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Friendship with the Saints: A Practical Theological Reading of Teresa of Avila as a Spiritual Companion

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FRIENDSHIP WITH THE SAINTS:
A PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL READING
OF TERESA OF AVILA AS A SPIRITUAL COMPANION

By

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“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

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FRIENDSHIP WITH THE SAINTS: A PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL READING OF TERESA OF AVILA AS A SPIRITUAL COMPANION

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Doctor of Philosophy

Boston University School of Theology, 2013

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a practical theology study of spiritual companionship with the saints, working with Teresa of Avila as a case study. Teresa’s writing reflects a robust understanding and practice of spiritual companionship with saints. While contemporary literature on spiritual companionship exists and the notion of friendship with saints can be found in some theological works on the communion of saints, practical theology studies that attend to the rich potential and theological meaning of friendship with saints have been lacking. This dissertation seeks to fill that gap, arguing that the relationship of saints to contemporary Christians is one of companionship within the communion of saints. This allows saints to serve as spiritual companions to contemporary Christians in ways that are analogous to contemporary personal relationships of spiritual companionship.

This is an interdisciplinary study, working across disciplines of practical theology and spirituality studies while deeply engaging historical studies. Due to the importance of historical context in spirituality studies and concerns with issues of appropriation, the practical theology methodology is modified, strengthening the historical theology movement. The dissertation
provides a textual and historical-contextual analysis of Teresa of Avila’s understandings and practices of friendship, including friendship with the saints. Current literature on spiritual companionship is explored and brought into a mutually critical dialogue with Teresa’s own descriptions—demonstrating common themes of journey and intimacy, affirmation and challenge, and personal transformation and growth in relationship with God. These themes are placed in dialogue with two contemporary understandings of the communion of saints, Anglican theological reflections based on liturgical practice and Elizabeth Johnson’s systematic treatment, yielding a model for companionship with saints that is grounded in norms of mutuality, deep knowledge, mutually critical dialogue, and living with differences. These norms suggest personal practices of companionship as well as contemplative pedagogical techniques for teaching the saints in an academic setting.

The dissertation thus presents a practical theology study of spiritual companionship with the saints, rooted in a deep historical-contextual dialogue with Teresa of Avila. It seeks also to demonstrate the value of increased attention to historical studies in practical theology methodology.
CHAPTER ONE

SPIRITUAL COMPANIONSHIP WITH SAINTS:
A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY STUDY

Companionship with Saints

Historical documents and the figures behind them are often central to studies in the field of spirituality. Although there are studies that primarily focus upon these texts and figures as objects of historical interest, many scholars in spirituality studies are interested not only in the historical importance of these texts but also in how the historical texts, figures, and practices speak to and inform contemporary spiritual experience and practice. Some of the authors of these studies in spirituality also claim a more direct and personal relationship with the saints who began as an object of study, a relationship that is often referred to as companionship or friendship. Through the texts that they have been studying, these scholars have developed a personal relationship with the author. In several cases, the authors specifically advocate such a relationship with saints for other Christians as well. However, there has been a lack of practical theology studies of this practice and the theological basis for the idea of spiritual companionship with saints. This dissertation argues that, due to the relationships of companionship that

1. Elizabeth A. Johnson defines saints to include “all persons who respond to the Spirit; they do so through lives that move in the direction of truth and love in the midst of ordinary time, seeking, even if often failing, to be faithful… the community also includes all such persons who have died.” Elizabeth A. Johnson, Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints (New York: Continuum, 1999), 232.

characterize the communion of saints, saints can serve as spiritual companions to contemporary Christians in ways that are similar to those described for personal, one-on-one, relationships of spiritual companionship between contemporaries.

Although the use of saints as role models, and in some traditions as patrons, has a long history in Christianity, the claiming of saints as companions raises several questions:

1. What type of companionship is possible between the saints and contemporary Christians given the gulf of time, culture, and often geography, and the fact that they are known primarily through texts?
2. What theological rationale supports such a relationship?
3. What norms might apply to such a relationship?
4. How might contemporary Christians practice spiritual companionship with a saint?

This study seeks to address those questions.

This is a practical theological study that looks at the way in which saints have been and might be appropriated in the field of spirituality, which means that it requires a cross-disciplinary approach. The methodology used will rely heavily upon methods common in practical theology. However, since this study is situated at the intersection of practical theology and spirituality, some modifications will be needed. The most significant will be the placement, role, and prominence of the historical theology movement. In a more common contemporary practical theology methodology, investigation would begin with a thick description of contemporary practice. In this case, however, the study will begin with a deep historical-contextual analysis of Teresa of Avila’s life and time, as well as her understanding of the practice of true friendship. The change in methodology is made for a number of reasons. First, although there are many
practices associated with the saints, I am limiting my study to those practices that are described as companionship or friendship. I am particularly interested in personal relationships of contemporary Christians with saints in which the relationship is not primarily one of patronage or benefaction. Although relationships within the communion of saints are inherently ecclesial and communal, personal relationships of companionship may provide a way for Christians to find support and companionship in their individual faith journeys. Although these limitations focus the work more clearly, the sample of descriptions of spiritual companionship that fit these criteria is relatively small, making it difficult to develop a thick description of such practices of spiritual companionship with a saint.

Second, the placement of the historical theology movement highlights the importance of historical-contextual analysis in studies that occur at the intersection of spirituality and practical theology. Although historical-contextual analysis is important in the field of spirituality, in many practical theology studies that movement, if engaged at all, is placed in service to understanding current practice in the descriptive theology movement, making it more difficult for historical texts to serve as equal partners in a mutually critical dialogue. Since the authors of the text are not present to defend their views, except through their texts, their distinctive views can be easily dismissed or ignored in favor of current interpretations or questions. Doing a deep historical-contextual analysis allows the historical texts to more closely retain their original meaning so that the power differentials are reduced and these texts can serve as more equal dialogue partners in any mutually critical dialogue. By engaging in the historical movement first, the historical texts are less likely to be read through the lens of current practice.
Third, as this work is intended to look at the ways in which saints have been and might be appropriated in the field of spirituality studies, it is logical to begin the study where studies in spirituality often begin, and that is with the historical figures themselves. My dialogue partner in this study will be Teresa of Avila, a well-known and widely appropriated saint in the field of spirituality.

Recognizing that companionship might take many forms, depending upon the saint engaged, I will begin by exploring what companionship with Teresa of Avila might look like and what Teresa has to say about companionship. The historical theology movement will include a deep historical-contextual analysis as well as a close analysis of Teresa’s own understanding of the practice of companionship or friendship. Next, the descriptive theology movement will look at contemporary literature in spiritual companionship and direction, as these writings describe practices that are similar to Teresa’s own understanding of the practice of true friendship. The understandings and practices of spiritual companionship drawn from the historical and descriptive movements will then be placed in a mutually critical dialogue with two understandings of the communion of saints that have the potential to provide a theological rationale for envisioning a continuing relationship between the saints and contemporary Christians. Both current understandings of the communion of saints in the Anglican tradition and the insights of Elizabeth Johnson in her book, *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints*, provide a theological understanding of saints as companions for people today. Anglican understandings of the communion of saints are best expressed in liturgy, so liturgy concerning the saints, will be used as a source for current Anglican understandings of that doctrine.
Personal practices of *spiritual* companionship, rather than other types of friendship, will be the focus of this work. For the purpose of this work, spiritual companionship is a form of accompaniment that is focused upon the goal of growing in one’s relationship with God. So although theologies of friendship will inform this study, they will not be the sole contributors to my practical theology of spiritual companionship, as their focus is different. In her work, *Fierce Tenderness*, Mary E. Hunt argues that “Friendship illuminates questions of ultimate meaning and value. This is what friends strive for and desire for one another.”\(^3\) In her model, which is intended to cover the range of possible manifestations of friendship, there are four elements: love, power, embodiment, and spirituality.\(^4\) While naming spirituality as an element of friendship, her definition of spirituality—“making choices about the quality of life for oneself and for one’s community”\(^5\)—is not specifically focused upon the goal of growing in one’s relationship with God. In his discussion of friendship, Paul J. Wadell is focused upon developing a community of friends, centered around the Eucharist. While discussing characteristics of friendship, using Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, and Aelred, Wadell is most interested in the communal aspect of friendship. He spends little time developing an argument for or description of personal practices of spiritual companionship. While acknowledging the possibility of one-on-one spiritual friendships, the focus of his work is on friendship within the worshipping communing. For Wadell, the liturgy should form the church into a “community of friends of God.”\(^6\) While acknowledging that not everyone within a worshipping community will

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4. Ibid., 98.
5. Ibid., 105.
be intimate friends, he is arguing that Christian friendship is most appropriately practiced, learned, and nurtured there. “Spiritual friends can be those special people in our lives with whom we can share the most intimate matters of soul, but they can also be the fellow believers who worship with us each week and who, like us, care deeply about the things of God.” In this statement, Wadell is affirming an understanding of the communion of saints that includes Christians today, an understanding that will also be important to my work. While likewise affirming an understanding of spiritual companionship within the communion of saints, my work will focus more upon those “special people” to whom Wadell alludes, rather than upon the larger communal aspects of companionship that are the primary focus of Wadell’s work.

Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, in her book *Rediscovering Friendship*, uses women’s friendships to explore the idea of friendship with God. For her, “friendship with God is not a dogma but an offer to commit oneself anew to God.” While her exploration of biblical understandings of friendship from women’s perspectives is illuminating for an understanding of friendship with God, it does not deal in any significant way with spiritual companionship between people. None of these sources significantly develops a theology around one-on-one spiritual companionship, and none deals with the idea of spiritual companionship with saints at all. Thus, while these sources will contribute to my practical theology of companionship with saints, they will not play as significant a role as other sources, as this work seeks to explore the possibility of personal, one-on-one, relationships of spiritual companionship between historical saints and contemporary Christians.

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7. Ibid., 109.

Although relationships between two contemporaries could also been seen as examples of spiritual companionship within the communion of saints, I will be focusing upon relationships between contemporary Christians, what is often referred to as the church militant, and historical saints, what is often called the church triumphant, as this is an area where practical theology studies have been lacking. Although spiritual companionship happens in a multitude of ways—within the community worshiping together, among small groups of believers, and between two contemporaries, this dissertation takes as its focus a practical theological study of spiritual companionship between contemporary Christians and the saints.

This study is intentionally interdisciplinary, drawing on and speaking to both the fields of practical theology and spirituality, as the intersection of these two disciplines offers the potential for a richer study of spiritual experience and practice. The methodology proposed has the potential to bring these two disciplines into creative contact for the study of spiritual practice. Being a work of practical theology, however, this project has two audiences, the academy and the church. The continuing relationship envisaged between saints and contemporary Christians has implications for personal and communal spiritual practices, as well as for the ways in which the teaching of historical figures in seminaries and congregations is carried out. The constructive proposals for the church may be of greater particular significance to those communities in which saints and the doctrine of the communion of saints are theologically important, although the use of the model of spiritual companionship may also allow the saints to speak to Christians of other denominations for whom a model of saints as patrons or benefactors has not been helpful. This understanding of the saints as spiritual companions argues for forms of pedagogy in which the
teaching of saints is not only educational but also potentially a source of personal and communal transformation.

The Goal of Transformation in the Study of Spiritual Experience and Practice

Scholars of spirituality often argue that, in order to understand spiritual experience and practice, the researcher or student needs not only to observe but to actually participate in the experience or practice. This understanding has implications for any methodology in this area. Many scholars in the field of spirituality argue that the discipline is inherently and necessarily self-implicating. However, the degree to which the academic field of spirituality is or should be self-implicating, as well as the role of the experience of the researcher in spirituality research, are debated issues within the field. Some scholars want to limit the researcher to a willingness to be open to a particular form of spirituality; others argue that the researcher must, to some extent, share that experience in order to really understand it. The former position is held by Bernard McGinn, who argues that although the researcher needs to be a sympathetic observer, participation can be limited to an openness to the spiritual experience of others and personal transformation is not required in order to understand spiritual experience. This position is consistent with the approach of many historians.9 McGinn writes,

spirituality need not be directed either immediately or mediately to the student’s own religious life, but should at least include the student’s willingness to investigate a particular spirituality as one way of expressing the central concerns

of living the human condition, however foreign that may be to him or her on a personal level.\textsuperscript{10}

Walter Principe goes a step further, arguing that individual spiritual experience is so radically pluralistic that it cannot be experienced by another or even studied directly.\textsuperscript{11} In his work, Principe focuses upon what can be studied, “Christian spirituality as lived and expressed by significant groups or different spiritual traditions.”\textsuperscript{12} For Principe, the goal of the study of spirituality is not, therefore, to foster personal transformation, but is instead to evaluate the plurality of spiritualities, using a set of criteria based on “theological principles developed within a faith community.”\textsuperscript{13} Although openness to the plurality of spiritual expressions may indeed be helpful, judgment based on external criteria would not necessarily require the researcher to have an analogous experience.

In contrast, for some scholars of spirituality, the transformation of the spiritual life of the researcher is one of the major goals of such study. Mary Frohlich defines spirituality as a “personal and communal discipline of discerning and appropriating authentic human interiority as it presents itself in the multiple and changing forms of lived spirituality.”\textsuperscript{14} Frohlich argues that while spirituality is an academic discipline that demands the highest scholarship, it is equally important to recognize that it is a spiritual discipline that demands the utmost of us personally.\textsuperscript{15}


\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 56.

\textsuperscript{14} Mary Frohlich, “Spiritual Discipline, Discipline of Spirituality: Revisiting Questions of Definition and Method,” Spiritus 1, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 75.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
Not only does this discipline require the researchers to share the experience that they are studying, but this study requires “a willingness to probe, experiment, and accept challenges to every element of one’s lived spirituality.”

The focus upon experience and the need for the researcher to share in that experience are characteristic of the hermeneutical or anthropological approach to the study of Christian spirituality. Although Sandra M. Schneiders has “very serious reservations about the inclusion of any kind of mandatory practice of the direct use of such personal practice in the construction or prosecution of research projects,” Schneiders, like Frohlich, argues that the study of spirituality has a double focus. Along with other academic disciplines, the discipline of spirituality shares the goal of expanding knowledge, and in agreement with other forms of postmodern research, it also is concerned with “an expansion or deepening of subjectivity, of the self.” According to Schneiders, the second goal means that the “personal transformation of the researcher (with implications for the world including the church) is integral” to an anthropological approach to the study of spirituality. Although this transformation may indeed root the researcher in a particular religious tradition or practice, such an outcome is not necessary according to Schneiders. “The researcher is not so much learning what to do or how to do it better or how to help others in the spiritual life. She or he is becoming a spiritually richer and deeper person.”

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16. Ibid., 76.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
who argues that researchers need to invest themselves completely in the subject.\textsuperscript{21} For him, the study of spirituality is a risky business, requiring a researcher to be open to the possibility of personal transformation.\textsuperscript{22} Transformation, while not precisely a goal of the study of spirituality for Burton-Christie, must remain an open possibility.

Not only does Schneiders argue that the transformation of the researcher is a goal in the study of spirituality, but she also argues that such personal involvement in the material is necessary to obtain the first goal as well: a deep understanding of spiritual experience. “Because spirituality is the study of experience which, by definition, is incommunicable as such, the analogous experience of the researcher is virtually necessary for understanding of it.”\textsuperscript{23} The need to know a subject not just cognitively but by participation is also echoed by Burton-Christie. “This is, I believe, an important epistemological statement: we begin to know a subject by loving it. Everything else follows from this, including the hard critical work of deepening our understanding.”\textsuperscript{24} Although both Schneiders and Burton-Christie caution that a certain critical distance is still necessary in the study of Christian spirituality, both also agree that the researcher needs to be personally engaged in the work. The researcher is also a participant whose work then not only proposes ways in which the subject being studied might be appropriated by others but may also result in their own personal transformation. This, according to Burton-Christie, is both the cost and the promise of interpretation; “…to adequately and fully investigate the subject

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\item 22. Ibid., 100.
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matter of the discipline, one must be willing to enter into it, even be transformed by it.”

Although such close personal identification with the object of one’s study has the potential to introduce biases or blind spots, it also provides invaluable insight.

This raises the question of how one maintains the necessary distance for critical work, while simultaneously being implicated in the study. Burton-Christie argues that the two are not mutually exclusive and that “one’s love of the subject, far from being a hindrance to careful academic work, constitutes an initial and enduring interpretive key, informing our work at every step along the way.”

Schneiders concurs, saying, “it would seem that a person has to have a spiritual life to understand the spiritual life, and the deeper one’s experience the more ‘understanding’ one can be of the religious experience of others.”

Frohlich argues that spirituality may have the potential to heal the “breach between life and knowledge,” by combining serious academic study with spiritual discipline.

For her, an understanding of spirituality as a spiritual discipline still demands “the usual hard work of any scholarly endeavor—including mastery of the necessary literature, terminology, and methods.”

Even those researchers in the field of spirituality who argue most strenuously that self-implication is necessary do not see the personal involvement and experience of the researcher as replacing the traditional scholarly methods of investigation, but as adding a depth to the knowledge that can be attained. Schneiders argues that integrating self-implication with the needs of scholarship is one of the major challenges of the discipline of spirituality:

25. Ibid., 100.
26. Ibid., 103.
29. Ibid.
How to integrate a holistic approach to research with full accountability to the standards of criticism, personal commitment to what one is studying with appropriate methodological perspective, and practical involvement with theoretical integrity is, in my view, one of the major challenges the discipline of spirituality faces as it develops its identity in the academy.  

Although the necessity of self-implication arises strongly in the anthropological or hermeneutical approach advocated by Schneiders, many researchers in the discipline of spirituality focus more strongly on a historical or theological approach to the subject, approaches that do not necessarily require the same level of self-implication. However, many studies in spirituality combine approaches, raising the issue of self-implication across the discipline. Schneiders argues that “all three approaches are necessary in respect to almost any question in the field.” The tendency of the field to combine all three approaches is affirmed by Philip Sheldrake, who argues that while there are still significant academic debates about the nature of the discipline of spirituality, there are three major points of consensus that are shared by most researchers in the field of Christian spirituality:

First, spirituality is both multidisciplinary and an interdisciplinary field. Second, there is a need for a proper understanding of the historical process. Third, historical-contextual, hermeneutical and theological approaches to the field cannot claim to be exclusive, but are mutually complementary.

If all three approaches are indeed important in researching many questions in the field of spirituality, then the issue of self-implication is an important issue in the field, and a theological analysis of the basis of appropriation, in addition to a thorough historical-contextual analysis of the work being appropriated, is essential to studies in spirituality.

Following the lead of Schneiders and Burton-Christie, I will argue that participation of
the researcher or student in the field of spirituality is necessary for a deep understanding of
spiritual experience and practice: in fact, the stance of pure observer is not possible. Not only
does that require an acknowledgment on my part of my own context, as I will present later, but it
will also affect how I envision the practices that are a part of the strategic practical theology
movement. As Burton-Christie argues, “there is no presuppositionless starting point for any
work of inquiry.”33 We are engaged, willingly or not. The willingness to enter into the subject
of spirituality, an outgrowth of the love of the subject, is an essential part of the work of
spirituality, and this willingness to participate may transform the lives of those who engage in it.
The love of the subject, however, does not excuse the researcher or student from necessary
critical work. In fact, the love of the subject draws one more deeply into the study so that the
object of one’s love can be more fully understood, and hard critical work is necessary for
deepening the understanding of the subject one loves. The critical academic work can provide
the necessary framework in which the knowledge gained through experience can be interpreted
and analyzed. Rather than being a hindrance or in opposition to experiential learning, the critical
work of defining and setting boundaries can actually enhance the possibilities of participatory
learning. Advocating a form of study that is potentially transformative requires clarity about the
boundaries in which such study will occur. By setting boundaries, studies in spirituality can
provide a protected space in which transformative knowledge may be acquired. Transformative
study is consistent with understandings in works of spirituality.

Transformative study is also consistent with works in practical theology. Often, however, there is a stronger focus upon social or communal transformation in practical theology than in spirituality. Although the goal of personal transformation is less commonly evoked in the field of practical theology, the goal of personal transformation is still a part of several definitions of practical theology. Don S. Browning argues that the aim of practical theology is to guide “its action toward social and individual transformation.”34 Stephen Pattison and J. Woodard argue that practical theology “conducts a dialogue that is mutually enriching, intellectually critical, and practically transforming.”35 Emmanuel Lartey argues that practical theology is a form of “theological activity which may be personally and socially transformative.”36 Mary McClintock Fulkerson says that practical theology is “an inquiry shaped by a logic of transformation.”37 Claire Wolfteich argues that this goal of transformation is one of the shared characteristics of the two disciplines. “The transformative aim—a dimension of all practical theology—is present here from the beginning. Indeed, practical theologians and many spirituality scholars share a concern with transformation.”38 Although certainly not found in all studies, a goal of transformation is common to both practical theology and spirituality, and it is an important piece


36. Emmanuel Lartey, “Practical Theology as a Theological Form,” in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, 133.


for works at the intersection of these two fields, when the object of study is spiritual experience or practice.

According to Burton-Christie, transformative study requires a deep “loving” engagement with texts in combination with an equally deep critical analysis, so that the subject may be deeply known. Both types of knowing raise questions about how historical texts are to be studied and integrated by researchers from other times and places. One goal of this study is to suggest a theological rationale and historical norms for works of appropriation in spirituality that serve the love of the subject and the goal of personal transformation. Such appropriative work needs to be done well if one is to honor the subject that one loves and to respect the voices of the historical authors.

As Schneiders argues, “The only truly critical approach to the knowing process is self-knowledge and honesty about our social location and presuppositions, and methodological control of their effects.” In an effort to be honest about my own social location, so that the reader can evaluate how it may have affected my critical approach, I offer a few comments about my own context and experience. I am an Episcopal priest and was raised in that tradition, a tradition that honors and celebrates the saints but does not usually engage them as patrons or benefactors. In fact, I am steeped in a tradition that emphasizes our essential unity with the saints, as members of the communion of saints. As I began this study, I wanted to find ways to allow the works of the saints to speak more clearly to people in their own spiritual journeys. I was not looking for a saint as my spiritual companion, and if I had been, Teresa of Avila would not have been my first choice. Needing to focus on one saint, I decided upon Teresa of Avila

after reading her *Life* for the first time. Although she initially began as an object of study, through this work Teresa of Avila became my companion and dialogue partner. This study has been transformative for me, but it is also a work of critical scholarship. The practices that I will recommend in chapter six, while following logically from the critical work that precedes them, have also been a part of my own spiritual discipline. It has reminded me of what I, along with many other scholars of spirituality, believe—that critical work and personal engagement can be mutually enriching instead of mutually exclusive.

**Appropriation in the Study of Spiritual Experience and Practice**

Appropriation, the use of historical material to enrich present spiritual practice and experience, is an important issue in both spirituality and practical theology as both disciplines place historical texts into dialogue with contemporary practice. Appropriation is common in the field of spirituality and is often an integral part of research projects in the field. Likewise, historical material is often used in practical theology, although usually in a more limited way, as noted above. This form of appropriation is more commonly referred to as correlation in practical theology studies.

Any work of appropriation raises serious questions about how material generated in another time or context is to be used, including issues about who has the power or authority to interpret and to assign meaning to these texts. In order to minimize power differentials in mutually critical dialogues between historical texts or figures and contemporary practice and experience, the researcher needs to deeply engage the historical texts so that the original voices can be heard as clearly as possible, allowing the historical texts to serve as more equal partners. Every attempt needs to be made to “hear” the texts in ways congruent with the way they would
have been understood by the author, prior to engaging the historical texts in conversation with contemporary questions and concerns. While issues of appropriation, particularly from a historical point of view, will be explored more deeply in chapter two, I want to raise two themes that are particularly pertinent to the use of such material in the area of spirituality: the need to engage with the whole historical text rather than fragments, and the importance of a deep contextual understanding of the culture in which the text was originally produced.

In using historical texts to answer contemporary questions, there is a temptation to rely upon a very narrow selection of writings, a subset of the whole that supports a particular thesis. Elizabeth Dreyer notes the problems that this approach causes in the study of medieval mysticism:

This explosion of research also invites questions about how to chart a course for fruitful and responsible conversation among voices that are at times harmonious, at times cacophonous. In the past several years, I have become uneasy with certain aspects of this retrieval of medieval mysticism, especially in the work of some feminist scholars, who give short shrift to the historical location of these texts…. At the least, as scholarly interpreters of medieval mystical texts, we need to distinguish methodologies that honor the contexts and meaning structures of those writing the texts (to the extent that this is possible), from those approaches that are simply projections or ideological constructs.40

Using texts in order to support ideological constructs is not confined to feminist scholars and medieval mystical texts.41 Serious engagement with the whole text, as well as with the historical context, adds additional complexity to works that are primarily focused upon appropriation and not historical analysis. It is certainly simpler to extract what may seem to be


41. As Gillian T.W. Ahlgren points out, although Teresa of Avila subverted traditional gender roles in many ways, leading to charges of heresy against her, in her canonization proceedings she was promoted for her “hyperfeminine” traits in order to be established as a model for other women. In order to do this, many of her actions and writings had to be ignored or misinterpreted. Gillian T.W. Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and The Politics of Sanctity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 170.
the relevant portions, while ignoring those that seem either irrelevant or contradictory to the point being made. Such use of historical material, however, does not honor the whole of the author’s life, thoughts, and writings. In order to respect the integrity of the writer’s work, works of appropriation need to include both points of agreement between the figure and historical practice as well as points of disagreement, and any interpretation of historical material needs to struggle to understand the meaning of historical texts within their original contexts. Although, in theory, a historical figure might completely agree with a contemporary practice, such an outcome is unlikely. Differences in historical times and contexts make it more likely that, even when there is substantial agreement with current thought and practice, there will also be elements of disagreement and challenge. Engagement with the complete text or even multiple texts written by the same author not only honors and respects the understanding of the author, it also opens up the possibility of these texts or figures having a transformative effect on contemporary practice and on the researchers involved, which is a goal of many studies in spirituality. Transformation is more likely to occur when one is confronted with views that counter already-held beliefs.

The second theme is the need for a deep understanding of the historical context in which the authors lived and wrote. Sheldrake argues that such an understanding is a necessary first step in the study of spirituality. “If the interpretation of a classical spiritual text involves a dialogue between its horizons and our own, it is apparent that an understanding of the text’s historical context is an important starting point.”\footnote{42 Sheldrake, \textit{Spirituality and History}, 175.} This insight is also echoed by McGinn, who says, “History may not have the last word when it comes to systematic or constructive questions concerning Christian faith, but a strong case can be made that it should always have at least the
first.” Without such a grounding in their original historical contexts, it is difficult to accurately interpret writings from different times and cultures. Works of appropriation that do not do the necessary work of historical-contextual analysis will be more likely to look specifically for areas of seeming agreement or to casually dismiss passages that might challenge contemporary practice and thought. The former treats context as irrelevant, positing timeless truths, while the latter uses context as a way of avoiding any serious challenge. Although historical texts can and do speak to contemporary questions, Sheldrake argues that they can only do so if we are open to the challenges that they bring. “Present perspectives may establish the questions we ask but not the answers we obtain.”

The search for timeless truths, not conditioned by social context, can lead researchers to impose their own understandings and values upon these texts, ignoring the original meaning of the authors. In an attempt to answer large questions of meaning or practice, inconvenient historical truths are often ignored. Dreyer argues that without a deep historical understanding, scholarship is more likely to lean “toward arrogant projections, unilateral certitudes, ‘presentist’ viewpoints, and narrowly vested personal interests that have as their primary goal the defense of our own lifestyle and intellectual positions.” For Dreyer, this concern does not preclude bringing contemporary questions to historical texts, but she argues that care needs to be taken in the way that such work is carried out.

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Dreyer advocates a way of appropriation that would “respect our subjects and borrow intelligently from their works.” She argues that “We need to be able to tell the difference between legitimate appropriation and illegitimate plunder.” Although Dreyer argues that it is not only acceptable but important to ask contemporary questions of historical texts, she further argues the need to engage historical awareness with as much rigor as we engage current questions. In order to do this, we must “pay as much attention to a text’s own interpretive categories as to our own.” Such a deep engagement with the texts opens up the possibility of a mutually critical dialogue between these historical texts and current practice and experience, an engagement that respects and honors the integrity of the original texts and their authors’ meaning.

Exploring a text in ways that uncover how historical context and personal biography shaped both the writing and the transmission of the text is essential in any mutually critical dialogue, and this exploration requires paying attention to the religious understanding as well as the social context. Dreyer notes that even researchers who pay close attention to the physical and historical circumstances of these figures are often reluctant to engage the religious self-understanding of the authors, an understanding that is particularly important for mystical texts. Dreyer speculates that “Perhaps noticing and appreciating key dispositions of genuine faith—humility, unknowing, and the invisible—is difficult in an academic culture that often privileges

46. Ibid., 165.
47. Ibid.
48. “Historians are unhelpful when they relegate the past to the past, refusing to entertain the kind of dialectic that connects the past and the present in mutual, critical, and meaningful ways.” Elizabeth A. Dreyer, “An Advent of the Spirit: Medieval Mystics and Saints,” in Adverts of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Current Study of Pneumatology, ed. Bradford E. Hinze and D. Lyle Dabney, 123-161 (Marquette, MI: Marquette University Press, 2001), 126.
opposing virtues.” However, the rejection or dismissal of the religious self-understanding of religious writers impairs a thorough investigation of these works, in which the religious beliefs underlying them are key, affect the interpretation of the texts, and open up a gulf between the figure and the researcher across which any mutually critical dialogue is difficult.

Without an understanding of the author’s religious beliefs, any analysis of spiritual writings, particularly mystical writings, is likely to miss key elements. Amy M. Hollywood, in her critique of the ways in which Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray use and understand female mystics, argues that their “ambivalence” about an other who is transcendent blinds them to certain key elements in the mystics’ self-understanding, and as a consequence their interpretation is flawed. Regarding their interpretation of Teresa of Avila, Hollywood says, “Whether one accepts the reality of Teresa’s God, one cannot help but be aware of the power this God invests in her and the ways in which this power enables her to bridge the divides created by Irigaray’s texts.” In other words, in refusing to engage seriously with Teresa of Avila’s religious self-understanding, Irigaray’s own, contemporary philosophical views blind her to an understanding that has the power to address a difficulty raised by Irigaray’s philosophical system.

Pushing her point even further, Hollywood wonders if we can really understand the mystics without sharing their belief system. “Can we follow the dialectical movement between god as all and nothing (or between theism and atheism) found in Eckhart and Porete without sharing in the power of their belief? What are the possibilities and dangers of engendering such

50. Ibid., 162.
belief?"\textsuperscript{52} This brings us back to the issue of self-implication, with both its costs and its promises. Although much post-modern work denies the possibility of objectivity, spirituality—with its acceptance of self-implication—is a reminder that knowledge gained through experience is an important element in any deeper understanding. Although such sharing of belief and experience raises issues about bias, particularly in academic circles, as noted above, Dreyer and Hollywood demonstrated that such biases are not confined to those who share a religious belief. Hollywood raises the question of whether shared belief or experience is necessary to really understand these figures from the past. Much of the work in the discipline of spirituality argues in the affirmative.

\textbf{Toward a Theological Rationale for Appropriation}

If, as Schneiders and Sheldrake argue, all three approaches to the study of spirituality (historical-contextual, theological, and anthropological or hermeneutical) are important in answering many of the questions posed in the discipline of spirituality, then issues raised by the self-implicating nature of the hermeneutical approach need to be addressed in any study in spirituality. This raises the question of the theological rationale for works of appropriation. The use of historical works in the process of correlation in practical theology also raises these same questions in a more limited way. Although the assumption is made, in both cases, that historical texts and figures can address contemporary experience and practice, a theological rationale for such an assumption is often missing. On what basis, then, can one argue that historical works and figures continue to speak to contemporary Christian experience and practice? This is a question that will be important in this study of spiritual companionship with saints.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 178.
To argue that historical texts and figures can serve as companions to contemporary Christians in their lives of faith is to postulate some form of continuing relationship between the saints and contemporary Christians. Part of the work of this study will be to develop a theological rationale that supports this continuing dialogue and provides theological norms for works of appropriation. Two particular sources that support such an understanding of companionship within the communion of saints will inform this work: Anglican understandings of the communion of saints as expressed in liturgical practice and the systematic work of Johnson on the communion of saints.

A continuing relationship between saints and contemporary Christians is encompassed by the doctrine of the communion of saints, and it is that doctrine that will inform my theological reflection upon the use of saints as spiritual companions. As Johnson notes,

The communion of saints is a Christian symbol that speaks of profound relationship. In traditional usage, it points to an ongoing connection between the living and the dead, implying that the dead found new life thanks to the merciful power of God. It also posits a bond of companionship among living persons themselves who, though widely separated geographically, form one church community.  

Johnson describes two different understandings of the communion of saints that have been posited through Christian history: the patronage model, which has been the dominant model throughout much of Christian history and is still common in Roman Catholic theological thought, and a model of companionship that reflects the understanding of the saints in the earliest strands of Christian thought. It is the relationship of saints as partners and friends that I plan to explore in this work. Spiritual companionship, in this context, is defined as a mutual collegial relationship between a saint and a contemporary Christian that, in the words of Johnson, “forges

intergenerational bonds across time that sustain faith in strange new times and places."\(^{54}\) Such a relationship has the potential to both challenge and support a person in their life of faith through its witness. Such a relationship also has the potential to provide a theological rationale for works of appropriation in spirituality.

Although I will be using the insights of Johnson, a feminist Roman Catholic theologian, this is not a work of Roman Catholic theology. I come to this work from the perspective of the Episcopal or Anglican tradition, which has, like the Roman Catholic tradition, valued the doctrine of the communion of saints. Anglican theology typically has been open to multiple theological perspectives, allowing a fruitful dialogue between Anglican thought and other theological traditions.\(^{55}\) Although Johnson speaks from a Roman Catholic theological context, her understanding of the communion of saints as spiritual companions has close parallels with current Anglican understandings and practice.\(^{56}\) Johnson argues for a "fundamentally mutual and collegial"\(^{57}\) relationship between the saints and contemporary Christians that she characterizes as companionship. This is consistent with the understanding of saints that is expressed in Anglican liturgical prayer. In Anglican worship, saints are invoked not as patrons but as partners,\(^{58}\) an understanding shared by Johnson.\(^{59}\) Although all Christian denominations

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54. Ibid., 85.


58. "So, Mary and the saints are, for most Anglicans, objects of respect, affection and veneration more than mediums of intercessory prayer. This is not to discount the prayers of the faithful, both living and departed, on our behalf. Anglicans have a very keen sense of the Communion of Saints, and our partnership in prayer with the
honor “biblical saints,” i.e., those mentioned in the Christian testament, and might find the idea of spiritual companionship with these exemplars of faith an attractive concept, this concept is most likely to be of interest to Christians whose understanding of saints includes not only biblical figures but also figures from later historical periods. The Lutheran Book of Worship also contains a sanctoral calendar, and For All the Saints proposes a sanctoral calendar for United Methodist worship. Both resources include non-biblical saints.

**Teresa of Avila as a Case Study**

Saints in all their diversity offer many possibilities for spiritual companionship. Although much of the work in this study, particularly the historical norms and theological rationale for the use of saints as spiritual companions, is potentially useful with regard to a wide variety of saints, the diversity of such figures means that the way in which each might serve as a companion is likely to be different. This will affect not only later descriptions of spiritual companionship but the strategic proposals for pedagogy. In order to illustrate how spiritual companionship might be incarnated, I will begin by engaging Teresa of Avila, a saint who was well known for her own spiritual friendships.

A sixteenth-century Spanish saint, such as Teresa of Avila, may seem an unusual figure to use in order to explore the idea of spiritual companionship from an Anglican perspective,

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59. “At the same time, I do not rule out direct address [to the saints] and even attempt a mild defense of it within the companionship model, as an address of friend to friend within the circle of disciples around Jesus.” Elizabeth A. Johnson, “Forging Theology: A Conversation with Colleagues,” in Things Old and New: Essays on the Theology of Elizabeth A. Johnson, eds. Phyllis Zagano and Terrence W. Tilley (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 97.

60. Lutheran Book of Worship (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), 41-45.

particularly as Teresa had harsh things to say about “Lutherans,” her term for Protestant reformers whom she believed were tearing the church apart. In spite of these views, however, Anglicans have seen in Teresa a model for holiness of life, and her feast day is remembered in the liturgical calendar of the Episcopal Church. In addition, many works about Teresa of Avila have been written for a wide audience, making her potentially of interest to a broader cross-section of Christians.

Teresa also has two other characteristics that commend her for this work. First, she has been widely appropriated in studies of spirituality, and these studies have portrayed her in a wide variety of ways. In various appropriative projects, Teresa has been held up as a role model as a mentor, spiritual friend, feminist icon, as well as perfectly submissive woman. Teresa has been used as a teacher for spiritual direction, for stages of the spiritual journey, and for methods of prayer. Although many writers have used Teresa’s writings in works of

63. The proposed Methodist calendar also includes Teresa of Avila in its list of commemorations. Guthrie, For All the Saints, 205.
70. Margaret Dorgan, “Beginning to Pray with Saint Teresa of Avila,” Spiritual Life 34 (Spring 1988): 29-
33; Dwight H. Judy, Embracing God: Praying with Teresa of Avila (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996); Anthony Morello, “Lectio Divina and the Practice of Teresian Prayer,” Spiritual Life 37 (Summer 1991): 84-100; Noel
appropriation, thus demonstrating a widespread belief that she does indeed have something to say to contemporary people, these sometimes contradictory portrayals raise issues about the historical and theological basis of appropriation that this study is designed to address.

Second, friendship was an important topic in Teresa’s own works, allowing her to serve not only as a model for spiritual friendship but also as an active partner in the dialogue about how companionship with a saint might be practiced. In particular, she was interested in friendship with God and friendship between friends of God. The latter was intended to help the friend to become a better friend of Christ. Friendship between the friends of God is what we might today label a spiritual friendship. Teresa envisioned this friendship not only with contemporaries but also with “saints,” which has direct relevance to this work. Teresa’s own ideas about friendship will enrich the mutually critical dialogue between the historical texts and contemporary practices in a way that would not be possible with a saint less focused upon spiritual friendship, as I will demonstrate later.

**Practical Theology and the Study of Spiritual Experience and Practice**

Practical theology, with its methods of correlation between contemporary practice, historical theology, and systematic theology, provides a framework to address the questions that I have posed above, and in this work, practical theological methods will be used to explore the issue of appropriation in works of spirituality. This interdisciplinary work has the potential to enrich both the disciplines of spirituality and practical theology.

Practical theology and spirituality share a common interest in lived experience and

practice as well as similar methodologies, leading to the question of the relationship between the two. Wolfteich argues that “spirituality should not be understood simply as a subdiscipline of practical theology but rather as a disciplinary partner whose subject matter, aims, and methodologies overlap with those of practical theology in rich and mutually fruitful ways.”

She argues that spirituality reminds practical theology of the “animating center” of its work, which is the “lived experience of faith,” while the correlational methodologies of practical theology are useful in the work of the study of spirituality, providing a critical reflection process capable of assisting in the appropriative task of spirituality. This work is an effort to use the methodology of practical theology to address questions of spiritual experience and practice across historical contexts and time periods, concerns that are relevant to the discipline of spirituality. An understanding of the potential inherent in a partnership of practical theology with spirituality undergirds the proposed methodology. In this work, at the same time that practical theological methodology will be used to explore spiritual practice and experience, this methodology will be modified by understandings in the field of spirituality that complement areas in which practical theology has been slower to respond. Two of these areas are the study of mystical texts and the role of history in research in practical theology.

With its focus upon practice, practical theology has not been used extensively in studying spiritual experience or texts. Although the study of spiritual experience and mystical texts is common in the field of spirituality, the traditional methodology employed in practical theology,

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74. Ibid., 330.
with its emphasis on rationality and ethical concerns, has made the study of mystical texts, with their focus on spiritual experience, problematic. Heather Walton and Mark Burrows have both noted the difficulty that contemporary theology, including practical theology, has in incorporating the more imaginative and nonrational ways of human knowing. That difficulty becomes problematic in practical theological analysis of spiritual experience—and particularly of mystical texts, such as those written by Teresa of Avila. Burrows argues that mysticism has been banished from theological discourse, and the truth that mysticism sought to express is now expressed in poetics. He attributes theologians’ concerns about both poetics and mysticism to discomfort with forms of insight that are based in imagination without “grounding in reason, ethics, and metaphysics.” Agreeing that practical theology has an uneasy relationship to poetics, Walton attributes this uneasiness to practical theology’s desire for academic respectability. In attempting to demonstrate its credentials as an empirical discipline rather than a “soft” subject, practical theology has aligned itself with the disciplines of moral philosophy, hermeneutics, and the social sciences. Such a turn renders the insights of both poetics and mysticism outside of the traditional methods of practical theology. One of the gifts

78. For the purposes of this study, Bernard McGinn’s understanding of the mystical will be used. For McGinn, mystical experience includes not only a direct consciousness of the presence of God but the whole movement that encompasses it, from what leads to the experience through the way that it is received and lived out. Bernard McGinn, “Mystical Consciousness: A Modest Proposal,” *Spiritus* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 50-51.
80. Ibid., 342.
82. Ibid.
that the study of spirituality can bring to practical theology is its greater comfort with a wider variety of historical texts, including mystical texts that express other types of knowing.83

A second gift that spirituality brings to the study of practical theology is a serious consideration of the role of historical context. In contrast, history has traditionally received less concentrated attention in the field of practical theology. Many practical theological studies use Browning’s fourfold methodology, which includes historical theology as one of the movements,84 giving historical theology a recognized place in works of practical theology. Even while acknowledging the importance of historical texts and documents in illuminating current practice, however, the historical movement does not receive as much attention in Browning’s own work as the descriptive and strategic movements receive. This was due to his understanding of the role that the historical movement played in the overall theological methodology. In reaction to a theology that considered the practical theology subdisciplines as simply applied theology, Browning and other practical theologians emphasized the importance of contemporary practice as a source of theology. The placement of the descriptive theology movement first emphasized that understanding. According to Browning, his understanding of all theology as primarily practical theology opens

the structure of theological reflection no matter where it occurs—in the pulpit, in the pastoral conversation, in the counseling room, in the setting of clinical pastoral education, in the educational situation, on the mission field, or in Christian social service.85


84. “I argue that theology as a whole is fundamental practical theology and that it has within it four submovements for descriptive theology, historical theology, systematic theology, and strategic practical theology.” Browning, A Fundamental Practical Theology, 8.

85. Ibid., 42.
According to Browning, then, the purpose of the historical movement was not to provide the theology to be applied in the strategic movement, but instead to ask, “What do the normative texts that are already part of an effective history really imply for our praxis when they are confronted as honestly as possible?” For Browning, traditional disciplines such as history are temporary procedures that provide “technical, explanatory, and distancing maneuvers…designed to gain clarity within a larger hermeneutic effort to understand our praxis and the theory behind it.”

With the focus on understanding “our praxis and the history behind it,” history can become simply a tool used to understand contemporary practice. In that case, the most important thing about historical documents is not their understanding in their original context, but the ways in which they are used and understood in the context that is being studied. I would suggest that this emphasis may have led to a lack of sufficiently serious engagement with the historical documents being used in some practical theological projects.

In his illustration of the Covenant Church, for instance, Browning indicates that practical questions, raised during the descriptive phase, “lead one to confront afresh the classic texts, events, and monuments of faith, both Hebrew and Christian. These are the submovements of historical and systematic theology.” The people of the Covenant Church did indeed engage texts, which included several key Biblical texts as well as Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Cost of Discipleship*. Browning notes that in their engagement with texts, due to pressures of time, the congregation spent little time engaging the historical context of the texts that they used. In his

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86. Ibid., 49.
87. Ibid., 228.
analysis, Browning does not do that historical work either, although he does argue for the importance of allowing the historical texts to confront and possibly transform contemporary practice. In spite of that argument, he seems to approve of the way that the congregation engaged these texts, citing their process as an example of how to engage in the historical theology movement:

Note that an applicational concern guided the historical task of interpreting Scriptures; it was hermeneutically conceived historical theology. The meaning of the text was not taken as a thing-in-itself isolated from the questions brought to it…When confronted honestly, playfully, and repeatedly in the to-and-fro process, they [historical texts] stretch and transform our questions. They confront us as something over against us. Their truth shines through and transformation can occur…

Although Browning notes that such use of historical texts can allow them to be “bent to the narrow interests of our situations and their questions” and that “the major purpose of the distancing procedures” is to prevent this, he does not insist that historical-contextual analysis is essential in order to prevent them from being bent. Yet this work is essential if the historical texts are to serve as partners in a mutually critical dialogue with contemporary practice, for such dialogue requires two equal partners. If the point of view of one partner is not fully explored, the mutuality required for such dialogue is impaired.

Unfortunately, practical theology has been moving away from a deep historical engagement that considers the historical texts within their original contexts, focusing instead upon how these texts might answer or are already answering contemporary questions. The strong focus of practical theology upon providing a thick description of current practice has not been

88. Ibid., 230.
89. Ibid., 230-231.
90. Ibid., 231.
matched by an equally strong focus upon providing a thick description of the historical texts used in the historical movement. This movement away from a deep historical-contextual analysis aimed at understanding the texts in their original contexts, in favor of using these texts to illustrate contemporary practice and experience, has been noted by James M. Brandt, who argues that historical theology no longer is focused upon understanding history for its own sake, but instead it now asks “about the ideological function of the narrative, what it promotes and obscures, more than about the truth or historicity of past events.” While arguing that historical theology plays a role in all four movements of practical theology, Brandt, in his essay “Historical Theology,” focuses specifically upon the importance of historical analysis in the descriptive movement of practical theology, arguing that a “full-bodied interpretation requires attention to the past.” Ted A. Smith also argues for the importance of using history to open up “naturalized human constructions like race and ethnicity.” These understandings of the role of historical theology follow Browning’s lead in placing historical analysis in service to contemporary questions and concepts. While retaining a place for historical theology in works of practical theology, this understanding can lead to a subordination of the historical theology movement to the descriptive movement. When that happens, the historical theology movement cannot serve as a full partner in a mutually critical dialogue, for historical texts stripped of their historical context and original meanings are partially silenced.


92. Ibid., 374.

While the descriptions above acknowledge a place for engagement with historical texts, not all descriptions of practical theology do even that much. In his book, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, Richard R. Osmer proposes four tasks for practical theology: the descriptive-empirical task, the interpretive task, the normative task, and the pragmatic task. ⁹⁴ Although Osmer’s tasks have much in common with the movements proposed by Browning, a major differences is in the way that Osmer conceives of the role of historical theology. Osmer, like many in practical theology, emphasizes the descriptive theology movement, and in his case Osmer splits what had been one movement for Browning into two tasks, descriptive-empirical and interpretive. Osmer’s pragmatic task has much in common with Browning’s strategic practical theology movement. The most significant change is in Osmer’s normative task, which now encompasses both the historical theology and the systematic theology movements of Browning. Osmer’s three approaches to normativity—theological interpretation, ethical reflection, and good practice—do not directly refer to any historical analysis. The theological interpretation is based on theological concepts. The ethical reflection uses ethical principles, rules, and guidelines. Good practice might include some historical analysis as both past and present models are explored, but the connection to historical analysis is not clear. ⁹⁵ In this approach, historical theology almost disappears. At least in some practical theology methodologies, then, historical theology is seen, in contrast to Browning, as not an essential movement.

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⁹⁵. Ibid., 161.
In this work, I am arguing that in order for the historical theology movement to be a full partner in a mutually critical dialogue with contemporary practice, as much attention needs to be paid to the historical context of the texts being used as to the context of contemporary practice. There may be practical theological studies whose focus does not require this type of mutually critical dialogue with the historical sources, but for studies in which the historical sources are important, it is likewise important to pay attention to their historical context as well as the ways in which they are currently being interpreted and used. Further, I am arguing that if the dialogue between current practice and historical sources is to be a true mutually critical dialogue, in which each partner is independent of the other, then the order of engaging the historical and descriptive movements is not important. In fact, due to the heavy focus upon the descriptive theology movement in practical theology, as well as the ways in which historical theology has come to be seen primarily as a way of understanding current practice, it might be advisable—especially in studies in which the historical texts play a key role—to start with the historical movement in order to safeguard the independence of the historical texts, so that they can enter into a mutual critical dialogue as true partners. Since historical texts are often important in studies of spiritual experience and practice, practical theology studies of spiritual experience and practice would be enhanced by beginning not with current practice, as is common in practical theology studies, but with the historical theology movement, a movement containing a deep historical-contextual analysis of the crucial texts.

In arguing for the need to treat history with a greater degree of seriousness, I am not alone. In a recent article, Osmer argues for a renewed understanding of interdisciplinarity that includes not just the relationship of practical theology with the social sciences, but also its
relationship with other theological disciplines such as “biblical studies, philosophical ethics, church history, and systematic theology.”\textsuperscript{96} Claiming that such a dialogue across theological disciplines is necessary in order to make normative proposals, Osmer argues that how practical theology engages these other disciplines within its own distinctive understanding of interdisciplinarity “has been given relatively little attention.”\textsuperscript{97} Osmer argues, as I will argue later, that this dialogue needs to “address the complexity of the conversation across theological fields in ways that are just as sophisticated as our more common dialogue with the social and natural sciences.”\textsuperscript{98}

One of the real gifts that practical theology has given to the overall enterprise of theology is an insistence that context matters. The focus on descriptive theology in many practical theological studies has yielded important insights into current practice, as well as strategic or pragmatic proposals to enrich or strengthen such practice. However, for a discipline that places such importance upon context, the lack of attention to the historical contexts of documents often used in the normative tasks of practical theology seems puzzling. If a thorough understanding of context is important for interpreting current practice, then it seems reasonable to suggest that context is important for interpreting the historical practices and documents as well. The focus in spirituality on the importance of beginning with history, as noted earlier, is a reminder to practical theology of the need, in studies of spiritual experience and practice, to ground the work in a study of the historical context of any texts being used.

