such a degree that she seemed to see the Three Divine Persons holding Their council of love in her. From that day on, whenever any special intention was recommended to her prayers, she would answer: “I will speak of it to my Almighty Council.” On the eve of her death, she could write in all truth: “The belief that a Being, Whose name is Love, is dwelling in us at every moment of the day and night, and that He asks us to live in His company, that, I own to you, is what has made my life an anticipated heaven.”

We are also deeply struck at seeing the degree to which she had received the gift of fortitude. It is constantly noticeable in the courage with which the servant of God accepted the hardest of trials, particularly during her illness. Unable to practice extraordinary mortifications, which obedience to her Superior forbade throughout her religious life, she bore unflinchingly; during a long and very trying year of novitiate, the painful passive purifications that were inevitable for a still too keenly sensitive character. She bravely walked the road of the dark night, more and more seeking refuge in pure faith, and never ceasing to lift herself up to God, beyond all His graces and all His gifts. But it was particularly during her last illness that her gift of fortitude revealed itself in its splendor. While her physical frame was being destroyed, her soul remained steadfast under the most crucifying divine purifications. She rose above the actual suffering so that, through joy and suffering alike, she might think only of her office of being a “Praise of Glory” of the Trinity. She thought of the majesty with which Christ the King, crowned with thorns, went to Calvary and it is a reflection of that majesty which we find in this valiant Bride of the Savior, who worked with Him, through Him, and in Him, by the same means as He, for the salvation of souls. Truly did God grant her last wish: “To die not only as pure as an angel, but transformed into Jesus Crucified.”

Finally, one of the most characteristic features of the spiritual physiognomy of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity is obviously

her doctrinal sense, nourished at the best sources of Christian thought in her two favorite teachers: St. Paul, the Apostle of the Mystery of Christ, and St. John of the Cross, the mystical Doctor of Carmel. Without being a theologian in the formal sense of the word, yet, like a true daughter of St. Teresa, she had a taste for solid doctrine, which she made the substantial food of her interior life, delighting to ponder the great truths of faith in silence and prayer under the light of life which increases in us as we grow in love of God and of souls.

Hence, the author's task was twofold: first, to set forth, in the light of the guiding principles of mystical theology, the essential movements of this contemplative soul and to distinguish the fundamental truths by which the servant of God lived, according to her special grace, under a Carmelite form; secondly, after having noted the principal stages of her ascension, to bring out the points of doctrine which particularly nourished her spiritual life, i. e., the asceticism of silence, the indwelling of the Trinity, the "Praise of Glory," conformity to Christ, her very personal devotion to Our Lady of the Incarnation, the operation of the gifts of the Holy Ghost in her, and finally the profound meaning of her celebrated prayer to the Holy Trinity and of her mission.

Father Marie-Michel Philipon wrote these pages after long meditation on the life and writings of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity. For several years he has been truly penetrated with them, and he has sought to explain them in the light of the principles of theology, as formulated by St. Thomas and applied to the direction of contemplative souls by St. John of the Cross.

He has fulfilled his task with both reverence and a sense of doctrine that together made it possible for him to combine supernatural enthusiasm with a right moderation—a balance difficult to maintain, especially in cases where the servant of God was called upon to practice simultaneously virtues that appear contrary to one another: fortitude and gentleness, prudence and simplicity, compassion for the erring and sinners and ardent zeal for the glory of God.

The reader will draw great profit from this clear-sighted

profound study, which concretely and vividly reveals the theology of "the grace of the virtues and the gifts" by displaying the riches it contains.

May the Blessed Trinity find in this book a new ray of glory and may those who read it draw from it the true humility that is so closely connected with the theological virtues, which, in turn, reveal to us the meaning of the highest things. So many poor human beings, made for eternal life and the fellowship of the Divine Persons, drag out their lives in the sterile, restless activity of a topsy-turvy world. God grant that some of them may find in these pages the bearings to chart their course and to regain the right road which leads to union with God, to the "light of life," which enlightens everything from on high, by showing us the "one thing necessary," the end for which we are destined.

FR. REGINALD GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, O.P.

Rome, *The Angelico*,
July 12, 1937.

INTRODUCTION

"A theologian views a soul and a doctrine."

The publication of the *Souvenirs*, containing an account of the life and a number of the writings of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, has met with extraordinary success in France. In less than thirty years, and without any flamboyant advertising, more than ninety thousand copies have been sold, not counting a dozen translations into foreign languages. The Chinese version is now nearly finished.

Thousands of letters have been received at the Carmel of Dijon, expressing the gratitude of those who have read the *Souvenirs*. They have come from all over the world and from the most varied sources: from simple Christian folk, from religious and contemplatives in particular, from numerous priests and seminarians, from eminent theologians and from outstanding members of the episcopate.

His Eminence Cardinal Mercier, on his way home from Rome after the canonization of St. Joan of Arc, decided to stop at Dijon and make a pilgrimage to the Carmel. When he was shown a portrait of Elizabeth of the Trinity in the chapter room, he asked: "How long was she in Carmel?"¹ "Five years, Your Eminence," replied the Mother Prioress. And the Cardinal remarked with a smile: "You become holy quickly here!" When he was taken to the cell of the young Carmelite, which had been transformed into an oratory, he expressed the

¹ Here are the most important dates in her life: Born at Bourges, July 18, 1880; Baptized, July 22, 1880; First Communion, April 19, 1891; First mystical graces: Retreat in January, 1899; Entered Carmel, August 2, 1901; Clothing: December 8, 1901; Profession: Epiphany, 1903; Admission to the infirmary: March, 1906; Died, November 9, 1906.

same thought once more: “*She* became a saint in no time, while we drag along.”

The holy and distinguished prelate often used the *Souvenirs* as his bedside reading. During a meeting with his clergy, he warmly recommended the book to them and expressed the wish that it might find a place in the library of every one of his priests.

How are we to account for such a widespread attraction?

It is for the Church, and the Church alone, to pronounce upon the sanctity of God’s servants. In advance, we submit to her judgment unreservedly in a filial spirit.

Our own point of view is a different one. As we read over the correspondence received at the Carmel of Dijon after the publication of the *Souvenirs*, and made endless inquiries in religious communities as to the nature of the influence exercised by Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, one obvious conclusion was forced upon us: what has most impressed readers of the holy Carmelite’s writings is *their doctrinal character*. The Abbe Sauv  struck the right note, and merely voiced the general impression, when he wrote: “It is in that, perhaps, that the *Souvenirs* will do the most good.”²

Many similar statements could be quoted from the most diverse schools of spirituality.³ We consider two of them particularly revealing.

The Reverend Father Arintero, O.P. wrote to the Carmel on June 16, 1937: “I am enchanted by this book [the *Souvenirs*] on account of its beautiful *doctrine*, which is sure to do immense good to souls.

“What I most admire in this servant of God is *her profound understanding of the great mysteries of Christian life*: our incorporation in Christ, Whose mission we must continue; the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in our hearts. . . . Through

² Quoted in the *Souvenirs*, p. xxvi, ed. 1935. The *Souvenirs* were translated into English by the Benedictines of Stanbrook Abbey, 1913.

³ Individuals quoted in the *Souvenirs* include: the Rev. Father Foch, S.J., Dom Vandeur, O.S.B., the Rev. Chas. Sauv , S.S., the Very Rev. Father Louis of the Trinity, O.C.D., the Very Rev. Father Vall e, O.P., certain Carthusians, etc.

this grasp of the great mysteries, identical with St. Paul's, she became a faithful interpreter of some of the most sublime passages of his profound Epistles. When Sister Elizabeth explains them in her intimate letters, even though only in passing, she sheds floods of life-giving light, thereby drawing innumerable souls to the interior life. . . ."

Again, His Excellency Monsignor Sagot du Vauroux wrote: "What I find most remarkable in the life of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity is the *absolute conformity of her views*, her inclinations, her interior life and her words *with the surest principles of mystical theology*. She cannot subtilize. Her imagination never carries her beyond the limits ordinarily observed by a sound reason enlightened by faith and quickened by love. Tenuous or vague considerations are foreign to her. The words come easily to her pen, as accurate as the thoughts they express. She thoroughly understands and penetrates the sense of the Scriptures, particularly St. Paul's Epistles; nor are we surprised at the special attraction her eager heart felt for this great saint. In interesting and accurate commentaries she sheds light on the most sublime teachings of St. John of the Cross. Who is this who writes so sublimely, yet with so sure a touch? Is it a priest long accustomed to theological study and mental prayer? It would be indeed difficult to recognize the soul of a girl behind these dissertations, at once simple and transparent and yet marked by truly virile logic, were it not for the incomparable sweetness shed over all Elizabeth's writings by the warmth and grace of her style, its delicacy and purity, its animation and even, at times, its playfulness. Like St. Teresa, the dear little sister loved above all else true, strong, beautiful doctrine."⁴

This "absolute conformity of views with the surest principles of mystical theology" is, indeed, the most characteristic feature of this essentially doctrinal spirituality. This was the dominant impression we constantly experienced when going over the documents left by Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity and it is what decided us to try to discover and explain their profound mean-

⁴ *Souvenirs*, p. xvii.

ing. We wish, therefore, to define the nature of our undertaking thus: "*A theologian views a soul and a doctrine.*"

Although our main object is not to give an historical sketch, we have endeavored to be strictly objective in interpreting facts. There was no question of building up a mystical thesis *a priori* and then forcing evidence and documents to fit it. Rather, by means of the rules of the historical method, we have sought to discover the true meaning of the evidence and the documents, according to circumstances of time and place, the persons to whom the letters were addressed, and the religious and social atmosphere, in order that we might determine their full significance in the light of psychological conditions and the divine or human influences at work.

To make this survey thoroughly objective, we painstakingly went through a great many documents and did considerable research into sources. We collated all the writings with the originals, except a few letters which we were unable to see but of which we obtained certified copies. We used a great many writings which are published for the first time in this volume. Pen in hand, we interviewed as many witnesses as possible. In particular, we talked at length with Elizabeth Catez's own sister; we talked with her three most intimate friends before her entry into the convent; with the nuns who had been her contemporaries at Carmel, one of whom had been her close friend; with the confessor who had directed her between the ages of fifteen and twenty-one; with other acquaintances; with a priest who, being related to the family, had often seen and talked with her. Lastly, and above all, we interviewed the most authentic witness of her life, Mother Germaine of Jesus who, throughout Sister Elizabeth's life at Carmel, was both her Prioress and her Novice Mistress. Special mention must be made of this last exceptionally valuable witness. Now that, by a holy death, she is with God, we feel it a grateful duty to declare that the confidences we received from Mother Germaine of Jesus and our long hours of conversation with her concerning one who was truly "her child" were of the utmost value in the preparation of this study. We consulted her most scrupulously upon every-

thing and repeatedly had the immeasurable satisfaction of receiving from her *full confirmation* of conclusions which we felt sprang from the documents. She was in perfect agreement with every essential point in this book.

When this critical sifting had been completed, the primary and fundamental task still remained to be done: to bring out in the light of the facts and confidences obtained, the *doctrinal sense* of the life and writings of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity.

With our desire for objectivity, it seemed best to search out the living source of Sister Elizabeth's doctrine and thence to follow its development and progress. As to method, we found it necessary, in large part, to enter into explanation of the doctrine by way of the concrete psychology from which it grew. The mystical doctrine of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity is not the abstract, didactic exposition of a professor of theology; it is above all the spontaneous outpouring of a contemplative soul. It is not the Carmelite's role to explain learnedly the ways of the spiritual life, but to live them in the silence of a soul wholly *hidden with Christ in God*.⁵ It is for the Master to reveal the doctrinal wealth of such a life when, for the benefit of His Church, He sees fit to do so. Thus, the doctrinal message of St. Teresa of the Child Jesus was spread abroad; in quite another manner, unostentatiously but intensely, as befits the apostle of the hidden life, the doctrine of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity has been revealed. *Divisiones gratiarum, idem Spiritus*.⁶

Hence the necessity of prefacing this doctrinal work with a long preliminary chapter which seeks to present the portrait of a soul whose upward progress is traced from the time of the first mystical intimations, when Elizabeth was nineteen, to the consummation of the transforming union on the Cross. This delineation explains the parallel evolution and progress of her mystical doctrine.

Only by thus studying her soul can we understand how, for her, the doctrine of silence did not assume a sense of general asceticism until after she had entered the solitude of Carmel and

⁵ Col. III, 3.

⁶ I Cor. XII, 4: "There are diversities of graces, but the same Spirit."

undergone the passive purifications of the novitiate; or how the mystery of the divine indwelling became increasingly the central point from which everything in her life radiated, and to which she referred her supreme vocation of "Praise of Glory of the Trinity," but within, "in the heaven of her soul."

After such a study, it was possible, while most carefully respecting the historical perspectives of the development of her thought on each point of doctrine, to analyze and accurately and surely to indicate *the principles of mystical theology to which the movements of this privileged soul were linked* and the dogmatic truths which had nourished most her inner life.⁷

Carried by grace into the cycle of the life of the Trinity, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity lived her Baptism completely, under the special form of her Carmelite vocation. Among the human influences she received, that of St. John of the Cross was dominant. By assiduous study of the *Spiritual Canticle* and the *Living Flame of Love*, she had assimilated the loftiest principles of his mystical theology. As a young girl and as a novice, she had been passionately fond of Father Vallée's somewhat oratorical style but she soon passed beyond it, to rest in God in naked faith, above all human ways of thought. As with all great artists, we find in her a first phase of rather servile imitation of models; then a second, in which she is feeling her way and which lasts through the first three years of her novitiate. Then, suddenly, a magnificent creative period

⁷ The same theological method, combining the historical and the doctrinal aspects, might be applied to the study of the lives of all the saints. It would seem that work in this vein would lead to a great enrichment and a valuable confirmation of mystical theology. In the light of the leading principles of mystical theology, it would be easy, by this same procedure, to bring out the great doctrinal lines of thought which animated, for instance, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Teresa of the Child Jesus, St. Bernadette, etc.

The great mystics would furnish the highest examples, St. Catherine of Siena perhaps, or St. Margaret Mary, or Mary of the Incarnation. An especially rich, but more complex example, would be St. John of the Cross: at once mystic and theologian.

There is a whole world waiting to be explored which would be immensely profitable in distinguishing the various streams of spirituality in the Church's life and building the history of mystical theology.

opens up brilliantly with the composition, in one outburst and without alteration, of her sublime prayer to the Trinity. Henceforth, in her, the Holy Spirit has a perfect instrument at His disposal. She sings the divine indwelling and the praise of glory in an inimitable, etched style that establishes her as one of the spiritual masters of the French language. Meditation on the Epistles of St. Paul and the mystical works of St. John of the Cross and long hours of contemplative silence have worked this miracle. Above all, the *Word* has become the inner master of her life, as she herself said: "What He teaches me within me is ineffable." *The true source of her doctrine and her life is hidden in that statement.* That was the hour of the supreme triumph of grace in her soul, the full revelation in her of the Trinitarian riches of her baptismal vocation. Henceforth the quiet rhythm of this life "made perfect in one"⁸ was limited to a few essential movements, always the same but very deep: the ascesis of silence; the indwelling of the Trinity and the sole preoccupation of working "unto the praise of Its glory"; identification with Christ and conformity to His death; imitation of the life of silent adoration of Our Lady of the Incarnation. Such were the great doctrinal thoughts which swiftly carried this simple but faithful life to the very highest summits of divine union. These are the most fundamental truths of Christianity, and it makes us happy to find a holy soul raising herself to God without miracles or extraordinary mortifications,⁹ but simply by following the vocation Baptism itself marks out and by perfect obedience to the divine will, amid the ordinary happenings of daily life.

