

Abstract of thesis entitled

“The Path and the Castle.

**A Comparative Study of *The Path of Purification* of Buddhaghosa
and *The Interior Castle* of Saint Teresa of Ávila: An Analytical Study on their
Similarities in the Dynamics of Spiritual Life.”**

Submitted by

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Parallels between the spiritual paths of Theravāda Buddhists and Discalced Carmelites have long been observed, although not satisfactorily explained. This study contributes to objectively clarifying the similarities and differences between the two paths; and to explain their phenomenological similarities and structural affinities. This latter goal is carried out by identifying relationships between both religious systems and determining if there is an underlying level where they converge, irrespective of their undeniable differences. To achieve this end, the research comparatively examines the dynamics of spiritual development as described in two iconic works from the respective traditions: *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)* by Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa and *The Interior Castle (Castillo interior)* by Saint Teresa of Ávila. The thesis focuses on the stages of virtue (*sīla*) and concentration (*samādhi*) in *The Path of Purification*, and the Mansions One to Six in *The Interior Castle* where the similarities are more pronounced.

After introducing the rationale that leads to the research and its expected outcome and delimitations, the study discusses some of the critical theoretical and methodological problems and issues that arise when engaging in interreligious and cross-cultural comparisons. It then reviews a series of methodological contributions by the school of New Comparativism, whose principles and tools are adopted throughout the study. The research goes on to introduce the background information requisite to understanding the doctrines of spiritual development as laid out by Buddhaghosa and Teresa. After presenting the comparands and their works, as well as their respective cultural and socio-historical contexts and influences, the study offers an overview of our two authors taxonomies of stages, and their notions of the nature and structure of the human being.

Next, the thesis contains a systematic and synoptic comparative analysis of the dynamics of spiritual progress described in Buddhaghosa's and Teresa's accounts. Through this methodical comparison, the study identifies a series of phenomenological coincidences and disparities and structural correlations and symmetries along the two spiritual processes, despite their irreconcilable differences in principles and final ends.

The interpretive part of the study builds on the phenomenological similarities and structural parallels identified in the comparative analysis. Here the hypothesis is tested whether underneath both paths a process of transformation and transcendence of the empirical self takes place which could allow us to construct an explanatory framework for the aforesaid similarities. We conclude that "transformation and transcendence of the experiential self," as hermeneutical principle, has explanatory efficacy to make intelligible the phenomenological similarities and structural parallels identified throughout the comparative analysis, without violating the integrity of either tradition.

The study concludes with some observations on prospects and implications based on the preceding interpretive synthesis. As an explanatory principle, "transformation and transcendence of the empirical self," invites reflection on several current debates in religious studies, comparative religion and the psychology and philosophy of religion. The conclusion infers the possibility of translating this hermeneutical insight into a better understanding of the dynamics of spiritual growth in general and, by extension, of the meaning, nature and function of religion.

(495 words)

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this University or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualifications.

Daniel Millet Gil

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GENERAL ABBREVIATIONS

BCS	<i>Buddhist-Christian Studies</i>
CUP	Cambridge University Press
DRAE	<i>Diccionario de la lengua española</i> (Dictionary of Spanish Language).
DS	<i>Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique Doctrine et Histoire</i>
EM	<i>Encyclopedia of Monasticism</i>
ER	<i>Encyclopedia of Religion</i>
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
NC	New Comparativism
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
OUP	Oxford University Press
PEW	<i>Philosophy East and West</i>
SUNY	The State University of New York
UCP	University of Chicago Press
WMD	<i>The Merriam-Webster Dictionary</i>

BUDDHIST TEXTS

AN	<i>Aṅguttara Nikāya</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i>
SN	<i>Saṃyutta Nikāya</i>
KN	<i>Khuddaka Nikāya</i>
Dhp	<i>Dhammapada</i>
Sn	<i>Sutta Nipāta</i>
Kv	<i>Kathāvatthu</i>
BP/BĪP	<i>Bhikkhu Prātimokṣa / Bhikkhunī Prātimokṣa</i>
Dhs	<i>Dhammasaṅgaṇī</i>
Mil	<i>Milindapañha</i>
Mhv	<i>Mahāvamsa</i>
Paṭis	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga</i>
PP	<i>The Path of Purification</i> (Ñāṇamoli's translation of the <i>Visuddhimagga</i>)
Vibh	<i>Vibhaṅga</i>
Udā	<i>Udāna</i>
Vim	<i>Vimuttimagga</i>
Vin	<i>Vinaya Piṭaka</i>
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>
BD	<i>Buddhist Dictionary. Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines</i>
BPS	Buddhist Publication Society
CPED	<i>Concise Pāli-English Dictionary</i>
DPPN	<i>Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names</i>
EB	<i>Encyclopaedia of Buddhism</i> (Sri Lanka)
EncBuddh	<i>Encyclopedia of Buddhism</i> (R E. Buswell)
JBS	<i>Journal of Buddhist Studies</i>
JCBSSL	<i>Journal of the Centre for Buddhist Studies, Sri Lanka</i>
JPTS	<i>Journal of the Pali Text Society</i>
PDB	<i>The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism</i>
PED	<i>The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary</i>
PEG	<i>Pāli-English Glossary of Buddhist Technical Terms</i>
PTS	Pali Text Society

CHRISTIAN TEXTS

Works by St. Teresa

C	<i>Camino de Perfección / The Way of Perfection (Escorial Codex)</i>
CO	<i>Constituciones de San José / Constitutions of Saint Joseph of Avila</i>
Cta.	<i>Epistolario / Epistolary</i>
CV	<i>Camino de Perfección / The Way of Perfection (Valladolid Codex)</i>
Exc	<i>Exclamaciones / Exclamations</i>
F	<i>El Libro de las Fundaciones / The Book of the Foundations</i>
M	<i>Moradas del Castillo Interior / The Interior Castle</i>
Me	<i>Meditaciones Sobre los Cantares / Meditations on the Song of Songs</i>
R	<i>Relaciones (Cuentas de Conciencia) / Spiritual Testimonies</i>
V	<i>El Libro de la Vida / The Book of the Life</i>
VD	<i>Visita de Descalzas / Method for the Visitation of Discalced Nuns</i>
VE	<i>Vejamen / Commentary on 'Seek Yourself in Me'</i>

Works by St. John of the Cross

CE	<i>Cantico Espiritual / Spiritual Canticle</i>
LI	<i>Llama de amor viva / The Living Flame of Love</i>
N	<i>Noche Oscura del Alma / Dark Night of the Soul</i>
S	<i>Subida al Monte Carmelo / Ascent of Mount Carmel</i>

Works by Francisco de Osuna

TAE	<i>Tercer Abecedario Espiritual / Third Spiritual Alphabet</i>
BAC	<i>Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos</i>
BMC	<i>Biblioteca Mística Carmelitana</i>
CE	<i>The Catholic Encyclopedia</i>
CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>
DSTJ	<i>Diccionario de Santa Teresa de Jesús</i>
ICS	<i>Institute of Carmelite Studies</i>
NED	<i>Nuevo Diccionario de Espiritualidad</i>
NT	<i>New Testament</i>
OCD	<i>Ordo Carmelitarum Discalceatorum/ Order of the Discalced Carmelites</i>
Rev. Esp.	<i>Revista de Espiritualidad</i>
Espiritualidad	<i>Editorial de Espiritualidad</i>
ST	<i>Summa Theologiae</i>
NRSVB	<i>New Revised Standard Version Bible</i>

PART ONE: PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Motivation for the study

In our troubled time, a deep understanding of the role of religion in human experience and a fruitful dialogue between religion and science have become an urgent task.¹ Some scholars believe that the discoveries and insights emerging from the comparative study of religions could be essential to such an inquiry into the nature of religion,² and instrumental in the communication between the various religious traditions, science, and the modern world. Unfortunately, the full potential promised by comparative religion has not been sufficiently tapped, despite over a century of comparative religious studies.

This is patent in the comparison of Buddhism and Christianity. Much was expected from the modern encounter between these two world religions.³ Important academic and religious journals have been founded in recent decades to study their interrelation.⁴ Numerous Buddhist-Christian institutions have been established worldwide to promote mutual understanding, interchanges, and comparative research.⁵ Researchers in both religions have spared no less effort in their endeavors to enhance mutual knowledge, resulting in a staggering number of publications every year. And yet, the full unveiling of a deeper relationship between these two traditions remains—in many ways—elusive.

This state of affairs has several causes. The first concerns scope: very frequently the comparative study of Buddhism and Christianity follows the line of thematic studies devoted to specific issues (e.g., love and compassion or meditation and contemplation). These comparative portraits, desirable as they are, are narrow in focus; they do not offer a panoramic view that fully captures the extent of the similarities and differences between both religions. Therefore, while indispensable, these studies do not extricate us from the current fragmentation and atomization in comparative knowledge.

¹ Charles Townes, "The Convergence of Science and Religion," *Zygon* 1, Issue 3 (September 1966): 301–11.

² Wallace states that the comparative study of religion might lead to a "synthetic understanding of how these diverse traditions relate to each other [...] Truths that are invariant across the conceptual frameworks of diverse religions and even science itself [...] may turn out to be the most significant truths available to humanity" (Allan Wallace, *The Taboo of Subjectivity: Toward a New Science of Consciousness*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, 181). P. Carus writes: "For the sake of purifying our conception of religion, there is no better method than a study of comparative religion; and in comparative religion there is nothing more fruitful than a tracing of the analogies and contrasts obtained between Buddhism and Christianity" (Paul Carus, *Buddhism and Its Christian Critics*, Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1897, 3).

³ Arnold Toynbee wrote: "a thousand years hence historians will look back at the twentieth century and remember it not for the struggle between liberalism and communism but for the momentous human discovery of the encounter between Christianity and Buddhism" (Cited by Akizuki Ryōmin, "Christian-Buddhist Dialogue," *Inter-Religio* 14, Fall 1988, 39).

⁴ For example, *Buddhist-Christian Studies* by the University of Hawaii Press and *Dialogue (NS)* by EIDS in Sri Lanka.

⁵ For instance, the European Network of Buddhist Christian Studies or the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture.

Conversely, on many occasions, the subject area of other Buddhist-Christian studies is too broad.⁶ The wide-angle lenses they adopt, result in imprecise generalizations, lacking sufficient details to uncover the depth and riches of the two traditions compared. As such, these interreligious thematic studies deprive the possibility of exploring the reasons behind the palpable symmetries and parallelisms between the two religions.

Another set of causes relate not to scope or focus, but to ideology or dogmatism. Repeatedly, in the name of a putative “transcendent unity of religions,”⁷ specific Buddhist-Christian studies are conducted in order to fit the two religions together. Typically, this is done by downplaying their undeniable differences and uniqueness, which leads to dramatically altered images of the traditions under scrutiny, sometimes to the point of making them unrecognizable to themselves.⁸ This faulty *modus operandi* hinders the appreciation of their particularities and singularity.

In yet other comparative studies, the emphasis errs on the side of contrast. In these studies, the stress is on the recognition of differences, and the celebration of “otherness,” refuting the existence of real commonalities (and even the possibility of comparison itself), thus opposing an alleged commensurability of religions. However, even a casual acquaintance with the literature of both traditions will reveal unmistakably striking points of convergence and remarkable parallelisms (e.g., in precepts for moral alignment, phenomenology), above and beyond their obvious departures in theory and praxis. These convergences cannot be justified by historical contact alone, will not disappear, and cannot simply be dismissed; instead, they call for a proper explanation.

Moreover, even when these comparisons are carried through with a sound and ideologically neutral methodology, they often fail to address an essential element in any given religious system: the diachronic aspect of the religious life, that is, that spiritual life, like life itself, is a dynamic process of growth over time. This oversight entails the absence of a proper perspective in the juxtaposition of particular doctrines or practices, and when comparing discrete religious phenomena in a synoptic fashion. This occurs when religious facts and events are compared as analogous and simultaneous when in reality they belong to unsymmetrical segments in the process of spiritual maturation.⁹

⁶ For instance, J. E. Carpenter, *Buddhism and Christianity: A Contrast and Parallel* (London: Hodder & Stoughton 1923); and Fumio Masutani, *A Comparative Study of Buddhism and Christianity* (Tokyo: The Young East Association, 1957).

⁷ Phrase coined by Frithjof Schuon and title of his *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (New York: Harper, 1948).

⁸ For example, following statement by Panikkar seem to present the Buddha as a crypto theist: “is to defend the absolute transcendence of the divinity [...] that the Buddha, consequently, denies it [the divinity]” [author’s translation] Raimon Panikkar, *El silencio del Buddha. Una introducción al ateísmo religioso* (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 1996), 77.

⁹ For example, when comparing the final state of *nibbāna* with mystical phenomena such as ecstasy in Catholicism.

1.2 Purpose of the study

Thus, faced with a plethora of thematic studies, it is then coherent to advocate overall Buddhist-Christian appraisals that contemplate the totality of their spiritual systems. The rationale for our research design rests on the basic assumption that this alternative viewpoint conveys a more comprehensive picture of the comparands. Such a holistic approach adequately captures the inherent complexities of the spiritual paths of the two religious systems, encompassing more particulars for an in-depth comparison.

We also believe that it is possible to compare religious traditions with objectivity and impartiality, instead of emphasizing resemblances or neglecting obvious dissimilarities. Academic fairness demands comparative exercises that convey more accurate images, whereby the comparands can recognize themselves in their own self-understanding.¹⁰

Moreover, we suggest that a rewarding perspective should highlight that spiritual life is not a static phenomenon, but a dynamic process of maturation unfolding over time.¹¹ An overall comparison of Christian and Buddhist spiritualities should accommodate such a consideration for the diachronic and developing aspects of religious life in both faiths through inclusive studies that compare their evolution from inception to culmination.

It is also essential to realize that both salvific systems are matrixes of transformation, in which metamorphosis occurs through discrete stages. Buddhism and Christianity delineate and meticulously describe and classify these phases of progress along the spiritual journey because they recognize the importance of such distinctions for proper spiritual formation and guidance. Unfortunately, there is no universal recognition yet that most religious traditions structure the unfolding of the religious life and frame its phenomenology within this sequence of levels of maturation. An in-depth acquaintance with the path-stations in both traditions should enable us to identify: similarities in the course of progression; resemblances in clusters of phenomenological occurrences, and parallel milestones along the two paths. In this light, the differentiation of stages offers an indispensable framework that any comprehensive comparison should incorporate.

Finally, a feasible comparison should account for the inherent diversity in both religions, and not attempt a comparison of Buddhism and Christianity in abstract terms. These are two religious convictions that have spawned civilizations and have a long and tortuous history in which multiple divisions occurred. As such, we aim to comparatively

¹⁰ We intend to develop this point in greater detail in Chapter Two, devoted to "Methodology."

¹¹ Both traditions describe themselves as ways (*maggā, via*) to liberation or salvation; "paths" to purification, perfection.

examine the developmental experience of spiritual growth within two specific traditions within their own denominations: Theravāda Buddhism on the one hand and Catholicism, and more specifically, the Order of the Discalced (Barefoot) Carmelites on the other.

We have selected these traditions for several reasons. They exhibit both profound differences and remarkable similarities. The similarities, we aim to show, are particularly pronounced in the structure of spiritual development of Theravādins and Carmelites.¹² It is not difficult to explain the differences; giving reasons for the similarities is arduous. What is missing then is a framework that explains both the similarities and differences.

1.3 The research question

In light of the above, we are now in the position to state the focus of our research, concisely formulated as follows: to comparatively examine the experience of Theravāda Buddhist and Discalced Carmelites with regard to their dynamics of spiritual growth, employing the scheme of the path-stages as an analytic framework for each tradition.

The *raison d'être* of this structural comparison is twofold: first, to contribute to objectively clarifying the similarities and differences between the spiritual paths of Theravāda Buddhism and Discalced Carmelites. This is the subject matter of Part Three ("Comparative Analysis") of the thesis; and secondly, we have the further aim of trying to make sense of the phenomenological similarities and structural parallelisms between both paths. We intend to attain this latter purpose by identifying possible interrelations between the two systems and determining if there is an underlying level where both traditions converge, despite their irreconcilable differences. This is the subject matter of Part Four ("Interpretive Synthesis") of the thesis.

We must emphasize at the outset that in our study we are not comparing two entire soteriologies, which is a much more sensitive and complex matter, but two particular spiritual processes that exhibit substantial similarities with the aim to explain these similarities. Another premise for the comparability of our comparanda, is that Buddhaghosa's path of purification and Teresa's seven mansions are on the same level, in that neither one nor the other is soteriologically indispensable. Their role is auxiliary, as in both traditions there are other ways and means to the soteriological goal.

¹² L. S. Cousins, "The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification: The Interior Castle of St. Teresa of Avila and the Path of Purification of Buddhaghosa," in *The Yogi and the Mystic: Studies in Indian and Comparative Mysticism* ed. Karel Werner (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 1995), 103-20.

1.4 The comparands and their works

From an ample catalog of mappings of spiritual life in Theravāda and Catholicism,¹³ our study aims to examine and compare two major works in their respective traditions: *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)* (ca. 5th century CE), by the Indian master Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa, and *The Interior Castle (Castillo interior)*, written in 1577, by Saint Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582), Spanish mystic, founder of the Order of the Discalced Carmelites and Doctor of the Church.¹⁴

A combination of theoretical and pragmatic criteria has been employed in our choice of the proper historical documents and adequate partners in dialogue. In the first place, Ācariya Buddhaghosa and Saint Teresa of Ávila are both towering figures in their own denominations. Few thinkers in Theravāda embody this tradition like Buddhaghosa.¹⁵ Similarly, Saint Teresa of Ávila occupies a unique place in Roman Catholic theology and gives testimony of the Carmelite tradition like few other spiritual teachers.¹⁶

Secondly, the selected works are classic spiritual guidebooks forming part of the common heritage of humanity, and on par with the most celebrated religious books of all times. The *Visuddhimagga* has been cataloged as the epitome of the Theravāda path to enlightenment, providing an elaborate compilation of doctrine and practice.¹⁷ Similarly, *Castillo interior* is a seminal Carmelite text widely acclaimed as one of the finest expressions and more sophisticated syntheses of Catholic spiritual theology.¹⁸

Both works' centrality and relevance as representatives of their respective traditions, supersedes the fact that they were conceived in different centuries, continents, and

¹³ In the long history of Buddhism, different schema of stages to Enlightenment were formulated over the centuries. Without leaving Theravāda, another rendition is contained in the *Path of Freedom (Vimuttimaggā)* by Arahant Upatissa. Another alternative, no less interesting, could have resulted from contrasting Teresa's account of the development of spiritual life with the Noble Eightfold Path. In Catholicism there is no lack of other schema either, for example, those contained in classics like the sevenfold *Itinerarium mentis ad Deum* by St. Buenaventura, the *Seven Steps of the Ladder of Spiritual Love* of John Ruysbroeck or the *Seven Stages of Contemplation* by Thomas Gallus.

¹⁴ Pope Paul VI, on September 27, 1970, declared St. Teresa of Jesus the first of only two females among the 32 doctors of the Church at that time, for her significance to Catholic Theology and, her contribution to the life of prayer.

¹⁵ Buddhaghosa "the chief commentator in the tradition and one of the greatest minds in the history of Buddhism" (Maria Heim, *The Forerunner of All Things: Buddhaghosa on Mind, Intention, and Agency*, Oxford: OUP, 2014, 4).

¹⁶ Pope Benedict XVI said of St. Teresa that she is "one of the highest examples of Christian spirituality of all times." Pope Benedict XVI, general audience in Rome on Feb. 2, 2011. O'Keefe says, "St. Teresa of Avila, mystic and Doctor of the Church, is undoubtedly one of the greatest teachers of prayer in the entire Christian tradition" (Mark O'Keefe, *The Way of Transformation: Saint Teresa of Avila on the Foundation and Fruit of Prayer*, Washington: ICS Publics, 2016, 1).

¹⁷ His Holiness the Dalai Lama sates: "Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* [...] represents the epitome of Pali Buddhist literature, weaving together its many strands to create this wonderful meditation manual, which even today retains the clarity it revealed when it was written" (His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Nāṇamoli in "Introduction" *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, translated by Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2010, xiii).

¹⁸ The *Castillo interior* is a fundamental work on mystical theology. As stated in the pontifical declaration of Teresa as Doctor of the Church: "This book occupies the first place among the most celebrated treatises of mystical Theology" (Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum, *Santa Teresa de Jesús, doctora de la Iglesia: documentos oficiales del proceso canónico*, Junta Nacional Española para el Doctorado de Santa Teresa de Jesús, Madrid: Espiritualidad, 1970, 224).

cultural milieus, precluding our comparison from being considered a mere case study. There are yet other intrinsic merits making them particularly suitable for comparison: both *magna opera* are *comprehensive*, covering the entire spectrum of the spiritual life and offering a comprehensive panoramic view of their respective religious traditions.¹⁹

Both are also *systematic*, describing their ordinary courses of progression, and typifying the sequential continuum of the path-stages from its inception to culmination. On the Buddhist side, the *Visuddhimagga* is an excellent compendium that amounts to the foremost systematization of the Theravāda philosophy of liberation. It exemplarily encapsulates the Theravāda process of enlightenment, and its subtleties, from the worldly state (*puthujjana*) to realization in three parts—*sīla* (morality), *samādhi* (concentration) and *paññā* (wisdom)—and seven stages of purification (*satta-visuddhi*). On the Christian side, *Castillo interior*, also known as *Las Moradas* (*The Mansions or Dwelling Places*), is Teresa's most mature and systematic work. It is widely recognized as a primary guide in Catholicism on the particular way to God: the path of prayer. It details the soul's progression from the worldly state (those outside the castle) to its marriage with God. This didactic work expounds the complexities of the journey through seven "mansions," arguably embedded implicitly in the classic threefold schema of the three *vias* (ways): *via purgative* (purgative way), *via iluminativa* (illuminative way), *via unitiva* (unitive way), since old described in the manuals of Spiritual Theology.

Equally, both compendiums are *orthodox* and *authoritative* in their denominations. The *Path of Purification* is the essential manual of doctrine and practice expounding and summarizing the Theravāda path to liberation. It is highly regarded as "the principal non-canonical authority of the Theravāda outside the *Tipiṭaka*"²⁰ and the indispensable reference for all subsequent developments within the tradition. *Castillo interior* is the backbone of Catholic orthodoxy with regard to a particular path to God, contemplative prayer, where it has been seminal for informing this tradition, more than any other work. Furthermore, both masters share the merit of having written manuscripts that are *descriptive* as well as *prescriptive*. Descriptive, in the sense that they describe a path along which they have journeyed and have been reported by their traditions over the centuries. Prescriptive, in the sense that being instructive to practitioners of regulatory practices extracted from a rich shared *praxis* accumulated over millennia.

¹⁹ As O'Keefe says, "In *The Interior Castle*, the most mature of Teresa's major works, we see the spiritual life as a whole within the structure of one overarching image" (O'Keefe, *The Way of Transformation*, 13). Paravahera Vajirañāza states: "The most exhaustive treatise on the subject of meditation is the *Visuddhimagga* by Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa, composed around 412 CE in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). This is the standard Theravādin work of exposition, its authority resting upon the original teachings of Gotama Buddha, as they are found in the Pāli *Tipiṭaka*" (Paravahera Vajirañāza Mahāthera, *Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice*. 2nd edition. Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1975, i-ii).

²⁰ Nānamoli, "Introd." to the *Path*, xxvii.

Our two texts are not only essential from a doctrinal standpoint but also for *praxis*; they are two necessary guidebooks and authorized manuals for meditators. In this light, the two masterworks are more than merely historical documents; they are “living books.” To date, they continue to guide and nourish the development of countless adepts and are the focal points around which both traditions continue to incorporate and develop.

It must be noted that, although our two systems were erected over different, even opposite, doctrinal foundations, and are far apart in terms of time, space and religious contexts, without having had direct traceable historical connections between them, in spiritual terms, both adopt remarkably similar strategies in the course of spiritual growth. In similar vein, Cousins writes, “there are between the accounts of St. Teresa and Buddhaghosa a whole series of similarities. In particular the models of the path which both of them give run parallel [...] Although there are many differences of detail and a very different context, the general structure is remarkably similar.”²¹ Quite often, our two authors describe spiritual development employing analogous vocabulary and images, tend to present veritable convergences in ascetic and meditative practices, and share surprising overlaps in religious phenomenology. These joint commonalities, should suggest substantial agreement in underlying structures of spiritual growth.

Notwithstanding the similarities, it is equally important to note the no less significant divergences between both systems, and their opposing and even conflicting viewpoints. In a number of their most fundamental beliefs, both traditions are mutually exclusive. They are embedded in different philosophical and theological milieus and, therefore, encompass differing discourses and even opposing views. They likewise provide unique maps borne of the singular exploration of the territory they describe, and they belong to different ages and tongues, having been bred in unconnected religious-cultural cradles, with disparate socio-economical and historical backgrounds.

Both manuscripts are also vastly different in their writing style and use of language. Whereas Buddhaghosa’s treatise is a compilatory corpus written as a textbook, Teresa’s narrative theology is experiential, intimate and frequently poetic in expression. She relates her experiences in an autobiographical tone, and her advice is based on her personal experiences and those around her. Far from being a handicap, it is precisely these wide disparities, and the fact that both systems developed in isolation from each other, which provide independent samplings of the spiritual quest, and the necessary counterpoint to hopefully make our comparative study both interesting and informative.

²¹ Cousins, “The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification,” 120.

1.5 Scope and delimitations

To be able to provide an answer to our research question, within a specific timeframe and the confines of what is doable, requires the undertaking to be properly delimited. Moreover, in a comparative study of this nature, the economy of words is a pressing problem. Thus, it is essential to define clear boundaries demarking the terrain of our inquiry. To this end, we should bear in mind that the issue at hand is not a comparison of two religions (Buddhism and Christianity), but of the dynamics of spiritual growth in the stage-based religious systems described by Buddhaghosa and Teresa.

However, even such a comprehensive but delimited comparison would undoubtedly involve a lengthy analysis and exposition, as well as a taxing *tour de force* that could end up generating an unbearably voluminous and impractical report. Consequently, because of the magnitude of the task, we do not attempt to cover every aspect of our topic. Instead, we intend to confine ourselves to analytically investigating its central ideas omitting or dealing in passing deliberation with issues peripheral to our concern.²²

Additionally, we aim to show that the similarities between the paths described by Buddhaghosa and Teresa are more pronounced from the commencement of spiritual life in both traditions until the culmination of *samatha* meditation in Theravāda and the Sixth Mansions in Teresa, respectively. Therefore, this segment is our primary target. Undoubtedly, another large study could be written comparing *vipassanā* meditation and Teresa's path, however we consider that here the two traditions diverge considerably. Consequently, no comparative analysis effort will be dedicated in our study to it. The same can be said regarding the Seventh Mansions. Our study aims to provide a satisfactory explanation for the similarities *along* the paths of Theravada and Carmel. Thus, no detailed comparison will be made about the states of liberation and salvation.

Finally, our primary task is to systematically compare two distinct trajectories and the sequence of stages that configure them, while attempting to recognize parallel patterns of growth and identify underlying structures through a balanced and objective approach, in order to provide a satisfactory way for explaining the similarities between both paths. This is the scope of our study. Thus, given the synthetic nature of our study, and that we take for granted that both traditions developed without traceable historical connections between them, no attempt is made here to pursue connections of a historical nature, exchanges or mutual influences between the two, which could have existed in the past.

²² About such tangential issues, efforts are made to suggest relevant literature; or are set aside for future research.

1.6 Expected outcome and relevance

Apart from providing an answer to our research question, we anticipate several other outcomes from comparatively examining our two authors' accounts on the development of spiritual life. Some of these subsidiary outcomes seem relevant for several reasons. Little is known, outside the sphere of Theravādins and Carmelites, about their understanding of the nature of man and his potentiality and the principles that govern his spiritual development. The simultaneous presentation of each *scala perfectionis* aspires to contribute to the dissemination of this essential knowledge which, sadly, is sinking into oblivion. This optimized knowledge promotes mutual acquaintance and to rise above misrepresentations and stereotypes still extant in both religious cultures.

A *vis-à-vis* exposition of both trajectories may reveal the similarities between the two accounts of growth, as well as their even perhaps more apparent disparities. Thus, a synoptic description of both paths facilitates the appreciation of the distinctive manner in which the Theravāda and Carmelite traditions confront and resolve similar problems.

Still, the attempt to promote interreligious understanding, and a better knowledge of how the Theravāda and Carmelite traditions approach and unravel the conundrums of spiritual life, are not the primary motivations for pursuing the present undertaking. As Barnes²³ and many other scholars have noted, a prerogative emanating from “learning across religious borders”²⁴ is the acquisition of new religious knowledge. Although our two selected spiritual guides—the *Path of Purification* and the *Interior Castle*—differ in background and doctrinal outlook, the methodic juxtaposition of these two stage-based spiritual paths enables the identification of seeming patterns of evolution or telling coincidences, in the course of maturation among otherwise distinctive religious cultures.

Such “interreligious learning”²⁵ springing from the reading of the two texts in tandem, could provide valuable insights and new perspectives into how both processes unfold. Moreover, it also sheds light on how both the two traditions function in practice and, through their interaction, promote a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of spiritual progression in general and the human potential for spiritual development. All this new knowledge is essential toward the nascent contemplative sciences that have begun to rise in recent years, and towards the wider meaning and role of religion itself.

²³ Michael Barnes, *Interreligious Learning, Dialogue, Spirituality and the Christian Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²⁴ Phrase coined by Francis X. Clooney and used throughout his *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

²⁵ Didier Pollefeyt, ed., *Interreligious Learning* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007).

1.7 Originality of the research

The present study provides a genuine contribution in several directions. To the best of our knowledge, no dissertation-length monograph has yet been dedicated to putting the Theravāda and Carmelite paths of spiritual growth into a comparative perspective, while considering their independent contextual socio-cultural and historical settings and original languages, and for the purpose of knowing the similarities and differences between these two religious systems and their true interconnection.²⁶

Likewise, as far as we know, no other study has been done to date bestowing a sustained consideration on our two comparands.²⁷ Previously, several scholars have noted phenomenological coincidences and structural symmetries between the spiritual paths described by Buddhaghosa and Teresa.²⁸ However, apart from a few remarkable but limited previous attempts—read here the article by Cousins “The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification: the Interior Castle of St. Teresa of Ávila and the Path of Purification of Buddhaghosa”²⁹—the present work is the first thesis-length comparative study devoted to comparing the paths described by our two authors.

Moreover, this work aims to extract principles of growth common to both processes and, hopefully, provide a new synthesis and reinterpretation of existing data, without calling into question the theological identity and integrity of the traditions investigated.

In summary, our research question invites an exploration that, as far as we know, has not been fully attempted and has not received sufficient attention by scholars. Moreover, this investigation aims to make an innovative and practical contribution to ongoing exchanges between Theravāda Buddhism and Roman Catholicism in general, and Theravāda and the Order of the Discalced Carmelites in particular.³⁰

²⁶ In recent years, we have seen a rising number of comparisons between Carmelite mysticism and the religions of Asia. However, in the few cases that these studies compare the entire paths of spiritual progress, the impetus has not always been the betterment of comparative knowledge, or other synthetic motives, but more pragmatic purposes such as the utilization of Buddhist meditative techniques among Christians, for example Peter Feldmeier, *Christianity Looks East: Comparing the Spiritualities of John of the Cross and Buddhaghosa* (New York: Paulist Press, 2006).

²⁷ Buddhaghosa’s work has been compared with several Christian mystics. For example, with the *Cloud of Unknowing* (Anonymous). See Ninian Smart, “What Would Buddhaghosa Have Made of the Cloud of Unknowing?” in *Mysticism and Language* ed. Steven A. Katz 103-22 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). The present work intends to add to the comparative studies between Theravāda and Carmelite spirituality. When, for whatever purpose, the comparison between the Theravāda and Carmelite paths of spiritual growth is elaborated, Buddhaghosa and the illustrious pupil of St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, are usually the preferred targets for comparison. For example, Mary Jo Meadow, Kevin Culligan and Daniel Chowning, *Christian Insight Meditation: Following in the Footsteps of John of the Cross* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2007). However, without downplaying St. John’s most impressive theology, St. Teresa of Avila is the one who epitomizes the Catholic teachings on the life of prayer.

²⁸ Sarah Shaw, *An Introduction to Buddhist Meditation* (London: Routledge, 2008), 271.

²⁹ Cousins, “The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification,” 103-20.

³⁰ A significant example of recent exchanges between Theravāda and the Order of the Discalced Carmelites was the “First World Encounter on Teresian Mysticism and Interreligious Dialogue: Theravāda Buddhism and Teresian

1.8 Dissertation outline

Regarding content and structure, the argument for this thesis is presented as follows: Present Chapter One has been dedicated to introducing the purpose and rationale of the thesis, statement of the research question, presentation of the comparands and their works, scope and limitations of the study, and the expected outcome and outline.

Chapter Two is devoted to methodology. The first section of this second chapter deals with the central theoretical questions and problems underlying the study. These are the justification of the comparison itself and theoretical frameworks of reference (i.e., universalism, particularism, postmodernism and new comparativism). As the exercise at hand is one of comparativism, and due to past excesses and the unsophistication with which cross-religious comparisons are very frequently conducted, the second section of this chapter examines chronic methodological failures in the practice of the discipline.³¹ Likewise, we shall review the contributions of some scholars who, under the banner of “New Comparativism,” have established significant advances in comparative methodology in recent decades selecting the best tools for our study.³² Chapter Two concludes with the presentation of the methodological approach adopted for our study.

Naturally, before any comparison familiarization with the comparands is desirable. Chapters Three and Four are thus devoted to providing the background necessary for understanding Buddhaghosa’s and Teresa’s doctrines on spiritual development. First, we introduce our two authors. If a biographical note is relevant, particularly in the case of Teresa, it is also essential to offer an account of our authors’ socio-historical and religio-cultural contexts. Afterward, the Theravāda and Carmelite monastic orders are presented, as well as the particular place that our two writers occupy in their traditions.³³ The next section in each chapter gives an overview of the development of the doctrine and taxonomy of their respective path-stages from their basis in both traditions’ scriptures until their culmination in Buddhaghosa’s and Teresa’s templates. Chapters Three and Four conclude, respectively, with a presentation of the understanding of the

Mysticism—Meditation and Contemplation, Pathways to Peace” held from July 27th to 30th of 2017 in Ávila, Spain, organized by the International Centre of Teresian and Sanjuanist Studies (CITeS), with the collaboration of the Centre of Buddhist Studies (CBS) of The University of Hong Kong (HKU).

³¹ For example, apologetic privileging of one tradition over another; distorting or decontextualizing theological realities of a tradition; reduction of the terms of one religion to another; inattention to undeniable differences between religions, etc.

³² Among the procedural questions and epistemological concerns that we shall raise, there are a number of reservations and objections habitually present in the current debate between adherents and opponents of the application of the comparative method to religious studies (e.g. legitimacy of trans-religious categories/vocabulary, generalization of data in a defensible way, problems of decontextualization, the validity of cross-faith comparisons themselves). As a result, the guiding principles of methodology employed in this research will be explicitly stated and applied throughout the study.

³³ Bearing in mind that the presuppositions of each religion confer them with their unique and distinctive flavor and, in turn, account for their essential differences, we believe that a starting point is to present and contrast these conceptual grounds. Here, we provide enough background to appreciate the extent of the divergences between both traditions.

nature and structure of the human being in each one of our two traditions.

Having laid the essential groundwork, we are in the position to start the comparative section, the core of our study, which is the purpose of Chapter Five. Our focus here turns to a systematic comparison of the individual stages described by the Theravāda and Carmelite traditions. Placing the two path-stages in synoptic fashion, we shall highlight affinities and disparities between corresponding segments of spiritual life. In doing so, we will learn of similar phenomenological descriptions and analog similes that announce the potential existence of experiential correlations between both processes. During the comparison, the systematic and diachronic character of our investigation will allow us to explore progressively fundamental issues and classical motives always present in the Buddhist-Christian dialogue, including different attitudes towards worship, self-reliance versus divine grace, and the roles of the Buddha and Christ, meditation versus contemplation, among others.

Chapter Six, dedicated to the discussion of our findings, is expected to be the most suggestive section of our thesis. It recognizes that a valid comparison does not consist merely of a mechanistic exercise in the pure identification of matches and variances (*objective analysis*), but requires a genuinely interpretive endeavor (*subjective analysis*), involving an effort to explore the meaning of the convergences and divergences in the transformative methods and salvific strategies delineated in the previous chapter. Thus, in this speculative segment, a dialectical process is undertaken in order to interpret the existing data and make sense of our findings, abstracting relevant knowledge (*synthesis*) to relate back to the original research question set out in Chapter One, namely, the reasons for the similarities along the paths of Theravāda and Catholicism.

Chapter Seven, the conclusion, deals with the prospects and implications entailed by our prior interpretive synthesis. Here, we shall see how the similarities and differences set out by the preceding discussion, and the subsequent interpretative synthesis, open the door for reflection in relation to several current debates in areas such as philosophy and psychology of religion, theology of religion, and comparative religion, among others. We shall likewise draw inferences in the direction of translating these new insights into a better understanding of the dynamics of spiritual growth in general and, hopefully, of the meaning, nature, and function of religion itself and its urgent need for our modern world.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

2.1 Introduction

Having stated the inquiry that drives our research, as well as its significance and scope, the present chapter moves on to the issue of how the study will be conducted. Preliminary remarks on method are in order for several reasons. Most of the difficulties surfacing in interreligious comparisons are methodological. Problems and controversies plague comparative religion (or comparative religious studies) as an academic field. Among them, apologetic agendas, unexplained assumptions, and unfounded claims, to name just a few.¹ Many scholars concur that the crux of these difficulties is that the discipline has not yet advanced a commonly-accepted theoretical framework or a rigorous methodology that can give to the cross-cultural study of religion an “academic respectability.”² This chapter elaborates on ideas about how to deal with these difficulties.

A clarification on methodology is also imperative when comparing two traditions as diverse as Theravāda and Carmelite spiritualities. This is especially true when relating two religious expressions articulated in different languages, conceptual frameworks, and symbolic vocabularies, and composed in socio-historical contexts and religious-cultural circumstances as dissimilar as the fifth-century Ceylon and sixteenth-century Castile. Therefore, due to the nature of the theoretical, and methodological issues involved in the comparison, as well as their complexity, consideration should be given to all the relevant hermeneutical concerns at the outset, setting up clear parameters of analysis, in order to make our methodology as explicit as possible. The validity of the research and the possibility of extracting its full potential depends on adopting a sound *modus operandi*.

In this chapter, for the sake of greater clarity, theoretical and methodological issues are presented separately. The next section discusses theoretical questions incumbent to study two or more religions comparatively. The ensuing section deals with questions of methodology, presenting recent scholarly contributions aimed at providing adequate tools for comparative analysis. And the chapter concludes by stating the methodological approach adopted for the present study.

¹ Thomas Athanasius Idinopulos, “The Mothering Principle in the Comparison of Religions” in *Comparing Religions: Possibilities and Perils?* ed. T. A. Idinopulos, Brian C. Wilson and James Constantine Hanges (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006), 51. A typical example is Mircea Eliade’s all-comprehensive concept of “the sacred.” See Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961).

² For Jonathan Z. Smith, comparative religion is a field in the process of grounding. Jonathan Z. Smith, “The End of Comparison” in *A Magic Still Dwells* ed. Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 238. See also Kimberley C. Patton, “Juggling Torches: Why We Still Need Comparative Religion” in *A Magic Still Dwells* ed. Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 153.

2.2 Theoretical issues in comparative religion

2.2.1 Introduction

Many difficulties troubling comparative scholars are dependent on theoretical issues. Before starting to compare two religious systems abounding in conflicting paradigms, these theoretical issues demand scrutiny. We will organize the discussion around the themes of what comparing religions consists of; legitimacy of the comparative task and comparability of religions (commensurability); and theoretical frames of reference.

2.2.2. What is involved in comparing religious systems?

First, we should clarify what our interreligious comparison implies and what our intentions are. A substantial sample of comparative literature on religious traditions may show that many problems in comparing religions arise because of misjudging the nature of interreligious comparisons or a deceitful intention of the comparativist behind them.

All religious traditions present both commonalities and differences between them. However, the comparison of two or more religious systems does not merely consist of a mechanical exercise in identifying these traits. We need to study the interrelationship between our two distinct spiritual paths, those of the Theravāda and Carmelite traditions. This means going beyond mere likenesses and divergences to explore shared patterns and common structures analyzing the meaning and significance of these concurrences.

However, the comparison of religious traditions is not like comparing works of art or medical procedures. Religions are very complex systems that cannot be easily defined. First, it is not immediately clear what religion is. Despite their differences, Buddhism and Christianity are usually considered “religions,” thus, they should have some fundamental common features. But, if the issue of commensurability comes to the fore, it is precisely because of the absence of a common unit by which to measure both “religions,” because there is no agreement on what religion is. There have been literally dozens of definitions of “religion,”³ but none have received universal acceptance. This is linked to the eternal debate of whether Buddhism is indeed a religion. Furthermore, on the Christian side, K. Barth maintained that Christianity is not a “religion” but revelation, the “Word of God.”⁴

³ Donald Wiebe, *Religion and Truth: Towards an Alternative Paradigm for the Study of Religion* (New York: Mouton De Gruyter, 1982), 9-39.

⁴ Karl Barth, *On Religion: The Revelation of God as the Sublimation of Religion* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 49-52.

In the present study, and for our purposes, we shall provisionally define religion as a soteriological system, that is, a system of salvation or liberation, howsoever, these words are defined. Each religious system has its structure, dynamism, and symbolic language. In other words, each religious system responds to its own laws and is fundamentally different from other systems. Thus, when comparing distinct religions, we must always take into consideration the different nature of each religion and its systemic character.

Postmodernism has tended to discredit the search for interreligious structures. Poststructuralism, in particular, has disdained any discussion of overarching patterns in religion and comparative categories and taxonomies. We must also consider this perspective and address it by stating that finding shared patterns and common structures is not a claim to have uncovered extratemporal essences or intuited eternal structures. To compare religious traditions is like comparing languages. The comparison primarily speaks of human nature and the nature of human communication, and not eternal laws.

2.2.3 Legitimacy of the comparative task: systems theory

Comparability between the spiritual paths described by Buddhaghosa and Teresa is supported by a systems theory approach⁵ applied to comparative religious studies,⁶ which considers religious traditions as organic wholes, promotes comparisons between religions as holistic systems, and avoids superficial analogies and comparisons.⁷ Our two authors' paths are not independent of the traditions in which they are embedded as integral wholes, which are endowed with distinct and irreconcilable paradigms on the nature of the human being, ultimate reality, and the purpose of the spiritual quest. Buddhism and Christianity are located at opposite ends of the doctrinal spectrum. If both systems can be compared, it is not because they are similar and compatible, but because they are integral systems and, irrespective of their nature, all systems can be compared to determine their differences and similarities, identifying common patterns and so on. Therefore, our two religious systems can be compared as long as we take into account their complexity, foundations, structural functioning, symbolic vocabularies, and so forth, and that all their subsystems and elements interact interdependently in a coherent whole.

⁵ The notion of systems theory was first introduced by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in the 1930s. Essentially, it consists of the organic and interdisciplinary analysis of systems. For an introduction to the systems theory see Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory: Foundations, Development, Application* (New York: George Braziller, 1968).

⁶ For a critical assessment on the adequacy of system theory applied to religious studies see Niklas Luhmann, *A Systems Theory of Religion*, ed. André Kieserling, trans. David A. Brenner with Adrian Hermann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); and Christopher Scott Queen, "Systems Theory and Religious Studies, a Methodological Critique" (Ph.D. Diss. Boston University Graduate School, 1986).

⁷ For an example of the application of systems theory to religious studies see Randall Studstill, *The Unity of Mystical Traditions: The Transformation of Consciousness in Tibetan and German Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

2.2.4 Theoretical frameworks of reference

Throughout the history of comparative religion, four approaches to its object can be identified. *Universalism* was the earliest analytical framework for cross-religious studies.⁸ It is best represented by the well-known phenomenologist of religion Mircea Eliade. Universalism upholds that “all religions refer to the same underlying spiritual reality, manifest through different cultural forms.”⁹ Based on an essentialist assumption of the unity of all religious traditions, it postulates sameness, even identity, among religions, considering that all of them share a common spiritual goal underlying seemingly diverse structures. Several scholars have long objected to Eliade’s methodology¹⁰ as uncritical, intuitive, “unhistorical.”¹¹ Smith dismissed Eliade’s methodology as being “contextless,” “rhetorical,” “aprioristic.”¹² Smart accused Eliade of “theologizing.”¹³ Another common criticism wielded against universalism is that, in its programmatic search for an universal religious truth, it typically highlights similarities while neglecting differences.

As a backlash to universalism, *particularism* emphasizes the uniqueness of each tradition. To the particularists, every religion has its distinctive idiom and identity, is based on a singular paradigm, and is embedded in a non-extrapolative context. Suspicious of religion as an all-encompassing concept, particularists believe that a tradition can only be apprehended in its singularity while seeking similarities compromises the differential. Not proposing a total incomparability, it stresses specialization and philological expertise. As a framework, it tends to underscore differences at the expense of commonalities.¹⁴ As Paden noted, particularism’s accent on uniqueness and “radical contextualism” had compensatory effects on universalism. Nonetheless, the focus on singularity swung the pendulum to the extreme of incommensurability, which is equally unacceptable.¹⁵ The one-sidedness of particularism and its emphasis on differences and micro-analysis generates atomization of knowledge and disconnected data, leading to total relativism. As Smith stressed, to be illuminating a comparison must seek similarities as well as differences. Besides, relationships are not properties of things but products of the mind. Hence, comparing does not compromise particularity, nor should it imply essentialism.

⁸ Universalism is also known under the names “comparative method”, “science of religions” and “history of religions.”

⁹ William E. Paden, “Comparative Religion” in ER, Vol. 3, 2005, 228.

¹⁰ For Mircea Eliade’s principles of methodology see his *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1958), and *The Sacred and the Profane*, 1961.

¹¹ For a critical analysis of Eliade’s methodology see Douglas Allen, *Structure and Creativity in Religion, Hermeneutics in Mircea Eliade’s Phenomenology and New Directions* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978).

¹² Jonathan Z. Smith, “Adde Parvum Parvo Magnus Acervus Erit,” in Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 240-64.

¹³ Ninian Smart, “Methods in My Life,” *The Craft of Religious Studies* ed. J. R. Stone (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 18-35.

¹⁴ Robert Segal, “In Defense of the Comparative Method,” *Numen* 48, No. 3 (2001): 339-373.

¹⁵ Ninian Smart, “What Would Buddhaghosa Have Made of The Cloud of Unknowing,” in *Mysticism and Language*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 104.

Postmodernism goes a step further, rejecting generalizations *in toto*.¹⁶ For the postmodernist, skepticism about meaning, and the primacy of the marginal preclude any comparison;¹⁷ comparativism is ideologically driven, invested in totalizing metanarratives, oppressive in its search for patterns that obliterate differences and impose uniformity.¹⁸ If there is a postmodern comparativism, its final goal is not truth, theory or structure, but playfulness, edification. The postmodern critique does raise important questions, many of which have been answered,¹⁹ although some of its criticisms have been rejected. Presently, the comparativist enterprise is more self-conscious of empty aspirations for truth. However, the “sanitization of political issues”—as W. Doniger puts it—brought about by postmodernism has not meant the end of the comparative endeavor.²⁰ There is a growing recognition that comparing is an inherent and primary function of the mind,²¹ an ineludible necessity for learning.²² It should be possible to compare cross-culturally.²³ As Sullivan suggests, comparing is not only cataloging variances; understanding comes through the apperception of similarities and differences between discrete phenomena.²⁴ As Poole states, it is by comparing that classification, generalization, categorization, and theorization are inductively obtained through a creative process open to revision.²⁵ Therefore, as Sullivan notes, a simple rejection of comparativism is not an option.²⁶ The overriding question is not whether comparative religion is urgent and necessary, but how to do comparativism in a more responsible and sophisticated manner.²⁷

In the last two decades, the development of comparativism in cross-cultural religious studies has been the task of scholars that could be collectively grouped under the label: *New Comparativism*. The characteristic features of this analytical framework include: intellectual integrity, pragmatism, contextualization (situatedness) and the use of the inductive method. In the next section, switching from a historical perspective to a thematic approach, the methodological contributions of this post-Eliadean comparativism are delineated. In parallel, references are made to several recent comparative theses that have efficaciously applied the tools of new comparativism to the comparative praxis.

¹⁶ P. M. Rosenau, *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 77-91; and Robert A. Segal, “All Generalizations Are Bad: Postmodernism on Theories” in *JAAR* 74, 1 (2006): 157–71.

¹⁷ Rosenau, 1992, 105.

¹⁸ Kimberley C. Patton, “Juggling Torches: Why We Still Need Comparative Religion” in Patton and Ray, 2000, 159.

¹⁹ David Gordon White, “The Scholar as Mythographer: Comparative Indo-European Myth and Postmodern Concerns,” in Patton and Ray, 2000, 47–54.

²⁰ Wendy Doniger, “post-modern and -colonial -structural Comparison,” in Patton and Ray, 2000, 66.

²¹ Smith, 1993, 240.

²² Smith, 1971, 67.

²³ Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 71.

²⁴ Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, “American religion is Naturally Comparative,” in Patton and Ray, 2000, 118.

²⁵ F.J. Porter Poole, “Metaphors and Maps: Towards Comparison in the Anthropology of Religion” *JAAR*, 3 (1986): 414.

²⁶ Sullivan in Patton and Ray, 2000, 118.

²⁷ Wesley J. Wildman, “Comparing Religious Ideas: There’s Method in the Mob’s Madness,” in Idinopulos, 2006, 78–113.

2.3 Methodological issues: the principles of new comparativism

The previous section started to delineate the rationale that leads to considering new comparativism as the most coherent approach to the cross-cultural study of religions. It also discussed the relevance and inevitability of interreligious comparison and the need to do it well.²⁸ We turn now to discuss how this emerging hermeneutic school differs from previous comparative engagements and redresses the criticisms directed at them. For this, the methodological recommendations and improvements advanced by this school will be systematically compiled and outlined against the errors from which they originated.

New comparativism (hereinafter “NC”) is a designation put forward by North American comparatist and theoretician William Paden.²⁹ NC is synonymous with the expressions “critical comparativism,” “revised comparativism” and “post-Eliadean comparativism.” In the study at hand, this category includes a series of contributions of many scholars who, on the shoulders of a giant like Jonathan Z. Smith, pragmatically work to improve the comparative praxis.³⁰ These comparatists benefited greatly from the insights of eminent scholars such as Aloysius Pieris, Ninian Smart, Eric J. Sharpe, Raymond Panikkar, Francis X. Clooney, and James L. Fredericks, whom they quote abundantly.

In a strict sense, NC is not a theoretical framework as it does not superimpose a theory upon its object. Instead, it is a disciplined approach, heuristically sound, that offers a variety of recommendations to accommodate religious comparisons to academic standards. Thus, this school is defined by advances in methodological sophistication.³¹ In some cases, these methodological advances are ripples of the changes in sensibility generated by the wave of hermeneutics that currently pervades the human sciences. On the ensuing pages, these methodological advancements are succinctly considered.

²⁸ Corinne G. Dempsey, *Bringing the Sacred Down to Earth: Adventures in Comparative Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.

²⁹ “New Comparativism” is a loose category put forward by William Paden in several publications. See William E. Paden, “Elements of a New Comparativism,” in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 8, 1 (1996): 5-14.

³⁰ These scholars include: (1) The 14 contributors to the anthology ed. Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray entitled *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); (2) The members of the Boston-based Cross-cultural Comparative Religious Ideas Project (CRIP), active 1995 to 1999, which was co-led by Robert C. Neville and Wesley Wildman. For an overview on the methodology see R. C. Neville and W. J. Wildman: “On Comparing Religious Ideas” in *Ultimate Realities*, ed. R. C. Neville (Albany: SUNY, 2001), 187-210; (3) The essayists assembled for the compilation of the publication entitled *Comparing Religions: Possibilities and Perils?* ed. Thomas Athanasius Idinopulos et al. (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006); (4) The participants in the monographic issue of the journal *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, Vol. 8, No 1, (1996); and (5) the authors of a series of comparative studies which give ample consideration to methodological issues and have put in practice the principles of this new orientation, among them: Christopher Buck, *Paradise and Paradigm: Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Bahá'í Faith* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999); Mark. A Toole, “Divergent Responses to the Human Predicament: A Case Study in New Comparativism” (PhD. diss., University of Denver, 2011); and John James Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 1997).

³¹ Many of the problems encountered in traditional comparativism were essentially failures to adhere to basic premises of the scholarly method (e.g. unreflected assumptions). NC addresses many of these procedural pitfalls, generating a model that is academically feasible. Although these provisions may evolve into a new paradigm in the future, the process of its formation is not yet complete as, until now, there is no unanimous understanding on how to proceed with comparisons.

An elementary axiom of the new method is the necessity and relevance of comparing. Diverging from postmodern stances, the new comparativists are unanimous in their belief that the singularity of a tradition, the distinctiveness of its paradigm, and the systematicity of any religious phenomenon, do not imply that different religions cannot be compared. They also agree that the goal of comparing should not be the comparison itself.³² The *raison d'être* for comparative analysis is to explore relations that may yield “interreligious learning.”³³ A comparison should aim at identifying patterns, generating perspectives, from which to derive “generalizable principles on the nature of religion.”³⁴ The simple juxtaposition of practices or “comparing simple ‘surface resemblances’—as Freidenreich puts it—do little to advance the study of religion.”³⁵ Unfortunately, “learning across religious borders”³⁶ has not always been the primary aim of previous comparative efforts. Therefore, a *motto* of NC is to compare “seriously and vigorously.”³⁷ And, this effort does not preclude theorification which, ultimately, is a question of how to make sense of things.

If a series of methodological vicissitudes characterizes the history of comparative religion, NC opens a new chapter because of its axiomatic reflexivity on methodology. Smith criticized Eliadean comparativism as “unscientific,”³⁸ crying out for “rethinking the comparative enterprise in modes appropriate to the academy’s self-understanding.”³⁹ If NC’s innovative approach was born of the methodological inadequacies of previous approaches, it is conscious of the need to eschew “arbitrary” or “intuitive” comparisons. NC’s purpose is to provide a scientific foundation for the comparative study of religion and, to do so, adopts the rigorous and systematic method that defines all scientific inquiry, sharing the fundamental principles, practices, and standards of the scholarly method. In contrast to the phenomenology of religion, post-Eliadean comparativism adopts a non-aprioristic, non-essentialist, and non-theological approach to comparing religions. Under the influence of modern philosophical hermeneutics, NC abandons the search for overarching theories, and atemporal essences, and opts for an inductive methodology. It rejects its phenomenological heritage *in toto*, that is, the unfounded claims of objectivity of E. Husserl’s disengaged subject, with his transcendent consciousness and privileged

³² Jonathan Z. Smith, “The ‘End’ of Comparison: Redescription and Rectification,” in Patton and Ray 2000, 239.

³³ Gregory D. Alles, “When Men Revile You and Persecute You: Advice, Conflict, and Grace in Shinran and Luther,” *History of Religions* 25, No. 2 (November 1985): 162.

³⁴ Buck, 1999, 320.

³⁵ David M. Freidenreich, “Comparisons Compared: A Methodological Survey of Comparisons of Religion from ‘A Magic Dwells’ to a Magic Still Dwells.” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 16 (2004): 80–101.

³⁶ Expression by Francis X. Clooney in his *Comparative Theology* (MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

³⁷ Gregory D. Alles, *The Iliad, The Ramayana and The Work of Religion: Failed Persuasion and Religious Mystification* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

³⁸ Jonathan Z. Smith, “In Comparison a Magic Dwells” in Smith, 1982, 24.

³⁹ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1990), vii.

access to meaning, in favor of a more realist fact-based and bottom-up approach.

NC scholars recognize the contextual, intersubjective nature of the mind. Eschewing essentialism, they uphold the hermeneutical tenet that meaning is culturally constructed. The relations “detected” by the observer are not found in “the-things-in-themselves,” nor are they historical manifestations of timeless archetypes or transcendental essences. Instead, they originate in inductive associations, creatively constructed in the scholar’s mind, although based on commonalities grounded in or supported by factual data.⁴⁰

A caution expressed by some NC authors to avoid overgeneralization is delimitation, that is, to adopt a limited scope, or an aspectual domain, as the field for comparison. As Buck puts it, any comparison must “have a point,” it should “further the comparative inquiry.”⁴¹ This “*quid*” should be the researcher’s interest in conducting the investigation. As Poole suggests, delimitation allows the researcher to exert control over the inquiry.⁴² To establish boundaries to a comparison should similarly remind us that similarity is not identity. Common aspects of an analogy do not obliterate differences in other aspects.⁴³

Another concern of NC is impartiality. Historically, many interreligious comparisons have been attempts to establish the superiority of one religion over another. Indeed, bias does occur in Buddhist and Christian apologetics. However, as Aloysius Pieris notes: “Those who try to prove that their own religion is better than the other are propagandists, apologetes or proselytizers [...] not students of comparative religions!”⁴⁴ One-sided, self-enhancing theological appraisals may even adopt deceptive tactics (e.g., intentionality misapprehending the other, unscrupulous manipulation of text, suppression of data). Academic standards deplore such instances of partiality, chauvinism, and unfairness. Violating the integrity of the religious “other” is prejudice or bigotry, not comparativism. While postmodernism credibly teaches that a neutral viewpoint is unattainable, NC calls for an unprejudiced approach without which the discipline oversteps the realm of science.

Besides lack of intellectual honesty, another methodological inadequacy addressed by NC is foundationalism, understood as the philosophical position that validates or invalidates certain beliefs by other beliefs. Examples of foundationalism are Eliade’s concept of “the sacred” or “the holy” in R. Otto. As Paden observes, such concepts, far

⁴⁰ Smith, 1990, 51.

⁴¹ Buck, 1999, 320.

⁴² Poole, 1986, 414.

⁴³ Paden, 1996, 9.

⁴⁴ Aloysius Pieris, “Comparative Study of Buddhism and Christianity” in Aloysius Pieris, *Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity: Doing Inter-Religious, Studies in the Reverential Mode* (EISD, Colombo, 2005), 106.

from being dogmatically or theologically neutral, do entail “ontological commitments.” Paden endorses the use of such irreducible notions with the proviso that their ontological or ideological referents should be clearly elucidated.⁴⁵

Another grievance of NC, in this case against universalism, is prompted by the latter’s alleged lack of respect of some universalist authors for the particularity of the religions compared. Eliadean phenomenology, for example, with its bracketing of the historic-religious context, abstracts the distinctive identity of any religious phenomenon from its background, leaving it misrepresented and meaningless.⁴⁶ Against such a procedurally flawed approach, NC aims to re-legitimize the comparative enterprise through contextualization, asserting the situated nature of any religious phenomenon. In doing so, NC’s theorists restore “specificity” and “distinctiveness” to its original configuration.⁴⁷

NC stresses systematicity, that is: any religious phenomenon is integral to a system. As Deming puts it: “The starting point for comparison is the recognition that each religion is a coherent system, [...] its elements derive their meaning as parts of that system.”⁴⁸ Comparing beliefs and practices removed from their systemic wholeness is pointless. For NC, systemic integrity is critical; instead of reading isolated dogmas, symbols and so on, an appropriate comparison results from comparing constituents of integral wholes.

Textualization is another preoccupation in reformed comparativism. Consequently, “lack of concern for the text” is a charge levied against traditional comparativism, which, in its eagerness to impose homogeneity among religions, disregards texts and scriptures and consistently shows a lack of respect for religious-specific meanings of specific terms. NC emphasizes that the specific words used by any religious tradition mean something; their precise denotation cannot be permuted or obliterated without impairing meaning.

Another significant methodological amelioration contributed by the NC is historicity. The reformed school exposes the danger of phenomenological atemporality, stressing the importance of recognizing the historical “situatedness” of any religious phenomenon and the relevance of considering the complex historical development of any religion.⁴⁹ Consequently, as J. Z. Smith puts it, any comparison should encompass “the integration of a complex notion of pattern and system with an equally complex notion of history.”⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Paden, 1996, 5-14.

⁴⁶ Paden, 1996, 8.

⁴⁷ Douglas Allen, “Major Contributions of Philosophical Phenomenology and Hermeneutics to the Study of Religion,” in *How to do Comparative Religion? Three Ways, Many Goals* edited by René Gothóni (Berlin Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 50.

⁴⁸ Will Deming, *Rethinking Religion: A Concise Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 109.

⁴⁹ Smith, 1990, 106.

⁵⁰ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of California Press, 1989), 29.

With diachronicity, “atemporal and ahistorical essences or structures of phenomenology are replaced with the recognition of the historically contingent nature of the religions.”⁵¹

Along with impartiality and integrity, another requirement laid down by NC is accuracy. A precise understanding and portrayal of what is compared is a *sine qua non* condition—and misconstruction a stumbling block—for any convincing comparative analysis.⁵² Therefore, a stricture of NC is that the comparative exercise should be well-informed.⁵³ This translates into the need for specialization, working with primary sources, philological expertise, and respect for a religion’s self-understanding. Let us consider these points.

The criticism of imprecision leveled against universalism gave place to the need for specialized knowledge. A *dictum* of NC is to provide a coherent account of the content and remain faithful to the context of what is compared, through appropriate expertise and fair description.⁵⁴ One of the most efficient ways to deliver on this prerequisite of competence is through cooperative projects between faith-specialists and generalists. An example mentioned earlier⁵⁵ is the CRIP collaborative project led by R. Neville, which brought together comparativists and tradition-specialists to discuss limited inquiries.

A misgiving against traditional comparative efforts has to do with idiomatic literacy. Recurrently, well-intentioned authors, albeit not versed in the languages involved in the comparative exercise, employed mistranslations. Since the dawn of particularism, philological command of the languages involved, or at least the use of accurate translations, has become a must in any academic comparative attempt. Equally important in the present-day comparative study of religions is the use of primary sources. Nowadays, comparisons based only on secondary literature are considered “illegitimate.”

Another major issue linked to accuracy is respect for a religion’s “self-understanding.” It is not unusual in comparative studies to find a religion presented in such a way that violates its self-understanding. This occurs, for example, when *datum* of one religion is interpreted reductively under the theological categories, idiom, or conceptual framework of another. A. Sharma calls this “theological reductionism.”⁵⁶ Alternatively, when a whole religion is understood under the paradigm of another (“theological inclusivism”).⁵⁷

⁵¹ Gavin Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion* (London and New York, 1999), 138.

⁵² Buck, 1999, 318.

⁵³ Aloysius Pieris hits the nail saying, “For the most part, the Buddhist-Christian encounter has been a matter of a deformed Christianity colliding with a misapprehended Buddhism” (Aloysius Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism*. New York: Orbis Books, 1988, 83).

⁵⁴ A. Pieris refers to John Paul II’s *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* saying, “There, he attempts to establish the superiority of Christianity on the basis of a distorted view of the most basic teachings in the Buddhist Scriptures” (Pieris, 2005, 76).

⁵⁵ See footnote 2 in this chapter.

⁵⁶ Arvind Sharma, *Religious Studies and Comparative Methodology* (SUNY Press, 2005), 247.

⁵⁷ For example, Buddhadasa states that to understand God we must progress from lower levels to understanding in terms

Proceeding in this way, the truths and features of any tradition are left distorted beyond self-recognition. Thus, another maxim of NC is “empathetic understanding from within;” each tradition should be understood on its own terms, and described in its formulations.⁵⁸ This *modus operandi* stems from theological responsibility, and that only contraposition with the “otherness” of the other lets us extract valuable comparative knowledge.

Another point is the need for a balanced consideration of similarities and differences. A common complaint of NC scholars against the universalist and particularists stances refers to their misuse of the comparative method. Comparisons are frequently denigrated because, for ideological reasons, or theoretical presuppositions, both schools tend to project their preconceptions onto the field, one-sidedly applying the method through an unbalanced attitude that either overemphasizes likenesses suppressing religious identity or exaggerates differences ignoring apparent similarities. As Segal rightly objects, the comparative method is a neutral hermeneutical tool.⁵⁹ As Carter explains, juxtaposing the symbols or creeds “of two or more traditions, appropriating the method to highlight similitudes, or to exacerbate differences, is not a sound methodology.”⁶⁰ Such approach distorts the realities compared impairing the legitimacy of the comparative endeavor.⁶¹ Realizing that “exclusive attention to either similarity or difference can be immobilizing.”⁶² NC scholars recognize that phenomena of discrete religions are never identical,⁶³ or unrelated, constructing a model that seeks a middle ground that grants equal importance to both elements of the equation,⁶⁴ consequently making comparisons informative.⁶⁵

Some NC scholars also recommend that any comparison must take into account the centrality and relevance of the phenomena compared within their integral systems.⁶⁶ Besides, a comparison must be made at equivalent levels of understanding and practice. For example, it is considered methodologically unfair to compare intellectual forms of Christianity (e.g., negative theology) versus popular forms of Buddhism or vice versa.

