Your Word Pierced My Heart, and I Fell in Love:
Teresa of Avila’s Reading of Augustine of Hippo’s *Confessions*

A DISSERTATION

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In 1554, after twenty years as a Carmelite nun in the Monastery of the *Encarnación* in Avila and having begun to practice the Prayer of Recollection, as espoused in Francis of Osuna’s *El Tercer Abecedario*, Teresa of Avila noticed a shift in her prayer before an image of the suffering Christ. At that time, she was given a copy of Augustine’s *Confessions*, which had been newly translated into Spanish. She writes, “As I began to read the *Confessions*, it seemed to me that 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 the voice in the garden, it only seemed to me, according to what I felt in my heart, that it was I the Lord called” (*Vida* 9.8).

Teresian scholarship acknowledges a connection between Augustine and Teresa and recognizes the influence of his writings upon her. Much has been done in the way of paralleling *Libro de la Vida* with the *Confessions*, especially in its autobiographical rendering. However, this scholarship typically falls short in addressing just how the *Confessions* impacted her life.

The *Confessions* speaks to various levels of conversion in Augustine’s life, all of which come together and culminate in the garden scene recorded in Book VIII. Interestingly, one of these levels is how Augustine approaches texts and comes to appreciate language. A gifted rhetorician, Augustine himself will notice a shift in how he experiences texts and is invited to “take up and read” Scripture and encounter the living Word. It is precisely this invitation that grabs Teresa’s attention and pulls her into the story of Augustine, and subsequently into her own
story, that is worth exploring closely. The *Confessions* enabled Teresa to see, read, and understand her experience(s) differently and deeply, helping her to develop a new mystical language. In other words, Teresa’s reception of this text marks a conversion in itself, namely, in her relationship to books, in how she receives and reads them. In effect, the *Confessions* serves as a bridge to understanding her mysticism.

Using the fourfold contemplative method of *lectio divina*, this dissertation examines Teresa’s reading of Augustine’s *Confessions*, which she describes as part of her own conversion experience, and, as a result, changes the ways in which Teresa reads, approaches, and reflectively writes of her own experience.
This dissertation by Kevin M. DePrinzio, O.S.A., fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Spirituality/Historical Theology approved by Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., Ph.D., as Director, and by Mark Clark, Ph.D., and Keith J. Egan, Ph.D., as Readers.

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San Agustín y Santa Teresa ofrecen sus corazones a la Virgen y San José
(Antonio de Pereda, 1640)
Introduction

The walls of the Monasterio de las Carmelitas de San José in Toledo, Spain, frame a beautiful picture, one of quiet, of solitude, and of contemplation, yet matted and outlined by strength, resilience, and determination. Begun in 1569 as the fifth foundation of the mid-sixteenth century Carmelite Reform ushered in by Saint Teresa of Avila, the present-day edifice was completed almost one hundred years later, having relocated four times within its first thirty years alone.¹

The public chapel, a later addition, is striking, with a single nave ornamented by statues and paintings of figures a visitor would expect to see in a Carmelite Church: Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Saint Joseph, Saint John of the Cross, and Saint Teresa of Avila, all in the baroque style characteristic of the Golden Age of Spain. One such adornment, however, a painting above the main altar in the sanctuary, is both surprising and curious, especially as it appears as the focus of the worship space. Entitled San Agustín y Santa Teresa ofrecen sus corazones a la Virgen y San José, this 1640 altarpiece by Antonio de Pereda clearly depicts what it says.

At first glance, the saints seem like an odd pairing, especially in a Carmelite space. If Teresa is depicted with anyone, John of the Cross usually accompanies her. Instead, a fifth century North African bishop and a sixteenth century Spanish nun are seen here side by side in

¹ See José Miguel Muñoz Jiménez, Arquitectura Carmelitana (1562-1800): Arquitectura de los Carmelitas Descalzos en España, México y Portugal durante los Siglos XVI a XVII. (Avila: Institución Gran Duque de Avila, 1990): 90-91. Interestingly, Muñoz Jiménez refers to all of the foundations as conventos, not monasterios, which is misleading, given that convento in Spanish (i.e., “convent”) is the name given for the dwelling of men religious, and monasterio is that of women religious. However, it is clear throughout the text that he is referring to Teresa’s foundations of the Discalced women.
positions that mirror each other: both are kneeling firmly on the earth, gazing heavenward
toward the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph, and holding out their hearts aflame. The objects often
associated with them and found in their possession, namely, the bishop’s staff and the book, are
placed – as if dropped suddenly – on the ground, further underscoring curiosity.

Although the connection between these two figures may not be an obvious one initially,
anyone familiar with Teresa’s writings could easily recall her fondness for Augustine and how
she came to endear herself to him. Not only had she spent a few years as a teenage girl in a
finishing school run by the Augustinian nuns of Nuestra Señora de Gracia in Avila, but even
more telling was her reading of Augustine’s *Confessions* in 1554 when it was first translated into
Spanish. Her reception of this classic text came at a key moment in her life when, after twenty
years as a Carmelite nun in the Monastery of the Encarnación in Avila, she noticed a shift in her
prayer before an image of the suffering Christ. She writes, “At this time they gave me *The
Confessions of St. Augustine*. It seemed to me the Lord ordained this, because I had not tried to
procure a copy, nor had I ever seen one.”² Teresa continues, “As I began to read the
*Confessions*, it seemed to me that 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 the voice in the garden, it only seemed to me, according to what I felt in my
heart, that it was I the Lord called.”³

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Publications, 1976), 103. Kavanaugh-Rodriquez will be the primary English translation used, while also consulting
the earlier Peers translation for nuance, as well as the Spanish texts themselves found in Efren de la Madre de Dios,
Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1997).

³ Ibid., 9.8.
What was it about Teresa’s reading of this classic is often a question that goes unasked: scholarship typically acknowledges an Augustinian autobiographical style mirrored in her *Libro de la Vida* (*The Book of Her Life*), but falls short in addressing just how it impacted her life, even though she so clearly draws attention to it. That Teresa links her receiving the text with a meaningful prayer experience coupled with her understanding it as a result of the direct activity of God suggests a deeper connection than a mere literary aid that she would later put to use in her own writing.

The *Confessions* speaks to various levels of conversion in Augustine’s life, all of which come together and culminate in the garden scene famously recorded in Book VIII, to which Teresa refers. Interestingly, one of these levels is how Augustine approaches texts and comes to appreciate language. A gifted rhetorician, Augustine himself will notice a shift in how he experiences texts and is invited to “take up and read” Scripture and encounter the living Word. It is precisely this invitation that grabs Teresa’s attention and pulls her into the story of Augustine, and subsequently into her own story, that seems to be key and is worth exploring closely. The *Confessions* enabled Teresa to see, read, and understand her experiences differently and deeply, helping her to develop a new mystical language. In effect, Teresa’s reading of Augustine’s *Confessions* is her own *tolle lege* moment, marking a conversion in her relationship to books, in how she receives and reads them, and ultimately in her encounter of and relationship to the Word. Consequently, this text serves as a bridge to understanding her mysticism.

Pereda’s altarpiece is suggestive of this rendering of Teresa’s reception of the *Confessions* and can be a helpful guiding image in investigating it further. The scene is dynamic, not static, and captures a moment of engagement, a snapshot of Teresa’s own reading in progress, modeled after and mentored by Augustine. The central location of the painting within
the worship space exposes an underlying sacramental dimension to the experience of this action-caught-in-stillness, inviting the careful admirer to move from a more comfortable perspective of observation to one of wonder, witness, and participation, as well as further exploration of the relationship of the pairing of these two saints and their shared posture.

Such a movement is reflective of the ancient practice of spiritual or sacred reading known as *Lectio Divina*, in which the reader deepens his or her relationship with a text through a series of four moments or stages of encounter, namely, *lectio, meditatio, oratio*, and *contemplatio*. Rooted in the desert tradition, it was first systemized in its present form in the twelfth century by the Carthusian Guigo II in his *Ladder of Monks*. Interestingly, Guigo defines *lectio* as “the careful study of Scriptures” but it is not exclusive to Sacred Scripture alone; rather, in the monastic sense, the canon would also have included classic spiritual texts, particularly those of the Fathers, and especially those seen as commentaries on the Word.

With this fourfold method, one can approach Pereda’s work in much the same way as one does a text, bringing to the fore new insights into Teresa’s reading of Augustine’s classic, with the painting’s images of the staff, book, and enflamed hearts as essential bookmarks that guide the onlooker/reader through the experience. This study will serve as an exposition of such a meta-lectio – a *lectio* about a *lectio* – of Teresa’s sacred encounter of the *Confessions* and its impact upon her life, with the hope of contributing to a growing body of Augustinian-Teresian scholarship, one in which Augustine and Teresa are pictured side by side.


Chapter One (*Lectio* – the Book) will explore the world of literature that Teresa encounters from a very young age in a family that reads, particularly those books of romance and chivalry, leading up to the moment when she reads the *Confessions*. This examination will include the issue of literacy in sixteenth-century Spain, as well as gender and class status. It will also address religious literacy, the Indexes of Prohibited Books, and the relationship to the Inquisition.

Chapter Two (*Meditatio* – the Staff) will give background to the reception history of Augustine, particularly his *Confessions* and how it was used and understood throughout the centuries, up to and including the 1554 translation into Spanish that found itself in the hands of Teresa. It will also explore the various levels of conversion that Augustine experiences.

Chapter Three (*Oratio* – the Heart) will trace the shift that begins to occur in Teresa’s reading, first when she learns about the Prayer of Recollection in Francis of Osuna’s *El Tercer Abecedario* (*The Third Spiritual Alphabet*), and, then, when she receives the *Confessions*, in which Augustine’s experience of *tolle lege* prepares her to go within herself and take up and read the Living Book of Christ.

Chapter Four (*Contemplatio* – the Fire) will explore the way in which Teresa tells and writes her story, giving particular attention to an Augustinian rhetoric of humility that characterizes *Libro de la Vida* that helps her to develop her own language of mysticism, drawn from Augustine’s. It will also include the issues of authority, audience, and redaction, as well as address these influences on her other two major works, *Camino de Perfección* (*Way of Perfection*) and *Moradas del Castillo Interior* (*Interior Castle*). All of this will yield to a final reflection on Augustine and Teresa’s holding and offering their restless hearts pierced by the Word, drawing them into deeper love.
Chapter One: Lectio – the Book

As I began to read the Confessions, it seemed to me that 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 the voice in the garden, it only seemed to me, according to what I felt in my heart, that it was I the Lord called.

Consider first the book. It sits closed on the ground and next to Teresa. Teresa’s right hand holds the heart, but her left hand is open and free, perhaps once having held the book. Many images of Teresa usually have her with both a book and quill pen in hand or at a desk where she sits, depicting her as a writer, but, curiously, no quill pen is in the scene, suggesting that before Teresa took to pen and ink, she was first a reader. As she herself attests in her Vida as expressed above, she “began to read.” Pereda’s work could account for this fact: there is no pen on her or around her; the book is unaccompanied, and so, the scene could easily signify Teresa as a reader and depict her in the act of reading. Interestingly, the book in the painting does not seem to bear a title, or at least the title is not in the admirer’s line of vision. There appear to be no markings on the cover, nor in its positioning does it show its bound edge; its binding is hidden. The book could be Scripture, Osuna’s El Tercer Abecedario, or even simply be a representation of books in general. Since Augustine is next to her, however, argument could be made that it is a copy of his Confessions.

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It is significant to note that the book is closed and on the ground, no longer on her person, suggesting that some sort of movement or transformation has occurred. It does not necessarily mean that books or reading are no longer useful and important to her, nor does it have to say that Teresa has moved beyond the text; rather, it might suggest that she is reading differently now, that texts and words are received by her in a new way. A contemplative stance is her new posture for reading, and she now reads through a different lens, with a sharper focus. With Augustine by her side, Teresa has learned to read contemplatively. As a result, the book has taken her some place, to a different realm that she has reached because she engaged and was engaged by it, and this engagement has left her open-handed, open to receive what comes next because of it.

This “reading into” of Pereda’s scene helps to begin to lay out the backdrop of Teresa’s lectio of the Confessions and sketch what may have happened to her and in her because of this reading. Drawing from Guigo’s treatise, The Ladder of Monks, can be helpful here to begin to give focus to this task. Guigo speaks of the process of lectio divina in terms of stages of ascent, in which reading, or what he simply refers to as lectio, is the first and lowest of four rungs of a ladder, followed by meditatio, oratio, and contemplatio. Interestingly, Guigo describes this initial stage as a resting on the earth, that is, a being grounded, from which the reader is eventually lifted up into the heights of heaven. This first step in reading does not need to be understood in the schema as the lowest or the least in a qualitative way, but as first and essential, as it provides the content and matter – the foundation – for the ascent into the eventual heights.

7. Guigo II, The Ladder of Monks, II (Colledge and Walsh, 68). Haec est scala claustralium qua de terra in caelom sublevantur, gradibus guidem distincta paucis, immensae tamen et incredibilis magnitudinis, cujus extrema pars terrae innixa est, superior vero nubes pentrat et coelorum ecreta rimatur. Again, the Latin text is found in SC (84).
and depths of contemplation. Here, the image of the ladder can be seen as one in which each rung is built upon the step below it, so that, as a person ascends or advances in his or her reading, he or she moves upward, but also deepens and is deepened.

Again, notice that in the painting Pereda depicts Teresa and the book as both on the ground; they are in relationship, sharing the ground in common with Augustine and the staff. Perhaps the book is positioned in this way next to Teresa in order to show that her reading is grounded and rooted in the earth, even in a moment of contemplation. While lectio as a process is considered to be a movement of ascent in the tradition, as explained by Guigo, the first step begins on the ground level; in other words, the reader has to be grounded first, rooted in the earth. Groundedness here is a key insight that the lectio tradition offers about understanding contemplation: in order to move or be moved toward contemplation, a person must be grounded and rooted, with a firm footing. Such an insight serves as a corrective to a common misunderstanding of contemplation as otherworldly and removed from the reality of everyday life.

To begin to read, even initially, as suggested by lectio divina is to read on the ground of life. This type of reading is not an escape from life; rather, it is an entryway into life. Reading in this way serves as the “groundwork” for reading contemplatively; it is both basic and essential for the next steps, laying out the work that must be done on the ground of one’s life, in which a reader digs deeper yet ascends higher. Ground level reading involves, what Susan Muto calls, informational reading: it gives something to the reader, namely, a new learning or mastery.

8. Ibid., XII (79).
9. So, too, are Augustine and the staff, but that relationship will be explored in Chapters Two and Three.
Yet, in order for this type of reading to be part of the entire *lectio* process, it cannot be a mere skimming of the surface of the text, nor a quick search for key words and main ideas. Instead, to read in this way, even initially, requires careful examination, a surveying of the ground of the text, as Guigo asserts. In doing so, the reader secures the ladder of ascent to the ground, attentively and intently taking in information that rises to the surface of the text.

Muto maintains that, in order to engage the process of true, deeper contemplative reading – that of *lectio divina* – the reader should not stop at gathering information from the text only. Instead, the key to contemplative reading is also an openness on the part of the reader to what the information from the text can do to the reader, namely, what is being read can be a tool to keep one grounded. Again, notice in the painting that Teresa, while even reading contemplatively, remains on the ground: new learning and openness can cause a shift in one’s footing on the ground, a movement from information to formation, what Muto calls formative reading, but one is to remain grounded, even in this movement. She writes, “Such reading can provide us with divine direction disclosures that at once reveal and conceal the overall plan of God in our lives. This process involves awakening to the presence of the transcendent in our actual here-and-now situation.”

The “here-and-now situation” of the reader is important to underscore; this is the ground on which the reader stands and reads. It, too, constitutes as a gathering of information, but not only from the text; instead, the information comes, too, from the reader, that is, it involves a surveying of the state of the mind and heart of the one being engaged by the text. Awareness of one’s situation, one’s world, and one’s lived reality, as he or she is reading, is essential to true


lectio, opening the reader to the possibility of real, contemplative engagement which both forms and transforms the individual – personal appropriation. Muto adds, “It is as if we live simultaneously in two orders of reality: the invisible and the visible, the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal. In short, the integration of heart and mind, of inspiration and incarnation, is the hidden goal of formative reading.” Here one can see that engaging a text even in the first rung of lectio involves a relationship, a mutual exchange between the reader and that which is being read; and that relationship is based and begins on the ground. This would be true for Teresa’s engagement of the Confessions, a text that grounded her in her own reality and, consequently, transformed her understanding of that reality.

In their introduction to A History of Reading in the West, Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier offer further insight:

Rejecting the notion that the text exists in itself, separate from any material manifestation (an idea elaborated by literature itself that the more quantitatively inclined histories of the book have taken over), we should keep in mind that no text exists outside of the physical support that offers it for reading (or hearing) or outside of the circumstance in which it is read (or heard). Authors do not write books: they write texts that become written objects – manuscripts, inscriptions, print matter or, today, material in a computer file. All these objects are handled, in various ways, by flesh and blood readers whose reading habits vary with time, place and milieu.

The text that is read and engaged, even with a first reading, exists in relationship to the one who is reading and engaging it, and by how that person is reading and engaging it. The book (or text) exists within a context, that is, all that comes with the text and is interwoven with it, the “with” being both the time, place, and milieu in which it was written and the time, place, and milieu in which it is received, inclusive of the reader; in this case, the Confessions as read by Teresa of

13. Ibid., 100.
Avila.¹⁶ All of these nuances make for the threads that are intricately woven together¹⁷ to form the binding of the book – what holds the book together. Just as in Pereda’s painting, which does not show the book’s edge, so, too, there is a hiddenness to this text-context relationship.

In order to get to these threads that bind the book, one must examine carefully and survey the ground that Teresa and the book share. Such groundwork reveals a complex reality that both enabled and shaped the way Teresa would read books in general and the Confessions in particular. Long before the Confessions found itself in the hands of Teresa, she “began to read” other works and in other ways: the Confessions was not the first text on the ladder of literature that Teresa ever read, spiritual or otherwise. While they may not have all been equally foundational, grounding, and formative in the fullest sense of lectio as discussed above, they certainly would have prepared her to receive Augustine’s classic at the time that she did. In the end, this study will show that Teresa’s reading of the Confessions grounded her, gave her a stronger footing in life, and deepened her self-understanding, further shaping her experience with a contemplative focus. To get to that end, a careful examination of the ground of Teresa’s world needs to constitute the first rung of this meta-lectio, as essential background information, which will help the reader to engage Teresa’s reading and experience of the Confessions, while entering more deeply into Pereda’s altarpiece.

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¹⁶ The text-context relationship of the Confessions will be explored in Chapter Two: Meditatio – the Staff. Chapter Three: Oratio – the Heart will be a meeting of the two contexts of Augustine and Teresa.

¹⁷ As in the Latin contextere. Chapter Two will offer further insight into this text-context relationship and how it may apply to what is understood as a religious classic and its understanding as being timeless.
The Book & Literacy: Lettered & Gendered

When Teresa first opened Augustine’s *Confessions* in 1554, she had read through a particular set of lenses she was given as a sixteenth century Spaniard, as a member of a growing bourgeoisie class whose family had Jewish ancestry, as a woman, and as a Carmelite nun of the *Encarnación*, all of which together gave her a certain focus. Her reading habits were shaped by circumstances that would give rise within her not only to a certain love of reading, but also to a protection and promotion of such activity among her nuns of the Carmelite Reform, as well as an anxiety of being misread herself in the wake of the Spanish Inquisition. All of this forms the ground on which Teresa stood and first read, and most likely re-read, the *Confessions*. She had already covered much ground in her life at the time of her initial reading: she was thirty-nine and had entered the *Encarnación* almost twenty years prior, so to begin to unthread these habits, which are hidden carefully within the binding of the book, is to look specifically and closely at this ground, revealing several layers, illustrating that Teresa was a woman of her time, and not so much an anomaly in this regard. What makes Teresa remarkable in this enterprise, however, is that she tried so often not to be marked – by society, by her community, by the Church. In the end, she managed to remain threaded as a true “daughter of the Church,” interwoven within the bindings of her day, yet uniquely grounded in herself and her God, managing to forge ahead on new ground, new territory for Carmel and the mystical tradition.

18. See Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 77. Sheldrake suggests that such a title is a conventional role reserved for a public presentation “in such a way as not to disturb time-honoured patterns of attitude and behaviour.” Chapter Four: *Contemplatio* – the Fire will investigate Teresa’s public self-presentation further and how the *Confessions* aids her in this regard.
Given that this study is a *lectio* of a *lectio*, it may seem ironic, then, to pull first, if at all, on the thread of literacy, but it is an essential task in order to “read” Teresa well. The ability to read is an assumption that is interwoven throughout the *lectio* tradition and worth examining. Such notions as what is being read, how it is being read, and who is doing the reading are all shades of such a complex threading, not only in sixteenth century Spain, but also during the Middle Ages that led up to Spain’s Golden Age. There are both points of convergence and divergence in the slow unfolding of literacy’s development that created a space for Teresa and her own ability to receive and read the world in which she lived. And so, an exploration of what is meant by literacy is foundational to a discussion on Teresa’s new, grounded reading of the *Confessions* and how her own experience as a literate woman influenced the way she received this text. Even to consider Teresa as a woman who is literate is an undertaking filled with much assumption.

A multi-layered issue, literacy is more than the ability to read and write “letters.” A fuller understanding within the context of its development reveals that it can be expanded to mean a “being read to,” that is, hearing words and texts proclaimed by readers and story-tellers; note that this is a very inclusive rendering of literacy, in which it can rightly be understood as both a seeing and a hearing. Consider, for example, Jean Leclercq’s explanation of *lectio* in a monastic setting, which speaks to a general understanding of reading: “[I]n the Middle Ages, as in antiquity, they read usually, not as today, principally with the eyes, but with the lips, pronouncing what they saw, and with the ears, listening to the words pronounced, hearing what is called ‘the voices of the pages.’” It is a real acoustical reading; *legere* means at the same time *audire*…. [W]hen *legere* and *lectio* are used without further explanation, they mean an activity which, like chant and writing, requires the participation of the whole body and the whole
mind.”¹⁹ Leclercq describes here what literary scholar Walter Ong, S.J., refers to as remnants or residue of an oral-aural culture or society.²⁰ Ong identifies an oral-aural culture as the first of three successive stages of communication in history, followed by the script/chirographic and electronic cultures. “[T]hese three stages are stages of verbalization,” Ong maintains. “Above all, they mark transformations of the word.”²¹ At the same time, these stages show how it is that the word not only is transformed but does the transforming – of the speaker, the listener, the writer, the reader.

With particular emphasis on the sense of hearing, how one hears, what one hears, and what is spoken, passed on, and received, a strictly oral-aural culture would technically be pre-scrip.²² Words were primarily spoken and heard, not visualized and touched, as they eventually would become in “seeing” script and “touching” and “holding” a text. However, the points of transition from stage to stage are both fluid and gradual, with a tendency for overlap, most especially the closer that the culture is to the transition point; hence, Ong’s notion of residue, with an exchange, a sharing between the new and what has come before.²³ In a residually and

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²¹. Ibid., 17.


²³. Interestingly, Ong says that “[t]he breakthrough from oral communication to script…occurred only around 3500 B.C., and seemingly occurred under the stimulus provided by the need for keeping records as society became more concentrated and highly organized in the urban centers developing at this time on a limited scale” (*In the Human Grain*, 7). Given this information, one can see that the evolution and development of literacy could be considered slow-going alongside the evolution of the “senses” of the human person: it would seem that oral-aural skills of humanity were much more sharpened, making for the slow embrace of visual-tactile skills of communication.
particularly high oral society, reading, in relationship to the word, had a much broader connotation: to read meant also to tell a story and to hear a story. Memory played a key role in how words were received and heard and in the sharing of stories – what constituted as the reading material – since the function of the spoken word “is limited to two modes of existence: its utterance and its remembrance. Its utterance being ephemeral, its remembrance is critical.”

Reading, then, involved a form of speaking, hearing and listening; seeing the script was secondary, and the word/story as spoken and heard remained primary. Hence, reading was more of an oralized-auralized activity, not originally experienced as a visual-tactile one.

In today’s understanding and experience of reading, a world that is further removed from strict orality, though still with some residue, there is an underlying assumption that it is done silently and to oneself, with the exception of public readings; for example, as in proclamations of the Word in liturgical celebrations. The emphasis is on sight, not sound, and it has a more individualized, personal rendering. However, for the ancients as well as for those of the Middle Ages, silent reading, while not “unheard” of, was still not common, at least by today’s standards. They were closer to the transition point from oral-aural to visual-tactile. Recall, for instance, how Augustine recounts being intrigued by Ambrose’s silent reading:

There were questions I wanted to put to [Ambrose], but I was unable to do so as fully as I wished, because the crowds of people who came to him on business impeded me, allowing me little opportunity either to talk or to listen to him. He was habitually available to serve them in their needs, and in the very scant time that he was not with


25. The fact pedagogical methods involve “reading a story” first to a child, or having a child “sound out” the letters, shows the residue of an oral-aural culture, and that it is the first – and basic – stage of reading and verbalization.

26. Although, even with this example of liturgical, public proclamations of the Word, one may argue whether members of the gathered assembly, as hearers and recipients of the Word proclaimed are hearing and receiving the Word in the same way as when they “read along” with a missalette.
them he would be refreshing either his body with necessary food or his mind with reading. When he read his eyes would travel across the pages and his mind would explore the sense, but his voice and tongue were silent. We would sometimes be present, for he did not forbid anyone access, nor was it customary for anyone to be announced; and on these occasions we watched him reading silently. It was never otherwise, and so we too would sit for a long time in silence, for who would have the heart to interrupt a man so engrossed? ....We thought that he might be apprehensive that if he read aloud, and any closely attentive listener were doubtful on any point, or the author he was reading used any obscure expressions, he would have to stop and explain various difficult problems that might arose…. Another and perhaps more cogent reason for his habit of reading silently was his need to conserve his voice, which was very prone to hoarseness. But whatever his reason, that man undoubtedly had a good one.  

Augustine exposes that there was an assumed need for a person to choose to read silently instead of aloud, which would have been the default for those who could read. He even offers some initial resistance toward silent reading, a practice that did not really begin to be common until sometime after the Middle Ages. This would be the opposite case for today, in which reading is typically assumed silent first.

Ambrose stands as evidence in the fourth century for an ever-so slight shift and leaning toward the practice of silent reading, though Augustine’s notation of it shows that it was highly exceptional and most likely not at all close to being considered normative behavior. Reading silently was slowly becoming more common for only those who were studying texts for

27. Confessions, VI.3, 3 (Boulding, 137).


29. Ibid., 21.

30. In fact, not only was it not normative, it was considered marginal, even elite. Jesper Svenbro evidences that silent reading was done in the Greek world, but “practiced by professionals of the written word – people plunged into such vast amounts of reading as to encourage the internalization of the reading voice” (Svenbro, “Archaic and Classical Greece: The Invention of Silent Reading,” in Cavallo and Chartier, A History of Reading in the West 62).
comprehension before oralization and delivery.\textsuperscript{31} This could explain the reason for Ambrose’s practice, and Augustine would have been mentored by him in this method. Consider how Augustine first went to Ambrose because of his reputation as a public speaker, not initially because of the content that he preached, but because of the way he preached. Augustine desired to hone his own rhetorical skills, and so Ambrose’s practice of silent reading, while at first curious and intriguing, could have become also attractive to him, especially if it was found to aid his delivery.\textsuperscript{32} This practice could have been what helped to distinguish Ambrose from Faustus in Augustine’s mind, one whose delivery had substantive content and the other, while a good rhetor, had no real, comprehensible and substantive message.\textsuperscript{33}

Moreover, in an oral-aural culture or, more properly, a culture that was highly residual in its orality, reading was rarely a private, individual endeavor; rather, it was more often a communal one. Reading – as the telling and sharing of stories – involved “a being read to,” which was a natural part of the experience. The orality-aurality of the experience would benefit not only the one enunciating and oralizing, but also those gathered for the session, those who were equally engaged, as a form of active listening and participation in the word event. This is not to say that there was no space for private reading, but this space was not cut off and removed from community; it was carved within it and still understood as part of it. Interestingly, while it was considered a reading to oneself, private reading is not to be confused with silent reading, at least in the strict sense. They were two different practices. In today’s understanding, one could almost equate the two, but in a highly oral culture, reading to oneself meant murmur or

\textsuperscript{31} M. B. Parkes, “Reading, Copying and Interpreting a Text in the Early Middle Ages,” in Cavallo and Chartier, \textit{A History of Reading in the West}, 92.

\textsuperscript{32} See \textit{Confessions} V.14, 24 (Boulding 131-132).

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., V.13, 23 (131).
rumination.\textsuperscript{34} Again, the emphasis is on the word spoken and heard. Even in a monastic setting, which placed a high value on silence, private reading, when it was done, was with a low voice, so as to prevent disruption within the community. Consider, for example, Chapter 48 of the \textit{Rule of St. Benedict}: “After Sext, however, and [the brothers] have risen from table, let them rest on their beds in total silence. If someone wishes to read, let him do so to himself in such a way as to disturb no one.”\textsuperscript{35} Recall that monks slept dormitory-style, and so a low reading voice would be essential so as not to disturb the brothers. Monasticism in its origin would have developed out of a highly oral culture, so any \textit{regula} would preserve such orality in reading customs that were prescribed; for example, reading (or really being read to) at meals.\textsuperscript{36} Note, as well, that this description helps to place the practice of \textit{lectio divina} within its original context, one that was communal with an emphasis on the Word that was spoken and heard.

The custom of oralized reading, even when private, also served a practical purpose for word separation, since the manuscript originally contained no spaces between words. When word separation, along with a development in word order and punctuation markings, began to appear in manuscripts in the Middle Ages, silent, even silent-private, reading became easier to

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\textsuperscript{35} Terrence G. Kardong, \textit{Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary} (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 382. The Latin is: \textit{post sextam…aut forte qui voluerit legere sibi sic legat ut alium non inquietet}.

\textsuperscript{36} Consider, for example, the \textit{Rule of Saint Augustine}, which predates Benedict’s about a century, mandates that members of the community read the \textit{Rule} once a week (see \textit{The Rule of Saint Augustine}, 8.49, trans. Robert F. Russell, O.S.A. (Villanova: Province of St. Thomas of Villanova, 1976), 17. Members would have understood it to be a communal activity in which they listened to it being read to them aloud, but it would not have been a passive listening; instead, it would have an activity in which they were actively engaged, thereby deepening their participation in the way of life proposed in the \textit{Rule}.\end{flushright}
practice, lessening the need for frequent oral delivery.\textsuperscript{37} It was in the universities in the twelfth century in which a clearer shift began to emerge, demonstrating a marrying of the old and new reading practices: “While the professor read aloud from his autograph commentary, the students followed the text silently from their own books. This was a change from the \textit{lectio divina} of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, where one monk had read aloud to others, who listened without the aid of the text.”\textsuperscript{38} One can see here that at this point in history it could have been that within human consciousness there was an emerging \textit{need} to read along, as in visually, in order to hear and comprehend what was being read aloud. In other words, the further society moved away from strict orality-aurality, the more important it was to \textit{see} the word; and, at the same time, the more that the sense of sight was engaged and sharpened in a new way, the less that hearing was in tune to receiving. A shift was starting to take place within the human person with regard to how an individual received and processed information.

The evolution around word spacing and practices of private, silent reading has a correlation to the spacing of individuals within community. A highly oral society was communal in such a way that, as Ong asserts, was “nonindividualistic and authoritarian.”\textsuperscript{39} Authority would rest within the community and specifically through a leader of the community, perhaps the individual with the strongest, loudest, most distinguishable voice and most eloquent speech: the leader’s voice being the voice of the community and the voice of the story shared (i.e., as in a narrator). In such a culture, there would be little, if any, consideration, thought, or acknowledgement given to the possibility of an individual’s inner voice or authority. In other

\begin{itemize}
\item[37.] Paul Saenger, “Reading in the Later Middle Ages,” in Cavallo and Chartier, \textit{A History of Reading in the West}, 120.
\item[38.] Ibid., 133.
\item[39.] Ong, \textit{The Presence of the Word}, 283.
\end{itemize}
words, authority rested outside of the individual. A person’s inner voice simply would not exist nor was it in a person’s or a group’s consciousness, as “[a]n oral culture stores information in memory and thus maximizes the word of others as an avenue to truth, stressing the reliance of mind on mind, of person on person.” The locus of power – the place of words and the telling and hearing of the story – is contained within the group, not the individual. Yet when spaces are created between words and there is no longer the practical reason for reading aloud, albeit even in a low voice in order to comprehend what is being read, then the voice is no longer heard from the outside and then interiorized, but within first, and the individual with an inner authority begins to emerge, spaced within community yet apart from others.

When reading began to take more of this inward turn, there was also a creeping sense of a narrowing of literacy. The inclusive rendering of literacy had a way of involving the whole community, even those who themselves could not read script. However, a leaning toward private and silent reading highlighted literacy in its exclusive connotation, which emerged naturally from those people who were closest to the symbol set that marked key moments of the transitions in the stages of transformation of the word: those who could read and oralize that which was scripted, the scrolls, codices, manuscripts, etc. These individuals were literate in the strict sense, that is, they were educated in and knew the letters and were themselves considered “lettered.” Standing at the forefront of the transition points of verbalization, though fluid as the stages might be, these individuals would be able to engage, embrace, and encourage the shifts more than those not exposed to the symbol on the same level, the illiterate, those unlettered who

40. Ibid.

41. The growing sense of one’s inner voice would have implications in the spiritual life, especially with regard to fostering interiority and the authority that is coupled with such a turn inward. This will be explored further in Chapters Three and Four.
could easily be left behind any advancements in verbalization, which were also advancements in culture. As the society moved further away from an oral-aural world and deeper into a visual-tactile one, so, too, did literacy move toward a heightened exclusivity. And as space was created between words, so, too, did the gap widen between what constituted as the literate and the illiterate, highlighting even more the power differential in relationships within society, especially around the power of words – words spoken, heard, and read – who spoke them and who received and listened to them.

This emerging exclusivity takes particular shape as a result of, and alongside, the sound-sight split in Latin between the sixth and ninth centuries, as the senses emphasized in reading practices shifted more from orality-aurality toward visuality-tactility.42 Such a movement marks a clear divergence in language that was spoken and language that was written. That which was spoken in common (i.e., as in vernacular) grew into the Romance languages, which “had moved so far along in their own development that the old Latin was quite incomprehensible to their ordinary users.”43 Latin became at once fixed and preserved, carefully controlled and scripted, more or less a foreign language that needed to be studied in order to be learned, while the vernacular lacked standardization in script and was much more fluid. In fact, it was only in the eighteenth century that “the orally developing stream of vernaculars…were to be brought under effective typographic, visual control by dictionaries and grammars.”44 Latin, however, was lettered and effectively moved out of the oral-aural realm of the majority of society, as it was only spoken by the lettered – the strictly literate themselves, who could also read it.

42. Ong, The Presence of the Word, 76.
43. Ibid., 77.
44. Ibid., 78.
This sound-sight split exposes an underlying issue in the narrowing of literacy, which furthered a stronger sense of exclusivity: literacy understood as lettered was also gendered. In other words, the sound-sight split underscored the already present female-male distinction in society: literacy, in its strict sense, was both patriarchal and sexist. Ong notes:

[W]hen Latin from around A.D. 500 to 700 on ceased to function as a vernacular and was retained only in the schools, it became a sex-linked language…. Learned Latin…moved only in artificially controlled channels through the male world of the schools [and] was no longer anyone’s mother tongue, in a quite literal sense. Although from the sixth or eighth century to the nineteenth Latin was spoken by millions of persons, it was never used by mothers cooing to their children…. Under these circumstances learning Latin took on the characteristics of a puberty rite: it involved isolation from the family, the achievement of identity in a totally male group (the school), the learning of a body of relatively abstract tribal lore inaccessible to those outside the group and calculated to make one a responsible member of extrafamilial society…. The Latin world was a man’s world.\(^{45}\)

To say that literacy became increasingly gendered does not necessarily mean that all women were illiterate in the strict understanding of not knowing the letters. What it does say is that it was male-dominated, with few exceptions of women’s participation, intimately tied to patriarchal power structures within society and the Church – with positions of power that were closed to women for the most part. Consequently, few women would have had access to learning and reading the letters. The exceptions generally depended on one’s place in aristocracy or monastic vocation. Consider, for example, that

[i]n the fourth century St. Cyril of Jerusalem exhorted men and women to keep a book in their hands during liturgical services, but he adds that while some of the men were listening to someone read, the women might instead sing…. In late antiquity only the great Christian ladies shone for their erudition, and, when they did, they demonstrated a knowledge not only of Greek and Latin, but also of Hebrew, all languages necessary to the study and comprehension of the sacred texts. Melania, a great lady who became a saint, spent several hours a day reading Holy Scripture or sermon collections…. Still,

\(^{45}\) Ibid.
like other Christian ladies of the age…, Melania belonged to a small elite that was, incidentally, soon to disappear.46

Other fine examples include Egeria, the nun-author of a journal detailing her pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the fourth century, or Hildegard of Bingen, the abbess-writer-mystic of the twelfth century, but again, the few women who were literate in the strict sense were the exception, not the norm. In a culture of high orality, women shared in the reading in a more inclusive way; there was more space for them as story-tellers, as people who used their voices and collective memory to pass on stories and information to others, in addition to being hearers and recipients of the word spoken and read.

Nevertheless, with the shift of emphasis to sight and touch, and as spaces were created between words, alternative spaces for an inclusive literacy were also created within the realm of the vernacular – which was the space of the bourgeoisie, the rising working class in urban centers, who brought the common language into the work and market places. And this would include women, since women’s space was primarily vernacular space. Again, that which was classified as vernacular was at first a spoken word that was eventually transcribed, though it was not as fixed as Latin had become; yet “[b]eginning with the last half of the twelfth century, the increase in the use of writing in the vernacular, both for literary and documentary purposes, breached the link between literacy and Latin, and vernacular literature from the oral tradition made its appearance in written form.”47 Closely associated with the bourgeoisie, the vernacular written form was at first pragmatic and increasingly necessary for work, “the literacy of one who

46. Guglielmo Cavallo, “Between Volumen and Codex: Reading in the Roman World,” in Cavallo and Chartier, A History of Reading in the West, 86.

47. Bäuml, “Varieties and Consequences of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy,” 244.
has to read or write in the course of transacting any kind of business,” but then shifted by the thirteenth century to a more cultivated expression, one of recreational purpose. Here began to emerge both a common, general reader, one who looked “beyond his immediate professional horizons,” and a growth in personal collections of books, especially among, but not excluded to, the nobility. Indeed, this vernacular literacy was what Bernard McGinn calls the “new literacy.”

However, because of its divergence from Latin, vernacular literacy was still considered a form of illiteracy by those who were lettered, which helps to clarify further the complexity of what would be acknowledged as acceptable reading within and by the established structures of authority in society, most especially the Church. More specifically, since Latin was the language of the Church, and, with that, the language of acceptable theology, the more there was a growing vernacular and inclusive literacy, the more there was a desire for theology to be expressed vernacularly and made available to a general readership. This leaning toward the vernacular pushed the limits of what it meant to be lettered and learned theologically, even though it remained somewhat suspect for reasons that will be discussed below. Nevertheless, a general, cultivated readership yielded to a general, cultivated readership in theology. McGinn offers this insight:


49. Ibid.

50. Ibid., 572.

51. See Ibid., 567-568.

The research of the past several decades...has begun to make clear the existence of a third form of medieval theology [after monastic and scholastic], equally important, if more diffuse and difficult to describe: vernacular theology. Some might prefer to say vernacular “theologies”; different linguistic matrices shaped different actualizations of an understanding of faith that was not bound to the professional schools or the cloister. Still...one could argue that there was some unity to vernacular theology, despite the many national tongues in which it came to expression, because of the singleness of spirit that fueled these attempts to appropriate the Christian story.  

It would be safe to say that there was always a vernacular theology, that is, a theology expressed and lived by the laity. Consider the theological, vernacular – and accessible – literacy expressed and “read” in art, such as in the stained-glass windows of cathedrals, or as “heard” in the creative, vibrant preaching of the mendicants. In fact, both of these examples underscore the marrying of an emerging, common visual literacy found in images, not words, and the remnant oral-aural literacy of proclamation and storytelling. That it began to become scripted in the High Middle Ages was new and a result of the confluence of two related movements, one within society in general and the other within the Church, namely, the humanist retrieval of the classics and the spiritual practices of the devotio moderna, which was a nuance and a re-expression of the overarching vita apostolica of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Both were bridged by a common desire for imitatio, imitatio of the rhetoric and grammar of the classics and imitatio of holy, devout lives (e.g., as in Imitatio Christi and popular hagiography). Together, these two movements of retrieval and renewal gave rise to a fresh, recorded vernacular theological literature. As Church historian Herbert Grundmann has noted,

A vernacular literature of this sort could only arise, and arise it must, when a new stratum formed between laity and clergy, one which, like the clergy, wanted to read and even write religious works, sermons, prayers, and not least the Holy Scripture, but like the

53. Ibid., 19.

‘laity’ could neither read nor write in Latin. The breaching of the strict division between the Latin-trained clergy and the laity in the religious movement of the twelfth and thirteenth century was the precondition and foundation for the rise of a religious literature in the vernacular.\(^5^5\)

Not only were the theological classics translated and made accessible, but new theological accounts were written, highlighting a creeping division within theology, one that was academic and official – classified as lettered – another that was lived and experiential – still considered unlettered.\(^5^6\) It is in the experiential and devotional that the mystical would subsequently move and be expressed.

This division in theology resulted in value judgment and suspicion from the positions of authority and power, most especially the Church. Since the vernacular was in such a state of formation and evolution, and, thereby, not as fixed as Latin, the theology that was developing out of and within the vernacular space was not as controllable nor as free from error, at least from the perspective of those in power. And so, lettered theology was deemed orthodox, and unlettered theology, as in vernacular, was more suspect and feared heretical. This could be clearly seen in the eremitical preaching of the eleventh and twelfth centuries that was eventually channeled into the mendicant movement. Even more, since vernacular space was also women’s space, women’s experience and theological expression were often, too, feared suspect and rendered invalid; consider, for example, the case of the Beguines. However, as Philip Sheldrake attests, “It is now apparent that the medieval women’s movement, known as the Beguines, was not as inherently unorthodox as it was portrayed in many official accounts. Rather, a discomfort with independent groups of women who read Scripture, were not subject to the usual canonical


restraints, who did not rely sufficiently on the clergy for appropriate guidance and preferred a more affective piety had much to do with the suppression of the movement."57

While the level of discomfort with the Beguines could rightly be interpreted as discounting women’s experience, it was also another example of the negation and/or suspicion of theological expression within vernacular space. It is important to note that the case of the Beguines was not initially, nor completely, dismissed: the movement garnered support from such officials like James of Vitry, as well as the mendicant communities.58 Notice, however, that the female voice, as in the case of the Beguines, was typically only “heard” if protected and supported by the male voice. Still, Sheldrake adds: “Not only did the Beguines create an alternative life-style but they placed a great premium on two things which were not generally favoured by Church authority: biblical translations and vernacular preaching of a radical kind…. Their critique of the Church, if such it may be called, was not doctrinal, but ascetical or devotional.”59 In addition, theirs was a vernacular critique – that is, a critique from within vernacular space – as both women’s experience, and its subsequent articulation, and the vernacular go hand in hand: to hold the vernacular suspect was to hold women’s expression in suspicion, and vice-versa. Moreover, “[v]ernacular reading was discouraged by the church, not only because it used degenerate forms outside the Latin lexicon and broke down barriers between sacred and profane literature, but also because it encouraged a new privatization in the reading experience.”60

57. Sheldrake, Spirituality and History, 73.
59. Ibid., 163.
Interestingly, at the heart of *imitatio* within the *devotio moderna* was a stress on the individual’s personal relationship with God that was particularly realized in and supported by the growing practice of silent sight reading.\(^{61}\) And so, *devotio moderna*, with its emphasis on the individual *imitatio*, could have contributed to, or have been an outgrowth of, a creeping privatization of spirituality that accompanied individual, private reading. In addition, with such reading practices one can note the fear of the individual voice emerging, as suggested above, especially in the realm of theology and spirituality – and, perhaps, rightly so: without the nuances and corrections that were found in the common story of tradition and the communal reading and hearing of the W/word. Fear and condemnation were even greater, however, if that voice were female. Such a leaning toward the individual, and its subsequent struggle with traditional authority, would eventually culminate in the eighteenth century with the age of the Enlightenment and the radical turn to the subject.\(^{62}\)

The advent of the printing press in mid-fifteenth century Europe ushered in a breakthrough in communication that coincided with this newfound consciousness in vernacular relationships, particularly in the development of national languages, as well as the rise of the upper, working middle class and experience of women.\(^{63}\) Given the above explication of this evolution and complexity of literacy, it would be too simplistic – and inaccurate – to suggest that Gutenberg’s invention caused all of these and other developments, though it remained intricately


\(^{62}\) See Ilia Delio, O.S.F., *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being: God, Evolution, and the Power of Love* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013). Delio offers the following insight: “This ‘turn to the subject’ imposed a burden on each person to make sense of the world individually and unify it by rational thought alone. With this inward turn of consciousness, objectivity came to be constituted by and to exist for the sake of subjectivity” (9).

linked with these advancements. The printing press, instead, stands more properly as a symbol of this evolution that was already in progress, in much the same way that Luther’s posting of his 95 Theses can be seen as a symbol of the Reformation, which interestingly paralleled and was aided by the press, making for a heightened intensity of the above issues and concerns around literacy. Though it certainly may have accelerated this language and literary evolution, the actual ability to print and circulate literature especially in the vernacular became a tangible expression of an already rapid emergence of vernacular languages as they were placed alongside the increasingly elite usage of Latin, underscoring both the tension and the excitement around the larger issues of authority, voice, and orthodoxy hidden within and bound by the thread of literacy through the promotion of new thinking and expression, especially ideas and criticisms arising from the Reformation and the growth in individual, private reading.

Noted literary historian Jean-François Gilmont maintains that “[a]t its inception, the ars artificialiter scribendi [i.e., the printing press] was closely modeled on the manuscript; but as printers became more familiar with the new technique, the printed book gradually acquired a personality of its own. That process was completed some time between 1520 and 1540…. By that time the printed book had become totally detached from the manuscript model.” Texts changed, accessibility to texts changed, and language changed, changes of which were bound up in the book. Recall that Ong remarks that each transition point of the stages of communication was, in essence, a marked transformation of the word, revealing at the same time the power of the word to transform. Hence, the new consciousness that emerged and was accelerated by the

64. Gilmont adds, “Luther changed the economy of Wittenberg. In 1517 it was a small university town with only one (thoroughly provincial) print shop. In only a few years, more and more printing houses sprang up to print the flood of Lutheran texts, to the point that Wittenberg rose to the rank of sixth or seventh among centres for printing in Germany” (Ibid., 216).

65. Ibid.
printing press showed a shift in the ground of life and in society’s footing, primarily a shift in philosophical assumptions, especially epistemological and cosmological, i.e., how one knows and comes to knowledge, how one sees and experiences the world. And it was all symbolized and ritualized by the handling and passing on of the book – the tangible word – from one person or group to the next, illustrating a more permanent, objective presence of the word: the word literally became an object to hold – and by many. While one could argue that part of the shift in the society was more of leaning away from an oral-aural culture to a technological one, it is important to maintain that orality was still the primary form of communication, that is, the residue was high. Gilmont adds, “In the sixteenth century what was new about the book was its proliferation in a world where relationships were still essentially oral. Information circulated by oral and auditory channels: rumour, which fed debate, both public and private; the proclamations of public criers and the calls and the come-ons of pedlars; sermons; drama, comic or polemical; letters; street songs and public reading. There were images, spectacles, and processions to catch the eye.”

Ong gives an interesting reflection on these beginnings and the profound effect they would have on the human person and relationships:

Oral-aural man, with his keen sense of the word as an indication of action and power, tended to think of the universe itself in terms of operations and sound. For technological man, actuality tends to be an ‘object’ something to be seen (and to some extent touched), something passive, something man operates on. For earlier oral-aural man, actuality, his life-world, the universe, tended more to be a ‘word,’ a manifestation and a power, something one interacted with, not a passive object of visual study and manipulation.

66. While literacy was indeed growing during this time, current scholarship suggests that literacy rates are still hard to measure given lack of documentation. See Gilmont, “Protestant Reformations and Reading,” in Cavallo and Chartier, A History of Reading in the West, 224.


68. Ong, In the Human Grain, 6.
With the printing press and the texts that were circulated from it, not only was there an underscored transformation of and encounter with the word, but, perhaps even more importantly, the book itself was bound up in and by all the complexities brought on by this transformation, in how words and books were handled, passed on, read, received, trusted, and eventually mistrusted within these oral relationships. Again, the thread of literacy, complex as it is, binds together all of the major issues surrounding authority and power, even within the Church. Ong offers further insight: “[T]he sixteenth-century crises regarding authority both in the religious and in the scientific worlds can be seen in a new and striking way as crises of the word.”

These crises included, too, a certain crisis regarding the Word of God, as in Scripture: consider, for example, the Reformation debate over Scripture and Tradition, in which Scripture post-Gutenberg took more of an emphasis on the Word, in Protestant circles, as written and recorded, coinciding with the push for vernacular translations of the Bible. Ong suggests that “[t]he Protestant stress on the primacy of the written word of the Scriptures – sola Scriptura – reflects quite patently the growing confidence in the word-in-space, whatever its foundations in the Christian tradition itself. One of the common critiques of the Protestant stress on Bible reading proffered by Catholic adversaries has been that it is accompanied by a doctrine of private interpretation of the text.”

This suspicion of private interpretation parallels the growth in individual, private and silent reading habits, as discussed above, which would have implications on the mystical tradition during the time of Teresa, especially for women. In other words, this crisis regarding the Word of God would have a profound effect on the reception of vernacular theology as well as on the identity of the one that is theologizing, in terms of authority, personal

69. Ong, Presence, 231.

70. Ibid., 272.
revelation, and credibility over-and-against tradition and community. The more that language evolved, the more literacy evolved and the more the power of the word was transformed, increasing the tension around what would be considered orthodox and what would be heretical and dangerous, as expressed in voice, gender, and the autonomy of the individual as it relates to and with community.

**The Book & Spanish Catholic Reform: Forbidden & Inquired**

By the time the book got to Teresa and her contemporaries, there was genuine excitement about this object and the desire to engage with it, even though the complexity surrounding literacy would have a particular manifestation and binding in Spain. Keep in mind that Teresa was born in 1515, so she was growing and maturing just as the book was being assembled by the press. When one reads Teresa, he or she has a sense that literacy was a given and universal; early on in her *Vida* she and her family are found reading, and she will return to the influence of this scenario often in her work. She writes, “My father was fond of reading good books, and some in Spanish so that his children might read them too.” 71 As Teresian scholar Carole Slade puts forth, “Teresa was in fact quite bookish, and quite well read for a sixteenth-century Spanish woman.” 72 However, to suggest that this was a common, shared experience among all Spaniards—and for all Spanish women—in Teresa’s day would be a misperception, since it bespeaks of a


general access to books, though it does point to a growth in availability of the printed word, and, perhaps, even to Teresa’s own understanding as to who had access to books.73

Hence, it is important to contextualize Teresa’s statement, for the press was, in fact, late to arrive in Spain in full force. For instance, Gilmont asserts that “[a]round 1540, only such peripheral regions as England, the Iberian Peninsula, central Europe and Scandinavia were not well equipped with print shops, while Germany, Italy, France and the Seventeen Provinces of the Netherland all had a dense network of printers.”74 The press in Spain was smaller in scale than the rest of Europe, leaving Spain to rely on importation of much literature.75 Here, too, Teresa and her family may have been the exception in the case of reading, or at least it was simply normative for her class or region of Spain that had easier access to the circulation of books. At the time of Teresa’s birth, the city of Avila, which was part of Castile, was beginning a season of economic growth, sustained by textiles and the wool trade, the foundation of Castile’s economy, and still dominated by a certain level of aristocracy.76 Her family was considerably wealthy and among the lower nobility, the hidalgo.77

Teresa’s lifespan (1515-1582) coincided with Spain’s Golden Age, a time when the word was flourishing, or beginning to flourish, in a new way, but it was not unmet by the marked

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73. Using records of the Inquisition tribunals, some studies suggest that between 1525-1817, “45 percent were literate and 47 percent were unable to read or write or sign. Fully 87 percent of women were illiterate, compared to 37 percent of men (of whom 4 and 53 percent respectively were literate). Not surprisingly, urban residents were more often literate than country people.” (Harvey J. Graff, The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society [Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987], 149.).

74. Gilmont, in Cavallo and Chartier, A History of Reading in the West, 214.


77. See Rowan Williams, Teresa of Avila (New York: Continuum, 1991), 1-2.
crises in and of the word that Ong describes above. The tension surrounding the word as it related to power, voice, gender, and theology in Spain was framed at the turn of the sixteenth century by the reign of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, the influence of Francisco Jiménez Cisneros, and the establishment of the New Inquisition. Given the tension, it is a wonder that the age is seen so positively from an art and literary perspective; somehow the transformative power of the word still managed to thrive despite obstacles that tried to hold it back.

Recall that Castile and Aragon became a strong political force united through the marriage of the two “Catholic monarchs,” as Ferdinand and Isabella were called, at the end of the fifteenth century; it was a unification that was Catholic by way of culture as well as religious practice. Ferdinand and Isabella’s accession to the throne in 1474 garnered an overall enthusiasm, both politically and religiously, for Catholic reform, some of which can be traced to the fervor of the devotio moderna and the humanist retrieval of the classics, and they saw reform as the way forward to strengthen the society. Religiously, the agenda of reform was not initially apologetic as a way to counteract the Protestant Reformation since Luther had yet to post his Theses; he would do so in 1517, almost fifty years after Ferdinand and Isabella married (and after their deaths), and so it should be seen separate from any Catholic reform agenda that would respond to Luther.

Interestingly, the peninsula, especially in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, managed to be mostly free of any major heresy; and so, Ferdinand and Isabella’s agenda was not so much a concern for orthodoxy. Instead, Spanish Catholic reform was motivated by a desire and push for renewal from within and addressed a creeping laxity. This is the same desire for and style of

reform that would catch and motivate Teresa and others like her, not unlike previous movements that typically focused on strict observance and interpretation of religious *regulae* that were often manifested as developments within monasticism and religious life, as well as concern for the education of the clergy and spiritual enrichment of and simpler lifestyles for the laity modeled on the Apostles found in Acts, all of which had been very much part of the previous wave of renewal found in the spirituality of the *vita apostolica* of the High Middle Ages.

The appointment in 1495 of the Franciscan Cisneros as Cardinal Archbishop of Toledo, which also made him the primate of the Church in Spain, was a key contribution in channeling this enthusiasm for Ferdinand and Isabella, and he executed this task primarily through his own excitement for the transformative power of the word. Cisneros’ aggressive campaign for and commitment to printing underscored how both printing technology and the use of books could easily spread and support the issues of reform; that the printing press was smaller in scale compared to other parts of Europe, as noted earlier, enabled Cisneros to have a better oversight of publications. His successful establishment of the Complutensian University of Alcalá hallmarked the Spanish endorsement of humanism, welcoming this newfound appreciation of classical and theological studies on the peninsula and becoming both the center of humanism in Spain and the training grounds for a reformed Spanish clergy.  