Practical theology, in turn, offers something to the study of spiritual experience and


\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
practice: resources that have the potential to unite the three major approaches currently in use in the field of spirituality—historical-contextual, theological, and anthropological.\textsuperscript{99} Wolfteich argues that Browning’s practical theology method with its four movements—descriptive theology, historical theology, systematic theology, and strategic practical theology\textsuperscript{100}—may be particularly useful in spirituality studies, as “the first three movements of descriptive theology, historical theology, and systematic theology bear a (rough) resemblance to the anthropological, historical-contextual, and theological approaches within the discipline of spirituality.”\textsuperscript{101} Several prominent scholars in the field agree on the need to incorporate all three approaches in studies in spirituality,\textsuperscript{102} and the methodology of practical theology offers a way of approaching this task.

This “rough” resemblance, however, also points to places where the two disciplines diverge and where spirituality has the potential to enhance practical theology methodology in studies of spiritual practice and experience. Spirituality, both with its focus on experience\textsuperscript{103} and with its strong historical approach, suggests ways in which practical theological methodology may need to be modified in order to deal with issues of spirituality, particularly spiritual experience. The method described below will be one of practical theology with some modifications that are based upon insights from the study of mystical texts in the field of spirituality.

\textsuperscript{99} For a further description of these approaches, see Schneiders, “Approaches,” 19-29.

\textsuperscript{100} Browning, \textit{A Fundamental Practical Theology}, 8.

\textsuperscript{101} Wolfteich, “Animating Questions,” 138.

\textsuperscript{102} Sheldrake, \textit{Spirituality and History}, 5; Schneiders, “Approaches,” 28.

\textsuperscript{103} Spirituality is often defined in terms not of practice but of experience. See Schneiders, “Approaches,” 16.
Methodology of the Study

I will be using a modified version of the methodology described by Browning, a methodology that grounds many studies in the field of practical theology. Central to Browning’s understanding of this process is a mutually critical dialogue between contemporary practices and the historical tradition. As previously noted, Browning described a fourfold movement of theology—descriptive theology, historical theology, systematic theology, and strategic practical theology. The order of these movements was important, as Browning imagined a process that began with practice and, after reflection upon the practice, returned once again to practice. In his words,

The view I propose goes from practice to theory and back to practice. Or more accurately, it goes from present theory-laden practice to a retrieval of normative theory-laden practice to the creation of more critically theory-laden practices.\(^{104}\)

Browning clearly distinguishes his understanding of practical theology from that proposed by Friedrich Schleiermacher, who likewise saw practical theology as the goal of theology, but who understood practical theology clearly as applied theology. Browning argues that

Although Schleiermacher saw practical theology as the teleological goal and “crown” of theology, his view of theology still had a theory-to-practice structure. He understood theology as a movement from philosophical and historical theology to application in practical theology….Schleiermacher saw theology in general as moving from historical knowledge to practical application; he had little idea how the practices of the church form the questions we bring to the historical sources.\(^{105}\)

The change in methodology that I propose is not an attempt to return to an understanding of practical theology as an application of truths discerned through study of the philosophical and

\(^{104}\) Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 7.

\(^{105}\) Ibid., 43. For a further discussion of Schleiermacher’s understanding of practical theology, see Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*, trans. Terrence N. Tice (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1966), 91-114.
historical theology to Christian ministry. The discipline of practical theology has moved far from that initial understanding, arguing that practice can be a source of theology, and not just an application of theology. What I am advocating is a mutually critical dialogue between the historical texts and practices and the contemporary texts and practices, a dialogue in which neither partner is privileged. Such a mutually critical dialogue requires that the two partners each be free to speak out of their own context. If this dialogue between contemporary practice and the historical tradition is indeed mutually critical, I would also argue that the dialogue need not always begin with the contemporary situation. A mutually critical dialogue in which both partners are equal could logically begin with either. The question then becomes which movement—historical or descriptive—provides the most useful entry point for a particular practical theology research project. In dealing with spiritual texts, it may be more illuminating to begin with those historical texts and move from there to questions of contemporary practice.

One challenging aspect in this argument is that practice and historical texts do not neatly confine themselves to the descriptive and historical movements. Although the historical movement in this study will begin with a deep historical-contextual analysis of the life and times of Teresa of Avila, it will also include an analysis of Teresa’s understanding of the practice of true friendship. Likewise, although the descriptive movement will focus upon current understandings of spiritual companionship, these contemporary practices are in dialogue with other historical texts, which must be considered within the descriptive movement. My distinguishing between the historical and descriptive movements, then, is not a distinguishing between practice and history, but between a focus upon historical sources and a focus upon contemporary sources. In beginning with the historical theology movement, I am arguing that
beginning with Teresa’s of Avila’s context and understanding of practice can be as valid a starting point for a work of practical theology as beginning with current practice, and in some cases, this switching of the order of the movements may allow the historical texts to become not the source of theology that practical theology applies but a partner with contemporary practice in the work of theology.

Beginning with the historical theology movement also serves to highlight the importance of the historical-contextual analysis in studies of spiritual experience and practice, particularly those in which historical texts are central. Since many projects in spirituality begin with historical analysis, beginning where many spirituality scholars more traditionally begin seems an added advantage as I seek to demonstrate the usefulness of a practical theology methodology in spirituality studies. In that sense, this project is an exploratory venture that tests the possibilities of a practical theological approach to the study of spirituality that takes contemporary practice seriously yet begins with historical analysis. The four movements of this study, in order, will be: historical theology, descriptive theology, systematic theology, and strategic practical theology. A description of each movement will follow.

**Historical Theology**

This movement will have two parts. In the first part, I will explore the issues raised in the appropriation of historical figures, looking at some of the ways in which historical figures have been and are being used in the field of spirituality. In particular, I will look at the issue of power—who has the power to define and interpret. Kathleen Ashley and Véronique Plesch, in their article “The Cultural Process of ‘Appropriation’,” criticize the way that dominant cultures
can appropriate elements of subaltern cultures, assigning their own meanings to such elements.\textsuperscript{106} Using their analysis, I will argue that appropriation need not always be a one-way exercise of dominant power. A key element in constructing a mutually critical dialogue is a serious consideration of the original context.

In the second part, I will explore Teresa of Avila’s historical context as well as her own understanding of the practice of true friendship, both with contemporaries and with historical figures. This latter understanding includes traditional saints such as Joseph as well as more recently deceased figures such as Peter of Álcantara. Hagiographies were widely available in the early part of the sixteenth century, and Teresa herself indicates that these lives of the saints were important sources for her.\textsuperscript{107} Although an in-depth study of early modern understandings of hagiography and the role of the saints is beyond the scope of this practical theology project, I will provide a cursory overview of the seminal Spanish hagiographers who were active and may have influenced Teresa. In order to explore her understanding of companionship with these historical figures, I will also need to look at the broader concept of companionship that is prominent in her writings, including companionship with contemporaries and companionship with God. Exploring these concepts in Teresa’s writings will mean placing them in their


historical context, which will include the ways in which spiritual writings were understood and crafted in sixteenth-century Spain as well as her own life experiences. This is a text-based study, focused primarily upon Teresa’s understanding of spiritual companionship, what she referred to as true friendship.

This work focuses upon Teresa’s own writings as a source in order to analyze her understandings and practices of personal, one-on-one relationships of spiritual companionship. Although limitations are necessary in any work of scholarship, these limitations do preclude a deep analysis of the influence of liturgical and other communal forms of devotion that shaped and embodied relationships with the saints in sixteenth-century Spain, including the role of art in mediating these relationships in this time period. Liturgy and material culture undoubtedly influenced Teresa’s understanding of spiritual companionship with the saints. As Colleen McDannell argues, “Practicing religion sets into play ways of thinking. It is the continual interaction with objects and images that makes one religious in a particular manner.”

Unfortunately, direct evidence of this interaction is difficult to find in the case of Teresa.

Liturgical expressions involved in the cult of saints in sixteenth-century Spain were many and varied. According to Stanley G. Payne, in the time leading up to the Catholic Reformation, “Local religion in Spain exhibited broad variation based on centuries of development of local cults, shrines, regional saints, and special liturgical features.” This led to a full, and sometimes burdensome, sanctoral calendar. As William A. Christian, Jr. notes, in addition to the holy days that fell on Sundays, there were many other days of required observance: in Toledo

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there were 40, in Cuenca 42, and in Sigüenza 36.\textsuperscript{110} In addition to the required diocesan celebrations, villages, towns, and cities would also have local days of observance. These local observances were often in fulfillment of vows made by the village or town in order to solicit the help of a saint, vows that were legally binding and could not be ignored by subsequent generations,\textsuperscript{111} and were binding on all who currently resided in the village, town, or city. In rural areas, these vows were often made in response to agricultural crises, while the vows made by cities were for more varied reasons. Toledo, for example, had thirteen vowed days of observance, and only one was known to be in response to an agricultural crisis.\textsuperscript{112} According to Christian, community vows were often of more importance to the populace than those imposed by the hierarchy, and attempts by Church authorities to limit or eliminate local observances were generally ineffective:

> Community vows were out of the control of the Church. The villagers set up a parallel but more restrained set of feast days, days of particular, significant helpers, as opposed to the (largely) biblical saints ordered by the Church, or the diocesan patron saints that bishops from time to time futilely tried to impose on the villages.\textsuperscript{113}

Even in convents, attempts to impose a uniform sanctoral calendar were often ineffective.

In her article, “Liturgy and the Spiritual Experience of Religious Women at Santa Maria de Vallbona,” Michelle M. Herder documents the addition of several saints, notably virgin martyrs,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{111} “But vows made by a corporation like a village were contracts with the divine that theoretically had to be fulfilled, even if a hundred years had passed and all the villagers who had made the original vow had died. Such vows could be modified or eliminated only by decision of the bishop or the pope. They were the corporate obligations of the community to the divine, and were legally binding, usually drawn up officially as an act of government.” Ibid., 32.
  \item \textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 148.
  \item \textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 174.
\end{itemize}
to the liturgical calendar of that community,\textsuperscript{114} in spite of the Cistercian Order’s efforts to restrict its sanctoral calendar in order to “distance themselves from local cults.”\textsuperscript{115} Although Herder found an unusual number of liturgical sources at Santa Maria de Vallbona, which allowed her to do this work, determining what went on in convents is not an easy task. As Jeffrey Hamburger notes, this type of work more difficult is made more difficult by enclosure:

> Designed to preclude eyewitness accounts of life within the walls, to a remarkable extent, it succeeded. In the written record, as in convents, either nuns remain silent or when they speak we hear their voices as if through the grille: filtered, removed and mediated by the inevitable scrutiny of men.\textsuperscript{116}

As Hamburger notes, this also makes it difficult to write a history of art in the context of convent life.\textsuperscript{117} Although art, or any image, was often considered a barrier to higher contemplation, artwork remained an important element in many monastic environments, particularly in convents. Hamburger argues that “Whereas theologians rarely mentioned works of art except to criticize them or, on occasion, to concede their utility for pastoral purposes, nuns made them an integral, even indispensable, part of their piety.”\textsuperscript{118} These works included those produced by the nuns themselves, a practice that has been documented by Mindy Nancarrow Taggard in one of Teresa of Avila’s own reformed convents in the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{119} Although those works focus upon events in the life of Jesus, creating depictions of saints could


\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 178.


\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.


also be a part of such Nonnenarbeiten, or nun’s work, as Hamburger demonstrated in regard to
the Benedictine abbey of St. Walburg.\textsuperscript{120} Devotional work featuring the saints was common in
the culture of early modern Spain,\textsuperscript{121} and Christian notes that “In the early seventeenth century
poor and wealthy peasants alike in the villages south of Toledo had a number of religious
pictures on their walls.”\textsuperscript{122}

Living in a society in which the saints were present to such an extent,\textsuperscript{123} Teresa’s
relationship with saints would have been affected by communal liturgical celebrations (including
not only diocesan saints’ days but also local festivals and those adopted by religious
communities) and by works of devotional art. The sanctoral calendar was obviously an
important part of her life, for many letters and other events are dated in reference to saints’ days.
Pictorial representations, particularly of Christ, were also an important part of her piety,\textsuperscript{124} but
artistic representations of saints are rarely mentioned in her text. Without further study—which
is beyond the scope of this dissertation—the extent that the communal context affected Teresa’s
understandings of personal companionship with saints is difficult to discern. One interesting and
important connection that apparently existed between Teresa’s devotion and local practices,

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote[120]{Hamburger, \textit{Nuns as Artists}, 7.}
\footnote[121]{For examples, see Carol M. Schuler, “Virtuous Model/Voluptuous Martyr: The Suicide of Lucretia in
Northern Renaissance Art and Its Relationship to Late Medieval Devotional Imagery,” in \textit{Saints, Sinners, and
Sisters: Gender and Northern Art in Medieval and Early Modern Europe}, ed. Jane L. Carroll and Alison G. Stewart
(Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2003); and Tanya J. Tiffany, “Visualizing Devotion in Early Modern Seville:
Tiffany demonstrates how the development of the “art of memory” was tied into devotional practice. Joseph F.
Chorpenning also argues that “Visual, verbal, mental, and living images were inseparable in early modern
Catholicism.” Joseph F. Chorpenning, “Visual, Verbal, Mental, and Living Images in Early Modern Catholicism:
\footnote[122]{Christian, \textit{Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain}, 147.}
\footnote[123]{In Teresa’s time period, even charitable giving “ritually re-enacted the lives of Christ and the saints.”
Maureen M. Flynn, “Charitable Ritual in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain.” \textit{Sixteenth Century Journal} 16,
no. 3 (Autumn 1985): 336.}
\footnote[124]{See Teresa of Avila, \textit{Life}, 9.1, 100; 9.6, 102; 22.4, 192.}
\end{footnotes}
however, is her choice of St. Joseph as a patron, an unusual choice in that time period.

According to Christian, devotion to St. Joseph was introduced into New Castile, not in response to a specific need, but at the insistence of a single preacher:

Here is a clear instance of a single preacher who introduced into a group of towns a devotion that had not previously existed in the region as a formal practice. The novelty of the votive devotion to Saint Joseph can be seen from the many different spellings. Of the ten cases of vows in New Castile as a whole, the name was spelled five different ways: Jose, Joseph, Josefe, Jusepe, and Xosepe. There were no chapels at all to Saint Joseph and only one monastery—a newly founded one in Toledo (of Discalced Carmelite nuns). Here then is the entry of a “new” saint into the local system—a saint thus far without specialty.125

Of course, the monastery in Toledo was not Teresa’s first dedication to St. Joseph. That honor goes to her first foundation, in nearby Ávila. For Teresa, as for these instances in New Castile, Joseph was a saint without a specialty, able to help “in all our needs.”126

As this short summary demonstrates, an understanding of liturgical practice as well as material culture would be important to a full understanding of Teresa of Avila’s relationships with the saints. While acknowledging that a detailed analysis of liturgy and art in Teresa’s context is out of the scope of this study, the textual study in this work will be a significant, though not comprehensive, contribution to scholarship on Teresa’s understanding of spiritual companionship with the saints.

Descriptive Theology

Although there are a few reported descriptions of spiritual companionship with saints that are described in terms of spiritual companionship or friendship, there are not enough examples, by themselves, to provide a satisfactory description of a practice of spiritual companionship. In


order, then, to suggest possible ways of practicing this form of companionship, another
contemporary practice that has characteristics in common with Teresa’s understanding of the
practice of true friendship, the practice of spiritual companionship with contemporaries, will be
explored. The literature on spiritual companionship overlaps that of spiritual direction.
However, I wish to make a distinction between formal relationships of spiritual direction and less
formal or even informal relationships of spiritual companionship. The latter relationships are
often distinguished by a high degree of mutuality.\textsuperscript{127}

Because of the difference in historical context, a mutually critical relationship, one better
symbolized by friendship than direction, seems more appropriate for historical figures. Burton-
Christie warns against giving spiritual classics too much authority, which may blind us to the
contradictions and limitations of the texts that we are engaging. A model of companionship,
rather than direction, allows the questioning, deconstructive work that Burton-Christie believes is
important in working with classic spiritual texts.\textsuperscript{128} Therefore, my focus will be upon describing
those less formal, more mutual forms of spiritual companionship.

**Systematic Theology**

Having explored the practice of spiritual companionship both in the writings of Teresa of
Avila and in contemporary descriptions of spiritual companionship, as well as the possibilities in
both for an understanding of spiritual companionship with saints, I will begin a mutually critical

\textsuperscript{127} As Margaret A.L. Blackie notes, the problem with the model of spiritual friendship being used to
describe spiritual direction is the lack of mutuality in contemporary spiritual direction. Margaret A.L. Blackie,
“Finding the Divine Hot Spots: An Ignatian Contrast to Parent and Friend Models of Spiritual Direction,” *Presence*
12, no. 1 (March 2006): 27.

dialogue between these two sets of practices in order to draw out characteristics that would be useful in an understanding of practices of spiritual companionship with saints.

The final step in this movement will be to explore a theological rationale and norms for the practice of spiritual companionship with saints. After exploring two understandings of the communion of saints that seem to be consistent with an understanding of saints as spiritual companions—the understanding expressed in Anglican liturgical theology and the writings of Johnson—I will place these understandings in a mutually critical dialogue with the practices described earlier, in order to provide theological grounding and guidelines for the practice of companionship with saints.

**Strategic Practical Theology**

Using the guidelines developed above, I will then develop constructive proposals for the practice of spiritual companionship with saints, suggesting ways to enhance this practice, so that this mutual and collegial relationship more fully realizes its potential to support and challenge contemporary Christians in their lives of faith. Companionship requires engagement with more than cognitive or intellectual ways of knowing. One way of doing this is with contemplative practices. Contemplative practices allow imagination to enhance the dialogue between saints and contemporary Christians, while at the same time giving contemporary Christians a greater insight into forms of prayer that were important to many of these historical figures.

An understanding of saints as spiritual companions also has implications for the way in which these historical figures are taught, both in congregations and in seminaries. Research in transformative and contemplative pedagogies offers a way of moving into nonrational realms of thought, which are important in texts associated with many mystics. I will also suggest practices
for the teaching of the saints that do not simply focus upon learning about these figures but offer
the potential of developing a relationship of companionship, a relationship that holds the
potential for personal transformation.
CHAPTER TWO
HISTORICAL ISSUES IN THE APPROPRIATION OF SAINTS

The lives of the saints have been subjects of Christian appropriation since Christianity’s beginnings. Since the early meetings in the catacombs or at the tombs of saints, the stories of their lives have been used to inspire Christians in their own faith and lives. Early on, saints began to be invoked in prayer as well, and the concept of the communion of saints, a relationship of saints—past, present, and future—that transcends time, was enshrined in the Nicene-Constantinople Creed in 381 AD. Since that point, the number of saints and the forms of devotion have multiplied. Certainly saints were important in Christian faith and life at the time of Teresa of Avila. Lives of saints, or hagiographies, were widely available and read. Teresa herself talks about the importance of such reading in her own faith and practice. As a child, she and her brother Rodrigo read the lives of the saints together and used them as models for their own Christian life, planning either to go to the land of the Moors and suffer martyrdom or to become hermits.1 Although the cult of the saints was one of the points frequently attacked at the time of the Reformation, it has remained, in reduced form, even in reformed churches. The biblical saints such as the apostles, Mary, Joseph, and Paul of Tarsus are still important for all Christians. In the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Anglican traditions, saints have continued to play an important role in worship and piety, although with some variations.

1. Teresa of Avila, Life, 1.4-5, 55.
Although Christianity has a long history of appropriating saints and their historical texts, such appropriations have, at times, led to the use of these figures and texts in ways that did not honor the full reality of these figures, including the contexts in which they lived and wrote. One example was the portrayal of Teresa of Avila during her canonization process. Gillian T.W. Ahlgren argues that in making Teresa a saint, her life was distorted into a post-Tridentine image of feminine sanctity that ignored her career as a writer and a reformer, focusing instead upon the more acceptable traits of obedience to clerical authority and humility.

‘Saint Teresa’ reduced an astute and ingenious woman to a set of patriarchal values essential to the Counter-Reformation agenda, an image that perpetuated stereotypes of holy women and effectively blocked other women’s bid for autonomy and authority within the Roman Catholic Church.²

In this way, the challenge that Teresa posed to the Church was countered. Such appropriative uses of historical material, in which aspects of the lives of saints are ignored or purposely excluded, do not honor the complexity of historical figures and work to silence their distinctive voices in service of later or more appealing interpretations of what their lives and writings meant.

The power to interpret and use contemporary and historical artifacts is an issue not only in spirituality studies but in a number of other fields as well. In appropriating the saints, spirituality would do well to engage in an interdisciplinary dialogue around the issues that appropriation raises. In contemporary scholarship, issues of appropriation are becoming important in a variety of fields, as those whose cultural heritage is being appropriated are asserting their right to determine how these materials will be used and interpreted by the dominant culture. These issues, however, are far from simple in a world in which overlapping

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2. Ahlgren, Teresa of Avila, 166.
cultural boundaries are the norm, and many cultural artifacts are themselves the product of appropriative acts. Appropriating historical material raises different, although similar, issues.

In this chapter, I explore issues of appropriation, beginning with an exploration of some contemporary issues in an interdisciplinary understanding of appropriation. This analysis will serve to highlight issues in the appropriation of historical figures in spirituality studies, as well as studies of spiritual experience and practice in practical theology. The discipline of spirituality, with its close attention to historical-contextual analysis, witnesses to the importance of understanding the context of historical writings in works of appropriation in order to address certain issues that arise in these appropriative works. The role that historical-contextual analysis may play in responding to issues of appropriation in practical theology will also be examined. I will further argue that the attention to historical context in appropriative works, especially works concerned with spiritual experience and practice, is necessary in practical theology studies, such as the one I propose, if a deep, mutually critical dialogue is to be achieved. Finally, in order to bring Teresa of Avila into this dialogue, I will also investigate how she might have understood the appropriation of saints by exploring some sixteenth-century hagiography.

**Issues of Appropriation in Contemporary Scholarship**

In dealing with the issue of appropriation in an interdisciplinary way, it is helpful to understand what is meant by the term “appropriation.” Unfortunately, there is no single definition or understanding. As Ashley and Plesch point out, the understanding of appropriation is not consistent across disciplines. During the last ten years, the term *appropriation* has become ubiquitous in the discourse of many disciplines, but—despite its manifest usefulness in academic
argument—it remains conceptually unstable. Such instability makes it more difficult to assess potential issues and problems that arise in works of appropriation.

Although understandings of appropriation in historical studies and in practical theological works are important in the definition of this term, the way in which it is used in works of spirituality will be the most instructive, as this work is assessing the ways in which appropriation occurs within that field. Any definition of appropriation in this work would need to be consistent with that usage. Unfortunately, while historical works are frequently used in ways that may be labeled appropriative, few works in spirituality attempt to define the term “appropriation.”

Appropriation in the field of spirituality is directly related to the aim of transformation. In studies of spirituality, it has been argued that spiritual experience and practice are studied not simply to better understand the phenomena, but so that the researcher may be transformed and through that transformation assist others in their own process of transformation. Mary Frohlich argues that the discipline of spirituality calls “for the repeated risk of dialogue with the sometimes unnerving range of interpretations applied to the phenomena of one’s own and others’ spiritual experiences.” This dialogue with a range of interpretations is one important way that appropriation is envisioned in studies of spirituality. According to Frohlich, this dialogue requires a vulnerability, a willingness to be transformed. Transformation requires asking contemporary questions of historical texts and allowing these historical texts to speak to current issues and concerns. This is a form of appropriation.

Michael Downey argues that appropriation for the sake of transformation is in fact the goal of such works of spirituality:

‘Appropriation’ and ‘appropriative’ bespeak an approach to Christian spirituality that aims more precisely at transformation through the personal appropriation of knowledge gained through the study of this subject matter, so that one might be better able to assist in the spiritual transformation of others.  

Although the way that many fields view appropriation is as an often unconscious influence, when the term is used in the field of spirituality it usually denotes a conscious and deliberate attempt to use material from a historical source in order to enrich current spiritual practice or experience. Many works in spirituality do use historical texts in order to shed light on contemporary practice or questions. The wide variety of ways in which Teresa of Avila’s works are used in this way was noted in the first chapter. An understanding of appropriation as conscious and intentional use of historical material is consistent with the way that it is defined by Ashley and Plesch, who argue that “Contrary to the notions of ‘origin’ or ‘influence,’ ‘appropriation’ emphasizes the act of taking; it is understood to be ‘active, subjective, and motivated’.”

The taking and using of historical texts by spirituality scholars inevitably raises issues of power similar to those described in other disciplines: in particular, who has the right to decide how an object or idea is to be used and what it means. These issues have been explored more fully in disciplines that have focused upon contemporary cultural appropriations, and an


7. See Chapter 1, footnotes 60-66.

investigation of the issue from a cultural perspective may be potentially illuminating for historical appropriations as well. When, in cultural appropriations, artifacts or concepts are taken from a minority culture in order to be used by the dominant culture, it raises important concerns about cultural hegemony. Cultural appropriation, or the taking of knowledge or artifacts from a culture that is not one’s own, has been heavily criticized. Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao detail four critiques in relation to such acts of appropriation:

One is that cultural appropriation harms the appropriated community. This claim is therefore based on a concern for the integrity and identities of cultural groups. A second complaint focuses on the impact of appropriation on the cultural object itself. The concern is that appropriation can either damage or transform a given cultural good or practice. A third critique is that cultural appropriation wrongly allows some to benefit to the material (i.e., financial) detriment of others. A fourth argument is that current law fails to reflect alternative conceptions of what should be treated as property or ownership in cultural goods. This is a claim based on sovereignty.

As Ziff and Rao argue, these critiques assume an understanding of processes of appropriation in which the dominant culture is able, due to its position of power, to determine the usage and meaning of artifacts from another culture. Such an understanding of appropriation presupposes distinct and separate communities of insiders and outsiders, in which tests of belonging are necessary to determine ownership of the cultural artifacts. In most societies, however, there are no rigid boundaries between communities, making any determination of ownership complex. “If cultural practices develop from an amalgam of influences, it becomes

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10. Ibid., 8-9.
11. Ibid., 3.
difficult to assign these to one group over another…The existence of shared cultures and histories suggests that sometimes these entitlements might also be shared or sharable.”\textsuperscript{12}

Since most of the materials appropriated in studies of Christian spirituality are part of the Christian tradition, a case could be made for ownership of these historical texts by those who are using them, if the scholars involved are part of that community. In that case, the work that they do is not properly appropriation, but reinterpretation of cultural symbols and knowledge by the community that produced the original texts. This solution does not, however, do justice to the complexity of the issue caused by the overlapping community boundaries. While the Christian community may have some claim to ownership of these artifacts, this claim presupposes that Christianity is a single community, when in fact it might more accurately be described itself as a collection of overlapping communities, complicating the issue of ownership. This leads to the question of which of these smaller communities has the right to assign meaning to historical texts.

Many other community boundaries are crossed in the use of Christian texts that originate in different geographical or temporal contexts, further adding to the complexity of ownership. To return to the example of Teresa of Avila: while she was definitely influenced by the Christian community in her work, this community is not identical to the Christian community of the twenty-first century in the United States. Her Christian community was influenced by the context in which it found itself, and it was overlapped by other communities within that context. Sixteenth-century Spanish Roman Catholic understandings of Christian belief and practice were different in many ways from understandings in contemporary Christian communities. In spite of

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
the attempts of the Christian monarchs to impose uniformity upon the population in Teresa’s time, there were also a variety of communities in Spain, leading to complexity even within that context in understandings of Christian belief. Unless the differences between the historic contexts and current contexts are acknowledged and the diversity of belief even within a particular context is taken into account, not only are we likely to misunderstand what Teresa intended, we are likely to interpret her words in ways that might be objectionable to her. Appropriation that does not respect the original context of an artifact has been justly criticized by scholars studying the ways in which appropriation occurs.

In spite of the focus upon the way that minority artifacts are appropriated by the dominant culture, cultural transmission is often multidirectional, with the direction of transmission being affected by power differentials. Critiques of appropriation and the power dynamics involved vary depending upon the direction of transmission. The borrowing of cultural forms by the dominant group, which Ziff and Rao designate appropriative practice proper, may be challenged due to the presumed use of power by the dominant group to define and confer meaning on artifacts or ideas that it does not “own.” When the receiver of the cultural transmission is the subordinate group, what Ziff and Rao term assimilative practice, the subordinate group may not have the power to define these cultural objects, and in fact they may be coerced into accepting the dominant understanding. Although traditional descriptions of appropriation often assumed that the dominant culture always had the power to define the meaning of cultural objects, the idea of the powerless position of subalterns is being increasingly challenged. Often the less visible strategies used by the minority groups were not acknowledged,

13. Ibid., 6.
a stance that has been challenged by postcolonial theory. “‘Natives,’ ‘subalterns,’ and ‘others’ may in fact be agents rather than powerless victims, capable of resisting or subverting the imposed agenda even as they appear to be adopting the tools of the dominant culture.”

This does not negate the power differentials, and Ashley and Plesch argue that appropriation and assimilation are distinctly different phenomena, but it does complicate our understandings of appropriative processes.

While acknowledging the power differentials between cultures, Ashley and Plesch argue that not all acts of appropriation are acts of imposed power. They see the possibility of a more benign or even positive understanding, in which appropriation is defined as “potentially a two-way process, one in which exchange and creative response may take place.” Instead of focusing upon individual acts of appropriation, Ashley and Plesch believe that appropriation is more often an extended process, one that takes place over time and in which the partners mutually influence each other through an ongoing interaction between cultures. This means that the process of appropriation has a “powerful diachronic dimension.” In the fluidity of cultural appropriation where acts of transformation of cultural objects from one culture to another can lead to further acts of appropriation as the transformed object is brought back into its original context, not all exercises of power are aggressive. The “multiple mutations and transformations” can best be seen, not as impositions of the dominant culture on the subaltern

17. Ibid., 9.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., 10.
culture, but as creative responses arising in the space between cultures, opening up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that does not necessarily rely upon an imposed hierarchy. It is this form of appropriation that I propose for works of spirituality, an exchange between contemporary ideas and practices and the historical texts, an appropriation that arises in the space between current belief and practice and the historical texts, figures, and practices. In order to accomplish this, however, the power differentials must be addressed so that this appropriation is not subject to an imposed hierarchy. The question becomes how to allow the historic text to have equal voice in any act of appropriation, in order that it may serve as a partner for a mutually critical dialogue.

If appropriation is to be an exchange as opposed to cultural domination, it is important that the voices, viewpoints, and understandings of both cultures be heard and honored. In cases in which the two cultures are in close spatial and temporal proximity, this may happen more naturally as the two cultures come into contact. The mutual appropriative processes may happen without any conscious or intentional act, although even in that case an open dialogue about the use of cultural artifacts may be important to ensure that the dominant culture is adequately hearing and deeply understanding the meaning of the artifacts derived from the subaltern culture. Because of the pressures of assimilation, messages of the dominant culture are often louder and more easily discerned, and care needs to be taken to ensure that minority voices are heard.

Use of historical artifacts from cultures that are widely separated both geographically and temporally adds a new layer of complexity. The work of hearing minority voices is not just an issue in intentionally appropriative acts, but it is also an issue in more traditional forms of

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20. Ibid., 4.
historical study. As Sheldrake notes, “We know that value-free history is not possible.”

The choices that the historian makes in terms of materials to be included and categories to be used are subject to the same type of power issues found in intentional acts of appropriation. Roger Chartier affirms this insight, saying, “By their choices and comparisons, historians assign new meaning to speech pulled out of the silence of the archives.”

History is not and cannot be free from this use of the power of the historian to select and interpret historical events and documents, and thereby to assign value and meaning. As Chartier argues, “Historians have become aware that the categories they manipulated also had a history and that social history was necessarily the history of the construction and use of these categories.”

Issues of power have influenced the way that history, in particular the history of Christian spirituality, has been understood. Often history has been portrayed within a “narrative structure which reinforces a sense that history is simple rather than complex, universal and monolithic rather than varied, plural and particular.”

In adhering to this narrative, minority voices are often lost. Such histories frequently focus upon Western or European movements, relegating other ancient Christian communities to footnotes. The exclusion of women and other marginalized groups from many histories of spirituality also points out the way in which power dynamics are operating even when the focus is on historical analysis and not appropriation. This exclusion of minority voices calls into question not only the way in which power is used in

23. Ibid., 4.
25. Ibid., 103.
historical studies, but also the way in which this use of power affects those groups who have not been included. “Exclusion from the account of history not only reinforces subordination but, more damagingly, may create a sense of being essentially insignificant.”26 Sheldrake’s concern about the effect of the use of power by the dominant group in the study of history echoes theorists’ concerns about the process of appropriation in general. Like intentional appropriation, this use of power by the dominant group in order to define the meaning and value for all has serious consequences that cannot be ignored.

As an example of the way the dominant group defines meaning, Grace M. Jantzen, in her book *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*, traces the differing social constructions of the word “mystic.” In this work, Jantzen demonstrates how the word mystic is a social construction affected by gender relations. For much of Christian history, although the word was defined in a variety of ways, changes in definition could be linked to changes in the understandings of authority and gender relations.27 Often changes were made so as to exclude women’s experiences and lessen challenges to authority posed by women having knowledge due to their direct access to God, as this direct access to divine authority was potentially threatening to the power of the Church.28 The resurgence in interest in women’s spiritual experience and the willingness to label these women as mystics in contemporary times is, according to Jantzen, linked with the privatization of religion and religious knowledge, and the lessening of its importance in the public square. Jantzen claims,

26. Ibid., 105.


28. Ibid., 2.
It was only with the development of the secular state, when religious experience was no longer perceived as a source of knowledge and power, that it became safe to allow women to be mystics. Thus it came about that when mysticism became constructed as private and personal, having nothing to do with politics, it was also possible to see it as compatible with a woman’s role of ‘angel in the house’, servicing her husband and children not only physically but spiritually as well. The decline of gender as an issue in the definition of who should count as a mystic was in direct relation to the decline in perception or religious experience, and religion generally, as politically powerful.\textsuperscript{29}

In demonstrating that the word mystic is a social construction, Jantzen is challenging the categories that we use to frame historical work, arguing that even those around which there seems to be a consensus are framed in accordance with the power relations present in the culture of the time.

This means that those who are using historical sources, where the community or person whose work is being appropriated is not present to speak its meaning, need to be aware of the way in which they are using the power of their position to interpret historical texts and to define their meaning. Because historical figures are present only in the texts that have been preserved, it may be particularly important both to acknowledge one’s own perspective as well as to do the hard work of understanding the perspective of the text and writer in order to reduce power differentials. In using historical texts, Dreyer asserts, “our aim should be to respect our subjects and borrow intelligently from their works. We need to be able to tell the difference between legitimate appropriation and illegitimate plunder.”\textsuperscript{30} Legitimate appropriation requires a respect for their differences, allowing the texts to “speak out of their own time and context to the extent that we know what these are.”\textsuperscript{31} Hearing the voices of historical figures through the texts that

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 326.
\textsuperscript{30} Elizabeth Dreyer, “Whose Story,” 165.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 166.
they wrote requires a deep contextual analysis of the culture in which these writers lived and wrote. We need to deal with these texts in all of their complexity, allowing the “past to be itself” before we try to make it speak to the present.32 Sabine MacCormack also argues for the need to listen to authors from the past, a listening that requires a deep historical-contextual analysis as well as careful listening to separate our understandings from theirs:

We cannot claim to understand the past if we are not prepared to lend our ears to those who spoke in it and to listen to them in their own words; if we are not prepared to consider the images and objects they created within the context in which these were first meaningful or to comprehend the social and political order that produced words, images, and objects in the first place.33

Coming from a different context and time, there will always be gaps in our understanding of historical texts. Interpretation of these texts, therefore, requires the scholarly virtues of “humility and tentativeness,”34 according to Dreyer. Acknowledging the limits of our ability to interpret these texts and seeing “a certain amount of indeterminacy as a hermeneutical strength rather than weakness”35 can help scholars to hear what is present in the text more clearly. The inability to fully know or understand these figures does not, however, excuse researchers from dealing seriously with their historical context. Even if it is not possible to fully hear what they are saying due to the effects of geography and time, with effort we can know something of what they believed.

32. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
Appropriation in the field of spirituality is predicated upon the assumption that these texts, written in a different context, may illuminate aspects of contemporary experience or may speak to contemporary questions. What these figures have to say is important, not simply for a deeper understanding of the time in which they lived, but because these texts continue to speak to people today. According to McGinn, “…it is not so much their past fame (or lack of it) that makes these texts worthy of investigation today. It is their content—what they still have to tell us about that loving, direct consciousness of God’s presence that is the goal of the mystical life.”\(^{36}\) In order to allow them to speak, however, we first have to do the hard work of understanding them as well as we can within their own context, which means a rigorous analysis of their historical context and a deep reading of the writings.

In works of appropriation in spirituality, a deep historical-contextual analysis is often recognized as an important element. Dreyer argues for the importance of such historical analysis in her work with Medieval texts, although her points apply equally well to other historical contexts:

Thus the richness and diversity of the present conversation cannot be a license for “anything goes.” The point is not that everyone must have a monolithic “take” on medieval mystical texts, but that whatever our “take,” we must respect the differences and pluralism of the past, give medieval writers the stage and let them speak out of their own time and context to the extent that we know what these are. Current awareness of the need to locate everything in its socio-historical, geographic, economic, cultural setting is a principle well applied to the Middle Ages.\(^{37}\)

The seriousness with which the discipline of spirituality deals with historical context has the potential to enrich practical theology studies of spiritual experience as well. Although


historical theology is one of the four constitutive movements in practical theology as defined by Browning and embraced widely in the field, because of the strong emphasis upon a thick description of contemporary practice in the descriptive theology movement, an equal focus upon the historical context has often been missing. For Browning, the role of historical theology was to put “questions emerging from the theory-laden practices to the central texts and monuments of the Christian faith.” Browning argues that the hermeneutical dialogue occurs between contemporary practice and the contemporary community’s understandings of these historical documents, rather than necessarily engaging in dialogue with these texts in their original historical context. “A hermeneutical dialogue with classic texts is not just a solitary conversation between one interpreter and his or her texts. In the situation of a congregation, it should be a community effort involving several people and their respective horizons in a dialogue with the classic texts.”

A deeper dialogue between the historical documents and contemporary practice, however, requires that the historical theology movement be grounded in its own historical context. The extension of the idea of a “thick description” to the historical theology movement of practical theology would not only enrich the historical understanding of the texts, but it would also deepen the mutually critical dialogue by allowing the voices of the text to be heard more clearly. In order for the historical documents to be able to offer a radical critique to contemporary practice in the mutually critical dialogue, these voices will need to be clearly heard, speaking out of their own contexts.

39. Ibid., 50.
Another issue is the choice of the historical documents to be used in the historical theology movement of practical theology. Due to Browning’s strong emphasis on contemporary practice, great importance is placed on the “few classic texts” that play a key role in the theological reflection of members of congregations. Although Browning argues that academic inquiry should “thematize more carefully the questions that are brought to the classic texts” and consider “a wider range of relevant texts,” such a historical analysis often falls short of what is needed for contemporary people to be able to hear the voices of the writers of these texts and to enter into a dialogue that could be construed as two-way, or in Browning’s terminology, mutually critical. In spite of Browning’s call to allow praxis to confront classic texts “as honestly as possible,” such confrontation is explained as being in service of explaining the theory-laden practices of contemporary society. That means that the focus remains upon contemporary practice.

Although a deep historical-contextual analysis may not be possible in every practical theology project, and indeed many works in practical theology deeply engage disciplinary partners other than history, this type of historical-contextual analysis seems particularly important in practical theology works that are addressing spiritual practice and experience and that are engaging spiritual or mystical texts, whose meanings may easily be misinterpreted when attempts are made to engage them in dialogue with contemporary experience and practice. Dreyer argues that using historical texts without deep contextual analysis will tend to reinforce

40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., 49.
42. Ibid.
our own views rather than being open to the views of the historical documents themselves. A deep historical grounding is more likely to challenge contemporary biases, understandings, and blind spots, an important element in mutually critical dialogue.

The discipline of spirituality, with its more serious approach to the issue of historical analysis, witnesses to the importance of understanding the context of historical writings in works of appropriation. This witness is one of the gifts that spirituality brings to the partnership between it and practical theology in the study of spiritual practice and experience. Practical theology, on the other hand, testifies to the importance of a deep contextual analysis of current practice in these studies, something that spirituality would do well to heed. Contextual analyses of both historical documents and contemporary practice need to be fully present in any work of appropriation that claims to be a mutually critical dialogue. The present work of appropriation, then, will attempt to treat both contexts—historical and contemporary—seriously so that a deep and mutually critical dialogue is possible.

As a step in providing the historical-contextual grounding necessary for this study, I will first look at how saints were appropriated in Teresa of Avila’s time. This will allow a dialogue between current and historical understandings of the appropriation of saints. As noted previously, hagiography was widely available in sixteenth-century Spain and Teresa testifies to the importance of this type of reading in her own spiritual experience and practice. This historical-contextual analysis will be the first step in grounding this study, so that Teresa’s voice may be heard more clearly through the texts that she left behind.

Hagiography in Sixteenth-Century Spain:
Appropriation of Saints in the Time of Teresa of Avila

Due to the invention of the printing press, books became increasingly available in early-modern Europe. Studying inventories of goods that were listed after death, Chartier notes that book ownership was not simply the prerogative of the nobility but was also found among the medical and legal professions, clerics, merchants, and craftsmen, although nobility and clerics often had larger libraries. Most of the books possessed by merchants and artisans were religious, and for those who had only one book, it was often a livre d’heures. Chartier notes that “ranked behind the livres d’heures, but in smaller numbers are the Légende dorée…. Bibles… breviaries, and missals.”

Even those who could not read were familiar with these forms of literature, especially in urban areas where written works were taught in monasteries, workshops, and festive confraternities. “Addressed in common, taught by some and deciphered by others, deeply integrated into the life of the community, the printed word laid its mark on the urban culture of the popular masses.” In addition to books, there was also a flourishing trade in smaller, less expensive booklets and woodcuts from books, “intended for walls of houses and churches,

45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., 239.
47. Ibid., 243.
bedrooms and workshops.” These booklets and woodcuts created a truly popular public for the written word, a public that encompassed the lower social classes as well.

In her book, *Related Lives: Confessors and Their Female Penitents, 1450—1750*, Jodi Bilinkoff looks specifically at hagiographies, which she defines as “biographical accounts of persons regarded as holy or exemplary in their own time, even if they were not formally canonized as saints.” Although she chooses a small sampling in her exploration of the relationship between confessors and women “saints,” she notes the approximately “two hundred *Lives* of saintly women produced in Spain in this period.” These *Lives* included both accounts written originally in Spanish as well as *Lives* that had been translated from other languages, allowing “saints” to serve as models not only across Europe but also in the French and Spanish colonies. As models, hagiographies were intended to shape the lives of those who read them. The virtues and actions of these saints were intended to be appropriated by readers living in a different context. These accounts were widely available, and female readers such as Teresa of Avila would have encountered these accounts in a variety of ways: growing up in a household where such literature was read, reading them and hearing them read in convents, being introduced to them by confessors, and hearing of them in sermons. All of these methods

48. Ibid., 246.
50. Ibid., 97.
51. Ibid., 98.
52. Ibid., 96.
53. Ibid., 100.
seem to have been important in Teresa of Avila’s own encounter with hagiography, as Teresa notes in her own writings.

Bilinkoff argues that hagiography in this time period served a number of rhetorical purposes. At a time when basic doctrines were being challenged by reformers, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, hagiographies “established models of behavior, reinforced key points of doctrine, and insisted upon the truth of Catholic teachings.” In doing so, they served the purposes of the Counter-Reformation, and they were “deployed as a polemical tool in the struggle against Protestantism.” This led to a “golden age of hagiography” in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which continued until the internal Roman Catholic controversies of the eighteenth century “contributed to the eventual waning of sacramental relationships and hagiographical texts.” Instead of concentrating on the production of hagiography, conditions and controversies in the eighteenth century favored the production of polemical tracts according to Bilinkoff.

Accounts of saintly people were also written in order to demonstrate qualities necessary for holiness. In the case of women, the primary virtues that were promoted in lives of saints were those of humility and obedience. Ahlgren noted that “the religious virtue of humility prescribed for women was defined in practice as withdrawal from the public sphere and dissociation from their own experience, authority, and power,” and hagiographies of holy

56. Ibid.
57. Ibid., 5.
58. Ibid., 114.
59. Ibid.
60. Ahlgren, Teresa of Avila, 23.
women were meant to epitomize such virtues. Often hagiographers directly compared their saintly women to those in earlier hagiographies as a way of legitimating the holiness of these women.\textsuperscript{61} These women would then become models of feminine piety to other women according to Bilinkoff. “Confessors were thus eager to publicize the pious lives and divinely endowed gifts of their spiritual daughters and offer them as models for emulation.”\textsuperscript{62}

Since hagiographies served as both polemicized tools of the Counter-Reformation and as models of feminine holiness, appropriation of the saints was an important goal in the dissemination and reading of these texts. Some hagiographers particularly targeted female readers. Pedro de Ribadeneyra used his hagiography of Doña Estefanía Manrique de Castilla to arouse upper-class women in Toledo “who are entranced by the baubles and unedifying things of this life.”\textsuperscript{63} Ribadeneyra was a prolific writer in a number of genres, including hagiography, in this time period. He is perhaps best known for his \textit{Lives} of early Jesuit leaders, including Ignatius of Loyola. He also composed hagiographies of two lay women and authored a compilation of the lives of saints, \textit{Flos Sanctorum}.\textsuperscript{64}

Although early-modern women read and were influenced by the \textit{Lives} of saintly men, Bilinkoff argues that these women “demonstrated a clear preference for saints of their own sex”\textsuperscript{65} and women from more recent historical times to those from more ancient history. “Perhaps they found that they could identity more readily with figures from a more recognizable past than with

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Bilinkoff, \textit{Related Lives}, 102.
\item Ibid., 35.
\item Ibid., 34.
\item Ibid., 39.
\item Ibid., 101.
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those in distant historical periods.\footnote{Ibid., 104.} Appropriation may often be accomplished more readily when gender differences and historical gaps are minimized.

For these early-modern women, the reading of Lives was not simply a matter of learning about saints and their associated virtues. The reading often promoted a close identification of the woman with the saint, and this identification with the saint led to a variety of spiritual experiences, including visions.\footnote{Ibid., 109.} Teresa reports a sense of identification with Augustine while reading his Confessions:

As I began to read the Confessions, it seemed to me I saw myself in them. I began to commend myself very much to this glorious saint. When I came to the passage where he speaks about his conversion and read how he heard that voice in the garden, it only seemed to me, according to what I felt in my heart, that it was I the Lord called. I remained for a long time totally dissolved in tears and feeling within myself utter distress and weariness.\footnote{Teresa de Jesús, Libro de la Vida, in Santa Teresa de Jesús: Obras Completas, ed. Efren de la Madre de Dios and Otger Steggink (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2006), 9.8, 65.}

Although that experience occurred later in life, Teresa begins her Life by remarking on the way in which reading of hagiography and devotion to the saints were a part of her life from early childhood, and the effect that such reading had in molding her character:

My father was fond of reading good books, and thus he also had books in Spanish for his children to read. These good books together with the care my mother took to have us pray and be devoted to our Lady and to some of the saints began to awaken me when, I think, six or seven years old, to the practice of virtue.\footnote{Teresa de Jesús, Vida, 1.1, 34.}
For Teresa, these writings served the role of encouraging imitation of virtues. Having been exposed to these stories as children, she and her brother desired martyrdom, and when this did not seem possible they tried to make hermitages in the garden. With the failure of the hermitages, she resorted to more traditional practices of piety: alms giving, prayer, and pretending to be a nun. Looking back on this early life, Teresa credits the reading of good books for her great devotion as a child, a devotion from which she was enticed by bad companions in adolescence.

Reading played a major role in the development of Teresa’s spirituality. Although she had been exposed to good books from an early age, she soon found the romances that her mother favored were more to her liking. These books had to be hidden from her father, who did not approve of such reading. Although Teresa said that the reading of these books did not harm her mother, who was naturally more virtuous than Teresa, they were unhealthy for her. She would later call such reading a useless practice, but it cultivated in her a love of reading that never left her. “I was so completely taken up with this reading that I didn’t think I could be happy if I...

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70. “When I considered the martyrdoms the saints suffered for God, it seemed to me that the price they paid for going to enjoy God was very cheap, and I greatly desired to die in the same way.” Teresa, Life, 1.4, 55; “Como via los martirios que por Dios las santas pasavan, pareciame compravan muy barato el ir a gozar de Dios, y deseava yo mucho morir ansi.” Teresa de Jesus, Vida, 1.5, 35.

71. Teresa of Avila, Life, 1.5, 55.

72. Ibid., 1.6, 55-56.

73. “Until I began to associate with her when I was fourteen, or I think older (I mean when she took me for her friend and confidante), I don’t think I would have abandoned God by a mortal sin or lost the fear of God, although the fear of losing my honor was stronger in me.” Teresa of Avila, Life, 2.3, 58; “Hasta que traté con ella, que fue de edad de catorce años, y creo que más (para tener amistad conmigo —digo— y darme parte de sus cosas), no me parece havía dejado a Dios por culpa mortal ni perdido el temor de Dios, aunque le tenia mayor de la honra.” Teresa de Jesus, Vida, 2.4, 37.

74. “Our reading such books was a matter that weighed so much upon my father that we had to be cautious lest he see us.” Teresa of Avila, Life, 2.1, 57; “De esto le pesava tanto a mi padre, que se havía de tener aviso a que no lo viese.” Teresa de Jesus, Vida, 2.1, 36.
didn’t have a new book.” It was the request of her uncle, Don Pedro Sánchez de Cepeda, to read to him that caused her to take up reading good books again. Although she admits that at the time she did not like them very well, reading good books once again reminded her of her childhood desire to serve God.

Although Teresa read many hagiographies, the “good books” that were important to Teresa throughout her life were many and varied. These included:

- St. Jerome’s epistles,
- Gregory the Great’s commentary on Job,
- Augustine’s Confessions and the pseudo-Augustinian Soliloquies,
- the lives of the saints,
- Ludolph of Saxony’s Vita Christi,
- Thomas à Kempis’ Imitation of Christ,
- Fray Francis of Osuna’s Tercer abecedario espiritual,
- Fray Bernardine of Laredo’s Subida del monte Síon.