A Solesmes monk wrote to the most intimate friend of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity: "I wish a theologian would comment on her writings." That is what this book, written for the glory of the Trinity, tries to do.

FR. MARIE-MICHEL PHILIPON, O.P.

St. Maximin, March 7, 1937

Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas.

⁸ *John* XVII, 23.

⁹ This detail was supplied by the Prioress of Dijon.

CHAPTER I

SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

"A Carmelite: in everything she bears the mark of this predestination."

Before we seek to sound analytically the depths of this soul, one general remark is called for: Elizabeth of the Trinity became a saint only after eleven years of struggle and constant retouching of details. Even after she had entered Carmel and had there spent several years of silently faithful religious life, it remained for her to undergo, at the hands of God, those purifications by which He brings heroic souls to the unchanging peace of the transforming union, above all joy and all suffering.

1.

Interior Life in the World

1. Childish failings. 2. Conversion. 3. Social life. 4. Good works. 5. Summer holidays. 6. *Agendo contra*. 7. The first mystical graces. 8. The meeting with Father Vallée, O.P.

1. As the daughter and granddaughter of soldiers, Elizabeth Catez bore in her veins the quickly roused blood of warriors. She inherited a fiery temperament. When not more than three or four years old, she once shut herself into a room of the family dwelling and stamped and raged behind the door, kicking that offending bulwark furiously all the while.

Until she was seven, these violent outbursts marked her childhood. It was impossible to control them. There was nothing to do but wait for the storm to subside of itself. Then her mother reasoned with her and taught her to overcome herself through love. "That child has a will of iron," her teacher would say. "She is determined to have what she wants."

She was but a child when her father died in her arms and left her with only her mother and her sister Marguerite. Marguerite was a gentle and retiring girl and Elizabeth shared every hour of her life with her until her entrance into Carmel.

Undisturbed by any other serious event, life flowed along in Dijon in happy, Christian fashion.

2. Her first confession wrought a change in Elizabeth's soul which she later called her *conversion*, a shock "which caused a complete awakening with respect to the things of God."¹ From that day forward she resolutely entered upon the struggle against her predominant faults: anger and oversensitiveness. This hard phase of spiritual warfare was to last until she was eighteen. The priest who prepared her for her first Communion and knew her well told an intimate friend of her mother: "With her temperament, Elizabeth Catez will be either a saint or a demon."

This first contact with Jesus, hidden in the Host, was decisive. "In the depths of her soul she heard His voice." The "Master took possession of her heart so completely that thenceforth her one desire was to give her life to Him."² To the astonishment of those around her, a sudden and profound change took place in Elizabeth and she began to make great strides toward that calm self-command which was soon to characterize her. One day, after Holy Communion, she seemed to hear the word "Carmel" spoken in her soul. She understood. She was only fourteen when, on another occasion, during her thanksgiving, she heard an interior call from the Master and she instantly made a vow of virginity in order to belong to Him alone. She was to die faithful to that vow and as pure as a lily.

Her poems, written between the ages of fourteen and nineteen, speak only the names of her beloved Jesus, her heavenly Mother, Mary, her angel guardian, the saints, and Joan of Arc, "the Maid whom none can dishonor."³

Carmel had a particularly irresistible fascination for her,

¹ *Souvenirs*, p. 6.

² *Poems*, "The Anniversary of my First Communion," April 19, 1898.

³ *Poems*, "Joan of Arc," October 1895.

and her verses sing the praises of the externals of the Carmelite: the coarse serge habit, the white veil, the cheap wooden rosary, the hairshirt chastising the flesh and, lastly, the ring worn by the bride of Christ.⁴ As she lived very near her dear Carmel, she often went onto the balcony of her room, "sadly dreaming," and gazed long and fixedly at the monastery.⁵ Everything spoke to her heart: the chapel hiding the Master of her life, the ringing of the Angelus, the knell for the dead, the cells with their "tiny windows" and poor furniture, where the nuns rested after a long day of redemptive prayer. She was seventeen and longed for the realization of her dream, still so remote. She did try once to escape "this sad, seductive world" by having a priest friend speak to her mother, but Mme. Catez could not be moved. So, in prayer, Elizabeth confidently awaited God's hour.

3. After that attempt, she was claimed by a constant round of amusements and parties, in which Madame Catez quietly urged her to take part. Perhaps, without wishing to dissuade her daughter from her vocation, she secretly cherished the hope that God would not take her from her. Nor did Elizabeth need to be urged; it was enough for her that her mother wished it. She went everywhere and apparently always enjoyed herself. "She never seemed the least bit bored," is the constant refrain of those who knew her. No one could have guessed that Elizabeth was the future Carmelite whose intense interior life, wholly hidden within herself in Christ, was to bring to the Unchanging Trinity a most moving testimony of silence and recollection.

She made a beautiful figure, always simply but irreproachably dressed, and she received several offers of marriage. Typically, she bought new gloves for one of her last evening affairs, not wishing anyone to suspect her departure. She joyously took part in the social life of her circle, shunning nothing but sin.

4. Throughout the year, at Dijon, Elizabeth gave herself to good works in her parish. She helped with the choir, she taught catechism to the children and to older first communicants whom

⁴ *Ibid.* "The Livery of the Carmelite," October 15, 1897.

⁵ *Ibid.* "What I See from my Balcony," October 1897.

the little girls made fun of, and did whatever else she was asked. She also had charge of a club for "tough" children who worked in the tobacco industry. They were so passionately fond of her that she had to conceal her address from them to keep them from overrunning her home. As Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, she later followed their lives and protected them with a Carmelite's silent prayer.

With exquisite tact, Elizabeth was at home with everyone, everywhere. She loved childhood because of its innocence and God granted her a wonderful gift of interesting youngsters. At parties for the family and friends, she sometimes had as many as forty children around her. She liked to get up tableaux, particularly of Jesus in the midst of the Doctors, and we find her dressing up her little company and teaching it how to act. She herself wrote both script and music for the plays and she was especially clever at arranging children's dances. Finally, when all the excitement of the play had died down, chairs would be set out in the garden and she would read to them while, all ears, they listened to "Patira." Sometimes they teased her to join in their games and she would smilingly give in. During the month of May, the little group she took to church used to make her stay in the back, as near the door as possible. And, "scarcely was the tabernacle closed than we would drag her off for a walk. Then she would make up wonderful stories to tell us. Elizabeth Catez always fitted into every mood."*

Let us remember this characteristic. In the cloister as in the world, Elizabeth of the Trinity tried not to seem different from others. With the rest, she appreciated the good tarts made by Francine, the best cook of Dijon, and laughed gaily at the heavy dinners typical of the south of France which filled them to the bursting point for three days after.

5. As the summer holidays came round, the family always left Dijon and went on long journeys. Thus Elizabeth visited Switzerland, the Alps, the Jura, the Vosges, the Pyrenees, and a considerable portion of France.

* From the evidence of a childhood friend.

Her letters show that she enjoyed herself; she was made much of in the whirling round of visits to relatives and friends and became strongly attached to a few chosen friends. More often, however, she seemed simply to mingle in the groups of girls of her own age, having, from motives both of charity and good breeding, a happy companionship with all.

“Our stay at Tarbes has been nothing but a long succession of pleasures: afternoon dances and musicales, country excursions, one after the other. The people at Tarbes are delightful. I have come to know a number of girls, each more charming than the rest. When X, who is a very good musician, and I were together, we never left the piano, and all the music shops in Tarbes could not keep us supplied with pieces to play at sight.”⁷

“We are leaving today for Lourdes and it breaks my heart to leave my dear Yvonne. She is the prettiest girl and a wonderful character. As for Madame X . . . , not a trace of her illness remains; she is younger and more stunning than ever, and always so kind. The day before yesterday was my eighteenth birthday and she gave me a lovely set of turquoise blouse studs. Write to me soon. I must leave you to finish packing. I shall be thinking of you a great deal at Lourdes. From there we will tour the Pyrenees, going to Luchon, Cauterets, etc. I am wild over these mountains, which I am looking at while I write to you. I feel as though I could never live without them.”⁸

She was especially charmed with Luchon. “It deserves its name of Queen of the Pyrenees. I was more excited about it than any place. The location is incomparable. We spent two days there and were able to make the trip through the Lys valley. We had gone out in a large landau, drawn by four horses, and were with cousins of R . . . , and S . . . , whom we had met again at Luchon. These ladies put us in the charge of someone we knew, who was also making the ascent as far as the Gouffre d’Enfer. We were 1801 meters above sea-level, hanging over that horrible abyss. Madeleine and I thought it so beauti-

⁷ Letter to Mlle. A. C., July 21, 1898.

⁸ *Ibid.*

ful that we almost wanted to whirl away in those waters but our guide, enthusiastic as he was, felt differently. He proved to be much more cautious than we, who galloped along the edge of the precipice without feeling the least bit giddy. Our friends gave a sigh of relief when we got back, for they had hardly felt easy about us during our escapade.”⁹

Thus she hurried from one set of friends to another, enjoying the most delightful life, as she tells us herself. Lunéville was typical: “Lunching here, dining there, in addition to numerous tennis parties with the most charming girls.”¹⁰ In short, she had not a minute to herself. On the 14th of July, she was present at the review at the Champ de Mars because of her family’s close friendships in military circles. As befits an officer’s daughter, she was thrilled by the cavalry charge. “Just imagine all those helmets and cuirasses sparkling in the sun. . . . The dazzling performance ended in the evening, in the groves of the park, with fairylike illuminations rather resembling Venice. . . .”

Yet amid these worldly amusements, in her heart she was still homesick for Carmel. As soon as the guests had left, without the slightest effort Elizabeth was back again with the Lord she had never left. At Tarbes, in order to escape for a moment from the noisy gaiety, she took refuge in the Carmelite convent and the out-sister found her kneeling by the grille in the parlor. Gladly would she have kissed every wall in that house of God! Lourdes was close by and for three days she buried herself in recollection near Our Lady of the Rock. Holidays and social gaieties easily dropped from her mind. Rapt in prayer, she remained motionless for a long time before the Grotto, beseeching Mary Immaculate to keep her pure in her own image, and offering herself as a victim for sinners.¹¹

Nothing could distract her from her Lord. Later on, from her Carmel at Dijon, she could write this postscript in a letter to her mother: “Do not forget to make your meditation on

⁹ Letter to Mlle. D., August 1898.

¹⁰ Letter to Mlle. A. C., July 9, 1897.

¹¹ *Poems*, “The Immaculate Conception,” December 8, 1898.

Friday, when you are on the train; it is a very good opportunity, as I remember."¹² She spoke from experience. Likewise the earthly riches of the great cities she visited left her indifferent. For her, Marseilles meant Notre Dame de la Garde,¹³ and Lyons, only Fourvières.¹⁴ At Paris, to which she had gone with her mother and sister for the great Exhibition of 1900, only two things really interested her: Montmartre and Our Lady of Victories: "We went to the Exhibition twice. It is very fine, but I detest the noise and the crowd. Marguerite laughed at me and declared that I was like someone just returned from the Congo."¹⁵

6. During this period of her life, her generous watchword was "agendo contra." A note in her diary, made when she was nineteen, reads: "Today I had the joy of offering Jesus several sacrifices over my dominant fault, *but how much they cost me!* I recognize my weakness there. When I receive an unjust reproof, I feel as though the blood is boiling in my veins; *my whole being rises in revolt*. . . . But Jesus was with me. Deep down in my heart I heard His voice and then I was ready to bear anything for love of Him."¹⁶ In order to find out whether she was really advancing in the way of perfection, she kept a little notebook in which, every evening, she marked down her victories and defeats.

Elizabeth tried to fast without her mother's knowledge, but the watchful Madame Catez discovered the fact in a few days and scolded her very severely. Once more Elizabeth obeyed. God did not will to lead her by the way of the great mortification of the saints. It was to be the same throughout her life at Carmel. The silent Trinity expected another kind of homage from her. "Since I can impose almost no sufferings on myself, I must accept the realization that this physical suffering is only a means—albeit an excellent one—of attaining to interior mortification and complete detachment from self. O Jesus! my Life, my Love, my Bridegroom, help me! It is absolutely necessary

¹² Letter to her mother," July 1906.

¹³ Letter to M-L. M., October 6, 1898.

¹⁴ Letter to A. C., Summer 1898.

¹⁵ Letter to M-L. M., Summer 1900.

¹⁶ *Diary*, January 30, 1899.

for me to reach that stage at which I may always, and in all things, *do the contrary of my own will!*"¹⁷

7. God could not wait long to reward Elizabeth's continual efforts to triumph over her nature by secret touches of His grace. The ascetic life leads to the mystical life and constitutes its necessary safeguard.

With her usual good sense, St. Teresa said: "Delicate living and prayer do not go together."¹⁸ All this is quite normal. *The Living Flame of Love* presupposes the painful *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, with its *dark nights* and active and passive purifications such as to make the most resolute tremble. We are too prone also to forget the long contemplative ecstasies of the author of the *Spiritual Exercises* in his cell at Rome, where the enraptured Ignatius murmured over and over: "O beata Trinitas!" We need not deny absolutely diversities of tendencies and spiritual paths—*alius sic, alius sic ibat*—but the Scriptural truth includes all these shades, and saints of all schools meet at a point beyond them all. At the summit, they are all transformed into Christ, identified with the beatitude of the Crucified.

The "spiritual combat" against her faults and the triumph over her natural temperament led Elizabeth Catez to the first manifestations of those mystical graces which were to transform her life, at first slowly and by successive touches as though step by step; then, from the time of her religious profession, by a calm and continuous motion; finally, in the last phase, the six months spent in the infirmary, by giant strides lifting her to the loftiest heights of transforming union.

She did not become aware of these first divine touches (received during the course of a retreat in January 1899) until several months later, when she was reading the works of St. Teresa. Her diary's account of the matter is of the greatest importance in the history of her spiritual life. It marks her entrance into the mystical way after a hard spiritual struggle which had lasted more than eleven years; which, in fact, was never to end.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, February 24, 1899.

¹⁸ *Way of Perfection*, c. iv.

“At present I am reading St. Teresa’s *Way of Perfection*. I find it tremendously interesting and it is doing me a great deal of good. St. Teresa speaks so well about prayer and interior mortification, that mortification which, with God’s help, I am determined to reach. Since I cannot for the present impose great sufferings upon myself, I can at least immolate my will at every moment of the day. Prayer—how I love the way St. Teresa handles this subject! When she speaks of contemplation, that degree of prayer wherein God does everything and we do nothing, wherein He unites our souls to Himself so intimately that it is no longer we who live but God living in us . . . oh, I recognized there *the moments of sublime rapture to which the Master deigned to raise me* so often during that retreat, as He has done since then too. What can I render to Him for such great benefits? After those ecstasies, those high raptures, during which the soul forgets everything and sees only its God, how hard and trying ordinary prayer seems! How painfully one must toil to unite all one’s powers! How much it costs and how difficult it seems!”¹⁹

God was even then raising Elizabeth to the higher states of prayer, and this was obvious when she prayed. She would be seen coming slowly up the central aisle in the parish church; she would kneel down in her place and be immediately absorbed in deep recollection. For a long time she would remain motionless, as though wholly possessed by God. Her most intimate friend was always struck by the sudden change that would come over Elizabeth the moment she entered the church to pray. “She was no longer the same person.”