It was at Alcalá where Cisneros gathered support for his greatest literary achievement, the production and publication of the Polyglot Bible, which “consisted of six volumes, with the Hebrew, Chaldean and Greek originals of the Bible printed in columns parallel to the Latin Vulgate,” thereby calling for and

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promoting the importance of contemporary biblical scholarship.\textsuperscript{81} This achievement alone shows how Cisneros was favorable to the printed word and interested in the humanist ideal of retrieval,\textsuperscript{82} yet “[a]lthough the Polyglot was probably his pride and joy, Cisneros’s patronage of other publications perhaps indicates more about his ideas and tastes…. These were to reform and improve the liturgy and music of the Roman rite in his diocese as well as his own cathedral.”\textsuperscript{83} And liturgical renewal would certainly complement the formation program for clergy.

Even more, Cisneros was a friend of vernacular literacy, especially vernacular theology, with great support for and appreciation of the growing devotional literature of his time from other parts of Europe and its translation into Spanish as an outcome of the \textit{devotio moderna}. He saw such literature as a way of “raising the level of spirituality amongst both clergy and people,”\textsuperscript{84} of reaching, teaching, and forming the masses. This literature, which fed the hunger for spiritual nourishment of the age, was also for him an antidote to the problematic Spanish romances, which were growing in popularity in the sixteenth century, and were even found in the library collections of Ferdinand and Isabella.\textsuperscript{85} These romances of chivalry, while coming out of an earlier literary tradition, were unique to Spain in that they were written first in the Spanish vernacular (and not translations from other languages), known for their length in prosaic

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\textsuperscript{81} Hamilton, \textit{Heresy and Mysticism}, 11.

\textsuperscript{82} Interestingly, humanism was not without its eventual criticism in Spain, as it would eventually become linked with both the thought of people like Erasmus, who offered strong critique of clerical and religious laxity, as well as Protestant thinking. See Kamen, \textit{The Spanish Inquisition}, 91f.

\textsuperscript{83} Edwards, \textit{The Spain of the Catholic Monarchs}, 272.

\textsuperscript{84} A. Gordon Kinder, “Printing and Reformation ideas in Spain,” in Gilmont, \textit{The Reformation and the Book}, 297.

\textsuperscript{85} Edwards, \textit{The Spain of the Catholic Monarchs}, 275.
composition (i.e., they were not short, nor were they in the form of a ballad), and involved chivalric tales of knights and courtly love.\textsuperscript{86} Moreover,

the world portrayed in the romances of chivalry was one which would appeal strongly to a section of Spanish society, but only to a section. It was a simple world, devoid of subtle philosophical or religious concerns. An individual could win fame and fortune primarily through his military abilities, whether exercised in serious battles or in less serious activities such as tournaments; scholarship and the world of books played, in the romances, a very secondary role. The knights-errant were often possessed of a crusading spirit and a religious element is always present. This is one of the ways these romances most reflect the values of Spanish culture.\textsuperscript{87}

One can see how Cisneros, in desiring to deepen and enrich the faith life of the people, and rooted in his humanist ideal, would want to improve upon their religious literacy by substituting these works with literature that was more substantial. He understood the word as having the potential for both a reformative and transformative effect. In this endeavor, he favored the contribution of the mendicant communities, particularly his own Franciscan heritage and its spiritual revival through \textit{recogimiento} or recollection; from this would eventually come a work of great influence on the unique brand of Spanish mysticism, Francis of Osuna’s \textit{El Tercer Abecedario (The Third Spiritual Alphabet)}, which would also have a profound effect on Teresa of Avila yet ironically be held in suspicion during the height of the Inquisition.\textsuperscript{88} Other significant works that Cisneros commissioned to be translated were Kempis’ \textit{Imitation of Christ}; Ludolph of Saxony’s \textit{Life of Christ}, which would have a tremendous impact on Ignatius of——

\textsuperscript{86} Daniel Eisenberg, \textit{Romances of Chivalry in the Spanish Golden Age} (Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta, 1982), 7. These are to be distinguished from other popular tales that were typically first written in French and not as long.

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 44.

\textsuperscript{88} Chapter Three: \textit{Oratio} – The Heart will discuss Osuna’s work and how it prepared Teresa to receive the \textit{Confessions}. While the mendicant communities were experiencing a certain tension of renewal within observant and conventual branches of their Orders, the Franciscans stand out with regard to leading the “recollect” (i.e., observant) movement, which was a more intentional, contemplative expression of their way of life; Cisneros was a member of the Friars Minor that promoted such recollection. See Edwards, \textit{The Spain of the Catholic Monarchs}, 214-217.
Loyola and his *Spiritual Exercises*; Pseudo Dionysius’ *Mystical Theology*; John Climacus’s *Spiritual Ladder*; as well as the biographies and works of Angela of Foligno and Catherine of Siena.89

There are a few things to note with regard to the religious literature that Cisneros brought into the peninsula, in addition to his embrace of vernacular literacy. First, the list evidences the growing popularity of devotional works from other countries at the time, which promoted an affective spirituality that focused on the humanity of Christ. Second, the collection shows Cisneros’ own endorsement of such texts and how he believed that they could contribute to the agenda of renewal. Third, with these texts, the language of mysticism is introduced into the vernacular of Spain, and is seen as accessible to the unlearned, that is, the unlettered masses.90 Again, this will “speak” to the promotion and development of the inner life, furthering, too, an accessibility of formative, mystical spirituality. Last, these texts are inclusive of women. This last point is particularly important to highlight, especially as the translations would pave the way for women like Teresa of Avila. The inclusivity, too, suggests that there was “a growing literacy among women readers more likely to know the vernacular than Latin.”91 That the biographies and works of such figures as Angela of Foligno and Catherine of Siena were introduced to the literary agenda illustrates even more that Cisneros had a certain focus when it came to reform, and that focus included not only women, but specifically women religious and their spiritual formation, seeing to it that “more women were inspired to participate in the wave of renewed


evangelism…. Many of his monastic reforms were directed specifically toward improving the religious life of nuns and women tertiaries.”\footnote{Weber, \textit{Rhetoric of Femininity}, 22.} Interestingly, scholars note that five editions of the works of Angela of Foligno and Catherine of Siena were published during his tenure, which shows both their popularity and accessibility.\footnote{Howe, “Translation of Women’s Spirituality,” in Blumenfeld-Kosinski, \textit{Vernacular Spirit}, 284.}

Much of Cisneros’ efforts in the support of women’s literacy comes out of his own humanist influence, one that, by the sixteenth century, began to see the value of women’s experience and expand what was available to them; it was a movement of “evangelical democratization.”\footnote{Weber, \textit{Rhetoric of Femininity}, 21.} These humanist efforts of Cisneros cannot be underestimated. That he was both a church official as well as endorsed by the monarchy is also significant to highlight: as a person of power and authority, as one with voice, he served as a bridge between the lettered and unlettered, helping to expand notions of what was considered to be acceptable literacy, particularly with regard to the language of theology, bringing it into vernacular space. In effect, he was a true champion of the word, seeing the significance of literacy and its power to transform, using the technology and the excitement of his day to transform – and reform – currents of thought as well as to channel energy. His leadership in this regard would speak to Teresa’s own religious literacy, the types of works to which she would have access while a Carmelite in the \textit{Encarnación}, and the libraries she would put together for her Reformed convents. In a word, Cisneros enabled and empowered Teresa, and women like her, to be “bookish.”
Such efforts endorsed by the throne of Ferdinand and Isabella are overwhelmingly positive and exciting, and they certainly are reason for the flourishing that was characteristic of Spain’s Golden Age. However, a shift in the literary agenda of reform would eventually take place within Teresa’s lifetime. Ironically, this shift has its roots in the very agenda that belonged to the monarchs and was executed by Cisneros; and it could even be tied to the seemingly rapid embrace of printed materials and emergence of vernacular languages – which again highlights the crises that came out of the word that were so particular to the sixteenth century.

Just prior to Ferdinand and Isabella’s marriage, their unification of the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, and the reconquista, Spain had been somewhat of an open and pluralistic society, in which Christians, Jews, and Muslims coexisted in such a way that was unique to the rest of Europe. Jews and Muslims alike participated in and contributed to the cultural, political, and economic life in this spirit of convivencia. However, “[t]he communities of Christians, Jews and Muslims never lived together on equal terms; so called convivencia was always a relationship between unequals. Within that inequality, the minorities [i.e., Jews and Muslims] played their roles while attempting to avoid conflicts…. In theory, both minorities were restricted to specified areas of the towns they lived in. In practice, the laws on separation were seldom enforced.”

Convivencia, then, was not without its tension. Rowan Williams suggests that it was really an uneasy truce, a mere surface-level, superficial tolerance, evidenced by sporadic persecutions throughout the Middle Ages, resulting from civil wars and invasions from North Africa, with residual attitudes and prejudices that were often left unspoken and kept at bay.


96. Williams, Teresa of Avila, 16.
Compared to other parts of Europe, however, the peninsula was relatively a haven for Jews and Muslims. The Jews, in fact, were often protected by reigning monarchs; yet even with some protection, *convivencia* eventually yielded to greater marginalization and violence at times by the masses, usually driven by religious fanatics, forcing many to convert to Christianity in the fourteenth century, most especially the Jews, who were often caught within and victimized by Christian-Muslim tension. Classified as *conversos*, they and their descendants, even though united by baptism to the rest of the Christian community, were never completely accepted and welcomed; nor were Muslim converts who were sometimes referred to by the more disparaging *moriscos*, or Moorish. The remaining “otherness” of Jewish and Muslim converts involved a complicated understanding of honor and acceptance in society by the dominating Christian culture, as “[t]rue honor was now defined by ethnicity, by blood, as well as by rank and pedigree. The idea of a strain of Moorish or…Jewish blood as a ‘stain’ on one’s reputation and standing affected families of relatively remote Jewish [and Muslim] heritage as well as those of more recent Christian conversion.”

By the time of the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, whose political agenda, while in the spirit of reform, was to create and maintain unity through the instrument of the Church, there had been an escalating concern for this *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood), the thinking of which was never officially theologically endorsed, though it was politically and socially. Coupled with this concern was the fear that *conversos* had been secretly reverting to their former religious traditions, that their conversion was not genuine, that it was only outwardly expressed but not

inwardly believed and lived. For some, this was the case, especially when one considers that conversion was often forced and more sociological than religious. It was precisely this concern of reversion – or “Judaizing” as it had come to be known for Jewish *conversos* – that drew the attention of Ferdinand and Isabella, who became convinced, after hearing a compelling sermon by a Dominican friar while on visitation to Seville, that Judaizers were a threat to political unity, and essentially a threat to reform.\(^{100}\) This conviction was rooted in the growing anti-Semitism of the day and became reason enough to establish the Spanish Inquisition in 1480.

The establishment of the Inquisition was basically the institutionalization of this deep sentiment toward the minority traditions and served as the beginnings of the official break from any remaining spirit of *convivencia*, all in exchange for political unity and under the guise of an overall religious reform. It was followed just twelve years later by the expulsion of the Jews, since the Jews were seen as pressuring their *converso* relatives and friends to return, even if clandestinely, to the practice of Judaism; in the accepted narrative, they became the real reason why *converso* baptism did not hold.\(^{101}\) The Jews who remained, and eventually the Muslims, too, were forced to be baptized; and many of the Jewish converts, afraid themselves of any further discrimination, made much effort to conceal their heritage and sever ancestral ties. Hence, the expulsion did not really resolve the *converso* issue, especially as it resulted in more forced conversions. The Inquisition was left to reinforce – or keep in check – the legitimacy of their acquiescence, and it “was distinguished from the earlier papal Inquisition in one crucial way; it was effectively controlled by the Crown, not by the Church. This was to make it a tool of royal policy; it could be used, if necessary, against, or at least independently of, the papacy.

\(^{100}\) See Edwards, *The Spain of the Catholic Monarchs*, 69ff.

\(^{101}\) Ibid., 226.
Non-Spaniards of the time were correct, however, in seeing its original purpose as being to deal with the [conversos] who were accused of Judaizing.”

In effect, a culture of fear and suspicion became the undercurrent of the day; even Cisneros himself served as inquisitor general for a time. Recall, however, that this undercurrent was simultaneous with Spain’s Golden Age. Despite the enrichment that resulted from the literary contribution and artistic expression, such a culture planted seeds for what would eventually come in and through the Inquisition itself, ironically calling into question the very efforts that really were Cisneros’ (as well as Ferdinand and Isabella’s) to raise the literary consciousness of the people, namely, the Indices of Prohibited Books of the mid-to-late sixteenth century. It is interesting to note that while Cisneros and company were indeed enthusiasts of a growing literacy and effective promoters of the printing press, any literature that was not aligned with the agenda of Catholic reform, that is, any Jewish or Muslim material, was held in suspicion and subsequently destroyed, not unlike the outcome of the later Indices.

The direction that the Inquisition eventually took was a result of a number of things, most especially the Protestant Reformation, any creeping heretical thinking that came to pass, as well as concern for political control and unity. It became Spain’s way of responding to Reformation ideas, which were any current of thought not seen as aligned with orthodoxy; such a pattern ultimately put into effect the Catholic response of the Council of Trent within the peninsula, thus expanding the original intent of the tribunals, which again initially concerned only conversos. Hillgarth attests to this trajectory of the Inquisition, saying that “[o]nce the conversos were


mastered and the Moriscos placed under surveillance, the Inquisition was principally concerned ‘to control, correct, and instruct’ the mass of the ‘old’ Christians [as opposed to the ‘new’ Christians, who were the conversos and Moriscos] on the lines laid down by the Council of Trent, to attempt, for instance, to punish sexual deviants, blasphemers, critics of the clergy or of the Inquisition itself, and to enforce the practices of confession and communion."104

Consequently, reversion to Judaism and Islam, the Protestant Reformation, heresy, and orthodoxy all became bound, threaded, and really tied together intricately to issues of literacy that, while not necessarily unique to Spain, were certainly heightened, intensified, and regarded as crises of the word. When one considers the origin of the Inquisition specifically as a way to manage the issue surrounding conversos but also ultimately serving the agenda of Spanish Catholic Reform and political unity and strength, it is ironic to see that it then shifted to serve the agenda of managing and counteracting another movement of reform while focusing on narrowing and mistrusting the literary means, i.e., the printing press, that had once been operative and previously promoted by it.105 In other words, the Inquisition expanded its focus yet narrowed the vision that the Golden Age provided, especially in its publication and distribution of theological works in the vernacular. In and through the Inquisition, Spain attempted to address the “question [that] arises as to the dignity of vernacular languages, and their ability to serve in the sacred domain,”106 part of which was at the heart of the crisis of the word – and Word – to which the Protestant-Catholic tension at the time brought to the fore.

104. Hillgarth, The Mirror of Spain, 216.

105. Even more ironic is that many of the faculty of Cisneros-fame at the once-reputed University of Alcalá were called into question (see Kamen, The Spanish Inquisition, 87-91).

What once had been embraced by those in authority, the monarchs and even the inquisitor general himself, was now regarded, as a result of Luther’s Wittenberg posting and the thinking that surrounded and followed from it, as a source of danger and mistrusted, namely, the printed word, especially in the vernacular.¹⁰⁷ Censorship, book burning, and lists of prohibition of certain works, then, were a natural outcome of the trajectory that the literary agenda took, coming really at no surprise when a once-subtle undercurrent of a culture of fear and suspicion became outwardly expressed. At the same time, however, especially regarding the Indices of prohibited books, Spain was not necessarily unique, though it did become most associated with them because of their relationship to the Inquisition. For example, the first Spanish Index appeared in 1551, though “[t]here was nothing original about it. It was simply a new and expanded edition of the Index published in Louvain in 1550.”¹⁰⁸ Seeds of such a list were planted by the Council of Trent, which relegated to the local bishop’s oversight and approval theological works.¹⁰⁹ During Teresa’s lifespan, two other official Indices were issued, 1554 and 1559; a fourth was issued the year after her death in 1582.¹¹⁰ The Index of 1554 concerned itself primarily with Scripture, most notably those considered having heretical notes and commentaries.¹¹¹ The Index of 1559, often referred to as the Valdés Index after the inquisitor general at the time, is the most expansive and specific, targeting especially vernacular

¹⁰⁷. Keep in mind, too, that at the time of Luther’s posting (October 1517), Ferdinand and Isabella had already died, while Cisneros himself was close to death (November1517).

¹⁰⁸. Pérez, 181. In fact, the first Index is credited to the Sorbonne in 1544 (181).

¹⁰⁹. Dominique Julia, “Reading and the Counter-Reformation,” in Cavallo and Chartier, A History of Reading in the West, 239.

¹¹⁰. While these are official promulgations, Kamen attests “[e]ach tribunal was allowed to modify its local version, so we know of at least five indexes issued in 1551-2, by the tribunals of Toledo, Valladolid, Valencia, Granada and Seville” (The Spanish Inquisition,108).

translations of Scripture as well as all devotional works in the vernacular.\textsuperscript{112} The vernacular that had been previously embraced was now held in suspicion and cast aside.

Interestingly, the Decree of Valdés on the 1559 Index is very specific as to where the catalogue of prohibited books should be distributed: “[W]e order the apostolic inquisitors…to immediately publish this mandate in their districts and jurisdictions, and especially in the cathedral churches, in other churches and monasteries, and in pulpits by preachers. Inquisitors visiting their districts shall read edicts against those who possess prohibited books or know that others have them, or know that such books are in certain libraries of monasteries, universities, colleges or some other places.”\textsuperscript{113} That monasteries are explicitly named might not be initially curious since they were known to have collections of books. It is all the more telling, however, since to distinguish monasteries in the list may also speak to a mistrust of what is being, or might be, read by religious (consider, for example, that Luther himself was a friar) as well as a desire to oversee, control, and safeguard what it is that they were reading.

One can see, too, that the catalogue garnered a certain vigilance – one based on fear – as noted in Valdés’ Decree, not only about where the Index should be distributed and read, but also about their responsibility to come forward with any information on any prohibited or suspect books in library collections. It states: “The edicts will prompt such people to come and declare what they know before the inquisitors, under pain of the penalties and censures that are appropriate to impose.”\textsuperscript{114} Moreover, an accompanying document, the Decree of the Suprema, addressed more specifically the nature of censorship, in which books, especially in the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{112} Kamen, The Spanish Inquisition,\textsuperscript{109}.
\item \textsuperscript{113} Decree of Inquisitor-General Valdés on books, 1558 in Lu Ann Homza, ed., trans., The Spanish Inquisition, 1478-1614: An Anthology of Sources (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2006), 214; emphasis added.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
humanities, would be examined carefully, with any errors, notably within glosses or annotations, being removed before the works would be returned to their owners.\textsuperscript{115}

How this differs from the literary reform agenda of Cisneros seems to be more in kind than in degree. Even though it can be said that both Cisneros and Valdés concerned themselves with the reading matter of men and women religious, and, in fact, all the faithful; that they were concerned with their spiritual re-formation; and that they saw value, or no value, in certain texts – all of which could be considered differences in degree – their respective tactics were ultimately differences in kind. Cisneros trusted the vernacular, promoted it, and added works to be read in the vernacular; Valdés mistrusted it, saw it as a threat to maintaining orthodoxy, and took away literature. Teresian scholar Gillian Ahlgren furthers this understanding of the difference between the approaches of the two Inquisitors General: “The Valdés Index encouraged a distinction between books published in Latin and those issued in the vernacular, thus determining the potential audiences of the works available. Instructional books, such as catechisms and moral treatises, were published in the vernacular; theological discourse was limited to Latin. The priorities of the press had changed and vernacular translations of speculative theological works were no longer available.”\textsuperscript{116}

What was once promoted by those in power and used as an instrument of reform and renewal was now held over and against the very heart of enrichment and renewal for which it had been initially utilized and embraced. Theology was returned exclusively to its former lettered, Latin realm and taken out of vernacular space, which would unfortunately inhibit and limit those uneducated and unable to read Latin. It seemed that the spirituality of the devotio

\textsuperscript{115. Decree of the Suprema on books, 1558 in Ibid., 215.}

\textsuperscript{116. Ahlgren, Politics of Sanctity, 20.}
modernas as well as the texts that came forth from it were called into question, no longer able to provide adequate, vernacular words—suitable expression—to name one’s experience of interiority or even help one to understand it, unless, of course, that person understood and could read Latin. Furthermore, “[b]y forbidding so many books published with the approval of Cisneros, the Index could also be regarded as the first official statement condemning [Cisneros’] spirituality.”117 In effect, Latin was intimately tied once again not just to theology, but to orthodox, acceptable theology, and the vernacular was linked if not to heresy, at least to that which required intense scrutiny. “In summary, the Valdés Index of Prohibited Books was not merely a list of books prohibited to the public; it was an edict intended to limit the scope of religious speculation and to define religious faith and practice very narrowly as the province of an educated elite whose task was not speculation but transmission of dogma.”118 Consequently, the Inquisition’s decrees of 1558 that accompanied the Valdés Index limited not only theological literature, but also those who were capable of “doing” theology as well as what it is one “does” when theologizing. As Ahlgren adds, “One result of this new orientation was the monopoly of the presses by university-trained, ordained theologians: the teaching office had become strictly sacerdotal.”119

This development underscores the divide not only between the lettered and the unlettered, but also between men and women, the divide that was not as emphasized or as distinct in the space of vernacular literacy. Lettered literacy, the literacy of those in power, of those with authority, of those with voice, and, because of the Valdés Decree and Index, of those with the

119. Ibid., 20.
ability to censure, remained gendered, divided between men and women. With the vernacular held in great suspicion, the space for women was narrowed, a space that had once been expanded by the efforts of such people like Cisneros, a space that had been embraced, albeit cautiously, by the Church and, subsequently, had enabled and empowered women to find words to express their experience of God and to understand their experience. Ahlgren asserts, “As the genres of theological discourse shifted from speculative and mystical treatises to dogmatic texts [as the Decrees and the Index called for], the technical terms used to describe mystical states were not accessible to vernacular writers.”

This restriction put women religious especially in a bind as they searched to find words to validate their prayer experiences or even to help guide and direct them. Translations of the works by women, such as Angela of Foligno and Catherine of Siena, which had previously been commissioned and popularized by Cisneros during the early days of the Spanish Catholic reform became scarce; in fact, interestingly, no further reprints of their works were issued during the time of the Indices. All of this would have particular implications for rendering mysticism and women’s participation in and experience of mysticism. Ahlgren notes further that, as a result, “[n]o books by female authors emerged from the presses in Alcalá, for example, between 1550 and 1600.” These were the years that Teresa of Avila was in the prime of her life, creative and energized, and in the midst of the Carmelite reform, and, despite the limits placed on women’s literacy, she stood there, compelled in vernacular space, holding the book – perhaps, the Confessions – and managing to be the exception in this regard.

120. Ibid.
121. Ibid., n.41.
122. Ibid., 20.
The Book & Teresa: Romanced & Mystical

As noted earlier, Teresa’s “bookishness” seems to have stemmed from her family’s social ranking among the lower nobility, the *hidalgo*, of Avila, which provided her and her siblings the opportunity, accessibility, and space for reading books in the vernacular. While she does tell her reader that she cannot read Latin, “Teresa does not say how she learned to read [i.e., Spanish]; indeed, she seems to take for granted her own literacy and that of her parents, siblings, and relatives.” She credits her parents, particularly her father, for such an opportunity and for her love of reading. Early on in her *Vida*, she writes, “These good books [provided by my father], 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. It was a help to me to see that my parents favored nothing but virtue. And they themselves possessed many.”

Teresa makes a connection of reading to prayer, by placing the two alongside one another, in such a way that they work together; perhaps even to suggest that reading can be a form of prayer, and that prayer can be a form of reading. Here, Teresa offers an insight, that when both reading and prayer parallel one another, when they work together, they can awaken within the reader/pray-er the desire for a life of virtue. Teresa comes to understand that she was exposed to virtuous living through the books selected for her as well as the prayers she was taught, both of which were modeled for her by her parents. In other words, she highlights how

123. See *Life* 26.5 (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, 226).
125. *Life* 1.1 (Kavanaugh, 54).
reading good books and prayer contributed together to her over all formation: prayerful reading – lectio – for Teresa was a formative experience. The body of literature, though unnamed by her, other than being labeled as “bueno,” that she and her siblings were given, endorsed the virtue she found in her parents, which subsequently awakened a rightful desire within her to follow in their footsteps.

The link that Teresa makes with reading, prayer, and virtue is precisely the link that Cisneros, too, had made when he opened the presses for the translation and printing of devotional material – good books – in Spain. Cisneros saw in the printing press, and more importantly, in the book itself, the potential to awaken the desire for virtue, that is to say, to awaken a deep, inner life in the reader. At the same time, he also saw how the press and the book had the potential for the opposite outcome; perhaps that is why, as an antidote to the chivalric romances of the day, which were rooted in fiction, he offered the other works instead, those rooted in the devotio moderna, the renewal movement of which he was in favor. Like Teresa, Cisneros understood books – and the activity of reading – as having the potential to form and reform the reader. As Teresa reviewed her life and told her story – she was forty-seven years old when she began to write her Vida in 1562126 – she was able to reflect on her childhood reading habits and how they affected, either positively or negatively, her life of virtue, or really her cultivating a life of virtue.

As a person of her time, whose literacy was framed within vernacular space, Teresa, too, recounts her reading chivalric romances and the initial excitement around this activity. She does so from the retrospective viewpoint in which she condemns them and regrets having read them,

even to the point of slightly contradicting what she had previously said earlier about the
modeling of behavior that her parents provided:

What I am going to tell about began, it seems to me, to do me much harm. I sometimes
reflect on the great damage parents do by not striving that their children might always see
virtuous deeds of every kind. For even though my mother, as I said, was so virtuous, I
did not, in reaching the age of reason, imitate her good qualities; in fact hardly at all.
And the bad ones did me much harm. She loved books of chivalry. But this pastime
didn’t hurt her the way it did me, for she did not fail to do her duties; and we used to read
them together in our free time. Perhaps she did this reading to escape thinking of the
great trials she had to bear and to busy her children with something so that they would
not turn to other things dangerous to them. Our reading such books was a matter that
weighed so much upon my father that we had to be cautioned lest he see us. I began to
get the habit of reading these books. And by little fault [pequeña falta], which I saw in
my mother, I started to grow cold in my desires and to fail in everything else. I didn’t
think it was wrong to waste many hours of the day and night in such a useless
practice, even though hidden from my father. I 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.127

This passage is rich in the information that Teresa gives to her reader. First, keep in mind
that Teresa writes this reflection in her late forties, very self-aware and conscious of the activity
of the Inquisition and the proscriptions provided by the Valdés Index, which had only been
issued a few years prior to her writing.128 While this comment is not meant to take away from
her genuine examination and critique of her past behavior, it is right to suggest that her critique
of chivalric romances may have been influenced by the Church of Spain’s heavy-handed opinion
of them. Second, she credits reading these books as a way to pass the time, as a form of escape,
especially for her mother who suffered from some unnamed distress.129 Third, that she read
them together with her mother as well as at times with her siblings, there is the great possibility
that this reading was done aloud, and was not a private, silent activity; that is, one person was

127. *Life*, 2.1 (Kavanaugh, 57; Steggink, 36).
128. See *Life*, 26.5 (168).
reading, most likely her mother, while Teresa and her siblings listened and participated in the activity, which speaks to the still highly oral-aural society of which she was a part. This could also provide a framework for how they read the “buenos libros” as well. Fourth, she still places great virtue in the life of her parents, especially her father. While Teresa maintains that her mother was both dutiful and virtuous, she does express a certain level of discomfort and disappointment in this “pequeña falta” of her mother, that is, in her enjoying these books and in not necessarily discouraging Teresa in reading them. Fifth, she notes the potential adverse formative nature of these books, especially if a person allowed them to break into his or her life.

Here, she underscores and redeems her mother’s virtue by seeing strength in her mother, who had the stamina to withstand their influence; Teresa, however, claims that the books impacted her own life negatively, undermining any of the desires for virtue that had been previously awakened within her by the good books of her childhood. One of these negative effects is the deception that accompanies her habit of reading these books and becomes the condition for doing so. This theme of her concern for deception will be an undercurrent operative throughout her Vida. Another possible negative outcome that Teresa seems to associate with this literature is her own sexual awakening coupled with growing vanity: “I began to dress in finery and to desire to please and look pretty, taking great care of my hands and hair and about perfumes and all the empty things in which one can indulge, and which were many, for I was very vain…. For many years I took excessive pains about cleanliness and other things that did not seem in any way sinful. Now I see how wrong it must have been.”130 The disappointment in herself that she expresses both in reading these books as well as the

130. Life, 2.2 (Kavanaugh, 57).
accompanying deceptive behavior and vanity reflects the disappointment found in her father and modeled by him.

This last point is worth further comment. Teresa is not specific about why her father was annoyed by their reading chivalric romances, though she does put them over and against his fondness for the “buenos libros” he offers his children. It could be that he was afraid that the books would influence her sexual awakening, as she suggested they did. There are a few other things of note, however, in the little that she does say. While she is not direct, there is at least the allusion that her father may know Latin. She is very explicit in highlighting that the “buenos libros” that she and her siblings are given to read are in Spanish. The phrase before that clause only claims that her father enjoys reading good books; she does not specify that they are in Spanish as she does for those she and her siblings read. Since she does not qualify the language in which his reading material was found, the reader could easily surmise that they are, therefore, not in Spanish, but rather Latin. It could be that, again being self-aware as she writes her Vida and conscious of the Inquisition and the scrutiny that comes with it, her description might be an indirect, subtle critique of the Church’s own critique of literature in the vernacular. By bringing to the fore the possible lettered-unlettered divide, here Teresa may be addressing some judgment and suspicion that had been placed on vernacular space; that is, by specifically addressing that she and her siblings were given good books to read in Spanish – as opposed to the chivalric romances, which are not “good” – she is saying that there are and can be good books in the vernacular, literature that can be formative for the good. In other words, she is endorsing the books of her childhood, those that were provided by her father and made possible because of the work of Cisneros. Her commentary in the Vida is made in a post-Cisneros Spain with a literary
program that has seemingly backtracked in its vernacular promotion. She offers, then, this critique veiled in her condemnation of chivalric romances.

In addition to the lettered-unlettered division, there is also possibly present the gendered underpinnings of literacy. While Teresa does not explicitly give the reason for her father’s disapproval of texts of chivalry, “the actual reasons could have extended to resentment [on the part of her father] of this pleasurable occupation that removed the two female members of his household from his control.”131 Teresa notes that they passed the time away in their reading, that it even served as an escape, a break from duties, so it could be that these works could have been looked down upon by men like her father, because it took women away from what would be considered their proper womanly concerns and responsibilities. Moreover, while it seems that there is evidence that there was a wide readership and great popularity of these romances among all the social classes, there was at least an outspoken-on-the-surface-level opinion that the works were questionable and looked down upon, and it could be that it was considered a mere womanly pastime.132 Whatever the reason, it does seem that her father was not successful in preventing neither Teresa nor her mother from reading these books, even if they had to be deceptive in doing so.133

Interestingly, in the catalogue of Teresa’s family library, there is no record of any chivalric romances; only devotional and classical texts – “buenos libros” – appear. It could be

133. This last point that ties deception to womanly behavior has implications on the question and interpretation of the spiritual life of women, and their capability of it, which will be explored in depth in Chapter Four: Contemplatio – the Fire.
that “[her father] might have kept them off the record due to their questionable respectability.”

Cisneros would most certainly approve of such a catalogue. If this is the case, there might have been something deeper at play here. Her father may have disapproved, certainly in his own right, of the chivalric romances, and even intentionally kept them off the official catalogue of their library collection, but he could have done so in order that the family would also be kept off the radar. Teresa and her family were *conversos*, having Jewish blood on her father’s side, the family Sánchez of Toledo. Not only that, but her grandfather, Juan, along with his sons, including her father, Alonso, had been accused of Judaizing; subsequently, had made public penance in 1485, in order to be reconciled and reinstated in the community; and eventually moved the family to Avila for the sake of their reputation, where they “attained a high level of wealth and public dignity.”

Coupled with all the issues that came with concerns for *limpieza de sangre*, there was the real, not-too-distant memory of documented scandal that would have serious implications around honor and acceptance for the family and their credibility within the community of Avila. It could be that this memory, as well as fear, kept her father reading good books and modeling behavior for Teresa and her siblings – and even for the outside community, especially Old Christian critics. As Williams asserts, “A brush with the Inquisition could mean disgrace or financial ruin [for them and for other *converso* families]: it would destroy the already fragile bonds of credit and trust that bound them to their fellow citizens.”

And so, her father would have made every effort to safeguard his family’s reputation, even by overseeing what they read.

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136. Ibid., 22.
This commentary is not meant to lessen or devalue the authenticity of her father’s faith and purpose of amendment, nor his taste in literature; his practice of reading such literature and, furthermore, instilling the habit in his family members could still have been his own genuine desire to be renewed and strengthened in his faith, even if motivated consciously or unconsciously by fear.

That this is also Teresa’s account of her father’s virtue and practice could be her way of doing the same, of keeping the family name clear – of keeping her name clear – especially since these concerns of limpieza de sangre were operative even within religious communities of her day, which often made outright efforts not to accept converso/a members, making it difficult for them to enter. In her reform of Carmel, Teresa was very conscious of this reality, and was driven and determined to form a community of equals, with special emphasis on communal and personal poverty, regardless of class status, and no needed proof of limpieza de sangre for entrance, unlike many other communities. Williams adds, “Research into the background of [Teresa’s] early associates, especially the first members of the convent of St. Joseph [the first foundation of her reform], strongly suggests that she attracted other New Christians [i.e., conversas] to her enterprise; and many of her patrons and benefactors clearly shared her social origins.” In addition, knowing full well that she herself was held in suspicion by the Inquisition and that this account, her Vida, would be thoroughly examined, Teresa desired to put

137. Bilinkoff, Avila of Saint Teresa, 146-147. Interestingly, Bilinkoff notes that in a “dramatic departure from the idealistic goals of Teresa of Jesus, the Discalced Carmelites in 1597 [Teresa died in 1582] at last bowed to social pressure from the Old Christian elites and instituted strict statutes of purity of blood. In an ironic twist, the Constitutions adopted by the Spanish Chapter in that year blocked entrance to the descendants of conversos extending back four generations, a proviso that would have prevented Teresa de Ahumada from joining the order she founded” (165).

138. Williams, Teresa of Avila, 23. See also Bilinkoff, Avila of Saint Teresa, 146-147.
forth an honest, but in the best possible light, review and portrayal of her own background and
standing. ¹³⁹

Teresa’s brief commentary and critical review on her past relationship with chivalric
romances, then, becomes an attempt on her part to give credibility to her ability to read, that is, to
read well, correctly, and accurately. She does this in a number of ways. First, she casts her
parents, especially her father, in a positive light. Given what was said about his Judaizing past,
which could very well be known by her audience, she shows him as one whose reading habits of
good books (as well as possible knowledge of Latin), along with prayer, have shaped him into a
model of virtue, a model Christian, even as a converso head of household. Even though her
mother engaged in deceptive behavior and read chivalric romances, she, too, remained a model
of virtue because she was able to resist the adverse effects of these “bad books,” unlike Teresa.

Second, that Teresa so freely critiques her behavior and regrets having read such works is
also quite telling, and she reveals it early on in her Vida. Teresa willingly takes ownership of her
past inability to read well – or to misread – as a way to authenticate her current ability to read
well, in what would be considered as a criterion of embarrassment. In other words, while her
parents, especially her father, are portrayed so positively, she refuses to do so for herself, and she
shows what misreading can do to a person, in fact, what it did to her, as in her own vanity and
fastidiousness. In doing so, she gives credibility to present experience to read well, and to read
prayerfully.¹⁴⁰ In addition, in a subtle recognition of the gender divide, her father is portrayed as
stronger than her mother, and her mother is portrayed as stronger than most women. Later on in

¹³⁹. Chapter Four: Contemplatio – the Fire will examine in further detail Teresa’s rhetoric of confessio
and humility, which she borrowed from Augustine but made it uniquely her own, as her guiding method and strategy
throughout her Vida.

¹⁴⁰. In many ways, this doctoral dissertation will demonstrate how the Confessions taught Teresa to read
well, to read accurately.
her *Vida*, she will discuss how women particularly have to be attentive to read well, that they are susceptible to misreading their spiritual lives.\textsuperscript{141} Her father, a man, possibly able to read Latin, modeled for his household how to read well, calling to account even his wife, when necessary, to do the same. Note the parallel in that Teresa, a woman, needs to go to lettered men, who are ordained and trained in theology, to give her guidance and ensure that she is reading her own spiritual experience accurately.

It is precisely this point of misreading a text that Teresa wants to hold out in tension with the *buenos libros* of her day. It is not coincidental that she dedicates the first opening pages of her *Vida* to a discussion on the importance of a quality relationship with good books in the vernacular. It is an intentional agenda on her part. She wants to alert her critical audience that she is aware of the issues, and that she herself is a good reader; in fact, that she has learned to be a good reader. Teresa is well aware of and saddened by the proscriptions of the Valdés Index, “when they forbade the reading of many books in the vernacular,”\textsuperscript{142} nor is she favorable toward the decision to prohibit such books. Instead, she would be supportive of the once-embraced Cisneros campaign. At the same time, however, she sees how some of these texts can have the potential to - and did – lead some astray, that is, when these texts – even as good books – are misread. The evidence for reading them well and accurately, for Teresa, lies in their relationship that she identifies with prayer, that together, prayer and reading must lead to good works, to a life of virtue, and to bear much fruit.

Teresa’s literary agenda is to set her and her acquired reading habits apart from two different, but related, movements, namely, “Lutheranism,” that is, any thought associated with

\textsuperscript{141} See *Life*, 7.5 (Kavanaugh, 85), 23.2 (201).

\textsuperscript{142} *Life* 26.5 (Kavanaugh, 226); emphasis added.
the Protestant Reformation, and illuminism, the mysticism of the *alambrados*. Recall that Luther posted his *Ninety-Five Theses* in Wittenberg just two years after Teresa’s birth; by the time Teresa is in her prime, the effect of the Reformation is creeping in on the somewhat guarded peninsula, which accounts for the expansion of the efforts of the Inquisition, post-Cisneros. As has been suggested above, one of the issues of concern within the Protestant Reformation centered on the Word, that is, Scripture, how one reads it and what it is one is reading, i.e., as in the translation, most especially regarding the vernacular. Related to this rendering of *Sola Scriptura* as a crisis of the Word was the concern around merit, good works, and faith. That Teresa sees virtue as an outcome of the coupling of prayer and reading, or even more, that a virtuous life is evidence of, and needs to accompany, reading for it to be considered good, prayerful reading – or *lectio* – Teresa addresses any criticism that could be directed to her around Luther’s critique of the faith-good works relationship.

Teresa grounds herself and her reading habits within a life of virtue, as she demonstrates in the first few pages alone of her *Vida*. She will more clearly speak to this issue of setting herself apart from the Lutherans, and, therefore, in complete alignment with the Catholic Church, in her *Camino de Perfección*, the first version of which began “between 1562 and 1566,” shortly after she writes her *Vida*.143 “In Teresa’s mind the Church and Christianity were identical. The attack of ‘those Lutherans’ was an attack against Christianity, she thought. Nowhere in [*Camino de Perfección*] does she use the qualifier ‘Catholic’ to designate the members of the Church or the Church itself. Moreover the relationship between her mystical life and the Church, both in its

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ministry and its sufferings, was inseparable." And Teresa wants to ensure her potential critics that she is correctly rooted in the good reading habits of the Church.

Mixed in with her awareness of Protestant concerns is also the suspicion of being in the company of alumbrados, or the illuminists. While unique to Spain at the turn of the sixteenth century, illuminism was not unlike the heretical thought found in Quietism and the Free Spirit, both of which touched upon indifference to the Church and the soul’s self-annihilation. This movement seems to have arisen from some of the literature of the devotio moderna, promoted by Cisneros himself, such as Osuna’s El Tercer Abecedario. Closely linked with, but not the same as, the practice of recollection, which interestingly Cisneros also favored, was the practice of dejamiento or abandonment, in addition to encouragement of the private reading of Scripture. Ahlgren adds, “Alumbrados had made two major errors: they had been deceived in prayer and they had had too much spiritual pride to admit that they had been so deceived. The campaign against the alumbrados had the double effect of redefining prayer as essentially vocal and as not an authoritative source of spiritual knowledge and of encouraging clerical mediation and sometimes control over the spiritual lives of confessees.”

There are a few things to note, especially when placing the alumbrados alongside Teresa. First, illuminism emerged within vernacular space, that is, within the non-lettered realm of literacy, which did not have an officially endorsed language of theology, even though Cisneros made great efforts to make good devotional literature both accessible and acceptable. Second, I


146. This tension will be explored further in Chapter Three, particularly how Teresa’s reading of the Confessions helps redeem her reading of Osuna’s work, and subsequently her experience of the prayer of quiet, especially as a woman.

147. Ahlgren, Politics of Sanctity, 7.
the movement concentrated on the individual and his or her personal experience of prayer and illumination, which during this time of spiritual hunger and enrichment, would have been certainly very attractive; while there is nothing initially concerning about a personal experience of prayer, the movement seems to have stressed the individual over and against the community that is the Church, and the Church’s Tradition. Third, it was an understanding of spirituality that became inextricably linked to the emerging appreciation of individual reading and interpretation of texts, which was gaining popularity in vernacular space, even though the culture was still highly oral, and which, in its extreme, opposed itself to Tradition. Last, as this spirituality was uniquely vernacular, illuminism was especially attractive to women, giving them the tools, the language, and the space to explore the inner life. As Ahlgren says, “[The] emphasis on revelation and charismatic gifts rather than on title, office, or academic education put women on an equal footing with men, and many of the first alumbrados prosecuted by the Inquisition were women.” In addition to women, the alumbrados were also attractive to conversos. Consider how conversos were held suspect and never fully welcomed by the greater Spanish society and Church community; and so, such a movement could validate their voice and experience.

Hamilton suggests, that “[t]he alumbrados’ use of the language of mysticism, moreover, their proximity to the Franciscan mystics, and their advocacy of complete passivity, the ‘quiet’ of the senses which the Church had long regarded with distrust, meant that the accusation of alumbradismo could serve to discredit other mystics, even the greatest mystical writers of the Spanish Golden Age.” Hence, the case of the alumbrados is definitely a concern centered on

148. Ibid., 12.
149. See Hamilton, Heresy and Mysticism, 2, 121.
150. Ibid, 2.
the danger of misreading texts, and one can easily see how Teresa, in her own effort to showcase her reading skills, would want to avoid any association with them, most especially as a woman and as a *conversa*. And the potential to misread was real; so too, was the potential to be accused of misreading, especially in a culture that was so acutely aware of a newfound power of the printed word.

**Impressions**

In many ways, Ong was right to label the sixteenth century as a marked period of crises of the word. The above examination of the development and evolution of literacy and how it reaches a climax with both the printing press and the Latin-Vernacular divide touches upon sensitive material within the human person and his or her consciousness, particularly as it relates to matters such as authority, voice, gender, authenticity, individuality, and community, not to mention a person’s intimate encounter with God and how that encounter can accurately be expressed within the context of Tradition. Teresa of Avila emerges from this scene as a person of her time certainly marked, but not necessarily scarred, by these crises. Her fascination with the book, indeed, her bookishness, is both characteristic of her time, yet also unique to her, as she is able to hold the book, in all by which it is bound – its intricate threading, its binding – but more importantly what it speaks, so much so that she was able to write, “My fondness for good books was my salvation.” However, this was not without its struggle, as she so often attested in her writings. Hers was a relationship with books that she was willing to protect and assert, even knowingly at the risk of strong, authoritative criticism that could have serious consequences

151. *Life*, 3.7 (Kavanaugh, 63).
for her honor and status within a variety of communities of which she was a part: society, the Church, even her Carmelite community.

Recall that Pereda’s altarpiece shows the book on the ground by Teresa, but does not show its edge, its binding. The binding – all that the book, and in effect, all that Teresa herself, were bound by – remains hidden in the painting, remains hidden on the ground. What this initial, ground level reading has done is to reveal that Teresa and the book are, in some ways, bound together, threaded together. And Teresa herself knows this, even from the start of her own writing. Teresian scholar Alison Weber muses about Teresa’s binding, placing it within the double bind theory: “The double bind is not a difficult choice but rather the illusion of choice within a relationship. The alternatives are illusory because they exist on different logical levels. For example, the command to ‘be independent’ is paradoxical since spontaneous behavior cannot be ordered; compliance with the order on one level violates it on another level. Such paradoxical injunctions are called binds not only because of the logical dilemmas they produce but also because they occur within an intensely important relationship that is essential to the subject’s self-definition.”

Weber’s analysis is a helpful one, as it gives further nuance to the intricacies of Teresa’s self-awareness and awareness of her own critics, as well as the threat of the Inquisition. Weber continues: “The binding ‘field’ from which Teresa wrote was constituted by ties that were emotional, theological, and legalistic. Her addressees were, after all, the very men who controlled her access to confession and absolution. Furthermore, as a woman without ‘letters’ (or theological studies in Latin) Teresa could not presume to have the necessary theological

152. Weber, *Rhetoric of Femininity*, 45. Teresa’s double bind will be explored further in Chapter Four: *Contemplatio* – the Fire.
learning to support her claims or fully understand her experience.”

Teresa knew the issues, and she willingly, yet indirectly, exposes the issues. She writes,

> Many years passed by in which I read a lot of things and didn’t understand anything of what I read. For a long time, even though God favored me, I didn’t know what words to use to explain His favors; and this was no small trial…. One thing I can truthfully say: although I spoke with many spiritual persons who wanted to explain what the Lord was giving me so that I would be able to speak about it, my dullness was truly so great that their explanations benefited me neither little nor much. Or maybe, since His Majesty has always been my Master, it was the Lord’s desire that I have no one else to thank.

Teresa knew she was bound by the proscriptions of the Church, and while wanting to remain a “true Daughter of the Church,” in opposition to the heresies scrutinized by the hands of the Inquisition, she also wanted to speak to the injustice of not being given an adequate theological vocabulary to express and to validate her experience of God, all which happened precisely because she was given materials to read that had been endorsed by the Church but then taken away. She wanted to engage in good, prayerful reading – lectio - and she knew the ground on which she walked, on which she stood, and on which she knelt. The issues were not hidden from her, but she needed a language, she needed a method, she needed permission and authority to pursue her reading, her prayer, her desire for virtue. “At this time,” she writes, “they gave the *Confessions of St. Augustine*. It seems the Lord ordained this, because I had not tried to procure a copy, nor had I ever seen one. I am very fond of St. Augustine, because the convent where I stayed as a lay person belonged to his Order, and also because he had been a sinner.”

Teresa’s encounter with Augustine and his book will shift the way she reads – and ultimately tells – her story.

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153. Ibid., 46.


155. Ibid., 9.7 (Kavanaugh, 103).
Chapter Two: Meditatio – the Staff

As I began to read the Confessions, it seemed to me that 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 the voice in the garden, it only seemed to me, according to what I felt in my heart, that it was I the Lord called.

Consider now the staff. In Pereda’s depiction, the staff sits on the ground close to Augustine, symmetrical with the book. Just as Teresa’s hand is open having once held the book, so, too, is Augustine’s hand with the staff. When in his grasp, the staff would have served the purpose of guiding, gathering, and pointing, carrying with it an authority along the journey and for the journey, especially in Augustine’s role as bishop of Hippo-Regius. As an instrument of guidance, the staff serves as a walking stick, holding up the one using it, helping to navigate and create balance, giving the person steady and firm footing as he or she negotiates the earth. The staff is in relationship with the ground in all of the earth’s variations from its smooth to its rough patches, and it is in relationship with the one who holds it, connecting that person even more deliberately to the terrain on which he or she walks. There is a sense of pilgrimage that is evoked here. The staff, too, gathers: it is a pastoral tool, modeled after that used by a shepherd with his flock, keeping the sheep together, with an ability to bring back any who stray away or veer off course. It symbolizes the ministry of the one who holds it – the episcopal ministry of leading and gathering, bringing together and fostering community. Finally, the staff points, giving direction and attention to whatever may lie ahead on the path. But here, in Pereda’s scene, the staff is at rest, placed on the ground, suggesting that a point has been reached – if not the final destination – on the journey.
As noted earlier, *lectio divina* involves interior movement and shifts in focus. To move one’s gaze at the painting from the book-at-rest to the staff-at-rest, a person must follow along the ground that connects them and on which they are mirrored. To see the book is to see the staff, just as to see Teresa is to see Augustine.\(^{156}\) If the first level or rung of *lectio* is a grounded reading, this second level has something to do with the ground as well: there is more ground to cover in reading here, more to unearth. Symbolized by the staff and its placement, this next phase of reading is a reflecting back on – a mirroring of – the initial *lectio* of the book. Susan Muto explains further: “As formative readers, we try to enter into the foundational experiences out of which the texts that touch us arose. Often this approach requires more than one reading. Since certain texts contain many levels of meaning, it may take more meditation on them to penetrate the heart.”\(^{157}\)

The work of the second rung of *lectio* is what is referred to in the tradition as *meditatio*, which is translated as meditation. Guigo in his *Ladder* writes: “Meditation is the busy application of the mind [*studiosa mentis actio*] to seek with the help of one’s own reason for knowledge of hidden truth [*occulta veritatis*].”\(^{158}\) Here, “*studiosa mentis actio*” would be better translated as an eager, zealous, or striving activity or action, instead of a “busy application,” highlighting a sense of something more or beyond, an uncovering of the hiddenness that meditation aims to reveal, which stirs up longing and desire. Such desire nudges, prods, or pulls the person into a deeper experience of the text, going underneath the ground of the text to even more meaning than what might be initially grasped. There is an insatiable, restless quality to

\(^{156}\) Chapter Four will explore the mirrored positions of Augustine and Teresa further.

\(^{157}\) Muto, “Formative Reading,” 104.

\(^{158}\) Guigo, *Ladder*, II (Colledge, 68; SC, 84).
meditatio, that keeps the reader motivated, enticed, and sustained as “[the soul] is consumed with longing, yet it can find no means of its own to have what it longs for; and the more it searches the more it thirsts.”

To help unpack this eagerness, excitement, and zeal, consider some of the verbs Guigo associates with meditatio throughout his treatise: invenit; masticat; frangit; penetrat; effodiens. Meditatio comes into, comes upon, and finds [“invenit”]; it chews [“masticat”]; it breaks into pieces and breaks open [“frangit”]; it passes through and penetrates [penetrat]; it digs and excavates [“effodiens’]. These verb choices offer nuances to meditatio that underscore an active, non-passive understanding of meditation, a constant movement toward the discovery of that which is underneath or within. The actions described here initially do not seem to match the controlling image of a ladder and its rungs, nor the action of climbing higher - altius pedem figit as Guigo reminds his audience. Interestingly, however, in addition to being higher, the descriptor altius can also mean deeper: what determines the directionality is based on one’s perspective, that is, the place from which someone sees and stands. And so, the choice of the word altius is telling, with various meanings that can be placed alongside one another, which enriches the overall meaning.

Such an insight is important to keep in mind especially when examining the mystical tradition, which often uses language of ascent on matters concerning the interior life. What may seem contradictory or counterintuitive in terms of directionality – or even mixed metaphors – from a contemporary perspective can, in fact, be understood clearly and embraced together from

159. Ibid., V (Colledge, 71; SC, 90).

160. See Ibid., III (Colledge, 68; SC, 84); XII (79; 106).

within the tradition, without contradiction or tension, by using words like *altius*. Neither does the direction nor the layering (as in the rungs of the ladder) need to be understood hierarchically. For Guigo, to climb higher is also to go deeper within; upward is also downward and even inward, conveying height, depth, and interiority – and words like *altius* allow for all of it, since it is more important that the intensity of the “more” in the comparative degree is conveyed than the actual direction of that intensity. This, too, can be seen as the work of a staff-in-motion – and not at-rest – with upward and downward movement, as it touches upon the earth, comes upon the surface and breaks into it along the journey.

*Meditatio*, like a staff-in-motion, takes the original grounded, surface-level reading of *lectio* and breaks through it, until it comes upon something hidden, an insight that is revealed within and underneath the ground of the text, as the person reads over and journeys with it. This hiddenness that attracts and sustains the reader in *meditatio* may very well be what renders a text a classic, having a timeless quality to it – something that it offers – so much so that it continues to invite, nudge, and prod readers to break it open and discover more, time and time again. As such, it serves as a staff of sorts, in that it guides, directs, points, even gathers, both an individual as well as a greater communal readership, on the way to a more-than-once reading, carrying with it a certain weight of authority with the message and meaning it contains.

Theologian David Tracy in his *Analogical Imagination* offers a description of a classic that helps to understand it as a meditative text, especially in the text’s ability to be both timeless and timely. He writes:

> When the text is a classic, I am also recognizing that its “excess of meaning” both demands constant interpretation and bears a certain kind of timeless; the kind of timeless of a classic expression radically rooted in its own historical time and calling to my own historicity. That is, the classical text is not in some timeless moment which needs mere repetition. Rather its kind of timeless as permanent timeliness is the only one proper to any expression of the finite, temporal, historical beings we are.
The classic text’s real disclosure is its claim to attention on the ground that an event of understanding proper to finite human beings has here found expression…. Every classic lives as a classic only if it finds readers willing to be provoked by its claim to attention.  

In other words, a classic as a meditative text brings one to meditatio only as the reader allows himself or herself to get caught up in that which the classic aims to disclose – the occulta veritas or hidden, concealed truth to which Guigo refers – and which calls the reader to scratch the surface of the text and read altius, deeper still. In doing so, the reader is rooted more firmly in his or her own ground, what Tracy calls historicity, and, at the same time, can respect the historicity of that which is being read: neither need to be mutually exclusive nor suffer an impasse, even if centuries and various circumstances separate the respective contexts. Instead, with a classic in hand, one can dig into the surface of his or her life while digging into the surface of the text. The shift is an interior one, Guigo’s interiora penetrat. It is this ability, which is really the potential and the ability to disclose truth, that, according to Tracy, makes a text a classic. He continues:

Yet somehow the classics endure as provocations awaiting the risk of reading: to challenge our complacency, to break our conventions, to compel and concentrate our attention, to lure us out of privacy masked as autonomy into a public realm where what is important and essential is no longer denied. Whenever we actually experience even one classic work of art we are liberated from privateness into the genuine publicness of a disclosure of truth.