These good books became increasingly important to her both in teaching her the practice of mental prayer and in supporting her in her spiritual journey at a time when she found few who could understand her form of spirituality. Teresa acknowledges her great debt to Osuna’s Tercer abecedario, crediting it with teaching her the practice of mental prayer, even giving it the sobriquet of “Master.” This book and the practice of mental prayer that it advocated would not only serve as the basis of her own life of prayer but also greatly influence the shape of her ideas for reforming the Carmelite Order. It was not the only book, however, that would play a decisive role in Teresa’s work. In addition to playing a part in her own experience of conversion, Augustine’s Confessions served as a literary model for her own Life, another form of appropriation. Although the Tercer abecedario and the Confessions played a major role in the

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75. Teresa of Avila, Life, 2.1, 57; “Era tan estremo lo que en esto me embeví a, que si no tenía libro nuevo, no me parece tenía contento.” Teresa de Jesús, Vida, 2.1, 36.
76. Teresa of Avila, Life, 3.4-3.5, 62-63.
78. Teresa of Avila, Life, 4.7, 67.
development of Teresa’s spirituality and the ways in which she understood and related her spiritual experiences, other good books also influenced her. Teresa says that she enjoyed reading the lives of saints, and these stories also had an important impact on her life and work. Stories of the saints were often appropriated in order to serve as role models in sixteenth-century Spain, and Teresa was obviously aware of and used this traditional form of appropriation. Joseph Chorpenning argues that the reading of hagiographies had a profound effect on Teresa, particularly on her own literary compositions, and that this impact has tended to be overlooked by Teresian scholars.  

Hagiographies, both ones originally written in Spain as well as those that had been translated into Spanish, were popular in sixteenth-century Spain. In addition to shorter hagiographies included in collections of the lives of the saints, there were full-length lives of several saints, including Catherine of Siena, Mary Magdalene, and Francis of Assisi. Not only was Raymond of Capua’s *Life of Catherine of Siena* available in Spain, but Catherine’s letters were also available in Spanish. In a letter written by Teresa to two of her nuns, Teresa refers to an event detailed in Raymond’s biography, demonstrating her knowledge of that text, and there are indications that she was familiar with the letters as well.

Catherine of Siena’s biography served an important role in Teresa’s context. Ahlgren argues that the translation of Raymond of Capua’s *Life of Catherine of Siena* into Spanish allowed Catherine to serve as a model of holiness for sixteenth-century women in Spain.


80. Ibid.

Although Catherine’s letters were also translated into Spanish, it was Raymond’s *Life* that “established a hagiographical model which women in sixteenth-century Spain could assimilate.”82 The model set up by Raymond in his biography of Catherine and adopted in sixteenth-century Spain was

one in which spiritual progress is measured in terms of the soul’s growth in humility and the corresponding supernatural rewards the soul receives. This spiritual preparation bears fruit in the public realm as well since the person becomes God’s instrument for the reform of the world.83

Not only was Teresa aware of this model, but Ahlgren argues that Teresa intentionally patterned her life after the model established by Raymond with respect to Catherine, appropriating that model for her own life. Certainly there are great similarities between Teresa’s story and that of Catherine. These include “similar descriptions of conversions facilitated by Mary Magdalene”84 and very similar mystical experiences. Like Catherine, Teresa feared being deceived by the devil, an accepted sign of humility, thereby demonstrating holiness.85 As in Raymond’s *Life of Catherine of Siena*, Teresa justified her public reforming activity as due to her mystical experiences and the fact that God’s power is shown by working through the weak, a strategy that Ahlgren labels a “strategy of instrumental authority, effective because it appealed to the central paradox of Christianity: God upholds the lowly.”86 By following this model, Teresa demonstrated humility—the necessary virtue of holy women—much as Raymond had done

82. Ibid., 54.
83. Ibid., 58.
84. Ibid., 61.
85. Ibid., 62.
86. Ibid., 63.
earlier for Catherine, while still justifying her reforming work. According to Ahlgren, the *Life of Catherine of Siena* served as an important model in Teresa’s own self-construction.

Chorpenning agrees that “Teresa consciously or unconsciously found in hagiography not only an interpretive aid for understanding but a method for presenting her life and experience.” Particularly in her *Life*, Chorpenning believes that Teresa appropriated hagiographical models for her own writing, and he lists five ways that Teresa’s text was influenced by these models. First, Teresa uses the conventions of hagiography to present not only her own life and experience but also those of Peter of Álcantara, presenting Peter as not only active in this life but continuing his work after his death. Second, Teresa contrasts her own sinfulness with God’s favors, a common theme in hagiography. Third, Teresa shows how God began to be active in her youth. Hagiographies often show how God blessed the person from early childhood and prepared them for what was to come. Fourth, elements of the demonic and the miraculous are prominent in Teresa’s *Life*, as they are in other hagiographical works. Fifth, Chorpenning argues that Teresa’s literary style is consistent with that in hagiography. Although the hagiographical underpinnings are more obvious in the *Life*, even Teresa’s *Interior Castle* has been influenced by that genre. The purpose of that work, as is true in other hagiographical works, is “to show how

87. Ibid.
89. Ibid., 172.
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid., 172-73.
92. Ibid., 173-74.
93. Ibid., 174.
God is working in the life of the one whom he calls and cares for.”

The role of hagiography in shaping Teresa’s writings should not be underestimated.

In fact, of all her good books, it would be the lives of the saints that would prove most important to Teresa in the end. Long after she had quit reading books on prayer, deciding that she had learned what they could teach her, Teresa continued to read hagiographies, finding in that reading support and encouragement in the life of faith. It was the lives of the saints that continued to challenge her to grow in her love of and service to God:

Since it seemed that I understood all the books that I read that treat of prayer and that the Lord had already given me such favors, I thought I had no need of these books and so did not read them but read only lives of the saints. Since I felt so lacking in the ways they served God, reading about them seemed to benefit and encourage me.

It was not simply reading about the saints that would sustain her. Through her reading as well as through prayer, Teresa developed relationships with several saints who encouraged her in difficult times, provided help and support, and validated her call to reform the Carmelite Order. Appearing in visions, these saints became her companions, not only in her life of prayer, but also in the work that God had called her to do in founding her reformed Carmelite monasteries. It was a relationship that shared much in common with others that Teresa described, ones that she labeled friendships.

In the next chapter, I will explore Teresa’s understanding of friendship and companionship: with other people, with God, and with the saints. Friendship is a major theme in

94. Ibid., 175.

95. Teresa of Avila, *Life*, 30.17, 261; “que como todos los libros que leía que tratan de oración me parecía los entendía todos y que ya me había dado aquellos el Señor, que no los había menester; y así no los leía, sino vidas de Santos, que como y me hallo tan corta en lo que ellos servían a Dios, esto parece me aprovecha y anima.” Teresa de Jesus, *Vida*, 31.17, 163.
her writings, and Teresa is clear about the difference between friendship as her culture understood it and what she called true friendship. In order to allow Teresa’s voice to be more clearly heard, I will first spend some time situating Teresa within her own context, both her own life story as well as in the context sixteenth-century Spain.
CHAPTER THREE

TERESA OF AVILA AND TRUE FRENDSHIP

The life of Teresa of Avila spanned a large portion of the sixteenth century, and in order to understand her and her writings, it is necessary to understand the context in which she lived and wrote. That was a time of great foment in Spain—a time of political and economic upheaval as well as of great changes in the church. Spain, recently unified under Isabel and Ferdinand (including parts recaptured from Muslim control), was in an expansionist and nationalist mood. The imposition of the Inquisition, which in its early years focused upon those Christians of Jewish descent (conversos), as well as the expulsion of Jews in 1492, would encourage many of Jewish descent to leave Spain, causing disastrous effects on the economy. Those conversos who stayed and Jews who chose conversion over expulsion would be viewed with suspicion as being tainted.\(^1\) Blood purity laws, limpieza de sangre, would threaten the social positions of conversos as well as moriscos (those of Muslim descent) by regulating access to certain occupations, educational institutions, and even religious orders. In a society in which honor was of great importance, to admit to impure blood was to relegate oneself and one’s family to the lower levels of society.\(^2\) Moving and changing names, buying patents of nobility, and marrying into “Old Christian” families were ways of hiding the taint of ancestry,\(^3\) tactics that allowed many of converso background to achieve a precarious position in society.

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2. Ibid., 21.
3. Ibid., 64-67.
In spite of the concern about judaizing, in the early years of the sixteenth century many *conversos* achieved prominent positions at court, particularly in positions of finance, and they were often involved in the movements of reform that were occurring throughout Europe. In Spain in the early years of that century, there was a great deal of openness to the spirit of questioning and inquiry epitomized by Erasmus. This openness encompassed the laity. With this change in spirit as well as rising literacy (in Spanish) among the upper and middle classes, vernacular literature flourished. Spiritual practices, such as mental prayer, that were once confined to the clergy began to be taught to the laity as well.4 With the support of King Philip I, the Inquisitor General of Spain, Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, began promoting these new ways of prayer for lay people.5

By the middle of the sixteenth century, however, this openness to the movement of the spirit would become suspect. A movement of those who practiced mental prayer and believed that direct, unmediated access to God was possible for all Christians began around 1509.6 The presence of this group, known as *Alumbrados*, as well as the continuing presence of those who had been inspired by the spiritual implications of Erasmianism, became problematic as these movements shared some characteristics with the Protestant reformers in other countries.7

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6. “While recent research has shown that a wide variety of views and practices existed among the *Alumbrados* they were, in general, accused of following the methods of *recogimiento* but of misunderstanding its basic principles.” Carrera, *Teresa of Avila’s Autobiography*, 67.
discovery in Seville and Valladolid of allegedly Protestant cells in 1557 and 1558 increased the fear of heresy infiltrating into Spain. This led to an increase in inquisitorial activity in Spain against movements that focused upon interiority and direct access to God, unmediated by church authority, rites, or structures, which included Alumbrados, Erasmians, “Lutherans,” and mystics. José C. Nieto argues that the targeting of the Alumbrados was intensified by the connection in the minds of the Inquisitors between their beliefs and “the international heresy of Lutheranism.” In response to fears of heresy, vernacular books on prayer were banned, not because they were heretical, but because they were deemed dangerous and could lead uneducated lay people astray. Mental prayer, which was linked to the Alumbrados and sometimes erroneously to “Lutherans,” was seen as particularly dangerous, as it taught a method of direct access to God that was not mediated by church, clergy or sacraments. Even after the Alumbrado and Protestant movements had been crushed in Spain, the fear of heresy remained, which led to a strengthening of the power of the Inquisition in the second half of the sixteenth century.


12. “Even thought the nascent Protestant movement had been destroyed in the early 1560’s, there was still the threat of foreign Protestants infiltrating the country, as well as the residual problem of the survival of elements of Islam and Judaism. The presence of large numbers of converted Jews and Moriscos meant that there was an everpresent threat that heterodox thought could filter into the consciousness of Old Christian Spaniards.” Stephen
Inquisition, which had initially been justified by the time of crisis in Spain during the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella in the late fifteenth century, became a permanent institution. In this new environment, mental prayer was often seen as a sign of heretical leanings.\textsuperscript{13}

Although the Council of Trent (1545-1563) did not ban all vernacular translations of the Bible in its final documents, Fernando de Valdés, the Inquisitor General of Spain (1547-1566), included such translations in his \textit{Index librorum prohibitorum} (1549).\textsuperscript{14} According to Elena Carrera, while it was intended to ban from circulation books containing any ideas that might have appeared Protestant, the Valdés Index contained a number of the earliest devotional writings to have been published in the vernacular. It also renewed the prohibition of Bibles in the vernacular. It drew a clear line between asceticism and mysticism, which it represented as incompatible methods. In an attempt to suppress the increasingly popular affective spirituality and reinforce the medieval ascetic practices of virtue and ‘desarraigo de vicios’, the Index censors singled out any book with mystical overtones.\textsuperscript{15}

What had been openly taught and even advocated during the first half of the sixteenth century in Spain became banned and labeled as dangerous during the latter half of that century. It was not so easy, however, to erase the knowledge that had been spread during the first half of the century, and the practice of mental prayer continued, particularly among the Franciscans,

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\textsuperscript{13} Ahlgren, \textit{Teresa of Avila}, 55.


\textsuperscript{15} Carrera, \textit{Teresa of Avila’s Autobiography}, 80.
Dominicans, and Jesuits, although its inclusion in these religious orders caused great upheaval and many of its practitioners were denounced to the Inquisition.\textsuperscript{16}

Teresa of Avila’s life and work spanned these changes in Spanish life and society. Her movement of reform was inspired by the reformist atmosphere of the early part of the sixteenth century, but she began it shortly after the publication of Valdés’ \textit{Index} and the Council of Trent when the climate and the rules had changed. Although she had learned the practice of mental prayer, which was to be a key part of her reform, from vernacular books on prayer in the first part of the sixteenth century, by the time she began her reform of Carmelite monasteries such books had been banned. In addition, she had to be very careful because of the association of mental prayer with the \textit{Alumbrados} and Protestants.\textsuperscript{17} As a woman, she would have been considered more susceptible to demonic influence than a man. Her family history also increased the potential threat to Teresa. Coming from a \textit{converso} family, the likelihood of condemnation by the Inquisition would have been even greater if her background had become public. In addition, the Council of Trent strengthened the rule on enclosure for nuns, making the work of founding monasteries across Spain more difficult. Although Teresa mandated a strict enclosure for her nuns, in keeping with the rules of the Council of Trent, she, herself, was accused of being a gadabout as she moved from place to place establishing new reformed monasteries.

In her life and writings, Teresa responded to and reacted against these dramatic changes in Spanish society, particularly changes to the religious life. Without an understanding of the

\textsuperscript{17} Evennett, \textit{“Counter-Reformation Spirituality,”} 54-55.
context in which she lived, much is lost. Teresa was who she was and did what she did because she lived in sixteenth-century Spain. In order to understand her writings, particularly the way in which she used the idea of spiritual companionship, it will first be necessary to explore the context in which she worked—for the changes in Spanish society in the sixteenth century would have a profound influence on her life and work—before turning in the final section of this chapter to a discussion of the ways in which Teresa spoke of spiritual companionship in her writings. This work will be a necessary grounding for the later constructive theological work of spiritual companionship.

**Teresa of Avila and Her Writings in Context**

After giving a brief synopsis of her life, I will explore several historical themes that are important in understanding Teresa and her writing. These themes will be honor and class, the blossoming and banning of vernacular literature, ideals of sanctity, and Teresa as author.

**Teresa of Avila’s Life**

Much of what we know about Teresa of Avila comes from her own writings.18 Her first book-length manuscript was the account of her *Life*, written on orders of her confessors19 when

18. Teresa of Avila is the name by which she is most often referred to in English-language literature, using the name given at her canonization. In Spanish-language literature she is more commonly referred to as Teresa de Jesús, the name that she chose when she entered the Carmelite Order. Both names refer to the woman known in secular circles as Doña Teresa de Ahumada or Teresa Sánchez de Cepeda. Elena Carrera argues that the choice as to which name to use is not without interpretive consequence. See Carrera, *Teresa of Avila’s Autobiography*. While acknowledging that this choice does affect the interpretation of Teresa, I have chosen throughout to use Teresa of Avila to reflect the prevalence of this title in English-language scholarship.

19. “Since my confessors commanded me and gave me plenty of leeway to write about the favors and the kind of prayer the Lord has granted me, I wish they would also have allowed me to tell very clearly and minutely about my great sins and wretched life.” Teresa of Avila, *Life*, pro.1, 53; “Quisiera yo que, como me han mandado y
she was forty-seven years old.\textsuperscript{20} Teresa herself does not call it a \textit{Life} but “The Story of God’s Mercies.”\textsuperscript{21} It was Luis de León, who collected and published Teresa’s books after her death, who labeled the work “\textit{Vida},” designating its genre. As an autobiography, it has its limits because it is focused more upon the realities of her internal life: autobiographical detail serves as a backdrop for the favors that God has given to her.\textsuperscript{22} Also, the latter part of her life, which included her public work of establishing reformed Carmelite monasteries, is not included. Second, having written it in order to justify her way of prayer and to validate her spiritual experiences, Teresa was very careful about what she included. As Carole Slade argues, “The potential charge of heresy affects nearly all the authorial choices Teresa made in the \textit{Life}, most important among them for understanding her mode of self-interpretation, the genre.”\textsuperscript{23} According to Slade, Teresa’s confessors commanded her to write in the genre of penitential confession, often the prelude to the more formal inquisitorial judicial confession. Both genres presuppose self-incrimination. In order to defend herself against the implied assumption of guilt, Teresa used other first-person genres in which guilt was not a constitutive part.\textsuperscript{24} This blurring of genre has made and continues to make interpretation of the \textit{Life} more difficult. In spite of its

\textsuperscript{20} “This book was finished in June, 1562.” Teresa of Avila, \textit{Life}, epi.4, 365.

\textsuperscript{21} Ahlgren, \textit{Teresa of Avila}, 34.


\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 16.
limitations as autobiography, however, this book as well as Teresa’s other writings and other documents from the time period provide a basic outline of her life and times.

Teresa was born in 1515 in Ávila and was the daughter of Alonso Sánchez and his second wife, Beatriz de Ahumada. She was the third of her mother’s children, and she had two older half-siblings. Her father came from a family with converso background, although Teresa never alluded to that part of her family heritage. In 1485, her grandfather Juan Sánchez and two of his sons, ten-year-old Alonso and twelve-year-old Alvaro, were “reconciled” to the Church in an auto da fé that required them to process barefoot through the streets of Toledo wearing the infamous yellow sanbenitos for their crime of secret judaizing. Often converso families chose to incriminate themselves even when innocent, during times when the Inquisition promised leniency, in order to avoid being denounced later by jealous neighbors who held a grudge against them and thereby facing the possibility of death. The fine and notoriety almost ruined the family, and shortly afterward Juan moved his family from Toledo to Ávila, where he was not known, so that he could resume his trade in the cloth business. The family was eventually able to procure a patent of nobility, a pleito de hidalguía, which pronounced them hidalgo, or lower nobility, something not theoretically possible for those of converso background, allowing the family to better hide its “impure” blood. When his first wife died young, Alonso, continuing the

family quest to gain social status, married into an established Old Christian family, against the wishes of that family,\textsuperscript{29} strengthening his family’s claim to hidalgo status.

When Teresa was thirteen, her mother died. At that point, according to Teresa, she asked the Virgin Mary to be her mother, beginning her lifelong devotion to Mary.\textsuperscript{30} Teresa describes herself in adolescence as popular, social, and frivolous.\textsuperscript{31} At the age of sixteen, due to some real or perceived threat to Teresa’s “honor,” her father sent her to the Augustinian Convent School of Our Lady of Grace.\textsuperscript{32} The reason given for this move was the marriage of her older half-sister, María.\textsuperscript{33} After a year at Our Lady of Grace, Teresa was removed from the school due to serious health problems. During this illness, her uncle, Pedro Sánchez de Cepeda, introduced her to “good books” in the vernacular, although Teresa still preferred the Romances that her mother had favored.\textsuperscript{34} While recovering from her illness, however, she read \textit{The Letters of St. Jerome} and began to consider a religious vocation.\textsuperscript{35} Unable to gain her father’s permission to enter the monastery, she ran away to the Carmelite monastery of Encarnación. She received the habit a year later, in 1536, and made her profession of vows in 1537. In 1538, Teresa became critically ill and was taken to Bacedas by her family for treatment, a treatment that proved to be useless and very painful.\textsuperscript{36} Teresa suffered paralysis, and she was almost buried when she was believed

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} Teresa of Avila, \textit{Life}, 1.7, 56.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 2.2, 57.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 2.6, 59.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 2.6, 60.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 3.4, 62.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 3.7, 63.
\end{flushright}
to have died. During her recovery, however, her uncle Pedro gave her a copy of Francisco de Osuna’s *Third Spiritual Alphabet (Tercer abecedario espiritual)* and Teresa began the practice of mental prayer.\(^\text{38}\)

After many years that she described as a “tempestuous sea,”\(^\text{39}\) Teresa was moved to a new level of prayer by an image of Christ during the passion\(^\text{40}\) and the reading of St. Augustine’s *Confessions*.\(^\text{41}\) She began to consult extensively with spiritual directors, confessors, and noted experts on the spiritual life. She described a series of spiritual experiences and visions, and the difficulty that she had in finding confessors who could understand and support her on this path.

In 1562, Teresa wrote the first redaction of the *Book of her Life*, at the request of her confessor, García de Toledo, so that he might be better equipped to judge her spiritual experiences. In her desire to garner support for her way of prayer and the spiritual life and in an attempt to safeguard her *Life*, she wrote to Juan de Ávila in 1568, receiving his approval on her work. This approval, however, did not keep the Inquisition from seizing the work in 1575.\(^\text{42}\)

In 1562, at the command of Christ and with great opposition both in the town and within the Carmelite Order, Teresa founded the first reformed Carmelite monastery, St. Joseph’s, in Ávila. After her confessor, Domingo Báñez, refused to allow her nuns to read her *Life*, Teresa

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 4.6, 66.
\(^{38}\) Teresa of Avila, *Life*, 4.7, 66.
\(^{39}\) Ibid., 8.2, 94.
\(^{40}\) Ibid., 9.1, 100-01.
\(^{41}\) Ibid., 9.8, 103.
\(^{42}\) Rady Roldán-Figueroa, *The Ascetic Spirituality of Juan de Ávila (1499-1569)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 12.
received permission from her confessor to write a few things about prayer. These few things would become *The Way of Perfection* (1566). Eventually, Teresa overcame opposition by local authorities and even superiors in her order to found seventeen reformed Carmelite monasteries for women, as well as to recruit men to begin a companion order for monks.

Teresa was a prolific writer. She would write four books—*The Book of Her Life*, *Foundations* (finished circa 1581), *Meditations on the Song of Songs* (1566), and *The Interior Castle* (1577)—as well as the *Constitutions* (1563) for the Reformed Carmelite Order and a variety of smaller works. Almost 500 letters are still extant. As Ahlgren argues, Teresa’s “vocation as a writer is tightly bound to her vocation as a reformer.”

Although her writings were not widely published during her lifetime—in fact, several were sequestered by the Inquisition—they circulated in manuscript form among her monasteries and outside supporters.

Most of her works were written in response to the needs that Teresa encountered as she worked to found Carmelite houses that followed the Primitive Rule of Carmel, rather than the mitigated rule followed by *Encarnación* and other Carmelite monasteries of the time, which allowed distinctions of class and open visiting to occur, practices that Teresa felt were contrary to an atmosphere of prayer. The banning of vernacular books on prayer would force Teresa to find another way of teaching the practice of prayer. After the promulgation of Valdés’ *Index,*

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Teresa would need to rely, not on the books that had formed her in the practice of mental prayer, but on her own experience in order to teach her nuns and friars. As Ahlgren notes, “The prohibitions in the Valdés Index were a major motivation for Teresa to move from reading books to writing them.” Although Teresa always attributed her writing to obedience, a necessary strategy in an era in which women could not claim teaching authority, Ahlgren argues that “the abundance of material that no one could command her to write is a reflection of Teresa’s literary gifts and her strong desire to express her ideas in writing.” Teresa died on October 4, 1582, at the convent in Alba Tormes. In spite of the fact that she was investigated at least three times by the Inquisition, and most of her works were sequestered during her lifetime, Teresa’s last words were reported to be thanking God that she was a daughter of the Church.

Themes in the Life of Teresa of Avila

_Honor and Class_

The culture in which Teresa lived and worked was one in which class was important, and the need to uphold family honor dictated many of the social values of urban centers, such as Ávila, according to Bilinkoff. The urban aristocracy was divided into two categories: nobility and “gentlemen.” The smaller class of nobility consisted of individuals with titles who owned large estates and whose wealth and influence were great. The majority of the aristocracy

45. Ibid., 41.
46. Ibid., 77.
47. Ibid., 63-64.
49. Ibid., 16.
belonged to the lower, *hidalgo*, class. The members of this class were exempt from taxes and were allowed to use the title of *Don* or *Doña*. It is to this class that the *pleito de hidalguía* elevated Teresa’s family.

Although honor was understood on many different levels, the most important was lineage, *linaje*. In Ávila, the greatest honor was conferred by being able to trace descent from a family with a long and untroubled pedigree, preferably back to the city’s reconquest and repopulation. The city was re-established in the late eleventh century after Toledo and its environs were recovered from the Muslims.\(^\text{50}\) Since most of the aristocratic families of sixteenth-century Ávila had arrived more recently, this was a difficult task.\(^\text{51}\) This task would have been an impossibility for Teresa’s family, having arrived in Ávila in 1486, but their heritage would have been even more problematic due to the concern for “pure blood,” with pure being defined as Christian lineage with no hint of Jewish or Muslim ancestry. Because of the doctrine of *limpieza de sangre*, or purity of blood, according to Bilinkoff “true honor was now defined by ethnicity, by blood, as well as by rank and pedigree.”\(^\text{52}\) This focus upon the purity of blood meant that even those *conversos* whose families had been Christians for generations were faced with negative social and economic effects if their heritage became known. As noted social historian Teofilo F. Ruiz has observed,

> Although *Converso* families might have been Christian for more than a century, suspicion and belief that their blood was tainted remained part of Spain’s social fabric and mentality throughout the early modern period. Positions in universities

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50. Ibid., 18.
51. Ibid., 20.
52. Ibid., 21.
(admission to the great colleges) and cathedral chapters, and access to military orders, with their profitable economic privileges, required evidence of purity of blood and proof of non-Jewish ancestry. Eventually, this process of racialization became the litmus test for admittance to the high levels of Christian society.\textsuperscript{53}

In 1449, the city of Toledo banned \textit{conversos} from public office, a ban that was overturned by 1454.\textsuperscript{54} This was followed by a number of anti-\textit{converso} outbreaks through the 1480s, but \textit{conversos} continued to “exercise great influence in high places.”\textsuperscript{55} According to Linda Martz, political instability in the early sixteenth century in Castile, following the death of Queen Isabella in 1504, reignited factional battles in cities such as Toledo.\textsuperscript{56} A famine in 1506 and plague in 1507 contributed to further instability.\textsuperscript{57} This period was also a time of a great religious revival. In the early sixteenth century, the Office of the Inquisition was working to stamp out a new messianic movement that had attracted many \textit{conversos}.\textsuperscript{58} This heresy, as well as the \textit{Communero} revolt and attempts by \textit{conversos} to weaken the power of the Inquisition by a campaign in Rome, led to a conservative reaction in Castile.\textsuperscript{59} The \textit{sanbenitos}, garments worn by penitents during reconciliation, were displayed in the Toledo Cathedral, stating name, offense, and date.\textsuperscript{60} According to Martz, “In an era that took seriously the task of defending the family

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 81-82.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 82.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 92.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 134.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 134.
name, including even remote ancestors, the sanbenitos served as a constant and public reminder of past humiliations.”

This led families such as Teresa’s that had a *converso* background to go to great lengths to hide their Jewish ancestry. Juan’s decision to move from Toledo, where his ancestry was known, to Ávila and to set himself up as a gentleman so that he could buy his way into the lower nobility by using the legal procedure of *pleito de hidalguía* was a common tactic for *converso* families. In fact, Bilinkoff uses the example of the Sánchez de Cepeda family (Teresa’s father and uncles) as an example of how “a wealthy converso family could use cash payments, the institution of marriage, and legal maneuvers to ‘prove’ its gentility.” The case of the Sánchez de Cepeda family was helped by their connections by marriage. As Martz notes, networks of kinship, like that in the Sánchez de Cepeda family, were important in promoting the cause of families with “impure” blood. “They testified for one another at hearings, they cooperated in financial endeavors, and their families intermarried.” The kinships that were established by intermarriage were crucial in establishing *hidalgo* credentials. Alonso’s first wife was the daughter of one of the city councilors. The municipal official who would decide the case, Francisco de Pajares, was the brother-in-law of Pedro Sánchez de Cepeda, one of Alonso’s

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61. Ibid., 134-35.
62. “….statutes of cleanliness of blood (or purity of blood), demeaning as they were, could always be circumvented by money and social connections; for the most part, they came to function more as a class than as a religious (or racial) sieve.” Ruiz, *Spanish Society*, 103.
brothers. The high level of corruption in these cases was well known at the time, meaning that although the Sánchez de Cepeda family could, as of 1522, officially claim status as *hidalgos*, they would need to be very careful to do nothing that would cast doubt upon their family’s “honor” and status.

Concerns about honor and class distinctions were not left behind when one joined a monastery, such as *Encarnación*, the monastery that Teresa entered in 1535. Within the convent, housing was allocated by class and wealth. As her father agreed to provide “twenty-five fenagas of grain or two hundred ducats a year,” Teresa was assigned a large private apartment, with its own parlor, cooking, and dining areas. In this apartment Teresa would house relatives and entertain guests. Servants for the upper-class nuns were also housed in the monastery, and titles such as *Doña* were retained. Nuns were encouraged to entertain wealthy guests, and they were often sent out to noble homes as companions, both to reduce costs for the monastery (which was chronically short of funds) as well as to serve as fundraisers for the monastery. “Economic conditions at la Encarnación became so strained that as many as fifty nuns at a time would live away from the convent.” Teresa, known as a witty conversationalist, was often requested, and she spent long periods of time away from the monastery.

After Teresa’s adoption of the practice of mental prayer, the social life of the monastery began to be a problem. In her writings, Teresa argued that those who were serious about the life

66. Ibid., 67.
67. Ibid., 114-15.
68. Ibid., 115.
of prayer needed to distance themselves from family ties. For Teresa, concern for honor, an important part of social interactions of that time, was in opposition to the life of prayer. As Rady Roldán-Figueroa notes, this belief was shared by Juan de Ávila, a noted spiritual authority whom Teresa would consult. Juan believed that mental prayer should lead to annihilation, a sense of one being “absolutely grounded upon God,” a state that was in direct opposition to notions of honor. In his book *Audi, Filia*, which was addressed to women, like Teresa, who desired a life of deep prayer, Juan urged them in their meditations to “reject, or destroy, all other ideas or images that can represent the self in a different way, as for instance grounded on personal merits, gender, status, or wealth.” The incompatibility of a serious life of mental prayer with the traditional social life of *Encarnación*, in which class, wealth, and social status were factors, led Teresa to specify in her *Constitutions* that “as much as they can, the Sisters should avoid a great deal of conversation with relatives. Aside from the fact that they will become preoccupied with their relatives’ affairs, they will find it difficult to avoid talking to them about worldly things.” Teresa, however, was not content with limiting the visits of outsiders in her reformed monasteries. Even the daily interactions between nuns could be an impediment to the practice of mental prayer, which required large amounts of solitude. For this reason, her nuns would spend

70. Ibid.
the majority of their day in solitude and silence, coming together only for worship, dining, and an hour of recreation:

All of that time not taken up with community life and duties should be spent by each Sister in the cell or hermitage designated by the prioress; in sum, in a place where she can be recollected and, on those days that are not feasts days, occupied in doing some work. By withdrawing into solitude in this way, we fulfill what the rule commands: that each one should be alone. No Sister, under pain of a grave fault, may enter the cell of another without the prioress’s permission. Let there never be a common workroom.  

The purpose of this solitude was to provide the necessary conditions for the nuns to progress in mental prayer, far from the distractions of the traditional social interactions.

Teresa’s Constitutions also abolished the distinctions in living conditions that were based upon social class. In her critique, Teresa was in accord with Juan de Ávila, who used his public sermons to criticize not only the excesses of wealth but the tendency of the culture of that time to equate social status and personal merit. According to Roldán-Figueroa, Juan believed that true merit comes not through social class but through moral union of the soul with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, traditional social distinctions were unimportant. Teresa took this understanding of the essential equality of all before God and incorporated it into her rule. She was clear that the nuns should have no possessions and all things must be held in common. Her monasteries were intended to be founded in poverty, and that spirit of begging, which involved being satisfied with

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72. Teresa of Avila, Constitutions, 8, 321; “Todo el tiempo que no anduvieren con la comunidad, o en oficios della, se esté cada una de por sí en las celdas u ermitas que la priora las señalare; en fin, en el lugar de su recogimiento, haciendo algo los días que no fueren de fiesta (llegándonos en este apartamiento a lo que manda la regla de que esté cada una de por sí). Ninguna hermana pueda entrar en la celda de otra sin licencia de la priora), so pena de grave culpa. Nunca haya casa de labor.” Teresa de Jesús, Constituciones, 1.14-15, 821.

73. Roldán-Figueroa, Ascetic Spirituality, 190.

74. Ibid., 204-08.

75. Teresa of Avila, Constitutions, 10, 322.
whatever the Lord provided, was to be the basis of their common life. The nuns were expected to graciously accept whatever was given, trusting that whatever His Majesty provided would be sufficient. 76 As was true in the larger monasteries, such as Encarnación, there were times when Teresa’s nuns would go hungry. In Teresa’s reformed monasteries, however, all of the nuns would be equally affected. In the matter of dress, they would also be equal. All clothes would be made of the same coarse cloth and all would wear sandals made from hemp. 77 No colored materials, including ribbons (which were often used to denote class), were to be worn. There was nothing in dress to distinguish one nun from another. 78

Unlike Encarnación—where those who came from wealthy families, like Teresa, might have their own apartments while the poorest nuns slept in dormitories—each nun in Teresa’s reformed monasteries would have her own cell. Under the Constitutions, if one Sister seemed to become attached to a particular cell, she should be moved in order to promote her detachment from material things. “If she [the prioress] sees that a Sister is attached to something, be it a book, or a cell, or anything else, she should take it from her.” 79 Teresa’s rule was intended to promote a detachment from worldly things, a necessary precondition for growth in the life of prayer.

76. Ibid., 9, 321.
77. Ibid., 12, 322.
78. Ibid., 13, 323.
79. Ibid., 10, 322; “Y por esto tenga mucho cuidado el padre prior en que, cuando viere a algún religioso aficionado a alguna cosa, ahora sea libro, o celda, o cualquiera ostra cosa, se la quite.” Teresa de Jesus, Constituciones [Medina], 2.4, 823.
For Teresa, concerns about status and honor were the most serious impediments in the life of prayer. In *The Way of Perfection*, Teresa prays,

> God deliver us from persons who are concerned about honor while trying to serve Him. Consider it an evil gain, and, as I said, honor is itself lost by desiring it, especially in matters of rank. For there is no toxin in the world that kills perfection as do these things.

For Teresa, true honor was demonstrated not through blood and lineage, nor through favors and tokens, but through a life of poverty, given to God. “True poverty brings with it overwhelming honor.” Teresa advises that those who wished to cultivate true honor should ask the prioress to give them a lowly task, something contrary to their nature. In such a way, they would gain honor in the sight of God.

Although Teresa firmly held the reins in her reformed monasteries, often addressing her nuns as “daughters,” she stressed that their relationship with each other should be one of friendship. In fact, one of her reasons for keeping her houses small was so that it would be possible for all of the nuns to be friends, instead of the nuns developing particular friendships: “…but in this house where there are no more than thirteen—or must there be any more—all must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, all must be helped.”

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80. Teresa of Avila, *Way*, 12.7, 84; “Dios nos libre de personas que le quieren servir acordarse de honra. Mirad que es mala ganancia, y, como he dicho, le misma honra se pierde con desearla, en especial en las mayorías; que no hay tóxico en el mundo que así mate como estas cosas la perfección.” Teresa de Jesus, *Camino [Valladolid]*, 12.7, 286.


83. Ibid., 4.7, 55; “...que en esta casa, que no son más de trece, ni lo han der ser. Aquí todas han de ser amigas, todas se han de amar, todas se han de querer, todas se han de ayudar...” Teresa de Jesus, *Camino [Valladolid]*, 4.7, 254.
insisted on blood purity, Teresa refused to ask those applying to her monastery about family background. In a culture in which women were expected to provide a generous dowry in order to be admitted as postulants, Teresa accepted women based upon their suitability for a life of prayer, not upon what they brought into the monastery financially. In a culture in which cultural distinctions were upheld, often rigidly, Teresa insisted that all should be treated equally. In a society in which honor, defined as family honor, was of prime importance, Teresa claimed that true honor was to be found in poverty among true friends, those who shared a friendship with God.

Blossoming and Banning of Vernacular Literature

According to Teresa, she enjoyed reading books of chivalry, something she learned from her mother.\textsuperscript{84} Although later she would deride this type of reading as a waste of time, when Teresa was young she said that she was “so completely taken up with this reading that I didn’t think I could be happy if I didn’t have a new book.”\textsuperscript{85} For Teresa, the habit of reading and her desire to read began at an early age. This love and habit of reading would continue through her life, and reading would be essential to her growth in the life of prayer.

Books in the vernacular became widely available in the early part of the sixteenth century. According to Henry Kamen, “Spaniards of that generation were excited at the new

\textsuperscript{84} Teresa of Avila, \textit{Life}, 2.1, 57.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.; “Era tan estremo lo que en esto me embevía, que si no tenía libro nuevo, no me parece tenía contenido.” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Vida}, 2.1, 36.
horizons opened up by Renaissance scholarship.”

A key figure in the promoting of this learning was Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, Archbishop of Toledo and Inquisitor General of Spain. He encouraged the publishing of the spiritual and devotional writings that arose from this opening of horizons. Cisneros was particularly interested in the practice of mental prayer. In his reform of the Franciscan Order, he required the monks to practice mental prayer daily for an hour and a half. Under his patronage, many works of spirituality written in the vernacular were written and published. In this group was the Tercer abecedario written by Francisco de Osuna, a book that would have a profound effect on Teresa and would serve as the basis of her later reform.

Erasmus, in particular, was held in high regard. His writings were imported into Spain from Charles’ court in the Netherlands. In 1526, Erasmus’ Enchiridion militis Christiani was published in Spanish (El Enquiridion o Manual del Cabellero Cristiano) and greeted with widespread enthusiasm.

As Kamen notes, “The mingling of mystical, Erasmian and heretical influences made the late 1520s a period of both freedom and tension.”

Links between ideas expressed by Erasmus and those expressed by Alumbrados and Protestant Reformers would later

87. Ahlgren, Teresa of Avila, 10.
88. Kamen, The Spanish Inquisition, 86.
90. Kamen, The Spanish Inquistion, 84.
91. Ibid., 87.
seem to justify the banning of works not only of Erasmus, but of those who had been influenced by the liberal humanism that he espoused.\textsuperscript{92}

In 1547, Fernando de Valdés became Inquisitor General of Spain. In 1554, faced with a large number of unauthorized biblical translations, Valdés issued a general censure of Bibles and New Testaments that had been translated into the vernacular.\textsuperscript{93} Translation of the Bible into Spanish was not a recent phenomenon. According to Roldán-Figueroa, there was an “unbroken chain of Castilian translations of the Bible. . . since the reign of King Alfonso X (1221-1284).”\textsuperscript{94}

In addition, Cisneros had endowed professorships in Hebrew and Syrian when he founded the University of Alcalá, a move that led to the eventual publication of the Complutensian Polyglot Bible.\textsuperscript{95} It was the discovery of Protestant cells in Spain in 1558 that led to a tightening of the censorship, and Valdés, largely on his own with some consultation among fellow Dominicans, put together an Index of Prohibited Books, which was published in 1559.\textsuperscript{96} According to Kamen, in this list of approximately 700 books were included all vernacular translations of the Bible and all devotional books in the vernacular.\textsuperscript{97} Although, as Roldán-Figueroa points out, reading of prohibited books was technically possible with a special permit from the Inquisition,\textsuperscript{98}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 91.
\item \textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 108.
\item \textsuperscript{94} Rady Roldán-Figueroa, “Infant Milk or Hardy Nourishment? The Bible for Lay People and Theologians in the Early Modern Period,” in \textit{Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium CCXXI} (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2009), 418.
\item \textsuperscript{95} Aspe, “Spanish Spirituality's,” 422.
\item \textsuperscript{96} Kamen, \textit{The Spanish Inquisition}, 109.
\item \textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{98} “It must be clarified that the reading of the Bible as such was never prohibited for the general public in Spain. However, after the 1521 prohibition of the books of Martin Luther, the Spanish Inquisition started issuing
\end{itemize}
for most readers these works, which had been widely distributed, were no longer readily available. As Kamen notes,

Valdés and his advisors were vividly aware of the recent spiritualizing movements that had produced the *Alumbrados*. They also suspected links between those movements and the Protestants. As a consequence they came down heavily on some of the best known spiritual writers of the generation.99

The timing could not have been worse for Teresa, who was advocating the founding of reformed monasteries based on the practice of mental prayer. For Teresa, books such as Osuna’s *Tercer abecedario* had served as her teachers of this practice. In her *Life*, Teresa said,

> And so I was very happy with this book and resolved to follow that path with all my strength. Since the Lord had already given me the gift of tears and I enjoyed reading, I began to take time out for solitude, to confess frequently, and to follow that path, taking the book for my master.100

Teresa attributes learning the practice of mental prayer not to any teaching of her confessors or other teachers, but solely to the reading of this book. In fact, as she notes in her *Life*, not only were her confessors unable to teach her mental prayer, but for twenty years she was not able to find any who could even understand her way of prayer.101 Although Teresa had progressed far enough on this path to be able to continue without access to this book and other

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100. Teresa of Avila, *Life*, 4.7, 67; “...y ansí holguéme mucho con él y determinéme a siguir aquel camino con todas mis fuerzas. Y, como ya el Señor me havía dado don de lágrimas y gustava de leer, comencé a tener ratos de soledad y a cofesararme a menudo y comenzar a aquel camino, tiniendo a aquel libro por maestro. . .” Teresa de Jesus, *Vida*, 4.7, 42-43.

101. “For during the twenty years after this period of which I am speaking, I did not find a master, I mean a confessor, who understood me, even though I looked for one.” Teresa of Avila, *Life*, 4.7, 67; “...porque yo no hallé maestro —digo confesor— que me entendiese, aunque le busqué, en veinte años después de esto que digo. . .” Teresa de Jesus, *Vida*, 4.7, 43.
similar works, the same would not be true of the new nuns and friars whom she was bringing into her reformed monasteries. Osuna’s book was crucial to her understanding and practice of mental prayer, and the loss of this resource as she was founding her reformed monasteries was a serious problem.

Faced with the need to teach others the practice of mental prayer, Teresa would be forced to find some way to do this without the books that had taught her and grounded her own practice. Not only did she need to find some other way to teach the practice, but for Teresa the reading of good books was the starting point for the practice of mental prayer. Teresa claimed that she, herself, was not able to begin mental prayer except by first reading. “In all those years, except for the time after Communion, I never dared to begin prayer without a book… With this recourse, which was like a partner [compañía] or a shield by which to sustain the blows of my many thoughts, I went about consoled.”

The reading of good books helped Teresa to collect her thoughts, which she compared to wild horses, so that her soul was drawn into recollection. With the banning of both vernacular books on prayer and vernacular translations of the Bible, her nuns would be left without good books to collect their thoughts. The banning of such books would propel Teresa into her career as a writer, in order to describe the practice of mental prayer.

102. “When they forbade the reading of many books in the vernacular, I felt that prohibition very much because reading some of them was an enjoyment for me, and I could no longer do so since only the Latin editions were allowed. The Lord said to me: ‘Don’t be sad, for I shall give you a living book…. the Lord showed so much love for me by teaching me in many ways, that I had very little or almost no need for books.’ Teresa of Avila, Life, 26.5, 226; “Cuando se quitaron muchos libros de romance, que no se leyesen, yo sentí mucho, porque algunos me dava recreación leerlos, y yo no podía ya, por dejarlos en latín; me dijo el Señor: <<No tengas pena, que yo te daré libro vivo.>>” Teresa de Jesus, Vida, 26.6, 142.

103. Teresa of Avila, Life, 4.9, 68-69; “Con este remedio, que era como, que era como una compañía u escudo en que havía de recibir los golpes de los muchos pensamientos, andava consolada.” Teresa de Jesus, Vida, 4.9, 44.
In place of reading books to begin the practice of mental prayer, however, Teresa would turn to other “sacred texts,” ones that could never be banned.\textsuperscript{104}

In \textit{The Way of Perfection}, Teresa describes mental prayer, beginning not with reading, as she had been accustomed to doing, but with pieces of the liturgy. In particular, she holds up the “Our Father” and the “Hail Mary” as texts that could serve the function that the vernacular books on prayer had served for her, collecting thoughts so that the soul is drawn into recollection.\textsuperscript{105}

Using those two pieces of the liturgy served another purpose as well. In joining the practice of mental prayer to that of vocal prayer, Teresa was responding to the concerns of those who believed that mental prayer, particularly done by women, led to heresy and that women should confine themselves to vocal prayer. In \textit{The Way of Perfection}, Teresa defines mental prayer as an essential component of vocal prayer. Mental prayer was nothing more or less than praying with full understanding of just who it is that one is addressing in that prayer,\textsuperscript{106} and it was not dependent upon whether the mouth was open or closed.\textsuperscript{107} In response to those who argued that only vocal prayer was necessary, Teresa agreed\textsuperscript{108} but noted that if such prayers were done

\textsuperscript{104} “And when books are taken away from us, this book cannot be taken away, for it comes from the mouth of Truth itself, who cannot err.” Teresa of Avila, \textit{Way}, 42.5, 204; “... y que quando no quitaren libros no nos pueden quitar este libro, que es dicho por lo boca de la mesma Verdad, que no puede errar.” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Camino [Escorial]}, 73.4, 418.

\textsuperscript{105} “I tell you that it is very possible that while you are reciting the Our Father or some other vocal prayer, the Lord may raise you to perfect contemplation.” Teresa of Avila, \textit{Way}, 25.1, 131; “... os digo que es muy posible que estando rezando el Paternóster os ponga el Señor en contemplación perfecta, u rezando otra oración vocal...” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Camino [Valladolid]}, 25.1, 338.

\textsuperscript{106} Teresa of Avila, \textit{Way}, 24.6, 130.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 22.1, 121.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 21.3, 118.
without an awareness of the One to whom they were addressed (recollection), “what poor music you produce.”

For Teresa, prayer was not about fulfilling requirements or getting through a set number of prayers. In fact, she argued that a few words, done with full awareness of the One being addressed, were far better than many prayers recited. For Teresa, prayer was the cultivation of a relationship. “For mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends [sino tratar de amistad]; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us.”

Ideals of Sanctity

In his article, “Counter-Reformation Spirituality,” H. Outram Evennett argues for a distinctive Counter-Reformation spirituality with its accompanying notions of holiness. This spirituality was sacramental, focused upon the life and passion of Christ, linked good works and self-improvement, and moved away from contemplation toward an active apostolate. Although such a description may have been an accurate description for Jesuits and even lay men in general, it does not take into account the gendered differences in ideals of sanctity. Teresa would be caught in the tension between her active work of writing and reformation and the ideals for holiness for women.

109. Ibid., 25.3, 132; “... qué mala música hará...” Teresa de Jesus, Camino [Valladolid], 25.3, 339.
111. Teresa of Avila, Life, 8.5, 96; “…; que no es otra cosa oración mental, a mi parecer, sino tratar de amistad, estando muchas veces tratando a solas con quien sabemos nos ama.” Teresa de Jesus, Vida, 8.5, 61.
Teresa of Avila struggled with these ideals that defined sanctity for women, and that thus circumscribed the role women could play in society, balancing her active work with protestations of womanly inferiority. Although in her writing she often spoke in accord with the traditional notions of female sanctity characterized by humility and obedience, her writing and her reforming activities would challenge these traditional gender norms. In founding reformed Carmelite monasteries, Teresa would play a more public role, but this challenge to traditional understandings of female sanctity came at a great cost. Her nuns would not have the same freedom: enclosure was strictly enforced in her monasteries. Her activities also caused her to be denounced to the Inquisition and at one point forced to abandon her work and retire to her monastery in Seville.

Although Teresa of Avila felt the call to an active apostolate, as a woman, different ideals of sanctity pertained. As Mary Elizabeth Perry argues,

In this period of the Counter-Reformation, religious beliefs permeated gender ideology. Enclosure and purity developed as strategies for defending the faith at this time, for separating the sacred from the profane, and also for protecting the social order. Women, warned theologians, were especially vulnerable to temptations of the devil, and they required the special protection of enclosure.113

The ideals of sanctity for women required not an active apostolate in the world but a cultivation of personal holiness and intercessory prayer. As Teresa herself pointed out,

At that time news reached me of the harm being done in France and of the havoc the Lutherans had caused and how much this miserable sect was growing. The news distressed me greatly, and, as though I could do something or were something, I cried to the Lord and begged Him that I might remedy so much evil. It seemed to me that I would have given a thousand lives to save one soul out of

the many that were being lost there. I realized I was a woman and wretched and incapable of doing any of the useful things I desired to do in the service of the Lord. All my longing was and still is that since He has so many enemies and so few friends [amigos] that these few friends be good ones. As a result I resolved to do the little that was in my power; that is, to follow the evangelical counsels as perfectly as I could and strive that these few persons who live here do the same.  

Gendered ideals of sanctity were not unique to sixteenth-century Spain. In fact, in her book, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*, Jantzen argues that ideals of sanctity, particularly with regard to the question of who is considered a mystic, are inherently gendered.

After presenting examples of how this has occurred through history, Jantzen concludes,

> Although it has been clear throughout this book that to a very large extent the definition and control of who should count as a mystic has been in the hands of powerful males intent on retaining ecclesiastical or intellectual dominance, and that they have exercised that control to their own advantage, it has also been evident that women were not simply passive victims. Even women who had strongly internalised male ideals of womanhood as passive and humble, and who accepted the authority of the ecclesiastical establishment, often pushed back the boundaries of what could be counted as genuinely mystical by the courageous integrity of their lives and writings. 

The struggle of women with ideals of sanctity was particularly acute in sixteenth-century Spain. In a society in which honor, defined as blood purity, was extremely important, women’s

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114. Teresa of Avila, *Way*, 1.2, 41; “En este tiempo vinieron a mi noticia los daños de Francia y el estrago que habían hecho estos luteranos, y cuánto iva en crecimiento esta desventurada secta. Diome gran fatiga, y como si yo pudiera algo u fuera algo, llorava con el Señor y le suplicava remediese tanto mal. Pareciame que mil vidas pusiera yo para remedio de un alma de las muchas que allí se perdían. Y como me vi mujer y ruin, y imposibilitada de aprovechar en lo que yo quisiera en el servicio del Señor, y toda mi ansia era, y aun es, que pues tiene tantos enemigos y tan pocos amigos, que étos fuesen buenos, determiné a hacer eso poquito que era en mí, que es seguir los consejos evangélicos con toda la perfección que yo pudiese y procurar que estas poquitas que están aquí hiciesen lo mismo. . . ” Teresa de Jesus, *Camino [Valladolid]*, 1.2, 238-39.

physical lives were severely circumscribed. Any appearance of sexual impropriety by a woman damaged the reputations of the male members of her family. Even offenses against women had severe consequences for the women involved. As Ruiz notes,

> Whether women engaged in transgressive behavior or were victims of male predatory practices — rape, seduction, kidnapping, or mere slander — they were expected to pay the price demanded by strict codes of honour. Banishment or revenge, often the killing of the seducer and the seduced, followed swiftly upon dishonour. The family’s honour could not be restored until these actions had been carried out.