A major inadequacy uncovered by postmodern and postcolonial studies is not to give due consideration to the political issues related to any comparison. Hermeneutics of the

of *Dhamma*. [...]. This is subsuming one tradition (in this case Christianity) into the framework of another (Buddhism).

⁵⁸ Robert Cummings Neville and J. Wildman Wesley, *Ultimate Realities* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000) 190-191.

⁵⁹ Segal, 2001, 349.

⁶⁰ Carter, 2004, 6.

⁶¹ Mark Taylor, “Introduction,” ed. Mark Taylor in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 14.

⁶² Dempsey, 2011, 9 and Doniger, 2000, 65.

⁶³ Segal, 2001

⁶⁴ Carter, 1998, 133.

⁶⁵ Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 14.

⁶⁶ For example, Deming proposes the centrality of the Holy Trinity in Christianity versus the doctrinal peripherality of the Hindu Trinity (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva) in Hinduism. See Deming, 2005, 109.

relation of comparativism to power, and other postmodern “suspicions” influenced the NC school, and these issues are present in most treatments on modern methodology. As Smith states “comparativism is preeminently a political category.”⁶⁷ According to its detractors, old comparativism imposes homogeneity and obliterates local meaning.⁶⁸ Besides, as Dempsey states, “comparison and religion, imposed from above, easily lend themselves to imperialistic structures of oppression.”⁶⁹ The principal charge here is that, with any comparison, imperialist, political, racist or sexist overtones tend to be introduced. In response, critical comparativism demands awareness of the ideological aspects of the comparison and of the prejudices and tacit assumptions present in our understanding. In their works, NC authors are conscious of the urgency “to dismantle such impositions and abstractions”⁷⁰ and to respect the religious other, abolishing relations of power.⁷¹

To conclude our survey, the discussion has shown how, by embracing complexity, NC assimilates criticisms addressing the excesses of prior comparative methodologies. It provides best practices for comparative studies that allow for the viability and validity of the comparative endeavor. As such, critical comparativism offers a vigorous defense of comparative religion reviving the discipline and favoring its future development. What emerges is the development of a more comprehensive methodological paradigm that is hermeneutically efficient, academically honest and scientifically legitimate.

2.4 Our methodological approach

In relation to our method for comparative analysis, we subscribe to the methodological principles and recommendations put forward by new comparativism. Some comments below point to particular points that we wish to underline.

2.4.1 Original text and translations

As indicated in the previous section, one of the methodological problems often found in comparative religious engagements is the presence of faulty or biased translations. To offset this problem, we shall use throughout our study translations into English of the *Visuddhimagga*, and *Castillo* considered authoritative within the respective traditions.

⁶⁷ Smith 1985, 10.

⁶⁸ Marsha A. Hewitt, “How new is the “new comparativism”? Difference, dialectics, and world-making” in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 8 (1996): 17.

⁶⁹ Dempsey, 2011, 5.

⁷⁰ *Idem*.

⁷¹ Hewitt, 1996, 17 and Paden, 1996, 39.

First, we discuss the editions of the Pāli text of the *Visuddhimagga* and its translations. The original Pāli text was put into Latin script by Henry Clark Warren from two Burmese and two Sinhalese manuscripts, edited by Dharmananda Kosambi and published by Harvard University Press as part of Harvard's Oriental Studies (Vol. 41, Cambridge, Mass., 1950). All our quotations in Pāli of the *Visuddhimagga* in our thesis, unless otherwise indicated, refer to the edition published by Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1989, as it was reprinted in 1999. Hereafter, when referring to the original text in Pāli of the *Visuddhimagga* will be to this version and using the abbreviation “*Vism*” for it.

There have been several translations of the *Visuddhimagga* into English: the first, incomplete, was written by C.R. Lanman and H.C. Warren in 1891 and published in several issues of the *Journal of the Pāli Text Society* from 1891 to 1893. This translation was followed by *The Path of Purity* by the Burmese scholar Pe Maung Tin in 1922, at Oxford, and reprinted by the Pāli Text Society in London in 3 volumes from 1922 to 1931. In his *Buddhist Meditation*, Edward Conze also provided a partial translation of the text. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (Osbert Moore) translated the *Visuddhimagga* with the title *The Path of Purification*. The first edition, dated 1956, was published by Ananda Semage in Colombo, followed by a second edition in 1964. After that, two further editions appeared by the Buddhist Publication Society in 1991 and 2010. In our thesis, the fourth edition, dated 2010, will be used for all English references, unless otherwise indicated. Hereinafter, when referring to this English version, the abbreviation “PP” will be used.

About the editions and translations of St. Teresa's works used in our study, for the Spanish edition of *El Castillo Interior* and the rest of Teresa's works, we shall refer throughout this thesis to *Obras Completas de Santa Teresa de Jesús*, Ed. Monte Carmelo, 7th ed. (2012) (Colección de Maestros Espirituales Cristianos). References to St. Teresa's works, for the Spanish edition, are given first by the abbreviation of the book's name (for example when referring to *Camino*, Valladolid code, the abbreviation is CV) chapter, and paragraph (e.g., CV 3,21). Only in the case of *El Castillo Interior*, and following tradition, is the chapter given before the name of the book (e.g., 7M 2,3).

The works of Teresa of Avila have been translated into English on various occasions. The translation by E. Allison Peers, excellent and highly readable, is titled *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus* and comes in three volumes (Sheed and Ward, London, 1946), supplemented by two volumes of the *Letters* (Burns and Oates, London, 1951). All quotations of Teresa in Spanish in our thesis, however, are from the also admirable

but more accessible *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh OCD and Otilio Rodriguez OCD, published in three volumes by the Institute of Carmelite Studies (Washington, DC, 1987, 1980, 1985). Two volumes with the letters were published separately as *The Collected Letters of St. Teresa of Avila*, also translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC, 2001 and 2007). The references for the English edition are given with the method used for the Spanish edition.

By employing these ‘official’ translations of the *Visuddhimagga* and Teresa’s works into English as the bedrock for our study, we do not mean that we agree with the entirety of these translations. Some words should be corrected. We will make comments on these, but without stopping using these translations as our primary source.

2.4.2 Exegesis and textual interpretation

As any world-view requires interpretation, our two author’s meanings and intentions are not readily accessible to us, and lacking an adequate grasp of it would invalidate the results of our investigation, it is crucial an adequate exegesis of our primary sources. Another procedural principle of our study then will be an extensive use in the exegeses of authorized interpreters of their respective traditions who share the religious framework or paradigm of our authors and can help us in the reconstruction in the meaning intended. Fortunately, we count in both cases with many works by prominent scholars from our two authors’ own traditions that can aid us in the hermeneutic process. On the accurate interpretation of the *Visuddhimagga*, and to preserve consistency, we can count on the scholarship of renowned scholars of the Theravāda tradition from Sri Lanka and abroad⁷² Opportunely, we also can count on extensive literature on Teresa. Her works have been profusely studied, and books have been written on virtually every issue she dealt with.⁷³

⁷² This thesis makes extensive use of Paravahera Vajirañāna, *Buddhist Meditation: in Theory and Practice* (Malaysia: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1975), which is a clear and comprehensive exposition of the *Visuddhimagga*. Another tool to adequately penetrate the meaning of the *Visuddhimagga* is critical research on specific subjects discussed in that book, among others: as ethics (e.g. Vyanjana, *Theravāda Buddhist ethics with special reference to Visuddhimagga* (Delhi: Punthi Pustak, 1992), the practice of insight meditation (e.g., Baidyanath Labh, *Paññā in early Buddhism: with special reference to Visuddhimagga*, Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 1991), studies on intentionality and agency (e.g. Maria R. Heim, *The Forerunner of All Things: Buddhaghosa on Mind, Intention, and Agency*, Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁷³ In this hermeneutical process, we count on scholarship by celebrated scholars of St. Teresa’s own Carmelite tradition. Among exegesis of Teresa’s works by Christian scholars who are not Carmelites stand prominently: *The Crucible of Love, A Study of the Mysticism of St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1963) and Thomas Dubay, *Fire Within: St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and the Gospel, on Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989). Particularly significant regarding the exegesis of mystic prayer and, specifically, of Teresa’s doctrine on the subject, is the monumental study by the Swedish scholar Ernst Arbman (1891-1959) translated into English as *Ecstasy or religious trance: in the experience of the ecstasies and from the psychological point of view* (Stockholm: Bokförlaget, 1963).

PART TWO: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

After discussing the theoretical and methodological issues relevant to our investigation in Part One of this thesis, in Part Two the aim is to give the background information necessary for a proper understanding of the doctrines of spiritual growth presented in Buddhaghosa's and Teresa's accounts. This is the subject matter of Chapters Three and Four, respectively.

As the preceding chapter has shown, a significant problem in the elaboration of interreligious comparative studies is a correct interpretation of doctrines discussed. Likewise, a proper contextualization of the comparands and their works and an explanation of their situatedness in their socio-historical and cultural setting and within their traditions is required. A deep contextualization will keep us from relying on unfertile assumptions and misperceptions, and address some of the problems discussed in the methodology chapter.

We begin then with the presentation of the comparands and their works, and their context. Due to our specific interest in analyzing the guidelines of spiritual growth as expounded by both traditions, in Part Two we shall also consider the doctrines and taxonomies of the stages of spiritual development in the religious systems under investigation as well as review the background and historical formation of those typologies in both convictions. For Buddhaghosa, the focus is on his teachings on the dynamism of spiritual realization providing an overview of his characteristic sevenfold classification schema. For Teresa, a similar presentation is made concerning the seven mansions of the castle of the soul.

Finally, and due to its importance for our comparative task, we dedicate a section in Chapters Three and Four to the background presentation of our two authors' conceptions and phenomenological descriptions of the nature and structure of the human being and his ultimate realization.

CHAPTER THREE: THE SPIRITUALITY OF BHADANTĀCARIYA BUDDHAGHOSA

3.1 BUDDHAGHOSA AND THE *VISUDDHIMAGGA*

This section is intended to present what is known about Buddhaghosa's life and his writings, the defining characteristics of the Theravāda tradition, the place that our Indian master occupies within this tradition, and his impact in defining the Theravāda orthodoxy.

3.1.1 The Life of Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa

Little is known about the life of Bhadantācariya¹ Buddhaghosa, and almost no element of his story is beyond dispute since anything one could view as fact is impossible to prove definitively. The scantily available sources convey a confusing blend of a few isolated facts and much fiction.² The only aspects commonly accepted among scholars are that Buddhaghosa was a Theravāda monk, a prolific commentator and scholar of Indian origin, who resided in Ceylon during the reign of King Mahānāma in the early fifth century CE. All other information is subject to debate.

The dates of the birth and demise of Buddhaghosa Mahāthera³ are not readily available. It is probably true that he was active during the early first half of the fifth century CE.⁴ References to King Mahānāma in the prologues of his commentaries provide a valid argument for sustaining that he resided in Ceylon during the fifth century CE.⁵ Hinüber has estimated Buddhaghosa's lifespan to be 370-450 CE,⁶ although, with the insufficient data at hand, it seems unwise to assign such definitive historical dates. Much also has been speculated about Buddhaghosa's place of nativity,⁷ although none of his works makes any reference to his place of birth.⁸ Buddhaghosa's birth name is also unknown. According to the *Mahāvamsa*, he was born into a Brahmin family, a point with which scholars tend to agree,⁹ but not without exceptions.¹⁰

Regarding Buddhaghosa's background, the *Mahāvamsa* states that the Brahmin later known as Buddhaghosa was "accomplished in the sciences [...] well qualified in the Three Vedas" and "well versed in what he knew and unhesitant over any phrase."¹¹ Several Buddhaghosa specialists believe that he was brought up, and was proficient, in

¹ Bhadantācariya (*bhadanta* + *ācariya*) means "Reverend Teacher." It is an honorific title given as a sign of high respect.

² Bimala Charan Law, *The Life and Work of Buddhaghosa* (Calcutta and Simla: Thacker, Spink & Co, 1923), 9.

³ "Mahāthera" is a compound word made up of "*mahā*," which means "great," or "prominent," and "*thera*" meaning "elder." It is an honorific title conferred upon a monk (*bhikkhu*) of great reputation.

⁴ Law notes that references in Buddhaghosa's works are to dates no later than the 4th century CE (Law 1923, xx). It is believed that one of his works—the *Samatapāsādikā*—was translated into Chinese in 489 CE. See Moriz Winternitz, *A history of Indian literature* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), 184.

⁵ It is known that King Mahānāma lived in the first half of 5th century CE. Cf. Law *The Life and Work of Buddhaghosa*, 9.

⁶ Oskar von Hinüber, *A Handbook of Pali Literature* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 103.

⁷ Cf. C. V. Udaya Sankar, "Buddhaghosa's nativity," *Quarterly Journal of the Andhra Historical Research Society* 39 (1995): 57-62; and R. Subramaniam and S. P. Nainar: "Buddhaghosa—his place of birth," *Journal of Oriental Research* 19 (1952): 278-84. In some of the colophons to his commentaries, Buddhaghosa mentions several localities in India (Hinüber 1996, 102), but never mentions his place of birth. The *Mahāvamsa* declares that Buddhaghosa was a native of the kingdom of Magadha, and that he was born near Bodh Gaya, where the Buddha attained Enlightenment. However, the attribution of such provenance is probably honorific and due to his later influence (Nāṇamoli, "Intro" to *The Path*, xxiii).

⁸ Hinüber has asserted firmly that Buddhaghosa "was actually born in southern India" (Hinüber 1996, 102). With the information at hand, however, such speculation does not provide a strong case to pinpoint his place of origin.

⁹ Nāṇamoli, "Intro" to *The Path*, xxiii.

¹⁰ Dharmanand Kosambi, "Preface" to *Visuddhimagga*, ed. Henry Clarke Warren (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), x. The Burmese *Buddhaghosuppatti* mentions the identity of Buddhaghosa's parents, teachers, and some episodes in his life. This work, however, lacks credibility as a historical document (Nāṇamoli, "Intro." to *The Path*, xxix-xxx).

¹¹ All quotations from the *Mahāvamsa* were extracted from Nāṇamoli, "Intro." to *The Path*, i-iv.

the Brahmanical tradition, on the grounds that he shows extensive familiarity with this culture in his writings.¹² It is indeed probable that before his conversion, Buddhaghosa received a Brahmanical education and was well acquainted with Indian literature and Panini grammar, which he quotes in his works. According to Law, before embracing Buddhism, the young Brahmin later to be known as Buddhaghosa had also been erudite in the Patanjali's yoga system contained in the Yoga-Sutras.¹³ Law further states that our author was acquainted with Sāṃkhya philosophy, but he did not seem to have known the Upanishads or the Vedic Epics.¹⁴ The Sri Lankan scholar D. J. Kalupahana believes that *Visuddhimagga* contains "some metaphysical speculations, such as those of the Sarvāstivādins, the Sautrāntikas, and even the Yogācārins."¹⁵ By his anatomical descriptions, Buddhaghosa seems to have been knowledgeable in medical science.¹⁶

Buddhaghosa admits to having resided in several places, mostly in South India, including Mayurasttapattana and Kānchi. Kalupahana noted that some of these locations had been associated with Buddhist learning centers since the fifth century CE.¹⁷ Dutt has elaborated on Kānchi as the location of a Buddhist school.¹⁸ Taking this into account, one cannot disregard that, after his conversion, Buddhaghosa traveled to various Theravāda centers in South India in search of knowledge and ended up in Ceylon.

About Buddhaghosa's conversion, the *Cūlavamsa* tells an edifying story, although no historical basis for it can be asserted.¹⁹ The *Cūlavamsa* states that after his conversion, Buddhaghosa became learned in doctrine (*Dhamma*) and discipline (*Vinaya*), compiled his first known work, a treatise entitled *Ñānodaya*, and authored the *Atthasālinī*.

¹² Bimala Charan Law, "Buddhaghosa," EB Vol. 3, 1971, 404-17.

¹³ *Idem*. Against such understanding see Kosambi in "Preface" to *Vism*, x.

¹⁴ Law, "Buddhaghosa," EB, 404-17.

¹⁵ David J. Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy: Continuities and Discontinuities* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994), 207-08.

¹⁶ Law, "Buddhaghosa," EB, 404-17.

¹⁷ Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy*, 206-7.

¹⁸ Nalinaksha Dutt, *Buddhist Sects in India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1978), 213.

¹⁹ According to the *Cūlavamsa*, being a young Brahmin, one night at a certain monastery, the senior Elder there named Revata heard our young Brahmin perfectly reciting the Yoga-Sūtras of Patanjali "with each phrase complete and well rounded." Hearing the Brahmin, Revata Thera thought to himself "this is a being of great understanding who ought to be tamed." The text indicates that the Elder, impressed by Buddhaghosa's perfect pronunciation, profound knowledge and intellectual capacity, considered him worthy of conversion. Hence, Revata engaged the Brahmin in a discussion over the meaning of what he was saying: "Who is braying like an ass?" The future Buddhaghosa asked "What, then, do you know the meaning of the ass's bray?" Revata replied, "Yes I know it" and then not only expounded upon it himself, but explained each statement in the proper way and also pointed out contradictions." When Revata had demonstrated each thesis to be faulty, Buddhaghosa asked Revata to expound upon his doctrine. Revata recited a passage from the Abhidhamma of which the Brahmin could not understand the meaning. Perplexed by Revata's teachings, he asked "Whose system (*manto*, *mantra*) is this?" Revata replied that it was the "Buddha's system." The *Cūlavamsa* states that the young Brahmin was so impressed that he requested the senior Elder to impart the deep doctrine to him that was beyond his comprehension. Revata agreed, on the condition that he entered the order becoming a Buddhist monk. The *Cūlavamsa* also states that our young Brahmin became a convert as "he was interested in the system" and he learned the three Piṭakas, after which he believed "this is the only way." The novice was ordained, and because his speech was profound and eloquent like that of the Buddha himself, he was called "Buddhaghosa," which means "voice of the Buddha," or "Buddha utterance," "so that like the Enlightened One, he might be voiced over the surface of the Earth" All quotations from *The Cūlavamsa* in this section are as translated by Ñāṇamoli, "Intro.," to *The Path*, i-iv.

Regarding the reasons for Buddhaghosa's travel to Ceylon, we are told in the *Cūlavamsa* that Buddhaghosa's teacher Revata, having observed that his pupil was desirous of undertaking the compilation of a commentary on the *Tipitaka*, told him that only the three Piṭakas were available in India and that the *aṭṭhakathās* (commentaries) and the tradition passed down by the teachers were lost and only extant in Ceylon.²⁰ Revata explained that the "Great Commentary" available in Ceylon was composed in Sinhalese by Mahinda—King Asoka's son—after Mahinda consulted all the Buddha's discourses.²¹ Revata encouraged Buddhaghosa to travel to Ceylon and translate the commentaries preserved there from Sinhalese "into the language of the Magadhans," adding that such an action "will bring benefit to the whole world."

Following the advice of his teacher, Buddhaghosa set off for Ceylon with the aim of translating the Theravāda exegetical tradition and compiling a great commentary.²² Regarding the date of Buddhaghosa's arrival and settlement in Ceylon, the *Cūlavamsa* places it during King Mahānāma's reign, which would be between 412 and 434 CE.²³ In the short excerpts relating to his own life in his books, Buddhaghosa likewise describes himself as having come to Ceylon from India during King Mahānāma's reign and settling in the city of Anuradhapura,²⁴ then the capital of Ceylon.²⁵ It is generally agreed that the Mahānāma kingship at Anuradhapura was from 409 to 421 or 431 CE.²⁶

The Mahāvihāra ("great monastery") at Anuradhapura is reputed to have been stronghold of Theravāda in Ceylon, preserving the unique texts and pure doctrines of the school.²⁷ The fact that the Mahāvihāra preserved the text of Theravāda, which existed only in Ceylon at that time, attracted well-known scholars from abroad over the centuries who were seeking its teachings.²⁸ The monastery was founded by King Devanampiya around 247–207 BCE. The monastics residing there, known as *mahāvihāravasins*, were adherents of Theravāda orthodoxy. In the fourth century CE, the Mahāvihāra was destroyed during sectarian conflicts with the rival monks of the Abhayagiri Vihāra.²⁹

²⁰ Nāṇamoli translates: "there is no commentary here, and likewise no Teacher's Doctrine; for it has been allowed to go to pieces and is no longer known. However, a Sinhalese commentary exists which is pure" (Nāṇamoli 2010, xxxviii).

²¹ The *Cūlavamsa* reads that Mahinda composed the great commentary "with proper regard for the way of commenting that was handed down by the three Councils as taught by the Enlightened One and inculcated by Sāriputta and others" (Nāṇamoli, "Intro.," to *The Path*, i-iv).

²² Idem, xxxiv.

²³ Idem, xxvi.

²⁴ Idem, xxix-xxx.

²⁵ The city of Anuradhapura was the capital of Sri Lanka from the 4th century until the beginning of the 11th century CE.

²⁶ Karl H. Potter, *The Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies, Buddhist philosophy from 350 to 600* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2008), 100.

²⁷ E. W. Adikaram, *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon* (Colombo: D. Gunasena & Co. Ltd, 1953), 105-6.

²⁸ Ibid. For example, Buddhadasa, a contemporary of Buddhaghosa, preceded our Indian master at the Mahāvihāra.

²⁹ The Abhayagiri monks incited King Mahasena to destroy the Mahāvihāra monastery and the building materials thus obtained were used to construct the Abhayagiri Vihāra. After this incident, Meghavannabaya, the king's chief minister, rebelled and raised an army to fight against King Mahasena. The king and his army arrived to defeat Meghavannabaya

The *Cūlavamsa* narrates how after his arrival at the Mahāvihāra, Buddhaghosa stayed in the Scriptorium at the residential institute at Anuradhapura studying “the whole Sinhalese commentaries of the Elders’ Doctrine under Sanghapāla.”³⁰ Nāṇamoli states that the commentaries refer to “a very large volume of commentarial texts that had been assembled and preserved by the monks there, “over a long period of time.”³¹ Caster notes how Buddhaghosa states in the prologues of his commentaries, that his work “represents a translation of the Sinhala commentaries established by Mahinda.”³² It is believed that the documents in existence in the Mahāvihāra monastery at Anuradhapura at the time of Buddhaghosa’s arrival reached Ceylon with the first Buddhist missionaries led by Mahinda in the mid-third century BCE. However, despite Buddhaghosa’s notes affirming that the commentaries before him were those that Mahinda brought to Ceylon from India translated into Sinhalese, scholars consider that “the texts must have arrived more gradually, in the heads of several people”³³ over the centuries prior to the fifth century CE, though such theory cannot be positively proved.

The *Cūlavamsa* also explains that after studying the texts, Buddhaghosa became convinced that the doctrine of the Elders was the true teaching of the Buddha, saying: “This alone is the intention of Dhamma’s Lord.” Then Buddhaghosa assembled the monastic community and sought permission to synthesize the assembled Sinhalese-language commentaries into a comprehensive commentary written in Pāli,³⁴ uttering: “give me all the books to make a commentary.”

Against the background of the Elders’ traumatic experiences under King Mahasena’s rule and the events in the Mahāvihāra in those times, it is understandable that the monks at Mahāvihāra were cautious, or even suspicious, of Buddhaghosa’s intentions. At the same time, the monks wanted to test our Indian master’s ability and worth before committing themselves to hand over the books to him. For this reason, the *Cūlavamsa* states that the monks did not give him free access at first to the books to be translated and commented upon in Pāli but waited until his qualifications and intentions were fully proven. In this way, the Elders decided to first test his preparation, by assigning him the

and camped opposite the rebel’s camp. On the night before the battle, Meghavannabaya burst into Mahasena’s camp and convinced him to stop the attack against the Mahāvihāra. Mahasena agreed, making peace with the rebels and reconstructing the Mahāvihāra. As a result, a later king expelled the Abhayagiri monks. In Buddhaghosa’s own time, King Mahānāma seems not to have been entirely well-disposed to the Mahāvihāra center (Nāṇamoli, “Intro.,” to *The Path*).

³⁰ Idem, xxxix.

³¹ Carter comments that in the monastery “he found 25 sources, forming a multifaceted collection of commentarial literature written in Sinhala” and at least one in the Dravidian language and adds that “these sources had developed over several centuries” (John Ross Carter, “Buddhaghosa,” ER, 1074).

³² Ibid.

³³ R. F. Gombrich, *Theravāda Buddhism: A Social History Colombo* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 153-54.

³⁴ Nāṇamoli, “Intro.,” to *The Path*, xxxv.

task of elaborating the doctrine regarding two verses (*gāthās*) of the Sutta. The *Cūlavamsa* says: “in order to test him [Buddhaghosa] the Community gave him two stanzas saying: “Show your ability with this, when we have seen that you have it, we will give you all the books.” These two stanzas are the riddle that opens the *Visuddhimagga* and reads as follows: “When a wise man, established well in virtue / Develops consciousness and understanding / Then as a *bhikkhu* ardent and sagacious. / He succeeds in disentangling this tangle” (PP 1.1).

With these two *gāthās*, and consulting the *Piṭaka* and *aṭṭhakathās*, Buddhaghosa’s answer to the challenge was the composition of his magnum opus: the *Visuddhimagga*. The *Cūlavamsa* reads: “On that text alone he summarized the three Piṭakas with a commentary as epitome that was called *The Path of Purification*.” Once the work was completed, Buddhaghosa assembled the most learned among the monks in the Mahāvihāra and, under the precincts of the sampling of the Bodhi Tree at Anuradhapura, brought by Mahinda to Ceylon, and he read out his commentary of the *Tipiṭaka*. The *Cūlavamsa* states that the Elders, pleased with Buddhaghosa’s work, acceded to his request to render the manuscripts from Sinhalese to Māgadhi. Yet, by the references in the *Visuddhimagga*, it is evident that Buddhaghosa had access to those ancient books during its preparation and not only after its completion. As Bhikkhu Bodhi observes: “the statement that he [Buddhaghosa] wrote the *Visuddhimagga* before gaining access to the old commentaries is untenable, as the work is based squarely on those texts.”³⁵ Our interpretation is that the permission to have access to the books was granted by the Elders to Buddhaghosa so that he could translate and edit the texts in the Pāli.³⁶ Buddhaghosa mentions the name of some of the original manuscripts, which included, the *Mahā Aṭṭhakathā*, the *Mahāpaccāri Aṭṭhakathā*, and the *Kurundi Aṭṭhakathā*.³⁷

The length of Buddhaghosa’s stay in Ceylon is unknown.³⁸ The rendition of Buddhaghosa’s story, as told in the *Cūlavamsa*, ends by saying that, after having translated and commented upon the Sinhalese commentaries preserved at the Mahāvihāra, Buddhaghosa reportedly returned to India, making a pilgrimage to Bodhi Gaya to pay his respect to the Bodhi Tree.³⁹ “when the tasks to be done were finished, he went back to Jambudīpa (India) to pay homage to the Great Enlightenment tree.”⁴⁰

³⁵ Bhikkhu Bodhi, “Buddhaghosa,” EM, 192.

³⁶ The old manuscripts that Buddhaghosa had in front of him, according to Ñāṇamoli, were three *Piṭakattaya*, along with the *Aṭṭhakathās* in Sinhalese (Ñāṇamoli, “Intro” to *The Path*, xxxv).

³⁷ H. R. Perera, “Buddhism in Sri Lanka: A Short History,” *Wheel Publication* 100 (1988): 47.

³⁸ Ñāṇamoli, “Intro.” to *The Path*, xvi.

³⁹ Idem, xxxv.

⁴⁰ Caster mentions the political turmoil caused by the overrunning of Anuradhapura by invaders as the probable cause of Buddhaghosa’s return to India (John Ross Carter, “Buddhaghosa,” ER, 1074).

3.1.2 Buddhaghosa's works and The *Visuddhimagga*

This section intends to discuss Buddhaghosa's works and the *Visuddhimagga*. Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa is generally recognized as the most significant name in all the Theravāda commentarial literature.⁴¹ His commentaries were composed in Pāli, the *lingua franca* of Theravāda Buddhism, probably in the earliest part of the fifth century CE. Buddhaghosa's work is centered on the systematization and synthesizing of the *Tipiṭaka* (Pāli Canon), and the translation and editing of the "Sinhala commentaries" (*sīnhaḷa-aṭṭhakathās*). These commentaries—extant in Buddhaghosa's time although they disappeared subsequently—were written down in old Sinhala and based on the original Pāli compositions reputedly introduced into Ceylon by the monk Mahinda, King Asoka's son, after the Third Buddhist Council (mid-third century BCE).⁴²

The Ceylonese chronicle *Mahāvamsa* (fifth century CE), the Burmese *Gandhavaṃsa* by Nandapañña (eighteenth century CE), and the Burmese *Sāsanavaṃsa* by Paññāsāmi (nineteenth century CE) ascribe the composition of a large number of commentaries to Buddhaghosa. Traditionally,⁴³ the following works are usually credited to his authorship: two commentaries (*aṭṭhakathās*) on the *Vinaya Piṭaka*: the *Samantapāsādikā* and the *Kaṅkhāvīvaraṇī*; four commentaries on the *Sutta Piṭaka*, which are the *Sumaṅgalāvilāsīnī* on the DN, the *Papañcasūdanī* on the MN, the *Sāratthappakāsinī* on the SN, and the *Manorathapūraṇī* on the AN; four commentaries on the *Khuddaka Nikāya*, namely, the *Paramatthajotikā* (I) on the *Khuddakapāṭha*, the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* on the *Dhammapada*, the *Paramatthajotikā* (II) on the *Suttanipata-aṭṭhakathā* on the *Sutta Nipata*, and the *Jātaka-aṭṭhakathā* on the *Jātaka*; three *aṭṭhakathās* on the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, the *Atthasālinī* on the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, the *Sammohavinodanī* on the *Vibhaṅga* and the *Pañcappakaraṇa-aṭṭhakathā* on the *Dhātukathā*, the *Puggalapaññatti*, the *Kathāvatthu*, the *Yamaka*, the *Paṭṭhāna*.⁴⁴ Modern scholarship has expressed doubts about the authenticity of all these attributions, ruling out the possibility that some of these works were actually authored by Buddhaghosa for several reasons, such as differences in vocabulary, commentarial style, chronology and doctrinal stance, just to name a few.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Hinüber asserts that of the Theravāda commentarial tradition "the most important commentator is Buddhaghosa" (Hinüber, *Pāli Literature*, 102). Similarly, Law writes: "Buddhaghosa was the most celebrated commentator of the Theravada School of Buddhism" (Law, *Buddhaghosa*, ix). In the same vein see G. Guṇapāla P. Malalasekera, *The Pāli Literature of Ceylon* (Colombo M. D. Gunasena Co. Ltd. 1928), 79.

⁴² L. R. Goonesekere, *Buddhist Commentarial Literature*, The Wheel 113/114 (Kandy: BPS, 1967), 113. On the translation into Sinhala of the old Pāli commentaries, see Adikaram, *Early History of Buddhism*, 79. For a survey of commentarial titles possibly extant in Sri Lanka in Buddhaghosa's time see Adikaram, *Early History of Buddhism*, 10.

⁴³ K. R. Norman, *Pāli Literature* (Wiesbaden, 1983), 120; John T. Bullitt in *Beyond the Tipiṭaka a Field Guide to Post-canonical Pāli Literature*, <https://www.accesstoinight.org/noncanon/fieldguide.html>; and Malalasekera, DPPN, Vol 2, 307.

⁴⁴ For an outline of these works: Hinüber, *Handbook of Pāli*; and Adikaram, *Early History of Buddhism*, 1-9.

⁴⁵ Adikaram, *Early History of Buddhism*, 1-9, and Hinüber, *Handbook of Pāli*, 109.

Ñāṇamoli has suggested that a committee of monks assisted Buddhaghosa in preparing the commentaries under his name.⁴⁶ Other scholars opine that some of the titles attributed to Buddhaghosa were elaborated after he passed away but were credited to his authorship due to his unparalleled reputation. In the midst of these uncertainties, modern scholarship shows substantial agreement with von Hinüber that Buddhaghosa is the author of the *Visuddhimagga* and the commentaries on the first four *Nikāyas*.⁴⁷

Of all Buddhaghosa's works, the *Visuddhimagga* is, undoubtedly, the most important. It is generally considered the principal commentary of Pāli Theravāda literature,⁴⁸ the "principal non-canonical authority outside the canon of the Theravāda"⁴⁹ and, as Endo says, "the authority every commentator relied upon after Buddhaghosa, which fact further elevates its status and position in the Theravāda tradition."⁵⁰ Furthermore, the prestige of the *Visuddhimagga* has grown since it was penned, which helped to cement Pāli as the language of Theravāda. It was written in Ceylon at the beginning of the fifth century CE (430?),⁵¹ during the kingship of King Mahānāma at Anurādhapura. As stated, it is said to have been composed at the request of Saṅghapāla Thera, the senior monk at the Mahāvihāra in Anurādhapura, as a commentary to two verses (*gāthās*) given to Buddhaghosa to prove his qualification to be offered access to the *sīhaḷa-aṭṭhakathās*.⁵² The *Visuddhimagga* was, apparently, Buddhaghosa's first major work and remained his most significant contribution.⁵³ This monumental compendium is a systematic exposition written as an abridged edition of the *Tipiṭaka* by compiling and condensing the Buddha's teachings into a single treatise.⁵⁴ For Crosby, the *Visuddhimagga* is "the most famous and influential post-canonical compendium of meditation practices" in Theravāda.⁵⁵

Regarding the book's title, it is translated as "*The Path of Purification*." Buddhaghosa clarifies that "purification" (*visuddhi*) "should be understood as *nibbāna*, which, being devoid of all stains, is utterly pure" (PP 1.5).⁵⁶ In reference to its addressees, the *Visuddhimagga* is a meditator's handbook written by a monk for the use of a monk (*bhikkhu*), considering a *bhikkhu* to be anybody who sees fear in existence (PP 1,7). However, the *Visuddhimagga* presupposes a certain knowledge of the Abhidhamma.

⁴⁶ Ñāṇamoli, "Intro.," to *The Path*, xxxi.

⁴⁷ Hinüber, *Handbook of Pali*, 102; and Ñāṇamoli, "Intro.," to *The Path*, xxxvii.

⁴⁸ Akira Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Śākyamuni to Early Mahāyāna* (Motilal Banarsidass, 1993), 134.

⁴⁹ Ñāṇamoli, "Intro.," to *The Path*, xxvii.

⁵⁰ Toshiichi Endo, "Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* Challenged?" *Journal of the Centre for Buddhist Studies Sri Lanka*, Vol. 9 (2011): 31.

⁵¹ For the dates of king Mahānāma's reign see Mendez, *History of Ceylon. A Study of the Pali Commentaries*, 332.

⁵² Bimala Charan Law, *A History of Pāli Literature* (London: PTS, 1933), 400.

⁵³ G. P. Malalasekera, *The Pāli Literature of Ceylon*, 85.

⁵⁴ Ñāṇamoli, "Intro.," to *The Path*, xxxvii; and Law, *A History of Pāli Literature*, 400.

⁵⁵ Kate Crosby, *Theravada Buddhism: Continuity, Diversity, and Identity* (Wiley-Blackwell Guides Buddhism, 2014), 145.

⁵⁶ The path (*magga*) of purification is thus the means to approach such purity.

The historical prestige of the *Visuddhimagga* has elevated its composition to the realm of legend. The *Mahāvamsa* embellishes the book's history, narrating a meaningful legendary event: with the intention of showing Buddhaghosa's skills to the multitudes, and making Buddhaghosa's wisdom celebrated among all men, the deities (*devatās*) intervened, and hid the book once and a second time, forcing Buddhaghosa to rewrite it. While the Master was rewriting the book for the third time, the first originals reappeared, as the deities restored them. Assembled, the monks recited simultaneously the three copies and all versions matched in every detail. Amazed, the monks rejoiced and "applauded [...] and again and again it was said, "Surely this is (Bodhisattva) Metteya."⁵⁷

Concerning the sources of the *Visuddhimagga*, these are multiple. Some scholars have suggested that Buddhaghosa was probably given access to all the Sinhala commentarial collections extant in the Mahāvihāra before its composition.⁵⁸ These included all the commentaries that reached—or were elaborated on—the island since Mahinda's time and, particularly, the Sinhala commentary par excellence, namely, the *Mahā-Aṭṭhakathā*. Other texts often cited in the *Visuddhimagga* are the *Vibhaṅga*, the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, and the *Niddesa*. The *Vibhaṅga* (*The Book of Analysis*) is a Buddhist scripture, part of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, which deals with the taxonomy and analysis of eighteen topics of Buddhist doctrine. The *Paṭisambhidāmagga* (*The Path of Discrimination*) is quoted very frequently by Buddhaghosa⁵⁹ According to Hinüber, the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* "is the only Abhidhamma text that has found its way into the *Khuddakanikāya*, probably because it was composed too late (perhaps second century CE) to be included in the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, which was already closed, while the end of the *Khuddakanikāya* always remained open for additions."⁶⁰ Its main purpose is to systematize the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* and, in this sense, it was a precursor to the *Path*. Another important source, the *Niddesa* (*Explanation of the Suttas*), is a scripture included in the *Khuddaka Nikāya*. According to Hinüber, the *Niddesa* can be dated to before the 1st century BCE.⁶¹ Another central source for the *Visuddhimagga* is the Mahāvihāra's great commentary the *Mahā-Aṭṭhakathā* from which Buddhaghosa draws extensively. Our author also cites para-canonical texts like the *Milindapañha* and the *Peṭakopadesa*. It can be said that in its composition the *Visuddhimagga* draws from a plurality of sources. It was completed consulting most of the sources available in Ceylon at the time as, in its pages, Buddhaghosa cites "nearly every work in the earlier Buddhist literature."⁶²

⁵⁷ *The Mahāvamsa* 37.28-240, as quoted by Ñānamoli, "Intro.," to *The Path*, xxxix.

⁵⁸ Opinion shared, among others, by Bhikkhu Bodhi, "Buddhaghosa," EM, 192.

⁵⁹ For the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* as a possible precursor to the *Visuddhimagga*, see Hinüber, *Handbook of Pali*, 60.

⁶⁰ Hinüber, *Handbook of Pali*, 59.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² R. F. Gombrich, *Buddhist Precept and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon* (Oxford:

As per its precedents, for centuries the *Visuddhimagga* has been praised for its originality. However, its novelty was put into question with the discovery of a similar work extant in the Chinese canon (*āgama*), namely, the *Vimuttimaggā* title rendered in English as *The Path to Liberation* (解脫道論),⁶³ that was probably written in Ceylon,⁶⁴ in Sanskrit, by Arahant Upatissa (c. first or second century CE) and preserved as translated into Chinese as the *Jietuo dao lun* by Saṃghapāla (僧伽婆羅) in the sixth century CE. Nāṇamoli maintained that the *Vimuttimaggā* was available to Buddhaghosa at the time of the composition of the *Visuddhimagga*,⁶⁵ probably based on Dhammapāla's opinion.⁶⁶ Anālayo writes: "in many respects, *The Path to Liberation* shows close similarities to the *Visuddhimagga*."⁶⁷ Some scholars even maintain that the *Visuddhimagga* is based on the *Vimuttimaggā*,⁶⁸ although others express skepticism,⁶⁹ or even openly reject such dependency,⁷⁰ as it departs in many and key doctrinal aspects from Upatissa's work.

In terms of style, Law observed that the vocabulary of the *Visuddhimagga* is rich and abundant in citations and stanzas.⁷¹ Plenty of vivid illustrative stories populate the pages of the book. The high standard of Pāli used by Buddhaghosa has similarly been praised as clear and lucid in style.⁷² The stylistic influence of Abhidhammic scholasticism is also patent in the structure and terminology of the work and in its systematic style. As per its content, the *Visuddhimagga* "is a concise but complete encyclopedia of Buddhist's teachings."⁷³ It systematizes and condenses all the Buddhist doctrines in one book. In unison, it can be characterized as a guidebook for meditative practice, which has been described as "meditation's official manual ever since its writing."⁷⁴ Regarding the Theravāda path, the *Visuddhimagga* provides its most comprehensive description, having become the well-established "work of reference" within the tradition.⁷⁵ It meticulously details a map describing and clearly at length the phenomenology of the stages on the way to *nirvana*. As a general commentary or "great treatise" of Theravāda, the *Visuddhimagga* does not comment on just one *Piṭaka*, but on all of the scriptures.

Clarendon Press, 1971), 43.

⁶³ Hinüber, *Handbook of Pali*, 124.

⁶⁴ Some scholars believe that the *Vimuttimaggā* has a Sri Lankan origin. See M. Nagai, "The Vimutti-Magga, 'The Way to Deliverance'" *Journal of the Pali Text Society* (1919), 70.

⁶⁵ Nāṇamoli, "Intro.," xiv; P. V. Bapat, *Vimuttimaggā and Visuddhimaggā. A Comparative Study* (Poona: 1937), xlix.

⁶⁶ Anālayo "The Treatise on the Path to Liberation (解脫道論) and the Visuddhimaggā," *Fuyan Buddhist Studies*, No. 4, (2009): 1-15.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Norman, *Pali Literature*, 120; Nagai "The Vimutti-Magga, 'The Way to Deliverance,'" 80.

⁶⁹ Anālayo, "The Treatise on the Path to Liberation," 3.

⁷⁰ Idem, note 9.

⁷¹ Law, *A History of Pāli Literature*, 400.

⁷² K. Anurasiri, "Visuddhimaggā," EB, Vol. 8, 1963, 707.

⁷³ Nāṇamoli, "Intro.," to *The Path*, xxiii; and Adikaram, *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, 4.

⁷⁴ Winston L. King, *Theravāda meditation: the Buddhist transformation of yoga* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1992), 6; and Nāṇamoli, "Intro.," to *The Path*, xxvii.

⁷⁵ Endo, "Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimaggā," 31.

3.1.3 The Theravāda Buddhist tradition

The preceding section began by stating that Buddhaghosa was a Buddhist monk in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition. However, this apparently straight-forward proposition is not as simple and clear as it might seem. What is the Theravāda Buddhist tradition? When did this tradition of Buddhism first come into being? What are its defining features? Some deep-rooted misconceptions must first be removed to answer these questions.

First, Theravāda Buddhism (hereafter, “Theravāda”) is a modern-coined notion.⁷⁶ In fact, the concept of Theravāda is the result of a convoluted historical process of conceptualization that has recently begun to be studied in-depth by several scholars.⁷⁷ A few assertions are uncontroversial. The compound word Theravāda (Skt. *Sthaviravāda*) literally means “view” or “doctrine” (*vāda*) of the “Elders” (*thera*,⁷⁸ Skt. *sthavira*).⁷⁹ Theravāda is associated with Southeast Asia,⁸⁰ is the most ancient living tradition of Buddhism, and the only surviving among the eighteen schools of early Buddhism.

Some Theravādins identify Theravāda with “the word of the Buddha,” defining it as the purest, the “most authentic” Buddhist school,⁸¹ holding the teachings of the Buddha.⁸² According to this view, the Buddha’s teachings are entirely preserved in the Pāli Canon (Theravāda scriptures),⁸³ which, in a closed system (canon), record the word of the Buddha (*buddhavacana*) as originally and literally given,⁸⁴ in the language spoken by the Buddha (Pāli), and uninterruptedly transmitted since the Buddha’s time.

⁷⁶ As Collins notes, “when in premodern times the term “Theravāda” is used, it refers not to a Buddhist school but to “[i] a monastic lineage and [ii] a textual transmission” (Steven Collins: “Theravāda civilization(s)? Periodizing its history,” University of Chicago, January 2013. http://theravadaciv.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Theravada-civilizations_.pdf). For information on Theravāda: Richard Gombrich, *A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo* (New York: Routledge, 1988); Crosby, *Theravada Buddhism*, 2014.

⁷⁷ It is necessary to bear in mind this complex historical process, as neglecting it would make it impossible to define “Theravada.” Some key recent studies on the conceptual formation of the notion of Theravada are: Todd LeRoy Perreira, “Whence Theravāda? The Modern Genealogy of an Ancient Term,” in *How Theravada is Theravada? Exploring Buddhist Identities*, eds., Skilling, et al., 443 – 571 (Chiang Mai: Silksworm Press, 2012), and Rupert Gethin, “Was Buddhaghosa a Theravadin? Buddhist identity in the Pāli commentaries and chronicles” in *How Theravada is Theravada? Exploring Buddhist Identities*, eds., Skilling, et al., 1-66, (Chiang Mai: Silksworm Press, 2012).

⁷⁸ In the Theravada tradition, a monastic is called “*thera*” ten years after from his admission into the monastic community.

⁷⁹ Other names for Theravāda are *vibhajjavāda* or “school of analysis” (*vibhajya* “analyzing” + *vāda*: “doctrine”) and *theriyā* which means “that which belonged to theras.” Theravāda Buddhists are also known as Theravādins or Theriyās.

⁸⁰ Theravāda is the predominant religion of Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos and is growing in Vietnam, Singapore, its original homeland in India, and in Western countries.

⁸¹ Donald. K. Swearer, “Theravada Buddhist Societies,” *The Oxford Handbook of Global Religions* (OUP, 2011), 83.

⁸² Abeynayake, “The Theravāda constitutes the word of the Buddha preserved in the Pāli Canon,” Oliver Abeynayake, “The Theravāda Tradition: Its Identity,” *JCBSSL Vol. II* (2009): 94.

⁸³ The Pāli Canon has been described as “the most complete among the extant of early Buddhism,” P. Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhism* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3. It is organized into three “baskets” (*Tipiṭaka*) or divisions: the *Vinaya Piṭaka* (“basket of discipline” or code of monastic rules), the *Sutta Piṭaka* (“basket of the discourses” of the Buddha and his chief disciples”), and the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* (“basket of Abhidhamma” or corpus of systematic scholastic exposition—Abhidhamma—of the teachings of the Buddha). In the Pāli Canon, the *Sutta Piṭaka* has five *Nikāyas* (collections), namely: the *Dīgha Nikāya* (long discourses); the *Majjhima Nikāya* (medium-length discourses), the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (short discourses), the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (discourses arranged numerically) and the *Khuddaka Nikāya* (miscellaneous collection).

⁸⁴ See Grace G. Burford: “Theravada Buddhist Soteriology and the Paradox of Desire” in *Paths to Liberation: The Mārga and Its Transformations in Buddhist Thought* by R. E. Buswell Jr. et al. (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 38. For a somewhat qualified instance of such traditional view see Abeynayake, “The Theravāda Tradition,” 90.

Modern scholarship casts doubt on almost all of these assumptions, particularly, the claims of purity, integrity, and continuity, putting forward a critical account instead. The first element to be deconstructed is the equation Theravāda = word of the Buddha. If for some Theravādins, the Pāli Canon simply contains “the word of the Buddha,” modern scholarship rejects a straightforward parity between Theravāda scriptures and the “word of the Buddha.” This is so because it is not known what “the word of the Buddha” was, based on what it is known today about how the Pāli Canon was in fact elaborated.

Another contentious point is that the Pāli Canon is “the only Buddhist Canon to survive in its entirety in an Indic language.”⁸⁵ Collins rejects that the Pāli Canon pre-existed the Theravāda school in Ceylon, and believes that this particular selection of scriptures “should be seen as a product of that school, as part of a strategy of legitimation by the monks of the Mahāvihāra lineage in Ceylon in the early centuries of the first millennium AD.”⁸⁶ This is not to say the Pāli Canon does not reflect the Buddha’s teachings. Scholars like Gombrich⁸⁷ Harvey,⁸⁸ Warder,⁸⁹ and Nakamura⁹⁰ hold that the Pāli Canon reflects the preaching of the Buddha. However, Theravāda scriptures should not be conflated with the original “scriptures” of Buddhism.

Regarding the legitimacy and authenticity of the Theravāda scriptures as faithful vehicles for the word of the Buddha (*buddhavacana*) and his foremost disciples, the affinities between the Theravāda *suttas* and the canonical scriptures and works of other early Buddhist schools strongly suggest the genuineness of the Theravāda teachings. However, the collection that constitutes the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* of the Theravāda school differs considerably from the works of the other schools of early Buddhism, and it is not generally considered as the genuine, unadulterated and direct teaching of the Buddha.

About the Pāli Canon actually recording the teachings of the Buddha in the original language spoken by the Buddha, Pāli, as a *medium*, is a hallmark of the Theravāda tradition, and that Pāli has been for centuries—with some exceptions—its *lingua franca*. “Pāli” originally meant “Pāli Canon,” and in Pāli the scriptures and some of the literature of the Theravāda school were written down and compiled, but not without exceptions. However, it is not known what the language of the Buddha was.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Crosby, *Theravada Buddhism*, 1.

⁸⁶ Collins, “On the very idea,” 72.

⁸⁷ Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism*, 20.

⁸⁸ Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 3.

⁸⁹ A. K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 3rd edition, 1999), 387.

⁹⁰ Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism: A Survey with Bibliographical Notes* (Motilal Banarsidass Publications 1999), 57.

⁹¹ Modern scholars tend to believe the Buddha used Old Māgadhī.

The idea of an uninterrupted transmission since the times of the Buddha has likewise been challenged. If in the traditional account, the Theravāda monastics of Ceylon have preserved immaculate the teaching of the Buddha since ancient times until now, modern scholars disagree, considering Theravāda the source of Theravāda. As Collins words it: “we can only have anything like secure knowledge of the texts of the Canon as we now have them from the time of the commentarial and scholarly works of ‘the committee called Buddhaghosa’ in the 5th and subsequent centuries AD, in the tradition mediated by the Mahāvihāra group of monks in Ceylon.”⁹² Skilton states: “[the Pāli canon] was allegedly put into writing late in the first century CE, though secure evidence for its content dates from comprehensive commentaries composed in the fifth century CE.”⁹³

In concluding this section, it can be strongly maintained that, as Lester states: “Theravāda Buddhists of Southeast Asia adhere to a tradition crystallized and codified in measure by the Bhikkhus of the Mahāvihāra (Great Monastery) of Ceylon between the third century BC and the fifth century AD.”⁹⁴ To speak of the Theravāda tradition as “the word of the Buddha” and the Theravāda scriptures (Pāli Canon) as the genuine and legitimate *buddhavacana* is a claim not supported by historical or textual evidence.

Let us consider next some of the defining characteristics of Theravāda Buddhism. Theravāda shares with all other Buddhist schools the beliefs at the core of the Buddhist worldview, a basic framework that emerges from the Enlightenment of the Buddha.⁹⁵ These include: the doctrine of dependent co-origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), which describes the nature of reality (*dhamma-niyāmatā*); the Four Noble Truths, which explain suffering (*dukkha*), the arising (*samudaya*) of suffering, the cessation (*nirodha*) of suffering, and the Path of the cessation of suffering (*maggā*); and the Eightfold Noble Path, constituted by right view, right understanding, right word, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration, whose practice leads to *nibbāna*. The Eightfold Noble Path can be subsumed within the “three trainings” (*ti sikkhā*) namely, morality or virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and understanding or wisdom (*paññā*); and the doctrines of no-self (*anattā*), karma and rebirth, among other basic tenets. Outside mentioning this firm core of essential tenets, it is not possible here to offer a comprehensive account of the defining doctrines and practices of Theravāda. It suffices to mention some of the most salient features that define the Theravāda identity.⁹⁶

⁹² Stephen Collins, “Theravāda civilization(s)? Periodizing its history,” University of Chicago. January 2013, <http://theravadaciv.org/wpcontent/uploads/2013/02/Theravada-civilizations.pdf>.

⁹³ Andrew Skilton: “Theravada” in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy* ed., S. Emmanuel, 71-86 (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

⁹⁴ R. C. Lester, *Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia* (University of Michigan Press, 1973), 66.

⁹⁵ For a classic introduction to Buddhism: Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld), 1974.

⁹⁶ Excellent introductions to Theravāda are: Kate Crosby, *Theravāda Buddhism: Continuity, Diversity, and Identity* (Wiley-

A largely accepted hallmark of Theravāda is its conservatism. Most scholars agree that Theravāda, as school, has experienced little doctrinal change since its inception.⁹⁷ Another describing trait is its claim of orthodoxy and direct lineage from the Buddha. As the name suggests, Theravāda (“view of the elders”) regards itself as the school most faithful to the teachings of the Buddha transmitted in unbroken continuity since the Buddha’s time. It is true that, as Crosby puts it, “[Theravāda] retains visible forms of discipline associated with the Buddha’s early disciples.”⁹⁸ But, as explained earlier, this does not prove an unbroken continuity with, or direct transmission from, the Buddha. The use of the Pāli language is another key characteristic of the Theravāda school and the Pāli Canon, the only surviving complete canon of the early schools of Buddhism. Another main feature is its emphasis on the consistent practice of meditation, in both *samatha* and *vipassanā* forms. For Theravāda, meditation is the heart of Buddhism and absolutely essential to achieving liberation.⁹⁹ One more defining mark of the Theravāda, also noted by Crosby, is its realism¹⁰⁰ An Abhidhammic tradition¹⁰¹ providing a scholastic systematization and interpretation of the main doctrinal points of Theravāda is another key feature of this Buddhist school¹⁰² since the strict observance of the monastic regulations is crucial to the Theravāda identity. The monastic rules contained in the *Vinaya* (monastic code of discipline) are essential to the lives of Theravāda monastics. Theravāda is also marked by an important commentarial literature, clearly standing out Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga*. Theravāda is also defined by its adherence to a variety of special teachings upheld by the Mahāvihāra tradition of Ceylon and Buddhaghosa.

3.1.4 Buddhaghosa and the Theravāda orthodoxy

In Theravāda lands, Buddhaghosa is appreciated as the “greatest commentator and exegetist”¹⁰³ of the *Tipiṭaka*. As Kalupahana comments, “for the traditional Buddhist scholars in this region, Buddhaghosa is literally the ‘voice’ (*ghosa*) of the Buddha.”¹⁰⁴ Buddhaghosa is also credited with having expounded the orthodoxy of Theravāda.¹⁰⁵

Blackwell, 2013); Richard Gombrich, *Theravāda Buddhism: A Social History Colombo (London and New York: Routledge, 1988; Asanga Tilakaratne, Theravada Buddhism, The View of the Elders, (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2012).*

⁹⁷ Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism*, 22.

⁹⁸ Grosby, *Theravāda Buddhism*, 2.

⁹⁹ King, *Theravada Meditation*, 82.

¹⁰⁰ In contrast with Mahāyāna. Realism, for example, in its conception of the Buddha (as having existed in the world) and its attributes; or its ontology (the world exists), in contradistinction to idealist forms of Buddhism.

¹⁰¹ Warder defined the Abhidhamma as “a restatement of the doctrine of the Buddha in strictly formalized language [...] assumed to constitute a consistent system of philosophy” (Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, 288).

¹⁰² The *Abhidhamma-Piṭaka* systematizes the teachings of the Buddha and provides a detailed clarification and exegesis of the main doctrinal points of the Theravāda.

¹⁰³ Malalasekera, *The Pāli Literature of Ceylon*, 79.

¹⁰⁴ Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy*, 206.

¹⁰⁵ Buswell, “Buddhaghosa,” *EncBuddhism*, Vol 2, 837; and Paul J. Griffiths, *On being mindless: Buddhist meditation and the mind-body problem* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1986), 3.

Therefore, among Theravādins Buddhaghosa's work is normative and indispensable.¹⁰⁶ Theravāda today is thus unintelligible without Buddhaghosa because Theravāda is already understood through Buddhaghosa's interpretations. In this sense, Buddhaghosa and the *Visuddhimagga* are comparable in the Catholic church with St. Thomas Aquinas and his *Summa Theologica* as, in Griffiths' words, "Buddhaghosa's interpretations [...] represent the orthodox views of the developed Theravāda tradition,"¹⁰⁷ and "Buddhaghosa's magnum opus, *The Path to Purity*, a text which, more than any other, defines doctrinal orthodoxy for the Theravāda tradition in all its cultural variants."¹⁰⁸

However, the fact that for many Theravādins Buddhaghosa's exegesis represents the orthodox interpretation the Buddha teachings¹⁰⁹ should not lead us to conflate the Buddha's teachings with Theravāda orthodoxy. There are crucial points in which Buddhaghosa and the Pāli scriptures differ considerably. We consider some examples: a) The sevenfold framework of purifications on which the *Visuddhimagga* is built appears only once in the Pāli canon—in the *Rathavinīta Sutta* (MN 24)—and is not found structuring any earlier Theravāda commentary. We comment on this departure in §3.2.2; b) The structural systematization of the path in *sīla, samādhi and paññā* put forward by Buddhaghosa in the *Visuddhimagga* makes it appear as if the meditators' progress is linear and systematic, whereas in the *Nikāyas* do not given in such a clear-cut fashion¹¹⁰; c) As Gethin and other scholars note, *samatha* and *vipassanā* in the *Nikāyas* are not developed as independently from each other as it transpires in the *Visuddhimagga*¹¹¹; d) As Arbel observes, "the *arūpa-samāpattis* are never referred to in the *Nikāyas* as *jhānas*."¹¹² The *arūpa-samāpattis* as presented in the canon seem a different meditation model than the framework of eight material and immaterial *jhānas* in the *Visuddhimagga*; e) The possibility of developing understanding (*paññā*), without having previous mastery of *samatha* (and *jhānas*), is treated as rarer in the *Visuddhimagga* than in the *Nikāyas*. Considering these examples, and others we shall touch upon, we conclude that Bucknell is correct when he says that Buddhaghosa's explanation is not "merely a more detailed and precise formulation of the account found through the *Nikāyas*, rather, it is a fundamentally different version which is in serious conflict with the *Nikāya* account."¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ Malalasekera, *The Pali Literature*, 99.

¹⁰⁷ Griffiths, *On Being Mindless*, 3.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism*, 43; and Griffiths, *On Being Mindless*, 3.

¹¹⁰ Gethin, *The Buddhist Path*, 350.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Keren Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation: The Four Jhanas as the Actualization of Insight* (London: Routledge, 2017) 8.

¹¹³ Roderick S. Bucknell, "Reinterpreting the Jhānas," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 16, No. 2 (1993): 403.

We can presume then that rather than presenting the orthodox reading of the *Nikāyas*, Buddhaghosa is probably presenting the orthodox views of the Theravāda tradition, and particularly of the Mahāvihāra lineage in Ceylon.¹¹⁴ Buddhaghosa's commentaries are, indeed, celebrated as the most faithful exposition of the Mahāvihāra tradition, which is widely regarded as the exponent of the strictest orthodoxy based on the Pāli Canon.¹¹⁵ It is broadly believed that Buddhaghosa was, in fact, faithful to the Mahāvihāra tradition and, as Gombrich puts it, "as unoriginal as he claims and aspires to be."¹¹⁶ He has even been accused of lack of originality and independence in his commentarial work.¹¹⁷ In the prologues to his commentaries, Buddhaghosa himself states that he writes in the Mahāvihāra monastery at Anurādhapura, following the teaching of the dwellers there, without adding anything or advertising his own standpoint (PP 17.25) and his work is limited to translating, editing, systematizing and summarizing the original manuscripts of the ancient *sīhala-aṭṭhakathās*.¹¹⁸ Buddhaghosa adds that he gives commentarial notes only on passages that were not previously commented upon by his predecessors. And, on those occasions in which Buddhaghosa offers his own opinion, he is compelled to mention that those views are his own or "our preference here is this" (PP 13.123).¹¹⁹

However, considering the vast influence that our Indian author exerts in the tradition, recent scholarship has expressed doubts questioning whether Buddhaghosa's role as a commentator was truly confined to rearranging and summarizing the Sinhalese Commentaries and "how far was Buddhaghosa faithful to the old commentaries when translating them into Pāli?"¹²⁰ These questions are not trivial since the Pāli Canon is largely seen through the lens of his interpretations. It is clear that, on the whole, Buddhaghosa was faithful to the Mahāvihāra tradition, but not all the content of earlier commentaries was included in his works, and all his interpretations do not coincide with doctrine stated in previous Theravāda commentaries. The traditional view of Buddhaghosa as a faithful translator has been challenged even further by recent scholarship, namely by Endo, who attributes to Buddhaghosa a more marked role as "critical editor" than earlier accepted, inserting his own doctrinal understanding when considered necessary.¹²¹

¹¹⁴ Moreover, when the *Visuddhimagga* was reputedly written to demonstrate Buddhaghosa's readiness and credentials to translate the Theravādin commentaries into Pāli, which surely implies his adhesion to the Mahāvihāra orthodoxy.

¹¹⁵ For a history of the Mahāvihāra tradition, see Gombrich, *Theravāda Buddhism*, 1988 and Kanai Lal Hazra, *History of Theravada Buddhism in South-East Asia*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publisher Pvt. Ltd., 2002.

¹¹⁶ Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism*, 22.

¹¹⁷ C. A. F. Rhys Davids notes "Of his [Buddhaghosa] talent there can be no doubt; it was equated only by his extraordinary industry. But of originality, of independent thought, there is at present no evidence" (cited in Adikaram, *Early History of Buddhism*, 4). In a similar vein: Nāṇamoli, "Intro.," to *The Path*, xxxvi; Malalasekera, *The Pāli Literature of Ceylon*, 98.

¹¹⁸ Gombrich, *Buddhist Precept and Practice*, 43.

¹¹⁹ Nāṇamoli, "Intro." to *The Path*, xxvi.

¹²⁰ Endo, "Buddhaghosa's Method of Work," 143.

¹²¹ For a critical assessment of Buddhaghosa's editing role see: Endo, "Buddhaghosa's Method of Work," 143.

3.2 STAGES OF THE PATH IN THE *VISUDDHIMAGGA*

3.2.1 Introduction

In a study involving the dynamics of spiritual growth in the *Visuddhimagga* such as the present undertaking, a discussion must be included on the doctrine on the stages of the path to awakening. This section examines the path-stages as presented in the *Visuddhimagga*. However, to conduct such an analysis, we should first look at the formative background of this doctrine in the Theravāda tradition prior to its expression in Buddhaghosa's work. The canonical teaching of the seven stages of purification (*satta-visuddhi*) is particularly important to consider, which constitutes the backbone of the *Visuddhimagga*, and is the subject of the first subsection. In the next one, we consider the doctrine of the stages of the path as presented in the *Visuddhimagga*.

3.2.2 Doctrine of the stages in the Pāli Canon and the *Visuddhimagga*

3.2.2.1 Doctrine of the Stages in the Pāli Canon

The early Buddhist teachings on the dynamics of spiritual life and a taxonomy of path-stages are best elucidated in the framework of the Four Noble Truths. In particular, the Fourth Noble Truth: the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo*). The aim of Buddhism is the Third Noble Truth, namely the cessation of suffering (*dukkha-nirodha*), synonymous with the elimination of thirst (*taṇhā*), ignorance (*avijjā*), and the attainment of *nibbāna*.¹ The realization of *nibbāna* coincides with the attainment of purity (*visuddhi*) and, in fact, Buddhaghosa elucidates *visuddhi* as *nibbāna*. Our Indian master writes: “purification (*visuddhi*) should be understood as *nibbāna* which being devoid of all stains is utterly pure” (PP 1.6). Such utter inner purity is attainable by uprooting three impurities: greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*), as they prevent the total eradication of suffering and the realization of the true nature of reality (*yathābhūtam*).

However, since its inception, Buddhist psychology explains that perfect purification, in most cases, is not instantly attainable.² *Nibbāna*, as a final breakthrough, is always sudden, but its unfolding is usually gradual, due to the unenlightened person's deep-rooted attachments. The Buddha recognized this dynamic aspect of spiritual life, and the need for gradual training. In fact, Buddhism is depicted metaphorically as a “path”

¹ Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (New York: Grove Press, 1974), 35.

² Matara Sri Nānārāma, *The Seven Stages of Purification and The Insight Knowledges* (Kandi: BPS, 1983), 13.

(*magga*) or a “way” (*paṭipadā*) from bondage to liberation, which is full of hazards and covers the entire transformation of the seeker, from a worldly person to liberation. What unfolds is an arduous growth process that occurs as defined by a sequence of stages. Hence, the Buddhist way frequently operates on a graduated scale, step by step.³

Considering several alternative canonical accounts of the course of practice taken by the Buddha, efforts were made in early Buddhism and the Theravāda tradition to map the stations of transition along the path to awakening. The outcome is several taxonomies, with varying levels of elaboration, which will be summarized next.⁴

A consideration of the path-stages to *nibbāna* starts with the Noble Eightfold Path. The Middle Way (*majjhimāpaṭipadā*) comprises right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*), right thought (*sammā-saṅkappa*), right speech (*sammā-vācā*), right action (*sammā-kammanta*), right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*), right effort (*sammā-vāyāma*), right mindfulness (*sammā-sati*), and right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*).⁵ In the *Mahācattārisaka Sutta*, the Buddha refers to two further factors, saying: “in one of right concentration, right knowledge (*sammā-ñāṇa*) comes into being; in one of right knowledge, right deliverance (*sammā-vimutti*) comes into being.”⁶ Right knowledge is typically defined as “seeing things as they really are,” which results in the unfolding of the tenth path-factor, right liberation, which matches with the *summum bonum* of Buddhism, the attainment of *nibbāna*.