This liberation into “publicness” caused by the reading of a classic is important to hold together with the insights revealed earlier about the transformation of the word noted by Walter Ong: namely, the shift from an oral-aural culture to a visual-tactile one, which coincided with the

163. Guigo, Ladder, V (Colledge, 70; SC, 88).
164. Tracy, Analogical Imagination, 108.
165. Ibid., 115.
public-aloud to private-silent reading, that evoked a transformation of consciousness with the emergence of the inner voice and autonomy of the individual (and reader). Again, these do not need to be understood in contradiction; in fact, the reading of a classic can enable the individual reader to “go public” with his or her inner voice, an authority that is shared and given weight by the disclosure of truth contained within the text that is both mirrored and emerging within the individual. Tracy highlights the role of meditatio in this endeavor: “To enter the world of a major classic the interpreter [i.e., the reader] must be prepared to be caught up in the back-and-forth movement of disclosure and concealment of a truth about life itself, to be carried along by the intensification process of the mode of being in the world disclosed by the text.”\textsuperscript{166} Meditatio coincides with the longing experienced as the reader is caught up in this back-and-forth movement, as he or she enters the story and is challenged to participate in it. As much as it is an interior shift within the person, it is also one that becomes outwardly expressed in the way he or she receives the text and is endorsed and/or subsequently changed by it.

Such an insight is given particular and normative expression when the classic is a religious one. Tracy suggests that “[t]o risk an interpretation of the religious classics of the culture is, in its manner, to risk entering the most dangerous conversation of all. For there the most serious questions on the meaning of existence as participating in, yet distanced, sometimes even estranged from, the reality of the whole are posed.”\textsuperscript{167} This helps to tease out the dynamic involved in meditatio as the reader eagerly, excitedly, anxiously, restlessly digs further into the text, never quite getting to that occulta veritas completely, leaving the reader feeling both close to and distant from the truth which is being both revealed and concealed. In other words, the

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 154.

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., 155.
meditative, religious text exposes the reader to a limit as a result of this dynamic interplay between disclosure and concealment. Tracy adds:

[A] religious classic may be viewed as an event of disclosure, expressive of the “limit-of,” “horizon-to,” “ground-to” side of “religion.” Like all classics, religious classics will involve a claim to meaning and truth as one event of disclosure and concealment of the reality of lived existence. Unlike the classics of art, morality, science and politics, explicitly religious classic expressions will involve a claim to truth as the event of a disclosure-concealment of the whole of reality by the power of the whole – as, in some sense, a radical and finally gracious mystery. That event will be some manifestation in some concrete expression of the reality of the whole in all explicitly religious expression.168

Here, Tracy draws from a previous work, Blessed Rage for Order, in which he describes the concept of limit in greater detail, particularly highlighting the distinction between the use of the prepositions “of” and “to”: disclosure reveals the “limit of” human existence (e.g., as in language barriers and expressions, experience, etc.) where concealment reveals the “limit to” that existence (e.g., as in basic fundamental beliefs, direction in life, values, etc.). The limit situation is the meeting point, the convergence and dynamic interplay of the occulta veritas, i.e., as both this disclosure and concealment. Tracy maintains that “[a]ll genuine limit-situations refer to those experiences, both positive and negative, wherein we both experience our own human limits (limit-to) as our own as well as recognize, however haltingly, some disclosure of a limit-of our experience.”169 And a limit situation can be experienced and expressed positively or negatively, for example, as moments of intense joy and love (what Tracy calls ecstatic experiences) or guilt and death (referred to as boundary experiences) – all of which point to the existential.170

168. Ibid., 163.
170. Ibid.
In *meditatio*, the reader of the text experiences and touches upon Tracy’s understanding of limit, inviting the reader of the religious classic to come upon such disclosure-concealment. One can easily see here the influence of scholars like Bernard Lonergan, S.J., and his transcendental method, especially in his rendering of horizon, with the possibility for self-transcendence, conversion, and ongoing transformation because of the dynamic.\footnote{171} The text in *meditatio* creates the condition for the possibility of encounter with the reader’s own horizon, with its potential to expand as the individual reads and meditates further.

At the same time, Tracy asserts that such an understanding and expression of limit is one in which the person, the reader, as a result of relating to the (religious) (classic) text is caught up in a participation in and of the whole, the whole of reality that is begging to be revealed in the text, that is held together in the interplay of disclosure and concealment. This is a fundamentally “catholic” experience in its truest sense. Walter Ong explains that “*Katholikos* in Greek means literally ‘through-the-whole.’” The concept has a positive, outgoing quality to it. Instead of pulling things in around a center, it moves out to all things. In the concept of catholic, ‘through-the-whole,’ there is no hint of fencing in. Rather, what is catholic floods being with itself. Let being grow, expand, as much as you will, what is Catholic will grow and expand with it, filling its every nook and cranny.”\footnote{172} Ong’s observation nuances Tracy’s insight further as it highlights the dynamic within a limit situation as an experience of the “part-of-the-whole,” one that helps to

\footnote{171. Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J., *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972): “In its literal sense the word, horizon, denotes the bounding circle, the line at which earth and sky appear to meet. This line is the limit of one’s field of vision. As one moves about, it recedes in front and closes in behind so that, for different standpoints, there are different horizons. Moreover, for each different standpoint and horizon, there are different divisions of the totality of visible objects. Beyond the horizon lie the objects that, at least for the moment, cannot be seen. Within the horizon lie the objects that can now be seen…. As fields of visions vary with one’s standpoint, so too the scope of one’s knowledge and the range of one’s interests vary with the period in which one lives, one’s social background and milieu, one’s education and personal development” (236).}

grow and expand the individual engaged in the process into an experience of interconnectedness with the text and ultimately what it contains, coupled with the opportunity for integration and wholeness. And so, engaging a religious text, especially on the level of meditatio, offers the reader the potential to be exposed and even disclosed himself or herself – along with the text – in such a way that places the reader within a much larger ground of reality and understanding in relation to “the whole,” putting the reader at risk into the “publicness” that Tracy previously asserts.

**The Staff & Augustine: A Confessio of Grace**

The above exposition regarding meditatio and its relationship to the reading of a religious classic serves as a good introduction to a dialogue concerning Augustine’s *Confessions* and how it eventually found itself within the grasp of Teresa of Avila, framing it within a much larger conversation about how such a work can be the impetus for a transformation and conversion of the one who holds it and who is called ultimately to “go public” with it. Seen in this light, the *Confessions* is a staff: it guides, it gathers, it points and gives direction, it serves, it provides balance and firm footing – all on the pilgrim way. As in the scene depicted by Pereda, the *Confessions* and the staff mirror each other: to see the *Confessions* is to see the staff.

In his *Retractationes*, a series of writings in which he reviews his past works (circa 412), Augustine admits of the spiritual nature and the benefit of this now classic text, acknowledging how it has affected and influenced both its writer and its reader(s). He explains,

The thirteen books of my *Confessions* concern both my bad and my good actions, for which they praise our just and good God. In so doing they arouse [*excitant*] the human mind [*intellectum*] and affections [*affectum*] toward him. As far as I am concerned, they had this effect on me in my writing of them, and still do when I read them now. What
others think about them is for them to say; but I know that they have given pleasure in the past [placuisse], and still do give pleasure [placere], to many of my brethren.  

Both intellectum and affectum conjure up words that are obvious, like intellect and affect, but more specifically constitute things like mind, desire, love, emotion, all of which reside within a deep place of the human person. Used together, these two words can speak to wholeness, unity, and integration, even an all-encompassing “oneness of mind and heart” of the individual, an image that Augustine used frequently throughout his writings, most pointedly in his Rule, having borrowed it from the Acts of the Apostles. Perhaps, too, this would be how Augustine understands his life’s journey reflected upon in the Confessions, as one in which his mind and heart were stirred by God, having awakened and struggled to become whole. Consider, for example, how he reflects on his conversion: “When I was making up my mind [ego cum deliberabam] to serve the Lord my God at last, as I had long since purposed, I was the one who wanted to follow that course, and I was the one who wanted not to. I was the only one involved. I neither wanted it wholeheartedly [plene] nor turned from it wholeheartedly [plene]. I was at odds with myself, and fragmenting myself.”

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173. Augustine, Reconsiderations II.6, 32, in Maria Boulding, O.S.B., trans. The Confessions (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997). 36. Interestingly, I once heard that the Confessions is his only work that he does not “retract” or “reconsider” in any form; others he will alter and acknowledge how he changed and developed his thought slightly over time. Note that “the Retractationes is a natural successor to the Confessiones. In each of these books his personal search for truth is advanced with the benefit of others clearly in mind. No other ancient author provided such a searching revision of his works.” See Allan D. Fitzgerald, O.S.A., “Retractationes,” in Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, O.S.A. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 723.

174. See Acts 4:32ff. Augustinian scholar Luc Verheijen, O.S.A., traces Augustine’s use of Acts 4’s “oneness of mind and heart,” noting that he moved from an individual rendering to a collective understanding of “oneness” by the time he wrote the Rule in 397, which, interestingly, was written around the same time as the Confessions. Perhaps, then, the stirring up of the intellectum and affectum could also echo the same sentiment, not only as an integration within the individual, but also a collective, communal stirring, an argument which would reinforce an early reception of the Confessions as a classic text by the community. See Luc Verheijen, O.S.A., Saint Augustine’s Monasticism in Light of Acts 4:32-35 (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1979), 6-16.

fragmented and sought unity, wholeness; he experienced his conversion as a coming together of himself completely, that is, wholeheartedly and whole-mindedly.

Moreover, this wholeness of the \textit{intellectum} and \textit{affectum} has an interesting nuance when used with the verb \textit{excitant}.\textsuperscript{176} To stir up, to arouse, to excite, to entice – there is a sense here of calling forth and calling from and out of, that is, a sense of that which is within being stirred to go without. It is a shift from the interior to the exterior, or, to recall Tracy, a call to “go public.” And so, this interiority of the mind and heart is being stirred up from within the depths of the person to be exposed, to be made known, to be disclosed: the work of \textit{meditatio}.

His \textit{Retractationes} notes that, in Augustine’s own lifetime, the \textit{Confessions} has had some sort of effect on his reader in such a way that aroused, stirred up, and called forth something pleasing from within the recesses of the individual. He implies that this pleasing effect is such that it causes one to read the text more than once. He is not the only person to do so, but others do as well; in fact, the text continues to please time and time again, providing direction and pointing the way. Augustine comes to know that his \textit{Confessions} has served as an instrument for \textit{meditatio}, for digging deep, pleasing, enticing, and inviting the reader into meditation so much so that it could call the reader to make the journey to wholeness, which includes, first and foremost, praise of God. Even in the act of his own writing of the text, the contents on which he was reflecting stirred something within himself: Augustine was particularly and uniquely close to the limit situation of disclosure and concealment, especially since it involved the details of his own life.

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\textsuperscript{176} \textit{excito, excitare}.
It is interesting, as well, to see how his *Retractationes*, written some fifteen years after the *Confessions* (circa 397), reveals what he has understood to be the motivation for, and the result of, writing the text, namely, to praise God. While there is no reason not to accept this claim as genuine, sincere, and even as a primary concern on the part of Augustine, there may be another, if only secondary – and even subtle – motivation, namely, to address his critics, those who are not among his brothers, most especially the Manichees and Donatists. This possibility is reinforced by Possidius, Augustine’s good friend and biographer, who reveals that Augustine “wrote as he did in order that, as the Apostle says, others might not believe or think more highly of him than they knew for themselves or had heard about him. With his usual humility he refused to practice any deception; he wanted the Lord and not himself to be praised for the deliverance and gifts he had already received.”

Notice the emphasis Possidius places not only on the praise of God, underscoring what is said in *Retractationes*, but also on Augustine’s humility and refusal to deceive, which, again, hints at criticism of disingenuousness and pride. Such hints, interwoven with his motivation in

177. See Boulding’s introduction in *The Confessions*, 10-11. James O’Donnell adds further insight here: “The book has three main forces running through it: first, the will to affirm the idealized, spiritual religion that he had discovered a decade earlier; second, the need to confront the ambiguities and frustrations of his episcopal position; third, his longing for an appropriate literary and spiritual agenda, for a personal life to accompany his public one.” See James J. O’Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2005), 78. Recall, too, that the Manichees were a dualistic sect (i.e., good vs. evil, spirit vs. flesh), of which Augustine had been a seeker; the Donatists, strictly a North African Christian phenomenon, propelled Augustine into the beginnings of articulating a theology of grace as well as a theology of sacrament, particularly around the issues of public sinners and apostates. See Robert A. Markus, “Donatus, Donatism,” in Fitzgerald, 284-286; and J. Kevin Coyle, “Mani, Manicheism,” in Fitzgerald, 520-525.


179. Some scholarship has revealed, too, that the actual prompting to write the *Confessions* may have originated in correspondence from Paulinus of Nola, who initially asked Alypius, the close friend of Augustine, about his own vocation/conversion story; from their correspondence came an invitation to Augustine. See John J. O’Meara, *The Young Augustine: the Growth of St. Augustine’s Mind up to his Conversion* (New York: Longmans,
writing, opens up a discussion on noteworthy scholarship of the classic. In the end, such scholarship ultimately endorses the claim that this great work has served, and continues to serve, the purpose of meditatio. At the same time, it unpacks some complexities surrounding the text, which, nevertheless, highlight the text’s consistent richness throughout the ages.

That Augustine admits that the Confessions speaks of his own bad and good actions points to a consideration of genre: there is certainly something of autobiography here. However, since it seems that the primary focus – at least in his own understanding of the work – is one of praising the just and good God, the text cannot be simply nor solely understood within the context of autobiography; to do so would limit it and frame the discussion in a certain way that it violates expectations around what counts as autobiographical content, at least according to modern-day prescriptions. Rather, while the text certainly contains the confession of his own actions, which he claims are both good and bad, these seem to be secondary for Augustine.

Indeed, it seems that his own understanding of how the text functions is to showcase the actions of God: these are the actions that are praiseworthy, not his; these are the actions Augustine wishes to reveal. And so, the text cannot simply be categorized as autobiography, even though it has often been quickly catalogued as such. This insight leads Augustine scholar Miles Hollingworth to say that the Confessions could safely be regarded not as autobiography, but as spiritual autobiography, and that his Retractions presents Augustine’s working

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understanding of it as such.\textsuperscript{180} Moreover, it would be the actions of God, that are really the source of that which is actually pleasing to the reader (and himself as the writer of the text), all of which place emphasis on the descriptor spiritual. To draw once again on Tracy, they are the source of the limit experience contained within the reading of the text – the \textit{occulta veritas} – that which is being both disclosed and concealed to the reader, and keeps the reader reading. While it may very well be the story of Augustine that initially draws the reader into the text, in the end, the actions of God are what captivate and compel the reader into further \textit{meditatio}, at least that is what Augustine desires; in other words, Augustine desires his \textit{Confessions} to be a confession, a naming of grace.\textsuperscript{181}

When the \textit{Confessions} is understood solely as “the story of Augustine” – embracing it merely or only as autobiographical – one runs the risk of not only misreading and misinterpreting it but even discounting what it is that Augustine sets out to do. As Augustine scholar Paula Fredriksen simply states, “A primarily autobiographical approach not only complicates our view of the \textit{Confessions}’ compositional integrity; it introduces complications about the integrity of its historical witness as well.”\textsuperscript{182} To classify it more as spiritual autobiography, however, as asserted by scholars like Hollingworth, frees the \textit{Confessions} from the parameters given to an autobiographical rendering, most especially around historical accuracy of his life’s details contained in the text, chronology of events, and even said-criticism of truth-telling and deceitful manipulation.

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\textsuperscript{181} I borrow this phrase from Mary Catherine Hilkert, O.P., \textit{Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination} (New York, NY: Continuum, 1997).
\textsuperscript{182} Fredriksen, “The \textit{Confessions} as Autobiography,” 89.
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Such a quest for naming accurately the specific genre of the *Confessions* centers around what Hollingworth calls the postmodern question concerning the text, namely, whether or not, its contents can be trusted. Answering along strict autobiographical lines often results in more questions and discoveries of discrepancies in the details. By the turn of the twentieth century, for instance, scholarship on the *Confessions* revealed particular issues when the text was placed alongside Augustine’s earliest extant writings, the *Cassiciacum Dialogues*. These treatises were composed sometime around 386-387 when Augustine was retreating with his mother, son, and friends in a villa in Cassiciacum, just outside of Milan, as he prepared for baptism, and recall the conversion event(s) given account in Books VII-VIII of the *Confessions*, namely, the discovery of the Pauline corpus; the hearing and sharing of various conversion stories of others, Antony of Egypt being among them; and the drama and hearing of *tolle lege* in the garden followed by the reading of Romans 13:13-14. However, as Fredriksen notes, the “tone and content [of the Dialogues] stand in marked contrast to his later account of this same event in 397 [i.e., when the *Confessions* was written].”

For example, *Contra Academicos*, while capturing the first extant account of his conversion, does not specify what of the Pauline corpus he read, nor does it recount the hearing of a child’s voice calling, “*Tolle lege*”; considering that the event would not have happened much before his retreat to Cassiciacum and, therefore, the writing of this treatise, there is an

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184. *Answer to the Academics* [*Contra Academicos*], *The Happy Life* [*De beata vita*], and *Order* [*De ordine*], as well as his *Soliloquies* [*Soliloquierum*] (Boulding, 214, n. 28). For a good, scholarly synopsis of issues (e.g., historicity, Neo-Platonist influences, etc.) surrounding the *Dialogues* see Joanne McWilliam, “Cassiciacum Dialogues,” in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, O.S.A. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 135-143.

interesting, suspicious lack of detail here. Additionally, his *De beata vita* intimates his conversion, but lacks even the slightest reference to Paul, only referring to a generic “Scripture,” though he does mention being “seized by a pain of the chest,” which gives a weight to some sort of experience he would have had. What does seem consistent, however, is a shift that he makes from reading Neo-Platonist books to Scripture, especially when compared to the end of Book VII leading up to Book VIII in the *Confessions*:

But in those days, after reading the books of the Platonists and following their advice to seek for truth beyond corporeal forms, I turned my gaze toward your invisible reality, trying to understand it through created things…. I believe that you willed me to stumble upon them before I gave my mind to your scriptures…. It was therefore with intense eagerness that I seized on the hallowed calligraphy of your Spirit, and most especially the writings of the apostle Paul…. So I began to read, and discovered that every truth I had read in those other books was taught here also, but now inseparably from your gift of grace.

The accounts in the *Dialogues* also glaringly lack the drama described in *Confessions* Book VIII, namely, the garden scene of his conversion – what has come to be embraced as the text’s centerpiece and climax, as well as the specific Pauline text of Romans 13. These differences, at least in degree, if not kind, prove particularly problematic when viewed through a strict autobiographical lens, begging the question, as O’Meara so aptly remarks, “Did Augustine in fact cast himself under a fig tree and hear the words *tolle lege*?” Depending on how one understood the *Confessions* – and ultimately how Augustine may have wanted his reader to understand the text – resulted in how one would address this question (and questions like it),

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188. *Confessions*, VII.20, 26-21, 27 (Boulding, 180-181).

189. Ibid., VIII, 8.19 (199-200).

190. O’Meara, *The Young Augustine*, 182.
with either continued praise or newfound disregard for its credibility, what, in Augustinian scholarship, has been named the “Two Augustines” theory. As Hollingworth interjects,

[I]t is impossible to overstate the problem [i.e., the historicity of the garden scene] that it is to have a moment like this at the centre of gravity in the West’s first autobiography. For plainly it is not a centre of gravity at all, but a hole. And it sits in precisely the place where a human life is meant to be most airtight. Right now, the Confessions is sitting on the bookshelf of the world's classics and this hole is in it. And through this hole is escaping every air and grace that we associate with ‘self-determination’ and Godlessness. [One] must either be maddened by that hole and desperate to plug it, or not.

The turning point for the discussion came in the mid-twentieth century with the work of Pierre Courcelle, whose research is now often the starting point for contemporary scholarship on the Confessions. Courcelle writes of his research:

Le but de cette étude sur les Confessions est, non d'apporter une solution à la controverse semi-séculaire, mais de sortir des ornières tracées. Le plus urgent, semble-t-il, est de délimiter la part du théologique et la part du biographique dans les Confessions, de décrire le mécanisme du rappel des souvenirs, d'apprécier le degré de sens historique d'Augustin. Cela fait, l'on pourra élaborer un programme de recherches philologiques et d'histoire littéraire, appliqué à ce texte.

Courcelle’s approach, which was to sift through the philological, philosophical, and theological “thickness” of the text, supports its credibility as well as development in Augustine’s thought on

191. That is, a “philosophical” Augustine found in his Dialogues and a “theological” Augustine, found in his Confessions. See the following works for good, scholarly descriptions: Robert J. O’Connell, S.J., Images of Conversion in St. Augustine’s Confessions (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996) 259-261; Paula Fredriksen, “Paul and Augustine: Conversion Narratives, Orthodox Traditions, and the Retrospective Self,” The Journal of Theological Studies 37, 1 (April 1986): 20-22. Interestingly, O’Connell is not as bothered by the noted differences between the Dialogues and the Confessions. In an impressive effort to bridge the “two Augustines,” he makes the case for Augustine’s use of the Romans text in the Dialogues, by examining the images and descriptions that are linked with the Romans text and found in the Dialogues (e.g., seizing upon, awaking from slumber, casting a side, etc.): in other words, Augustine became more explicit in the Confessions than he had been in the Dialogues. Moreover, he argues that it is not only verses 13-14 that impacted Augustine, but also 11 and 12 (see 277-290).


193. Hollingworth writes, “Those who know something of how Augustinian studies have gone will know that the postmodern question [i.e., concerning trust issue] reached the Confessions in major style with the publication of Pierre Courcelle’s Recherches sur les Confessions de Saint Augustin in 1950 (2nd enl. edn. 1968)” (“Part 2,” 118).

what it was that “happened” to him and in him. Consider, for example, that the Confessions is written some ten years after the event(s) recorded: in those ten years, his thought developed, was influenced by, and became steeped in his own baptism, monastic life, and call to ministry, so he had more information, more tools with which to reflect on, understand, and recall his experience(s). In contrast, and understandably so, the Dialogues have a heavy philosophical tone, which was Augustine’s strong suit at the time of his writing them.

Augustine himself may actually lead the way in addressing the issue and the concern – anticipating, perhaps, potential criticism through the centuries from those familiar with his earlier work – when he refers to the Dialogues in his Confessions:

At last the day arrived which was to set me free in fact from the profession of rhetor, as I was free already in spirit. And so it was done; you detached my tongue from that bond whence you had already delivered my heart, and I blessed you as I joyfully set out for the villa with all my company. The evidence of what I did there in the way of literary work is to be found in the books that record disputations held between those there present, and deliberations alone with myself in your sight; it was work unquestionably devoted by now to your service, but still with a whiff of scholastic pride about it, like combatants still panting in the interval.195

One can easily see here that Augustine admits that his own understanding of what had happened to him had changed, deepened in nuance and in degree; consider, for example, his theology of grace, which was just starting to take shape by the time of his writing the Confessions.196 In other words, there are not two “Augustines”; rather, an Augustine who has evolved. Such an insight must be applied when examining, for example, the Augustinian corpus of writings, in

195. Confessions, IX, 4.7 (Boulding, 213-214).

196. In fact, it was really his response to Simplicianus (Ad Simplicianum) concerning a few passages from Paul’s letter to the Romans that paved the way for Augustine as the Doctor of Grace. Not coincidentally, this letter is not only written contemporaneously with the Confessions, but Simplicianus, who figures prominently in Augustine’s story, is described as “a man from whom grace radiated” (VIII.1, 1 [Boulding, 184]).
how his thought developed over time or how an issue was heightened or stressed depending on context.197

Augustine’s emphasis on the primacy of God’s presence and action (or, in a word, grace) in the *Confessions* – and the praise evoked – has a way of framing or re-focusing the issues and the matters on which he recalls and reflects in the text. The shift toward grace in the telling of his story through the light of and praise for God’s presence, that is, as a *spiritual* autobiography, could very well be the result of his own *meditatio* of his life’s journey, which changes how the text, in its truth-telling, can be studied, assessed, and evaluated. This “*occulta veritas*” is exposed in his use of retrospect. O’Meara maintains that Augustine “presents, therefore, his memories of events as they seem to him in retrospect *at the time of his writing*, while being fully aware that the events themselves may have seemed otherwise to him at the time of their occurrence. He does not conceal this. He draws attention to it.”198 Perhaps, this insight reflects a true “two Augustines” theory: an Augustine who is at present (i.e., in 397, as bishop of Hippo, writing his *Confessions*) recounting, recalling, and reflecting on an Augustine prior to his conversion in 386/387. Hollingworth adds further awareness: “We are a remembering race, always looking back to a reality from which to make sense of the moving forwards. But He is the resuscitating God, starting and refreshing us afresh in an eternal conservation of emotion.”199

Notice, for example, how he describes his initial encounter with Ambrose: “So I came to Milan and to Bishop Ambrose, who was known throughout the world as one of the best of

197. For example, to understand Augustine’s view of grace, one has to look at the particular context in which he writes. The theology of grace that is present in *Ad Simplicianum* and the *Confessions* becomes highly nuanced once he encounters the Pelagians.


men…. Unknowingly I was led by you to him, so that through him I might be led, knowingly, to you”\(^\text{200}\); or understanding his restoration of health after being close to death when in Rome:

“Meanwhile my mother, who knew nothing of this, persevered in praying for me…. I recovered my bodily health, though I remained sick in my sacrilegious heart…. This is why you restored me from my sickness; you saved your handmaid’s son, and gave me back my bodily health for the time being, preserving me so that you might endow me with better and more dependable health later.”\(^\text{201}\) The reader comes to see that Augustine has a new, fresh understanding of his past, cast in the light of grace, as he acknowledges God who was always, already at work, even if he himself was not aware of it at the time.\(^\text{202}\)

Hollingworth refers to this growth or this shift as living fictionally: “Through the medium of Augustine’s *Confessions*, something dramatically different is presented to us and through us. This is the idea that fictional – that is, spiritual – lives require that the grace of God be the medium that is totally free. And Augustine presumes that we would want to be leading fictional lives.”\(^\text{203}\) To live (and write) fictionally is not necessarily to do so falsely; it merely is a shift in how one sees, understands, and articulates reality, a nuance in what becomes emphasized in the narrative and, consequently, how one understands himself or herself in the grand narrative. Hollingworth offers this further reflection: “God, Augustine’s God, defies biography. So the biographer must respect that. The biographer expects to be able to lay out all the millions of

\(^{200}\) *Confessions*, V.13, 23 (Boulding, 131).

\(^{201}\) Ibid., V.9,17-10,18 (Boulding, 126).

\(^{202}\) “You were with me, though I was not with you” (*Confessions* X.27, 38 [Boulding, 262]). One can also see here Augustine’s sense of divine foreknowledge at work, that, while circumstances may not have been clear to Augustine or understood differently at the time, God always knew what would happen; God was always leading Augustine and caring for him.

\(^{203}\) Hollingworth, “Part 1,” 61.
pieces of a life like the million pieces of a wrecked aircraft – all in a hanger and awaiting
ingestion and the ‘What happened?’ and ‘Why?’ But God is waiting to push all the pieces
through the pinprick of a moment.”

By the time Augustine writes the Confessions, nuances or new leanings have emerged in
his life, as he leans literally on a staff. In fact, he writes the Confessions with the staff in hand;
that is, he writes as a bishop, as the pastor of the Church of Hippo, which, again, was not the case
when he wrote the Dialogues. Augustine took his ministry of leadership within the Church quite
seriously, ever mindful of the burden of responsibility that came with it. And so, the
Confessions as a spiritual autobiography is also a pastoral work – a work of the staff – teaching,
guiding, directing, and stirring up the hearts and minds of his readers. As O’Meara succinctly
articulates, “[I]f the Confessions were meant for the ears of God alone, they would never have
been written; for God needs no reminder of our deeds nor of the operation of his Grace, and he
knows the mind of every man.”

Augustine himself even admits this early on, when he writes, “But to whom am I telling
this story? Not to you, my God; rather in your presence I am relating these events to my own
kin, the human race, however few of them may chance upon these writings of mine. And why?
So that whoever reads them may reflect with me on the depths from which we must cry to

205. In his Sermon 340, Augustine famously wrote/preached, “Where I am terrified by what I am for you, I
am given comfort by what I am with you. For you I am a bishop, with you, after all, I am a Christian. The first is
the name of an office undertaken, the second a name of grace; that one means danger, this one salvation.” See Saint
Augustine, Sermon 340, 1, in The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century –Sermons (309-
Press, 1993), 292.
206. O’Meara, The Young Augustine, 3.
you.” And toward the end of the *Confessions*, he reminds his reader, “Why then am I relating all this to you [God] at such length? Certainly not in order to inform you. I do it to arouse [excito] my own loving devotion [affectum] toward you, and that of my readers, so that together [omnes] we may declare, Great is the Lord, and exceedingly worthy of praise.” Recall that this is echoed in his testimony of the *Confessions* in his *Retractationes*. Here, there is a particular communal, corporate understanding of what he sees that the meditatio of his *Confessions* is doing, that together he and his readers may offer fitting praise of God. Indeed, the staff of the *Confessions* gathers and guides. He writes his *Confessions* out of a sense of pastoral responsibility, in a truly catholic understanding, that is, as part of a whole, through the whole.

Ever the rhetorician, Augustine has a way of directly indirectly addressing his audience of readers, even though the text is written as an address to God. He crafts the work so that “[o]thers are allowed to listen in, so to speak, to this confession made to God.” They become the “real” audience to whom he writes. By addressing God, he is also able to address his reader; he uses a rhetorical, pedagogical strategy that invites and encourages his reader to pray and praise along with him. And he does this immediately upon opening the text with reference to the same psalm used above, namely, “Great are you, O Lord, and exceedingly worthy of praise.”

James O’Donnell, in his three-volume commentary on the *Confessions*, notes:

There have been various attempts to find precedents for this form of opening, but in the history of Latin literature, its originality and oddity are clear…. It begins abruptly, with speech directed to a silent God – but the speech chosen from the words of God himself

207. *Confessions*, II.3, 5 (Boulding, 64).

208. Ibid., XI, 1.1 (284).


[i.e., as Scripture, the inspired Word of God]…. This opening can give rise to the disconcerting feeling of coming into a room and chancing upon a man speaking to someone who isn’t there. He gestures in our direction and mentions us from time to time, but he never addresses his readers.\textsuperscript{211}

From the outset, Augustine has a way of aligning his readers with himself, moving from a general third person to the first-person plural, as he goes from \textit{homo} [human being] to \textit{nos} and \textit{nostrum} [us, our], all within the same sentence.\textsuperscript{212} In the opening paragraph alone, there is the effect of bringing the reader, without directly addressing him or her, into Augustine’s anthropology, that is, his understanding of the human person. It is as if his reader is given no choice but to go along with him into \textit{meditatio}, once the reader makes the choice to take up the book and read.

None of this is to say that Augustine is insincere in his praise of God, nor does he necessarily manipulate his reader in such a way that detracts from an authenticity of the text’s content and message – of what Augustine wants to share. Instead, the reader is simply and easily brought into Augustine’s story, a story of praise of God, which he believes is everyone’s story, creating the effect of reading \textit{in persona Augustini}. Robert McMahon explains further:

The literary form of the \textit{Confessions} also acts upon its readers…. [i]ts self-presentation as a prayer forces readers to impersonate – to take on the persona of – Augustine the speaker. One cannot read the \textit{Confessions} without praying Augustine’s prayer, without addressing God. One cannot read the volume without taking up, in one’s own first person, the speaker’s \textit{inquisitio veritatis}. Even before Augustine’s rhetorical powers begin to “rouse up the hearts” of his readers, the \textit{Confessions} engages them in prayer to God from its very first words. The persuasive force of this literary strategy can hardly be overestimated.\textsuperscript{213}


\textsuperscript{212} As in “\textit{et tamen laudare te vult homo}, aliqua portio creaturae tuae tuu excitas, ut laudare te delectet, quia fecisti \textit{nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum}, donec requiescat in te” \textit{(Confessions, I.1, 1} [O’Donnell Text I, 4]; emphasis mine.

From the beginning, then, the reader reads in the person of Augustine. By listening in on Augustine’s account of praise, the reader at the same time takes on his words and speaks them, having a twofold outcome: the reader enters Augustine’s story and, consequently, enters his or her own as well. The reader is guided by and leans into Augustine’s fiction, how he has come to understand reality. And if and when there is resistance on the part of the reader to enter this meditatio or even question his authenticity, Augustine offers this compelling insight, which clearly also addresses his would-be critics:

What point is there for me in other people hearing [audiant] my confessions? Are they likely to heal my infirmities? A curious lot they are, eager to pry into the lives of others, but tardy when it comes to correcting their own. Why should they seek to hear [audire] from me what I am, when they are reluctant to hear [audire] from you what they are? And when they hear [audiunt] from me about myself, how do they know that I am speaking the truth, since no one knows what goes on inside a person except the spirit of that person within him? If, on the contrary, they hear [audiunt] from you about themselves, they will be in no position to say, “The Lord is lying.” Is hearing [audire] the truth about oneself from you anything different from knowing oneself? And can anyone have this self-knowledge and still protest, “It is not true,” unless he himself is lying?²¹⁴

Notice Augustine’s use of the verb audire, i.e., to hear, and recall the conditions for reading in an oral-aural culture. Augustine would have written this work with the intention and expectation that it would be read aloud and heard, which all the more intensifies the experience of the text and its invitation to meditatio, in the reader’s taking on the person of Augustine.²¹⁵

Consider, for instance, how powerful it would be to read, that is, to speak and hear, the words tolle lege of the garden scene. McMahon asserts, “Augustine’s contemporaries would have felt


²¹⁵. Leo C. Ferrari offers this insight: “One internal sign [i.e., within the text] is that of the vocal and auditory orientations of the work as a whole. It is understandable therefore that the word ‘to hear’ (audire) and its variants occur some one hundred and eighty-three times in the Confessions. Likewise, ‘voice’ (vox) and its cognates are found one hundred and thirty-seven times” (The Conversions of Saint Augustine [Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1984], 55.
the voice of the *Confessions* more deeply than most moderns, for his contemporaries would literally have heard the work they read. More than ourselves, they would have encountered the work as a process of speech being spoken in the present.”216 And most likely, it would have been a corporate, communal experience: together, their hearts and minds would have been stirred and awakened. Such an experience could have an interesting, pleasing, yet vulnerable effect in going “public”: their shared restlessness would have been exposed and disclosed, or, as Guigo suggests of *meditatio*, the interior would have been penetrated, just as how Augustine discloses himself and his vulnerabilities throughout the text.217 And it would point them – like a staff – in the direction of ongoing *meditatio*.

Not all scholars, however, agree that Augustine’s intention would have been for the text to be read aloud, nor even as a group. Margaret Miles, in her fascinating commentary, argues for the exact opposite, and that Augustine put in the reference of Ambrose reading silently (VI.3, 3) precisely to cue the reader to do the same: just as Ambrose modeled silent reading to Augustine, so, too, Augustine wanted to model a silent reading of his *Confessions*. She asserts, “In writing the *Confessions*, Augustine adopted and adapted an esoteric reading practice and unknowingly provided it with one of the texts that would perpetuate this practice and give it its greatest popularity.”218 This is an interesting suggestion worth revisiting below.

The uniqueness with which Augustine composes the text can be both compelling and confusing, as it evokes the inner workings and stirrings of the human person, which are not always connected nor clear, chronological nor formulaic. Some scholars, like O’Meara, while


championing this classic also critique it for what is believed to be bad composition, questioning an overall unity to the work, especially the seemingly glaring disconnect between the first nine books and the last four. Many readers, too, could become caught up in a rhetoric of confusion, which O’Meara posits more as a rhetoric of indefiniteness, placed within Augustine’s trust of divine providence: “Augustine had a great fondness for indefinite expressions, especially at crucial points in his story. He does not tell us, for example, the name of his mistress or of the friend whose death affected him so profoundly…. Most puzzling of all is his professed – or genuine – ignorance as to whether his first work On the Beautiful and Fitting was made up of two or three books.”

Perhaps, however, it is not confusion nor indefiniteness that really characterize the book. The dynamic may be much simpler and plainer to see than either of these. If the opening paragraph, as has been argued, so quickly, clearly, and uniquely sets the stage for how Augustine relates to his direct addressee, namely, God, in a dialogic form of praise and prayer, as well as to his indirect addressee, that is, the reader who acts in persona Augustini, than that opening paragraph also reveals an overarching, guiding rhetoric that he uses to compose the text, namely, a rhetoric of restlessness, the cor inquietum: quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te. This now-famously coined phrase from Augustine’s classic captures and capitalizes on his understanding of the human person, that is, made by God, for the praise of God, and restless until at rest and at peace in God. In other words, his is an anthropology of restlessness, and he uses his own life which he recounts in the Confessions as an illustration of


220. Ibid., 10. “…and I wrote some books entitled The Beautiful and the Harmonious, two or three books, I think – you know, O God, but it escapes me for I no longer have them; they have somehow been lost” (Confessions, IV, 13.20 [Boulding, 105]).
And so, it is most accurate to name Augustine’s unique rhetorical strategy as restless itself.

Since he sets out to detail this anthropology in the telling of his story, he so creatively and effectively does so with this rhetoric. The way he writes the text mimics and takes on characteristics of restlessness: not only is the story about a dynamic journey, of ups and downs, of movement, anxiety, questioning, and searching, but, as noted by O’Meara, the composition itself has an indefinite, restless quality with a sense of incomplete thoughts, which serves to heighten the experience of the reader, bringing the person deeper into the heart of the text. Indeed, restlessness captures the experience of the text’s contents, the experience of reading the text, and ultimately the experience of the reader, which Augustine argues is the experience of the human person.

The *Confessions* as a text about the human person who is restless presents itself in a restless way effectively. Its characteristic restlessness, which, for some, takes the shape of a poorly composed and badly edited work, is quite brilliantly and intentionally crafted. As McMahon states, “[S]ince [the *Confessions*] represents a prayer being spoken to God in the present of writing-reading, the volume presents itself as an unrevised work. Indeed, the premise of its being spoken implies that it is unrevisable.” Quite simply, the text is not only read-able; it is speak-able, as it praises God in and through direct dialogue. Its speakable quality creates an unpredictability, an unfolding as Augustine tells his story in a manner that appears unscripted, and the use of the present tense – or an “ongoing present” as McMahon describes it – brings

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221. In fact, that the work is understood as an illustration of anthropology, O’Meara asserts that the text cannot, therefore, be classified as an autobiography. See O’Meara, 18.


223. Ibid., 5.
the reader into the dynamic all the more, as it “happens” in the present of the one who is reading it. If Augustine sets out to stir up the minds and hearts of his readers, then surely he sets out to stir up (as in *excito, excitare*) their restlessness within.

The opening paragraph in which this rhetoric of restlessness is first introduced also hints at something with regard to the unity of the work as a whole, which has so often been studied and questioned, something that points to and predicts the restless trajectory of the text, most especially into the often overlooked and dismissed last four books of the *Confessions*.224 Consider that just before he speaks of the human person as restless – “*tu excites ut laudare te delectet, quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te*” – he speaks of the human person as part of creation – “*homo, aliqua portio creaturae tuae.*” It is noteworthy that Augustine uses this clause twice, which places emphasis on this understanding.225 And it is essential to that which follows, especially since it seems that it is how Augustine first identifies the human person, namely, in relationship to the rest of creation, as part of the whole, as in Ong’s rendering of *katholikos*, before he gets to the characterization of restlessness. Together, these phrases are the linchpin of the entirety of the *Confessions*, unlocking the unity of the text, and how it functions: Augustine situates the human person within a much larger context, that is, as

224. For example, Fredriksen maintains that Peter Brown in his classic biography of Augustine unfortunately reinforces such a dismissive view of the last “part” of the *Confessions*, noting that “his chapter specifically devoted to the *Confessions* fails to take into account the final third of Augustine’s work; indeed Brown merely mentions, in the closing paragraph of his 24-page chapter, the existence of Augustine’s last three books. The effect is a subtle re-editing of the *Confessions*, whereby the ‘impersonal’ Books 11 through to 13 virtually drop from view” (90). Consider, too, that one of the most recent translations (2013) by a well-known Augustinian scholar regrettably only contains the first nine books, noting in his introduction, that “books 10 to 13 are not included, as these are mainly a commentary on the early chapters of Genesis” (Benignus O’Rourke, O.S.A., trans., *Confessions* [London, Darton, Longman and Todd, Ltd, 2013], xiv). This is unfortunate, as such a decision separates the first nine books from the last four, as if to show a clear and certain disconnect between the two, furthering a divide, and quite sadly removing Augustine’s seeming autobiography from the greater narrative he wishes to tell.

part of, a member of, God’s creation, thereby situating the characteristic restlessness within creation as well. Consequently, Augustine’s argument of anthropology is also one that “rests” in his cosmology.

The rhetoric of restlessness, then, is not only used to describe the story of the human person; it is used also for the much larger narrative, of which Augustine, his readers, and all of humanity are a part, and, that is creation itself. The dynamic is such that these key phrases together encapsulate the entirety of the Confessions, clearly telling his readers what to expect as they embark on the restless journey of reading, hearing, and speaking the text, namely, that they will necessarily and logically fall into the so-called commentary of creation at the end of the work and that, in order to understand fully the “autobiographical part” of the Confessions, readers will have to see it as “portio creaturae dei.” If his readers relate to the text authentically, which Augustine would have them do, they cannot help but be in touch with their own humanity, as they read in persona Augustini. And Augustine would say that to be in touch with one’s humanity is to be in touch with creation, and one’s creaturehood status, which is both pleasing and humbling, leading to praise of God:

And what is this? I put my question to the earth, and it replied, “I am not he”; I questioned everything it held, and they confessed the same. I questioned the sea and the great deep, and the teeming live creatures that crawl, and they replied, “We are not God; seek higher.” I questioned the gusty winds, and every breeze with all its flying creatures told me, “Anaximenes was wrong: I am not God.” To the sky I put my question, to sun, moon, stars, but they denied me: “We are not the God you seek.” And to all things which stood around the portals of my flesh I said, “Tell me of my God. You are not he, but tell me something of him.” Then they lifted up their mighty voices and cried, “He made us. My questioning was my attentive spirit, and their reply, their beauty.”

It seems that, for Augustine, the great work of creation, inclusive of humanity, is for the praise of God, that is, to confess praise. For creation, inclusive of humanity, to “be” itself, to

“do” itself, is to praise God. Certainly, the text also confesses Augustine’s wrongdoings, his failures, his sins, his regrets, but as has been argued, the text, in using Augustine’s own life’s circumstances, his vacillations, his questionings, ultimately points, names, confesses grace, God-always-present-and-at-work. The Augustinian insight here is that confession is not only an individual account, but it is also a communal act, inclusive of creation. The word confession from the Latin *confessio* derives from the prefix *con* (i.e., with, together) and *fateor* (admit, reveal, make known). In other words, confession is to make known, to reveal together.

Recall, too, that not only did Augustine write his *Confessions* as a bishop, but his monastic *Rule* is also dated around the same time of his writing, circa 397. His *Rule* places great emphasis on communal living, on living with a corporate identity, which emphasizes what it means to be a baptized member of Christ’s Body; again, the notion of being one in mind and heart. His pastoral leadership of the Church of Hippo as well as his desire to live in community like the disciples in Acts would certainly have influenced a unique rendering of *confessio*, namely, to admit praise of God and to reveal and make known together, as a community, as a whole, the presence and action of God; again, a *katholikos* rendering, one act of creation, one act of the whole, in the ongoing present.

**The Staff & Mysticism: Confessions as Guide for the Journey**

Perhaps one way in which Augustine entices and excites his reader to continue reading the text is an unspoken expectation that Augustine himself will find rest in “his story.” Such an expectation, while not unrealistic, is another condition of its rhetoric. O’Donnell asserts, “When on the first page we hear that the heart is restless until there is repose in God, the reasonable
expectation is that the text will move from restlessness to rest, from anxiety to tranquility.”

One would rightly assume that when Augustine comes to awareness of God always, already present in his life and “confesses” God – that is, by the time of the great garden scene of Book VIII, as well as at his baptism in Book IX – that surely Augustine would find the repose for which he had longed. Augustine had thought so, too, at least initially, which was reason enough for him to leave behind his career and to retreat to Cassiciacum, as he and his friends desired holy leisure, *otium.* He writes that, after having thrown himself on the ground and having stood to take up and read Romans, “a wholehearted desire to be still and see that you [God] are the Lord had arisen within [him] and grown strong.”

Augustine experienced rest and peace, surely, but he found that it was somewhat fleeting, that he could not sustain it, that it simply could not be sustained; yet his continued desire for stillness post-conversion is telling. Restlessness would remain operative throughout his life, with moments and glimpses of rest. His rhetoric discloses this truth, and he even admits it openly in his writing. In Book X, for instance, well after the garden scene and the “autobiographical part” of the text, Augustine the author, the bishop, in the ongoing present of writing, speaks of experiences of meditation, reflection, and prayerful review of his life and how on occasion would find such moments of peace:

O, Truth, is there any road where you have not walked with me, teaching me what to avoid and what to aim at, whenever I referred to you the paltry insights I had managed to


229. *Confessions*, IX.2, 4 (Boulding, 211).
attain, and sought your guidance? I surveyed the external world as best I could with the aid of my senses…. Then I moved inward to the storehouse of my memory, to those vast, complex places amazingly filled with riches beyond counting; I contemplated them and was adread. No single one of them could I have perceived without you, but I found that no single one of them was you…. No I was not you, either, not even as I did all this…for you are that abiding Light whom I consulted throughout my search…It is still my constant delight to reflect like this; in such meditation I take refuge from the demands of necessary business, insofar as I can free myself. Nowhere amid all these things which I survey under your guidance do I find a safe haven for my soul except in you; only there are the scattered elements of my being collected, so that no part of me may escape from you. From time to time you lead me into an inward experience quite unlike any other, a sweetness beyond understanding [ad nescio quam dulcedinem]. If ever it is brought to fullness in me my life will not be what it is now [quod uita ista non erit], though what it will be I cannot tell [nescio quid erit]. But I am dragged down again by my weight of woe, sucked back into everyday things and held fast in them; grievously I lament, but just as grievously am I held. How high a price we pay for the burden of habit! I am fitted for life here where I do not want to be, I want to live there but am unfit for it, and on both counts I am miserable.230

The above could very well be a fitting description of his own experience and process of writing the Confessions: a prayerful review and search, in the presence and the light of Truth, of his life’s journey – in effect, what he proposes is a template for the human person – holding each piece, each moment separately and then together, realizing that there was still work unfolding, still much to be done in gathering what had remained scattered and disconnected in his life, even after the great conversion event of the garden.

It is important to realize that Augustine writes not only out of his own experience of restlessness but how he has come to understand that experience; in fact, this understanding is current, that is, in the “ongoing present” of his writing and being used to interpret that which he is recounting. He was very much aware of this current state, his own sinfulness, and his continual need for God’s presence and activity even after the climax of conversion. It was a deep, humble knowing on his part that he had not yet completely arrived – even though he had longed to – and that his staff would not and could not rest on the ground for long. When, on

occasion, the staff was put down in meditatio, however, something “other” and “beyond understanding” occasionally happened to him and in him interiorly, as he says, a moment of rest, one might say a foreshadowing of future life with God, something “not yet,” but it was something not of his own doing. As he said, he was led to that place, that moment, by God.

One can see that such a moment can be classified as a limit situation for Augustine, as articulated by Tracy, something for which he could not quite find the words, something indescribable, unknowable, as he says “ad nescio quam dulcedinem” as well as “nescio quid erit.” Moments like these of coming up against the limits in his life before God became for Augustine the interpretive tool for understanding his life; that limit outlined the space for him to understand and see his life and his very self differently, in the presence and light of Truth that was being both disclosed and concealed before him, inviting him into further and deeper meditatio. Tracy writes, “Undeniably, such experiences (love, joy, the creative act, profound reassurance) are authentically ‘self-transcending’ moments in our lives. When in the grasp of such experiences, we all find, however momentarily, that we can and do transcend our usual lackluster selves and our usual everyday worlds to touch upon a dimension of experience which cannot be stated adequately in the language of ordinary, everyday experience.”

It is here, perhaps, too, that another rendering of restlessness may aid this discussion and bring one to a newer place of understanding the text and what it is Augustine explains happens to him from time to time. The adjective inquietus is usually translated as restless, as Augustine describes the heart, cor, as inquietum. However, quite strikingly, Maria Boulding in her translation uses “unquiet” instead of the popular “restless,” which can cause the modern day reader to pause and even question her translation, especially since it is part of such a classic.

231. Tracy, Blessed Rage, 105.
popular phrase that one expects to find in the text. In doing so, Boulding offers an interesting, if slight, nuance to understanding the restlessness that characterizes not only the human person but also the text that Augustine presents. In addition to its meaning as restless, *inquietus* rightly connotes unquiet. Interestingly, its verb form, *inquieto*, can mean to disquiet or to disturb. Boulding’s translation is helpful and fresh, since being restless can be so commonplace in the rhetoric of Augustinian circles that it runs the risk of rarely getting defined or discussed beyond surface-level conversation.

These deep meanings of the *cor inquietum* that Boulding offers lead to several related implications regarding how one may receive and possibly understand what is going on in the *Confessions*. First, they underscore what was said above regarding the orality and aurality involved in reading the text, making even a more deliberate connection to notions of hearing and speaking the text, especially since Augustine’s time was still so highly oral and aural. And yet it may also allow for, and even give credence to, Margaret Miles’ argument that Augustine’s intention was actually to counteract the popular oral reading of his day, especially *via* the story of Ambrose, and encourage readers to create space for private, silent, interior reading – or, perhaps, at least to hold both practices together, knowing full well that his reader(s) would naturally default to public, oral reading. To have room for both practices, especially in the case of reading the *Confessions*, could underscore once again the role of community in the shape of the individual and vice-versa.

Second, if the *Confessions* has rightly been composed as a dialogue to and with God, as in the form of a spoken prayer, and the reader is able to “listen in” on Augustine’s *confessio*, and take on Augustine’s words in his person, then the nuance of *inquietus* as being both restless and unquiet is a helpful one and also telling in what it is that Augustine sets out to do in the text, as
he describes the human person’s search for God, most especially in the context of meditatio: this search involves a movement toward silence. In other words, Augustine’s rhetoric is so effective and so compelling around the inability to hear, to listen because of unquiet – noise – in the heart, that the movement he discovers in meditatio is a movement toward silence, which is how he may have come to understand his own restlessness.

In this context, consider once more the power of his ability to hear the words tolle lege in the garden in Milan in the midst of his angst, of his being able to shut out all other sound in his cor and focus on the invitation to take up and read the Word. Immediately before hearing the words, Augustine is found accompanied by Alypius who is supporting him in the intensity of his emotions and vacillation, yet he desires to weep and wail “unchecked…[so he] arose and left Alypius, for solitude seemed to [him] more suitable for the business of weeping. [Augustine] withdrew far enough to ensure that [Alypius’] presence…would be not burdensome to [him].”

Augustine physically moves toward solitude: one who was frequently found in the company of friends saw the need for the space to be alone. It is in that moment that he is then able to hear those famous words. What follows next is significant: he picks up Paul’s letter to the Romans and “read in silence [in silentio] the passage on which [his] eyes first lighted.” What Augustine shares here in this climactic scene is that he encounters the Word in silence. Not only is it the type of reading modeled by Ambrose, but Augustine moves toward and finds silence, and in that silence, that quiet, he hears the Word spoken.

Third, and finally, the Confessions itself; as has been previously addressed, is inquietus in its composition, as in restless and seemingly disjointed. It is also inquietus as in unquiet, that is,

232. Confessions, VIII.12, 28 (Boulding, 207).

233. Ibid., VIII.12, 29 (Boulding, 207; O’Donnell Text I, 101).
it involves Augustine speaking (constantly), using words, in dialogue, with the added effect of it occasionally, if not usually, being read aloud. It is a “loud” text and verbose, heightening the interior noise and wordiness that an individual can often experience, or at the very least drawing attention to the individual reader’s interior noise. Furthermore, Augustine addresses directly a God who does not speak, a God who is quiet, as in quietus, as well as occulta Veritas itself, yet as he discovers is always, already there and active. He writes early on: “and I was wandering away from you, yet you let me go my way. I was flung hither and thither, I poured myself out, frothed and floundered in the tumultuous sea of my fornications; and you were silent [et tacebas, as in “you kept silent” or “you were not speaking”]. O my joy, how long I took to find you!”

That God is silent in the text yet found to be intimately present can cause the reader, following Augustine’s cues, to listen intently for that silence, to listen intently in that silence, a silence that speaks the Word, just as it was spoken in the garden in Milan.

The dynamic between inquietus and quietus, especially as expressed in the dynamic of an unquiet Augustine and a quiet God, sheds light on the hiddenness (and cleverness) of Augustine’s rhetoric of inquietus. As a wordsmith, as a rhetorician, Augustine’s default position is to use words, to speak, to write - persuasively, creatively, and brilliantly so. It is not the norm for him to be without words, that is, to be quiet; one may even say that it would be counter-intuitive for him. And so, for Augustine to say that he found a place within himself, in which he cannot use words to describe the moment and encounter, speaks to a space in his cor in which he found silence and was led to silence, in which words were not necessary, in which words could not be used, except for the Word, the Word that he heard spoken.

234. Ibid., II.2, 2 (Boulding, 63; O’Donnell Text I, 16).
This limit experience pointed to the possibility of transformation in his life as he moved to a new place within himself, a place without words. He was “limited” here since he could not do, and essentially be, what, up until that point, he knew himself as: one who was comfortable with words, texts, speeches. It was here in this interior space where he experienced words, texts, speeches differently. It was a true *conversio*, a turning around with, or one might say a turning upside down of his world, even a change in his perspective, the perspective of God, given in and expressed by the Word. It was here where Augustine’s story, or his understanding his own story, was altered, changed. Augustine writes: “You called, shouted, broke through my deafness; you flared, blazed, banished my blindness; you lavished your fragrance, I gasped, and now I pant for you; I tasted you, and I hunger and thirst; you touched me, and I burned for your peace.”

Ironically, God was not the one who was silent after all; Augustine simply could not hear; in fact, all of his senses had been disturbed, skewed. It was here where Augustine received a new fiction, a new narrative, God’s narrative, one in which he was to “put on Christ.”

Augustine’s honed and transformed skills as a rhetorician in composing the *Confessions* are so convincing here, that he is able to use the Word, as in Scripture, embedded and interwoven throughout the text with his own wordiness, set within the backdrop that is ultimately about creating a silent, interior space within his person – and, really, his reader – without ever really addressing it directly. It is quite an effective *occulta veritas* within the narrative. His is a subtle, yet compelling, invitation to the reader of the *Confessions*, who reads *in persona Augustini*, to find that interior space in his or her own *cor* in which *quieta* – quiet, silence, rest – could

235. Ibid., X.27, 38 (Boulding, 262).
236. As in Hollingworth’s rendering, the new fictional living.
237. Romans 13:14, part of the text Augustine read in the garden.
possibly be experienced and encountered, a space to “take up and read,” to hear and listen to the Word, altogether leading to a strong and fundamental confessio in which the praise of God is awakened, stirred, and evoked within the reader.