In a culture in which family honor was very important and that honor could be destroyed by even the appearance of sexual misconduct on the part of women, the lives of women needed to be carefully controlled and every hint of impropriety needed to be punished severely. Avoiding the loss of social standing for the whole family depended upon women’s absolute and unquestioned sexual purity. The easiest way to ensure that was to keep women closely confined, either in homes or in monasteries.

The issue of miscegenation was so explosive in sixteenth-century Spain that such accusations were commonly used as ways of inflicting institutional violence on competitors or enemies. Accusations of miscegenation were commonly used in even mundane disputes because such an accusation was “particularly effective at bringing the judicial apparatus unpleasantly to

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116. “*Limpieza de sangre*, or genetic purity free from intermarriage with other religious groups, determined who could hold office or enjoy privilege, and it depended directly on female chastity.” Perry, *Gender and Disorder*, 6.


118. Ibid., 242.
bear upon the accused.”¹¹⁹ David Nirenberg argues that this issue was highly charged in the Christian community because of the Christian idea that sexual intercourse makes the two one flesh. Intercourse with a non-Christian unites the “heathen” with the body of Christ. “Each Christian woman, wed or unwed, is the bride of Christ… miscegnation becomes the cuckolding of Christ.”¹²⁰ Such sexual boundary crossing, even in the case of prostitutes, was considered to be an attack on the faith. Safeguarding women’s purity, defined as keeping them safe from the sexual advances of non-Christians, became a major concern in Spanish society.

In spite of this, however, the early part of the sixteenth century was a time when women’s spiritual equality and authority were more commonly recognized. Erasmus, who was widely read and revered in early sixteenth-century Spain, encouraged all Christians to study the philosophy of Christ.¹²¹ As Ahlgren notes,

women were conceded an increasingly specific intercessory role in the redemptive process—their private prayers and penances could speed the purification of souls in purgatory—yet the more charismatic the woman, the more dangerous she seemed to the institutional church.¹²²

The concern with women exercising spiritual authority increased due to their role in the *Alumbrados*. The emphasis of the *Alumbrados* upon direct, unmediated experience of God and their valuing of the theological insight gained from personal experience allowed women to

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¹²⁰. Ibid., 145.


participate fully and on an equal basis.\textsuperscript{123} Many of the early Alumbrados prosecuted by the Inquisition were women, and the movement became associated in the minds of the Inquisitors with women. The prominence of women in this “heretical” movement encouraged a more rigid control of women’s lives.\textsuperscript{124} Often Alumbrados were accused not of unorthodoxy but of moral (usually sexual) deficiencies, underscoring the connection between control of women’s sexuality and the suppression of alumbradismo. Ahlgren argues that the prosecution of Alumbrados is “probably best understood as an attack on women’s ecstatic experience and charismatic power.”\textsuperscript{125}

Views of women’s sanctity, therefore, did not emphasize spiritual authority and an active apostolate, although many wealthy women from the noble classes played an active role by serving as patrons of new and existing religious foundations. In fact, several of the donors who supported Teresa in her work of founding reformed monasteries were women, such as Doña Guiomar de Ulloa.

Increasingly, however, in mid to late sixteenth-century Spain, the model of holiness promoted for women emphasized humility and obedience.\textsuperscript{126} Kathleen Ann Myers argues that “Increased control over the definition of official sanctity and the production of hagiographic narratives resulted in a yet more narrow area of sanctity allowed for women.”\textsuperscript{127} As justification

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{124} Weber, \textit{Teresa of Avila}, 24-25.
\textsuperscript{125} Ahlgren, \textit{Teresa of Avila}, 15.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 23.
of this model, the doctrine of women’s intellectual and moral inferiority was emphasized, as well as women’s susceptibility to being deceived by the devil.\textsuperscript{128} In order to combat these deficiencies, Ahlgren argues, women were forced to withdraw “from the public sphere” and dissociate “from their own experience, authority, and power.”\textsuperscript{129} Speaking of their own spiritual experiences or insights derived from those experiences was seen as arrogant, and often demonic. Personal experience, which had been a source of spiritual authority for women, became highly suspect,\textsuperscript{130} as did many of the forms of behavior and bodily asceticism that had been considered indicators of holiness in previous eras. As Nancy Caciola argues, “The same behaviors that once had rendered possessed women ciphers, betokening either divine or demonic possession according to the interpretation of the audience, now were seen as clues to the indwelling of unclean spirits only.”\textsuperscript{131} Unusual spiritual experiences, visions, miracles, or even penitential forms of asceticism were seen not as conferring spiritual authority, but as signs of either hubris or fantasy. According to Caciola, women were seen as “unlikely to be the bearers of divine prerogatives,”\textsuperscript{132} resulting in “a tighter, more exclusive connection between women and the demonic.”\textsuperscript{133} In early modern Spain, mystical experience and extreme forms of bodily asceticism that had been sources of spiritual authority for women were more likely to be seen as signs of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{128} Ahlgren, \textit{Teresa of Avila}, 22.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 23.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 23.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Nancy Caciola, \textit{Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 313.
\item \textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 314.
\item \textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 315.
\end{itemize}
demonic possession, a charge that Teresa faced in her own ministry. Although these types of experiences could be signs of divine work, such experiences began to play a lesser role in official hagiographies of this period. As Myers notes, it was no longer experiences of direct access to God that most determined sanctity but conformity to church teaching and practice:

The Catholic Church not only redefined the importance of these doctrines [the role of sacraments and the intercessory power of saints], but it instituted ways to more carefully regulate the practices of the faithful. Redirecting the devotio moderna—the idea that had developed at the turn of the fifteenth century about an individual’s direct access to God—the Catholic Church now began to require frequent confession, to prohibit books that promoted individual spiritual practices without church monitoring, and to construct new models of holiness in which heroic virtue, defined as obedience to the church and active participation in the sacraments, was a key factor in determining sainthood.134

The problematic issue of female spiritual authority would make Teresa’s work in founding her reformed Carmelite monasteries more difficult. With the banning of books on vernacular prayer, Teresa would be forced to teach her nuns the practice of mental prayer herself. As a woman and unlearned (not conversant with Latin), Teresa’s only source of authority would be that of experience. As experience, and particularly women’s experience, began to be treated with greater suspicion, however, Teresa had to be extremely careful to preserve the rhetoric of humility and obedience to church authority, even while cautiously asserting the authority that she had through her own experience of mental prayer. Even so, the very act of writing was dangerous, for it could lead both to confessors deciding that she was under the influence of the devil as well as denunciation by the Inquisition. Teresa would experience both consequences.135

134. Myers, Neither Saints nor Sinners, 7.
The facts that Teresa’s writings survived, her reform would succeed, and she would eventually be upheld as a saint, testified to her ability to navigate the restrictive understandings of female sanctity in Spain in the mid to late sixteenth century. In commenting upon her canonization, Ahlgren argues that perhaps one of Teresa’s greatest gifts was her ability to survive and to have her writings survive. To do this, however, she had to conform outwardly to the ideals of feminine sanctity that were a part of her times:

Institutional definitions of virtue were conditioned by the post-Tridentine agenda to control public space and to confine women to increasingly smaller spheres of influence. In such a context, women’s spiritual expression, which traditionally had offered them many options otherwise denied them, proved to be a minefield. Teresa, who vacillated from stereotypical forms of feminine humility and obedience to public activities judged to be male prerogatives, was able to negotiate these difficult times. Indeed, in Teresa of Avila the institutional church found a powerful spokesperson for the Counter-Reformation church. Having proclaimed her allegiance both to hierarchical officials and to the sacramental life of the church, Teresa was an exemplary model of Roman Catholic piety.  

Although Teresa was a great writer, teacher, and reformer, these were not the characteristics most held up in her canonization proceedings. It was her embrace of extreme humility and obedience that allowed her to overcome her womanhood, with its associated weaknesses. Ahlgren argues that this focus upon Teresa’s “detachment, purity, and strict observance of her order’s rules” was used “to establish models of femininity in the twentieth century.” Her continuing spiritual authority would be based more on the traditional ideals of feminine sanctity than on her work as a reformer.

137. Ibid., 165.
Teresa as Author

In order to be able to write, and to share what she was writing, Teresa had to accomplish two contradictory tasks. She had to claim authority based on her experience, while simultaneously exhibiting the required strict obedience to (male) confessors and prelates and extreme humility. As experiential authority became more suspect, particularly among women, Teresa was forced to represent herself as adhering to the prevailing understanding of women’s holiness, even when such representations were at odds with her vocation as a writer.

According to Ahlgren, Teresa’s “self-representation was the most critical element in her efforts to establish her authority as a teacher.” Teresa had to repeatedly demonstrate her humility and obedience, the key definitions of sanctity for women. At the beginning of The Way of Perfection, Teresa makes it clear that this work was written under obedience: in obedience to her nuns who have urged her write, in obedience to her confessor, Domingo Bañez, and ultimately in accordance with the will of God. This theme of writing in obedience is found throughout her works, and all that she does is to be judged by her confessors and others in authority. In The Way of Perfection, Teresa submits to the authority of her confessor, saying, “And if I should be mistaken, the Father Presentado, who will be the first to see this book, will either make corrections or burn it. I will not have lost anything by obeying these servants of

138. Ibid., 67.
139. Ibid., 68.
God.”\textsuperscript{142} She would uphold the authority of her confessor even when he refused permission for her to make her \textit{Life}, a work written under obedience, available to her nuns.\textsuperscript{143} Her obedience to her confessors was an outgrowth of her obedience to the church, whose authority to determine correct doctrine she did not challenge.\textsuperscript{144} Teresa, unable to claim teaching authority, needed her confessor to validate her work and judge its orthodoxy. As Raquel Trillia argues, Teresa’s strategy of obedience transfers authority for the works’ orthodoxy to her confessor. By giving Toledo permission to destroy her writing if he deemed it unacceptable, Teresa made him responsible for assuring its authority and orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{145}

Teresa was equally careful to demonstrate her humility. The role of teacher was not considered to be an acceptable role for a woman, so Teresa had to give other reasons for her writing. In justifying writing \textit{The Way of Perfection}, Teresa says, “I am aware that the great love they [her nuns] have for me will make what I say, so imperfectly and with such poor style, more acceptable than what is in some books that are very well written by those who know what they are writing about.”\textsuperscript{146} If Teresa has some insights that might have been helpful to her nuns, these

\textsuperscript{142} Teresa of Avila, \textit{Way}, pro.1, 39; “Y si fuere mal acertado, el padre presentado que lo ha de ver primero, lo remediará u lo quemará, y yo no havré perdido nada en obedecer a estas siervas de Dios.” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Camino [Valladolid]}, pro.1, 237.

\textsuperscript{143} Teresa of Avila, \textit{Way}, pro.4, 40.

\textsuperscript{144} “In all that I say in this book I submit to what our Mother the Holy Roman Church holds. If there should be anything contrary to that, it will be due to my not understanding the matter.” Teresa of Avila, \textit{Way}, JHS, 38; “En todo lo que en él dijere, me sujeto a lo que tiene la madra santa Eglesia romana, y si alguna cosa fuere contraria a esto, es por no lo entender. Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Camino [Valladolid]}, JHS, 236.


\textsuperscript{146} Teresa of Avila, \textit{Way}, pro.1, 39; “…viendo que el amor grande que me tienen puede hacer más acepto lo imperfecto, y por mal estilo que yo les dijere, que algunos libros que están muy bien escritos de quien sabía lo que escribe.” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Camino [Valladolid]}, pro.1, 236-37.
were not due to her own understanding, but they were instead given directly by God. God was the real teacher, and Teresa was simply the scribe. In her *Meditations on the Song of Songs*, Teresa credits God as the source of her insights. “For about two years, more or less, it seems to me the Lord has been giving me, for the sake of my purpose in writing this work, some understanding of the meaning of certain words.”

Since Teresa’s reliance upon her own experience also challenged the rhetoric of humility, she needed to counter accusations of arrogance with frequent protestations of her own sinfulness. This combination of reliance upon her own experience and the rhetoric of humility gives Teresa’s writing a dual and at times almost contradictory pattern. Trillia writes, “Teresa’s defense oscillates between two primary elements: self-criticism of her text which anticipates the worst critic, and questioning her superiors’ ability to judge her text given their lack of letters and/or experiencia.” Trillia argues that by writing about her own doubts and by leaving gaps in her writing, Teresa forced the readers, particularly confessors and prelates reading her work,

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148. Examples include: “Since my confessors commanded me and gave me plenty of leeway to write about the favors and the kind of prayer the Lord has granted me, I wish they would also have allowed me to tell very clearly and minutely about my great sins and wretched life.” Teresa of Avila, *Life*, pro.1, 53; “Quisiera yo que, como me han mandado y dado larga licencia para que escriba el modo de oración y las mercedes que el Señor me ha hecho, me la dieran para que muy por menudo y con claridad dijera mis grandes pecados y ruin vida.” Teresa de Jesus, *Vida*, pro.1, 33; “But everything can be harmful to those as weak as we women are. The wiles of the devil are many for women who live a very cloistered life, for the devil sees that new weapons are needed in order to do harm. I, as wretched as I am, have known how to defend myself only poorly.” Teresa of Avila, *Way*, pro.3, 40; “…y a cosa tan flaca como somos las mujeres todo nos puede dañar; porque las sotilezas del demonio son muchas para las muy encerradas, que ven son menester armas nuevas para dañar. Yo, como ruin, heme sabido mal defender. . .” Teresa de Jesus, *Camino [Valladolid]*, pro.3, 237. “For it is impossible that anyone understand them all since there are many; how much more so for someone as wretched as I.” Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, 1.1.3, 284; “…que todas será imposible entenderlas nadie, sigún son muchas, cuánto más quien es tan ruin como yo. . .” Teresa de Jesus, *Moradas*, in *Obras Completas*, 1.1.3, 473.

to come to a decision about the validity of her spiritual experiences.\(^{150}\) By arguing that only the spiritual, and not the learned, could truly judge these experiences, Teresa was inviting her judges to identify themselves primarily as either an *espiritual* or a *letrado*. Only *espirituales*, those who had had similar religious *experencia*, would be able to see the hand of God at work in her. The implication is that if the reader could not see the hand of God at work in Teresa’s experiences, he was not truly spiritual.\(^{151}\)

The rhetorical strategies that Teresa was forced to use mean that all of her works, of whatever form she used, were theological reflections upon her own experiences. As noted earlier, Teresa felt free to mix genres as she wrote her *Life*, turning what was meant to be a penitential confession into a form whose genre is not easy to define. The same can be argued of many of her other works, such as her *Meditations on the Songs of Songs*. As a woman, it would have been dangerous for her to claim to be writing a Biblical commentary. So, although she was commenting upon the words of the Song of Songs, she stressed that what she was doing was not a commentary but a series of meditations. Unlike the works of the learned, who studied the scriptures, her work was a description of her experience of prayer, and of the knowledge that God had given her through prayer. Again, in a sense it is God who was the teacher, and Teresa was only the scribe.\(^{152}\) Even this attempt to blur the genre of the

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150. Ibid., 117.
151. Ibid., 116.
152. “For about two years, more or less, it seems to me the Lord has been giving me, for the sake of my purpose in writing this work, some understanding of the meaning of certain words, and I think these words will bring consolation to the Sisters our Lord leads by this path and also to me. For at times the Lord gives understanding of so much that I find myself hoping I won’t forget, but I didn’t dare put anything in writing.” Teresa of Avila, *Meditations*, pro.2, 215; “Ha como dos años —poco más a menos— que me parece me da el Señor para mi
Meditations and to pass on authority to God was not enough, however, to allow her text to be circulated in Teresa’s own lifetime. One of Teresa’s confessors, Diego de Yanguas, was so disturbed by a woman trying to explain the words of the Song of Songs that he ordered Teresa to burn her copy, and he tried to make sure all other copies were burned. Fortunately, he was not successful.¹⁵³

Teresa’s flexible use of genre and her rhetorical strategies make it hard to define her works strictly by genre. Although genre is not unimportant in understanding her work, what is most important to an understanding of Teresa’s work is the goal behind her writing. For Teresa, genre was a tool to be used in communicating her understanding of God, and her skills as a writer allowed her to communicate using elements of a wide variety of genres.

**Teresa of Avila’s Understanding of the Practice of Friendship**

Friendship was a major theme in the writings of Teresa of Avila. Both *amigo/amistad* and *compañero/compañía* occur repeatedly throughout her writings, and she uses them in a variety of ways with respect to human beings, as well as with respect to God. At times, the terms seem to be used interchangeably. Although usage of these terms is rare in relation to saints, the understanding of companionship that she describes as “true friendship” is consistent with her relationship with saints.

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Terms Used

The term *amigo* is one that Teresa uses extensively. She uses it as a noun, to speak frequently of someone being a friend of someone else, often denoting a relationship that is useful.\(^{154}\) In her *Foundations*, Teresa frequently speaks of people being friends, i.e. providing help (financial or otherwise), as she is working to establish her reformed monasteries. She also talks of friends of friends who have been helpful or useful in this task.\(^{155}\) In those cases, friend denotes someone who is favorably disposed toward the project of reformation and who is willing to commit resources or to use their influence to promote her foundations.

Another common use of the word *amigo* is to express a fondness or a preference for something. For example, she said, “My fondness for good books was my salvation.”\(^{156}\) She commented that Angel de Salazar “assented very readily, for he is fond of all religious life.”\(^{157}\) Contrasting the religious life with that in the world, Teresa remarked, “The world is so fond of

\(^{154}\) E.g., “... for he and Father Antonio were friends of Doctor Ervías, and they began to converse with these holy Sisters. Becoming admirers of their virtue and persuaded by the townspeople and the doctor, they took this matter upon themselves as their own and through letters tried very hard to persuade me.” Teresa of Avila, *Foundations*, 28.11, 254-5; “…que eran amigos del doctor Ervías—, y comenzaron a tratar con estas santas hermanas. Y aficionados de su virtud y persuadidos del pueblo y de el doctor, tomaron este negocio por propio y comenzaron a persuadirme con mucha fuerza con cartas.” Teresa de Jesus, *Libro de las Fundaciones*, in *Obras Completas*, 28.11, 780.

\(^{155}\) E.g., “He and his friends gave orders that some rooms in the hospital of the Conception be given to us, for the Blessed Sacrament was reserved there and Mass was said each day.” Teresa of Avila, *Foundations*, 31.27, 297; “El y los amigos dieron orden que nos diesen unas piezas de el hospital de la Concepción, que havía Santísimo Sacramento allí y misa cada día.” Teresa de Jesus, *Fundaciones*, 31.27, 808.


novelty that were it not for the veils we wear over our faces, these crowds would be a great trial.”

Although Teresa used the term *amigo* casually in many instances, she also clearly distinguished between types of friends in other instances, arguing for an understanding of friendship that was at odds with the cultural norm, which was based upon ideals of honor and kinship. According to Teresa, the cultural understanding of friendship, with its focus upon class, honor, and privilege, could be a significant barrier to the life of prayer to which her nuns were called. In fact, as much as possible, they were to sever their ties with friends and relatives outside of the monastery, seeking instead a truer friendship within. One chapter in *The Way of Perfection* is even entitled, “Oh how good it is for those who have left the world to flee from relatives and how they find truer friends.” If one should feel obliged to continue a friendship with relatives and those who were not a part of the order, such a relationship should only be maintained in order to bring the other person closer to God. For Teresa, the proper goal of true friendship with other people was to support them in the life of prayer:

Thus, daughters, in reference to all the persons who speak with you, if they are disposed and there is some friendship, try to remove any fear they may have of beginning to use so great a good. And for the love of God I beg you that your conversation always be directed toward bringing some good to the one with whom you are speaking, for your prayer must be for the benefit of souls.

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158. Teresa of Avila, *Foundations*, 30.8, 283; “Esto no era cosa neuva, que en cada parte que vamos, como el mundo es tan amigo de novedades, hay tanto que, a no llevar velos delante del rostro, sería trabajo grande; con esto se puede sufrir.” Teresa de Jesus, *Fundaciones*, 30.8, 799.


160. Teresa of Avila, *Way*, 20.3, 115; “Por eso, todas las personas que os trataren, hijas, haviendo disposición y alguna amistad, procurad quitarles el miedo de comenzar tan gran bien; y por amor de Dios os pido que vuestro trato sea siempre odenado a algún bien de quien hablardes, puesvuestra oración ha de ser para provecho de las almas.” Teresa de Jesus, *Camino [Valladolid]*, 34.3, 321.
For Teresa, being a good relative or a good friend meant rejecting the cultural norms of honor and of friendship in favor of true friendship, a friendship that had the power to benefit the other in their relationship with Christ. All other friendships were not only a waste of time but dangerous, as they had the power to draw a person from their focus upon their true friend, Christ.

Although Teresa does use the word *amigo* when referring to Christ, most often she used *amistad* when referring to a relationship with Christ, particularly the relationship with Christ achieved through a life of prayer. In the *Life*, Teresa describes the path of prayer that she is advocating as nothing less than an intimate friendship, a friendship in which the friends share the same will:

> And if one perseveres, I trust then in the mercy of God, who never fails to repay anyone who has taken Him for a friend. For mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us. In order that love be true and the friendship endure, the wills of the friends must be in accord.

For Teresa, the goal of the Christian life was to become a true friend of the One who was, above all, a true friend to us. For Teresa, the relationship with Christ was the model for true friendship and it stood in opposition to that friendship that the world promoted. She urged her readers to cultivate a response that was a fitting one to the great gift that Christ had given them in

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161. “If you want to be a good relative, this desire to be of benefit to the relative is where true friendship lies; if you want to be a good friend, know that you cannot be one save by this path.” Teresa of Avila, *Way*, 20.4, 115; “Si queréis ser buen duedo, ésta es la verdadera amistad; si buena amiga, entendí que no lo podéis ser sino por este camino.” Teresa de Jesus, *Camino [Valladolid]*, 20.4, 321.

162. Teresa of Avila, *Life*, 8.5, 96; “…y si persevera, espero yo en la misericordia de Dios, que nadie le tomó por amigo que no se lo pagase; que no es otra cosa oración mental, a mi parecer, sino tratar de amistad, estando muchas veces tratando a solas con quien sabemos nos ama. Y si vos aun no le amáis (porque para ser verdadero el amor y que dure el amistad, hanse de encontrar las condiciones…).” Teresa de Jesus, *Vida*, 8.5, 61.
God’s gift of friendship. “Blessed may he be who is always a true friend when we desire his friendship.”

Teresa also used the terms compañero and compañía when speaking of friendship or companionship. The most common use for compañero in the writings of Teresa referred to a companion on a journey or the companions whom she took with her to found new monasteries. Occasionally, Teresa also used the term compañero in place of amigo, particularly in the case of Doña Guiomar de Ulloa, who was a financial supporter and collaborator in the founding of St. Joseph’s in Ávila. In all of these cases, Teresa simply used the word compañero to mean someone who was present with her and at times collaborated with her in her work of reformation.

Although compañía is not used as frequently by Teresa as amistad, it is often used in similar ways. As with amistad, Teresa uses compañía with respect both to people and to God.

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164. E.g., “I set out from Toledo the second day after Pentecost traveling by way of Madrid. There my companions and I went for lodging to a monastery of Franciscan nuns, with a lady, who had founded it and lived in it, named Doña Leonor Mascareñas.” Teresa of Avila, *Foundations*, 17.5, 180; “Salí de Toledo segundo día de Pascua Espíritu Santo. Era el camino por Madrid, y fuimos a posar mis compañeras y yo a un monasterio de franciscas con una señora que le hizo, y estaba en él, llamada doña Leonor Mascareñas…” Teresa de Jesus, *Fundaciones*, 17.5, 731.

165. E.g., “Had I been alone, I think I could have suffered the situation. But to think that my companions after the opposition with which they had left, had to return to their houses was a painful thing to bear.” Teresa of Avila, *Foundations*, 3.11, 110; “Y a ser sola, paréceme lo pasara mejor; mas pensar havían de tornar las compañeras a su casa, con la contradición que havían salido, hacíaseme recio.” Teresa de Jesus, *Fundaciones*, 3.11, 683.

166. E.g., “He [Baltasar Alvarez] didn’t dare tell me definitely to forget about the new monastery; but he was aware that it wasn’t feasible from the viewpoint of natural reason since my companion who was the one who would have to provide for the foundation had little or almost no possible means for it.” Teresa of Avila, *Life*, 32.13, 281; “El no osó determinadamente decirme que lo dejase, mas vía que no llevava camino conforme a razón natural, por haver poquísima y casi ninguna posibilidad en mi compañera [Guiomar de Ulloa], que era la que havía de hacer.” Teresa de Jesus, *Vida*, 32.13, 176.
As with *amistad, compañia* with people is a mixed experience. She credits bad companionship for her frivolous behavior during adolescence. “It frightens me sometimes to think of the harm a bad companion can do, and if I hadn’t experienced it I wouldn’t believe it.”

On the other hand, Teresa believes it is important to have good companions for the life of prayer, particularly in the early stages, to counteract the negative comments that people who pursue this way of life are likely to encounter:

> If any begin to give themselves to God, there are so many to criticize them that they need to seek companionship to defend themselves until they are so strong that it is no longer a burden for them to suffer this criticism. And if they don’t seek this companionship, they will find themselves in much difficulty.

Although Teresa uses *compañía* much less often in reference to a relationship with God, she uses it in similar ways to the ways that she uses *amigo/amistad*, sometimes using the terms interchangeably. “Christ is a very good friend [*amigo*] because we behold Him as man and see Him with weaknesses and trials — and He is company [*compañía*] for us.”

**Friendship with Contemporaries**

For Teresa, friendship with contemporaries can be either positive or negative. Worldly friendships, based upon the cultural understanding of friendship, are held in contrast to the values of a true friend, such as Christ. Such worldly friendships are detrimental to the life of prayer that
she is advocating for her nuns. On the other hand, the life of prayer, particularly in its beginning stages, requires true friendship, and such friendships can aid people in drawing closer to the one who is the true friend. A bad companion can do great harm to someone who wishes to follow the life of prayer,\textsuperscript{170} while a good companion is of “great profit.”\textsuperscript{171}

For Teresa, the goal of friendship was meant to help one to love God more, and in her opinion friendships, even within the monastery, were seldom directed to that goal. From her experience in the monastery, such friendships were more likely to serve the purposes of the devil than those of God. “For these great friendships are seldom directed toward helping one love God more. On the contrary, I think the devil gets them started so as to promote factions in religious orders.”\textsuperscript{172} In addition to fomenting jealousy and a high regard for the other person’s honor, such friendships led to a loyalty toward the friend that might even supersede a person’s loyalty to God.\textsuperscript{173} Such friendships could cause even nuns to hide the misdeeds of other nuns, in the name of loyalty. Such loyalty that hid faults that needed correction, which was characteristic of

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\item \textsuperscript{170} Teresa of Avila, \textit{Life}, 2.4, 58-59; Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Vida}, 2.5, 37.
\item \textsuperscript{171} “From such experience I understand the great profit that comes from good companionship. And I am certain that if at that age I had gone around with virtuous persons, I would have remained whole in virtue.” Teresa of Avila, \textit{Life}, 2.5, 59; “Por aquí entiendo el gran provecho que hace le buena compañía; y tengo por cierto que, si tratara en aquella edad con personas virtuosas, que estuviera entera en la virtud…” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Vida}, 2.5, 37.
\item \textsuperscript{172} Teresa of Avila, \textit{Way}, 4.6, 55; “Porque estas amistades grandes pocas veces van ordenadas a ayudarse a amar más a Dios, antes creo las hace comenzar el demonio para comenzar bandos en las religiones.” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Camino [Valladolid]}, 4.6, 254.
\item \textsuperscript{173} “I was so frivolous and blind that it seemed to me a virtue to be grateful and loyal to anyone who loved me. Damned be such loyalty that goes against the law of God! This is the kind of nonsense that goes on in the world, which makes no sense to me: that we consider it a virtue not to break with a friendship, even if the latter go against God.” Teresa of Avila, \textit{Life}, 5.4, 72; “…que esto tenía yo de gran liviandad y ceguedad, que me parecia virtud ser agradecedic y tener ley a quien me quería. ¡Maldita sea tal ley que se estiende hasta ser contra la de Dios! Es un desatino que se usa en el mundo, que me desatina: que devemos todo el bien que nos hacen a Dios, y tenemos por virtud, aunque sea ir contra El, no quebrantar esta amistad.” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Vida}, 5.4, 46.
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worldly friendships, was not a value characteristic of true friendship.\textsuperscript{174} For Teresa, following one’s conscience was a higher value than the loyalty which worldly friendships held up as the greater virtue. “But where a matter of conscience is involved, friendship doesn’t suffice, for I owe more to God than to anyone.”\textsuperscript{175}

In spite of all the protestations of friendship in worldly relationships and the focus upon loyalty, such friendships, in contrast to friendship with Christ, were inherently flawed and not dependable. Teresa showed a certain cynicism about worldly friendships, warning Fray Mariano de San Benito, “Take care, padre, to be on your guard, and don’t grow careless about anything, for the friendships shown to you could be feigned.”\textsuperscript{176} Unlike Christ, friends in the world could not be trusted completely, for such friendships were based upon their value in upholding kinship and honor. “What more do we desire than to have such a good friend at our side, who will not abandon us in our labors and tribulations, as friends in the world do?”\textsuperscript{177} As she noted, those

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  \item \textsuperscript{174} “She must think she is being loyal to a friendship; but in truth she is very attached to herself, for true friendship does not show itself by hiding what, if revealed, could have provided a remedy without so much harm.” Teresa of Avila, \textit{The Collected Letters of St. Teresa of Avila}, vol. 2, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh (Washington: ICS Publications, 2007), 319.3, 247; “Elle deve pensar es guardar amistad, y a la verdad es asimiento grande que tiene; que la verdadera amistad no se ha de ver en encubrir lo que pudiera haver tenido remedio sin tanto daño.” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Cartas}, 307.6, 1246.
  \item \textsuperscript{175} Teresa of Avila, \textit{Letters}, vol. 1, 135.1, 359; “…mas cuando hay cosa de conciencia en ello, no basta amistad, porque devo más a Dios que a naide.” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Cartas}, 131.1, 1017.
  \item \textsuperscript{176} Teresa of Avila, \textit{Letters}, vol. 1, 194.4, 533; “Mire, mi padre, que esté siempre advertido, que podrían ser estas amistades forzosas para no se descuidar en nada.” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Cartas}, 192.7, 1102.
  \item \textsuperscript{177} Teresa of Avila, \textit{Life}, 22.7, 194; “¿Qué más queremos de un tan buen amigo a el lado, que no nos dejará en los trabajos y trobulaciones, como hacen los de el mundo?” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Vida}, 22.7, 122.
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who had no need of friends, i.e., who did not need the favors that are a normal part of worldly friendships, would have many friends.\textsuperscript{178}

According to Teresa, most friendships, even those friendships within the monastery, actually interfere with developing a friendship with God. In many monasteries it was more acceptable to talk of worldly friendships than friendships with God.\textsuperscript{179} This was in part Teresa’s rationale for insisting upon reformed houses with a small number of nuns who were serious about the life of prayer. While factions and subgroupings were inevitable in a large house, like Encarnación, Teresa declared that the reformed houses were to be small enough so that all were to be friends, avoiding the divisive effects of special friendships: “…but in this house where there are no more than thirteen—nor must there by any more—all must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, all must be helped.”\textsuperscript{180} In order to grow in the life of prayer, her nuns might need to put aside all worldly friendships, and even close relationships with relatives. That, however, would not be a hardship, for in doing so they would find true friends.\textsuperscript{181} In fact, Teresa said that she could no longer be tied in friendship with those who did not love Christ and

\textsuperscript{178} “It is certain that in having need of no one a person has many friends. I have become clearly aware of this through experience.” Teresa of Avila, \textit{Way}, 2.6, 45; \ldots y es cosa muy cierta, en no haviendo menester a nadie, tener muchos amigos; yo lo tengo bien visto por espiriencia.” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Camino [Valladolid]}, 2.6, 243.

\textsuperscript{179} “And they must be more cautious and dissimulating in speaking about the friendship they desired to have with God than in speaking of other friendships and attachments that the devil arranges in monasteries.” Teresa of Avila, \textit{Life}, 7.5, 85; \ldots y más cautela y disimulación ha de tener para hablar en la amistad que desea tener con Dios, que en otras amistades y voluntades que el demonio ordena en los monesterios.” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Vida}, 7.5, 54.

\textsuperscript{180} Teresa of Avila, \textit{Way}, 4.7, 55; \ldots que en esta casa, que no son más de trece, ni lo han de ser. Aquí todas han de ser amigas, todas se han de amar, todas se han de querer, todas se han de ayudar…” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Camino [Valladolid]}, 4.7, 254.

\textsuperscript{181} “On how good it is for those who have left the world to flee from relatives and how they find truer friends.” Teresa of Avila, \textit{Way}, 9.title, 73; “Que trata del gran bien que hay en huir los deudos los que han dejado el mundo, y cuán más verdaderos amigos hallan.” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Camino [Valladolid]}, 9.title, 274.
try to serve Him, and she experienced dealing with such persons as a cross to be borne, even if they were relatives or had been friends. In the midst of her first rapture, the Lord made it clear that she was not to continue with her worldly friendships, but instead was to converse with angels. Reflecting on this experience, Teresa says,

> These words have been fulfilled, for I have never again been able to tie myself to any friendship or to find consolation in or bear particular love for any other persons than those I understand love Him and strive to serve Him; nor is it in my power to do so, nor does it matter whether they are friends or relatives. If I’m not aware that the persons seek to love and serve God or to speak about prayer, it is a painful cross for me to deal with them.  

Although worldly friendships were to be avoided, friendship with those who were also friends of God was a great blessing. Early in her life, when she was sent to the convent school, there was a saintly nun who served as a good companion to Teresa, and Teresa’s relationship with this nun helped to counteract the influence of her bad companions. “This good company began to help me get rid of the habits that the bad company had caused and to turn my mind to the desire for eternal things…” In fact, for Teresa, the role of a true friend was to assist another in growing in their friendship with God and to commend others to God as mutual friends. Teresa speaks of the role that she played as a friend to García de Toledo:

> I recall that after having begged Him with many tears for that soul, that it be truly committed to His service, I said that even though I considered him good this didn’t satisfy me, since I wanted him to be very good; and so I said to His

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183. Ibid., 24.6, 211-12; “Ello se ha cumplido bien, que nunca más yo he podido asentar en amistad ni tener consolación ni amor particular sino a personas que entiendo le tienen a Dios y le procuran server, ni ha sido en mi mano, ni me hace al caso ser deudos ni amigos. Si no entiendo esto, u es persona que trata de oración, esmz cru penosa tratar con nadie.” Teresa de Jesus, *Vida*, 24.6, 133.

Majesty: ‘Lord, You must not deny me this favor; see how this individual is fit to be our friend.’”\textsuperscript{185}

Such true friendships are a calling and responsibility for all who call themselves friends of God. They are to sustain those who are weak, and Teresa cautions her nuns not to hide their talents of friendship out of undue humility.\textsuperscript{186} All friends of God are to offer this service to others who are growing in their friendship with God.

Such human friendship, in the service of friendship with God, was especially important when one was beginning the life of prayer.\textsuperscript{187} Because those who committed themselves to the life of prayer were likely to face much criticism, Teresa believed that friends who shared the same desires were an essential means of support.\textsuperscript{188} Throughout her works, Teresa spoke of her own difficulties when she began a life of prayer and could find no one who understood her. For

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\item \textsuperscript{185} Teresa of Avila, \textit{Life}, 34.8, 297; “Acuérdome que le dije esto, después de pedirle con hartas lágrimas aquella almo pusiese en su servicio muy de veras; que aunque yo le tenía por bueno, no me contentava, que le quería muy bueno, y ansi le dije: ‘Señor, no me havéis de negar esta merced; mirad que es bueno este sujeto para nuestro amigo.’” Teresa de Jesús, \textit{Vida}, 34.8, 186.
\item \textsuperscript{186} “I should very much like to advise these souls to be careful not to hide the talent since it seems God desires to choose them to bring profit to many others, especially in these times when staunch friends of God are necessary to sustain the weak.” Teresa of Avila, \textit{Life}, 15.5, 141; “Querríalas mucho avisar que miren no ascondan el talento, pues que parece las quiere Dios escoger para provecho de otras muchas, en especial en estos tiempos que son menester amigos fuertes de Dios para sustentar los flacos…” Teresa de Jesús, \textit{Vida}, 15.5, 89.
\item \textsuperscript{187} “For this reason I would counsel those who practice prayer to seek, at least in the beginning, friendship and association with other persons having the same interest.” Teresa of Avila, \textit{Life}, 7.20, 92; “Por eso aconsejaría yo a los que tienen oración, en especial al principio, procurem amistad y trato con otras personas que traten de lo mismo.” Teresa de Jesús, \textit{Vida}, 7.20, 58.
\item \textsuperscript{188} “If any begin to give themselves to God, there are so many to criticize them that they need to seek companionship to defend themselves until they are so strong that it is no longer a burden for them to suffer this criticism. And if they don’t seek this companionship, they will find themselves in much difficulty.” Teresa of Avila, \textit{Life}, 7.22, 93; “…si uno comienza a darse a Dios, hay tantos que mormuren, que es menester buscar compañía para defenderse, hasta que ya estén fuertes en no les pesar de padecer; y si no, veránse en mucho aprieto.” Teresa de Jesús, \textit{Vida}, 7.22, 59.
\end{itemize}
Teresa, it was important to have friends with whom one could share spiritual experiences. The more and the longer the conversation one could have with those who understood you, the better. Such companions had the ability to mold one’s soul. “Neither is conversation with a saintly companion as beneficial when it lasts only one day as when it lasts many; and if it is prolonged over many, it will make us similar to the other — if God favors us.”

Friends were a gift from God, to help one both to draw closer to God as well as to do the work that God gave one to do.

Friendship with Christ

Not only was friendship an image that Teresa used frequently to describe the relationship of a Christian with Christ, but it seemed to be a foundational image, describing the way in which God related to human beings. “Oh, what a good friend You make, my Lord! How you proceed by favoring and enduring. You wait for the others to adapt to Your nature, and in the meanwhile You put up with theirs!”

For Teresa, friendship with God was not something restricted to only

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189. “It is also a torment for the soul to see that even though it complains no one, seemingly, will believe it. This pain is so intense that the soul would not want solitude as before, nor would it want companionship with anyone other than one to whom it can complain.” Teresa of Avila, *Life*, 20.14, 178; “También la atormenta que esta pena es tan crecida que no querría soledad como otras, ni compañía, sino con quien se pueda quejar.” Teresa de Jesus, *Vida*, 20.14, 112.

190. Teresa of Avila, *Life*, 22.16, 199; “También una compañía santa no hace su conversación tanto provecho de un día como de muchos; y tantos pueden ser los que estemos con ella, que seamos como ella, si nos favorece Dios.” Teresa de Jesus, *Vida*, 22.16, 125.

191. “But if God had not given us the good friends that He did, all would have been to no avail.” Teresa of Avila, *Foundations*, 29.12, 272; “…aunque si Dios no diera los buenos amigos que nos dio, todo no era nada…” Teresa de Jesus, *Fundaciones*, 29.12, 792.

192. Teresa of Avila, *Life*, 8.6, 97; “¡Oh qué buen amigo hacéis, Señor mío, cómo le vais regalando y sufriendo y esperáis a que se haga a vuestra condición, y tan de mientra le sufris Vos la suya!” Teresa de Jesus, *Vida*, 8.6, 61.
a few, but it was available to all who loved Christ.\textsuperscript{193} Such a relationship, however, required effort on the part of the person: Christ expected the person to demonstrate their love through prayer and deeds. This love called forth friendship from God,\textsuperscript{194} and any effort on the part of the person would be rewarded greatly by Christ.\textsuperscript{195}

Although Teresa acknowledged that Christ was Lord, she could also speak to him as a friend, unlike the case of human lords who insisted upon a strict separation based upon social class.\textsuperscript{196} Teresa understood the incarnation itself to be a form of friendship between God and human beings. In her commentary on the Song of Songs, Teresa says of the bride, an image of the soul for her, “I also wondered whether she was asking for that union so great that God became man, for that friendship that he effected with the human race.”\textsuperscript{197} The fact of Christ’s bodily existence made Him a particularly good companion for all who are living in the world, for the shared human experience could provide support and comfort, particularly in times of difficulty:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{193} “When You desire You can love, and You never stop loving those who love You!” Teresa of Avila, \textit{Life}, 25.17, 221; “...y como poderoso, cuando queréis podéis, y nunca dejáis de querer si os quieren.” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Vida}, 25.17, 138.

\textsuperscript{194} “I do not know, my Creator, why it is that everyone does not strive to reach You through this special friendship.” Teresa of Avila, \textit{Life}, 8.6, 97; “… y no veo, Criador mío, por qué todo el mundo no se procure llegar a Vos por esta particular amistad.” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Vida}, 8.6, 61.

\textsuperscript{195} “And if one perseveres, I trust then in the mercy of God, who never fails to repay anyone who has taken Him for a friend.” Teresa of Avila, \textit{Life}, 8.5, 96; “…y si persevera, espero yo en la misericordia de Dios, que nadie le tomó por amigo que no se lo pagase...” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Vida}, 8.5, 61.

\textsuperscript{196} “I can speak with Him as with a friend, even though He is Lord.” Teresa of Avila, \textit{Life}, 37.5, 325; “Puedo tratar como con amigo, aunque es el Señor…” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Vida}, 37.6, 204.

\textsuperscript{197} Teresa of Avila, \textit{Meditations}, 1.10, 221; “También he pensado si pedía aquel ayuntamiento tan grande, como fue hacerse Dios hombre, aquella amistad que hizo con el género humano.” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Meditaciones}, 1.11, 427.
\end{quote}
When one is in the midst of business matters, and in times of persecutions and trials, when one can’t maintain so much quietude, and in times of dryness, Christ is a very good friend because we behold Him as man and see Him with weaknesses and trials — and He is company for us.  

Such friendship with Christ was best experienced and deepened through prayer, particularly mental prayer. “For mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us.” The mutual understanding of the soul and God was a manifestation of the love of the two friends for each other. Teresa likened such understanding to that achieved by friends who understand each other with just a glance.

This level of friendship, however, was not achieved by all Christians. For Teresa, the closest friendship occurs with those who are willing to forgo the normal comforts of life in their efforts to draw ever closer to God. “Well, to think that He admits into His intimate friendship people who live in comfort and without trials is foolish.” In her meditation on the Song of Songs, Teresa compared the ordinary friendship that Christ offers to Christians with the deeper

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200. “For God and the soul understand each other only through the desire His Majesty has that it understand Him, without the use of any other means devised to manifest the love these two friends have for each other. It’s like the experience of two persons here on earth who love each other deeply and understand each other well; even without signs, just by a glance, it seems, they understand each other.” Teresa of Avila, *Life*, 27.10, 232; “…que se entiende Dios y el alma con sólo querer Su Majestad que lo entienda, sin otro artificio, para darse a entender el amor que se tienen estos dos amigos. Como acá sí dos personas se quieren mucho y tienen buen entendimiento, aun sin señas parece que se entienden con sólo mirarse.” Teresa de Jesus, *Vida*, 27.10, 145.

friendship of the bride, and it was to this deeper, bridal friendship that Teresa was urging her nuns:

To return to our topic; since the bride indicates the peace she is seeking by saying, *Let Him kiss me with the kiss of His mouth*, we have a sign that the Lord has other ways of bestowing peace and showing friendship. I now want to explain some to you so that you will see the kind of lofty petition this is and the difference that lies between these two types of peace.202

Teresa acknowledged that the Lord had a variety of ways of befriending people.203 In fact, there were people who seemed to enjoy the benefits of a friendship with Christ even though they were reluctant to give up the comforts of an easier life. This way, however, was not the way that Teresa wanted her daughters to follow, for such a way had great dangers. It was too easy to succumb to the desire for pleasure and to forsake the path that led to great friendship with Christ. Even minor occasions for sin could cause the soul to be led astray. Ordinary Christian friendship might actually be the more difficult path, for the temptations were greater. The only secure route to friendship with Christ was the path of the bride:

There is another kind of friendship and peace our Lord begins to give some persons who are totally committed to not offending Him in anything, although they don’t withdraw so much from the occasions. They have their times for prayer. Our Lord gives them tenderness and tears. Yet, they do not want to give up the enjoyments of this life. They want to live a good and well-ordered life, for they think it is beneficial for them to live here below with tranquility. Life bears with it many changes. They will be doing enough if they continue


203. “There are so many ways in which our Lord begins to exchange friendship with souls that I don’t think I would ever finish recounting the ones I’ve recognized, even though I am a woman.” Teresa of Avila, *Meditations*, 2.23, 232; “Son tantas las vías por donde comienza nuestro Señor a tratar amistad con las almas, que sería nunca acabar —me parece— las que yo he entendido, con ser mujer…” Teresa de Jesús, *Meditaciones [Alba]*, 2.25, 440.
in the practice of virtue. But if they don’t withdraw from the satisfactions and pleasures of the world, they will soon grow lax again in walking the Lord’s path; there are great enemies we must defend ourselves against. Such, daughters, is not the friendship the bride desires; neither should you desire it. Turn away always from any little occasion, however small, if you want the soul to grow and live securely.\textsuperscript{204}

The friendship that the bride asked for was a perfect friendship, one that gave up all worldly comforts for the sake of the beloved.\textsuperscript{205} Teresa prayed, “God deliver us from this lukewarmness.”\textsuperscript{206} Her daughters were to beg the Lord for the perfect friendship of the bride with “continual tears and desires.”\textsuperscript{207} Simply living the religious life was not enough, however, to prepare one for this great gift, “for only after one has been occupied in much prayer, penance, humility, and many other virtues, will that peace come.”\textsuperscript{208} In such a friendship, there was no longer anything separating the soul and Christ.\textsuperscript{209} In that friendship, the soul’s will was

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\textsuperscript{204} Teresa of Avila, \textit{Meditations}, 2.22, 232; “Hay otra manera de amistad y paz, que comienza a dar nuestro Señor a unas personas que totalmente no le querrían ofender en nada, aunque no se apartan tanto de las ocasiones. Tienen sus ratos de oración, dales nuestro Señor ternuras y lágrimas; mas no querrían ellas dejar los contentos de esta vida, sino tenerla buena y concertada, que parece para vivir acá con descanso les está bien aquello. Esta vida trai consigo hartas mudanzas; harto será si duran en la virtud; porque no apartándose de los contentos y gustos del mundo, pronto tornarán a aflojar en el camino del Señor, que hay grandes enemigos para defendérnosle. No es ésta, hijas, la amistad que quiere la esposa; tampoco ni vosotras la queréis. Apartaos siempre de cualquier ocasioncita, por pequeña que sea, se queréis que vaya creciendo el alma y vivir con seguridad.” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Meditaciones [Alba]}, 2.24, 439-40.

\textsuperscript{205} Teresa of Avila, \textit{Meditations}, 2.21, 231.

\textsuperscript{206} Ibid.; “…Dios os libre de ella…” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Meditaciones [Alba]}, 2.23, 439.

\textsuperscript{207} Teresa of Avila, \textit{Meditations}, 2.30, 236; “con lágrimas muy continuas y deseos…” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Meditaciones [Alba]}, 2.36, 444.

\textsuperscript{208} Teresa of Avila, \textit{Meditations}, 2.30, 236; “…porque será con haverse ocupado en mucha oración y penitencia y humildad y otras muchas virtudes.” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Meditaciones [Alba]}, 2.36, 444.

\textsuperscript{209} “…for the Lord now shows the soul that He loves it in so particular a way that there is nothing separating the two…” Teresa of Avila, \textit{Meditations}, 4.3, 243-44; “…que ya el Señor muestra aquí al alma, que la quiere tan particular con ella, que no haya cosa partida entre entrambos…” Teresa de Jesus, \textit{Meditaciones [Alba]}, 4.3, 450.
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subjected completely to the will of God. This joining of wills was a true union, for Teresa would also say, in *The Way of Perfection*, that in this friendship God put the soul in command, doing whatever the soul asked. “He begins to commune with the soul in so intimate a friendship that He not only gives it back its own will but gives it His. For in so great a friendship the Lord takes joy in putting the soul in command, as they say, and He does what it asks since it does His will.”

For Teresa, friendship with Christ brought two gifts. First, Christ provided support in the difficulties of human, bodily existence: Christ gave a person the ability to endure all things. The road to Christian perfection could be a difficult one, full of struggle. In fact, Teresa described it as a battle, a battle that one dared not lose. This battle, however, was not fought alone, and on the journey the determined soul was sustained by the friendship and favor of Christ. Such favor and friendship allowed the soul to conquer the devils who were tempting it to give up the journey. Christ, in fact, had already paid most of the cost in this battle, in order that the little that the soul could do would be enough to ensure its ultimate triumph.

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210. “…my will may always, Lord of my life, be subject to Your will and not depart from it.” Teresa of Avila, *Meditations*, 3.15, 242; “…Señor de mi vida, sujeta mi voluntad a no salir de la vuestra, que no haya cosa que me impida pueda yo decir.” Teresa de Jesus, *Meditaciones [Alba]*, 3.12, 449.

211. Teresa of Avila, *Way*, 32.12, 164; “Y comienza a tratar de tanta amistad, que no sólo la torna a dejar su voluntad, mas dale la suya con ella; porque se huelga el Señor —ya que trata de tanta amistad— que manden a veces, como dicen, y cumplir El lo que ella le pide, como ella hace lo que El la manda…” Teresa de Jesus, *Camino [Valladolid]*, 32.12, 375.