For some time, she had been experiencing strange phenomena in the depths of her soul, which she could scarcely explain to herself. She felt as though she were dwelt in. “When I see my confessor,” she said to herself, “I shall speak to him about it.”

8. It was then that she met a Dominican Friar at Carmel,

¹⁹ *Diary*, February 20, 1899.

the meeting with whom was to give a decisive orientation to her interior life.²⁰ Mother Germaine of Jesus, Sister Elizabeth's prioress and novice mistress and the author of the *Souvenirs*, justly remarked that "this providential meeting" recalls, by its effects of grace, that of which St. Teresa tells us in the Eighteenth Chapter of her *Life* and in the Fifth Mansion of her *Interior Castle* (First Chapter).²¹ The Saint does indeed relate how "a great theologian of the Order of St. Dominic [Master Bañez, a celebrated professor at the University of Salamanca] by confirming from the doctrinal standpoint what she had experienced of the divine presence within her during prayer, brought her great consolation, in addition to the complete security which the truth gives."

When Elizabeth timidly questioned the distinguished religious as to the meaning of the movements of grace of which she had been aware for some time and which gave her the impression of being dwelt in, Father Vallée replied, in the forceful, thought-provoking language that characterized him: "But most certainly, my child; the Father is there, the Son is there, and the Holy Ghost is there." And, like the contemplative theologian he was, he proceeded to explain further how, by the grace of Baptism, the soul becomes that living temple

²⁰ Some account of this distinguished priest will be of interest to English and American readers: Iréné Vallée was born at Urville (Calvados) on June 28, 1841. In 1860, at the age of nineteen, he entered the Dominican Order at Flavigny, where he received the religious name of Gonzalvé and was the last novice to receive the habit from Lacordaire. Professed on September 5, 1861, he entered upon a long and fruitful apostolic career. Between 1881 and 1904 he preached constantly from some of the most famous pulpits in France, besides having close connections with several religious Orders. When, as a result of the Combes legislation, the French Dominicans were expelled in 1904, he saved the Province by founding the priory of Le Sauchoir, across the Belgian frontier in the diocese of Tournay, and there established the strict observance. In 1910, he returned to Paris, living in private and continuing his apostolic labors. After the Great War he was able to re-establish the Dominican simple novitiate at Amiens. He died at Paris on January 5, 1927, at the age of eighty-five. His own summing-up of Elizabeth of the Trinity was as follows: "Elizabeth de la Trinité avait le sens de la Rédemption." ("Elizabeth of the Trinity knew the meaning of the Redemption.") (Translator.)

²¹ *Souvenirs*, p. 66, note 1.

of which St. Paul speaks and how, together with the Holy Ghost, the whole Trinity is present with Its creative and sanctifying power, making Its dwelling in us, coming to abide in the most secret recesses of the soul, there to receive in an atmosphere of faith and charity the interior worship of praise and adoration that is Its due.

Elizabeth was delighted with this dogmatic explanation. Since it was grace that was urging her, she could, in perfect security, yield to her interior attraction and dwell in the innermost depths of her soul. During this interview she was overcome by an irresistible movement of recollection. The priest went on talking but he soon saw that Elizabeth Catez was no longer listening. "I was longing for him to be silent," she said later to the Prioress.

Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity is completely portrayed in this avowal: eager for silence under the influence of the grace received.

On his part, Father Vallée said of this decisive hour: "I saw her borne away as on a tidal wave."

Elizabeth was one of those souls who, having once seen the divine light, never turn aside. From that day on, everything was transformed and illumined; she had found her way. Henceforth, no matter what happened, the Trinity was to be her whole life.²²

²² After her mother had finally consented to her following her religious vocation (March 26, 1899), Elizabeth resumed the visits to Carmel which had been forbidden her for eight years. They were her support during the last two years she spent in the world. Mother Mary of Jesus was again Prioress. She it had been who, on the evening of Elizabeth's First Communion day, had given her a picture with these few lines, explaining the meaning of her name:

"Thy blessed name, O child, a mystery hides,
On this great day fulfilled.
God, Who is Love, within thy heart abides,
His temple here below 'ELIZABETH.'"

Elizabeth, then, means *House of God*.

Mother Mary of Jesus was a Trinitarian soul. Her ardent devotion to this mystery had developed suddenly, when she was but fourteen, as the result of a grace received one day during the Rogation procession. As the young girl responded to the Litany's first invocations to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the mysterious

2.

The Carmelite

1. Elizabeth's Carmelite ideal. 2. Sensible graces of her postulancy. 3. The purifications of the novitiate. 4. Intense interior life.

When Elizabeth Catez was shown into her Carmelite cell she was heard to murmur: "The Trinity is there!"

At her very first community exercise in the refectory, when she had finished her frugal meal, Elizabeth was seen to fold her hands simply beneath her cape, then, her eyes closed, to fall into a profound mood of meditation. The nun who was serving, noticing her, said to herself: "It is too good to last." She was mistaken, the Carmel of Dijon possessed a saint.²³

but most real presence of the Three Divine Persons in her soul was interiorly revealed to her. "After that," she said later, "I always tried to withdraw into that depth where They dwell." As foundress of the Carmel at Paray-le-Monial, she dedicated her beautiful monastery under the title of the Most Holy Trinity, which we enter by the Heart of Jesus. It was Mother Mary of Jesus who named Elizabeth Catez *Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity*, that name of grace which became the whole program of her religious life. Elizabeth went regularly to see the Mother Prioress, as did the little group of postulants *extra-muros* who frequented the grilles of the Carmel. Mother Mary of Jesus trained her in the Carmelite spirit and Sister Elizabeth, the future novice, gave her an account of her prayer. As she did not have much steady, continuous spiritual direction outside, she was very glad to go and ask of the Prioress the advice and suggestions she needed for her spiritual progress. She would consult her before making her resolutions in time of retreat. All the Mother's decisions seemed to her to come from God Himself and these visits to the Carmelite parlor helped her greatly.

²³ *Note on the Carmel of Dijon.* As is well known, the Venerable Mother Anne of Jesus, companion and fellow-worker with St. Teresa in the Carmelite Reform in Spain, came to France and there established the first monastery at Paris, in the Faubourg Saint-Jacques, on October 8, 1604.

Only one year later, in 1605, Mother Anne of Jesus founded the Carmel at Dijon, which had the honor of receiving the first nuns professed under the Reform in France. The spirit of St. Teresa reigned in the community in all its purity until the day the Carmelites were expelled from their house during the French Revolution. When, in 1854, it was restored by the Very Reverend Mother Mary of the Trinity, the spirit and traditions of the French Carmel returned with her and were faithfully maintained by the two prioresses who succeeded her: Mother Mary of

1. A week after her arrival at Carmel, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity filled out a questionnaire, at recreation, which shows us her state of mind on the threshold of her religious life. The most characteristic features of her spiritual physiognomy are already clearly indicated there: her ideal of sanctity—to live by love in order to die of love; her ardent devotion to the Will of God; her love of silence; her devotion to the soul of Christ; the watchword of her whole religious life—to bury herself in the very depths of her soul in order to find God there. Nothing is forgotten, not even her dominant fault, oversensitiveness. The only things lacking are that stripping of self which will be the work of the passive purifications of the novitiate and the supreme grace which will transform her life by showing the meaning of her final vocation: to be a praise of glory to the Trinity.

What is your ideal of sanctity?

To live by love.

What is the quickest way to reach it?

To become very little, to give oneself wholly and irrevocably.

the Heart of Jesus and Mother Mary of Jesus, the future foundress of the Carmel at Paray-le-Monial.

Mother Germaine of Jesus, who succeeded the latter as Superior, remained Prioress from 1901 until 1906, that is, during the whole religious life of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity. At regular intervals, over a period of twenty years, the Dijon Carmel had the grace of having her again as Prioress. Mother Germaine of Jesus was a great Carmelite: a prayerful, peaceful soul, very zealous for perfect observance, she was indeed the instrument of Providence who was to provide Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity with that setting of religious life in which her contemplative soul might freely develop in an atmosphere of silence and recollection. The servant of God, well aware of and very grateful for the motherly training given her, could in all truth write in a private note found after her death (and bearing on the envelope these significant words: Secrets for our Reverend Mother), "*I bear your mark.*" The new Prioress, in her first conference in chapter, in the presence of all the community, including Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, thus outlined the spiritual program of her government: "To keep as perfectly as possible, in the wholly apostolic spirit of our Holy Mother, this Rule and these Constitutions which she has left us, after herself having observed them with such great perfection."

Such was the setting of perfect religious life in which Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity was able to realize her Carmelite ideal so quickly.

Who is your favorite saint?

The Beloved Disciple, who rested on the heart of his Master.

What point of the Rule do you like best?

Silence.

What is the dominant trait in your character?

Sensitiveness.

What is your favorite virtue?

Purity. "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God."

What fault of character do you most dislike?

Egoism in general.

Give a definition of prayer.

The union of her who is not, with Him Who Is.

What is your favorite book?

The Soul of Christ. In it I learn all the secrets of the Father Who is in heaven.

Have you a great longing for heaven?

I sometimes feel homesick for heaven but, except for the vision, I possess it in the depths of my soul.

In what disposition would you wish to die?

I would like to die in an act of love, and thus fall into the arms of Him Whom I love.

What form of martyrdom would you prefer?

I love all forms, but especially the martyrdom of love.

What name would you like to have in heaven?

"The Will of God."

What is your motto?

"God in me and I in Him."

In accordance with her special grace, it was in the very depths that she lived her Carmelite ideal. She went straight to the essentials: solitude, the life of continual prayer, the consummation in love.

"A Carmelite is *one who has beheld the Crucified*, who has seen Him offering Himself to His Father as a victim for souls and, meditating in the light of this great vision of Christ's charity, has understood the passion of love that filled His soul and has willed to give herself as He did. On the mountain of Carmel, in silence, in solitude, in a prayer that never ceases because it continues through all else, the Carmelite lives as

though already in heaven, by God alone. The selfsame God Who will one day be the cause of her beatitude and will fully satisfy her in glory, is already giving Himself to her. He never leaves her; He dwells within her soul; more than that, *the two become but one*. And so *she hungers for silence* in order to be always listening, to penetrate ever more deeply into His infinite Being. She is identified with Him Whom she loves. She finds Him everywhere; she sees Him shining through everything.”²⁴

“There is the whole Carmelite life: to live in Him. Then all the sacrifices, all the immolations become divine. The soul sees Him Whom she loves through everything, and everything takes her to Him. It is a continual heart to heart union. Prayer is the essence of the life at Carmel.”²⁵

Her favorite point of the Rule was silence and, from the very first, she was delighted with the familiar motto of the early Carmelites: *Alone with the great Alone*.

2. As often happens, the first stage of the religious life of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity was marked by a flood of sensible consolations. God leads souls to the heights slowly, taking them to Calvary by way of Thabor. Sister Elizabeth often went to her Prioress, declaring: “I cannot bear this weight of grace.”

At that time, she would scarcely reach the choir and kneel down before being irresistibly enveloped in deep recollection. Her soul seemed to be immovably fixed in God. She passed through the cloister silent and absorbed, and nothing could distract her from her Christ. One day a nun saw her so seized upon by the divine presence while she was sweeping that the sister did not dare even speak to her. Outside of recreation hours, when Sister Elizabeth was joyous and charmingly spontaneous in manner, chatting with each of her sisters about what she knew would please her, her whole outward bearing showed a soul possessed by God. This recollection of her powers as though lost in God even caused some involuntary forgetfulness during the Divine Office of which she sincerely and humbly accused herself. She was visibly upheld by grace.

²⁴ Letter to G. de G., August 7, 1902.

²⁵ To the same, Sept. 14, 1902.

So passed the months of her postulancy. Her clothing took place on the 8th of December and Father Vallée came to preach the sermon. Completely given up to the joy of her total surrender to her Master, Sister Elizabeth that day lost consciousness of what was taking place around her, being wholly absorbed in that Christ Who had taken possession of her. In the evening, back once more in her little cell, alone with Him, her soul exulted. A song of thanksgiving rose to God from her heart. For a whole life of love she was at last alone with Him Who is Alone!

3. Thus far divine grace had been showered upon her. She had yet, through weary days, to experience her nothingness, to feel that she was a poor creature and capable of any failing and thus to become more understanding of her sisters' weaknesses.

For a long year God was to leave her to herself: to her helplessness, her weariness, her hesitation over her own future, even as to her vocation. On the very eve of her profession a priest would have to come and reassure her and declare what was God's will for her bewildered soul.

Facility in prayer disappeared. No more flying: she had to feel her soul dragging itself along. Her artist's nature lay dormant; her sensitiveness was dying. Many, many times did the young novice go to her Mistress and faithfully report her helplessness, her struggles, her temptations, the martyrdom suffered by her sensitive nature in passing through the terrible nights described by St. John of the Cross. To help in the accomplishment of the divine work, Mother Germaine of Jesus guided her kindly and firmly. At the time of Sister Elizabeth's entry into Carmel, she had realized how excessively sensitive she was. In the evening during the Great Silence, the young postulant loved to walk on the terrace; the sight of the sky helped to raise her soul to God. One evening Mother Germaine happened to pass by. It was the time of the Great Silence, so she said nothing, but the next day the young postulant heard these words addressed to her: "We do not come to Carmel to dream in the starlight! Go to God by faith."

Later on, in order to test her, Mother Germaine never lost an

opportunity to reprimand her for the least shortcoming, the slightest oversight. Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity would then humbly kiss the ground and go on her way.

Mother Germaine of Jesus purposely disciplined an over-affectionate disposition which might easily have become dangerous. The brave child let her do so, for, from experience, she understood better than anyone else how necessary it was for her to watch over her heart at every instant. As a young girl, she had become extremely fond of a friend whom she met almost daily at Carmel and had had long, intimate conversations with her. She loved to write to her and to read and re-read her letters, especially the passages in which her friend declared that she loved her more than anyone else. This recalling of her girlhood's past in retrospect throws special light upon her religious psychology.

"Dear little sister, yes, let us be *only one*; let us never be separated. On Saturdays, if you are willing, we will receive Holy Communion for each other. This will be our contract and so shall we always be one. Henceforth, when God looks at Marguerite, He will see Elizabeth too. When He gives something to one, He will be giving to the other too, for there will be but one victim, but one soul in two bodies. Perhaps I am too sentimental, dear sister, *but I was so happy when you told me I was that sister whom you loved best. I love to re-read those lines.* You well know that you are indeed my little sister, beloved beyond all others; need I tell you so? When you were ill I felt that nothing, not even death, could separate us. Oh! sister dear, I do not know which of us two the good God will call first; our union will not cease then, but, on the contrary, will be perfected. How good it will be to talk to the Beloved of the sister one has left behind!

"Who knows? Perhaps He will ask our blood of both of us! Then what happiness to go to martyrdom together! I cannot think about it, it is too good. . . . Meantime, let us give Him our heart's blood, drop by drop."²⁶

²⁶ Letter to M. G., 1901.

There is a certain sentimental emotionalism in these lines and, from the oral testimony of this same friend, we cannot but recognize that Elizabeth was excessively affectionate. Could anyone be astonished at weaknesses like these in the saints? Even St. Margaret Mary was momentarily held back by a too human affection for one of her sisters, for which the Sacred Heart reproached her. St. Thomas, who was both a great doctor and a great saint, teaches that no one on earth can completely divest himself of faults of weakness; not even the most perfect escape them.