What then is the interrelation between the eightfold and tenfold schemes? According to the *Mahācattārisaka Sutta*, “the path of the disciple in higher training possesses eight factors, the arahant possesses ten factors” (MN 117.34). This statement, plus the fact that the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* discusses the tenfold scheme more often than the eightfold path, has led some to consider that the tenfold path is superior to the eightfold path,⁷ and may suggest that the eightfold path is incomplete. However, as Bucknell observes: “the absence of *sammā vimutti* from the eightfold path is no real defect, since [...] the path is

³ The *Dhammapada* states: “Let a wise man remove impurities from himself even as a silversmith removes impurities from the silver: one after one, little by little, again and again” (*Dhp* 239). *The Udāna* reads: “Just as, brethren, the mighty ocean deepens and slopes gradually down, hollow after hollow, not plunging by a sudden precipice; even so, brethren, in this *dhamma*-discipline the training is gradual, it goes step by step; there is no sudden penetration of insight” (*Udā*, 54).

⁴ For reason of space, our consideration on the taxonomy of stages is not all-comprehensive. Other classifications are set aside for space reasons. Other gradual teachings given by the Buddha include: the four bases of mindfulness as per the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN I.10), or the four factors of exertion for purification (AN II.194)—extended to nine factors in the *Dasuttara Sutta* (DN III.288)—and the fourfold attainments of stream-entry, once-return, non-return, and arahantship.

⁵ The *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* or “Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion” (SN 56.11).

⁶ The *Mahācattārisaka Sutta* or the Great Forty Discourse (MN 117.34) is the only discourse where the Buddha goes into great length on the list of the ten factors. For other discourses with reference to ten factors see Roderick S. Bucknell, “The Buddhist Path to Liberation: An Analysis of the Listing of Stages,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 7, No. 2 (1984), 38.

⁷ Bucknell writes: “as C. A. F. Rhys Davids pointed out half a century ago, the *Aṅguttara* implicitly assigns superior status to the tenfold path by discussing it far more frequently, while in the *Eights* the eightfold path is listed only twice, whereas in the *Tens*, the tenfold path is listed no fewer than fifty-four times” (Bucknell, “The Buddhist Path to Liberation,” 8).

the way to the final realization and therefore need not include that realization.”⁸ A question that may arise is what causes the unfolding of the ninth factor (right knowledge) and the tenth factor (right liberation). Continuing with Bucknell, “it may be that right insight is not [...] an active practice to which the meditator must direct his energies after he has mastered right practice of the preceding eight stages, [but] something that will arise spontaneously once the eight have been perfected—in which case its omission from the path is no real defect.”⁹

Are the factors present in the Noble Eightfold Path sequential? *Prima facie*, it may seem, that the eight noble factors form a sequence. The *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* appears to suggest such an understanding.¹⁰ Other Pāli scriptures seem to concur, such as the *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* (MN 9) and the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* 10.121. In view of these texts, Bucknell asserts that “the path is therefore sequential [...] the order of listing represents the sequence in which the factors are developed in practice.”¹¹ The Theravāda tradition, though, does not recognize the advancement along the path as linear.¹² For Rahula, the factors “are to be developed more or less simultaneously, as far as possible according to the capacity of each individual. They are linked together and each helps the cultivation of the others.”¹³ Bhikkhu Bodhi in similar terms explains:

The eight factors [...] are not steps to be followed in sequence, one after another. They can be more aptly described as components rather than as steps, comparable to the intertwining strands of a single cable that requires the contributions of all the strands for maximum strength. With a certain degree of progress all eight factors can be present simultaneously, each supporting the others. However, until that point is reached, some sequence in the unfolding of the path is inevitable.¹⁴

There is a seeming inconsistency between understanding that in the Noble Eightfold Path all factors are to be practiced simultaneously and that the path is sequential. This tension can be resolved if we consider the linear conception as being too naïve. A sequential development necessarily exists but can be better described as a spiral of dynamic interactions. In other words, all the factors should be practiced at once, and progressing in one factor helps to develop the others, but, at some point, mastery of the earlier stages is a requisite for mastery of subsequent ones.¹⁵ The sequential and cumulative nature of the factors is also indicated by the order in their nomenclature: from the more external and gross ones to those that are more internalized and subtle.

⁸ Bucknell, “The Buddhist Path to Liberation,” 8.

⁹ Idem, 10.

¹⁰ “The *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* reads: “Of those, right view is the forerunner. And how is right view the forerunner? In one of right view, right resolve comes into being [...]. In one of right knowledge, right release comes into being” (MN 117).

¹¹ Bucknell, “The Buddhist Path to Liberation,” 11.

¹² Y. Karunadasa, *The Early Buddhist Teaching on the Practice of the Moral Life* (Hong Kong: CBS, HKU, 2013), 16.

¹³ Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 46.

¹⁴ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Noble Eightfold Path: The Way to the End of Suffering* (Pariyatti Publishing, 2006), 57.

¹⁵ For example, without some mastery of right concentration, mastery of right understanding will not be possible.

The Pāli Canon recognizes a further segmentation of the path in a threefold partition: morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). Textual evidence for this major division is found in the *Samyutta Nikāya* that reads: “A man established on virtue (*sīla*), wise, developing the mind (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*), a *bhikkhu* ardent and discreet: He can disentangle this tangle” (SN I 23).¹⁶ This threefold partition coincides with the three trainings stated in the *Sikkhā Sutta* (AN 3:88), which are training in higher virtue (*adhisīla-sikkhā*), training in higher mind (*adhicitta-sikkhā*), and training in higher wisdom (*adhipaññā-sikkhā*), leading to the eradication of lust, hatred and delusion.

What is the relationship between the tripartite division of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* and the Noble Eightfold Path as presented in the Pāli Canon? The interaction of the two schemes is clarified by Bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā in the *Cūlavedalla Sutta*:

Lady, are the three aggregates [i.e. three aggregates of virtue (*sīlakkhanda*), concentration (*samādhikkhandha*), and wisdom (*paññākkhandha*)] included by the Noble Eightfold Path, or is the Noble Eightfold Path included by the three aggregates?” “The three aggregates are not included by the Noble Eightfold Path, friend Visākha, but the Noble Eightfold Path is included by the three aggregates. Right speech, right action, and right livelihood—these states are included in the aggregate of virtue. Right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration—these states are included in the aggregate of concentration. Right view and right intention—these states are included in the aggregate of wisdom (MN 44).

If we include the two further factors mentioned in the *Mahācattārisaka Sutta*, namely, right knowledge and right deliverance, under the category of wisdom (*paññā*), the scriptures show a threefold partition of the Middle Path that can be grouped as: (a) morality, consisting of right speech, right action and right livelihood, (b) concentration, including right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration, and (c) wisdom, which band together right intention, right understanding, right knowledge and right liberation. In AN 5:22 mastery of the preceding stage in the threefold division is needed for the next.¹⁷ Success in moral effort (*sīla*) paves the way for success in concentration (*samādhi*). Concentration, in turn, helps to attain wisdom (*paññā*), since concentration is required to see things as they truly are (*yathābhūtam*). Karunadasa explains: “The threefold scheme of moral training shows that the way to moral perfection is a graduated course (*anupubba-sikkhā*), leading systematically from one step to the next [...] these three aspects are mutually dependent and gradually progress towards a higher ideal.”¹⁸

Another taxonomy found in the *Nikāyas* is the “seven purifications” (*satta visuddhi*), a major classification that is extremely important for this study. The sevenfold division finds

¹⁶ Similarly in MN 7 1,6; MN.6; MN 44, DN 16.4 and AN 3.88,89.

¹⁷ “O monks, without having mastered the domain of morality, it is not possible to master the sphere of concentration, without having mastered the domain of concentration, it is not possible to master the sphere of wisdom” (AN 5:22).

¹⁸ Karunadasa, *The Early Buddhist Teaching*, 16.

its only canonical foundation in the twenty-fourth discourse of the *Majjhima Nikāya*: the *Rathavinīta Sutta* (Discourse on the Relay of Chariots in MN 24).¹⁹ This discourse refers to a discussion between two disciples of the Buddha, Sāriputta and Puṇṇa Mantāniputta. Sāriputta expounds on the path as consisting of: purification of virtue (*sīla-visuddhi*), purification of mind (*citta-visuddhi*), purification of view (*diṭṭhi-visuddhi*), purification by overcoming doubt (*kankhā-vitarana-visuddhi*), purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and not the path (*maggāmagga-ñānadassana-visuddhi*), purification by knowledge and vision of the path (*pāṭipadā-ñānadassana-visuddhi*), and purification by knowledge and vision (*ñānadassana-visuddhi*). Apart from the *Rathavinīta Sutta*, the scheme of seven purifications recurs only once in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, namely, in the *Dasuttara Sutta* (Discourse on Tens Upward in DN 34).²⁰ This *sutta* lists the seven stages to be developed without expounding on them. One important point on which the *Rathavinīta Sutta* and the *Dasuttara Sutta* differ is that, in the latter, the stages to *nibbāna* are rendered as nine. The *Dasuttara Sutta* adds to the list of the *Rathavinīta*: purification of wisdom and the purification of deliverance. These nine purifications are jointly named: “factors of endeavor tending to purification” (*pārisuddhi-padhāniyaṅga*).²¹ The fact that the *Dasuttara Sutta* recognizes nine instead of seven stages might give the impression of inconsistency between the two *suttas*. This contradiction is, however, only apparent. Some scholars argue that the seven purifications describe the stages on the path, while the last two describe the goal of *nibbāna* itself.

Are the seven purities a gradual progression (or developmental sequence) towards the goal? In the *Rathavinīta Sutta*, they are compared to the chariots in a regal relay race; one stays behind as the next gets into position, each a requisite for the next.

Purification of virtue is for the sake of reaching purification of mind; purification of mind is for the sake of reaching purification of view; purification of view is for the sake of reaching purification by overcoming doubt; purification by overcoming doubt is for the sake of reaching purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path; purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path is for the sake of reaching purification by knowledge and vision of the way; purification by knowledge and vision of the way is for the sake of reaching purification by knowledge and vision; purification by knowledge and vision is for the sake of reaching final Nibbāna without clinging. It is for the sake of final Nibbāna without clinging that the holy life is lived. (MN 24).

Anālayo states: these seven purifications are successive stages required to reach the final goal, each stage constituting the basis for the next stage, comparable to seven chariots used in relay to quickly cover a long distance”²²

¹⁹ Nāṇārāma, *The Seven Stages of Purification and The Insight Knowledges A Guide to the Progressive Stages of Buddhist Meditation* (Kandy: BPS, 1983), 13.

²⁰ Nyanatiloka Thera (Bhikkhu) *The Buddha's path to deliverance in its threefold division and seven stages*, 52.

²¹ Nāṇārāma, *The Seven Stages of Purification*, 13.

²² Anālayo, “The Seven Stages of Purification in Comparative Perspective,” in *Journal of the Centre for Buddhist Studies*

Along the way, as Hirakawa puts it, the person moves progressively through the purification of virtue, mind, views, doubts, knowledge of the right path, and knowledge of the correct method, to the gate of liberation.²³ Thus, as Ñāṇārāma states: “the seven stages of purification form a causally related series in which one has to pass through the first six purifications before one can arrive at the seventh.”²⁴ According to the chariots simile, the stages comprise a sequence.²⁵ Abeyesekare says “[as] it would be impossible for the king to mount the second chariot without having travelled the stretch to be covered by the first chariot [...] In the same way, the purity of mind cannot be gained without the purity of good conduct, and so on till the last stage is reached.”²⁶ By the same token, it cannot be said that the goal is reached upon reaching any particular stage, for this is only attained through their combination.

How does the scheme of the seven purifications relate to the Noble Eightfold Path and the threefold training? According to Rewata: “The aim of following the Noble Eightfold Path is to attain the state of enlightenment. The path to enlightenment must develop through the seven stages of purification with their corresponding levels of insight.”²⁷ Nyanatiloka points out that: “The development of the Noble Eightfold path—or more correctly, the gradual purification and perfection of morality, concentration, and wisdom—is accomplished by way of the seven stages of purity.”²⁸ Likewise, Abeyesekare observes: “The highest perfection of the Noble Eightfold Path is woven round the seven stages of purity. It comprises the most profound and comprehensive development of virtue (*sīla*), mental concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*).”²⁹ Abeyesekare adds “The first [stage] corresponds to the virtue group of the Noble Eightfold Path, the second stage to the concentration group and the remaining five stages to the wisdom group.”³⁰

The practice of spiritual life divided into stages is an important Buddhist teaching. It offers a guide for gradual progress towards the goal. However, the Pāli and Chinese versions of the *Rathavinīta Sutta*, as well as other scriptures, do not provide enough information on the implications of, and interrelations between, the stages. These will be better elucidated in the next development in Theravāda tradition of the path-stages which took place with the advent of Buddhaghosa and to which we turn now our attention.

(2005), 126.

²³ Hirakawa Akira. *A History of Indian Buddhism from Śākyamuni to Early Mahayana* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990).

²⁴ Ñāṇārāma, *The Seven Stages of Purification*, 13.

²⁵ Anālayo, “The Seven Stages of Purification,” 126.

²⁶ Solomon Abeyesekare, “The Seven Stages of Purity or *Sattā Visuddhī*” *Buddhist* 51.1 (1980), 34.

²⁷ Rewata Dhamma, *The First Discourse of the Buddha* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publication bls, 1997), 71.

²⁸ Nyanatiloka, *The Buddha's Path to Deliverance in Its Threefold Division and Seven Stages* (Kandi: BPS 20002), 52.

²⁹ Abeyesekare, “The Seven Stages of Purity,” 34.

³⁰ Idem.

3.2.2.2 Doctrine and taxonomy of stages in the *Visuddhimagga*

The previous section examined the early Buddhist doctrine about the path stages and its multiplicity of orderings, as presented in the *Sutta Piṭaka*. This section discusses the systematization and codification of stages that occurred with the *Visuddhimagga*.

However, before the composition of the *Visuddhimagga*, a major post-canonical development in the Theravāda treatment of the stages took place with the appearance of another classic: *The Vimuttimagga (The Path of Freedom)* by Arahant Upatissa.³¹ Speaking of its content, Upatissa's treatise expounds on the path and its stratification, arranged according to the tripartition of morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*),³² and further structured within the framework of the Four Noble Truths. It is noteworthy that the seven purifications scheme is absent from the *Vimuttimagga*.³³

In the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa expounds on the path to the purity of *nibbāna*.³⁴ It is generally believed that Buddhaghosa's compilation is the most comprehensive guide to Buddhist meditative practice; an itinerary for the meditator on his way to deliverance. Buddhaghosa's work enriched the Theravāda doctrine of stages in many ways, but probably the most significant was the adoption of an organizational structure that fully integrates the general framework of the threefold partition, the scheme of the seven purifications, and the outline of the Noble Eightfold Path laid down in the Pāli Canon.

On the basis of Dhammapāla's testimony and other textual and structural evidence, some scholars believe that the conception of Buddhaghosa's *magnum opus* was inspired by the *Vimuttimagga*.³⁵ However, although Buddhaghosa's work may have been written with the *Vimuttimagga* in mind and the fact that there are striking similitudes between both books,³⁶ the *Visuddhimagga* departs from the older manual by Venerable Upatissa in numerous and decisive ways, one of which is their diverging outlines.

Like Venerable Upatissa, Buddhaghosa assumes the succinct framework of the canonical threefold partition of morality, concentration and wisdom as the foremost axis.

³¹ As mentioned in Section 3.1.2, the *Vimuttimagga* is a significant exegetical work, precursor of the *Visuddhimagga*, is attributed to Arahant Upatissa, and was probably written during the second century CE. The original text is lost and is only preserved in Chinese as translated in the sixth century. See Anālayo "The Treatise of the Path of Liberation," 1-15.

³² Upatissa's introductory stanza of the *Vimuttimagga* reads: "virtue, concentration, wisdom and peerless freedom, to these varieties awoke the Illustrious Gotama" (*Vim* 1,1).

³³ Nāṇamoli, "Intro.," to *The Path*, xiv.

³⁴ "Purification should be understood as *nibbāna* [...] The path of purification is the path to that purification" (PP 1,5).

³⁵ P. V. Bapat, *Vimuttimagga and Visuddhimagga: A Comparative Study* (Poona: India, 1937), xvii; U. Dhammaratana, *Guide through the Visuddhimagga*. Kandi: BPS, 2011. ii; and Nāṇamoli, "Intro.," to *The Path*, xlv.

³⁶ For a comparison of the *Vimuttimagga* and the *Visuddhimagga*, see: Bapat, *Vimuttimagga and Visuddhimagga*.

The probable reason for this pivotal structure can be traced to the origin of the book. As mentioned, according to the *Mahāvamsa*, the chief monk of the Mahāvihāra gave two stanzas from the *Devatāsamyutta Sutta* (SN I 13) to Buddhaghosa to test his abilities. These stanzas are cited at the opening of the *Visuddhimagga*.³⁷ This tripartite structure facilitates Buddhaghosa's arrangement of the content and headings of the book as Chs. 1-2, morality, Chs. 3-14, concentration, and Chs. 14-22, wisdom, and is an apt vehicle for organizing and presenting the Buddha's teachings in the *Tipiṭaka*.

However, in contradistinction to the *Vimuttimagga*, Buddhaghosa further structures his work in accordance with the scheme of the sevenfold progression of purifications as outlined in the *Rathavinīta Sutta*, instead of the blueprint of the Four Noble Truths. This fact, Anālayo notes, seems "puzzling" given the cornerstone position of the Four Noble Truths in early Buddhism and the fact that the sevenfold schematization occurs only once in the *Sutta Piṭaka*.³⁸ As Nagai noted, Buddhaghosa's decision does have its implications, among them, shifted the emphasis in the Theravāda tradition from the Four Noble Truths to the seven purifications as a way to explain the path to liberation.³⁹

Moreover, taking the seven purifications of the *Rathavinīta Sutta* as a reference point instead of the nine stages, as outlined in the *Dasuttara Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, compelled Buddhaghosa to include "purification of deliverance" (*vimutti-visuddhi*) under the heading "purification by knowledge and vision" (*ñānadassana-visuddhi*). Objecting to such a move, Anālayo argues that "in the thought world of the discourses, the expression 'knowledge and vision' does not necessarily imply the attainment of final liberation."⁴⁰ Anālayo refers to the *Mahāsāropama Sutta* (DN 29), the *Cūlasāropama Sutta* (DN 30), and the *Saṅgīti Sutta* (DN 33) as testimony where the purification by knowledge and vision is presented leading up to liberation but is not identical to the ultimate state.

Anālayo concludes: "it would certainly have been preferable if he [Buddhaghosa] had employed the complete scheme of nine purifications found in the *Dasuttara Sutta* [...] where the ninth and final stage 'purification of liberation' would have been a more appropriate heading for the breakthrough to awakening [...] instead of the seventh stage of "purification by knowledge and vision."⁴¹

³⁷ PP 1,1; Cf. SN 1 13; and DN 16 iv.

³⁸ Anālayo, "The Treatise on the Path to Liberation," 9.

³⁹ Idem. note 51. Cf. Makoto Nagai, "The Vimutti-Magga, the "Way to Deliverance." The Chinese Counterpart of the Pāli Visuddhimagga" *JPTS* (1919): 69–80.

⁴⁰ Anālayo, "The Treatise on the Path to Liberation," 10.

⁴¹ Ibid.

The *Visuddhimagga*'s index clarifies the interrelationship between the threefold and sevenfold divisions. "Purification of virtue" corresponds to *sīla*. "Purification of mind" relates to *samādhī*. The remaining five purifications are equated to *paññā*. Therefore, all the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path are incorporated into the seven purifications. For each stage, Buddhaghosa expounds on the practices needed to overcome it.

True to the seven chariots metaphor, in the *Visuddhimagga* the stages are presented as successive; they form a sequence in which the mastery of one stage is the basis for the next. This sequence encompasses a developmental progression, from the lower to the higher stages of spiritual growth. In each stage, the removal of the cluster of impurities or unwholesome factors corresponding to that level supports progress and reveals new insights necessary to attain those arising in the next.⁴² The practitioner may develop all stages simultaneously, but to effect tangible progress, consolidation of an earlier stage is necessary before proceeding to subsequent stages. The order of the stages is not arbitrary but rather in accordance with the nature of spiritual growth. All stages are transitory until *nibbāna*, the final realization.

Whatever its canonical correctness, the taxonomy contained in the *Visuddhimagga* is an important contribution to the Theravāda tradition. It presents a detailed and systematic map for inner cultivation, conducive to enlightenment in a lifetime.⁴³ The sevenfold scaffolding of the progress of virtue, calm and insight, expounded by Buddhaghosa, is the orthodox paradigm by which Theravāda meditation operates, being codified in a manual of the *Abhidhamma*, the *Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha* by Ācariya Anuruddha (12th century CE), which reflects and abridges the *Visuddhimagga* integration of path stages.⁴⁴ It also provides the gradual process that informs modern-day Theravāda practice.⁴⁵

In recapitulation, we have explored the historical formation of the doctrine of the stages, from its canonical beginnings with the seeds planted by the Buddha to the integration of the different schemes in the *Visuddhimagga*, through its codification in the Theravāda *Abhidhamma* with the *Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha*. As observed previously, in the *Rathavinīta Sutta*, Sāriputta outlined the seven stages which are not elaborated in the Buddha's sermons. It was to be one of Buddhaghosa's historical roles to expound on this classical division throughout the *Visuddhimagga*.

⁴² Nāṇārāma, *The Seven Stages of Purification*, 17.

⁴³ King called it the "meditator's official manual ever since its writing" (Winston L. King, *Theravada Meditation: The Buddhist Transformation of Yoga*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992), 6.

⁴⁴ See the ninth and final chapter of Ācariya Anuruddha's *The Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha, A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, ed. Bhikkhu Bodhi, Pali text originally edited and translated by Mahāthera Narada (Kandi: BPS, 1993).

⁴⁵ Anālayo, "The Treatise on the Path to Liberation," 11-12.

3.2.3 *Samatha* and *Vipassanā* in *Visuddhimagga*

The relationship between *samatha* and *vipassanā* is a complex issue requiring an extensive elaboration. For reasons of space, only a concise analysis is possible here.

The classic threefold course of training—*sīla*, *samadhi*, and *paññā*—as presented in the *Visuddhimagga* (e.g. PP 1,1) forms a linear sequence. In this paradigmatic or ideal abstract model, only after the monastic is well established in virtue (*sīla*), does he practice purification of mind (*samādhī*), referred to also as *samatha* (calm) meditation. Once the meditator has mastered “purification of mind” or *samadhi* (including *jhānas*), he may attempt the practice of “wisdom” (*paññā*), also known as *vipassanā* (insight) meditation, since *samādhī* is the foundation of *paññā*. This schema is archetypal in the Canon. It is the classic approximation followed as standard by Buddhaghosa, Upatissa and throughout the *Abhidhamma*. It is also in accordance with the Noble Eightfold Path.⁴⁶ And is the approach followed by the Buddha in his course of practice (MN 27).

There are *suttas*, however, and recurrent discussions in the Commentarial tradition, where alternative sequences of practicing are regarded as valid as the standard model, this bearing in mind how the aptitudes of meditators to mental cultivation may differ. Bodhi has summarized four alternative sequences of practicing that can be found in the Pāli Canon (i.e., the *Yuganaddha Sutta*, “In Tandem,” AN 4.170). These approaches are: 1) To develop *samatha* first and *vipassanā* afterwards. This approach may consist of attaining first mastery of the four *jhānas*, that is to say, liberated by freedom of the mind; 2) To develop *vipassanā* first and *samatha* afterward. Concentration is always needed for insight meditation. But, in this second approach it is assumed that some meditators have enough concentration to attempt *vipassanā* without the *samatha* training. This second approach can go as far as the attaining “liberation by wisdom” (*paññā-vimutti*). Such concentration nevertheless is not enough to fruitfully attempt the supramundane path. Thus, the meditators should attain *samatha* before trying the supramundane path; 3) To develop *samatha* and *vipassanā* in tandem until the supramundane path is attained (The *Mahāsaḷāyatana Sutta*, MN III 289, is an example of calm and insight developed in conjunction); 4) in the fourth model, “a monk’s mind is seized by agitation about the teachings,” and then, sometime later, he gains concentration and attains the supramundane path.

⁴⁶ See Section 3.3.2 for a discussion on the relationship between the threefold partition of the path (*magga*) in three trainings and the three groupings of the Eightfold Path as per in the *Cūlavedalla Sutta* (MN 44).

There are then in the Pāli Canon alternative sequences to the course of practice but, whatever the approach, both *samatha* and *vipassanā* are equally *sine quo non* for final liberation (AN I 100),⁴⁷ that is, the “taintless liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom.”⁴⁸ This is so because *samatha* calms, pacifies, settles, steadies, purifies, unifies, stills and concentrates the mind. By its means one attains liberation of mind (*ceto-vimutti*). The vehicle of *vipassanā* develops understanding, penetrative discrimination of wisdom which is also necessary. By its means one attains liberation by wisdom (*paññā-vimutti*). Both also tangle different aspects of the mind: *samatha* tangles passion; *vipassanā* tangles ignorance. AN I 61 reads: “the fading away of passion there is liberation of mind, and through the fading away of ignorance there is liberation by wisdom.” Cf. AN 2:3 10. The eradication of both passion and ignorance are equally indispensable for liberation. Both are needed for liberation by both ways.⁴⁹ Whoever attains one either serenity or insight eventually should attain the missing development to attain liberation (AN 4: 94).

For Buddhaghosa, the attainment of *samatha* precedes *vipassanā* as a general rule. However, in several places of the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa makes reference to the possibility of purification by “insight alone” (e.g., PP 1.6; and PP 18,31), which, as Ñāṇamoli notes, excludes *samatha* (access concentration and *jhāna*) but not *sīla*.⁵⁰ Buddhaghosa speaks of those whose vehicle is ‘pure insight’ (*suddhavipassanāyānika*) as contraposed to those whose the vehicle is tranquility (*samathayānika*) (PP 18,5). Therefore, the possibility of alternate sequences is acknowledged in the *Visuddhimagga*. However, Buddhaghosa makes clear that the supramundane kinds of consciousness are not discernible either by those of pure insight or those whose vehicle is serenity because, as he says, “they are out of their reach” (PP 18.8). Buddhaghosa states:

One who strives with serenity alone reaches the base consisting of neither perception nor non-perception and remains there, while one who strives with insight alone reaches the attainment of fruition and remains there. But it is one who strives with both, and after performing the preparatory tasks, causes the cessation of [consciousness belonging to] the base consisting of neither perception nor non-perception, who attains it (PP 18,31).

Regarding the sequence of practice in the Pāli Canon, the threefold sequence of training is archetypal and favored as it is in accordance with the Noble Eightfold path, nevertheless, there is plenty of room for alternative approaches. In the *Visuddhimagga*

⁴⁷ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Complete Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publication, 2012), 47.

⁴⁸ Bhikkhu Bodhi: “The development of the mind through *samatha* and of wisdom through *vipassanā*, however, culminate in the “taintless liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom” (*anāsavā cetovimutti paññāvimutti*), the final goal of the Dhamma. Here, *samatha* is the condition for liberation of mind and *vipassanā* for liberation by wisdom” (Bodhi 2012, 1626).

⁴⁹ Alexander Wynne, “An interpretation of ‘released on both sides’ (*ubhato-bhāga-vimutta*), and the ramifications for the study of early Buddhism” *Buddhist Studies Review* 19, No. 1 (2002):31-40; G A Somaratne, “*Ubhato-bhāga-vimutta*: Liberation from both parts or through both ways?” *Thai International Journal of Buddhist Studies* 4 (2012):117-34;]

⁵⁰ Ñāṇamoli, *The Path*, 6, note 3.

the approach seems more rigid; as a general rule, it favors *samatha* preceding *vipassanā*. The vehicle of “pure insight” (*suddhavipassanāyānika*) can be adopted but is atypical. But, whatever the approach, both in the Pāli Canon and the *Visuddhimagga*, the completion of both *samatha* and *vipassanā*, that is, to be “liberated in both ways” (*ubhato-bhāga-vimutta*) is required for the attainment of perfect liberation.⁵¹ In other words, the Pāli canon allows for the attaining of *paññā* without *samādhi*. That is to be “liberated by wisdom” alone (e.g. the *Susīma Sutta*; SN II 119-128; and the *Kīṭāgiri Sutta* of MN 70), following the path of “dry-insight” practitioners, and vice versa, that is to say, to attain *samādhi* without *paññā*. But, eventually, both are required for liberation (S. IV, 359). The sequence of practice is left to the individual choice of the practitioner.

Buddhist soteriology *samatha bhāvanā* and *vipassanā bhāvanā*

This is so since *samatha* and *vipassanā* are complementary, having unlike functions. The cultivation of *samatha* leads to a high degree of purification and control of the mind, necessary to reach deep levels of insight.⁵² The calm and joy achieved through *samatha* is needed as antidote against the alluring attraction to mundane pleasure (MN I 91). Both *samatha* and *vipassanā* are needed as they attack different aspects of the defilements. As Anālayo notes, according to a passage of in the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, *vipassanā* leads to the destruction of ignorance while *samatha* leads to destruction of passion (AN I, 61).⁵³ Having attained one, the remaining must be eventually developed to attain *nibbana*.⁵⁴

⁵¹ For the concept as conceived at a later stage, see Tse-fu Kuan “The *Pavāraṇā Sutta* and “liberation in both ways” as against “liberation by wisdom,” in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 76, 1 (2013).

⁵² Anālayo “*Vipassanā*,” EB, 672–681.

⁵³ “*Vipassanā*,” in EB, 672–681.

⁵⁴ To borrow from the poetic imagery found in the discourses. *samatha* and *vipassana* are the “swift pair of messengers,” carrying the message of *Nibbāna* along the road of the noble eightfold path (S IV, 195).

3.3 THE NATURE OF THE PERSON IN THE THERAVĀDA PERSPECTIVE

If we are to understand Buddhaghosa's elucidation of the path and its dynamism, it is necessary to understand his view on the nature of the human being and his experience.¹ Since Buddhaghosa was a Theravādin, this section examines the Theravāda concept of the nature and structure of the human being. In doing so, we will address an essential and distinctive tenet of Buddhism, the doctrine of no-self (*anattā-vāda*),² a crucial point in our impending comparison.³ Due to the scarce allusions to the doctrine of *anattā* in the *Visuddhimagga*, most of the examples here are given from the *suttas* of the *Nikāyas*.

3.3.1 The nature of the human being according to Theravāda

Distinctively, Buddhism defines the nature of the human being apophatically. The human being is “no-self” (Pāli *anattā*,⁴ Skr. *anātman*). Buddhism denies the existence of a substantial (ontological), autonomous, and enduring self as the reality of a person. A typical approach to the doctrine of *anattā* is against the backdrop of the Brahmanical notion of self⁵ (Pāli *attā*, Skr. *ātman*) that seemingly prevailed in the Buddha's time. From what arises through the *suttas*, the Buddha and his addressees understood the Brahmanical “self” as an ontological entity, dualistically distinct from the body. For the Brahmanical tradition, this substantial and imperishable individual spiritual self is the human being's true essence and real identity, subsisting through countless rounds of deaths and rebirths. Other features of the Brahmanical self are “own-being” (*sabhāva*), immutability, inviolability, self-governance, and existing in a state of perpetual bliss.⁶

Consistent with his experiential realization of the principle of dependent origination,⁷ the Buddha denied an underlying reality to the prevalent “doctrine of the self” (*attā-vāda*)—that is, the belief in the existence of an unconditioned “self” as the true nature of the person—rejecting such a conception as illusory, a “foolish teaching” (MN 22.25). Instead, the Buddha realized that everything, including the nature of the human being, is

¹ Buddhaghosa elaborates unsystematically on the *anattā* doctrine throughout the *Visuddhimagga* (e.g. Chs. 14 and 17). His views on the nature of the person are essentially those of the Theravāda school of Buddhism.

² Malalasekera qualifies *anattā-vāda* as “the bedrock of Buddhism” (G. P. Malalasekera, *The Buddha and His Teachings* (Colombo: The Buddhist Council of Ceylon, 1957), 33-34. Nyanatiloka writes: “with this doctrine of egolessness, or *anattā*, stands or falls the entire Buddhist structure” (Nyanatiloka, “Impermanence,” *The Wheel*, 186-7 (1973): 2-3).

³ This is even truer when considering that a mistaken understanding of the Buddhist teachings on the nature of the human being has been the cause of many faulty comparisons with Christianity.

⁴ The term of *anattā* [*an* (no) + *attā* (self or soul)] has also been translated as “egolessness” or “soullessness.”

⁵ The Brahmanic *ātman* is not the immortal soul of Western religions. The term ‘self’ is a better translation.

⁶ As Schmidt-Leukel has noted, this conception of *ātman* does not appear to be the individual self in the Upanishads which, ultimately, is identified with universal *ātman* or Brahman (Schmidt-Leukel, 2012, 37). Cf. *Katha-Upanishad* 2,1,14.

⁷ The doctrine of dependent origination states that all phenomena arise, exist, and pass away because of causes and conditions, and nothing has independent existence, self-substance or own being.

impermanent (*anicca*), suffering, (*dukkha*), and not ontologically substantial (*anattā*).

The Buddha labelled wrong belief in an ontological self “eternalism” (*sassatavāda*), postulating that this mistaken understanding originates from a desire to preserve a self. The Buddha likewise rejected the opposite doctrine, meaning, the materialist view that there is no self beyond bodily transience. This conceptualization, also present in the time of the Buddha, upholds that the self is identical to the body and is thus annihilated at death. The Buddha referred to this non-metaphysical view of self as “annihilationism” (*ucchedavāda*), explaining that it is born of a desire to rid oneself of a self.

If for the Buddha the person (*puggala*) is neither an independent spiritual substance nor a mere psycho-physical entity or self, what is the nature of the human being? How do Buddhist teachings explain individuality (*sakkāya*) and individual experience? Buddhism denies the reality of an ontological self but does not deny the empirical self. Indeed, there is no self, but Buddhism does not negate subjectivity or inner experience. In his First Sermon,⁸ the Buddha rejected the “personality view” (*sakkāya-dīṭṭhi*) of both eternalists and annihilationists, propounding a Middle Path (*majjhimā paṭipadā*) instead.⁹ How is this notion of Middle Path defined? Among other explanatory representations,¹⁰ the Theravāda framework of analysis distinguishes five aggregates (*pañcakkhandhā*),¹¹ the constituents of empirical personality. Of these five components, corporality (*rūpa*), the first, is material, while the other four—feelings (*vedanā*), perceptions (*saññā*), mental formations (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*)—are mental (*nāma*). The psycho-physical unit is jointly known by the compound *nāma-rūpa* (lit. “name and form”).¹²

There is apparently scholarly consensus the scheme of the aggregates (*khandhas*) is intended as an exhaustive inventory comprising all human capabilities (e.g. sensation, volition and so forth). Buddhaghosa writes: “they are stated as five because this is the widest limit as a basis for the assumption of self and what pertains to self” (PP 14.218;

⁸ The *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (The Sutta of the Setting in Motion of the Wheel of the Dharma) (SN 56,11).

⁹ Karunadasa explains that the “Middle Path is not a compromise between both extremes but transcends the mutual opposition” Karunadasa, “The Buddhist Critique of Sassatavada and Ucchedavada: The Key to a proper Understanding of the Origin and the Doctrines of early Buddhism,” *The Middle Way*, Vol. 74 & 75, 1999-2000.

¹⁰ As Gethin says, the Abhidhamma knows other analyses and classifications of the constituents of the human person: the “12 sense-spheres” (*āyatana*s)—i.e., the 6 senses and the 6 classes of objects of those senses; the “18 elements” (*dhātu*)—the 6 senses, the 6 classes of sense-objects; the 6 types of consciousness. Rupert Gethin, “The Five *Khandhas*: Their Treatment in the Nikāyas and Early Abhidhamma,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 14 (1986), 49. As Harvey writes: “personality is also analyzed in a more dynamic way, according to the principle of *paṭicca-samuppāda*” (Harvey, 2013, 5).

¹¹ In a non-Buddhist context, *khandha* means “mass,” “bundle,” “heap”. For discussion on the aggregates: M. Boisvert, *The Five Aggregates: Understanding Theravada Psychology and Soteriology* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997).

¹² Without ever falling into dualism, Theravāda regards the human being as an integral whole, where mind and body are fully interdependent. As Buddhaghosa put it: “it is when supported by materiality that mentality occurs; and it is when supported by mentality that materiality occurs.” (PP 18,34). Illustrating this point, Buddhaghosa likens the interrelation of mind and body to a blind man and a cripple supporting each other in a mutually dependent interrelationship (PP 16.35).

MI 22). There is seeming accord that the particular order in the enumeration of elements indicates a direction from external to internal, objective to subjective, gross to subtle.¹³

The *locus classicus* that illustrates the workings of empirical self, and its confusion with an enduring self, is the simile of the chariot found in the *Questions of King Milinda*,¹⁴ which refers to the *Vajira Sutta*: “Just as, with an assemblage of parts, the word ‘chariot’ is used, so, when the aggregates are present, there’s the convention of a being.”¹⁵ Buddhaghosa states that on account of the five aggregates there are linguistic usages such as *evamrūpa*, a conventional way of referring to the person (*puggala*).¹⁶

What is the nature of the *khandhas*? Each of these five categories is said to be a mass, heap, group or a bundle, and each can be considered a process. In other words, they are better described as dynamic functions rather than substantial essences,¹⁷ and “conventional truth” (*sammuti-sacca*) rather than “ultimate truth” (*paramattha-sacca*).

The “personality view” is grounded in the clinging of the person to the five *khandhas*. The ordinary person’s view of himself as a lasting self can be traced back to such misidentification with, or appropriation of, the five *khandhas*. According to Buddhism, individuality is not the earthly manifestation of a metaphysical self, but the result of superimposing the ideas of “I,” “me,” and “mine” over a combination of interacting and ever-changing aggregates. “I-ness” is not an entity but a process without any essence or substance. Due to *taṇhā* (craving) for existence, and beginningless ignorance (*avijjā*), a person appropriates these groups of impersonal processes as personal occurrences.¹⁸ Therefore, Buddhaghosa, citing the *suttas*, states that it is through clinging to the *khandhas* that such a view arises: “This is mine, this is I, this is my self” (PP 14.218). Inclination to the “personification”¹⁹ of the *pañca-khandhas* is so inherent in the human being that the Buddha refers to them by the compound *upādāna-khandhā* (lit. “clinging-aggregates”). It is clinging (*upādāna*) to, or arrogation of, the *khandhas* which constitutes the basis for the mistaken view of the empirical individuality as an ontological self.²⁰

¹³ Mitchell states: “from the first aggregate [...], through feeling, perception, and primary mental formation to the last aggregate of consciousness, there is a systematic progression from the objective to the subjective” (Donald W. Mitchell: “The No-Self Doctrine in Theravāda Buddhism,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 9, 2 (1969): 248-260. Stcherbatsky states that the order of aggregates reveals “a gradual progress from coarseness to subtleness” (T. H. Stcherbatsky, *The Central Conception of Buddhism and the Meaning of the Word “Dharma* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), 55).

¹⁴ *The Milinda Pañha* (ca. 100 BCE).

¹⁵ *The Milinda Pañha* 1; SN I 135.

¹⁶ Buddhaghosa states: “personality (*attabhāva*) is what the physical body is called; or it is just the pentad of aggregates, since it is actually only a concept derived from that pentad of aggregates” (PP 9.54).

¹⁷ *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha (Saṃyuttanikāya)*, trans. by Bhikkhu Bodhi (Wisdom Publication, 2000), 841.

¹⁸ Nalinaksha Dutt, *Early monastic Buddhism* (Calcutta: K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1971), 84-86.

¹⁹ Anālayo, *From Craving to Liberation. Excursions into the Thought-World of the Pali Discourses* (Onalaska, WA: Pariyatti Publishing, 2012), 19.

²⁰ Karunadasa, “The Buddhist Critique of Sassatavada and Uchedavada.”

The Buddha persistently taught that no ontic self is found in any of the constitutive factors. The clinging-aggregates (*upādāna-khandhas*) are said to be “empty-of-self,” “not under one’s control,” “liable to change” (SN III 66-7).²¹ The body, the senses, the intellect (*buddhi*) and so forth, all have the three marks of impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*) and non-self (*anattā*). Nevertheless, when the “appropriated” senses and faculties are brought together and combined, there is a strong sense of being a self.

The first Noble Truth reads: “the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering” (SN 56.11). Suffering is not intrinsic to the aggregates; misidentification with them is suffering because of their conditioned, unessential, unstable and evanescent nature.²² From this fact comes the Buddha’s assertion that “life is suffering,” because a wrongful association with the five aggregates engenders a deluded conception of the reality of a self that in turn gives rise to selfish desire or craving (*taṇhā*), the root cause of suffering, birth, decay, and death. It is the thirst for existence that propels the individual to rebirth. Consequently, to extinguish suffering, clinging to the five aggregates should be completely abandoned. The *suttas* emphasize that, subject to clinging, the personality factors become murderous (S III 112-13), a burden (S III 25), and are likened to an armed enemy (S IV 174). Therefore, the Buddha exhorted his disciples to regard the personality constituents as “this is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self” (e.g. SN 22.59), to cease craving for them (MN 22) and to reject any form of personality view. Only this leads to happiness.

The doctrine of (*anattā*) repudiates the assumption of an ontologically-existing agent. As a central tenet in Buddhism, it maintains that there is no actual core in the person. What common sense naively knows as “I” is no more than a combination of aggregates, a bundle of processes, without anything substantial in them, a series of psychophysical states, causally connected, one giving rise to the next.²³ There is psychophysical functioning, but no entity behind these processes.²⁴ As Buddhaghosa put it: “there is suffering, but none who suffers; doing exists although there is no doer” (PP 16.90).

But, contrary to what is often asserted, the anti-substantialist stance of Buddhism does not deny the interrelated conditioned processes responsible for the utterance “I.”²⁵ The assertion of an empirical self who experiences the world is attested in the *Nikāyas*. The concept of *anattā* does not mean the denial of self *in toto*. Human nature is constant

²¹ R. P. Chowdury, “Interpretation of the ‘Anattā’ doctrine in early Buddhism” *Indian Historical Quarterly*, 1-4 (1985), 195.

²² Bhikkhu Bodhi, “Aggregates and clinging Aggregates” *Pāli Buddhist Review* Vol. 1, No. 2 (1976), 91-102.

²³ Collins writes: “What appear to be stable and unitary persons are in fact collections of impersonal and impermanent events, arising and disappearing in beginningless process of condition” (Collins 1994, 64).

²⁴ Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 26.

²⁵ Kalupahana, 1992, 70.

flux rather than an intact substance, a person is not a being but a becoming. The identification with *nāma-rūpa* confers upon the person his individuality as a distinct being. *Attā*, however, should be understood in a “conventional” (*sammuti*) sense, not “absolute” sense (*paramattha*).²⁶ As a “conventional mode of speech” (*voḥāravacana*), or in a relative sense, “I” exists, but in the ultimate or absolute sense there is no “I.”²⁷

Not surprisingly, since its inception, this counterintuitive and perplexing teaching has encountered numerous critics, some among Buddhists themselves (*pudgalavādins*). The repudiation of an ontological self encounters fierce criticisms mostly on grounds of agency and continuity of identity. Other puzzling ramifications of *anattā* refer to moral responsibility,²⁸ nihilism and the doctrines of karma and rebirth,²⁹ among others. Buddhism has offered argumentations to contravene such objections, maintaining that a satisfactory answer can be given to them without the need to posit a spiritual self.

How does Buddhism account for the psychological continuity of the empirical self? The ever-changing person is made up of a stream of consciousness (*viññāṇa sotam*), and an ever-evolving consciousness (*samvattanika viññāṇa*) of continually changing states. The mind continuum (continuity of personality) is explained by the principle of causality (*idappacayatā*): “this existing, that exists; this arising, that arises.” This dependent arising of linked conditioned states causes a “flux of causally-related states.”³⁰ The *Milindapañha* explains this continuity by the simile of the seed turning into a plant.³¹

To many critics it is far from obvious that these responses advance truly convincing and definitive arguments that resolve all the problems raised by the teaching of *anattā*. Some scholars and students of Buddhism misinterpret the teaching of no-self believing that it is exclusively soteriological in character, and not ultimately intended to postulate the ontological status of the human being, but is instead an instrument for liberation.³² Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, for example, considers that “*anattā* is presented in the *suttas* as more a strategy (for letting go *dukkha*) than an ontological assertion.”³³ For Ṭhānissaro *anattā* is formulated as a soteriological strategy, a skillful device, designed to generate

²⁶ Gethin, 1998, 146; and Matthews, 1983, 10.

²⁷ Harvey, 1995, 7; and Gethin, 1998, 145.

²⁸ (M III 179-180). Cf. *Milindapañha* 46-8.

²⁹ Gombrich, 1996, 47.

³⁰ Harvey, 1995, 65.

³¹ Buddhaghosa illustrates this point by the analogy of milk turn into curd, which turns into butter, substances that are neither identical nor dissimilar (PP 17.167).

³² Steven Collins speaks of ‘soteriological strategy’ (Collins, 1990, 78).

³³ Ṭhānissaro, Bhikkhu. “The Not-Self Strategy,” 1993. <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/>

a right view that undermines the noxious attachment to the self, which generates the distortion of awareness and causes the inclination toward craving and suffering. Thus, the Buddhist stance of “no-self” has more a salvific function than hypothetical function, and it can be characterized more as praxis than as *theoria*.

Bhikkhu Bodhi rejects such restricted interpretations. While, along with Ṭhānissaro, Bodhi also believes that *anattā* is presented in the *suttas* as soteriological strategy,³⁴ Bodhi considers the *anattā* is indeed an ontological assertion. Bodhi states:

“I depart from Ven. Ṭhānissaro over the question whether *anattā*, even in the early texts, can be satisfactorily understood simply as a “strategy of liberation” without reference to an underlying ontology regarding the *anattā*-teaching as both pragmatic and ontological. I do not see these two perspectives as mutually exclusive but, on the contrary, as mutually reinforcing.”³⁵

Bodhi goes on to say:

“In my view, this capacity of the contemplation of *anattā* derives from its connection with the underlying ontology. The contemplation draws its efficacy from its correspondence with the actual nature of things. As I understand it, the contemplation of *anattā*, as it gradually develops, draws closer and closer to alignment with the actual nature of things, and as it does so, it counters and inhibits the mind’s proclivities towards conceiving in terms of self”³⁶

Bodhi concludes:

“But in so far as the teaching on *anattā* is intended to make known the real nature of things, the way things actually exist, it necessarily involves an ontological dimension.”³⁷

3.3.2 *Anattā-vāda* as refutation of universal self or over-self

The discussion on the nature of a human being in Theravāda would not be complete without touching upon a subject of great relevance to our forthcoming comparative task: the prospect of *anattā-vāda* as a device to postulate a universal self or over-self. The scheme of the five *khandhas* is a key doctrine in the Buddha’s teaching for explaining the workings of the mind and analyzing the constituents of experience³⁸ but it primarily serves the purpose of asserting that no self abides in the five aggregates. However, over the years, some scholars have questioned if such a scheme likewise excludes that an ontic self can be found elsewhere beyond or apart from the *khandhas*. With this idea, these scholars have in mind a transcendental self, a “ground of being,” beyond empirical personality. This critical issue is the focus of the present section.

³⁴ Bodhi “Anattā as Strategy and Ontology.”

³⁵ Idem.

³⁶ Idem.

³⁷ Idem.

³⁸ Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 40.

Some Buddhist scholars in modern times have defended that the Buddha's refutation of an enduring self does not preclude the postulation of a supra-phenomenal self, distinct from and beyond the five constituents of empiric individuality (*khandhas*).³⁹ These authors display vedantic, perennialist, theosophical or traditionalist inclinations. They believe that the *anattā* doctrine is, at its core, a restatement of the Upanishadic notion of identity between the individual soul (*ātman*, *jīvātman*), or "false" individuated self, and the universal soul (*ātman*), over-self (*paramātmā*), Brahman or "true self."⁴⁰ These scholars claim that—as in Vedānta thought—this metaphysical supra-reality can be glimpsed behind the veil of human beings' attachment to the physical or mental life. This is done through a progressive de-identification of the person with the aggregates until a bottomless absolute underlying the phenomenological self is ultimately realized.

Pioneering this view, C. A. F. Rhys Davids claimed that the Buddha's original gospel proclaimed a self beyond experience,⁴¹ later denied by Buddhist scholastics, among them Buddhaghosa.⁴² Similarly for C. Humphreys: "the Buddha nowhere denies the Ātman doctrine as originally taught [in Upaniṣads] only in the degraded form of an 'immortal soul' which separates man from man."⁴³ C. A. F. Rhys Davids influenced other scholars, among them I. B. Horner and A. Coomaraswamy, for whom the Buddha's negation refers to the "small self", not to the "great self" (*mahātta*) dwelling beyond the *khandhas*.⁴⁴ S. Radhakrishnan likewise believed that, like the Upanishadic sages, the Buddha simply repudiated a wrong identification of the surface self with the higher self.⁴⁵ A monographic study published in 1980 by J. Pérez-Remón, once more reiterated the idea that the *anattā* doctrine does not deny the ontological self.⁴⁶

Against the interpretation of an Ātman entity beyond or apart from the *khandhas*—fueled by the Buddha's silence over the ontological status of the liberated being (e.g. the *Vacchagotta Sutta*⁴⁷)—leading Theravādin scholars like Rahula reacted strongly to this view. Rahula considered it as an attempt to "smuggle the idea of self" into Buddhism, an idea never accepted by the Buddha.⁴⁸ The nature of the present study does not permit

³⁹ Y. Karunadasa, "The Buddhist Doctrine of Non-Self, and the Problem of the Over-Self" in *Middle Way*, 69 (1994), 2.

⁴⁰ Paul Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2010).

⁴¹ Rhys Davids, *Buddhism: A Study of the Buddhist Norm* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1912), 58.

⁴² Rhys Davids, *Buddhist Psychology: An Inquiry into the Analysis and Theory of Mind in Pāli Literature* (New Delhi, Cosmo Publ., 2002), 289.

⁴³ Christmas Humphries, *Buddhism* (Penguin Books, 1962), 86.

⁴⁴ A. K. Coomaraswamy and I. B. Horner, *Living thoughts of Gotama the Buddha* (Cassell & Co Ltd, 1948).

⁴⁵ Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, "Gautama, the Buddha," in *Proceedings of the British Academy* Vol. XXIV 1938, 51.

⁴⁶ Joaquín Pérez-Remón, *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and Co., 1980), 304.

⁴⁷ The *Vacchagotta Sutta* (SN 44.8) is emblematic of such silence.

⁴⁸ Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 26.

an extended analysis of the arguments put forward by the participants in the controversy. However, the discussion's main points are outlined next.⁴⁹

The main objection to the theory of a hypothetical postulation by the Buddha of an over-self transcending the empirical self is the absence of scriptural evidence: no *sutta* proclaims the existence of a metaphysical self as object of a higher knowledge.⁵⁰ G. P. Malalasekera, a renowned Theravadin scholar, noted "that there is an *attā*, outside and apart from body and mind [...] finds no support in any of the records of the Buddha."⁵¹ The question arises: if the Buddha was an exponent of a true self, why did he never say so?⁵² Why such a truth cannot be inferred from the *Sutta Piṭaka*? Why did his disciples not expound it? Why did no Buddhist school reach such a conclusion?⁵³

Another argument in the discussion is textual evidence that shows that a substantive *attā* is not only not predicated for the *khandhas* but for anything distinct from them.⁵⁴ Malalasekera writes: "in Buddhist ontology, when 'being' (*satta*) is resolved into five *khandhas*, there is no residuum whatever left" and, in support of this thesis, calls the testimony of a *sutta*.⁵⁵ Buddhaghosa also states that the five aggregates "are stated as five because this is the widest limit as a basis for the assumption of self and what pertains to self" (PP 14.216), showing that, as Malalasekera says, these "were selected for this very purpose for examination to show that there was no residual self."⁵⁶

Those who locate a higher self in the Buddha's teachings, frequently do so on the grounds of mistranslations. In Theravāda literature, there are indeed expressions like "seek yourself" (*attanam gaveseyyatha*),⁵⁷ "self is the lord of self" (*atta hi attano nātho*), "self is the refuge of self" (*atta hi attano gati*)⁵⁸ or "be an island unto yourselves."⁵⁹ Some scholars find indicators of a canonical true self in these sentences,⁶⁰ which seemingly

⁴⁹ For a fuller sense of the debate see Malalasekera, 1986, 94, Y. Karunadasa 1994, 107

⁵⁰ Karunadasa, 1994, 107.

⁵¹ Malalasekera, 1986, 11.

⁵² Vishwanath Prasad Varma, *Early Buddhism and Its Origins* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Pubs, 1973), 145.

⁵³ In his line of thought: H. Von Glasenapp, "Vedanta and Buddhism' on the question of Anattā," *The Middle Way*, 1957, 154. When among the Buddhists an ontic self was posited it was among the heretics (e.g. Vatisiputriyas).

⁵⁴ *The Khemaka Sutta* reads: "As to this notion of 'I am,' friend Khemaka, of which you speak, what do you mean by this notion of 'I am'? Do you speak of 'I am' as body or as distinct from body, as feeling or as distinct from feeling, as perception or as distinct from perception, as mental formations or as distinct from mental formations, as consciousness or as distinct from consciousness...?" *The Khemaka Sutta* (SN 22.89).

⁵⁵ Malalasekera remarks: "it is clearly stated in one passage (e.g., S III 46f) that all *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas*, who talk about the soul which is variously described by them, talk about it in reference to the five *khandhas* or one or other of them." (Malalasekera 1986, 11).

⁵⁶ Malalasekera, EB, 574.

⁵⁷ *Mahāvagga* of the *Vinaya* (Vin I).

⁵⁸ *The Dhammapada*, verse 380.

⁵⁹ SN 22.43.

⁶⁰ E.g. Coomaraswamy referring to SN III143.

contradict the said refutation of a spiritual self.⁶¹ However, the accepted view in the Theravāda tradition is that such usages of *attā* are no more than ordinary language conventions that do not contradict the Buddhist soullessness doctrine.⁶² Much-quoted statements from the *Burden-Sutta*⁶³ and the *Discourse of Not Yours* (SN 22.33) also seem to imply a trans-phenomenal self. The mainstream Theravāda interpretation is, however, that these are not explicit (*nitattha*), but implicit (*neyyattha*) statements to be interpreted in light of the fundamental doctrines of Buddhism.⁶⁴

However, the strongest refutation is derived from the principle of dependent origination, according to which nothing is beyond causation and all *dhammas* are without self.⁶⁵ On the basis that everything is conditioned, interdependent, relative to everything else, and that “there is no self, either in the *puggala* (person) or in *Dhamma* [conditioned or not],”⁶⁶ the postulation of the existence of a putative transcendent self or independently originated “ground of being,” cannot be maintained in Theravāda.⁶⁷

Another ground for positing a self relates to the stages of mental absorption (*jhāna*). Firstly, it has been said that without postulating a transcendental witness it is not possible to give a satisfactory account of the ascending scale of concentrative states.⁶⁸ Secondly, the question arises if whether in the highest levels of immaterial *jhānic* absorption the meditator may experience the absolute, true self or union with a deity. To this, Buddhist doctrine has always warned against misinterpreting such experiences as revealing a “self, soul, god or any other form of an absolute entity.”⁶⁹

One of the aims of the *anattā* doctrine is to eradicate the noxious belief in a self.⁷⁰ The Buddha taught that any *atta* doctrine constitutes wrong view (*micchā-diṭṭhi*), and leads to suffering. Moreover, he maintained that to postulate the reality of *atta* (of any kind) is undesirable, as it provides a psychological basis for attachment, aversion, and delusion.

⁶¹ Another mistranslation by Coomaraswamy and Horner is “*buddhatta Buddho*” that “These scholars translate as, ‘Buddha is awakened Self.’ But the correct translation of the Pāli is: “He is the Buddha because he knows or he has known.” The word *buddhatta* is not a compound of *buddha* and *atta*, but one word, *buddha*, with the suffix *-tta* combined with the ablative case termination, *a*, which means “because of.” See Silananda, 1998.

⁶² Malalasekera, 1986, 11.

⁶³ “I will preach to you, monks, the burden, the bearer of the burden, the taking up, and the putting down of the burden.” (SN III 25).

⁶⁴ Karunadasa, 1994.

⁶⁵ “*Sabbe dhammā anattā*” Dhammapada, verse 279.

⁶⁶ Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 58.

⁶⁷ See the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* (MN 22). As Gombrich says “the Buddha rejected ‘being’ as a reified category: for him there is no such thing as ‘existence’” (Gombrich, 2012, 69). Cf. Karunadasa 1999-2000: vol 74 & 75.

⁶⁸ Vishwanath, *Early Buddhism*, 152.

⁶⁹ German Buddhist monk, Ven. Gnanaponika wrote: “A fertile soil for the origin and persistence of beliefs and ideas about a self, soul, god or any other form of an absolute entity is misinterpreted meditative experience occurring in devotional rapture or mystical trance. Such experience is generally interpreted by the mystic or theologian as revelation of, or union with, a godhead; or it is taken for a manifestation of man’s true and eternal Self” (Karunadasa, 1994).

⁷⁰ Karunadasa, 1994.

On the contrary, the removal of any self-belief is a necessary condition for liberation.⁷¹ The attainment of the Tathāgata⁷² coincided with the realization of not-self (*anattā*). And the *arahant*, that is, the liberated being, is one who has finally awoken from the “delusion of the personality view” (*sakkāya-dīṭṭhi-nirodha*), also understood as the erroneous belief in “I am,”⁷³ or misidentification with the five aggregates,⁷⁴ which lets one see “things as they truly are” (*yathā bhūtam*).

The Buddha’s reluctance can also be explained if we consider that, theorizing about the nameless, unspeakable, ineffable, mysterious nature of the Tathāgata, or trying to conceptualize it and define it as “self” or “no-self,” is to objectify or rarify a theory of the self, not leaving the realm of discourse, intellect and metaphysical reflection, which is precisely what *nibbāna* is not. When at the beginning of his teaching career the Buddha was asked if he was a god, he identified himself only as a Buddha, an “Awakened One.” As Buddhaghosa put it, “the description of the characteristics of not-self is the province of none but a Buddha” (*Vibh-a* 49f).

In summary, the thread unifying all these arguments is that, to assert that Buddhism recognizes a transempirical “I” in or beyond phenomenal categories, contradicts a commonly accepted view in Theravāda, of which no foundation can be found in the *Nikāyas*.⁷⁵ What the records support is precisely the opposite reading: that no residuum can be found beyond the *khandhas*.⁷⁶ Therefore, in Buddhism nothing can be predicated as self, ground of being or inner-nature because, as Malalasekera states “the Buddha never recognized the presence of an *attā* of any nature or description either in the universe or outside of it.”⁷⁷ Consequently, it can be concluded that no universal self, over-self, ground of being or absolute is acknowledged in Theravāda.⁷⁸ The only selfhood known in early Buddhism is that of empirical individuality, which is a conventional designation and thus, inexistent in an ultimate sense.

⁷¹ The stage of stream entering (*sotāpatti*) is reached when the third of the ten fetters (*samyojana*) have been removed of which the first is the belief in a permanent individuality (*sakkāya-dīṭṭhi*) or belief of the non-self as self.

⁷² The Buddha referred to himself as Tathāgata literally meaning “thus gone” (*tathā-gata*) or “thus come” (*tathā-āgata*).

⁷³ If an *arahant* addresses himself as “I” it is for convenience, as he has exceeded the belief in “his” personality (DN I 202).

⁷⁴ The enlightened person has abandoned or freed himself from identification with the personality factors (S III 35).

⁷⁵ Malalasekera, 1986.

⁷⁶ Johansson, 1969, 68.

⁷⁷ Malalasekera, 1986.

⁷⁸ Karunadasa, 1994.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE SPIRITUALITY OF SAINT TERESA OF ÁVILA

This chapter intends to provide the background necessary to understand Teresa's doctrine of spiritual growth, starting with some details about her life and works (Section 4.1). We will also consider her doctrine on the stages of spiritual life (Section 4.2) and her understanding of the nature and structure of man in relation to God (Section 4.3).

4.1 TERESA OF ÁVILA AND THE INTERIOR CASTLE

The Interior Castle is a theological narrative of St. Teresa of Jesus's life.¹ She had first written an autobiography that had been seized by the Holy Office of the Inquisition.² Instructed by her confessors, she proceeded to rewrite her development in the third person, to avoid future suspicions and conflicts with the inquisitors. The outcome is *The Interior Castle*. To understand the stages of progress as described in this seminal work, some acquaintance with the milestones in Teresa's life is imperative, which we set out in 4.1.1. Through her works, mainly her autobiography, and testimonies of the time, abundant information is available on Teresa's life and the context in which she lived.³

Next, in 4.1.2, we consider all Teresa's works, and particularly *The Interior Castle*. A leading Teresian, A. Mas Arrondo, spoke about the hermeneutic key to Teresa's works, referring to the interrelationship between all her texts and their interpretation under *The Interior Castle*—her most mature work—written when she better understood her earlier life experiences (1M 2,7, 4M 2,7).⁴ In 4.1.2, we will also reflect on Teresa's influences. Section 4.1.3 is devoted to the religious and socio-historical context in which Teresa lived and worked, as Teresa's setting is key to the understanding of crucial points about her doctrine and experience. Therefore, we have made an effort to contextualize her works and “the special and unique circumstances within which they were conceived.”⁵ With this aim of contextualization in mind, the last two sections on Teresa's background are dedicated to introducing the Carmelite tradition and its most salient features (4.1.4); and presenting Teresa's relationship with the orthodoxy of the Catholic Church (4.1.5).

¹ Álvarez opines that *The Interior Castle* “is the best version of the interior Teresian biography” (Tomás Álvarez Fernández, “Santa Teresa de Jesús contemplative,” *Ephemerides Carmeliticae*, 13, 1962: 11).

² Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition is also known as the Spanish Inquisition.

³ The following are notable biographies of St. Teresa of Ávila in English: Marcelle, Auclair, *Saint Teresa of Avila*, trans. Kathleen Pond (Petersham, Massachusetts: St. Bede Publications 1988); and Victoria Lincoln, *Teresa: Woman. A Biography of Teresa of Avila* (New York, State University of New York Press, 1984). See also Bernard McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2017), 120-229.

⁴ Antonio Mas Arrondo, “El Itinerario espiritual en el Castillo Interior” in *Las Moradas del Castillo Interior de Santa Teresa De Jesús. Actas del IV Congreso Internacional Teresiano en preparación del V Centenario de su nacimiento* (1515-2015). Dir. Fco. Javier Sancho Fermín and Rómulo Cuartas Londoño (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2014), 224-28.

⁵ Peter Tyler, *Teresa of Avila: Doctor of the Soul* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 60-1.

4.1.1 The Life of Saint Teresa of Ávila

Teresa Sánchez de Cepeda y Ahumada was born in the city of Ávila, Castile, on March 28, 1515. Her father, Don Alonso Sánchez de Cepeda, was an affluent merchant, a descendant of Jewish converts. In 1505, Don Alonso married Doña Catalina del Peso, who bore him two children and died shortly after in 1507. Two years later, he married his second wife, fifteen-year-old Doña Beatriz Dávila y Ahumada, a descendant of old Christians, who would be Teresa's mother. Teresa was the third of ten children born to her mother. Doña Beatriz instilled a fondness for prayer in Teresa at a very early age. In her autobiography, Teresa describes her childhood attraction to the religious life. She recounts how, together with Rodrigo, her closest brother at the time, she enjoyed reading the lives of the saints, and how, when she was seven, they both left home one day with the intention of travelling to the Moorish lands to be beheaded and declared martyrs, only to be stopped by their uncle Francisco when they were leaving the city. The future saint narrates how she enjoyed building hermitages with stones, and how, when playing with other girls, they enjoyed pretending to build convents and be nuns.

When Teresa was thirteen years old, her mother died at the age of thirty-three. Heartbroken, Teresa entrusted herself to the Virgin Mary, begging her to be her mother. After her mother's death, the young Teresa had a slightly frivolous period. She became increasingly interested in books on chivalry and more aware of her beauty. After Teresa's sister married and moved away, and a somewhat obscure affair, her father admitted her into the nearby Augustinian convent-school of Our Lady of Grace. Here, at sixteen, under the influence of a gentle older nun, Teresa started to consider a religious vocation and gradually reconciled herself to the prospect of becoming a nun. After eighteen months in the convent-school, she had to return to her father's house due to illness. When started to feel better, she moved in with her sister in a neighboring village to convalesce. On the way, Teresa visited her paternal uncle Don Pedro de Cepeda who, after having been widowed, decided to renounce the world and became a monk. Don Pedro familiarized Teresa with the *Letters of St. Jerome*. This reading would be crucial in helping Teresa to decide to adopt the religious life by realizing that "everything is nothing. This world is temporary. All things change and pass away" (V 3,5).