212. “Whoever lives in the presence of so good a friend and excellent a leader, who went ahead of us to be the first to suffer, can endure all things.” Teresa of Avila, *Life*, 22.6, 194; “Con tan buen amigo presente, con tan buen capitán que se puso en lo primero en el padecer, todo se puede sufrir…” Teresa de Jesus, *Vida*, 22.6, 122.

213. “But it is a great thing to have experienced the friendship and favor He shows toward those who journey on this road and how He takes care of almost all the expenses.” Teresa of Avila, *Way*, 23.5, 127; “…mas es gran cosa haber espiritumado con el amistad y regalo que trata a los que van por este camino, y cómo casi les hace toda la costa.” Teresa de Jesus, *Camino [Valladolid]*, 23.5, 335.
Christ, however, not only gave strength to those He loved, but He also gave suffering to those who were His most intimate friends. Suffering was, for Teresa, a sign of an intimate friendship with Christ. Those who were contemplatives, who had intimate friendship with Christ, were blessed with greater tribulations:

And it is clear that since God wants to lead those whom He greatly loves by the path of tribulation— and the more He loves them the greater the tribulation— there is no reason to think that He despises contemplatives, for with His own mouth He praises them and considers them His friends.\[^{214}\]

In doing this, Christ was conferring a great favor upon the soul, giving to the soul what He himself most desired—the cross. “What better friendship than that He desire for you what He desired for Himself?”\[^{215}\] Suffering, then, was seen in Teresa’s writings not as a punishment for sins but as a reward for those who had developed a deep friendship with Christ, a reward that brought gifts that might not have been realized through prayer alone.\[^{216}\]

Friendship with Saints

Although Teresa spoke of her relationships with saints, particularly with the Virgin Mary and with St. Joseph, she rarely used the terms for friendship in this respect. Nevertheless, the

\[^{214}\] Teresa of Avila, *Way*, 18.1, 102; “Y está claro que —pues lo es que a los que Dios mucho quiere lleva por camino de trabajos, y mientras más los ama, mayores— no hay por qué creer que tiene aborrecidos los contemplativos, pues por su boca los alaba y tiene por amigos.” Teresa de Jesús, *Camino [Valladolid]*, 18.1, 306.


\[^{216}\] “And it could be that you would not have received so great an award in contemplation.” Teresa of Avila, *Way*, 17.7, 101; “Y pudiera ser no tuviérades tanto premio en la contemplación.” Teresa de Jesús, *Camino [Valladolid]*, 17.7, 306.
way in which she related to the saints had characteristics in common with the way that she described good companionship both with contemporaries and with Christ.

Teresa had a particularly close attachment with St. Joseph, and she used a variety of terms to describe this relationship: advocate, lord, and father.\(^{217}\) When Teresa could find no spiritual master, no one who could understand her way of prayer and serve as a spiritual director, Joseph served that purpose, and she encouraged her nuns to take Joseph as their master in their life of prayer.\(^{218}\) Although Teresa did not use the terms *amigo* or *compañero* in relation to Joseph, the saint fulfilled some of the requirements of true friendship. As noted earlier, a key role of friendship was to provide help to the person, particularly in serving God and advancing in the life of prayer, two roles that were clearly true of St. Joseph. Teresa said of St. Joseph,

> I don’t recall up to this day ever having petitioned him for anything that he failed to grant. It is an amazing thing the great many favors God has granted me through the mediation of this blessed saint, the dangers I was freed from both of body and soul.\(^{219}\)

Although other saints had a role to play in assisting people with their needs, for Teresa, Joseph was the more powerful advocate. Whereas many other saints were useful in helping a

\(^{217}\) “I took as my advocate and lord the glorious St. Joseph and earnestly recommended myself to him. I saw clearly that as in this need so in other greater ones concerning honor and loss of soul this father and lord of mine came to my rescue in better ways than I knew how to ask for.” Teresa of Avila, *Life*, 6.6, 79; “…y tomé por abogado y señor a el glorioso san Josef, y encomendéme mucho a él. Ví claro que ansí de esta necesidad, como de otras mayores de honra y pérdida de alma, este padre y señor mío me sacó con más bien que yo le sabía pedir.” Teresa de Jesus, *Vida*, 6.6, 50-51.

\(^{218}\) “Those who cannot find a master to teach them prayer should take this glorious saint for their master, and they will not go astray.” Teresa of Avila, *Life*, 6.6, 80-81; “Quien no hallare maestro que le enseñe oración, tome este glorioso santo por maestro, y no errará en el camino.” Teresa de Jesus, *Vida*, 6.8, 51.

\(^{219}\) Teresa of Avila, *Life*, 6.6, 79; “No me acuerdo, hasta ahora, haverle suplicado cosa que la haya dejado de hacer. Es cosa que espanta las grandes mercedes que me ha hecho Dios por medio de este bienaventurado Santo, de los peligros que me ha librado, ansi de cuerpo como de alma…” Teresa de Jesus, *Vida*, 6.6, 51.
person with a particular need, Joseph had the ability to respond to all of Teresa’s needs. In that respect, the companionship relationship she had with Joseph bore more similarity to that described with Christ than that with other people. Joseph’s intercession, like that of Christ’s, was effective for the needs of both body and soul and was not limited by human frailty. In fact, the description of Joseph being able to command Christ sounds similar to the soul’s ability to command Christ in intimate friendship. Although there is a hierarchical tone to her relationship with Joseph, and her terminology reflects this, his role seems to be consistent with that in spiritual companionship, sharing characteristics with friendship as described both with Christ and with other people.

It was during the time when Teresa was working toward the founding of her first reformed monastery, St. Joseph’s in Ávila, that she talked most about the companionship of saints. The saints served as supporters of her in this venture. During the time when Teresa was forced by her confessor to give up her plan to found St. Joseph’s, it was the Virgin Mary who comforted her and assured her that the monastery would indeed be founded, and that she, Joseph, and Christ would be greatly served by Teresa’s work. This support was crucial as Teresa persisted in her work of founding reformed Carmelite monasteries in spite of great opposition.

220. “For with other saints it seems the Lord has given them grace to be of help in one need, whereas with this glorious saint I have experience that he helps in all our needs and that the Lord wants us to understand that just as He was subject to St. Joseph on earth — for since bearing the title of father, being the Lord’s tutor, Joseph could give the Child command — so in heaven God does whatever he commands.” Teresa of Avila, Life, 6.6, 79; “…que a otros santos parece les dio el Señor gracia para socorrer en una necesidad, a este glorioso Santo tengo espirencia que socorre en todas, y que quiere el Señor darnos a entender que así como le fue sujeto en la tierra — que como tenía nombre de padre siendo ayo, le podía mandar—, así en el cielo le pide.” Teresa de Jesus, Vida, 6.6, 51.

221. “She told me I made her very happy in serving the glorious St. Joseph, that I should believe that what I was striving for in regard to the monastery would be accomplished, that the Lord and those two would be greatly served in it, that I shouldn’t fear there would ever be any failure in this matter even though the obedience which was
Teresa credits her relationship with two other “saints” for confirming her in her desire to found the monasteries in poverty and supporting her when opposition to this decision was at its most intense. These saints, as companions, provided the help that she needed in order to carry out God’s will. St. Clare was an obvious model for Teresa in this respect, and it was Teresa’s relationship with Clare that convinced her of the necessity for poverty:

On her feastday, while I was going to Communion, St. Clare appeared to me with striking beauty. She told me to take courage and to continue on with what I had begun, that she would help me. I became very devoted to her; and what she said has indeed come true, for a nearby monastery of nuns of her order helps sustain us. What is more important is that little by little she brought this desire of mine to such perfection that the poverty the blessed saint practiced in her house is practiced in this one, and we are living on alms. 222

Although St. Clare perfected her desire for poverty, the opposition to her founding of St. Joseph’s in Ávila in poverty caused her to waver in her determination. When Teresa had reluctantly agreed to accept an income for her first foundation, the recently deceased holy man Friar Peter of Alcántara appeared to her in a dream, telling her that she should not concede on that point, because the opposition was from the devil. 223 Fortified by the dream, Teresa
continued to insist on founding St. Joseph’s in poverty, eventually prevailing. Clare and Peter both served as true friends, aiding Teresa in following God’s will.

For Teresa, the saints were not only friends and companions, but they also served as models of what friendship with Christ was all about. They had all truly loved God and kept Christ close by their sides. For them, friendship with God was of the utmost importance, and it was their model of friendship with God that she cited as an example of the type of life she was advocating in her monasteries:

Let us consider the glorious St. Paul: it doesn’t seem that any other name fell from his lips than that of Jesus, as coming from one who kept the Lord close to his heart. Once I had come to understand this truth, I carefully considered the lives of some of the saints, the great contemplatives, and found that they hadn’t taken any other path: St. Francis demonstrates this through the stigmata; St. Anthony of Padua, with the Infant; St. Bernard found his delight in the humanity; St. Catherine of Siena — and many others about whom your Reverence knows more than I.”

Reading St. Augustine’s *Confessions* was pivotal to Teresa’s own conversion. In reading about his conversion experience in the garden, Teresa was moved, feeling God calling in her own afterward to renounce it, as well as some other things. That same night the holy Friar Peter of Alcántara appeared to me, for he was already dead. And before he died he had written to me — since he had known about the strong opposition and persecution we were undergoing — that he rejoiced the foundation was being so vehemently opposed, that that was a sign the Lord would be very much served in this monastery in that the devil was interfering so much to prevent it, and that I should in no way decide to receive an income.” Teresa of Avila, *Life*, 36.20, 318-19; “Estando la noche antes que se havía de tratar en oración, y ya se havía comenzado el concierto, dijome el Señor que no hiciese tal, que si comenzásemos a tener renta, que no nos dejarían después que lo dejásemos, y otras algunas cosas. La mesma noche me apareció el santo fray Pedro de Alcántara, que era ya muerto, y antes que muriese me escrivió —como supo la gran contradición y persecución que teníamos— que se holgava fuese la fundación con contradición tan grande, que era señal se havía el Señor servir muy mucho en este monesterio, pues el demonio tanta ponía en que no se hiciese, y que en ninguna manera viniese en tener renta.” Teresa de Jesus, *Vida*, 36.20, 200.

224. Teresa of Avila, *Life*, 22.7, 194; “Miremos a el glorioso san Pablo, que no parece se le caía de la boca siempre Jesus, como quien le tenía bien en el corazón. Yo me mirado con cuidado, después que esto he entendido de algunos santos, grandes contemplativos, y no ivan por otro camino: san Francisco de muestra de ello en las llagas; sant Antonio de Padua, el Niño; san Bernardo se deleitava en la Humanidad; santa Catalina de Sena, otros muchos, que vuesa merced sabrá mejor que yo.” Teresa de Jesus, *Vida*, 22.7, 122.
heart. Not only would reading about Augustine’s conversion experience be important in her own experience, but the *Confessions* would serve as a model for her *Life*.

Although Teresa does not often speak of saints in terms of friendship and companionship, in her *Life* Teresa indicates that conversation with the saints is the most beneficial kind of conversation and that they provide better companionship than those still alive on earth, for they live in “our true country.” Those who are still pilgrims on earth cannot provide the company that those who have already arrived in heaven can:

These revelations also helped me very much, I think, in coming to know our true country and realizing that we are pilgrims here below; it is a wonderful thing to see what is there and know where we shall live. For if someone has to go to live permanently in another country, it is a great help to them in undergoing the struggle of the journey to have seen that it is a land where they will be very much at ease. These revelations are also a great help for reflecting on heavenly things and striving that our conversation be there; these things are done with ease. Doing them is very beneficial; merely to look toward heaven recollects the soul, for since the Lord desired to reveal something of what is there, the soul concentrates on it. It happens to me sometimes that those who I know live there are my companions and the ones in whom I find comfort; it seems to me that they are the ones who are truly alive and that those who live here on earth are so dead that not even the whole world, I think, affords me company, especially when I experience those impulses.  

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225. “As I began to read the *Confessions*, it seemed to me I saw myself in them. I began to commend myself very much to this glorious saint. When I came to the passage where he speaks about his conversion and read how he heard that voice in the garden, it only seemed to me, according to what I felt in my heart, that it was I the Lord called. I remained a long time totally dissolved in tears and feeling within myself utter distress and weariness.” Teresa of Avila, *Life*, 9.8, 103; “Como comencé a leer las *Confesiones*, paréeme me vía yo allí. Comencé a encomendarme mucho a este glorioso Santo. Cuando llegué a su conversión y lei cómo oyó aquella voz en el huerto, no me parece sino que el Señor me la dio a mí, según sintió mi corazón. Estuve por gran rato que toda me deshacia en lágrimas y entre mí misma con gran aflicción y fatiga.” Teresa de Jesús, *Vida*, 9.8, 65.

226. Teresa of Avila, *Life*, 38.6, 332; “También me parece me aproveché mucho para conocer nuestra verdadera tierra y ver que somos acá peregrinos, y es gran cosa ver lo que hay allá y saber adónde hemos de vivir. Porque si uno ha de ir a vivir de asiento a una tierra, ese gran ayuda, para pasar el trabajo del camino, haver visto que es tierra adonde ha de estar muy a su descanso, y también para considerar las cosas celestiales y procurar que nuestra conversación sea allá, hácese con facilidad.” Teresa de Jesús, *Vida*, 38.6, 208.
For Teresa, saints serve as companions on the journey toward heaven. Having already traveled that way themselves, they can provide glimpses of the path to those still on the journey. In addition, Teresa relies on them for comfort, and to help her recollect herself, so that she is focused upon heaven. They are true companions on the way, friends on the journey.

**Spiritual Companionship and Teresa of Avila**

Although Teresa never uses the terms “spiritual companionship” or “spiritual friendship,” for her true friendship or companionship had a spiritual aim. Although any friendship is likely to provide mutual help and support, Teresa was clear that the type of help true friendship was intended to provide was support on the spiritual journey, particularly regarding the life of prayer. The journey into closer relationship with God, as envisioned by Teresa, was not any easy one. It was full of struggle and difficulty, and without friends, a person would soon find themselves in danger. True friends were those who shared similar spiritual experiences and whose support was essential when all others were critical, especially at the beginning stages when one was likely to be the weakest. True friends were those who commended you to God and begged God to make you a better friend of Christ. True friends were those who were faithful, as Christ was faithful, and who were willing to expose the faults of their friends, so that those faults might be corrected. Friends were those whose assistance helped one to do God’s work. True friendship was, for Teresa, deeply spiritual.

It is also true that Teresa found such spiritual friends in many places. She found true friends, those who shared her way of prayer, among both her nuns and others. She also found true friends among those who shared her vision of a reformed Carmelite Order. Finally, she
found true friends among the saints, who, because their own experience on the path to God could illuminate the country, were especially important. In each of these cases, true friendship was defined in relationship to Christ, who was the perfect model of True Friendship.

Not all of Teresa’s ideas about friendship are compatible with contemporary understandings of spiritual companionship. Her understanding of the role of suffering, particularly, challenges contemporary understandings of spiritual friendship. Early modern understandings of holiness and sanctity, including the role of suffering in growing in holiness, as well as the more hierarchical understanding of roles in Teresa’s writings, will need to be placed in conversation with contemporary understandings. The next chapter will focus upon current understandings of the practice of spiritual companionship, before beginning a mutually critical dialogue about spiritual companionship between Teresa and current practices of spiritual companionship.
CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF SELECTED CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE ON SPIRITUAL COMPANIONSHIP

In his book, *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship*, David G. Benner argues that there is a great hunger for spiritual companionship, for relationships in which people can talk about their own spiritual quest.\(^1\) Spiritual companionship has been a part of the Christian tradition from the earliest times, practiced in a variety of ways among different denominations. Although it is often equated with spiritual direction, which has historically been more common in the Roman Catholic tradition, Benner is a Protestant. Like Teresa, Benner affirms, “If you are making significant progress on the transformational journey of Christian spirituality, you have one or more friendships that support that journey. If you do not, you are not. It is that simple.”\(^2\) As the quote from Benner attests, there are connections between Teresa’s understanding of friendship and contemporary practices of spiritual companionship. This chapter will explore some of these contemporary practices that may have similarities to Teresa’s practice of true friendship.

As noted in chapter three, Teresa argues for an understanding of the practice of spiritual friendship that was crucial to growing in the life of prayer. This journey, as Teresa envisioned it, was full of struggle and difficulty, and the support of others who were on a similar journey and

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2. Ibid., 16; In a similar way, Teresa argues for the importance of spiritual companionship. “If any begin to give themselves to God, there are so many to criticize them that they need to seek companionship to defend themselves until they are so strong that it is no longer a burden for them to suffer this criticism. And if they don’t seek this companionship, they will find themselves in much difficulty.” Teresa of Avila, *Life*, 7.22, 93; “…si uno comienza a darse a Dios, hay tantos que mormuren, que es menester buscar compañía para defenderse, hasta que ya estén fuertes en no les pesar de padecer; y si no, veránse en mucho aprieto.” Teresa de Jesus, *Vida*, 7.22, 59.
therefore had had similar experiences was important, particularly in the beginning stages. For Teresa, true friends commended each other to Christ and were willing to point out the faults of their friends so that these faults could be corrected. For Teresa, friends were also those who assisted each other in doing God’s work. Most important of all for Teresa, however, friends were mutual friends of God, and they were those who helped each other to become better friends of the true friend, who was Christ.

In this chapter, I move from the historical theology movement of practical theology to the descriptive theology movement, exploring the ways in which spiritual companionship is understood and practiced today. After describing current practice and its historical roots, I will place Teresa’s understandings in a mutually critical dialogue with contemporary understandings in chapter five.

A survey of practices that use the terminology of spiritual companionship unfortunately does not turn up descriptions from a diverse sample of authors or traditions. As Arthur Holder notes, there is a shortage of scholars of color and marginalized communities in the field of spirituality.³ In addition, practices of “soul care” often vary significantly in diverse contexts. One-on-one spiritual direction or the individual practice of spiritual companionship is often not the model used in other contemporary contexts. That means that although much of the following discussion will focus upon Euro-American or British authors, I will be attentive to the limitations of that context and will make connections with selected Latino/a and Black understandings of spiritual companionship.

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Although Teresa of Avila’s understanding of spiritual companionship, as noted above, may be resonate with current understandings, her descriptions of friendship are not regularly cited in contemporary descriptions of spiritual companionship. Instead, many twentieth and twenty-first-century Euro-American or British works on spiritual companionship reach back to more ancient texts and traditions for their historical sources, citing Aelred’s understanding of friendship and/or the Celtic anamchara movement in order to ground their descriptions of current practice. Although the tradition of the Desert Mothers and Fathers is often used to ground more formal relationships of spiritual direction, it is not usually used to describe spiritual companionship as it is characterized by more hierarchical relationships.

Although it is not possible, in this chapter, to carry out the same type of deep historical-contextual analysis on Aelred and the anamchara tradition as was done with Teresa in chapter three, it is still important to look more closely at the historical sources that are used to ground the current practices of spiritual companionship in order to, as Browning phrases it, “gain clarity within a larger hermeneutic effort to understand our praxis and the theory behind it.” Although the lack of a deep historical-contextual analysis will not allow these sources to serve as partners in a mutually critical dialogue with contemporary practice, some understanding of these historical texts is necessary in order to understand how current practices of spiritual companionship use these sources to justify and to support current practice. The number of possible historical texts that could be of interest or use in any study of spiritual practice is large, and decisions need to be made as to which of the texts will serve as primary dialogue partners in the mutually critical dialogue.

Although much has changed between the sixth-century Ireland of the anamcharas or the twelfth century England of Aelred and twenty-first-century America, the importance of spiritual friendships in the life of faith has been affirmed in the current context as well. Marjorie Zoet Bankson, in her book *Seasons of Friendship*, claims that spiritual friendships are increasingly important in a world that often does not value committed friendships. “We live in a promiscuous culture in which the quiet support of committed friendship goes largely unnoticed. Yet we long to be known, understood, and received without conditions, so we move from person to person, group to group, looking for a place to be loved.”

This chapter will describe contemporary conceptions of spiritual friendship, looking at the ways in which such relationships are described and practiced. Although the term spiritual companionship or friendship is often also used for formal spiritual direction relationships, the focus of this chapter will be on the more informal, personal relationships of love and support, whose goal is growing in one’s relationship with God. This contextual analysis of current practice will allow me to place Teresa of Avila, and her ideas of spiritual companionship, in a mutually critical dialogue with contemporary practices and understandings of spiritual companionship in the following chapter.

**Spiritual Companionship and Spiritual Direction**

Spiritual companionship or accompaniment can take many forms. Both terms, as well as spiritual friendship, can be and have been used to describe both formal spiritual direction relationships and as other types of relationships. Spiritual companionship or accompaniment,

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particularly when envisioned in a spiritual direction relationship, has yielded a variety of images or metaphors for the relationship. These images have included parent-child, companions on the journey, friend-friend, midwife-parturient, listener-speaker, host-traveler, physician-patient, teacher-student, guardian of mystery-candidates, confessor-penitent, master-disciple, guide-disciple, helper-one being helped, and priest-congregant. In most cases, except for the models of companion on the journey or friends, there is an implied inequality in the relationships, with one person being helped by another who is more knowledgeable, skilled, or holy. This inequality sits uneasily with many contemporary Christians because of their discomfort with hierarchical relationships. Feminists, in particular, have challenged the idea of a hierarchical relationship within spiritual direction. Kathleen Fischer argues,


10. Ibid., 1.

11. Ibid., 8-39.

12. Leech, Soul Friend, 44.

13. Ibid., 70; Guenther, Holy Listening, 42-80.


15. Leech, Soul Friend, 56.


17. Leech, Soul Friend, 63-64.


This issue of models for spiritual direction is of special significance for women since they are already conditioned to see themselves as inferior and to rely on powerful authority figures, usually men. The myth of the expert is more harmful to women than it is to men.\textsuperscript{20}

However, it is not just women who are uncomfortable with the term spiritual director and its implied hierarchy. Margaret A.L. Blackie argues that, because of this discomfort, friendship is the model that is often most comfortable for people today:

*Spiritual direction* is itself a term that many shy away from, preferring terms such as *spiritual companion*, *soul friend* and the like. While we continue to struggle with the vocabulary, we also struggle to find an adequate image to describe this unique relationship. Traditionally, two major images are used to describe the relationship between director and directee: the relationship between parent and child and that of friends.\textsuperscript{21}

Alan Jones argues that spiritual director and spiritual friend can often be used interchangeably. He believes in a progressive relationship. As one is beginning in the spiritual life, a director—someone more experienced—is helpful and often needed. Later on, however, the Holy Spirit has a way of reversing roles, even in relationships which had previously been more static. If they are “under the guidance of the Holy Spirit,” Jones believes that the relationship will inevitably move toward one of spiritual friendship.\textsuperscript{22} This does not mean, however, that Jones believes that spiritual direction is unimportant. Instead, he argues that it increases the importance of friendship:

I do, however, want to insist that spiritual direction is an ancient and noble art that should not be treated in the cavalier way we tend to treat friendship. The remedy is to take our friendships more seriously than we do rather than insist on a qualitative difference between direction and friendship.\textsuperscript{23}


\textsuperscript{22} Jones, *Exploring Spiritual Direction*, 4.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
As Blackie notes, however, the use of the image of friendship does not really describe spiritual direction as it is normally practiced today. The main difficulty she sees with the image of friendship is the idea of mutuality. In friendship, there is “an expectation of disclosure on both sides.”

Although the spiritual director may at times disclose parts of his or her own journey to the directee, it is done as a way of helping the directee in their own spiritual journey. Blackie argues that although both are fellow pilgrims, the relationship is not one of friendship because the self-disclosure is not equal, “nor should it be.” There is an imbalance of power that the image of friendship does not capture. Although Blackie argues that the model of spiritual parent better reflects this lack of mutuality, she argues that neither model adequately describes contemporary spiritual direction relationships.

Tilden Edwards also argues that although “all direction is in some sense mutual,” spiritual direction—in which the focus is on one of the persons—is the better option in most cases. In most relationships there needs to be “a primary focus on one person or the other, lest they become a give-and-take of spiritual conversation that, though perhaps valuable, loses the intensity and depth of focus needed in full spiritual direction.”

Sr. Donald Corcoran believes that although the model of friendship seems to be the most favored model in our time due to its egalitarian language, the parental language of the early monastic movement bears witness to an important element in spiritual direction today: the need for the spiritual director to be a person of

25. Ibid., 28.
26. Ibid., 31.
prayer who is striving for holiness and who can help to serve as a guide for those who are on the spiritual journey, serving as a midwife for the “begetting in the Spirit.”

Although spiritual directors and spiritual friends both serve the task of “codiscernment” according to Benner, he distinguishes the two types of relationship. He argues that “spiritual direction is more structured and less mutual than spiritual friendship.” This distinction also highlights another distinction between spiritual friendship and spiritual direction: the increasing professionalization of spiritual direction. Although Ekman P.C. Tam argues that this professionalization has many advantages, it has changed the nature of spiritual direction, moving it farther from the idea of spiritual friendship:

In adopting a professional stance, the director may no longer be seen as a friend of the soul, or midwife, or spiritual teacher, or host of the sojourner, or life-servant — let alone a father. Spiritual directors may become a trained elite, well educated in the field of spirituality, and equipped with skills and techniques that others cannot easily learn, who are supposed to have personal experience in the area of spiritual growth, and desirous to provide service to those who pay for it.

Although current understandings of spiritual friendship usually include both formal spiritual direction relationships as well as the more informal modes of companionship, the focus in this study will be on the less formal and more mutual relationships of companionship. These forms of companionship may be better suited to a relationship between contemporary Christians and the saints because of the radically different contexts the two often inhabit. Wendy Wright argues that an uncritical reading of classic texts can “lead to a kind of slavish literalism, intolerance,

29. Benner, Sacred Companions, 205.
30. Ibid., 17.
undue fearfulness (what used to be called scrupulosity) or narrow self-righteousness.”32 Because differences in context may make it difficult, or even impossible, to follow the advice or admonitions of the saints without some modification, less formal modes of companionship that allow more dialogue may allow contemporary Christians, in Wright’s words, “to analyse the values—both explicit and implicit—that inform a particular piece of spiritual literature,”33 in order to determine if what one is reading is helpful to contemporary Christian life. Although the focus in this work will be upon less formal relationships of spiritual companionship, some overlap with the literature on spiritual direction is inevitable due to the close connection in the literature between formal spiritual direction and more informal practices of spiritual companionship.

**Aelred and the Anamchara Movement: Exploring Two Historical Roots of Contemporary Practices of Spiritual Companionship**

As noted previously, many current descriptions of spiritual companionship often claim for their historical roots the understandings of this practice as espoused by either Aelred of Rievaulx or the Celtic *anamchara* tradition. From these two sources, contemporary descriptions of spiritual companionship, particularly from Euro-American or British sources, claim a continuity of tradition. Therefore, even though current understandings of spiritual companionship differ in important ways from those earlier understandings, it is important to explore how the two ancient traditions are understood and used in the description of contemporary forms of spiritual companionship. This will not be a full historical analysis of

33. Ibid., 41.
Aelred’s understanding of friendship or the understanding in the anamchara tradition, nor will it be a direct comparison with Teresa of Avila’s ideas. Rather, these historical pieces will be explored in order to shed light on the current practices that claim to be grounded in these traditions. Unfortunately, limitations of time and space prevent me from doing the type of deep historical-contextual analysis that would allow them to enter the mutually critical dialogue as partners.

Aelred wrote De spirituali amicitia somewhere around 1147 after he was elected abbot of Rievaulx. Aelred’s treatise is a Christian reworking of Cicero’s De Amicitia, which Aelred acknowledges had had a profound effect on his understanding of friendship. Unsure how to manage his relationships, Aelred found in Cicero’s treatise a model for friendship which would inform his understanding of spiritual friendship:

And so, torn between conflicting loves and friendships, I was drawn now here, now there, and not knowing the law of true friendships, I was often deceived by its mere semblance. At length there came into my hands the treatise which Tullius wrote on friendship, and it immediately appealed to me as being serviceable because of the depth of his ideas, and fascination because of the charm of his eloquence. And though I saw myself unfitted for that type of friendship, still I was gratified that I had discovered a formula for friendship whereby I might check the vacillations of my loves and affections.34

For Aelred, as for Cicero, there were three types of friendship: carnal, worldly, and spiritual, with spiritual friendship being the highest form of friendship. According to Katherine M. Tepas, for Cicero, the basis of true friendship was a shared sense of values, and it was upon the basis of shared virtue that the highest levels of friendships were shared. This spiritual friendship was not desired for any worldly advantage: such a friendship was its own reward. For

Aelred, a shared moral sense and a shared life of virtue were also necessary preconditions; he argued that “spiritual friendship among the just is born of a similarity in life, morals, and pursuits, that is, it is a mutual conformity in matters human and divine united with benevolence and charity.”35 In distinction to Cicero, however, Aelred believed that these spiritual friendships had a goal other than simply the reward of friendship. These relationships were, according to Tepas, intended to bring the participants into “a yet deeper love and union with God.”36 Although Aelred also believed that there were other, lesser forms of friendship (carnal and worldly), the shared love of God was the connection that brought people together in a spiritual friendship. It was the presence of Christ that made a friendship a spiritual friendship. As he noted at the beginning of his treatise, friendship was not a relationship between two people, but rather between three, for when Christ was present, true friendship was possible. “Here we are, you and I, and I hope a third, Christ, is in our midst.”37 For Aelred, it was Christ who ultimately established the bond between friends in a true friendship.

For contemporary authors writing about spiritual friendship, it is this view of friendship as being a gift from God that is one of the most commonly noted similarities between Aelred’s ideas of spiritual friendship and current understandings. Edwards argues that for Aelred, spiritual friendship came “closer to the love of the saints in heaven than most other loves.”38 Certainly, in stressing the importance of spiritual friendship, Aelred resonates with contemporary writers on spiritual companionship. In addition, Edwards uses Aelred to describe four qualities

35. Ibid., 1.46, 61.
37. Aelred, Spiritual Friendship, 1.1, 51.
38. Edwards, Spiritual Friend, 45.
that must be tested in any true friendship: “loyalty, right intention, discretion, and patience.”\(^{39}\)

These qualities, as well as Aelred’s (and Cicero’s) insistence that true friendship does not seek personal advantage, form the basis of Edwards’ discussion of spiritual companionship.\(^{40}\)

Virtue, however, was important in the establishing of true friendships for Aelred, as it had been for Cicero. According to Tepas, only when one had achieved a high level of virtue was true friendship possible, making such friendships rare.\(^{41}\) Nonetheless, Aelred encouraged Christians to avoid a sense of despair, asking God for the requisite virtue so that they might experience true spiritual friendship. “Indeed, the Christian ought not to despair of acquiring any virtue since daily the divine voice from the Gospel re-echoes: ‘Ask, and you shall receive…’”\(^{42}\) Following Cicero’s lead, Aelred did not believe that all people were worthy of true friendships.\(^{43}\)

Although humans were, according to Aelred, created equal, as demonstrated by the creation story in which Eve was created from the side of Adam, the fall changed that basic equality.\(^{44}\) All people were due charity, but friendships should be entered into only after a prolonged period of testing and probation designed to determine the person’s worthiness.\(^{45}\) True friendship could only occur among those of the highest virtue—the perfect—although it could begin and even progress among the “good” and the “better.”

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 46.
\(^{40}\) Ibid.
\(^{41}\) Tepas, “Amor, Amicitia, and Misericordia,” 253.
\(^{42}\) Aelred, Spiritual Friendship, 1.27, 56.
\(^{43}\) “And yet, not all whom we love should be received into friendship, for not all are found worthy of it.” Ibid., 3.6, 92.
\(^{44}\) Ibid., 1.58, 63.
\(^{45}\) Ibid., 3.6, 93.
This limiting of friendship has proven troubling for some Christian commentators. Hunt, in her theology of friendship, argues that friendship is available to all in whatever state a person may find herself or himself. A high level of virtue is not necessary. “There are far more friendships around than we acknowledge. Friendship is available to everyone, at least potentially.”

Paul J. Wadell, echoing the thoughts of Stanley Hauerwas, argues that Christian understandings of friendship require an openness not simply to those similar to us in virtue and moral understanding, but also to those who are very different:

But a Christian understanding of friendship demands hospitality and openness to the “stranger” whose experiences, concerns, and views of the world might be strikingly different than our own, and so teaches us that the “way we see things” might sometimes obscure the truth.

As Hauerwas and Charles Pinches argue in their book, *Christians among the Virtues*, the model for Christian friendship is that based on Christ, who called his followers friends and bid them to love each other as he loved them. God becoming incarnate in order to enter into friendship with human beings is the ultimate case of a friendship based on otherness. In fact, they argue that otherness, rather than being a barrier to true friendship, is the basis of Christian friendship:

Friendship is not just an instance of some more universal love, it is the attention and regard for another precisely as they are other, as they are different, from ourselves. We can take the risk of such love because we are called to imitate the partiality of God’s love for us as shown through His Son.

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This means that not only is friendship possible among those who are not equal, friendship is intended, according to Hauerwas and Pinches, to include those of various states and classes, whom Jesus commanded to be friends.\textsuperscript{49} This understanding was called a new commandment by Jesus, indicating that Christian friendship was intended to be distinctly different from the type of friendship familiar in the world.\textsuperscript{50}

Human friendship, as understood by Hauerwas and Pinches, is based on God’s friendship with us, and therefore includes shared suffering. Arguing against Aristotle—who, according to Hauerwas and Pinches, believed that true friends shield their friends from tragedy—they argue that “Christians cannot accept a vision of friendship which excludes (or overcomes) otherness in the friend, which shelters her from sharing our sufferings or defeats.”\textsuperscript{51} In fact, Christians are warned that they will suffer for the sake of friends, and that they are called to be those who can share in this suffering with others as Christ suffered.\textsuperscript{52} Aelred also argued that sharing in suffering was an important characteristic of friendship. “Friendship, therefore, heightens the joys of prosperity and mitigates the sorrows of adversity by dividing and sharing them.”\textsuperscript{53} This is another instance of the congruence between Aelred and current practices of spiritual companionship.

The second tradition often cited as a source for contemporary understandings of spiritual friendship is the Celtic “soul-friend” or anamchara tradition. Kenneth Leech notes that the idea of an anamchara or soul-friend was very important in the Celtic tradition. Although the choice

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 44.  
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 45.  
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 44.  
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 48.  
\textsuperscript{53} Aelred, \textit{Spiritual Friendship}, 2.13, 72.
of soul-friends was voluntary—one could refuse, as Columba did with Donnan of Eig—everyone needed a soul friend.\textsuperscript{54} A well-known Celtic saying, attributed both to Brigid of Kildare (c. 451-525) and to Comgall, another sixth-century saint, attests to the high value placed upon these relationships: “Anyone without a soul-friend is a body without a head.”\textsuperscript{55} These relationships often started very early in life and were maintained for years.\textsuperscript{56} Unlike the relationships advocated by Aelred, anamchara relationships often occurred between people of unequal social status, or differing genders or ages, even while acknowledging a mutuality based on the relationship.\textsuperscript{57} This element of mutuality echoes current understandings of spiritual friendship, which often shy away from the more hierarchical images of traditional spiritual direction models.

Although Edward C. Sellner acknowledges that there were two categories of soul friendships in the Celtic tradition—a more formal confessor role and a less formal relationship that was characterized by a greater degree of mutuality—it is the less formal role that he claims has had the greater influence in Christian spirituality. This less formal role, which Leech describes as a counselor or guide, was not seen in sacramental terms, and therefore was open to lay men and women as well as clergy.\textsuperscript{58} Sellner traces the idea of spiritual direction and contemporary understandings of spiritual friendship directly to the more intimate form of soul friendship in the anamchara tradition, granting it a decisive role in the way that spiritual companionship is understood today:

\textsuperscript{54} Leech, \textit{Soul Friend}, 45.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 205; Leech, \textit{Soul Friend}, 46.
\textsuperscript{58} Leech, \textit{Soul Friend}, 46.
Soul friendship also affected the entire history of Christian spirituality, affirming as it did the conviction that a person’s relationship with God can take the form of effective dialogue, and that whenever sins or faults, grief or human vulnerability are openly and honestly acknowledged, healing begins and God’s presence is experienced, sometimes unforgettably.\(^{59}\)

As Sellner notes, a focus on healing and reconciliation was a part of the Celtic soul-friend tradition. Although the practice came to be increasingly associated with the practice of penance and therefore the necessity for a clerical companion, it never lost its earlier focus on healing, which Sellner traces to its Druidic roots. Because of their Druidic roots, early Celtic penitentials offered “healing remedies” in addition to the traditional penances prescribed elsewhere, in order to “help repair and heal the harm that those sicknesses of soul had caused.”\(^{60}\) The variety of roles that *anamcharas* played led to a variety of images being used to describe the relationship. Sellner notes four major images that were particularly prevalent: judge, physician, discerning guide, and teacher. Over time, the first role, the judge, which is associated with assigning penance, would come to take precedence, changing “the nature of the confessional encounter with an *anamchara*,”\(^{61}\) leading to clericalization of the ministry of the soul-friendship. According to Leech, the change in this pattern can be seen in the life of Columbanus (543-615); he initially “confessed to a woman but later he reverted to priests.”\(^{62}\)

Although Celtic penitentials stressed the role of *anamchara* as judge, Sellner finds a different emphasis in the descriptions of these relationships in hagiographies. In these stories, the *anamchara* relationships were characterized by intimacy and respect, mutuality,\(^{63}\) a sharing


\(^{60}\) Ibid., 186.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., 192.

\(^{62}\) Leech, *Soul Friend*, 46.

\(^{63}\) Sellner, *The Celtic Soul Friend*, 205.
of common values,\textsuperscript{65} affirmation and challenge,\textsuperscript{66} and an ability to survive geographical isolation and the passage of time and even death;\textsuperscript{67} they were centered upon God;\textsuperscript{68} and finally, they demonstrated the importance not only of friendship but also of solitude.\textsuperscript{69} It is these characteristics, rather than the penitential emphasis, that Sellner believes can inform current understandings of spiritual companionship.\textsuperscript{70}

From the descriptions of spiritual friendship in hagiographies, Sellner finds an understanding of spiritual friendship that informs his own understanding of the importance and the characteristics of spiritual friendship for people today, a friendship focused not upon confession and penance, but instead on intimacy and mutual respect. “This bonding and exchange of soul and heart in a relationship of trust, respect, and mutuality is the greatest gift we can receive from others or give to them.”\textsuperscript{71} For Sellner, such soul friendships should be relationships of mutuality and intimacy, whose goal is healing and wholeness. In the less formal anamchara relationships, Sellner finds qualities that can be used to support spiritual friendships today.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 206.  
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 208.  
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 209.  
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 215.  
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 216.
Spiritual Friendship Today

Although there are a variety of ways in which spiritual friendship or companionship is practiced today, there are some elements which are common to many of these descriptions. Whether this companionship occurs in a spiritual direction relationship or in a more informal arrangement, there are themes that resonate with Aelred and the anamchara relationship in some respects, yet deviate significantly in other respects from both traditions. Many writers, even while citing Aelred and the anamchara relationship as the basis and justification of their own practices, feel free to choose elements that support these practices, while ignoring those that challenge them. For instance, while Aelred is used to argue that friendship is important, that the friendship is a gift from God, and that it is a relationship that does not seek personal advantage, discussions of spiritual friendship are less likely to mention Aelred’s insistence upon testing friends and demanding a high level of virtue prior to initiating a spiritual friendship. While there is a stress on mutuality and healing in the descriptions of anamcharas in hagiographical literature, there is also a strong focus upon penitence that is often less appealing to contemporary practitioners of spiritual companionship.

In contemporary descriptions of the practice of spiritual companionship, three sets of themes appear in many of the writings: intimacy and journey, affirmation and confrontation, and growth in relationship with God and personal transformation. These paired themes seem to be a convenient way of organizing the diverse descriptions of spiritual companionship.

72. Leech, Soul Friend, 49.
73. Edwards, Spiritual Friend, 45.
74. Ibid., 47.
Intimacy and Journey

The image of journey seems to be a common theme in writings on spiritual companionship. Benner argues that “The Christian spiritual journey is a journey we take with others. Each of us must take our own journey, and for each of us that journey will be unique. But none of us is intended to make that journey alone.” In fact, Benner claims that taking that journey alone can be particularly hazardous, and that without soul friends it is not possible to make significant progress. According to Kathleen M. Brown and David M. Orr, the journey and the companions who share that journey are treasures, for “those who walk with another on the journey of faith have these privileged encounters with another’s soul.” For Barbara A. Sheehan, this role as companion for the journey is the definition of a spiritual companion:

Spiritual companionship is an intentional and mutually negotiated relationship between one person (or group) desirous of bringing to consciousness the Spirit operative in his life and another person who serves as companion or partner on the journey.

If Christian life is a journey, as is often stressed in writings on spiritual companionship, for these writers it is a journey that should not be taken alone, but with a companion or a set of companions.

The theme of journey and the need for companionship are also major themes in writings in Latino/a theology and spirituality. In his book, *Caminemos Con Jesús*, Roberto S. Goizueta

77. Ibid., 14.
78. Ibid., 16.
proposes a theology of accompaniment to “appropriate the anthropological and theological wisdom of U.S. Hispanic popular Catholicism.”

81 For Goizueta, in order to be a person, one needs to be accompanied, to have companions. “To be a human being is to be in relationship with others, and to be in relationship with others is to be ‘acompañado.’”

82 Walking with others, while not specifically focused upon spiritual matters, does include a spiritual dimension. According to Adele J. Gonzalez, this journey by a pilgrim people is done not only with family and others around them, but with Jesus, the elder brother, “who walks with them in their joys and sorrows and he understands suffering and rejection.”

83 The importance of companionship is also strongly affirmed in the stories of Hispanic migrants in Migration Miracle: Faith, Hope, and Meaning by Jacqueline Maria Hagan. Hagan has collected stories of those who have made the dangerous crossing into the United States from Mexico. Because of that uncertain journey, the theme of companionship on the journey was particularly strong among migrants. Although they spoke of their human companions, Hagan particularly noted the way that these migrants spoke of saints as companions on the journey.

84 This companionship was symbolized and made physical by “rosaries, crosses, holy cards, medallions, scapulars, amulets, devotionals, Bibles, candles, and statues.”

85 In a journey in which their lives were at risk, they relied on these spiritual


82. Ibid., 205.


85. Ibid., 126.
companions for safety and protection, and many spoke of the miracles that they encountered through the intercession of these saints. According to Robert W. Kellemen and Karole A. Edwards, African-American soul care is based on the Exodus story, another story of journey. They are “bound for the Promised Land.” Although one-on-one relations of spiritual companionship undoubtedly occur, the focus in the African-American community has been communal, in distinction to the individual journey more common in other writings on spiritual companionship. In addition to this communal focus, much of the soul care and spiritual direction within the African-American community took place not in individual interactions, but “from the pulpit during preaching and in the congregation during worship.”

This understanding of the role of the congregation, as a community of spiritual companions joined in worship, echoes Wadell’s idea of the way that churches should form a communion of friends of God. Companionship is important in African-American churches, but descriptions of individual spiritual companionship relationships are not common, in this literature.

There are many potential types of companions on a journey, from casual traveling companions to intentionally chosen friends. In literature on spiritual companionship, this journey relationship is often described as one of great intimacy. The casual accompaniment of near strangers is not how these writers are describing a spiritual companionship. Instead, Benner

86. Ibid., 165.
87. Ibid., 13.
89. Ibid., 27.
90. Ibid.
90. Wadell, Becoming Friends, 12.
describes relationships of great depth. “But it is not just connections in general that we seek. In the core of our being we yearn for intimacy. We want people to share our lives. We want soul friends.”\(^92\) This need to be deeply known is a longing that many of the writings on spiritual companionship affirm. In fact, John Eudes Bamberger claims that it is the intimacy of these relationships that allows people to become who they were created to be:

> We are made for mutuality, a mutuality that engages us completely. In order to become fully the self we are created to be, we must cultivate our capacity for sharing all we are at every level of our person: not only the deepest center, which for most of our life escapes our focused consciousness, and all the hidden recesses of memory, but all our faculties and their operations.\(^93\)

This theme of intimacy, helping us to become the people we were created to be, a theme which is prominent in Goizueta’s writing, is also echoed by Benner, who believes that Christian character can only be developed within this type of close, intimate relationship:

> The gift of those who accompany us on the spiritual journey is not merely that they help us know God and ourselves. It is also that, by virtue of their relationship to us, they help us become people who are capable of intimacy—an essential element in the Christian character that is the goal of the journey. Love is cultivated only in close soul relationships.\(^94\)

> This relationship of accompaniment is of the utmost importance in the life of faith. The sharing of a spiritual journey is a rare and precious gift, according to Brown and Orr, and this sharing means that the companions stand on “holy ground.”\(^95\) “To be heard is one of the deepest longings of the human heart,”\(^96\) and Benner claims that this type of intimate companionship


\(^94\) Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 41.


\(^96\) Ibid., 10.
requires a deep sharing of experience. Although no companion can fully enter into the experience of another, in this deep sharing and deep listening, something new can sometimes be heard—even, at times, the voice of God. Edwards also affirms this understanding:

Neither soul-friends nor anyone else can fully enter our deep soul space. However, they can listen to our articulations of it, silently open these to God as soon as they are heard, and occasionally speak when something is heard in that openness that seems to be meant for the directee.

This sharing requires a mutuality, a willingness to be open to the truth of the other, as expressed in their unique journey. Kent Ira Groff argues that there needs to be a “yearning for the person to teach me something new about myself, about the unique terrain of his or her world, about the world we inhabit together, and about God.” In the interaction, companions help each other to find their voice, and to affirm that what they have to say has value, that through their voice, God may be speaking. “Sometimes being a friend means helping another find their voice, even being a voice for them. And friendship means that sometimes we are God’s voice for one another,” according to Brown and Orr. In that speaking and listening, the power of spiritual companionship is experienced.

What qualities do people need in order to be able to serve as spiritual companions to each other? Different authors will have different lists. The different formulations may reflect the needs for different types of companionship. Bankson notes, “I have discovered that different

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98. “It is important to remember that even the most intimate friendship cannot eliminate the strangeness that exists between any two people.” Ibid., 75.


seasons in my life require different kinds of friendship and different levels of companionship.***102
There may not be a single characteristic that defines this relationship; what is important is that the relationship provides accompaniment on the journey and intimacy. There are, however, characteristics that are helpful in developing such intimate relationships, and several authors offer lists. Benner says that the important qualities are depth, honesty, and mutual respect.103
Edwards, echoing Aelred, names the necessary qualities as loyalty, right intention, discretion, and patience.104 For Brown and Orr, the essential qualities are affirmation, communication, and freedom.105 Sellner asserts that the important characteristics are trust, respect, and mutuality.106
All these formulations are intended to allow two people to be intimate companions on the journey, but no one person is likely to be able to perfectly fulfill the role of the ideal companion. Benner remarks, “true friendships do not demand perfection. We come to them as we are and are received with grace by someone who accepts and loves the imperfect self we bring.”107
Intimacy and companionship are possible even with flawed human beings. In these intimate relationships, we must take the risk of bringing in our whole selves, selves that are not perfect, selves that are often not likely to reach the levels of virtue required by Aelred for true friendship, and yet selves yearning for the companionship of another on the journey. This lack of perfection

102. Bankson, Seasons of Friendship, xi.
103. Benner, Sacred Companions, 81.
104. Edwards, Spiritual Director, 11; “There are four qualities which must be tested in a friend: loyalty, right intention, discretion, and patience, that you may entrust yourself to him securely.” Aelred, Spiritual Friendship, 3.61, 105.
107. Benner, Sacred Companions, 82.
is why so many of the descriptions of spiritual companionship speak of the need for friends to be able both to affirm the goodness of the other and to confront each other in love.

Affirmation and Confrontation

In descriptions of spiritual friendship, spiritual companions provide affirmation for each other. “As companions with one another on the journey, we affirm the goodness and grace that we see in each other, and we help each other to see that goodness and grace more clearly.” For Brown and Orr, such affirmation is a “light showing God’s way and a messenger from God.” These affirmations and support allow the companions to grow into the fullness of what God has planned for them. For Bankson, “birthing—physical and spiritual—occurs more easily with the affirmation and encouragement of a friend.” For Benner, the central desire in spiritual companionship is the blessing of the other. “Friends long for each other’s well-being and do whatever they can to support it.” The love that flows from this intimate relationship naturally expresses itself in support and encouragement.

Although affirmation and support are strong elements in descriptions of spiritual companionship, many of the writers also argue that challenge and confrontation are also necessary in this relationship. Wadell writes,

In friendships we see the other person’s goodness—we see the image of God alive in that person—but we also become intimately aware of his or her shortcomings and weaknesses, of imperfections that may never disappear and struggles that may never end.

109. Ibid.
111. Benner, Sacred Companions, 67.
True love requires both support and confrontation, and it is critical to balance the two.\textsuperscript{113} The love of spiritual companions is not a blinding to faults, but rather an opening of eyes to the whole of the person. David B. Burrell argues that spiritual companionship is “never mindless or uncritical ‘support,’ which presumes that one’s friends are beyond correction, worthy of nothing but adulation and confirmation in their manner of life.”\textsuperscript{114} In fact, for many of the writers, such challenge or confrontation is a sign of the love for the other, a love willing to endure the discomfort of confrontation in order to work for the good of the other.\textsuperscript{115} Sheehan argues that because it is grounded in love, the spiritual companionship relationship “can also focus on challenge and confrontation of negative self-images and destructive behavior.”\textsuperscript{116} It is this desire to help the other that is at the heart of the challenge and confrontation in a relationship of spiritual companionship.

Spiritual companions, because of the intimacy of the relationship, are in a position that can challenge and confront. They know each other so well that they can realistically assess strengths and weaknesses, even those that might not be obvious to others.\textsuperscript{117} Benner argues that because of the love that is shared by spiritual companions, they “will not accept our self-deceptions but will gently and firmly confront us with our soul blindness.”\textsuperscript{118} Wanting their companions’ well-being, spiritual friends risk the necessary discomfort that comes with

\textsuperscript{113} Benner, \textit{Sacred Companions}, 71.
\textsuperscript{114} David B. Burrell, \textit{Friendship and Ways to Truth} (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 49.
\textsuperscript{115} Benner, \textit{Sacred Companions}, 69.
\textsuperscript{116} Sheehan, \textit{The Celtic Soul Friend}, 11.
\textsuperscript{117} “True friends, in contrast, see each other realistically. Because they know each other so well, they know the weaknesses that are hidden from the view of those at a distance.” Benner, \textit{Sacred Companions}, 68.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 70.
confrontation. Spiritual companions may even allow “people to feel their pain, work through it, and decide for themselves how to resolve it, even when we think we know best how to take it away,” according to Brown and Orr. The role of spiritual companions is not to make things easy or even necessarily painless, according to Benner, but instead to help the person with the hard work of “becoming the whole and holy person they are called to be.” This work requires both confrontation and support, which can only occur in a loving, intimate relationship. This leads to the final set of themes, for growth in one’s relationship with God and one’s own personal transformation require such loving engagement.