A fine book—and a most consoling one for us!—could be written on the failings of the saints and the manner in which they corrected them, with God's grace aiding their own efforts.

As soon as Elizabeth Catez perceived that her heart was not free, she heroically detached herself, but gently and with exquisite tact. "Dearest Marguerite: I can safely confide something to you, though I do not want to hurt you. You see, in the chapel with you this morning I realized that being there together was even better than our nice talks; so, if you are willing, we shall spend with Him, side by side, the time we used to spend in the garden. Am I hurting you? Dear little sister, have you not felt as I do? It seems to me that you have. Tell me, quite simply. You know that you can say anything to your Elizabeth."²⁷

After this generous act of detachment, this intimate friend told us, "I felt her move away."

Something similar, but very much deeper, took place during the phase of passive purification which Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity underwent during her novitiate. All her senses had to attain this complete detachment which alone can set the soul free.

No one around her, except her Prioress, ever suspected this stage of purgative suffering. At that time, everything which it would seem should have consoled her either left her indifferent or irritated her. Even a retreat preached by Father Vallée

²⁷ *Ibid.*

whose teaching, beautiful and profound as always, she truly appreciated, could not rescue her from this interior anguish. The priest himself no longer understood her and, over and over, sadly asked: "What have you done to my Elizabeth? You have changed her." The work he did not understand was God's doing and men could avail nothing.

From that hard year of trials, Sister Elizabeth gained a more robust faith and an experience of suffering that would enable her to understand and comfort other souls who were being tested by God. The essential result of this period of purgation was to render her more virile and to establish her definitely in a spiritual life based entirely on pure faith, which would henceforth go forward peacefully, under the eye of God, secure from any recurring assaults of oversensitiveness.

Physical health returned with the establishment of spiritual balance and the conventual Chapter admitted her to profession. She was informed of this fact on Christmas Day. As on all the most important occasions of her life Sister Elizabeth took refuge in the all-powerful prayer of Christ in the Mass. This time, however, she most particularly sought His help, begging for a whole novena of Masses from the venerable priest friend who had been the first person to whom she had confided her aspirations when, as a little girl, she had climbed upon his knee. Then Sister Elizabeth disappeared in retreat beneath her lowered veil. She passed like a shadow through the community halls, her face always veiled, and her Sisters enveloped her with their prayers. But soon the retreat, begun in such joyous anticipation of her profession, became so painful as even to raise doubts as to her future and her vocation. It was necessary to send for a religious of wide experience who reassured her. Sister Elizabeth believed the priest's word as the voice of God. It is customary in Carmel to prepare for profession by keeping a sacred vigil the night before. Sister Elizabeth was in choir, wholly united with her Lord, beseeching Him to take her life for His glory, when the Master visited her. "During the night preceding the great day, while I was in choir awaiting the Bridegroom, *I understood that my heaven was beginning on*

earth: the heaven of faith, with suffering and immolation for Him I love." ²⁸

A new stage of her spiritual life was beginning. No longer would there be sufferings from a sensitive nature not yet purified, or scruples and anxieties over mere nothings. Henceforth she would tread the road to her Calvary with the peaceful and unshakable confidence of a bride who knows she is loved: she would go forward amid the most heroic sufferings with the majesty of a queen.

4. Her profession once made, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity set herself to the pursuit of religious perfection, without the least sentimental emotionalism but with a new enthusiasm and a calm, heroic strength which would lead her from sacrifice to sacrifice, up to the consummation of Calvary.

The whole program of her inner life was to realize her name, Sister *Elizabeth*, that is, the House of God, in which the Trinity dwells.

It is true that this seeking of the presence of God in all circumstances is the very essence of the Carmelite life and is in the established tradition of the Order. St. Teresa constantly recurs to it in her *Interior Castle*. "Intimacy with the Three Divine Persons" constitutes the central truth of her mystical doctrine.

By a special grace, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity found the most characteristic inclination of her interior life in that doctrine. Her letters, her conversations in the parlor, her poems, her retreat resolutions, all converge on this indwelling which was, if we may trust her own testimony, "the beautiful sun lighting her life." ²⁹ "The day I understood that, everything became clear to me." "My only practice is to enter into myself and lose myself in Those Who are there." ³⁰

As the years of her religious life passed, her soul buried itself more and more in this tranquil and peace-giving Trinity, Which at every moment imparted to her something of Its eternal life.

²⁸ Letter to Canon A., July 15, 1903.

²⁹ Letter to Madame de B., 1906.

³⁰ Letter to G. de G., end of September 1903.

At times, indeed, there were still some slight disturbances in her interior life, but more and more everything hushed to silence. "It is the greatest happiness to live in close union with God, to make one's life a heart to heart intimacy with Him, an exchange of love, to know that the Master is to be found in the depths of the soul. One is never alone then, but must have solitude in order to enjoy the presence of this adored Guest. . . . Everything is lighted up and it is so good to live."³¹ "You ask me what I do in Carmel. I might answer that a Carmelite has only one thing to do: to love and pray."³² "A Carmelite's life is a communing with God from morning till night and from night till morning. If He did not fill our cells and our cloisters, how empty they would be! But we see Him through all for we bear Him within us and our life is an anticipated Heaven."³³

The tranquil rhythm of this spiritual life is simple, constantly coming back to certain unchanging, essential movements: to be silent and to believe in Love, Who is there, dwelling in the depths of the soul in order to save it. Many "nights" and weaknesses remain, it is true, but what do the involuntary waverings of a soul that lives in the presence of the Immutable matter? Gradually everything grows quiet and becomes divine.

And so the life of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity flowed on. In that fervent Carmel, where so many other great souls were living by God and for His glory, it must not be imagined that she was an extraordinary figure, to be pointed out as "the Saint." It is the normal thing in monasteries to canonize religious only after they have been taken from the community! At Dijon, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity was merely the ever faithful novice³⁴ who, like so many others and as a true Carmelite, was wholly "hid with Christ in God."³⁵

³¹ Letter to F. de S., April 28, 1903.

³² Letter to Madame A., June 29, 1903.

³³ Letter to F. de S., 1904.

³⁴ Among the Carmelites, as in some other Orders, the young professed religious spend three years in the novitiate after they have made their vows. (Sister Elizabeth did not live to enter upon her full community life as a professed nun. Tr.)

³⁵ *Col.* III, 3.

3.

Toward Transforming Union

When, on November 21, 1904, under an impulse of grace and in a single spontaneous outburst, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity had composed her sublime prayer to the Trinity, it still remained for her to climb the last summits of love.

It is not by chance that in the second sentence of the prayer, immediately after the first movement of adoration of the Trinity, Sister Elizabeth falls back upon herself: "Help me to become wholly forgetful of self." In three years of religious life, one object had remained stubbornly insurmountable: her own self. She had not yet attained that supreme deliverance of selfless souls whose only occupation is to love. That was to be the work of the last two years. At first, during eighteen months of secret fidelity, it was slow and laborious; then, with almost terrifying swiftness, beginning with that Palm Sunday evening when God descended upon her "as a prey," coming Himself to accomplish His work of destruction and consummation in her body and soul. Then was the transforming union wrought in her, not on Thabor but, according to her wish, in the image of the Crucified and in "being made conformable to His death."

This most sublime phase of her life remains for us to analyze.

For several months, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity had suffered from such exhaustion that without the help of God she would have collapsed. Before she was removed from the office of portress, she had sometimes to make a real effort to ascend the first step of the stairs to answer a call: she was worn out. "In the morning, by the time we had said the Little Hours," she acknowledged subsequently to her Prioress, "I already felt at the end of my strength, and used to wonder how I could go on until evening. After Compline my *cowardice* was at its height, so that I was sometimes tempted to envy a nun who was excused from Matins. I spent the time of the Great Silence in real agony, which I used to unite with that of our Divine Master, keeping by His side close to the choir grille. It was an

hour of pure suffering, but it gained me the strength for Matins. I found then a certain facility in applying myself to God. Afterwards my weakness returned and, without being noticed, I regained our cell as best I could, often leaning against the wall.”³⁶

At the beginning of Lent in 1906, after the mid-day recreation, Sister Elizabeth, according to her custom, opened her beloved St. Paul at random and came upon this text: “That I may know Him . . . and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death.”³⁷

This last expression struck her: *being made conformable to His death*. Did it not announce her forthcoming deliverance?

In the middle of Lent, the symptoms of a serious stomach disorder became obvious and, after the feast of St. Joseph, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity was installed in the infirmary. “I was sure that St. Joseph would come for me this year,” she said, quite delighted, “and here he is already.”

A veritable crusade of prayers was begun, but in vain; the disease progressed steadily. Sister Elizabeth rejoiced. Disregarding all consideration of secondary causes, she called this mysterious illness, love’s sickness. “It is God Who is working upon me and consuming me. I surrender myself completely, rejoicing in advance at everything He will do.” On Palm Sunday, her condition was suddenly aggravated by a syncope and a priest was summoned that night. With her eyes shining and her folded hands clasping to her heart her beautiful profession crucifix, she repeated rapturously: “Oh, Love, Love, Love!”

“I have seen many sick persons,” declared the priest who gave her the last Sacraments, “but I never saw a sight like this.”

On Good Friday they thought she was dying, but the crisis passed and, on Holy Saturday morning, the infirmarians were astonished to find Sister Elizabeth kneeling on her bed.

The return to life was almost a disappointment to her. “On Palm Sunday evening I had a very serious attack and I thought that at last the time had come for me to take my flight to the

³⁶ *Souvenirs*, p. 175.

³⁷ *Phil.* III, 10.

infinite realms, to behold unveiled that Trinity which had already been my dwelling place here below. In the peace and silence of the night I received Extreme Unction and my Master's visit. It seemed to me that He was waiting for that moment to break my bonds. What ineffable days I spent awaiting the great vision!"³⁸

"To you, who have always been my confidant, I know that I can tell everything. The prospect of going to see Him I love, in His ineffable beauty, and of plunging myself into that Trinity which had already been my heaven here below filled my soul with immense joy. I cannot tell you how it hurt to come back to earth! It seemed so ugly when I came out of my beautiful dream. Only in God is all pure, beautiful and holy."³⁹

This violent shock had driven her nearer to the invisible world. Accustomed as she was to live above secondary causes, Sister Elizabeth understood the providential meaning of her illness from the very first. She saw the divine hand in it, the "exceeding love" which now more than ever was pursuing her. She immediately adjusted herself to the divine plan. "If God has given me back a little life," she told herself, "it can only be for His glory." God willed to set her firmly on that last peak of Mount Carmel where, according to the celebrated sketch of St. John of the Cross, "there is no longer anything but the divine honor and glory."

Some months before her illness, during a "license day" in the summer of 1905, while talking with one of her Sisters, she had found in St. Paul the name which definitively expressed her particular grace: LAUDEM GLORIAE.⁴⁰ Thenceforth, all the efforts of her interior life were directed to that end. The task might have been long-drawn-out, but God hastened it. It often happens that God allows souls to advance in divine ways at their own pace and then suddenly intervenes and takes upon

³⁸ Letter to G. de G., May 1906.

³⁹ Letter to Canon A., May 1906.

⁴⁰ All readers of the biography (*Souvenirs*) of Sister Elizabeth will remember that the name which became so precious to her is always left in her imperfect Latin. The passage is from the *Epistle to the Ephesians* I, 11-12: "being pre-destinated . . . that we may be unto the praise of His glory." (Translator.)

Himself the direction of their lives down to the smallest details. Finally, under the impulse of an irresistible grace, He sweeps them unto Himself. He makes use of secondary causes: a great trial that shatters a life or an illness that seems to lead to death. In reality, it is the divine hour of Calvary wherein all things are consummated. Thus it was for Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity: the attack that struck her down on Palm Sunday evening and Good Friday was the signal for the supreme deliverance, the definitive entrance into the state of transforming union.

From that time on, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity was completely detached from everything of earth, and lived here with a soul that dwelt in eternity.

The nuns who knew her most intimately declared that it was a revelation to them of what it meant to be a saint: "We felt her leaving us." "We could no longer follow her; she was already a being of the world beyond." They watched her go forward on the way of suffering "with a queenly dignity," to quote the expression of a witness who did not know that Sister Elizabeth had used the very same words.

It was clear enough what was happening. As her physical frame was gradually being destroyed, her soul, more and more blessed, soared aloft and forgot itself. Day and night she was obsessed by a single thought: to be the "praise of glory of the Trinity." She had only one desire now: to spend her life completely in the service of souls, and she dreamed of "dying transformed into Jesus crucified." "I am growing weaker daily and I feel that the Master will not delay much longer in coming for me. I am experiencing unknown joys: the joys of suffering. . . . It is my dream, before I die, to be transformed into Jesus crucified."⁴¹

Although this soul was essentially *Trinitarian*, her last months may be said to have been haunted by the thought of the Crucified, so true is it that, as St. Teresa remarks, the remembrance of the Sacred Humanity of Christ must never be effaced, not

⁴¹ Letter to G. de G., late October 1906.

even in the highest mystical states. He Who as God is the term, as Man remains the Way: Calvary is the only way to the Trinity.

The constant yearning for the glory of the Trinity which is the very keynote of the whole interior life of Elizabeth's soul is, accordingly, closely mingled with the thought of Jesus crucified: " ' *Configuratus morti ejus.* ' That is what still haunts me, that gives strength to my soul in its sufferings. If you knew the sensation of destruction I feel in my whole being! The road to Calvary is opening before me and I am utterly joyful to walk it, as a bride beside my crucified Lord.

" On the 18th, I shall be twenty-six. I do not know whether this year will end for me in time or in eternity. I ask of you, as a child of its father, to be so good as to consecrate me in Holy Mass as a sacrifice of praise to the glory of God. Consecrate me so completely that I may no longer be *I* but *He*; so that the Father, looking upon me, may recognize Him; that I may be ' made conformable to His death,' and fill up in my flesh what is wanting to His Passion for the Church which is His Body; and then bathe me in the Blood of Christ that I may be strong with His strength." ⁴²

Thus Sister Elizabeth's spiritual life became increasingly reduced to the essential: transformation into Christ by love; an almost constant filial intimacy with Our Lady; the realization of her baptismal grace in its special relation to the Trinity. Borne away into the soul of Jesus crucified, the activity of her interior life soon became extremely simple: the glory of the Trinity. That is all.

Sister Elizabeth had reached that higher unity of the soul of those saints who have attained to the fulness of Christ. Everything else either entered into this unity or disappeared. The " palace of beatitude or of suffering " is all one for her. Longing for suffering does not exclude longing for heaven, which she feels more and more as she reads over those last chapters of the Apocalypse on the heavenly Jerusalem which are ever beside

⁴² Letter to Canon A., July 1906.

her. She had never seemed at once so human and so divine. Her tender affection for her sisters in religion was especially evident.

“ Never did the Heart of Christ so overflow as at the moment when He was about to leave His own. Nor have I, little sister, ever felt so keenly the need to protect you with my prayers. When my pain becomes sharpest, I feel so urged to offer it for you that I cannot do otherwise. Have you some particular need of it? Are you suffering? I give you all my sufferings; they are wholly at your disposal. If you knew how happy I am at the thought that my Master is coming for me! Death is indeed beautiful for those whom God has safeguarded, and who have not sought the things which are seen, because they pass away, but rather the things which are not seen and which are eternal.