It is in this space, according to Augustine, where the individual “reader” discovers that God is not silent after all: God is present, God is active, God speaks. And it only serves to reinforce the unified reading of the thirteen books of the Confessions, as Augustine’s story, the human story, is part of the ongoing creation narrative; this is the fiction that Augustine takes up and reads. After the climax of Book VIII, the retreat at Cassiciacum, and his own baptism, Augustine relays that he, his mother, Monica, son, Adeodatus, and friends, make their way from Milan to North Africa, and stop to “rest” in the Roman port city of Ostia. While there, Augustine and Monica share a moment of intimate conversation and communion—once again in a garden—that has the makings of a possible joint vision, perhaps even ecstasy. In this moment, they come to the following shared insight that reflects the above call to quiet and silence in the cor:

If the tumult of the flesh fell silent for someone, and silent too were the phantasms of the earth, sea and air, silent the heavens, and the very soul silent to itself, that it might pass beyond itself by not thinking of its own being; if dreams and revelations known through its imagination were silent, if every tongue, and every sign, and whatever is subject to transience were wholly stilled for him— for if anyone listens [audiat], all these things will tell him “We did not make ourselves; he made us who abides forever”—and having said this they held their peace for they had pricked the listening ear to him who made them; and then he alone were to speak [loquatur], not through things that are made, but of himself, that we might hear his Word [verbum] not through fleshly tongue nor angel’s voice, nor thundercloud, nor any riddling parable, hear him unmediated whom we love in all these things [ipsum quem in his amamus], hear him without them [ipsum sine his audiamus], as now we stretch out and in a flash of thought touch that eternal Wisdom who abides above all things; if this could last, and all other visions, so far inferior, be taken away…this passing moment that left us aching for more…

238. Confessions, IX.10, 25 (Boulding, 228; O’Donnell, Text I, 113-114).
This account certainly leans heavily in the direction of a unified reading of the *Confessions*, illustrating Augustine’s implicit agenda of creating space for silence in order to hear; a space that leads to a deepening of relationships and a realization of connectedness with others and all of creation properly rooted in God. This agenda for a move to interior silence is the condition for that *quies* for which his *cor* longed, a rest in which he can hear the Word, be in relationship with the Word, the Word that is always being spoken, the Word that stirs up and awakens a response of praise.

Yet, while praise is at the *cor* of his *confessio*, there is something to be said for what O’Donnell identifies as an anxiety in the text.²³⁹ There is a sense that Augustine’s restlessness would manifest itself from time to time as a type of worry in his life, leaving him concerned about trusting in himself alone as well as his day-to-day matters.²⁴⁰ That could very well be an unspoken, maybe an unconscious, motivation in writing the *Confessions*: it serves as an exercise to remind himself what he has come to know, namely, that God had always been at work in his life, which would be reason enough to believe and trust that God would continue to be. His exercise of looking back in *meditatio* created the condition for the possibility of looking at his now, at his present, as well as the ponderings of what his future might be and mean.

Moreover, it could also very well be the case that what seems to be a rhetorical strategy of restlessness is not really intentional at all on Augustine’s part: Augustine could be writing so

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²³⁹ In his *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2005), O’Donnell writes that “for all that [the *Confessions*] is a testimony of faith and confidence, it is permeated with anxiety,” seeing it as a “dark thread” interwoven throughout the text as “an obsessive and meticulous examination of conscience that sifts through the ashes of regret and anxiety for the possibility of past and future sin” (36). Obviously, O’Donnell comes down hard on Augustine here, with a rather pessimistic and cynical tone. While I appreciate his insight, I am not sure that “obsessive” is the right word, so much as “thorough.” Anxiety certainly may be the right word, maybe even a slight manifestation of restlessness, but it need not be rendered negatively.

²⁴⁰ As he says, “But I am dragged down again by my weight of woe, sucked back into everyday things and held fast in them; grievously I lament, but just as grievously am I held” (X.40, 65 [Boulding, 280-281]).
authentically, so openly in his experience of *meditatio* that he presents and discloses himself as he is, in all humility, with an ever restless, unquiet heart, experiencing both the limits “of” and “to” in his current ministry as bishop, one who is for his flock and with his flock. And so, the *Confessions* was not so much about only his past limits (and limitations), as recounted in mere autobiographical form, but his present experience of loving mystery within all of creation that continues to unfold before him in both disclosure and concealment. Notice how he often addresses God as “Truth”; there is certainly something of Guigo’s *occulta veritas* here, a God who has been hidden throughout his life and yet made known. Writing the *Confessions* was itself an event of *meditatio*, of coming closer and closer to the disclosure of Augustine’s truth(s) in the presence of Truth; and the reading of the *Confessions* served as an ever-deeper *meditatio*, pleasing Augustine, helping him to make greater connections to and with grace – not only in his past – but in his ongoing present. The dynamic, if not the same, would be at least similar for the one reading *in persona Augustini*: the reader would be led to realize that Augustine is not the only one who remains in, or returns to, some form of restlessness; he or she is invited into and challenged by this awareness that is basic to the human condition.

The understandable and reasonable expectation for the *Confessions* as a text to lean upon and tend toward rest, then, is not necessarily its ultimate trajectory, as one would be led to think. Augustine invites his reader further along and deeper into the mystery of the human person as “part of the whole” of creation, of the disclosure-concealment interplay that is restless itself in *meditatio*. Augustine scholar Charles Mathewes adds this insight: “Far from a text seeking ‘resolution,’ where that is conceived as an ending, Augustine aims to produce a text showing us what it means to begin: He wants us to picture life as a way of inquiry, conceived not as a

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241. See again *Sermon* 340, 1 for this “for” and “with” distinction in his pastoral relationship with the people; Augustine sees one is of service, the other is of membership and mutual support and accountability.
narrowly intellectual project but as a whole way of seeking God, exercised not simply in contemplative interiority but in the ecstatic communion with others in the world, framed and formed by the reading of Scripture."\(^\text{242}\) Mathewes asserts that, if there is a resolution found in the *Confessions*, it is the human resolve to begin: it is a way of beginning, and beginning again, in a deeper way, as one moves closer and closer to the disclosure of Truth, God’s self-revelation. With this insight, Mathewes addresses the criticism that the *Confessions* is a badly composed and edited work, as suggested by O’Meara, as well as the assertion that it is fundamentally disjointed and seemingly goes nowhere, as noted by O’Donnell.\(^\text{243}\) One only has to look at the end of the text itself to see what Augustine offers:

Give us peace, Lord God, for you have given us all else; give us the peace that is repose \([\text{qui} \text{etis}]\), the peace of the Sabbath, and the peace that knows no evening…. And then you will rest \([\text{requies} \text{cis}]\) in us, as now you work \([\text{oper} \text{ar} \text{is}]\) in us, and your rest \([\text{requies}]\) will be rest through us as now those works \([\text{op} \text{e} \text{ra}]\) of yours are wrought through us. But you yourself, Lord, are ever working \([\text{semper oper} \text{ar} \text{is}]\), ever resting \([\text{semper requies} \text{cis}]\). You neither see for a time nor change for a time nor enjoy repose \([\text{qui} \text{es} \text{cis}]\) for a time, yet you create our temporal seeing and time itself and our repose \([\text{qui} \text{etem}]\) after time…. Once our heart had conceived by your Spirit we made a fresh start and began to act well, though at an earlier stage we had been impelled to wrongdoing and abandoned you; but you, O God undivided and good, have never ceased to act well….What human can empower another human to understand these things? What angel can grant understanding to another angel? What angel to a human? Let us rather ask of you, seek in you, knock at your door. Only so will we receive, only so find, and only so will the door be opened \([\text{aperie} \text{t} \text{ut}]\) to us. Amen.\(^\text{244}\)

Notice, first, the last verb of the text is “will be opened.” In the Latin, *aperietur* is actually the last word: it is the end of the text itself. As one is about to close the *Confessions*, there is the invitation to “be opened,” perhaps as a book, perhaps even as a recalling of *tolle lege*.

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\(^\text{244}\) *Confessions* XIII.35-38 (Boulding 379-380; O’Donnell *Text I*, 198-199). O’Donnell notes that manuscript evidence shows that “Amen” was a later addition by copyists (*III*, 421).
Couple this invitation with the interplay of the sampling of “resting” and “non-resting” words that precede it: quietis, requiescis, operaris, requies, semper operaris, semper requiescis, quiestis, quiem. Augustine captures a simultaneous going back-and-forth in the text that is the activity of God in creation, in which God created – worked – and then rested on the Seventh Day.

In addition, notice, too, that one of the resting words is requiesco in its various forms; re-*quiesco*, as in literally, to quiet, to rest again. It can mean simply to rest, to repose, to quiet; or to do so by way of emphasis. It also can mean the final rest or repose, that which comes with death, complete rest in God. This insight certainly has been hinted at, and even experienced in, the various moments and glimpses that Augustine encountered in the limit situations of his *meditatio*, most poignantly in the Ostia account, as Monica’s death, her final rest, would follow soon thereafter. There is an eschatological sense here to which Augustine is pointing, an invitation, to live eschatologically as in Christ, that is initiated from the moment of one’s baptism, when one first “puts on Christ.”

What Augustine captures in this restless-rest dynamic is the here-and-not-yet aspect of the Christian life, that ongoing aspect of the creation-new creation account in Christ. While this may have been an *occulta veritas* throughout the text, it was not as concealed as one might think. Augustine uses requiescat, alerting his reader to the dynamic and to his rhetoric at the very start of Book I: *quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te*. The cor rests, quiets, re-rests, re-quiets, ever deepening until that final rest and quiet in God. And so, by ending the text in a way that takes the reader back to the beginning of the text “completes” or “resolves” Augustine’s rhetoric of restlessness, which ultimately is a rhetoric for *meditatio*, a *meditatio* not only of the *Confessions*, but on life, on creation, all of which reveals, discloses the
activity of God.

What undergirds and guides this rich discussion has been, in effect, Augustine’s mysticism, or rather his understanding and experience of mysticism, which places his *Confessions* within the realm of a mystical text, in that it is a text that outlines, gives direction, or sets the agenda of his understanding of the mystical journey, one that points to or even speaks to union with God. This strong assertion is telling, as it clarifies further the depth of this classic text and how reading it and re-reading it, as in *meditatio*, can bring one further along an interior journey of concealment and disclosure within a person’s *cor*; moments that, what Augustine calls a “sweetness beyond understanding,” entice, stir up, and awaken desire for more. Augustine’s rhetorical genius, located within his own personal survey and living out of this call to interior silence, is such that an authentic reading of the text must lead to the reader doing the interior work himself or herself, that is, he or she is compelled to go silently within his or her own *cor*.

As an aside, a potential obstacle to placing the *Confessions* within a discussion that explicitly involves mysticism is defining the term itself. As Augustine scholar Frederick Van Fleteren notes, “Since no common opinion [on a definition] prevails, an answer to the question of what constitutes mysticism already identifies, at least provisionally, who *is* and *is not* a mystic.” Recall that mysticism was not essentially a separate theological enterprise or discipline during Augustine’s time, or really at least for the first half of the two millennia of the Christian tradition. All theology, however, concerned mysticism, involved mysticism, and pointed toward mysticism as the goal of any “God-talk,” in that theology addressed the nature of God and God’s relationship with humanity and creation, often dovetailing on doctrinal,  

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sacramental, scriptural, mystagogical/catechetical themes.\textsuperscript{246} True to its Greek root \textit{mysterion}, mysticism implies an underlying hiddenness and mystery begging to be noticed and to be made known, not unlike the \textit{occulta veritas} found in Guigo’s \textit{Ladder}. The study of mysticism eventually became separate and highly specialized, as discussed previously, becoming solely focused on “experience(s)” and “moments of union” rather than on the nature and unfolding of the \textit{mysterion} within the Christian life, with the unfortunate result of being marked off and set aside only for the few who had been given and tried to detail such encounters.

Scholarship of late has worked on mysticism’s proper retrieval, as being both a spiritual discipline and having a rightful place within theological discussion that is intimately linked to all theology proper. The foremost scholar on mysticism, Bernard McGinn, argues that

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  mysticism is always a process or a way of life. Although the essential note – or, better, goal – of mysticism may be conceived of as a particular kind of encounter between God and the human, between Infinite Spirit and the finite human spirit, everything that leads up to and prepares for this encounter, as well as all that flows from or is supposed to flow from it for the life of the individual in the belief of the community, is also mystical, even if in a secondary sense. Isolation of the goal from the process and the effect has led to much misunderstanding of the nature of mysticism and its role as an element of concrete religions.\textsuperscript{247}
\end{quote}

It is in this retrieval, this deep meaning of mysticism that underlies all theological discussion and expression, in which Augustine’s \textit{Confessions} can be rightfully placed as a text that concerns itself with the mystery/ies of a hidden God who is and has been present, always

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{246} The word “mysticism” itself is only of recent (as in seventeenth century) origin, similar to the birth of the word “spirituality.” See McGinn, \textit{Foundations}, 266-267, and David Knowles, \textit{What is Mysticism?} (London: Sheed and Ward, 1966), 12-13. John Peter Kenney ties its growing popularity, particularly beginning in the nineteenth century, to notions of privatized religion, personal piety, and private, personal experience. See his \textit{The Mysticism of Saint Augustine: Rereading the Confessions} (New York: Routledge, 2005), 1-2.

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inviting the *cor* that is *inquietum* to be at rest, to be quiet and still. However, because of the eventual narrowing of mysticism that emerged as a highly specialized (and elite) encounter with the Divine, Augustine was often overlooked, as was his *Confessions*, as having anything to do with mysticism, since both he and his writing(s) lack detailed commentary on specific encounters that involve nuanced “union language” between the soul and God. If anything, scholars tended to focus solely on the Ostia account and its ascent language, comparing it to Augustine’s failed attempts at Neoplatonic ascent found in Book VII, prior to his conversion.

As McGinn suggests, “In the case of the bishop of Hippo, union language seems to be deliberately excluded as a tool for the description of the consciousness of the divine presence in this life, so that if mysticism is to be defined on the basis of the notion of union with God in this life and a clear distinction between acquired and infused contemplation, then Augustine is certainly not a mystic nor do his writings contain mystical theology in the proper sense.”

Argument can be made, however, that a separate agenda of the soul unioning with God was simply not part of mainstream theological discussion on the “mysteries” in Augustine’s time, especially of pastoral concern or consciousness; the methodology around mysticism concerned itself more with scriptural exegesis, linked intimately to ongoing liturgical practice and celebration of the sacraments. Augustine’s *Confessions*, instead, invites his reader on that mystical journey, affirming the idea that mysticism is the unfolding of the mysteries, which are

248. Again, that the *Confessions* was composed alongside Augustine’s response to Simplicianus, which concerned the nature of grace found in the Pauline corpus, one could consider it to be a “theological reflection” or even a “praxis” of his understanding grace hidden, as in *mysterion*, at the time.

249. *Confessions*, VII.10, 16; 17, 23. See Kenney’s *The Mysticism of Saint Augustine*, especially Part II, 47-72. Probably the foremost scholar on Augustine’s mysticism, he constructs an excellent comparative analysis of these ascent accounts, and shows the marked shift in Ostia as a result of Augustine already being “in Christ.”


dynamically being concealed and disclosed. This journey of and movement toward mysticism is accessible to anyone who enters in and listens to his or her cor inquietum.

The Staff through the Ages: Reception of Augustine’s Classic

While the invitation to “take up and read” the Confessions and enter more deeply into the mystical journey to and with Christ is for everyone, not everyone received this invitation “to confess” from Augustine well. Augustine most certainly had his critics, especially among the Manicheans and Donatists during the time of his writing the text; and soon thereafter he would come upon his Pelagian opponents. Given that the Confessions centers around naming grace, it should come as no surprise, then, that Augustine would come up against a not-so-welcome reception of this text especially in Pelagian circles, since, first, grace was the growing hot-button theological issue of the day, particularly as it related to such topics as free will and divine foreknowledge; and, second, Augustine placed himself right in the “heart center” of the debate by using his own life as an illustration of responding/not-responding to grace-at-work and always-present.

Consistent with what he shared in his Retractationes, Augustine did not hesitate to admit that his work was not always warmly embraced, nor was he afraid to stand by the authenticity and sincerity with which he wrote, as well as the truth he believed it contained. In his De Dono Perseverantiae (circa 427), he writes,

But which of my works could have been more widely known and more favorably received than the books of my Confessions? Though I published them also before the Pelagian heresy emerged, I certainly said in them to our God and often said, “Give what you command, and command what you will.” When these words of mine were cited at Rome by some brother and fellow bishop of mine in Pelagius’ presence, he could not
tolerate them and, attacking them somewhat emotionally, he almost came to blows with the one who had cited them.\textsuperscript{252}

This particular treatise addressed a dispute among monks in Provence, some of whom held a Pelagian understanding of their own asceticism, i.e., one that stressed personal merit over grace, and, hence, had concerns about divine foreknowledge and seeing perseverance as itself a gift and grace from God, which Augustine championed.\textsuperscript{253} Besides showcasing Pelagius’ disdain for the \textit{Confessions} as well as Augustine’s knowledge of it, this excerpt illustrates that, first, the \textit{Confessions} was far-reaching in Augustine’s lifetime, having been popularly circulated for the thirty years since it was first published, and, second, Augustine was still quite willing to advertise it, despite the potential threat of further public criticism. Ironically, the very issue(s) this treatise addressed would re-emerge in that region well after Augustine’s death, and Augustine’s authority will be invoked once again to settle them.

Another instance of the interest in and promotion of the \textit{Confessions} comes in the form of correspondence (\textit{circa} 428) initiated by Augustine to Darius, a newly appointed ambassador from Ravenna who had been sent to North Africa to negotiate peace with a rebellious general.\textsuperscript{254} The correspondence is one of mutual admiration and encouragement, and in Darius’ response to Augustine, he asks for a copy of the \textit{Confessions},\textsuperscript{255} to which Augustine writes:

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253. See the Introduction to \textit{Works, Volume I/26}, especially 12-14 and 29-34.


255. Darius writes: “For, if you can believe me, my father, you have so penetrated our mind and heart ever since we were not content with your reputation, which is so glorious and so great, and we have preferred to contemplate you in your writings, since this one brief letter of yours to me has stirred up such great flames and fires of love…. I ask that you be so good as to send and give us also the books of \textit{The Confessions}, which you wrote.
Since, therefore, I could not explain in words how much delight I drew from your letter, I mentioned what caused me delight. I now leave for you to conjecture what I was unable to state well enough, namely, how much it delighted me. Receive, then, my son, receive, I repeat, the books of my Confessions, which you desired, my lord, who are good and Christian not superficially but with Christian love. In them contemplate me so that you do not praise me beyond what I am; in them believe not others about me but me myself. In them pay attention to me and see through me what I was in myself. And, if anything in me pleases you, praise there along with me not me but him whom I have wanted to be praised because of me. For he made us and not we ourselves (Ps 100:3). We destroyed ourselves, but he who made us remade us. But when you find me in them, pray for me so that I may not fail but may be made perfect. Pray, my son, pray. I see what I say; I know what I ask for. Do not think it something inappropriate and beyond your merits. You will deprive me of a great help if you do not do this. Not only you, but also all who have come to love me because of your words, pray for me; indicate to them that I have asked for this, and if you think highly of me, think that we have commanded what we ask for, and yet give to us when we ask, and obey us when we command.  

Again, Augustine provides a consistent message of sincerity, especially in regard to authentic self-presentation rooted in humility in relationship to the activity and praise (i.e., confession) of God. One could easily see here that critics could have been claiming that he was simply promoting himself, even a false-self, in the Confessions, but it seems clear that Augustine really wanted to ensure that the text was received not merely as a promotion of himself, but instead as a promotion of God for the benefit of all who read it. He did not want a superficial reception or reading of the text: rather, he understood that his life – sins, conversion, and all – was “remade” by God within God’s ongoing work of creation, and the same is true for everyone who receives and embraces this truth.

This sense of being remade touches on the sensitive matter concerning self-presentation, that is, how one not only perceives himself or herself, but how one wants to be perceived, presented, and received. Karla Pollmann, whose scholarship has centered on Augustine’s reception through the ages, pinpoints his initial reception in the efforts of what she calls

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After all, if others too have given us your writings with a ready heart and kind disposition, how much less ought you yourself to excuse yourself in the case of your own writings?” (Letter 230, 4 in Works, Letters 211-270, 117.)

Augustine’s self-fashioning, which was first shaped and shared publicly in his *Confessions* and later in his *Retractationes*. Pollmann suggests, “Generally, self-fashioning has the function of establishing or regaining authenticity, of authorizing the true reading of one’s works, of divesting oneself from all superimposed ‘wrong’ readings, while at the same time displaying a seemingly self-effacing and sometimes gently pompous self-scrutiny which not only puts oneself inevitably at the very centre of the readers’ attention but leads also to self-transformation and self-mythologization.” For Pollmann, while this would be a conscious, purposeful endeavor, it does not need to be seen as maliciously constructed.

Instead of self-fashioning, however, perhaps it would be more accurate to suggest that Augustine would cast his efforts as a re-fashioning – the result of being re-made by God, through baptism and in Christ – the taking on of a new fiction, in Hollingworth’s sense, a new narrative through which Augustine understands himself and all of humanity. This understanding is a more positive interpretation of Augustine writing his story, in which it need not be cast as manipulation on his part as an author to present himself in a certain light; rather, this self-presentation is a result of God’s activity. His *Retractationes* emphasizes this idea, and not only in what it says about the *Confessions*: the very activity of reviewing his works and reflecting upon them, i.e., in the art of the compiling the *Retractationes*, suggests his operational theology of ongoing re-creation. There is a certain “restless” quality to the work, a desire to ensure correct thinking, clear development of thought, and an ongoing desire to rework the material so that it would be understood well, perhaps, even reminiscent of getting closer and closer to the truth found in the process of *meditatio*. Pollmann says that this portrayal and technique would

serve Augustine well, since he, especially in his *Confessions* and *Retractationes*, was generally well received, with the exception of aforementioned critics, even aiding him in said disputes.\(^{258}\)

The reception of Augustine’s re-fashioning as found in his *Confessions* is intimately tied to his emerging authority. O’Donnell notes, “Augustine’s authority spread in his lifetime in two ways: ecclesiastical and personal. Both were important, though on Augustine's own theory only the first should have been determinative. The personal influence came through his epistolary contacts with the world outside his native Africa.”\(^{259}\) Simply put, Augustine was well-connected. Consider his travels pre-conversion, from Thagaste to Carthage to Rome to Milan, in addition to his own well-respected popularity post-conversion that drove him to be seized for ministry in the Church of Hippo, as well as his being linked to such respected figures as Simplicianus, Ambrose, Paulinus of Nola, and even Jerome. Indeed, his relationship with them brought his name and reputation to their own circles outside of North Africa.

So, too, does Possidius’ *Life* reinforce this idea of re-fashioning: again, being a close friend and disciple of Augustine, Possidius would want to provide a similar message, which he also understood and argued as an authentic portrayal, a true reflection of “what I know of the life and conduct of that excellent bishop, Augustine, a man predestined and revealed at the proper time.”\(^{260}\) The *Life* cannot be overestimated in the efforts related to Augustine’s authority and reception either, as it served to reinforce strongly and extend the reputation that such works as the *Confessions* and *Retractationes* promoted. Possidius offers that

> So many are the works [Augustine] dictated and published, so many the sermons he preached in church and then wrote down and revised…that even a student would hardly

\(^{258}\) See Ibid., 417.


\(^{260}\) Possidius, Preface, 1 (O’Connell, 35).
have the energy to read and become acquainted with all of them. Nevertheless, in order not to cheat in any way those who are eager for the word of truth, I have decided to append to the present little work a short list of those books, sermons, and letters. In this way, those who love God’s truth more than temporal riches will be able to choose the ones they wish to read and acquainted with; then they may visit the library in Hippo, when may find more correct copies, or may make inquiry wherever they can, and, having found what they want, may make a copy and keep it, and generously allow others to copy it in turn.

It may even be that it was really Possidius’ details of the copy efforts of Augustine’s library as well as his appended catalogue containing his bibliography that safeguarded Augustine’s works during the Vandal invasions, in conjunction with the chronological listing provided in Augustine’s Retractationes, creating the condition for the possibility of a rich and strong manuscript tradition as well as the use and quoting of his works, the Confessions being among them.

One may wonder, too, if even the Vandal invasions in North Africa accelerated the dissemination, and subsequent reception, of his works. As a result of the invasion, O’Donnell adds, “The translation of Augustine's body from Africa first to Sardinia and then to Pavia [Italy]…suggests a deliberate and timely withdrawal: if his mortal remains received such attention, it is not unlikely that his literary remains were similarly cared for.”

261. Ibid., 18, 9-10 (.80).

262. In reflecting on the importance of Possidius’ text, Conrad Leyser writes, “[Possidius’ Index] was intended to accompany his Life of Augustine…. Indeed the Life itself has been described as a ‘Reader’s Guide’ to the [Index]. Although there is a narrative element to his text…Possidius’ approach is thematic; following the structure of the [Index], he divides up Augustine’s career into a series of confrontations with opponents, above all the Donatists and the Pelagians, before moving to a description of Augustine as an episcopal householder” (“Augustine in the Latin West, 430-ca. 900,” in A Companion to Augustine, ed. Mark Vessey (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012), 454. For a sweeping overview of the manuscript tradition related to Augustine’s works, see Clemens Weidmann, “Augustine’s Works in Circulation,” in Companion, 431-449. Weidmann writes, “The transmission of Augustine’s texts was a dynamic process, and scribes and users left their own marks. Some of the changes undergone by those texts were the result of deliberate initiatives on the part of medieval readers, while others were the products of chance” (449). In terms of the number of manuscripts of the Confessions itself, there are more documented than almost any other work of his (See Weber, “Confessiones,” in Oxford Guide).

263. O’Donnell, “Authority,” 16. Erik L. Saak claims that this literal move north across the Mediterranean was the beginnings of Augustine losing his African heritage and becoming a European saint (“Augustine in the Western Middle Ages to the Reformation,” in Companion, 467).
The weight of Augustine’s library was symbolic of the weight that he carried as a leader in his lifetime, preserving and carrying with it the authority that he himself had embodied by the time of his death in 430. And the *Confessions*, along with Possidius’ *Life*, which served to fill in the (autobiographical) blanks of the *Confessions*,\(^{264}\) accompanied the dissemination of such authority, as a re-fashioned and approachable, pastoral, and timeless leader, with episcopal staff in hand and in motion. O’Donnell asserts, “His office, his holiness, and his orthodoxy were all factors in claiming his place: but had he not written, had he not written so much, and had his works not survived so consistently…he would never have become the authority figure that he did become. He was the right man in the right place at the right time.”\(^{265}\)

Augustine’s writings preserved his presence, his voice, in a Church that was very much evolving and expanding theologically and pastorally and facing new challenges. To be able to use such a figure who not only wrote and preached the amount he did, but also the way he did, that is, opening himself up, for example, in the *Confessions*, proved a powerful instrument. The litmus test for his reception came in Provence, as mentioned earlier, and the rest of Gaul ultimately leading to the Council of Orange (529), from which he emerged one hundred years

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265. O’Donnell, “Authority,” 22. Scholarship of late has begun to scratch the surface as much as is possible, with regard to how figures like Augustine became “patristicized” and “canonized,” that is, just how, in fact, the canon of patristic literature developed into what it became. For example, Leyser mentions the Augustine Transmission Project and the Gregory the Great Transmission Project (34-36). Also, Karla Pollmann says that it is Bede who, in the seventh century, is really the first to “canonize” the four doctors of Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory the Great (Pollmann, “Self-fashioning,” 418-419). See also Karla Pollmann and David Lambert, “After Augustine: A Survey of His Reception from 430 to 2000,” *Millennium* 1 (2004): 165-183 for the methodology of Pollmann’s Reception Project, from which came *The Oxford Guide* (2013) referenced above.
after his death as the champion of grace. As much as he was received and invoked, however, “Augustine was unknown in the Middle Ages. He was used and abused, cited and excerpted, copied and created, but never really known. That is, perhaps, the fate of someone who was omnipresent in the Middle Ages.” In other words, with relative ease, Augustine was a referent, both used in and out of context.

In addition to being such a looming and quotable figure evoking authority, Augustine also emerged as a monastic icon, given, not only what he records in the *Confessions* about his desire for *otium* in the company of his friends, but even more what Possidius says of him within the context of a religious community, as well as some of his own sermons, especially those in which he publicly preached about issues of accountability within the monastery of Hippo, for example, over the death of a member who scandalously had kept his patrimony. It was this monastic thread, along with a *Rule* of life attributed to Augustine, that would also

266. Leyser, 454. Interestingly, however, when one looks at the conflicts and difficulties surrounding the nuances of grace in relation to such weighty matters as predestination (and what is meant by that term), especially leading up to Orange, the Council basically came to a friendly truce, while still condemning Pelagian ideas of salvation and merit. O’Donnell notes, for example, “There was remarkably little name-calling, and remarkable circumspection in all the debates. The results of this controversy were scarcely less remarkable: the council of Orange in 529 promulgated what may be taken as a reading of Augustine, but at the same time may be taken as a quiet refusal to accept all that Augustine said or seemed to say. The decrees of Orange could be taken by all sides in good part: they represent in many ways the most successful resolution of a doctrinal controversy in all of Christian antiquity. But as one sign of that success, and perhaps one reason for it, the issues and the decrees quickly became a matter of little interest. Serious argument over predestination and free will in the west was put off until the ninth century, and the Augustine who is read and praised in the intervening years is not the Augustine of predestination” (“Authority,” 17-18). See also Pollmann and Lambert for greater details of Augustine’s reception in Gaul (“After Augustine,” 174-183).

267. Saak, “Augustine in the Western Middle Ages to the Reformation,” 465.

268. And this is true even for today. See Pollmann, “After Augustine,” 166.

269. *Confessions*, VI.14, 24 (Boulding, 155).

270. Sermons 355 and 356.

271. Augustine’s *Rule* has a long and complicated (and interesting) history, including the question of his authorship, but one filled with much, practically definitive, scholarship, thanks to the work of Luc Veirheijen, O.S.A., in the 1950s and 60s. One such issue surrounding the authenticity of the *Rule* is that it appears nowhere in
contribute to preserving his influence in a timeless way, especially as collections of his works were held within monastic libraries throughout Europe, and religious communities began forming around his identity and ideals, first during the Carolingian reform in the ninth century, but not in the universal and systematic use as is the case for the *Rule of St. Benedict*, and then most notably, and more officially, in the Canons movement begun in the eleventh century. The Canons Regular of St. Victor (Victorines), for example, especially Hugh and Richard, served as great personages on behalf of Augustine. However, it was with the emergence within the mendicants of the thirteenth century of the Augustinian Friars that the reception of Augustine took on a more formal and intentional channeling and direction. As Saak notes, “This foundation provided Augustine with a second social group [i.e., in addition to the Canons], which would seek to be his very re-embodiment and thereby to effect a second renaissance of Augustine; and that was to have a decisive impact on the later Middle Ages and on the emergence of early modern Europe.”

Not only was this community under the patronage of Augustine, but they soon became his protector in every way.

Possidius’ Index nor is it reviewed in Augustine’s *Retractions*. However, scholarship for the most part has agreed that neither Augustine nor Possidius considers it a public document, though its earliest manuscript was attached to Augustine’s *Letter 211*. The contents of the *Rule*, however, particularly its foundation in Acts 4:32ff present in Possidius’ *Life* and Sermons 355 and 356. For a good overview of this work, see George Lawless, O.S.A. *Augustine of Hippo and His Monastic Rule*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987; and Adolar Zumkeller, O.S.A. *Augustine’s Rule*. Translated by Matthew J. O’Connell, edited by John E. Rotelle, O.S.A. Villanova, PA: Augustinian Press, 1987.

272. Saak, “Augustine in the Western Middle Ages to the Reformation,” 469.

273. The foundation of the mendicant communities, especially the Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites, and Augustinians, is a fascinating one, given the spiritually rich, yet often turbulent and confusing, time period out of which they arose. All four communities, as well as some “minor” mendicants, were caught between Lateran IV and Lyons II, both of which concerned themselves with the almost exorbitant amount of new religious communities, coupled with fears of heresy. Both the Franciscans and Dominicans, being the first in the mendicant line, were safeguarded and exempted, the Franciscans, due to Francis’ being given special permission to be established by Innocent III, and the Dominicans, since Dominic kept the *Rule of St. Augustine* from his original canonical roots. The Carmelites and Augustinians, however, having no particular founder *per se*, fell under a threat of expulsion and both creatively and somewhat convincingly rewrote their respective histories, claiming that Augustine and the Prophet Elijah founded them. Such “refashioning” deepened their identities, especially for the Augustinians, in that, not only did they become the great defenders of Augustine, but even more so fashioned themselves as his sons, the
The *Confessions* itself was universally embraced and treasured, but not solely in a personal, meditative way. Weber notes that in particular it was used to support referentially theological treatises in the ninth century, especially around the issues of grace and God’s intervention; but it was probably in the eleventh century with Anselm’s *Proslogion* and its confessional style that the *Confessions* began to be drawn upon heavily, followed by the twelfth century with figures like Peter Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux, both of whom used parts of the text to support their theological ideas; e.g., Bernard’s understanding of likeness and unlikeness found in *Confessions* Book VII. In addition to its use as a theological text, however, the *Confessions* was also used as a way of personal self-understanding; e.g., the twelfth century Cistercian Aelred of Rievaulx used the text as a model for his own life. And so, one can see that the *Confessions* was seen in an autobiographical light as a way for the reader to be re-fashioned, re-made, and understood in a new way.

With the rise of vernacular languages and the emergence of vernacular literacy, as in reading and writing, texts that were once exclusive to the lettered, especially both the scholastics and the monastics, became available for the officially unlettered, coupled with the rise of a new vernacular religious literacy, as discussed previously. Texts like the *Confessions* with such authoritative figures as Augustine became accessible, found in the hands of people desiring

original recipients of his *Rule*. This “Augustinian transformation” was ceremoniously and symbolically captured in the initial sharing of the Remains of Augustine in Pavia with a group of Augustinian Canons of Holy Cross of Mortara, under the decree of Pope John XXII in the mid 1300s, and eventually, the Friars were given exclusive custody of the Remains. For a recent comprehensive study on the foundation of the Augustinian Friars, see Luis Marin de San Martin, O.S.A., *The Augustinians: Origins and Spirituality* (Rome, Italy: Institutum Historicum Augustinianum, 2013). Erik L. Saak’s *Creating Augustine: Interpreting Augustine and Augustinianism in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) is very fine, particularly his chapter, “The Rebirth of Augustine,” 57-83, in which he credits the work of the Friars in this endeavor.

274. Weber, “*Confessiones.*” See also Saak, “Augustine in the Western Middle Ages,” 467.

spiritual enrichment, perhaps needing encouragement, correction, or deeper understanding of matters related to God and God’s activity in their lives.

In Spain, in particular, it was through the efforts of Cardinal Cisneros that a vernacular literacy was made possible in the sixteenth century, not only with his founding of the University of Alcalá and its printing press, but presses in other areas of the Spanish regions as well. It was his program of Catholic reform that paved the way for the Confessions to be received into vernacular hands in Spain. More specifically, it was through the work and translation efforts in 1554 of the Portuguese mendicant, Sebastián Toscano of the Order of Saint Augustine, that the Confessions were received into the vernacular hands of Teresa of Avila. Born in 1515, the same year as the one who would so famously be a recipient of his vocation and ministry, Toscano was a noteworthy member of the Order, having served briefly as Secretary General as well as the appointed Vicar to a proposed restoration of Augustinian presence in England; even more, he himself was a mystical writer in his own right, in the line of such friars as Luis de León and Alonso de Orozco.

Impressions

The implications of bringing the Confessions into the vernacular, of creating the condition for the possibility of Augustine’s rhetoric and invitation to be received and embraced


277. For an account of the manuscript tradition of the Latin text Toscano used, see J. Ignacio Tellechea Idígoras in his introduction Confesiones. Primera versión castellana (1554) por Fray Sebastian Toscano, O.S.A. (Madrid: Fundación, 1996), xvii-xviii. Hereafter, Toscano.

278. See David Gutierrez, O.S.A., The Augustinians from the Protestant Reformation to the Peace of Westphalia, 1518-1648 (Villanova, PA: Augustinian Historical Institute, 1979), 41 and 162. Chapter Three: Oratio – The Heart will explore more deeply Teresa’s encounter with the Toscano translation.
by all, followed through on his initial intent to invite, stir up, awaken others in a pleasing way to
confess, to praise God and to have their lives seen through God’s Fiction, one that was always
being re-fashioned, remade to disclose more and more a Truth that, while sometimes hidden, was
always already there. To receive his text, to place it in one’s hands and take up and read it so
that the reader could be transformed – that was ultimately what Augustine imagined any
“reception” of his text might be.

It is worth highlighting a challenge, however, that Margaret Miles creatively offers in her
commentary. She suggests, and perhaps rightly so, that in his context, Augustine probably
would never have imagined a woman reading the *Confessions*, or that it even would have been
available to women to read, at least in the space of private, silent reading, since women of his
time generally were not lettered, as he and his companions were.\(^279\) This challenge is certainly
worth considering, as it touches upon the gendered understanding of literacy that has been
operative in literacy’s development. In addition, a gendered reading of the *Confessions*, or really
having an awareness of understandings of gender that may have been operative in its
construction and its telling, also brings to the fore the implications of the shift in literacy from
public, oral to private, silent reading that is coupled with the shift from an oral-aural to visual-
tactile culture.

That there was room so creatively and convincingly made in the *Confessions* for private,
silent reading, which Augustine demonstrated not only in the story of Ambrose, but even more

\(^{279}\) See Miles, *Desire and Delight*, 70-71. Her insight here becomes a guide for her feminist re-reading
of the text, in which she concludes that one of the text’s characteristics is the drive and passion of male sexuality. In
fact, it is this insight that helps her to frame why the women involved in the narrative, other than Monica, are never
named, and in fact peripheral to the story, or at least how they are “evaluated according to their role in Augustine’s
heroic epic.” I once heard, however, from the late Maureen Tilley when she was a visiting professor at Villanova
University in a public lecture entitled, “Augustine, Friends and Family: Best Friends Forever,” (November 15,
2011), that most of the figures in the *Confessions* go unnamed until after the garden scene and his baptism, to signify
so with his own reception of the conversion event in the Milanese garden, which is the seeming center of the text, does suggest that in the mystical turn of the *Confessions*, there is the strong invitation from Augustine for the reader to go silently inward in *meditatio* to find God already there, who is more intimately present than a person is to himself or herself. This mystical inward turn would be tied intricately to the emerging authority and voice of the individual reader that also came with private, silent reading that manifested itself in a particular way, and was encouraged by, the spirituality of the *devotio moderna*. At the same time, it would be a cause for concern of those with power in the Church and society, as has previously been discussed. With the vernacular expression of literacy, itself gendered in its own unique way, the inner voice of women began to find expression. Regardless of whether Augustine had ever imagined women reading, in whatever way, his *Confessions*, with the emergence of the vernacular, women like Teresa found in Augustine a person with unchallenged authority who encouraged, invited, and reinforced an inward turn and deep listening for all.

While Augustine himself was delighted that his text pleased others who would read it, he was not pleased if their reading of it only stopped at praising him. Rather, such would be the *real* misreading. In fact, one might wonder if that, too, was part of a lasting anxiety of his, not only that he himself was on the journey and had not quite yet arrived, because of his own sins, shortcomings, and failings, but even more that deep sense of accountability that Augustine possessed, an accountability both to the community and to God for the sake of the community’s salvation, a sense of responsibility to and for the members of Christ’s Body, women and men, of which he, too, was a member – that was part of Augustine’s drive, especially as he carried the staff, which was at times a heavy burden to carry.

280. See *Confessions*, III.6, 11 (Boulding, 83).
Indeed, the sense of accountability that motivated Augustine concerned him; he knew that the Christian life was not merely about an individual journey. It was a journey not of singleness, but of oneness, oneness of mind and heart, a deep discovery and knowing that he was part of a whole, a whole that itself was *inquietus* and being refashioned until that Day. Nor was the Christian life about an individual, one-time reading. Instead, for Augustine, the Christian’s task, regardless of gender, was to read deeper and higher still, to go below the surface and lean into a process of ongoing discovery of God at work, a God who desires, restlessly so, to be disclosed and made known, to awaken and to stir up the *cor* in such a way that the reader – the person – himself or herself will go public in proclamation, in confession, and ongoing conversion.

There is a risk, however, to such activity, such public disclosure, as Augustine himself can attest. It is the risk of criticism, of not being well-read nor well-received. Certainly, this was a risk that Teresa herself found when she would “go public” in her discovery of reading in an Augustinian fashion. Quite simply, *meditatio* leaves one vulnerable, exposed, but it also creates the possibility for going deeper still. For to misread in *meditatio* would mean to stop reading altogether, and Augustine discovered that to stop, to rest *completely* was not possible in this life; rather, one was always invited to keep reading. Just as the insight offered at the end of the *Confessions* revealed, the book is never closed; it is always there to be opened.

In one of his sermons dated 416, Augustine, reflecting in the basilica of Hippo on Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, urges his people:

You ask, “What does walking mean?” I'll tell you very briefly; it means forging ahead, in case you should possibly not understand, and start walking sluggishly. Forge ahead, my brothers and sisters; always examine yourselves without self-deception, without flattery, without buttering yourselves up. After all, there's nobody inside you before whom you need feel ashamed, or whom you need to impress. There is someone there, but one who is pleased with humility; let him test you. And you, too, test yourself. Always be
dissatisfied with what you are, if you want to arrive at what you are not yet. Because wherever you are satisfied with yourself, there you have stuck. If, though, you say, “That's enough, that's the lot,” then you've even perished. Always add some more, always keep on walking, always forge ahead.\textsuperscript{281}

Such could be a description of the process of meditatio he used to read his own life in the Confessions and to reconsider his own works in his Retractationes. One can see here that, for Augustine, to re-fashion, to reconsider, to re-read, i.e., to keep on walking with the staff in hand, had become a way of life for him; one might even say that it had always been the way he was wired. The difference now was that he saw it related to God, that, in fact, he – and all of humanity – was made by God in that fashion. Augustine’s discovery of his restlessness being rooted in God - his naming and confessing grace – transformed the way he understood his cor inquietum.

The activity of meditatio evoked in the Confessions was a process of movement forward and ahead for Augustine. As much as it was one that involved a review, a reconsideration, a re-reading of his life, it was not one in which he was found stuck or remaining in the past; that would be despair. Instead, it was a process rooted in Christian hope, that invited the potential for ongoing conversion, transformation and movement ahead and forward into a new narrative, a new creation, that was both here and not yet. It was not a stagnant reading of predictability; instead, Augustine’s was a reading of his life that was fresh and dynamic because it focused on the very activity of God, who was always creating and doing something new. And the same is true for the reader of Augustine’s narrative, who, in reading in his person, reads into it his or her own story. And the same would be true for Teresa as she would soon discover in meditatio.

Chapter Three: *Oratio* – the Heart

As I began to read the Confessions, it seemed to me that 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 the voice in the garden, it only seemed to me, according to what I felt in my heart, that it was I the Lord called.

Consider now the heart. After the admirer of Pereda’s painting moves his or her gaze from the book to the staff, the eyes then shift upward from the ground and see that both Augustine and Teresa each hold out a heart. Yet neither touch the heart, nor is the heart in either’s grasp. Instead, the heart hovers above Augustine’s hand, as it does with Teresa, as if lifted up, offered – just as described in the title of Pereda’s work, *San Agustín y Santa Teresa ofrecen sus corazones a la Virgen y San José*. Again, Augustine and Teresa, mirroring each other, are in a kneeling position on the ground, with their eyes focused upward and their hands opened in a gesture of both giving and receiving.

This movement of the eye’s gaze from the book to the staff to the heart creates the sense of a circular motion within the painting. Such movement is the type of reading promoted and caused by *lectio divina*. Susan Muto suggests that oftentimes one’s approach to reading is linear, that is, going “from point to point. [The reader’s] task at that moment is not to stand still, but to move on: 1) to master a perspective; 2) to solve a problem; 3) to amass pertinent information in the right proportions, neither too much, nor too little.”


283. See Chapter One.
*lectio divina* is not informational, but rather formational, with an approach that “is spiral. The same book can be approached formationally if we stand in one spot and go deeper into what is offered. Our goal is to *abide in the mystery.* This is *different from mastery.* We purposefully wish to return to the same place and see it as if for the first time. At this moment one is no longer an explorer of new lands. One is returning home to sink one’s roots deeply into the earth.”

Ironically, to move and to read spirally and formationally as that promoted in *lectio divina* requires a certain stillness and rootedness, just as Augustine and Teresa are depicted as still and rooted, with the book and the staff. The first two chapters have shown, through the initial practices of *lectio* and *meditatio,* that reading in this way is about digging deeper in the ground on which one stands, uncovering that which lies underneath the surface. These practices revealed the roots of the ground on which Teresa stood and walked, the world of an emerging, unlettered, vernacular literacy in which she lived that created the possibility for her to receive the *Confessions* – let alone any text. Standing her ground and leaning on Augustine’s staff, Teresa would be enabled to navigate and explore further and deeper the very ground of her inner life, the interiority that Augustine himself had unearthed and uncovered centuries earlier. Teresa’s practice of reading and, in particular, her reading of the *Confessions,* indeed would ground her and keep her rooted in her life and, most importantly, in her encounter with the God of her life. It is this encounter that is lifted up with the heart in the painting, as the next phase in *lectio* following that of *meditatio* is *oratio,* a practice that involves a movement toward lifting up of that which has been uncovered, in a gesture of offering.

Recall that in *meditatio* there is a sense of yearning and drawing closer to that which is being revealed and disclosed in such a way that also exposes human limits and limitations, a result of the interplay between hiddenness and disclosure, transcendence and immanence, of the Truth that is God. Turning to Guigo once again to help frame the conversation on *lectio divina*, he writes, “But what is [the soul] to do? It is consumed with longing, yet it can find no means of its own to have what it longs for; and the more it searches the more it thirsts. As long as it is meditating, so long is it suffering [*dolorem*], because it does not feel the sweetness [*dulce*] which, as meditation shows, belongs to purity of heart [*in cordis munditia*], but which it does not give.”

Already one can see that the action of *meditatio* reveals something that is lacking in the *cor* of the person, that there is a void that he or she cannot fill on his or her own. Guigo expresses this void as a suffering, as an ache; even so, it need not be taken negatively. Instead, this lack can reveal the potential within the *cor* for encounter and completeness. One might say that this is an insight toward which Augustine’s *cor inquietum* points throughout his *Confessions*, namely, a sense of incompleteness that propels the *cor* on its journey toward completeness and oneness that can only come from God.

It is at this juncture at which the reader is drawn into the next phase, that of *oratio*. Guigo writes, “Prayer [*oratio*] is the heart’s devoted turning to God [*devota cordis in Deum intentio*] to drive away evil [*pro malis removendis*] and obtain what is good [*vel bonis adipiscendis*].” Once again, it is important to pay attention to the Latin text to unpack this sentence a bit further so as to deepen what is meant by the action of *oratio*. Both *devota* (“devoted”) and *intentio* (“intention,” “stretching,” “directing”) are in the nominative case,


286. Ibid., II (Colledge, 68; SC, 84).
predicating oratio. Cordis, the genitive of cor is in relationship to these descriptions. In Deum is accusative and implies both an action and an endpoint; it is not rendered as a static “in God,” but rather the “in” has a dynamic movement that accompanies it, such that an “into” or a “on the way to” or a “towards” would assert, with the goal of and desire for reaching God. Furthermore, devota and intentio bracket cordis in Deum by way of emphasis, so that the heart and God are in dialogue with each other and central in the dynamic. And so, in prayer the heart is being stretched toward, or in the direction of, God, leaning toward and into God. This intentio of the heart is purposeful and invitational, capturing a movement of conversion from that which is bad to that which is good, a turning toward something. Oratio, then, is a stretching of the heart that creates the possibility and the space for such conversion and transformation, the space for God.

Notice, however, while meditatio is the digging deep and finding that which has been hidden, oratio, although the next phase, is still not the grasping of the truth disclosed: while it may seem to be in the reach of the person, Guigo wants to maintain that the attainment of that truth is not by human effort, but is instead gift freely given. There is still a transcendence, a sense of totally other, that one could not possibility get on one’s own. Oratio, true to its Latin rendering, is a ‘putting to words’ – speech – directed to God that which is desired, as Guigo says, “ask[ing] for what we long for.” One can see that out of meditatio comes an urge for oratio, a naming and an acknowledgement of the longing that occurs within and results from the disclosure-hiddenness interplay. Indeed, this longing has an ache to it, a suffering, a sorrow, a deep yearning or strain that is experienced in the stretching – intentio – of the heart. Guigo describes further:

So the soul, seeing that it cannot attain by itself to that sweetness of knowing and feeling for which it longs, and that the more ‘the heart abases itself,’ [quanto magis ad cor altum

287. Ibid., III (Colledge, 69).
accedit] the more ‘God is exalted,’ humbles itself [humiliat se] and betakes itself
[confugit] to prayer, saying: Lord, you are not seen except by the pure of heart [a mundis
cordibus]. I seek by reading and meditating what is true purity of heart [vera cordis
munditia] and how it may be had, so that with its help I may know you, if only a little.
Lord, for long have I meditated in my heart, seeking to see your face. It is the sight of
you, Lord, that I have sought; and all the while in my meditation the fire of longing, the
desire to know you more fully, has increased. When you break for me the bread of
sacred Scripture, you have shown yourself to me in that breaking of bread, and the more I
see you, the more I long to see you, no more from without, in the rind of the letter, but
within, in the letter’s hidden meaning [non jam in cortice litterae sed in sensu
experientiae]. Nor do I ask this, Lord, because of my own merits, but because of your
mercy [tua misericordia]. I too in my unworthiness confess [fateor] my sins with the
woman who said that ‘even the little dogs eat of the fragments that fall from the table of
their masters.’ So give me, Lord, some pledge of what I hope to inherit, at least one drop
of heavenly rain with which to refresh my thirst, for I am on fire with love.”

Guigo’s description is rich in insight, nuance, and imagery. Oratio involves a humble
knowing of the heart, which, at the same time, exalts God. The Latin is telling: quanto magis ad
cor altum accedit tanto magis exaltatur Deus, humiliat se, confugit ad oration dicens. Note the
use of altum to connote a lowering as well as a depth. As remarked earlier, altum could also
speak of height, which coincides with the ladder imagery, but since it is rendered comparatively
with the exaltation of God, it can be rightly understood as the former. The insight here is that the
more one goes lower, deeper within the ground of his or her being, there, in authentic humility, is
the exaltation of God. Even more, that altum is placed with humiliat, which in its literal
understanding connotes a nearness to the ground, as well as confugit, which, again literally, is “a
taking flight with,” there is a wonderful rendering of a dynamic movement that Guigo captures
about prayer. Humility, the groundwork and digging deep within the cor of the person, can
eventually bring one to the heights with God, in and through oratio. Guigo will later say that
“prayer lifts itself up to God with all its strength, and begs for the treasure it longs for.”

288. Ibid., VI (Colledge, 73; SC, 94).

289. Ibid., XII (Colledge, 79).
so, as much as there is a deepening, there is also a raising and rising up. One can see here the
creative interplay evoked with just a few choice words, that, in plumbing the depths of the heart,
one can be lifted up in right relationship with God.

However, to underscore this notion of right relationship, there is another nuance of *altum*
that can be expressed, that is, as a heightening of distance between the person and God, as part of
the experience of God’s utter transcendence, of God as totally Other. This would intensify all
the more the longing, yearning, and suffering that the person as reader can initially encounter in
*meditatio* as well as *oratio*, stressing the earlier expression of *dolorem*. The interior work that
Guigo discusses concerns, then, a cleansing, a making pure of the heart, which involves a
conversion of heart, a “turning away from” that is also a “turning toward,” removing that which
is bad or unclean, all the while making room for something good to fill it. Conversion of heart
coincides, too, with an admission of guilt, wrongdoing, and sinfulness, as Guigo suggests. His
word choice *fateor* shares the same root with *confiteor*, as well as a similar meaning, from which
*confessio* derives, all of which comes from being close to the ground, as expressed in *humiliat*,
ultimately pointing to the importance of self-awareness and self-knowledge.

Moreover, and perhaps what is most interesting in Guigo’s description, is his suggestion
that, as a level of reading, *oratio* results from an encounter with the word in such a way that the
text is broken open, calling to mind images of Eucharist, an encounter that breaks open,
nourishes, and fills. In other words, Guigo exposes a sacramental understanding of the *lectio*
process, in that it reveals and breaks open mystery, the mystery of the human person and, more
notably, the mystery of God in and through the expression and utterance of *word*. While it is
clear that Guigo is writing specifically about a reading of Sacred Scripture, as in the Word of
God, a similar dynamic can be said about reading prayerfully a religious text other than
Scripture, such as the *Confessions*, which is the subject of this study. Again, Guigo describes a movement from outer to inner, a reading “into” the text, not simply a reading of words, but taking the words in and experiencing the text deeply, as he says, “*in sensu experientiae.*”

The sacramentality of the text evoked here – specifically in *oratio* – speaks to the eventual transformative quality of the overall process of *lectio divina*. Recall Tracy’s description of a religious classic as one that captures an event of disclosure of the reality of the whole, coupled with a call to publicness, all of which coincides with a truly “catholic” understanding. Richard McBrien, building upon Tracy’s assertion, suggests that the sacramental dimension of the classic, in its ability to disclose, “both manifests and proclaims the invisible, ineffable, divine reality which is the foundation and source of all reality. The classic is at once word and event.”

When such a word is received timelessly, that is, rendered as a classic, a person’s encounter with it, when expressed in and through the process of *lectio*, affirms the text’s sacramentality, necessarily bringing the reader to *oratio*. This insight serves to underscore all the more Ong’s understanding of word as event in that the word does something, has efficacy, particularly when spoken and heard. The overall text itself can then be seen as a sacramental symbol in that it mediates the (sacramental) encounter and invites a response from the reader. And that uttered response – that “publicness” – is *oratio*. This will have certain implications for Teresa when she engages, and is engaged by, Augustine’s *Confessions*.

Yet, as Guigo asserts, such a reception of the text, and specifically with the *occulta veritas* being disclosed, is not based on merit or human effort alone. Instead, rooted in the

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reader’s work of humility, the source is found ultimately in God’s mercy and grace. In fact, mercy – or more properly misericordia – seems to be at the “heart” of the encounter with the text as particularly realized and expressed in oratio. Guigo identifies misericordia as belonging to God and that this mercy even allows for the prayer to be spoken and to be heard.