Growth in Relationship with God and Personal Transformation

As noted above, personal growth is an expected outcome of spiritual friendships. For Benner, “Spiritual friends nurture the development of each other’s soul. Their love for each other translates into a desire that the other settle for nothing less than becoming all that he or she was intended to be.” Although this type of terminology is common in the literature, something specific is meant by the phrase “becoming all that he or she is intended to be.” It is not a vague hope for improvement in a person, but has a definite religious connotation. For these writers, becoming all that one is intended to be requires growing in one’s relationship with God. This occurs through developing a friendship with God, and through the relationship of spiritual friendship people also learn how to be friends with God, according to Bankson. The most important goal of spiritual companions, according to Brown and Orr, is to help the other to

120. Benner, Sacred Companions, 70.
121. Ibid., 16.
122. Bankson, Seasons of Friendship, 97.
develop this friendship with God, “allowing — in fact, encouraging and, where possible, enabling — others to keep God at the center of their lives.”\textsuperscript{123} In fact, the relationship between the spiritual companions is secondary for Edwards; “the primary relationship in spiritual friendship is between God and the friend, not between the friends themselves,”\textsuperscript{124} and through spiritual friendship all are invited “into the intimacy of the circle of friendship that exists between him [Christ] and the Father.”\textsuperscript{125}

The earthly relationships with spiritual companions are preparatory, preparing the friends for that greater friendship with God which is the goal of the spiritual life. In these friendships, the voice of the true Friend can be more easily heard. Through the earthly spiritual friendships, Brown and Orr believe that “God speaks and communicates love and desire for us,”\textsuperscript{126} and the friendships can help the friends to “discern the presence, will and leading of the Spirit of God,”\textsuperscript{127} according to Benner. Bamberger argues that spiritual friends can even help each other to learn to respond, “to speak without embarrassment of…experiences of the love of God…a neglected task for most persons of our culture.”\textsuperscript{128} Through spiritual friendships with others and ultimately God, people are transformed. At the heart of this transformation, and a necessary component of it for Benner, are relationships of spiritual friendship:

The essence of Christian spirituality is following Christ on a journey of personal transformation. The distant land to which we are called is not heaven. Nor is it some external, physical place. The distant land is the new creature into which Christ wishes to fashion us—the whole and holy person that finds his or her

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\item \textsuperscript{123} Brown and Orr, “The Gift of Spiritual Friendship,” 11.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Edwards, \textit{Spiritual Friend}, 110.
\item \textsuperscript{125} Benner, \textit{Sacred Companions}, 65.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Brown and Orr, “The Gift of Spiritual Friendship,” 11.
\item \textsuperscript{127} Benner, \textit{Sacred Companions}, 27.
\item \textsuperscript{128} Bamberger, “Spiritual Accompaniment,” 418.
\end{itemize}
uniqueness, identity and calling in Christ. Spiritual friends accompany each other on that journey.¹²⁹

Spiritual companionship, if one follows the argument of Benner, is not an optional activity, but instead is integral to a life of faith, for at the heart of faith is personal transformation. Spiritual friends, as he argued earlier, are not only important to this journey, but without their presence one cannot make “significant progress on the transformational journey.” These relationships are, for him, essential. He names a high calling for the practice.

At this point, we have explored understandings of spiritual companionship in two very different contexts: in twentieth and twenty-first century western culture, and in sixteenth-century Spain through the writings of Teresa of Avila. I will next place the understandings of these two different times and places into dialogue, in a mutually critical correlation with each other and with understandings of companionship within the communion of saints, in order to see what each can both teach and learn from the other sources about friendship with others, with God, and with the saints.

CHAPTER FIVE

TERESA OF AVILA, SPIRITUAL COMPANIONSHIP, AND THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS: A MUTUALLY CRITICAL DIALOGUE

This chapter begins a mutually critical dialogue between the practice of true friendship as described by Teresa of Avila, practices of contemporary spiritual companionship, and theological sources that describe relationships within the communion of saints. As noted earlier, there are few descriptions of the practice of spiritual companionship with saints. This chapter will lay a foundation for suggested practices of companionship with saints, describing characteristics of such relationships as well as developing a theological grounding and norms for these practices.

There are three parts to this preparatory work. In the first section, the two sets of practices already described—the true friendship of Teresa and contemporary practices of spiritual companionship—will be placed in a mutually critical dialogue in order to analyze characteristics of spiritual companionship that may be applicable to relationships of spiritual companionship with saints and to explore the theological basis and norms for these practices. In the second section, two theological sources that use companionship as a model for relationships within the communion of saints—Anglican theology, derived from liturgical practice, and the writings of Elizabeth Johnson—will be explored, in order to provide a theological basis for a practice of companionship with saints as well as to suggest norms for such a practice. In the third section, these theological understandings and norms will be placed in a mutually critical dialogue with the understandings and norms from the first section in order to move toward a full-bodied practical theology of spiritual companionship with saints. Finally, Teresa of Avila will be
used as a case study to show how the concept of mutually critical dialogue might be envisioned within a relationship of companionship with a saint. This practical theology exercise will provide the grounding for the practices of spiritual companionship with saints that will be discussed in chapter six.

**Views of Spiritual Friendship in Dialogue: Teresa of Avila and Contemporary Practice**

Contemporary practices of spiritual companionship were explored because they seemed to have some features in common with Teresa of Avila’s understanding of true friendship. Not the least of these features was the common theme of friendship or companionship. After having explored in detail Teresa’s understanding in chapter three and contemporary understandings in chapter four, it is time to begin a mutually critical dialogue between these sets of practices, in order to explore characteristics of spiritual companionship and to look at the ways in which these understandings have been or might be applied to relationships with the saints. First, however, I need to explore how one might engage in a mutually critical dialogue with a saint.

**Dialogue with Historical Figures**

What might a mutually critical dialogue with a sixteenth-century Spanish Carmelite nun on the subject of spiritual companionship entail? Dreyer argues that “a more detailed exploration of the theology and spirituality of ancestors can awaken consciousness of the communion of saints, reminding us that we are part of a larger story.”¹ The story of which Teresa is a part encompasses contemporary Christians and current practices as well. In such dialogue, then,

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¹ Dreyer, “An Advent of the Spirit,” 150.
contemporary Christians are reminded that they are part of a larger story and part of a larger company of the friends of God, who have also been practicing companionship with God and each other. This company is often referred to as the communion of saints.

Dialogue with historical sources is potentially problematic. As noted in chapter two, there are issues in the use of historic texts and authors to support or to challenge current practice. Current assumptions, understandings, and issues can make it difficult for researchers to view these authors and texts in ways consistent with the author’s own self-understanding, and such a viewpoint is important in any mutually critical dialogue. Although it is dangerous to presume to understand, much less speak for, people from one’s own context, culture, and time, the difficulties mount when figures are separated by time, geography, and social context. That does not mean that contemporary scholars can say nothing about what Teresa believed, but such work does require an admission that any attempt to speak in Teresa’s voice is likely to be only partially successful. Dreyer argues that this provides an invitation to scholars. “The invitation then, is to embrace the scholarly virtues of humility and tentativeness, and view a certain amount of indeterminacy as a hermeneutical strength rather than weakness.”

As Dreyer argues, one should not abandon the possibility of hearing these voices and even allowing them to engage contemporary concerns and questions. However, according to Dreyer, we need to “raise historical awareness to the same level of sophistication as knowledge of critical theory.” I argued in chapter two that two essential elements in this task were a willingness to engage with the whole corpus of an author’s work (rather than smaller, selected excerpts) and a deep historical-contextual analysis. This was the work that I did in chapter three,

3. Ibid.
first placing Teresa in her historical context, then examining all of her writings for the ways in which she spoke of friendship. The contextual analysis in the first part of chapter three was then used to discern Teresa’s understanding of the concept of true friendship.

As I begin the mutually critical dialogue between Teresa’s understanding of the practice of friendship and current understandings of the practice of spiritual companionship, I will need to continue to keep in mind the two very different contexts of the dialogue partners, so that I am not tempted to claim more similarities than may be warranted. I do not claim that I know exactly what Teresa thought about spiritual companionship, but rather that her writings, understood within the context of sixteenth-century Spain, argue for a certain understanding of this concept, an understanding that may illuminate and/or challenge contemporary understandings of spiritual companionship. Even in the discussion of contemporary practice and understandings of spiritual companionship, I will need to claim some indeterminacy. There is hardly a current, universal understanding of spiritual companionship.

As noted earlier, the use of historical texts both to understand and to transform current practice is one of the places where there is overlap between the disciplines of spirituality and practical theology. In this current study, I am using both disciplines in order to enrich the study of spiritual companionship. The discipline of spirituality encouraged the deep historical-contextual analysis that was the essential precursor to this mutually critical dialogue. Practical theology, on the other hand, provided the concept of a mutually critical dialogue between contemporary practice and historical texts. Together, these two steps yield a strong method for allowing historical texts and authors to illuminate and also to challenge current spiritual practice. A key concept that will be important in my methodology is mutually critical dialogue, defined as dialogue in which each source retains its independent voice while illuminating and challenging
the other. In this mutually critical dialogue, I will use the three sets of paired themes described in chapter four in the discussion of contemporary views of spiritual companionship. Since the purpose of this section is to allow Teresa’s writings on friendship to enter into a mutually critical dialogue with current practice, some common terminology is necessary for such dialogue, and these terms, while not identical to those used by Teresa, provide enough overlap to allow such a dialogue to occur.

Teresa in Conversation with Contemporary Themes in Spiritual Companionship

In this mutually critical dialogue, I am using categories derived from my analysis of current practices of spiritual companionship in chapter four. While familiar to contemporary practitioners, these categories might have seemed strange or puzzling to Teresa. Her way of expressing her understanding would not have used all of the terms that I will be using, and yet I will argue that, at least in some cases, what is meant by these terms—journey and intimacy, affirmation and confrontation, growth in relationship with God and personal transformation—is part of Teresa’s understanding as well. Teresa’s voice, as captured in her writings, joins in a mutually critical dialogue with current practice. This dialogue engages not only the practices themselves but also the theological understandings and norms of these practices, for in the terminology of practical theology these are “theory-laden” practices.4

Unless the dialogue is meant to simply be an airing of views, some type of norm is needed in order to evaluate the contributions of the participants. I am choosing to use a norm based on the two great commandments: love of God and love of neighbor.5 Since the purpose of

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4. The terminology of “theory-laden” practices is borrowed from Browning. See Browning, A Fundamental Practical Theology, 7.
this movement is to develop a practical theology of spiritual companionship with saints that could suggest and guide current practices, the question then becomes, “How do these understandings of spiritual companionship either foster or frustrate the growth of contemporary Christians in their love of God and of neighbor?” In framing the question this way, I am acknowledging that practices need to be rooted in a particular context. This does not mean, however, that Teresa has nothing to say to the contemporary context. Her very different context and understandings may very well illuminate blind spots in current understandings and challenge contemporary practice in important ways. Likewise, contemporary practice may illuminate and challenge Teresa’s understanding of true friendship.

A major difference between Teresa’s understanding of spiritual companionship and that of contemporary practitioners is in the description of the nature of the journey. Although the image of journey as a metaphor for the spiritual life was familiar to her, Teresa’s conception of the journey seems to be a more hazardous one than that imagined by many contemporary practitioners. While they acknowledge that there are dangers and hazards along the road, Teresa likens this journey to entering a battle, a battle where one’s life is at stake—a battle which, once engaged, must be seen through to its final conclusion, and whose outcome is in doubt:

He knows that come what may he will not turn back. As in the case of one who is in a battle, he knows that if he is conquered they won’t spare him his life and that if he doesn’t die in battle he will die afterward. He struggles with greater determination and wants to fight like a desperado—as they say—and he doesn’t fear the blows so much, because he is convinced of how important victory is and that for him to conquer is to live.  

6. Teresa of Avila, Way, 23.5, 127; “Ya sabe que, venga lo que viniere, no ha de tornar atrás. Es como uno que está en una batalla, que sabe, si le vencen, no le perdonarán la vida, y que ya que no muere en la batalla ha de morir después; pelea con más determinación, y quiere vender bien su vida, como dicen, y no teme tanto los golpes, porque lleva adelante lo que le importa la victoria y que le va la vida en vencer.” Teresa de Jesus, Camino [Valladolid], 23.5, 334-35.
Although the current descriptions of spiritual companionship do emphasize the importance of the journey, they focus almost exclusively upon the benefits of the journey: growing in one’s relationship with God and personal transformation. Little is written about what might be in store for those who fail to undertake the journey, or those who begin it only to turn back or to become lost.

Although Teresa will speak of the delights awaiting those who undertake this journey, she is also concerned to point out the dangers of failure. Teresa makes it clear that one’s very life and salvation are at stake, and that there are not simply obstacles and barriers on the way, but forces actively opposing this quest. Those who are newly journeying are at the greatest risk, “for the devil intimidates persons who don’t yet fully know the goodness of the Lord through experience, even though they know it through faith.” For Teresa, this journey of faith is a much more terrifying journey, with seemingly more at stake than many contemporary descriptions depict. A contemporary exception that parallels Teresa’s conception of a dangerous journey can be found in the migration narratives collected by Hagan. However, although Hagan argues that these journeys are deeply spiritual, the dangers of the journey are to be found in this world. Teresa, on the other hand, argues that the spiritual, inward journey is the more dangerous one.

While human friendship is important on the journey, as Teresa makes clear in other places, it is the friendship with Christ that preserves the soul from all dangers. So, although one may have other companions on the journey, the real companion on the journey is Christ.

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7. Teresa of Avila, *Way*, 23.5, 127; “…porque acovarda mucho a personas que aún no conocen del todo la bondad de el Señor por espiriencia, aunque le conocen por fe..” Teresa de Jesus, *Camino [Valladolid]*, 23.5, 335.

8. “In unexpected ways, then, the migration journey strengthens and intensifies religious commitment and becomes a spiritual journey.” Hagan, *Migration Miracle*, 167.

reliance upon Christ as the one who is the companion and who preserves life is also an important theme in Hagan’s migration narratives. The theme of Christ as the companion on this journey is strongly emphasized both by Teresa and in the Latino/a understandings of companionship already explored.

That does not mean that Teresa thinks human companionship on the journey is unimportant; however, she does not particularly associate spiritual companionship with accompanying another on a journey. If anything, Teresa sees a spiritual companion as one who, because of their own experience, can offer advice to others about the spiritual life, or even more as someone who can serve as matchmaker between another and the true Friend and bridegroom, rather than as a fellow voyager. The role of the spiritual companion, or friend of Jesus, is to present others to Jesus so that they might enter into that same type of friendship. As in the case of Teresa and García de Toledo, this role might take the form of begging, even demanding, that God make the other very good, fit to be a friend not only of the intercessor but of Jesus as well.

This shows one other distinction between Teresa’s idea of friendship and current ideas of spiritual companionship. For Teresa, the friend was actively involved in the other’s life,

11. “He [the devil] knows that the complete remedy for a soul lies in consulting the friends of God.” Teresa of Avila, Life, 23.4, 202; “Sabe él que está todo el medio de un alma en tratar con amigos de Dios...” Teresa de Jesus, Vida, 23.4, 127.
12. “I recall that after having begged Him with many tears for that soul, that it be truly committed to His service, I said that even though I considered him good this didn’t satisfy me, since I wanted him to be very good; and so I said to His Majesty: ‘Lord, You must not deny me this favor; see how this individual is fit to be our friend.’” Teresa of Avila, Life, 34.8, 297; “Acuérdate que le dije esto, después de pedirle con hartas lágrimas aquella alma pusiese en su servicio muy de veras; que aunque yo le tenía por bueno, no me contentava, que le quería muy bueno, y así le dije: ‘Señor, no me havéis de negar esta merced; mirad que es bueno este sujeto para nuestro amigo.’” Teresa de Jesus, Vida, 34.8, 186.
13. Teresa of Avila, Life, 34.8, 297.
deciding what they needed for their growth and pursuing their betterment with force and vigor, something that is not really captured by the notion of a companion on a journey. In fact, many contemporary writers would argue against that understanding of companionship, seeing the companion in a more supportive but less intrusive role. In the case of many of the contemporary American mainline Protestant, Anglican, and Roman Catholic authors, there is less comfort with a companion or friend deciding what the other needs. Edwards reminds spiritual companions of the need to listen in silence, and only “occasionally speak when something is heard in that openness that seems to be meant for the directee.”

In current descriptions of spiritual friendship, there is a humility—an acknowledgment that what one hears, or thinks one hears, even in deep listening may not really be the voice of God. As Brown and Orr argue, spiritual companions need to let others decide how to resolve their own dilemmas, even when they may think they know the right way for their companion. For Edwards, it is not that one knows the direction the other should take. Instead, there is a “shared discernment, a shared sense of what is happening and what is called for, a mutual confirmation.”

In this caution is a humility, an acknowledgment of the inability of one person to ever truly know the will of God for another. Teresa, living in sixteenth-century Spain, was more comfortable with a hierarchical relationship, believing that God was at work through these unequal relationships even while acknowledging that her superior could and did err.

For Teresa, such mutual discernment might eventually occur, and she prayed that it might occur. However, she also experienced many cases where the two companions did not see eye to eye.

eye. When she thought that John of the Cross and Fray Antonio were being too severe with their penitential practices, as foundress she scolded them for adding penances that were not part of the rule. Their hermitages were very small, not even allowing them to stand straight, and very cold, with windows that allowed the snow to cover their habits as they prayed. They refused to wear sandals even for journeys in the snow. In addition, their monastery was adorned with many crosses and skulls. Although Teresa admired them for their strict asceticism, she was aware that excesses in ascetical practices were often problematic. Afraid that their insistence on ascetical practices beyond those required by the rule might jeopardize the first discalced monastery for monks, she told them that she thought they were giving the devil an opening to end what had barely begun. Teresa advised moderation, advice that they refused to take.\textsuperscript{17} As monks and as priests, however, they were not directly under her authority, and when they refused to alter their ascetical practices, she accepted their decision. In her relations with her nuns, however, her authority was clear, and she expected them to obey her without question. In contrast to her worries that the monks’ penances were too severe, she remonstrated with her nuns when they used light illnesses as an excuse for not following the rule, arguing that doing so led to too much pampering of the body.\textsuperscript{18}

For Teresa, there was always one of the pair of companions who was more advanced in the spiritual life, one who heard more clearly what God was saying, and that companion had the duty to make sure the other followed the way that led to friendship with God. Although there was a more hierarchical element in Teresa’s conception of friendship than there often is in

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contemporary conceptions, such spiritual authority did not always reside in the culturally expected places. Often Teresa would turn the tables on her confessors, becoming a spiritual guide to them instead, as she did with García de Toledo. Mutual discernment might come, and often Teresa prayed to Christ for her own confessors to come to hear what Christ was telling her, but there were times when action could not wait for mutual discernment because a soul was at stake. Teresa would challenge current understandings of spiritual companionship that deny the very real distinctions between companions and deny that obedience can be an important element in the relationship.

Although current descriptions of spiritual companionship underscore the importance of an intimate relationship, this is not a major theme in Teresa’s writings. As such friendships were an expected part of religious life, the importance of sharing one’s spiritual life and experience was assumed in Teresa’s context in a way that it is not assumed by many Christians today. However, in his theology of friendship, Wadell argues that the worshiping community needs to fulfill this role for people today:

The capacity to speak and live the truth should be engendered in a life of friendship with God not only through the liturgy and worship of the Church but also through lives of prayer, through the reception of the sacraments, through constant meditation on the Scriptures, and through ongoing communal support. In addition, relationships with

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19. Although even in spiritual direction, the hierarchical nature of the relationship is usually minimized, there are those arguing for a place in spiritual direction for a relationship more like that of the Desert Fathers with those who came to them for a word. For one discussion of this, see Blackie, “Finding the Divine Hotspots,” 27.


21. “All the Sisters should give the prioress a monthly account of how they have done in prayer, of how the Lord is leading them, for His Majesty will give her light so that if they are not proceeding well she might guide them.” Teresa of Avila, *Constitutions*, 41, 331-32; “Den todas las hermanas a la priora cada mes una vez cuenta de
confessors, which also served as more formal spiritual direction relationships, were very important in sixteenth-century Spain. Some of Teresa’s relationships with confessors would turn into intimate relationships, true spiritual friendships in the current sense. In all relationships, however, even relationships with those who were hostile to her, Teresa believed it was important to share as fully as possible, for often one’s critics better served the discernment process than those who were strong supporters. Intimacy was not a requirement for Teresa, as it often seems to be for contemporary companions, for God could work equally well—and sometimes better—through one’s opponents. Even when natural sympathy was lacking and even when the confessor was initially in opposition to what Christ had commanded Teresa to do, she trusted that God would fulfill God’s promises through her confessor:

As often as the Lord commanded something of me in prayer and my confessor told me to do otherwise, the Lord returned and told me to obey my confessor; afterward His Majesty would change the confessor’s mind, and he would agree with the Lord’s command.

Although she shared her spiritual experiences with a wide variety of people, she notes the importance of talking with those who shared similar experiences. It is these experiences of sharing with others on the same path that may be more analogous to contemporary depictions of spiritual friendship. She spoke of her own difficulties when she could find no one who

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la manera que se han aprovechado en la oracion y cómo las lleva nuestro Señor, que Su Majestad le dará luz para que, si no van bien, las guíe…” Teresa de Jesus, Constituciones, 9.8, 833.

22. “The safest thing, as the Lord told me, is to make known to my confessor the whole state of my soul and the favors God grants me, that he be learned, and that I obey him.” Teresa of Avila, Life, 26.3, 225; “Lo más seguro es…que no deje de comunicar toda mi alma y las mercedes que el Señor me hace con el confesor, y que sea letrado, y que le obedezca.” Teresa de Jesus, Vida, 26.3, 141.

23. Teresa of Avila, Life, 26.5, 226; “Siempre que el Señor me mandava una cosa en la oración, si el confesor me decía otra, me tornava el mismo Señor a decir que le obedeciese; después Su Majestad le volvía par que me lo tornase a mandar.” Teresa de Jesus, Vida, 26.5, 142.
understood her, and of the great joy and relief it was to talk with someone who understood her way of prayer:

After I spoke with that servant of God—for he was very much so and most wise—all about my soul, as to someone who well knew this language, he explained to me what I was experiencing and greatly encouraged me.²⁴

Although Teresa valued learning and believed that some learned men might, through their study, attain a degree of understanding,²⁵ she believed it was those who actually shared a similar experience who were able to truly nourish and support someone in the life of prayer. The importance of shared experience is also echoed in current descriptions of spiritual friendship. Benner argues that, although spiritual friendship can spring up even among people who are quite different, “the most intimate forms of spiritual friendship…are restricted to those on a similar spiritual journey.”²⁶

In addition to the focus upon intimacy, current descriptions of spiritual companionship highlight the importance of affirmation. Teresa appreciated the affirmation that she got from those who shared her own experiences, and she speaks of the importance of having people who can support one in one’s own spiritual journey, particularly at the beginning of a life of prayer. However, she often seems to speak more of the importance of challenge in order to help people grow in virtue and in their friendship with God. Although both affirmation and challenge are a part of Teresa’s and contemporary understandings of spiritual companionship, the focus and

²⁴. Teresa of Avila, Life, 23.16, 207-08; “Tratando con aquel siervo de Dios—que lo era harto y bien aislado—told mi alma, como quien bien sabía este lenguaje, me declaró lo que era y me animó mucho.” Teresa de Jesus, Vida, 23.16, 131.

²⁵. “Learning is a great help for shedding light upon every matter. It will be possible to find both learning and goodness in some persons. And the more the Lord favors you in prayer, the more necessary it will be that your prayer and good works have a good foundation.” Teresa of Avila, Way, 5.2, 59; “Son gran cosa letras para dar en todo luz. Será posible hallar lo uno y lo otro junto en algunas personas; y mientras más merced el Señor os hiciere en la oración, es menester más ir bien fundadas sus obras y oración.” Teresa de Jesus, Camino [Valladolid], 5.2, 260.

²⁶. Benner, Sacred Companions, 80.
perhaps importance has shifted from challenge to affirmation in the last five centuries. Both, however, would agree with Wadell, who argued,

> Spiritual friends do not see us changing in ways that are harmful and keep silent. They are willing to be truthful with us because they care for us and do not want us to imperil the most promising possibility of our lives: our friendship with God.\(^{27}\)

Personal transformation was something that Teresa expected to happen in relationships of spiritual companionship, but she would likely have been puzzled by language such as “becoming all that he or she was intended to be.”\(^{28}\) Teresa would speak of growth in virtue and goodness, reaching a virtue that even exceeded that of the normal religious life,\(^{29}\) as a prerequisite to growing not into who one is called to be but instead into the likeness of Christ. The goal was growing more Christ-like so that nothing would separate the soul from Christ.\(^{30}\) For Teresa, this union with Christ was the common goal of all Christians. The idea that each individual had a personal goal that was somehow apart or distinct from the goal of all Christians is not found in her writings.

In fact, due to the strong class differences in Spain that often separated nuns from each other in traditional monasteries, Teresa emphasized the importance not of the individuality of her nuns but of their sameness and equality. In her reformed monasteries, differences due to class and social status were erased: all were clad, housed, and fed the same way. Instead of encouraging her nuns to claim their particular calling, she followed the more traditional ascetical

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28. Ibid., 16.
30. Ibid., 4.3, 243-44.
route, encouraging her nuns to free themselves from all attachments to particular goals or
outcomes:

I repeat that the whole matter, or a great part of it, lies in losing concern about
ourselves and our own satisfaction. The least that any of us who has truly begun
to serve the Lord can offer Him is our own life. Since we have given the Lord our
will, what do we fear?  

Although contemporary commentators might see in Teresa’s description a route for becoming
all that one was intended to be, her insistence upon giving up one’s whole will and losing all
concern for one’s own satisfaction often sits uneasily with current understandings of being all
that one can be. Conversely, Teresa would have likely been skeptical of contemporary paths to
personal transformation as being too concerned with one’s own comfort and desires. While she
did note that some who seemed to practice an easier path did appear to find friendship with God,
she believed that the deepest friendship with God was reserved for those who were willing to
give up everything for Christ’s sake, and who embraced suffering not only willingly but eagerly,
for such signs of tribulation, according to Teresa, were signs of the Lord’s favor. For Teresa,
atttempts to make the path easier were fraught with danger.

For Teresa, the ultimate goal of any friendship was to bring others to friendship with
Christ. Even in her time, however, such a goal was far from universally embraced. Friendships
often deviated from this ideal even in monasteries, and nuns who were trying to develop their
friendship with Christ “must be more cautious and dissimulating in speaking about the friendship
they desired to have with God than in speaking of other friendships and attachments that the

31. Teresa of Avila, Way, 12.2, 82; “Torno a decir que está el todo u gran parte en perder cuidado de
nosotros mismos y nuestro regalo; que quien de verdad comienza a servir a el Señor, lo menos que le puede ofrecer
es la vida; pues le ha dado su voluntad, ¿qué teme?” Teresa de Jesus, Camino [Valladolid], 12.2, 283.
33. Teresa of Avila, Meditations, 2.22, 232.
devil arranges in monasteries.” 34 One can hear a similar echo in current descriptions of this spiritual practice as well. According to Bamberger, “learning to speak without embarrassment of such feelings and experiences of the love of God is a neglected task for most persons of our culture.” 35 The neglect of this task, and the need for companions to support each other in speaking of their experiences of the love and friendship of Christ, may be common elements in both sixteenth-century Spain and twenty-first-century America.

For both Teresa and writers on spiritual companionship today, the ultimate goal of spiritual friendship is to bring people closer to God. As Burrell puts it, “Friends then become friends in the one who offers us friendship with God.” 36 Bankson agrees that our friendships with others and our friendship with God are intimately connected. We “learn the substance of a relationship with God through the discipline of a committed friendship.” 37 For Goizueta, the role of the saints among us is to bring others closer to Christ. “If we are drawn to Christ, therefore, it will likely not be because we have been convinced by theological arguments, but because we have been inspired by the witness of his martyrs and saints.” 38 Teresa would agree in similar words, exhorting her nuns to offer spiritual friendship with others since “in these times...staunch

34. Teresa of Avila, Life, 7.5, 85; “…y más cautela y disimulación ha de tener para hablar en la amistad que desea tener con Dios, que en otras amistades y voluntades que el demonio ordena en los monesterios.” Teresa de Jesus, Vida, 7.5, 54.


37. Bankson, Seasons of Friendship, 97.

friends of God are necessary to sustain the weak, “39 so that they may also become friends of God.

Thus there is much in common between Teresa’s understanding of spiritual companionship and current practices, but there are distinct differences in emphasis that provide challenge as well. The image of companionship is similar in both, although when Teresa speaks of the journey, she focuses on the dangers and the need to have Christ as a companion in order to survive. In this insistence upon the dangers and the need for Christ as a companion, she echoes themes in the migration journeys; however, in the latter case, the dangers are external, whereas Teresa’s focus is upon the internal journey and the warfare required. Teresa likewise agrees with the need for both affirmation and confrontation in relationships of spiritual companionship. However, in her writings, she frequently speaks more highly of confrontation: through opposition and even oppression, often more strongly than through affirmation, one is personally transformed. This personal transformation is not, however, described in terms of living up to one’s potential, but as growing in virtue and likeness to Christ. Finally, for Teresa, relationships of spiritual companionship were often inherently hierarchical. While Teresa could, and often did, invert these relationships with her confessors so that she served as a spiritual director to them, she always acknowledged both their authority over her, as confessor and priest, as well as her need to practice strict obedience. Likewise, her relationships with her “daughters” were understood in a hierarchical way. For Teresa, living in sixteenth-century Spain, relationships of true equality were not the norm.

39. Teresa of Avila, Life, 15.5, 141; “…en especial en estos tiempos que son menester amigos fuertes de Dios para sustentar los flacos…” Teresa de Jesus, Vida, 15.5, 89.
Spiritual Companionship with the Saints

As noted in chapter three, Teresa spoke about her relationship with saints in ways that were very similar to the way that she spoke about spiritual friendship with contemporaries, and in one place she extolled the saints as better companions than those still on earth. From the point of view of Teresa, such a relationship of spiritual companionship across time and space was possible. The question then becomes what contemporary understandings of spiritual companionship might have to say, in turn, to Teresa about such a relationship with the saints.

Although the idea of spiritual companionship with the saints is not a major topic in current spiritual companionship literature, there are writers who do talk about that type of relationship today. Benner cites the importance of historical figures in his own journey toward God, saying, “God gave me the Christian mystics as spiritual friends and used them to direct me toward a deeper experience of him.” Sellner notes that stories of anamcharas indicate that those relationships were not ended by death.

There are also contemporary accounts of people who have relationships of spiritual companionship with a particular saint. Lou Ella Hickman calls Edith Stein her friend, companion, and spiritual mentor. Wadell claimed Thomas Aquinas as his friend and the inspiration for his book on friendship. As noted earlier, Barbara Mujica and Kevin Feeney

40. Ibid., 38.6, 332.
42. Sellner, The Celtic Soul Friend, 209.
44. Wadell, Becoming Friends, 9.
claim Teresa as a spiritual guide and mentor. In his book, *My Life with the Saints*, James Martin tells his memoirs as a journey in which a wide variety of saints have served as companions. He argues that “God in his wisdom has also given us these companions of Jesus to accompany us along the way, so why not accept the gift of their friendship and encouragement.” These accounts raise two questions: “Why do these figures from widely different contexts still speak to people today?” and “What is it that they are providing for contemporary Christians?” Edwards notes that the spiritual journey can be difficult if we find ourselves in a place where those around us do not support the path that we are following, a problem Teresa knew all too well. In that case, Edwards says, if “there is little room or understanding of the path you seem to be called to walk now, then you may have to find a spiritual companion from a more sympathetic tradition.” When that problem arose for Teresa, she turned to the saints, and she suggested to her readers that if they had similar problems, they should turn to St. Joseph as well. Such a turning to the saints seems to be the case for at least some of those authors mentioned above. In the saints, they have found sympathetic companions. Benner writes,

> From distant places and times these wise Christians are able to reach across generations, cultures and denominational boundaries to offer soul-nourishing guidance to those seeking accompaniment on the Christian spiritual journey. We should be careful not to neglect or despise them simply because they may seem unlike us—possibly overly serious, perhaps too otherworldly, maybe associated with another branch of the Christian church. In reality they are fellow pilgrims who, as part of the cloud of witnesses that surrounds us on the journey, offer us important accompaniment and spiritual guidance.

Hickman also specifically argues for the importance of having a saint as a spiritual companion. She defined this companionship as “a dynamic relationship, one that can be lived out as shared discovery on the journey toward God.”\(^{51}\) She argues that this relationship is not only one of true friendship, but it is a gift from God, who will send you the saint you need when you need him or her.\(^{52}\) Martin believes that the saints are “on my side, that they want me to succeed in the Christian life…This is impossible to prove, but since first encountering them, I’ve believed that they were praying for me.”\(^{53}\)

Why are the saints so important? Burrell claims, “We can only learn how to be friends with God from those who have learned already, and it turns out that they have learned from others as well.”\(^{54}\) Goizueta writes, “In the final analysis, it is not the rationality of theological arguments that will convince us of the truth of the Christian faith, but the beauty of those lives in which that faith in incarnated and made visible and palpable.”\(^{55}\) Although they are referring primarily to contemporary companions, they point out an important truth. Knowledge of how to be a friend of God is embodied in the people who are friends of God, and this knowledge is handed down, not primarily through teaching, but through relationships. Through the saints, then, contemporary Christians can learn something important about being a friend of God, and helping others to become friends of God is the ultimate goal of spiritual friendship. Although perhaps not able to verbalize why saints have been important to Christians through the centuries, ordinary Christians have testified to the importance of saints in their life. Hickman says, “In our

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52. Ibid., 88.
53. Martin, My Life with the Saints, 376.
54. Burrell, Friendship and Ways to Truth, 58.
55. Goizueta, Christ Our Companion, 3.
time, not only are saints in vogue, but ordinary people know they need them.” She suggests that all the rest of us take a lesson from the ordinary people in their companionship with the saints.

Imagining Spiritual Companionship with Teresa and Other Saints

It is one thing to speak of the possibility of saints serving as spiritual companions, but another thing to imagine on what basis a claim for this continuing relationship might be made, what such a relationship might look like, and finally how we judge the sometimes contradictory notions of spiritual companionship and spiritual life across time and space. To do all of this, we need a theological foundation on which to build.

As Hauerwas and Laura Yordy argue, friendship is an important Christian virtue, for through friendship the body of Christ is built up. For Hauerwas and Yordy, as important as the present relationships are, Christian friendship is larger: “…such friendship is not only with those now present but with those who have gone before; we call this the communion of saints.” The communion of saints provides not only a theological rationale for a continued relationship with those who have gone before, but also glimpses of what it might mean to have a saint as a spiritual companion today. The next section will explore the concept of the communion of saints as friends of God as well as the implications this has for considering saints, particularly the example of Teresa of Avila, as spiritual companions today. These understandings will then be

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placed in a mutually critical dialogue with the understandings of spiritual companionship already discussed.

**Theological Sources for Companionship in the Communion of Saints**

Spiritual companionship with the saints has been and continues to be practiced. Teresa practiced such companionship with several saints, notably St. Joseph. Benner found companionship with the mystics. Mujica talks about companionship with Teresa herself. Although their descriptions of companionship vary, all three of these examples show a lived understanding of the communion of saints. The doctrine of the communion of saints provides a theological rationale for a continued relationship between the saints and contemporary Christians. However, this relationship can be and has been conceived in many different ways. Through church history, the saints have been considered as role models, as companions, as intercessors, and as mediators. Different Christian communities have tended to favor one of these possibilities over another, and companionship is only one of the possibilities that can be envisioned. Can the doctrine of the communion of saints provide a theological basis for practices of spiritual companionship with saints for people today, a relationship that is analogous to that described between contemporaries? I will argue that it not only can do so but also suggests theological norms to help evaluate such relationships.

In developing a practical theology of companionship with saints, I will draw on upon two sources: the theology of Anglican/Episcopal churches with regard to the communion of saints, as lived out in liturgical practice, and the writings of the Roman Catholic feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson. Companionship is a key element in the understanding of relationships within the communion of saints in both of these sources, and the idea of saints as companions for
Christians today is supported in both, although the understandings of the type of companionship described varies. Anglican sources argue for a living, personal relationship between the saints and contemporary Christians, analogous to the ways in which spiritual companionship is described with contemporaries. Although Johnson does not rule out the possibility of such relationships, she advocates a relationship of companionship mediated through story, which does not depend upon postulating a continuing personal existence for the saints.

The Communion of Saints in Anglican Worship

In the introduction to his book on the communion of saints, Michael Perham argues that “throughout the history of the Church there has been some attempt to retain a theological rationale for whatever commemoration of the departed a particular age has adopted.” Although as a practical theologian I might put it differently—that practice gives rise to theology—it is true that the understanding of the communion of saints has undergone significant changes within the Anglican Communion in recent years. In many cases, these shifts in theological understanding were based upon evolving liturgical practice. In the earliest Anglican liturgical sources, practices dealing with the saints were greatly curtailed and calendars of saints were initially reduced to Biblical saints. Particularly in the last fifty years, however, there has been a growing interest in and expansion of liturgical practice around the saints. Although early Anglican sources were focused upon saints as role models, rejecting the idea of saints as mediators, current liturgical sources are more likely to describe the relationships of saints with contemporary Christians in terms that indicate a living, shared relationship of encouragement. Although this has not always been in case in Anglican history, in these current Anglican sources the saints are

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described as spiritual companions, an understanding of companionship with the saints that reflects current Anglican understandings of the doctrine of the communion of saints. As a full history of understandings of the communion of saints is beyond the scope of this work, I will focus upon current understandings of the doctrine, beginning with the liturgical changes that occurred with the introduction of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer in the Episcopal Church.

The Communion of Saints and the 1979 Book of Common Prayer

The process of revision of the 1928 Book of Common Prayer in the 1970s was not simply an updating of the liturgies but a radical reform. Some of these changes reflect a changed understanding of the doctrine of the communion of saints. In the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, practices that had been dropped during the Reformation were restored and practices from the early church were reappropriated. Baptism, which had often been a private event, was now a celebration of the community, “appropriately administered within the Eucharist as the chief service on a Sunday or other feast,”59 stressing the centrality of this sacrament to the life of the church. The passing of the peace was restored to the Eucharist.60 A form for private confession was included for the first time.61 Additional liturgies, such as an Easter Vigil, were included.62 Daily offices, which had been reduced to Morning and Evening Prayers, now included services such as Compline63 and a service for Noonday.64 In addition, the 1979 Book of Common Prayer

60. Ibid., 360.
61. Ibid., 447-452.
63. Ibid., 127-136.
64. Ibid., 103-107.
had an expanded sanctoral calendar, reflecting a growing interest in saints. This calendar included both biblical and historical saints.

Another change that would affect the understanding of the communion of saints was a change in the timing of baptism. Although baptism could be celebrated on any Sunday, there were four recommended times for baptism. These included the Easter Vigil, the Day of Pentecost, All Saints’ Day or the Sunday after All Saints’ Day, and the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord. In fact, in the directions for baptism, it says that “It is recommended that, as far as possible, Baptisms be reserved for these occasions or when a bishop is present.”65 By linking baptism with those particular times in the liturgical calendar, certain aspects of the understanding of baptism were emphasized. In recommending that baptisms be celebrated on All Saints’ Day, the prayer book highlighted an understanding of the communion of saints that included all of the baptized. This understanding of the communion of saints was not new to the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. It was expressed clearly in a beloved children’s hymn, “I Sing a Song of the Saints of God,” which predates the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. The final verse of that hymn ends with the assertion, “For the saints of God are just folk like me, and I mean to be one too.”66 The association of All Saints Day with baptism, however, both reinforced the understanding of all Christians as saints and increased the liturgical significance of the feast.

In addition, during this time period Lesser Feasts and Fasts, the Episcopal Church’s book of propers for the commemoration of saints’ days, went through a variety of editions, with each General Convention adding “saints” to the sanctoral calendar. The current version, Holy Women, Holy Men,67 is a much-expanded version that includes more than 300 entries. Those

65. Ibid., 12.
remembered in this book do not undergo the same type of canonization process followed in the Roman Catholic Church. They are those whose lives, in the judgment of the General Convention, reflect a life faithfully lived and provide a witness to God, and who can therefore serve as witnesses and role models. In the current version, there has been a serious attempt to include those who have been less represented in traditional listings of the saints, so as to reflect the diversity of the communion of saints.

Current Anglican Understandings of the Communion of Saints

These changes in liturgical practice in the Episcopal Church reflect changing understandings of the communion of saints within the Anglican Communion. There has, however, been little sustained theological reflection on this doctrine in the last fifty years. Changes in understandings of eucharist, baptism, and ordination have occupied Anglican scholars, and little has been written about the communion of saints. It is practice that best demonstrates these changing understandings of the doctrine in the Anglican Communion. Even in 1967, Lautz argues that “It is difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain the popular belief of Anglicans about the Communion of Saints. The closest approach to a solution lies in an examination of the liturgical books used throughout the Anglican Communion.”68

In the introductions to the books of propers for saints’ days throughout the Anglican Communion, various Anglican theologians and liturgical scholars have reflected on current practice and the changes that have been occurring in practice. These books provide one of the best sources of theological reflection about the communion of saints from an Anglican perspective. Along with a few other recent sources of theological reflection on the communion

of saints from an Anglican perspective, they offer a glimpse into current Anglican understandings of the communion of saints as reflected in the lived practice, and it is in these writings—and in the practices themselves—that the Anglican doctrine of the communion of saints is most fully explored.

In these Anglican sources, the saints are spoken of as models and also as spiritual companions actively involved in the lives of the faithful, and not as the passive conduits of God’s grace. In the introduction to *Holy Women, Holy Men*, the former Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, The Most Rev. Frank T. Griswold, states, “The men and women commemorated in the Calendar are not simply examples of faithfulness to inspire us: they are active in their love and prayer. They are companions in the Spirit able to support and encourage us as we seek to be faithful in our own day.”

A collect from the *1979 Book of Common Prayer* captures this sense of the encouragement offered by the saints:

> O God, the King of saints, we praise and glorify your holy Name for all your servants who have finished their course in your faith and fear: for the blessed Virgin Mary; for the holy patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs; and for all your other righteous servants, known to us and unknown; and we pray that, encouraged by their examples, aided by their prayers, and strengthened by their fellowship, we also may be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; through the merits of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

This theme of encouragement is also echoed by Perham, a theologian in the Church of England, who claims that encouragement is an important concept in Anglican understandings of the role of saints.

As noted, saints in the Anglican tradition do not go through an extensive process of canonization. No miracles are required, and there is no fundamental difference between the

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saints and the faithful still on earth.\textsuperscript{72} In the introduction to the book of propers for the Anglican Church of Canada, compiler Stephen Reynolds states that “The Anglican Communion does not commend saints to our remembrance because of their present state or status beyond the grave. It is for the sake of their evident righteousness while they lived in our midst that we give thanks to God for them, call them ‘saints,’ and pray for grace to follow their examples.”\textsuperscript{73} This was also noted in the collect quoted above.

Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, argues,

Now when the New Testament, especially St. Paul, talks about ‘holy people’, it doesn’t mean quite what we might mean by ‘saints’, it isn’t offering a sort of verdict on a lot of spectacularly good lives, Christian people are ‘holy’ simply because they have been adopted by God into relationship, into that family relationship expressed in saying ‘Our Father’.\textsuperscript{74}

Holiness for Anglicans, then, is made possible by baptism, that adoption into the family of God, and not by virtuous living. Although the saints might manifest the quality of holiness more clearly, Daniel E. Joslyn-Siemiatkoski and Ruth A. Meyers argue that “on an anthropological level they are no different from any other baptized Christian.”\textsuperscript{75} The baptismal liturgy includes a prayer thanking God for “making us worthy to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”\textsuperscript{76} It is baptism that confers this worthiness. A traditional All Saints’ Day hymn also stresses this essential equality of the whole communion of saints, an equality that is central to an

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., xii-xiii.

\textsuperscript{73} Stephen Reynolds, compiler, \textit{For All the Saints: Prayers and Readings for Saints’ Days: According to the Calendar of the Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada} (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1994), 18.

\textsuperscript{74} Rowan Williams, \textit{Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief} (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 111-12.


\textsuperscript{76} \textit{1979 Book of Common Prayer}, 311.
understanding of companionship or friendship: Christians today still struggle, while the saints do not, “Yet all are one in thee, For all are thine.” 77

Michael Perham argues that this understanding of the saints allows Anglicans to acknowledge the saints as both graced and flawed, an understanding echoed by Rowan Williams. Williams argues that saints have their weaknesses and their failures: perfection may not be the defining characteristic of saints. What is important in holiness is not perfection, but “constantly and courageously standing in a place where the light comes through.” 78

In his book on Williams’ theology, Benjamin Myers argues that Williams sees saints not as people exhibiting wholeness but as the opposite. 79 Saints are those whose lives have been skewed out of their previous world by contact with “the strange world of God,” 80 and through whom others are given glimpses of that other world. 81 This understanding of the imperfection of saints allows a wide variety of people to be considered saints, including those whose lives and witness may be considered to be odd or unsettling.

Instead of perfection, Anglicans are content to discern that saints are moving closer to God:

For, if we believe that, even for the greatest of saints, there is growth in self-knowledge and in both knowledge and love of God to follow after death as well as before it, we become less concerned to find in the life of the saint perfection of living. Instead we are content to discern the right direction in movement towards God. Because we feel this need only to discern direction, rather than perfection, we are less concerned to idealise the saints. We are happier to present them

80. Ibid., 77.
81. Ibid.
‘warts and all.’ This represents not so much a lowering of standards but a more honest presentation of them. It so happens that it also makes the saints more attractive to a generation that has little interest in heroes ‘ten foot tall.’

Even in the most virtuous of lives, however, the saints have not yet reached perfection according to the Anglican tradition. Like the faithful on earth, they are awaiting the final resurrection. This means that the relationship between the saints and the faithful is more mutual. Reynolds writes,

The souls of the saints may indeed enjoy perfection, but it is only their souls. Their humanity, which includes their bodies, still awaits the promise of resurrection...For that reason they must continue to share our hope, with the same graciousness towards us in our concerns as we show towards them in our remembrance. Our memorials and commemorations are not only an exercise in Christian history; they are also acts of companionship with those extraordinary friends of God whose spirits rejoice while their bodies rest in hope (Ps 16.9). The communion of saints is also communion with the saints.

Although the role of saints as mediators is not traditional in Anglican piety and liturgy due, in part, to the more equal relationship envisaged between the saints and the faithful, intercession can play a role in Anglican prayers; this is a sign of a living, personal relationship. Peter Hannen argues that Anglicans today share a partnership with the saints that includes mutual prayer. According to Hannen,

Mary and the saints are, for most Anglicans, objects of respect, affection and veneration more than mediums of intercessory prayer. This is not to discount the prayers of the faithful, both living and departed, on our behalf: Anglicans have a very keen sense of the Communion of Saints, and our partnership in prayer with the departed is very much part of that.

The idea that the saints pray for Christians today is also written in the official liturgies in the Canadian Book of Alternative Services as well as the South African Book of Common Prayer.

83. Reynolds, For All Saints, 18-19.
85. Ibid.
In addition, all Anglicans are reminded in weekly celebrations of the Eucharist that the saints pray with them, proclaiming, “we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven.” Comprecation, as opposed to invocation, has been more characteristic of Anglican understandings of relationships with saints. Even by 1967, Lautz argued that the practice of comprecation had been widely accepted by Anglicans, whereas the practice of invocation, while not forbidden, had been shunned.

The idea of mutual companionship is characteristic of current Anglican liturgies and writing with respect to the communion of saints. This companionship is seen as a relationship of equals: it is not hierarchical. All share in holiness by virtue of their baptism, and saints have not yet attained the final perfection that comes with the general resurrection. Saints serve contemporary Christians as models, not perfect but both graced and flawed. They provide encouragement for contemporary Christians in their own struggles to live faithful lives, and as a part of this encouragement, they pray with those Christians.

For Anglicans, the saints are spiritual companions for Christians today. This understanding of the saints is based on their understanding of the saints being alive in Christ, and so able to enter into a relationship with Christians today. This is attested to by the many liturgical sources that speak of the saints praying with Christians or encouraging Christians in their life of faith. In addition, the Anglican understanding of holiness, based as it is on baptism, leads Anglicans to see the saints and living Christians in a relationship of mutuality and basic equality. The understanding of the saints as not yet having been perfected allows Anglicans to view saints as those who share a common journey that is not yet completed—in other words, as companions. Alive in God, in mutual relationship with Christians today, the saints are celebrated in Anglican

86. 1979 Book of Common Prayer, 362.

worship as the spiritual companions they are. While practices of spiritual companionship vary, the idea of saints as spiritual companions is very much a part of Anglican liturgy today.

Anglican worship is not, however, the only place where saints are celebrated as companions. In her book, *Friends of God and Prophets*, Johnson also argues that the saints are needed companions for people today.

**Friends of God and Prophets: Johnson on the Communion of Saints**

In her book, Johnson argues for an understanding of the communion of saints as companions for people today. Basing her definition of the communion of saints on Wisdom 7:27, Johnson defines the communion of saints as “a circle of companions” who by the power of Spirit-Sophia become friends of God and prophets. 88 This circle of companions is “an intergenerational company of persons profoundly touched by the sacred, sharing in the cosmic community of life which is also sacred.” 89 Although arguing for an understanding of saints as companions, Johnson is reluctant to claim a living, personal relationship between the saints and contemporary Christians that is analogous to the relationship of spiritual companionship with contemporaries.