“ In heaven I shall be your ‘ angel ’⁴³ more than ever. I know how much my little sister needs shielding in a city like Paris where her life is spent. St. Paul says that God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted in His sight. How fervently I shall ask Him that this great purpose of His will may be fulfilled in you! That it may be so, listen to the advice of the same Apostle: ‘ Walk in Christ; rooted and built up in Him.’ When I am contemplating the Absolute Beauty, in all Its brightness, I shall ask Him to imprint It in your soul, so that even here on earth, where everything is soiled, you may be beautiful with His beauty, luminous with His light. Good-bye. Thank Him for me, for my happiness is immense. I shall meet you again in ‘ the heritage of the saints.’ It is there that in the choir of Virgins, that generation pure as light, we shall sing the beautiful song of the Lamb and the eternal *Sanctus* in the radiant light of the Face of God. Then, says St. Paul, ‘ We shall be transformed into the same image, from glory unto glory.’ I embrace you with all my heart’s love and am your ‘ angel ’ for all eternity.”⁴⁴

⁴³ To this correspondent, who had been a postulant at the Dijon Carmel, Elizabeth had been “ angel,” that is, the novice especially appointed to teach her the observance and help her in the early days.

⁴⁴ Letter to C. B., late Summer 1906.

The night of August 2, 1906, the anniversary of her entrance into Carmel, being unable to sleep, she settled herself near the window and remained there in prayer with her Master until almost midnight. She spent a sublime evening. "The sky was so blue, so still; the monastery was so deeply silent. . . . And as for me, I went over these five years, so filled with graces."⁴⁵

Feeling that the end was near, Sister Elizabeth asked her Prioress to allow her to go into retreat the evening of August 15, that she might prepare for her passage to eternal life. In a note slipped into the hand of one of her Sisters, she says that she is going away with *Janua caeli* for these days of prayer and recollection. "This evening, *Laudem gloriae* is entering the novitiate of heaven, to prepare to receive the habit of glory, and feels urged to beg Sister A to think of her. 'For whom He foreknew,' St. Paul tells us, 'He also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son.' That is what I am going to teach myself: conformity, identity with my adored Master Who was crucified for love! Then I shall be able to fulfill my office of Praise of Glory and even here below to sing the eternal *Sanctus*, while waiting to go and chant it in the heavenly courts of the Father's house."⁴⁶

It was during these evenings and nights of silence with God, when she felt her Master leading her to her Calvary, that, at the request of her Mother Prioress, she composed *the last retreat of LAUDEM GLORIAE*, in order to explain how she conceived her office of "Praise of Glory."

Until the last week of her life, she used to drag herself to the evening Office and, all huddled up in a corner of the tribune, she would extract the last measure of strength from her exhausted body. As far as her extreme weakness permitted, she remained faithful to the end to the smallest observances of her Order. Frequently, during interminable sleepless nights, she endured a very martyrdom of body and soul. In a strong spirit of faith she then sought refuge with her Prioress, whom she called her "priest," appointed by God to consummate her sacrifice.

⁴⁵ Letter to her mother, August 3, 1906.

⁴⁶ Note to one of her Sisters in religion.

“ 11 p. m. From the palace of suffering and beatitude. Mother dear, my dear Priest. Your little ‘Praise of Glory’ cannot sleep; she is suffering; but in her soul, though the anguish reaches there, all is so calm. It was your visit that brought her this heavenly peace. Help me to climb my Calvary; I feel so strongly the power of your priesthood over my soul, and I need you so much.

“ Mother, I feel my *Three* so near to me. I am more overwhelmed with happiness than with suffering. My Master has reminded me that pain is my dwelling-place and that I must not choose my sufferings. So I am plunging myself with Him into the immensity of suffering with all its fear and anguish.” (October 1906)

“ My dearest Priest. Your little victim is suffering very, very much; it is a sort of physical agony. She feels cowardly, so cowardly that she could cry out. But He, the Being Who is the fulness of love, visits her, keeps her company, associates her with Himself, while He makes her understand that as long as He leaves her on earth He will give her suffering as her portion.” (October 1906)

No matter how sharp the pain, no one ever caught her giving way in the slightest degree. Her lovely smile never left her lips. During those last weeks of real martyrdom, the gift of fortitude was made radiantly plain in her. One day she was asked whether she were suffering much; she made a gesture as though something were tearing her inside and her face was convulsed. Then she immediately resumed her tranquil serenity.

It was in this state of exhaustion that, on October 15, Father Vallée saw her for the last time. He was struck at the work of destruction which God was accomplishing in this soul and which was making it “so strangely, so divinely beautiful.” He exhorted her to make a supreme effort to raise herself to the love which exceeds suffering. Much comforted by this last visit from the Father, she scaled the half-seen heights: those higher states of transforming union on Calvary, which have no resemblance to anything that takes place on earth.

On October 29, thanks to a slight respite, she was able to

go down to the parlor to see her family. They had brought her nieces, "those two lovely white lilies," and their mother made them kneel down by the grille. Raising her profession Crucifix, Sister Elizabeth blessed them.

When the moment came to say good-bye, she had the strength to whisper to her mother: "Mother, when the Out-Sister comes to let you know that I have finished with suffering, you will kneel down and say: 'Lord, Thou didst give her to me; Thou hast taken her away. Blessed be Thy Holy Name.'" ⁴⁷

By the following day, October 30, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity could no longer leave the infirmary. In the evening she was shaken in her bed by a violent fit of shivering. During the night heaven again seemed almost ready to open to her. There was no time to delay; the grace of the last Sacraments was renewed very early the next morning. The Church was singing the First Vespers of All Saints. No longer able to write, Elizabeth dictated a last message: "I think the great day of my meeting with my adored Bridegroom, my one love, has come. I hope by this evening to be among that great multitude whom St. John saw before the throne of the Lamb, who serve Him day and night in His temple. Let us meet in that beautiful chapter of the Apocalypse and also in the last chapter, which sweeps the soul beyond this earth, into the vision wherein I am going to lose myself forever." ⁴⁸

At midnight, all the bells of the town rang out. "Oh! Mother," she cried, "those bells encourage me; they are ringing for the departure of *Laudem Gloriam*. They will make me die for joy, those bells! Let us go!" And she stretched her arms to heaven.

On All Saints' Day, about ten o'clock in the morning, the last hour seemed to have come. The community assembled in the

⁴⁷ When Mme. Catez, informed by the Out-Sister, came to the parlor where the body of her dead daughter was laid out, a cry of sorrow broke from her. Then a friend who was with her said: "Remember what Elizabeth told you." The brave mother remembered and, falling upon her knees, murmured: "My God, Thou didst give her to me; Thou hast taken her. Blessed be Thy Holy Name."

⁴⁸ Letter to Madame H., Oct. 31, 1906.

infirmiry to recite the prayers for the dying. Sister Elizabeth roused herself, made sure that all her Sisters were present, and asked forgiveness of the community. Then, begged to speak, she uttered these words: "All passes away. . . . In the evening of life only love remains. . . . We must do everything for love. . . . We must constantly forget ourselves. . . . The Good God so loves us to be forgetful of ourselves. Oh, if I had always been so!"

Then began nine days of distressing agony. Stretched upon her bed as upon an altar, her eyes closed, all life concentrated in the depths of her soul, the saintly victim prayed constantly. When they tried to console her at being no longer able to receive the Blessed Sacrament, she said: "I am finding Him on the Cross; it is there that He is giving me life."

Violent headaches caused fears of cerebral congestion; the danger was averted by continual applications of ice, which melted immediately. Her brain seemed on fire. Her words, which were distinguished with difficulty, gave evidence of a divine union already accomplished. Her face, wasted and unrecognizable, at times took on a startling resemblance to the suffering features of the Holy Face, recalling Our Lord on the Cross. Three weeks previously, she had said to her Prioress: "If my master offered me the choice of dying in an ecstasy or in the abandonment of Calvary, I would choose the latter in order to be like Him." Her Master had granted her desire to the full. Within as without it was the crushing agony of Calvary. After a violent attack she was heard to cry: "Oh, Love, Love, Love, consume my whole substance for Thy glory; may it be spent drop by drop for Thy Church!"

Two days before her death, the doctor admitted to her that her pulse was extremely weak. She was delighted and found the strength to say: "In two days I shall be in the bosom of my 'Three.' Our Lady, who is all bright, will herself take me by the hand and lead me to heaven." The doctor, an unbeliever, was astonished at such joy. Sister Elizabeth spoke to him of the divine adoption, of the great mystery of Love leaning down to us. . . . These last efforts left her completely exhausted, but

they could still hear her murmur in a sort of chant: "I am going to Light, to Love, to Life." Those were her last intelligible words.

On Friday, November 9th, at a quarter to six in the morning, she turned on her right side and put her head back. Her face shone; her beautiful eyes, which for a week had been closed and almost sightless, opened and fixed themselves with a wonderful expression a little above her Prioress, who was kneeling beside her bed. She lay in angelic beauty. Around her, her Sisters, who were reciting the prayers for the dying, could not take their eyes from her. Then, without having perceived her last sigh, they saw that Sister Elizabeth was no more.

It was the morning of the feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica, one of her favorite festivals. While in choir, where lay her mortal remains, the Sisters were singing the praises of the House of God—*Beata pacis visio*—Sister Elizabeth, already in the unchanging vision of peace and the glories of the heavenly Jerusalem, the thought of which had dominated her last days, was mingling with the throng of the Blessed who, holding palms in their hands, rest not day or night saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was, and Who is, and Who is to come." With them, falling down, adoring and casting down her crown, the reward of her martyrdom of love, she ceased not to repeat before the throne of the Lamb: *Dignus es, Domine*—Thou art worthy, O Lord, "to receive power, and divinity, and wisdom, and strength, and honor."⁴⁹

Before the face of the Most Holy Trinity, Sister Elizabeth had become the PRAISE OF GLORY for all eternity.

⁴⁹ *Apoc.* V, 12.

CHAPTER II

THE ASCESIS OF SILENCE

“What is your favorite point of the Rule?” . . . “Silence.”

1. The saint of silence.
2. Exterior silence.
3. Interior silence.
4. Divine silence.

Two fundamental elements constitute the essence of all sanctity: self-abnegation and union with God. They appear in the lives of all the saints, but in infinitely various ways.

In the case of the Carmelite, the negative aspect takes the form of a complete separation. Carmel is the desert; God alone is there. Yet among Carmelites each one lives in her own manner the doctrine so dear to St. John of the Cross, the Mystical Doctor of Carmel: the doctrine, namely, that the creature is *nothing* and that God is *all*. One star differs from another not only by its size, but by its special light, its peculiar brilliance; God is multiform in His saints. It would be useless to try to force even two saints of the same religious family into an identical mould, for unalterable differences are concealed beneath certain common features. It is the task of a theologian who sets out to search the depths of a soul to know how to discern these differences. To distinguish is to see better.

There have been frequent attempts to compare or contrast St. Teresa of the Child Jesus and Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity. Their ways are essentially different. The Carmelite of Lisieux radiantly covers the whole Catholic world with rose petals scattered for love. She has taught the modern world how it can once more become “a child with the Good God.” The Carmelite of Dijon fulfills her mission in interior souls. Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity was the saint of silence and recollection.

1. In her poems, when but fifteen, Elizabeth Catez expressed her dream of solitude with her Lord:

“To live alone with Thee.”¹

Later, when she was nineteen, she wrote in her diary: “Soon I shall be all Thine; I shall dwell in solitude, alone with Thee, concerned only with Thee, living only with Thee, talking only with Thee.”² And when in the country during the summer, she loved to slip away to lonely woods.³ From the day she entered religion she was enchanted with the Carmelite solitude. *Alone with the Alone!* There we have the whole life of Carmel.

The Carmelite is essentially a contemplative hermit, whose native land is the desert of Carith and whose refuge is the cleft in the rock. Not that she forgets souls in peril—St. Teresa was led to found her Reform by the sight of the ruin wrought by Luther’s heresy—but the witness she is called to bear to God is that of a solitary whose gaze remains fixed on Him alone, eager to forget all else; a silent but most moving attestation that the divine Beauty alone is worthy of the attention of a soul raised by grace to share in the life of the Trinity. God alone suffices.

Her apostolic action is that of prayer, which obtains everything. One single soul raised to the state of transforming union is more useful to the Church and to the world than a multitude of others engaged in constant activity. Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity was the type of silent contemplative whose overflowing apostolic action extends to the entire universe.

From the very first, she was seen to enter completely into this spirit of silence and death which is the condition of all divine life in Carmel. She had a special devotion to the prophet Elias, who was the first to lead the eremetical life and whom God had commanded to flee from the dwellings of men and to hide himself, far from the multitude, in the desert: *Get thee hence . . . and hide thyself by the torrent of Carith.*⁴ He it was who taught the hermits of the holy mountain of Carmel to detach

¹ *Poems*, August 1896.

² *Diary*, March 27, 1899.

³ Letter to Madame A., September 29, 1902.

⁴ *III Kings XVII, 3.*

themselves from all that is not God, to live alone in the presence of the living God, forgetting all others.

To lead the life of a hermit, like the holy solitary Elias; to live in little cells, like the monks of Mount Carmel in the caves by the Prophet's spring: such was the dearest wish of St. Teresa's heart. "The kind of life which we aspire to lead," she writes in the Thirteenth Chapter of the *Way of Perfection*, "is not only that of religious; more than that, it is the life of hermits." "Let us call to mind our holy Fathers, those hermits of other days, whose life we seek to copy. What sufferings did they not have to bear, and in what loneliness!"

Following the example of the courageous Reformer, her first daughters buried themselves in the desert of Carmel. "Their solitude was their delight," St. Teresa tells us. "They assured me they were never tired of being alone. A visit, even from their brothers and sisters, was a torment to them. She held herself happiest who had most time to spend alone in a hermitage."

SILENCE and SOLITUDE: there you have the purest spirit of Carmel.

"You may have foundations in deserts . . . each one shall have a separate cell . . . each one shall remain in his cell or near it, meditating day and night on the Law of the Lord, and watching in prayer." (The Holy Rule)

"Whenever the Nuns are not engaged at Community acts nor in the offices of the house, each Sister shall remain in her cell or in the hermitage assigned to her by the Prioress . . . and in this way she will observe what the Rule ordains, that each one shall live in solitude . . ."

"There shall be ground enough to build some hermitages, that the Religious, after the example of the Holy Fathers, may retire to them for prayer . . ."

"That occasion for breaking silence by being together may be avoided, there shall never be a common workroom . . ." (Constitutions)

Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity possessed in an exceptional degree this attraction for silence, which flees all created things

in order to remain in faith in the presence of the living God. Her whole asceticism may be reduced to silence, in the widest sense of the word. In her eyes, silence constitutes the most fundamental requirement for the soul that desires to be raised to the divine union.

While we do not wish to confine her thoughts within too rigid limits, for that would be incompatible with the free inspirations to which under the guidance of the Holy Ghost Sister Elizabeth, of the Trinity surrendered herself, we may yet distinguish three kinds of silence in her line of thought: exterior and interior silence and, finally, a wholly divine silence, in which the soul is completely passive and which is one of the highest effects of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. For want of a better name and drawing on an expression of her own, we may call it "sacred silence," or "God's silence." It is analogous to the *Divinum Silentium* of the drawing made by St. John of the Cross.⁵

2. Exterior silence is not the most necessary; in certain circumstances it is even impossible. Then the soul's resource is to take refuge within itself, in that interior solitude which alone is necessary for union with God. But outward silence must be sought as much as possible, because it helps interior silence and normally leads to it; the love of silence leads to the silence of love.