Once recovered, and against her father's wishes, Teresa secretly ran away from home and, at twenty, entered the Carmelite convent of the Incarnation (*La Encarnación*) in Ávila (V 4,1). In 1536, she took the habit and adopted what was to be her religious name, "Teresa de Jesús." A short aside on Teresa's religious name seems in order

here: Teresa de Jesús is the name that Teresa Sánchez de Cepeda took in her religious life. “Teresa of Ávila” is the appellative by which St. Teresa de Jesús is known in the English-speaking world.⁶ Throughout this study both names are interchangeably used although, as Pope John Paul II pointed out, Teresa is more of Jesus than of Ávila.

Teresa will live at *La Encarnación* for twenty-seven years except for short intervals. Here she realized her love for religious life that would remain with her always (V 4,2). During her first year in the convent, she started to have recurrent mysterious ailments, accompanied by fainting, high fevers and heart pain. When these illnesses became increasingly serious, and with the failure to find doctors who could find their cause,⁷ Teresa’s father sent her to her married sister’s home where she was treated by a healer who not only failed to cure her, but even caused permanent damage to her constitution.

About this time (1538), her uncle Don Pedro introduced her to a book crucial in Teresa’s development: *The Third Spiritual Alphabet (Tercer Abecedario Espiritual)* by the Spanish Franciscan writer, Francisco de Osuna (1492-1540), from which Teresa learned the Franciscan method of the prayer of recollection (*oración de recogimiento*). Having this prayer book to guide her, and determined to thoroughly follow its method,⁸ Teresa learned how to recollect her senses and thoughts and started experiencing the prayer of quiet (*oración de quietud*) and, occasionally, even the prayer of union (*oración de unión*), though she did not understand the nature of these experiences (V 4,6).

When the healer’s treatment failed, her father arranged for Teresa to return to Ávila. Once in Ávila, she suffered a seizure (*parajismo*) that left her unconscious for four days. Fearing imminent death, she was administered the last rites and the burial rites were prepared for her funeral.⁹ Unexpectedly, Teresa regained consciousness. In 1539, although paralytic (*tullida*), she returned to *La Encarnación*, remaining in that prostrated state for more than eight months. It took her almost three years to recover. During these years of suffering and torment, Teresa practiced mental prayer regularly and developed the moral virtues (love, patience, humility, obedience, etc.). Although she eventually recovered from this illness, Teresa remained physically delicate for the rest of her life.

⁶ Carrera says, “Teresa’s *appellation d’origine* was chosen [...] in 1622, in line with the traditional practice intended to promote town, country or the convent most closely associated with a saint” (Elena Carrera, *Teresa of Avila’s Autobiography: Authority, Power and the Self in Mid-Sixteenth-Century Spain*, Oxford: Legenda, 2005, 1).

⁷ Much has been speculated about Teresa’s illnesses, nonetheless no conclusion has been reached about their nature. For a description of Teresa’s illnesses and their possible explanation see Efrén de la Madre Dios and Otger Stegging, *Tiempo y vida de Santa Teresa* (Madrid: BAC, 1996), 109-34.

⁸ Teresa writes: “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” (V 4,6).

⁹ See V 5,9. In fact, Teresa was considered dead and she found wax in her eyelids when she regained consciousness.

In 1542, at twenty-seven, Teresa recovered “through the intercession of St. Joseph.” Once cured, her newly acquired but still tender piety and love for prayer began to wane. Frequent visitors at the convent, particular amities, chatter with worldly-minded people, and other vanities and distractions, replaced her zeal for virtue and the “things of God.” Considering herself unworthy, Teresa decided to stop contemplative prayer altogether. At the end of 1543 Teresa’s father died. In 1544 she resumed mental prayer under the direction of the Dominican Vincent Baron. At this time, in the parlor, Teresa had a critical vision of Christ with an angry expression, rebuking her association with the laity (V 7,6).

After twenty years of internal turbulence, spiritual mediocrity and discontent (V 8,1), in 1554 Teresa radically changed her life through a second conversion, which happened before a very wounded (*muy llagado*) figure of Christ that awoke her devotion to the core, in parallel with her momentous reading of *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. Until that moment, the overriding obstacle was a religious life not fully lived: insufficient moral rectitude, inconsistency in prayer, divided love between God and the world. She writes: “On the one hand, God called me; on the other, I followed the world!” (V 8,1). She struggled between her attraction to spiritual life and the life of sensual pleasures. After her second conversion at the age of thirty-nine, Teresa’s spiritual life flourished. She realized a hitherto unrecognized need for moral perfection and the renunciation of worldliness; her prayer also thrived as soon as she ended discursive reasoning during prayer (*sin discurso de entendimiento*) (V 9,4). More committed to virtue, she started to receive “delights and gifts” (*gustos y regalos*) in prayer (V 8,9), though Teresa did not know what these experiences were (*sin saber qué era*) (V 9,4). In her autobiography, Teresa describes these graces as a “brief suspension of the faculties” and a feeling of the presence of Christ at her side, which she knew as “*mística teología*” (V 10,1-3).

Teresa believed that she began another new life (*otra vida nueva*) from this point on. As she dedicated herself more frequently and intensively to contemplative prayer, she started to enter repeatedly into the prayer of quiet and even long-lasting union (V 23,1). Not knowing what these non-discursive experiences were, or whether the Devil caused them, she sought out advice from spiritual persons. Her first advisors—Gaspar Daza and Francisco de Salcedo—told her that the experiences were “things of the Devil.” With this exchange, Teresa’s problems with her counselors started. Inconsolable and frightened, she sought direction from Jesuit Fray Diego Cetina who thought that her experiences were from the “Spirit of God” (*dijo ser espíritu de Dios*) and advised her greater moral exertion, moderate mortification and the resumption of mental prayer (V 23,8). Comforted, Teresa experienced a dramatic improvement in her spiritual condition.

To her amazement, discovered how little success she had resisting the gifts from God, which became increasingly stronger. When Cetina was transferred, Teresa entrusted herself to the Jesuit Juan de Prádanos (1555) under whose skillful direction she gained further perfection and thrived (V 24,5). At the age of forty-one, she began to receive spiritual favors in form of intellectual visions and experienced her first ecstasy (V 24,7).

In 1557 the Jesuit, and future saint, Francisco de Borja came to Ávila. He confirmed her experiences to be the Spirit of God, advising her to resist them no longer. In 1558 another Jesuit, the young Fray Baltasar Álvarez, became her confessor, directing her for six years. Under his direction Teresa had another of her unfortunate experiences with her confessors. At the beginning, Álvarez told her these experiences came from the Devil and advised her not to receive Eucharistic communion so frequently (V 25,14). Between 1558 and 1560 Teresa underwent an array of mystical experiences (ecstasies, locutions). In 1559 she had an intellectual vision of Christ near her (*cabe mi*) (V 27,2).

Precisely at this time, the Inquisition started to react with stricter intransigence towards contemplative prayer while she was reporting visions and ecstatic experiences. In 1559, the General Inquisitor, Fernando de Valdes, issued the Index of Forbidden Books, banning numerous books on prayer in the vernacular used by women and the laity. Teresa experienced her first imaginary vision (*vision imaginaria*) of Christ's hands, which was followed by a series of similar mystical experiences: a vision of Christ's face, culminating in the vision of Christ's as he appeared when resurrected (V 28,3). In 1560 Teresa experienced the vision of the *Transverberation of the Heart* (V 29,13), later immortalized by Bernini's sculpture, and the crucial *Vision of Hell* (V 32,1). As the visions and locutions increased in number and frequency, and raptures (*arrobamientos*) became stronger and more notorious, they came to be known throughout Ávila. The later saints Pedro de Alcántara and Francisco Borgia, the Dominican Pedro Ibañez and others comforted her by reassuring that these experiences were from God (V 32,16).

After the Vision of Hell, Teresa took the vow for the most perfect (*voto de lo mas perfecto*), which consisted of always aspiring to the highest perfection. This vow was to bring her to a life of higher purity (CC 1). Teresa increased the number and intensity of moderate mortifications and benign penitences that she applied to herself. Likewise, in those days, in view of the lax monastic climate in *La Encarnación*, Teresa yearned for a convent where she could follow the strict observance of the primitive rule of the order.

With the endorsement of Pedro de Alcántara, Francisco de Borja, another future

saint Luis Beltrán, Pedro Ibañez and others, after facing initial hostility and opposition, Teresa obtained permission and founded the convent of the Order of the Discalced (Barefoot) Carmelites of St. Joseph in Ávila in 1562; a small cloistered convent of thirteen nuns dedicated to the life of prayer. At this time, she was asked by her confessor to write an account of her soul: *Cuenta de Consciencia* 1-3 (her first writing). In 1562, by order of her confessor, Fr. Pedro Ibañez, Teresa wrote her autobiography, *Libro de la Vida*. With these Teresa began her career as founder and religious writer. In 1566, *Vida* was rewritten on the advice of the Inquisitor Don Francisco de Soto.

By her own confession, from 1562 to 1567 Teresa lived the most restful years of her life. In 1566-67 she wrote the rules of the Order (*Constituciones*) and *Way of Perfection* (*Camino de Perfección*), a prayer guidebook for her Discalced Carmelite sisters. During these fruitful years, she had frequent levitations, visions, and other phenomena. John-Baptist Rossi (Rubeo), by then Vicar General of the Carmelites in Rome, visited the Carmelite nun in Spain and not only approved of what Teresa had put in motion but authorized her to found new convents both for nuns and friars, except in Andalusia.¹⁰

In 1567, in the search for the right person to lead her first friary, and having made the acquaintance of Fray Antonio de Heredia, prior of Medina, Teresa had her first encounter with Fray Juan de Santo Matía, later to be known as St. John of the Cross.¹¹ John came recommended as the best student in Salamanca among the Carmelites, but unsatisfied, he planned to leave the Carmelites to become a Carthusian, seeking greater rigor. After a conversation in which Teresa explained her reform, John gave his word to be associated with the Discalced “if it would not take long” (*si no tardase mucho*) to begin. John joined the first foundation for friars which opened in Duruelo in 1568. Later, Teresa founded more friaries in Pastrana, Mancera and Alcalá (1570).

In 1571 she was appointed prioress of *La Encarnación*, a position that she held until 1574. During this period her raptures and visions continued (e.g. of the Virgin, of Christ bleeding). In 1572 Teresa of Jesus brought John of the Cross to the Encarnación as a confessor. John remained with Teresa in *La Encarnación* until 1577 (CC 48,2). These five years would be the longest period the two Carmelite saints lived side by side. During this time, Teresa received final guidance for spiritual perfection from John.

¹⁰ Once this gate opened, Teresa founded a proliferation of new convents: Medina del Campo (1567), Malagón and Valladolid (1568), Toledo and Pastrana (1569), Salamanca (1570), Alba de Tormes (1571), Segovia (1574), and others. The history of the foundation of 14 convents is narrated in Teresa's book *Foundations* (*El Libro de Fundaciones*).

¹¹ At the time of the encounter, John was twenty-seven years old and the Discalced Carmelite prioress fifty-seven.

On November 18, 1572, Teresa entered into spiritual marriage with God (*matrimonio espiritual*), when receiving communion from the hand of John of the Cross. Teresa was to live in this most elevated spiritual state until the end of her life ten years later (CC 25).

In 1574, the Discalced nuns of Pastrana reached Segovia, escaping interference from the Princess of Eboli who, infuriated, denounced *Vida* to the Inquisition. Confiscated, *Vida* remained in the possession of the Tribunal of the Inquisition for the next twelve years. The same year, an important figure in Teresa's life, Fray Jerónimo Gracián, was named reformer of the Carmelite convents of the Ancient Observance in the province of Andalusia. Teresa gave a vow of obedience to Gracián and, at his request, abandoned her original idea to found a convent in Madrid, instead founding one in Seville (1575). In doing so, Teresa contravened the prohibition previously given by the Vicar General of the Order of the Carmelites in Rome, John-Baptist Rossi, to found in the province of Andalusia. Such an action alienated J. B. Rossi and disposed him against the Discalced and, indeed, forbade the founding of new convents. A former novice denounced Teresa to the Inquisition, which started an investigation. Motivated by hostility or resentment, the Calced Carmelites began a brutal attack on the Discalced, which was to last four years. In 1577 Teresa was ordered to choose a convent and remain there in seclusion. She chose Toledo and began writing *The Interior Castle*. The death of the nuncio that year interrupted her writing. It would be in the convent of Saint Joseph in Ávila where she finished *The Interior Castle* on November 29, 1577.

By mandate of the Vicar General of the Order, one night in December John of the Cross was imprisoned in a tiny jail in Toledo where he suffered months of torture and ill-treatment until he escaped in August 1578. On December 4, 1577, Teresa had written to King Felipe II advocating the release of John. The new nuncio also revoked Gracián's powers. Rossi died in 1578 and Gracián was imprisoned in Alcala de Henares. The conflict came to an end with the decree of King Philip II canonically establishing the separated province of the Discalced Carmelites on June 22, 1580. Old and sick, Teresa continued to found new convents¹² until passing away in Alba de Torres,¹³ October 4, 1582, aged sixty-seven.¹⁴ Teresa was beatified by Pope Paul V in 1614, canonized by Pope Gregory XV in 1622 and declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope Paul VI in 1970, the first of only three women among 32 Doctors of the Church at that time.¹⁵

¹² Namely, in Villanueva de la Jara and Palencia (1580), Soria (1581), Granada and Burgos (1582).

¹³ Several years later, Teresa's corpse was transferred to Ávila, but later returned to Alba, where it is still preserved.

¹⁴ The date of her death was later changed to October 14 due to the reform of the calendar.

¹⁵ The other two female Doctors are St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) and St. Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897). There are now 36 Doctors of the Church including St. Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), proclaimed Doctor by Benedict XVI.

4.1.2 Teresa's works and *Castillo interior*

Although our study focuses primarily on *The Interior Castle*, we should not overlook other major works in the *corpus scriptorium* of Teresa of Jesus, which are indispensable to appropriately understand her doctrine on prayer and the dynamism of spiritual life.

Teresa's *opus* was written over the course of about twenty-one years (1560-1581), commencing at the age of forty-five with her early spiritual testimonies (1560-1563). Her first composition was *Libro de la vida* (*The Book of Life*) (1562-1565),¹⁶ (hereinafter, *Vida*), widely considered one of the most remarkable and influential spiritual autobiographies of all times, and only comparable to *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. It covers the first fifty years of Teresa's life and narrates her mystical experiences. *Vida* is an essential source for understanding Teresa's spiritual development and, therefore, an essential complement to *The Interior Castle*, which cannot be ignored in this study. *El Camino de perfección* (*The Way of Perfection*) (1566-1567) (*Camino*) was written to instruct and guide her fellow Discalced Carmelite nuns in the life of prayer.¹⁷ *Constituciones de las descalzas* (*Constituciones*) are the original statutes regulating the religious life of the Carmelite nuns of San José of Avila. It was written in 1567.¹⁸ *Meditaciones sobre los Cantares* (1566-1575) (*Cantares*) are a collection of reflections of a mystical nature about the biblical poem *The Song of Songs* attributed to King Solomon. *Cuentas de conciencia* or *Relaciones* (*Relaciones*) was not conceived as a book. Instead, it is a heterogeneous repertoire of sixty-seven testimonies ranging from 1560 to 1581. It includes accounts of Teresa's spiritual experiences written as instructed by her confessors. It was published by her editors after her death. Her last major work, *Libro de las fundaciones* (1573–1582) (*Fundaciones*) can be read as a sequel to *Vida*. It relates the history of the foundations, though it also contains important points on doctrine. Other minor writings are *Conceptos de amor de Dios* (*Conceptions of the Love of God*) written from 1571-1575, on "the veneration with which the Holy Scriptures should be read," *Exclamaciones del alma a Dios* (*Exclamations of the Soul to God*) penned in 1569, *Visita a las descalzas* (*Way to Visit the Convents*), *Escritos menores* (*Minor Writings*), *Avisos* (*Notices*) and *Poesias* (*Poetry*), which includes a collection of thirty-one superb poems. We also have an extensive and invaluable epistolary (*Letters*) which includes some 450 letters out of the thousands written by the saint during her life.

¹⁶ *Vida* was written at the request of Teresa's confessors and drafted twice. Only the second draft (1565), made at the request of Inquisitor Soto, survived. *Vida* would remain in the Inquisition's hands from 1575 until after Teresa's death. *Vida* contains a brief "treatise of prayer" (Chapter 11-21) describing the path of prayer using the symbol of the "four ways of watering the garden"—drawing water from the well with a bucket, with a wheel, with flood of the land and by the rain.

¹⁷ *Camino* was drafted twice, both autographs extant. The first autograph is known as "Escorial," the second "Valladolid."

¹⁸ The text of the *Constituciones de San José* is lost but the *Constituciones de Durero* remains, which is virtually identical.

The Interior Castle is, theologically, the most significant and systematic of Teresa's works. The book was originally entitled *Castillo interior* (*The Interior Castle*) although in Spanish-speaking countries it is commonly known by its alternative title, *Las Moradas del Castillo interior* or simply *Las Moradas* (*The Mansions* or *The Dwelling Places*). Hereafter, we will refer to it as *Castillo*. It was written in 1577, at the peak of Teresa's human maturity and from the vantage point of her highest spiritual realization, five years after she entered into spiritual matrimony with God. The book offers the interpretative key to, and a broader view of, the development of her spiritual life and, in this sense, completes and clarifies her previous works (1M 2,7). In the prologue, Teresa explains that she writes out of obedience to her superiors.¹⁹ Another motive given for writing the book is to benefit the Discalced Carmelites at the convents she founded, responding to their "need for someone to answer their questions about prayer."²⁰ We should recall that, after the publication of the *Valdés Index* (1559), Teresa's monks and nuns lacked books on prayer and spiritual edification written in the vernacular.²¹ In addition, in 1575 the Inquisition had confiscated Teresa's autobiography, a book that she had thought would be impossible to publish.²² Thus, another aim was to recover and improve on *Vida*, adding Teresa's mystical experiences during the last decade.²³ All of this impelled Gracián to request her "another book," this time narrated in the third person, so it would be acceptable to the Inquisition.²⁴ Teresa undeniably also wrote, as she herself says, to entice the souls and to encourage her readers to follow the road to sanctity (V 18,4).

As per the circumstances surrounding the composition of the work, our Carmelite author was ordered to write in times of extraordinary difficulty. She was then sixty-two, and beset by multiple health problems.²⁵ She wrote quickly, in the midst of multiple endeavors,²⁶ and during the most intense persecution of the Discalced Carmelites.²⁷ Nonetheless, *Castillo* was written in a short period of time (from February to November 1577), with long interruptions.²⁸ Regarding its audience, in *The Interior Castle* Teresa addresses the Discalced Carmelites, a small number of monastics deeply committed to the religious life, and not the general public, "because it seems a blunder to think that it makes to the case to other people."²⁹

¹⁹ Jerónimo Gracián and her by-then confessor, the theologian Dr. Alonso Velazquez, required her to write the book.

²⁰ Prologue to *Castillo*, paragraph four.

²¹ Epilogue to *Castillo*, paragraph one.

²² Prologue to *Castillo*, paragraph two.

²³ *Ibid.* Cf. Cta. 17.1.77.

²⁴ Gracián certainly also sought a last written spiritual testimony of Teresa.

²⁵ Prologue to *Castillo*.

²⁶ Despite being written in a short period of time, the richness and depth of the book suggests years of prior reflection.

²⁷ In beginning to write the book, Teresa was literally held prisoner in the monastery of Saint Joseph in Toledo.

²⁸ This indicates the state of equanimity and calm in which the Saint of Avila abided.

²⁹ Prologue to *Castillo*. See also Prologue to John of the Cross's *Subida al Monte Carmelo* (Prologue, paragraph nine).

The Interior Castle is a “treatise”³⁰ on Spiritual Theology “in the Teresian spirit.”³¹ As a doctrinal exposition, it describes one way for progressing in the Christian spiritual life. In her work, Teresa synthesizes a history of the development of the Christian soul, from the periphery of religious life until it reaches the center of the soul where God abides. With extraordinary sensitivity to her mystical experiences and that of her companions, Teresa was able to codify the entirety of a particular trajectory of a soul’s journey to God, describing in great detail the map of progress and its transitional states, and the types of mental prayer and specific phenomena corresponding to each particular spiritual stage. This synthesis, together with the work of St. John of the Cross, will help to establish the paradigm of a particular model of Christian life: the way of contemplative prayer.

Regarding its contents, although Teresa had discussed her spiritual development in *Vida* and to a lesser extent in *Camino*, here she resumes the exposition initiated twelve years earlier after completing *Vida*. It includes a large part of the mystical phenomena characteristic of the sixth mansions, as well as the final stage of her realization, with her entrance into the seventh mansions five years earlier, at the hand of John of the Cross. Thus, Teresa’s intention in *Castillo* is also to provide an in-depth description of the last stage of spiritual life that she had not fully grasped when writing *Vida*.³² In *Castillo*, Teresa likewise establishes a theologically-safe spiritual guide, proven by experience.³³ It provides the knowledge needed—by means of travel notes and cautions—to safely lead the souls and prevent their wandering through the “beautiful gardens, fountains and labyrinths”³⁴ of each mansion, so that they do not suffer terrible trials (4M 1,9). But, assuring that the guide that she proposed is proven and fully orthodox, the Foundress also makes it clear that this road is a normal course of events although by no means the only one. The souls can travel along other roads of the many the Lord has (5M 3,4).³⁵

With regard to the work’s structure, *Castillo* is organized around the central symbol of the human soul as a diamantine castle in which there are seven mansions (1M 1,1). Each mansion is a “state of the soul” in its approach towards the center where God abides, and also a “degree” of love to God and neighbor. Teresa writes: “the mansions

As Weber notes, there are indications, though, in Teresa’s works that she had in mind a wider audience when writing. See Alison Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 79.

³⁰ The title of Prologue to *Castillo* reads: “Teresa of Jesus, a nun of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, wrote this treatise [*tratado*] called the Interior Castle for her Sisters and daughters, the Discalced Carmelite nuns” (M Prologue).

³¹ Álvarez, “Castillo Interior,” in DSTJ, 132-36.

³² 4M 2,6. Cf. 1M 2,7 and 4M 1,8.

³³ Teresa advises her daughters: “Let’s refuse to take an unfamiliar path, for we will get lost at the most opportune time. It would indeed be novel to think of having these favors from God through a path other than the one He took and the one followed by all His saints” (7M 4,12).

³⁴ Epilogue to *Castillo*, paragraph three.

³⁵ Teresa says that there are “many roads in this way of the spirit” (F 5,1).

are according to the love with which we have imitated our good Jesus” (F 14,5).³⁶ The book has seven parts (seven mansions) and a total of twenty-seven chapters. It merits mention that the last two mansions occupy about half of the book.³⁷ This imbalance is due to the fact that in *Castillo* the saint of Avila explains her developments since *Vida* and her reflections on them (probably inspired by John of the Cross). The lengthy treatment of the mystical phase is also justified because as she often says, supernatural things are difficult to discuss (1M 2,7) and clarity was needed at a time when the Inquisition’s focus was against the practice of mental prayer. *Castillo*, along Teresa’s other works is necessary to clarify or expand on doctrinal points that are important for our purposes. But, the whole Teresian doctrine is to be understood by the light of the seventh mansions of the interior castle, which holds the hermeneutic key to her work.³⁸

To understand Teresa’s works and theological style, major influences on her life and spirituality are considered next.³⁹ By Teresa’s testimony, certain books were particularly important to her development: two hagiographies *Flos Sanctrum* and *Vitae Patrum*, St. Jerome’s *Epistles* (V 3,7), and St. Gregory the Great’s *Magna Moralia* (V 5,8). In *Vida*, our Carmelite nun mentions a book that exercised great influence on her life: *The Third Spiritual Alphabet* by the Franciscan Francisco de Osuna (V 4,6). In F. de Osuna Teresa discovered the method of recollection, foundation of her contemplative prayer. Crucial to her second conversion was St. Augustine’s *Confessions* (V 9,8). Clearly, the Bible had an enormous influence, although Teresa probably did not possess one.⁴⁰ Other important books include: *Subida al Monte Sion* by Bernardino de Laredo (V 23,5), *Audi Filia* by St. Juan de Ávila, *Libro de la oración y meditación* by Luis de Granada, *Itinerario de la oración* by Francisco Evia, and *Arte de servir a Dios* by Alonso de Madrid. Especially influential was *Contemptus mundi (Imitacion de Cristo)* by Thomas Kempis. In *Constituciones* she recommends *Vida de Cristo (El Cartujano)* by Ludolfo of Sajonia. Teresa had probably, read St. Pedro de Alcantara, St. Vincente Ferrer, St. Caterina de Siena and St. John Cassian’s *Collationes* (V 19). But, as Peers points out, aside from F. de Osuna and other recollected authors (i.e., Juan de Avila, B. de Laredo), the influence of other authors, even if she did indeed have the chance to read them, is negligible.⁴¹

³⁶ John of the Cross writes: “the seven mansions are the seven degrees of love” (2S 11,9).

³⁷ Teresa dedicates the first five chapters to the ascetic or active phase of the spiritual life, which occupy only about one third of the book. The remaining twenty-two chapters are devoted entirely to the passive phase of the path to sanctity.

³⁸ E. W. Trueman Dicken, *The Crucible of Love: A Study of the Mysticism of St. Teresa of Jesús and St. John of the Cross* (Daron: Longman and Todd, 1963), 421.

³⁹ With regard to influences on Teresa, see Jesús Castellano Cervera, “Espiritualidad Teresiana,” in ed. A. Barrientos, *Introducción a la lectura de Santa Teresa* (Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad 1978), 124; and Tomás Álvarez Fernández, *Cultura de mujer en el siglo XVI: el caso de Santa Teresa* (Burgos, Monte Carmelo, 2006).

⁴⁰ J. M. Sánchez Caro, “La Biblia en Castillo Interior de Teresa de Jesús,” in *Las Moradas del Castillo Interior de Santa Teresa de Jesús* ed. F. J. Sancho and R. Cuartas (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2014), 123-158.

⁴¹ Edgar Allison Peers, *Studies of the Spanish Mystics*, Vol. 1 (London, The Sheldon Press, 1927), 222.

Teresa's readers soon realize that conversations she had with confessors and advisors over the years were more influential on her thought and works than books. Mystical theology was "dangerous waters" to navigate in during Teresa's lifetime. Deeply distressed by her mystical experiences, she reached out to some of the best theologians in Spain,⁴² many of them respected scholars of the Dominican Order. Through these exchanges, she assimilated the prevalent Thomism philosophy of her time,⁴³ and the intricacies of the Christian theological tradition.⁴⁴ The role of sermons and homilies cannot be ignored as they were especially important in her development.⁴⁵

The influence on Teresa of John of the Cross (1542-1591) (hereafter, "John") merits special attention. Declared a Doctor of the Church in 1926, John is one of the greatest theologians of the Christian tradition. Since their encounter in Medina del Campo (1567), Teresa and John began one of the most significant collaborations in the history of the Church. Although in 1567 John was twenty-eight years old—and Teresa was already fifty-two—and still quite inexperienced—he had not yet even completed his Theology studies in Salamanca—he shone with asceticism and theological knowledge (F.3). Despite the differences in personality and style, they immediately recognized each other as kindred spirits,⁴⁶ and embarked on a lifelong friendship and fruitful cooperation.⁴⁷ John was the person the Mother of Carmel chose to bring her reform to the Discalced monks and became her most trusted advisor and confidante for the rest of her life. Scholars notice that the mutual influences must have been enormous.⁴⁸ Yet, as Dicken notes, it is difficult to put a finger on the exact place where these influences reside.⁴⁹

However, despite manifold influences Teresa was intensely independent and original, drawing always from her personal and unique experience (V 10.9). Teresa's own religious and mystical experiences are her primary source of knowledge and reflection. Teresa said often that she would not speak of things she had not experienced many times herself (R 1 and V 18,4). It is from prayer where her deepest insights originate (V 10,6), insights often ignored by the learned.

⁴² Castellano, "Espiritualidad Teresiana," 124.

⁴³ St. Thomas Aquinas, one of the most influential theologians of the Christian tradition, is always in the background.

⁴⁴ Particularly important was Teresa's association with her Jesuit confessors and advisors. In them Teresa found lifelong guidance. In 1578, Teresa writes to Gracián that in the Jesuits she grew and had her being (Cta. 270, 10).

⁴⁵ The mediaeval Jewish tradition has been alleged to have possibly influenced on Teresa as she had Jewish ancestry. However, nothing conclusive has been proven. See Deidre Green, *Gold in the Crucible: Teresa of Avila and the Western Mystical Tradition* (Longmead, Shaftesbury: Element, 1989), 78.

⁴⁶ After their first meeting, Teresa says to her sisters "I have found a man according to God's heart and mine" (Andrés de La Encarnación, *Memorias Historiales* (Valladolid: Junta Castilla y León, Consejería de Cultura y Turismo, 1993, 169).

⁴⁷ A. M. Lopez Díaz-Otazu, *Aproximación a San Juan de la Cruz de la mano de Santa Teresa* (Narcea, 1990), 102.

⁴⁸ Efrén de la Madre de Dios, *Teresa de Jesús y Juan de la Cruz. Sistematizaciones de la vida espiritual cristiana*, Burgos, Monte Carmelo 97 (1989): 285-314.

⁴⁹ Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 300-1.

Concerning Teresa's background, it is frequently said that she was "uneducated." She probably contributed to such a perception through her constant self-deprecation. She speaks of her clumsiness (3M 1,5), poor intelligence (V 9,5), and lack of education (V 14,4). These self-deprecating statements cannot be imputed to humility alone. Teresa did not know Latin; her poor orthography and grammar reveal an imperfect education and she did not always grasp the theological jargon of her advisers (V 28,2). But perceptions are here misleading. As Mas Arrondo noted, the stereotype of an uneducated Teresa is today clearly "unsustainable."⁵⁰ Teresa was neither illiterate, nor ignorant, as one discovers in her writings. Moreover, she had a bright intelligence, and was theologically sophisticated, as she debated with the best theologians in Spain to their amazement. But, for sure, she lacked the scholarly background of John (3M 1,5).

About her theological style, Teresa's presentation is often unstructured; she terms it "befuddled" (*desconcertada*). According to known testimonies, Teresa wrote quickly, spontaneously, as inspired (V 18,4), as in a state of mystical prayer,⁵¹ and often in the midst of endless routines (V 14,5). She did not use drafts and rarely edited or reread what she wrote (5M 4,1). This may be the reason she repeated things (2M Prol.) and entered into lengthy digressions (CV 2,11). She wrote colloquially, as she spoke to her nuns.⁵² This regularly led to expressions and terminologies not polished. In many cases she adopted terms learned in conversations with theologians or readings and used them improperly or inconsistently. Following Dicken, we could say that Teresa was "unrefined," even for the theological standards of the time.⁵³ However, we must remember that Teresa wrote for her confessors and the Discalced Carmelite sisters of her convents of whom most in all likelihood had even less education than her.⁵⁴ For this reason she wrote simply, without stylistic concerns, in a style appropriate to her task, amidst an environment of misogyny, censorship and persecution. Yet, all these deterrents did not prevent her from revealing the spiritual truths that she wanted to convey. Besides, Teresa wrote prolifically, and it is her *oeuvre* viewed as a whole that gives it meaning. This style, though, does not mean unconcern; she struggled to convey what she intended to say but often expressed her ideas beautifully (e.g. 1M 2,9). Her writing is lively, fresh and spontaneous, flowing directly from her experience. And her prose is colorful, imaginative and full of symbols and metaphors from daily life (5M 4,2).

⁵⁰ Antonio Mas Arrondo, *Teresa de Jesús en el matrimonio espiritual: un análisis teológico desde las séptimas moradas del Castillo interior* (Ávila: Institución Duque de Alba, 1993), 34.

⁵¹ Silverio de Santa Teresa, *Biblioteca Mística Carmelitana* Vol. 18 (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 1934), 315.

⁵² Teresa says: "I will go talking with them (her nuns) in what I will write" (4M Prologue).

⁵³ Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 9.

⁵⁴ Prologue to *Castillo* paragraph 4.

4.1.3 The historical context and religious milieu

The preceding section outlined the most significant influences on Teresa's work. In this section we will analyze how specific traits of Teresa as a writer, theologian, reformer, and founder were conditioned by the environment in which these activities took place.

Teresa and her reform did not emerge in isolation, but instead must be situated in the context of a period of great change in European religiosity: the Counter-Reformation. Besides, her reform took place in a critical period of great complexity in the history of Spain, and developed in synchrony with a series of spiritual movements prevalent at that time in the country, which significantly conditioned and shaped her theological output.⁵⁵ A comprehensive presentation of the historical-theological context in which Teresa did her written work and reform is not possible here.⁵⁶ But, it is essential for our impending comparison to write a few lines concerning the factors that influenced the formation of her doctrine and helped to define her orthodoxy and her unique manner of expression.

Although Lutheranism did not have a significant presence in sixteenth-century Spain, the Inquisition's persecution of Protestant heresy permeated the country and created a backdrop to the development of Teresa's theology. Luther (1483-1546) triggered the Reformation when he hung his "Ninety-Five Theses against Indulgences" in 1517, just two years after Teresa's birth. Teresa lacked thorough knowledge of the Lutherans (CV 1,2), which was at times mistakenly ascribed to the Huguenots, but she was aware of the severity of their error (R 3,8). Protestantism impacted Spain by adding fuel to the Inquisition's later obsessions: signs of disrespect towards the papacy or the Church and its mediating character; denial of the value of human effort in salvation, and so forth. The Catholic Church's reaction to the Protestant Reformation, and the recognition of its own need for change, gave rise to the Counter-Reformation. It started with the Council of Trent, which met in twenty-five sessions between 1545 and 1563. After Trent, the Church adopted "a more catechetical approach to Christianity":⁵⁷ teaching the doctrine, educating a better-trained and more participative priesthood, encouraging vocal prayer, favoring a more personal relationship with God, devotion to the Humanity of Christ, instruments of popular piety (e.g. the veneration of saints, use of rosaries), reform of the religious orders and the like, which all had an impact on Teresa's theological thought.

⁵⁵ Alastair Hamilton, *Heresy and Mysticism in Sixteenth-Century Spain: The Alumbrados* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Gillian T. W. Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1996); Alison Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁵⁶ Teófanos Egido Martínez, "The Historical Setting of St. Teresa's Life," *Carmelite Studies* Vol. 1 (1980): 122-82; and Enrique Martínez Llamas, *Santa Teresa de Jesús y la Inquisición española* (Madrid: CSIC, 1972).

⁵⁷ Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity*, 5.

However, much of Spain's "Golden Age" in the sixteenth-century can be explained by reforms introduced in Spain that long predated Martin Luther and the Council of Trent. Most of these reforms were implemented at the beginning of the fifteenth-century by the Franciscan Cardinal Ximénez de Cisneros (1436-1517). Cisneros introduced important religious changes⁵⁸ and was instrumental in disseminating innovative religious ideas including a more internalized personal and heart-felt spirituality as opposed to the formalistic and institutional religiosity prevalent at that time in Spain. This new sensibility emphasized devotion, virtue, piety and mysticism as a reaction against the speculative theology of a scholasticism divorced from spirituality. It gave foremost importance to the believer's personal relationship with God, the imitation of Christ and the veneration of His sacred humanity. This more internalized spirituality placed greater emphasis on mental prayer and contemplation, and less on vocal prayer and external works.⁵⁹

In Franciscan houses of prayer (*recolectorios*) of the 1480s, a new prayer method appeared that would be crucial to Teresa's development: the prayer of recollection (*oración de recogimiento*). This form of mental prayer is based on the withdrawal of the exterior and interior senses and faculties of the soul from the external world and their orientation within towards God dwelling in the center of the soul.⁶⁰ The prayer of recollection was popularized in the sixteenth-century, and was the subject of books Teresa possessed.⁶¹ Yet, at the start, it was associated with Illuminism and Teresa's work was to become "an alternative to the potentially confusing mystical doctrine of Osuna."⁶² Another trend at this time that would influence Teresa was the return of the orders to their primitive observance, as well as the emergence of the Society of Jesus.

Therefore, all the currents ignited by Cisneros converged in a time of burgeoning spirituality when a large part of the population was engaged in religion and prayer. Theorization about prayer abounded at the time and prayer-guides proliferated,⁶³ with a variety of methods. However, this explosion of popular religiosity also contributed to the emergence of serious heresies that the Roman Catholic Church struggled to counteract. This emergence of heterodoxy is essential to understanding Teresa's spiritual doctrine.

⁵⁸ Among other innovations, Cardinal Cisneros introduced Erasmism in Spain, founded the University of Alcalá, ordered the translation and printing of medieval spiritual classics and edited the Complutensian Polyglot Bible in six volumes.

⁵⁹ See Kieran Kavanaugh, "Spanish Sixteenth Century: Carmel and Surrounding Movements," in *Christian Spirituality II: Post-Reformation and Modern*, Vol. 18, ed. Louis Dupre and Don E. Saliers (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 69-92.

⁶⁰ "García de Cisneros and St. Ignatius of Loyola did not initiate the technique of meditation, yet they developed its inner discipline through concentration of the exterior and interior senses especially the imagination" (Kavanaugh 1989, 69).

⁶¹ Melquiades Andrés Martín, *Los recogidos: Nueva visión de la mística española (1500-1700)* (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1976), 41.

⁶² Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity*, 29.

⁶³ Among others, we can mention here the works of Cardinal Cisneros himself, especially his *Exercises for the Spiritual Life* (1500), Alonso de Madrid's *The Art of Serving God* (1521) and San Ignacio de Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* (1522).

An unwanted effect of the outburst of popular religiosity created by the reform of Cisneros was the emergence throughout Spain of the *Alumbrados* (Illuminated), a spiritual movement that would have important consequences for Teresa's spirituality. For the *Alumbrados* complete abandonment (*dejamiento*) to the will of God was a shortcut to union with Him, repudiating as useless all other forms of piety such as vocal and mental prayer, ceremonies, penances, external works and the cult of saints.⁶⁴ Considering that salvation comes directly from God, the *Alumbrados* denied the need for the Church and priests' mediation as well as reverence to the image of Christ.⁶⁵ They disregarded the commandments and the ecclesiastical sacraments and believed it was possible to understand Scripture by the mere inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Inducing meditative trances and claims of mystical phenomena were common among members of this sect, which included a large percentage of recent Jewish converts and women. Their belief that one should act on impulse to attain perfection led to frequent scandals. The Inquisition was blunt in its fight against Illuminism, suspecting hidden relations with Lutheranism, as both heresies similarly emphasized interiorized religion. Throughout her religious life, Teresa had to defend herself against accusations of "*alumbrada*,"⁶⁶ and the fight against Illuminism was essential to her definition as a reformer and writer.

Another adverse effect of Cisneros' reform was the proliferation of false visionaries. If in Cisneros' times, ecstasies and female visionaries were revered, when Teresa started her reform there was a backlash against an explosion of false women mystical seers. Because women lacked academic training (or ecclesiastical power), their only source of validation was a direct personal experience of God, which is by definition unverifiable. Given recent cases of fraud, the Inquisition looked with increasing mistrust at all cases of supposed direct access to God, revelation, prophesy, ecstasy, visions, and the like. Teresa, being a nun who experienced all sorts of extraordinary mystical phenomena, was treated with utmost suspicion by the Inquisition. But it is precisely the memory of these frauds, the suspicions of confessors and inquisitors and her own doubts that forced Teresa to define criteria for the discernment and certainty of these experiences.

A factor in Teresa's life as a reformer is her condition as a *mujercilla* ("little woman"). In her highly misogynist environment, prejudices against women were insurmountable. Excluded from academic life, and illiterate, women were considered intellectually

⁶⁴ Green, *Gold in the Crucible*, 126 and ff.

⁶⁵ See Lu Ann Homza, "1525 Inquisition Edict on the Alumbrados," in *The Spanish Inquisition 1478-1614: An Anthology of Sources* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. 2006), 80-92.

⁶⁶ Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, 34.

inferior, unable to understand the Scriptures, inept to teach,⁶⁷ and unfit to preach.⁶⁸ In addition, cases of fraud in recent decades, and the many woman among the Illuminists, made the Holy Inquisition look with suspicion on ecstatic and visionary women.⁶⁹ They were considered “carnal,” and susceptible of being used as “instruments of by the Devil.” There was opposition to the practice of mental prayer by “carpenters’ wives” (C 21,2). Therefore, female spirituality became suspect and strictly subjected and controlled. Being a woman in such circumstances partly explains Teresa’s so-called “rhetoric of femininity”⁷⁰ (i.e., her self-depreciatory language, self-accusations of incompetence),⁷¹ and her constant preoccupation to have her experiences verified by male theologians.

Another factor in the definition of Teresa’s theological style was her Jewish ancestry. The *raison d’être* of the Spanish Inquisition, and its main mission for several decades, was the persecution of the Jews and control over the orthodoxy of the newly converted, known as “*conversos*” or “*marranos*.” Among these “new Christians” (*crístianos nuevos*), false conversions or relapses into Judaic practices (apostasy) were not infrequent.⁷² These condemned practices included “directing prayers to the omnipotent God (without cultivating a relationship with Jesus Christ or seeking the intercession of saints).”⁷³

Many of these new Christian converts also increased the ranks of the *alumbrados*.⁷⁴ In the 1940s, it was discovered that Teresa was the descendant of Jewish converts.⁷⁵ The fact of her Jewish background should have been known by the Spanish Inquisition⁷⁶ Teresa was never investigated by the Inquisition for this reason, but the fact that the statutes of the Discalced Carmelite Order did not require “purity of blood,”⁷⁷ and that our Spanish saint accepted many *conversos* as monks and nuns in the Carmelite Order, among them John of the Cross, and that many of her friends and supporters of her foundations were in fact converted Jews, are contributing factors that may have created suspicion around her.

⁶⁷ C 20,6. Notable exceptions were Julian of Norwich and Catherine of Siena.

⁶⁸ Women were seemingly banned from preaching by Saint Paul (1 Corinthians 14.34).

⁶⁹ Recent cases, at that time, of fraud among visionary women—like the respected Dominican nun Maria de Santo Domingo or Maria Magdalena of the Cross, who deceived bishops—led the Inquisition against feminine mystique.

⁷⁰ Expression coined by Alison Weber in his *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*.

⁷¹ See C 3,7, CE 4,1, R 3,6, CAD 1,8, E 10,3 and F 1,6.

⁷² Teresa’s grandfather was condemned for such practices.

⁷³ Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity*, 6

⁷⁴ Green says that many of the converts “developed a particular brand of Christianity characterized by various degrees of Jewish influence in custom, symbolism, religious attitudes, etc.” (Green, 1989, 84).

⁷⁵ This relevant fact went unnoticed until the year 1946, when the scholar Alonso Cortes showed her *converso* lineage. See Teófanos Egido Martínez, *El linaje judeoconverso de Santa Teresa*, Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 1986. Daniel de Pablo Maroto, *Santa Teresa de Jesús. Nueva biografía (Escritora, fundadora, maestra)*, (Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 2014).

⁷⁶ Teresa was born twenty-three years after the ‘Catholic Kings,’ Fernando and Isabel, mass expulsion of the Jews who refused forced conversion to Christianity and the imposition of the Statute of the Purity of Blood (*limpieza de sangre*).

⁷⁷ It has been claimed that many converts joined the Discalced Carmelites because it did not require purity of blood.

Of all the factors around Teresa that influenced her output as a writer, the existence of the Inquisition (*Santa Inquisición*) was probably the most determining.⁷⁸ The Spanish Inquisition was created to maintain religious orthodoxy and as a tool of political control. In a climate of suspicion fermented by religious speculation, visionary activity and the like, the reaction of the Inquisition was to intensify its fight against mystical proliferation and to adopt drastic measures to curb the popularization of mental prayer. The growing threat of Lutheranism was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back, causing a severe response. With the ban on publishing foreign books in Castilian (1558) and studying abroad (1559), and the publication of Valdés' *Index of Forbidden Books* (1559), the Inquisition entered a new phase of persecution not only by removing about 300 titles on mystical theology in the vernacular, but almost all books on mental prayer.⁷⁹ Teresa was questioned on six occasions by the Inquisition and warned several times, although all without consequences for her or her reform. And it is because of the Inquisition that Teresa had to rewrite fragments of her works. In summary, all these factors forced Teresa to use a language that was both theologically accurate and acceptable to the religious authorities of her time, and to refine discernment criteria to the point of her today being considered an epitome of the Catholic orthodoxy.

Our survey on context would not be complete without a few lines on the presence of the Americas in the background, as the New World was always present in Teresa's mind. Her brothers left their father's home in the 1540s heading to the Americas (the "Indies," Teresa called it) in search of riches and honor and some died there. Of them, Francisco, returned wealthy and helped Teresa to establish her foundations. Teresa was always concerned about the souls of the "Indians,"⁸⁰ and what happened in the Americas had an important echo in her life. The rich literary environment of Spain's 'Golden Age' should also be mentioned as contextual underpinning to Teresa's work.

Finally, the changes in subjectivity in the sixteenth-century should also be mentioned, albeit briefly. Teresa cannot be explained, or Spanish mysticism, without the emerging Renaissance individuality. The Teresian "I" is recognizable to the modern reader. As paradoxical as it may seem, Teresa's reform and her mysticism cannot be explained except as a result and reaction to the individualistic restlessness brought about by the new "I" of the emerging Renaissance era.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Ahlgren *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity*, 33.

⁷⁹ These books included works by Saint John of Avila, Saint Peter of Alcantara, Tauler, Savonarola and Erasmus.

⁸⁰ Tomás Álvarez, *St. Teresa of Avila 100 Themes on Her Life and Work* (Washington, ICIS Publics, 2011), 63-6.

⁸¹ Pedro Cerezo Galán, "La experiencia de la subjetividad en Teresa de Jesús," in S. Ros García (coord.), *La recepción de los místicos Teresa de Jesús y Juan de la Cruz* (Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 1997), 171-204.

4.1.4 The Carmelite Tradition

As with the Theravāda school of Buddhism, for exegetical and contextualizing purposes we introduce briefly the Carmelite tradition in this background presentation, as this Catholic religious order embodies the interpretive paradigm by which the spiritual path laid down by Teresa in *Castillo* can be properly understood.⁸²

In 1562, Teresa founded the Convent of St. Joseph in Ávila, the first convent of the Discalced Carmelite nuns. However, it was not until after her death (1582), and the death of John of the Cross (1591), that the Order was officially established (1593), after its separation from the original branch, known today as the Order of Calced Carmelites. The Discalced (Barefoot) Carmelites is a mendicant order of the Catholic Church. Its acronym is OCD from the Latin *Ordo Carmelitarum Discalceatorum*. It is likewise known as the Order of Carmelites of the “Primitive Observance,” in contradistinction to the mendicant Carmelites of the Ancient Observance (“O. Carm”) or Calced Carmelites.

The original Carmelite Order, the Order our Lady of Mount Carmel, began in the twelve-century CE as a community of hermits gathered near the Prophet Elijah’s cave in Mount Carmel (Palestine). Elijah’s life of austerity, solitude, and prayer inspired these eremites. This inspiration has permeated the Order since its inception. Being without a historical founder, the Carmelite Order venerated Elijah as its Founder. The Rule that St. Albert, Patriarch of Jerusalem, given to them in 1206, had great significance in shaping the Carmelite spiritual tradition, as it became “the foundational document for the entire Carmelite spiritual tradition.”⁸³ The *Rule of Saint Albert* stipulates a life of faithfulness to Christ, constant and faithful prayer, devotion to the Virgin Mary, and manual labor. Another important text that has helped to define the spirituality of the Carmelite Order is the *Institution of the First Monks*, written by Philip Ribot, Provincial of Catalonia (circa 1370), which calls for a life of renunciation, virtuous living, and entire dedication to God.

On migrating to Europe, the Order gradually relinquished its austere heritage (i.e., contemplation, eremitical life). In 1247, Innocent IV sanctioned a mitigation of the Rule. The austerity of the Rule was mitigated again by the Pope Eugenius IV in 1432. Attuned to the new conception of religious life introduced in the sixteenth-century by

⁸² For introductory works on the Carmelite tradition, see: Paul-Marie de la Croix, *Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition*, Translated by Kathryn Sullivan (Washington D.C.: ICS Publ., 1997); John Welch, *The Carmelite Way: An Ancient Path for Today’s Pilgrim* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996); Wilfrid McGreal, *At the Fountain of Elijah: The Carmelite Tradition* (New York: Orbis Books, 1999); Peter Slattery, *The Springs of Carmel: An Introduction to Carmelite Spirituality* (New York: Alba House, 1991).

⁸³ Steven Payne, *The Carmelite tradition* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press), 2011.

the Council of Trent, Teresa started a radical reformation curbing the irregularities and great abuses in the observance that she found first-hand in *La Encarnación* at Ávila. Teresa founded the Discalced Carmelites to bring back the strict observance of the primitive rule to cloister convents of nuns and monks and restore the spirit of austerity, unceasing prayer, authentic religiosity, solitude and silence of the first hermits.

Carmelite charism,⁸⁴ as defined by authoritative interpreters of the tradition, provides the framework for understanding the tradition. It is essential then to know these distinctive signs of identity to apprehend the meaning and significance of Teresa's path. The fundamental values of Carmelite spirituality can be summarized as follows:⁸⁵

The essence of the spirituality of the Discalced Carmelites is the way they conceive and live Christian values. Carmelite spirituality has been defined as "spirituality of divine intimacy."⁸⁶ The Carmelite spirit, for P. de la Croix, "consists essentially in longing for union with God [...] an insistence on prompt realization that distinguishes the Order's religious attitude."⁸⁷ This love for God, and longing for union with Him, is the very reason for the existence of the Carmelite Order, and underlies its radical demands for virtue, the cloistered life, fraternal love, service to all, and desire for perfection that would predispose the person to receive the infused grace of God.

The centrality of mental prayer, contemplation and deep interiorization is another constant in the Carmelite tradition from its beginnings and characterizes its religiosity.⁸⁸ *The Rule of Saint Albert* prescribes a life of perpetual prayer: "To meditate day and night on the law of the Lord and keeping watch in prayer" (Chapter VII). Teresa declares: "All of us who wear this holy habit of Carmel are called to prayer and contemplation. This call explains our origin; we are descendants of men who felt this call" (5M 1,2).

There is freedom in how Carmelites pray, for what counts is not the form but love.⁸⁹ Teresa describes mental prayer as a relationship of friendship between God and the soul. She famously defines prayer as "nothing else than an intimate sharing between

⁸⁴ Charism, or charisma, is the defining feature that inspires and distinguishes one particular religious order from others.

⁸⁵ For learned expositions of the Carmelite charism see Gabriel de Santa María Magdalena, "La Espiritualidad carmelitana," *Revista de Espiritualidad* (1948): 30-58; and Keith J. Egan, "The Spirituality of the Carmelites," in *High Middle Ages and Reformation*, Vol. 2 of *Christian Spirituality*, edited by Jill Raitt (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 50-62.

⁸⁶ Gabriel de Santa María Magdalena, "La Espiritualidad carmelitana," 30.

⁸⁷ Paul-Marie de la Croix, *Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition*, 15.

⁸⁸ The *Carmelite Directory of The Spiritual Life* reads: "The contemplative life is the essential and chief feature of the Carmelite life in a more distinctive sense than in other orders of the mixed life" *Carmelite Directory of The Spiritual Life*, translated from the Latin version entitled *Directorium Carmelitarum Vitae Spiritualis* by Joannes a Cruce Brenninger (The Carmelite Press Chicago, Ill, 1951), 95.

⁸⁹ Teresa's dictum: "the important thing is not to think much but to love much; and so do that which best stirs you to love" (4M 1,7). See also F 5,2.

friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us” (V 8,5). This dialogical attitude to mental prayer leads A. Borrell to observe that “probably, relationship is what best defines the spirituality of the Teresian Carmel.”⁹⁰

The Carmelite charism is Christocentric; Álvarez says: “the religious experience lived by the Blessed Mother is a Christian experience: the experience of God in Christ.”⁹¹ S. Castro’s work also shows that Christ is the gravitational center of Teresa’s spirituality.⁹²

The Carmelite spirituality is experiential. Teresa declares: “I will say nothing about things of which I don’t have much experience” (V 18,8).⁹³ Teresa discovers God’s presence within the soul with astonishment: “In the beginning I was ignorant about a certain matter because I didn’t know that God was in all things,” until her experience uncovered his presence within and “how God communicates Himself to us” (V 18,15).

Moreover, the Carmelite identity is charismatic. It derives from the legacy and the religious experience of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross as teachers of Carmel.⁹⁴ The Carmelite spirit is also rooted in the Holy Scriptures and is intensely ecclesial.⁹⁵ There is great emphasis in it on self-knowledge, understood as becoming aware of one’s real spiritual condition but also of “the beauty and dignity of our souls” (1M 1,1).

Another distinctive feature is communality, fraternity and commitment to one another. The Carmel is also definably Marian.⁹⁶ Although the cult of the Virgin Mary is not stated in the Rule, devotion to her is a constant in the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

In summary, the Carmelite conception of spiritual life is shaped by the experience of Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross,⁹⁷ founded on the loving relationship between God and the soul, lived in prayer, and manifested in the love for God and neighbor and expressed in the active dedication of the soul to God and others or, as Teresa put it, in “good works, good works,” which is the purpose of spiritual marriage with God (7M 3,6).

⁹⁰ Agustí Borrell i Viader, “El Carmelo Teresiano” in Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín, *Meditación y contemplación. Caminos hacia la paz (Budismo Theravada y mística teresiana)*. Burgos: Monte Carmelo-CITEs (in press).

⁹¹ Tomás Álvarez Fernández, “Las grandes líneas de la espiritualidad teresiana” in 89th *Capitulum Generale Ordinis Carmelitarum Discalceatorum*, Ávila, April 28--May 188, 2003. <http://www.ocd.pcn.net/capitulo/doc5ES.htm>

⁹² Secundino Castro, *Cristología Teresiana* (Madrid: Espiritualidad, 2010), 11. Teresa writes: “Fix your eyes on the Crucified and everything will become small for you” (7M 4,8).

⁹³ Teresa declares: “I believe there are few who have arrived at the experience of so many things” (V 40,7). Also V 40,8.

⁹⁴ Tomás Álvarez, “Las grandes líneas de la espiritualidad teresiana”

⁹⁵ Egan writes: “The prayer of Carmel is then rooted in Christ, shaped by the Holy Scriptures and lived within the church” Keith J. Egan: *Carmelite Prayer: A Tradition for the 21st Century* (Paulist Press, 2003), 12. See V 33,5.

⁹⁶ Egan, *Carmelite Prayer*., 12 and P. de la Croix, *Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition*, 28. Teresa’s Marian devotion is found throughout all her works. For some examples see V 1,7; 1M 2,12; C 13,3; CAD 6,7; and 3M 1,3.

⁹⁷ P. de la Croix, *Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition*, 15.

4.1.4 Teresa of Ávila and Catholic orthodoxy

As shown in 4.1.3, Teresa carried out her reform, and most of her literary production, in the most inauspicious circumstances—she speaks of “tough times” (*tiempos recios*). In an environment of widespread persecution and generalized religious censorship, Teresa met all the conditions of suspicion: descendant of a paternal line of converts;⁹⁸ a “little woman” (*mujercilla*) in an epoch of misogyny; having ecstatic visions, locutions, mystical experiences and levitating, when many visionary women were *alumbrados*; debating theology, when it was forbidden for women to preach and teach;⁹⁹ speaking of friendship and direct union with God, when the Church reaffirmed its mediation and struggled to control popular religiosity with the Lutheran rebellion and the Illuminated;¹⁰⁰ a “wandering nun,” often outside of the cloister, against an explicit Trentine prohibition; moreover, Teresa started to write on mental prayer in the vernacular in 1562, just three years after those books were banned, being the only woman who saw her work appear in print during the second half of the sixteenth-century (her first complete works were published in 1588). All these factors, as Deirdre says, made Teresa “very vulnerable.”¹⁰¹

The Spanish Inquisition saw all these traits as “flirtation with heresy” and, for an extended period the Holy Office of the Inquisition followed Teresa like a shadow.¹⁰² Indeed, the nature of the matters covered by her work, and the radicalism of her reform caught the attention of the Inquisition,¹⁰³ and Teresa had several encounters with the Holy Office. But despite being investigated—like St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. John of Avila, Fray Luis de Leon, among many others—Teresa was never sentenced or reprimanded. Given the climate of persecution, it is surprising and remarkable that her “confrontation” with the ecclesiastic authorities was not serious and that she was never punished.¹⁰⁴ Even more. Teresa was canonized in 1622—only thirty-five years after her death and being the only women declared a saint in the sixteenth-century—declared Doctor of the Catholic Church (1970) and, with John of the Cross, would be recognized by the Church as representing “two of the highest peaks of the sciences of spirit officially recognized by the Church.”¹⁰⁵ Teresa is now considered the most important person of the sixteenth century renewal incarnating the model of a Counter-Reformation saint.

⁹⁸ Philip II said “all the heresies in Europe, France and Spain have been caused by the descendants of the Jews.”

⁹⁹ St. Paul declared: “Women should remain silent in the churches” (1 Cor. 14:34)

¹⁰⁰ For example, in 5M 2,3 and M Epilogue. Cf. Rowan Williams, *Teresa of Avila* (London: Continuum, 1991), 26.

¹⁰¹ Green, *Gold in the Crucible*, 145.

¹⁰² See Enrique Martínez Llamas, *Santa Teresa de Jesús y la Inquisición española* (Madrid: CSIC, 1972).

¹⁰³ In 1574 *Vida* was denounced to the Inquisition as a book plagued with “visiones, revelaciones y doctrinas peligrosas” See Jeronimo Gracián, *Dilucidario* (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 1928), 15.

¹⁰⁴ Williams: “It is surprising that she had as (relatively) little trouble with the Inquisition as she did” (Williams 2004, 32).

¹⁰⁵ Andrés Martín Melquiades, *La teología española en el siglo XVI* (Madrid: BAC, 1976), 166.

Why is Teresa held in such high regard? Why did she have few problems with the Inquisition? Several reasons have been put forth: Ahlgren points to Teresa's "rhetorical strategies."¹⁰⁶ Weber speaks of her "rhetoric of femininity."¹⁰⁷ Other authors speak of her exceptionality, the captivating force of her personality,¹⁰⁸ her reputation of holiness, and her network of contacts and friends in the nobility (including the King), and high levels of the clergy.¹⁰⁹ These reasons probably all concurred; it is not difficult to see that she had to maneuver with intelligence to dodge the obstacles that appeared along the way. However, they are not enough to explain how she survived the situation of her time and a debate over centuries that culminated in her declaration as Doctor of the Church.

Teresa's theological strength lies first in the authenticity of her religious impulse and the intrinsic value of her experience, without which it would not have received support. Second, Teresa is not only orthodox but is the very definition of what orthodoxy is and is exemplary of it. In trying to understand her own experience, as a religious teacher and guide of many souls, and in her role as founder and reformer, Teresa was concerned about truth; she said that she would die a thousand deaths before giving bad doctrine. Therefore, Teresa's first aim was to define orthodoxy and ensure that her doctrine was always in accord with it.¹¹⁰ She moved heaven and earth to confirm her experience with some of the best theologians in Spain, seeking criteria of certainty that would strengthen her doctrine (V 25,12),¹¹¹ as, for example, on the validity criteria for visions and ecstasy (F 8,1). All Teresa's work, therefore, is an effort to discern the correct doctrine, preempt claims of fraud, and avoid fantasy and self-deception. It is for this reason that Teresa was never afraid of the Inquisition,¹¹² nor did this institution find her guilty of anything. Teresa's doctrine was indeed confirmed as certain by leading theologians of her time.¹¹³ Since then, St. Teresa came to define the Catholic orthodoxy as a Doctor of the Church.

¹⁰⁶ For example, Teresa's rhetoric of subordination, claims of ignorance, humility in the presentation of her experience, that she says that writes for "obedience" (V 1,1; C 1,1; M. Prol.; F Prol.), her auto-deprecation. See Ahlgren *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity*, 68.

¹⁰⁷ Teresa often alludes to her submission to her confessors (V 40,23) and the Church (ME 4). See Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, 159.

¹⁰⁸ Antonio Perez-Romero, *Subversion and Liberation in the Writings of Saint Teresa of Avila* (Atlanta: Rodophi, 1996), 2-3. and J. Mary Luti, *Teresa of Avila's Way* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 11-15.

¹⁰⁹ Victoria Lincoln, *Teresa, a Woman*.

¹¹⁰ In a very delicate situation, Teresa strove to find the "correct doctrine" ("orthodoxy," ethimologically comes from *ὀρθός orthós* (correct) and *δόξα dóxa* (opinion, doctrine). Teresa's greatest concern was to have her doctrine confirmed as fully in accord with the Catholic faith and as a "safe path" (*camino seguro*) recognized by the Church to which she submitted unconditionally and in all aspects. Cf. M Epilogue 4 and C 21,1.

¹¹¹ CC 57 is a Who's Who in Theology in Spain of her time.

¹¹² Teresa said that "in matters of faith," she did not fear the Inquisition, she would offer herself on her own initiative for its approval if she thought it needed, and that she was stricter with herself than the Inquisition would have been (V 33,3-5).

¹¹³ Among them, Fr. Domingo Báñez, Professor of Theology at Salamanca University, and Fray Luis de León, also Professor of Theology at Salamanca who, only six years after the death of the Saint, edited and introduced her complete works. Inquisitors themselves approved Teresa's works and doctrine, among them, the General Inquisitor Gaspar de Quiroga. Teresa's doctrine was of course confirmed in the processes of canonization and subsequent beatification.

4.2 THE DOCTRINE OF STAGES OF THE PATH ACCORDING TO TERESA

This section examines Teresa's teachings on the stages of spiritual life (*moradas*) and, particularly, how she describes them in *Castillo interior*, her most mature work. Teresa's doctrine of the stages is significant because it provides the framework for the development of spiritual life, as she understood it.¹ Regarding the layout of this section, we will first present Teresa's essential teachings on the stages. Afterwards, we will study the taxonomy of the stages of spiritual life preceding its classification in Teresa's works. The section concludes with a consideration of "other ways to the center of the castle," apart from the linear Teresian scheme, which are as valid as the seven mansions.

4.2.1 The stages of spiritual life according to Teresa

The dynamism of spiritual life is generally recognized in Roman Catholicism. There is an abundance of images of spiritual growth in the Bible.² For Teresa, spiritual life is advancement (*adelantamiento*), perfecting (*perfeccionamiento*), growth (*crecimiento*) and ascension (*ascenso*). In her writings, we encounter the classic images of the path (*via*), the trail (*sendero*), and the way (*camino*).³ Moreover, the Catholic tradition has traditionally recognized that spiritual development usually occurs as a journey with successive phases or stages.⁴ Speaking of this graduated process, Christian writers have used images such as that of a ladder (Climaco), spiral (Bernardino de Laredo), ascension (St. John of the Cross) and itinerary (St. Buenaventura). As for the stages, they have used metaphors such as steps, rungs, levels, and illuminations some of which have become classic formulations. Similarly, in Teresa's writings, the road is not covered in one go but through stages or by degrees. Teresa then speaks of degrees (*grados*),⁵ states (*estados*),⁶ steps (*pasos*), or levels, nevertheless, her most significant and well-known, image is mansions (*moradas*).⁷ The allegorical representation of the mansions, like the symbol of the soul as a interior castle, is profound and complex, having both static and dynamic aspects and a wealth of meaning as we shall see next.

¹ It is important because it facilitates the identification of the person along the process of spiritual growth and for the intrinsic needs of spiritual guidance. Teresa writes: "It is very important to know that you're going the right way" (C 22).

² "The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon" (Psalm 92:12). In New Testament, the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed that germinates and grows into a tree, so that the birds may dwell in its shade (Mk 4:30-32). In St. Paul, the spiritual path is gradual maturation (1 Cor. 2,6), constant improvement (Flp. 3, 9-14).

³ For Teresa, the Christian life is a "way of perfection," or "the way of the Cross" (V 11,5) that leads to God (6M 7,6).

⁴ See J. Rivera and J. M. Iraburu, "Las edades espirituales" in *Síntesis de espiritualidad católica* (Edibesa, 2009), 405-13; B. J. Groeschel, *Spiritual passages: The psychology of spiritual development* (New York: Crossroad Publish. 1999); and C. L. Mendizábal, "Las etapas de la vida espiritual," in *Manresa* 38 (1966): 251-70. For an opposing view, K. Rahner, "Sobre el problema del camino gradual hacia la perfección cristiana" in *Escritos de Teología* (Taurus, 1961), 13-33.

⁵ Teresa often speaks of "degrees" (*grados*), for instance, "of love" or "of prayer" (e.g. 6M 6,4; V 11,5; V 7,13; V 22,18).

⁶ See 6M 4; V 7,13; V 11,5; and V 22,18.

⁷ See Álvarez, "Camino espiritual" in DSTJ, 100-2. The symbol of *morada* already appeared in previous works, thus the idea must have matured. John also uses the image of the "mansions" on several occasions (e.g. S2 9,9).