Johnson, in arguing for her understanding of saints as spiritual companions, approaches the task from a different history of practice than the Anglican sources do, for the idea of saints as mediators has a strong history in Roman Catholic practice. Any discussion of the saints as companions in a Roman Catholic context therefore needs to address the dominant understanding of saints as mediators and patrons, a more hierarchical understanding of the relationship of saints and contemporary Christians than is found in Anglican understandings. It is her argument against

89. Ibid.
the hegemony of the patronage model that drives Johnson’s analysis. Using her knowledge of church history, Johnson demonstrates that there have been two primary models describing the relationship of the saints to the faithful through Christian history: companionship and patronage. In choosing to argue for the saints as companions, therefore, she is not moving into new territory, but is instead reappropriating the original understanding of relationships within the communion of saints:

My study of the literature suggests that two distinctly different patterns can be glimpsed, one an egalitarian model that names others companions and friends, the other a patriarchal one that casts certain privileged dead into positions of patronage. In the first, the holy dead are an inspiration as a cloud of witnesses in the one Spirit surrounding the living with lessons of encouragement; in the second, they are heavenly intercessors before the distant throne of God obtaining good things for needy petitioners.90

This change is necessary due to changes in contemporary western culture that have made the idea of patronage unappealing to many contemporary Roman Catholics. Johnson argues that while saints as mediators are problematic in contemporary western culture, there is still a need for these spiritual companions. This shift back to the companionship model also brings her closer to the views of saints found in current Anglican theology and practice.

Her return to the earlier model of companionship is not without controversy among Roman Catholic theologians. There are those for whom the patronage model is still very important, and her rejection of this model provokes a visceral response at times. David Matzko McCarthy states, “I felt this rejection of patronage—of relationships of devotion and benefaction—in my gut. I felt a loss.”91 McCarthy interprets Johnson’s rejection of the patronage model as a rejection of any real relationship with the saints. According to McCarthy,

90. Ibid., 79.

“Johnson explains, with some regret, that the age of special, personal relationships to saints has passed.”\(^{92}\) Nathan Costa also critiques the change of models, arguing that in endorsing an “egalitarian community of friends,”\(^ {93}\) Johnson lessens “the importance and necessity of intercession,”\(^ {94}\) a key element in the patronage model.

Johnson is not, however, without supporters among Roman Catholic theologians as well. Robert P. Imbelli argues that in the companionship model that was “recovered by Vatican II, emphasis lies on the equal baptismal dignity of the entire people of God and the universal call to holiness.”\(^ {95}\) Although Johnson’s stress on the universal call to holiness in her writings on the communion of saints may seem to be radical, Imbelli notes it is in keeping with the documents of Vatican II. The language of companionship is also not unique to Johnson’s writings, but is found in key Roman Catholic documents as well. Although *Lumen Gentium* upholds the understanding of the saints as benefactors, thereby lending support to the patronage model, the language of friends is also present. “It is most fitting, therefore, that we love those friends and co-heirs of Jesus Christ who are also our brothers and outstanding benefactors, and that we give due thanks to God for them.”\(^ {96}\) Her emphasis upon a circle of companionship also has some echoes in the catechism, which states that “exactly as Christian communion among our fellow pilgrims brings us closer to Christ, so our communion with the saints joins us to Christ.”\(^ {97}\)

\(^{92}\) Ibid., 21.

\(^{93}\) Nathan Costa, “‘For All the Saints’: A Feast for All People and All Time,” *Worship* 81, no. 6 (November 2007): 487.

\(^{94}\) Ibid., 488.


\(^{97}\) *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, no date), chapter 3, article 9, paragraph 5, II.957.
In order to understand Johnson’s theology of the communion of saints, as well as the foundation for her claims of the saints as a circle of companions, it is necessary to explore her understanding of the two models for the communion of saints: the companionship model of the early church and the patronage model that is the dominant model today in Roman Catholic theology and practice.

Two Models of the Communion of Saints

According to Johnson, the companionship model was the earliest model for the communion of saints. Johnson notes that the earliest remembrances of saints focused around the martyrs. These commemorations “served to nourish the sense of community belonging.”98 In the early church, the relationship between the martyrs and the living faithful was one of mutual companionship in Christ.99 Together, the living and the dead formed a circle of friendship, “a true koinonia.”100 The lives of the martyrs were “received with profound gratitude because of how their witness to God nourishes the faith of the rest.”101 Johnson argues that “the communion of saints in the companionship model forges intergenerational bonds across time that sustain faith in strange new times and places.”102 As in the Anglican tradition, Johnson argues that theologically paradigmatic saints “have no essential spiritual advantage over the rest of their community.”103 This is in contrast, however, to the catechism, in which three different states are postulated for the faithful. “But at the present time some of his disciples are pilgrims on earth.

98. Johnson, Friends of God, 78.
99. Ibid., 79.
100. Ibid., 81.
101. Ibid., 79.
102. Ibid., 85.
103. Ibid., 236.
Others have died and are being purified, while still others are in glory, contemplating ‘in full light, God himself triune and one, exactly as he is.’”\(^{104}\)

In current Roman Catholic understandings of the saints, it is this closeness that allows the saints to serve as mediators and intercessors:

Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness…they do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth through the one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus.\(^ {105}\)

The ability of the saints to serve as mediators has been explained by Roman Catholic theologian Patricia A. Sullivan by the belief that those who have been canonized are perfectly united with Christ, proof of which is demonstrated through miracles attributed to them.\(^ {106}\) Although all Christians can intercede for one another, according to Sullivan, prayers addressed to a saint are in reality addressed to Christ since canonized saints have become one with Christ,\(^ {107}\) and the union with Christ guarantees that the prayers will be heard.\(^ {108}\) She posits “no activity on the part of the saints other than conformance to Christ.”\(^ {109}\) This understanding of the saints, in which they serve as passive conduits for prayers, would be at odds with an understanding of the saints as spiritual companions.

However, Johnson argues that in the early church, requests for the prayers of the saints served a different purpose. In that context, private petitions arose to the martyrs as a way of

\(^{104}\) Catechism, Chapter 3, Article 9, Paragraph 5, II.954.

\(^{105}\) Ibid., 956.


\(^{107}\) Ibid., 386.

\(^{108}\) Ibid., 386.


\(^{109}\) Ibid., 397.
“evoking the solidarity...between the martyrs and those who asked for their prayers...who might be called next to give the supreme witness of their lives.”

Those intercessions provided bonds across generations to those who had been or might be asked to sacrifice their life in witness to the faith. Rather than serving as benefactors, the saints were partners in hope.

By the end of the fifth century the patronage model began to be the dominant model. No longer was the term saint used for those living in the community, and a separation arose between the faithful and the saints. The saints became “primarily intercessors in a structure of power and neediness.”

Remembrance of the saints was less important than pleas for intercession. Saints themselves became arranged in a heavenly hierarchy, with special areas of expertise or interest, a hierarchy that mimicked patterns of patronage intrinsic to the Roman Empire.

This system of patron and petitioner changed the equality found in the earlier companionship model to a “system of exchange founded on asymmetrical relations between persons of unequal status—the antithesis of friendship between equals.”

Johnson argues that this model of patronage no longer speaks to people today, at least people in the more affluent parts of the world. There has been a “noticeable diminishment of private devotion among dominant sectors of the population in the democratic, capitalist nations of western Europe, North America, Australia.” This is in contrast to the continued popularity of such devotion in parts of the world where poverty and oppression are rampant and where the faithful “reclaim saints as partners in the struggle against an oppression that is analyzed in

110. Johnson, Friends of God, 78.
111. Ibid., 86.
112. Ibid., 87.
113. Ibid., 89.
114. Ibid., 15.
explicitly social and political terms." For Johnson, the solution to the disappearance of private devotion to the saints is not to abandon the saints altogether in more westernized countries, but to return to the earlier companionship model of the communion of saints in which saints are seen, not as powerful figures to whom the faithful appeal for help, but as companions, fellow friends of God and prophets who through their witness demonstrate ways of living authentically in diverse times and places.

The understanding of saints as benefactors does not require an in-depth knowledge of the lives of the saints. Having been particularly associated with a certain illness or problem, the petitioner knows which saint will be of most help. For McCarthy, the saints serve as symbols or types, making connections “between the personal and metaphysical.” Because of this, the faithful need to know little about the saint:

The life, particularly the internal life of nearness to God, continues to unfold; yet, there is also a common sense that little needs to be said. Hagiography in its most prominent form puts the life of a saint in a single paragraph on a single page. The “lives” are usually mere introductions, meant to inspire the beginning of a practical relation. Sometimes a whole life, particularly of the martyrs, comes down to a sentence. For Johnson, however, this reduction is one of the failings of the current system of sainthood. Too often, in reducing the saints’ lives to a paragraph or even a sentence, the stories, particularly those of women, have been erased or distorted. Johnson believes that without a fuller telling of the stories of all the saints, both those who have been remembered and those who were forgotten, the story of the friends of God and prophets is incomplete. “To discover these foresses with their sufferings and defeats, their accomplishments and victories, and to recover their lives from the judgment that labels them insignificant is to break through a long and

115. Ibid., 13.
debilitating amnesia.”\(^{117}\) It is the telling of these women’s stories fully that allows them to speak to women today, who draw strength and nurture from their foresisters. It is that telling of their stories, as fully and completely as possible, that allows a real relationship with the “saints” to flourish. For Johnson, it is these stories that are the important element in allowing the saints to be companions in memory and companions of hope.

Johnson argues that “Few traditionally told lives of the saints, however, function with anything near the full potential of critical narrative, enabling hearers to leap about and dance, to risk their lives, to stay afloat, to survive evil.”\(^{118}\) Freed of the need to serve as patrons or benefactors, freed of the need for perfection, Johnson argues that their stories can be fully told, allowing the saints to serve as companions, whose companionship can nurture and support people today in their Christian lives and witness. Together all the saints, those living on earth and those living in Christ, form a “wisdom community of holy people praising God, loving each other, and struggling for justice and peace in this world; a company that stretches backward and forward in time and encircles the globe in space.”\(^{119}\) This community, according to Johnson, is a community in which difference, rather than being an obstacle, is a “creative, enriching, community-shaping force.”\(^{120}\) To forge such a community of difference, however, requires “listening, imagination, and openness of heart.”\(^{121}\)

Although Johnson argues that private petitions to the saints are not required in Roman Catholic teaching, leaving Catholics “serenely free” with respect to private devotions to the saints, she does accept the veneration and intercession of the public liturgy as important and

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118. Ibid., 174.
119. Ibid., 41.
120. Ibid., 179.
121. Ibid.
necessary. In terms of private piety, Johnson cites scripture for the importance of Christians praying for each other. It is in this context, for Johnson, that prayer to and with the saints derives its importance and necessity.

**Characteristics of Relationships in the Companionship Model**

For Johnson, relationships within the communion of saints are characterized by the definition of the communion of saints as a circle of companions who are friends of God and prophets. As friends of God, saints, both those who are with Christ and those who are living today, are “connected in a reciprocal relationship characterized by deep affection, joy, trust, delight, support in adversity, and sharing life; knowing and letting oneself be known in an intimacy that flows into common activities.” As prophets, all the saints are called to comfort those in pain, to criticize what inhibits human flourishing in the name of God, and “to speak truth to power about injustice, thus creating possibilities of resistance and resurrection.” This deep, intimate friendship and prophetic witness “forges intergenerational bonds across time that sustain faith in strange new times and places.” For Johnson, these bonds form new communities that manifest the characteristics of resistance, memory, and hope. These bonds allow the faithful to experience their relationship with the saints as companionship of the friends of God across space and time.

For Johnson, the communion of saints provides companionship, a companionship that is marked by reciprocity, equality, encouragement, and comfort. “Instead of the prayer of petition

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122. Ibid., 124.
123. Ibid., 132.
124. Ibid., 41.
125. Ibid.
126. Ibid., 85.
which has had pride of place in traditional devotion to the saints, the prayer of praise and thanks to God and the prayer of lament characterize the companionship model.” 127 The purpose of this companionship is to allow “their witness and the encouragement it gives [to] serve as a vehicle for the same Spirit who inspired them to kindle the sacred fire in our own lives.” 128 For Johnson, however, it is the relationship with the saint’s story that is of primary importance, not the direct relationship with the saint. Arguing that we cannot know what happens after death, Johnson does not venture to affirm a relationship beyond the relationship based on their witness. She argues that “Empirically, the darkness of death is unconquerable. Regarding its outcome, we literally have no information nor adequate conceptions. We do not know, in the literal sense, but we hope. In the end, everything depends upon the character of God.” 129 Although affirming that everything depends upon a radical trust in God, Johnson seems unwilling to trust that the saints are alive in a way that would allow a real relationship with contemporary Christians to occur. For Johnson, they reside in memory and as companions in hope:

Their status in our memory is that of a great cloud of witnesses whose efforts, defeats, and victories empower us for the struggle of our own lives to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God. Their status in our hope is that of a great cloud of witnesses whose destiny encourages our hearts and charges us to care for the world and its flourishing. Their status in themselves is that of the utterly transformed ones who have entered upon the consummation of their life in close communion with the mystery of the living God. Beyond that there is not much we can say. 130

About the possibility of a living relationship with the saints, Johnson remains agnostic, although this seems at odds with her earlier assertion that the saints and Christians today

127. Ibid., 245-46.
128. Ibid., 247.
129. Ibid., 201.
130. Ibid., 215.
are “connected in a reciprocal relationship characterized by deep affection, joy, trust, delight, support in adversity, and sharing life.” Deep affection and sharing of life would seem to be more characteristic of a living, personal relationship beyond what might be imagined by those who were only companions in memory and whose relationship is mediated through story and witness.

Johnson’s understanding of the saints as a circle of companions has much to offer any understanding of the saints as spiritual companions. Her emphasis on the equality of the saints and on the importance of encouragement also would be important elements in any understanding of saints as spiritual companions. There is no question that for Johnson, saints are companions, but are they capable of being spiritual companions in ways similar to what was described for contemporary spiritual companions in chapter four? The answer to that question is not clear in Johnson’s work. At issue in Johnson’s understanding of the saints as companions is whether she sees the possibility of a living relationship between the saints and contemporary Christians.

Johnson, while not ruling out that type of relationship, also does not affirm this possibility. As noted above, she is reluctant to state her understanding of what happens to the faithful after death. Although arguing that the continuation of life after death is consistent with her understanding of God, a personal existence, which would allow a true relationship, is not assured. For her, it is the stories of the saints that have the transformative, encouraging, and supportive power that she attributes to this circle of companions. She is eager to recover the stories—the full stories—of those who have been oppressed in order to give hope to those who are being oppressed today. The

131. Ibid., 41.
stories, instead of being ways to connect contemporary Christians with the saints, are themselves sources of power that provide that hope and encouragement even if no other relationship is developed with the saint. Johnson’s reluctance to affirm that the saints are alive in a way that would allow a direct relationship with contemporary Christians makes her theology less helpful for undergirding practices of spiritual companionship with saints.

Companionship of the Friends of God Across Time and Space

A Theological Grounding in the Doctrine of the Communion of Saints

As noted, even among theological sources dealing with the relationships in the communion of saints as companionship, there can be different understandings. Notably, the Anglican sources studied and Johnson vary in their understanding of what type of relationship of companionship is possible. For Johnson, they are companions in memory; what is most important is their stories and their witness. Although it is possible to conceive of a companionship present only in memory, such an understanding does not easily explain some of the experiences of spiritual companionship in the literature. For Teresa of Avila, for instance, St. Joseph was alive to her in a direct way, and not simply memory. He taught her, when she did not have a spiritual director, and he responded to her prayer. Mujica talks about an experience of Teresa of Avila as physically present. Although Johnson’s understanding of the communion of saints would allow the possibility of such experiences, it insists upon the type of personal existence after death that would justify them.

Although less systematically developed than Johnson’s work, the Anglican sources affirm a living relationship with the saints. Based on an understanding of the communion of saints that argues that the saints are still personally alive in Christ, even after their death, it
provides a justification for arguing that a living and personal relationship of spiritual companionship with the saints is possible. Johnson is careful to deal with current intellectual and ethical concerns about life after death. Arguing that all depends on the character of God, Johnson seems unwilling to speculate what the character of God would mean for life after death.

The Anglican sources approach this question not from point of view of systematic theology, but from reflection on the practice and experience of communal worship. As noted, comparable Anglican systematic treatments of the doctrine of the communion of saints that reflect changes in the understanding of this doctrine in the last fifty years are not readily available. Instead, the reflection on liturgical practice reflects a lived communal theology—a type of knowing in which speculative concerns that are important in Johnson’s systematic work are clearly secondary to communal liturgical experience. This makes a direct comparison with Johnson’s work problematic. The practice of worship in the Anglican tradition encourages the community to trust in an understanding of the character of God, an understanding that makes continued, personal life after death assured. The God who is worshiped is a God who cares for every sparrow, and who counts even the hairs on a person’s head.  

The character of God is demonstrated in God’s love for each person, which cannot be broken even by death. That character makes a continuing relationship between all who are alive in Christ possible. It makes all God’s saints, those who have lived in the past and those living on earth now, spiritual companions through their shared life in Christ.

While the Anglican sources provide the theological grounding for a continuing, living relationship, Johnson reminds us that the communion of saints is not simply about personal

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133. Romans 8:38.
relationships, but needs to encompass communal dimensions as well. The communion of saints needs to provide a prophetic witness, which allows people to resist violence and oppression. It also needs to acknowledge a relationship not only with people but with all creation. Johnson expands the vision of the goal of the communion of saints beyond being simply a circle of companions who are friends of God, and reminds us that these companions also need to serve as prophets to our broken world.

Theological Norms for Practices of Companionship with the Saints

Johnson, in her understanding of the communion of saints as a circle of companionship of the friends of God, describes a relationship with a variety of figures, both those officially named in the Roman Catholic tradition as saints and others who respond to the Spirit “through lives that move in the direction of truth and love in the midst of ordinary time.” With her focus on discernment of direction as opposed to perfection of life, she echoes Anglican understandings of sainthood. For her, saints are “sisters and brothers who accompany the current generation on the path of discipleship,” serving “as companions along the way.” The understanding of companionship described in the Anglican sources and in Johnson’s work can also provide norms for practices of spiritual companionship with the saints. This study proposes four characteristic aspects of spiritual companionship to guide the practice of spiritual companionship with the saints derived from the theological sources discussed above. These include mutuality, deep knowledge, mutually critical dialogue, and living with differences.

135. Ibid., 235.
Anglican understandings discussed above and Johnson’s work both suggest the fruitfulness of a focus on mutuality and the image of journeying together. Although saints have finished their earthly life, in Anglican tradition they will not have finished their journey until all finally do so together. The basic understanding in both Anglican thought and Johnson’s arguments is that the saints are not theologically different from living Christians. All are alive in Christ, and all fall short of perfection. This means that any relationship with the saints is one that manifests a basic mutuality and equality. It is a two-way relationship that is more characteristic of friends than either role models or patrons. The acknowledgement of a lack of perfection brings the saints closer to the daily life and experience of Christians, allowing them to form the close relationship described by McCarthy, in which their lives and stories become intertwined with those of living Christians. “We become part of the saint’s life. The lives of the saints do not tell themselves but are told in the context of sharing life across time.”\textsuperscript{136} The difference between McCarthy’s understanding and the one being advocated here is that the relationship here is envisioned not as one of patronage but as one of fellow companions on the way, the circle of friends of God, enlivened by the Spirit.

If, however, a relationship of true friendship is to develop with the saints, then the one-page or even one-sentence hagiographies that McCarthy suggests are adequate need to be expanded. True friendship requires a deep knowing and intimacy. The more that we know about a saint—not just what they are most remembered for but their joys and sorrows, their struggles and their triumphs—the more potential there is to develop this type of deep and intimate relationship. In order for this to happen, good historical analysis needs to be done, in Johnson’s

words, to “break through a long and debilitating amnesia,”137 and to allow the saints to be deeply known. This model of friendship is not content with types but requires engagement with real people in all their complexity and differences. Although attention to the daily lives of the saints may reveal striking differences between the saints and contemporary Christians, an open and honest relationship can accept and honor differences. Marie Louise Gubler argues that people are looking for “models of faith that are credible and that genuinely respond to daily life.”138 Rather than depicting a perfect life, “the saints embody the life that is possible for believers,”139 according to R.L. Moss. As Johnson argues, the obvious differences between the saints in heaven and those on earth need not be seen as a barrier within the communion of saints but as a positive enrichment of the circle of companions.

These differences, discovered through deep engagement, will require the saints still living on the earth to decide how the witness of the saints in heaven will affect their own lives and witness. As Perham argued, imitation of the saints in heaven is not possible. Not only is the context likely to be radically different, but each person is different as well, called to live out his or her life in joyful accordance with God’s guiding love. A true honoring of the saints in heaven as well as an honoring of the saints on earth in their own particular contexts requires a mutually critical dialogue. If the saints are not models of perfection, but simply are oriented in the right direction, there may be things that the faithful today see in the lives of the saints of the past that do not lead to lives of wholeness and grace. There may be ways in which their lives witness to things that should not be done in response to the Gospel, at least in this time and place. Other

aspects of their lives may be more neutral, not wrong but simply incompatible with Christian life in a particular context in a particular time. However, there may also be ways in which their lives and witness challenge contemporary understandings as flawed, ways in which contemporary understandings are blind to the call of Christ. As in any deep friendship, the first step is to listen deeply and to engage one’s friend in respectful dialogue. Such conversation is likely to include both support and challenge offered in love, always toward the ultimate goal of friendship with Christ. This type of dialogue is one of the potential gifts of a relationship of spiritual companionship with a saint.

Disagreement does not preclude a close relationship: friends will not always agree. Sometimes such mutually critical dialogue can move one or both to a new place, where agreement becomes possible. At other times, however, friends will need to decide to live with their differences. Such agreement to live together in difference allows an opening for the friends to continue the dialogue another time, when perhaps the issues are clearer or the Spirit provides additional illumination. In the meantime, however, an appreciation of difference can be a source of joy, allowing Christians to praise the way the Spirit works in different ways among all the saints of God. Rose Hoover argues that even in the midst of our differences, the communion of saints has the power to awaken within us a deep sense of relationship and belonging, and in that belonging differences will not be erased but barriers will be broken down by the work of the Spirit:

Our relations in this family include Mary the mother of Jesus, the apostles, the martyrs, the saints throughout the ages, known or unrecognized, and a motley assortment of kin. This is the universal communion of all who have lived, however imperfectly, in Christ, and all who have died in him: all who, by the Spirit of Jesus who breaks down barriers and causes strange tongues to be understood, are one in God, whether or not they are conscious of their union.
From time to time a deep sense of our own belonging to this holy assembly may awaken in us.\textsuperscript{140}

The doctrine of the communion of saints has the potential to provide this deep sense of relationship and belonging. Practices of companionship are one way in which this relationship can be lived out.

**Spiritual Companionship with the Saints:**

**Practice and Doctrine in Mutually Critical Dialogue**

Having argued that the practice of spiritual companionship with the saints is one way of embodying the doctrine of the communion of saints, it is time to return to the dialogue between the theological norms recommended above—mutuality, deep knowledge, mutually critical dialogue, and living with differences—and the understandings of spiritual companionship with contemporaries discussed in chapter four. Together they will provide a basis for suggesting additional practices of spiritual companionship with saints in chapter six. I will engage the norms listed above and the themes from the descriptions of spiritual companionship with contemporaries as outlined in chapter four—journey and intimacy, affirmation and confrontation, and personal transformation and growing in relationship to God—in a mutually critical dialogue about the practice of spiritual companionship with saints. As Browning notes, systematic theology “is concerned with general rather than with concrete aspects of situations.”\textsuperscript{141} The mutually critical dialogue allows the general understanding of spiritual companionship with saints to speak in and with the more concrete understandings of spiritual companionship with saints derived from the practices described by Teresa and contemporary practitioners.


\textsuperscript{141} Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 140.
The concept of spiritual companionship involving a shared journey represents a common element in the descriptions explored in this project. As noted earlier, however, the understandings of this journey vary considerably between contemporary descriptions and those of Teresa of Avila. In the Anglican sources studied, the nature of the journey is less well described, although Perham describes the relationship of the faithful with the saints as “fellow Christian travelers.” In the focus on everyday lives, the Anglican tradition may be closer to the descriptions of the journey in contemporary practices of spiritual companionship than those described by Teresa, which she likened to crucial battles. The more embattled aspect, however, comes out in Johnson’s work, where she focuses on the potential of the saints to strengthen the faithful in their resistance to oppression. Johnson claims that “by bonding in memory with suffering, victimized, creative, and victorious foresisters and foremothers in the tradition, women draw strength and are nourished in their own human, spiritual powers.” Although, like Teresa, Johnson paints a picture of the journey that requires strength and resistance against evil, Teresa’s vision of evil involves an internal struggle, while Johnson focuses upon confrontation of the evil in the world around us. The image of journey is common, but due to differences in context, the ways that the journey is envisioned are quite diverse. Rather than being a problem, this multiplicity of images is a potential asset, allowing people from very different contexts, whose struggle occurs in different aspects of their journeys, to discover the value and importance of spiritual companionship. The communion of saints, with its incredible diversity, could allow contemporary Christians traveling on very different journeys to find compatible companions.

Contemporary descriptions of spiritual companionship often emphasize the need for intimacy in such relationships of spiritual companionship. However, this is not a major element

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of the other sources explored. Although Teresa had some relationships of great intimacy, this was not a requirement that she stressed in her descriptions of true friendship. Likewise, intimacy is not mentioned in the Anglican sources analyzed. The latter may be due to the fact that these descriptions focus more upon the prayers to the saints in public liturgy than in personal devotions. Intimacy is a quality that is less likely to be expressed in such a public setting. The idea of intimacy is, however, consistent with the Anglican insistence on telling a fuller story of the life and witness of saints, one that shows them honestly, warts and all. This honesty, while not necessarily guaranteeing intimacy, provides the first and necessary step for developing such a relationship. Although Johnson used the word intimacy in at least one place in her work, she focuses more upon a sense of connection or bonding. The companionship in memory “fosters a sense of connectedness among women with the great crowd of women who have lived before now,”144 who inspire “our running” of the race before us, “who give us ‘lessons of encouragement’ and make our way a little less rough.”145 Through the sharing of stories—stories of hope and struggle, pain and joy—bonds with the saints are forged that touch the lives of women today. In this bonding, women are “nourished in their own human, spiritual powers.”146 This connection, for Johnson, is dependent upon telling the silenced stories and retelling the stories that have been distorted. Telling silenced and distorted stories requires a deep knowledge of the lives of the saints, in all of their particulars, for as Johnson affirms, “there is no ideal, archetypal ‘woman’; there are only real women whose lives are embedded in various combinations of bodily, relational, economic, political, and social structures in historical times.

144. Ibid.
145. Ibid., 34.
146. Ibid., 33.
and geographic places, for better or worse.”¹⁴⁷ Because of the physical distance, companionship within the communion of saints is less likely to be described as intimate, but a deep connection is still consistent with a relationship of spiritual companionship.

In contemporary writing about spiritual companionship by authors such as Brown, Orr, Bankson, Burrell, Sheehan, and Benner,¹⁴⁸ as well as in Teresa of Avila’s view of friendship, both affirmation and confrontation were important, although confrontation appeared to be more prominent in Teresa’s writings. Johnson also affirms the dual nature of the relationship with the saints, one that encompasses practices of both praise and lament. Saints provide encouragement for women today, but for her their primary challenge is not a personal challenge, as in the case of contemporary descriptions of spiritual companionship, but a larger challenge to the unjust structures that oppress women. “Prayer for help also diminishes in the context of the larger impulses of imbibing encouragement from the saints’ witness and praying in profound gratitude for their lives and in lament over their destruction.”¹⁴⁹ In the Anglican writings on the communion of saints, the element of encouragement is stronger than the element of challenge, even though the witness of the saints to a life of Christian service may indeed provide an element of personal challenge. The norm of mutually critical dialogue between the saint and the faithful, derived from the theological sources, however, has the potential to restore a strong element of challenge to the relationship, in keeping with Teresa’s emphasis, and challenge is also deemed essential in contemporary writings on spiritual companionship.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 178.
¹⁴⁸ For a discussion of the role of affirmation and confrontation in the current understandings of spiritual companionship, see chapter 4, “Affirmation and Confrontation.”
¹⁴⁹ Johnson, Friends of God, 246.
Both the contemporary descriptions of spiritual companionship discussed in chapter four and Teresa’s own writing on spiritual companionship focus upon the goal of such relationships—a closer relationship with Christ. Expressed as union or friendship with God, all activity is ultimately directed toward that telos. The effect of the relationship upon behavior and earthly life is important, but its importance is measured by its ability, in Teresa’s understanding, to bring people into friendship with Christ. Johnson’s description of the goal of relationships in the communion of saints is much more focused upon what can be accomplished in this life. Johnson also has a more communal focus than is found in many current descriptions of spiritual companionship, which tend to stress personal and individual transformation and growth in relationship with God. In her focus on the communal aspect and the importance of providing concrete help, however, Johnson echoes themes within the Hispanic/Latino/a writing explored, particularly in the migration narratives that Hagan describes, as well as in African-American forms of soul care. For Johnson, the growth of the whole of the people of God is the primary focus, a focus that needs a circle of friends of God and prophets. This focus upon the more communal and ecclesial element is important to remember in considering spiritual companionship within the communion of saints. While this work has focused upon personal practices of spiritual companionship, these relationships are lived out within a larger fellowship.

The combination of the communal/ecclesial with the personal is a part of the Anglican liturgical tradition. While stressing the way in which saints encourage Christians in their life on earth, the Anglican sources studied also point out that the ultimate goal is to come with all of the saints into closer union with God. The goal is to follow the saints into a shared future. The collect for All Saints Day in the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer illustrates this. “Give us
grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you.”

Although neither Teresa nor the current descriptions of spiritual companionship explicitly mention the importance of living with differences, any relationship requires such a willingness to let the other be the other. Wright argues that engagement with classic texts “means being willing to accept an author as a person of his or her moment in history.”

Although the radically different contexts accentuate these differences in the case of a historical figure and a contemporary figure, differences exist even among people today who share very similar contexts. The larger differences between the saints and contemporary Christians are reminders of an important principle in any spiritual companionship.

The four characteristics of relationships between the saints discussed above—mutuality, deep knowledge, mutually critical dialogue, and living with differences—show a significant overlap with understandings of spiritual companionship, both contemporary descriptions of the practice and those that appear in the writings of Teresa of Avila. With its emphasis upon relationships across time and space, the communion of saints provides a theological rationale for describing a relationship between the saints in heaven and those on earth in terms of spiritual companionship that is analogous to current descriptions of spiritual companionship with contemporaries.

Although mutually critical dialogue and living with differences are necessary in any relationship of spiritual companionship with any other person, including a contemporary, they are brought into sharper focus when the relationship is conceived across time and space. Context is important in any relationship. In order to demonstrate how mutually critical dialogue, based

150. 1979 Book of Common Prayer, 245.
upon a deep historical-contextual analysis, and living with differences might be imagined in a relationship of companionship with a saint, I will turn briefly to Teresa of Avila as a case study. Her biography in chapter three highlights some possible issues in a relationship of friendship with a contemporary Christian.

Spiritual Companionship with Teresa of Avila: A Case Study

As noted in chapter one, Teresa of Avila has become a popular figure in writings in the field of spirituality. Some, such as Mujica, specifically claim her as a spiritual companion. “I felt at that moment that I had found a spiritual guide, a friend who would lead me on an adventure, a journey of faith, using language I could understand.” Nevertheless, the differences between Teresa’s life and understanding of the Christian faith and those of Christians today could still serve as barriers to a relationship of spiritual companionship for many Christians. A deep historical-contextual analysis, which is necessary in order to clearly hear these voices from the past, is also likely to bring up troubling elements from their lives or beliefs. In this section, I will explore some of the potentially troubling issues found in Teresa’s writings—ideas of sanctity, the place of women, church authority, and the value of suffering—and explore how the concepts of mutually critical dialogue and living with differences might allow Teresa to serve as a spiritual companion for people today even across significant differences in belief and understanding. Although there are other issues that might result in barriers between Teresa and current descriptions, these issues will serve to illustrate these two concepts.

152. For a fuller discussion of the ways in which Teresa of Avila has been appropriated, see chapter 1, “Teresa of Avila as a Case Study.”
As noted in chapter three, women’s sanctity in sixteenth-century Spain was judged by the ways in which their lives and behavior manifested the virtues of humility and obedience. Beliefs that women were more susceptible to demonic authority made women’s adherence to those virtues more closely enforced. In spite of the fact that Teresa would deviate in many ways from the ideals of feminine sanctity present in her time, much of her writing supports these ideas, and she enforced these understandings of feminine sanctity among her nuns. Although Teresa’s establishment of monasteries would take her far beyond the confines of her own monastery, her nuns would be more strictly enclosed. Her writing and teaching likewise pushed the boundaries of acceptable behavior in a society and time where the most holy role for women was intercessory prayer, particularly for those in purgatory. Through a life dedicated to prayer, fasting, and penance, women were believed to be particularly effective intercessors.

Teresa provides a particularly interesting case study in how to engage in mutually critical dialogue because her writings seem, at times, at odds with her own actions. She talked about the importance of obedience, and yet in pursuit of her work of reform, she would often go around authorities that stood in her way, and occasionally she would even hide her activity from those who would have been sure to forbid her if they had known what she was doing. Teresa was also an astute politician. When confessor forbade her way of spirituality, she would look for other authorities to support her. She may have immediately thrown her manuscript of *Meditations on the Song of Songs* into the fire when ordered to by a later confessor, Diego de Yanguas, who was horrified by a woman writing a biblical commentary, but Teresa knew that copies had already been distributed and were in good hands. When the nuns in her reformed monastery of Alba de
Tormes were ordered to destroy their copy by Yanguas, they instead passed it on to the Duchess of Alba for safe-keeping.\textsuperscript{154}

As noted previously, Teresa’s writings were public documents that needed to withstand the heavy scrutiny of her confessors, other censors, and even the Inquisition. In order to ensure that her writing would survive, Teresa needed to uphold traditional notions of sanctity. In order to gain the support that she would need in her reform efforts, she would also need to be seen as a holy woman, someone whose life manifested the virtues of obedience and humility. This focusing on obedience and humility, unpopular in twenty-first-century feminist thought, make her writings challenging to women today.

Teresa, herself, did not always fit neatly into sixteenth-century understandings of humility and obedience. Having exercised her intelligence, her political astuteness, her gifts as a writer and teacher, her organizational ability, as well as her gifts as a spiritual director and pastor to her nuns, Teresa’s life opens a much broader understanding of holiness than was popular in her life and times. This does not, however, negate the importance that Teresa placed on the virtues of humility and obedience. For all her struggles with these two virtues and in spite of the ways in which they circumscribed the ministry of women, Teresa did strongly did affirm their importance. Rather than resolve the issue, she seemed in her own life to try to hold these values in tension with her own call to ministry. For her, spiritual progress would not have been possible without humility. Pride was, for Teresa, one of the great barriers to spiritual progress. Even at the height of her activity of founding monasteries, Teresa found people whose advice she trusted and respected, and she was willing to listen. She was open to admitting that she might have been mistaken. Most of all, she was aware of the dangers of becoming focused on what she wanted,

\textsuperscript{154} Kavanaugh, “Meditations on the Song of Songs—Introduction,” 212.
for her own glory, instead of what God wanted for her. The practice of humility was, in Teresa’s estimation, central to the spiritual life, and she encouraged practices that reinforced that virtue:

If you wish to take revenge on the devil and free yourself more quickly from temptation, ask the prioress as soon as the temptation comes to give you orders to do some lowly task; or, if possible, do it on your own and go about studying how to double your willingness to do things that go contrary to your nature.\(^{155}\)

Teresa also counted obedience to superiors a great virtue, and in her writings she stressed her own obedience. She did not disobey direct orders of those in authority over her (unless of course she could get someone even more senior to counteract that order). In that time, she would have had little choice, if she wanted her reform to succeed. Her obedience, however, was more than a simple necessity. Teresa believed in an orderly universe, and in a church in which Christ worked through the hierarchy. If the hierarchy did not always understand what Christ would have them do, that was simply due to human sinfulness—regretful, but a part of life. Christ, however, would not ultimately be balked. Either the person would eventually be convinced, or another way around the blockage would be discovered. Christ would continue to assure her, through prayer, that she should obey, and that Christ would deal with the problem.\(^{156}\)

Johnson argues that the “modern and postmodern spirit offers a poor fit for traditional appreciation of the saints.”\(^{157}\) It may also provide a poor fit for the traditional understandings that they espouse. Unquestioning obedience to one’s superiors provides a challenge that is seen

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155. Teresa of Avila, *Way*, 12.7, 84; “Si queréis vengaros del demonio y libraros más presto de la tentación, que así como os venga, pidáis a la perlada que os mande hacer algún oficio bajo — u como pudierdes los hagáis vos— y andéis estudiando en esto cómo doblar vuestra voluntad en cosas contrarias —que el Señor os las descubrirá—, y con esto durará poco la tentación.” Teresa de Jesús, *Camino [Valladolid]*, 12.7, 286.

156. “For, beyond all natural reason, You make things so possible that You manifest clearly there’s no need for anything more than truly to love You and truly to leave all for You, so that You, my Lord, may make everything easy.” Teresa of Avila, *Life*, 35.13, 308; “…porque sobre toda razón natural hacéis las cosas tan posibles que daís a entender bien que no es menester más de amaros de veras y dejarlo de veras todo por Vos, para que Vos, Señor mío, lo hagáis todo fácil.” Teresa de Jesus, *Vida*, 35.13, 193-94.

as problematic in theologies from many groups who have been oppressed and silenced. Fischer argues that this is particularly important in the spiritual realm for women. She argues that spiritual direction for women needs to be done in a relationship of equals, so that women can claim their own authority. Hierarchical relationships, according to Fischer, are harmful to women’s spiritual progress:

This issue of models for spiritual direction is of special significance for women since they are already conditioned to see themselves as inferior and to rely on powerful authority figures, usually men. The myth of the expert is more harmful to women than it is to men. They have been taught that submission and obedience, not the appropriation of one’s own spiritual gifts and power, are the paths to holiness. If a spiritual direction experience is to be liberating for women, its very process must counteract the dependence that is the fruit of oppression.158

Teresa’s insistence on the importance of obedience, particularly to one’s spiritual directors, is in sharp contrast to Fischer’s assertion that women’s spiritual growth and nurture requires them to resist such outside authority, while cultivating their own inner authority. While even Teresa did not exercise unthinking obedience—although she came close at times to advocating it for her nuns—she did see obedience as an important, even necessary, virtue for growth in the spiritual life.

One way of dealing with this issue is to see Teresa’s arguments as a part of what she needed to do in order to survive in sixteenth-century Spain. Ahlgren argues that “Teresa’s message and contributions to women were very complex. My own assessment is that she taught women more about the process of survival in the church than anything else.”159 Certainly Teresa’s strong emphasis upon the importance of strict obedience to superiors was necessary to her survival in a culture in which sanctity for women was dependent upon modeling the virtues of obedience and humility. Yet to simply ignore that strand in Teresa’s writings is to refuse to

deal with Teresa in all her complexity. Obedience is central to her understanding of the Christian life, and to exclude her writings on obedience is to circumscribe the dialogue with her.

Although frustrated at times because her confessors blocked her from following God’s commandments, Teresa obeyed, confident that Christ was in charge and would ultimately prevail. Deep in plans to found her first monastery of St. Joseph’s, she was ordered not only to cease activity, but to forget ever doing it:

God granted me the very great favor that none of all this disturbed me; rather, I gave up the plan with as much ease and contentment as I would have if it hadn’t cost me anything. No one could believe this, not even the very persons of prayer who knew me. They thought I was very afflicted and ashamed; even my own confessor couldn’t believe it.160

Her serenity in obedience came not because she thought that what her confessor told her was right: she believed that it was contrary to the will of God. Her serenity came in her trust that the founding of St. Joseph’s was God’s will and that ultimately what God willed would come to pass. Teresa says, “Although I could never stop believing that the foundation would come about, I no longer saw the means, nor did I know how or when; but I was very certain that it would.”161

As she would acknowledge, often that does not happen right away—often it requires great patience—and it may mean the need to struggle and even to suffer. Obedience was costly, but Teresa obeyed, trusting that ultimately all would be united to the will of Christ. This facet of Teresa opens up many questions about obedience and authority. Teresa had an unquestioning acceptance of the authority of the church over her life, something that is not a given for Christians today. Engaging in dialogue with her around these issues of obedience and authority

160. Teresa of Avila, Life 33.2, 285; “Hacíame Dios muy gran merced que todo esto no me dava inquietud, sino con tanta facilidad y contento lo dejé como si no me huviere costado nada. Y esto no lo podia nadie creer, ni aun las mismas personas de oración que me tratavan, sino que pensavan estaba muy penada y corrida, y aun mi mismo confesor no lo acabar de creer.” Teresa de Jesús, Vida, 33.2, 178-79.

raises many questions about the relationship of the individual with the larger faith community, questions about the relative roles of individual and ecclesial authority in the lives of Christians. Although Christians today may very well answer them differently than Teresa did, a deep dialogue with Teresa confronts companions of Teresa with these important issues, forcing them to examine their own understandings of obedience and authority.

A second issue that could be troubling to companions of Teresa is her descriptions of women. Rowan Williams argues that Teresa had accepted her culture’s understanding of what it meant to be a woman. “She assumes, when she bothers to think about it, what her Church and society meant her to assume about being a woman, and when she thinks about it, it rather depresses her.”162 There is certainly language in her writings that deprecates women and echoes sixteenth-century Spanish ideas of women’s weakness and susceptibility to demonic influence.163 Such language and ideas can prove a barrier to contemporary women who see in it patriarchal ideas of women that continue in less obvious ways today, but which they feel must be resisted.

To dismiss Teresa because of such language, however, does not do justice to the complexity of her writings and her thoughts. She does often echo prevailing notions of womanhood, and what she actually believed versus what she felt was necessary to include in her writings to make them acceptable is contested among scholars, with feminist scholars in general arguing in favor of the latter. Teresa also writes about the unfair ways in which men view women, and she bemoans the way in which women are devalued and inhibited from active


163. “But everything can be harmful to those as weak as we women are. The wiles of the devil are many for women who live a very cloistered life, for the devil sees that new weapons are needed in order to do harm. I, as wretched as I am, have known how to defend myself only poorly.” Teresa of Avila, *Way*, pro.3, 40; “…y a cosa tan flaca como somos las mujeres todo nos puede dañar; porque las sotilezas del demonio son muchas para las muy encerradas, que ven son menester armas nuevas para dañar. Yo, como ruin, heme sabido mal defender. . .” Teresa de Jesus, *Camino* [Valladolid], pro.3, 237.
ministry. In a section in *The Way of Perfection* that was excised by her confessor, Teresa passionately argues that Christ will judge women fairly, unlike how men judge them. In a show of humility, Teresa still affirms her own wickedness, but she affirms the virtue and strength of other women:

> And You found as much love and more faith in them [women] than You did in men. Among them was Your most blessed Mother, and through her merits—and because we wear her habit—we merit what, because of our offenses, we do not deserve. Is it not enough, Lord, that the world has intimidated us...so that we may not do anything worthwhile for You in public or dare speak some truths that we lament over in secret, without Your also failing to hear so just a petition? I do not believe, Lord, that this could be true of Your goodness and justice, for You are a just judge and not like those of the world. Since the world’s judges are sons of Adam and all of them men, there is no virtue in women that they do not hold suspect. Yes, indeed, the day will come, my King, when everyone will be known for what he is. I do not speak for myself, because the world already knows my wickedness—and I have rejoiced that this wickedness is known publicly—but because I see that these are times in which it would be wrong to undervalue virtuous and strong souls, even though they are women.\(^{164}\)

Teresa was not a feminist: such a designation would be anachronistic in the context of sixteenth-century Spain. She did, however, challenge the patriarchal thinking of her own time. As in the case of her views of sanctity, Teresa challenged the gender roles that restricted women’s possibilities for service to God. She recognized at least some of these restrictions as unfair, and not due to God’s will. In that challenge and resistance, Teresa may have the potential to speak to women who are also struggling with societal or church gender roles that restrict their ability to do the work to which God is calling them.

\(^{164}\) Teresa of Avila, *Way*, 3.7, 50-51; “...y hallastes en ellas tanto amor y más fe que en los hombres, pues estaba vuestra sacratísima Madre, en cuyos méritos merecemos, y por tener su hábito, lo que desmereciamos por nuestras culpas... el mundo honrábles... que no hagamos cosa que valga nada por Vos en público, ni osemos hablar algunas verdades que lloramos en secreto, sino que no nos habiades de oir petición tan justa. No lo creo yo, Señor, de vuestra bondad y justicia, que sois justo juez y no como los jueces del mundo que —como son hijos de Adán, y, en fin, todos varones— no hay virtud de mujer que no tengan por sospechosa. Sí, que algún día ha de haver, Rey mío, que se conozcan todos. No hablo por mí, que ya tiene conocido el mundo mi ruindad, y yo holgado que sea pública; sino porque veo los tiempos de manera que no es razón desechar ánimos virtuosos y fuertes, aunque sean de mujeres.” Teresa de Jesus, *Camino [Escorial]*, 4.1, 249-250.
A third problematic issue is Teresa’s understanding of the value of suffering. For Teresa, suffering has a positive value, and it was something to be embraced as a sign of God’s favor. \[165\] Teresa believed that the determination to suffer was necessary for one who wished to lead a contemplative life. \[166\] As was common in sixteenth-century Spain, Teresa accepted the value of bodily asceticism. She saw the body as something that was prone to comfort, a comfort that was detrimental to spiritual progress:

A fault this body has is that the more comfort we try to give it the more needs it discovers. It’s amazing how much comfort it wants; and since in the case of health the need presents itself under the color of some good, however small it may be, the poor soul is deceived and doesn’t grow. \[167\]

For her times, however, Teresa was remarkably restrained in her ideas of bodily asceticism. Suffering that the Lord sent was to be accepted joyfully, but self-imposed suffering should be limited. In the Constitutions, Teresa admonishes novice mistresses to treat their charges “compassionately and lovingly” and “mortify each one according to what her spirit can suffer. She should lay more stress on doing away with the lack of virtue than on rigorous penance.” \[168\]

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165. “And it is clear that since God wants to lead those whom He greatly loves by the path of tribulation—and the more He loves them the greater the tribulation—there is no reason to think that He despises contemplatives, for with His own mouth He praises them and considers them His friends.” Teresa of Avila, Way, 18.1. 102; “Y está claro que—pues lo es que a los que Dios mucho quiere lleva por camino de travajos, y mientras más los ama, mayores—no hay por qué creer que tiene aborrecidos los contemplativos, pues por su boca los alaba y tiene por amigos.” Teresa de Jesus, Camino [Valladolid], 18.1, 306.

166. “So, I see few true contemplatives who are not courageous and determined to suffer, for the first thing the Lord does, if they are weak, is to give them courage and make them unafraid of trials.” Teresa of Avila, Way, 18.2, 102; “…pocos veo verdaderos contemplativos que no los vea animosos y determinados a padecer, que lo primero que hace el Señor, si son flacos, es ponerles ánimo y hacerlos que no teman travajos.” Teresa de Jesus, Camino [Valladolid], 18.2, 307.

167. Teresa of Avila, Way, 11.2, 80; “Porque este cuerpo tiene una falta, que mientras más le regalan, más necesidades descubre. Es cosa estráña lo que quiere ser regalado; y como tiene aquí algún buen color, por poca que sea la necesidad, engaña a la pobre del alma para que no medre.” Teresa de Jesus, Camino [Valladolid], 11.2, 281.

168. Teresa of Avila, Constitutions, 40, 331; “Trátelas con piadad y amor, no se maravillando de sus culpas, porque han de ir poco a poco, y mortificando a cada una sigán lo que viere puede sufrir su espíritu. Haga más caso de que no haya falta en las virtudes que en el rigor de la penitencia.” Teresa de Jesus, Constituciones, 9.7, 833.
In official visitations to the monasteries, the visitator is to determine if the prioresses are adding extra penances, for “it could happen that each one, according to her own taste, might add particular things and so burden the nuns that they will lose their health and not be able to do what they are obliged to do.”169 Teresa also chastised the first two reformed Carmelite monks, John of the Cross and Antonio, for the severity of their penances.170 Although Teresa accepted the importance of bodily asceticism, she was moderate in its uses for a nun in sixteenth-century Spain. In fact, after her death, the rule was actually amended in order to increase penances for the nuns.

Since many Christians today would reject the need to inflict suffering on the body, Teresa’s view of the importance of bodily asceticism provides a challenge. However, Teresa’s arguments about how the love of bodily comfort interferes with spiritual growth have much to say in a consumer-oriented culture, in which our desires and comfort are often held up as paramount. Teresa challenges contemporary Christians to think about how the tendency to accumulate possessions interferes with spiritual growth and the value of living more simply. Teresa’s emphasis, in her Constitutions, on simplicity of life could indeed challenge present understandings of what it means to live life well.

Although contemporary Christians might well challenge Teresa’s belief that God inflicts suffering upon those whom Christ loves most dearly, living the Christian life may require the willingness to suffer. In imitation of a crucified messiah, Christians through the centuries have


accepted the need to be willing to suffer and even die for what they believe. Teresa’s assertion that the Lord gives courage in the face of trials could be a great comfort for those whose Christian life and witness require suffering or even for Christians who are experiencing the normal suffering that is a part of human life. In Teresa’s view of suffering, the sufferer does not face it alone and is given the strength needed to endure. For Teresa, Christ is powerfully present in the suffering.

A relationship of spiritual companionship with Teresa would indeed raise many potential issues and disagreements. Listening deeply to Teresa of Avila, through historical-contextual analysis and serious engagement with her writings, is nevertheless important in developing a relationship of spiritual companionship. These tasks, however, require an openness to transformation. The questions raised may challenge contemporary Christians’ ways of understanding and living out the Christian life—but then Teresa was known, even in her own lifetime, for her challenges. Engaging her in mutually critical dialogue and listening to what she has to say, as we would with any good friend, allows her to act as a spiritual companion even across time and space. Ultimately the question becomes one of discerning which understandings will lead contemporary Christians to a deeper love of God and neighbor and which will interfere with such growth. Wright argues that some understandings from classic texts and authors need to be sloughed off, as being antithetical to a vital faith, which others need “to be lived with and lovingly contemplated, as it were, in order for the kernel of universal religious meaning to be hulled from the husk of its historical appearance.”171 Mutually critical dialogue and living with differences can help in that discernment process.