Sister Elizabeth loved the enclosure. Useless visits to the parlor were a torment to her. On several occasions she gently but firmly reminded her relatives of this point of the Rule. She faithfully abstained from correspondence during Advent and Lent, unless obedience made it a duty to write. When we take account of all the circumstances, it is only by what seems an obviously providential permission that she was able to leave so many letters behind her, notwithstanding her longing to remain in silence behind the grilles of her Carmel.

The same silence governed her contacts with her Sisters within the monastery. She accepted "silence challenges" more

⁵ Cf. *The Complete Works of St. John of the Cross*, Vol. I, Frontispiece. London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1934.

than once and the very few failures in keeping silence of which she accused herself were always from motives of charity. She was faithful to this spirit of silence to the very last day of her life. "Once," relates a nun, "I had obtained permission to take something to her in the infirmary and stay with her until the end of recreation. Sister Elizabeth received me joyfully. The bell rang; gently and with a sweet smile, she resumed her silence. I felt that I must not prolong the conversation. There was nothing stiff about her, but fidelity to the Rule came before all else."

She was always coming back to silence. The young Sisters knew so well that it was her special program that, on the eve of novenas or retreats, they would whisper mischievously: "Silence! You will spend it in silence, won't you?" And she would smile and nod.

During her illness, as the Prioress insisted that she should go out in the fresh air, Sister Elizabeth chose the most solitary spot in the garden. "Instead of working in our little cell, I have settled myself like a hermit in the loneliest spot in our large garden, and spend delightful hours there. All nature seems to me so full of God; the wind sighing in the tall trees, the little birds singing, the lovely blue sky—all these things speak to me of Him."⁶

Above all, she loved the silence of her cell, which she called her "little paradise" and in which she delighted to take refuge. "A straw bed, a little chair, a wooden table; there you have the furniture. But it is full of God and I spend such happy hours there, alone with the Bridegroom. I keep silence; I listen to Him; it is so good to hear everything from Him . . . and then, I love Him!"⁷

She was especially fond of the time of the Great or Night Silence. She so loved her silent Carmel. "Carmel is a corner of heaven; in silence and solitude we live there alone with God Who is Alone."⁸

Two or three times a year, more or less according to the

⁶ Letter to her mother, August 1906.

⁷ Letter to Madame A., June 29, 1903. ⁸ Letter to M-L. M., Oct. 26, 1902.

custom of different houses, the nuns have "license days," that is, days when they may visit one another in their cells, as did formerly the hermits of the desert. Sister Elizabeth lent herself with good grace to this custom, of which St. Teresa approved in order that the Sisters might mutually encourage one another in the love of their Beloved. In fact, it was during one of these days that she received one of the greatest graces of her life: her name, "Praise of Glory." But it is obvious, that given human weakness, these visits, which should cause the spirit to flame with zeal, may degenerate into trivial chatter and be a sheer loss so far as union with God is concerned, which is the only object of a Carmelite's life. Sister Elizabeth joyfully returned to the silence she loved beyond everything else. She once wrote to her sister: "We had a license on election day, that is, we could pay one another little visits during the day. But, you know, *a Carmelite's life is silence.*"⁹

3. The Carmelite's true silence is the silence of the soul, in which she finds God.

As a faithful disciple of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, Elizabeth strove to impose silence on the powers of her soul and to withdraw herself from all created things. With pitiless zeal she immolated everything: her sight, her thought, her heart. "It is in Carmel as it is in heaven; we must be separated from everything in order to possess Him Who is All."¹⁰

Even as a girl, this idea of complete separation from creatures had a powerful attraction for her. "Let us empty ourselves; detach ourselves from everything. Let Him be the only one, Him Alone. Let us leave earth, all creatures, everything perceived by the senses."¹¹

In the midst of social gatherings and gay parties, her soul fled from the tumult and raised itself to God. "It seems to me that one can never be drawn away from Him when one acts only for Him and is ever in His holy presence, under that divine gaze that penetrates into the innermost recesses of the soul.

⁹ Letter to her sister, October 1901.

¹⁰ Letter to her mother, August 1903. ¹¹ Letter to M. G., 1901.

Even in the world we can listen to Him in the silence of a heart that wills to belong to none but Him.”¹²

Sister Elizabeth had a special devotion to St. Catherine of Siena on account of the great Dominican mystic's teaching on the *interior cell*, wherein she had found her constant refuge in the midst of the bustling activity of men and her prodigious apostolic work in behalf of the papal policy.

This interior silence, so precious to Sister Elizabeth, was soon to assume for her the form of a general ascesis and take a foremost place in her mystical life. This is teaching straight from the Gospels: whoever desires to be lifted up to God in prayer must reduce to silence in himself both the empty tumult without and the din within, and retire into the depths of his soul and there in secret, “having shut the door,”¹³ recollect himself in his Father's presence.

Thus did Christ pray during those silent nights in Palestine, when, at evening, He went forth alone into the mountain, to spend the time until morning “in the prayer of God.”¹⁴

The lives of the anchorites and Desert Fathers in the first centuries of the Church, in their withdrawal from all useless intercourse, clearly show us this purifying function of silence in the primitive conception of Christian ascesis. The desert led to the silence of the soul in which God had His dwelling.

In accordance with her particular grace, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity understood this Gospel teaching in a completely Carmelite sense: silence of all the powers of the soul, which are kept for God alone. No more tumult in the outward senses, in the imagination and sensitive self, in the memory, the understanding, the will; to see nothing, hear nothing, take pleasure in nothing; to stop at nothing that may distract the heart or retard the soul on its way to God!

First of all, the sense of sight must be watched. Did not the Master say: “If thy eye scandalize thee, pluck it out. . . . If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome.”¹⁵ Impurity and a host of imperfections are caused by this want of

¹² Letter to Canon A., December 1, 1900.

¹³ *Matt.* VI, 6.

¹⁴ *Luke* VI, 12.

¹⁵ *Matt.* VI, 22.

watchfulness over the eyes. David, who could speak from sad experience, besought God: "Turn away my eyes that they may not behold vanity,"¹⁶ that vanity of the earth which had caused his soul to fall. The virgin soul does not allow itself to cast a single look away from Christ.

Silence of the imagination and other faculties of the soul is no less necessary. We carry a whole interior world of sensations and impressions about with us, and it threatens to take possession of us at every moment. There also we must practice the asceticism of silence. A soul which continues to entertain itself with its memories, "which indulges in any desire"¹⁷ apart from God, is not a silent soul as Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity understands the term. It still has "discords"¹⁸ and clamorous sensibilities which prevent the harmonious chorus which should never cease to rise to God from all the powers of the soul.

The understanding, in turn, must hush all human commotion within itself. The "least useless thought"¹⁹ would be a false note which must be silenced at any price. An overly keen intellectualism, which allows too much play to the understanding for its own sake, is a subtle obstacle to the true silence of soul where God is found in pure faith. Like her master, St. John of the Cross, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity was ruthless in this respect. "We must extinguish every other light,"²⁰ and attain to God by nakedness of spirit, and not by building a learned structure of beautiful thoughts.

Above all, there must be silence in the will. The whole drama of our sanctification takes place there; the will is the faculty of love. Rightly does St. John of the Cross assign to the will the final purifications that prepare the way for transforming union. *Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing*, on the way; and on the Mountain, *nothing*.²¹ Sister Elizabeth resolved to follow her spiritual guide to the uttermost point on the "narrow way" that leads to the summit of Carmel. She strongly urges the soul

¹⁶ Ps. CXVIII, 37.

¹⁷ *Last Retreat*, 2nd day.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 4th day.

²¹ Drawing by St. John of the Cross of the *Ascent of Mt. Carmel*.

that would reach divine union to rise above even its most spiritual personal tastes to the complete abnegation of all self-will. "To know nothing"; to make no distinction between feeling and not feeling, enjoying and not enjoying;²² to be resolute in passing everything by in order that, in complete self-forgetfulness and abnegation, the soul may be united to God alone. Thus far did Sister Elizabeth carry her ideal of silence and absolute solitude, far from all created things. We know that the last hours of her life were the living realization of this ideal.

Consequently, with her we must understand this ascesis of silence in its deepest sense. It is not a material separation from external things, but a solitude of spirit, a detachment from all that is not God. Silent in the face of all happenings, whether within itself or outside, the soul "ceases to distinguish between them, but breaks through them and passes them by to rest in the Master Himself above all else."²³

This is the night of St. John of the Cross, the dying to all natural activity. "The soul that aspires to dwell with God in the impregnable fortress of holy recollection, must, at least in spirit, be separated, detached and withdrawn from the thought of all else."²⁴ This is absolute silence in the presence of God alone.

Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity devoted a whole chapter of her last retreat to singing the praises of this blessed state of the soul completely set free by interior silence: "'I will keep my strength to Thee' is another of Christ's songs in which I desire to join incessantly. My Rule tells me: 'In silence shall be your strength.' To keep our strength for the Lord is to keep our whole being in unity by interior silence; to collect all our powers, to occupy them in the one work of love, to have the 'single eye' which allows the light of God to enlighten us."²⁵

This silence embraces everything. "A soul which listens to

²² Cf. *Last Retreat*, 4th day.

²³ *Heaven on Earth*, 4th prayer.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5th prayer.

²⁵ *Last Retreat*, 2nd day. (References to the quotations contained in this *Last Retreat* and *Heaven on Earth* will be found in the Appendices, where both are given in full.)

self, which is preoccupied with its sensibilities, which indulges in useless thoughts or desires, scatters its forces. It is not completely under God's sway. Its lyre is not in tune, so that when the Divine Master strikes it, He cannot draw forth celestial harmonies; it is too human and discordant.

"The soul which reserves anything for self in its interior kingdom, whose powers are not all 'enclosed' in God, cannot be a perfect 'praise of glory'; it is unfit to sing continually the *canticum magnum* of which St. Paul speaks, because it is not in unity. So that, instead of persevering in praise in simplicity whatever may happen, it must be continually tuning the strings of its instrument which are all a little off key."²⁶

4. There is another silence, which the soul is unable to produce by its own activity, but which God Himself causes within it, if it remains continually faithful, and which constitutes one of the highest fruits of the Holy Ghost: the *divinum silentium* of the drawing of St. John of the Cross. The spiritual powers are no longer dispersed in a search for things; henceforth the soul knows only God. Unity has been established.

"How necessary is this blessed unity for the soul that craves to live here below the life of the blessed—that is, of simple beings, of spirits! Did not the Divine Master mean to teach this to St. Mary Magdalen when He spoke of the *unum necessarium*? How well that great saint realized it! She had recognized her God by the light of faith under the veil of His humanity and in the silence, and unity of her powers, she 'heard His word,' and could sing: 'My soul is continually in my hands,' and also, the little word: '*Nescivi!*'

"Yes, she knew nothing but Him. Whatever noise and bustle there was around her: '*Nescivi!*' She might be blamed: '*Nescivi!*' Neither care for honor nor exterior things could draw her from her sacred silence.

"Thus it is with a soul dwelling in the fortress of holy recollection. By the light of faith, it sees its God present, dwelling within it, while, in turn, the soul is so present to Him in its

²⁶ *Ibid.*

beautiful simplicity that He guards it with jealous care. Then, whatever turmoil there may be outside or whatever tempests within, however its honor may be assailed: 'Nescivi!' God may hide Himself, withdraw His sensible grace: 'Nescivi!' 'For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things,' it exclaims with St. Paul. Henceforth the Master has full liberty—liberty to infuse Himself into the soul, to give Himself 'according to the measure of the giving of Christ,' and the soul, thus simplified and unified, becomes the throne of Him Who changes not, because unity is the throne of the Blessed Trinity."²⁷

In a celebrated passage, St. John of the Cross alludes to the silence of the Trinity: "One word spake the Father, which Word was His Son, and this word He speaks ever in eternal silence . . ." ²⁸ Sister Elizabeth found, in this silence of the Trinity, the model of her own: "Let a deep silence reign in the soul, the echo of that Word which is sung in the Trinity."²⁹

By the transforming union, the soul enters into this silence of God. Everything in it is stilled; nothing of earth remains, there is no light but the light of the Word, no love but Eternal Love. The soul is clothed in divinity. Its life rises to a plane far above all the restlessness of created things and dominates them; it enters into communion with Immutable Life and becomes, in Sister Elizabeth's own words, "as calm and changeless as though it were already in eternity."

By a special, most secret touch of the Holy Ghost, the life of the soul is borne away into the unchanging and silent Trinity. The soul still lives by faith here below; yet by one of the highest effects of the gift of wisdom, it lives by God, after the manner of God, wholly absorbed in God. Henceforth it hears only the Eternal Utterance: the generation of the Word and the spiration of Love. The whole universe is for it as if it were not. At this stage, face to face with the mystery of God, silence is the soul's great refuge—"a profound and deep silence, that silence of which David spoke when he cried: 'Silence is Thy praise.'

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Complete Works of St. John of the Cross*, Vol. III, p. 251.

²⁹ Note to her sister.

Yes! that is the most perfect praise, for it is sung eternally in the bosom of the tranquil Trinity.”³⁰

The divine way of life sets the pattern for the virtues of the soul which has reached such heights. Forgetful of self and stripped of everything earthly, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity was raised to that height in the last days of her life, there to seek her ideal of silence and solitude in the bosom of God. “Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect.” As she writes: “‘God,’ says St. Denis, ‘is the great Solitary.’ My Master bids me imitate this perfection, to render Him homage by living in strict solitude. The Divinity dwells in eternal and profound solitude. He cares for the needs of His creatures, without in any way leaving it, for He never goes out from Himself, and this solitude is nothing but His Divinity.”³¹

“I must guard against being withdrawn from this holy interior silence by keeping myself always in the same state, the same isolation, the same retirement, the same detachment. If my desires, my fears, my joys or my sorrows, if all the impulses coming from these four passions, are not completely ordered to God, I shall not be solitary; there will be turmoil within me. Therefore, calm, the slumber of the powers, the unity of the whole being are needed. ‘Hearken, O daughter . . . incline thy ear; forget thy people and thy father’s house. And the King shall greatly desire thy beauty.’ This injunction is, I feel, a call to silence. ‘Hearken . . . incline thy ear.’ But in order to listen, we must forget our ‘father’s house,’ that is, whatever pertains to the natural life, of which the Apostle says: ‘If you live according to the flesh you will die.’ To forget our people is more difficult, for this ‘people’ is that world which is, as it were, a part of ourselves. It includes our feelings, memories, impressions, etc. In a word, it is *self*. We must forget it, give it up. Then when the soul has broken with it and is wholly delivered from all it means, ‘the King shall greatly desire’ its beauty, for beauty—at least God’s beauty—is unity.”³²

“The Creator, seeing the beautiful silence that reigns within

³⁰ *Last Retreat*, 8th day.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 10th day.

³² *Ibid.*

His creature, who is deeply recollected in her interior solitude, greatly desires her beauty. He leads her into that immense and infinite solitude, into that 'large place' of which the Psalmist sings, which is His very Self."³³

This supreme solitude establishes the soul in the very silence of the Trinity.