In its static aspect a mansion is a room (*estancia*), a lodging (*piezas*) or chamber (*apoyento*), which the soul has in itself representing a state of the soul (*estado del alma*) with respect to God,⁸ in an image of clear Biblical origin (Jn 14:2). A mansion then is a particular situation of the soul in relation to God, including all the dimensions of a person.⁹ In this sense, a mansion suggests stability. Teresa invites us to think not of fleeting moments, or interim dwellings, but of places where the soul “may live for a long time;”¹⁰ a person’s spiritual center of gravity. A mansion likewise suggests solidity. At times, Teresa softens the physical-spatial aspect of the mansions and the castle symbols, evoking instead the evanescence, amplitude and spaciousness of the soul (1M 2,8). Teresa says that there are seven mansions. She writes: “There are not more than seven mansions” (M Epil. 3). John speaks of “the seven mansions” (S 2, 11,9), “seven degrees of love” (LI. 2,29); “seven purgations” (LI 2,29) and “seven degrees of love” (C 26,3-7). But, Teresa also states that “although there are only seven mansions, in each of these there are many” (M Epil.). Each mansion contains many rooms in itself, as many as imperfections in a soul.¹¹ Teresa speaks of “morada” or “moradas” interchangeably.

In its dynamic aspect,¹² the symbol of the mansions represents stages in a journey that the soul travels motivated by love, as Teresa often expresses it.¹³ The mansions-castle symbol, then, provides the image of a path from the exterior to the interior, from the sensible to the spiritual (C 40), from the impure to the pure, or from darkness to luminosity, in which many mansions or stages are revealed (1M 1,1). This dynamism manifest itself when Teresa says that a soul must not remain in one single mansion but should move through the castle and explore its many rooms (1M 2,8). In this sense, the mansions, in Teresa’s use of the word are stages on the journey to awaken to the things of God. The mansions also symbolize degrees; they have a gradation between them and are arranged in concentric spheres around the center where God dwells.¹⁴ In this sense, each mansion of the soul is a degree of “purity,” “love,”¹⁵ “knowledge,” “friendship,” and intimacy with God. Occasionally, Teresa also refers to the mansions as “levels” (1M 1,3).¹⁶ In another sense, “mansion” refers to a “state of prayer” (*estado de oración*).¹⁷

⁸ Cf. 5M 3,1; V 13,2; and C 6,4. Gracián writes: “The spiritual man passes through seven states and has seven events of the spirit, which we have compared to seven mansions” (J. Gracián, *Dilucidario del verdadero espíritu*, Ch. XV, 85).

⁹ Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 170.

¹⁰ The idea of a mansion as a place for relatively prolonged residence is ubiquitous in *Castillo* (e.g. 4M 1,2 and 1M 2,8).

¹¹ 1M 2,12. See Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 18.

¹² This dynamic aspect is expressed frequently. See, for example, 3M 2,8 and 2M 1,2.

¹³ Teresa says, “we dare not go forward, as if we could reach these mansions and others may also follow the path” (3M 2,8); “souls which have reached the second mansion [...] still do not have the determination to stop being in it” (2M 1,2).

¹⁴ 1M 3 and 1M 2,8.

¹⁵ Teresa writes: “the dwellings places are according to the love with which we have imitated [...] Jesus” (F 14,5); and “to go up to the dwellings we want does not consist of thinking much, but in loving much” (4M 1,7). See also F 5,2.

¹⁶ Álvarez, “Simbología teresiana” in DSTJ, 592-96. These are levels of interiority, perfection or love.

¹⁷ Examples of this nuance can be found, for example, in 4M 1,3; 4M 3,3 and 5M 1,5.

In *Castillo* the evolution through the seven mansions appears as linear, a continuum of gradual development in which each stage builds upon the preceding one, and is foundation of the next. But, this image must be nuanced. As Fermín Sancho notes, the sequential progression described by Teresa fulfills a didactic and pedagogical function, being a ideal model for a progress that is, in practice, an “ascent in spiral, and where not necessarily one stage precedes the other, but can intermix, anticipate, or overlap.”¹⁸

The Carmelite tradition describes the spiritual process in an ideal, schematic and more or less linear way, while not evading the action of God’s grace. The division into seven mansions recognizes a regular course of development that Teresa observed in her own life and in those with whom she interacted and cared for. However, both Teresa and John are adamant in saying that not all souls proceed following a regular pattern. Teresa warns against a rigid interpretation of the pattern she systematically describes. She emphasizes that each soul advances as led by God, and each in a different way as “not everyone walks by the same path” (C 24,1). She states that “God leads souls by many paths” (6M 7,12), and “there are many paths along this way of the spirit” (F 5,1). John of the Cross pronounces similar statements as, for example, in S.2.17,5. For Christians, the life of grace is open to the extraordinary interventions of the Spirit, who “blows wherever it wants” (Jn 3:8).¹⁹ On the archetypal pattern set forth by Teresa, there will be variations. Therefore, as John points out, confessors should be sensitive to the nature of the person and not impose rigid systems over the souls under their care.

Moreover, spiritual growth is neither continuous, nor uniform. Teresa says the soul does not grow like the body (V 15,8). The path is not always forward, nor progress linear. She writes: “these mansions should not be understood as successive, such as things in a row” (1M 2,8). Souls can take steps backwards, or leave the castle. Therefore, Teresa says that the soul must never neglect itself, and those higher up have as much to fear (V 15,8), as they have much to lose. Nor should the soul stay too long in one mansion. On occasions, the soul might leap forward, such as when God wants to teach the soul what is to come (e.g. through supernatural experiences). But, despite variations in the pattern, the soul should always try to move forward. Teresa says that in standing still the soul is moving backwards, as in the castle of the soul one who does not grow regresses.

¹⁸ Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín en “La oración ‘mística’ y sus grados a la luz del Castillo Interior de Teresa de Jesús” in Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín (ed.), *Meditación y contemplación. Caminos hacia la paz (Budismo Theravada y mística teresiana)*. Burgos: Monte Carmelo-CITeS (in press).

¹⁹ Teresa writes: “It will seem that to reach these dwelling places one will have had to live in the others a long while. Although it is usual that a person will have to have stayed in those already spoken about, there is no certain rule, as you will have often heard. For the Lord gives when He desires, as He desires, and to whom He desires. Since these blessings belong to Him, He does no injustice to anyone” (4M 1,2).

4.2.2 Classification of the stages of spiritual life according to Teresa

Throughout the extensive history of Catholic spirituality, its mystics—although always aware of the mystery of grace—recognized in their own and other persons' paths changes that they described as phases, stages, or degrees of drawing near to God. This has given rise to diverse taxonomies, some quite elaborate, of the Christian spiritual life. We will mention some of these divisions next, with no attempt to be comprehensive.²⁰

4.2.2.1 Classification of the stages prior to Teresa

The Bible does not contain sophisticated divisions of the spiritual life, although it does have images that would plant the seeds for later theological and mystical reflections. The New Testament does not speak of stages but rather of growth in spiritual development. The Gospel of Mark reads: "For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. And as soon as the grain is ripe, he swings the sickle, because the harvest has come" (Mk: 4,28-29).²¹ St. Paul also speaks of the "ages of man," contrasting spiritual childhood to adulthood.²²

A description of Christian spiritual life as composed of the ascetic and the mystical has its foundation in the scriptures.²³ This most basic distinction between the ascetical and contemplative life was already clearly present in the first centuries of Christianity.²⁴ This differentiation is a most significant contribution of the fathers of the Eastern Church.

The Eastern fathers also began to differentiate between stages of spiritual growth. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-c. 215) distinguished three stages: "fear-hope-charity."²⁵ Evagrius Ponticus (345-399) sets out three stages of development: *practike* purifies the soul and ascetically leads to *apatheia*, a state of purity and silence that readies the soul for *theoria* (contemplation).²⁶ St. John Climacus (c. 575-649) divides Christian spiritual growth into three stages, namely, renunciation, virtues and perfection.²⁷

²⁰ We do not intend to offer here an exhaustive overview of the various taxonomies, an impossible task in a work of these characteristics and a topic not central to our task. Therefore, only a general overview is given herein. For a more comprehensive view the reader may consult the following titles: Jose Rivera-Jose Maria Iraburu, *Síntesis de espiritualidad Católica* (Madrid: Edibesa, 2009), 405-13; Ciro García Fernández, *Corrientes nuevas de Teología Espiritual* (Madrid: Editorial Studium, 1971), 187-200; and L. Mendizábal, "Las etapas de la vida espiritual," in *Manresa* 38 (1966): 251-70.

²¹ "The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, and grow strong like the cedar of Lebanon" (Psalm 92:12). Cf. 1 Cor 2,6.

²² St. Paul says: "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (Cor. 1.3, 9-10).

²³ For an evidence about the biblical foundations of mysticism see Sean Freyne, *Texts, Contexts and Cultures: Essays on Biblical Topics* (Dublin: Veritas Publication, 2002), 210-20.

²⁴ Cf. J. Rivera and J. M. Iraburu, *Síntesis de espiritualidad Católica*, 406.

²⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, Book 4.

²⁶ Cf. Evagrius Ponticus, *Gnostikos*, 18-21.

²⁷ John Climacus, *Ladder of Divine Ascent*.

The Syrian monk known as the Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (c. 5th century CE) introduced a division into three 'ways' (*vias*) essential for understanding the dynamism of the Christian spiritual life. The *purgative way* (*via purgativa*) comes first, consisting of a moral purification or *catharsis*, which leads to the *illuminative way* (*via illuminativa*) or *photismos*, in which the soul is elevated to the light of God. The *unitive way* or *henosis* (*via unitiva*) is the culmination of the spiritual path entailing the soul's union with God. This threefold division has become a classical formulation in the Christian tradition.

Among the Latin fathers, St. Augustine (351-430), in addition to the tripartite division, speaks of the seven stages from the 'old man' to the 'new man' in *De Vera Religione*.²⁸ In *De Quantitate Animae*, he describes the seven degrees through which the soul advances in contemplation.²⁹ In Section 35.79 of this work, he refers to this seven-fold division as vitalization, sensation, art, virtue, tranquility, initiation and contemplation.³⁰

St. Gregory the Great (c. 540–c. 600) divides spiritual growth into eight degrees, in relation to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit "crowned by contemplation."³¹ These seven gifts are: fear of God, piety, knowledge, fortitude, counsel, understanding and wisdom, which should be completed with the Christian theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. For St. Gregory, Christian life should be a continuous progression toward God. The five first gifts are moral, and prepare the soul for mystical union, while the gifts of understanding and wisdom elevate the soul to contemplation of God while in this life.³²

St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) essentially follows the tripartite division into the purgative, illuminative and unitive ways, although he does not use these exact terms. But, he also devised more detailed divisions. In *Steps of Humility and Pride*, St. Bernard he sets out twelve degrees of progress in humility.³³ The first two steps can be acquired in the world, while the remaining ten can only be attained through the monastic life. In *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, he describes seven stages toward grace culminating in the plenitude of love. In *A Teaching of the Loving Knowledge of God* (1160), a division is made in seven stages of growth corresponding to seven parts of the human body.³⁴

28 Augustine, *De vera Religione*, Chapter XXVI, 48-9.

29 Augustine, *De Quantitate Animae*, Chapter XXXIII, 70-6.

30 In his "*Commentary on the Beatitudes and on Isaiah*" St. Augustine also divides the states of spiritual life in accordance with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

31 Cf. Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Ezekiel*, L2, Hom. 2, 1029-1030.

32 G. C. Carluccio, *The Seven Steps to Spiritual Perfection According to St. Gregory the Great* (Ottawa, 1949), 6.

33 These twelve degrees are: "(1) Fear of God; (2) Abnegation of self-will; (3) Obedience; (4) Patient endurance; (5) Disclosure of the heart; (6) Contentedness with what is; (7) Lucid self-awareness; (8) Submission to the common rule; (9) Silence; (10) Emotional sobriety; (11) Restraint in speech; (12) Congruity between one's inside and one's outside" [Translation as given in Vultus Christi: <http://vultuschristi.org/index.php/2007/09/amice-ascende-superius>]. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Steps of Humility and Pride*.

34 Bernard of Clairvaux, *A teaching of the Loving knowledge of God*.

German Dominican Meister Eckhart (1260-1327) suggests four stages in the soul's ascent towards union with God in his theological treatises: 1) *dissimilarity*, during which the creature recognizes that he is nothing, and only receives being derivatively from God; 2) *similarity*, where the soul—detached from the individual—discovers itself to be an image of God; 3) *identity*, when God's operation and man's becoming are seen as one; 4) *breakthrough*, where man finally lives “without why,” and seeks nothing, not even God.

St. Thomas of Aquinas (1225-1274) preserved the classic tradition of the three *vias* speaking of those who are beginners (*incipientes*), those who are progressing on the way to perfection (*proficients*) and those who are perfect (*perfecti*).³⁵ But he also skillfully combined, in perfect synthesis, other criteria and perspectives on growth, such as the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and the seven virtues. Although St. Thomas did not set out original or detailed divisions of spiritual life, his doctrine had a deep indirect impact on other mystics after him and indirectly on Teresa. Peers says that “*The Interior Castle* might almost be considered a practical illustration of certain parts of the *Summa Theologiae* as it describes the progress of the soul through every stage of perfection.”³⁶

The Flemish mystic Jan Van Ruysbroeck (1293-1384) in *The Seven steps of the Ladder of Spiritual Love*, laid out a chart of the mystic's progress with seven steps: goodwill, voluntary poverty, purity, lowliness of mind, desire for God's glory, divine contemplation, and the unnameable, which is an indescribable transcendence of thought and knowledge. The formula of the seven stages is taken up by other representatives of mystical theology, such as the Franciscan St. Giles de Assisi (1190-1262), who in Chapter Thirteen of his *Sayings*, differentiates seven stages of development,³⁷ and Thomas Gallus (1200-1246) who wrote the treatise *The Seven Stages of Contemplation*.

St. Bonaventure (1221-1274) formulated several divisions to describe spiritual growth. He often articulates the classic three-phase diagram of the three ways, as for example in *The Triple Way* (*De Triplici Via* 3,1). However, this great Italian Franciscan mystic also speaks of “virtues-gifts-blessings,”³⁸ and of “commandments-counsels-joy.”³⁹ In Chapter Two of *The Triple Way*, St. Bonaventure introduces the “six degrees of love through which slowly, and in an orderly fashion, one progresses until attaining perfect love.” These six stages are gentleness, greed, saturation, euphoria, security and tranquility.

35 Thomas of Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Second Part of the Second Part, Question 183. He expressed it in different ways and nomenclatures “three ages,” “three stages of charity,” beginning-middle-end, purgative-illuminative-unitive, etc.

36 E. Allison Peers, “Introduction,” *The Interior Castle* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1974), xxxiii.

37 Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 77.

38 *Breviloquium*, 5, c. 6 (V 259) cited in Mendizábal, *Las etapas de la vida espiritual*, 263.

39 *Apologia pauperum*, Ch. 3 (VIII 244) cited in Mendizábal, *Las etapas de la vida espiritual*, 263.

In *The Mind's Journey to God (Itinerarium mentis ad Deum)*, St. Bonaventure describes six stages of ascent or illumination in loving contemplation, culminating at the zenith.

David of Augsburg (d. 1272), a contemporary of St. Bonaventure, follows the tripartite division in his entire *oeuvre*, but also speaks of the seven steps. For example, In *The Composition of the Interior and Exterior Man (De exteriores and interioris hominis compositione)*, the German Franciscan refers to these seven stages in spiritual life. Augsburg wrote *The Seven Stages of Prayer*: “two stages of vocal prayer prepare the way for the passage through four ascents of interior prayer.” The last state can only be reached in heaven, though some great saints, like St. Paul, received a taste in life.⁴⁰ Rudolf von Biberach (1270-1329), another prominent German thinker, in *De septem itineribus aeternitatis*, proposes a model with seven stages culminating in deification.

Prior to Teresa's emergence on the mystical scene, a predecessor in Spain who was the closest to her thought, was Francisco de Osuna (1497-1540). Several other mystics and theologians in Spain also merit mention, among them Juan de los Ángeles (1536-1609), Antonio Sobrino (1556-1622) and Antonio Ferrer (1572-1644). A division into five degrees of growth is recurrent among the tradition of Spanish mystics and theologians, namely: mortification or purification (beginners), intelligence (proficients), forgetting oneself, detachment from the senses, and ceasing the action of understanding and will.⁴¹

In summary, the division of spiritual development into stages and its systematization did not start or end with the works of Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross. Biblical allegories contain the seeds of future elaborations conceived not only by mystical theologians, but also by all thinkers who toiled to philosophically found Christian doctrine. While divisions into three and seven stages may stand out, other taxonomies were conceived which overlap or coincide with them in some way or another. As can be seen, the treatises of Christian mystics and theologians set out not only stages of development with regard to contemplative life, but include devotional, intellectual, and moral aspects, and intellection of mystical experiences, biblical exegesis and philosophical arguments. In general, the history of these classifications and systematizations reveals a tendency towards more mature expressions culminating in the general recognition of the division made by Teresa of Avila. Our attention will focus next on Teresa's contributions.

40 McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 115.

41 Melquiades Andrés Martín, *Los recogidos. Nueva visión de la mística española (1500–1700)* (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1976), 487. For Francisco de Osuna, “recollection” stands for the entire process of the mystical life, whereas for Teresa it is only one part.

4.2.2.2 The classification stages in Teresa of Ávila

As Dubay says, “spiritual writers since the sixteenth century have so gladly embraced Teresa’s sevenfold schema for the development of prayer that it has become classic.”⁴² Teresa’s *oeuvre* has an extraordinary importance in the study of the stages of Christian spiritual life and is one of its greatest contributions to the legacy of the Catholic Church. Several reasons can explain the significance of the Teresian systematization.

Firstly, the stratification Teresa sets out is *experiential*. Unlike other mystic authors like St. Augustine, Teresa expresses her experiences openly, autobiographically, and with abundant details. However, her coding also contains the experiences of many other contemplatives who Teresa admired as masters (St. Peter of Alcántara) or who she encouraged and had under her care in her role as founding mother and spiritual guide. The Teresian classification could also be called *scientific*. This is because it is based on the methodical analysis of her own experience and the painstaking observation of the countless persons that she guided, and whose growth watched over as spiritual director, assimilating their experiences to refine her system. Moreover, as Dicken’s says: “It is from their work [Teresa and John] that the scientific study of spiritual progress begins.”⁴³

In addition, Teresa’s classification and coding are *systematic, complete and detailed*. As González Arintero says, prior to Teresa the divisions of the stages of development of Christian spiritual life were abstract, aspectual, exemplar, admonitory or pedagogical.⁴⁴ None of them provided a systematic, complete and meticulous systematization. Teresian analysis is also *comprehensive*. Her works include a broad catalog of experiences that cover the entire process from its inception to the highest zenith.⁴⁵ As Saudreau states, Teresa deals with the subdivisions in spiritual life with exceptional clarity and breadth.⁴⁶ For the majority Christian theologians, the system that Teresa presents is the most extensive and lucid to have appeared until that time and, possibly, until the present day.⁴⁷ The Teresian classification is also *accessible*. Teresa’s *oeuvre* is written in sixteenth-century Spanish that can still be understood today. And it is written on the threshold of

42 Dubay, *Fire within*, 80.

43 Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 476.

44 Juan González Arintero, *Grados de oración y principales fenómenos que les acompañan* (Salamanca: 1966), 3.

45 Juan González Arintero points out that before Teresa, “gradations of phenomena were largely unknown that may appear in a single degree of prayer” (Arintero 1966, 132). The perspective of the seven mansions encompasses all of Christian’s stages of spiritual life. Teresa also describes the phenomena that may arise in a single stage in great detail.

46 Saudreau remarks: “We don’t think we have a better guide than St. Teresa, not only because her authority in spiritual matters is of the first rank, but also because she has treated this question at length and with great clearness in her “Mansions of the Interior Castle” (Auguste Saudreau, *The Degrees of the Spiritual Life: a method of directing souls according to their progress in virtue*. 2 vols. Transl. by Dom Bede Camm London: R. & T. Washbourne, 1907, ix).

47 Ibid.

modern times. The self of the renaissance is recognizable by the contemporary self.

Moreover, it is a *universal* codification. Teresa introduces not only her pioneering biographical journey, but also a universal mystic path, corroborated and applicable to all souls creating a system that—completed by John—would become a classic. Additionally, Teresa establishes a nomenclature that has ended up being generally accepted. Terms such as the “prayer of quiet,” and definitions for terms like “supernatural,” have entered and become part of the manuals of theological guides.

Furthermore, her most mature work, namely *Castillo interior* and some of *Relaciones*, is written from the viewpoints of the seventh mansions, the culmination of the mystical life. Finally, Teresa sets out progress over the course of both ordinary and extraordinary pathways and, due to her vast experience, she also makes extensive references to abnormal and aberrant situations, establishing clear criteria of discernment.

Due to the reasons above, and the fact that Teresa represents *orthodoxy*,⁴⁸ Teresa's coding has become a classic. A model for Christian spiritual life is crystalized and finds its definitive expression in Teresa's work, after a shaping and refinement process of over 1500 years. All divisions devised by previous mystics fit perfectly and make sense in this system.⁴⁹ This is why, since the model appeared, no other alternative has been able to replace the Carmelite system and most scholars on mystical theology have adapted it.⁵⁰ The ascetic-mystical journey described by Teresa and John was adopted as prescriptive by Mystical Theology before the Second Vatican Council and represents the backbone of classic manuals on spiritual theology such as those by Giovanni Battista Scaramelli (1687-1752),⁵¹ Auguste Soudreau (1859-1946),⁵² Adolphe Tanquerey (1854-1932),⁵³ Augustin-François Poulain (1836-1919),⁵⁴ Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange (1877–1964),⁵⁵ Jacques Maritain (1882–1973)⁵⁶ and, more recently, Louis Bouyer (1913–2004)⁵⁷ and Jordan Aumann (1916-).⁵⁸

48 Cf. Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 5 and 170-72; Dubay, *Fire Within*, 3. The elaborate on this point in Section 4.4.

49 Dicken says that “the teaching of all their great predecessors slips naturally and smoothly into place within the structure they [Teresa y Juan] define” (Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 476).

50 Dicken states: “in succeeding generations the acid test of spiritual literature has been its ability to find a setting within their [Teresa and John] doctrinal scheme” (Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 476).

51 Giovanni Battista Scaramelli, *Direttorio ascetico in cui s'insegna il modo di condurre l'Anime per vie ordinarie della grazia alla perfezione christiana, indirizzato ai direttori della Anime* (1752).

52 Auguste Soudreau, *The Degrees of the Spiritual Life*. Trans. by Dom Bede Cam London: R. & T. Washbourne, 1907.
53 Adolphe Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology*. 2nd revised edition. Trans. By Herman Branderis (Tournai: Desclée, 1932).

54 Augustin Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer (Des Grâces D'oraison). A Treatise on Mystical Theology*. Translated from the Sixth Edition by Leonora L. Yorke Smith (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1921).

55 Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*. 2 vols. Trans. by M. Timothea Doyle (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1989).

56 Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*. Trans. by Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959).

57 Louis Bouyer, *Introduction to the Spiritual Life*. Trans. by Mary Perkins Ryan (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1961).

58 Jordan Aumann, *Spiritual Theology* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

4.2.3 Overview of the seven mansions

Teresa represents the soul as a castle that comprises seven concentric mansions. In an itinerary of progressive interiorization, each dwelling place or mansion (*moradas*) symbolizes a greater degree of love of God and neighbor and coming closer to the centre where God resides. In words of the Teresian scholar, T. Álvarez, in each of these seven mansions “Teresa places her degrees of prayer [...] so that levels of spiritual life and degrees of prayer appear paired.”⁵⁹ Prayer, which Teresa defines as “intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us” (V 8, 5), is central and omnipresent in Teresa’s work.⁶⁰ Although of a single essence, prayer is not always uniform adapting itself to new spiritual realities. The following outline will help us to correlate the seven mansions and their corresponding forms of prayer.

The first three stages in the process of spiritual development are ascetic,⁶¹ meaning that they depend on our own efforts, even though God’s help is always necessary. Ascetic prayer can be vocal or mental and take the form of discursive (or affective) meditation, or the prayer of active recollection. The last three mansions are mystical, “passive” or “supernatural”, meaning that the soul cannot attain them through its own effort, but depend only on the will of God to reach them. In these mansions, the soul is united mystically with God in infused contemplation, becoming transformed into Him. The fourth mansion occupies a middle ground between “the natural and the supernatural.”⁶²

On the fence of the castle live souls in mortal sin. These unfortunate souls identify with the outside world and live in great anguish and suffering, immersed in total darkness, and made one with their disorderly passions and appetites. They are unaware of the value of prayer, ignore the divine reality of the soul and mainly identify with their bodies.

Little light arrives at the first mansions because they are obscured by venial sin represented by “vermin and beasts” (1M 1,6). These “believing souls”⁶³ are beginners in spiritual life who have begun to exercise themselves in self-knowledge fight against sin, and the cultivation of prayer and “consideration” (meditation) that Teresa described as the “gate to the castle” (1M 1,7). The prayer mode of these mansions is vocal.

59 Álvarez, “Grados de la oración,” DSTJ, 326.

60 Daniel de Pablo Maroto, *Dinámica de la Oración* (Madrid: Editorial Espiritualidad, 1973), 17.

61 Among other authors, Dicken classifies the seven Teresian mansions into the classical taxonomy of the three-fold paths, so that mansions I, II and III correspond to the path of purgation, mansion IV to the path of illumination and mansions V, VI and VII to the path of union. See E. W. Trueman Dicken, *The Crucible of Love* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1963).

62 Tomás Álvarez, “Introducción a *El castillo interior*” in *Santa Teresa de Jesús, Obras completas*, 16th edición, prepared by Tomás Álvarez (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2011), 657.

63 Antonio Rojo Marín, *Teología de la perfección cristiana* (Madrid: BAC, 2002), 283.

The second mansions are those of the “good souls,”⁶⁴ who persevere determinedly in internalization and the struggle against sin, and understand how necessary it is to not turn back. These souls find help in the council of wise people, lectures, sermons (2M 1,3) and apply mild mortification when necessary. They also exercise regularly in prayer, and their most appropriate mode at this stage is discursive or affective meditation.

The third mansions are those of the “devout souls.”⁶⁵ These reasonable and virtuous people, with great humility, detachment and charity, wish to follow Christ and seek perfection. These people are eager not to offend God, rarely commit venial sins (3M 1,5) and have become accustomed to discursive meditation. However, they may suffer severe emotional states (happiness) or aridity (dryness), when trying to guide their own progress through their reason and effort, rather than putting their absolute faith in God. The appropriate prayer mode in this state is the prayer of recollection. In *The Way to Perfection*, the prayer of recollection is understood as “active” or “natural”, meaning, “we can do it ourselves with the help of God, without Him, we can do nothing” (C 29,3). Recollection is so named because it “recollects all powers into the soul, and enters within himself, with his God” (C 28,2). It has the virtue of placing the soul at the gates of mysticism (C 28,2). In *The Interior Castle* the prayer of recollection is passive or infused.

The fourth mansions are those of the “fervent souls.”⁶⁶ In this transitional stage, the persons give themselves entirely to God through humility, love for God and neighbor. These souls begin to receive infused contemplation in prayer of quiet, which is passive, and the beginning of the union with God, although it does not prevent the exercise of the powers of the soul. “Quiet” refers to the great peace that the mystic feels in prayer. In the prayer of quiet, the will is “tied” to God, while understanding and memory roam free.

Teresa illustrates the fifth mansions by using the allegory of the silkworm that dies to become a white butterfly: a person dies at their own will to be reborn in Christ (5M 1,12). In these mansions, we find ourselves fully immersed in mystical life. In the prayer of simple union, the faculties of the soul (i.e. will, memory and understanding) experience the first suspensions (*suspensiones*), albeit briefly. This prayer is infused, that is, it occurs “when God wants it to and how He wants it to;” the soul cannot do anything to acquire it, although it can do much by making itself available. Another form of union is the “true one,” which is produced by agreement of the soul’s will with that of God (5M 3).

64 Idem, 283.

65 Ibid.

66 Idem, 284.

The sixth mansions are those of “spiritual betrothal” or “ecstatic union.” In this state, the mystical experience intensifies and deepens and the soul suffers greatly for its sins. At first, the soul cries out for God because His visits are rare (6M 7.2). After receiving profuse passive purifications, these “heroic souls,”⁶⁷ progressively enjoy a higher degree of purity and the unions are more frequent. Here, Christ is present “in a wonderful way, the soul never ceases to walk with Christ Our Lord but is ever in the company of both His Divine and His Human nature” (6M 7.9). This is a stage accompanied by many supernatural phenomena. Among the charisms that Teresa received, her first was an intellectual vision of Christ (1560), followed by numerous ecstasy, rapture, flights of spirit, impetus, locutions, visions, levitation, etc. The contemplation of the humanity of Christ remains essential in these mansions.

The seventh are the mansions of “Spiritual Marriage” or “Transforming Union.” In these mansions of the “great St.s,”⁶⁸ God in His mercy unites with the soul at its core. Here, the soul “dies with great joy, because its life is now Christ” (7M 2,5) and it finally understands the Pauline phrase: “I no longer live, I, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2;20). To illustrate the meaning of “stable union,” Teresa says that it is “like two wax candles coming together (...) that all light becomes one” or “as if one falling from the sky into a river or fountain becomes the water” (7M 2,4). The soul becomes one spirit with God (7M 2,5) becoming one thing that cannot be separated. It is transformation of the soul in Christ, and its union with the Trinity to the greatest degree possible in this life. The soul becomes God through participation, although it remains distinct. At this point, virtually all ecstatic and supernatural phenomena cease. The soul finds its rest and response in God in full activity in and for God and love for fellow man, having found the reason for the spiritual journey: “good works” (7M 4,6).

4.2.4 Other ways to the center

Teresa writes: “by many roads, and pathways God leads the souls” (V 22,2).⁶⁹ And in *Foundations* says “there are many paths along this way of the spirit” (F 5,1). For Teresa there are paths to God other than that of the linear sequence of the seven mansions.⁷⁰ Confessors should understand the souls under their care and lead them as per their own nature.

67 Idem, 285.

68 Ibid.

69 Teresa emphasizes that “not all the souls go down the same path” (C 24,1) and that through many paths God leads the souls (3M 7,12); “[One should not tie] His hands by thinking that He cannot help us except by one path!” (F 5,1).

70 Assuring that the guide that she proposes is proven, the souls may go by other roads of the many of the Lord (5M 3,4).

4.3 TERESIAN THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

As noted earlier, before starting to compare our writers' doctrines of spiritual growth, familiarization with their respective anthropological concepts is deemed necessary as, for both, human nature and the dynamism of spiritual life are closely related themes.¹ Certain knowledge of Teresian theological anthropology, in particular, is indispensable to understand the guidelines of spiritual development described by the Carmelite saint. An ordered study of Teresa's concept of man, however, is not without difficulties, the first being the absence of systematicity; Teresa's doctrine of man is disseminated throughout her writings and not always explicit but frequently expressed through symbols. Another strain is terminological imprecision and conceptual confusion due to her lack of scholastic training.² It is also noticeable that Teresa's anthropology is a topic relatively little studied.³ As Dicken observes, finally it intervenes the complexity of many scholastic psychological concepts and their difference from those of modern psychology.⁴

4.3.1 The nature and composition of the human being according to Teresa

The Interior Castle is a work conceived around the symbol of the soul as a castle.⁵ Next, the symbol is analyzed seeking to understand Teresa's notion of the nature of the soul and its relationship with God. At the start of the book Teresa draws the symbol thus:

Today while beseeching our Lord to speak for me because I wasn't able to think of anything to say nor did I know how to begin to carry out this obedience, there came to my mind what I shall now speak about, that which will provide us with a basis to begin with. It is that we consider our soul to be like a castle made entirely out of a diamond or of very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwelling places. For in reflecting upon it carefully, Sisters, we realize that the soul of the just person is nothing else but a paradise where the Lord says He finds His delight. So then, what do you think that abode will be like where a King so powerful, so wise, so pure, so full of all good things takes His delight? I don't find anything comparable to the magnificent beauty of a soul and its marvelous capacity. Indeed, our intellects, however keen, can hardly comprehend it, just as they cannot comprehend God; but He Himself says that He created us in His own image and likeness. Well if this is true, as it is, there is no reason to tire ourselves (1M 1,1).⁶

1 A fundamental axiom of Christian theology is that God moves things in accordance with their nature. John of the Cross expresses this dictum: "*Omnia movet secundum modum eorum* (God moves each thing according to its mode)" (S2 17,2).

2 This is palpable in Teresa's writings (e.g. V 3,10, 1M 2,7). On occasions, she knows scholastic terminology only approximately (e.g. E 16; 2M 2,12). She said that she lacked proper knowledge of distinctions in scholastic psychology, which she learned from her confessors. Álvarez comments: "Teresa had an elemental awareness of what is the soul [...] On aspects more delicate and complex, [her] knowledge was much more precarious" (Tomas Álvarez, "Teresa de Jesús contemplativa," *Ephemerides Carmeliticae*, 13, 1962, 20). Although in *Castillo* her knowledge is already more adequate, in *Vida* Teresa confesses to being unaware of the notional differences between spirit, soul and mind (V 18,2).

3 Maria Isabel Alvira, *Vision de l'homme selon Thérèse d' Avila. Une philosophie de l'heroïsme*, Paris: F-X. Guibert, 1992.

4 Dicken points out how concepts such as emotion, and personality did not exist in Teresa's time and how she uses terms such as "memory" or "imagination" which today do not have the same meaning. Cf. Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 327.

5 For a study on the gestation of the symbol of castle in *Castillo Interior* see Ángel Raimundo Fernández González, "Génesis y estructura de 'Las Moradas del Castillo Interior'" in *Actas del Congreso Internacional Teresiano 4-7 October 1982*, Vol. II (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1983), 609-36.

6 Another remarkable description often-quoted of this "vision" is found in the transcription made by one of the confessors and early biographers of the Saint, Fr. Diego de Yepes of a conversation he had with her sometime between 1579-1580, found in *Biblioteca Mística Carmelitana*, ed. Silverio de Santa Teresa, Vol. 18 (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 1934), 276-78.

The allegory of the soul as a castle is not entirely original.⁷ It is previously found in Francisco de Osuna⁸ Bernardino de Laredo.⁹ It also appeared in Teresa's earlier works, *Camino* (C 48,1; C 28,6), *Vida* (V 40,5), and John's image of soul as a city (CE 18).¹⁰ However, it is in *Castillo* where the image acquires the dimension of a symbol and offers the hermeneutical key of this work.¹¹ There is ambiguity, nevertheless, in Teresa's image of the soul as a castle as well as in her notion of the soul itself.¹² The castle does not symbolize the soul as distinct from the body but the whole person,¹³ represented as a concentric sphere. Its most external part is the body, the wall of the castle (1M 1,2). Then, there is the soul made of a single diamond with its many mansions. At the soul's centre dwells God, but likewise the human spirit. Therefore, the castle-soul symbolizes the person as a unit, composed of "body" (*cuero*), "soul" (*alma*) and the "spirit" (*espíritu*).¹⁴ But, in Teresa "soul" also signifies the spiritual facet of a person, in contradistinction to the "body."¹⁵ And occasionally, Teresa speaks of the soul as apparently ontologically distinct from the body (V 38,5) and the spirit (7M). How do these concepts fit together?

Underlying Teresa's concept of man is the scholastic anthropology of St. Thomas Aquinas, essentially Aristotelian, but assimilating spiritualist notions not included in Aristotle. This conception is found, with a few variations, in John of the Cross' works.¹⁶ St. Thomas distinguishes body and soul as two constituent parts of a human being. But, beneath this apparent ontological dualism there is a substantial unity. St. Thomas says, "a human soul is the form of its body," meaning that there is no human being without soul, nor a soul without body.¹⁷ The soul has two parts: the "lower part" (*parte inferior*), is called the "sensitive part," and consist of the five external senses. Within this lower part, John of the Cross recognizes an interior corporal sense: the imagination (*la imaginación*). The "higher part" (*parte superior*) of the soul consist of three "faculties" or "powers:" the will (*la voluntad*), the memory (*la memoria*) and the understanding (*el entendimiento*). The higher part is also called the "spirit" (*el espíritu*), thus, the spirit is part of the soul.

7 The allegory or metaphor of the soul as a castle which has many dwelling places has a long history in mystic literature. It appeared well before Teresa in Muslim and Jewish similes.

8 Francisco de Osuna, *Tercecer abecedario espiritual*, Treatise VII.

9 Bernardino de Laredo, *La Subida del monte Sion* (1535).

10 It appears in popular and medical literature of the time. Cf. Francisco Márquez Villanueva, "El símil del Castillo interior: sentido y génesis" *Actas del Congreso Internacional Teresiano* (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1983), 495-522.

11 Mas Arrondo, *Teresa de Jesús en el matrimonio espiritual*, 57.

12 This ambiguity is present in the popular concept of the soul in Teresa's time. See "Alma" in DSTJ, 34-8.

13 Throughout her writings, Teresa refers to the person as "soul" or "person" indistinctly. This finds reflection in our study.

14 Teresa occasionally employs the Pauline trichotomy (V 13,17). See Dicken *The Crucible of Love*, 329, note 5.

15 See Álvarez, "Alma" DSTJ, 34-8.

16 It must be stated that probably Teresa learned her image of the human being in conversations with her confessors and, most probably, in intellectually nurturing discussions with John of the Cross, but only approximately, without precision.

17 St. Thomas Aquinas writes: "body and soul are not two actually existing substances; rather, the two of them together constitute one actually existing substance" (*Summa contra Gentiles*, II. 69.2).

In Teresa's symbol of the soul-castle, the body is an integral part of the whole person. It constitutes the "fence of the castle" (1M 1,2), the "setting" of the jewel, the soul. It is the material element, in contrast to "soul" and "spirit," the spiritual component.¹⁸ But we are not angels, we but have bodies (C 22,6), and the soul is often affected by the body's condition. Yet, the human being is not only a body, for we are not empty but have souls.

"Soul" (*alma*) is an essential word in Teresa's lexicon.¹⁹ If the body is the "outer man" (C 31,2 and 4M 2,4), the "walls of the castle," the soul is the castle's interior (C 13,7), the most essential and noble part of man; that which gives him beauty and a great dignity. The difference between God and the soul is that between the Creator and His creature (1M 1,1). However, the soul's relationship with God is not only having been created by Him. God sustains the soul (V 10,4). It is from God, that soul draws its life and being.²⁰ Without God, the person "has no being,"²¹ he is "nothing."²² Without acknowledging God as the being of his being, the person attributes to himself a being that he does not have. In this light that we can understand why Teresa says that every human being "lies" (e.g. 6M 10,5). This true identity, expressed as a mystery, makes all human beings brothers.

For Teresa, being of a divine origin, the soul is incomprehensible and of such dignity and beauty²³ that it is inconceivable and inexpressible. This great nobility and capacity is conferred on it by the fact of having been created in the "image and likeness of God."

I don't find anything comparable to the magnificent beauty of a soul and its marvellous capacity. Indeed, our intellects, however keen, can hardly comprehend it, just as they cannot comprehend God; but He Himself says that He created us in His own image and likeness. Well if this is true, as it is, there is no reason to tire ourselves in trying to comprehend the beauty of this castle. Since this castle is a creature and the difference, therefore, between it and God is the same as that between the Creator and His creature, His Majesty in saying that the soul is made in His own image makes it almost impossible for us to understand the sublime dignity and beauty of the soul (1M 1,1). Cf. 7M 1,1; R 54 and M Epilogue 3.

Teresa continues therefore the line of the *Imago Dei* theological tradition, whose roots are buried in the patristic era and which springs from biblical images (e.g. Gen 1:26-28). The soul is made by God "in His image and likeness." The soul is not the image of God. Only Christ is the perfect image (identity) of God.²⁴ The soul participates in God reflecting His image.²⁵ This is man's true identity.²⁶ God is the original of His reflected image.²⁷

18 See "Alma" in DSTJ, 34-38.

19 The term "alma" appears in the complete works of Saint Teresa more than 400 times.

20 God is the spring from which surge the waters of life give man his being (1M 2,1), the tree of life is planted (7M 2,9).

21 A Teresa's poem read: "Oh Beauty [...] bind the one without being with being unending" (Po "Oh Exceeding Beauty").

22 2M 1,9; CAD.3,12 and C.19,1.

23 This beauty irradiates the body and all things (R 54; C 28, 9-12; V 40,56 and 2 M 2)

24 The Gospel of John reads: "he who has seen Me has seen the Father" (Jn. 12:45).

25 In St. Augustine the soul is not *the* image of God but *in* the image. Only Christ is the perfect image of God and has perfect identity. The human soul is *in* the image, it is not perfect identity with God, it only partakes of this image.

26 Ciro García Fernández, "Antropología Teresiano-Sanjuanista y Oración," Vol. 44, 1 *Burgense* (2003): 137.

27 The human soul is like a mirror reflecting Christ. The pure soul reflects God purely. St. Paul says that deified men "with

The soul is also of a great dignity because God dwells in its inside centre (7M 2,3), “in the deepest part,” “at the bottom of its being” (7M 1,7), in its “entrails” (6M 2,4), marrow” (5M 1,6). God is seated on the throne of a great price which is the human heart (C 27,6). In the spiritual architecture of *Castillo*, the King (God) dwells in the Seventh Mansion. This is the Divine Monarch’s main chamber or palace (1M 2,14). The inalterable presence of God in the center of the soul confers to it its brilliance and sublime beauty. From this center, God is the Sun that never ceases to shine on the castle and its rooms (7M 2,6), the source of the living waters, which give life and being to the human being (1M 2). Even in a soul in sin, God never ceases to be present and illuminate it (R 29,1). The soul of the just is “a paradise where the Lord says He finds His delight” (1M 1,1).

In its essential nature, the soul is not affected by sin, but it is luminous, reflecting the supernatural light which shines from inside it (7M 1,3; V 28,5). In the center of the castle, the Seventh Mansions, God does not move, nor does the soul loses its essential peace. Teresa asserts that “from this center, God gives being to our being and life to our life and merit to our work,”²⁸ radiating light on all faculties and illuminating all the mansions.

At a certain point, Teresa learns that the soul is capable of God (*capax Dei*),²⁹ and that can find Him in its interior. Yet, when she discovers experientially that God dwells in the soul (R 56) she is surprised by His presence (R 54), of which she herself does not consider worthy (R 6). Asking her confessors about the nature of this presence, they confirmed that God is in the soul by “presence, power and essence” and not only “by grace” which, once understood, confirmed her intuition on the nature of the experience.

I know a person who hadn’t learned that God was in all things by presence, power, and essence, and through a favor of this kind that God granted her she came to believe it. After asking a half-learned man of the kind I mentioned-- he knew as little as she had known before God enlightened her -- she was told that God was present only by grace. Such was her own conviction that even after this she didn’t believe him and asked others who told her the truth, with which she was greatly consoled (V 8,10). See R 54.

We have here St. Thomas’s doctrine of the presence of God in everything through “power, presence and essence,” discovered by Teresa through her experience (V 18.10). This presence is also called of “immanence,” “immensity,” or “continenence.” Pope Leo XIII explains: “God is present and exists in all things, by His power, in so far as all things are subject to His power; by His presence, inasmuch as all things are naked and open to His eyes; by His essence, inasmuch as he is present to all as the cause of their being.”³⁰

the face uncovered”, reflect “as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord” (2.Co, 3,18).

28 Tomas Álvarez, “Santa Teresa de Jesús Contemplativa: Experiencia de Dios” in *Teresa de Jesús, Enséñanos a Orar* by T. Álvarez and J. Castellano (Burgos, Monte Carmelo, 1981), 172.

29 García Fernández, “Antropología Teresiano-Sanjuanista y Oración,” 133. CCC 27.

30 Pope Leo XIII Encyclical *Divinum Illud Munus* (“On The Holy Spirit”) issued on May 15, 1897.

God can likewise be present in the soul through the “presence by supernatural grace.”

As Martínez Llamas points out:

Besides these forms of natural presence, the word of God and theology affirm the reality of another higher presence, which we could say is more intimate: it is presence by supernatural grace, which is not universal, but pertains to rational creatures. This presence is by participation in the divine nature [...] It is the presence in which the soul is God's temple, God's friend, which feels and perceives His reality, not just as One in essence, but also as the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is the presence of inhabiting.³¹

Through this presence by supernatural grace, man participates in the divine nature. Teresa expresses it by saying: “the soul is participating of His divine nature” (E 17,5). This is called the “presence of inhabiting,” the experience of the Three Divine Persons (R 6,9). To the degree that it reflects God, in union with God the soul participates in Him. This presence of God confers to the soul its dignity as partaker in the divinity. Teresa declares, “I also understood [...] the reason why God delights with souls more than with other creatures (R 54). The human being is worthy because is capable of union with God in His chamber in the heart. But, if God is the divine guest in the human soul (C 38,7), the soul is also in God (R 18).

Teresa's concept of the person is then relational. God created man for Himself, and in the soul of just (C 29,4), in the pure soul (1M 1,1 and V 18,15), He has His delight. For its part, the soul's aspiration and supernatural destination is God, and is ultimately in God in whom it has its life and joy. It is only in its participation in God that the soul rests.³² However, the human being's participation in the divine does not cancel his individuality. The soul's relationship with God is that of two persons, “I” and “You” (Martin Buber). God gives man his life and his knowledge of Him which leads to man's self-knowledge, as “we are never able to know unless we try to know God” (1M 2,9), but in the Christian tradition prayer is friendship and the two loving friends always remain ultimately distinct. Ciro Garcia put it, for Teresa “man exists in himself and before himself, with a capacity of introspection and of free and responsible decision.”³³ But this individuality is not that of the modern subject who understand himself as entirely autonomous and separated. As Ciro Garcia explains:

“Teresa, from her own experience, conceives of man as a being essentially open to God, determined from the depths of himself by the relationship with Him; a relationship that fulfills him fully and finds its maximum expression in union with God and in the Trinitarian communion with the divine persons.”³⁴ and adds: “The ‘I’ that [Teresa] discovers on her way toward interiority is a subject open to an absolute dimension, which overflows and transcends him. God appears on the horizon of his interiority as the creator of his own ‘I.’”³⁵

31 Martínez Llamas, *Inhabitación Trinitaria* http://www.mercaba.org/DIOS%20CRISTIANO/Inhabitacion_trinitaria.htm

32 García Fernández, “Antropología Teresiano-Sanjuanista y Oración,” 133.

33 *Idem*, 134.

34 *Idem*.

35 *Idem*.

4.3.2 Dynamic aspects of the human being according to Teresa

To consider the fundamental nature and structure of the human being only as it were the static plane of the floor in a castle would give us a distorted vision of the Teresian symbol. To properly understand Teresa's theological anthropology, we must study the dynamic aspects of the symbol, which turn around a series of closely interrelated ideas.

The human being is afflicted by sin and ignorance. Starting from the walls around the castle, Teresa describes a journey of inner purification where there are many mansions, essentially seven, leading to the encounter with God in the center of the soul. Along this journey, the soul is subject to a gradual active and passive purification and divinization by God, leading from its radical separation from God to its progressive union to Him; from its animadversion toward God, to an intimacy and friendship with Him, culminating in the soul's stable and lasting union with God; the true happiness for the human being.

The goal, then, is the permanent union of the soul with God, made possible because the soul, having been created by God in His image and semblance, is capable of God. To advance along the spiritual path, the soul must configure itself towards the divine while God broadens it and illuminates all the mansions with the soul's collaboration. This leads to final union with God, symbolized by the image of the spiritual marriage, and the soul's discovery that "in God we have our life, our movement and our being" (CE 8,3).

Originally and essentially the soul is pure and only is darkened by sin. The Teresian images of the castle made of diamond, clear glass or mirror, are metaphors of this original purity and transparency of the soul. The luminosity of the soul comes from God's presence in it, a presence that never fails. Sin sullies the original cleanliness of the soul's mirror preventing it from reflecting the image of God (R 57),³⁶ and breaks the friendship between the soul and God, encircling the soul with the darkest shadows (V 40,4). According to Teresa, it is because the human being's transgressing of God's will that "we do not see ourselves in this mirror that we contemplate, where our image is engraved" (7M 2,8), and we live as though God were not present in the soul (2M 1). Teresa writes:

To fall into mortal sin; there's no darker darkness nor anything more obscure and black. You shouldn't want to know anything else than the fact that, although the very sun that gave the soul so much brilliance and beauty is still in the center, the soul is as though it were not there to share in these things. Yet, it is as capable of enjoying His Majesty as is crystal capable of reflecting the sun's brilliance (2 M 1)

³⁶ Teresian simile is "if a black cloth is placed over a crystal that is in the sun, obviously the sun's brilliance will have no effect on the crystal even though the sun is shining on it" (1M 2,3) Cf. V 28,5.

Besides sin, the second reason why God is not experienced in the soul is ignorance. Teresa often exclaims: “we don’t understand ourselves or know who we are” (1M 1,1). It is due to ignorance that the human being does not understand his own nature (1M 1,2). This is because “our intellects however keen can hardly comprehend the magnificent beauty of a soul and its marvelous capacity, just as they cannot comprehend God (2M 2.1). The human being confuses his being with the body and does not comprehend the nature and dignity of the soul (1M 1,2). As a result of this confusion, man embraces sin. Given free will, man is situated between grace and sin, affected by flesh, body and world. Distanced from God and his soul, man throws himself into the world to pursue his desires.

This regrettable situation, however, is not irreversible. Every soul has the inalienable capacity to reflect God’s image and to enter into a union with Him and participate in Him. Through the religious life, the soul can restore communion with God. To this end, the Christian must set his gaze not on the outer world but on the inner reality through internalization, seeking the original of the image he reflects and not “things of the world.” He must deepen its friendship with God by purify itself from sin (with God’s help and assisted by His grace), and cultivating the virtues chiefly humility, detachment and love, all accompanied by self-knowledge and prayer.³⁷ Let us discuss next these ideas briefly.

Regarding internalization, following St. Augustine, Teresa says that, to find God, the person must seek Him within himself (C 28,1) that is how God is better found (4M 3,3). Through interiorization and recollection, the soul departs from the outside things and orients itself toward God in solitude and silence (C 28,3) to find out God within (V 14,6).

The soul must then be purified of sin. The purer and full of virtues a soul is the more it shines reflecting the light that comes out of its very center where God dwells (C 27,6). The whole process of transformation described in *Castillo* is one of purification of sin, as “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Matt 5:8).

The soul must eliminate ignorance through self-knowledge (*nosce te ipsum*).³⁸ Self-knowledge is knowledge of “what is Creator, and what is creature” (1M 1,2; F.5.3); knowledge the true nature of the human being. This is one of the hermeneutical keys to the Teresa’s works. Teresa emphasizes that “self-knowledge is a great thing” (1M 1,1).

37 “this bit about sins, and self-knowledge is the bread that has to be taken with all foods however delicate they may be on this road of prayer, as without this bread the soul cannot sustain itself” (V 12.11).

38 The term “Christian Socratism” is found in Gilson’s *L’esprit de la philosophie medieval*, 214-33. It is a tradition rooted in the Christian tradition in St. Augustine, St. Bernard, Richard and Hugo de San Victor, Angela de Foligno, Catalina of Siena, but it is particularly important in Teresa.

This self-knowledge is always necessary (V 13,15); without it “we can never get out of ourselves” (1M 2,11). Man cannot approach God if he does not first consider who is God and who he is. Self-knowledge leads from ignorance and misery to fullness. Knowledge of God leads to knowledge of oneself because “we shall never understand if we do not try to know God” (1M 2,9).³⁹ Even in the Seventh Mansion self-knowledge is necessary (1M 2,9), without it “to think that we are to enter heaven ... is foolishness” (2M,1,11; E.9).

A consequence of self-knowledge is humility, which is the foundation of the castle and the most important virtue, because it is based on truth (V 40) and embraces all others. Humility bring us closer to God. It is the Queen that give make jake to the King (C 16,1). It allows the person to contrast his baseness and misery with the greatness of God (1M 1,5). A humble soul recognizes that “it has nothing good of itself” (V 13,15) and that without God is utterly nothing and that God is his being. This knowledge is experimental (F 22,6), fruitful (F 5,16); it determines the person to further seek God and growth (F 5,3).

The Christian must also pray. In the prayer of recollection “the soul collects its faculties together and enters within itself to be with its God” (C 28,4). It is in dialogical prayer that Teresa discovers the presence of God in the soul (V 14,6). The path of prayer also leads to the self-knowledge.⁴⁰ Ciro García writes how for Teresa prayer has many blessings:

In prayer the true and living God is revealed to him; [it allows the person to] contemplate the humanity of Christ; enter into relationship with divine persons. In prayer he hears the voice of his interiority; discover in the depths of his soul the image of God, which becomes the perfect image of Christ. Prayer resound historical events, the needs of the Church and the urgency of evangelization. In prayer, finally, the new man is being forged, the foundation and root of a new dynamism, which, starting from life, follows a process of internalization and culminates in divine contemplation, to return again to life. This is the itinerary traced in *Camino y Moradas*.⁴¹

In the path described by Teresa, God leads the soul through the mystical mansions. To the ascetical phase follows the mystical phase where God’s mercy moves the process. Here, through raptures, flights of spirit, visions and so forth, God passively purifies the soul for its ultimate union with Him. Álvarez explains how, at a certain moment, Teresa began to receive bursts of supernatural light inside her that allowed her to contemplate herself and gradually allowed her to discover “even the most arcane background of her being.”⁴² This discovery of the soul’s true nature and great dignity are the experiences described at the beginning of *Castillo* and key to the nature of the Seventh Mansions.

39 John of the Cross say: “knowledge of oneself [...] is the first thing they have to do in order to move towards a knowledge of God” (CE 4,1) and quotes St Augustine when he says to God “Let me know myself, Lord, and I shall know thee” (N1 12,5). Perfection is in the knowledge of God and of oneself” (N2 18,4).

40 Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín, “El conocimiento de sí en la Meditación Teresiana,” in *La meditación teresiana: características fundamentales y su práctica* (Ávila: CITEs, 2002), 51-90.

41 Ciro García, “Antropología Teresiano-Sanjuanista y Oración,” 133.

42 Tomas Álvarez, “Santa Teresa de Jesús Contemplativa: Experiencia de Dios” in *Teresa de Jesús, Enséñanos a Orar* by T. Álvarez and J. Castellano (Burgos, Monte Carmelo, 1981), 172.

The culmination of the spiritual process is the spiritual marriage between God and the soul described in Chapter Seven of *Castillo*; to enter into permanent union with God in the center of the castle in the Seventh Mansions. Teresa uses several images to explain the nature of this union. In spiritual marriage, the soul dies and lives in Christ (7M 3,1). It consists of the soul's transformation in Christ by its spiritual union with the Risen One. It is a mystical union of "spirit with spirit." In the Seventh Mansions, Teresa explains, the "spirit of the soul" is united to God becoming "one spirit with Him" (*un espíritu con el*). Teresa writes: "perhaps this is what St. Paul means in saying He that is joined or united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him and is referring to this sovereign marriage, presupposing that His Majesty has brought the soul to it through union" (7M 2,5).

In the Seventh Mansions "the life of the soul is Christ" (7M 2,5). Speaking of this permanent union with God Teresa asserts: "I can say what St. Paul said, although not with such perfection, that I no longer live but that You, my Creator, live in me" (V 6,9). See also R 3,10; R 56. This permanent union occurs in the very interior of the soul: "In the spiritual marriage, there is still much less remembrance of the body because this secret union takes place in the very interior center of the soul, which must be where God Himself is" (7M 2,3).

The ultimate union of the soul with God has been articulated in a variety of ways. As McGinn says, before the twelve century the concept of "union with God" is not known and there is talk of "sanctification," "deification" (*theosis*). St. Augustine does not speak of union but of "touching the Eternal Wisdom." Teresa does talk about union with God, Spiritual Marriage, but also of "presence," not as a new presence but a new experience. The idea of God as ground of being is found in some texts of John of the Cross for example in *Cantico*.

We will summarize our discussion with the following words by Bernard McGinn:

The responses of the subject to immediate divine presence have been discussed theologically in a variety of ways and according to a number of different models. Among them we might list direct contemplation or vision of God, rapture or ecstasy, deification, living in Christ, the birth of the Word in the soul, radical obedience to the directly present will of God, and especially union with God. All of these responses, which have rarely been mutually exclusive, can be called mystical in the sense that they are answers to the immediately experienced divine presence. Therefore, the mysticism of union is just one of the species of a wider and more diverse genus or group.⁴³

43 Bernard McGinn, "Love, Knowledge, and Mystical Union in Western Christian tradition" in ed. Moshe Idel and Bernard McGinn, *Mystical Union and Monotheistic Faith: An Ecumenical Dialogue* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 59.

4.3.3 The transformed self in the Seventh Mansions

In the final state of permanent union with God the subject exists, individuality persists. But this is not the self of modern subjectivity, that considers himself to be independent. As Cerezo points out, Teresa's subject is "a subject in the ecstasy of transcendence,"⁴⁴ a relational subject, an "I" open to the absolute and infinite. As Cerezo says, for Teresa: "the subject is constituted in a dialogic relationship with the Absolute Other."⁴⁵

The person in the Seventh Mansions has realized he is not autonomously separated self from God but

a subject that, at the limit of himself, deposes its autonomy in the abandonment of love by which it is subject to the One who claims it from the root of its being. But, reciprocally, in this joint action, Teresa writes boldly "He is the one who submits, and He wants you to be the lady with authority to rule; He submits to your will" (C 26,4). God Himself is subject of the experience, which the soul carries out with Him, and subject to it. In a circular relationship, the Teresian subject realizes the infinite experience of himself in God and finds the experience of God in himself. This dialogic or communicative circularity is hallmark of Castilian mysticism.⁴⁶

Writing *El Castillo interior* from the summit of the Seventh Mansions, Teresa gives an account of her experiences presenting them with an integrated vision, the meaning of her own history, but Teresa has discovered that her own being is sustained by God and that her history is the history of the mercies of God; that her history is also His history. Teresa is very conscious that her life has been transformed by salvific action of God. She exclaims:

You have deigned to bestow upon me mercies so outstanding they amaze those who see them; and as for me, they frequently carry me out of myself to praise You the better. By remaining in myself without You, I could do nothing, my Lord, but return to cutting the garden flowers in such a way that this miserable ground would once more serve for a trash heap as it did previously. Do not permit it, Lord, or desire the loss of the soul You bought with so many labors and which You have so often gone back again to rescue and save from the teeth of the terrifying dragon (V 10,11).

In another place she writes:

His Majesty well knows that I can boast only of His mercy, and since I cannot cease being what I have been, I have no other remedy than to approach His mercy and to trust in the merits of His Son and of the Virgin, His Mother, whose habit I wear so unworthily (3M 1,3).

God has transformed her and saved her from herself:

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 from the point where I began to explain these things about prayer is the one God lived in me—according to the way it appears to me—because I think it would have been impossible in so short a time to get rid of so many bad habits and deeds. May the Lord be praised who freed me from myself (*me libró de mí*) (V 23,1).

44 Pedro Cerezo Galán, "La Experiencia de la subjetividad en Teresa de Jesús" en *La Recepción de los Místicos. Teresa de Jesús y Juan de La Cruz*, ed. Salvador Ros (Salamanca: Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 1997), 173.

45 *Idem*.

46 *Idem*

Christianity speaks of the nature of the relationship between man and God as mystery. Merton writes often about this mystery. In *New Seeds of Contemplation* Merton says:

“The secret of my identity is hidden in the love and mercy of God. But whatever is in God is really identical with Him, for His infinite simplicity admits no division and no distinction. Therefore I cannot hope to find myself anywhere except in Him. Ultimately the only way that I can be myself is to become identified with Him in Whom is hidden the reason and fulfillment of my existence.”⁴⁷

“To say that I am made in the image of God is to say that love is the reason for my existence, for God is love. Love is my true identity. Selflessness is my true self. Love is my true character. Love is my name. If, therefore, I do anything or think anything or say anything or know anything that is not purely for the love of God, it cannot give me peace, or rest, or fulfillment, or joy. To find love I must enter into the sanctuary where it is hidden, which is the mystery of God. And to enter into His sanctity I must become holy as He is holy, perfect as He is perfect.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1961), 37-8.
⁴⁸ *Idem*, 63.

PART THREE: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

CHAPTER FIVE: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Catholic Buddhologist Roger J. Corless writes: “Christian and Buddhist practitioners, without having a single doctrine in common, seem to understand each other at a deep level.”¹ Researching exactly what this “deep level” of understanding is between Christian and Buddhist practitioners is at the heart of the forthcoming comparative analysis.

The preceding chapters introduced the motivation for the present research and the major theoretical and methodological issues that appear in connection with the study. They were likewise designed to provide the required background information, and cultural and historical context. At this point, we are now in a position to start a comparative analysis of Buddhaghosa’s and Teresa’s paths of spiritual development. But before starting our structural comparison, a few preliminary remarks are in order. First, it is worth restating that this comparative exploration is not intended as a mere technical exercise in comparativism. Instead, it is carried out bearing in mind our research question which—as mentioned earlier—is to identify the phenomenological and structural similarities between the processes described by Buddhaghosa and Teresa, with the intention of explaining these parallels. We aim to determine whether there is an underlying level at which both paths converge irrespective of their undeniable differences.

Second, the intention behind the impending comparative undertaking is therefore not to compare and contrast every detail on the whole spectrum of spiritual life described by our two authors—which, if it were to be done, would produce a lengthy albeit rather futile report—but to find out how the two processes are related in terms of phenomenology, methods and the like, in order to detect emerging patterns and telling affinities that could answer our research question. The purpose of this comparative endeavor, therefore, is not to provide an all-inclusive inventory of the ways in which our two selected authors differ from each other. The impending comparative analysis, instead, is limited to identifying particular convergences and divergences as they appear along both paths. Therefore, the comparison does not intend to be exhaustive, but broadly comprehensive.

¹ Roger J. Corless “The Dialogue of Silence. A Comparison of Buddhist and Christian Monasticism with a Practical Suggestion” ed. G. W. Houston, *The Cross and the Lotus: Christianity and Buddhism in dialogue* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985), 82.

Third, the differences in narrative style between *The Path Purification* and *The Interior Castle* also merit consideration, along with how this affects the comparison. Mention has been made of the fact that both works have the advantage of presenting the entirety (of one particular way) of spiritual life in their own traditions. However, on a stylistic level, they are as different as their authors' personalities. We are here faced with a great disparity between Buddhaghosa's scholastic (Abhidhammic) analysis and expression and Teresa's somewhat disorganized but highly-inspired and evocative approach. To properly accommodate both styles at the same time that paving the way for the comparison, Buddhaghosa's inclusiveness and systematicity is matched by the systematization of Teresa's work by generations of Teresian scholars most of them Discalced Carmelites.² Nevertheless, we still prioritize examining the original texts and, as much as possible, let our authors speak for themselves.

Fourth, no preconceived framework has been superimposed upon the comparison. Contrarily, the framework that has been adopted is that which seems to naturally emerge from the comparison. The fourth section of Chapter Two of this investigation is dedicated to introducing the theoretical and methodological approach chosen for the present study. To summarize, taking the two sevenfold (diachronic) sequence of stages as a basis, and using a synoptic juxtaposition method, the two paths are compared by seeking clusters of religious phenomena that seem to be correlated and reveal analogous features. Heeding similarities in descriptions, images, developmental tendencies and the like, a comparative framework has emerged suggested by the spiritual paths themselves, avoiding letting preconceptions, or the lack of the hermeneutic cycle, dictate our findings.

Fifth, and as a final note, it is important to restate, before starting the comparison, that the systems described by Buddhaghosa and Teresa are founded on disparate religious paradigms. The apparent parallels and observable resemblances between both systems do not mean, in our judgment, that we find ourselves facing the same process that is understood in different ways. In our view, both processes are, and always remain, distinct.

As Thomas Merton said, "all comparisons are defective in some respect."³ With these caveats in mind, the precautions and safeguards adopted for the impending comparison should help us to avoid deeply-entrenched errors from the past and pave the way for a better understanding of reasons behind the similarities between both religious systems.

² The names of distinguished Carmelite scholars such as Tomás Álvarez, Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín, Rómulo Cuartas Londoño, Maximiliano Herráiz García, and Secundino Castro Sánchez, will appear throughout the comparison.

³ Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1960), 65.

5.2 THE WORLDLY STATE

Underlying Buddhaghosa's path of purification and Teresa's way of perfection is the understanding of a liberative process that commences with the spiritual condition of the worldly person. Neither of our authors, though, deals with this less-spiritually advanced state in explicit detail. Buddhaghosa does not elaborate on it in the *Visuddhimagga*, speaking only of mankind entangled in a net of craving at the opening of the book (PP 1.1), thus, we shall supplement this discussion with Theravāda doctrine on the subject. Teresa writes about the mundane state as "the soul in the outer courtyard of the castle," but reserves only a small part of the First Mansions to its discussion (1M 1). Nonetheless, it will prove useful to compare what both traditions have to say regarding the worldly state that, in both cases, is the antipode of their state of deliverance.

