

Reading Report CH582 *Interior Castle* Teresa of Avila (translated by E. Allison Peers)

by Christoph Lameter, FTS Box 466, August 1, 1993

Teresa of Avila's intend - if it can be called that - is to help her heareresses - the book is addressed to her "sisters" - to grow closer to God and thereby also to help us discover what and who we are. We will discover and experience our souls. This is described in terms of a castle - the soul - with lots of different "mansions" or different experiences of life. Teresa describes seven mansions gradually coming up to the final one.

The central point in this process is humility needed against the desires of the treasures of the world. Not the visible world should be our concern but the spiritual should be the most important. It is better to pray for a person than to give material things to them for example. Our focus needs to be on Christ alone and neither what others think of us nor our concern for our well-being should divert us from that.

The final stage is one where the mystic experiences unity with God. There is a "detachment" from the world and the concern of people is not selfish anymore but only for others or for God. There are no internal trials to be experienced anymore there is just a quiet desire to praise God.

Here the soul experiences unity with God. The seventh mansion is the innermost mansion. Here the soul is ready finally to give its life up for God. There is joy when suffering for God's purposes is possible. In fact God does send great trial and suffering for those people so that they can experience these as his favors. The soul wants to join Christ in his sufferings for the sinners and is ready and joyfully expecting the ultimate crown in dying a martyr's death.

The mansions cannot be entered by human effort since God expects humility. One is admitted to them by God's free will. A forceful effort to get into one of these would displease God and thereby would make him unwilling to let one in. It will be easy to enter

the more advanced mansions if one considers oneself unworthy of even being admitted to the first mansions.

A particular point in the last mansion is also the experience of the Trinity in oneself not possible at lower mansion. This sounds disturbingly heretical since the biblical teaching is the Spirit in us as a participation in the Trinity. Indwelling of the Trinity seems to be more like the eastern-religions' experience of universal consciousness.

Other disturbing points come up like the advocacy of self-torture. The arguments against this is that one might destroy ones ability to serve God and not that one does violence to what God has given.

In the postlude Teresa claims that if someone finds anything spiritual beneficial in this book then one can be "quite sure" that it comes from God. This is a stark contrast to her earlier words where she does not see herself fit to communicate spiritual things.

Tereasa's use of the Bible to illustrate her points is very creative and very helpful to bring her points. For example she compares people not praying with people not using their limbs and sees them ultimately to turn into pillars of salt like Lot's wife. People have so much in this world so that they look back and do not strive to go forward with God. I found this illustration particularly striking.