In the sublime aspiration with which she ends her prayer, Sister Elizabeth takes her refuge in that solitude, there to lose herself, even here below, in the tranquil and unchangeable Trinity. "O my God, Trinity whom I adore, help me to become wholly forgetful of self, that I may be immovably fixed in Thee, as changeless and calm as though my soul were already in Eternity. May nothing disturb my peace or draw me out of Thee, O my immutable Lord, but may I at every moment penetrate more deeply into the depths of Thy mystery. . . .

". . . O my 'Three,' my All, my Beatitude, *Infinite Solitude*, Immensity wherein I lose myself, I yield myself to Thee as Thy prey. Bury Thyself in me that I may be buried in Thee until I depart to contemplate in Thy Light the abyss of Thy greatness."

³³ *Ibid.*, 11th day.

CHAPTER III

THE INDWELLING OF THE BLESSED TRINITY

*“My only practice is to enter
‘within,’ and to lose myself in
Those Who are there.”*

1. The saint of the Divine Indwelling. 2. Her doctrine of the Divine Indwelling. 3. The place of this presence: the inmost center of the soul. 4. Its essential acts: the activity of faith, the exercise of love. 5. In pure faith. 6. The primacy of love. 7. Practice of acts of recollection. 8. Short catechism of the presence of God. 9. Progress in the presence of God. 10. The two chief effects of this presence: forgetfulness of self and transforming union. 11. “Oh! if only I could tell every soul . . .”

Silence is only a condition of true life. With the mystery of the abiding presence of the Trinity, we reach the central point of the doctrine and life of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, truly the saint of the Divine Indwelling. In that again, she was a Carmelite.

If there is one truth which is dear to the mystical teaching of Carmel, it is this very mystery and this certitude, that God is present in us and that in order to find Him we must enter “within,” into this interior kingdom. All spiritual life may be summed up in that. In her *Way of Perfection*, when commenting on the *Pater Noster*, St. Teresa significantly remarks that God is not only in heaven, “but in the inmost center of our soul,” and that we must know how to recollect ourselves to seek and find Him there. In the *Interior Castle*, this presence of the Trinity marks the culminating point of her mysticism: souls who have reached transforming union live habitually in the company of the Divine Persons, and find in the fellowship of the Trinity the most blessed joys to be found on earth. St. John

of the Cross also makes it the point of convergence of his whole mystical theology, especially in the highest states. Devotion often led him to say the Votive Mass of the Blessed Trinity, and as he was offering the Holy Sacrifice, his soul would be so irresistibly drawn toward this mystery that he had literally to fight against ecstasy. The Carmelite tradition has remained faithful to the teaching of these two great spiritual masters. It is not rare to meet souls in Teresian convents whose silent life is completely orientated toward the mystery of the Trinity. Did not St. Teresa of the Child Jesus offer herself as a victim on the feast of the Trinity? Her offering to Merciful Love is part of an essentially Trinitarian prayer: "O my God! Blessed Trinity, in order to live in an act of perfect love, I offer myself as a victim of holocaust to Thy Merciful Love. . . ." ¹ Nevertheless, we must recognize that Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity received a very special grace to live by this mystery. God, Who predestined her to the mission of drawing souls within themselves in order to make them conscious of the divine riches of their Baptism, made of her in very truth the saint of the Indwelling of the Trinity.

1. On the first page of the notebook of her girlhood days, she had copied as a watchword this thought from St. Teresa: "You must seek Me in thyself." ² About the age of nineteen, she felt "as though Someone dwelt in her." Often Elizabeth repeated to a friend: "It seems to me as though He were there," and she would make a gesture as though holding Him in her arms, and pressing Him to her heart. "When I see my confessor," she said to herself, "I shall ask him what is happening in me."

We have seen how Providence arranged that she should meet Father Vallée, and how the latter, as a contemplative theologian, enlightened her on the Christian dogma of the Divine Indwelling. For Elizabeth Catez, this was a dazzling light which gave the decisive orientation to her life. Reassured as

¹ *Autobiography of St. Teresa of the Child Jesus.*

² Poem sent by St. Teresa to Monsignor Alvaro de Mendoza.

to the truth of this mystery of faith, from that day forward she buried herself in the depths of her soul with a feeling of complete security, there to seek her "Three." The evidence given with respect to this period leaves no doubt on the subject; even before she entered the cloister, Elizabeth was "possessed" to an exceptional degree by the mystery of the Divine Indwelling. She spoke of it repeatedly to her intimate friends: "The Trinity was everything to her."³

From the time of this sudden revelation, which lighted her whole life, she never flagged. Within a few months she almost ceased speaking of it, but she seemed "seized upon" by the Trinity. This expression, used by a witness, well stresses the *passivity* of her soul under the action of the Holy Ghost from the time of the first mystical graces granted in the retreat in 1899.

"Let us lose ourselves in this Holy Trinity, in this God Who is all love and let Him carry us away into those regions where there is no longer anyone but Himself, Himself alone."⁴ " 'God in me, I in Him,' let that be our motto. Oh! how good is this presence of God within us, in the inner sanctuary of our souls. There we always find Him even though we may have no sensible feeling of His presence. But He is there, all the same. It is there that I love to seek Him. Let us try never to leave Him alone. Let our lives be a continual prayer. Who can take Him from us? Who can even distract us from Him Who has taken full possession of us, Who has made us all His? "⁵

Sister Elizabeth had already discovered the watchword of her life. A week after her entrance into the convent, she had but to copy it on the questionnaire which she was asked to answer: "What is your motto?" "God in me, I in Him."

In Carmel, this life in the presence of God is considered as a sacred heritage which is traced back to the days of the Patriarch Elias: "As the Lord liveth the God of Israel, in Whose sight I stand."⁶ It is the very essence of Carmel. All the sacrifices, the

³ Evidence of a friend.

⁴ Letter to M. G., 1901

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *III Kings XVII, 1.*

silence, the purifications have but one object: to keep the soul free to apply its powers to this continual presence of God.

Consequently, on this point, Sister Elizabeth found in Carmel a whole spiritual doctrine which had become familiar to her in the setting of her previous life. As to her interior life, her entrance marked the beginning of its complete development. Hitherto, Elizabeth had shown herself to be a very innocent, very devout girl, to whom, in recompense for her heroic fidelity, God had granted some mystical *touches*, but she still stood in need of instruction and of spiritual training. The meeting with Father Vallée had securely settled her soul in the half-perceived light; assiduous reading of St. John of the Cross supplied her with the doctrine; the surroundings of religious life did the rest.

She herself carefully marked the passages of her new spiritual master in which he treats of the nature and effects of this mysterious but very real and substantial presence of the Holy Trinity in the soul. By a unique grace, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity was able to find in this presence of the Three Divine Persons in the depths of her soul her "heaven on earth," the secret of her heroic sanctity.

From the very first, she was enchanted with her Trinitarian name: "Have I ever told you my name at Carmel—Mary Elizabeth of the Trinity? It seems to me that this name indicates a particular vocation. Isn't it beautiful? I so love this mystery of the Most Holy Trinity! It is an abyss in which I lose myself."⁷ "I am Elizabeth of the Trinity, that is to say, Elizabeth disappearing, losing herself, letting herself be completely possessed by the 'Three.'"⁸

That was the watchword of her life as a Carmelite: "My only devotional practice is to enter 'within,' and lose myself in Those Who are there. I feel God so alive in my soul that I have only to recollect myself in order to find Him within me. That is the secret of all my happiness."⁹

"Let us live with God as with a Friend. Let us make our faith a living thing, so as to remain in communion with Him

⁷ Letter to Canon A., June 14, 1901.

⁸ Letter to G. de G., Aug. 20, 1903.

⁹ Letter to Canon A., July 15, 1903.

through everything. That is how saints are made. We carry our heaven within us, since He Who completely satisfies every longing of the glorified souls, in the light of the Beatific Vision, is giving Himself to us in faith and mystery. It is the same thing. IT SEEMS TO ME THAT I HAVE FOUND MY HEAVEN ON EARTH, SINCE HEAVEN IS GOD AND GOD IS IN MY SOUL. THE DAY I UNDERSTOOD THAT, EVERYTHING BECAME CLEAR TO ME AND I WISH I COULD WHISPER THIS SECRET TO THOSE I LOVE in order that they also might cling closely to God through everything, and that Christ's prayer might be fulfilled: 'Father . . . that they may be made perfect in one.'"¹⁰

By a phenomenon of appropriation, familiar to souls that are dominated by one idea, she refers everything to that. Liturgical feasts which seem to have no connection with the mystery of the Trinity hidden in her soul are brought back to it by a transposition that is quite natural to her. Christmas provides us with a characteristic example: "Christmas in Carmel is something unique. In the evening, I settled myself in choir, and there I spent my whole vigil with our Lady, waiting for the Divine Babe Who, this time, was to be born no longer in a stable, but *in my soul*, in our souls, for He is Emmanuel, 'God with us.'"¹¹

Her poetic inspiration finds its fundamental theme in this Indwelling of the Divine in the depths of the soul:

O BEATA TRINITAS!¹²

May His Grace, as a stream in flood, overflow thee,
As a river of peace fill thy soul;
Beneath its calm billows may it hide thee secure
That nought from without may touch thee.

In this abyss, this calm, this mystery,
Thou wilt be visited by the Divinity;
It is there, in silence, that I keep thy feast, Mother,
While with thee I adore the Blessed Trinity.

—*Laudem Gloriorum*. June 1906.

¹⁰ Letter to Madame de S., 1902.

¹¹ Letter to her aunts R., December 30, 1903.

¹² To a Sister in the Carmel of Dijon.

On the occasion of the Lay Sisters' feast, she writes: "On the feast of St. Martha, we kept the feast of our good Sisters of the white veil. In honor of their holy Patroness, they have a holiday from their duties, so that they may spend their time with Magdalen in the sweet rest of contemplation. The novices take their place and do the cooking. I am still in the Novitiate, for we remain there for three years after profession, so I spent a good day at the kitchen range. While holding the handle of the frying pan, I did not go into ecstasy like my Mother, St. Teresa, but I *believed in the Divine Presence of the Master, Who was in the midst of us, and at the very center of my soul adored Him Whom Magdalen had been able to recognize beneath the veil of humanity.*"¹³

Her correspondence is full of advice concerning the presence of God: "May your soul be His sanctuary, a resting place for Him on this earth where He is so grievously offended."¹⁴ "May He make of your soul a little heaven, where He may happily rest. Take away from it everything that might offend His divine eye. Live alone with Him. Wherever you are, whatever you may be doing, He never leaves you. Therefore, stay always with Him. Enter into the depths of your soul; you will always find Him there, longing to do you good. I say a prayer for you that St. Paul used to say for his converts: he asked that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith, that they might be rooted in charity."¹⁵ This expression is so deep, so mysterious. Yes, may God Who is all love be your unchanging dwelling place, your cell and your cloister in the midst of the world. Remember that He abides in the inmost center of your soul, as in a sanctuary and He wills to be loved there even to adoration."¹⁶

Adapted to persons and circumstances, the same fundamental thought recurs again and again: the true life is in the depths of the soul with God. There it is that Sister Elizabeth found those who were dear to her; it is also the secret of the happiness which made her life an anticipated heaven.

¹³ Letter to her aunts R., Summer 1905.

¹⁴ Letter to Madame de B., August 17, 1905.

¹⁵ Cf. *Eph.* III, 17.

¹⁶ Letter to Madame de B., Summer 1905.

Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity was truly a soul of one idea. When at Prime on Sunday, the Church put upon her lips the Athanasian Creed, like her Mother, St. Teresa, she was carried away by this mystery of mysteries, in which her soul dwelt always. She consecrated every Sunday to the Holy Trinity, and when Trinity Sunday came round, she was overwhelmed by an irresistible grace. For several days the earth simply did not exist for her. "This feast of the 'Three' is truly my feast. For me, there is no other like it; never have I so well understood the mystery, and all the meaning of the vocation expressed by my name. I give you tryst in this great mystery in order that it may be our center . . . our home. I leave you with this thought from Father Vallée, to be the subject of your prayer: 'May the Holy Spirit bear you away to the Word, and the Word lead you to the Father, that you may be perfect in the One, as are Christ and our Saints.'" ¹⁷

Thus the years and the graces of the religious life daily buried her more deeply in her soul with Him Whose touch at each moment imparted to it eternal life. The smallest events served to reveal how completely this soul was possessed by the Trinity.

She is informed of the arrival of a little niece, and immediately her soul rises to the Trinity: "We gave a real ovation to little Sabeth. This morning at recreation, our good Mother was pleased to show us her photograph, and you may guess how fast Aunt Elizabeth's heart beat. Oh! my Guite, I think I love her, the little angel, almost as much as her little mother does, and that is saying a lot! And then, you see, I feel so penetrated with respect before this temple of the Most Holy Trinity. To me, her soul seems like a crystal that radiates the good God. If I were near her, I should go down on my knees to adore Him Who dwells within her. Please kiss her for her Carmelite aunt, then take my soul with your own to recollect yourself beside your little Sabeth. If I were still with you, how I should love to pet her, to sing her to sleep—what should I not do for her? But the good God has called me to the mountain that I may be her

¹⁷ Letter to her sister, June 1902.

angel and wrap her in my prayers. All the rest, I joyously sacrifice for her sake.”¹⁸

In her visits to the parlor and in her letters, as in all contacts with her mother, her sister, her friends, and indeed, all who came near her, she unobtrusively but persistently carried on her apostolate of this Divine Presence within the soul. “Think of the fact that you are in Him, that He makes Himself your abode here below. And then that He is in you, that you possess Him in the very depths of your being, that at every hour of the day and night, in every joy or sorrow, you may find Him there, quite near, within you. That is the secret of happiness, the secret of the saints. They knew so well that they were the temples of God; that when we unite ourselves to this God, we become ‘*one spirit with Him,*’¹⁹ as St. Paul says. Illumined by that light they faced everything.”²⁰

And so, we might quote all her writings. To anyone who looks closely, it is evident that more and more the mystery of the Trinity became the predominating truth of her life, while all else faded and disappeared.

On the 21st of November, the feast of the Presentation, the whole community renewed their religious profession. While Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity was pronouncing the formula of her vows with her companions, she felt an irresistible movement of grace raise her up to the Holy Trinity. When she returned to her cell, she took up her pen, and on a common sheet of paper from a notebook, without hesitation and without a single correction, in one stroke, she wrote her celebrated prayer, that burst like a cry from her heart:²¹

“O my God, Trinity Whom I adore! Help me to become utterly forgetful of self, that I may bury myself in Thee, as changeless and as calm as though my soul were already in eternity. May nothing disturb my peace or draw me out of Thee, O my immutable Lord! but may I at every moment penetrate more deeply into the depths of Thy mystery!

¹⁸ Letter to her sister, March 1904.

¹⁹ *I Cor.* VI, 17.

²⁰ Letter to M-L. M., Aug. 24, 1903.

²¹ This prayer was found among Elizabeth's papers without any title.

“ Give peace to my soul; make it Thy heaven, Thy cherished dwelling place, Thy home of rest. Let me never leave Thee there alone, but keep me there, all absorbed in Thee, in living faith, adoring Thee and wholly yielded up to Thy creative action!

“ O my Christ, Whom I love, crucified by love, fain would I be the bride of Thy Heart; fain would I cover Thee with glory and love Thee . . . until I die of very love! Yet I realize my weakness and beseech Thee to clothe me with Thyself, to identify my soul with all the movements of Thine Own. Immerse me in Thyself; possess me wholly; substitute Thyself for me, that my life may be but a radiance of Thine own. Enter my soul as Adorer, as Restorer, as Savior!