Interestingly, when one looks at the roots of mercy, one can see that two words are brought together in the Latin, namely, miser – from misereo/miserere, to pity, to have compassion on, to commiserate – and cordia – from cor, heart. Misericordia is about the heart, and can be rightly understood as a heart that commiserates, a heart that has compassion, that pities, that is saddened, even a heart that aches or suffers, which echoes, perhaps even takes on, the earlier dolorem that the person experiences. In addition, it can also be understood as tender-heartedness, as opposed to hardness of heart, allowing for the heart to be moved by another’s ache, sorrow, situation, and encounter. However, this heart of which Guigo describes is not that of the person; rather, this heart is the cor of God. God in and through misericordia identifies with the person in his or her longing, yearning, and suffering, even in the distance experienced by the person, such that God would be moved, in and through God’s own mercy, to draw closer, to disclose Godself further: God in and through misericordia identifies with, reaches out to, the cor of the person.

If oratio is directed speech, it is cor speaking to cor, as it concerns itself with the desire(s) and longing(s) of the heart coupled with this awareness of the need for God’s mercy. As speech of the heart, words in oratio arise from the heart of the person – they are lifted up –as a result of lectio and meditatio, pleading for and recognizing the need for God’s heart to be turned and moved with compassion. That Augustine and Teresa hold out and offer their hearts in a gesture of openness illustrates this rich understanding. Just as in Pereda’s painting, in oratio,
the heart is lifted up and offered in a moment of desire and longing, creating the possibility of a
deeper – or higher – encounter.

Prayer as speech of the heart leads one to speak further about the word “heart” itself and what might be meant by it. Reflecting on the power of words in speech, theologian Karl Rahner, S.J., writes that there are certain words that cannot be defined, “ultimate words [which] possess only that simplicity which conceals within itself all mysteries.”\(^{292}\) These words are what he calls primordial in that they are foundational and fundamental:

> In the primordial words, spirit and flesh, the signified and its symbol, concept and word, things and image, are still freshly and originally one…. [T]he primordial word is in the proper sense the presentation of the thing itself. It is not merely the sign of something whose relationship to the hearer is no way altered by it; it does not speak merely ‘about’ a relationship of the object in question to the hearer: it brings the reality it signifies to us, makes it ‘present,’ realizes it and places it before us.\(^{293}\)

In this oneness evoked by the primordial word, Rahner draws out even further an underlying sacramental principle at work, underscoring Ong’s notion of word as event, since “whenever a primordial word of this kind is pronounced, something happens: the advent of the thing itself to the listener.”\(^{294}\)

Rahner classifies heart as such a primordial word, as it is foundational and fundamental to the human person and human experience. He asserts that “the meaning [of heart] is an original unity and totality…. When a man says that he has a heart, he has told himself one of the crucial secrets of his existence. For when he speaks in this way, he is speaking of himself as the one self-knowing whole…evoking the unity of his being…that in which the manifold of human


\(^{293}\) Ibid., 298-299.

\(^{294}\) Ibid., 299.
reality is still freshly one.”

And so, to classify oratio as speech of the heart – to see heart as the center of the lectio process – is to suggest that the cor of the human person is being engaged and stirred up in and by an encounter with the word. And this encounter is an event, an event that, in effect, is sacramental, disclosing and mediating God’s presence that at once can stir, lift up and transform the reader. Oratio as speech and movement of the heart as an event is action directed from within and stretching the heart toward unity. The desire and longing acknowledged and named in the speech of prayer ultimately concerns itself with the wholeness, completeness of the human person, the rest that Augustine names in his Confessions.

To clarify this understanding further, oratio – as words, speech that come from the heart – speaks to and from this desire, this heart-ache for oneness. Mary Catherine Hilkert, O.P., asserts that “[w]ords spoken from the center of ourselves…are revelatory – they allow a deeper dimension of reality to emerge. These kinds of ‘depth words’ are not merely signs which point to a reality that exists independently of the naming. Rather, the word ‘embodies’ the deeper mystery in a public, conscious, historical way. Here words become sacraments – they function as symbols which make present a deeper mysterious reality.” The words of oratio are indeed depth words and serve as a response to the words of the text being engaged in lectio. These words contained within the religious classic are at the “heart center” of the encounter and are themselves sacramental in that they not only disclose the occulta veritas but also stir up from within the cor of the person the response that arises, that is lifted up from the depths of the cor of the reader.


The Heart of Prayer: Recollection

The insight gleaned from Guigo’s reflection on *oratio* reveals a dynamic process that is rooted in God’s own mercy, a *cor* itself that stirs and moves to act and engage the *cor* of the person all the more. Such richness helps to frame Teresa’s experience of reading brought on by her *lectio* of Augustine’s *Confessions*, what happened within her own heart, exposing it, stretching it, and lifting it up in a gesture of generous offering. However, her reception of the *Confessions* was certainly not her first exposure to, nor experience of, prayer; rather, the text itself helped her articulate, give her a speech – as in *oratio* – for that which had already been taking root within her.

As has been discussed previously, Teresa notes from the beginning of her *Vida* that she was drawn to virtuous living by the example of her parents, which was reinforced by the reading of good books, most especially through her father, and that these inclinations to the good were given to her by God.297 She recalls with fondness her desire for martyrdom, shared with one of her brothers, who read with her the lives of the saints, and since martyrdom did not seem to be within their reach, they opted for an eremitical life instead, which they would often reenact on the grounds of their house.298 These desires were coupled with devotional prayers, which were part of her life from an early age within a supportive family environment. She writes, “I sought out solitude to pray my devotions, and they were many, especially the rosary, to which my mother was very devoted; and she made us devoted to it too. When I played with other girls I

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298. Ibid., 1.4-5 (Kavanaugh, 55).
enjoyed it when we pretended we were nuns in a monastery, and it seemed to me that I desired to be one, although not as much as I desired the other things I mentioned [i.e., martyrdom and eremitical life].”

After her mother died when Teresa was fourteen, she recalls a moment when she was moved to pray before an image of Mary asking her to be her mother and was given consolation: “It seems to me that although I did this in simplicity it helped me. For I have found favor with this sovereign Virgin in everything I have asked of her, and in the end she has drawn me to herself. It wearies me now to see and think that I was not constant in the good desires I had in my childhood.”

There are two points here worth considering further. First, Teresa seems to look back on these times and experiences of prayer with a hint of judgment. While she admits that such practices were modeled for her by family members and the desires were innate within her from God, there is also a sense that the type or way of prayer that she practiced, while not necessarily bad – she still calls it “good” – was simple, that is, lacking complexity, perhaps even depth. Second, she claims to have strayed from such form of prayer and desire, or at least its frequency as she grew, as a result of both reading books of chivalry, as discussed earlier, as well as the company she began to keep, notably, some of her cousins as well as one of her sisters. Such company would differ from the supportive relationship she found particularly with her brother with whom she read the lives of the saints. While seemingly regretful, Teresa does not believe she, nor they, had any bad intentions; instead, it was symptomatic of childishness characteristic

299. Ibid., 1.6 (Kavanaugh, 55-56).

300. Ibid., 1.7 (Kavanaugh, 56).

of emerging adolescence, and contributed greatly to a growing laxity in devotional practices and “having lost this fear of God completely.”

Teresa places a particular stress here on the importance of community in the life of the individual, influencing the person for good or for bad, even when not intending so or being attentive to such influences. This relationship can play itself out in either fostering one’s prayer life and virtuous desires, as she claims it did in her own life with her father, mother, and brother, or weakening them, as with some of her adolescent friendships. She writes, “If I should have to give advice I would tell parents that when their children are this age they ought to be very careful about whom their children associate with. For here lies the root of great evil since our natural bent is toward the worst rather than toward the best,” and “[f]rom 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.”

One might think that in this advice-giving and reflection, Teresa is blaming her father’s oversight in her regression, even though she says he had been cautious about the company she kept. Instead, however, it seems that her own insights on the importance of community were actually gleaned from her father, evidenced by her placement in a convent finishing school staffed by the Augustinian nuns of the Monastery of Nuestra Señora de Gracia in Avila, since he feared her growing lack of virtue. If anything, she felt her father loved her too much that he was not able to see clearly how she truly was, as she believed she was quite effective in deceiving him. “So excessive was the love my father bore me,” she writes, “and so great my dissimulation

303. Ibid., 2.3 (Kavanaugh, 58).
304. Ibid., 2.5 (Kavanaugh, 59).
305. Ibid., 2.2 (Kavanaugh, 57).
that he was unable to believe there was much wrong with me, and so he was not angered with me.” 306

While Teresa was not initially content in the convent environment, her father’s choice to place her there proved beneficial, as she reveals, “My soul began to return to the good habits of early childhood, and I saw the great favor God accords anyone placed with good companions.” 307 One such newfound companion was Doña María de Briceño y Contreras, “a nun there in care of the dormitory for all of us who were lay persons.” 308 This relationship was key in re-igniting and nurturing Teresa’s desire for the good, coupled with that for prayer, though she acknowledges that, when she compared herself to this nun, she noticed she had a hardness of heart – “porque era tan recio mi corazón” – unable to have an emotional response even to the Passion narrative, so much so that it “pained” her. 309 “After a year and a half in the convent school,” she admits, however, “I was much better. I began to recite many vocal prayers and to seek that all commend me to God so that He might show me the state in which I was to serve Him.” 310

At this point, Teresa’s practice of prayer revolves around an openness to vocational choice and discernment, paving the way for her becoming a nun, though initially she resisted the idea, nor did she desire to join the Augustinian community, believing them to be too strict and virtuous for her liking. Instead, if she were to enter a community, it would be the Carmel of the Encarnación, where a close friend was a member. Teresa hints, too, that the community of Nuestra Señora de Gracia may have agreed with her assessment, particularly the younger

306. Ibid., 2.7 (Kavanaugh, 60).
307. Ibid., 2.8 (Kavanaugh, 60).
308. Ibid., 2.10 (Kavanaugh, 61).
309. Ibid., 3.1 (Kavanaugh, 61; Steggink, 39).
310. Ibid., 3.2 (Kavanaugh, 61).
members. Interestingly, there is a hint of regret here in her sharing, yet also an honest reflection of who she was at the time of her discernment, admitting that “if all [of the sisters] had been of one mind I would have greatly profited.”

Even still, Doña María de Briceño y Contreras remained a strong mentor for Teresa, attracting, softening, and preparing her heart for a life of prayer.

After her time at the convent school had come to an end because of taking ill, Teresa found herself at an uncle’s house once she had recovered, and, like her father, “[h]e spent his time reading good books in the vernacular, and his talk was – most often – about God and the vanity of the world. He asked me to read these books to him; and although I did not like them, I pretended to. For in this matter of pleasing others I went to extremes, even when it was a burden to me; so much so that what in others would be considered virtuous, in me was a great fault, for I very often acted without discretion.”

One can see here an initial resistance on the part of Teresa, similar to her experience when first arriving at Nuestra Señora de Gracia, as well as her admission of deception and wanting to come across as likable and pleasing to others and to God.

While her self-assessment may be true, her hardness of heart had begun to soften, unable to prevent God’s activity from reaching her. She reveals, “Although the days I remained there were few, because of the good company and the strength of the words of God – both heard and read – gave my heart [con la fuerza que hacían en mi corazón las palabras de Dios, ansí leídas como oídas, y la buena compañía], I began to understand the truth I knew in childhood (the

311. Ibid., 3.2 (Kavanaugh, 62). Teresa’s reader can be left with a few questions here regarding her commentary on the community at Nuestra Señora de Gracia compared to that of the Encarnación. First, that the younger sisters of the Nuestra Señora de Gracia felt the community was too austere could be because of a lack of maturity or readiness on their part. Second, she was attracted to the Encarnación because of her friend, perhaps making it appear easier and more friendly as compared to the Augustinian community. Last, Nuestra Señora de Gracia could be reflective of the reform community of St. Joseph’s she would later found; she was simply not ready for such an undertaking.

312. Ibid., 3.4 (Kavanaugh, 62).
nothingness of all things, the vanity of the world, and how it would soon come to an end).”

Teresa gains a new insight into her past, or at least a nuance: she is able to see that from the beginning she had the foundation and capacity for, a leaning toward God. And she uses a rich image here to describe this realization: something happened in and to her heart. The word(s) of God, that is, those found particularly in good books, or more specifically those spoken through those books, impacted her heart, or as Peers’ translation says, an impression was made on her heart.314

Teresa’s heart was pressed upon or imprinted in such a way that she became more and more convinced that the best possible place for her was in the convent, yet she admits it was initially a decision motivated by fear, not by love.315 This insight is especially telling in that it reinforces what she previously said regarding other aspects of her life that were mixed with both deception and the desire to please and to be pleasing in others’ sights. Such, too, were her dealings with God in her prayer life. “I did not want this on account of the love I felt for God,” she writes of her earlier desire for martyrdom with her brother, “but to get to enjoy very quickly the wonderful things I read there were in heaven.”316 While her heart was being reached, touched, softened, it was still not quite an experience of mutual love for Teresa, that is, in Teresa not only receiving love, but being able to reciprocate it. Her starting point for “being pleasing” remained fear-based as well as what might be pleasing to her, and she hints to her reader that it would be her heart’s move toward love that would make the eventual difference.

313. Ibid., 3.5 (Kavanaugh, 63; Steggink, 40).

314. “…such was the impression made on my heart by the words of God, both as read and heard…” (Peers, 18). This is important language that will be necessary to return to when discussing Teresa’s engagement with the Confessions, as it is uniquely Augustinian in its rendering.

315. Ibid., 3.5-6 (Kavanaugh, 63).

316. Ibid., 1.4 (Kavanaugh, 55).
A slight shift begins to take place within her after she entered Carmel in 1535, taking ill
again and finding herself visiting with that same uncle with whom she had shared enjoyment in
reading good books. Notice how Teresa describes her illness: she experienced “heart pains”
and “nearly lost consciousness.” While she was experiencing physical symptoms, her spirit
may have also been suffering: something was happening to and in her heart that she was feeling
an ache, a pain, which was intimately linked with her lack of consciousness and awareness. It
was in the visit with her uncle that she was given a copy of Francisco de Osuna’s *El Tercer
Abecedario*, introducing to her Prayer of Recollection. Teresa writes:

And although during this first year I read good books (for I no longer desired to make use
of the others, because I understood the harm they did me), I did not know how to proceed
in prayer or how to be recollected. 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. 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. This hurt me so much that I often turned
back and was even completely lost, for a master would have helped me flee from the
occasions of offending God.

This is an interesting confession on her part, in stating that, until Osuna’s work, she did not know
how to proceed in prayer. While it may be a commentary on a lack in quality instruction and
formation in prayer when Teresa entered the Carmel of *Encarnación*, it could also be that she
herself was simply feeling the lack, that the devotional and vocal prayers that she had been
practicing even as a nun perhaps no longer aided her in her spiritual development, nor could she

317. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez note that Teresa entered *Encarnación* in 1535, received the habit as a
novice in 1536, and made her profession of vows in 1537 (469, n.2, 3, 4); Teresa was in her early twenties at this
point. It seems she took ill sometime after her profession.

318. *Life*, 4.5 (Kavanaugh, 66); “un mal de corazón....que casi me privara el sentido siempre...” (Steggink, 42).

319. Ibid., 4.7 (Kavanaugh, 66).
articulate the ways of her heart.\footnote{320} She lacked full consciousness, and she did not know how to pray with the ache of her heart. That she had been accustomed to – and enjoyed – reading good books that were often linked to her own spiritual insights, it was no wonder that Osuna’s book on prayer itself would delight her and aid her even further, waking her up to her heart’s stirrings.

Before examining Teresa’s practice and experience of recollection or recogimiento, it is essential, first, to define this expression of prayer as espoused by Osuna in his El Tercer Abecedario. Recall for a moment both the broad and particular contexts out of which recogimiento emerged in Spain. The turn of the sixteenth century was characterized by an energy for reform and renewal within Catholic Spain, as a result of the unification of the kingdoms coupled by the spiritual fervor brought on by the devotio moderna entering the peninsula from the rest of Europe. This sense of renewal was both politically and religiously charged as a way of uniting, catechizing, and reforming a Catholic culture. The leadership of Cardinal Cisneros in this endeavor was key, especially in his founding of the university at Alcalá, which symbolized his embrace, promotion, and publication of vernacular religious literature.

Cisneros himself was the product of a much larger program for reform within some of the major religious orders, most notably the Franciscans, of which he was a member, and other mendicant communities, like the Augustinians. These communities of reform, referred to as “observant” communities throughout Europe, tended to be separate dwellings within the larger

\footnotetext{320}{In their introduction, Kavanaugh and Rodriguez write that “[c]ontrary to common belief, religious life at the Incarnation was austere. Days each week were set aside for fasting and abstinence; silence was carefully maintained so as to encourage the spirit of continual prayer. With many kinds of detailed, minute rubrics, the Divine Office was celebrated in solemnity and splendor. No time, however, was designated in the legislation for mental prayer – a deficiency not without its drawbacks in what must have been a crowded monastery. Novices received instructions about the Carmelite order, its eremitical origins, its devotion to the Blessed Virgin and to the prophets Elijah and Elisha. They were also trained in the practice of the intricate ceremonies used in the chanting of the Divine Office” (19). All of this would make for an excellent practice of, what Osuna will call, stage one of prayer.}
federation of the specific orders and were characterized by a simpler, more austere lifestyle with more intentionality toward prayer and adherence to the respective *regula* of the religious house, but they were not initially envisioned as separate from the larger, lived expression of the respective orders.

The observant movement tended to give greater emphasis to the eremitical roots of the mendicant tradition. Of the four main mendicant orders, three of them – the Franciscans, Augustinians, and Carmelites – had strong hermit ties. The Franciscans in particular had the strong figure of Francis of Assisi from whom to draw their inspiration, seeing him as both a model and mentor in this reform endeavor, since “[he] and his early companions spent long periods of prayer in solitude, at some distance from the towns, moving back and forth ‘between hermitage and city,’” even composing a separate *Rule for Hermitages*. Not all observant efforts were successful in Europe, especially as some became closely linked with Protestant Reformation efforts. The movement within Spain, however, was particularly far-reaching and impressive, even to the point, for the Franciscans at least, of having only these houses become the majority, and, eventually the only, Franciscan presence in Spain.

Commenting further on this at-once characteristically Spanish and Franciscan expression, Hamilton writes:

An essential aspect of Franciscan reform, especially in the late fifteenth century, was the

321. The Order of Preachers, the Dominicans, had been mostly Canons Regular.


323. For example, Martin Luther, a contemporary, was a member of an observantine community within the Augustinian friars in Germany; as a result of the Reformation, the Augustinian observantine communities in Germany went extinct.

practice of meditation… [T]he exercise of *recogimiento*, the ‘gathering’ of the senses which became characteristic of the order, seems to have developed in the 1480s partly as a reaction of the anti-intellectualism and devotion to liturgy prevalent during the early phases of the reform. The encouragement of this method led to convents being reserved for its practice. They came to be known as *recolectorios*, and it was to one of the most important, La Salceda, that Cisneros withdrew from his secular life and there that he decided to become a Franciscan.\(^{325}\)

It was within the community of *recolectorios*, then, that Cisneros’ spirit for reform was birthed and nurtured, taking that energy to the larger Church when appointed Cardinal primate of Spain. The word *recogimiento* itself is telling, involving a picking up, a collecting, a taking in that its verb form *recoger* describes; even a straightening and a tidying. One variation on the noun - *recogida* – is a collection, a harvest, as well as a (military) retreat. One can easily see how Cisneros’ approach to the overall renewal efforts was rooted in a broad sense of *recogimiento* – as his were efforts based on collecting, gathering, even tidying Catholic Spain– religiously, politically, and culturally.

In addition to the nurturing environment found in the Franciscan *recolectorios*, Cisneros’ “harvesting” efforts of the spirituality of the *devotio moderna* was also reinforced by the work of his Benedictine cousin, García Jiménez de Cisneros, notably his *Exercitatorio de la Vida Spiritual*, published in 1500, originally in Spanish, then in Latin. Even though it was written specifically to his Benedictine confreres, he offers this insight at the end:

*Fenesce el presente tractado Exercitatorio de la vida spiritual, en el qual, si alguno leyendo, meditando, orando o contemplando diligentemente se exercitare, fácilmente y en breve tiempo, con ayuda del Señor, será elevado y ayuntado con él por ardiente amor, y dende seguramente podrá esperar la bienaventurança venidera, por premio y galardón de su trabajo. El qual compilámos assí en vulgar, porque nuestra intención ha seydo de hazerle para los simples devotos, y no para los letrados soberbios.*\(^{326}\)

\(^{325}\) Ibid.

An appeal is made to “los simples devotos,” the unlettered masses. The spirituality evoked here is inclusive, typical of the literature of the *devotio moderna*. While the Benedictine Cisneros’ work may not seem to bear original thinking, the fact that it was not only composed first in Spanish, but also by a Spanish author is significant; that is, it was not merely a translation of a text, and is a key influence in how the spirit of *recogimiento* is eventually nuanced and articulated as a particular focus of and contribution to Spanish mysticism. Peers argues that this alone accounts for the work’s originality, especially as Garcia Cisneros is able to interweave both traditional authors and some of his non-Spanish contemporaries.327 Even more, its popularity attests to its merit and contribution.328

Its tri-partite structure, which uses the traditional threefold *via purgativa*, *illuminativa*, and *unitiva* coupled with a threefold method of *lectio* (i.e., using *lectio* as an umbrella for *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*),329 is reminiscent of Bonaventure and the Victorines, both for memorizing and internalizing as well as for invoking Trinitarian imagery. The notion of *exercitatorio* from which Cisneros organizes his approach – which Ignatius of Loyola will then popularize and systemize all the more – is borrowed from his contemporary, the Belgian Augustinian canon Jean Mombaer and his *Rosetum exercitiorum spiritualium*.330 One can see here how the Benedictine Cisneros introduces themes and structures that would eventually


328. Peers notes, “That it was widely read, and not only in Benedictine communities, its bibliography alone will show. Five editions in Spanish, and seven in Latin, were current during the sixteenth century. In Latin, the book went on reprinting to the extent that seven further editions have been issued since 1600. Of extant translations, many of them quite modern, there are three in Italian, two in French, two in English, one in Catalan, and one in German” (*Spanish Mystics, Volume II*, 27-28).

329. See, for example, the Prólogo in *Exercitatorio* (Baraut, 92).

hallmark Spanish mysticism, the mysticism promoted by the efforts of his Cardinal-primate cousin.

The alphabetic structure of its last chapter is particularly revealing. Not only does it aid internalization, but it teaches, shapes, and reminds the reader of disposition, space, and place for prayer, offering both a summary and purpose. He writes,

Las quales, porque más fácilmente se retengan en el corazón, ponerlas hemos según la orden del alphabet por sus parraphos, y ante de cada párrapho se ha de poner esta dición: De. Apartamiento… Buena vida… Constante confianza al amado… Disposicion corporal… Exercitacion de diversas cosas… Fin de la meditacion… Gratitud de la gracia… Abundancia de punctos… Intimidad… Caridad… Lavor… Moderacion de las obras por discrecion… Natural Complission… Orden… Promptitud… Quietud… Recolegimiento… Servicio de los Sanctos… Total Subieçion… Ulterior tendencia por la holgançia de la contemplacion… Christo. Ninguna cosa antepongas a Christo, rogándole sea tu ayudador, protector, endrescador y fin de tu camino.331

Notice the emphasis placed on Christ; by putting Christ at the end of the “alphabet,” the work evokes Christ as the Alpha and Omega and serves as a challenge to any suspicious “misreading” that can happen in prayer, namely, that it is the work solely of the individual, and not of Christ, not of grace.

Garcia Cisneros’ Exercitatorio and Cardinal Cisneros’ own exercise of his authority and passion for renewal would give rise to an articulation of a more nuanced recogimiento practiced in the Franciscan recolectorios through Francisco de Osuna’s El Tercer Abecedario, which would find itself in the hands of Teresa. Himself a Franciscan – having entered not only the same recolectorio as Cardinal Cisneros, but also having studied at the university in Alcalá that he founded – Osuna would adopt the “alphabet” method of style and instruction contained within the Exercitatorio and become the defining figure of recogimiento, since “[a]though the Third

331. Exercitatorio, 69 (Baraut, 454).
*Spiritual Alphabet* embraces far more than just recollection, this was its most important element and the reason for its production.\(^{332}\)

The title is telling in that it suggests that there are at least two other alphabets that come before it. In fact, there are altogether six *abecedarios*, the last two of which were published posthumously.\(^{333}\) However, in 1527, Osuna published the third volume first, since it centered on the definition and practice of *recogimiento*:

This peculiar order of publication arose from the contentious religious and political ferment in which Osuna found himself. The most immediate pressure came from those who would soon be called *alumbrados*… Osuna had discovered that these *alumbrados* groups had been taking his scattered writings and interpreting them freely for their own purposes. He therefore rushed into print the most doctrinal…in order to stake his claim immediately to what true recollection was.\(^{334}\)

Osuna hints at these concerns when he writes in his prologue, “Many have erred not because they followed recollection but because they thought they did so when in fact, unmindful of the writings of saints that could have helped them avoid error, they strayed from the path onto other somewhat pleasant little ways. The advice of most of the writings I refer to is contained in this Alphabet, as will be noted in the commentary.”\(^{335}\) And further: “In the Alphabet by itself, without commentaries, I have exercised great caution in abbreviating the teachings about recollection so that they are in accordance with observation men greatly experienced in the matter, and the commentary will contain some points that could not be explained in the brevity

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Osuna is well aware of *recogimiento*’s growing appeal and popularity, so he wants to be understood as simply and as clearly as possible when giving instruction on it, emphasizing the importance of being guided properly in the interior life as well as caution in understanding its practice. Ironically, the text would eventually be held suspect itself in encouraging what Osuna intended to safeguard against in his corrective, though was not placed on the Valdes *Index* of Prohibited Books.

The structure of the *Abecedario* is itself a work of *recogimiento* in that it both harvests and orders: in the first five of twenty-three treatises alone, it affirms the inclusivity of vernacular literacy and spirituality, distinguishes between God’s activity and human effort, and the importance of experience in fostering an inner life that is reflected in outward engagement, all of which are key principles in the vernacular spirituality of the day. It is not until the sixth treatise that Osuna introduces the importance of *recogimiento*, of retreating and withdrawing as did Jesus, “to advance further and imitate loftier things,” though not as a way of negating, but in addition to, works of charity.  

He writes that *recogimiento* gathers together the exterior person within himself; clearly we are to some degree composed of many pieces as our concerns, and they are brambles that prick the poor person, like the lamb, until he bleeds. I have observed many times that when people begin to taste of recollection they set out to recollect their way of life, abandoning distracting affairs and decreasing and moderating them so that with little effort they can be recollected. When preachers finish their Lenten sermons, they practice this holy exercise and gather up their concerns to approach God more intimately, not so much to rest or refresh the body as to nourish the soul.

Drawing once again on the roots and meaning of the word itself, for the spiritual life *recogimiento* would be a collecting, gathering together, harvesting, and an ordering and clearing

336. Ibid., Prologue, (Giles, 43).

337. Ibid., Treatise, VI.1 (Giles, 59).

338. Ibid., VI.4 (Giles, 171).
out that would involve making space within oneself, perhaps even a putting “things” into their rightful place both collectively and interiorly; certainly it would be a true *exercitatorio* in prayer, encouraging solitude in order to do the inner work.\textsuperscript{339} Short notes, “The basic movement in this type of prayer at first is a quieting of the pieces of the external world that fill our minds with images and thoughts of whatever is outside us. This is an operation of cleaning out our inner dwelling place, sweeping away the multitude of words, ideas and images that fill it.”\textsuperscript{340} In other words, *recogimiento* is both a way of life and a particular practice of prayer; both are mutually inclusive.\textsuperscript{341} Some of the external practices that help a person to maintain, or even to begin, focusing interiorly include patterns of prayer coupled with sleep\textsuperscript{342} and fixing one’s gaze toward the ground even when in the midst of others or while doing manual labor.\textsuperscript{343}

In the thirteenth treatise, Osuna introduces three stages of prayer that align, not surprisingly, to the threefold *via* of *purgativa*, *illuminativa*, and *unitiva*, in keeping with the tradition, using imagery found in the *Song of Songs* and their commentaries.\textsuperscript{344} Interestingly, he tells his reader that “[i]t is not easy to determine, however, if someone is a beginner, a proficient, or [one who is greatly experienced in prayer], for this is appropriately discerned less on the basis of a person’s intelligence or the length of time he has practiced prayer than on the piety in his

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{339} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{340} Short, “The Franciscan Practice of Recollection,” 464.
\item \textsuperscript{341} Osuna describes two kinds of recollection in XV.2 (Giles, 386-391)
\item \textsuperscript{342} See, for example, XIII.5 (Giles, 355ff).
\item \textsuperscript{343} Ibid., XV.1-3 (384-392).
\item \textsuperscript{344} “The first is the kiss on the feet. The second is the kiss on the hand. The third kiss is on the mouth. The first converts us to faith, which is to be proclaimed by mouth. The second converts us to hope, which we should hold in the heart. The third connects us to charity, which we are to demonstrate on works” (XIII.4 [Giles 351]).
\end{itemize}
These three stages of prayer enable a person to recollect and go deeper into quiet, moving from outward to inward, from words to silence, directing the person’s attention to his or her heart. Notice the emphasis here on having experience, sometimes placed over and against being learned, very much characteristic of vernacular mysticism/spirituality; that is, one does not need to be lettered in the interior life. Such a stress also underscores the need for grace and God’s initiative in the life of prayer.

The first stage of prayer that Osuna identifies is vocal: “accordingly it is the prayer of those who recite the divine office and praise the Lord with prayers they pronounce with the mouth.” This would be a common expression and experience of prayer for all people. Osuna upholds that the Lord’s Prayer is the highest of vocal prayers, calling it preeminent, though “we should not forsake other vocal prayer or we might run the risk of becoming tired of just the one.”

The second stage of prayer is “that within our heart, wherein we do not pronounce the words vocally with the mouth. We pray like this when our hearts speak alone with the Lord and we beseech him from within for everything we need.” It is here where recogimiento would begin to take shape, identifying it, first and foremost, as prayer of the heart, reflective of Guigo’s oratio. Osuna states that “[i]n order for this prayer to last longer than the preceding one, which is less excellent than this, we must discover the heart: We need to depart from other concerns,

345. Ibid., XIII.1 (Giles, 337).
346. Ibid., (Giles, 338).
347. Ibid., XIII.2 (Giles, 343).
348. Ibid., XIII.3 (Giles, 345).
whatever they might be, if they are superfluous and conducive to sin." To get in touch with the heart, Osuna recommends at this stage to focus on images of the humanity of Christ, particularly the Passion, as “[f]or this prayer, which consists of holy thoughts, it is necessary to commit to memory devout stories and mysteries of the Lord and many good things of those we might hear or read, all of which are to be like wood to fuel the fire on the Lord’s altar.”

The third form of prayer is called mental or spiritual in which the highest part of the soul is lifted more purely and affectionately to God on the wings of desire and pious affection strengthened by love. The greater our love, the fewer words we use, and the more inclusive and to the point they are, for genuine love…becomes silent and achieves great things, knowing that if it withdraws from creatures and becomes recollected with God, it will be entirely received by him, and the more recollected and fervent it is, the more entirely will it be received.

There is a sense of quiet in this stage, what he calls the prayer of quiet, where no words are necessary, perhaps even no images. This stage would lack a precise articulation of the experience, as is often expressed in mystical literature, and, in a way, is itself “unlettered.”

Osuna writes:

It is beneficial to the recollected who have chosen this narrow road that leads to life to quiet the understanding not only in order to know God in a loftier, more suitable way, but also to help them pray more purely…. Stilling the understanding and making the will call out, we form brief prayer that at once penetrates the heavens. I do not call this prayer brief because it will not endure but because it uses no means other than love to reach God; and love can immediately join with him….

…The silence of love is marvelous and most admirable and praiseworthy, that silence wherein the understanding is profoundly quieted, receiving the sublimely contenting knowledge of experience. We clearly realize that when lovers are present to each other, they fall silent and the love that unites them supplies the want of words.

349. Ibid.

350. Ibid., XIII.3 (Giles, 346). Both the humanity of Christ as well as the use of images would be characteristic of the vernacular expression of spirituality, as often such images were used to catechize and form those who were unlettered. One can see here similarities to Ignatius of Loyola’s prayer of imagination found in his Spiritual Exercises.

351. Ibid., XIII.4 (Giles, 349).

352. Ibid., XXI.3 (558).
Note, first, the stress on experience, reminiscent of the theology of the Middle Ages, what Bernard of Clairvaux would call the book of experience; this would not be a “lettered” book. And second, love, is the highest form of knowledge. As such, it is an unlearned, that is, unlettered, knowledge that is to be experienced, and it is intimately expressed in and with silence.

This brief sketch of recogimiento as both way of life and specific practice of prayer, as articulated by Osuna, helps to give a more detailed context for Teresa’s timely reception of the Abecedario, and how it helped prepare her for reading Augustine’s Confessions. Teresa says that her uncle gave her Osuna’s work at the time she needed most: she had a sense that she desired something new in her prayer life. Not quite knowing how to proceed in prayer, she becomes resolved and eager for it once she learns of it. Recogimiento could have appealed to her on a number of levels: First, Osuna is quick to show that as a lifestyle it is for everyone, reinforcing the vernacular embrace of spirituality. Second, that Osuna identifies stages of prayer is helpful for Teresa, as she is able to try to locate herself as a religious within the stages, maybe even self-diagnose her feeling of lack in her prayer life up to this point. Third, it appeals to the spirit of reform already pervasive in Spain. It is interesting, however, that Teresa gets a copy of the text from her uncle, that is, from outside of the Encarnacion. This may speak either to a resistance to

353. See, for example, Bernard’s Sermon 3.I.1, in On the Song of Songs, 4 volumes, Cistercian Fathers Series, trans. Killian Walsh (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980), 100. Earlier in the work, Osuna gives a direct nod to Bernard, writing, “…you are to become an expert: that is, learn from experience. Consider that everyone is obliged to know the business of his ministry and to seek out someone to teach him or a book where it is explained so that he can learn through reading and asking questions. According to Saint Bernard, experience alone teaches wisdom of the heart, which is attained only through prayer….Those inexperienced in such matters will not understand them unless they read them more clearly in the book of experience.” (V.3 [147]). Note the appeal to Bernard: given the context of the monastic debate with emerging scholasticism (i.e., the “lettering” of theology), the vernacular spirituality of the devotio moderna would naturally be drawn to the Cistercian stress on experience.

354. Life, 4.7 (Kavanaugh, 67).
reform or an ignorance of it, if not a lack of eagerness for it, within Carmel’s walls at the time, even though Cisneros’ program for reform, particularly within religious houses, would have been considerably widespread. Carmel could have been slow to receive and embrace renewal.

From this point on in her Vida, Teresa details her practice of recogimiento, and the reader can see how her initial attraction to it is fitting for one who is eager to begin something new, before habit and discipline take hold. She writes of placing herself in solitude, trying to create a quiet exterior space so that she can foster an interior space that could open her to the possibility of the prayer of quiet. She also expresses frustration that she had no one to mentor her or guide her regularly in the process, nor someone to whom she could confess. Already she finds difficulty in both being understood and being able to express her inner life; this could also be a sign that those “masters” whom she encountered may not have been familiar with, endorsers of, nor practitioners of recogimiento. Even so, she admits that God granted her the prayer of quiet, “[a]nd sometimes [she] arrived at union, although [she] did not understand what the one was or the other, or how much they were to be prized.”

While she expresses such occasions as favors from God, Teresa readily acknowledges their fleeting nature and the difficulty she began to experience in her ongoing practice of recogimiento, as well as a need for accompaniment:

I tried as hard I could to keep Jesus Christ, our God and our Lord, present within me, and that was my way of prayer. If I reflected upon some phrase of His Passion, I represented Him to myself interiorly. But most of the time I spent reading good books, which was my whole recreation. For God didn’t give me talent for discursive thought or for a profitable use of the imagination. In fact, my imagination is so dull that I never succeeded even to think about and represent in my mind – as hard as I tried – the humanity of the Lord. And although, if one perseveres, one reaches contemplation more quickly along this way of inability to work discursively with the intellect, this way is nonetheless most laborious and painful. For if the will is not occupied and love has nothing present with which to be engaged, the soul is left as though without support or

355. Ibid.
exercise, and the solitude and dryness is very troublesome, and the battle with one’s thoughts extraordinary.\textsuperscript{356}

Here, one can see that Teresa tries to follow the guidance offered by Osuna in the second stage, in using her imagination to focus on the humanity of Christ, to move from vocal prayer to prayer of the heart, yet realizes she has difficulty with Osuna’s recommendations. Recall her conversations with Doña María de Briceño y Contreras, the Augustinian nun from Nuestra Señora de Gracia, who counseled her and challenged her to reflect on the Passion of Christ and to feel it in her heart; she herself was probably a practitioner of recogimiento. Here, as a result of reading El Tercer Abecedario, Teresa revisits this practice, still finding difficulty with it.

Coupled with this hardship is aridity in her prayer. What sustains her is, once again, the reading of good books. Reading continues to engage Teresa, and she begins to adapt it in her practice of recogimiento, with or without good counsel, as she says; the decision becomes based on her experience:

Reading is very helpful for recollection and serves as a necessary substitute – even though little may be read – for anyone who is unable to practice mental prayer….Now it seems to me that it was the Lord’s providence that I not find anyone to instruct me, for, on account of my being unable to reflect discursively, it would have been impossible, I think, to have persevered for the eighteen years I suffered this trial, and in that great dryness. In all those years, except for the time after Communion, I never dared to begin prayer without a book. For my soul was as fearful of being without it during prayer as it would have been should it have had to battle with a lot of people. With this recourse, which was like a partner or a shield by which to sustain blows of my many thoughts, I went about being consoled. For the dryness was not usually felt, but it was always felt when I was without a book. Then my soul was thrown into confusion and my thoughts ran wild. With a book I began to collect them, and my soul was drawn to recollection. And many times just opening the book was enough; at others times I read a little, and at others a great deal, according to the favor the Lord granted me.\textsuperscript{357}

\textsuperscript{356} Ibid., 4.8 (68).

\textsuperscript{357} Ibid., 4.8-9 (68).
Reading not only brought her great comfort and consolation, but it helped her to focus and re-collect herself. Teresa’s insight is not surprising given how she had written earlier about the good books provided her in her childhood, and how returning to the practice of reading such works, along with good companions, helped her in her adolescence, after falling away from the practice, as well as her own vocational discernment.

Osuna writes,

It happens that a great number of books can impede learning in the same way that a confusing number of people can obstruct victory. May it please God for you to have one book and study it carefully so that you do not go jumping around from one to another but stand your ground with one…. Consider that a crowd of books can make a library out of your cell but not of your memory, for your memory can hold only the titles. One book by itself, however, can turn your memory into a library and this will prove more beneficial than many.358

Very pointedly, Osuna addresses not only a spirit of non-possessiveness and the interior attitude that come with a life lived in authentic recollection, but even more strongly and critically the possessiveness associated with the lettered life of the erudite – the letrados – who claimed specialization on what was understood as knowledge.

Teresa need not have read Osuna as an accusation of her own relationship with books; rather, she could have been consoled and affirmed in her practice of prayerful reading, nor does she make an apology for her use of good books. Perhaps when her eyes first came across this passage, she herself may have been caused to take stock in her own collection; whether or not on her person, she may have harvested those titles in her memory that she considered good, those works that accompanied her up to that point of her life, that indeed influenced her “for the good,” reinforcing those relationships that helped to begin to soften her heart and to become more conscious of her desire for God. And Osuna’s Abecedario could have become that “one book”

358. Third Spiritual Alphabet, XII.1 (Giles, 318).
up to that point that not only focused her prayerful practices but also aided her reading of other works, especially during those eighteen years that she experienced spiritual aridity. It would eventually be replaced by another, however.

Reading was not only an aid to prayer; it was already a form of prayer for Teresa. In addition to the devotional practices and vocal prayer she learned from her parents, Teresa had been practicing *lectio divina* since her childhood, whether or not she called it as such nor even knew it to be. “Good books” helped her to be herself and to draw closer to God, underscoring all the more Slade’s earlier description of Teresa as bookish. It is no wonder, then, that reading, since it was already so much a part of Teresa’s identity, *needed* to be part of the experience of collecting herself, of centering herself – indeed, harvesting herself in *recogimiento* – in order to keep her focused.

Interestingly, she notices that she does not need books after she receives the Eucharist; this is an important realization to keep in the fore, since Teresa may be subtly suggesting that she sees an underlying connection between Word and Sacrament. That somehow she did not need books during Communion may actually show that there was something Eucharistic and sacramental about her own *lectio*: the Eucharist provided a similar comfort, aid, and focus that good books did.359 Even so, Teresa maintains that the dryness she experienced in prayer, which was significantly heightened without books, as well as her inability to imagine and stay focused on the humanity of Christ (i.e., located within Osuna’s second stage), lasted for at least eighteen

359. The next section will make the argument that Teresa receives this insight through Augustine.
years.\footnote{Note earlier in \textit{Life}, 4.7 that Teresa said it was twenty years. While there is no real significant difference between eighteen and twenty years, Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, as well as Peers, in their respective translations/commentaries say that Teresa often confuses dates; e.g., her entrance, profession, how old she was when she first practiced \textit{recogimiento}.} This suggests that a significant shift or conversion would eventually take place within her after these eighteen years.

\textbf{The Heart of Conversion: Teresa meets Augustine}

Coupled with inconsistent mentorship from both confessors and spiritual directors who did not understand her, spiritual aridity was a real struggle for Teresa. She had initially embraced \textit{recogimiento} with a beginner’s eagerness and enthusiasm, but had found the discipline of prayer increasingly difficult. Rowan Williams offers this summary:

\begin{quote}
[Teresa] tells us that she continued to struggle with some kind of private prayer during these years except for one patch of rather more than twelve months when she gave up entirely (7.11, 8.3). What was her prayer like? We know from 7.7-10 that she constantly used a book to focus her mind; but it seems that she also continued, for the whole eighteen years, to try to use her mind in the approved fashion….The effort involved made the prospect of prayer alarming; she speaks of the depression she regularly felt on going to the chapel to pray, and describes how on many occasions, she waited impatiently for the clock to signal her release.\footnote{Williams, \textit{Teresa of Avila}, 66-67.}
\end{quote}

Teresa interweaves these descriptions within episodes of what she labels as deceptive behavior mixed in with a continued desire to be pleasing, not unlike her struggles during adolescence.

Williams suggests that “[m]odern readers have sometimes found these chapters [i.e., 5-8] baffling. It is by no means clear what sort of prayer Teresa does and does not practice; and it is hard to see why she judges herself so very harshly in the period being described.”\footnote{Ibid., 65.} Instead,
Teresa remains caught up in relaying these episodes to her reader, and suggests that they were distractions and symptomatic of her spiritual dryness.

She writes specifically of a friendship with a priest who served briefly as her confessor and began to take a liking to her, and who ironically confesses to her about an improper relationship he was having with a woman. Teresa counsels him strongly, encouraging him to end the relationship, and so he does. While she acknowledges the good that was done in the end, Teresa evaluates this experience as one with mixed motivations, seeing that their relationship with one another had been dangerously flirtatious. “[I]f we had not remained very much in God’s presence,” she writes, “there would have been more serious offenses.”

This is not unlike her earlier adolescent instances of using her own attractiveness to be pleasing in another’s sight. Such occurrences become for Teresa moments tied intimately to appearance and perception, what she often labels as vanity: “Since I thus began to go from pastime to pastime, from vanity to vanity, from one occasion to another, to place myself so often in very serious occasions, and to allow my soul to become so spoiled by many vanities,” she writes, “I was then ashamed to return to the search for God by means of a friendship as special as is that found in the intimate exchange of prayer.”

From experiences such as this, Teresa comes to realize not only the need for authenticity and transparency in prayer, but even more, the incapability of being inauthentic before God. God cannot be deceived: in prayer she would stand accused, so it was easier for her to forego the practice or at least to lessen the discipline and intensity with which she approached recogimiento as non-vocal prayer: “…seeing myself so corrupted I began to fear the practice of prayer. It

363. *Life*, 5.6 (Kavanaugh, 73).
364. Ibid., 7.1 (Kavanaugh, 82).
seemed to me that, since in being wicked I was among the worst, it was better to go the way of the many, to recite what I was obliged to vocally and not to practice mental prayer and so much intimacy with God.”

Teresa admits a growing fragmentation, a dis-integration and split between the exterior and the interior of her life. Externally, Teresa would say that she appears to be a “good nun,” participating in community prayer at the appointed times, keeping up with her house chores as assigned, and relating well to the other sisters with whom she lived, all the while experiencing inner turmoil and struggle.

Her appearance is so convincing that others are drawn to speak with her about spiritual matters, and Teresa complies and gives advice, even to her own father, yet, because she does not want to deceive him, she at least admits she was no longer praying as she had, offering the excuse of her previous illnesses, an excuse that he finds believable. She looks back on such moments with regret and a sense of failed responsibility, as she fears that she could have easily led others astray, recalling, for instance, a vision of Christ looking on her displeasingly, probably when gossiping with another sister, saying that “this vision left such an impression on me that, though more than twenty-six years have gone by, it seems to me it is still present.”

Indeed, as Williams asserts, it does appear that Teresa does come down hard on herself, perhaps even over-analyzing and over-evaluating the state of her heart as well as her motivations, scrupulously so, as she becomes increasingly aware of her own shortcomings and failings. It could be, however, that something else had been going on in, and as a result of, her

365. Ibid.

366. Ibid., 7.2 (Kavanaugh, 83).

367. Again, this is not to suggest that Teresa was not praying, but no longer praying as she had, that is, as in that called for in the practice of recogimiento. Teresa was still participating in communal prayer, as well as vocal prayer.

368. Ibid., 7.6 (Kavanaugh, 85).
prayerful practices. Recall that Guigo describes a heightened awareness of one’s sinfulness that comes with the *intentio* of the heart in *oratio*: that the heart, as it begins to be stretched, experiences a pull, a turning *from* that moves to a turning *toward*. The aridity that she is undergoing could very well be a spiritual tension, a tension within her heart. Teresa, in her *oratio*, even though she “felt” (as in the aridity) like she was not praying, may have actually been beginning to feel an *intentio* of her heart, thereby being bothered, intensely so, by any sort of sinful behavior.

For instance, she writes that after her father’s death, a Dominican friar becomes her confessor,

> who was very good and God-fearing [and] profited me a great deal….And, little by little, in beginning to talk to him, I discussed my prayer with him. He told me not to let it go, that it could in no way do me anything but good. I began to return to it, although not to give up the occasions of sin; and I never again abandoned it.

> I was living an extremely burdensome life, because in prayer I understood more clearly my faults. On the one hand God was calling me; on the other hand I was following the world. All of the things of God made me happy; those of the world held me bound. It seems I desired to harmonize these two contraries – so inimical to one another – such as are the spiritual life and sensory joys, pleasures, and pastimes. In prayer I was having trouble, for my spirit was not proceeding as lord but as slave. And so I was not able to shut [*encerrar*] myself within myself (which was my whole manner of procedure in prayer); instead, I shut [*encerrar*] within myself a thousand vanities.\(^{369}\)

Teresa is encouraged to keep with her prayer, despite the struggle, and she describes a pull in two directions – a call – between God and the vanities of the world. Interestingly, she has a difficult time recollecting, that is, going within herself without seeing her failings; the Spanish she uses is *encerrar*, to shut or to lock away: while she wants to be able to go within herself, she also desires to shut out all those aspects of her life that are sinful and in need of healing, but her prayer will not let her do so; in prayer, she is forced to face herself.

\(^{369}\) Ibid., 7.17 (Kavanaugh, 91).
One might say that her prayer was “working,” that, in her collecting and gathering, she could not escape herself and all that came with it. The work of *recogimiento* would be one that naturally involves *intentio*, a tension in realizing that all has to be gathered, the whole of the person has to be harvested, which includes those aspects most especially in need of integration, healing, correction, and transformation. In order to go further in her prayer, she would need to face herself all the more: all the appearances, perceptions, and realities of her person would need to be collected and gathered into one as an offering. Such an *exercitatorio* of her heart would be one in need of discipline and accompaniment, accompaniment that could both encourage and challenge, which Teresa seems to have been given, at least initially, by this Dominican confessor. Teresa offers the following insight about such endeavors:

However, I see clearly the great mercy [*veo claro la gran misericordia*] the Lord bestowed on me; for though I continued to associate with the world, I had the courage to practice prayer….Though we are always in the presence of God, it seems to me the manner is different with those who practice prayer, for they are aware that He is looking at them. With others, it can happen that several days pass without their recalling that God sees them.

True, during these years there were many months, and I believe sometimes a year, that I kept from offending the Lord. And I put forth some effort, and at times a great deal of it, not to offend Him….But I remember little of these good days, and so they must have been few; and a lot about the bad ones. Few days passed without my devoting long periods to prayer, unless I was very sick or very busy. When I was sick, I felt better when with God. I tried to get persons who talked with me to practice prayer, and I besought the Lord for them. I frequently spoke of Him.

So, save for the year I mentioned, for more than eighteen of the twenty-eight years since I began prayer, I suffered this battle and conflict between friendship with God and friendship with the world…. …I have recounted all this at length, as I already mentioned, so that the mercy of God and my ingratitude might be seen; also, in order that one might understand the great good God does for a soul that willingly disposes itself for the practice of prayer, even though it is not as disposed as is necessary. I recount this also that one may understand how if the soul perseveres in prayer, in the midst of the sins, temptations, and failures of a thousand kinds…in the end, I hold as certain, the Lord will draw it forth to the harbor of salvation as – now it seems – He did for me. May it please His Majesty that I do not get lost again.\(^{370}\)

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370. Ibid., 8.2-4 (Kavanaugh, 95-96).
It is no coincidence that Teresa is often found ill, as in the above excerpt, or that she associates much of her spiritual struggles with physical illness. While this is not an attempt to psychologize the body-soul relationship, there is some connection that Teresa seems to suggest between the two that underscores the need for healing on which her practice of *recogimiento* is casting light. Whenever she is ill, or recovering from being ill, Teresa seems to find comfort in God’s presence; consider, for instance, her “heart pains” and the visits with her uncle who introduced to her the *Abecedario*. And so, her ongoing practice of *recogimiento* suggests growth toward wholeness and healing; that in her keen awareness of being ill and in need of healing comes also a keen awareness of her need for God.

In addition, for the past few chapters, Teresa consistently mentions the eighteen years of struggle after she first started practicing *recogimiento*. She invites her reader to take note, to pay attention, and to consider that something significant happened to her and in her after those years, a marked change that she had noticed, something that she would come to see as a climax, a highlight in her story, perhaps as a coming to full consciousness about her struggles in her heart, as opposed to being partially conscious as noted earlier. If, as Teresian scholars believe, she first read Osuna’s work sometime shortly after she made her first profession of vows in 1537, then it would be around the year 1555 that these struggles would somehow have ceased, that a new consciousness about her life would be made known.

Furthermore, this excerpt shows that she is getting close to revealing the event, as the style in which it is written not only repeats and revisits familiar themes – e.g., sickness, her sinfulness, desire and importance of speaking with others about prayer – but her acknowledgement of recounting her story/ies at length in particular evokes a sense of purpose in her telling, not simply a repetition for repetition’s sake (nor even spiritual amnesia); her *seeming*
repetition is an intensification about which she is preparing to share. Teresa emphasizes, too, that her perseverance in prayer, despite her own sinfulness, her failings, and her sickness – which was the counsel previously given to her – would reap the mercy of God, that is, her keen awareness of God’s enduring presence that had always been operative had come to light in favors given, which is her way of speaking about grace freely given out of God’s generosity. Even more, she leads her readers to believe that this realization was, as said above, an event in which she was no longer lost, a place from which she could see claro mercy as operative, and consequently has been able to stay the course, up to the time of her writing her Vida.\footnote{371}

Notice that there is a twofold rendering of clarity here. Without revealing the event just yet, Teresa provides a glimpse of her sense of mission that she has received. Not only was she able to see “claro,” but she understood that hers was also to help others to see with that same clarity, “[t]o make known His mercy and the great good it did me not to abandon prayer and reading.”\footnote{372} In some ways, just as Teresa had already been want to talk with others about prayer and the things of God, she does so now with a newfound purpose, rooted in authenticity, that is, no longer dis-integrated and disconnected from her interior struggles, but from a place of a practitioner seeking greater wholeness. This is a clarity with which she is writing, and it reflects Tracy’s call to publicness after an event of disclosure in a classic text.

However, there is also clarity \textit{about} which she is writing, that is, a clarity that began to open her eyes, to perceive and understand a movement that was occurring within herself at the time it was happening. For example, she writes,

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\footnote{371. Again, the \textit{Vida} was begun around 1565. Chapter Four: \textit{Contemplatio} – the Fire will explore more in depth the writing of her \textit{Vida}, the style and rhetoric with which Teresa wrote her \textit{Vida}, most of which are Augustinian techniques gleaned from her \textit{lectio} of the \textit{Confessions}.}

\footnote{372. \textit{Life}, 8.10 (Kavanaugh, 99).}
I understood clearly [bien entiendo yo] that I was in captivity, but I wasn’t able to understand why [no acabava de entender]; nor was I able to believe completely that what my confessors did not consider serious was less wrong than I in my soul felt it was….Since my confessors saw my good desires and my devotion to prayer, they thought I was doing a great deal. But my soul understood [mas entendía mi alma] that it was doing what it was obligated to do for Him to whom it owed much.373

Teresa is seeing more clearly a disconnect in her life: she believes she is “reading” her soul correctly, despite what others perceive in their “reading” of her, which is a shift from her earlier confession of deception; the difference here being that she is honestly expressing her interior life and not trying to withhold information or deceive.

Part of this clarity, too, is that she understands that her motivation in persevering in prayer has been out of a sense of obligation and responsibility. In other words, she is beginning to realize, to understand more clearly, that prayer should not be rooted solely in obligation, which is not to devalue the role of discipline and regularity necessitated in prayer. This sense of duty could be part of the reason for the lack and the aridity she experiences, yet, at the same time, that she is knowingly only praying from a place of obligation shows that Teresa believes she is holding back, that she is not giving herself completely, which is preventing her from wholly being gathered and harvested in recogimiento. As she says, she is “in captivity,” holding herself bound and captive.374

In addition, her dutifulness to the practice of prayer could also be intimately tied to her struggles with appearance and the desire to be pleasing before God and others, as well as her inability to articulate well the interior movements that were often misunderstood by her confessors who tended to dismiss her concerns and give her bad counsel, with the exception of the Dominican friar. Instead, a new understanding is beginning to emerge within Teresa – a

373. Ibid., 8.11 (Kavanaugh, 99; Steggink, 63).

374. Ibid.
fuller clarity – one that would take her beyond obligation as her primary motivation for prayer and help her to experience freedom from such imprisonment. Prayer out of obligation keeps one at an “appearance” level of practice; what was needed for Teresa, as she reflects back, was accompaniment and counsel that would help her to discern better and go deeper, breaking through the surface level of her heart. “I wanted to live (for I well understood that I was not living but was struggling with a shadow of death),” she laments, “but I had no one to give me life, and I was unable to catch hold of it.”375

At this point in her story and in her practice, a significant shift begins to occur within Teresa. Recall how Osuna locates the second stage of prayer with the ability to use one’s imagination, to use an image on which to concentrate, especially a scene of the Passion of Christ, in order to enter into prayer of the heart, that is, to move from vocal prayer to prayer of quiet; and recall, too, that Teresa has noted her difficulty with such a practice. Nevertheless, she writes,

Well, my soul was now tired [cansada]; and, in spite of its desire, my wretched habits would not allow it rest [no la dejavan descansar las ruines costumbres que tenía]. It happened to me that one day entering the oratory I saw a statue they had borrowed for a certain feast to be celebrated in the house. It represented the much wounded Christ and was very devotional so that beholding it I was utterly distressed in seeing Him that way, for it well represented what He suffered for us. I felt so keenly aware of how poorly I thanked Him for those wounds that, it seems to me, my heart broke [que el corazón me parece se me partía]. Beseeching Him to strengthen me once and for all that I might not offend Him, I threw myself down before Him with the greatest outpouring of tears [y arrojéme cabe El con grandísimo derramamiento].376

Teresa reached a new moment: she was moved before an image, and she noticed a change within

375. Ibid., 8.12 (Kavanaugh, 100).

376. Ibid., 9.1 (Kavanaugh, 100; Steggink, 63).
her heart. \(^{377}\) It seems that for the first time Teresa notices a stirring within herself from her heart and it causes her to respond, to move, to throw herself down on the ground in a gesture of literal humility.