In Pāli Buddhism the worldly person (monastic or layman) is known as *puthujjana*.¹ Pertaining to the vast majority of the people, this "ordinary person"² is the "ignoble one" (*anariya*), who has not yet entered the path and dwells between the extremes of self-mortification and self-indulgence, as opposed to the one who has adopted the Middle Way and is already on the path, thus being qualified as a "noble one" (*ariya puggala*). The *puthujjana* is the common human being, enslaved by craving and obscured by ignorance, "whose eyes are still covered with the dust of defilements and delusion."³ This ordinary person is "trapped in dungeon of egotism,"⁴ and self-centeredness, holds an unquestioned belief in a substantial and lasting self (*atta-vāda*), and identifies himself *ad sacrarium* with the clinging aggregates (SN 3.22). These common folk is unlearned, without insight into the nature of things or discernment of spiritual matters.⁵

The *puthujjana* has all the ten fetters (*saṃyojana*) that tie human beings to *saṃsāra*. These are: personality-belief (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā*), attachment to rules-rituals (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*), sensuous craving (*kāma-rāga*), ill-will (*byāpāda*), craving for fine-material existence (*rūpa-rāga*), craving for immaterial existence (*arūpa-rāga*), conceit (*māna*), restlessness (*uddhacca*) and ignorance (*avijjā*). The *puthujjana* can be classified as a "blind worldling" (*andha-puthujjana*), that is, one who has neither knowledge nor interest in the Dhamma or as a virtuoso worldling (*kalyāna-puthujjana*), meaning, one who has heard the teachings of the Buddha and is being disciplined in it.

¹ "Puthujjana," EB, 476-78.

² In Buddhism *puthujjana* (from *puthu* "far and wide," "many" + *jana* person) stands for "ordinary person," "average man," the common folk, always as a spiritual category. Cf. "Puthujjana," PED, 518.

³ Bhikkhu Bodhi "The Nobility of the Truths," *BPS Newsletter* (Winter 1991-92), 1.

⁴ *Idem*.

⁵ The *puthujjana* is said to be *ariyānaṃ adassāvī*, namely, lit. unable to discern who is noble (*ariya*) (MN I 21).

Teresa characterizes “the souls outside the castle” as those in mortal sin (1M 2,1). They are many. Attracted by the world, and accustomed to the “insects and vermin” that are their passions (1M 1,6), they live outside of themselves. They identify with their bodies and are attached to external things, thus being unable to enter within. Ignorant of the divinity dwelling inside, unaware of the beauty and sacredness of the soul, they “don't care at all about entering the castle, nor do they know what lies within that most precious place, nor who is within, nor even how many rooms it has” (1M 1,5). Teresa paints a horrific picture of a soul that has gravely and deliberately offended God.⁶ Although by nature brilliant, shining and pure, the soul that falls into mortal sin is so blackened by it that “there's no darker darkness nor anything more obscure and black” (2M 1,1), as “if a black cloth is placed over a crystal that is in the sun” (2M 1,1). Whatever a sinner does in this condition is wretched and filthy and does not contribute to his salvation, as it does not come from the principle of God (1M 2,1). A soul in mortal sin is “like a person completely bound, tied, and blindfolded; for although wanting to see,...cannot,...and remains in great darkness” (R 20). Teresa says those without prayer are like “people with paralyzed or crippled bodies” (*almas tullidas*), unable to govern themselves, and enslaved by their bodies, wants and attachments (1M 1,6). Living in darkness, ill-will and ignorance prevent the soul's restoration to the light.

Notwithstanding the discordant causes of this condition (ignorance, on one side, fallen state on the other), the mundane state described by our authors display areas of convergence: first, the vast majority of the people dwell in them (*Dhp.* 85 and 1M 1). Next, the worldly person holds attitudes and beliefs traditionally opposed to spiritual life: dissolute behavior not abiding by precepts/commandments, sensual desire, lust, ill-will, selfishness, lack of humility, untruthfulness, apathy to spiritual things, and so forth. In addition, the mundane person is described as being outside the path or castle.⁷ Moreover, they are stained by wrongdoing. The castle-soul is by nature clean, shining and bright, and is darkened by sin and moral imperfection (2M 1,1). In Buddhism the mind is by nature luminous, brightly and shining but is tainted by the defilements.⁸ Furthermore, these people are controlled by their disorderly passions and attachments. They are foolish, unlearned,⁹ lacking in self-examination, ignorant of their own nature. In both traditions the worldly state is a life of great suffering and regret. Eventually the unhappiness caused by ignorance in Buddhism and the absence of God in Christianity may lead to a turnabout or religious conversion, which is explored in the next section.

⁶ Cf. vision of the soul in mortal sin in 2M 1 and 1M 2,2.

⁷ The *puthujjana* is said to be an outsider (*bāhīro*), that is, one who has not embarked upon or entered the noble path. For Teresa, souls in mortal sin are those outside the castle, having not entered the castle.

⁸ In AN I.10, the mind is said to be “brightly shining” (*pabhassara citta*) and only tainted by adventitious defilements.

⁹ The *puthujjana* is often characterized as *assutavant* (lit. “one who is not in possession of the *suttas*”).

5.3. RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

5.3.1 Entering the religious life

Our comparative analysis now begins in the proper sense with religious conversion, initiation and the adoption of the monastic way of life. While these are distinct religious phenomena, their treatment is handled jointly in a single section due to their related psycho-spiritual functions and implications. One may object that neither of our writers—Buddhaghosa and Teresa—regards these first steps as part of their respective sevenfold structure of stages, nor do they discuss them in their books. This is true, although surely not because they considered religious conversion to be unimportant, but because they took this indispensable but preliminary phase for granted.¹ At any rate, conversion (here understood in the broadest sense) is an indispensable feature of the dynamics of spiritual growth of both systems that should not be ignored in the present comparative inquiry and for which consideration is required in our line of discourse and argumentation.

5.3.2 Religious conversion

For Buddhists and Christians alike, conversion contains the seed of deliverance. It is based on the recognition that, what the world considers as worthy pursuits, produce an illusory happiness that is spiritually barren and ultimately leaves the person unsatisfied. “Conversion” has several meanings, among them, that of change of religious affiliation. In the present context, it is defined as “an experience associated with a decisive adoption of a religion.”² Etymologically, it comes from the Latin *conversio* meaning “turning about.”³ The Hebrew word *šūb*, translated as “conversion,” also means “to turn around.” As typified by the cases of Buddhaghosa and Teresa, a genuine conversion is indeed a turning point, a major shift in one’s spiritual life.⁴

The idea of conversion is commonplace in Christianity,⁵ understood as repentance, “change of heart,” (*nhm* in Hebrew, *metanoia* in Greek) entailing the sinner’s turning away from sin and turning back to God. In Christianity, converts, assisted by grace, abandon the road that leads to perdition and turn back to the path of salvation, restoring

¹ Buddhaghosa assumes his readers to be monastics (PP 1,1). Teresa explicitly writes for “the nuns of this monastery of our Lady of Mt. Carmel [who] need someone to answer their questions about prayer” (1M Prologue 4).

² “Conversion,” MWD, 159.

³ *Convertere* (*con* “together” + *vertere* “to turn”).

⁴ Pieris comments: “180° turn is intended here because the presupposition is that the sinner is one who is on the way to ‘hell,’ and hell in Pāli is ‘*apāya*,’ literally, ‘going (*aya*) away (*apa*) from the path of salvation’” (personal communication).

⁵ H. T. Kerr and J. M. Mulder (eds.), *Conversion: The Christian Experience* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1983).

their orientation to God.⁶ In Teresa, conversion can be identified with the change of direction consisting of leaving the world away from God and entering the castle within.⁷

In Buddhism, the idea of conversion is also central.⁸ However, in Pāli, there is no exact equivalent for “conversion.” Several related words and expressions convey analogous meaning and are often used as synonymous, among them: *nivattana* (turning around).⁹ The English word “conversion” is also widely used among Buddhist writers in English. In the traditional language of Pāli scriptures, conversion (for monastics) is typically expressed as going forth (*pabbajjā*), away from the worldly pursuits of the *puthujjana*. Thus, conversion is a truly cross-cultural heuristic category, and many comparative Buddhist-Christian studies have been dedicated to its meaning and phenomenology.¹⁰

Religious conversion is a complex and pervasive phenomenon that implicates all dimensions of a person, and affects his worldview and whole course of action. In Buddhism and Christianity sincere conversion is an internal and voluntary act of will. The Buddha through supernatural power sees predisposition (*upaniṣṣaya*) for higher attainment in some people and preaches to them, but conversion is a result of self-will. In Christianity, although conversion requires a loving human disposition and cooperation, it always entails the intervention of God’s grace, as is exemplified in Teresa’s case.¹¹ In Catholicism conversion is reversible, the convert can always fall back into sin. In Buddhism it is also reversible, though at a certain given point it becomes irreversible.¹²

However, no matter how radical and profound, religious conversion is always merely a starting point. All these transformative ideas and new beliefs, change of worldview, and religious feelings must become firmly established in the convert’s mind and heart, typically deepening with the convert’s initiation into the newly adopted religious tradition. To this, we shall now turn our attention.

⁶ Biblically, conversion is epitomized by the return of the prodigal son in Luke’s parable (Lk 15:11-24).

⁷ See Álvarez, “Conversion,” DSTJ, 174-75; and Mary Eileen, *Pilgrimage and Possession. Conversion in the Writings of St Teresa and St John of the Cross* (Oxford: Slg. Press, Convent of the Incarnation, 1983).

⁸ Cf. Christopher Lamb, “Conversion as a Process Leading to Enlightenment: The Buddhist Perspective,” in *Religious Conversion: Contemporary Practices and Controversies*, ed. C. Lamb and M. D. Bryant (London: Cassell, 1999), 75-88; Torkel Brekke, “Conversion in Buddhism?” in *Religious Conversion in India - Modes, Motivations, and Meanings*, ed. R. Robinson and S. Clarke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 181-91; Torkel Brekke, *Religious Motivation and the Origins of Buddhism: a social-psychological exploration of the origins of a world religion* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002); and Sameer Das Gupta, *Buddhism, reflection on religious conversion* (New Delhi: Cyber Tech. Publications, 2010).

⁹ “Nivattana” [fr. *nivattati*]: 1. returning, turning, fig. turning away from, giving up, ‘conversion’ (“Nivattana,” PED, 372). The Pāli word “Nivattana” literally means “turning back,” “returning,” in the sense of putting an end to the cycle of *samsara*. The word *nivattana* often occurs in the sense of “turning away from sin” (*pāpato*) in commentarial literature.

¹⁰ John D’Arcy May, ed. *Converging Ways? Conversion and Belonging in Buddhism and Christianity* (Ottilien: EOS, 2006); and J. W. Heisig, “Converting from Buddhism to Christianity, Christianity to Buddhism,” *Japanese Religions* 22, 107-17.

¹¹ Teresa attributed her conversion to God’s mercy (3M 1,3).

¹² A *sotāpanna* (stream-enterer) is not liable to fall back (*avinipātadhamma*), but apostasy is possible before that stage.

5.3.3 Religious initiation

A logical outcome of conversion, initiation¹³ is the neophytes' public expression of their newly adopted commitment, and their admission into the newly professed religion. For Buddhists and Christians alike, initiation has both a *ritualistic* and *ethical* dimension and, in the two cases, can be categorized metaphorically as the doorway into the spiritual life, symbolized as entry onto the path in Buddhism,¹⁴ and into the castle in Teresa.¹⁵

5.3.3.1 Theravāda initiation and the sacrament of Holy Baptism

In Buddhism and Christianity, the convert is formally admitted into the religious community through certain symbolic practices or initiatory rites¹⁶ that are conducted by an accredited representative of the tradition and mark a change in spiritual status. In Theravāda, the rite of initiation consists of reciting the formula of the Three Refuges sincerely three times¹⁷ which means, “taking refuge in” (or “going for refuge to”) the Three Jewels (*tiratana*), namely, the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha—as formally dispensed by an authorized Buddhist monk—and taking the Five Precepts (*pañcasīla*).¹⁸ This way, the candidates are accepted as laywomen (*upāsikā*) and laymen (*upāsakā*), due members of the Buddhist community and rightful followers of the Buddha.

Traditionally, to be admitted as a member of the Catholic Church, the infant at birth is administered the sacrament of the Holy Baptism. To Christians, Holy Baptism symbolizes the washing away of sin through the death and resurrection of Christ.¹⁹ Through the sacrament of the Holy Baptism, the infant is given entry into the Christian community and salvific grace is granted by God. Baptism is followed (normally at the age of seven) by the sacrament of Confirmation, the “sealing of the covenant created in Holy Baptism,” and through which the baptized consciously accepts the obligations derived from having received Baptism.²⁰ The entrant then celebrates the sacrament of the Holy Communion (Eucharist), which is the sharing in the substance (body) and life (blood) of Jesus Christ.

¹³ Religious initiation is defined here as the rite marking the entrance or acceptance of a person into a religion.

¹⁴ “From ancient times to the present the going for refuge has functioned as the entranceway to the dispensation of the Buddha” Bhikkhu Bodhi, “Going for Refuge and Taking the Precepts,” *The Wheel*, XIX, Kandy, BPS 33 (2012): 281-95.

¹⁵ “The Decree for the Armenians” in the bull “Exultate Deo” by Pope Eugene IV, reads: “Holy Baptism holds the first place among the sacraments, because it is the door of the spiritual life.”

¹⁶ The Buddha rejected irrational attachment to vows and rituals (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*) but he did not reject rites per se (*sīlabbata*).

¹⁷ The formula of the Three Refuges reads: “To the Buddha for Refuge I go, to the Dhamma for Refuge I go, to the Sangha for Refuge I go.” To become a Buddhist does not always require a specific ad hoc ceremony.

¹⁸ Cf. Christopher Lamb, “Conversion as a Process Leading to Enlightenment: The Buddhist Perspective,” 75-88.

¹⁹ In pre-Christian times, Baptism was a rite of ablution (purification by immersion in water).

²⁰ Of course, all Christians must obey the Ten Commandments.

In most Christian denominations an infant is given entry into the Church by Baptism shortly after birth. In Buddhism, by contrast, reciting the *tiratana* is a conscious act of a grown-up rational being. It must be said that there is nothing in Buddhism that parallels the sacrament of Baptism in contemporary mainline Christianity, including Catholicism.²¹ The nearest analogue of a sacrament in Buddhism is the *pabbajja* and the *upasampadā* when a person is radically transformed from lay-status to monkhood at the moment when the entire Saṅgha assembled consents through silence (i.e., through non-contestation) for the third time. It is a sign that effects a real change, as we know a sacrament to be.

In both traditions, initiation is a passage that signifies renunciation of the old person and the coming to be of a new being and puts him or her on the path to righteousness. A difference between the Buddhist and Christian initiations is that while the Buddhists, by taking refuge, express commitment and confidence in the Buddha as a guide for liberation, Christians express faith in Jesus Christ as a source of eternal salvation. Obviously, the ultimate goals of the Buddhist and the Christian initiations are different. The Buddhist rite of initiation commits the person to the Buddhist path of liberation from suffering. What the sacrament of Baptism aims to realize as the transformation of the person, is what Teresa describes as the seventh mansions: spiritual marriage with God.

5.3.3.2 The Five Precepts and the Ten Commandments

All Buddhists, laymen or monastic, are expected by the act of becoming a Buddhist to undertake the Five Precepts (*pañca-sīla*), just as all Christians must observe the Ten Commandments of God, the Decalogue, abiding by them at all times.²² A clear divide exists between these two moral codes with regard to the first three Commandments, which in Christianity are theistic in nature. Abe highlights this difference in which he finds the different standpoints of both traditions. According to Abe, the Christian commitment to theism prioritizes human beings' relationship with God. To this, Abe opposes the prohibition of destruction of life, which is first in the Precepts whilst being the fifth Commandment, emphasizing a prioritization in Buddhism of man's relationships among themselves and with all other sentient beings²³ However, contradicting Abe's opinion, the two supreme Commandments are the love of God and to the neighbor (Mt. 2:37-39). To these two, Christ reduced "all the whole Law and the Prophets" (Mt. 22:40). Thus,

²¹ Originally Baptism was administered only to adults who with conviction, expressed their faith in Christ as the Savior.

²² The Old Testament has several lists of commandments. At the Council of Trent, the Catholic Church adopted St. Augustine's list as dogma, based on the Saint's reading of the Bible in his *Questions of Exodus*. Probably, this was the list of commandments known by Teresa and the one used in our chart.

²³ Masao Abe, "The Problem of Evil Christianity and Buddhism" in *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Mutual Renewal and Transformation*, ed. P. Ingram and F. Streng (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), 141.

love is *the* priority in Christianity and not only the love of God but among human beings (Mt 7:12).²⁴ If any difference exists, it is that Buddhism emphasizes explicitly a universal compassion that encompasses all sentient beings.

Table 3.1 The Five Precepts and the Ten Commandments

The Five Buddhist Precepts	The Ten Christian Commandments
1) Abstaining from killing any living being,	1) Thou shalt not have strange gods before me,
2) Abstaining from stealing,	2) Thou shalt not take the Lords name in vain,
3) Abstaining from sexual misconduct,	3) Remember thou shalt keep the Sabbath,
4) Abstaining from lying,	4) Honor thy Father and Mother,
5) Abstaining from use of intoxicants.	5) Thou shalt not kill,
	6) Thou shalt not commit adultery,
	7) Thou shalt not steal,
	8) Thou shalt not lie,
	9) Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife,
	10) Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods.

Putting the first three Commandments aside, the commonalities at an ethical level, between the Five Precepts and the Ten Commandments have long been observed.²⁵ Moreover, the Christian list follows the same order as the Five Precepts with regard to killing, stealing and lying, probably coinciding in perceiving the severity of these offences. The sixth Commandment is subsumable under the third Precept (sexual misconduct). Among other commonalities, the Commandments, warns Teresa, have to be fulfilled to perfection and met in full at all times (C 4,1), whatever the soul's state (1M 2,15). Equally, the defilements have to be abandoned "totally, completely, and finally."²⁶ Another aspect shared is the essentiality of both moral codes. The Five Precepts are indispensable.²⁷ Jesus Christ said, "If you will enter into life, keep the commandments" (Mt.19:17). And the Ten Commandments is "the summary and epitome of all laws" (CCC Trent). Both also put the person on the path to righteousness. Notwithstanding the similarities, however, it is crucial to realize that the Five Precepts and the Ten Commandments lead to different religious ends. Another clear divide is the different nature of "precepts" and "commandments."²⁸ The Precepts are "principles of training," "ethical guides for living" to be undertaken. The Commandments are divine mandates that demand obedience.

²⁴ Some Catholic theologians, among them Pieris, consider that, according to Jesus and some of the writers of the NT, "love of neighbor is that which is required for salvation," which disqualifies M. Abe's observation even more. This means that "those who do not believe in God and do not follow the first three commandments are saved through love of neighbor according to Jesus (Samaritan in Luke 10: 33-42 and "nations" Mt 25:31-46)" (Aloysius Pieris, personal communication).

²⁵ For a comparison see: Maurice Nyunt Wai, *Pañcasīla and Catholic Moral Teaching* (Rome: Gregorian Bookshop, 2002).

²⁶ Bhikkhu Bodhi, "Going for Refuge and Taking the Precepts."

²⁷ Constant Lounsbury, "The Importance of Pañca Sīla," *The Wheel*, No. 55, Kandy: BPS, 1963.

²⁸ We shall discuss this point when comparing Christian and Buddhist ethics in Section 5.4.2.

The essential point to focus on here is that, in both traditions, by subscribing to a moral code and abiding by it, the most severe violations are avoided and spiritual life begins. By solemnly taking the Three Refuges, and sincerely undertaking the Five Precepts, the Buddhist neophyte formally enters the path leading to liberation. Baptism washes away the original sin through the death and resurrection of Christ (although the effects of original sin remain), and removes all personal sins (CCC 1263). By abiding by the Decalogue, the soul abandons mortal sin and is “justified,” which means that is “made righteous in the sight of God.” With it, in Teresa’s imagery, a soul enters the castle, reestablishing its friendship with God.²⁹ Thus, besides initiation (which is essential), what determines if a person is in or out of the path or the castle is the avoidance of the most serious moral offences.³⁰ These grave transgressions in Catholicism are the mortal sins defined by the Church as violations of a Commandment with regard to a serious matter,³¹ in contraposition to venial sins or mere moral imperfections which are minor trespasses. Mortal sins break the soul’s friendship with God, although God always dwells within it.

There is no official list of mortal sins in Catholicism. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) describes some acts as “grave offences.”³² Mortal sins have their root in the seven capital³³ vices—pride, greed, gluttony, lust, sloth, envy, anger—which are “disordered passions” and, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, a “source of sin.” The seven vices have their origin in the weakness of human beings due to their fallen nature.

In Buddhism, the most serious moral failings to be avoided are those enumerated in the Five Precepts (killing, etc.). As we will see later in detail, these flaws are caused by the “defilements” (*kilesas*) that Bodhi defines as “afflictive mental forces which cause inner corruption and disturbance and motivate unwholesome actions. Their principle members are greed, hatred, and delusion; from these all the secondary defilements derive.”³⁴ All the defilements can be subsumed into Five Hindrances—sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), anger (*byāpāda*), sloth-torpor (*thīna-middha*), restlessness-worry (*uddhacca-kukkucca*), and doubt (*vicikicchā*)—which are born of craving and ignorance. We comparatively analyze the seven vices and the Five Hindrances in Section 5.4.3.1.³⁵

²⁹ Teresa refers to those on the walls of the castle as “those who are in mortal sin” (1M 2,10). Cf. 1M 2,14.

³⁰ To commit a mortal sin takes the soul out of the castle. The rules of *pārājika* (defeat) entail the expulsion of the monastic from the *Saṅgha*. These are: sexual acts, stealing, depriving a human being of life, and false claims of spiritual attainment.

³¹ The CCC states that for a sin to be mortal three conditions must concur: “Mortal sin is sin whose object is a grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent” (CCC 1858).

³² The CCC reads: “grave matter is specified by the Ten Commandments which every Christian must obey” (CCC 1858). In CCC there are several acts considered to be grave matter, among others: fornication, blasphemy, adultery, and murder. For abortion, for example, see CCC 2322.

³³ They are “capital” because they give rise to other sins (Summa, II-II:153:4), “deadly” as they are death to the soul.

³⁴ Bhikkhu Bodhi, “Going for Refuge and Taking the Precepts.”

³⁵ Most mortal sins, such as rape, incest, murder, etc. are subsumable under the acts prescribed within the Buddhist list of the Five Precepts. Others are tradition-specific. Some mortal sins are theistic in nature (e.g. blasphemy). In Theravāda,

5.3.4 Profession of monastic vows

For a spiritual elite, one effect of conversion is a desire to follow a religious vocation. A feature shared by Buddhism and Catholicism is to commit to a monastic tradition, the result of a common need felt by a community of dedicated religious seekers for solitude, reflection, and the adoption of a way of life that supports their practice.³⁶ However, while in Buddhism monasticism is central,³⁷ the way toward a religious calling in Catholicism is complicated by the distinction between priesthood and monkhood. As Boisvert writes: “Perhaps the most crucial difference between Christian and Buddhist monasticism [...] is that the former is merely peripheral [...] while the latter is central.”³⁸ Recall, though, that Buddhaghosa and Teresa, both monastics, address themselves to monks and nuns. To become a monastic is consequently essential to the spiritual process they describe. While the initiation is for everyone, one becomes a monk or nun through “ordination.”³⁹ Through it, the ordinand pledges to follow the monastic rules and takes the vows.

In Theravāda, the profession of monastic vows for novices (*pabbajja*) is specified in the *Vinaya* and the *Pāṭimokkha* codes. The process by which a person becomes a religious mendicant, either male (*bhikkhu*) or female (*bhikkhuni*), is twofold: first, there is a minor ordination, known as *pabbajjā* (lit. “going forth”), through which the aspirant or postulant is bestowed entry into the *Saṅgha* (the community of monks and nuns) and becomes a novice (*samanera*) until reaching the age of twenty. Second, this time a major and proper ordination rite is performed, known as *upasampadā* (lit. “undertaking”),⁴⁰ through which the novice commits to fully undertake the monastic obligations.

In Catholicism, the person becomes a monastic through the rite of profession. The novitiate represents the person’s admission into the monastery. Subsequently, there is a two to four years of training or “formation” (Teresa’s *Constituciones*, rule number 21, mentions one year) that lasts until the novice’s superior recommends that he is a “professed” monastic, which entails taking the vows and adopting the monastic rules.

the five crimes are so heinous that they prevent attaining the stages of *sotāpanna*, *sakadagami*, *anāgāmi* or *arahant* in a lifetime: injuring a Buddha; killing an arahant; creating schism in the Saṅgha, matricide and patricide.

³⁶ “If I truly understand the doctrine declared by the Exalted One, it is not easy for one who remains in household life to fulfill point by point the wholly stainless, wholly purified ascetic life.”

³⁷ For an authoritative account on early Buddhist monasticism: Mohan Wijeratne, *Buddhist Monastic Life According to the Texts of the Theravāda Tradition*, trans. Claude Grangier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

³⁸ Mathieu Boisvert, “A Comparison of the Early Forms of Buddhist and Christian Monastic,” *BCS*, Vol. 12 (1992): 124.

³⁹ In the present context, “ordination” is used as a broad cross-religious category for the process of becoming a monastic. However, in the Catholic Church, strictly speaking, the term “ordination cannot be used for entry into monastic life.” In Catholicism, by profession one is initiated into a religious order monastic or not; by ordination one becomes a presbyter.

⁴⁰ *Upasampadā* (upa+saṃ+pad) means “taking upon oneself,” “undertaking.” See “Upasampadā,” *PED*, 167.

Buddhist ordination entails having taken the Five Precepts⁴¹ (or vows), now extended to Ten Precepts (*dasa sīla*). These five additional abstentions are: 6) eating after midday; 7) dancing, singing, music or any kind of entertainment; 8) the use of garlands, perfumes, unguents and adornments; 9) abstaining from luxurious beds; and 10) accepting or handling gold and silver. Novices and fully ordained monastics⁴² must abide by these ten moral rules which must be fulfilled to perfection. Quite similar abstentions or prohibitions (in essence) can be found in the Constitutions governing Teresa's convents.⁴³

In the Catholic Church, after a period of training (novitiate), the postulant takes three public vows: celibacy-chastity, poverty and obedience,⁴⁴ which are sacred and the votary must fulfill to perfection. [Both Buddhism and Christianity advocate celibacy as well as marital chastity.] Buddhists do not profess these three religious vows as such. However, *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* are celibate, and essentially poor (homeless, mendicants; with a shelter and few possessions provided by the Sangha, through donations provided by lay supporters). Buddhists do not vow obedience to a superior; decisions are made through consensus and otherwise with a majority vote.

The Buddhist and Catholic monastic communities are governed by a codified set of monastic rules. The *Vinaya Piṭaka* regulates life in the Buddhist monastic community.⁴⁵ In particular, one of its three sections, the *Pāṭimokkha*,⁴⁶ contains the disciplinary code that establishes 227 rules for *bhikkhus* and 311 for *bhikkhunis*.⁴⁷ In the case of Teresa, the original *Constituciones de San José de Ávila* were principally inspired by the primitive "Rule of Carmel" and the "old Constitutions." The *Constituciones* were later developed and become the *Rule and Constitutions of the Carmelite Order*.

We shall examine the spiritual role of the monastic codes and the disciplinary rules when discussing asceticism in Section 5.4.

⁴¹ In addition to the Five Precepts, three additional ones can be undertaken willingly by laywomen (*upāsikā*) and laymen (*upāsaka*), thus becoming eight precepts (*aṭṭha-sīla*). These are abstaining from: 6) eating after midday; 7) dancing, singing, music or any kind of entertainment; and 8) from the use of garlands, perfumes, unguents and adornments.

⁴² Lay persons also take these ten vows and, indeed, many people do so in most Theravāda countries on Poya days. Apart from *bhikkhunis*, there is also a category called *dasa-sīla mātā*, or women who profess the ten precepts perpetually. For further information, see Lynn De Silva, *Buddhism: Beliefs and Practices in Sri Lanka* (Colombo, Wesley Press, 1980).

⁴³ See Table 3.2 where we compare the *Pāṭimokkha* and the *Constituciones de San José de Ávila*. See also Hyacinth Kalu, "The Rules and Rites of Ordination in the Buddhist Monastic Code vis-a-vis Catholic Ordination / Profession in the Code of Canon Law" in *Essays on World Religious Thoughts: A Comparative Study* by Hyacinth Kalu (iUniverse, 2014), 87-102.

⁴⁴ The diocesan ministers do not take a vow of poverty; it is the religious (both lay and clerical) who take the three vows. The religious clerics take the vows as part of their religious commitment; the diocesan priest takes the vow of celibacy as an ecclesiastical condition for receiving sacerdotal ordination, officially from the 12th century onwards.

⁴⁵ The code of discipline is contained in one section of the Pāli canon: the basket of Monastic Discipline (*Vinaya-Piṭaka*). The Vinaya has two sections: the *Sutta-Vibhaṅga* and the *Khandhaka*, accompanied by an appendix called *Pārivāra*.

⁴⁶ The *Pāṭimokkha* is a division of the Vinaya Piṭaka contained in the *Sutta-Vibhaṅga*. The contents and purpose of each of these (*Sutta-Vibhaṅga*, *Khandhaka* and *Pāṭimokkha*) will be discussed in the chapter on asceticism.

⁴⁷ Customarily, the Sangha meets twice a month to recite the *Pāṭimokkha* and ensure that the rules are internalized.

5.3.5 Right view and self-knowledge

The conversion process, in any tradition, involves instruction in the essential principles of the religion, and the convert's internalization of its worldview, values and belief system.

In Buddhism, *dukkha* arises from craving (*taṇhā*) which stems from “wrong view” (*miccā-ditṭhi*)⁴⁸ of the nature of reality, distorting a right understanding of how things truly are. The path begins with the substitution of wrong view with right view (*sammā-ditṭhi*).⁴⁹ This involves the convert's assimilation of the Buddha's teaching (*Dhamma*), with its core belief-system (i.e., the Four Noble Truths, dependent-origination), and, particularly, a radical change in the person's self-understanding: the doctrine of no-self (*anattā*). Without “right view,” all of a person's deeds, words and thoughts will lead to suffering, “just as all growth originating from a bitter seed will be of a bitter nature” (AN I 32).

Turning to Teresa's concept of “self-knowledge” (*conocimiento propio*), it refers to a gradual realization of one's true nature in one's creatunerness and nothingness without God.⁵⁰ Through self-knowledge, one learns one's reality, and the origin and essential nature of the soul (*imago dei*), adopting a proper attitude towards God and His creation: true humility. It is a spiritual process that paves the way toward the realization of the truth of the person.

Indeed, between *sammā-ditṭhi* and *conocimiento propio* there are clear differences in nature, both contextual and systemic, but there are likewise intriguing commonalities, which suggest that these principles play a somewhat similar function in their respective systems. Both are soteriological insights; discriminative awareness of their paths and not mere intellectual knowledge. Both are *sine qua non* principles of the utmost importance.⁵¹

Both function as a compass that points to the correct direction of the spiritual path. Such right outlook is taught at the beginning of both paths and acts as their foundations.⁵² The Buddhist path to awakening begins with “right view,” which is the first factor in the

⁴⁸ The Buddha, in his first discourse, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (*The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of the Dharma*) (SN 56,11) summarized *dukkha* as the five clinging aggregates, which is the epitome of wrong view: “in short, the five clinging aggregates is suffering” (*sankittena pañca-upādāna-khandhā dukkha*).

⁴⁹ See Rupert Gettin, “Wrong View (miccha-ditthi) and Right View (samma-ditthi) in the Theravada Abhidhamma,” in B. K. L. Dhammajoti *et al.*, *Recent Researches in Buddhist Studies: Essays in Honour of Professor Y. Karunadasa*, Y. Karunadasa Felicitation Committee (Colombo, Chi Ying Foundation, Hong Kong, 1997), 211-29.

⁵⁰ See Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín, “El Conocimiento de sí en la Meditación Teresiana,” in *La Meditación Teresiana*, ed. Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín (Ávila: CITEs, 2012), 51-90.

⁵¹ Teresa emphasizes the essentiality of self-knowledge (1M 1,2, 2M 1,9, and V.13,15), without which there is no growth.

⁵² Anālayo, *From Grasping to Emptiness. Excursions into the Thought-world of the Pali Discourses* (2). (Onalaska, WA: Pariyatti Publishing, 2012), 27.

Eightfold Path, and “the forerunner in entering upon wholesome qualities” (AN 10,105). Teresa also invites her readers to self-knowledge already in the first section of the first mansions, which she describes as the mansions of self-knowledge (*las primeras piezas, que es el propio conocimiento*) (1M 2,8). And the two principles remain ubiquitous throughout the two spiritual processes and acting as their guiding light. As Anālayo says, “There is no point at which right view is to be left behind,”⁵³ and Anālayo adds: “Right view is not only a precondition for being able to embark on the practice of the path. The same path-factor remains of continuous relevance throughout.”⁵⁴ For her part, Teresa writes: “This path of self-knowledge must never be abandoned [...] self-knowledge and the thought of one’s sins are the bread with which all palates must be fed” (V 13,15).⁵⁵ *Sammā-diṭṭhi* and *conocimiento propio* both deepen through their cultivation and their destination of the two paths coincide with the realization of these fundamental principles.

Right view and self-knowledge are both wide-ranging concepts that refer to an experiential knowledge of one’s own nature bringing about a proper perspective and a right attitude towards reality: humility and selflessness. As Pieris rightly observes, and we shall try to show in the interpretive part of this thesis, “this selflessness is the condition *sine qua non* for salvation in both systems, and where the two spiritualities meet.”⁵⁶

⁵³ Anālayo, *From Grasping to Emptiness*, 32.

⁵⁴ Anālayo, *From Grasping to Emptiness*, 27.

⁵⁵ Cf. 1M 2,8.

⁵⁶ (Aloysius Pieris, personal communication).

5.4 PURIFICATION OF VIRTUE AND TERESA'S INITIAL MANSIONS

5.4.1 Introduction

Buddhaghosa's sevenfold structure of the path to purification begins with "purification of virtue" (*sīla-visuddhi*), consisting of the monastic's firm establishment of virtue. For Buddhaghosa the cultivation of virtue is explicitly the starting point for the spiritual journey in the *Visuddhimagga*. Similarly, the initial mansions in Teresa's crystal castle of the soul can be defined as having the purpose of fighting sin and cultivating virtue, corresponding to the *via purgativa* (*catharsis*) in the classic pre-Vatican II partition of the path into three *vias*.¹ Thus, as Cousins notes, "since the first member of the division is purification or *via purgativa*, it is natural to expect a measure of correspondence between the earlier mansions of *Castillo interior* and Buddhaghosa's initial section on morality." In our view, these correspondences do indeed exist. We also concur with Cousins' continuing remarks: "Most of the points covered in the first three Mansions of Teresa seem to be paralleled in Buddhaghosa, although not always obviously so at first sight."² Additionally, we intend to show that these parallels are even accentuated when comparing Chapter One of the *Visuddhimagga*, titled "Description of Virtue" (*sīla-niddesa*), with Teresa's First Mansions, on the one hand, and "Description of Ascetic Practices" (*dhutaṅga-niddesa*), Chapter Two of the *Visuddhimagga* with the Second and Third Mansions, on the other.

Regarding the arrangement of the present segment of our comparative analysis—purification of virtue and the initial mansions—the object of our inquiry will be divided into two sections. Since the first task to be performed in both accounts is a moral purification,³—involving the avoidance of wrongdoing and the cultivation of virtue—this is the subject of the present section, with the next section devoted to comparing ascetic practices. The current section then is divided into two subsections: the first consists of a comparative analysis of the nature of Buddhist and Christian ethics. The second, compares and contrasts "virtue as the foundation" as presented by Buddhaghosa and Teresa. We should point out that neither of our authors elaborates extensively on morality, because they certainly considered this stage as well-known and handled in their other works.

¹ In Section 4.3.2, we discussed the theory held by Teresian scholars arguing that Teresa's sevenfold structure can be subsumed under the threefold partition of the Christian pathway in three *vias* (i.e. *via purgativa*, *iluminativa* and *unitiva*). In this interpretation, the "purgative way" corresponds to the three initial mansions. As mentioned earlier, we do not make extensive use in our study of the scheme of the three *vias* as a framework for a comparison with Buddhaghosa, although, occasionally (like in the present case), we make reference to it for heuristic purposes.

² Cousins, "The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification," 103.

³ St. Thomas Aquinas wrote: "The first duty which is incumbent on man is to give up sin and resist concupiscence, which are opposed to charity; this belongs to [the stage of] beginners" (Thomas Aquinas, *Heroic Virtue*, Chapter VI, No. 5). Dubay comments that "St. Teresa's starting point is the absolutely basic condition for a serious prayer life: an earnest, continuing effort to rid oneself of sins, imperfections and attachments" (Dubay, *Fire Within*, 81).

5.4.2 Buddhist and Christian ethics

As previously indicated, this section compares Buddhaghosa's "Description of Virtue" (*sīla-niddesa*) in the *Visuddhimagga* and Teresa's initial mansions, where the primary aim is a focus on virtue. However, this section will first set out a series of considerations that should be taken into account to put the comparison into a proper perspective.

Similarities between Buddhist and Christian moral teachings have long been noted.⁴ Despite the likenesses and occasional interchangeable language and terminology, though, closer inspection reveals that both ethical systems remain distinct. The essential fact determining their distinctiveness is that they are integral components of religions rooted in different soteriologies. Buddhist and Christian ethical systems are embedded in distinct systemic contexts, inalienably endowed with particular assumptions and contingent on their principles and aspirations. Their telos and ethos are not subsumable. Christian ethics is theistic, Buddhist non-theistic. The Five Precepts are engrained in the Eightfold Noble Path; the Ten Commandments are God's revelation. Deviating religious conceptions and emphases engender different ethical paradigms. Consequently, to appropriately compare both ethical systems, their natures, grounds, and places relative to the totality of their religious traditions must be differentiated. The discussion will, therefore, turn to theoretical ethics, which contains significant distinctions. However, neither the *Visuddhimagga* nor the *Castillo interior* can be called on to bear testimony to theoretical ethics, for they are vacant of abstract ethical thinking. Instead, the heights must be scaled of the disciplines of moral philosophy⁵ and comparative religious ethics⁶ to obtain a panoramic view of both systems. Various criteria from these two theoretical realms are employed in this section to differentiate the two ethical systems adequately. If the presentation may appear schematic, it is owing to space restrictions.

When the two ethical systems are put under comparative scrutiny, the first striking feature is their agreement on the foundational basicity of morality in their systems. Moral purification is the central and *sine qua non* constituent of Buddhism⁷ and

⁴ Damien Keown, "Christian Ethics in the Light of Buddhist Ethics," *Expository Times* No. 106, (1995), 133.

⁵ Richard H. Jones, *Mysticism and Morality: A New Look at Old Questions* (Lanham, Md.; Lexington Books, 2004).

⁶ David Little and Sumner B. Twiss, *Comparative Religious Ethics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978); Cherdchai Lertjitlekh, *Buddhist paññā: a study of Theravada Buddhist ethics in dialogue with Christian morality* (Saengtham College Press, 1998); D. A. Clairmont, *Moral struggle and religious ethics on the person as classic in comparative theological contexts* (MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); and Langdon Gilkey, "Ethics in Christianity and Buddhism," in *Dialog* 28:1 (1989): 37-42.

⁷ Those times when Buddhism was seen as exclusively preoccupied with personal salvation are long forgotten. Nowadays morality is recognized as "the most important characteristic of Buddhism" (Vyanjana, *Theravāda Buddhist Ethics with Special Reference to Visuddhimagga*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1992, 109). The *Dhammapada* distills Buddhism in one *gāthā*: "Not to do any evil, to cultivate the good and to purify one's mind, this is the teaching of the Buddhas" (*Dhp* 183).

Catholicism,⁸ which emphasizes that spiritual growth always presupposes virtue.⁹ Morality takes primacy as indispensable in both processes, as the problems they address—craving (*taṇhā*) in Buddhism and original sin in Christianity—are quintessentially moral. Morality is also the foundation of spiritual life, as well as the first stage in both processes, which can be fairly described as of a progressive deepening in virtue. Fulfillment of the *Dhamma* in Buddhism and keeping God's law in Christianity are the "way."¹⁰ And *nibbāna* and God's Kingdom are conceived as states of moral perfection.

The origin of Buddhist moral wisdom is the Buddha's experience of the *Dhamma* (the eternal law of righteousness) that was discovered, not conceived by the Buddha or buddhas of the past. Christian morality instead originates in divine revelation, distinctively through Christ's Ministry. The source of Buddhist ethics is the *Buddha dhamma* (in the sense of the Buddha's teachings), which abounds in moral teachings that appear in all canonical scriptures. Christian moral teachings find their primary source in the Bible, particularly the four Synoptic Gospels (as in the Beatitudes). The validity of Buddhist ethics rests on experience rather than authority or revelation. Christian moral teaching is normative by the authority of the Bible as God's revelation. The foundation of Buddhist ethics is the *Dhamma*¹¹(in the sense of the eternal moral law) that should govern the moral conduct of all beings in the universe. The foundation of Christian ethics is God's law and to be virtuous is to live by the Ten Commandments. The effect of a Buddhist or a Christian life of virtue is made visible in the person's spiritual transformation.¹²

Comparative religious ethics offers a series of theoretical taxonomies and insights that prove useful when comparing the Buddhist and Christian moral systems. The foremost distinction is between theistic and non-theistic ethics, where Buddhism and Christianity present opposing viewpoints. The theistic or non-theistic nature of a system defines the nature of the authority of its rules. In Christianity, moral injunctions are "commandments," divine decrees adhered to by followers as ethical imperatives. Buddhist moral teachings and precepts are "descriptive rather than prescriptive"¹³ formulated not as divine mandates but as "training principles," or guidelines, and are

⁸ Teresa writes: "You already know that the cornerstone must be a good conscience and that with all your strength you must strive to free yourselves even from venial sins and seek what is the most perfect" (C 5,3).

⁹ "Without which virtue clansmen find no footing in the dispensation?" (PP 1,24). Teresa warns that unless the soul is virtuous, there can be no progress (7M 4,9), and adds that without morality, striving for salvation is an imagined dream.

¹⁰ Teresa says, "keeping the law of God with perfection is all our good" (C 5,4), is "the way to heaven" (5M 1,1; 2M 1,8).

¹¹ Damien Keown, *Buddhist Ethics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 20.

¹² In both cases these effects are peace, love/compassion, joy and fulfillment. As Keown puts it: "Living in accordance with Dharma [...] is thought to lead to happiness, fulfillment and salvation; neglecting or transgressing it is said to lead to endless suffering" (Keown 2005, 20). The Gospel reads: "If you want to enter life, keep the commandments" (Mt. 19,17)

¹³ Y. Karunadasa, "The Moral Life: Both as a Means and an End," *Middle Way* Vol. 69:1 (1994): 17.

voluntarily adopted by disciples for the sake of liberation.¹⁴ Theistic and non-theistic ethics also vary in the attribution of outcomes to moral acts.

The realm of moral philosophy offers yet other useful distinctions and taxonomies. Contrasted with subjectivism, Buddhism and the Christianity are exponents of moral objectivism (i.e. ethical values are objective, independent of subjective opinion), and moral realism (i.e. ethical sentences express propositions made true by “real” moral values, corresponding to the nature of reality¹⁵). Within moral realism, Buddhism and Christianity both endorse ethical naturalism (i.e., moral values are “natural,” meaning, ingrained in the nature of things). Contrasted with moral relativism, Buddhism and Christianity also jointly hold moral absolutism (i.e., moral norms are valid regardless of culture, time or place), and moral universalism (ethical principles are envisioned to regulate the behavior of all individuals regardless of caste, gender, and the like).

Another useful distinction pertains to normative theories: Our two ethical systems are illustrative of teleological and soteriological ethics, and not of deontological ethics. Buddhist ethics is purposive; its ethos and the ultimate goal is to put an end to suffering.¹⁶ Catholic morality in the Teresian tradition is embraced to avoid sin and purify the heart, that is, to live by God’s law and restore the original state of salvation.¹⁷

Both Christian and Buddhist ethics have often been characterized as virtue ethics. Against deontology (ethics of duties), and consequentialism (consequences of actions), virtue ethics considers morality in terms of perfecting “virtue” or “moral character.”¹⁸ Against a traditional conception of *sīla* as utilitarian,¹⁹ Keown successfully argued that Buddhist ethics is aretaic,²⁰ consisting of the cultivation of wholesome dispositions²¹ (virtues) and is not “merely” a preparatory or instrumental stage, but an end in itself.²² Likewise, Christian ethics is widely considered as virtue ethics.²³ By way of example, Teresa mentions “*virtud*” more than 300 times in her works (not including the letters).

¹⁴ In other words, while the Ten Commandments must be obeyed, the Five Buddhist precepts should be practiced.

¹⁵ Vélez says that in Buddhism “certain external actions are unwholesome or wholesome” Abraham Velez de Cea, “The Criteria of Goodness in the Pāli Nikāyas and the Nature of Buddhist Ethics,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 11 (2004): 134-5.

¹⁶ *Prātimokṣa* (in Pāli *Pātimokkha*), the name of the basic code of monastic discipline, derives from the word *prati* “towards” and *mokṣa* “liberation from cyclic existence” (*saṃsāra*).

¹⁷ Some moral injunctions in the Old Testament can also be interpreted as representative of deontological ethics.

¹⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1985).

¹⁹ Such understanding as in Isaline Blew Horner, *The Basic Position of Sīla* (Colombo: Buddha Sahitya Sabha, 1950).

²⁰ Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (Macmillan, Hong Kong 1992), 2.

²¹ The Buddhist saint has eradicated the roots of evil and is “perfect in knowledge and virtue” (*vijjā-caraṇasampanno*).

²² As argument, Keown cites precepts as moral absolutes, and moral perfection as a goal in itself. See Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, 17.

²³ See, for example, D. J. Harrington and J. F. Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 2002).

Recapping our findings in this section, both systems agree on the centrality of virtue. However, they are informed by irreconcilable paradigms; hence there is an unbridgeable schism between them. Theistic and non-theistic ethical systems entail discrepancies in the origin, sources, validity, foundation, binding force and consequences of moral rules. Yet, Buddhism and Christianity are exponents of moral objectivism, supporters of moral realism and ethical naturalism. And they both also embrace moral absolutism and moral universalism, while normatively each is an illustration of *teleological* and *soteriological*, rather than *deontological ethics*. Finally, both religious systems are described as fostering virtue ethics, an important point which we will revisit below.

To conclude, even though the two ethical paradigms are irreconcilable, their ethical systems share some features that facilitate the generation of a comparable moral transformation. In fact, advanced practitioners in both traditions share moral qualities mutually recognizable. In order to examine the moral transformation underlying these similarities but also the differences, the next subsection examines the changes that actually occur in Buddhaghosa's "Description of Virtue" and in Teresa's initial mansions.

5.4.3 Description of virtue and the first mansions

Having examined the nature and most salient characteristics of Buddhist and Christian morality, by summarily yet inclusively considering the two ethical systems, we are now in a better position to compare and contrast Ch. One of the *Visuddhimagga*, "Description of Virtue," with Ch. One of *Castillo interior*, "First Mansions". In doing this, we will first consider morality as the cornerstone of spiritual life in both traditions.

5.4.3.1 Morality as the foundation

Virtue in both soteriological systems is viewed as preceding, essential, and primary. The priority of virtue is shown by the fact that it constitutes the first stage in both paths. In the *Visuddhimagga*, *sīla-visuddhi* comes first within the basic framework of the sevenfold purification (*satta-visuddhi*), as described in the *Rathavināta Sutta* (MN 24). Buddhaghosa also states that "virtue is the beginning of the dispensation" (PP 1.10).²⁴ *Sīla* is interpreted literally as fore-runner (*sira-atthena*),²⁵ as virtuous conduct always comes first. Likewise, a firm founding in virtue is the essential endeavor of the soul in the

²⁴ In the Eight-Fold Path, *sīla* corresponds to right action, right speech and right livelihood.

²⁵ Maheśa Tivārī explains: "the word *sīla* is interpreted in three ways, namely; as a foundation-stone (*sīlana-atthena*), calming down (*sīlala-atthena*) and acting as fore-runner (*sira-atthena*)" Maheśa Tivārī, *Perspectives on Buddhist ethics*, (Department of Buddhist Studies, Delhi University, 1989), 61.

First Mansions (and *via purgativa* in general), as clearly implied in Teresa's account.²⁶ If our two writers begin with virtue, it is because they consider it to be the foundation upon which the spiritual edifices to be erected are built.²⁷ Buddhaghosa considers *sīla* the basis (*ādhāra*) of spiritual life.²⁸ Moreover, *sīla* is interpreted literally as the foundation stone (*sīlana atthana*)²⁹ on which the structure of *samādhi* and *paññā* is built.³⁰ Likewise, for Teresa virtue is the cornerstone (*primera piedra*) upon which the spiritual life rests.³¹ The essentiality of virtue in both systems is shown by being a *sine qua non* condition for progress. Without *sīla*, spiritual attainment will be out of reach. The *Visuddhimagga* reads: "without which virtue clansmen find no footing in the dispensation?" (PP 1.24). Teresa is equally adamant in warning that without virtue there is no possibility of growth: "it is necessary that your foundation consists of more than prayer and contemplation. If you do not strive for the virtues and practice them, you will always be dwarfs" (7M 4,9). Finally, the primacy of morality in both systems is equally demonstrated by the fact of constituting their foremost principle. Morality at the initial stage, in both cases, has the purpose of purifying one's moral behavior. The observance of God's Commandments and Buddhist Precepts always has a spiritual purpose, not mere external adherence.

What is the moral condition of the person who enters and remains in this first stage? In the *Visuddhimagga*, moral training (*sīla-sikkhā*) begins right after the first ordination (*pabbajja*), after the person has gone to the Three Refuges and undertaken the Ten Precepts (*dasa-sīla*). The reference is to the act of becoming a novice, a *sāmaṇera* who takes only the *tisaraṇa* and *dasa-sīla* in contrast with *upasampadā* or higher ordination. Teresa refers to the souls who have entered the first chambers as "beginners." They have overcome mortal sin, in contrast to those outside the castle, still stained by it.³² Therefore, in both accounts, starting the path presupposes avoiding severe offences.³³

In both cases, the initial stage is also accompanied by heightened self-awareness and reflectiveness. *Sīla-visuddhi* implies vigilance of wrong action and understanding its

²⁶ Like Teresa, St. Thomas Aquinas says that "the first duty which is incumbent on man is to give up sin" (ST II-II:183:4).

²⁷ Chilson asserts that "The primary Christian task is the development of spiritual life built upon a moral foundation" Richard Chilson, *Catholic Christianity. A Guide to the Way, the Truth and the Life* (Mahwah-New York, Paulist Press, 1987), 27.

²⁸ Buddhaghosa interprets *sīla* etymologically as composing (*sīlana*), in the sense of "upholding (*upadhāraṇa*), meaning a state of basis (*ādhāra*) owing to its serving as foundation for profitable states" (PP 1.19).

²⁹ Maheśa Tivārī states: "Nagasena identifies *sīla* as having the characteristic mark of 'base' or 'foundation' [...] As foundation stone it is the base of the whole building, so is *sīla* for the moral structure of character" Maheśa Tivārī, *Aspects of Buddhism: Based on Pāli Sources* (Banaras Hindu University Publication Cell, 2001), 26.

³⁰ Angraj Chaudhary, *Essays in Buddhism and Pāli Literature* (Delhi, India: Eastern Book Linkers, 1994), 101.

³¹ Teresa writes: "You already know that the cornerstone must be a good conscience and that with all your strength you must strive to free yourselves even from venial sins and seek what is the most perfect" (C 5,3).

³² A soul gains "justification" (moral sin is cleansed from a soul) by faithfully abiding by the Ten Commandments (1M 2,10). Teresa says of the souls in the First Mansions that they "are not dark and black, as when the soul is in sin" (1M 2,14).

³³ See Section 5.4.1.1; Meadow *et al.* "Congruent Spiritual Paths," 182.

consequences and, as such, introversion and self-awareness.³⁴ Teresa describes the first mansions as the state of neophytes who have begun to enter inside themselves (*dentro de sí*) (1M 1,5). This interiorized awareness is brought about by prayer and reflection. Yet, these people are still spiritual apprentices in need of further purification.

Sīla-visuddhi, as an initial stage, implies a virtue that has not yet been utterly purified.³⁵ The fact that *adhi-sīla* (higher morality) is attained through “training” (*sikkhā*) also reveals this ameliorative aspect. Teresa, for her part, states that the souls already in First Mansions have “good intentions,” but are still worldly (1M 2,12).³⁶ They entered the castle but accompanied by “many reptiles,” and still dwell in their “lower rooms” (1M 1,8), hindered by many impediments. Consequently, in both accounts, the virtue needed to remain at the initial stage is not moral perfection, which in both traditions is only attained at the paths’ end, but ethical living in action, speech, livelihood and intention.³⁷

To surpass the initial stage of spiritual growth, a higher morality (virtue) is required. As stated by Buddhaghosa, the ethical level required by the trainee to commence the practice of mental concentration (*samādhi*) is to be “firmly established in virtue” (PP 1.1). To reach such a stage, perfection in ethical conduct should not deviate from the smallest detail: *Sīla* is strict for monastics: as the precepts should be kept intact and not even the smallest rule should be transgressed. Teresa does not condition the beginning of prayer with having reached a high level of morality, although it is clear that growth in virtue is essential for progress in prayer.

In both accounts, this process of moral purification is one of twin abandonment of vice and cultivation of virtue—in Teresa’s lexicon “take away the vices and put in the virtues” (V 28,11). Consequently, vice and virtue will be the topic of the following two sections.

5.4.3.2 The abandonment of the *kilesas* and vices

As stated by Buddhaghosa, the aim of the purification of virtue is “surmounting the states of loss” and “abandoning of defilements by substitution of opposites” (PP 1.12). In Buddhism, the defilements—or unwholesome dispositions—are known as “*kilesas*.”³⁸

³⁴ As the Indologist Gavin Flood points out, interiority—what he calls “inwardness without a self”—is a feature of all forms of Buddhism that begins with virtue (*sīla*) and continue throughout the spiritual process. Flood writes: “The famous story of Siddhartha Gautama testifies to the importance of inwardness that lies at the root of the tradition” Gavin Flood, *The Truth Within A History of Inwardness in Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 167.

³⁵ This progressive dynamism is implicit in the structure of the path of purification itself.

³⁶ Teresa says souls in first mansions are “involved in worldly things ...absorbed with its possessions, honor” (1M 2,14).

³⁷ Training in higher morality (*adhisīla-sikkhā*) seeks avoidance of misconduct at bodily, verbal, and behavioral levels.

³⁸ P. V. Bapat, “Kleśa (kilesa) in Buddhism—with special reference to Theravada Buddhism,” in *A Study of Kleśa: A Study*

The word *kilesa* is translated as “stain,” “soil,” “impurity.” In the ethical sense, it may mean “depravity” or “lust.”³⁹ Connotations of “defilement” or “corruption” are also given.⁴⁰ Other common renditions include: “afflictions,” “negative emotions,” or “mind poisons.” In the Pāli Canon, *kilesa* likewise has the meaning of “passion” or refers to “passion(s).”⁴¹ The Pāli word “*mala*,” which denotes “stain,” or “maculation,” is a common synonym. Another term for defilement is *āsava*, for which the meanings of “outflow,” “poisons” (that intoxicate the mind), or “mental pollutants” are specified. *Āsava* is also frequently used as a synonym for *kilesa*,⁴² though technically they are different notions.⁴³ The *kilesas* in their subtler or dormant form are known as the *anusayas* or “underlying tendencies.”⁴⁴

The *kilesas* are defined as “mental factors that disturb the mind and incite unwholesome (*akusala*) deeds of the body, speech, and/or mind.”⁴⁵ In Pāli texts, they are described as defiled states that “cloud” or “darken” original purity and the pristine clarity of the mind,⁴⁶ and should be replaced by wholesome states and dispositions illuminating it. *Kilesas* are also referred to as “hindrances,” “impediments” or “obstacles” that hamper mental maturity and should be overcome by the substitution of opposites (PP 1.12). And they are also known as the “origin” or the “roots of evil” (*akusala mūla*). When unguarded, the *kilesas* may manifest themselves in unwholesome actions that tie human beings to the worldly existence and result in suffering—i.e. the figurative sense of “affliction” is given often to the word *kilesa*. The *kilesas*, and the hurtful actions they provoke, must be eliminated to attain liberation. Yet, throughout “purification of virtue” the *kilesas* are only “abandoned,” not completely “suppressed,” which only occurs by concentration, or “cut off,” which only occurs by understanding (*paññā*) (PP 1,12).

The *Sutta Piṭaka* does not provide a complete list of defilements but mentions, among others: greed, egotism, ignorance, anger, attachment, envy, lack of conviction, malice, stinginess, obstinacy, impetuosity, arrogance, conceit and doubt.⁴⁷ The *Abhidhamma*

of Impurity and its Purification in the Oriental Religions ed. Genjun H. Sasaki (Tokyo: Shimizukobundo, 1975), 119-28; and You Mee Lee, *Beyond Āsavas and Kilesa: Understanding the Roots of Suffering According to the Pāli Canon* (Nedimala: Buddhist Cultural Centre, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2009).

³⁹ “Kilesa,” PED, 244.

⁴⁰ Ibid. Buddhaghosa writes: “only virtue’s water can wash out the stain in living things” (PP 1,24).

⁴¹ Karunaratne states: “The term Kilesa has thus become the standard term for passions in the scholastic works of Pāli literature” (Karunaratne, “Kilesa,” EB, 213).

⁴² “The term [*āsava*] is a synonym of the *kleśas* (afflictions, defilements), since objects (such as the five skandhas) that can serve as objects of defilement are ‘contaminated’ (*sāsrava*)” (“Āsrava,” PDB, 71).

⁴³ “They [the *āsavas*] are: (1) the contaminant of sensuality (*kāmāsrava*); (2) the contaminant of continuing existence (*bhavāsrava*); and (3) the contaminant of ignorance (*avidyāsrava*); and often added to this list (4) the contaminant of views (*dṛṣṭyāsrava*)” (“Āsrava,” PDB, 71). “Freedom from the *āsavas* constitutes Arahantship” (“Āsavas,” PED, 130-31).

⁴⁴ “Anusaya,” PED, 52.

⁴⁵ “Kleśa,” PDB, 438.

⁴⁶ The Buddha states: “Luminous, monks, is the mind. And it is defiled by incoming defilements” (AN 1.8-10).

⁴⁷ Silva says, “The *Simile of the Cloth* cites sixteen such defilements: greed, covetousness, malevolence, anger, malice, hypocrisy, spite, envy, stinginess, deceit, treachery, obstinacy, impetuosity, arrogance, pride and conceit” (Padmasiri de Silva, “Buddhist ethics” in *A Companion to Ethics*, edited by Peter Singer (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1991), 64.

Piṭaka reckons the “ten fetters of becoming.”⁴⁸ Buddhaghosa lists ten defilements, namely, greed (*lobha*), hate (*dosa*), delusion (*moha*), conceit (*māna*), wrong view (*micchādiṭṭhi*), doubt (*vicikicchā*), torpor (*thīnaṃ*) restlessness (*uddhaccaṃ*), shamelessness (*ahirikaṃ*) and recklessness (*anottappaṃ*) (PP 22.49). The first three fetters (greed, hate, delusion) are the most important, known as the “roots of suffering.”⁴⁹

A broader classification of defilements is the “Five Hindrances” (*pañca nīvaraṇāni*), thus called since they are unwholesome mental states that hinder success in meditation. These are: “sensual desire” (*kāmacchanda*), “ill will” or “anger” (*byāpāda*), “sloth-torpor” (*thīna-middha*), “restlessness-worry” (*uddhacca-kukkucca*), and “doubt” (*vicikicchā*).⁵⁰

Turning now to Teresa, if the presence of mortal sin keeps the soul in the courtyard of the castle, it is venial sin⁵¹ that impedes the progress through the First Mansion.⁵² Like the *kilesas*, Teresa considers sin a “stain,” “soil” or a “dark and black thing” (1M 2,1) that darkens (*oscurece*) the soul which, by nature, is shining, beautiful and pure (1M 1,1). [The Latin word *macula*, a synonym of *peccatum* (sin), also means “spot,” “stain”]. To illustrate the tainting effects of immoral conduct, both Buddhaghosa and Teresa use the image of a stained piece of cloth in contrast with the immaculate purity of virtue.⁵³ If *kilesas* and *āsavas* are “mind poisons,”⁵⁴ in another shared image Teresa speaks of sins as “snakes and vipers and venomous creatures” that poison the heart (1M 2,14).⁵⁵

The Catholic Church does not provide a list of venial sins. The Seven Capital Sins or Seven Deadly Sins,⁵⁶ is a taxonomy traditionally used to categorize and classify sin.⁵⁷ However, in strict sense, the seven deadly sins are a taxonomy not of sins but of vices.

⁴⁸ *Dhs* 1113-34 and *Vibh* XII.

⁴⁹ In the Theravāda tradition, ignorance, attachment and aversion are considered the unwholesome roots (*akusala-mūla*). And their opposite, that is, *amoha*, *alobha* and *adosa* (respectively) are used to describe *nibbāna*.

⁵⁰ In AN, IV, 9 seven propensities are also mentioned.

⁵¹ The difference between mortal sin and venial sin has been already been pointed out. Venial sin does not create a rift in the soul’s relationship with God, nor does it mean death of the soul or to deprive it of sanctifying grace. Teresa knows that even the Apostles were not free from them but any deliberate sin must be avoided (C 13,3; and V 25,20).

⁵² The presence of venial sin is the hermeneutic key for understanding the 1M (as moral imperfection is for the 2M). In *Vida*, Teresa relates how in her initial years, mostly due to an improper direction, she was careless about venial sins and “paying little attention to venial sins is what destroyed me” (V 4,3), keeping her for 18 years in the 1M (V 8,1). Only with her second conversion did she free herself from sin. She advises guarding against venial sins to move to the 2Ms.

⁵³ To exemplify the staining effects of defiling virtue, Buddhaghosa introduces the image of a piece of cloth that is torn (as in the case of a man who has broken the training course at the beginning or the end, by any of the seven offences), broken (in the middle), blotched (by repeated offences), or stained (as a trainee who breaks the precepts twice or thrice in succession), in contrast with the cleanness of the robes of a virtuous monastic (PP 1.143). Teresa, speaking of sin before entering the castle, says: “It should be kept in mind here that the fount, the shining sun that is in the center of the soul, does not lose its beauty and splendor; it is always present in the soul, and nothing can take away its loveliness. But if a black cloth is placed over a crystal that is in the sun, obviously the sun’s brilliance will have no effect on the crystal even though the sun is shining on it.” (1M 2,3). Cf. V 40,5.

⁵⁴ The Mahāyāna tradition speaks of the *kleśas* as five poisons: the three poisons plus pride and jealousy.

⁵⁵ Jesus said to His disciples: “out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man” (Mt 15:19).

⁵⁶ Not to be confused with “mortal sin.” A sin is called “capital” because it might engender other sins, venial or mortal.

⁵⁷ Though this taxonomy does not appear in Teresa’s works.

“Vice” comes from the Latin *vitium*, which stands for failing, defect, fault, blemish, vice. It is defined as “immoral or wicked behavior,” or “a weakness of character or behavior; a bad habit.”⁵⁸ The difference between vice and sin must be distinguished: where vice is a “flaw in human nature as defined by reason,” sin instead is an “offense to God’s law.” Vice may lead to the commission of sin (venial or mortal), but not necessarily.⁵⁹

The affinity between the notions of *kilesa* and vice did not escape the authors of PED, who wrote that *kilesa* is “tantamount to our terms lower, or unregenerate nature, sinful desires, vices, passions.”⁶⁰ And it is not infrequent to translate the word *kilesa* as “vice.” Like the five hindrances, the seven vices are source of evil that hamper or bind the soul and, unguarded, lead to degeneracy and bring affliction. Both are generated from within, should be understood as opposite to the virtues and are rooted in the passions which in themselves are not good or evil but, when not submitted to reason, may constitute fetters.

In the order given by Pope Gregory, and later repeated by Dante Alighieri in the *Divine Comedy*, the Seven Capital Sins are: pride (*superbia*), envy (*invidia*), wrath (*ira*), sloth (*acedia*), avarice (*avaritia*), gluttony (*gula*), and lust (*luxuria*). This list enumerates them in relation to charity and opposed to the Seven Heavenly Virtues.⁶¹ As previously stated, the Seven Capital Sins properly understood are not sins but vices and traditionally serve to identify the predominant passion or “character” that defines a person.

The similarities in content between the Five Hindrances and the Seven Capital Sins have also been observed.⁶² Yet, there are important differences between the two lists. A comparative analysis of the Five Hindrances and the Seven Capital Sins follows next, and while necessarily concise, it shall cover some of these similarities and differences.

Mary J. Meadow and her Carmelite coauthor Kevin Culligan, comparing the Five

⁵⁸ “Vice” *Oxford English Dictionary*. Web source: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/vice>

⁵⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas: “a capital vice is that which has an exceedingly desirable end so that in his desire for it a man goes on to the commission of many sins all of which are said to originate in that vice as their chief source” (ST II-II: 153:4).