“ O Eternal Word, Utterance of my God! I long to pass my life in listening to Thee, to become docile, that I may learn all from Thee. Through all darkness, all privations, all helplessness, I crave to keep Thee ever with me and to dwell beneath Thy lustrous beams. O my beloved Star! so hold me that I cannot wander from Thy light!

“ O Consuming Fire! Spirit of Love! descend within me and reproduce in me, as it were, an incarnation of the Word; that I may be to Him another humanity wherein He renews His Mystery!

“ And Thou, O Father, bend down toward thy poor little creature and overshadow her, beholding in her none other than Thy Beloved Son in Whom Thou hast set all Thy pleasure.

“ O my ‘Three,’ my All, my Beatitude, Infinite Solitude, Immensity wherein I lose myself! I yield myself to Thee as Thy prey. Bury Thyself in me that I may be buried in Thee, until I depart to contemplate in Thy Light the abyss of Thy greatness! ”

November 21, 1904.

In order to compose such a prayer, one of the most beautiful in Christian literature, a whole life of sanctity was required, together with a special charisma causing it to well up from her heart.

Devout souls live on it for months and years without ever growing weary, and while they murmur it in silence, Sister Elizabeth, faithful to her mission, draws them to recollection, helps them to go out from themselves by a simple, loving movement, and carries them peacefully into the Trinity.

After 1904, the year in which she composed the prayer to the Trinity, when God came to visit her through suffering, it was still in this Divine Presence that Sister Elizabeth found strength for her smiling heroism. At the very last hour of her life, she turned with redoubled tenderness to her friends and relatives to leave them as a legacy, her cherished devotion to the "Three." . . . "I leave you my faith in the abiding presence in our souls of the God Who is all love. I commit it to you. It is this intimate contact with Him 'within' which has been the beautiful sun shining through my life, making of it an anticipated heaven. It is what supports me today in my suffering. I am not afraid of my weakness, for within me is the Strong One, and His Power is Almighty. As the Apostle says: 'It works above all that we can hope.'"²²

In still more moving words, she leaves the same heritage to her sister: "Little sister, I am glad to go up above to be your angel; how jealous I shall be for the beauty of your soul, already so loved on earth! I leave you my devotion to the 'Three.' Live within with Them in the heaven of your soul. The Father will overshadow you and place a cloud between you and the things of earth, in order to keep you all His. He will impart His Power to you, that you may love Him with a love stronger than death. The Word will imprint upon your soul, as in a crystal, the image of His own beauty, so that you may be pure with His purity, lightsome with His light. The Holy Ghost will transform you into His mystic lyre which, in silence, beneath His divine touch will give forth a glorious hymn to Love. Then you will be the 'praise of His glory,' which it has been my dream to be on earth. You will take my place. I shall be *Laudem Gloriam* before the throne of the Lamb, and you will be *Laudem Cloriam* in the center of your soul."²³

²² Letter to Madame G. de B., 1906.

²³ Letter to her sister, 1906.

For Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, the abiding presence of God in the depths of her soul was the secret of her rapidly attained sanctity. We may trust her own testimony written only a few hours before her death: "Above, in the home of love, I shall be actively thinking of you. I shall ask—and it will be the sign that I have entered heaven—that you may have a special grace of union, of intimate communion with the Master. I confide to you the secret which has made my life an anticipated heaven: **THE BELIEF THAT A BEING WHOSE NAME IS LOVE IS DWELLING WITHIN US AT EVERY MOMENT OF THE DAY AND NIGHT, AND THAT HE ASKS US TO LIVE IN HIS COMPANY.**"²⁴

2. It would be vain to ask of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity a strictly systematized doctrine, with all the material arranged in order. As a contemplative, she lived the highest mysteries of the Faith and, in particular, the dogma of the Divine Indwelling, without in any way trying to do the work of a doctor or a theologian, without even suspecting that God had reserved a universal significance for her writings.

In her private notes she recurs to passages from St. John of the Cross which had particularly struck her, especially those from the *Spiritual Canticle*, in which the holy Doctor treats of the nature and effects of the mysterious Divine Presence. There we find the classic doctrine of Catholic theology in a lofty, contemplative light: God is substantially present in all beings by His contact with them as their Creator; to this presence, which is common to all, is added a special presence in the souls of the just and in the blessed, as the object of their knowledge and love in the supernatural order.

Sister Elizabeth had meditated upon these texts at length and had drawn from St. John of the Cross the elements of a mystical teaching on this Divine Presence in the souls of the just which constitutes one of the most traditional and most consoling truths of Christianity.

In the thought of the Church, its origin has always been recognized as found in the plain teaching of Jesus: "If anyone

²⁴ Letter to Madame G. de B., 1906.

love Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our abode with him.”²⁵ The text is clear. The Son and the Father dwell together within the faithful soul as does the Holy Spirit Who makes but One with Them. The whole mystery of the generation of the Word and the spiration of Love is silently wrought in the most intimate depths of the soul; our spiritual life becomes an unceasing union with the Life of the Trinity within us. Divinized by the grace of adoption, the soul is raised to the Divine Friendship, and introduced into the family of the Trinity, there to live as the Father, the Word, and Love, and with Them, by the same light and by the same love, “made perfect in One.”²⁶

In His high-priestly prayer, our Lord has left us the description of this deiform life of perfect souls admitted to the *consortium* of the life of the Trinity: “Holy Father, keep them in Thy name whom Thou hast given Me: that they may be one, as We also are. . . . That they all may be one, as Thou, Father in Me and I in Thee; that they also may be one in Us. . . . That they may be one as We also are One: I in them and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one. . . . That the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them and I in them.”²⁷

After the Master has spoken so explicitly, what more do we need? There is no unity of nature between the Holy Trinity and us—that would be pantheism—but unity of grace by which, as adopted children, we are associated with the very life of our Father Who is in heaven, with the image of His Son and in the same Spirit of Love.

Without the Trinity, the soul is deserted. It is inhabited when, possessing within it the Divine Persons, it enters by faith and charity into intimate “fellowship”²⁸ with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The Three Divine Persons are substantially present in the soul of a baptized infant who has become, in St. Paul’s words, “the temple of the Holy Ghost.”²⁹ Our whole spiritual life, from Baptism to the Beatific Vision,

²⁵ *John* XIV, 23.

²⁷ *John* XVII, 11-26.

²⁶ *John* XVII, 23.

²⁸ *I John* I, 3.

²⁹ *I Cor.* VI, 19.

develops as a rapidly increasing progressive ascension toward the Trinity. The Beatific Vision and, *a fortiori*, all the intermediate mystical states, even the highest, are in germ in Baptism. We do not consider sufficiently the primordial importance of this baptismal grace to which we owe our entrance, as adopted children, into the family of the Trinity.

This magnificent theology of the Divine Indwelling underlies the spiritual teaching and the mystical life of Sister Elizabeth. It enables us to follow her into the deepest recesses of her soul. There was no need of long dissertations on how the mystery is possible for her to understand it. Through infused wisdom and in all simplicity, but with rare depth of thought, Sister Elizabeth had penetrated into the meaning of her baptismal vocation and understood that, even on earth, she was called to live, according to the expression of St. John which was so dear to her, in the "fellowship" ³⁰ of the Trinity.

As a sort of legacy she even composed a whole retreat for her sister to explain to her how to "find her heaven on earth." Together with the retreat of *Laudem Glorise*, these pages, written in the last weeks of her life and sent to her sister after her death, may be said to constitute a little summa of her spiritual doctrine at its most completely developed stage.

In the very first prayer of this retreat, Sister Elizabeth considers our supernatural destiny in the high contemplative light of the prayer of Christ the Priest, according to the Master's own words in which He calls souls to grace to be "made perfect in one," ³¹ in the unity of the Trinity.

"'Father, I will that where I am, they also whom Thou hast given Me may be with Me; that they may see My glory which Thou hast given Me, because Thou hast loved Me before the creation of the world.' Such was Christ's last desire, His supreme prayer before returning to the Father. He wills that where He is, we too may be, not only through all eternity but even in time, which is eternity begun and ever in progress. Where, then, are we to be with Him that His divine ideal may

³⁰ *I John* I, 3.

³¹ *John* XVII, 23.

be realized? The hiding-place of the Son of God is in the bosom of the Father or the Divine Essence, transcending all mortal vision, and hidden from all human understanding, as Isaias said: 'Verily Thou art a hidden God.' Yet it is His will that we should abide permanently in Him, that we should dwell where He dwells in the unity of love and that we should be, so to speak, the shadow of Himself. By Baptism, says St. Paul, 'we are buried in Christ,' and again: 'God hath made us sit together in the heavenly places, through Jesus Christ: that He might show in the ages to come the abundant riches of His grace.' He adds: 'Now, therefore, you are no more strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and domestics of God.' The Blessed Trinity, then, is our dwelling place, our Father's house which we ought never leave."³²

3. The place of this meeting of the soul with its God is within itself, in the very depths of its being. The mystics call this place the seat of God's most secret operations, which He alone enters and where He alone can act: the *mens*, or the summit of the soul. Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity preferred to keep to the terminology of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, and to term it "the center of the soul," its deepest center.

"This heaven, our Father's house, is in the center of our soul. When we are deep within ourselves, we are in God."³³ We need not go outside ourselves to find Him; the kingdom of God is "within you."³⁴ St. John of the Cross says that it is in the substance of the soul, which is inaccessible to the devil and the world, that God gives Himself to it. Then all the movements of the soul become divine and though of God still are the soul's, because our Lord effects them in it and with it. The same saint also states that God is the center of the soul. When the soul loves, comprehends, and enjoys Him with all its strength, it has attained to its deepest and ultimate center in God. When, however, the soul has not attained to this state, though it be in God, Who is the center of it, still it is not in its deepest center, because there is still room for it to advance.

³² *Heaven on earth*, 1st prayer.

³³ Letter to her sister, August 1905.

³⁴ *Luke XVII*, 21.

Love unites the soul to God and the greater its love, the deeper does it enter God and the more is it centered in Him. Thus, a soul which has but one degree of love is already in God Who is its center, but when its love has attained the highest degree, it will have penetrated to its inmost depth or center, and will be transformed until it becomes most like God. Such a soul, recollected in itself, may be addressed with the words of Father Lacordaire to St. Mary Magdalen, 'Ask no more after the Master of anyone on earth or in heaven, for He is your soul and your soul is He.'"³⁵

4. This mysterious and real Divine Presence remains inaccessible to the senses. God is a Spirit, and they that approach Him must do so "in spirit and in truth."³⁶

Sister Elizabeth is particularly careful to insist upon this, to emphasize the fact that the feelings have no place here. The stumbling-block of beginners in the spiritual life is the desire to feel God, and even souls advanced in perfection find it difficult at times to rid themselves of this desire, which continues to exist under the most subtle pretexts. Personal experience had taught Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity to distrust feelings, and the remembrance of the hard purifications of her novitiate kept her soul alert to seek only the "peace of God which surpasseth all understanding."³⁷

After the first sensible, even intoxicating, joys of the Divine Presence concerning the actuality of which Father Vallée had reassured her, Elizabeth Catez was very soon obliged to cling to pure faith in order to find God present within her. "It is no longer a veil but a thick wall which hides Him from me. I find it hard after having felt Him so near, but I am ready to remain in this state as long as it pleases my Beloved to leave me in it, for faith tells me that He is there all the same. Of what use are consolations and sensible sweetness? All that is not God; and it is God alone we seek. So let us go to Him in pure faith."³⁸

³⁵ *Heaven on earth*, 3rd prayer.

³⁶ *John IV*, 24.

³⁷ *Phil. IV*, 7.

³⁸ Letter to M. G., 1901.

5. In order to advance safely on this “magnificent way of the Presence of God,”³⁹ faith is the essential act, the only one that gives us access to Him Who is the living but the hidden God.” ‘*He that cometh to God must believe that He is.*’ It is St. Paul who speaks thus. He also says: ‘Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not.’ That is to say, faith makes future blessings so certain and present to us that they are evolved in our soul and subsist there before we actually enjoy them. St. John of the Cross says that faith serves as feet to take us to God, and is possession itself in an obscure manner. Faith alone can enlighten us concerning Him Whom we love, and should be chosen by our soul as the means by which to attain divine union. It fills us with spiritual gifts.

“Christ, when speaking to the Samaritan woman, alluded to faith when He promised to give those who should believe in Him ‘a fountain of water springing up into life everlasting.’ Faith gives us God even in this life; behind the veil, yet still God Himself. ‘When that which is perfect is come,’—that is, the clear vision—‘that which is imperfect’—or the knowledge given by faith—‘shall be done away.’

“‘We have known and have believed the charity which God hath to us.’ This is our great act of faith, the means of rendering love for love to our God. It is ‘the mystery, which hath been hidden’ in the heart of the Father, of which St. Paul speaks, which at last we fathom, and which thrills our soul. When it has become able to believe in this ‘exceeding love’ overshadowing it, we may say of it as was said of Moses that it ‘endured, as seeing Him that is invisible.’ The soul no longer stops at tastes or feelings. Thenceforth it cares little whether it feels God or not, whether He sends it joy or suffering; it believes in His Love. The more it is tried, the stronger is its faith, for it overleaps, as it were, all obstacles and finds its rest in the bosom of Infinite Love, which can do naught but works of love.

³⁹ *Last Retreat*, 9th day.

“So to this soul, vivified by faith, the Master can whisper in secret the words He once spoke to Mary Magdalen: ‘Go in peace, thy faith hath saved thee.’”⁴⁰

To the end, Sister Elizabeth remained faithful in going to God by pure faith: “A Carmelite is a soul of faith.”⁴¹ Even after the exceptional grace of the last feast of the Ascension that she spent on earth, by which the Three Divine Persons had been made irresistibly manifest to her as present in the center of her soul holding “Their Almighty Council” day and night,⁴²—even after that, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, a recluse in the solitude of the infirmary, would still have to seek her Master by faith. It is the absolute condition of all divine life on earth.

“I am the good God’s little recluse, and when I return to my dear cell to continue the intercourse we have begun, a divine joy takes possession of me. I greatly love solitude alone with Him, and I lead a little hermit life which is really delightful. It is far from being exempt from weaknesses; I also need to seek my Master, Who hides Himself well. But then I rouse up my faith, and I am happier not to taste the joy of His presence in order to give Him the joy of my love.”⁴³

Her religious life was the realization of the words she heard in choir the night before her profession: “Heaven in faith, with suffering and immolation for Him Whom I love.”⁴⁴

6. It is even more necessary to practice charity than faith. These two great theological virtues are the two wings by which we ascend to God; it is not enough to believe, we must love . . . above all, we must love! Like all saints, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity emphasized this primacy of love upon which the Master Himself so insisted, reducing the Law, the Prophets, and all the Commandments of God to this first principle: “Hear, O Israel . . . thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength.”⁴⁵

⁴⁰ *Heaven on earth*, 8th prayer.

⁴¹ Letter to Madame de S., 1906.

⁴² Thus she expressed to her Prioress the grace granted her on Ascension Thursday, 1906.

⁴³ Letter to her sister, July 15, 1906.

⁴⁴ Letter to Canon A., July 1903.

⁴⁵ *Mark XII, 29-30; Deut. VI, 4.*