While there had been before a tension and a pull in her heart, that tension was such that in this moment, her heart was stretched so much that it broke, it was moved. And this brokenness evoked a response. She continues, “This is the method of prayer I then used: since I could not reflect discursively with the intellect, I strove to represent Christ within me, and it did me greater good – in my opinion – to represent Him in those scenes where I saw Him more alone. It seemed to me that being alone and afflicted, as a person in need, He had to accept me….The scene of His prayer in the garden, especially, was a comfort to me; I strove to be His companion there.”\(^{378}\) Notice the change: Teresa is able to represent Christ within her, that is, use her imagination, and, at the same time, she is moved to enter into relationship with Christ. Williams draws out the insight further: “[Teresa] gets into the habit of turning her mind to the figure of Jesus in his moments of isolation….[She] does this from a conviction that Christ in his vulnerability cannot refuse her presence, her ‘consolation’, however unworthy she may be, so great is his need: ‘He had to accept me’.”\(^{379}\)

Teresa, who had so longed for good quality companionship and mentorship, found in her very heart the desire to be the one companioning, just as she had done earlier – only this time companioning Christ himself and from a more authentic place: she was able to be herself, sins and all, and not hide herself nor deceive anyone. She desired to give of herself to Christ, from

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377. Scholars seem to believe that the image of Christ is the Ecce Homo still kept in the Encarnacion. See Williams, Teresa of Avila, 67, and Kavanaugh, 471, no. 9.1.

378. Life, 9.4 (Kavanaugh, 101).

379. Williams, Teresa of Avila, 68.
her heart, a heart broken, one that had been aching; she was in touch with her own ability to receive and to give *misericordia*, a heart in misery reaching to another’s misery, because of her own sense of isolation in prayer that she felt. Her heart had been suffering, both physically and spiritually, and she was able to channel it in the direction of Christ, that is, with *intentio*, just as Guigo describes the movement of the heart in *oratio*.

It is at this crucial point in the narrative in which Teresa introduces her encounter of Augustine’s *Confessions*. “At this time [*en este tiempo,*]” she writes, “they gave me [*dieron*] *The Confessions of St. Augustine.* It seems the Lord ordained this, because I had not tried to procure a copy, nor had I ever seen one.” These two sentences are revealing. Note that it is *after* Teresa describes her prayerful experience with the wounded Christ and other images of the suffering Christ that she then says, “*en este tiempo.*” Consider that before now Teresa usually *begins* prayer with a book. That she describes the encounter with the image before introducing the *Confessions* suggests that she did not use the text, nor was she given it, first, though it remains somewhat unclear since “*en este tiempo*” could be rendered as “at” or “during” or “in” this time. Given that Teresa sometimes has difficulty with an accurate sense of timing of things in the telling of her story is also worth keeping to the fore.

If it is that she did receive the *Confessions* before her prayerful encounters, Teresa would most likely have introduced her account of it first, since again, on previous occasions of prayer she began with the reception of a book. Instead, it seems significant that she introduces the text

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380. Williams offers an additional wonderfully rich insight regarding her experience of isolation and acceptance, namely, that Teresa was also in touch with the fact that she was one who was in search of acceptance on many levels, especially when she was writing her *Vida*, most especially as a woman in the Church questioned on her authority and often found pleasing and attractive (68-69). One might also add that her *converso* family history, which was established in Chapter One, was also a point of concern and a source of the desire to be accepted and pleasing. These insights will be touched upon further in Chapter Four.

381. *Life*, 9.7 (Kavanaugh, 103; Steggink, 65).
after the encounter with the image of the wounded Christ. It could be that she is demonstrating a change in her prayer here especially in how she uses a text.

That she introduces the *Confessions* with “en este tiempo” could also allow for a certain relationship she wants to promote in how she understands her reception and use of the text. By linking both the prayer experience(s) she just recounted and her reception of the *Confessions* with the clause “en este tiempo,” Teresa shows a parallel relationship with the two “events,” placing them alongside one another, in such a way that they mirror each other.

In addition, Teresa says “dieron,” that is, “they gave” the book to her. Interestingly, Teresa uses a general third person plural here, not specifying the person(s) who gave her the text. Recall that usually Teresa associates the people with whom she had at least read significant books, if not by whom she was given them: her father, mother, brother, and uncle all were named in her reception of books, the most significant being, thus far, Osuna’s *Abecedario* which was introduced and given to her by her uncle. If the *Confessions* holds significance as it seems it does, it is curious, then, that the gifter of the *Confessions* is not identified here: it is simply a generic “they.”

There are several possibilities worth mentioning, though none have been definitively determined nor explored by scholarship. First, since immediately after this sentence she reminds the reader that she was educated for a time by the Augustinian nuns of *Nuestra Señora de Gracia*, it could be that it was through her continued relationship with some members of the community, perhaps Doña María de Briceño y Contreras who had mentored her, that she was given a copy. She does say that she has a “muy aficionada” – great affection and fondness for Augustine because of this community; obviously, she would have first learned of him through them. Second, it could also be that the “they” are members of her own Carmelite community of
Encarnación, who, as a result of the renewal begun by Cardinal Cisneros, with particular attention paid to women’s religious communities, were gifted a copy for their library. Regardless, there is no reason given for why she receives the text; it could be as a result of conversation with another or others, perhaps about her recent experiences of prayer before the image of the wounded Christ.

There may be something more striking and purposeful, however, in the way Teresa recounts her introduction to the Confessions. It could simply be en este tiempo, as in timely, that she happened upon the book, yet Teresa relays, “It seems the Lord ordained this, because I had not tried to procure a copy, nor had I ever seen one.” Teresa may have intentionally left out the details in her Vida in order that she might give greater emphasis to God’s providence and activity in her reception of it, which would serve to underscore and mark the shift she claims that has taken place within her; that is, she sees her reception of the text as a result of God’s initiative, God’s timing, God’s work – the intentio, the stretching and reaching out of God. If this is the case, it is en este tiempo that Teresa all the more draws attention to the impact of her reception and reading of the Confessions and wants her reader to know that something significant happened to her because of it.

Related to this notion of timeliness is the very “time” that surrounds the copy of the Confessions she received. Again, Teresa says she had never before seen the work. As has been previously discussed, the Confessions was first translated into Spanish, in 1554 by a Portuguese friar, Sebastián Toscano, a member of the Order of Saint Augustine; so 1554 is the absolute earliest that Teresa could have received the text in her hands. This date is about seventeen to

382. The end of the dedication of the translation given by Toscano reads, “De esta su casa de Santo Augustín de Salamanca, a quince de enero de 1554” (8).
eighteen years since she first read Osuna’s Abecedario and started practicing recogimiento, probably around 1537, and Teresa has consistently reminded her reader of the struggle she experienced for eighteen years since she became a practitioner. If 1537 is the actual year she would have read Osuna’s text, then a strict eighteen years would be 1555, which is certainly in the realm of possibility, given the demand for printing and circulation of materials to the various communities. In addition, that Teresa places within the narrative her reception of the Confessions in this “eighteenth year” demonstrates the relationship she sees the text having with the shift that she experiences in her prayer beginning with her encounter of the image of the wounded Christ; this would serve to reinforce the parallel structure of the passages.

A fascinating side note that may accentuate the significance that the Confessions may have had in Teresa’s life is found in Toscano’s dedication and introduction that accompanies the translation. The first sentence reads: “Señora Doña Leonor Mascareñas, aya del muy poderoso príncipe de España don Felipe, y del serénísimo Infante su hijo, Fray Sebastian Toscano no desea todo bien y salud.” A noblewoman and friend to the court, Mascareñas was, like Toscano, Portuguese by birth, and also a woman of her time, a strong proponent of vernacular spirituality and champion of the renewal and reform of religious communities, eventually founding a Franciscan community in Madrid. Throughout the dedication’s entirety, Toscano shows great affection and indebtedness to Mascareñas, referring to her as “muy ilustre señora”

383. See footnote 317, concerning the timing of Teresa’s entrance in the novitiate, her religious profession, her taking ill, and her visit with her uncle.


and “Vuestra Señoría” several times, holding her in high esteem. What is even more striking is that Toscano credits Mascareñas as the one who not only encouraged but commissioned him to translate the Confessions into Spanish, despite his initial reluctance. Toscano writes,

*Sólamente quiero tratar con Vuestra Señoría, por cuya voluntad me puse en este negocio. Vuestra Señoría me mandó que tradujese las Confesiones de nuestro padre Sant Augustín. Y si me mandara que le hiciera este servicio, volviéndolas en mi propia lengua portuguesa, tuviera por cosa dificultosa; pero siendo en la castellana, que me es ajena, parece a me cuasi imposible, por muchas causas que dijera aquí, si lo hubiera de haber con otro que con Vuestra Señoría, de quien estoy bien cierto que suplirá todas mis faltas.*

Mascareñas’ connection to Teresa is all the more intriguing and reinforces Toscano’s praise of her. In her book of Foundations, Teresa writes,

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. She had been the king’s governess and is a very good servant of our Lord. I had lodged there at other times when on certain occasions I had to pass by, and she always showed me much kindness.

This lady told me she was happy that I had come at that time because a hermit was there who eagerly desired to meet me and that it seemed to her the life he and his companions were living was very similar to that of our rule.

One can see Mascareñas’ involvement in and support of the reform efforts of Teresa and others, as she extends hospitality to others and draws them into relationship with one another. It seems that Teresa and Mascareñas may have met through María de Jesús, herself a Carmelite, whom Teresa identifies as a beata, that is, a religious woman not bound by strict enclosure, much like the custom of the Encarnación, and had begun a reformed Carmelite community in Alcalá.

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386. Toscano, 6.

387. Foundations, 17.5 (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, III, 180). Peers locates this particular reference to 1569, when Teresa was on her way to Madrid to look into the possibility of a foundation there and that Teresa also stayed with Mascareñas on a previous occasion for two weeks on her way to Alcalá de Henares in 1567 (See Peers, *Life*, xxix-xxx).
around the same time Teresa first began hers at St. Joseph’s in 1562. According to Teresa, they had consulted with one another in their mutual desires for reform and renewal. Interestingly, the property of the community in Alcalá was gifted to María de Jesús by Mascareñas. However, as María de Jesús’ vision for reform was becoming known more and more for its severe austerity and strict understanding of absolute poverty – Teresa herself says that María de Jesús’ walked barefoot to Rome – so did Mascareñas great concern for the community’s overall health grow. In 1567, Teresa stayed with Mascareñas for two weeks at her home, where she asked Teresa to intervene and help soften the community’s lived understanding of the Carmelite Rule. Given Teresa’s relationship with María de Jesús, her intervention on Mascareñas’ behalf was reasonable and understandable.

Considering that Teresa began writing her Vida in 1562 and finished it in 1565, one can see that Teresa’s reception of the Confessions, as she includes it and recounts its impact on her life in her Vida, could be understood to be credited in some form to Mascareñas; in fact, both she and Toscano could be among the non-specific “they” who gave the book to her, regardless of

388. See Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, Volume I, 19, for a good explanation of beata. In the case of María de Jesús, she was considered a beata, that is, a former religious woman.

389. “…and during the fifteen days that [María de Jesús] stayed with me, we arranged how we should go about founding these monasteries. Until I had spoken to her, it hadn’t been brought to my notice that our rule [i.e., the Rule of St. Albert, Patriarch of Jerusalem] – before it was mitigated – ordered that we own nothing, nor had I been about to found the house without an income” (Life, 35.2 [Kavanaugh, 303]).

390. See Life, 35.1-2 (Kavanaugh, 303). Peers writes, “Born at Granada in 1522, [Maria de Jesus] had been left a widow when very young and had entered the convent of the Calced Carmelites of her native city. But, believing that God had called her to found a reformed house of the Order, she left the convent before making her profession and journeyed with some friends to Rome, where she eventually obtained a Brief for this purpose. Her attempts to make a foundation in Granada failed and it was then that she came to see St. Teresa, as described in [Chapter 35 of the Vida]. Later Dona Leonor de Mascarenas gave her a house at Alcalá de Henares and the convent was founded in July 1563” (Peers, Life, 241, n. 4).

391. Life, 35.1 (Kavanaugh, 303).

whether Teresa would have known Mascareñas when she first read it. In other words, had Mascareñas not encouraged and pressed Toscano to work on the translation, the Confessions may not have found itself in the hands of Teresa, at least en este tiempo. Since Teresa would have met Mascareñas by the time of her writing her Vida, she could have considered her and Toscano to be part of the providence of God and had them in mind and heart – retrospectively – when composing that section of the narrative, given Teresa’s friendship with her at the time and knowing by then that the hand of Mascareñas was behind the translation, since she would most likely have read the dedication and, perhaps, even had a discussion about the text with her. Because of the impact of the Confessions in her life, Teresa may have been all the more attracted to friendship with Mascareñas, and, maybe, like Toscano, felt indebted to her because of her influence in and embrace of vernacular literacy.

While filled with some conjecture, this brief aside helps to draw out and elucidate the timeliness of Teresa’s reception and its impact, especially if Teresa’s experience before the image of the wounded Christ happened first, as the narrative strongly seems to suggest. That she places the event of her reading the Confessions immediately after the event(s) of her prayer provides a mirror effect, a parallel, that helps to serve as an interpretive tool for what may have been going on interiorly for Teresa; in fact, her happening upon the Confessions and reading the text after these events provided for Teresa such a tool. Her esteem for Augustine, first associated with her by her time with the Augustinian community, seems to be rooted in an experience of kinship, she writes,

because he had been a sinner, for I found great consolation in sinners, whom, after having been sinners, the Lord brought back to Himself. It seemed to me I could find help in them and that since the Lord had pardoned them He could also pardon me. But there was one thing that left me inconsolable, as I have mentioned, and that was that the Lord called them only once, and they did not turn back and fall again; whereas in my case I had turned back so often that I was worn out [fatigava] from it. But by considering the love
He bore me, I regained my courage [que el amor que me tenia, tornava a animarme], for I never lost confidence in His mercy; in myself, I lost it many times.393

While not saying so directly or explicitly, Teresa seems to suggest that Augustine, more than any other saint, offered her consolation and hope since he, like Teresa, evidenced struggle, shame, anxiety, and disappointment in himself so many times throughout his Confessions. And it has something to do with her sense of fatigue that she notes here, which repeats the tiredness she had expressed earlier394 when she first began to recount her experience before the image of the wounded Christ, which evoked the response of the breaking open of her heart.

Again, it was in her consideration of Christ’s love for her that she felt the change, the move in her heart. The Spanish is particularly strong: the love that Christ had for her turned her, enlivened her, gave her life, that is, animarme.

Since she most likely would have read Toscano’s dedication and introduction, she would have also been offered a brief summary by him that would have attracted her and intrigued her, perhaps even helping her to remain focused when reading the text. Toscano writes,

Aquí se ven como en retrato al vivo debujadas, de una parte la miseria humana, y de otra la misericordia de que Dios usa con sus criaturas; el odio con que se han de huir los vicios, y el amor que se debe a las virtudes, cuán malo es el mundo, y cuán bueno es Dios; la brevedad y engaños de esta vida, y la seguridad y perpetuidad de la otra. Hay en él grandes doctrinas porque informa desde la niñez hasta la vejez cuál deba ser cristiano, cuán humilde, cuán piadosa, cuán despreciador de todo lo visible y cuán amador de la riqueza y hermosura eterna.395

These few sentences alone draw forth a connection that Teresa would feel toward Augustine, as someone like herself who evidenced struggle between deception and authenticity, vice and virtue, and who could possibly mentor her, companion her, even offer her a template for living.

393. Life, 9.7 (Kavanaugh, 103; Steggink, 65).
394. Ibid., 9.1 (Kavanaugh, 100).
Teresa continues, “It made me fearful to see how little I could do by myself and how bound I became so that I was unable to resolve to give myself entirely to God.” Teresa works toward an insight and comes to the realization that the battle was with herself and what she thought she was capable of doing by herself, despite the countless favors of God. While she had been able to admit that grace had been active in her life all along, she nonetheless compartmentalized God’s work, such that she focused solely on what she tried to do on her own, and she continued to come up short and disappointed in herself. Teresa was not only bound by her sinfulness; Teresa was tied to fear and to an understanding that her efforts in her spiritual life were merit-based. Augustine helped her shift such an understanding: “As I began to read the Confessions,” she reveals, “it seemed to me I saw myself in them [paréceme me via yo allí]. I began to commend myself very much to this glorious saint.”

Teresa saw herself in the Confessions. Teresa saw herself in Augustine’s story. She saw herself in and with Augustine – as in a mirror – and identified with him. She did not feel alone; instead, Teresa felt companioned, accompanied in her struggle. This mirror effect establishes a parallel in her narrative, interpreting how she comes to understand and articulate what has been going on interiorly, with regard to her prayer life, her struggle to be pleasing coupled with an anxiety of being deceiving, and her fundamental battle within herself and with herself and her own (in)abilities, the realization of which first comes before the image of the wounded Christ. She continues, “When I came to the passage where [Augustine] speaks about his conversion and read how he heard that voice in the garden [y lei cómo oyó aquella voz en el huerto], it only

396. *Life*, 9.8 (Kavanaugh, 103).
397. Ibid. (Steggink, 65)
seemed to me, according to what I felt in my heart, that it was I the Lord called [no me parece sino que el Señor me la dio a mí, según sintió mi corazón].”

Much like her experience before the image of the wounded Christ, Teresa is able to imagine, to place herself and enter into the garden scene; even more, she is able to participate in the event, in such a way that it evokes a response within her heart, of which she becomes aware, fully conscious that God is speaking to her, stretching toward her, moving her to respond in a like manner. She is no longer concerned about her inability to pray discursively, that is, with the mind, which often served as a block, and perhaps the cause of her aridity; instead, she finds in the moment the resolve and response to pray with the heart. “I remained for a long time totally dissolved in tears and feeling within myself utter distress and weariness…I marvel now [ahora] at how I could have lived in such affliction. May God be praised who gave me the life to rise up [que me dio vida para salir] from a death so deadly.” Teresa’s heart has been affected, moved, and she becomes aware again of a stress and a weariness, caused by this intentio.

Interestingly, Teresa’s reader, too, is made aware that she writes from a place that has already experienced the shift and that resulted from the shift; it is a nuance on the timeliness of the encounter, en este tiempo, that is now, literally to the hour, exact, and Teresa brings her reader back to the ahora, both the now of the experience of which she writes and the now from which she writes. Similar to her double use of claro, the ahora of and with which she writes helps to draw out further the parallel structure of the passage in which her ahora before the image of the wounded Christ is placed alongside her ahora of reading the Confessions, thus exposing the mirror effect.

First, Teresa writes of feeling cansada, tired, weary, fatigued, language of which she repeats upon receiving Augustine’s text, which ultimately points to the desire and need for rest
for which Augustine, too, longs and of which he writes. Consider that in the Toscano translation the often-quoted phrase in the opening lines of Book I reads, “y nuestro corazón no sosiega hasta que en ti descanse.” Sosiega is a derivative of sosegar and implies calm, peace, quiet; descans means rest from exhaustion as well as repose, similar in connotation to the Latin inquietus and (re)quies, which were discussed earlier. Teresa would be attracted to this line, as she writes of feeling cansada and fatigava, perhaps feeling an immediate connection to Augustine as she is drawn in by his words. That Augustine uses nuestro corazón – the first person plural possessive with the singular heart – may make for an interesting reading for Teresa. She may very well be consoled in thinking that she and Augustine share the heart together.

Second, Teresa describes being made aware of her heart as broken before the image of the wounded Christ and feeling in her heart that the Lord called her when reading the conversion scene in the Confessions. These two “heart events” appear to describe the same moment and process, that God’s action of speaking does something to and in the heart, that the heart breaks open, causing a response, and, in both cases, marked by a flood of tears. It appears to be a realization on Teresa’s part of misericordia, as Guigo suggests. Again, Teresa’s weeping happens both while beholding the Christ image and picturing herself in the garden with Augustine. Augustine, too, speaks of his heart being filled with sorrow, misery, contrition, which caused weeping immediately before hearing the voice of the child in the garden. The

398. Chapter Two: Meditatio – the Staff.

399. The Latin “inquietum est cor nostrum” is correctly reflected in the Spanish here. Often in common parlance, it is mis-translated as “our hearts are restless,” instead of the precise “our heart is restless.” This is an unfortunate mistake as it takes away from the more compelling image of the shared heart of humanity – even creation – of the common longing, the common journey, and the serious ethical implications of the call to such oneness. This insight will be drawn out further in Chapter Four: Contemplatio – the Fire.
Toscano text reads, “Decia yo tales cosas, y llobará con amarga contrición de corazón.”\textsuperscript{400}

Such contrición is rooted in awareness of one’s sinfulness, which both Teresa and Augustine express in their vacillations, and as Augustine reveals, it is experienced in the heart; the heart is filled with sorrow and moved.

Third, like Augustine in the garden, Teresa’s weeping is accompanied by a gesture of complete humility, that is, she falls prostrate on the ground, from which she eventually rises up because of the activity and strength of God. Again, notice the similarity in Teresa’s two descriptions before the wounded Christ and as a result of reading and entering in the garden scene, respectively:

I think I then said that I would not rise from there until He granted what I was begging Him for. I believe certainly this was beneficial to me, because from that time I went on improving.\textsuperscript{401}

May God be praised who gave me the life to rise up.\textsuperscript{402}

These are words of conversion, a movement and turning of the heart, and they speak, too, of resolve and action. Augustine records a similar experience in the garden upon hearing “Tóma, lee, tóma, lee”:

I stemmed the flood of tears and rose to my feet, believing that this could be nothing other than a divine command to open the Book and read the first passage I chanced upon.\textsuperscript{403}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{400} Toscano, 212. Compare with the Latin text: “Dicebam haec et flebam amarissima contrition cordis mei” (Conf. VIII.12, 29 [O’Donnell, I, 101]).
\item \textsuperscript{401} Life, 9.3 (Kavanaugh, 101).
\item \textsuperscript{402} Life, 9.8 (Kavanaugh, 103).
\item \textsuperscript{403} Confessions, VIII.12,29 (Boulding, 207). This image of rising, as noted earlier in Chapter Two: Meditatio – the Staff, is also a rising to new life, a rising of Christ within Augustine (See Conf. IX.2, 4 [(211)], sacramentally and ritually expressed in Baptism.
\end{itemize}
This image of rising is a rising from the ground of humility to newness of life. For Augustine, it is a rising of Christ within himself, who “put on Christ,” eventually expressed sacramentally and ritually in Baptism. The ability and strength to rise up comes from Christ and is reflected again in Teresa as a result of an experience of the misericordia of God, God’s own heart-ache, a heart that is moved by the sorrows and miseries of another heart, as she follows with, “It seemed to me my soul gained great strength from the Divine Majesty and that He must have heard my cries and taken pity on so many tears.”

These parallels that also mirror the conversion scene in the Confessions expose a few insights worth exploring further. That she places her receiving the text after the event(s) yet still en este tiempo, as highlighted earlier, could certainly be a chronological truth, that is, the text was given to her after the experiences recorded, even though the exact date is not known, except for the absolute earliest of possibilities, 1554, when it was first translated into Spanish and published. Teresa’s reading of the Confessions could very well be the interpretive tool for how she came to understand her experience before the image of the wounded Christ. The parallel structure within the narrative is such that it is written as two separate sets of events, that is, what happened before the image of the wounded Christ (and from there, all images of the Passion), happened again when Teresa read the Confessions, in particular, the garden scene of Book VIII. While this could be the case, the language and style in which these passages are written, since they mirror the language and style of the garden scene, suggests strongly that it could be understood as the same “event” experienced, relived, remembered in her reading of the Confessions. Teresa’s reading the Confessions could be a “reading back” into the events of her

404. See Confessions, IX.2, 4 (211).
405. Life, 9.9 (Kavanaugh, 103).
shift in prayer. As she read the Confessions she was drawn to reflect further and more deeply on the previous events and, consequently, given the words, the language to name the interior shift of which she was becoming more and more aware.

However, at the same time, her reading of the Confessions, while serving as a mirror, a point of reflection on a previous event (or series of events), could also be seen as an event in and of itself. It is here where drawing on the sacramentality of a word event – as supported by Ong, Tracy, and Rahner – is helpful. While it may function as an interpretative tool for her prayer experiences, Teresa records her reading of the Confessions as a separate moment and as an experience of word, of lectio.

Recall those words that Augustine famously records in Book VIII of the Confessions, “Tolle lege! Tolle lege!” “Tóma, lee, tóma, lee.” Notice, however, that Teresa does not repeat those words in her narrative; they are simply implied with the statement, “que el Señor me la dio a mí.”406 When she imagined and placed herself in the garden, she was invited and affirmed to take up and read, and in that experience, she mirrored the posture of Augustine, and read and heard in persona Augustini, thereby identifying her heart with Augustine’s heart. Rowan Williams adds, “As with her experience before the man of sorrows image, she senses herself to be wanted directly by God.”407 In effect, she becomes deeply and profoundly aware of God’s desire for her. It is a word event: the word she read, the word she heard, both from Augustine and the Lord – ultimately the word she encountered – was efficacious, exposing and disclosing a hidden truth, in such a way that something happened and changed within her, in how she understood herself and in how she understood God’s activity in her life. And those words of

406. Life 9.8 (Steggink, 65).
407. Williams, Teresa of Avila, 69.
“Tóma, lee, tóma, lee” were so powerful, so sacred that there was no need for Teresa to repeat them in her narrative. In her lectio of the Confessions, the call to take up and read was happening en este tiempo as she was taking up and reading; the call was embodied in the moment, ahora, in the here and now of her oratio.

It is not coincidental that Teresa remarked several times how she needed a book—she needed to read—during prayer, with one exception, during Eucharist; in particular, her prayer after she received Communion. This insight leads to the discovery of a subtle Eucharistic undertone, then, in the invitation to take and read, in such a way that the action of reading is somehow sacramental, manifesting the presence of God for Teresa. This is not to say that her lectio replaces Eucharist; instead, Eucharist is the ultimate, primordial act of lectio, that is, a word-event in its highest and foremost form, making present that which is spoken, calling that person who “takes and reads” into a life of transformation.408 In Teresa’s lectio of the Confessions, she is invited into a new moment of encounter with God, to “put on Christ,” as did Augustine. In the words of Tracy, “This God acts in the word-events of ordinary history and time. This God proclaims paradigmatic words and deeds which shatter our usual sense of participation.”409 This God, for Teresa, acted in Teresa’s very act of lectio; and en este tiempo she was invited to participate in that lectio differently.

408. To draw this out further, Rahner says, “There are many efficacious words spoken at the command of Christ. These words are of varying efficacy in themselves and in the men who hear them. When is the most concentrated, the most effective word spoken? When is everything said at once, so that nothing more has to be said, because with this word everything is really there? Which is the word of the priest, of which all others are mere explanations and variations? It is the word which the priest speaks when, quietly, completely absorbed into the person of the incarnate Word of the Father, he says: ‘This is my Body…this is the chalice of my Blood…’ Here only the word of God is spoken. Here is pronounced the efficacious word” (“Priest and Poet,” 306). Consider, too, that Augustine’s invitation of “tolle lege” was to take and read Scripture, the Word of God, in his case, the Romans text, which was a conflation of his conversion in reading the entire Pauline corpus.

409. Tracy, Imagination, 209.
Those words that she hears with Augustine, and in his person, those words that were, as if, spoken directly to her by God, those words are essential to the dynamic that Teresa recounts, that ultimately capture the Teresian story and Teresian spirituality, in which Teresa was affirmed that what she had been doing all along in reading, in her embrace of vernacular literacy – in her lectio – was a valid and just entry point in her relationship with God, that, in fact, God would – and did – enter into her story and speak and act in her reading. Teresa, in her reading of the Confessions, was able to understand that the draw and attraction she had to read, the comfort and consolation with which she read, was actually not a replacement for prayer, but prayer, as in oratio, itself, that God had been reaching out, as in intentio, all along. With Augustine, in his person, she was able to reflect, remember, and re-read that back into her story.

Impressions

It is often the case that when Teresa describes – or tries to describe – her experience in her narrative, she uses parecer and its derivatives, namely, seems or appears. Many times she will write, “paréeme,” that is, “It seems to me,” or “It appears to me.” In addition to its suggestion of humility, the rhetoric of which will be explored further in the next chapter, her use of it also reflects an inability to capture the moment or event exactly as it is. Even though Teresa will have times when it is, as she says, claro – when she becomes fully aware and fully conscious – she will still often rest on parecer. While it may offer an interesting play on and remnant of her previous “appearance-based” concerns of her adolescence, Teresa’s use of paréeme may additionally suggest her efforts to put words to her experience: it is more than

410. Similar to the effect in the Confessions, these passages can be understood as “rehearsal passages” of the word-event with the Confessions itself (See O’Connell, Images of Conversion, 210ff.).
simply an opinion she is rendering; rather, she has a desire to give an account, a description, even a *confessio*. In other words, the language of *parecer* is the language of mysticism. And “it seems” that her reading the *Confessions*, and more particularly entering into the scene of Augustine’s narrative, gives her just that, a way of adopting and adapting to Augustine’s fiction, thereby, taking on his language.⁴¹¹

In addition to finding his language helpful, Teresa takes on Augustine’s stance, mirroring his posture; most clearly obvious is the posture found in the garden scene. This would especially be noted in the way both engage a text. Consider that Teresa most likely read the *Confessions* in solitude, as she was want to do with good books that aided her in her prayer. The account of her reading Augustine’s work certainly assumes such a space. She gives no indication that she shared her *lectio* with another, as she did the good books with her father, the chivalric romances with her mother, the Lives of the Saints with her brother, even Osuna’s *Abecedario*, when first exposed to it, with her uncle. Such an experience of solitude and silence would heighten her reading of the garden scene with Augustine all the more, as Augustine himself, as discussed earlier, went off in solitude and, after hearing of the voice, read Scripture silently. For Teresa to say “*me parece sino que el Señor me la dio a mí, según sintió mi corazón*” is, then, striking. What Teresa experiences and describes is a mystical encounter with the text, a moment of quiet, hidden in her heart, such that, her heart felt, her heart read, her heart heard something – words – seemingly direct and directed to her, as a response to the longings of her pained, weary heart. *Cor* was speaking to *cor, corazón* to *corazón*, in an encounter of *misericordia*. And this encounter exposed a hiddenness through her *lectio*, which was called into publicness, that is, given words that would speak to the moment.

Considering the eighteen-year period of aridity that Teresa experienced spiritually that kept her bound and stuck, her encounter of the Confessions was, indeed, timely. The text became a staff for guiding her on and directing her in her journey, helping her to go deeper still, prostrate on the ground of humility, yet rising up higher with arms outstretched in oratio, all the while stretching her heart, turning in the direction, the intentio, of God, whose heart was already turned to her. The timeliness of her encounter within the stretching and expanding of literacy into the vernacular, giving a language to the spirituality of the unlettered masses, cannot be overestimated; nor can the timeliness of the efforts of Cisneros, Toscano, and Mascareñas – those who “gave” her the text. Indeed, en este tiempo the shift from an oral-aural world to that which was more visual and tactile was particularly felt in Teresa’s lectio, for it was a word event that was both/and, bringing together both worlds of literacy, a word in transformation. It was an oral-aural event, as it involved a word that was both spoken and heard in the heart. It was a visual-tactile one, as it was a word seen and imagined, touched and felt in the heart.

Yet, Teresa’s lectio of the Confessions does not end her story; rather, it bridges it, re-interprets it, re-directs and re-focuses it into a loving response of her heart that will be expressed deeper and higher still. She writes immediately after her account of the Confessions that “[t]he inclination to spend more time with Him began to grow [la afición de estar más tiempo con El].”412 Indeed, en este tiempo the space of her heart was expanded and longed for más tiempo. No longer did she merely feel obliged to pray; she felt an urge, a stirring in her heart that moved away from obligation and duty, to desire and love.

412. Life, 9.9 (Kavanaugh, 103; Steggink, 65).
Chapter Four: \textit{Contemplatio} – the Fire

\textit{As I began to read the Confessions, it seemed to me that 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 the voice in the garden, it only seemed to me, according to what I felt in my heart, that it was I the Lord called.}

Consider now the fire. The admirer of Pereda’s work cannot help but notice it. When one is drawn to the center of the painting and sees that the hearts of Augustine and Teresa are offered as gift, he or she also sees that the hearts are on fire; they are inflamed. That the fire inflames the heart is a detail worth further exploration. The fire and the heart are in relationship to each other. However, unlike the relationship of the staff and the book, both of which reflect and mirror each other, placed alongside Augustine and Teresa respectively, the fire and heart are imaged together as one, held by and belonging to Augustine and Teresa. To see the heart is to see the fire, and to see the fire is to see the heart. Here, the fire is a descriptor of the heart, qualifying the heart and depicting its state. The heart, too, can be understood as a descriptor of the fire, suggesting that the fire is the “heart” of the painting: all that has been considered, noticed and said about the book, the staff, the heart – indeed, Teresa’s entire \textit{lectio} of Augustine’s \textit{Confessions} – leads to the fire, points to the fire, yields to the fire. The fire comes from and results from this dynamic process.

The heart on fire is an important aspect and outcome of \textit{lectio divina}, imaging the last phase of contemplative reading, \textit{contemplatio}. Once again Guigo’s \textit{Ladder} proves to be a helpful resource in framing this idea before examining closely Teresa’s experience of \textit{contemplatio} as a result of her reading the \textit{Confessions}. Recall that \textit{oratio} can be rightly
understood as directed speech of the heart and as heart speaking to heart, as a putting to words the desire for God that a person experiences from within when he or she encounters his or her limits in *meditatio*. In the discovery of the ongoing “more” of God’s self-disclosure, in the interplay of disclosure and hiddenness, immanence and transcendence, the heart is caught in tension and, in *intentio*, is stretched, creating more space within, as it empties itself out with awareness of one’s sinfulness and need for conversion. Interestingly, Guigo ends his commentary on *oratio* with a prayer itself:

> Lord, for long have I meditated in my heart [*diu meditata sum in corde meo*], seeking to see your face. It is the sight of you, Lord, that I have sought; and all the while in my meditation the fire of longing [*in meditatione mea excravit ignis et desiderium amplius cognoscendi te*], the desire to know you more fully, has increased [*in meditatione mea excravit ignis et desiderium amplius cognoscendi te*]….So give me, Lord, some pledge of what I hope to inherit, at least one drop of heavenly rain with which to refresh my thirst, for I am on fire with love [*quia amore ardeo*].

Note how the image of fire is used. It is first presented as a noun, *ignis*, but, with the past tense of the verb *excrresco*, *excriscere*, it is fire that has been ignited, grown, and sprung forth; there is an increase in the flame. Fire is then expressed as a verb, *ardeo*, *ardere*, that is, to burn, glow, be on fire. Fire is placed next to love, *amore*, and love is in the ablative case. It could be considered the ablative of accompaniment, whereby a “with” is implied, so that love accompanies fire. It could also be the ablative of cause, whereby love causes and brings about the fire: the heart is on fire because of an experience, an exchange of love. If one holds both of these expressions together as possibilities, there is a deeper understanding that comes forth, namely, a mutuality of engagement between heart and fire: the more the heart is engaged by love, the more it is ignited into fullness, and the more on fire the heart is, the greater the love grows. Furthermore, in these uses of fire as both noun and verb, fire is not static. It is imaged

413. Guigo, *Ladder*, VI (Colledge, 73; SC, 94).
as active and implies movement; fire is what happens to the heart the more it enters authentically into the process of lectio. Fire engages, inflames, and moves the heart with and to love. From a flickering to a fanning of the flame, there is a sense of yearning, growth, stretching, and expansion associated with the heart and the fire together that speak of love that is growing and springing forth.

This fiery image underscores the notion that lectio is a process of reading that is not linear, in which there would be a clear delineation from one stage to the next. Instead, it is a process that involves a deepening within the heart and a heightening of the senses and awareness, but also a movement outward, much like the movement and spreading of fire. Out of lectio comes meditatio, and from within meditatio comes oratio. Oratio can be understood as an intensification of meditatio which is a more focused lectio. It is oratio itself in the heart’s expansion, and out of which the directed speech of the heart arises, that gives rise to the fire of contemplatio.

Guigo writes, “So the soul by such burning words inflames its own desire [ignitis eloquiis, suum inflammat desiderium], makes known its state, and by such spells it seeks to call its spouse.”\textsuperscript{414} The words of oratio are themselves described as fiery – they burn – and in their intensity ignite the heart. It is within this flame, within the rising of the words of oratio, that the last phase of lectio ignites and springs forth into contemplatio:

But the Lord, whose eyes are upon the just and whose ears can catch not only the words, but the very meaning of their prayers, does not wait until the longing soul has said all its say, but breaks in upon the middle of its prayer \textit{[sed medium orationis cursum interrupens]}, runs to meet it in all its haste, sprinkled with heavenly dew, anointed with the most precious perfumes, and He restores the weary soul \textit{[animam fatigatam recreat]}, He slakes its thirst, He feeds its hunger, He makes the soul forget all earthly things: by making it die to itself He gives it new life in a wonderful way \textit{[immemorem sui mirabiliter mortificando vivificans]}, and by making it drunk it brings it back to its true

\textsuperscript{414} Ibid., VII (Colledge, 73; SC, 96).
senses….in this exalted contemplation [superna contemplatione] all carnal motives are so conquered and drawn out of the soul [superantur et absorbentur carnales motus ab anima] that in no way is the flesh opposed to the spirit [ut in nullo caro spiritui contradicat], and man becomes, as it were wholly spiritual [et fit homo quasi totus spiritualis].

There is a sense of height, growth, sustenance, newness of life and restoration that speaks of a rising up and a coming together, an integration and wholeness, the desire for which has been expressed in the earlier stages of lectio. Here, there is no longer contradiction, struggle, and tension in this phase of reading. The intentio of the heart experienced in oratio, the stretching in the direction of God, is such that what once was pulling the heart in another direction no longer has a hold or power over it because of God’s action. Sinfulness is named and expressed, but in the moment it no longer has control over the individual. The heart empties out in contrition and bursts into flame.

This description reveals, too, that contemplatio is the transformative action of God alone acting upon the reader’s prayer, openness, and receptivity. It serves as God’s response to oratio, entering into the speech of the heart and breaking into the medium orationis – in the middle and in the midst of prayer – interrupting it in its very center and igniting the heart in love all the more. Contemplatio happens within the context of oratio as an in-breaking of God, with an immediacy and an urgency that charges it, responding to the longings and burning of the heart. The insight here is that grace is not separate from, nor over and against, the desire and longing of the human heart; rather, grace happens within the context of the ordinary, within the human situation and condition. That occulta veritas which has been present and enticing the heart all along, that which has been drawing it and moving it forward to read further and deeper is

415. Ibid. (Colledge, 74; SC, 96).
grasped, reached, and touched, but only because it discloses itself, moving itself closer and
making itself known and reachable.

In the moment of *contemplatio*, the potential for the transformative power of the word is
realized within the heart of the reader, bringing about a transformation in love. Such an insight
is in keeping with both Rahner’s understanding of the primordial word, a word that in its very
construction has sacramental potential, as it speaks of reality and contains the reality that it
speaks; and Hilkert’s understanding of a depth word as a word that comes from the center of
oneself that has the potential to reveal a deeper dimension of reality. *Contemplatio* as an action
of in-breaking is an opening up of the word in its very center to reveal what has already been
present in that center, the fire of love, inflamed by God’s transforming presence. That which has
been spoken by the heart has been received, heard, and embraced.

The heart no longer resists nor struggles; it is alive in its fullness, experienced as a
reversal of expectations. Guigo writes,

> Can it be that the heralds and witnesses of this consolation and joy are sighs and tears? If
> it is so, then the word consolation is being used in a completely new sense, the reverse
> [*antiphrasis*] of its ordinary connotation. What has consolation in common with sighs,
> joy with tears, if indeed these are to be called tears and not rather an abundance of
> spiritual dew, poured out from above and overflowing [*potius roris interioris desuper
> infusi supereffluens abundantia*], an outward purification as a sign of inward cleansing.\(^{416}\)

What might ordinarily be marked and seen as an expression of sadness, for example, is, through
*contemplatio*, seen and received as consolation, challenging the reader further to see that the
cries and tears coming from the heart in contrition are already a sign of the activity of God, of
God’s mercy, of the change happening within the heart, and are to be received as gift: “The
wonderful reward and comforts which your spouse has brought and awarded you are sobbings

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\(^{416}\) Ibid., VIII (Colledge, 74; SC, 98).
and tears. These tears are the generous draught which He gives you to drink.”\textsuperscript{417} Such is the language of transformation: the action of \textit{contemplatio} transforms and gives new, deeper meaning, new expression, and new life to one’s experience, and it is marked by conversion, by conviction, by mercy, by self-emptying all within a relationship that is deeply engaged, motivated, and inflamed by love.

This insight presents a challenge and a corrective to the common misunderstanding of \textit{contemplatio} as solely a moment of ecstasy, union, or even a vision of the heavenly realm. While it can be such a moment, union need not be the only expression nor evidence of \textit{contemplatio}. Bernard McGinn, for instance, argues that when describing the details of \textit{contemplatio} within the mystical tradition that the word “presence” is a helpful, more nuanced description over and against what tends to be the exclusive language of union.\textsuperscript{418} When language of union is used, it makes for an esoteric rendering of mysticism, in which union is understood as the goal, which would mean when union is not “achieved” there is a seeming lack in contemplation. Instead, McGinn asserts that “presence” as a descriptor is all-encompassing and more inclusive and, consequently, more faithful to the roots of the word mysticism that speak to the hiddenness and mystery of God’s presence.

This broader articulation suggests a twofold pattern of \textit{contemplatio} within \textit{lectio}. First, \textit{contemplatio} is a moment of encounter with the Transcendent, as complete and total divine initiative and gift, in which the longing heart is filled and satisfied. This encounter is not long-lasting, however: hiddenness will resume, as will the longing and yearning of the heart, though

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{417} Ibid., 75.
  \item \textsuperscript{418} McGinn’s multi-volume corpus on the history of Western Christian Mysticism is purposely entitled \textit{The Presence of God} to maintain this assertion. See McGinn’s “General Introduction” to volume one, \textit{Foundations}, xv-xviii.
\end{itemize}
the fire of love that has been ignited becomes all consuming. “These things all work together for your good,” Guigo assures his reader, “and you profit from His coming and from His withdrawal….Then, too, if we never lacked this consolation, which is a mere shadow and fraction in comparison with the future glory that will be shown in us, we might think we have here on earth our eternal home.”

As a moment of encounter, contemplatio is a gifted-glimpse, a vision of that which is promised for eternity, a “not-yet” of reality. Second, and at the same time, contemplatio ignites the individual into a way of life, a life lived in transformation because of this encounter, “for He surrounds you with those messengers of His…to watch how you behave when He is not there.”

The fire is not meant for oneself, nor can it be contained. He or she is invited and challenged to bring this vision and presence to the rest of the world in and through all encounters.

This twofold notion could be experienced as an arrival – an in-breaking – of an insight that brings the reader to a new height of understanding, in which what was previously held to be true is deepened all the more or further nuanced or even corrected, causing a shift in one’s perspective, outlook, and approach to life. Contemplatio compels the reader to put the book down and both engage and read one’s life through the glimpse that was given, with this newfound perspective gained, with a new set of lenses through which one can vision and envision his or her world: first and foremost, in and through a heart on fire; first and foremost, in and through love, both received and given, in mutual relationship. Such re-visioning influences and impacts how one would then “take up and read” again.

419. Guigo, X (Colledge, 77).

420. Ibid., XI (Colledge, 78).
This level of encounter and engagement with the text develops the notion of the sacramentality of the *lectio* process discussed previously, in which true *lectio* is a word event that not only creates the condition for the possibility of transformation by the word but holds in that moment a place where immanence and transcendence come together, breaking in and through words the real presence of love. This notion of “real presence” has deliberate Eucharistic and sacramental connotations, in underscoring the textual encounter of the *lectio* process as an encounter of presence, a presence that constitutes an abiding in the word.\textsuperscript{421} The words and the text serve as the symbol set, the conduit through which the encounter occurs and effects transformation, a change in the reader, igniting the heart all the more and evoking a response in love, a response that spreads like fire into life.

For this reason, *contemplatio* and sacramentality are closely linked, for it is through *contemplatio* as both a moment of encounter of presence and as a way of life that one is given a sacramental consciousness, seeing everything as the potential to reveal the loving presence of God. And this has serious ethical implications. Muto articulates the insight this way: that, in contemplative reading, “[w]e abandon the potentially arrogant position of being a textual expert and become a disciple who not only reads but also prays with these words, who hears them not only in an auditory manner but also with the ears of the heart. The fruits of this being-with-and-in-the text flow forth in our actions.”\textsuperscript{422} Hence, contemplative reading has the potential to inform and form the way an individual reads his or her world and acts within it, drawing out the call to publicness highlighted earlier by Tracy’s rendering of the religious classic.

\textsuperscript{421} Again, this is in keeping with McGinn’s assertion.

\textsuperscript{422} Muto, “Formative Reading,” 106. One can see in the difference between informational and formational reading how this tension played itself out in sixteenth-century Spain between the lettrados and those unlettered. When reading is only for the purposes of information, the trap of arrogance can bring about expressions of power and authority that are unjust, fear-based, and exclusive.
Contemplatio rests on one’s experience, as noted previously and advocated in the tradition by such authorities as Bernard of Clairvaux and the Cistercian school. In terms of the process of lectio, contemplatio as its final phase involves reading the book of experience, which allows the insights gleaned from the text to penetrate the heart of the reader and integrate them with his or her life: one has to experience encounter in order to know it. Guigo says it best when he asks, “But why do we give this public utterance to what should be said in secret [secreta colloquia proferimus in publicum]? Why do we try to express in everyday language affections that no language can describe? Those who have not known such things do not understand them, for they could learn more clearly of them only from the book of experience where God’s grace itself is the teacher [ubi ipsa docet unctio].”

Such experience is graced, considered an anointing, an unctio, of the Spirit; and this unctio is what missions the individual into publicness with the urge to explain and name the experience, even though one can never do so adequately, and integrate it into the rest of life. As contemplatio is concerned with the exposure of the hiddenness of God, which is the draw of the mystical journey, there is a sense that no words can quite capture such mystery completely, which also suggests an “ongoing-ness” of contemplatio: what is said of the experience will never be enough.

One might see in this inability to “name grace” adequately the ultimate paradox. That contemplatio is a “part-of-the-whole” of the lectio process – one might say the whole “point” and hope of lectio – and that lectio in its entirely is about an encounter with, even a confrontation by, words, it is all too ironic that no word can sufficiently detail the experience of contemplatio. Words fail here. In fact, texts, even books, fail here. In effect, silence – no words, no sound – arises. Consider that contemplatio breaks into the middle of oratio, interrupting the speech of

423. Guigo, VIII (Colledge, 75; SC, 98).
the heart while it is occurring. That words fail to describe the moment precisely, it could be that silence, the very silence of God, is what breaks in and interrupts even the deepest, most profound of heart-filled speech. In the end, it is silence that speaks. The experience of such deafening silence effects transformation, brings about the sweetness that inebriates, that fills and satisfies the heart. Such is the ultimate reversal and irony found in lectio divina, namely, the transformation of the word is a transformation of the word into silence, that is, into no word. And from this silence flow loving actions, the fruits of the lectio process. While words may not capture the experience, loving actions do. This rendering of the call to publicness affirms and nuances the sacramentality of mysticism, whereby that which is hidden is made known in and through the actions of the transformed individual, in and through whom the text becomes embodied.

This insight is aligned with Ong’s description of the transformation of the word in the evolution of literacy as a shift from reading aloud in common, which is oral-aural, to reading that is private and silent, which coincides with the emergence of vernacular literacy. One could label this as a contemplative shift, or at least holding the potential for contemplation, as it created the condition for the possibility of a vernacular embrace of contemplation and silence. Just as Ong describes the sixteenth century as a crisis of the word, so, too, one could say that the sixteenth century is a crisis in contemplation, which casts a new light on the contributions of Spain’s Golden Age to the mystical tradition, especially those made by Teresa of Avila, the icon of Spanish mysticism.
Indeed, Teresa’s contributions to the mystical tradition are those that caught fire and that spread like fire, the source of which was her heart on fire. Such fire drove her into the public forum. This commentary on *contemplatio* as the fourth phase of *lectio divina* and the insights and implications that accompany it help to unpack further the nature of Teresa’s fire, her transformation, what it was that ignited her heart in a new way. It is the assertion of this study that it was through her *lectio* of the *Confessions* that Teresa began to read contemplatively in such an ongoing way that it missioned her quite publicly and permanently. Augustine’s *Confessions* gave her the language of contemplation and transformation that enabled her to speak to her experience and understand more deeply the call to publicness she heard and received.

Recall that in her account of her reception of the text that, especially after reading the garden scene of Book VIII, Teresa says that she “remained for a long time totally dissolved in tears and feeling within [herself] utter distress and weariness.” Teresa continues, saying that “[God] must have heard my cries and taken pity on so many tears. The inclination to spend more time [*más tiempo*] with Him began to grow [*comenzóme a crecer*]. I started to shun the occasions of sin, because when they were avoided I then returned to loving [*luego me volvía a amar*] His Majesty. In my opinion, I clearly understood that I loved Him; but I did not understand as I should have what true love of God [*el amar de veras a Dios*] consists in.”

There are a few points worthy of note. First, Teresa places her experience of tears in a causal relationship between her reading the text and a noticeable change in her relationship with

424. *Life*, 9.8 (Kavanaugh, 103)

425. Ibid., 9.9 (Kavanaugh, 103-104; Steggink, 65).
God. Theses cries usher in a reversal, a shift in her life. They are a sign that something new is happening within her, and they accompany the change. Up until this point, Teresa repeatedly and readily admits that for a period of eighteen years or so she has experienced spiritual aridity, a dryness in her prayer life. In effect, the tears serve to nourish and water the dryness of her heart, from which would come considerable growth. Second, it is after this word event that Teresa begins to understand her heart as responding in love, no longer out of obligation nor duty only, but not quite understanding fully her nature and capacity of that love. As a result, she desires more time for prayer, to spend more time with God and in God’s presence because love has moved her, and she wants to use such moments as opportunities to discover and understand it more deeply. Third, an awareness of her sinfulness and a continued need for God’s mercy are present still, but she does not let what had been previously expressed as anxiety prevent her heart from responding to and with this newfound love of God. She is more intentional in moving away from occasions that would enable her to sin. No longer does she experience the intensity of struggle, nor does sinfulness have the same hold on her that it previously had. Her heart has been stretched in the direction of God.

Teresa’s reflection conveys a certain understanding of conversion, one that is experience-based. In her telling, she has a sense that her conversion is underway, in process, and not complete: it is ongoing and not a one-time event. While both the image of the wounded Christ and the Confessions are moments of significance that symbolize the movement of her heart in the direction of love, behavioral changes follow that reflect and deepen the shift, but they did not all happen at once. These changes in behavior are evidence of the shift; they do not earn it or cause it. Rather, grace is freely given, despite any efforts on her part. In fact, such efforts can be seen
as cooperating with, tending to, and acknowledging the grace that has already, always been active in her life.

Even though Teresa’s conversion was a process, and not fully realized and finished, her awareness of God’s action has been heightened, such that she desires to foster that awareness intentionally by spending more time in prayer. She writes, “It doesn’t seem to me I was yet finished preparing myself [no me parece acababa yo de disponerme] to desire to serve Him when His Majesty began to favor me again.” Teresa comes to realize that God’s activity is not conditional, and there is a growing comfort with this realization, in coming to know God’s generosity. “Clearly, it seems, He took pity on me,” she says, “and showed great mercy in admitting me before Him and bringing me into His presence, for I saw that if He Himself had not accomplished this, I would not have come.” 426 While Teresa sees the change is within herself, she acknowledges, too, that this change did not come from her: it happened to her, but not because of her, but because of God. Its source is rooted in God’s mercy, God’s heart entering into her own suffering and misery. God’s move of mercy moved, stretched, and turned her heart. This is counter to her previous efforts and attempts to be pleasing before God and others. Again, Teresa’s motivation is different: it is not out of obligation; it is not to earn God’s love and favor; rather, it rests in a desire to respond and grow in love.

After a short digression in which she recounts times that she had asked for consolation, Teresa returns to her reflection on the lectio event and her experience of tears, but this time she uses a telling image, one that demonstrates more effectively how Teresa has come to understood God’s action and the shift within her, that is, the nature of God’s action. She reflects, “But still, I believe [the tears] were valuable for me because, as I say, especially after these two instances

426. Ibid., (Kavanaugh, 104; Steggink, 66).
[i.e., before the wounded Christ and reading the *Confessions*] of such great compunction and weariness of heart over my sins, I began to give myself more to prayer and to become less involved with things that did me harm, although I did not avoid them completely; but – as I say – God was helping me turn aside from them.”

She repeats much of the same details: one sees an ongoing and gradual experience of conversion, in which the hold of Teresa’s sinful patterns of behavior are not as strong as they once were and she has a greater desire to increase the length of time for prayer. She also places the events of her experience before the image of the wounded Christ and her reading of the *Confessions* together in relationship with her tears, followed by an intentional increase in opportunities for prayer. It is her choice of the word compunction, however, that is quite descriptive, revealing how she has come to understand what happened to her. Compunction, from the Latin *compungo*, *compunge*, means to puncture, or, more faithful to the roots of the word, to puncture *with* (com). Teresa understands that her heart was punctured; an opening was created in her heart. It was pierced with and by something, by *someone*.

It is interesting to note that there is a slight conflict between the Peers and Kavanaugh translations in understanding the source of Teresa’s experience of compunction. This is a small, but important detail worth exploring because it impacts how one understands the role Teresa’s reading the *Confessions* plays in her conversion narrative, especially within the stages of *lectio*. The Spanish text reads: “Pues con todo, creo me valieron; porque, como digo, en especial

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427. Ibid.