⁶⁰ “Kilesa,” PED, 244.

⁶¹ John’s list of “pride, avarice, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth (N I, 2-7) was probably known to Teresa.

⁶² Comparing the spiritual path of Saint John of the Cross with Buddhaghosa’s path of purity, Meadow and Culligan write: “John describes the faults of these individuals [beginners] [...] under the rubric of each of the seven capital sins seen as manifesting in subtle “spiritualized” fashion: pride, avarice, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth (Night I, 2-7; pp. 299tT). Theravāda Buddhists think in terms of five hindrances that hamper the aspirant’s progress: greed, aversion, sloth, torpor, restlessness, anxiety, and doubt. Greed encompasses lust, avarice, and gluttony from John’s list. Aversion covers envy and anger. Sloth/torpor corresponds to John’s sloth. Doubt involves concern about both the value of the practice in which one is engaged and one’s ability to persevere. Restlessness! Anxiety also reflects concern about self-approval and the opinions of others. Functionally, the lists are quite similar. The primary problem is a habitual preoccupation with oneself, one’s gratifications or dissatisfactions, and what both oneself and others think of one. John (A III, 16tT) elaborates greatly on the various kinds of such goods in which one can take satisfaction and the harm in so doing. Even delight in spiritual and moral goods carries risks. Buddhist practitioners find similar discussions of the hindrances and how to work with them in such writings as the Abhidhamma-Pitaka and the VisuddhiMagga. Overcoming them leads to the concentration, or Purity of Mind, necessary for practice to deepen” Meadow and Culligan, “Congruent Spiritual Paths,” 182.

Hindrances with the Seven Capital Sins as given in John's list—to which these authors add the “supreme hindrances” of greed (*lobha*), hate (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*),⁶³ as a canopy that surpasses and covers them—write: “Greed encompasses lust, avarice, and gluttony from John's list [of the Seven Deadly Sins]. Aversion covers envy and anger. Sloth/torpor corresponds to John's sloth. Doubt involves concern about both the value of the practice in which one is engaged and one's ability to persevere. Restlessness and anxiety also reflect concern about self-approval and the opinions of others.”⁶⁴ *Lobha*, translated as lust or greed, indeed, encompasses *luxuria* (lust) and *avaritia* (avarice or greed). *Dosa*, rendered as hatred, aversion or ill-will, includes features of *invidia* (envy), *ira* (wrath) and the contravention of the “supreme commandment” of communal love. *Moha* has relation to *superbia* (pride). In Christianity pride is the paramount vice and, when acted upon, the deadliest sin, as opposed to God's love. Buddhism emphasizes also the need of eradicating the delusion of “I” and warns of the dangers of pride.⁶⁵

But, limiting ourselves to comparing merely the Five Hindrances and the Seven Sins, *kāmacchanda* (i.e. sensual desire) includes features of *luxuria* (lust) and *gula* (gluttony). *Byāpāda* (ill-will) corresponds with certain aspects of the notion of *ira* (anger or wrath). Regarding *thīna-middha* (sloth/torpor) it overlaps with *pigritia seu acedia* (sloth).⁶⁶ *Uddhacca-kukkucca* (restlessness-worry) has no homologue among the Seven Capital Sins but, as Pieris, notes, “as for *uddacca-kukkucca*, it corresponds to “remorse” which St. Paul finds unhealthy; it is contrasted with repentance, which is recommended.”⁶⁷ As for *vicikicchā* (doubt) neither is it mentioned in the Christian list of the Seven Capital Sins but “faith in God” must exist in the Christian, impeding doubt, mistrust and anxiety.

In conclusion, we would say that, although the correspondences between the Five Hindrances and the Seven Deadly Sins are not perfect, we agree with Meadow and Culligan who conclude that “functionally, the lists [of the Seven Sins with the Five Hindrances] are quite similar.”⁶⁸ Therefore, we might infer, the abandonment of the Five *Kilesas* and Seven Vices must produce a similar transformation in a person's character.⁶⁹

⁶³ Meadow and Culligan call greed, hate, and delusion, the “supreme vices,” and “roots of suffering.” For Khāntipālo, the relation of the five hindrances to the three “unwholesome roots” is this: “greed corresponds with sensual desire, aversion with ill-will, and delusion with lethargy and drowsiness, agitation and worry, and skeptical doubt” (Khāntipālo 2003, 48).

⁶⁴ Meadow and Culligan, “Congruent Spiritual Paths,” 184.

⁶⁵ “*Māna*,” translated as “pride” or “arrogance,” is one of the ten fetters in Theravāda and one of the fourteen unwholesome mental factors in the *Abhidhamma*. *The Dhammapada* reads: “Only for his ruin does renown come to the fool” (*Dhp.* 72).

⁶⁶ *Acedia* has a specific sense in the desert fathers: it means “spiritual” sloth rather than mere physical laziness.

⁶⁷ Aloysius Pieris, personal communication.

⁶⁸ Meadow and Kevin Culligan, “Congruent Spiritual Paths,” 184.

⁶⁹ The similarities between the Seven Deadly Sins and the Five Hindrances were also pointed out by Smart who concludes: “So though the way virtues and vices are described varies somewhat, there appear to be fairly broad agreements about the behavior required of a person undertaking the Christian or the Buddhist life” Ninian Smart, “What Would Buddhaghosa Have Made of The Cloud of Unknowing,” in *Mysticism and Language*, ed. Steven Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 103-22.

5.4.3.3 The cultivation and acquisition of virtue

A defining feature common to *sīla-visuddhi* and the *via purgativa* is cleansing efficacy, that is, the purging and washing away of moral impurities. However, moral growth does not depend exclusively on the negative aspect of the removal of evil tendencies (*vices*). As noted earlier, Christian and Buddhist ethics are best characterized as virtue ethics.⁷⁰ Compared to deontology (duty-based ethics) and consequentialism (consequences of action) virtue ethics considers morality in terms of improved traits of character: virtues.⁷¹ The opposite of vice, a virtue is a good habit, a wholesome source of action. A virtuous person possesses and exercises excellent and admirable moral qualities. Virtue is then well established in the monastic (in all traditions) by the transformation of his character, through the positive adoption of salutary dispositions conducive to liberation/salvation.⁷² The eradication of vices and the acquisition of virtues are, therefore, two parallel and concurrent practices, the concave and convex of the same transformative process.⁷³

Interestingly, our two traditions use similar images to describe this twofold process. Both traditions liken the expurgation of the weeds of vice and the planting of seeds of virtue to good gardening.⁷⁴ Both compare the vices to stains that darken the mind or soul and must be removed so that virtue can shine.⁷⁵ In both traditions, the acquisition of virtue is a continuous process that increases at each stage of growth and leads to perfection,⁷⁶ aided by knowledge (in Christianity knowledge of God's word and example) and spiritual practice. An essential difference is the self-reliance found in Buddhism when contrasted with the necessary intervention of God through grace in the Christian tradition. Teresa explains how God and the soul cooperate in the development of virtue and how God may infuse (V 6,9), fortify (V 7,9) and make the virtues shine in the soul (V 4,10).⁷⁷

⁷⁰ In Section 5.4.2. Cf. James Whitehill, "Buddhist Ethics in Western Context: The Virtues Approach," JBS, 1 (1994) 1-22.

⁷¹ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.

⁷² Buddhism and Christianity both express their moral codes negatively. The reverse of a vice is the opposite virtue. Buddhaghosa says: "the abandoning of defilements by substitution of opposites is shown by virtue" (PP 1.12).

⁷³ Our two religious traditions describe their processes as of a progressive purging of defilements and implanting of virtues. For Buddhism see Keown, *Buddhist ethics*, 12. The Buddha is said to have abandoned all evil states of mind (*sabbakusala-dhammapahīno*) but be endowed with wholesome mental traits (*kusaladhammasamannagato*).

⁷⁴ Bhikkhu Bodhi writes: "the process of purifying virtue can be compared to growing a flower garden [...] We do not begin by planting the seeds in expectation of a bountiful yield. We have to start with the duller work of weeding out the garden and preparing the beds. Only after we have uprooted the weeds and nourished the soil can we plant the seeds in the confidence that the flowers will grow healthily" (Bodhi 1981, 71). Teresa also says: "beginners [...] are starting to cultivate a garden on very barren soil, full of abominable weeds. His Majesty pulls up the weeds and plants good seed... And with the help of God we must strive like good gardeners to get these plants to grow and take pains to water them so that they don't wither but come to bud and flower and give forth a most pleasant fragrance" (V 1,6). Cf. V 21,8.

⁷⁵ Padmasiri de Silva says: "Buddhist ethics deal with the nature of the evil states which darken the mind, as well as wholesome states which illuminate the mind" (Silva 1991, 64). We find a similar image in Teresa (1M 1,2).

⁷⁶ The Buddha explains how the progressive acquisition of "wholesome virtues lead gradually up to the summit" (AN 5,2). Teresa says to her sisters "If you do not strive for the virtues and practice them, you will always be dwarf" (7M 4,9).

⁷⁷ Teresa adds that ultimately all virtues come from God (V 14,5).

The Theravāda tradition holds several lists of qualities leading to arahantship. Character traits opraised in Pāli scriptures include: truthfulness (*sacca*), determination (*adhiṭṭhāna*), generosity (*dāna*), patience (*khanti*), renouncement (*nekkhamma*), detachment (*appicchatā*), contentment (*santuṭṭhi*),⁷⁸ and gratitude (*kataññu*). The ten perfections (*dasa-pāramita*),⁷⁹ and the *brāhmavihāras*,⁸⁰ can also be considered virtues. Teresa surely would agree with many of these virtues, some similar to the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:3),⁸¹ although each virtue in the two traditions has different nuances. Teresa would include other virtues similarly valued in Buddhism.⁸² Nonetheless, a more comprehensive enumeration would unveil undeniable differences.

The Christian tradition prioritizes the love of God and neighbor, recalling the Theological Virtues of Christian theology.⁸³ Although some correspondences can be drawn between the Four Cardinal Virtues—prudence (*prudentia*), justice (*iustitia*), temperance (*temperantia*), courage (*fortitudo*)—and analogous qualities in Buddhism, the three Theological Virtues of faith, hope and charity, are infused by God, thus cannot be acquired, and have a theological imprint inconsistent with the telos of Buddhism.⁸⁴

Similarly, some of the Buddhist virtues (e.g. *paññā*) are not strictly ethical and are incongruous with the spirit of Christianity. In addition, the two traditions conceive the virtues differently, namely, in line with their own doctrinal outlook, and prioritize them according to the specific place they occupy in the overall systems.⁸⁵ Notwithstanding the differences, the virtues enumerated by both traditions are similar, in many cases interchangeable, and hence generate a similar changes in the practitioner's disposition.

⁷⁸ *Appicchatā* and *santuṭṭhi* often occur in this order in the Pāli texts. *Appicchatā* literally means "having minimum desires/needs" (*appa+icchā*) but, idiomatically, it is to "have the basic needs and nothing more" [corresponding to evangelical poverty in Christian spirituality] whereas *santuṭṭhi* is the result of *appicchatā* and means "contentment" (from the root *tuś* meaning "rejoice," "be happy"). Poverty and contentment are virtues greatly valued by Teresa.

⁷⁹ The Ten Perfections (*dasa pāramīs*) appear in various places in the Pāli Canon (e.g. the *Buddhavaṃsa*, the *Jātakas*). These Ten Perfections are: generosity (*dāna*), virtue (*sīla*), renunciation (*nekkhamma*), wisdom (*paññā*), energy (*virīya*), patience (*khanti*), truthfulness (*sacca*), determination (*adhiṭṭhāna*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*).

⁸⁰ Loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), altruistic joy (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*).

⁸¹ Like comparing the Buddhist Five Precepts with the Ten Commandments, comparing the Noble Eightfold Path with the Eight Beatitudes has become commonplace in Buddhist-Christian comparative literature. Undoubtedly, the eight "rightnesses" of the Middle Path can be considered virtues. Some authors have written about the "most remarkable correspondences" between the eight factors and the eight beatitudes, although not always persuasively and with a degree of esoteric flavor. Unfortunately, a detailed comparison between the eight "rightnesses" and the eight Beatitudes would take too long. Let us suffice to say that *grosso modo* some similarities do exist. For a serious study on this subject see: Elizabeth West, *Happiness Here and Now: The Eightfold Path of Jesus* (New York: Continuum, 2000).

⁸² For example: friendship, honesty, forgiveness, kindness, confidence, spiritual courage, perseverance and respect.

⁸³ Since Thomas Aquinas, Catholic theology speaks of the seven virtues: three "theological"—faith, hope and charity—and four "cardinal," namely, temperance, justice, prudence and fortitude. The "theological" virtues are so called because God is their object and are infused by Him. The Cardinal virtues are attainable through human effort with God's help.

⁸⁴ Faith, for example, is emphasized in Buddhism as described in the scheme of Five Faculties, but it is not "theological".

⁸⁵ The virtues of the two traditions are not arbitrary but constituents of ethical systems with internal logic. The virtues in their own systems are interrelated and should be developed in harmony with other virtues. Each virtue shapes and is shaped by the system to which it belongs. Each virtue confers a character trait that contributes to each tradition ideal.

Space constraints prevent us from comparatively analyzing these virtues comprehensively. Some specific virtues, though, should be discussed due to their intrinsic importance in their respective systems and their highly transformative effect. The most important virtues in Buddhism are the exact reverse of the “root defilements”—greed (*rāga*), ill-will or hatred (*dosa*) and bewilderment (*moha*). These three “Buddhist Cardinal Virtues”⁸⁶ are liberality (*arāga*), benevolence (*adosa*) and wisdom (*amoha*),⁸⁷ commonly known in Buddhism as the three roots of goodness or merit (*kusala mūla*), and, together, often described as constituting a synonym for *nibbāna*, perfect liberation. In *Camino*, Teresa recommends “three things” for spiritual life that she exalts above all others: “love for one another,” “detachment from all created things,” and “true humility,” emphasizing that humility “is the main practice and embraces all the others” (C 4,4). *Amoha* springs from gradual acquisition of wisdom (*paññā*) whose essence is the realization of the true nature of reality and self (i.e. no-self). Teresa’s humility is the necessary consequence of self-knowledge, the realization of man’s creatunerness and dependence on God. Both virtues derive from the realization of the nature of the self, although differently understood, and invoke similar responses to it: “selflessness” (as the main virtue). Liberality (*arāga* or *vitārāga*) and detachment (*desasimiento*) are virtues that mirror each other.⁸⁸ Benevolence (*adosa*) and “love [for one another]” are likewise closely-related virtues. However, this last statement requires further elaboration.

In Christianity, the Ten Commandments are summarized in the supreme mandate of the love of God and neighbor (Mk 12:31). Christians identify the nature of God as love. For Teresa all the virtues stem from love and growth in perfection is measured by it.⁸⁹ This emphasis has led some to assert that Christianity is “the religion of love,”⁹⁰ and others to criticize, mostly *a priori*, that Buddhism is inferior to Christianity in love.⁹¹ However, *karuṇā* (compassion)⁹²—which, together with the rest of the *brahmavihāras*, resembles the Christian notion of *agape* (King called them *agape* “in four parts”)⁹³—is quintessential to all forms of Buddhism. Such likeness has brought other writers to assert

⁸⁶ Expression coined by Maurice Nyunt Wai in his *Pañcasīla and Catholic Moral Teaching*, Gregorian Biblical, 2002, 33.

⁸⁷ PED also translates *arāga* as “disinterestedness”; *adosa* as “absence of ill-will” and *amoha* as “absence of confusion.”

⁸⁸ For detachment in Eastern traditions, see Kellenberger, *Dying to Self and Detachment*, 40.

⁸⁹ Teresa emphasizes: “Let us understand my daughters, that true perfection consists in love of God and neighbor; the more perfectly we keep these two commandments the more perfect we will be. All that is in our rule and constitutions serves for nothing else than to be a means toward keeping these commandments with greater perfection” (1M 2 17).

⁹⁰ King, *Buddhism and Christianity*, 64.

⁹¹ In *What it Means to Be a Christian*, Cardinal Ratzinger wrote: “Being Christian means having love” (Ratzinger, 2006). Pope John Paul II wrote: “Do Buddhists not love? For those committed to Enlightenment, the answer must be an emphatic “no, they do not – not in the Christian sense of agape,” John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1995).

⁹² *Karuṇā* is wishing all sentient beings to be happy and free from suffering. The Buddha taught out of compassion and incarnates the “universal friendliness” and “compassionate dedication.” Buddhaghosa writes about *karuṇā*: “When there is suffering in others it causes (*karoti*) good people’s hearts to be moved (*kampana*), thus it is compassion” (PP 9.91).

⁹³ King, *Buddhism and Christianity*, 64.

a pure equivalence between the two notions (i.e. *agape* and *karuṇā*).⁹⁴ Indeed, the Buddhist notion of *karuṇā* and Christian *agape* exhibit similarities but there are also differences. Conceptually, there is no exact corresponding word for “*agape*” in Pāli and, as Pieris notes “the biblical word corresponding to *karuṇā* is not love but mercifulness, which in Hebrew is mentioned as womb-love (a mother’s gut feeling for a child).”⁹⁵

Philosophically, H. Dumoulin noted that the Christian concept of love presupposes the notion of a person and that, theologically, all love derives from the love of God.⁹⁶ This is a significant difference. *Karuṇā* does not derive from God’s love, and the denial of substantiality to human personality eschews love from its precise Christian meaning. But this does not mean that deep empathy for one another cannot exist in Buddhism, as has been said.⁹⁷ Compassion neither requires the postulation of an ontic self nor eliminates some attributes of love such as self-sacrifice, or empathy for the enemy.⁹⁸ Summarizing, it can be said then that Christian *agape* and Buddhist *karuṇā* share similarities, but we agree with Smart when he states that more appropriate than comparing *agape* to *karuṇā* would be to compare *agape* to the four *brahmavihāras*.⁹⁹ But, a truer (yet not fully corresponding) homologue to Christian *agape* is *adosa*, *arāga* and *amoha* understood as empathy towards all sentient beings, even the enemy (*adosa*), unselfish self-sacrificing love (*arāga*) and the realization of one’s nature (*amoha*).

We conclude that the virtues most valued in Buddhism and by the Christian tradition are quite similar, thus they should produce comparable changes in the person.¹⁰⁰ But, this does not mean that the core experiences and final states of both traditions are equal. As Pieris writes: “In Buddhism, this core experience lends itself to be classed as gnosis or ‘liberative knowledge,’ whereas the corresponding Christian experience falls under the category of *agape* or ‘redemptive love.’” To this statement Pieris adds: “Each of these two experiences is salvific in that each is a self-transcending event that radically transforms the human person affected by it. At the same time, there is a contrast between them that largely determines the major differences between both religions.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁴ See F. Sottocornola and M. A. de Giorgi in K. J. Becker et al. 2010, 450.

⁹⁵ (Personal communication). Pieris adds that “God is called el-rahâm, the God of womb-love.” The idea of compassion as a mother’s love for her child is also present in Buddhism.

⁹⁶ Heinrich Dumoulin, *Christianity meets Buddhism* (Open Court Publishing Company, 1974), 119.

⁹⁷ Henri de Lubac, *Aspects of Buddhism* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1954), 37.

⁹⁸ “Enemy” the four kinds of person in the fourth *brahmavihāra*.

⁹⁹ Smart, “What Would Buddhaghosa Have Made of The Cloud of Unknowing,” 106. Another seeming difference relates to the reputed emotional nature of love in Christianity as passion that involves strong emotions, and even emotionalism or sentimentality, contrasted with the equanimity of Buddhism’s compassion. However, like in Buddhism, Teresa puts emphasis on detachment and the equanimity of love towards any person.

¹⁰⁰ *Dana* (generosity) is particularly important in Buddhism, as is detachment in Christianity.

¹⁰¹ Pieris, *Love meets wisdom: a Christian experience of Buddhism* (Orbis Books, 1988), 111.

5.4.4 The effects of morality, summary and conclusion.

As initial attainment, *sīla* consists of “conscientious behaviour and moral restraint.”¹⁰² As Bodhi says: “moral discipline, consistently observed, infuses the mind with the purifying force of moral virtue, generating joy and deeper confidence in the Dhamma.”¹⁰³ Teresa explains that when the virtues have grown they are like flowers in a garden that emit a good scent (V 14,9). Then God often comes to visit the garden of the soul.

Ethical living and, particularly, the substitution of unwholesome habits (vices) with wholesome traits (virtues) transforms the person’s character in both traditions. This connection between moral living and deep changes in one’s character is manifested in the etymology of *sīla*, “ethics” and “morality.” As Cousins points out, “the word [*sīla*] is commonly translated as ‘morality’ or ‘ethics,’ although its original meaning is more like ‘nature’ or ‘character’.”¹⁰⁴ Buddhaghosa in fact cites this meaning in connection with canonical passages which refer to unskillful (*akusala*) *sīla*, but rejects it as the sense which the word has ‘in the world’¹⁰⁴ The Greek word *ethikos* (ἠθικός) and the Latin word *moralis* also refer to a person’s moral character where, as MacIntyre says “a man’s character is nothing other than his set dispositions to behave systematically in one way rather than another, to lead one particular kind of life.”¹⁰⁵ We will discuss in more detail such profound altering in the person’s character produced by the practicing of the virtues in Section 6.2.4 of the interpretive part of this study.

Virtue also prepares for meditation. Both traditions consider morality the cornerstone for a life of prayer and meditation. This is because remorse and guilt impede the peace of mind that allows success. *Sīla* provides the foundation for the practice of *samādhi*. Without moral training and ethical conduct the development of concentration is impeded. Teresa notes the indispensability of virtue as the foundation of the edifice of prayer.¹⁰⁶ Without ethical living the human heart cannot be silenced to be attentive to God’s will.

The firm establishment of virtue in the monastic’s character is usually challenging. It requires discipline and effort, a reason why most practitioners in both traditions remain at the initial spiritual stage. Frequently, the ascetic practices are necessary to establish firmly virtue in the monastic. Thus, the next chapter is devoted to asceticism.

¹⁰² Bhikkhu Bodhi, *In the Buddha’s Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon* (Wisdom Public. 2005), 257.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Cousins, “The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification,” 104.

¹⁰⁵ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 38.

¹⁰⁶ Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 40; Cf. C 16,6; Morality is “the foundation of the spiritual path, otherwise the contemplative practices will dry up” (Feldmeier 2006, 59). However, prayer does not require starting with morality.

5.5 THERAVĀDA AND CARMELITE ASCETICISM

5.5.1 Introduction

Thirteen ascetic practices (*dhutaṅgas*) are listed in *The Path of Purification*, Chapter Two, which a monastic may undertake to perfect the special qualities stated in Chapter One “Purification of Virtue,”¹ so that he may have a strong foundation of virtue (PP 2.1). “Asceticism” encapsulates the essence of the *dhutaṅgas*, which are optional practices above and beyond the asceticism inherent in the communal rules. With Teresa, although all three initial mansions are ascetic, as Álvarez says, “[in Second Mansions] Teresa proposes a special version of Christian asceticism, before introducing him to the mystique of grace and the experience of God.”² Teresa writes: “the soul that enters the [second] dwelling places always begins wanting to practice some penance” (2M 1,3). Asceticism is also a defining mark of Third Mansions, which she epitomizes with the young rich man parable saying that here a soul is “fond of doing penance” (3M 1,5).

Asceticism is justified by its internal logic in the traditions represented by Teresa and Buddhaghosa, but their respective rationales are related. Dwelling in Teresa’s Second and Third mansions is a sign of the soul’s resolve to abandon sin and embrace virtue (2M 1,2). After the initial purgation, the soul’s desire is to be closer to God and be rid of all that impedes it from drawing nearer to God (2M 1,12). For his part, a Theravādin, having been practicing *sīla* strenuously and being already advanced in the purification of virtue, now seeks eradication of all remaining defilements. In both cases, therefore, a state of greater religiosity and newly-gained virtuousness³ makes the person even more painfully aware of how far he falls short of the religious ideal on account of inadequacies.⁴ Such inadequacies, hitherto hidden by grosser defilements, become excruciatingly exposed at this time due to the clarity of heightened awareness. In the *Visuddhimagga* and *Castillo interior* alike, the next step therefore is to proceed to the purging of these recalcitrant blemishes, which can be a challenging task, however, as evil habits are profoundly entrenched in the monastic while the virtues are still tender.

¹ Buddhaghosa explains that the *dhutaṅgas* are ascetic austerities that a trainee might undertake while in pursuit of *sīla*. These thirteen ascetic practices are first enumerated in PP 2.2 and discussed in detail from PP 2.23 through PP 2.77. The thirteen *dhutaṅgas* are enumerated under the heading 5.5.4 of the present Section.

² Tomas Álvarez, *Guía al Interior del Castillo* (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2004), 40 [Author’s translation]. McLean notes that “[Second Mansions] is the primary dwelling place of ongoing and deepening asceticism [...] aimed at cleansing, purifying ourselves” Julienne McLean, *Towards Mystical Union: A Modern Commentary on the Mystical Text the Interior Castle by St Teresa of Avila* (London: St. Pauls Publishing, 2003), 156.

³ Buddhaghosa explains that the *dhutaṅgas* are aimed at perfecting the special qualities described in Chapter One of the *Visuddhimagga*: “Purification of Virtue.” These “special qualities” are virtues such as “contentment.” See PP 2.1.

⁴ Teresa writes: “By gazing at His grandeur, we get in touch with our own lowliness; by looking at His purity, we shall see our own filth; by pondering His humility, we shall see how far we are from being humble” (1M 2,9).

5.5.2 Theravāda and Carmelite asceticism

In both religious cultures, a way to deepen virtue is to engage in asceticism as an active aspect of the growth in virtue and the transformation of desire. Etymologically, “asceticism” derives from the Greek word *áskēsis* (ἄσκησις), which means “exercise” or “practice,” and was used to refer to the training of athletes. In the religious context, ascetic exercises are spiritual gymnastics for ethical excellence.⁵ In Buddhism, *samaṇa* (from Skt. root *śram* “to strive,” “to exercise”) have similar meaning. For our purposes, asceticism can be defined as a system of practices characterized by self-cultivation, and the abstinence from worldly pleasures, for the pursuit of spiritual goals.⁶ As a religious category, it is accepted in Buddhism,⁷ and Christianity, and is cross-cultural.⁸

Asceticism is an integral element of the paths defined by Buddhaghosa and Teresa. Although the Buddha rejected extreme ascetic disciplines as ineffective for liberation, he did not shun asceticism *per se*.⁹ The practice of moderate asceticism is attested to in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, the monastic and disciplinary code, and in the practices described in the *Visuddhimagga* where asceticism seems to be a constitutive aspect of the path.¹⁰ Catholicism embraces a moderate asceticism, rejecting *in toto* some pathological rigors of its medieval history. This temperate asceticism is rooted in the Gospel, epitomized by the Desert Fathers,¹¹ and incorporated into the Carmelite path to perfection.¹²

In the Theravāda and Carmelite traditions alike the orientation of the ascetic effort is soteriological. Both cultures reject asceticism for its own sake and genuine asceticism does not involve rejoicing in pain; austerities undertaken with either meritorious or punitive motivations lack any salvific value. Teresa declares that true penances are “to benefit the soul” (Cta. 148,11). The telos of the disciplines sanctioned by our authors is therefore ethical purification. This role of asceticism cannot be emphasized enough. Austerities are not designed for self-mortification but to overcome imperfections.¹³ Buddhaghosa would therefore agree with Teresa’s assessment that asceticism is more

⁵ Gavin Flood, *The Ascetic Self: Subjectivity, Memory and Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4.

⁶ W. O. Kaelber, “Asceticism,” ER, 526.

⁷ Yoshiro Tamura, “Asceticism” and “Ascetic practices,” EB, 158-161.

⁸ Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis, eds., *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford: OUP, 1995), xix-xxi.

⁹ C. A. F. Rhys Davids, “Asceticism” in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. I, ed. J. Hastings (Scribners, 1913), 71.

¹⁰ See Oliver Freiberger, “Early Buddhism, Asceticism, and the Politics of the Middle Way” in *Asceticism and Its Critics: Historical Accounts and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Oliver Freiberger (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 235–55.

¹¹ Owen Chadwick, “General Introduction” in *Western Asceticism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958); Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (Columbia University Press, 1988).

¹² For an informative study on Teresian asceticism: Blas de Jesús, *Ascética teresiana* (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 1960).

¹³ The disciplines praised by both traditions are not directed against the body but against the “addictions of the heart.”

interior than exterior,¹⁴ to transform and heal the mind rather than to coerce the body.¹⁵

What are the imperfections the monastic wrestles with in this level of spiritual life? The paradigmatic obstacles in the Third Mansions are not only venial sins (largely transcended in the First Mansions), but especially “imperfections,” that is, voluntary but minor moral transgressions that do not constitute venial sins but simple wrongdoings. Similarly, Buddhaghosa describes the *dhutaṅgas* as means of “shaking off” defilements and “perfecting” the virtues defined in the “Purification of Virtue” (e.g., contentment). Therefore, given the nature of the *dhutaṅgas*—i.e., voluntary, moderate, oriented at perfecting the virtues—the conclusion may be that we are also dealing with minor defilements or imperfections here. John offers instances of these moral imperfections: attachment to particular things (habits, objects) or persons (a confessor) (S1 11.4), which remind of the purpose of some *dhutaṅgas* (e.g. freedom of attachment to food).

What are the immediate causes of these imperfections? According to Buddhaghosa, the *dhutaṅgas* are undertaken to shake off “cupidity” (PP 2.12). They aim to eliminate craving for robes, and so forth. In the *Vimānavatthu Aṭṭhakathā* the *dhutaṅgas* are said to serve to subdue “sense desires” (VvA 114). Specifically, the aim of the practices endorsed by Buddhaghosa is to subjugate evil proclivities that may cause defilements. In Catholicism, minor offences and imperfections are caused by “disordered appetites.” [The distinction between “disordered appetites” and “simple natural appetites,” should be noted here; the latter are vital human wants that must be appropriately satisfied. Satisfying these needs would not constitute imperfection in either tradition,¹⁶ for these desires are vital for survival.¹⁷ It is only when these needs are left unrestrained that the appetites look for satisfaction beyond essential needs and become “inordinate desires,” which are morally inadmissible for the spiritual seeker.] In Buddhism the defilements “afflict” or “torment” the mind, keep human beings trapped in the life cycle of *saṃsāra*, while in Christianity, the inordinate desires “tire,” “torment,”¹⁸ and “bind” the soul. Both the defilements and the disordered appetites must consequently be purified thoroughly. The *kilesas* must be eliminated totally, because even a tiny attachment may impede awakening. John expresses this idea with respect to all attachments in similar terms (S1 11,4). Both systems see asceticism as a way to suppress inordinate wants by

¹⁴ Teresa’s *Constituciones* reads: “The novice mistress should be very prudent, prayerful, and spiritual [...]. She should stress the interior life more than exterior things, taking daily account of how the novices are progressing.” (Co 40) and, in *Camino*, Teresa says: “For interior mortification makes everything else more meritorious and perfect” (C 12,1).

¹⁵ Our two traditions concur in considering that perfectly following their respective paths is the best form of asceticism. For the Buddha walking the path of liberation is the best austerity. For Teresa the observance of humility, obedience, charity, good works and prayer are more effective for spiritual transformation than exterior mortifications (R 23).

¹⁶ Buddhism does not speak of the extinction of all desires. Some desires are beneficial and legitimate, even conducive to spiritual progress (desire for health, to do good, liberation).

¹⁷ Not attending adequately to these essential needs constitutes an impediment.

¹⁸ John of the Cross writes that disordered desire torments, fatigues, wearies, blinds and weaken the soul (AI 6,3).

restricting desire to essential needs (e.g., food, clothing, shelter), and holding back superfluous desires.¹⁹ And both traditions strive to overcome cupidity by denying sensual gratification and adopting “contrary practices” to subdue underlying tendencies leading to it. Buddhaghosa speaks of “abandoning of defilements by substitution of opposites” (PP 1.22) Teresa speaks of “bending your will with contrary things” (C 2,6). In both traditions these contrary practices can be internal (e.g., silence) or external. But, in all cases, the ascetic practices are always aimed at controlling the will.

For our authors, ascetic practices must be appropriate to their purpose. Asceticism is typically presented as a struggle, or a battle, against oneself. Contradicting desires, and subjecting the flesh to reason, may cause great discomfort and even excruciating agony. But both Buddhism and Catholicism reject extreme austerities as a means to holiness.²⁰ For Teresa genuine asceticism must be moderate and efficacious,²¹ applied gently according to the individual needs²² and circumstances of the ascetic (V 13,3), and should never harm his health (C 15,3), or psychological well-being (F 10). Finally, asceticism should be enduring to create habit, a pattern of thought and action. Once the practice is established, craving is purified, and the renouncer is neither arrested nor distracted by sensory stimuli and is able to focus on the pursuit of the religious life.

Having pointed out similarities between both ascetic cultures above, we will now consider their differences, which arise from their respective underlying assumptions. Logically the ultimate ascetic goal is dissimilar in both traditions. Another dissimilarity concerns the attitude towards ascetic suffering. Asceticism always involves some pain. Although both traditions reject gratuitous pain and never seek pain for its own sake, Christian asceticism involves a willing acceptance of suffering for the love of God.²³ Another reason for this attitude is the imitation of Christ (*imitatio Christi*), which evokes the sacrifice of the Passion, that is, the suffering endured by Christ on the Cross.²⁴ Even so, there is never exaltation of suffering or morbidity in Christianity or in Teresa for whom asceticism is spiritual, more about humility and love than bodily mortification.

¹⁹ Let us recall that the virtues perfected by *dhutaṅgas* in PP 2.83, that is, fewness of wishes, contentment, effacement, seclusion, and “that specific quality,” are oriented at the attainment of reduced volition toward wrong objects of desire.

²⁰ The Buddha’s critical stance is well-known towards the extreme ascetic practices of the wandering ascetics. He himself had partaken of the extremities but subsequently reacted against them, favoring instead a middle way approach.

²¹ Gombrich writes: “The *dhutaṅga* represent a limit to what the Theravādin tradition will sanction by way of mortifying the flesh” (Gombrich 1988, 94). Teresa is a good example of a judicious approach to asceticism advocating moderate practices (F 13,5). She rejected the “bewildered” (*desconcertadas*) disciplines extant of her time, none of which were practiced in her foundations (F 14,12). Her emphasis was always on the virtues (Cta. 12, December 1576).

²² Teresa warns that austerities should be applied with discretion, considering the particular needs of the ascetic and knowing a soul cannot be perfected all at once (Co 40).

²³ Christian saints like Ignatius of Loyola, John of the Cross and Teresa herself, all of them well-balanced and sane, are exemplars of this moderate willing acceptance of suffering, always ultimately motivated by love.

²⁴ Teresa says: “I would always choose the path of suffering, if only to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ if there were no other gain; especially, since there are always so many other benefits” (6M 1,7). And speaks of “my great desire to suffer for Him” (V 36,9) and accompany Him in his sufferings, stating, “I want suffering, Lord, because you suffered” (V 11,12).

5.5.3 Theravāda and Carmelite monastic asceticism

Both the *Visuddhimagga* and *Castillo* were written by monastics for monastics. There is an extensively recognized connection between monasticism and asceticism.²⁵ The Theravāda and Catholic monastic traditions have their origin in ascetic practices.²⁶ Their asceticism encapsulates and embodies their ideals of self-restraint and is introduced into their monasticism by their respective regulatory codes of communal life.

The Theravāda and Carmelite monastic life²⁷ is governed by a series of codified rules. As discussed earlier, the Buddhist code of discipline is contained in the *Vinaya Piṭaka* (The Basket of Discipline). The *Pātimokkha* of the *Sutta-Vibhaṅga* contains 227 rules for monks and 311 rules for nuns.²⁸ On the Carmelite side, the first reformed convent of Discalced Carmelites founded by Teresa was regulated by the Primitive Rule of Carmel (1208) and the *Constituciones de San José de Ávila* (1563). The corpus of disciplinary rules laid down both in the *Pātimokkha* and in *Constituciones* regulate all aspects of communal life (e.g. attires, food, sleep, norms of decorum), are guides for monastics to the ascetic way of living, and true matrices for moral perfection.

The Theravāda and Catholic monasticisms bear remarkable similarities in content, structure and function, which, as Corless puts it, “far outweigh their differences.”²⁹ Nonetheless, there are crucial departures that impact both traditions of asceticism and which in turn shape their disciplinary practices. The centrality of monasticism in Buddhism, for example, contrasts with its peripheral place within the Catholic Church.³⁰ Other differences include the role of the vow of obedience in Catholicism, and that Teresa’s Discalced Carmelites lived in enclosed convents (without this implying any rejection of social involvement), while the Buddhist monastery (*vihāra*) is never a religious enclosure. Further dissymmetry reflects differences in culture and climate. Nevertheless, in their asceticism both monastic traditions resemble each other closely.

²⁵ Monasticism can be defined as “organized asceticism as practiced in a monastery.”

²⁶ On the origin of Buddhist monasticism in relation to asceticism, see Robert Thurman, “Tibetan Buddhist Perspectives on Asceticism,” in *Asceticism*, ed. V. L. Wimbush and R. Valantasis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 108-118; Samuel Rubenson states that the ascetic practices initiated by Desert Fathers “led to the development of monasticism in the fourth century” Samuel Rubenson, “Christian Asceticism and the Emergence of the Monastic Tradition,” in *Asceticism*, ed. V. L. Wimbush and R. Valantasis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 53-55.

²⁷ Any bibliography on Buddhist monasticism should include Sukumar Dutt’s study *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India: Their History and Their Contribution to Indian Culture* (London: George Allen & the Unwin, 1962). For literature on Catholic monasticism, David Knowles, *Christian Monasticism* (London: World University Lib., 1969), is worthy of study.

²⁸ The Buddhist code of discipline is one of the three baskets (*Tipiṭaka*) that make up the Pāli Canon. The *Vinaya Piṭaka* (Basket of Discipline) has two sections: *The Sutta-Vibhaṅga* and the *Khandhaka*. The former contains the *Pātimokkha*.

²⁹ Corless, “The Dialogue of Silence,” 82. Other valuable comparative works on asceticism are: P. G. Henry and D. K. Swearer, *For the sake of the world: the spirit of Buddhist and Christian monasticism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989); and Patrick Henry, ed., *Benedict’s Dharma: Buddhists reflect on the Rule of Saint Benedict* (London: Continuum, 2002).

³⁰ On the marginal (*virtuosi*) role of monasticism in Christianity: Corless, “The Dialogue of Silence,” 87; and Mathieu Boisvert, “A Comparison of the Early Forms of Buddhist and Christian Monastic Traditions,” BCS Vol. 12, (1992), 123.

The moderate asceticism incorporated in the disciplinary codes of the Theravāda and the Carmelite monastic traditions institutionalizes a type of “built-in” or “default” asceticism crucial to the dynamics of spiritual life in both traditions. They define a daily routine and a way of life that become a template that molds the monastic’s character.

This is so for several reasons. First, the monastic rules contained in the *Pātimokkha* and *Constituciones* are intended as means to perfect *sīla* and the Commandments, respectively. The monastic rules extend the basic moral precepts and instill their ethical values in the monastic.³¹ Secondly, monasticism provides an ascetic environment that nurtures and stimulates spiritual growth, inhibiting or diminishing hazards commonly encountered in the external world. It enables the cultivation of virtues deeply cherished by both traditions (e.g., humility, simplicity, renunciation, selflessness, chastity), and the eradication of common vices. Thirdly, monastic asceticism determines a way of life that reduces material and emotional needs to a bare minimum, inducing contentment with extreme simplicity. It provides what suffices for maintaining life and religious practice and nothing more,³² and puts the monastic on the road to ethical-spiritual perfection.³³

The importance of the asceticism ingrained in the monastic code is made manifest by the extreme reluctance of both traditions to modify the rules,³⁴ and their insistence on the observances to be well-known by the community and read frequently by all.³⁵ Moreover, both traditions emphasize that the rules should be followed with perfection. The Buddha says: “*Bhikkhus*, dwell possessed of virtue, possessed of the *Pātimokkha*” (MN 6); Teresa insists that the monastic rules should be kept to perfection (V 32,9).

In light of the transformative effect of the ascetic lifestyle embedded in the monastic code, and its importance to the dynamics of the spiritual life of our two traditions, it would be rewarding to attempt a comparison of both sets of rules.³⁶ Below, we present a comparative table of the *Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha* and the *Constituciones de San José* that synoptically juxtaposes the two sets of monastic rules under several categories.

³¹ Corless, “The Dialogue of Silence,” 85.

³² *Constituciones* reads: “The Lord will provide what they need. Provided they are content to live simply, they will have what is necessary to sustain life. If they strive with all their might to please the Lord, His Majesty will keep them from want” (Co 9).

³³ In her work *Visita de Descalzas* Teresa writes: “if the constitutions are observed everything will run smoothly” (VD 23). And in one of her letters states: “that the Constitutions be kept, that with this they will not be able to err” (Cta. 318,7).

³⁴ In Buddhism, the same disciplinary code was generally accepted before the beginning of sectarianism. It is generally believed that the divisions within the *Saṅgha* were habitually the consequence of disagreements over the *Vinaya*.

³⁵ The *Pātimokkha* is recited as a liturgical formula every two weeks (in the moon and the new moon) at the *Uposatha* ceremony (Buddhist day of observance).

³⁶ Several studies successfully attempted a similar undertaking regarding the Theravāda and Catholic monastic rules. See, for example, Corless, “The Dialogue of Silence,” 81-10; and I. B. Horner, “The Monk: Buddhist and Christian, Gotama’s Rules Compared with the Rule of St. Benedict,” in *Hibbert Journal* XXXIX, 2 (1941): 168-78.

Comparison of the *Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha* with *Constituciones de San José*.

Our objective in synoptically laying out the rules in the disciplinary codes of the Theravāda and Carmelite monastic traditions³⁷ is not to offer a thorough comparative analysis of both sets of rules but to call attention to similarities relevant to our task. For the Theravāda side, we survey the *Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha*³⁸ (monastic rules for nuns), complemented with the *Bhikkhu Pātimokkha* (the rules for monks), and supplemented by the *Vinaya* when correspondences with the Carmelite side are not given in the *Pātimokkha* or further clarifications are needed. For the monastic rules of the Discalced Carmelites nuns, we refer to the *Constituciones de San José de Ávila* (1562),³⁹ which were drafted by Teresa herself—and, as Gabriele di Santa Maria Maddalena states, are “fully endowed with her spirit”⁴⁰—complemented with the *Constituciones de Alcalá*, which were issued in 1582 for the Discalced Carmelites friars,⁴¹ supplemented when necessary by *Las Reglas de San Alberto*,⁴² which frame the *Constituciones*.

In order to proceed with this tabular analysis, and in view of the different way in which the two sets of rules are arranged and presented, the disparate manner in which the relevant precepts are formulated and following the lead of Coreless and Pachow, we have reorganized the rules by enumerating and unifying their styles of expression. The resulting juxtaposition is based on shared categories and common topics that are basic aspects of asceticism. This allow us to compare the relevant rules and the position of each tradition regarding among others, chastity, poverty, attire and etiquette.

³⁷ In producing this comparative tabular chart, we have been inspired by a similar tabular analysis by Roger J. Corless comparing the *Prātimokṣa* and the *Regula Monachorum* (“Rule for Monks”) of Benedict of Nursia (d. 480 CE), that appears in his “The Dialogue of Silence: A Comparison of Buddhist and Christian Monasticism with a Practical Suggestion” in *The Cross and the Lotus: Christianity and Buddhism in dialogue*, ed. G. W. Houston (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985), 92-107. We also have been inspired by W. Pachow, *A Comparative Study of the Prātimokṣa: On the Basis of Its Chinese, Tibetan, Sanskrit and Pāli Versions* (Santiniketan, India: Sino-Indian Cultural Society, 1955), which contains a similar chart in its Appendix I, 201-02.

³⁸ There are several translations of the *Bhikkhu Pātimokkha*, among them, by J. F. Dickson (1876), T. W. Rhys Davids and H. Oldenberg (1881-85), I. B. Homer (1938-66), Nānamoli (1966), Thānissaro (1994) and K. R. Norman (2001). As far as we know, there is only one translation of the *Bhikkhunī Prātimokṣa* (from Sanskrit), that by K. R. Norman in 2001. For the present comparison, we also use *The Pātimokkha*, edited by William Pruitt and translated by K. R. Norman (Oxford: PTS, 2001), which includes the two original Pāli texts and their translation in English.

³⁹ The original autograph manuscript of “*Constitutions for the Sisters of the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel of the First Rule without Relaxation, given by the Most Reverend General of the said Order Fray Juan Bautista Rubeo*” is lost. Fortunately, the text has come down to us in three versions. For our comparison, we have used the version preserved by the Portuguese congregation of Discalced Carmelites and edited by Silverio de Santa Teresa in his critical edition of the works Teresa of 1919. All quotations in English are of *Teresa of Avila. The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*. Translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, Vol. 3, 311-33 that follows the version edited by Padre Silverio.

⁴⁰ *Constituciones de San José de Ávila*, far from being a merely “legalistic” text has a profound spiritual meaning. See Gabriele di Santa Maria Maddalena, *Comentario espiritual de las constituciones de Carmelitas Descalzas* (Colegiata, 1962); and Álvarez, “Constituciones teresianas,” DSTJ, 165-68. In *Constituciones*, Teresa reformed the mitigated rules of the *Order of our Lady of Mount Carmel* introducing two-hour prayer, examination of conscience, spiritual reading, matins at nine p.m. and “spiritual conferences” (Gabriele, *Comentario espiritual*, 26). Gabriele says that the organization of monastic daily life of the Carmelites is a “specifically Teresian work” (Gabriele, *Comentario espiritual*, 28).

⁴¹ Which, as pointed out by Gabriele, also inherited the blueprint of Teresa’s spirit (Gabriele, *Comentario espiritual*, 31).

⁴² The “Primitive” Rule of the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel that Teresa knew was the one given to the Carmelites by St. Albert and corrected, emended and confirmed by Pope Innocent IV.

Table 3.2 Comparative chart *Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha* and *Constituciones of San José*

Category / Topics	<i>The Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha</i>	<i>Las Constituciones de San José</i>
I. Chastity		
Sexual abstinence	Absolute chastity (Precept 4). A <i>bhikkhunī</i> should not engage willingly in any kind of sexual intercourse (BĪP II.C.1). For <i>bhikkhus</i> see BP I.C.1.	Vow of Chastity Every Catholic nun takes a solemn and public perpetual vow of chastity.
Avoidance of any lustful contact, encounter, or relations, between a monastic and members of the opposite or same sex.	Any <i>bhikkhunī</i> should not have passionate contact, lustful conversation, a seductive approach, or improper attitude with any member of the opposite or same sex (BĪP II.C.5; II.D.5-7). Similar rules for <i>bhikkhus</i> (I.D.5-7). No two <i>bhikkhunis</i> should lie down on one couch or one carpet (BĪP II.D.31).	“Let no Sister embrace another or touch her on the face or the hands” (Co 28). “When the doctor, barber surgeon, confessor, or other necessary persons enter the enclosure, they should always be accompanied by two nuns. (Co 15). “The prioress must keep the key of the parlor and the main entrance” (Co 15).
Avoidance of any improper contact, encounter, or relations, between a monastic and the opposite sex.	A <i>bhikkhunī</i> should not stand with drinking water or with a fan near a <i>bhikkhu</i> while he is eating (BĪP II.F.6). A <i>bhikkhunī</i> should not stand next to or talk with a man in a screened or open place, a carriage road, a cul-de-sac or at a crossroads, nor whisper in his ear or dismiss the <i>bhikkhunī</i> who is his companion (BĪP II.F.12-14).	“No nun should be seen with her face unveiled unless she is with her father, mother, brothers, or sisters, or has some reason which would make it seem as appropriate” (Co 15). “When outside persons enter the enclosure, they should be accompanied by two sisters (Co 15).
II Simplicity, alms, begging, income, work, trade, money		
Simplicity (poverty)	Prohibition of any form of private property. Absolute renunciation of material things. Standard of living: extreme simplicity. Be content with what is needed to sustain life.	Vow of Poverty. Absolute renunciation of material things. Standard of living: extreme simplicity. Be content with what is needed to sustain life.
Common property	All things belong to the order.	Everything is held in common (Co 10).
No personal possessions other than essential material things needed	A monastic is not allowed to have personal possessions, apart from the four requisites, (robes, a bowl, a bed, and medicine). And should not possess an extra robe, an extra alms-bowl (BĪP II.F.c.21) or a rains-bathing cloth prematurely (BP II.F.C.24), nor store medicines for a long time (BĪP II.E.25).	The sisters should never have private possessions (e.g., food, clothing) nor should such permission be granted (Co 10; 30). It is forbidden to have a coffer or small chest in which to lock up personal items (Co 10).
Do not take what is not yours	A <i>bhikkhunī</i> should not divert gains allocated for the <i>Saṅgha</i> to herself (BĪP II.E.30 and BP.F.c.30) nor take into her mouth an edible that has not been given (BP II.F.c.40), or pick up a valuable.	Everything that is brought to the convent should be shown to the Prioress (Co 30).
Income (alms) and religious mendicancy	Live on alms (<i>bhikkhu</i> = “almsman”). The monastic should accept what is given.	“Let them live always on alms and without any income (Co 9). ⁴³ The monastic should accept what is given (Co 9)

⁴³ Kavanaugh and Rodriguez say: “In 1568, Teresa founded a monastery in Malagón that was endowed with an income. And in 1576, Gracián ordained that in towns where the nuns could not be sustained through alms an income would be permissible. See *Monumenta Historica Carmeli Teresiani* (Rome: Teresianum, 1973-), 1:316” Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, Volume III (Washington, ICS Publ. 1985), 333, note 10.

Begging for the basic necessities of life.	"The Buddha believed that begging was the 'right livelihood for renouncers.' (Wijayaratna, <i>Buddhist Monastic Life</i> , 59).	"Insofar as possible let there be no begging" (Co 9), only in case of extreme necessity.
Attitude toward work and trade	Monastics are not to work for a living, thus monastic can focus on spiritual matters. Any <i>bhikkhuni</i> should not spin yam nor do householders' work (BĪP II.F.43-44). A <i>bhikkhuni</i> should not engage in trade BĪP II.E.23; For <i>bhikkhus</i> see BP II.F.b.20.	Sisters should help themselves by working (Co 9 and 3), for example by spinning. Work requiring careful attention to details so that it keeps the mind from the Lord, or a fixed daily amount of work, should not be done (Co 9).
Money gold or silver	A <i>bhikkhuni</i> should not accept gold or silver or engage in monetary transactions (BĪP II.E.21).	The sisters should never do work with gold or silver (Co 9)
III. Food, medicine, drink, alcohol, etc.		
Fasting and food restriction	Allowed one meal a day, except when sick or under special circumstances (BP II.D.31).	Fast from Exaltation of the Cross to Easter, except Sundays (Co 11) Rule of St. Albert (87). From Sept. to April, one meal a day.
Consumption of meat	Allowed except when animal is killed especially for the monastic	Never eat meat unless out of necessity (Co 11).
No food at improper times	The meal should be eaten before noon No food allowed at other times (BP II.G.37). No storage of private food allowed (BP II.G.38).	"Outside dinner and supper, no Sister should eat or drink without permission" (Co 26).
Acceptance of food without criticism	Acceptance of food regardless quantity or quality. No preferences of any food can be expressed, asked for, eaten (Vin IV 346-48)	No Sister should comment if the food given is too much or too little, well or poorly seasoned (Co 22).
Not to ask for or have special food	A <i>bhikkhuni</i> having asked for roasted, pounded or cooked raw grain should eat, it there is an offence of expiation (BĪP II.F.7).	It is understood that the Sisters should not have or ask for special food, except for medical reasons (Co 23).
Alcohol	Complete abstinence (Precept). The drinking of alcohol or fermented liquor is to be confessed (5.51).	Wine in moderation (diluted).
IV Dressing, bedding, rest, rugs, decoration		
Poor robes/habit. Simple, inelegant Fabric (source) and habit materials.	"Made out of rags" provided by begging	"The habit should be made of coarse cloth or black, rough wool, and only as much wool as is necessary should be used" (Co 12).
Not wearing ornaments	A <i>bhikkhuni</i> should not wear a petticoat, ornaments, perfume or paint (BĪP II.I.86-88)	Never use any adornments, as to complete self-forgetfulness (Co 12).
Sandals	Any <i>bhikkhuni</i> who is not sick should use a sunshade and sandals (BĪP II.I.84); "Monks are allowed to wear sandals made with several strands" (Vin I 185).	Permitted to wear sandals made from hemp (Co 12).
Bed	Prohibition of high or large bed (Precept 8; and BP.I.G.87)	Each sister should have her own bed.

Mattresses	"5 kinds of mattresses are allowed if made of wool, cotton, bark, tina-grass or leaves." A <i>bhikkhu</i> should not have a bed or bench stuffed with cotton (BP II.G.88).	"Straw-filled sacks for mattresses" (Co 13).
Carpets cushions, divans	Carpets allowed but of cotton (Vin II 150). Cushions and divans not allowed.	No carpeting or cushions except in the Church (Co 13). No hangings, hemp matings, to cover a doorway, a blanket or some rough, woolen cloth or similar that is poor quality (Co 13).
Sheets, pillows		Not allowed sheets (and pillows) made of fine wool (Co 12). Colored clothing or bedding must never be used (Co 13).
V Proper behavior and appearance, social conduct, etiquette, vanity		
Short hair	Monks and nuns must shave their hair completely and are forbidden ever to let the hair grown longer than two inches.	"The Sisters must keep their hair cut so as not to have to waste time in combing it (Co 12).
Dressing with utmost decency	Wearing properly the robe (cover body).	Covering the entire body: the habit should extend in length to the feet.
No mirrors, ointments	"The rule laid down in the <i>Culavagga</i> (Vin II 107) forbade the use of combs, mirrors or ointments to monks."	Never should a mirror be used (Co 14).
No careless actions. Decorum in behavior	Do not laugh or speak, loudly, sway body, swing the arms or shake the head in public.	No careless actions. Decorum in behavior.
VI Silence, solitude, avoidance idle talk, worldly distractions, personal relations.		
Silence	Silence as a virtue	Total silence on the Days for Receiving the Lord. Silence at eight o'clock until after Prime the following day (Co 7).
Solitude	Solitude as a virtue	Strict enclosure. All time not taken up with community each sister should withdraw into solitude in the cell (Co 8).
Worldly distractions	A <i>bhikkhuni</i> should not attain, or teach, worldly knowledge (BIP II.F.49-50.)	Sisters should pay no attention to the affairs of the world nor speak about them (Co 18).
Avoidance of idle talk	Avoidance of idle talk	Avoid superfluous talk. Conversations should be rare and brief and about spiritual matters (Co 18).
Entertainment	A <i>bhikkhuni</i> should not go to watch dancing or singing or music (BIP II.F.10). A <i>bhikkhuni</i> should not visit a King's house, a picture gallery, a park, a pleasure grove or a lotus pond (BIP II.F.41).	"The chant should never be sung with musical notation but should be done in a monotone and with uniform voices" (Co 3) Games should never be permitted (Co 27)
Nurturing spiritual talk	Spiritual friendship	A sister's dealings should be with persons who are an edification and help for the life of prayer and who provide spiritual consolation rather than recreation (Co 15).

No particular friendships Relationship with relatives	Attachment to any person is a defilement	No particular friendships; general charity (Co 28). "The Sisters should avoid a great deal of conversation with relatives" (Co 19).
Detachment	Attachment to any object is a defilement	"If [the Prioress] sees that a Sister is attached to something, be it a book, a cell, or anything else, she should take it from her" (Co. 10)
Comfort (Proclivity to seek comfort and avoid pain)	A <i>bhikkhunī</i> should not make use of a sofa or of a divan (BĪP II.F.41). A <i>bhikkhunī</i> should not bathe with scented ground sesamum nor have herself rubbed [with ointment] or massaged by a <i>bhikkhunī</i> a trainee, a female novice or a householder's wife (BĪP II.F.89-93).	Austerity is a characteristic of the cloistered convents.

When the Theravāda and Carmelite disciplinary codes are read in tandem, it is not difficult to recognize similar preoccupations in both coenobitic communities, although the comparative analysis of the tabular chart also reveals significant variances. The monastic life in a cloistered convent differs from that in an open monastery, which affects a number of rules (e.g., regarding the means of subsistence, the relationships with the laity). Both Carmelite and Theravāda are mendicant orders; they depend on alms for survival, but their attitudes to begging differ. Teresa reluctantly accepted that the Carmelite convents would receive a fixed income, but she always discouraged begging unless there was an absolute necessity, preferring for them instead to sustain themselves through manual work. *Constituciones* requires the Carmelite nuns to procure remuneration with their handiwork to support the communal needs, insofar as such work did not distract them from prayer. Here the command to work expressed in Genesis and by St. Paul should be mentioned. This contrasts with the Theravādin position on manual labor and handling money. Since the inception of Buddhism, Buddhist monastics are not allowed to earn their livelihood depending entirely on the laity. On a more formal level, the Theravāda regime is regulated with great minuteness; this level of elaboration is absent in the organization of the Carmelite communal life.

In spite of these differences, observing the tabulated results, evidence demonstrates a noticeable parallelism with regard to asceticism in the *Pātimokkha* and the *Constituciones*. The Buddha did not want to burden the monastic with an asceticism that was too rigorous. Teresa's *Constituciones* embrace the same moderate spirit.⁴⁴ Both traditions share a wish for life that balances absolute abnegation and material detachment, on the one hand, and the need for physical wellbeing, on the other; a

⁴⁴ Teresa writes: "It is sufficient to fulfill the obligation set by the Church without imposing another on top of it, for the nuns tend to get scrupulous" (Cta. to Gracián, Feb. 21, 1581). See Gabriele, *Comentario espiritual*, 29.

middle road between gluttony and extreme fasting. It is abundantly clear that the rules are designed to provide for the monastic's basic needs but remove craving (or the thought of it) for what is not essential. Prohibitions and ascetic austerities only aim to eliminate what is superfluous and prevent attachment.

Regarding food intake, for instance, the disciplinary codes of the two religious orders sanction a reduced amount of nourishment that is enough for survival and to remain in good health. *Constituciones* established a long eight-month fast with one meal a day, and the permanent avoidance of meat, except in cases of great necessity (V 36,14). Both rules also advocate absolute indifference towards the quantity and quality of food.

Pātimokkha and *Constituciones* state that all property, including personal effects, belong to the community and that the monastic cannot possess anything as his own,⁴⁵ such rules are designed to curb possessiveness and to utilize objects with detachment. Both codes stipulate inexpensive materials for clothing (decent, without adornment).⁴⁶ Similarly, the beds should be austere and made with low-priced materials. Sumptuous decorations and all ornamentations are superfluous, distracting from the spiritual life. Clearly, all these rules are also intended to keep self-preoccupation and vanity at bay.

A thorough analysis would take us into further but unnecessary details. Suffice it to say that in both sets of ascetic observances, the life of abnegation means complete but progressive detachment from all unnecessary wants, relegating desires to the simple natural appetites of a human being. The aim is contentment with a simple life (i.e. poverty, chastity), excluding all unnecessary material items and comforts, which never bring lasting happiness, and so reorient desire towards religious aspirations.

In conclusion, in comparative perspective, the asceticism ingrained in the monastic rules of both traditions seeks the perfection of virtue, detachment from the world, freedom of the spirit, and a life of extreme simplicity. This transformation occurs by attenuating wants, reducing the ascetic's needs in order to transcend sensorial desires. The monastic codes of both traditions contribute to the cultivation of a life of simplicity, contentment, and to the perfecting of "good behavior."⁴⁷ But, above all, to the purity of heart described in both traditions as the essence of the monastic life.

⁴⁵ *Constituciones* reads that if a Prioress sees a nun who has a fondness or pleasure in something particular, be it books, cells or anything else, then the Prioress should remove that particular thing (Co 8,63).

⁴⁶ In Buddhism the monastic's garments are made of several pieces sewn together.

⁴⁷ "The *Pātimokkha* contains 75 rules of good behavior (called *sekhiya dhamma*)" (Mohan Wijayaratna, *Buddhist Monastic Life: According to the Texts of the Theravada Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 45).

5.5.4 Comparison of ascetic practices

Thus far, our discussion focused on the asceticism inherent in the monastic code. In some cases, however, to attain further purification and perfect the virtues, the monastic may require ascetic practices beyond the monastic code as additional implements to subjugate particularly-entrenched wants and attachments. As with stipulated practices, these ascetic practices are intended to reduce desires to a minimum, so that disorderly appetites of the flesh and unruly desires of heart are conquered, freeing the person from needless distractions. In this section, we will consider the *dhutaṅgas* and Teresa's ascetic practices and compare what our authors and traditions have to say about them.

As noted in Section 5.5.1 in Chapter Two of the *Visuddhimagga* (*dhutaṅga-niddesa*), Buddhaghosa recommends thirteen ascetic practices (*dhutaṅgas*): (1) wearing only robes made out of rags; (2) having only three robes; (3) living only on lumps (*piṇḍa*); (4) begging from house to house; (5) taking meals in one sitting; (6) eating from a single bowl; (7) refusing food after finishing one's meal; (8) forest-dwelling; (9) dwelling at the root of a tree; (10) dwelling in the open; (11) dwelling in a charnel ground; (12) sleeping in any place; (13) sitting posture (PP 2.2).⁴⁸ These extra-regulatory practices are voluntarily taken up by the renouncer to defeat deeply-ingrained attachments and designed to perfect the virtues (e.g. fewness of wishes, contentment) stated in PP 2.1.

As these practices pertain to a life in an uncloistered monastery, the *dhutaṅgas* find no place in Teresa's convents,⁴⁹ hence there are no exact counterparts in Teresa's works. However, despite incompatibilities arising from a dissimilar cultural-religious context, the spirit of these auxiliary austerities would have been familiar to Teresa, for they aim to uproot cravings for "things of the flesh" (e.g. superfluous food, comforts and ornaments). Although the purpose of these austerities is to conquer unruly appetites, their final aim is to control volition restraining it to essential requirements of the body and the mind. Just as the one-sessioner's or the bowl-food-eater's *dhutaṅga* practices are conducive to the attainment of detachment and cultivation of contentment with essential needs, Teresa has comparable means for avoiding needless wants, superfluous wishes and eliminating attachments. To give one example, *Constituciones* rule 10 reads: "the prioress should be very careful. If she sees that a sister is attached to something, be it a book, or a cell, or anything else, she should take it from her."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ In the *Visuddhimagga*, details of these ascetic practices are discussed from PP 2.23 through 2.77.

⁴⁹ Also, recall that of these thirteen practices, five are not allowed to *bhikkhunis*, namely, the later-food-refuser and the tree-root, forest, open-air-ground and charnel-ground-dweller's practices.

⁵⁰ It must be said that the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and key virtues such as charity and humility, are also

Like Buddhaghosa, Teresa mentions voluntary ascetic practices outside of the code, which she refers to, in her contemporary language, as “mortifications” (*mortificaciones*), “penances” (*penitencias*), “works” (*trabajos*), “punishments” (*castigos*). Such austerities extraneous to the code may be extended periods of self-imposed silence, voluntary fasting, seclusion, vigils, staying in upright posture and performing unpleasant tasks. *Constituciones* mentions: “works, fasting, silence, enclosure, serve the choir” (Co 12,1), and even contemplates periods for such practices, as it was customary in her time.⁵¹ Catholicism, thus, allows disciplines that may involve a *moderate* self-infliction of pain. But Teresa always rejected extreme austerities and self-discipline.

An important question for our discussion is: are these additional practices described by our two authors always necessary? For Buddhaghosa, these non-regulatory practices are not compulsory and, likewise for Teresa, all mortifications are optional.⁵² Yet, both Teresa and Buddhaghosa seem to consider them integral part of their paths. Although the Buddha rejected making the *dhutaṅgas* compulsory, for Buddhaghosa they seem to be a constituent part of the path to purification, as he includes a chapter on the *dhutaṅgas* in this book. Flood seems to share this opinion when he writes “For some later writers (namely Buddhaghosa and the author of the Questions of King Milinda) considered it [asceticism] to be an integral constituent of the middle way.”⁵³ Similarly for Teresa, it seems that ascetic practices help a life of prayer to be genuine.⁵⁴

Asceticism is a universal phenomenon of religious life for, without conquering unruly appetites or unnecessary wants, there cannot be liberation from detachment from the self or purification of the soul. What is imperative for our authors is the transformation of the heart. Purification of moral inadequacies is always necessary, but where a life of virtue, self-mastery, and detachment have become an intrinsic part of the renouncer’s character, the application of extra-disciplinary ascetic practices is not required.

5.5.5 The benefits of asceticism

Our two writers concur that moderate asceticism is efficacious. Buddhaghosa writes:

directed at the root of intentionality as occurs with Theravāda practices.