171. Wright, “The Spiritual Classics,” 42.
Mutuality, deep knowledge, mutually critical dialogue, and living with differences are important norms in any relationship with a saint. These theological norms need to inform any practices of spiritual companionship with the saint. The next step will be to suggest specific practices of spiritual companionship that are consistent with these norms. Practices of friendship, however, are not easy to describe, for friendship occurs in many forms. Nevertheless, as discussed in previous chapters, intimacy and a sense of accompaniment, the ability to both affirm and challenge, and personal transformation and growing closer to God are important in those friendships that are called spiritual companionship. In order for saints to serve as spiritual companions in these ways, the practices used need to allow the contemporary Christian to deeply engage the saint.

Dialogue across differences, as shown above, is an important part of any relationship, but by itself, such a practice would not necessarily lead to a relationship of spiritual companionship. Another step would be needed, a step that provides a more direct encounter with the person behind the writings, so that the contemporary Christian not only knows about the saint, but feels that they know and are in a relationship with the saint. Such knowing is an important element in feeling a sense of accompaniment or companionship. The focus of the practices suggested in chapter six will be to acquire a deep knowledge of the saint, knowledge that moves beyond a simple knowing about the saint to a knowing of the saint. This type of knowing of a person is not only important in a relationship of companionship or friendship, but also has implications for the way in which saints are taught in congregations and seminaries. Practices of personal companionship as well as pedagogical practices for teaching the saints are the subject of the final chapter.
CHAPTER SIX

PRACTICING SPIRITUAL COMPANIONSHIP WITH THE SAINTS

Practical theologians tend to assert that practice should be both a source of theological reflection as well as its telos. Elaine Graham, Heather Walton, and Frances Ward argue that theology has, from the beginning, arisen out of reflection upon practice, and that such reflection is “a perennial and indispensable part of the history of Christian doctrine.”¹ Dorothee Soelle argues that “When we delve deep enough into our own situation, we will reach a point where theological reflection becomes necessary. We then have to ‘theologize’ the given situation.”² This need to reflect on our praxis, in Soelle’s understanding, is for the sake of continued engagement with the world. For Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, the role of the academic discipline of practical theology is to help and guide the broader enterprise of theological education not only to “explore the depths and range of Christian faith and life,” but also “to serve church and society.”³ Browning summarized the work of practical theology as moving from “practice to theory and back to practice.”⁴ All of these theologians point to a key understanding of the discipline of practical theology: practice can be a source of theology and this reflection upon practice leads to recommendations for improved practice.

Although this work began with the historical theology movement, which was the second movement in Browning’s schema, it also began with practice—in this case Teresa of Avila’s practice of spiritual companionship. This practice was placed in mutually critical dialogue with current practices of spiritual companionship. The doctrine of the communion of saints provided a theological argument for the existence of a continuing relationship between the saints and contemporary Christians, a relationship that Johnson characterized as a circle of companions who are friends of God and prophets. The four characteristics that described such a relationship—mutuality, deep knowledge, mutually critical dialogue, and living with differences—in dialogue with Teresa’s understanding of true friendship and contemporary descriptions of spiritual companionship give guidance for the ways that spiritual companionship with saints might be lived out.

The final step in this practical theology study is to envision how such a relationship might actually be practiced. In this last chapter, I turn my attention to this strategic question. As Browning argues, “To think and act practically in fresh and innovative ways may be the most complex thing that humans ever attempt.” That, however, is one of the tasks of practical theology.

Many Christians today have never considered any type of relationship with the saints. The idea of a relationship between Christians and the saints has not been prominent in Protestant circles, and as Johnson noted, devotion to the saints is decreasing even among Roman Catholics, especially in first world countries. When such a relationship is considered, saints usually serve

5. Ibid., 7.
either as role models or as benefactors. However, a serious consideration of the potential possibilities in the communion of saints suggests other types of relationships. In focusing upon a model of companionship for the relationship between the saints and contemporary Christians, I am arguing for a type of spiritual companionship with saints that is analogous to that practiced between contemporaries. Indications of this type of relationship are present both in historical and in contemporary sources. Teresa of Avila seemed to have practiced a form of companionship with saints, which shared characteristics with her understanding of true friendship. Contemporary writing on spiritual companionship also touches on the idea of spiritual companionship with saints, although practices of companionship with the saints are not as well described as practices between contemporaries. Current practices of spiritual companionship, as described in chapter four, encompass the themes of journey and intimacy, affirmation and confrontation, and personal transformation and growth in relationship with God. Both contemporary descriptions of spiritual companionship and Teresa of Avila’s description of friendship indicate clearly that the goal of any such relationship is personal transformation in service to the ultimate goal of growing in relationship to God, or in Teresa’s terms, friendship with Christ.

The goal of personal transformation is also consistent with one of the frequently stated goals of studies in spirituality. As noted in chapter one, one of the explicitly stated goals of studies in spirituality is transformation—both of the researcher and of others. Schneiders argues that “One studies spirituality to understand spirituality; but one also studies it in order to foster
one’s own spirituality; and finally, one studies it in order to foster the spirituality of others.”

Although not all practical theologians would argue for transformation as a goal, that language is present in the discipline as well. As Brandt argues,

> Practical theology, then, can be characterized as comprehensive in its scope, concrete in its focus, transformative in its orientation, and praxiological in its method. Practical theology aims to foster informed and life-giving embodiment of faith and concrete action in human life that gestures toward the reign of God.\(^7\)

In recommending practices of spiritual companionship with the saints, then, the goals of personal transformation and growing closer to God need to be kept in mind, for they provide the telos for the practice of spiritual companionship not only with contemporaries, but also with the saints.

In this chapter, I will briefly explore practices that embody and enact a relationship of spiritual companionship between a saint and a contemporary Christian before moving on to a discussion of how the saints could be taught—in both seminaries and in congregations—in such a way as to provide a space where Christians could develop such a relationship of companionship. Due to the focus upon transformation, I will be relying on the insights of transformative pedagogy and a related field, contemplative pedagogy, to support my suggestions for the practices of teaching.

Finally, I will return once again to the questions of practical theology methodology that were raised in chapter one. In particular, I will evaluate what difference the changes that I

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proposed—placing the historical theology movement prior to the descriptive movement and adding a deep historical-contextual analysis—made in this study.

**Contemporary Practices of Companionship with Saints**

In her book, *A Retreat with Teresa of Avila*, which is part of a series of “retreats” with noted saints, Gloria Hutchinson explains the rationale for the series. The books “are an invitation to choose as a director some of the most powerful, appealing and wise mentors our faith tradition has to offer.” With this series, St. Anthony Messenger Press seems to be tapping into a desire on the part of contemporary Christians to learn more about these figures from the past. Arthur Holder notes the proliferation of popular versions of spiritual classics in mainstream bookstores. He argues that this demonstrates how people are “hungering and thirsting for spiritual nourishment.” Although that hunger is a good thing, not all of the popular versions are of high quality, and Holder argues that this provides the discipline of spirituality with a challenge. How do scholars of spirituality provide presentations of these classics that can reach contemporary seekers, and not simply other academics or even traditional church members?

Popular presentations of spirituality can be done well or done poorly, but they are essential if our purpose is to reach an audience beyond the confines of our classrooms and church buildings. If we do not like the way that spiritual classics are being marketed for public consumption, then it is up to us to actively resist the commodification of spirituality as a palliative for privatized souls, and to offer an alternative.

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10. Ibid.,” 34.
This work, including the practices that will be outlined below, is an attempt to offer an alternative that is respectful of the saints and the writings they left behind but offers contemporary Christians who may be feeling drawn into companionship with a saint the opportunity to encounter that saint more deeply—through a more thorough understanding of historical context, through a broader engagement with historical texts, and finally through contemplative spiritual practices that encourage a sense of companionship or presence. This work might be seen as an invitation for Christians to move beyond a nodding acquaintance with a saint into the more intimate forms of spiritual companionship that are possible with the saints, due to the relationships of companionship that are found within the communion of saints. Any relationships with saints will also have to take into consideration power dynamics inherent in this type of relationship. In addition to the power dynamics that come when contemporary people interpret the saints, as addressed in chapter two, saints, particularly those who have been lauded by the church and cherished in popular devotion, have often also been invested with a great deal of power and spiritual authority. This makes a critical reading even more important.

Companionship with a saint can take many forms—as many forms as there are of being companions or friends with contemporaries. This form of spiritual companionship is based upon the themes of spiritual companionship from the previous chapters. Although contemporary understandings of spiritual companionship inform these descriptions, Teresa’s understanding of spiritual friendship has had the greater influence. That is because of her many reflections on both the nature of spiritual friendship and the way it is manifested in relationships with other people, with God, and with the saints.
Throughout this work, themes of accompaniment, dialogue, and friendship with God have surfaced. Practices related to each of these themes that would reflect a lived relationship of spiritual companionship with a saint are described below. Although personal practices of spiritual companionship are important, this work also raises a larger question of how people who are not familiar with the concept of spiritual companionship with saints could learn about this spiritual practice. What type of pedagogy would provide an encounter with the saint that might lead to a relationship of spiritual companionship? Teaching in such a way as to provide the space where transformation might occur engages the fields of transformative and contemplative pedagogy, and this methodology will be explored later in the chapter.

Whether or not a relationship of friendship develops from such teaching, the techniques of transformative and contemplative pedagogy that will be described may allow a student in any educational setting to engage with the saints more deeply, coming to know them in different ways. These pedagogical techniques do not have to be explicitly religious or for religious purposes. Transformative and contemplative pedagogical techniques have been used in a variety of fields to help students to engage a subject more deeply by engaging in alternate forms of knowing. This type of engagement, however, holds special promise for those wishing to explore a relationship of spiritual companionship. For those in religious settings—congregations or seminaries—spiritual companionship could also be raised as a spiritual practice that the students might wish to explore.
Personal Practices of Companionship

As noted in chapter five, there are a number of Anglican liturgical practices that promote an understanding of the saints as spiritual companions. The remembrance of saints’ days, particularly when accompanied by educational offerings or sermons that explore the lives of saints more deeply, holds the potential for enhancing a sense of saints as spiritual companions, and even the possibility of identifying a particular saint as worthy of further investigation. The feast of All Saints, often celebrated with great enthusiasm in Episcopal churches, also affirms the sense of all the baptized being in a circle of companions known as the communion of saints. This sense of the baptized as a circle of companions is consistent with Wadell’s idea of the worshiping community being a community of spiritual companionship.

However, in addition to providing a sense of companionship among all the baptized alive today, the liturgy of All Saints includes prayers, hymns, and readings that focus upon the relationship of the living to the faithful throughout the generations. In the Anglican Communion, liturgical events such as All Saints Day that celebrate saints provide an opening and context in which to speak of the saints as companions, forming a foundation for a communal sense of spiritual companionship with the saints. However, few Episcopalians go beyond this communal relationship to develop a personal relationship of companionship with one particular saint, as that practice has not been common in the Anglican Communion.

One possible barrier to the development of one-on-one relationships with saints is that the stories of saints are not widely recounted in many Episcopal churches, and the great variety of possible companions may be relatively unknown. Commemorations of most of the saints listed in *Holy Women, Holy Men* are not regularly observed, and therefore the stories of these
saints are often not retold in public worship. Since weekday services, when the days of saints are properly commemorated in the Episcopal Church, are not found in many Episcopal churches and are often poorly attended when present, these “missing” stories need to be woven into the Sunday liturgy in some form, if Episcopalianians are to be encouraged to “meet” a wide variety of possible companions. Telling the story of one saint whose commemoration falls during the week would be one way to accomplish this goal, as would encouraging preachers to consider including more stories of the saints in sermons. Another traditional form of “telling” the stories of saints has been the use of liturgical art. Many Episcopal churches have stained glass windows depicting saints, and more are now displaying icons. Continuing and even expanding these artistic representations of the saints may be another way to familiarize Christians with the stories of the saints.

These communal practices of spiritual companionship would acquaint Episcopalianians with additional saints, who could serve as potential spiritual companions. In order to help those who have never considered a relationship with a particular saint or saints that approaches the type of relationship described in contemporary practices of spiritual companionship, however, additional practices are needed to help Christians to live into this type of relationship with a saint. The practices described below are intended to assist contemporary Christians in embodying a personal, one-on-one, relationship of spiritual companionship with a saint.

The proposed practices of spiritual companionship with saints fall into three categories—accompaniment, dialogue, and friendship with God—that are consistent with the understandings of spiritual companionship in the previous chapters. Although these themes that arose in the historical, descriptive, and systematic movements have varied in understanding in different
contexts, there was a remarkable consistency between Teresa’s views of true friendship and contemporary descriptions of spiritual companionship. Many of these same elements were also a part of the systematic theology movement, using Johnson’s understanding of the communion of saints as a circle of companions who are friends of God and prophets. While the ways that the three themes in this section have been understood have varied in the historical or contemporary discussion of spiritual companionship, they are present in a broad range of understandings of spiritual companionship. This section explores practices consistent with an understanding of the relationship of saints with contemporary Christians on the basis of these themes.

Accompaniment

The theme of accompaniment is strong in all three of the previous practical theology movements: historical, descriptive, and systematic. As noted, Teresa used not only the terms amigo/amistad (friend/friendship) but also compañía/compañero (companion/companionship) in talking about both relationships with others and relationships with Christ. Although for Teresa the journey of faith was one fraught with great dangers and the real companion on the road was Christ, she also spoke of the companionship provided by others in the life of prayer. This theme of companionship on a journey was also echoed in current descriptions of spiritual direction and in other less formal relationships also labeled as spiritual companionship. For some of the writers, as for Teresa, progress in the life of faith required one or more companions. The theme of companionship was strong in the Latino/a literature, particularly in the migration narratives—which, like Teresa’s texts, emphasized the importance of having Christ as a companion on a dangerous journey.
The use of companionship with respect to the saints also appeared in all three movements, although most strongly in the systematic theology movement. Johnson argued in her book that there are two traditional understandings of the communion of saints, and that the earliest understanding of the communion of saints was based on the idea of companionship. She says that “the living were partners, companions, codisciples with those who had given their lives, one witnessing to the other, both carried along by the saving grace poured out in Christ.”¹¹ Likewise, Anglican liturgies have envisioned the saints as companions.

Johnson argues that the “companionship model calls forth its own concrete expressions, many still in the process of being shaped in the current age as different groups devise forms of keeping memory.”¹² For Johnson, this memory is not one of simply recalling certain facts. In her understanding, the communion of saints “can be interpreted not only as a company of friends whose memory stirs our action in loving care and the struggle for justice, but also as a company of friends whose destiny shines as a beacon of hope.”¹³ For Johnson, then, the saints have both a present and a future abiding with God, and they are our companions in hope.¹⁴ As noted before, Johnson argues that this companionship means that the saints “are with their companions on earth in one community of grace.”¹⁵

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¹² Ibid., 245.
¹³ Ibid., 214.
¹⁴ Ibid., 214-15.
¹⁵ Ibid., 132.
Having argued in chapter five that a continuing relationship exists with the saints, the question becomes what practices will support this sense of memory and companionship, particularly when the saints are not physically present. Although it may be difficult to imagine the presence of saints from other times and cultures, maintaining a sense of presence even when physical presence is impossible is something that many people have learned to do in other relationships. Those who live far from family, close friends, or even spiritual companions develop practices that help them to maintain a sense of companionship. These practices may, with some modifications, be applicable for maintaining a sense of companionship with saints as well. Reading letters, emails, or other writings by someone who is not physically present can generate a sense of their presence, even if they are far away. Sharing pictures can also bring to mind the one who is absent. Telling stories is another practice that is often used to recall a person more vividly. Similar practices may also be helpful in personal relationships of spiritual companionship with saints. Telling stories is one of these practices that has been used to sense the presence of saints. In the introduction to *My Soul is a Witness*, Gloria Wade-Gayles argues for the importance of telling stories of foremothers, in order to allow them to be present in our lives. This presence is so vivid that it leads to other practices, practices done “with” the foremothers. “Lighting candles with them, praying prayers with them, chanting mantras with them, and singing witnessing songs with them at high octaves, we may be started on a search for our own spirituality, our own new beginnings.”¹⁶ This honoring of foremothers shares similar practices with the “ceremony of commemoration and veneration of ancestors” that is performed

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yearly by the Institute for Black Catholic Studies. Through a ritual of “gathering, processional, libation and prayer, readings, singing, telling the story, ‘walking’ the circle, and feasting with the ancestors,” the dead are made present in a commemoration that features elements of BaKongo and Roman Catholic understandings of ancestors.\(^{17}\)

Although a variety of practices may be useful in generating a sense of presence for those who are absent, three practices—reading, looking at pictures, and holding imaginative conversations—could be used even with saints from very different contexts. These practices are described below.

Although not all saints left written texts, Teresa left a large amount of written material: books, letters, rules for her order, shorter reflective pieces, and even poetry. For those who did not leave written texts, the reading of biographies or other commentaries on the saint may serve a function similar to that of telling stories. Through learning more about the saint, their life, and their historical context, such a historical figure becomes more vividly present. Chad Hoggan argues for the importance of story in teaching, as it has the power to make personal connections:

> Through story, ideas are given meaning and relevance as they bring abstract concepts into concrete and personal terms. This personal connection has the potential to lead to transformational experiences because it touches the soul, the spirit, the emotion of being.”\(^{18}\)

The power of story to make what is abstract concrete and personal would also be useful in developing a personal connection with the saints. A combination of reading deeply and

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contemplatively may allow connections to be made between their stories and the stories of contemporary Christians, strengthening the sense of being accompanied.

The importance of reading as a spiritual practice, and in particular deep contemplative reading of texts, usually called *lectio divina*, has a long tradition in Christian spirituality. In the fifth century, John Cassian urged monks to keep a passage of scripture at their sides at all times. Unceasing meditation on a verse of scripture would be like a “protective rock” keeping the monk safe from “the ambushes of the circling enemy.”19 From the fifth century onward, reading of Scripture aloud in a contemplative manner became associated with monastic communities.20 The first known summary of the four stages of contemplative reading that form the traditional practice of *lectio divina*—reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation—was written by Guigo II, prior of Grande-Chartreuse in the twelfth century.21

Reading is the careful study of the Scriptures, concentrating all one’s powers on it. Meditation is the busy application of the mind to seek with the help of one’s own reason for knowledge of hidden truth. Prayer is the heart’s devoted turning to God to drive away evil and obtain what is good. Contemplation is when the mind is in some sort lifted up to God and held above itself, so that it tastes the joys of everlasting sweetness.22

*Lectio divina*, long a monastic practice, is also becoming more familiar to contemporary Christians through popular works that seek to adapt the practice to meet the needs of people today. Although many of these works use the traditional practice of

22. Ibid.
lectio as a base, the authors feel free to modify it. In his book, The Word is Very Near You: A Guide to Praying with Scripture, Martin L. Smith describes lectio divina as reading a passage very slowly until a word or phrase “lights up,” repeating the word until it is absorbed, responding to God, and finally staying in the awareness of God, a description that calls to mind Guigo’s steps. M. Basil Pennington’s method of lectio combines the traditional understanding of the practice with the practice of centering prayer. The practitioner takes ten minutes to read the text, to listen to what God is saying and respond, and to take a “word” to be used in the practice of centering prayer. Although Eugene Peterson uses the four traditional steps of lectio—lectio, meditatio, oratio, contemplatio—he believes that contemplatio needs to be reinterpreted for contemporary Christians who are not a part of a monastic community. He believes that contemplation, as traditionally described, “requires a vowed life of seclusion from the ‘world’.” He redefines contemplation for those living in the world. “Contemplation means submitting to the biblical revelation, taking it within ourselves, and then living it unpretentiously, without fanfare.” Although most books on lectio divina focus upon the reading of Biblical texts, the technique is flexible, and it can be used for other types of

26. Ibid., 112.
texts. With modifications, it can also be used for objects or images, a process usually called visio divina.

The use of visual imagery can also call to mind a sense of presence. When available, portraits (or even photographs of more recent saints) can provide a visual focus for practices of companionship. Icons or other sources of artwork depicting saints can also be helpful, as well as photographs depicting places where the saint may have lived or served. Icons may have a particularly powerful effect for some Christians. For Orthodox Christians, icons are an essential element in worship. According to Léonide Ouspensky, icons convey “the same truth that is expressed by other essential elements of the church’s life and faith,” but in a different language.27 In particular, the presence of icons within the sanctuary during worship “witnesses to the unity of the earthly and the heavenly church.”28 That makes icons particularly helpful in envisioning a relationship between contemporary Christians and the saints, allowing Christians, through the use of icons, to experience “communion with Christ or the saint portrayed.”29 Kallistos Ware argues that the presence of icons in worship ensures “that the communion of saints is not simply an article of faith but a fact of immediate experience.”30

Jim Forest also argues that icons help to bring the saints closer to contemporary Christians. “Of course Christ and the saints are close with or without icons, but one could see

28. Ibid., 392.
29. Ibid.
how icons help to overcome all that normally impedes our awareness that we live in the presence of God and in the midst of a ‘cloud of witnesses.’”  

Icons have been understood as windows to the divine, treasured for their ability to draw worshippers “beyond what can be seen with our physical eyes into the realm of mystical experience.”

In addition, some saints also left behind artwork that they created, both visual and other forms of artistic expression. Engaging visual imagery associated with the saint can allow a deeper appreciation and knowledge of the saint, engaging other types of knowledge than the merely cognitive.

Creative forms of learning, especially the use of imagination, have been found to be important in pedagogy that has as its goal not simply the learning of material but personal transformation. In the foreword to Creative Expression in Transformative Learning: Tools and Techniques for Educators of Adults, Chad Hoggan, Soni Simpson, and Heather Stuckey argue for the importance of the “extrarational” in any type of adult education in which the goal is personal transformation. “The extrarational approach goes ‘beyond the rational.’ Transformative experiences can occur through creative expression, intuition, imagination, and nurturing the soul.”

John M. Dirkx argues that transformative learning requires the engagement of the soul, and “learning through soul calls for a more central role of imagination and fantasy in our instructional methods and content.” Dirkx argues that different types of imaginative experiences are needed to nurture this soul learning. “Soul is nourished within our lives through

32. Ibid., 13.
33. Hoggan, Simpson, and Stuckey, Creative Expression in Transformative Learning, viii.
story, song, myth, poetry, and the concreteness of our everyday experiences.” The use of imaginative dialogue taps into this type of soul learning, and it resonates with types of spirituality in which the use of imagination is key, such as Ignatian spirituality. According to George P. Schner, “An imaginative construal as basis for religious language and thought may not give clear and distinct ideas, but it does accomplish for the believer the kind of knowledge that has the characteristics essential for the Christian.” It is imagination, according to Schner, that makes it possible for the believer to experience the past as present. This type of imaginative engagement with Biblical texts was important in Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises.*

According to Barbara Bedolla and Dominic Totaro,

> In contemplation, as Ignatius understands it, the imagination is used as a source of prayerful understanding of the gospel message. The one praying enters into the scene, sees the images, smells the smells, hears the discussion or words spoken, and takes part in what is happening, either actively or passively, according to what it desired.

The use of imagination, even of imaginative dialogue, is an important part of Ignatian spiritual practice, as well as being an important part of transformative dialogue.

35. Ibid., 83.
37. Ibid., 4.
Dialogue

The practice of imaginative conversation is not the only type of dialogue that is possible with the saints. The practice of reading described above can also be a form of dialogue. In her essay, “Transformative Reading,” Una Agnew addresses this kind of reading, “which yields lasting results in terms of life formation.” She argues that “reading becomes transformative when a fragment of life-experience encounters a fragment of text.” A key to this form of reading, according to Agnew, is slow and repeated reading of the text, in a process similar to traditional forms of lectio divina:

For a text to become transformative, the reader generally reads it several times, pauses, allows the text to settle into life, to dream and allow the imagination to interplay freely in the world before the text. Text and reader holiday together before the reader returns with fresh insight.

This form of slow, repeated reading, which allows the imagination freedom, could also be used in spiritual companionship with the saints. By imagining not simply the context of the words but the author of the text or the character in the biography, a form of mutually critical dialogue could arise between the saints and contemporary Christians.

Mutually critical dialogue between the writings of saints or about saints and contemporary Christians, however, faces the questions raised in chapter two about appropriation. Mutually critical dialogue requires two full partners. The question becomes how to allow the saint to “take the stage” as Dreyer argued and “speak out of their own time and context to the

41. Ibid., 195.
42. Ibid., 193.
extent that we know what these are." As Dreyer argued and as I argued in chapter two, a deep historical-contextual analysis is a first step in being accountable to the saints whose lives and texts are being engaged in dialogue. Through such work, Dreyer argues, we grant the writers the right to “have thought their own thoughts—thoughts that are likely to be dramatically different from our own.” Through such work, we “nurture epistemological hospitality and openness to conversation with these historical figures we study.” Such work will not escape all distortions due to contemporary interpretations and understandings, but it will allow the saints to speak as clearly as possible across space and time.

Unfortunately, this type of deep historical-contextual analysis may not be a possibility for all Christians interested in companionship with a saint. Learning as much as possible about the saint is still important, however, for knowledge of context provides many clues and hints as to the meaning of texts or incidents in the biographies of saints. Although McCarthy argues that the very short descriptions of saints found in many books of the saints are sufficient for real relationships, a one-line or one-paragraph description hardly allows saints to be deeply known, much less to speak out of their own context. Getting to know someone more deeply is one of the results of friendship with contemporaries, and such knowledge deepens the friendship. Learning about the saint and about their historical context can allow them to be present in a more complex and nuanced way, allowing them to be a living presence rather than simply a symbol or type, as

44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., 167.
McCarthy seems to advocate. Living relationships are complex, and encountering the saint as a complex figure allows them to be more present.

This dialogue, however, raises a question as well: How do we deal with the very real differences that are likely to be revealed between the saints and ourselves, differences in worldviews, values, human nature, and even understandings of the nature of God? There may be practices that seem counter to how we understand the relationship of people with God. Biases against certain groups of people may be troubling as well. Teresa’s denigration of women in some of her writings can be problematic for women today. Her understanding of suffering as a gift from God, given to those whom God loves best, could be troubling in a contemporary context. Her fear and condemnation of “Lutherans,” her word for any Protestants, demonstrates the less than tolerant views of her context. All of these issues potentially raise questions about how to deal with differences.

46. “As for everything else, just being a woman is enough to have my wings fall off — how much more being both a woman and wretched as well.” Teresa of Avila, Life, 10.8, 109; “…de otra manera sería con gran escrúpulo, fuera de decir mis pedados, que para esto ninguno tengo; para los demás basta ser mujer para caërseme las alas, cuantimás mujer y ruin.” Teresa de Jesus, Vida, 10.8, 69.

47. “And it is clear that since God wants to lead those whom He greatly loves by the path of tribulation—and the more He loves them the greater the tribulation—there is no reason to think that He despises contemplatives, for with His own mouth He praises them and considers them His friends.” Teresa of Avila, Way, 18.1, 102; “Y está claro que —pues lo es que a los que Dios mucho quiere lleva por camino de trabajos, y mientras más los ama, mayores— no hay por qué creer que tiene aborrecidos los contemplativos, pues por su boca los alaba y tiene por amigos.” Teresa de Jesus, Camino [Valladolid], 18.1, 306.

48. “At that time news reached me of the harm being done in France and of the havoc the Lutherans had caused and how much this miserable sect was growing. The news distressed me greatly, and, as though I could do something or were something, I cried to the Lord and begged Him that I might remedy so much evil…Since we would all be occupied in prayer for those who are the defenders of the Church and for preachers and for learned men who protect her from attack, we could help as much as possible this Lord of mine who is so roughly treated by those for whom He has done so much good; it seems these traitors would want Him to be crucified again and that He have no place to lay His head.” Teresa of Avila, Way, 1.2, 41-42; “En este tiempo vinieron a mi noticia los daños de Francia y el estrago que havían hecho estos luteranos, y cuánto iva en crecimiento esta desventurada secta. Diome gra fatiga, y como si yo pudiera algo u fuera algo, se tanto mal…para que todas ocupadas en oración por los que son
Both saints and contemporary Christians are conditioned by their time and context. The different contexts will likely yield significant differences, issues that cannot be easily reconciled. That is where the practice of mutually critical dialogue is important. In such dialogue, difference can be seen not as a problem but rather as an important and necessary element. Holder argues that we need to engage the classic spiritual texts more deeply, allowing the classic texts to confront us in all of their strangeness. 49 Johnson argues that the role of saints is to help us to locate ourselves within an ongoing tradition and to allow their stories to challenge our own understandings:

By telling and listening to stories, persons locate themselves in a cultural, historical, or religious tradition and allow its insights and challenge to shape their identity as human subjects. The stories become woven into their lives, and they join the plot of their own lives to the ongoing tale. 50

This does not mean an uncritical acceptance of their stories, practices, or beliefs. Johnson argues for solidarity, not an attempt to make us into the people of old. 51 This solidarity “consists not only in a common history, origin, and goal, but in the same Spirit who flows through and enlivens all.” 52

In joining this circle of companions who are friends of God and prophets, Christians are engaging in dialogue with friends of God and prophets through the ages who, while dealing with

51. Ibid., 179.
52. Ibid., 215.
many of the same issues and questions that affect Christians today, do so in very different times and contexts. Their witness may serve as an inspiration, a source of hope, and even a guide for faithful living, but it cannot be a blueprint for Christians in other contexts. The role of this companionship is not to make Christians just like the saints, but to make saints—friends of God and prophets—of contemporary Christians. The stories, practices, and beliefs of saints in previous centuries need to be evaluated in this light. The ultimate norm in this mutually critical dialogue needs to be whether this practice, belief, or story helps Christians today to become better friends of God and prophets in this time and place.

*Friendship with God*

As noted in chapter four, the goal of growing in friendship with God is something that is found not only in Teresa of Avila’s writings, but also in many descriptions of current practices of spiritual companionship. Although there are many ways that friendship with God could be described, particular saints, with their own stories and understanding of friendship with God, are able to invite contemporary Christians into a specific type of such friendship. They invite Christians today into the friendship with God that they have enjoyed and are presumably still enjoying within the larger circle of companions who are friends of God.

This means that not all saints will be equally helpful to all Christians today. As Johnson notes, “A trail of bloody and violated bodies runs through the communion of saints.”\(^53\) This is particularly true of many of the women saints who are remembered. Some of the ways that friendship with God has been envisioned may not be possible for certain individuals or even

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 157.
advisable. There is a shortage of role models among officially recognized saints in the Roman Catholic Church whose lives mirror those of most contemporary Christians. Johnson argues that the list of saints “is overwhelmingly favorable toward men who are priests or bishops and toward persons of aristocratic and upper-class origins.” More troubling, they are “biased against lay people in general and women in particular, and prejudiced against the full and legitimate use of human sexuality by both women and men.” Hence she argues for a fuller understanding of the communion of saints, which includes the faithful in every generation.

If that full cloud of witnesses is a potential source for models of friendship with God, then certainly no one person could embody all the ways that this friendship has been lived out through the centuries. The very diversity of the communion of saints makes it more likely, however, that contemporary Christians could find, within the communion of saints, a way of living out friendship with God that resonates with them. Engaging Christians and seekers with the variety of ways in which the Christian life has been lived is one way of responding to that “hungering and thirsting for spiritual nourishment” that Holder refers to. In the company of the communion of saints, Christians can find others with whom to share their own journeys. The practices discussed above give those who are seeking such companionship a way of living into a relationship of spiritual companionship that may feed their souls, nourishing them for their journeys of faith.

54. Ibid., 102.
55. Ibid.
In order for Christians to meet potential spiritual companions, however, more teaching about the saints is needed. There is a great richness of friendship with God within the communion of saints that can be experienced and shared, inviting Christians today to explore new ways of living out their lives in friendship with God.

Teaching the Saints as Spiritual Companions

It is important to teach about the saints, and yet teaching that occurs in an academic environment is often not hospitable to questions or insights from faith, an important element if the saints are to be able to be seen as spiritual companions. In the introduction to The Academy and the Possibility of Belief: Essays on the Intellectual and Spiritual Life, the editors, Mary Louise Buley-Meissner, Mary McCaslin Thompson, and Elizabeth Bachrach Tan, argue that the modes of teaching and of discourse in the academy often function to suppress religious and spiritual beliefs:

Many students in undergraduate and graduate programs have been embarrassed, scorned, or shamed when they have acknowledged in class their religious backgrounds or faith traditions. The implicit (sometimes explicit) message from their teachers has been clear: To be educated means to be educated out of beliefs affirmed by church, temple, synagogue, or sacred circle. To be educated means to become an intellectual skeptic, an independent thinker whose judgments are based on material reason and logical analysis. Attempting to meet the demands of the university, students frequently assume the distanced critical stance essential to academic inquiry. They take on the roles of well-disciplined rationalists as they try to speak and write standard academic discourse. With varying degrees of success, they learn to disassociate themselves from the objects of their study. But outside of class, they often raise troubling questions about the means and ends of
that education. Why should the life of the mind and the life of the spirit be separated?"  

Robert L. Brown, Jr., and Michael Jon Olson argue that the problem is at its root a conflict between what they call “disciplinarity,” those forces that are working to form and conform students into citizens of the academy, and “spirituality,” which includes those issues of religious belief and values, as well as the personal. They argue that the ferocity with which spiritual and religious issues are often excluded from academic discourse results because these different ways of approaching material challenge traditional academic identities. They argue that:

The academic community that supports us exacts payment for the power and solidarity it confers. The exclusion of spirituality from the academy, we claim, has everything to do with how the research university operates as a modernist institution that legitimates and validates knowledge while it constructs disciplinary subjects who do academic work.

As argued earlier, the goal of studies in spirituality and practical theology often includes personal transformation. This task is quite different from the task of forming “well-disciplined rationalists,” who separate themselves from the object of their studies in order to engage in academic discourse. Arthur W. Chickering, Jon C. Dalton, and Liesa Stamm argue that “our almost exclusive emphasis on rational empiricism needs to be balanced by similar concern for other ways of knowing, being, and doing.” Different goals require pedagogical tools that are congruent with those goals. If the goal, in this case, is to create opportunities for people to


experience spiritual companionship with the saints, then spirituality needs to be integrated into the academic setting in ways that have often been discouraged in the academy. Although traditional academic pedagogical techniques are not adapted for such a purpose, the tools of transformative and contemplative pedagogy seem ideally suited to this task.

Transformative and Contemplative Pedagogy

Jack Mezirow, one of the leading theorists in the field of transformative pedagogy, defines transformative learning as “learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change.”

This type of pedagogy, according to Mezirow and Edward Taylor, has become “the dominant teaching paradigm discussed within the field of adult education.” The focus in transformative learning enables adults to learn to reason for themselves and not simply to act upon prior beliefs or the judgments of others. This type of learning necessarily involves questions of meaning, value, and purpose. As Parker J. Palmer and Arthur Zajonc argue, education not only needs to be a way of obtaining knowledge, but also should help the students to find a sense of meaning and purpose for their lives:

When asked, almost 80 percent of both undergraduates and faculty said that they considered themselves spiritual and that they were committed to a search for purpose and meaning. When asked how often they experienced such a search in


the classroom, almost 60 percent of both undergraduates and faculty reported never.\textsuperscript{62}

Transformative pedagogy attempts to address this desire for learning that engages questions of purpose and meaning.

Although a variety of methods have been used in transformative learning, pedagogies claiming to be transformative have some shared characteristics. Originally, according to Taylor, three core elements were identified: individual experience, critical reflection, and dialogue.\textsuperscript{63} As the field grew and evolved, other elements were also identified as important in transformative pedagogy. These included others that Taylor identifies as being equally significant: a holistic orientation, awareness of context, and authentic practice.\textsuperscript{64} In the focus upon awareness of context and authentic practice, the field of transformative pedagogy and the field of practical theology share similar concerns and interests. In particular, Kathleen Cahalan, Carol Lakey Hess, and Bonnie Miller-McLemore identify common ways of teaching practical theology in the presentations that they analyzed, ways that echo themes found in transformative learning:

Commonalities cluster around four interrelated pursuits: cultivating distinctive modes of knowing, engaging the body, forming persons for practice, and making space for God. Simply put, practical theological knowledge involves practice, embodiment, self-reflection, and recognition of God’s presence.\textsuperscript{65}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{64} Ibid.
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In the focus upon self-reflection and practice, practical theology pedagogy uses some of the same elements that are important in transformative pedagogy. The importance of practice in pedagogy is emphasized even more strongly in the field of spirituality. Elizabeth Liebert argues that practice is essential in teaching Christian spirituality. “It is a matter of doing always what it is that we study (as well as studying what we do). This shared and self-critically reflective experience of lived spirituality is, in shorthand terms, ‘practice.’” For her, this is so central to the teaching of spirituality that even at the doctoral level she would incorporate elements of practice, not for the purpose of “personal spiritual formation of the students (though I won’t object if that occurs), but helping the students understand” spiritual practice and experience more deeply. For Liebert, students need not only to grasp the material, but to be grasped by it. The transformative nature of pedagogy in the field of Christian spirituality requires space where this can happen, and Liebert argues that this is just good pedagogy, for “when experience ‘comes into the room,’ it makes the study of the experience immediate and compelling.”

In the emphasis upon distinctive modes of knowing and engaging the body, teachers in the field of practical theology also echo what more recent studies in the field of transformative pedagogy have affirmed: transformation is not solely a rational activity, and other forms of knowing are important in the transformative process. Taylor argues that, while critical reflection was at one time predominantly seen as a rational approach to learning, research has revealed that it is the affective ways of knowing that

67. Ibid., 38.
68. Ibid., 39.
prioritize experience and identify for the learner what is personally most significant in the process of reflection.”

For Taylor, a holistic orientation is an essential element in transformative learning, and “this orientation encourages the engagement with other ways of knowing—the affective and relational.” Dirkx and Regina O. Smith argue that dealing with emotionality is necessary for any pedagogy that aims at personal transformation. They specifically design their courses so as to create the tension and emotionality that they argue is necessary for transformative learning. Although they argue that “engaging, accepting, and helping students work through these emotional dynamics is perhaps one of the most difficult and challenging dimensions of a kind of teaching that is guided by the concept of transformative learning,” they also argue that these tasks are essential for any pedagogy that hopes to provide a space for transformation.

Advocates for transformative pedagogy argue that this form of teaching is not a way of engaging certain subjects, but is actually required for deep engagement with any subject. Traditional forms of pedagogy that focus exclusively upon cognitive knowledge do not provide the kind of learning necessary for the full development of humans into people who can integrate what they are learning in ways that allow them to respond to the complexity of our world.

Palmer and Zajonc argue that

Advocates for integrative education take facts and rationality seriously; the failure to do so would betray our DNA. But we also seek forms of knowing, teaching,

70. Ibid., 10.
72. Ibid., 65.
and learning that offer more nourishment than the thin soup served up when data and logic are the only ingredients. In our complex and demanding worlds—inner and outer worlds—the human species cannot survive, let alone thrive, on a diet like that.  

Such integration is necessary if people are to be educated in ways that allow them to learn to “use their knowledge with wisdom, compassion, and love.” This use of knowledge has much in common with practical theology’s focus on transformed practice as its telos.

One form of transformative pedagogy that is advocated by Zajonc is what he defines as contemplative pedagogy. For Zajonc, contemplative pedagogy is based upon an epistemology of love, with seven stages. These stages are respect, gentleness, intimacy, vulnerability, participation, transformation, and imaginative insight. Based on the Buddhist idea of “direct perception” and the Greek idea of episteme, Zajonc claims that this type of experience is a “kind of seeing, beholding, or direct apprehension, rather than as an intellectual reasoning to a logical conclusion.” This type of encounter provides knowledge that is based upon subjectification and intimacy, not objectification and distance. In this contemplative gaze, the observer participates in that which is being observed. In other words, a relationship develops between the two. This development of a relationship is one of the characteristics that commends this type of pedagogy to the work of teaching the saints in a way that would allow the development of a relationship of companionship.

74. Ibid, 38.
75. Ibid., 94-96.
76. Ibid., 96.
77. Ibid., 94.
A second characteristic that commends this type of pedagogy is its use of contemplative practices. Such a way of knowing and teaching has obvious parallels with forms of contemplative prayer within the Christian tradition, prayer forms that were important to many saints, particularly those often labeled as mystics. The use of contemplative pedagogical practices allows students to experience practices that are, at times, analogous to those of the saint being considered. If, as argued in chapter one, participation in an analogous experience is necessary in order to understand spiritual experience, then contemplative pedagogical experiences provide a way of allowing students to understand more deeply those practices that were important to the saints. Of course, contemplative practice only serves this purpose for those saints for whom contemplation was an important spiritual practice. In other cases, however, the use of contemplative pedagogical techniques still could allow the students to acquire the type of participative knowledge of the subject of which Zajonc speaks. This knowledge could serve as a foundation for developing a relationship of spiritual companionship. The classroom experience would need to be supplemented, however, with other types of practices based upon the practices of the saint being studied if contemplative practices were not practiced by the saint, in order to serve the second purpose.

An example of the way that contemplative pedagogy could be used to allow students to share an analogous experience is found in Teresa of Avila’s understanding of mental prayer. Teresa likens this type of prayer to an intimate conversation between friends.78 In addition, she

78. “Mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else that an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us.” Teresa of Avila, Life, 8.5 96; “…que no es otra cosa
describes mental prayer as being aware of the person to whom you are speaking. “Mental prayer consists of what was explained: being aware and knowing that we are speaking, with whom we are speaking, and who we ourselves are who dare to speak to so great a Lord." Using a form of contemplative dialogue would allow students to participate in an experience that is analogous with Teresa’s own preferred style of prayer. A description of this pedagogical method follows below.

Method for Imaginative Dialogue

As with companionship with a contemporary, developing a relationship that allows intimate conversation is a matter of stages in which, as the companions come to a deeper level of friendship, the intimacy of the relationship is also increased. This deeper intimacy allows the other to understand nuances that were not obvious in the earlier, more superficial relationship. Knowledge of the other’s story and context also helps to make a deeper and more intimate dialogue possible.

In teaching the saints in such a way as to make space for the potential of developing a relationship of companionship, I propose a three-stage process of deepening intimacy: initial engagement, contextual engagement, and contemplative engagement. This process both illustrates a pedagogy that could be adapted to a variety of saints and allows for different types of

oración mental, a mi parecer, sino tratar amistad, estando muchas veces tratando a solas con quien sabemos nos ama.” Teresa de Jesus, Vida 8.5, 61.

79. Teresa of Avila, Way, 25.3, 131; “…que es lo que queda dicho: pensar y entender qué hablamos, y con quién hablamos, y quién somos los que osamos hablar con tan gran Señor.” Teresa de Jesus, Camino [Valladolid], 25.3, 339.
knowing and engagement to be used. I will demonstrate how this would work with Teresa of Avila.

*Initial Engagement*

The students would be given a very short biography of Teresa of Avila, the type of sketch often given in books about saints. This lays down, in a few sentences, the basic facts about her and why she is remembered. Following this, the students would read a short passage from one of Teresa’s works, e.g., Teresa’s prologue to *The Way of Perfection*. The students would then be asked to discuss what they hear Teresa saying, what they think is important, and what questions they have. Since the students often have different amounts of knowledge about Teresa of Avila, the responses will be varied.

*Contextual Engagement*

The students then would be given an introduction to Teresa of Avila’s context. The basics of her biography would be placed within the context of sixteenth-century Spain. The focus in this exposition is on understanding the context that shaped Teresa and her writings. Following this, the same passage would be read and the same questions asked, noting the changes that occur in the responses.

*Contemplative Engagement*

For the final step, the students would be given more biographical information about Teresa of Avila, including the ways that Teresa and others described her personality. In addition, the students would be provided with a copy of the only known portrait painted of Teresa during
her lifetime. This time, while the passage is being read, the students would be invited to look at the portrait and imagine that they are sitting across from Teresa, hearing her say the words. At the end, they would be invited to engage in an imaginative dialogue with Teresa, asking her questions about what she said and why she said it. Following that exercise, the students would be invited to share their experiences, noting any differences in the way that they heard the passage the third time.

Analysis

This contemplative exercise opens up space for the students to encounter Teresa more directly, from a participatory stance and not the stance of an objective observer. It is not, however, simply a way of reading into Teresa’s words one’s own understanding. As the changing answers to the questions through the three steps will illustrate, learning about the historical context and the details of Teresa’s biography changes and deepens the engagement of the students with Teresa’s writings. This allows Teresa to speak as clearly as possible across space and time, both in ways that might support current practices and understandings and in ways that might challenge them. In such dialogue, relationships of spiritual companionship might be forged.

This exercise, while described for an academic environment, could easily be adapted for an adult education offering within a congregation. The same deepening engagement would be helpful in inviting the participants into a possible relationship of companionship. Although the more limited time frames of most educational events in congregations may not allow a deep
description of the context and life story of the saint, even a relative short introduction to the life and times of the saints may illuminate the possibility of companionship.

One issue in both contexts is that the number of saints who might be able to serve as spiritual companions is enormous. This type of in-depth description can only be done for a few saints in any particular setting. Although students may not find any of the particular saint or saints presented to be a suitable companion for their spiritual journeys, suggesting the possibility of such a relationship and demonstrating how one might go about exploring this possibility with a saint may encourage contemporary Christians to explore other saints who have a greater potential for them, or even to engage familiar saints in a new and deeper way. Not all forms of friendship will appeal to all Christians, but an encouragement to explore friendship with the saints and ultimately with God may be one of the benefits of this type of pedagogy.

Conclusions

Evaluating the Change in Practical Theology Methodology

Having come to the end of this practical theology study, it is appropriate to consider how the methodology proposed in chapter one has actually functioned for research at the intersection of the disciplines of practical theology and spirituality. How has the change in methodology enhanced the study of spiritual experience and practice in practical theology?

The most obvious difference is the way that Teresa’s insights have permeated the whole work. The historical texts did not stay confined to one movement, but are found throughout the work. Unlike what Brandt suggests, however, they are not used so much to illuminate current practice, i.e., to explain why current practice is the way that it is, but to engage it in mutually
critical dialogue. Teresa’s works became not merely part of the background material, but partners in the ongoing dialogue.

Although the placement of the historical movement raised concerns about tradition dictating the questions raised by contemporary practice, that did not happen in this study. The focus upon mutually critical dialogue kept the historical texts from serving primarily as sources of the theology that would be applied in contemporary practice. In order to engage in mutually critical dialogue, both the historical and the contemporary sources needed to be deeply described in their own context, in order to better preserve the integrity of each. The contextual analysis of both the historical texts and the contemporary practice enhanced the possibility of a critical dialogue of a truly mutual nature, one in which the historical sources do not limit the contemporary questions and in which the contemporary sources do not limit the historical questions. It allowed tradition and the contemporary practices to be held mutually accountable, as they were in this study.

The ability to hold a mutually critical dialogue is also enhanced when both sources are more similar in genre. Because of that, Teresa proved a particularly good tradition source for this method. Her descriptions of the practice of true friendship were theory- and tradition-laden. The same was true of the contemporary practice of spiritual companionship. Although the historical contexts were very different, the concern to describe practices of companionship in ways that were true both to experience and tradition were important in both, and provided a foundation for the mutually critical dialogue.

The change in methodology, which allowed Teresa’s voice to be a strong dialogue partner throughout the work, not only enhanced the mutually critical dialogue but made it more
similar to works in spirituality, in which the historical sources often play a much greater role than they do in practical theology. Perhaps the most important point demonstrated in this study was that it was possible to begin with the historical movement and to allow it to play a strong role in the research without risking reducing contemporary practice to simply applied theology. This broadens the possible methods available for practical theology, a broadening that has potential positive applications in the study of spiritual experience and practice.

The Promise of Spiritual Companionship with Saints

The communion of saints provides the theological rationale for the continuing relationship of contemporary Christians with those Christians who have lived in ages past. Early Christian understandings of saints as a circle of companions who are friends of God and prophets, to use Johnson’s terminology, work well to support an understanding of the possibility of a relationship of spiritual companionship with a saint. This type of relationship, also described by Teresa, has parallels with current understandings of spiritual companionship. Like relationships with contemporaries, spiritual companionship with a saint can provide a sense of being accompanied on the journey by one who shares similar experiences. As in current understandings of spiritual companionship, companionship with a saint can provide both support and challenge to current understandings of the spiritual life. Finally, such relationships provide a wide variety of models of friendship with God.

In order to develop such a relationship, however, forms of teaching about the saint need to incorporate pedagogical methods that allow for the possibility of a more direct engagement between the saint and contemporary Christians. Forms of transformative pedagogy, particularly
contemplative pedagogy, work well for this purpose, not only allowing a more direct engagement with the saint but also allowing students to participate in forms of contemplative practice. Since contemplative prayer was often important in the lives of saints, particularly the mystics, contemplative pedagogy allows the students to experience practices that share a contemplative focus.

As noted, transformation is often stated as a goal of both spirituality and practical theology. The use of these pedagogical techniques is an attempt to provide a structure where such a goal, a goal described by Teresa and many others as becoming a better friend of Christ, is possible. Transformation is not something that can be guaranteed, no matter how well-designed the experience. As Teresa lamented, not everyone wants to become a friend of Christ. Not all will find Teresa a suitable companion for their spiritual journeys. The communion of saints, however, provides an almost unlimited variety of ways in which the Christian life has been lived in friendship with Christ. According to Johnson, Christians’ connections with the saints help them to weave their stories into the Christian story:

Woven into the story of Jesus are the stories of all those who throughout history have responded to the call of the Spirit in suffering and joy: all saints. Few traditionally told lives of the saints, however, function with anything near the full potential of critical narrative, enabling hearers to leap about and dance, to risk their lives, to stay afloat, to survive evil.

Engaging the saints deeply as spiritual companions may allow Christians to find what Johnson argues is missing in most traditionally told lives of the saints—a sense of accompaniment that supports them in their lives of faith, so that they can leap, dance, risk, stay

afloat, and survive. The saints invite Christians into that circle of companions who are friends of God and prophets, where they can find companionship on their spiritual journeys and the help they need to grow into better friends of God.
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