428. According to the *New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, compunction “is found in the works of the Fathers of the Church in a number of different patterns, e.g., compunction of fear, compunction of desire and compunction of the heart…. In the NT the Pentecost speech of Peter (Acts 2:37) employs the notion to express the supernatural shock that leads to conversion, translated in the Vulgate as *compuncti sunt corde*. To this extent, the most common use associates the idea of compunction with a change of heart.” See Michael S. Driscoll, “Compunction,” in *New Dictionary*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 193.
después de estas dos veces de tan gran compunción de ellas y fatiga de mi corazón, comencé más a darme a oración y a tratar menos en cosas que dañasen…**429**

Peers offers the following translation: “But all the same I think [the tears] were of some benefit to me; for, as I say, especially after those two occasions when they caused me such compunction and such distress of heart, I began to devote myself more to prayer…”**430** The structure of his sentence is such that it is somewhat unclear as to what pierced her heart. The pronoun “they” could refer back to the tears or to her experience before the image of the wounded Christ and her reading the *Confessions*. In fact, the sentence seems to lean in the direction that the *tears* caused the compunction. The Kavanaugh text, however, suggests that both her experience before the wounded Christ and her reading the *Confessions*, which Teresa has scripted as mirrored events, are what caused the compunction, and the tears are what flow from this experience. Certainly, the Kavanaugh rendering seems more logical.

The clause “*de tan gran compunción de ellas*” causes the confusion in the translation, as the pronoun *ellas* could refer either to *veces* or *lágrimas*, both of which are feminine and could be represented by the feminine *ellas*, and both of which precede it.**431** To reiterate, the Peers translation captures the confusion of the referent of *ellas*. A word-for-word literal translation would read: “…especially after these two times of so great compunction of them….” Kavanaugh, however, omits “of them” either seeing it as redundant or simply as an emphasis of the impact of the “two occasions,” while Peers understands *de ellas* as “when they caused me.” Considering that it has been established that Teresa recounts that she “remained dissolved in

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429. In Steggink, 66.


431. *Lágrimas* is the “they” of *valieron*, as made clear from the previous sentence in which she is talking about another experience of tears.
tears” after her lectio, Kavanaugh has the better, clearer, and more consistent understanding of the clause, as it reinforces what Teresa has already previously said about the relationship between the two events and her tears. Kavanaugh’s translation illustrates that Teresa understands her experience before the image of the wounded Christ and her reading as events that pierced her heart, causing a flood of tears, which expressed a sign of reversal and change within her heart. Teresa’s heart has been pierced by these mirrored events, causing the compunction, and this action opens up the floodgates of her heart.

Such an articulation is significant, as it underscores the performative nature of Teresa’s reading, revealing the impact of the text and the efficaciousness of the word she read. Recall that Teresa says that she saw herself in the Confessions, in particular, the garden scene of Book VIII, and that it seemed that God was calling her according to what she had felt in her heart. This word event was entirely sensory: it was oral-aural and visual-tactile, even more descriptive than her experience of prayer before the wounded Christ, which was only visual. This word event in piercing her heart, effected and performed a felt change that was expressed in the tears that she wept.

In order to develop this understanding even further, it is helpful to remember that, in addition to this section of her Vida serving as a reflection on the mirrored events of both the image of the wounded Christ and her reading, Teresa is also coming from a place in which she has been practicing, or attempting to practice, recogimiento as espoused by Osuna, within an eighteen-year period of spiritual aridity. In his Abecedario, Osuna devotes the tenth treatise to the performative function of tears, in which he discusses their three degrees, namely, the tears of those who are beginners, of those who are proficient, and the perfect. He writes,

The prophet [Isaiah] spoke about tears more than anything, ordering them in three degrees, each higher than the previous. He says that the recollected person in the first
degree is like a watered garden, and then, because it seemed he had said very little, he added that he was like a fountain, and furthermore, to preclude our thinking that the followers of recollection ever could lack tears, he added the third, stating that the waters of this fountain would never fail or dry up as can happen with the fountain of the eyes.

Those who follow recollection cry in many ways and for many reasons. Good beginners cry primarily because they wish to be recollected completely with the One who gives himself more abundantly the more they are alone, and they strive to attain with tears what they do not believe they merit on the basis of their deeds, beseeching God for nothing other than himself for whom they prepare themselves.…

Those who have attained to the second degree on the road to recollection and are known as proficient do not cease to shed tears when they are being recollected in their hearts, even though their intention is not to weep but only to be recollected…. The recollected weep like the still that because of the fire it receives unceasingly drips hot distilled water without any noise or effort whatsoever. In this way, when the grace of the Holy Spirit comes to light a fire in our mortal earth, the still of the heart is enkindled and through the channels of our eyes sends forth the waters of our tears.…

The perfect enjoy other, more perfect tears, which originate in the joy they feel on seeing themselves loved by God who gives them grace abundantly. Thinking on this, they consider themselves unworthy of such favors and are joyfully consumed in tears that seem like those of angels. Such people do nothing but give thanks, which makes their hearts melt in love for God like frozen water that, when it absorbs the splendor of the sun, seems to thank the sun for having come to take away the coldness.432

These degrees are an obvious reflection of the threefold way of purgation, illumination, and union, respectively. Based on the information that Teresa gives her reader, it seems that her tears can be located at least within the first degree as a beginner, since she relates a certain awareness and sorrow for her sinfulness; there is a purgative, cleansing element to them. In addition, she seeks out more space and time for moments of prayer, which Osuna identifies as a quality of the first degree. It could be that these might be the beginnings of tears of the proficient, that the tears she expressed moved her into illumination, because she also receives consolation, favor from God, and gratitude for being in God’s presence. These seem to be more than tears of sorrow, though sorrow they do express; they may be the beginnings of tears of joy, joy in God’s graciousness, mercy, and love, reflecting the ongoing nature and fluidity of Teresa’s conversion experience.

432. Osuna, Third Spiritual Alphabet, X.II (Giles, 274); X.IV (278); X.V (280).
Trying to locate Teresa’s experience of tears within degrees delineated by Osuna may not prove all that helpful in and of itself, if it is studied in isolation from her rendering of conversion as an ongoing, unfinished event. Note that this conversion experience is framed within her reading of the Confessions: she recalls it several times within a short amount of text, which demonstrates the importance of the event, that it is repeated in an ongoing way. It has already been established previously that Teresa uses much of the same language that Augustine uses, particularly in the garden scene. In her entering into the scene with him, in her receiving the text, Teresa, too, receives his language. In much the same way that Augustine’s articulation of his own word event of tolle lege captures the essence of his conversion’s entirety, so too does Teresa’s account of her lectio capture her conversion.

As the source of the compunction of her heart, mirroring the event before the image of the wounded Christ, Teresa’s reading of the Confessions can be understood proleptically, which brings greater clarity to her experience and how she articulates that experience. A prolepsis is an anticipation of what is to come, of realized potential, a preview that gives a glimpse of the fullness of an event’s impact. One can see that a prolepsis is also in keeping with a sacramental imagination. In other words, the word event as Teresa articulates it contains the fullness of what was to come for Teresa in her conversion and in her lectio, that is, the grace and the gift of contemplatio: Teresa’s heart would be set on fire with love.

Consider again some of the phrases that Teresa uses. First, after remaining “for a long time [por gran rato] totally dissolved in tears,” Teresa then praises God “who gave [her] the life


434. When applied to theology, a prolepsis typically is used as an eschatological term used in biblical, systematic studies as a reading back into an historical event the fullness of the Christ event, that is, the fullness of the Paschal Mystery. See “Prolepsis,” in Gerald O’Collins, S.J., and Edward G. Farrugia, S.J., A Concise Dictionary of Theology (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 214.
to rise up from death so deadly.”

That this sentence immediately follows her tears, Teresa cues her reader that the word event caused this new life and led to this resurrection experience. Interestingly, Teresa never defines the length of the time she was dissolved in tears, though she does use “rato” rather than “tiempo,” which is telling. While rato and tiempo both denote time and can be used interchangeably, rato is often understood as a shorter amount of time than tiempo, where tiempo can be longer or even undefinable and incalculable. To help elucidate this nuance, a better translation of “por gran rato” might be rendered as “for a while.” Compare this to the mas tiempo Teresa desired to spend in prayer in order to foster and sustain awareness of God’s presence. And so, the initial impact or piercing that caused tears was not long-lasting compared to the length of time she was moved to spend in prayer as a result, which could be understood as “never enough time.”

Second, while she knew that she loved God, and that a deeper love of God came out of this lectio experience, Teresa also says that she “did not understand as [she] should have what true love of God consists in.” However, there is an implied “yet” to this clause, perhaps even a preview of the love she would need in order to arrive fully. In other words, the fullness of love would come; the fullness of love she encountered in her lectio would eventually be realized within her in an active response. Teresa again cues her reader that she relates the fire of love to this encounter with the text, as she does the sense of newness of life that has been raised within her, even though the fullness of love and life would take mas tiempo. There is an unfinished quality that emphasizes the growth she is undergoing, implying, too, that she is leaning in the right direction of that growth.

435. Life, 9.8 (Kavanaugh, 103).

436. Ibid., 9.9 (Kavanaugh, 103).
To understand Teresa’s account of her reading of the *Confessions* proleptically, then, is to see that in the experience of her lectio, Teresa receives as gift all that she needs for her conversion and transformation to come to fruition, for her heart to be set ablaze with love in *contemplatio*. While it may have been revealed *por gran rato, mas tiempo* was needed in order for it to be realized fully. Again she notes she that she was not finished preparing herself when God favored her, graced her all the more. This unfinished, yet in process, ongoing nature of her conversion is additionally revelatory and telling in that Teresa never shares when she stopped her lectio, that is, when she actually “finished” reading. Recall that she only says, “As I began to read [*como comencé a leer*]” and “when I came to the passage where he speaks about his conversion [*cuando llegué a su conversion*].” Teresa does not give any more explicit details of her reading; it remains unfinished, that is, as a *lectio continua*. Teresa needed to “sit with” the text more. This insight underscores the notion of understanding this particular word event proleptically, that is, as an anticipation of where Teresa was heading, as a glimpse given to her, and indirectly to her readers, about the fullness of the call she received in her own *tolle lege* event with Augustine’s text.

While Teresa believed she needed to prepare herself more for the fullness of what she received and heard, God, it seems, could not wait. Teresa gives a sense of not only God’s ongoing action, but an action that was purposeful and intentional, intensely “favoring” her, so that she might become more acutely aware of God’s presence and, thereby, become more intentional herself in preparing and creating space for increased prayer. It should come as no surprise that after her unfinished account of her reading the *Confessions*, Teresa begins to reflect further on such favors. It can be understood that her act of reading the *Confessions* leads her into such a discussion, in much the same way that her reception of the text opened her to receiving –
or becoming aware of such favors from God. “I sometimes experienced, as I said, although very briefly, the beginning of what I will now speak about.” She continues, “It used to happen, when I represented Christ within me in order to place myself in His presence, or even while reading, that a feeling of the presence of God would come upon me unexpectedly so that I could in no way doubt He was within me or I totally immersed in Him.” Notice that Teresa mirrors the practice of internally representing Christ and her practice of reading, not unlike how she mirrored the two events of sitting before the wounded Christ and reading the Confessions. Teresa cues her audience that reading for her has become a contemplative, interior practice, equal to imaginative prayer and that the source of this shift and insight are found in the previously described mirrored events.

She devotes the next thirteen chapters to this excursus on prayer that seems to divert from the somewhat chronological telling of her story up to this point of her Vida. However, that the reflection directly follows her account of receiving the Confessions suggests that its placement in her Vida is quite intentional, as it not only draws attention to the unfinished, ongoing aspect of her account of lectio but illustrates that Augustine’s text connects her to this language and discourse of interiority, the inner landscape of one’s life which requires ongoing cultivation in relationship to God’s continual activity of hiddenness and disclosure, transcendence and immanence. And so this digression is not really a digression at all; instead, her lectio opens Teresa to the deep discourse of mysticism. In other words, the prolepsis of her lectio account yields to the excursus of its fulfillment.

437. Ibid., 10.1 (Kavanaugh, 105).

438. That is, from Chapters 10 to 23.
“As much as I desire to speak clearly about these matters of prayer,” Teresa writes, “they will be really obscure for anyone who has not had experience. I’ll speak of some things that as I understand them are obstacles to progress along this path and other things in which there is danger.”\textsuperscript{439} Teresa writes as an expert here. While it may seem unclear to her reader about the nature of this discourse, Teresa calls her reader to experience prayer in order that he or she might come to understand her methodology. One can see Osuna’s influence in her plea for experience, as opposed to the learning that comes from book knowledge. However, what follows is not a mere reiteration of Osuna’s thought, which ironically instead would endorse an emphasis on book knowledge, but rather her own insights and development of recogimiento that are rooted in her experience of her lectio of the Confessions, in addition to the “theory” presented in Osuna’s Abecedario. She continues, “These things I’ll say from what the Lord has taught me through experience and through discussions with very learned men and persons who have lived the spiritual life for many years.”\textsuperscript{440}

Teresa demonstrates that she has integrated the wisdom of the learned with her own experiences of prayer. She revisits some of the highlights of her lectio account, most notably the call to deeper love and her experience of the gift of tears, and draws them out further with Osuna’s insights, creatively making them her own by using and developing the metaphor of cultivating and watering a garden. Her metaphor is striking on a number of levels. First, it illustrates her own knowledge of gardening.\textsuperscript{441} Second, it has connotations that are uniquely Carmelite, as Carmelites trace their origins to Mount Carmel, particularly the wadi ‘ain es-siah, a

\textsuperscript{439} Life, 10.9 (Kavanaugh,109).

\textsuperscript{440} Ibid., (Kavanaugh,110).

\textsuperscript{441} See Ibid., 11.4, note 4 (Kavanaugh, 471).
valley known for its plush, fertile gardens irrigated by what is referred to as the spring of Elijah. Third, and most important for the purposes of this study, there is a highly nuanced understanding that one can give to Teresa’s choice of garden imagery that makes the argument for her unfinished, ongoing *lectio* with the *Confessions* even more compelling.

Recall that Teresa says that she “saw herself” in the *Confessions*, and even more so in the garden scene of Book VIII. The impact of Augustine’s text upon her, particularly his conversion narrative, suggests that the garden – the place in which she entered imaginatively and interiorly – became an integral image for her in this newfound life of prayer that kept her rooted in that word event. It was in the garden in which she experienced a shift in her prayer life of *recogimiento* mirrored by a shift in her *lectio*, as it contained her own *tolle lege* moment. This insight endorses Teresa’s purposeful, intentional placement of her excursus on prayer as an extension of her *lectio* account and its significance in her ongoing journey of conversion. Teresa’s use of the garden metaphor illustrates that she remained in the garden of her *lectio* – the garden of Augustine’s conversion – with the sole task of cultivating it in her own way, in making that which was Augustinian, uniquely Teresian. Consequently, this excursus on prayer can be seen as Teresa’s commentary of that word event of her *lectio* of the *Confessions*.

“Beginners must realize,” she writes, “that in order to give delight to the Lord they are starting to cultivate a garden on very barren soil, full of abominable weeds. His Majesty pulls up the weeds and plants good seed. Now let us keep in mind that all of this is already done by the time a soul is determined to practice prayer and has begun to make use of it.” Notice not only the rich sense of mutuality and relationship that Teresa draws out between the person and God,

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443. *Life*, 11.6 (Kavanaugh, 113).
both the action of divine initiative as well as cooperating grace, but that she speaks from experience, that this was part of the call she received while reading in persona Augustini: she was called to cultivate her interior garden. She continues:

But let us see now how [the garden] must be watered, so that we may understand what we have to do, the labor this will cost us, whether the labor is greater than the gain, and for how long it must last. It seems to me the garden can be watered in four ways. You may draw water from a well (which is for us a lot of work). Or you may get it by means of a water wheel and aqueducts in such a way that it is obtained by turning the crank of the water wheel. (I have drawn it this way sometimes – the method involves less work than the other, and you get more water.) Or it may flow from a river or a stream. (The garden is watered much better by this means because the ground is more fully soaked, and there is no need to water so frequently – and much less work for the gardener.) Or the water may be provided by a great deal of rain. (For the Lord waters the garden without any work on our part – and this way is incomparably better than all the others mentioned.)

Now, then, these four ways of drawing water in order to maintain this garden – because without water it will die – are what are important to me and have seemed applicable in explaining the four degrees of prayer in which the Lord in His goodness has sometimes placed my soul.\footnote{Ibid., 11.7 (Kavanaugh, 113).}

It is not coincidental that Teresa proposes four ways of nurturing, caring for, and watering the garden of her inner life, especially if this is as strongly connected to her reception of the Confessions as this study suggests. Looking closely at her description, one can see that she presents a strong metaphor that reflects her own cultivation and adaptation of the fourfold process of lectio. Keep in mind that Teresa has already mirrored a number of times prayer and reading, that reading has been a prayerful practice for her. It is in the garden in persona Augustini, that is, while reading the Confessions, however, that Teresa is able to go within, cultivate her inner life, and advance in this practice, as she makes it her own and is drawn more deeply into relationship with God.

First, the groundwork of the garden of her lectio involves drawing the water from the well, taking much effort as she begins to examine her life as Augustine did his. \textquotedblleft This path of
self-knowledge must never be abandoned,” she writes, “nor is there on this journey a soul so much a giant that it has no need to return often to the stage of an infant and a suckling. And this should never be forgotten… There is no stage of prayer so sublime that it isn’t necessary to return often to the beginning.”

Indeed, self-knowledge is the ground of reading contemplatively, the ground into which one digs. Teresa’s insight is that the work of self-knowledge is itself unfinished and always remains part of continued contemplative reading.

Second, the gardening in meditatio is repetitive and more cyclical, like the movement of a water wheel, in which Teresa discerned patterns of behavior, as Augustine admitted himself, challenges and struggles that God desired to transform and make whole. It is here in which the person in recogimiento, begins to enter into a space of quiet. There is a sense here of emerging mutuality in which the water and the wheel work together in continuous, meditative movement. She writes, “Here the soul begins to be recollected and comes upon something supernatural because in no way can it acquire this prayer through any efforts it may make… But here the water is higher, and so the labor is much less than that required in pulling it up from the well. I mean that the water is closer because grace is more clearly manifest in the soul.”

From this interior movement something begins to surface out of the depths, “a little spark of the Lord’s true love which He begins to enkindle in the soul; and He desires that the soul grow in the understanding of what this love accompanied by delight is. For anyone who has experience, it is impossible not to understand soon that this little spark cannot be acquired.” This spark of love is initiated by God, enticing the person to stay with it and to delve more deeply. “What the soul

445. Ibid., 13.15 (Kavanaugh, 130).
446. Ibid., 14.2 (Kavanaugh, 134).
447. Ibid., 15.4 (Kavanaugh, 141).
must be doing during these times of quiet,” she offers, “amounts to no more than proceeding gently and noiselessly.”

Third, the gentleness and quiet of oratio flows in and out of the heart like a river, the current of which pulled Teresa further into the direction of God. “I don’t know any other terms for describing it or how to explain it,” she admits. “Nor does the soul then know what to do because it doesn’t know whether to speak or to be silent, whether to laugh or to weep. This prayer is a glorious foolishness, a heavenly madness where the true wisdom is learned.” It is in this stage in which Teresa speaks of the faculties – intellect, memory, will – saying that they go to sleep, “neither fail[ing] to entirely function nor understand[ing] how they function.” Something new is about to emerge, that words fail to capture accurately.

Fourth, in contemplatio there is a drenching, a being soaked in the keen and fresh awareness of God’s life-giving, sustaining, nurturing presence; awareness, like Augustine’s, that God was always, already there and deep within, active all along. Teresa continues,

In all the prayer and modes of prayer that were explained, the gardener does some work, even though in these latter modes the work is accompanied by so much glory and consolation for the soul that it would never want to abandon this prayer. As a result, the prayer is not experienced as work but as glory. In this fourth water the soul isn’t in possession of its senses, but it rejoices without understanding what it is rejoicing in. It understands that it is enjoying a good in which are gathered together all goods, but this good is incomprehensible. All the senses are occupied in this joy in such a way that none is free to be taken up with any other exterior or interior thing.

448. Ibid., 15.6 (Kavanaugh, 142).
449. Ibid., 16.1 (Kavanaugh, 148).
450. Ibid., (Kavanaugh, 147). Teresa’s use of the language of the faculties is characteristically “Augustinian,” drawn probably first from her reading of Osuna and then reinforced by her reading of Augustine. Osuna’s reference to them in his Abecedario would have Augustinian roots.
451. Ibid., 18.1 (Kavanaugh, 157).
There is a sense of reversal, in addition to the potential for transformation, as the senses are not engaged in a predictable, understandable way; nor is there a language that names and grasps the newness fully.

Not only does Teresa develop the image of watering a garden consistently throughout these four stages, she is also comfortable mixing metaphors as she continues to try to express and name accurately these experiences of prayer. In some ways, this comfort signals to her reader the transformative nature of mysticism in which seeming contradictions and paradox can be held together and embraced. The spark of fire that was first enkindled in the second phase, for example, increases by the last phase, even though the water becomes all consuming. Teresa writes, “This prayer and union leaves the greatest tenderness in the soul in such a way that it would want to be consumed not from pain but from the joyous tears. It finds itself bathed in them without having felt them or knowing when or how it shed them. But it receives great delight in seeing that the driving force of that fire is quenched by a water that makes the fire increase. This sounds like gibberish, but that’s what happens.”

In addition, while Teresa does use union language in this phase of contemplatio, she is also concerned with the effects of the fire and water, that is, growth that takes place in the garden that coincides with this movement in prayer:

This progress in virtue remains for some time with the soul. It can now, with clear understanding that the fruits are not its own, begin to distribute them since it has no need of them. It starts to show signs of a soul that guards heavenly treasures and has the desire to share them with other, and it beseeches God that it may not be the only rich one. It begins to be of benefit to its neighbors almost without knowing it or doing anything of itself. They recognize it because now the fragrance of the flowers has reached the point in which it attracts others.

452. Ibid., 19.1 (Kavanaugh, 164).

453. Ibid., 19.3 (Kavanaugh, 165).
The cultivation of the inner life, of interiority, is ultimately cooperation with God’s own activity of gardening within the person and results in outward action, outward expression rooted in love. Teresa is quick to note that “[t]he Lord, not the soul, distributes the fruit of the garden, and so nothing sticks to its hands. All the good it possesses is directed to God; if it says something about itself, it does so for God’s glory. It knows that it owns nothing in the garden.”

Throughout the excursus, Teresa reminds the reader that everything has its source in God’s grace, even one’s efforts, no matter the stage of prayer or reading, whether beginner or proficient; even one’s desires to be more intentional in one’s prayer life is a movement of grace and a response to grace. While such conviction on her part is rooted in the Catholic tradition, it is interesting to suggest that Teresa’s language and articulation may have actually come from her reading of the Confessions, especially if this excursus is directly related to her lectio of the Confessions as this study suggests. For example, early on when discussing temptations and roadblocks that may arise particularly within the first stage of prayer, she quotes Augustine directly when she says, “In the past I frequently kept in mind St. Paul’s words that all things can be done in God. I understood clearly [bien] that of myself I couldn’t do anything. Understanding this helped me very much: and also what St. Augustine says; give me, Lord, what You command, and command what You desire [Dame, Señor, lo que me mandas, y manda lo que quisieres].” This phrase is a word-for-word quote from Toscano’s translation of the Confessions. It can be found in Book X, in three different sections in which Augustine repeats

454. Ibid., 21.28 (Kavanaugh, 184).
455. Recall that one of the ways a person can read Augustine’s Confessions is as a theological reflection of Augustine’s understanding of grace operative in his life and the life of all humanity. See “The Staff: a Confessio of Grace” in Chapter Two: Meditatio – the Staff.
456. Ibid., 13.3 (Kavanaugh, 124).
his struggle with continence, his desire for rightly ordered love rooted in and directed toward God, and the reality of concupiscence in his life.\textsuperscript{457}

This Augustinian articulation on the need for grace would have appealed to Teresa on a number of levels. First, while continence itself may not have been the driving issue for Teresa, as it had been for Augustine, Teresa would have been able to identify with his emphasis on inner struggle and vacillation, especially when reflecting on her past, in which the desire to be pleasing coupled with the tendency toward deception would have dominated her thoughts and regrets, in addition to any aspects that remained after her initial conversion. Second, if, while reading the \textit{Confessions}, especially the conversion narrative of Book VIII, Teresa received a contemplative glimpse of her own conversion’s entirety, then this Augustinian appeal to grace was her reaffirmation on the significance of that \textit{lectio} event, as well as her desire to live it and see it through to its fullness and completion alongside her commitment to an ongoing need for God in order to do so. Third, and perhaps most important, just as Teresa identified a growing love for God within herself and an increase in time and space for prayer, like Augustine, she understood that it was God who favored her in this way, who loved her and desired more space and time for prayer and relationship; indeed, it was God who planted the desire within her garden to love more deeply. “It was I the Lord called,” she writes, that is, she was responding to divine initiative, a recognition that God loved her first. Even though Teresa was moved with compassion at the sight of the wounded Christ, the source of that suffering was God’s love.\textsuperscript{458}

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\textsuperscript{457} See \textit{Confessions} X.29, 40 (Boulding, 203; Toscano, 277); X.31,45 (267; 281); X.37,60 (277; 292). Carole Slade also highlights Teresa’s use of Augustine here, but I disagree with her interpretation. Slade suggests that Teresa misquotes Augustine, but, as I have shown, it is a direct quote from Toscano’s translation, which follows the Latin. See Carole Slade, \textit{St. Teresa of Avila: Author of a Heroic Life} (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 87.

\textsuperscript{458} See \textit{Life}, 12.1 (Kavanaugh, 119).
\end{flushright}
Teresa’s appeal to grace is especially evident when one considers that Book X of the *Confessions*, from which she draws her articulation, is itself an excursus into the “ongoing present” of Augustine’s writing, the beginning of a seeming shift away from the chronological, autobiographical narrative of Books I though IX in a similar manner as Teresa’s excursus. In addition to his theology of grace, contained within it is the language of Augustine’s understanding of interiority, namely, his articulation of the search within for God. “Let me know you, O you who know me,” he opens, “then shall I know even as I am known. You are the strength of my soul; make your way in and shape it to yourself, that it may be yours to have and to hold, free from stain or wrinkle.”

Augustine touches upon themes of discovery of self, happiness, humility, and love, as well as the transformation of the senses, that is, the move from the outer to inner senses as a result of his ongoing call to conversion, all captured within his discovery of God and God’s activity within his life, namely, grace. And these are all themes upon which Teresa touches in her own excursus, as has been illustrated: in other words, Teresa’s excursus is a refashioning of Augustine’s; one might see it as her cultivation of the garden of Augustinian interiority into Teresian interiority.

Since, in her own excursus on prayer post-conversion, Teresa directly quotes Augustine from Book X, specifically his desire to do God’s will and his admission of his need for grace in order to do it, she cues her reader implicitly that she drew much inspiration from Book X as part of her ongoing lectio of the text. Just as she saw herself in the garden of the *Confessions*, so too does she look into Book X as in mirror. In addition to the importance Teresa places uniquely on

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460. Recall, for example, X.27, 38: “You called, shouted, broke through my deafness; you flared, blazing, banished my blindness; you lavished your fragrance, I gasped, and now I pant for you; I tasted you, and I hunger and thirst; you touched me, and I burned for your peace” (Boulding, 262).
the conversion narrative of Book VIII, in which Teresa enters the garden *in persona Augustini*,
the depth and quality of Augustine’s discourse of his continued inner journey in Book X gave her
the language for her own unfinished conversion narrative, which becomes the excursus of her
life, especially as she made more time for God in prayer, of going within herself, there to
represent Christ, all the while cultivating the inner garden in which she found herself with her
God.

This argument is strongly reinforced especially when one considers that Book X was the
last book in its entirety that Teresa would have read of the *Confessions*. As has been established
earlier, perhaps the most common approach to reading the *Confessions* is through the lens of
autobiography, yet several problems can arise when it is classified as such, at least in the strictest
of senses. For example, questions concerning the historical accuracy of events like Augustine’s
conversion scene in the garden and the vision of Ostia have been the subject of much scholarly
scrutiny. Even when these events are taken at face value, the common reader is left with a
bewilderment that comes with reading the whole text, namely, how to digest and make sense of
the last three books. Their connection to Augustine’s “life” is not explicit, so much so that they
are often dismissed or seen as an afterthought or an addendum. Instead of seeing Augustine’s
story, as well as the story of humanity, as part of the greater creation narrative in which the text
“rests,” one can be misled in his or her reading and risk its integrity and trajectory. This is not
the intent of Augustine himself, however, especially since in his *Retractationes* he refers to his
work as “the thirteen books of my *Confessions*.” 461 He sees all thirteen books as a whole, as
working together.

461. See Chapter Two: *Meditatio* – the Staff.
Nevertheless, Teresa did not read the _Confessions_ in its entirety, because she was not given it in its entirety. Toscano’s translation stops at Book XI, Chapter 2, just three short paragraphs into it. He offers this brief explanation at the end of the translation coupled with an attempt at a summary of the last three books:

_Todo le que se sigue desde aquí adelante, hasta el fin del libro treceño y último de estas Confesiones, gasta nuestro padre Sant Augustín en declarar el principio del Génesis, sin hacer más mención de su vida. De manera que aunque el resto, como lo pasado, se llame Confesiones, más se puede decir Exposiciones que Confesiones, por ser lo que se sigue exposición (como he dicho) del primer capítulo del Génesis, adonde se trata de la creación del mundo, y no de la vida de Sant Augustín, mi padre. Y por esta causa me pareció de no pasar adelante traduciendo, porque mi intento en este trabajo, fue solamente dar noticia de la vida de S. Augustín según él la escribe y lo que queda no hace a este propósito ni es de calidad que, puesto en romance, se dejaría entender de todos._

_Laus Deo._

Toscano’s decision not to translate the last three books endorses a strict autobiographical reading of the _Confessions_, understanding Books XI through XIII solely as commentary on the book of Genesis, with no clear understanding of their purpose in the text. Nor does he believe that having them available in the vernacular would be necessary, since their inclusion would add nothing to Augustine’s narrative. While Toscano was a friend of the vernacular, he also would have been among the lettered; and so, there is a hint in his explanation that only the _letrados_ would appreciate the last three books; the common reader would fall short.

Whether the omission of these books in the 1554 translation would have affected Teresa’s reading is hard to say. It could be that she would have made the decision on her own not to read them, which is likely the case, since doing so has been a consistent practice with readers in the popular reception of the text. That Book X was the last book in its entirety in her copy of the _Confessions_, however, does at least offer a stronger emphasis on the possibility of

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her *lectio* being a *lectio continua*, especially as it relates to her seeming excursus on prayer:

Teresa’s excursus dwells in Augustine’s garden experience, and her language of mysticism and interiority, that is, of cultivating the inner garden, is supported by his.

When discussing the effects of *contemplatio* within the last phase of prayer, Teresa offers the following insight that serves to underscore this argument:

Whoever may have experienced this prayer will know something about it; since what happens is so obscure, it can’t be explained more clearly. I can only say that the soul appears to be joined by God, and there remains such certitude about this union that the soul cannot help believing in the truth of it. In this prayer all the faculties fail and they are so suspended that in no way, as I said, does one think they are working. If a person is reflecting upon some scriptural event, it becomes as lost to the memory as it would be if there had never been any thought of it. If the person reads, there is no remembrance of what was read; nor is there any remembrance if one prays vocally. Thus this bothersome little moth, which is the memory, gets its wings burnt here; it can no longer move. The will is fully occupied in loving, but it doesn’t understand how it loves. The intellect, if it understands, doesn’t understand how it understands; at least it can’t comprehend anything of what it understands.  

Teresa writes here of a spiritual excursus that can happen in prayer, a seeming digression or disconnect of the faculties that transcends the limits of the human condition and transforms the senses, in which a person is caught up in newness, yet this newness also has a subtle familiarity and likeness, as well as clarity.

It could be that what she really is describing is what happened to her at one point in her *lectio* of the *Confessions* that caused her to forget more explicit details of her encounter of the text: her faculties were engaged in such a way that diverted her attention into this deeper experience of prayer while in the garden, so much so that she was unable to make more, deliberate connections to it because her faculties were “put to rest.” This explanation has a twofold effect. First, it serves as a brief commentary on the nature and cause of her written excursus on prayer in this section of her *Vida*, which follows her *lectio* account, thereby

mirroring or imitating the prayer experience. Second, all that remains tangible for her in the reflection is the language of metaphor, the garden in which she dwells, which is the realm of mystical encounter, and which relates directly back to her lectio account.

Augustine, too, offers a similar commentary in Book X:

But what am I loving when I love you? Not beauty of body nor transient grace, not this fair light which is now so friendly to my eyes, not melodious song in all its lovely harmonies, not the sweet fragrance of flowers or ointments or spices, not manna or honey, not limbs that draw me to carnal embrace: none of these do I love when I love my God. And yet I do love a kind of light, a kind of voice, a certain fragrance, a food and an embrace, when I love my God: a light, voice, fragrance food, and embrace for my inmost self, where something limited to no place shines into my mind, where something not snatched away by passing time sings for me, where something no breath blows away yields to me its scent, where there is savor undiminished by famished eating, and where I am clasped in a union from which no satiety can tear me away. This is what I love when I love my God. 464

This beautiful mystical reflection on the transformation of the senses follows a line that captures the heart of this study of Teresa’s lectio. Augustine writes, “I love you, Lord, with no doubtful mind with absolute certainty. You pierced my heart with your word, and I fell in love with you [percussisti cor meum verbo tuo, et amavi te].” 465

Notice that Boulding translates percussisti as “pierced,” which captures the sense of compunction that was described earlier; it could also be understood as “struck” or “beat.” Toscano’s translation reads, “Heriste mi corazón con tu palabra, y yo te amé,” 466 in which heriste implies a wounding. This piercing and wounding of the heart is an action of divine initiative, and for Augustine it ushers in a reversal, a reversal that brings about love of God uttered in mystical expression. He uses a similar image once before when he reflects on the

465. Ibid. (Boulding, 241).
466. Toscano, 252.
decision he and his friends made to renounce their careers and retreat to Cassiciacum to prepare for baptism: “With the arrows of your charity,” he writes, “you had pierced our hearts, and we bore your words within us like a sword penetrating us to the core.” Here, there is a clear sense that it was an event of love, initiated by love, and resulting in love, a love expressed and embodied in the word.

Just as this image of the heart being pierced by the word can be said to evoke Augustine’s continued reflection of his own *tolle lege* in the garden scene with the Pauline corpus that was followed by a life lived in ongoing conversion, so, too, does this same image speak to Teresa’s experience of *lectio continua* with the Augustinian text, nuancing Teresa’s understanding of what happened in her heart because of her reading of the *Confessions* and how it opened her to deeper and fuller expressions of love. Not only does it give her the language of compunction at the moment of entering the garden scene of Book VIII, that is, it names the experience for her as she understands, describes, and “reads back into” the word event with it, but it gave her an articulation of what would happen to her subsequent to that experience. This image, this language would continue to take on newer, deeper meaning in her life and her self-understanding. In Teresa’s reception of the *Confessions*, she received the language and the image for understanding her call to, and experience of, ongoing transformation.

When Teresa transitions from her excursus on prayer to the telling of her life she says: “I now want to return to where I left off about my life, for I think I delayed more than I should have so that what follows would be better understood. This is another, new book from here on – I mean another, new life. The life dealt with up to this point was mine; the one I lived where I

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began to explain these things about prayer is the one God lived in me.” The book of her life, which recounts how she has received books, has been transformed, rewritten, refashioned while in the garden with the *Confessions*, that is, while, and as a result from, her interior cultivation. Hers is a book, a *vida*, that recounts how the word continually called to her and pierced her heart, and how she learned to respond. In a similar manner to Augustine’s, Teresa’s narrative was refashioned into God’s fiction: her experience of words, of books have been transformed into something new.

For example, Teresa will write about a few experiences of locutions, of hearing the voice of God speak to her, all of which expand on the preparation begun in her *lectio* of the *Confessions*. One way of understanding this phenomenon is that her heart was being pierced by the word, more and more intensely in *recogimiento*. The garden of her interiority had been cultivated in silence in such a way that her skills for deep listening had been honed, the culmination of which happens within what is commonly referred to as Teresa’s transverberation. Teresa describes it as follows:

> The Lord wanted me while in this state to see sometimes the following vision: I saw close to me toward my left side an angel in bodily form. I don’t usually see angels in bodily form except on rare occasions…. This time, though, the Lord desired that I see the vision in the following way: the angel was not large but small; he was very beautiful, and his face was so aflame that he seemed to be one of those very sublime angels that appear to be all afire. They must belong to those they call the cherubim, for they didn’t tell me their names…. I saw in his hands a large golden dart and at the end of the iron tip there appeared to be a little fire. It seemed to me this angel plunged the dart several times into my heart and that it reached deep within me. When he drew it out, I thought he was carrying off with him the deepest part of me; and he left me all on fire with great love of

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469. See, for example, *Life*, 25 (Kavanaugh, 212-223). “The words are very explicit,” she writes, “but are not heard with the bodily ears, although they are understood much more clearly than they would be if heard – and to try, no matter how hard, to resist understanding them is of no avail” (25.1, [Kavanaugh, 213]).

470. Liturgically, this event is recognized as an Obligatory Memorial for Discalced Carmelites on August 26.
God…. The loving exchange that takes place between the soul and God is so sweet that I beg Him in His goodness to give a taste of this love to anyone who thinks I am lying.\textsuperscript{471}

This is yet another nuance of the image of her heart pierced and set on fire with love, with the same elements she has consistently used from her \textit{lectio} of the \textit{Confessions}; here it is found in its deepest expression. The name given to this experience is telling: transverberation. From the Latin \textit{transverbero}, \textit{transverberare}, it means to pierce through, with its roots, \textit{trans} for “over,” “across,” and \textit{verbero}, \textit{verberare}, to “beat,” “strike,” “scourge.”

Another rendering of this experience that is in keeping with what Teresa describes offers a further connotation. Notice that there is a shared etymology of \textit{verbum}, the Latin for “word,” with \textit{verbero}; especially when one considers that \textit{verbum} was initially an oral-aural event, a sound that “struck through” the vocal chords in order for it to be heard. Understood in this way, \textit{verbum} is first and foremost performative and does something. In its deepest, truest meaning, then, \textit{verbum} is not something static: it is in action, perhaps best understood as a verb as it is expressive in its very utterance and being. In this sense, Teresa’s transverberation can be understood most deeply as a word event, as the word of love expressed in such a way that it strikes, pierces, wounds the deepest part of herself; that its sound, its effect, is sustained in the heart, reverberating throughout her very being as it echoes back that word of love in total reciprocity and mutuality. And it is expressed not only in her moments of \textit{recogimiento}, but in and through her actions.

In fact, Teresa does not say that the transverberation was a one-time occurrence, nor does she say it occurred only in isolation or solitude, suggesting that there are strong communal

\textsuperscript{471} \textit{Life}, 29.13 (Kavanaugh, 252). While Teresa names the angel as a cherubim, this may show her lack of “book knowledge.” In the tradition, the seraphim have been depicted with fire, symbolic of the highest form of contemplation. Peers also notes that in the first edited versions of her text “seraphim” is written in the margin (see Peers, n.3, 192).
implications even with a most personal and intimate of moments in the spiritual life.\textsuperscript{472} The work of interiority, of cultivating one’s garden, moves that person outward, to echo the love of God in and through love of neighbor. One might say that this word event of the transverberation for Teresa is the logical conclusion of that which was anticipated and foreshadowed in her initial \textit{lectio} of the \textit{Confessions}. This understanding illustrates how Teresa received Augustine’s language and articulated it, nuanced it, and transformed it according to her own experience. The intensity of this encounter reveals that the potential first recognized in her \textit{lectio} has now been realized, such that it now permeates her entire being.

\textbf{The Fire Within: Interiority, Gender, & Voice}

The disclosure of such an event as the transverberation draws attention to Teresa’s vulnerability. Not only does it express an intimate exchange of a profound love of God for which she had longed, but her admission of this love relationship with God exposes her to the possibility of criticism; and it does so on a number of levels. In an environment and culture in which claims to experiences of this nature were becoming more and more suspect under the threat of the Inquisition, Teresa could easily stand accused of being inauthentic and thereby seen as deceptive. Nevertheless, Teresa speaks from a place of authority and expertise that is consistent throughout her \textit{Vida}, knowing full well that there were those “who think [she is] lying.” Teresa did not pretend that she would be free of critics, nor did it prevent her from speaking openly and even directly to them. In fact, she shared their concern.

\textsuperscript{472} \textit{Life}, 29.14 (Kavanaugh, 253).
In the last chapter of her *Vida*, Teresa leans on the staff of Augustine once more as she reflects on the presence of Christ that she has found and that has claimed her. She writes, “Particularly, the glorious St. Augustine speaks about this for neither in the market place nor in pleasures nor anywhere else that he sought God did he find Him as he did when he sought Him within himself. Within oneself, very clearly, is the best place to look; and it’s not necessary to go to heaven, nor any further than our own selves; for to do so is to tire the spirit and distract the soul, without gaining as much fruit.”

Augustine can be seen as the one who directed her to go within, for as his reader, she does what he invites her to do *in persona Augustini*. Planted within her when she began mirroring Augustine in her lectio, her inward turn and its cultivation are the source of her truth-claim, namely, her authority comes from within, the indwelling of God, whose voice she had heard calling to her in the garden, becoming clearer to her once she began this work of cultivation.

It is precisely Teresa’s appeal to interiority, however, that can be considered dangerous and problematic, yielding to scrutiny and criticism, even though she follows faithfully Augustine’s imperative. On one level, she is burdened by an anxiety that Augustine himself professes, namely, a concern about deception. Based on past sinfulness and seen as remnants in present struggles – what Augustine would call concupiscence – this concern is both underneath and drives the authority with which both write their narratives. While neither Augustine nor Teresa claim to be deceptive intentionally after their conversions, that is, deceptive to others, they shared a fear that they could still be deceived when it came to understanding themselves, which would make them culpable in indirectly deceiving others. Perhaps this is what Teresa initially saw in Augustine when she “began to read” his *Confessions* that at once attracted her to

473. *Life*, 40.6 (356).
him: a fear of deceiving the self which could lead to misguiding others, to whom they were accountable and for whom they felt responsible. This, then, is the risk of turning inward, of fostering interiority: the risk that a person can misread his or her inner life.

What Augustine models for Teresa in this endeavor, however, is transparency in naming the fear: in exposing his anxiety around the concern for deception, Augustine exposes the human condition for what it is, namely, always in need of God’s grace; that without grace, as both Augustine and Teresa attested several times over in their narratives, the human person would fail miserably. The work of Augustinian-Teresian interiority has this subtle, guiding principle of the need for grace as its hallmark. It is manifested in the following manner. First, the process of interior cultivation creates and adds to an unrest, an inquiés within the individual, an anxiety that it is never done and that it will always be ongoing, unfinished. And second, the work, as much as it is a personal endeavor, cannot be done alone; it must always be done in cooperation with God if it is to be done authentically.

While it consists of going within oneself, interiority rests on the need for God to do the work with the person, that is, the person’s efforts must be met by the action of grace. Without this rendering and openness to God’s Spirit, interiority runs the risk of mere navel-gazing and being misunderstood – capable of deceiving – whereby the self is and/or becomes its own god. One might say that this insight is at the heart of the caution placed on language of self-annihilation of the soul within the mystical tradition, for the flip-side would be the annihilation of God, such that interiority is then understood as nothing more than the true self equaling God, rather than being in right relationship to and with God.

For Augustine and Teresa, interiority without God’s grace is not authentic. In the end, the person by himself or herself, that is, without the grace of God, cannot be trusted; to do so
would be to commit the ultimate act of self-deception. Augustine offers this insight early on in the *Confessions*:

The house of my soul is too small for you to enter: make it more spacious by your coming. It lies in ruins: rebuild it. Some things are to be found there which will offend your gaze; I confess this to be so and know it well. But who will clean my house? To whom but yourself can I cry, Cleanse me of my hidden sins, O Lord, and for those incurred through others pardon your servant? I believe, and so I will speak. You know everything, Lord.... I do not argue my case against you, for you are truth itself; nor do I wish to deceive myself, lest my iniquity be caught in its own lies.  

By the time of his writing the *Confessions*, Augustine had done a lot of reflection and inner work, gaining much awareness of himself, though he knows there is still a hiddenness within himself, that there are still aspects of himself yet to be discovered. While on the one hand it may mirror the hiddenness-disclosure interplay of God’s transcendence and immanence, it also underscores the ongoing-ness of his conversion. Moreover, he knows that he has the capability of deception. Just as others deceived him, he knew he could deceive others, as he had done earlier in his life. And he knew full well that he could even deceive himself, since sinfulness, especially sinfulness of which he was unaware, could prevent him from seeing the truth about himself. Yet, he knew that before God he was incapable of deceiving, that before God he was called to be himself and in right relationship, grounded in the virtue of humility.

Teresa has a nuance to Augustine, understanding that the deception in which the self engages is caused by the devil. Characteristic of the age, her concern for diabolical activity was real. She saw her decision to stop the practice of prayer, for example, as “the most terrible trick the devil could play on me.” Moreover, she often expressed this concern in a threefold

474. *Confessions*, I.5, 6 (Boulding, 42).


476. *Life*, 7.1 (Kavanaugh, 82). See also 8.7 (Kavanaugh, 97).
manner around the issue of voice, that is, the process of attempting to distinguish among the voices she heard within herself: first, the emerging voice of her authentic, true self; second, the voice of God; and third, the voice of the devil. That which would be false or inauthentic would be from the devil and she would note that it was based on fear, causing a “mis-read” of both herself and of God. When first discerning religious life, Teresa writes,

I was engaged in this battle within myself for three months, forcing myself with this reasoning: that the trials and hardships of being a nun could not be greater than those of purgatory and that I had really merited hell…. And in this business of choosing a state, it seems to me I was moved by servile fear than by love. The devil was suggesting that I would not be able to suffer the trials of religious life because I was too pampered.477

One can see that Teresa articulates the experience of doing interior work, and the turmoil that can come with it, in language that speaks of the deceptive activity of the devil in a person’s spiritual life. And so, part of the work of interiority is learning to differentiate between the self and the devil, to recognize what her authentic desires really are over and against those disguised by the devil. There is a difference, it seems, even if subtle, between how she would understand this deceptive activity and her own personal sinfulness. Teresa does not equate the two, so as to blame her own sinfulness on the devil, as if to say, “The devil made me do it,” thus, taking away her own sense of responsibility. Rather, she writes more about the skills of discernment necessary in the inner life, how one listens deeply and makes decisions before acting, paying attention to movements drawn by love and those drawn by fear.

This issue of self-deception also involves discerning the voice of God over and against that of the devil, calling to mind aspects of the discernment of spirits popularized by Ignatius of

477. Ibid., 3.6 (Kavanaugh, 63).
Loyola. Teresa describes the process in this way:

When the words are from the devil, not only do they fail to have good effects but they leave bad ones. This happened to me no more than two or three times, and I was then advised by the Lord that the words were from the devil. Besides the great dryness that remains, there is a disquiet in the soul like that which the Lord permitted many other times when my soul suffered severe temptations and trials of different kinds. Although this disquiet often torments me as I shall say further on, one is unable to understand where the disquiet comes from. It seems the soul resists; it is agitated and afflicted without knowing why because what he says is not evil but good. I wonder if one spirit doesn’t feel the presence of the other spirit. The consolation and delight that he gives is, in my opinion, very markedly different. He could deceive with these consolations someone who does not have or has not had other consolations from God…. I hold it to be most certain that the devil will not deceive – nor will God permit this – a soul that does not trust itself in anything and that is fortified in the faith and understands that it would die a thousand deaths for one item of the faith. And with this love of the faith, which God then infuses and which is a strong living faith, it always strives to proceed in conformity with what the Church holds, asking of this one and that, as one who has already made a firm assent to these truths.479

Teresa underscores once more the importance of experience, of learning to keep an interior inventory when doing the work of cultivation so as to hone one’s skills of discernment based on past shortcomings and successes. Notice the openness with which she writes. Her appeal to experience reveals an admission on her part: not only is she capable of being deceived by the devil, but, in fact, she has been deceived at times. And this is the qualifier: in those moments, she placed trust in herself, and not in God, which is another way of saying that she

478. While most would know Ignatius, at least on the surface, by his Spiritual Exercises and his language around the discernment of spirits as well as consolation and desolation, it is important to underscore that such is characteristically Spanish (as a result of recogimiento) before it can be considered characteristically Ignatian, and with origins once again in the devotio moderna. In other words, just as Teresa of Avila was a woman of her time and nuanced and developed the tradition she inherited, so, too, was Ignatius of Loyola a man of his time, a beneficiary of what was before him. This is not to suggest that neither Teresa nor Ignatius contributed greatly to the Spanish mystical tradition; instead, they received it and made it uniquely their own. As such, while one could easily classify Teresa’s use of the discernment of spirits as Ignatian on her part, especially since she did, at times, have Jesuit spiritual directors, such language was also present in Osuna (e.g., Alphabet XII.III [Giles, 323ff]), who drew heavily on Jean Gerson’s Mystica theologioa and De probatione spiritum (e.g., Alphabet XII.VI [Giles, 333]; Hamilton, Heresy and Mysticism, 13, 33). In addition, there is the strong influence of the Franciscan Peter of Alcantara, who counseled Teresa several times, in fact, telling her that women make more progress than men in recollection (Life, 40.8 [Kavanaugh, 357]), and was able to reflect back to her visions and help her to discern them (Life 27.1-9;16-20 [Kavanaugh, 227-231; 234-236]).

479. Ibid., 25.10, 12 (Kavanaugh, 217-218).
failed to look for and to rest on grace. Moreover, she asserts the importance of the community of faith, the Church, in the interior endeavor, that one must be aligned with, and not contradict, the Church, in order to foster authentic interiority: in other words, the Church as a body keeps one accountable. Underneath it all she has come to have confidence in God’s sustaining presence, of placing oneself before God, like Augustine, and trusting that God would not abandon her.\footnote{480}

In her articulation, Teresa exercises and models the virtue necessary for authentic interiority. Throughout the text, Teresa’s expression of authority is couched in humility, and she speaks of it at great length, “for the closer one comes to God the more progress there must be in this virtue; and if there is no progress in humility, everything is going to be ruined.”\footnote{481} And so, humility becomes more and more present and necessary as one enters deeper into the cultivation of the garden; indeed, humility keeps one grounded in the garden. “Let humility always go first,” she says, “so as to understand that this strength does not come from ourselves.”\footnote{482} Her constant reference to humility serves to aid her in her disclosure and keep her grounded.

Teresa has repeatedly admitted her sinfulness and shortcomings; in particular, she draws much attention to her tendency toward deception especially in her youth, with the desire to have been found pleasing, which begs the question all the more as to the authenticity of not only the experiences she claims to have had but the very account of those experiences. In other words,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \footnote{480. See, for example, \textit{Life} 25.18 (Kavanaugh, 221).}
  \item \footnote{481. Ibid., 12.4 (Kavanaugh, 120).}
  \item \footnote{482. Ibid., 13.3 (Kavanaugh, 124). While humility is the virtue upon which Augustine calls throughout his \textit{Confessions}, this reference is strikingly reminiscent of Augustine’s \textit{Letter 118}, in which he says, “The first way, however, is humility; the second is humility; and the third is humility, and as often as you ask I would say this. It is not that there are no other commandments that should be mentioned, but unless humility precedes and accompanies and follows upon all our good actions and is set before us to gaze upon, set alongside for us to cling to, and set over us to crush us down, pride tears the whole benefit from hand when we rejoice over some good deed.” In \textit{The Works of Saint Augustine: Letters 100-155, Volume II/2}, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Roland Teske, S.J. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2003), 116. This Augustinian call to humility is reflected deeply in Osuna’s \textit{Abecedario}, especially Treatise XIX (Giles, 494ff), in which Osuna draws heavily on Augustine.}
\end{itemize}
Teresa’s reader could easily be caught in a subtle bind of whether or not to trust her, especially since she admits that she likes to be pleasing, the motivation of which has caused her in the past to be deceptive. That Teresa shows to be “an open book” in this regard, however, she manages to create a certain amount of trust, especially as one follows the trajectory of her narrative in light of her conversion. In effect, by humbly admitting that her reader may come to her text with reservation, she knowingly and purposefully exposes her own vulnerability, which in the end disarms her reader – and potential critic – and, in doing so, disarms her own self-concern. Such transparency, rooted in humility, is a direct outflow of her ongoing work in the interior garden.

While Teresa may have learned to rest confidently and humbly in God, there is another layer to this issue of interiority in need of addressing, and it is a gendered one. Not only was there fear of the activity of the devil, but the belief that women were, in fact, more susceptible to the devil’s guise and, consequently, more prone to deception. Teresa notes that “other women had fallen into serious illusions and deceptions caused by the devil,” knowledge of which heightened her concern. And so, for Teresa to share her experiences outright – no matter how experienced she was – made her extremely vulnerable to criticism, especially because she was a woman, which brings to the surface the double bind in which Teresa found herself.

While Teresa’s concern for her own interior life was genuine, as she was desirous of deepening her relationship with God and continue the work of interior cultivation, to share about these experiences, no matter how authentic they were, put Teresa in a position that was always going to be held suspect first and under intense scrutiny because she was a woman of her time, since

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483. Ibid., 23.2 (Kavanaugh, 201). The most prominent case at the time was of Magdalena de la Cruz, “a nun who was widely venerated for her fasts, vigils, prophecies, and stigmata,” but eventually confessed to being a fraud (Weber, *Rhetoric of Femininity*, 44). See also Ahlgren, *Politics of Sanctity*, 21-22, and Kavanaugh, “Introduction,” 24.

“Anyone claiming to be speaking with God, particularly a woman, was subjected to rigorous scrutiny by ecclesiastical authorities to determine whether it was God or a malign spirit at work in the individual, clearly a highly vexed determination. Women were examined systematically, whereas men were not because men were understood to possess the intellectual capacity to discern their own experiences.”485

The basic issue, then, was one of trust: not only whether women could trust their own experiences, but also whether they could be trusted by others, and whether they even had the capability of going within themselves authentically. Teresa uses her vulnerability to her own advantage: by exposing her own previous sins and susceptibilities to deception from the devil, she anticipates her critics by professing her trust in God and foundation in the Church, and not in herself: her rhetoric of humility and the transparency with which she writes, modeled by Augustine, is all the more striking. Weber asserts, “Humility is thus the touchstone of the spiritual graces received from the prayer of recollection – a virtue all the more necessary for women, who were considered more susceptible than men to delusions.”486 In a sense, Teresa had as a task to prove humbly her own humility, which, if not careful, could bind her further by an accusation of pride.

Her leaning on the staff of the Confessions helped her in this endeavor. It could be that Teresa’s lectio both validated her experience and put her deeper into the reality of her experience of the double bind, as Augustine brought her into that interior garden and challenged her to do the work of cultivation, giving her the authority to go within. As a result, Teresa’s “self”


486. Weber, Rhetoric of Femininity, 47.
emerged, and with that so did her inner voice and the voice of God, despite fear of deception. There is a subtle irony here, however. While Augustine’s text encourages his reader to do the work of interiority, recall Margaret Miles’ question of whether Augustine would have ever intended or imagined women to read his work, given the culture and literacy of his own time. Yet, if Miles is correct about this question as well as her assumption that his *Confessions* also makes a strong case for private, silent reading, as evidenced by both the practice of Ambrose and Augustine’s silent reading and need for solitude in the garden of Milan, then the *Confessions* itself serves as a lightning rod and symbol of the dangerous activity of contemplative reading, disguised deceptively so by the weight and credibility of its author.487

Recall that the literacy that grew into prominence by the time of Teresa was one that had begun the shift toward private, silent, and inclusive reading: not only was it for the uneducated – those considered to be unlettered – but it also included women. The excitement that was initially embraced in Catholic Spain, especially through the Cisneros reform, was tempered at the height of the Inquisition. As previously examined, this evolution in literacy coincided with the emergence of the inner voice and authority of the individual. The Inquisition’s caution of vernacular literacy was a caution of this turn inward; it was in this interior turn in which the problem lay. Such vigilance was not unfounded either, as can be seen by such cases as the alumbrados, who could be considered the Spanish equivalent of earlier manifestations of spiritual “misreading” on the Continent. While the movement of the alumbrados may not have been intended to be considered heretical, it was their tendency not to be held accountable to the community, inclusive of Church authority, that placed great danger on the rich consequences of vernacular spirituality, namely the attraction to and promotion of contemplation and interiority

487. I use “dangerous” here in its subversive connotation popularized by Metz’s “dangerous memory of Jesus Christ.”
offered by the tradition. One might classify the *alumbrados* as those who practiced *recogimiento* without the accountability that would endorse its authenticity, resting solely on their experiences. And so, there was a rightful concern for any who were “called to publicness” in their interior practice. Ahlgren notes that “[t]he major difference between Teresa and the *alumbrados* lay in institutional allegiance.”

In Teresa, the complexity of the consequences of this vernacular literacy, and the spirituality that accompanies it, is lifted up. In Teresa, one sees that true contemplative reading, the reading that is taught and modeled in the *Confessions* helps one to sift through, to discern, and listen intently to one’s true voice, the voice that is in sync with and attuned to God’s voice. Teresa was able to lean on Augustine to give her the language of accountability, characterized both by transparency and a rhetoric of humility, indebted to an Augustinian rendering of the theology of grace. However, she bore an extra burden as a woman of the Church since women were seen to be more susceptible to grave misreading and deception. The double bind of her being both unlettered and a woman could have easily made her a target. To prevent this possibility, she needed to tame the fire within herself so as not to be burned by it in the end.

Teresa’s emerging “self-consciousness” – perhaps received in her reception of the *Confessions* – helped to keep her in check. Like Augustine, she identified an anxiousness, a restlessness within herself – not solely an anxiety that was fear-based, but one that was motivated to advance and to deepen, even an impatience toward the slowness of growth in the interior garden, one that came with the shift in her prayer life of *recogimiento*. “Believing it has no longer anything to fear from itself,” Teresa says,

> the soul places itself in dangers and begins with splendid zeal to give away fruit without measure. It doesn’t do this with pride; it well understands that of itself it can do nothing.

It does it with great confidence in God, but without discretion since it doesn’t observe that it is still a fledgling. It can leave the nest, and God takes it out; but it is still not ready to fly. The virtues are not yet strong, nor does it have the experience to recognize dangers, nor does it know the harm done by relying upon oneself.

This self-reliance was what destroyed me. For this reason and for every reason there is need of a master and for discussions with spiritual persons. I truly believe that God will not fail to favor the soul that reaches this state; nor will He allow it to be lost, unless it completely abandons His Majesty.489

Since her primary concern was to ensure and safeguard her relationship with God, and from there to help others in *recogimiento*, there is no reason to assume that her efforts in this regard were not genuine, nor was her self-protection artificial. Instead, Teresa found that the best way to ensure an authentic relationship with God, in reading her experiences well, was through accompaniment. Consider this as a Teresian rendering of private, silent, interior reading: she would re-read the narrative of her life, the book of her experience, aloud in the company of another, in order to hear it again and see it for herself more intently. This exercise was not unlike what she read in the *Confessions* when Augustine, after his moment of *tolle lege*, brought his word event to his friend Alypius.490

While Augustine’s account was a template for contemplative reading for Teresa, she valued the mentoring she would receive with one caveat, as long as it was grounded in experience, and she would express frustration and regret when any mentor lacked it. Part of the frustration was her own struggle to find the words to name and describe her experience, which is a peculiarity to and an impediment of mysticism; having another who would have undergone similar events would serve as a bridge in these conversations of personal accountability. Such a grievance is yet another nuance to her vulnerability and transparency as an unlettered woman and


490. “I closed the book, marking the place with a finger between the leaves or by some other means, and told Alypius what had happened…. He asked to see what I had read: I showed him, but he looked further than my reading had taken me” (*Confessions*, VIII.12, 20 [Boulding, 207]).
as one who embraced vernacular spirituality. Teresa’s reading of her interiority not only required accompaniment and accountability, but it needed to be validated by those who were lettered, the letrados, which is another way of saying she needed the validation of those in authority, clerics, who were men. Ahlgren avers,

> At a time when experiential authority was rapidly eroding, Teresa had no other weapon in her arsenal to defend herself from attacks on the credibility of her teachings. Thus her self-representation was the most critical element in her efforts to establish her authority as a teacher.

> Teresa realized the shakiness of her position as a mystical theologian and repeatedly acknowledged her limitations as an unlettered woman in her efforts to disarm hostile readers with her humility and lack of pretentiousness. At the same time, Teresa was well aware of the value of her teachings, and she lamented her lack of ecclesiastical and theological authority: “I wish I had great authority so people would believe this. I beg the Lord to give it to me.”

And so she needed first to present herself, her story, to those who had authority, but her preference – and what became her insistence – was that those in authority were also “lettered” in the book of experience.

> When both “books” were held up together, an intertextual reading was accomplished, in which both texts were mutually informative and formative, that is, created the condition for a true lectio event, which would, in turn, safeguard Teresa, as a daughter of the Church, from misreading the narrative of her life. Two practices that were essential in this endeavor for Teresa were confession and spiritual direction. “Teresa’s account of her experience of confession between 1539 and 1554 [i.e., before her conversion and lectio of the Confessions] suggests that the picture of the ideal confessor offered in confession manuals was hard to match in reality. Part of the difficulty she had is that confessors were often not only unfamiliar with the advanced spiritual teaching which she had derived from her reading of Osuna, but even lacked the

necessary learning and virtue.” And it has already been previously discussed how Teresa, reflecting back on these moments, believed that she did not have the help she needed to grow in prayer, and, moreover, to work through her spiritual aridity. “Her complaints do not question the efficacy of the sacrament in forgiving sins, but relate to the second function of confession, namely, providing spiritual guidance… Nonetheless, she also gives testimony of how the ignorance of the majority of local priests was counterbalanced by the excellent theological standards of a minority of ‘letrados,’…from whom other priests could in principle seek advice.”

Interestingly, what filled the void for her, was her access to good books, most especially Osuna’s Abecedario, which, as examined earlier, provided the guidance she needed to stay the course and to pay attention to the shift that she would eventually experience. Recall that she laments, “I began to take time out for solitude, to confess frequently and to follow that path, taking the book for my master. 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.” Osuna’s own critique of the letrados and the uneducated clergy affirmed Teresa in her frustrations and gave her consolation:

The good religious must first seek kindness and devout discipline, then knowledge, and insure that his knowledge, like weeds growing among wheat, does not choke devotion…. God’s servant must be discrete and informed. There are, however, two forms of learning: the one by prayer, the other by study.

The first is very appropriate for religious because…religious orders are schools where we learn affection and love. The religious who intends to be a priest and confessor


493. Ibid., 98. Additionally, Carrera also suggests that “when [Teresa] writes about this from the perspective of the more experienced narrator in Vida, she appears to perceive herself as a victim of her circumstances, namely, the fact that even well-intentioned confessors lacked the necessary spiritual experience to understand the state of her soul and the graces which God was granting her” (104).

494. Life, 44.7 (Kavanaugh, 67).
should ask his prelates for a course of studies consonant with the position he will hold. When some who know very little receive a responsibility they cannot discharge, they think their ignorance is excusable.\textsuperscript{495}

Teresa would learn to stress the importance of a confessor and master being both lettered in theology and experience: it was that combination that would safeguard the penitent/directee from any further potential deception. She writes, “Beginners need counsel so as to see what helps them most. For this reason, a master is very necessary providing he has experience. If he doesn’t, he can be greatly mistaken and lead a soul without understanding it nor allowing it to understand itself. For since it sees that there is a great merit in being subject to a master, it doesn’t dare depart from what he commands of it.”\textsuperscript{496} Therein lies the great reversal in which Teresa ushers that results from her humility, who as an unlettered woman is considered to be susceptible to deception, unable to trust her voice within: Teresa flips the assumption from this concern for deception from inner voices to concern for deception from outer voices, underscoring that authentic interiority needs authentic accountability. She continues, “I have come upon souls intimidated and afflicted for whom I felt great pity because the one who taught them had no experience; and there was one person who didn’t know what to do with herself.”

\textbf{Fanning the Flame: Teresa Takes to Pen}

That Teresa stayed the course, despite the threat of being misunderstood and misguided, is telling of her character and how she understood herself in relationship to the Church and to her sense of personal accountability to God and her vocation. Her regular participation in the life of

\textsuperscript{495} See Osuna, \textit{Third Spiritual Alphabet}, Treatise XII.2 (Giles, 319).

\textsuperscript{496} \textit{Life}, 13.14 (Kavanaugh, 129).
the Church through the sacraments, both Reconciliation and Eucharist, as well as the communal prayers of her Carmelite community of the Encarnación, reveals that she understood her personal prayer life to have communal implications, that interiority and life with God had an outward reach; it was not separate from life. She understood that the cultivation of a person’s inner garden was not only meant not to be done alone, it was also not for one alone. Moreover, one’s context within community was to inform one’s interior practices, serving as nourishing soil for the garden.

When one considers the importance Teresa placed on the concern for self-deception coupled with the concern for theologically-rooted, experienced, and pastorally motivated confessors and spiritual guides, it is her use of and approach to the sacrament of confession – the sacramental expression of confessio – that serves as the context for growth, accountability, and the development of her call to publicness, becoming yet another point of intersection with Augustine, especially in the outward direction of interiority. In Augustine’s time, ritual structures would not have yet been in place for the individual sacramental rendering of confession as such, though there would have been a developing strong communal expression. However, it is Augustine’s practice through his rhetoric of confessio in the Confessions that influenced Teresa in the various dimensions of her own practice.

Recall that the 1554 translation of the Confessions that Teresa was given was incomplete. While the last book in its entirety that she would have read was Book X, which gave her the language for her own excursus on prayer, the translation actually ended with the first two chapters of Book XI. Followed by the summary of Books XI through XIII, provided by Toscano

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497. See George E. Demacopoulos, Five Models of Spiritual Direction in the Early Church (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 14. This book shows the evolution of the ministry of spiritual direction and its various expressions and approaches through the examples of Athanasius, Gregory Nanzianzen, Augustine, John Cassian, and Gregory I.
at the end of his work, the four brief paragraphs that make up these first two chapters would have been the final words of Augustine available to her, and they may cast a light on the inspiration and the impetus for Teresa to go from reading to writing, which is another way of saying that they may have served as a bridge for her *contemplatio* to go outward, to be “published,” that is, to be *confessed* into publicness as the final scope of her *lectio*.

There are several phrases in these last lines from her copy of the *Confessions* that provide clues to this call to publicness, framed by Augustine’s language of *confessio*, that Teresa would have read and heard from within her garden, and which, in the end, also frame and give context to the call she received to reform her own Carmelite community. First, Augustine writes, “Why then am I relating this to you at such length? Certainly not in order to inform you. I do it to arouse my own loving devotion toward you, and that all of my readers, so that together we may declare, Great is the Lord, and exceedingly worthy of praise. I have already said, and will say again, that it is out of love for loving you I do this.”

Augustine consistently reminded his reader that the first reason for his *confessio* is praise of God and to arouse love from within directed toward God. Teresa’s own experience of the sacrament of confession while it bespoke awareness of her sinfulness and concern for self-deception, came to be grounded in her desire to grow in her love of God. Augustine continues, “I have long burned with desire to meditate on your law, that there I may confess to you both what I know and what I still find baffling, your dawning light in me and the residual darkness that will linger until my weakness is swallowed up by your strength.” Teresa certainly endeared herself to this same realization, namely, that

498. *Confessions*, XI.1, 1 (Boulding, 284).

499. Ibid., XI.2, 2 (Boulding, 284).
confessio is also a confession of sinfulness overshadowed by God’s lavishness of grace despite that sinfulness, even when sinfulness is hidden and unknown.

Second, Augustine’s rendering of confessio included his confession of responsibility for and accountability to others, not only to himself and God. He desired not only to awaken praise and love from within himself, but to stir up the same praise and love within others. His was a confessio of a call to serve the people of God: “O Lord my God, hear my prayer, may your mercy hearken to my longing, a longing on fire not for myself alone [quoniam non mihi soli aestuat] but to serve the brethren I dearly love; you see my heart and know this is true. Let me offer in sacrifice to you the service of my heart and tongue.”

His relationship with God, fostered by his work of interiority was not meant to be kept private, but to flow out into service, likewise calling others to confessio. The fire of contemplatio burning within was meant to be shared. Teresa would have been reminded, then, that this love of God that had been deepened and awakened within her was a call, too, to ignite the hearts of others, to set others on fire with that same love.

The images Augustine uses in the final lines of his confessio would have resonated with Teresa in a profound way, especially if she continued to see herself in him and mirror that which he confessed and the way he confessed it. “Not in vain have you willed so many pages to be written,” Augustine says, “pages deep in shadow, obscure in their secrets…. Let me confess to you all I have found in your books. Let me hear the voice of praise, and drink from you, and

500. Ibid., XI.2, 3 (Boulding, 285). “Señor, Dios mío, oye mi oración, y tu misericordia oya mi deseo, porque no se enciende para mi solo, mas para aprovechar muchos, y Tú ves en mi corazón que es así, para que te sacrificque servicio de mi pensamiento y de mi lengua, y dame que te ofrezca” (Toscano, 304).
contemplate the wonders of your law.”  

501 While Augustine is speaking here about Scripture, it is also an account of his reading, his lectio with Scripture and its impact upon him, of the Word penetrating his heart; this would have affirmed Teresa in her own experience of lectio and, in particular, how God drew her closer in prayer through “good books,” most notably Osuna’s Abecedario and Augustine’s Confessions.  

502 And so, Teresa would have been ignited by these lines to confess all that she has found in these books, to share her experience of lectio with others, just as Augustine did with Alypius and just as her father and her uncle had done with her.

Furthermore, seeing that such “good books” were filled with Scripture, it is this last point that is especially revelatory and worth underscoring. The words that composed Teresa’s good books, especially those of Osuna and Augustine, reflected and mirrored God’s words, namely, God’s Word, as in Scripture, but even more so God’s Word as in Christ. In the final lines Teresa read of her copy of the Confessions, Augustine concludes, “Through him you sought us when we were not seeking you, but you sought us that we might begin to seek you. He is the Word through whom you made all things, and me among them….for in him are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And they are what I seek in your books….and he is the Truth.”

503 Teresa would have “heard” and have been reminded in this reading that it was Christ the Word who had been present all along in the “good books” that occupied her time; it was Christ the Word who had been calling to her, getting her attention in these words, to a deeper, more loving

501. Ibid., XI.2, 3 (Boulding, 286). “y no la cierres a los que la buscan, porque no de balde quesiste Tú que se escribiesen tantos secretos y ocultos misterios....Confesarte he todo lo que hallare en tus libros y oiré voz de loor y beberte he; y consideraré maravillas de tu ley.” (Toscano, 305).

502. It would make for an interesting additional study to consider how the Confessions, as it was so permeated with Scriptural references, both explicit and implicit, served as a source of Scripture for Teresa, in addition to what she would have already received liturgically, especially since as a woman she would not have had any other access to the Bible.

503. Confessions, XI.2, 4 (Boulding, 287). “o por el cual buscate a nosotros, que no te buscábamos, Verbo tuyo por el cual heciste todas las cosas, en las cuales me llamaste a ti y me heciste....en el cual están todos los tesoros de la sabiduría y ciencia escondidos. A El busco en tus libros....así lo dice la verdad” (Toscano, 305).
relationship; and it was Christ the Word whom she had encountered in her lectio, who had pierced her heart and set it aflame to love. She had been seeking Truth in her reading and in her prayer, and Augustine’s text reminded her of that continual search.

With Augustine’s Confessions in hand, Teresa was given a prompt for how to approach and use the mode of confession made available to her. Her experience of sacramental confessio framed how she eventually went public with her inner life, bringing the internal forum of the confessional to the external. In fact, it was this particular mode of confessio that first gave her the authority as a woman to have a public voice on spiritual matters. Teresa opens the Prologue to her Vida with these lines: “Since my confessors commanded me [me han mandado] and gave me plenty of leeway [larga licencia] 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 [muy por menudo y con claridad] about my great sins and wretched life. This would be a consolation. But they didn’t want me to. In fact, I was very much restricted in those matters.”

Teresa immediately gives the reason for writing her account, namely, that it is done out of obedience. She was mandated by her confessors. This mandate is not unique to Teresa, however: “Like other women mystical writers before her [e.g., Catherine of Siena, Angela Foligno], Teresa presents her writing as an act of obedience, partly because she lacks the authority to write what she would wish.” Moreover, it is restrictive, and she is given certain parameters, with some freedom for digression and explanation. She does not claim to write on her own accord, but rather out of the direction she received by clerics, those with authority in the

504. Life, Prologue, 1 (Kavanaugh, 53).

505. Carrera, Teresa of Avila’s Autobiography, 163.
Church. She would not have chosen to do so on her own; in fact, she suggests that she resisted it.

Teresa continues,

May God be blessed forever, He who waited for me so long! I beseech Him with all my heart to give me the grace to present with complete clarity and truthfulness [con toda claridad y verdad] this account of my life which my confessors ordered me [me mandan] to write. And I know, too, that even the Lord has for some time wanted me to do this, although I have not dared [yo no me he atrevido]. May this account render Him glory and praise. And from now on may my confessors knowing me better [conociéndome ellos mejor] through this narration help me in my weakness to give the Lord something of the service I owe Him, whom all things praise forever. Amen.\(^{506}\)

It is remarkable to see how forthcoming Teresa is in these opening lines and how aware she is of her context. She immediately tells her readers that this work will be centered on the continued need for God’s grace. First, she asks for the grace to be clear. Teresa wants to be understood, knowing that what she will eventually share will be in the realm of the mystical. Second, she asks for the grace to be honest, as in not deceptive.

Her appeal to toda claridad y verdad could be understood as both an examination and manifestation of conscience as well as a request to her audience to be open to what she has to say. She wants to be known better by them, and she sees herself as part of the Church. Recall Teresa’s use of claro (“clearly”) throughout her Vida coupled with her variations of parece (“it seems”) as characteristic of mystical angst. Rhodes asserts, “By all accounts, the direct experience of God cannot be captured by human language with anything close to high fidelity. The mystic who rises to the surface of history is not only able to attain and endure contact with the ultimate power and presence but is also able to pick up a pen and articulate that amazing and

\(^{506}\) Life, Prologue, 2 (Kavanaugh, 53).
excruciating experience in a way that moves readers.” This grace for *toda claridad y verdad* is certainly an essential element to mysticism for Teresa. It is also about self-protection from intense scrutiny from the Inquisition. Teresa’s desire to find the right words to capture her experience with God is motivated, too, by her desire not to be captured by those in power. Teresa does not lack awareness on these matters. Rhodes adds, “Ideologically, Teresa sits astride the Catholic reform, during whose years she grew up, and the conservative period of the Counter-Reformation, in whose reality she accomplished her reformist mission in the world.”

In some sense, then, Teresa can be understood as doubly implicated by the Church: the Church provided the means to hear the call for her to go within, especially in its initial embrace and promotion of vernacular spirituality, but it also set the limits for that journey of interiority in her lifetime. As Teresa writes, she is caught between both realities of reform, one motivated more by a spirit of renewal, the other by correction and right understanding. This dichotomous understanding of reform is not meant to sound overly-simplistic, but rather to suggest that Teresa and her contemporaries stood on tenuous grounds. Certainly, the Catholic reform marked by Cisneros, in addition to its embrace of the vernacular, was also politically charged by Ferdinand and Isabella’s uniting of the kingdoms and had corrective edges to it with concerns for heresy and right thinking, all of which was intensified by the Church’s reform and response to what was called “Lutheranism.”

It is curious to notice that not only does Teresa repeat by way of emphasis that her writing is not self-motivated, but rather mandated by her confessors, but that it was asked of her by God *first*, that is, *before* the promptings of her confessors. Such is a bold claim, especially for


508. Ibid., 53.
a woman of her time, as she admits that she was called by God to go outward, even though she waits for this call to be confirmed by those in authority. She says that she would not dare, presume, or risk to do so on her own, that is, it would be disrespectful, insubordinate, and out of place – all of which is connoted by her use of the verb *atreverse* (*atrevido*) – but she is being somewhat daring and assertive nonetheless by “confessing” that it was God’s mandate for her to write in the first place, implying she had already heard and discerned that message from God on her own. Although she needed confirmation from those in authority, she asserts that the idea was originally God’s, and not hers nor her confessors’, saying that she believes her authority to write – and for that matter to become public – ultimately has come from God; she chooses not to act on her own – she would not dare to – because she knows that such an action would have targeted her further.

In the opening lines of her *Vida*, one can see how Teresa already uses a rhetoric of *confessio* modeled by Augustine, as she confesses praise and love of God, her sinfulness, and continued need for grace, but she also uses *confessio* in her own way and to her advantage, signaling to the reader what to expect in the account that follows. It will be an account with an attempt at *toda claridad y verdad* – an attempt to be understood – expressive not only of God’s activity in her life, but also of fitting into her rightful place in community and in the Church and the struggles and sufferings that accompany it. Her *confessio*, then, is both gendered and subversive, framed by her experience as a sixteenth century Spanish woman. Unlike Augustine, she could not write on her own, nor could she claim religious experiences without having them confirmed and cleared by officials in the Church; if she did claim them publicly, she would run the risk of – dare – being silenced by the Inquisition and labeled an *alumbrada*. 
Even the way she “confesses,” that is, the way in which she writes her account, is
gendered. Augustine’s narrative, for example, is directed to God, with an indirect nod to his
readers; his authority as a bishop is not questioned. Teresa, however, does not directly address
God, at least initially; instead, she writes directly to her readers first, with an indirect
acknowledgment that she is being scrutinized. For her to have addressed God directly as the
primary recipient of her account, as did Augustine, Teresa would have put forth an overt claim to
authority in her relationship with God that was not “becoming” of a woman, unlettered or not. In
addition, it would have associated her all the more with the alumbrados who deemed it
unnecessary for their interior lives to be mediated by the Church, both sacramentally and
otherwise.

Instead, in order to have credibility, Teresa has to demonstrate her accountability to the
Church. In other words, her confessio is intentionally and purposefully scripted as sacramental,
writing as if she is in the confessional, begging for God’s grace, truth, and clarity through the
medium of the Church’s ministers, regardless of their own experience:

Teresa’s confessors, concerned that her unusual spiritual experience and her convictions
concerning prayer might be diabolical in origin, commanded her to write a work that can
be defined as a judicial confession. Judicial confession per se was by the sixteenth
century a highly conventionalized sphere of written language. The formal judicial
confession was written to or taken down by an officer of the Inquisition in the
hearings…. In connection with administering the sacrament of penance or with pastoral
counseling, priests sometimes requested confessions in writing. These ecclesiastical
confessions might take the form of a penitential confession (confesión general), a
confession of sin or of faith put in writing for the purpose of recalling previous events
with sorrow sufficient to merit forgiveness, and a spiritual testimony (relación espiritual
or ecuenta de conciencia), an account of spiritual experience. 509

Interestingly, Weber points out that while her Vida is modeled on a confession in its
various renderings, Teresa never really “admits” what her sins actually were, at least in their

specificity, unlike Augustine in his narrative, which is somewhat ironic given the reason for her writing in the setting of the Counter-Reformation Church. In the Prologue, for instance, she says that she was restricted in how much she could detail her sinfulness, saying that she would have been more forthcoming but was not permitted. Weber argues, however, that this humility is a gendered strategy, what she calls a “rhetoric of concession,” which helps Teresa in the end to keep certain matters within the internal forum and to “carve out and defend inviolable areas of individual authority.” 

Even though Teresa understands her testimony as an attempt to be clear and trustworthy, she blurs the lines between perception and reality, in which the reader lacks complete claridad about what Teresa is actually confessing, as her attempt rests ultimately and comfortably in an appeal to God’s grace. And this is both intentional on her part and reflective of the climate of her day, as “Teresa realized that the boundary between what the Inquisition considered orthodox and unorthodox was extremely hazy.”

Another nuance to Weber’s understanding of this rhetoric of concession is a Teresian rendering and mirroring of the dynamic of the “Two Augustines” that marks the Confessions. Teresa the writer “takes the stance of a converted narrator, a narrator separated from the protagonist by an experience of conversion.” In other words, “Two Teresas” are present in her account: first, the one about whom she writes up until her reception of the Confessions, the Teresa of the past; and second, the Teresa post-Confessions, the one who reflects and tells her story.

510. See Weber, Rhetoric of Femininity, 51-56. For example, Teresa’s reader gets successfully pulled into her story about the company she keeps which ultimately prompts her father to send her to the convent school of Nuestra Señora de la Gracia, though she never admits the details of wrongdoing nor if she ever really committed any wrongdoing. Carrera argues that “[u]nlike Augustine’s confession, Teresa cannot confess that she committed serious sins related to concupiscence: she only mentions that her honour was badly damaged as a consequence of her fondness for frivolous conversation” (183).

511. Ahlgren, Politics of Sanctity, 29.

512. Slade, Author of A Heroic Life, 34.
story in the present. This idea is reinforced with the “ongoing lectio” excursus on prayer that follows her reception of the Confessions that brings the reader to the “present” of the Teresa that writes and narrates her story. And it is re-emphasized by Teresa’s articulation of her Vida as a “new book” once she reenters the narration of her life after the excursus is finished.  

This nuance adds to the uncertainty within the reader as to what Teresa actually confesses – or is even guilty of – in that, if she is culpable of any wrongdoing or “misreading” of the texts of her inner life, that culpability is in the past and has already been confessed sacramentally and forgiven. She is not admitting present guilt, at least of which she is aware, nor is she asking forgiveness from her readers of what she shares. Instead, Teresa primarily confesses her relationship with God, “who waited for [her] so long,” and her relationship to the Church and its ministers, that they may “help [her] in [her] weakness.” She writes as one who has done the work of cultivation and accountability, the accountability for which the Church asks of all its members, lettered and unlettered alike.

While Teresa’s account was done by her pen and speaks to her efforts of self-presentation both to be clear and truthful, one must also consider that these efforts did not belong solely to her. As much as her Vida is a confessio that is an examination and manifestation of her conscience and interiority, it is also one of discernment, discernment of what is included, excluded, and revised. Her written account could be better rendered as a communal discernment, inclusive of those confessors who gave her the mandate to write. Recall Teresa’s unpredictable relationship with her confessors, some of whom distrusted her, some of whom instilled fear in her, some of whom developed feelings for her, some of whom were learned but lacked

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513. Again, Teresa writes, “I now want to return to where I left off about my life, for I think I delayed more than I should have so that what follows would be better understood. This is another, new book [otro libro nuevo] from here on – I mean another, new life [otra vida nueva]” (Life, 23.1 [Kavanaugh, 200]).
experience, and most of whom she ended up advising and counseling. Given that Teresa is bold and direct in her evaluation of them, she would not be so bold and direct as to criticize so pointedly those confessors under whose obedience she writes; they are not the confessors who misguided her or with whom she was frustrated. Instead, these confessors could be considered among those whom she found theologically grounded and pastorally sensitive. These men would be those about whom she considers favorably when she writes, “Since I believe that my confessors stand so truly in the place of God, I think they are the ones for whom I feel the most benevolence. Since I am always very fond of those who guide my soul and I felt secure, I showed them that I liked them.”

Granted, they did provide some parameters and restrictions about what she should detail in her account, but these directives need not be understood negatively nor solely as an exercise of authority, rather as part of the spiritual direction and confessional relationship. Consider that in spiritual direction and guidance, as well as confession, ideally there is to be engagement in the process on the part of the director and confessor to listen attentively and help sift through what is being shared by the individual. These elements of mutual discernment and listening are essential in the attempt to attain *toda claridad y verdad* so that the penitent/directee can be best understood and well guided. The same can be said for the redaction and revision efforts placed upon a written *confessio*, in which questions for clarity can be asked, or new insights revealed as the account is shared. And Teresa seems to have this understanding as well, as she presents both roles of confessor and editor in the same light:

> I don’t know if I am speaking foolish words. If I am, may your Reverence tear them up, and if they are not, help my stupidity by adding here a great deal. There is so much sluggishness in matters having to do with the service of God that it is necessary for those who serve Him to become shields [*hacerse espaldas*] for another that they might

514. *Life*, 37.5 (Kavanaugh, 325).
advance….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.

It seems to me this must be why some saints used to go to the deserts. And it is a kind of humility not to trust in oneself but to believe that through those with whom one converses God will help and increase charity while it is being shared. And there are a thousand graces I would not dare speak of if I did not have powerful experience of the benefit that comes from this sharing.515

There is a certain level of trust that Teresa expresses here: the same trust she has learned to place on her confessors she also places on them as readers of her written confessio. In other words, she understands those who mandated her self-presentation to be sharers, companions in the mandate, seeing them as responsible for ensuring her accountability with toda claridad y verdad, for safeguarding her from being misread by others, giving them the power to edit and revise for that sake of understanding. They are to be shields, that is, to help protect, or as Peers translates, “to have each other’s back.”516 On the other side of this is Teresa’s belief that if she is somehow misread, misunderstood, unclear, or deceptive, they participate in the culpability.

The one she addresses directly as “your Reverence” is not meant to be taken as a general referent in her account, an artificially constructed recipient who represents all those confessors under whose obedience she writes. Instead, Teresa did have a particular individual in mind to receive this text, who, after the account’s revisions, would come to represent the confessors in a general way. While in her Vida she never names him directly, in the Prologue to the book of her Foundations, she does identify him: “While in St. Joseph’s in Avila in the year 1562, the same year in which the monastery was founded, I was ordered by Fr. Garcia de Toledo, a Dominican,

515. Ibid., 7.22 (Kavanaugh, 93).

who at the time was my confessor, to write of that monastery’s foundation, along with many other things; whoever sees that work, if it is published, will learn there of those events.”

This description is significant in several ways. First, Teresa suggests that one of the promptings for writing her account is the reform movement she had begun with the founding of St. Joseph’s, especially as it brought Teresa into the public arena more so than she had been. Born out of conversation and prayer, Teresa’s call to reform Carmel can best be understood as the Carmelite response to the Spanish “reform from within” of the major religious orders channeled by a spirit of recogimiento, of which the Franciscan recolectorios were the most notable, with both Cisneros and Osuna as members. Since it was the spirit of recogimiento that grew alongside the vernacular spirituality of the devotio moderna that was now being tamed by the Church, any new expression of that spirit could be seen as an agenda not aligned with the culture of the Catholic Counter-Reformation. Consequently, Teresa’s initial efforts came under quick fire and criticism by members not only of the Encarnación but of the local Church of Avila as well, and her claims that she received locutions from God that accompanied her

517. *Foundations*, Prologue, 2, in Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, *Volume III*, (96). In addition, Weber presents a fascinating understanding of how Teresa uses the primary referent of García de Toledo in subversive ways in that he serves as both one in authority as a confessor/redactor and also as, what Teresa considers, her spiritual son. In other words, Teresa successfully places him in a bind in his efforts of redaction: he finds Teresa likable and credible, so he wants to ensure that she is received credibly. See *Rhetoric of Femininity*, 69-71. The other major confessor/addressee would be Domingo Báñez, O.P. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez describe him as follows: “Highly respected for his powers of mind and his doctrinal authority, he had some influence on the definitive redaction of the Life and played a part in the later history of the manuscript, giving a favorable opinion of it to the Inquisition” (“Introduction,” 35).

518. See *Life*, 32.9-10 (Kavanaugh, 279-280).

519. It is important to re-emphasize this notion of “reform from within” which by this point was characteristically mendicant. It is an expression and a lived reality of ongoing renewal within the community, and it was not intended to become a separate movement, but instead was intended to be seen as “part of the whole.” And so, Teresa, and for that matter, John of the Cross, her male counterpart, technically died as members of the “original” branch of the Carmelites, even though they were part of the discalced movement.
discernment only drew her greater attention. In her writing, Teresa would need to “show obliquely that her reforming programme is consonant with the welfare, peace and continuity of the Catholic Church by showing how, in her own life, obedience to the Church in a life of discipline is itself the foundation for response to the disturbing and ‘untraditional’ calling of God.”

Second, Teresa’s efforts at reform and her writing are inextricably linked to her contemplatio. To criticize one is to criticize all three, and to safeguard one is to safeguard all three. Her appeal for toda claridad y verdad, a mandate received by and shared with her confessors, was one for credibility of and understanding for not only her prayer life, but also the fruits of that prayer life: the intent of her written conféssio can be understood to give credence to her interiority, but also to her new foundation, which can be seen as the exterior expression and manifestation of that interiority. The Discalced Reform was an outgrowth of her work in the interior garden, so, too, was her writing an outcome of her lectio. Both can be seen to be her “publications.”

Third, and most intriguing for this study, is the process Teresa undergoes in writing her Vida. The date 1562 is the date she gives for the first version of her account. By this point Teresa already had begun journaling and keeping a written record of her prayer life at the

520. See Life, 32.11-12 (Kavanaugh, 280-281).
521. Williams, Teresa of Avila, 59.
522. For a wonderful exposition on this link between Teresa as author and Teresa as reformer/foundress, see Bárbara Mujica, Teresa de Ávila: Lettered Woman (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009); in particular, 44-67. Mujica makes the excellent point that letter writing freed Teresa from official censorship she would endure with her major works. She writes, “the communication network Teresa and her collaborators maintained through letters facilitated their work. In an age when information traveled slowly, the thirst for news was enormous. Letters were often meant to be read not only by the addressee but also by other nuns and male associates. Teresa and her disciples constantly wrote letters to inform, encourage, or instruct others with the expectation that some would become semipublic documents” (45).
suggestion of some of her other confessors, and so the mandate for her confessio from Toledo was not completely out of the ordinary nor surprising for her. It is this 1562 account which serves as the source for what would become the eventual Vida of 1565, which is the product of the communal discernment, review, and conversation with her confessors, that is, their participation in the mandate.

Interestingly, the 1565 revision contains Teresa’s excursus on prayer, the seeming digression “in the garden” after Teresa recounts receiving the Confessions; this excursus was not part of the 1562 draft. In other words, Teresa purposely places the excursus in that section, which also accounts for its seeming disconnect, interrupting the flow of her story. From a literary perspective, this addition can be seen to express what it is that her word event with the Confessions does to her, namely, it pierces, it interrupts, it inserts. This excursus pierces the “heart” of Teresa’s narrative and redirects it, reframes it. To borrow from Augustinian scholar Miles Hollingworth, it is an insertion of God’s “Fiction” into Teresa’s life, which all the more illustrates how “from now on,” it becomes a “new book,” a new narrative, because indeed it did. Not only does the narrative of her life change with her reception of the Confessions, but so did the narrative of her Vida by the insertion of these chapters into the text as a result of feedback she received in conversation with her confessors. And it has everything to do with the nature of mysticism, of that which is hidden coming into disclosure, as “mysticism happens when the divinity makes the (presumably) executive decision to erupt directly into human affairs through a human being; the human passivity recognized as a hallmark of the mystical way suggests that

523. E.g., see Life 23.15 (Kavanaugh, 207). Carrera offers a good analysis and summary of Teresa’s writings prior to the Vida. See Teresa of Avila’s Autobiography, 145-150.

524. Ahlgren says the additions in the revision were Teresa’s attempts to make “her experience of prayer more objective” (Politics, 41), which creates some distance in a purposeful way from the vulnerability and intimacy that she shares. See also Williams, Teresa of Avila, 59.
people have relatively little to do with how or when that actually transpires." Teresa’s text itself captures the very dynamic of which she writes.

To put it simply, Teresa’s account is about grace, that which initiates and that which responds and cooperates, and how grace is inserted, interrupts, revises, and reframes a life, giving it a new perspective, and expressed through the medium of community, the Church. Rowan Williams expresses this notion well in a fitting summary he offers of her *Vida*:

To understand the *Life*, then, we need to read it as a story of a twofold victory. On the one hand it is about the triumph of discipline, about the shaping of Christian discernment by reading, friendship and conversation, sacramental practice, the candid and unsparing exposure of what might have been an exciting ‘private’ world of experiences to the common speech and culture of the Church; the triumph of discipline over plain idleness, over the obsessive concern for status and reputation in Teresa’s society, over the construction by the *self* of an identity as ‘holy’ or ‘special.’ On the other hand it is a story of God’s triumph even over the disciplined spirituality of a loyal Catholic – the triumph that makes it possible and legitimate for a loyal Catholic to be also a prophet and critic. Thus the main interweaving themes in the *Life* are Teresa’s willingness at every point to submit her experience to the judgment of others (though not necessarily to submit in the sense of *accepting* their judgment) and her inability to resist the disturbing impulsions coming to her in prayer. The *Life* is, centrally and basically, about struggle and conflict – Teresa’s struggle for acceptance and legitimacy, and God’s struggle to be present to Teresa.  

It is not a far reach to say that, for Teresa, the process of writing itself, as an extension of her *lectio*, helped her to come to more *claridad y verdad* as she reflected back on her life and experiences, coming to the realization, as did Augustine in writing his own *confessio*, how that grace of God had always been present and inserting itself in her life all along, though she did not have the contemplative gaze in those moments to see it in action. The exercise in confessing, in going back and forth with others in conversation and writing, helped Teresa to identify key piercing and interrupting moments in her life and enabled her to put words to these experiences,

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to find her voice, and indeed to present her heart on fire, igniting the hearts of those whom she would encounter.

The fire of her writing would catch on: as she emerged as a leader of the Carmelite reform, with its numerous foundations, her guidance in spiritual matters, as well as in community formation and dynamics, was sought after increasingly, and necessarily so. “Teresa had first taken up the pen at command of her confessors; if she began to write out of apologetic necessity, she continued to write with apostolic zeal, first for an intimate audience of nuns in her reformed order, then for an expanding circle of disciples and admirers.”

While she always wrote in the shadow of the Inquisition, the mandate to write shifted as did her audience, though always in a spirit of Augustinian confessio of the praise and love of God and her continued need for grace to sustain her and move her, as did the level of publicness of her writing: as an unlettered woman she still needed permission to engage safely in this manner, and so required the endorsement of her confessors and advisors.

Her Vida stood as the cornerstone, that is, the basis of her writing, as what followed by her pen contained elements from her Vida that became more nuanced and developed as she continued to cultivate her inner garden in the midst of reform, accompanied by struggles and trials that came with it. Her Camino de Perfección (1566, 1569), for example, can be said to be an expansion of her excursus on prayer inserted in the 1565 revision of her Vida. It is specifically addressed to her sisters in the communities of reform. They were not permitted to read her Vida, since it was under review and not considered for consumption by anyone but the reviewers. However, since her sisters “mandated” her to offer them by way of instruction on

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527. Weber, Rhetoric of Femininity, 158.
prayer, her confessors gave her permission to write what became her *Camino.*  

She opens her Prologue, “The Sisters in this monastery of St. Joseph have known that I received permission from the Father *Presentado,* Friar Domingo Báñez, of the order of the glorious St. Dominic, who at present is my confessor, to write some things about prayer…. The Sisters have urged me so persistently to tell them something about it that I have decided to obey them.”  

This is somewhat of shift in that it presents Teresa’s authority in a different light: the cause of her writing is not primarily to serve as a *confessio* to showcase her loyalty, or for that matter, tendencies toward deception; instead, her reputation as a spiritual figure and guide precedes her.

Her *Moradas del Castillo Interior* (1577) differs even more so from her previous two works in that she writes in a general, more objective way, not rendering what she describes as personal experiences, which was counseled to her by her confessor at the time to distance herself from and safeguard against further investigations by the Inquisition.  

It has the status of a mystical treatise more than her preceding works, expressive of more authority, and “considered Teresa’s masterpiece, her most systematic presentation of the mystical experience, expounded with her most delicate figurative language.”  

Her understanding of the inner life is much more developed and lived, such that the interior garden of her *vida,* as in her life, was cultivated in such a way that it had now grown into an interior castle.

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529. The Way of Perfection, Prologue, 1, in Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, Volume II, 39. While Báñez gave Teresa permission to write, it was actually Toledo to whom she submitted her work; he was more favorable to Teresa and not as strict as Báñez, though he still offered some revisions.

530. At the time of her writing the *Moradas,* Teresa’s *Vida* had been sequestered by the Inquisition. See Ahlgren, 61-62, and Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, “The Interior Castle Introduction,” in Volume II, 263.

Impressions

The awareness that Teresa had of her time, of being a woman inserted in the time that she was, and the various implications that came with it, cannot be stressed enough. It was that awareness that aided Teresa in her self-knowledge – the reading of herself – as well as her self-presentation – the writing of herself. If interiority is about going within and reading oneself authentically before God, then Teresa’s exercise of writing was a natural extension of her interiority, of her turn inward that became a turn outward, as writing flows from reading. In other words, such awareness is rooted in the interiority she had cultivated, in which Teresa had to sort through all aspects of the garden of her life, sowing, reaping, planting, and pruning. She discovered that interiority is the place in the heart of the garden in which transformation occurs, in which reading is transformed into writing, in which the word itself is transformed. Such was Augustine’s experience, especially as he learned to embrace private, silent reading, the kind of reading that promotes internalization of the word, and such was the experience of Augustine’s reader, Teresa. To do the work required in one’s garden is to take up and read not only oneself, but oneself in relationship to God and to others.

This place of transformation is not without its struggles, however. It could be the reason why the image and metaphor of fire has been used throughout the tradition to identify contemplatio, since fire burns as it breathes and expands; it is dangerous. Teresa, on fire with and consumed by the love of God because of her conversion and turn inward, was cautious, too, of getting burned by the fire, sometimes experienced in community, oftentimes under the threat of Church officials concerned about right thinking and expression. In some ways, Teresa learned to tame and channel the fire, which is what she did in her writing. Teresa’s task of writing her
interiority, of bringing it into publicness, deepened her inner life all the more, as she was forced to make sense of it, make meaning of it, by finding the “right” words to capture well her experience of the indwelling of God that had set her heart aflame. As she was asked to revise and rewrite, so, too, did she have to re-read her experiences in light of the Church and tradition, of which she desired so deeply to remain a part.

This exercise was an extension of her lectio, becoming a practice of deepening, of repeating, and revisiting her experiences, all of which speaks to her search for toda claridad y verdad in a time which any claim to truth was held suspect and needed to be tested by those in authority. And yet this search for complete clarity and truth she would find would be never-ending, since no words could quite capture completely nor effectively the intimate exchange of love she experienced with God; it would need to be expressed in metaphor, which itself is risky, since metaphor always has a chance of somehow being misunderstood. Even though Teresa’s narrative, her story, can be said to be about her relationship with books and with words and how they brought her to God – consider that the title of her account The Book of Her Life\textsuperscript{532} could be easily rendered as Her Life with Books – she eventually found that books could not quite capture what was at the heart of her experience anymore. This shows the growth that took place in her prayer throughout the years, given that initially it was only through books that she could find herself centered in recogimiento. She writes in her Vida:

When they forbade the reading of many books in the vernacular [libros de romance], I felt that prohibition very much [yo senti mucho] 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 [yo te daré libro vivo].” I was unable to understand why this was said to me, since I had not yet experienced any visions. Afterward, within only a few days, I understood very clearly [lo entendí muy bien], because I received so much to think about and such recollection in the presence of what I saw, and the Lord showed so much love for me [ha tenido tanto amore

\textsuperscript{532} This title was given posthumously by one of her editors, Luis de Leon, O.S.A.
el Señor conmigo] by teaching me in many ways, that I had very little or almost no need for books. His Majesty had become the true book [el libro verdadero] in which I saw the truths [visto las verdades]. Blessed be such a book that leaves what must be read and done so impressed that you cannot forget [no se puede olvidar].

Teresa admits of the pain that the Church’s backlash against vernacular spirituality caused her, since she can credit that spirituality for giving her the language and space to go within; one might even wonder if Teresa of Avila would have become the Mystic and Doctor of the Church she is had she not received all of those texts that she did, inclusive of the Confessions. Because of the effect of her ongoing lectio, she was able to take this deep pain and struggle of her life to prayer, and have it transformed in contemplatio, in which she experienced the ultimate reversal, one which she could never have imagined for herself: el libro vivo, el libro verdadero, that is, a true and clear transformation of her lectio. She was able to “read” Christ, the Word in a new way, which is not to say that books were no longer important to her, but that it was a deep realization on her part that, if all books were taken away from her, the living Word would remain, one that was clearly understood and true, the Word that had pierced her heart in love and abided deep within it.

This expression of reversal is one of the effects of Teresa’s contemplatio, one in which Teresa was able to sit comfortably in the paradox and complexity of life with God. It was yet another mode of the transverberation for her, in which her heart was pierced by and struck with this Word, as a transformation of the word that was also a transformation of books; in effect, a transformation of her spiritual literacy. It was a contemplative “re-visioning” of her narrative in which in her vision she received the book of Christ, the vision that set her in motion, the vision that kept her reading – and writing. It was a visual encounter of the word, in keeping with Ong’s rendering of the evolution of literacy, in which both locution and vision, orality-aurality and

533. Life, 26.5 (Kavanaugh, 226).
vision-tactility, come together in crisis, in creative tension, uniquely expressed in the mysticism of the sixteenth century.

*Lectio divina* is about fostering such a spiritual literacy, the reading and writing of God’s Fiction into the narrative and tensions of life. Perhaps this is what Pereda’s depiction really envisions and reveals: Teresa’s comfort in the heart of this tension, that alongside Augustine, who taught her how to go inside of herself and read herself authentically, she was able to put the book down, guided by his staff, rest comfortably and see that what was written on her heart was God’s Word of love which set it on fire to be offered and shared. Indeed, she was caught by the fire, the same fire that caught Augustine and set his heart aflame, that ignited his own transformation in his interior garden, a transformation from reading to writing, from contemplation to action, which, in turn, caught others like Teresa into the cycle of an ongoing, restless *lectio*. Or, as Guigo says in his treatise, “[I]f you wish to have your fill of this sweetness, hasten after me, drawn by my sweet-smelling perfumes, lift up your heart to where I am at the right hand of God the Father. There you will see me not darkly in a mirror but face to face and your heart’s joy will be complete and no one shall take this joy away from you.”

Conclusion: the Ongoing Task to Re-read, a Return to Lectio

Recall that Augustine’s opening lines to his Confessions can be understood as an abbreviation of his entire text, in which his story and the story of humanity are inserted, as part-of-the-whole, into God’s Narrative of creation. In much the same way, so too can Teresa’s description of her reception of Augustine’s text be considered an abridgment of hers. As such, it has purposefully served as the epigraph for each chapter of this study and contains all the elements of her lectio in which she reads in persona Augustini: “As I began to read the Confessions,” she writes, “it seemed to me that 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 the voice in the garden, it only seemed to me, according to what I felt in my heart, that it was I the Lord called.”

First, she acknowledges that the initial reading of her lectio was one that grounded her, identified her in the narrative that Augustine put forth; one in which she saw herself and came to understand her story to be part-of-the-whole of God’s Fiction. Second, this reading gave her a firm footing, guiding her in meditatio as she was mentored and accompanied by Augustine with his staff in hand. Third, the text moved her in such a way that her heart was stretched in oratio, as she heard God’s voice invite her to take up and read deeply and further still. Last, this call from God evoked a response within her in contemplatio to be committed, to be on fire, and to be

535. “Great are you, O Lord, and exceedingly worthy of praise…and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you” (I.1, 1 [Boulding, 39]). “Magnus es, domine, et laudabilis valde. Magna virtus tua et sapientiae tuae non est numeros. Et laudare te vult homo, aliqua portio creaturae tuae, et homo circumferens mortalitatem suam, circumferens testimonium peccati sui et testimonium quia superbis resistis; et tamen laudare te vult homo, aliqua portio creaturae tuae. Tu excitas ut laudare te delectet...” (I.1,1 [O’Donnell, Text I, 3]).
commissioned quite publicly, like Augustine, guiding others in their call to take up and read the narrative of their lives.

In her Constitutions that she put together for her Discalced foundations, Teresa writes of the importance of a library in each local house: “The prioress should see to it that good books are available, especially The Life of Christ by the Carthusian, the Flos Sanctorum, The Imitation of Christ, the Oratory of Religious, and those books written by Fray Luis de Granada and by Father Fray Pedro de Alcantara. This sustenance for the soul is in some way necessary as is food for the body.”

This Teresian mandate shows her commitment to reading and the importance of this endeavor in the spiritual life, despite the shadow cast on it by the Valdés Index. It does not take away from her experience and reception of Christ as the Living Book; instead, it speaks to the journey the individual sister must make on the road to contemplatio, that is, to embrace the process of lectio divina, as reflected by Teresa’s narrative, her own Life with books.

Given the importance Teresa gives to the Confessions in her Vida and its impact upon her life, one might find it curious that she does not name it specifically as essential to the collection of each Carmelite house. It could be that she considered that it would be naturally included in any house collection such that it did not need to be mentioned. In fact, it seems that this list speaks more directly to the Valdés Index itself, as some of the texts she names had been once included in the library collection.

536. Constitutions, 8 in Kavanaugh, Volume III, 321. Kavanaugh maintains that these are but a sampling of all good books to which she is referring, and would be in keeping with the reform spirit of Cisneros. See no. 7 (Kavanaugh, Volume III, 445). In the “Introduction” to the Constitutions, Kavanaugh writes, “When Teresa petitioned Rome for the faculty to found the monastery of St. Joseph, she had only a general plan in mind. In the reply from Rome, February 7, 1562, the brief granted her the power to make licit and respectable statutes and ordinances in conformity with canon law. It also granted her the faculty to change these for the better or also abrogate them, entirely or in part, according to the condition of the times and to make other new ones. Teresa needed these powers because the constitutions in use at her monastery of the Incarnation would not have served for the kind of life she envisioned in which the rule of Carmel was to be observed. Neither did there exist within the order any other constitutions drafted for monasteries of nuns observing the primitive rule” (Volume III, 311). It is important to underscore that while her Constitutions were for the purposes of the Discalced reform begun at St. Joseph’s, the reform itself was “part-of-the-whole,” that is, not separate from the already-established Carmelite way of life, in keeping with the mendicant spirit of “reform within.”
flagged in it, but then, after some corrections, were released to be re-published and re-distributed.\textsuperscript{537} In other words, Teresa’s omission of Augustine’s text from her list in the \textit{Constitutions} does not lessen the high esteem in which she held his text in regard to the promotion of the spiritual life of her sisters; instead, the sampling serves as an embrace of some texts that once had been considered questionable.

Moreover, within the \textit{Constitutions} itself, this mandate for her sisters to “take up and read” is located at the end of the section that concerns the house schedule and daily horarium, which is telling, as it underscores both the meaning and the importance Teresa places on fostering the spiritual literacy of each individual sister. She sees their spiritual literacy and practice of \textit{lectio} as contributing to the rhythm of the life of the community. In other words, \textit{lectio} is essential to her vision of reform and renewal. That the two preceding paragraphs mention reading, it could also be that the mandate serves as both an addendum and a clarification as to the type of reading that Teresa desires her sisters to engage. She writes:

During the times when Vespers is said at two, it should be followed by an hour of reading (during Lent the hour of reading takes place at two o’clock); this means that at two o’clock the bell is rung for Vespers. On the vigil of feast days, this hour of reading will take place after Compline.

In summer, Compline is to be said at six o’clock; in the winter, at five. In both winter and summer the bell is rung for silence at eight o’clock, and the silence is kept until after Prime of the following day. This silence should be observed with great care. During the other times, no Sister may speak with another without permission, except about necessary matters if she has duties to fulfill…. This rule of silence should not be understood to refer to a question and answer or to a few words, for such things can be spoken without permission. An hour before they say Matins, let the bell be rung for prayer. This hour of prayer may be spent in reading if they are drawn in spirit to spend the hour after Vespers in prayer. They may decide in accordance with what helps them most toward recollection.\textsuperscript{538}


\textsuperscript{538} \textit{Constitutions}, 6-7 (Kavanaugh, 320).
Not surprisingly, recogimiento is her agenda, and reading brought her to such a state; she desires the same for all her sisters in community. And so, “good books” would naturally be part of her community prescriptions. Note, too, the mandate’s placement within the context of silence; again, this is reflective of her own story that she shares in her Life. Silent reading allows for the emergence of the inner voice, and this quiet fosters the interiority and deep listening that she wants her sisters to cultivate. Interestingly, there is a sense that this silent reading is not necessarily in private, but rather in the presence of community members. It is only after she writes these lines and gives the charge for the availability of good books that she then includes the following notation on solitude: “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 feast 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.”

There is a sense that reading, as part of the daily horarium, is part-of-the-whole of community and, consequently, part of “all that time taken up with community life and duties,” and, therefore, need not to be considered solely as done on “one’s own time,” though indeed it can be. Instead, as do all her prescriptions, reading should pave the way for solitude, that is, time and space that would yield to contemplation.

This insight could serve as a final reiteration of the analysis of an Augustinian-Teresian rendering of spiritual literacy gleaned from Teresa’s reception of Augustine’s text, one that brings together Ong’s understanding of literacy as an evolution, development, and transformation of the word, namely, that private, silent reading has a public impact. Silent reading and the emergence of one’s inner voice in the end are not meant to be kept silent, nor

539. Ibid., 8 (Kavanaugh, 321).
private. Interiority, one’s inner life with Christ the Word, as personal and intimate as it is, is meant to be shared aloud and to pierce the hearts of others. It is in the exercise of sharing one’s lectio that accountability to and membership in the community are both deepened and strengthened, as it marries one’s own experience with the tradition, the charter of the Christian community, underscoring the desire that Augustine had for oneness of mind and heart and that declared Teresa to be a true daughter of the Church. It is here in which reading becomes once again necessarily communal but even more so deeply contemplative, with the potential of being mutually informative and formative, and ultimately transformative, not only for the individual but for the whole community.
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