⁵¹ Teresa’s *Constituciones* reads: “Should the Lord give a sister the desire to perform a mortification, she should ask permission. This good practice should not be lost, for some benefits are drawn from it. Let it be done quickly so as not to interfere with the reading” (Co 26).

⁵² Teresa clearly states that “mortification is not matter of obligation” (F 18,8).

⁵³ Flood, *Ascetic Self*, 122.

⁵⁴ Teresa says “Our primitive rule states that we must pray without ceasing. If we do this with all the care possible ... the fasts, the disciplines, and the silence the order commands will not be wanting. For you already know that if prayer is to be genuine, it must be helped by these other things; prayer and comfortable living are incompatible” (C 4,2). Cf. C 18,1.

“no ascetic practice is unprofitable” (PP 2.78), a statement with which Teresa would agree saying, as we have seen, that the ascetic disciplines are beneficial for the soul. What are then these benefits? Asceticism has the longer-term effect of perfecting the religious-spiritual life. It also has the more immediate effect of furthering the ethical life. Where virtue immerses the monastic ethical living, asceticism contributes to his further ethical advancement. This latter aim is finally reached when virtue is firmly incorporated into the ascetic’s character.⁵⁵

The asceticism of Theravāda and Catholicism are informed by discrete paradigms, but both share a goal: to purify impurities—the defilements (e.g. sensory desires)⁵⁶ and the “disordered appetites” (e.g. lust, gluttony)—from their attachment to the senses. Ascetic practices may appear exacting,⁵⁷ but their objective is to provide inner restraint contentment, and detachment from appetites for non-essential needs.⁵⁸ The purpose of the *dhutaṅgas*, like Teresa’s disciplines, then is the attainment of freedom from unnecessary wants and mental preoccupations. The ascetic practices are performed so that one may avoid attachment to food, attire, lodging and the like while maintaining life and health. To do so, cravings in the monastic’s heart must be removed.⁵⁹ Likewise, Ascetic performance strengthens resistance to urges like hunger, sleep, facilitates detachment from attraction to pleasure and aversion to pain, from likes and dislikes, and lets the monastic attain *apatheia* (ἀπάθεια) with respect to the allures of the world, equanimity towards binaries (cold-hot), and to gain internal and external independence.

Asceticism has other important benefits: it brings what Castelli fittingly refers to as “intensification of self-awareness.”⁶⁰ It confers joy and purity to the ascetic’s heart, restores his balance, and induces positive and enduring changes in his character. Moreover, another outcome of asceticism is to minimize impediments to meditation. Through elevating virtue and overcoming cravings, and living without regret or remorse, ascetics in both traditions are prepared to embark upon and succeed in the practice of advanced levels of meditation and contemplation,⁶¹ to which we turn our attention next.

⁵⁵ For Buddhaghosa the degree of *sīla* needed for starting the practice of *samādhi* is when the monastic is well established in virtue (PP 1,1). Teresa speaks of the nun “embellished with the virtues.”

⁵⁶ Buddhaghosa states that the *dhutaṅgas* “are the practices (*aṅga*) of a *bhikkhu* who is ascetic (*dhuta*) because he has shaken off (*dhuta*) defilement by undertaking one or other of them” (PP. 2,11). See also PP 2.81.

⁵⁷ Christianity speaks of “mortification,” a word from the Latin “*mortem facere*” (lit. “to put to death”). “Mortification of the flesh” means to kill evil inclinations of the heart that lead to sin. The essence of Christian asceticism is found in Mt. 5.29.

⁵⁸ Like a Christian ascetic, the Buddhist ascetic “has no material longings [...] his material wants are confined to the basic necessities of life essential for leading a healthy life...a life of extreme simplicity” (“Ascetic Practices,” EB, 167).

⁵⁹ J. C. Holt writes: “*Vinaya*” [verb *vi* + *√ni*] means “abolishing,” “removal.” Holt renders *Vinaya* as “that which removes” John Clifford Holt, *Discipline: The Canonical Buddhism of the Vinayapīṭaka* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 1981), 62. One of the benefits of the *Vinaya* stated by Buddha is the prevention or elimination of *āsavas* or evil states (Vin III.21).

⁶⁰ Elizabeth Castelli, “Asceticism-Audience and Resistance: Response to the Three Preceding Papers,” *Asceticism*, 185.

⁶¹ Teresa states that it would not be possible to attain high degrees of contemplative prayer without the virtues (C 16).

5.6 PRAYER, WORSHIP AND RITUAL

5.6.1 Introduction

In the previous sections, we observed commonalities in ethico-ascetical development between the Buddhist path prior to the practice of *samādhī* and Teresa's early mansions. In succeeding sections, further structural, functional and phenomenological parallels in comparing the path of *samatha* meditation and Teresa's path beyond *via purgativa* will be set out and analyzed. But, before we attempt such comparison, the subject of prayer, worship and ritual should be discussed as these themes are significant for our purposes.

For Teresa, prayer is integral to the path since crossing through the gate of the interior castle that is prayer, as well as performing acts of religiosity, worship, and ceremonies. Buddhaghosa does not discuss similar acts of religiosity and ritual in the *Visuddhimagga*. But, at this juncture, several questions arise. Are there prayers and acts of worship in Theravāda analogous to those in Catholicism? What is their significance? What do these religious acts and prayer-like practices look like? To answer these questions, we must first seek out and recapitulate what Teresa says about the religious activity of monastics in the early mansions and compare it with religious and prayer-like activity in Theravāda.¹

The concept of meditation as being the central practice of Buddhism is archetypal. Yet, Theravāda includes rites and ceremonies (e.g. liturgical recitation of Pāli scriptures), and non-liturgical acts of religiosity such as devotional offerings of incense, homages, veneration of relics, adoration of images and the like, which are performed by all Buddhists—lay devotees, novices, and fully ordained monastics—and are as spiritually important today as in Buddhaghosa's time.² Some of these acts, resembling those in the Christian religious life,³ are ancillary to the cultivation of virtue and will be compared in this Section with their Christian counterpart. But first, Theravāda practices which can be categorized as "speech acts," and resemble in many ways the first rung on Teresa's ladder of prayer (i.e., vocal and mental prayer) will be compared and contrasted. These "speech acts," and acts of religiosity are not limited to *sīla* and *via purgativa* but extend to all spiritual life. They are discussed here due to their appropriateness at this stage.

¹ The distinction between vocal and mental prayer may seem unimportant today but, as shown in the background, it was a highly-controversial issue in the 16th century Spain. Owing to these polemics, we have detailed knowledge of Teresa's doctrine on prayer. We also have good knowledge of the religious and devotional acts practiced in Teresa's time. Buddhaghosa does not discuss worship and prayer-like activity during the practice of *sīla* in the *Visuddhimagga*. Thus, references to worship and prayer-like activity have been brought from other sources within the Theravāda tradition.

² U. Pe Maung Tin, *Buddhist devotion and meditation: an objective description and study* (London: S.P.C.K., 1964).

³ For many Theravāda monastics today (and most probably also in the past), rituals, ceremonies and devotional acts are the main spiritual practice, as not all monastics engage in meditation. Cf. Faure, *Unmasking Buddhism*, 66-70.

5.6.2 Christian prayer and Buddhist “prayer”

5.6.2.1 Teresian vocal and mental prayer

Spiritual beginners practice vocal and mental prayer.⁴ In *Vida*, these forms of prayer are the “first waters” of the four ways described to irrigate the garden of the soul (V 11,7).⁵ These modes of prayer are active (V 11,5), or ascetic, as their effects are acquired. As Teresa states, neophytes “draw water from a well” (V 11,9), meaning, they pray through their willful effort or, as Dicken puts it, “only by means of self-conscious concentration.”⁶

In Teresa’s lexicon, “vocal prayer” does not necessarily imply vocalization, but rather the use of prescribed words (e.g. those from a prayer book, the *Pater Noster*, the Apostles Creed). In contrast, in mental prayer, words are a spontaneous expression of thoughts or feelings. For Teresa, both are needed (C 21,7), each has its function (C 39,7). Teresa insists that both forms of prayer may lead to perfect contemplation.⁷ In addition, they can be indistinguishable, as both need “consideration” of what is said (C 2,1).⁸ The suitability of one or the other is contingent of the mentality of the person praying. Some people struggle to pray mentally because they are not able to “tie their thoughts”⁹ (C 24,1). For them, vocal prayer is advised (C 24,1) and, particularly, the recitation of short prayers (e.g. the *Ave Maria*). Teresa explains that ascetic prayer (vocal or mental) always involves some effort. Beginners, she says “must tire themselves in trying to recollect their senses. Since they are accustomed to being distracted [...] They need to get accustomed to caring nothing at all about seeing or hearing, to practicing the Liturgy of the Hours [...] and thus to solitude and withdrawal, and to thinking on their past life” (V 11,9).

According to Teresa, vocal prayer, practiced at any stage, is exceedingly important. Although rudimentary, it should be performed with care as, through it, the person grows in self-awareness, acquires a good inner disposition, and contemplation may ensue (CV 31,13). The practice of prayer should always be accompanied by growth in virtue.¹⁰

⁴ In *Castillo* there is no detailed discussion on vocal-mental prayer as this book is addressed to those familiar with *Camino*. In *Camino* and *Vida* these forms of prayer are discussed in detail. In fact, *Camino* is a prayer-guide for Teresa’s nuns.

⁵ Vocal and mental prayer are suitable for all stages of spiritual life. They are introduced here because they are the most adequate form of prayer for those in the early mansions.

⁶ Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 208. Cf. V 9,5. Teresa would add that even here the grace of God is always needed.

⁷ Teresa says, “to keep you from thinking that little is gained through a perfect recitation of vocal prayer, I tell you that it is very possible that while you are reciting the *Pater Noster* or some other vocal prayer, the Lord may raise you to perfect contemplation” (C 25,1) and speaks of a nun who attained perfect contemplation praying the Lord’s Prayer (C 30,7).

⁸ According to Teresa, praying without “consideration” of what is being said is not prayer at all (C 24,1) or, as Shakespeare put it, “words without thoughts never to heaven go” (William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 3, scene 3).

⁹ That is, they cannot keep a line of thought or mental images during prayer, due to the erratic nature of their minds.

¹⁰ Teresa says, “Everything depends on our having true light to keep the law of God perfectly. This is a firm basis for prayer; but without this strong foundation the whole building will go awry” (C 5,2).

5.6.2.2 Theravāda homologue of Christian prayer¹¹

In the preamble to this section, we stated that Theravāda practitioners of purification of virtue (*sīla*) may perform acts of religiosity similar to those in Christian *via purgativa*. Among them, religious acts of speech that have phenomenological affinities to Christian prayer and are habitually referred to as “prayers” by Theravāda authors writing in English.¹² It must be said in the same breath that many Theravāda writers and scholars are understandably reluctant to employ the word “prayer” in the Buddhist context, due its theistic connotations as these Buddhist “prayers” are never addressed to the gods.¹³

As noted earlier, the word “prayer” in the Christian milieu has many meanings and is applied to a diversity of contexts: from “prayer” as a synonym for the whole spiritual path, to “prayer” as a spiritual state, or as a rung in the Christian ladder of orison (as in Teresa). “Prayer,” as used in this subsection, refers specifically to acts of vocal or mental prayer that are the most rudimentary and straightforward forms of prayer in Christian religious life, and in contradistinction to discursive and non-discursive meditation. This mode of prayer, basic and universal, is especially suitable for those in the first stage of practice—the large majority—and is a prelude to meditation. Such use of “prayer” is nonetheless still problematic in Buddhism, mostly due to theistic connotations,¹⁴ and because some of its forms are indistinguishable from specific types of meditation (e.g. *mettā bhāvanā*).

If “prayer” is recurrently used in Buddhist contexts, however, it is in its broader sense, and because no exact equivalent is found in Pāli,¹⁵ a language that lacks an umbrella concept for all these religious “speech-acts.” Pāli terms like *āyācana* (adoration), *paṇidhi* or *paṇidhāna* (aspiration),¹⁶ *patthanā* (wish, request),¹⁷ or *manta* (mantra) are too restricted in meaning to encompass the broader sense frequently given to “prayer.” In the present study, the word “prayer,” applied to Theravāda, is used then merely as a heuristic tool, or comparative category, but always in quotes, and taking into account that this use merits the above extended qualification. Next, the features of Christian vocal and prayer are compared to, and contrasted against, analogous practices in Theravāda.

¹¹ For “prayer” in Buddhist context see J. L. Cabezon, “Prayer,” *EncBuddh*, Vol. 2, 671-73; Luis O. Gomez: “Prayer: Buddhist Perspectives,” *EM*, 1038-40; A. Govinda, “The Importance of Prayer in Buddhism,” *The Middle Way* 39, 2 (1964), 46-53; and Addicabandhu Ganeri, *Buddhist Prayer and Worship* (Sea to Sea Publications, 2007).

¹² The word “prayer” is used often in the context of Theravāda. It is also often applied in Tibetan and Mahāyāna Buddhism and is a commonplace in Buddhism. Cf. “Prayer,” Damien Keown, *A Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), 222.

¹³ Richard Gombrich, *Precept and Practice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971). 254.

¹⁴ Luis O. Gomez, “Prayer: Buddhist Perspectives,” *EM*, 1038.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ See “*Āyācanā*,” *PED*, 121; and “*Paṇidhi*” *PED*, 450.

¹⁷ *PED* defines *patthanā* as “aiming at, wish, desire, request, aspiration, prayer.” See “*Patthanā*,” *PED*, 454.

5.6.2.3 Christian prayer and Theravāda “prayer”

The word “prayer” (etym. from Medieval Latin *precaria*, “petition, prayer”) is polysemic. Typically, it is understood as “an address [...] to God or a god in word or thought.”¹⁸ Teresa’s definition, as “loving conversation with God” (V 8,5), presupposes: belief in God, an inter personal relationship¹⁹ and communication with Him (in dialogue rather than soliloquy), God’s responsiveness to prayer, and the possibility of communion with Him. Clearly, such connotations are not applicable to Theravāda, where no belief in a creator god is upheld, and therefore, no communication with such god is conceivable. Moreover, the Buddha discouraged prayer to the gods as futile for liberation,²⁰ nor is the Buddha a divine being to whom prayers can be addressed or to which he may respond. As Pieris states: “any prayer to the Buddha is heretical for Buddhists. All orthodox prayers in devotional texts are wishes uttered before the Buddha rather than prayers addressed to the Buddha.”²¹ Furthermore, divine beings’ capacity to interfere with a person’s karma is denied in Theravāda. Thus, in the sense stated, there is no prayer *per se* in Theravāda.

“Prayer,” however, has other meanings, such as intense hope or wish, some of which are not confined to a theistic conception but connote a universal human activity.²² Besides, Christian prayer has many forms and functions. The Christian tradition classifies prayer by its content into several types (e.g. thanksgiving, blessing, dedication, adoration, confession, praise, lamentation and so on). Some of these modalities reverberate with practices in Theravāda, called “prayers” in Buddhist writings in English²³ due to phenomenological overlaps, and in the absence of an alternative umbrella term in Pāli. Some instances of these orthodox Theravāda “prayers” may suffice to illustrate this point. Pāli devotional texts contains “earnest wishes” (*patthanā*),²⁴ or “aspirations” (*paṇidhi*),²⁵ which, as Gombrich notes, “play an important part in Theravāda conceptions of the path to nirvana.”²⁶ These wishes and aspirations, although different in nature, are somewhat reminiscent of Christian prayers of intercession for the Kingdom of God, or the welfare of the world. A Theravādin also expresses veneration or reverence for the Buddha in laudatory praises of his qualities, that are evocative of praises for Jesus Christ. Some Buddhist “prayers for protection” are also akin to some Christian prayers.

¹⁸ “Prayer,” MWD, 563.

¹⁹ Recall the familiarity and intimacy Teresa’s relationship with Christ, to whom she addresses as a friend, spouse, father.

²⁰ Prayers to gods exist in Theravāda as petitions for mundane needs but recognized as ineffective for liberation (AN 5.43).

²¹ Aloysius Pieris, personal communication, 22/10/14.

²² Janet Ruffing, “The Human Experience of Prayer: East and West,” in *Teach us to Pray: Proceedings of the Theology Institute of Villanova University* ed. Francis Eigo (Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1996), 1-34.

²³ For example, J. L. Cabezon, “Prayer,” *EncBuddh*, Vol. 2, 671–73.

²⁴ *Patthanā* is often translated as “prayer” or “religious aspiration.”

²⁵ Such as: “May all beings be happy” or “May all beings be free from suffering.”

²⁶ Quoted by Malcolm David Eckel, *To See the Buddha: A Philosopher’s Quest for the Meaning of Emptiness*, 1994, 81.

Buddhist “prayers” bear a resemblance to some Christian prayers, not only in content, but in form and structure. Both are usually short, consisting of the recitation of traditional formulae of consecrated words. However, both may also adopt a freer form of expression. Referring to the rudimentary praying engagement of the initial mansions, Teresa says that, here, every person prays in his own way (*a nuestro modo*). Such prayer can be mental or vocal, formal or improvised. In Buddhism, “prayer” may also adopt a variety of forms or be spontaneously expression of feelings, in ways similar to Christian prayer.

Buddhists recite mantras²⁷(e.g. the Buddha’s name: “Buddho”), hundreds of times, which reverberate with Christian single word repetitions like “Jesus,” “God,” or “love,” various litanies, or mantra-like recitations like the Lord’s Prayer,²⁸ the Rosary.²⁹ In our two traditions, the use of prayer beads helps to mark the number of repetitions.³⁰ Buddhists also recite verses (*gāthās*), which bring to mind Christian counterparts, and pronounce verbal formulas (e.g. Three Refuges) that, “functionally,” as Gombrich says, resemble the Lord’s Prayer.³¹ In Theravāda, monastics perform “chanting prayers” (e.g. *suttas*), in Pāli, with no intonation, similarly to monastic practices extant in Catholicism.

The psychology of religion identifies a series of functions of prayer, which Christian prayer and Buddhist “prayer” share, and are important for development of the person.³² Prayer, like worship and other devotional practices, channels the persons’ religious yearnings. It is more a manifestation of a heartfelt religiosity than a product of the intellect. In both traditions, there is a close and reciprocal relation between prayer and mortality, in developing the virtues,³³ enhancing self-awareness and control,³⁴ and transforming the person’s character.³⁵ Prayer also serves as a primary firewall against distractions caused by the senses; it concentrates the attention and tends to reduce interior chatter. From a psychological standpoint, genuine “prayer” is uplifting and helps to cultivate an attitude of sincerity, reverence, and humility, opening the person’s heart. It reaffirms the person’s commitment to his faith and imbues his character with the religious ideal.

²⁷ The word “mantra” (*mantra* in Pāli), impossible to translate precisely (a reserve case of “prayer”), has been adopted in the English vocabulary. It derives from the Sanskrit verbal root *man*, “to think,” and the suffix *-tra*, denoting instrumentality.

²⁸ The *Lord’s Prayer* reads: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Of Oriental origin, the Jesus Prayer became known through the *Philokalia* and today has been widely adopted by Roman Catholicism.

²⁹ Rosary is a Catholic devotion “consisting of meditation on usually five sacred mysteries during recitation of five decades of Hail Marys of which each begins with an Our Father and ends with a Gloria Patri” (“Rosary,” MWD, 630).

³⁰ Buddhist prayer beads are traditionally made of 108 beads, the rosary strings of 54 beads and an additional five beads.

³¹ Gombrich states, “The Five Precepts, preceded by the Three Refuges, are taken so frequently that they may be called the functional equivalent of the Lord’s Prayer” (Gombrich, *Precept and Practice*, 296).

³² Bernard Spilka and Kevin L. Ladd, *The Psychology of Prayer: A Scientific Approach* (New York: Guildford Press, 2013).

³³ Prayers of praise, exhortations and the like, bring the spiritual qualities to the forefront of the religious ideal contributing to the development of the virtues and subtly transforming the person’s character.

³⁴ Teresa comments: “that souls who do not practice prayer are like people with paralyzed or crippled bodies; even though they have hands and feet they cannot give orders to these hands and feet” (1M 1,6).

³⁵ Prayer helps to build an attitude of reverence and humility of which accompanying bodily postures (e.g. standing, kneeling, prostration), and gestures of performance (e.g. folding of the hands together, *añjali*) are external manifestations.

Relating to attitude and performance during prayer, Teresa upholds that prayer should be done “with consideration,” that is, with respect for “interior things” (1M 1,7). Likewise, Buddhist masters are adamant in teaching that monks should not recite like “parrots,” but with heartfelt intention, sincerity, and “understanding and insight.”³⁶ In both traditions, prayer should be interiorized, from the lips to the mind, until it penetrates the heart.

All similarity ends when approaching the systematicity of prayer in the two traditions. Christian and Buddhist prayers are part of disparate soteriological systems informed by distinct religious understandings. These diverse outlooks generate dissimilar motivations and qualities. All Christian prayer is ultimately addressed to God, leads to contemplation, and seeks salvation, “through communion with the Holy Mystery.” Buddhist “prayers” instead are merely ancillary to the path of liberation, whose goal is the end of suffering.

A crucial point remains about the place of prayer in both systems. The two traditions part ways in the essentiality of prayer. Prayer is at the very heart of Christian spiritual life. Prayer is what Christians do, the “quintessential thing.” Jesus was always in prayer to God (Lk. 6:12) and always commanded his disciples to be awake and pray (Mk. 13:33). For Teresa, “prayer” is the gate of the castle (1M 1,7), the indispensable means of spiritual growth (V 8,5). The Carmelite *dictum* is “constant prayer.” In contradistinction, “prayer” is not essential in Buddhism. The heart of Buddhism is meditation. The reason for this difference, and for the central importance of prayer in Christianity, has to do with the nature of Christian salvation. Prayer in Christianity may bring, through divine grace, a realization of the presence of God in the human soul, which is not the case in Buddhism. Another difference is the energy that moves prayer. Buddhist “prayer” is a human affair. For Christians, the source of prayer is God. For Teresa, God moves the soul to prayer.

In the present section we have set out some similarities between Theravāda “prayer” and Christian prayer in content, form, structure, functions, attitude and performance, which help to explain the use of the word “prayer” by Buddhist authors writing in English. We also have seen how, beyond these similarities, there are important departures in the the object, motivation,³⁷ systematicity, nature, and uneven centrality and essentiality of prayer in both religious systems. In the next section, although concisely, we will say a few words with regard to the role of devotion, religiosity and ritual in our two traditions.

³⁶ Harvey observes that reciting the formula of the Three Refuges three times “marks off the recitation from ordinary uses of speech and ensures that the mind dwells on the meaning of each affirmation at least once” (Harvey 2000, 244).

³⁷ Regarding the destination and motivation of prayer, Christianity presupposes a Creator God, and prayer is dialogically oriented to union with Him (motivation). In Buddhism, where there is no belief in a Creator God, thus, no communication with Him is possible. The motivation of “prayer” in both systems also remains fundamentally different.

5.6.3 Worship, religiosity, and ritual

Worship, and devotional practices, are so common in most religions, including non-theistic traditions,³⁸ that often are confused with the religion itself. Acts of veneration and adoration, such as the cult of images or relics, offerings, use of rosaries, pilgrimage, and the like, are steps taken by a devotee to open the heart, canalize emotion, purify and calm the mind, develop spiritual qualities, enliven faith and fervor, strengthen awareness and commitment, recollect the senses, concentrate the attention, and transform volition.

Worship and devotion are as significant aspects of Buddhist practice³⁹ nowadays as it was in Buddhaghosa's and the Buddha's time,⁴⁰ both for lay people and monastics. Some defining features of worship and devotion are subsumable under notion of *pūjā*,⁴¹ which includes practices in Theravāda crucial in its economy of merit (*puñña-kamma*). *Pūjā* may take many forms.⁴² It manifests in homages before an image of the Buddha,⁴³ whose cult is crucial to the life of the Buddhist temple, or be expressed in bows, prostrations, raising of hands, offerings, and communicated by poems of praise, chants, music and recitations. The highest form of *pūjā*, however, is the practice of meditation.⁴⁴

Worship and devotional life are essential to the life of the Catholic Church,⁴⁵ and to Teresa. The first ten chapters of *Vida* are an ideal place to learn practices of worship and devotion, as well as other acts of religiosity and piety favored by Teresa and realize that they had an important role in her spiritual development.⁴⁶ In Teresa's religious life, her early stages were accompanied by tearful devotion to the Virgin Mary, St. Joseph (V 6, 6-9), and "the glorious Magdalena" (V 9,2), the reading hagiographies, holy conversation, listening to sermons, frequent confession (V 4,2), and the use of reliquaries, amulets, breviaries and images.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, as Andrés Martín explains, these acts of religiosity, worship, and devotion were always for Teresa a prelude to the religion of the spirit.⁴⁸

³⁸ Douglas Davis, "Introduction: Raiding the Issues," *Worship*, ed. J. Holm and J. Bowker (London: Pinter Publ., 1994), 3.

³⁹ Peter Harvey, "Buddhism," in *Worship*, ed. J. Holm and J. Bowker (London: Pinter Publ., 1994), 9-33.

⁴⁰ See Charles Hallisey, *Devotion in the Buddhist Literature of Medieval Sri Lanka* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988).

⁴¹ The root of the Pāli word is *pūjā* is √ *pūj*, meaning "reverence," homage, adoration. Although some scholars question the adequacy of using "worship" or "devotion" in a Buddhist context, most Buddhist writers in English do not shy away from using these terms which are commonplace in Buddhist writings. Cf. V. V. S. Saibaba, *Faith and Devotion in Theravāda Buddhism* (UMI, 1998); Francis Story, "Prayer and Worship," *The Wheel*, No. 139, Kandi: BPS, 1980.

⁴² Shaw, *An Introduction to Buddhist Meditation*, 92-110.

⁴³ Nyanaponika pointed out that: "the Buddha repeatedly discouraged any excessive veneration paid to him personally... It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that the Buddha disparaged a reverential and devotional attitude of mind..." (Nyanaponika, "Devotion in Buddhism," *The Wheel*, No. 18, 1960).

⁴⁴ Recollection of the Buddha (*buddhānussati*) is discussed in Ch. VII of the *Visuddhimagga* as part of *samatha* meditation.

⁴⁵ For worship and devotion in Catholicism: James F. White, *Roman Catholic worship: Trent to today*, Pueblo Books, 2004.

⁴⁶ Cf. Álvarez, "Devociones," DSTJ, 221-22.

⁴⁷ An image of Christ Teresa saw in the garden of the convent provoked her second conversion (V.9).

⁴⁸ Andrés Melquiades Martín, "La religiosidad de los privilegiados: Santa Teresa y el erasmismo," in *Actas del Congreso Internacional Teresiano*, Vol. I (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1982), 189.

Differences between Buddhist and Catholic attitudes towards worship must be noted. Teresa's devotion is an expression of a loving relationship with Christ, a love and veneration to which He is expected to respond.⁴⁹ The Buddha, in contrast, is not a living presence who respond to prayers but a source of inspiration, affection, and devotion. The practice of *pūjā* expresses emotion and may help to transform unwholesome into wholesome dispositions.

On rituals, as Gethin states, the Buddha was critical of certain Brahmanical rituals (e.g. sacrifice of animals) and denied that rituals and ceremonies may bring about liberation, "but there is no real evidence in the early texts to suggest a negative attitude to faith and its ritual and devotional expression."⁵⁰ The Buddha rejected clinging to rules and rites (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*) not rites *per se*.⁵¹ Ritual observances are in fact integral to Buddhism as practiced by its adherents,⁵² including monks, since the Buddha's time.⁵³ As G.A. Somaratne notes, rituals are not sanctioned in the threefold training—*sīla*, *samādhī* and *paññā*—nor are itemized in the Noble Eightfold Path,⁵⁴ therefore, rituals and ceremonies are not essential for liberation having a secondary role, mostly the generation of merit. As Kariyawasam observes, rituals are simply ancillary to the path by developing faith and virtue and "complement inward contemplative practices."⁵⁵

The Catholicism upholds a series of consecrated ritual actions and ceremonies (e.g. reciting the Rosary) some of which are important to the life of the Catholic Church. The essential among them are the Seven Sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, Matrimony). The Sacraments "contain and communicate grace" therefore are essential on the path to sainthood and divinization. Teresa says that for any ceremony (Sacrament) of the Catholic Church she would die a thousand deaths (C 33,3) and that the Sacraments are the medicine and the ointment for our wounds (V 19,5). Rituals, ceremonies and the Sacraments are the life of the Church. Without them, Catholicism cannot be understood.⁵⁶ The Catholic attitude toward rites and ceremonies is thus very different than the early Buddhist attitude toward them.

⁴⁹ And worship and devotion are active steps in the path towards mystical union with God.

⁵⁰ Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 169.

⁵¹ On Buddhist rituals: A.G.S. Kariyawasam, "Buddhist Ceremonies and Rituals of Sri Lanka," *The Wheel*, 402/404, 1995.

⁵² To give some examples, the admission of new entrants into Buddhism, offerings in the temple, the worship of stupas, offering respect to the teacher, chanting, sharing the merits, new births and funerals have ceremonial aspects to it.

⁵³ The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN 16). Some rituals are: taking refuge in the Three Jewels; undertaking the precepts, worship of stupas, offerings to the monks, preaching the dhamma (*dhamma-desanā*).

⁵⁴ G. A. Somaratne, "Theravada Buddhist Rituals in Sri Lanka: A Ladder to Heaven" In *Pranamalekha: Essays in Honour of Ven. Medagama Vajiragnana*, ed. Wilaoye Wimalajothi *et al.* (2003), 169-78.

⁵⁵ Kariyawasam, "Buddhist Ceremonies and Rituals of Sri Lanka," 3.

⁵⁶ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that "liturgy is an 'action' of the whole Christ (*Christus totus*) (CCC 1136) and that, in it, "It is the whole community, the Body of Christ united with its Head, that celebrates" (CCC 1140).

5.6.4 The benefits of prayer, worship and ritual.

We do not know with precision how the devotional and ritual practices conducted by Theravāda monastics looked like in Buddhaghosa's time, but we know that ceremonial and ritual performance, the use of buddha images, incense, consecrations, chanting, recitations and the like have been commonplace in Buddhist almost from its inception. More information is available on the 16th century traditions prevalent in Teresa's time.

Prayer, worship and ritual are not only practices of devotional Christianity, and of what has been called "Communal Buddhism" and opposed to "Soteriological Buddhism."⁵⁷ In both the Theravāda and Carmelite traditions, devotion and ritual, today as before, are ancillary to morality and asceticism, thus they have a soteriological component to them. Gombrich says "acts of devotion produce spiritual welfare because they are said to calm the mind, and this constitute part of the same mental training as morality and meditation."⁵⁸ A similar statement can be pronounced with regard to the Carmelite path. Wordship, prayers and recitations, other observances (e.g. confession, penances) are integral and significant components of all spiritual paths developing faith and confidence, conveying the emotional needs of the devotees, generating virtue and positive feelings and the like. Therefore, devotional, ritualistic and ceremonial practices should be taken highly into account when considering the dynamics of spiritual growth in both traditions.⁵⁹

It should be stressed, though, the common rejection in the Theravāda and Carmelite traditions of what can be called "misplaced devotions," that is, purely external devotional acts without soteriological value, as in the case of devotions to the beauty of the Buddha, or "devocioncillas" (small devotions) criticized by Teresa. These are spiritually barren observances which can constitute impediments instead of aids to spiritual progress.

⁵⁷ See Gombrich's book, *Theravāda Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*. London and New York: Routledge, 1988.

⁵⁸ Richard F. Gombrich, "Buddhist Cultic Life in Southeast Asia," in *Buddhism and Asian History*, ed Joseph M. Kitagawa and Mark D. Cummings (New York, MacMillan Publishing, 1989), 309- 15.

⁵⁹ Recitations and rituals may induce ecstatic trances, even communal ones.

5.7 PURIFICATION OF MIND AND TERESA'S PATH BEYOND *VIA PURGATIVA*

5.7.1 Introduction

The inspiration for this study, as stated earlier, has a twofold purpose and objective: (1) to clarify the similarities and differences between the dynamics of spiritual life described by Buddhaghosa and Teresa; and (2) to make sense of phenomenological coincidences and structural parallelisms between the two processes. The latter aim is sought by identifying possible interrelationships between them and by determining if there is an underlying level where they converge, notwithstanding their undeniable divergences. So far in our study, a pattern has already emerged. Our two authors prioritize a firm ethical foundation as the basis of spiritual life for which the cultivation of virtue is indispensable. They also concur that moral behavior alone is insufficient to attain the soteriological goal. More is required: the entire spiritual transformation of the person (i.e., through self-effort for Buddhists and “good works” aided by grace for Christians).

Along this line of further spiritual transformation beyond *sīla* and *via purgativa*, additional phenomenological affinities and correlative patterns can be identified between “purification of mind” (*citta-visuddhi*)—the second stage in the sevenfold framework of the *Visuddhimagga*—and the Third to the Sixth Mansions in Teresa’s castle of the soul. This is so, first, because there are robust phenomenological correspondences and enough structural coincidences between the pre-*jhānic* phase of *samatha* meditation and the Third and Fourth Mansions—i.e. *via illuminativa*—to justify a comparative task. These correspondences will be explored in Sections 5.8 to 5.10 of this comparative part of the study. Secondly, we will argue that remarkable correspondences can also be found between the four *jhānas* and Teresa’s mystical degrees of prayer: the Fifth and the Sixth Mansions—i.e., *via unitiva*—culminating in both systems with a cluster of paranormal phenomena whose likeness merits an explanation and must be explored accordingly.¹

The next two subsections present an overview “purification of mind” (*citta-visuddhi*) as described in the *Visuddhimagga*, and a survey of Teresa’s prayer-path beyond *via purgativa* and its main features as presented in *Castillo interior*, in preparation for a synoptic comparison between the two processes in following subsections. Here, we will consider the similarities and differences between *samatha* meditation and Teresa’s path of contemplation. Afterwards, we will consider the essential prerequisites of *samatha* meditation and Christian prayer and contemplation, according to our authors’ accounts.

¹ A comparison of purification of mind (*citta-visuddhi*) and *via unitiva* is made in Sections 5.11 to 5.18 of this study.

5.7.2 “Purification of Mind” (*citta-visuddhī*)

The prefatory verse of the *Visuddhimagga* reads thus: “When a wise man, established well in virtue [*sīla*], develops consciousness [*citta*] and understanding [*paññā*], then as a *bhikkhu* ardent and sagacious, he succeeds in disentangling this tangle” (PP 1.1). In this verse, the word *citta* (or mind), translated here as “consciousness” by Ñāṇamoli, should be understood in the sense of “concentration” (*samādhi*),² and is synonymous with “purification of mind” (*citta-visuddhī*), the second stage in the threefold framework of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, and in the sevenfold scaffolding of stages of the path of purification—as described in the *Rathavinīta Sutta* (MN 24)—in which the *Visuddhimagga* is set.³ “Purification of mind” (*citta-visuddhī*) is dealt with in Part II of the *Visuddhimagga*, titled “Description of Concentration” (*samādhi-niddesa*). The exposition of “purification of mind” is the most extended section of the *Visuddhimagga*, occupying half of the book.⁴

In Abhidhammic terms, “purification of mind,” or “concentration” (*samādhi*), matches the second of the three “trainings” (*sikkhā*):⁵ “training in higher mind” (*adhicitta-sikkhā*). The purpose of this second training is to purify the mind until it reaches a degree of purity, unification, concentration and tranquility that prepares it for, and enables the practice of “understanding” (*paññā*). In this section, we will discuss briefly each of these qualities. But first, it merits to mention once again that in the linear and abstract model presented by Buddhaghosa, based on the *Rathavinīta Sutta*, “purification of mind” begins after the fruitful practice of “purification of virtue” (*sīla-visuddhī*) (PP 3.28).⁶ Throughout the Pāli Canon, however, no such a clear-cut succession is once again found, but instead there is a synergistic model in which all stages are undertaken together in mutual dependence.

“Training in higher virtue” (*adhisīla-sikkhā*) is the foundation (*paṭiṭṭhā*) of the holy life (*brahmacariya*). But although ethical conduct prevents acting on the Five Hindrances—by precluding verbal, bodily and mental transgressions—and leads to concentration,⁷ mere restraint does not suppress the hindrances at the level of dispositions. In pursuit of awakening, faultless ethical behavior is needed, but all defilements at the level of

² The Pāli word *samādhi* comes from *sam* (“together”) + *ā* + *dhā* (“to place”) meaning “to put together”, “to concentrate.”

³ “Concentration” (*samādhi*) is generally understood as consisting of the cultivation of three factors of the Noble Eightfold Path: right effort (*sammā-vāyāma*), right mindfulness (*sammā-sati*) and right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*).

⁴ It comprises eleven chapters, that is, from Ch. Three to Chapter Thirteen.

⁵ These three trainings (*sikkhā*), corresponding to the threefold division *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* are: (1) training in higher virtue (*adhisīla-sikkhā*); (2) training in higher mind (*adhicitta-sikkhā*), and (3) training in higher wisdom (*adhipaññā-sikkhā*).

⁶ For Buddhaghosa, “[*samādhi*] should be developed by one who has taken his stand on virtue that has been purified by means of the special qualities of fewness of wishes, etc., and perfected by observance of the ascetic practices” (PP 3.1).

⁷ Anālayo writes: “The foundation for any mental culture is morality, and its relevance for *samādhi* finds expression in a standard qualification of moral conduct as being ‘conducive to concentration’” (Anālayo, *From Craving to Liberation*, 238).

tendencies must also be suppressed and not only abandoned.⁸ *Samādhi*—the “middle of the dispensation” as Buddhaghosa labels it—“surmounts the element of sense desires by concentration” and purifies the mind (although the defilements are only eradicated at process’ end). Thus, if *sīla* prevents the defilements from manifesting into misconduct through non-transgression, and *samādhi* prevents obsession with and craving for them by concentration, *paññā* prevents them as inherent tendencies and false view (PP 1.13).⁹

The practice of “understanding” (*paññā*), and the attainment of *nibbāna*, must also be preceded by the elimination of the mental dispersion that prevents concentration, and the attainment of mental unification that allows the realization of the nature of reality. This goal is attained through the practice of “purification of mind” or “concentration” (*samādhi*), defined by Buddhaghosa as *kusalacitta ekaggatā* (PP 3.2), a phrase translated by Ñāṇamoli as “profitable unification of mind.”¹⁰ “Concentrating” (*samādhāna*), as per Buddhaghosa’s definition, consist of the centering (*ādhāna*) of the mind and mental-concomitants, evenly (*samaṃ*) and rightly (*sammā*) on a single object, so that the meditator’s attention remains undistracted and unscattered on that object (PP 3,3).

Through the practice of “purification of mind,” the meditator also avoids restlessness and mental agitation, and gradually generates the quality of tranquility or calmness that prepares him for the practice of *paññā*. The word *samatha* means “calm,” “tranquility,” and the attainment of such quality is one of the goals of “purification of mind” or *samādhi*. Focusing attention on a single object for long periods of time pacifies the mind so that it becomes a non-wavering instrument in the quest to penetrate the true nature of reality.¹¹

All these difficulties—namely, defilements, mental dispersion and restlessness—originate in the mind. “Purification of mind” consists of cleansing the mind of impurities, making it pristine, and concentrating it and unifying it so as to eliminate distractions and enable it for the practice of understanding (*paññā*). Eventually, “purification of mind” enables the meditator to overcome the Five Hindrances and gain concentration through the practice of the *jhānas* (meditative absorptions) making the mind unblemished, one-pointed and equanimous. Free from defilements, focused, bright, flexible, and steady, the mind is now able to contemplate the nature of reality through *vipassanā* meditation.

⁸ Buddhaghosa states: “the abandoning of defilements by substitution of opposites is shown by virtue; that by suppression is shown by concentration; and that by cutting off is shown by understanding” (PP 1.12).

⁹ Anālayo, *From Craving to Liberation*, 238.

¹⁰ See PP 3.2. Ñāṇamoli opines that the compound *citta-ekaggatā* must be understood as “agreement or harmony (cf. *samagga*) of consciousness and its concomitants in focusing on a single object” (PP 3.2, note 2).

¹¹ In our present context, the terms *samatha-bhavana* (“cultivation of calm,” or *samatha* meditation), *citta-visuddhi* (“purification of mind”), and *samādhi* (“concentration”) are interchangeable.

An Overview of “purification of mind” in the *Visuddhimagga*

Following, we summarize “purification of mind” (*citta-visuddhi*), *samatha* meditation, à la Buddhaghosa in a schematic outline to be elaborated on in subsequent sections. In the linear model set forth by Buddhaghosa, once the monastic is well established in virtue (*sīla*), he is ready to engage in the second stage of the sevenfold progression based on which the *Visuddhimagga* is structured, namely, “purification of mind” (*citta-visuddhi*).¹² Buddhaghosa writes: “[concentration (*samādhi*)] should be developed by one *who has taken his stand on virtue* that has been purified by means of the special qualities of fewness of wishes, etc., and perfected by observance of the ascetic practices” (PP 3.1).¹³

But before commencing the cultivation of *samādhi* (*samādhi bhāvanā*), the monastic must optimize the conditions under which the practice of *samādhi* will be conducted. He should first avoid ten “impediments” (*palibodha*), which are obvious causes of distraction that may hinder the monastic’s progress. These ten impediments are: “dwelling (*āvāsa*), family (*kula*), gain (*lābha*), class (*gaṇa*), building (*kamma*), travel (*addhāna*), kin (*ñāti*), affliction (*ābādha*), books (*gantha*), and the supernormal powers (*iddhi*)” (PP 3.29).¹⁴

After removing the *palibodha*, the meditator should find a monastery favorable to the practice of *samadhi*,¹⁵ and approach a “good friend” (*kalyāṇa-mitta*), that is, a wise and beloved teacher who, among forty meditation subjects (*kammaṭṭhāna*), will assign him a subject suitable to his temperament and guide him throughout the meditation process.¹⁶ If a “good friend” (or meditation master) is not readily available in the monastery where the monastic dwells, the meditator should move to a monastery having one (PP 3.28). Optimally, this revered and experienced spiritual mentor or meditation guide should be one whose defilements are destroyed. If such a person is not available, it can be a non-returner, a once-returner or, in a descending order, a “very conscious person” (PP 3.63).

¹² As already mentioned, *citta-visuddhi* is the second stage in the sevenfold progression of the *Rathavinīta Sutta* (MN 24), and in the ninefold progression in the *Dasuttara Sutta* (DN 34).

¹³ [Author’s emphasis]. Buddhaghosa again states: “mundane concentration should be developed by one who has taken his stand on virtue that is quite purified in the way already stated” (PP 3.28). [Author’s emphasis].

¹⁴ The monastic’s “dwelling” (*āvāsa*), understood here as the place of the meditation practice, and “family” (*kula*), could become impairments for the successful *samādhi* practice if, for example, the monastic feels attachment to them. Family here means all those close to the monastics. Excessive “gain” (*lābha*)—here understood as the four requisites (robes, food, lodging, and medicine)—giving “class” (*gaṇa*) to students, doing “construction work” (*kamma*) in the monastery, or taking frequent “journeys” (*addhāna*), can also distract from the practice. Taking care of “kin” (*ñāti*), treating an illness or “affliction” (*ābādha*), excessive studying of “book” (*gantha*), or “supernormal powers” (*iddhi*), can also impede a fruitful practice. The unbeneficial effects of these ten *palibodhas* are explained by means of edifying stories from PP 3.28 to 3.56.

¹⁵ For Buddhaghosa’s definitions of favorable and unfavorable monastery see PP 4.1-18.

¹⁶ For Buddhaghosa the “good friend” (*kalyāṇa-mitta*) as a revered teacher, of profound speech, solicitous of the welfare and progress of the disciple (PP 3.61-73). The “good friend” is the “giver of a meditation subject” (*kammaṭṭhāna dāyaka*).

As a final preparation, the monastic should sever “lesser impairments” that may interfere with the practice (e.g., rules of decorum such as mending his clothes or cleaning the cell), and “not overlook any of the directions for development” (PP 3.28). After that, the “good friend” assigns a meditation topic to the meditator suitable for his temperament.

Buddhaghosa lists forty meditation subjects or “places of work” (*kammaṭṭhānas*),¹⁷ arranged in seven groups: ten *kaṣiṇas*,¹⁸ ten “foulnesses” (*asubhas*),¹⁹ ten “recollections” (*anussatis*),²⁰ four “divine abodes” (*brahma-vihāras*),²¹ four “immaterial” states (*arūpa*),²² one “perception” (*saññā*),²³ and one “analysis”²⁴ (*vavatthāna*).²⁵ The immediate function of the *kammaṭṭhānas* is to suppress defilements, eliminate distractions, cultivate good traits of character, develop concentration, and elicit meditative absorption (*jhāna*).

Along the path of *samādhi*, the meditator may develop three increasing levels of concentration: “preliminary concentration” (*parikamma samādhi*), “access concentration” (*upacāra samādhi*), and “absorption concentration” (*appaṇā samādhi*) also termed *jhāna*. Within *jhāna* there are four levels of attainment referred to by their numerical order.²⁶ All the forty meditation subjects may generate “preliminary concentration,” which is an initial stage of concentration. Due to their intricacy, eight of the ten “recollections” (*anussatis*)—i.e., all “recollections” except “recollection of the body” and “mindfulness of breathing”, “perception of repulsion in the nutrient” and “analysis of the four elements”—may lead only to “access concentration,” so called because it precedes “absorption concentration” or *jhāna*, which is a deeper state of full absorption and entirely absent of sensory input. The ten “foulness meditations” and “recollection of the body” may lead to the first *jhāna* only, since they involve the two “*jhāna*-factors” (*jhānaṅgas*) of *vitakka* and *vicāra*.²⁷ The first three *brahma-vihāras*—i.e. “loving-kindness” (*mettā*), “compassion” (*karuṇā*), and “altruistic joy” (*muditā*)—may only lead to the first three *jhānas*, being powerful emotions.

¹⁷ *Kammaṭṭhāna* (Skt. *karmasthāna*) means “place of work.”

¹⁸ *Kaṣiṇas* are disks made of clay that representing earth, water, fire, air, blue, yellow, red, white, light or unlimited space.

¹⁹ The ten kinds of foulness (*asubha*) are ten possible states in the process of decomposition of a corpse: bloated (*uddhamātaka*), bruised (*vinīlaka*), festering (*vipubbaka*), cut (*vicchiddaka*), eroded (*vikkhāyitaka*), strewn (*vikkhittaka*), chopped (*hatavikkhittaka*), bleeding (*lohita*), infested with worms (*pulavaka*), and skeleton (*aṭṭhika*) (PP 3.105).

²⁰ The ten recollections (*anussati*) are the recollection of the Buddha (*buddha-anussati*), the recollection of the Dhamma (*dhamma-anussati*), the recollection of the Saṅgha (*saṅgha-anussati*), the recollection of virtue (*sīla-anussati*), the recollection of generosity (*cāga-anussati*), the recollection of the deities (*devatā-anussati*), the recollection of peace (*upāsama-anussati*), the recollection of death (*maraṇa-anussati*), the mindfulness occupied with the body (*kāyagatā-sati*), and the mindfulness of in-breathing-and-out-breathing (*ānāpāna-sati*).

²¹ The four divine abodes (*brahma-vihāras*), also called the four boundless or immeasurable (*appamaññā*) meditations, are: loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), altruistic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*).

²² The base of infinite space (*ākāśānañcāyatana*), the base of infinite consciousness (*viññānañcāyatana*), the base of nothingness (*ākīñcaññāyatana*), and the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*).

²³ Perception of repulsion in the nutrient (*āhāre paṭikkūlasaññā*).

²⁴ One “analysis” refers to the definition, or “analysis,” of the four elements (*catu-dhātu-vavatthāna*).

²⁵ For a concise presentation of the forty meditation subjects, see Shaw, *Introduction to Buddhism meditation*, 67-86.

²⁶ In the *Abhidhamma* there is an alternative taxonomy of five *jhānas* instead of four by separating *vitakka* and *vicāra* as *jhāna* factors. In our present discussion we follow Buddhaghosa’s main classification into four *jhānas*.

²⁷ *Vitakka* and *vicāra* mean “initial” and “sustained” (application of the mind to the object) and define first *jhāna*.

Only meditation on “equanimity” (*upekkhā*)—the fourth *brahma-vihāra*—the ten *kaṣiṇas*, and “mindfulness of breathing” may lead to the fourth *jhāna*. Meditation on “immaterial states” (*arūpa-kammaṭṭhānas*) may generate all four “formless *jhānas*” (*arūpa-jhānas*).

As stated in PP 3.28, the “good friend” assigns to the meditator a meditational topic that suits his temperament. Buddhaghosa distinguishes six types of temperament or “character” (*carita*), elaborating on the relationship between the meditation topics and the meditator’s nature from PP 3.74 to 3.103. These six kinds of temperaments are: “lustful” (*rāga-carita*), “hateful” (*dosa-carita*), “deluded” (*moha-carita*), “faithful” (*saddhā-carita*), “intelligent” (*buddhi-carita*), and “discursive” or reflective (*vitakka-carita*).²⁸ The first three preponderant character traits are negative; the last three are their reverse.²⁹

Buddhaghosa offers exhaustive criteria for figuring out a person’s temperament based on observing his posture, actions, food preferences and the like (PP 3.97-94). This knowledge is important because it helps to identify the suitable subject for the meditator. The choice of one meditation topic or another is in order to reduce unwholesome temperamental traits in the meditator and enhance the reverse positive ones instead. Thus, as Somaratne puts it: “in this way, through the practice of *samatha*, one would be able to transform one’s greatest spiritual challenge into one’s greatest spiritual gift.”³⁰ Buddhaghosa links the suitability of a topic and meditator’s character in PP 3.121-22.³¹

Returning to the practice of *samatha* meditation itself, Buddhaghosa describes it based on the earth *kaṣiṇa*, which is a physical object (disk) apprehended by sight.³² Focusing on the “object” or “preliminary sign” (*parikamma-nimitta*) allows the meditator to form a mental “image” or “sign” (*nimitta*) of it known as “learning sign” (*uggaha-nimitta*), and gradually suppress the Five Hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇāni*) that are impediments that hinder mental unification.³³ The temporary removal of these impediments coincides with the appearance in the meditator’s mind of a luminous mental replica of the object:

²⁸ There can be combinations of character traits in a person (PP 3,74).

²⁹ This taxonomy is designed so that the parallel between opposites becomes clear.

³⁰ G. A. Somaratne, “Preliminaries of Concentration Practice: A Study Based on The Visuddhimagga.” Presentation read on occasion of the “1st. World Encounter Teresian Mysticism and Interreligious Dialogue Theravāda Buddhism and Teresian Mysticism Meditation and Contemplation- Pathways to Peace,” held in Ávila, Spain, 27-30 July 2017.

³¹ Buddhaghosa states that for people with a greedy temperament eleven subjects are suitable: ten foulness meditations and mindfulness occupied with the body. For those hateful the four divine abidings and the four color *kaṣiṇas* are suggested. Mindfulness of breathing is advised for those deluded. The faithful should practice the first six recollections (i.e., the Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, virtue, generosity and the deities). For those of intelligent nature the mindfulness of death, the recollection of peace, the perception of loathsomeness in food and analysis of the four elements are suggested. For the discursive, the *kaṣiṇa* of earth, water, fire, air, space, light and four immaterial states are suitable. Buddhaghosa adds that “there is [...] no profitable development that does not suppress greed, etc., and help faith, and so on” (PP 3.122).

³² Although some meditation subjects are apprehended by sound or touch (PP 3,119), Buddhaghosa’s instructions for the practice of *samatha* meditation are based on the earth *kaṣiṇa* applied *mutatis mutandis* to all the other meditation subjects.

³³ These Five Impediments are: sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), malevolence or ill-will (*byāpāda*), lethargy-clumsiness (*thīna-middha*), agitation-concern (*uddhacca-kukkucca*) and skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā*).

the “counter-sign” (*paṭibhāga-nimitta*) (PP 3,31). Such appearance marks the attainment of “access concentration” (*upacāra-samādhi*), which is a state of high concentration but below the level of “full absorption” (*appanā-samadhi*) or *jhāna* because the *jhāna* factors (*jhānaṅgas*) that would allow *jhāna* to emerge are not yet here sufficiently strengthened. Buddhaghosa states that the “counter-sign” appears as if breaking out of the “learning sign” being a hundred times, a thousand times, more purified than the “learning sign,” “like the moon’s disk coming out from behind a cloud” (PP 3.31). Any flaws that may appear in the “learning sign” vanish in the “counter-sign,” which, Buddhaghosa explains, “has neither color nor shape; for if it had, it would be cognizable by the eye, gross, susceptible of comprehension and stamped with the three characteristics” (PP 4.31).

The suppression of the Five Hindrances and the arising of the “counter-sign” indicate that the meditator has attained access concentration. Now, in order to rise above “access concentration” and reach *jhāna*, five “*jhāna* factors” must be strengthened. For such a goal, the meditator should guard carefully the “counter-sign” (*paṭibhāga-nimitta*), for the Five Hindrances are near and the person still dwells in the realm of the senses. To attain *jhāna*, subjects of a more discursive nature that have helped to attain “access concentration” should now be abandoned.³⁴ A continuous immersion in the object of meditation and balancing the “faculties” (*indriya*) leads to strengthening the factors of full absorption culminating in *jhāna*, which is a state characterized by the withdrawal of the internal and external senses, and complete absorption in the object of contemplation.

The taxonomy in four *jhānas* is further elaborated into eight *jhānas*, jointly categorized as the eight “achievements” (*samāpattis*), by including the four immaterial *jhānas*. The first four *jhānas* are named “material” or “with form” (*rūpa-jhānas*). In first *jhāna* five *jhāna* factors (*jhānaṅgas*) appear, which are the cause of the absorption and exact opposite to the Five Hindrances (PP 4.86). These five factors (using a provisional translation) are: (1) “initial application of the mind (to the object)” (*vitakka*); (2) “sustained application of the mind” (*vicāra*); (3) “happiness” (*pīti*); (4) “bliss” (*sukha*); (5) and “one-pointedness of mind” (*ekaggatā*)” (PP 3.21). To successively enter each *jhāna* and transcend the previous one, one must “separate” (*viveka*) himself from coarsest factors of absorption (PP 4,140). To attain second *jhāna*, the meditator should abandon the factors of *vitakka* and *vicāra*. Access to the third *jhāna* requires the abandonment of *pīti*. The fourth *jhāna* entails separation from *sukha*. In the fourth *jhāna*, the meditator remains absorbed, dwelling in perfect “equanimity” (*upekkhā*) and “one-pointedness of mind” (*ekaggatā*).

³⁴ These ten discursive subjects have been listed in footnote 20 above.

The next four *jhānas* are named “immaterial” or “formless” (*arūpa-jhānas*) because in them the “object” of meditation has no “materiality” or “form” (*a-rūpa*).³⁵ The immaterial *jhānas* share with the fourth *jhāna* the *jhāna* factors of equanimity and mental unification and are traditionally understood to be refinements of the fourth *jhāna*.³⁶

Buddhaghosa offers a series of taxonomies of concentration according to several criteria. Among them: (1) “mundane concentration,” to which the *jhānas* dealt with in this section belong and refers to the “three planes” (sensual, fine material and immaterial), is contraposed to “supramundane concentration,” related with the noble paths (PP 3.7);³⁷ (2) by the degree of concentration attained: “inferior, medium, and superior” (P 3.10); (3) by the *jhānaṅgas* involved (e.g., with happiness or without it) (PP 3.8-9; and 3.11-12); (4) by the degree of difficulty encountered (e.g., limited) (PP 3.14); (5) by the relationship of the meditator with the degree of concentration attained: partaking of diminution, partaking of stagnation, partaking of distinction and partaking of penetration (PP 3.22); and by the preponderant aspect of the practice: zeal, energy, *citta* and inquiry (PP 3.24).

The fourth *jhāna* is the basis for attaining five kinds of supernormal skills, known as “direct knowledges” (*abhiññā*)³⁸ and described in Chapter Twelve of the *Visuddhimagga*. These “mundane direct-knowledges” are: (1) a series of “supernormal powers” (*iddhi*), including supernormal hearing, telepathy, the memory of past lives and the “supernatural knowledge of the destruction of flows;” (2) “the knowledge of the divine ear element;” (3) “the knowledge of penetration of minds;” (4) the “knowledge of recollection of past lives;” and (5) “the knowledge of the passing away and reappearance of beings” (PP 12.2)

Although “purification of mind” (understood as synonymous with *samatha* meditation), as presented by Buddhaghosa in the *Visuddhimagga* seems to establish a clear linear and prototypical path of practice, for some scholars like Somaratne consider that:

What the *Visuddhimagga* presents is a pool of practices from which a practitioner could choose from to constitute one’s path, under the supervision of the meditation master, until he discovers his own path, with trials and errors. The Buddhist path is always individually based; it is always to be one’s own discovery after a period of practicing the general path laid down in the texts. The teacher in Buddhist path is “the good friend”, someone who assists the practitioner giving him some direction, guidance and encouragement, in finding the practitioner’s own path.³⁹

³⁵ The “objects” of the *arūpa-jhānas* are the bases of: infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, and neither-consciousness-nor-non-consciousness. These four immaterial states correspond to the immaterial planes of existence.

³⁶ Beyond them, the meditator may attain the state of the “cessation of perception and feeling” (*nirodha-samāpatti*). *Nirodha-samāpatti*, transcends the *arūpa-jhānas* and is understood to be the “ninth *jhāna*.” In this state, all mental activities are suspended, and it is the highest possible degree of absorption in Buddhist meditation.

³⁷ The “noble paths” refers to the four progressive stages of awakening in Theravada Buddhism: The Stream-enterer (*soṭāpanna*), once-returner (*sakadāgāmi*), non-returner (*anāgāmi*) and the *arahant*.

³⁸ *Abhiññā* has also been translated as “higher knowledges.”

³⁹ G. A. Somaratne, “Preliminaries of Concentration Practice: A Study Based on The *Visuddhimagga*.” Paper read on

5.7.3 Teresian path of prayer beyond *via purgativa*

Besides Doctor of the Church, another of Teresa's official titles is "Master of Prayer."⁴⁰ Her *magisterium* on the pedagogy on prayer,⁴¹ built on her rich personal experience and analytical depth, is one of her foremost contributions to the Church.⁴² The "way of prayer" (*camino de oración*) is how Teresa describes the journey she proposes. This "way of prayer" is not always uniform; it changes while progressing through the mansions, adapting itself to new spiritual realities and becoming more intimate and deeper. Appropriately then, Spiritual Theology speaks of different "modes" or "degrees" of prayer. In the Teresian theological lexicon, the expression "degree of prayer" (*grado de oración*) may signify either a "mode" of praying or the "state" of the soul during this prayer mode.⁴³ As mentioned earlier, each degree of prayer corresponds to one of the seven mansions, "so that—as Álvarez put it—levels of spiritual life and degrees of prayer appear paired."⁴⁴ Let us revisit the seven mansions, this time from the perspective of prayer.

An Overview of the Teresa's path of prayer

The initial three mansions are degrees of ascetic prayer, and the last three mansions are degrees of mystical prayer, whereas Fourth Mansions is a degree of transition. The souls in 1M,⁴⁵ although they have entered "the door of the Interior Castle," which is prayer and consideration, still pray once in a while, with their minds on other business. The souls of 2M are those who have begun to pray frequently, either vocally or mentally (2M 1,1). At this stage, the person is determined to live more evangelically, and struggles to conform to God's will. Many impediments arise in prayer at this stage (e.g., distractions), which obstruct the soul's progress, and entice it to abandon prayer altogether. At this juncture, Teresa advises greater virtue, faith in God, and prayer and—for those who like herself are easily distracted during meditation—meditative reading.

The reasonable and virtuous souls dwelling in 3M are already accustomed to praying—predominately discursive prayer—and "to reason with the understanding."⁴⁶ Up

occasion of the "1st. World Encounter Teresian Mysticism and Interreligious Dialogue Theravāda Buddhism And Teresian Mysticism Meditation and Contemplation- Pathways to Peace," held in Ávila ~ Spain, 27-30 July 2017.

⁴⁰ The title was conferred by Pope Paul VI in his proclamation of St. Teresa as Doctor of the Church on Sept. 27, 1970.

⁴¹ For an overview see Maximiliano Herráiz García, *La oración, historia de amistad*, Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 2003; and Daniel de Pablo, *Teresa en Oración. Historia-Experiencia-Doctrina*. Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 2004.

⁴² Pablo Maroto writes: "It is difficult to find in the whole history of Christian mysticism an exemplar richer in experiences, with more precise and profound descriptions that accompany it, than St. Teresa of Jesus" (Pablo Maroto 2004, 200).

⁴³ Teresa often equates "degrees of prayer" to "states of the soul" (e.g., when speaking of the fourth waters in V 18,3).

⁴⁴ Álvarez, "Grados de la oración," DSTJ, 323-24.

⁴⁵ From this point onwards, we will also use the abbreviation "1M," "2M" and so forth, to refer to the "first mansions," "second mansions,"... as stages. We will keep using "First Mansions" and so forth to refer to chapters of *Castillo Interior*.

⁴⁶ "[...] these souls work almost continually with the intellect, engaging in discursive thought and meditation" (3M 1,6).

to this point, prayer was oriented to avoiding sin, controlling the passions and fortifying reason. Now, reason is well established as the compass for one's life. But it is at this stage that the person complains of distractions (*diversiones*), dryness (*sequedades*) in prayer that, according to Teresa, are caused by excessive righteousness, lack of humility and attachment to reason (3M 1,6). These tend to transform discursive meditation into a mere intellectual activity. At this stage, Teresa advises that one should excel in virtue—chiefly humility, obedience and charity—and intensify detachment (*dejamiento*) from all created things (3M 1,8) and imitate Christ. The soul should also start practicing the prayer of recollection, which consists of recollecting the senses and faculties of the soul (3M 1,6) in order to awaken the will and love, but without ending meditative prayer altogether.

The prayer of recollection, acquired or infused, eventually develops into the prayer of quiet, which is characteristic of the 4M, and the first mode of prayer considered properly supernatural. The qualifier “quiet” originates from the experience of quietness and calm, peace and spiritual delight that this passive prayer generates in the soul of the mystic. Likewise, this contemplative prayer is characterized by a feeling of infused awareness and closeness to God (contemplation). In it, the will is entirely captivated by God's love.

The prayer of quiet may unfold into the supernatural prayer of full but short union of 5M. This experience of (simple) union consists of the suspension of all the soul's powers, which means that memory, will and intellect are now entirely absorbed in God (5M 1,4). This prayer is called “passive” because it occurs “when God wants and how He wants it” and cannot be acquired by the soul, although it can do much to dispose itself for it. Teresa says at this point the soul “is dead to the world to live more in God” (5M 11,4).

The defining prayer of 6M is the “ecstatic union” or “spiritual betrothal.” In this mystical state of prayer, the experience of union intensifies. Having reached this supernatural stage, the soul enjoys a greater degree of purity through multiple passive purifications. The stage of spiritual betrothal is accompanied by numerous supernatural phenomena. Among the graces received by the soul are locutions, ecstasies, visions and levitation. The faithful contemplation of the humanity of Christ is still essential at this stage.

The seventh degree of prayer is “spiritual marriage” or “transforming union,” the climax of the Christian spiritual life. It means permanent union with the Sacred Trinity and transformation of the soul in Christ, as much as is possible in this life. Here mystical phenomena cease for the most part. Having presented, albeit succinctly, the degrees of prayer in relation with each of the seven mansions, let us summarize them arranged in sequential order, expunged of non-essential information, and presented as a diagram.

Table 3.3 The Seven Mansions and Their Corresponding Modes of Prayer

First Mansions	Vocal – Mental Prayer	<i>via purgativa</i>
Second Mansions	Discursive and Affective Prayer	
Third Mansions	Prayer of Recollection Active - Passive	
Fourth Mansions	Prayer of Quiet	<i>via iluminativa</i>
Fifth Mansions	Prayer of Simple Union	<i>via unitiva</i>
Sixth Mansions	Spiritual Betrothal	
Seventh Mansions	Spiritual Marriage	

Having overviewed Teresa's path from the perspective of prayer, let us next further consider the general lines of the two stages beyond *via purgativa* in the framework of the threefold division of spiritual life, that is, *via iluminativa* and *via unitiva*.

The illuminative way (*via iluminativa*), or the Fourth Mansions, matches that which St. Aquinas's terms the "degree of the proficient."⁴⁷ After the early mansions, these souls have overcome spiritual mediocrity and lukewarmness; they have better control over their passions, but still fall prey to venial sins and their usual defects. During prayer, they are distracted by a myriad of desires and imaginations and suffer "aridity" (*sequedad*); or lack of consolation in prayer. These are not sins, says Teresa, but hinder union.⁴⁸ What is necessary now, is "a deep purification that facilitates the perfection of spiritual life; a purification that is both active and passive, that is, the work of God and man."⁴⁹ The *via iluminativa* is also the stage of the purgation of reason and its elevation to God. New modes of prayer are required here, beyond reflective meditation to the prayer of recollection and contemplation. After applying these remedies, the virtues flourish and the soul is gradually illuminated in knowledge and love, and better disposed to union.

The unitive way (*via unitiva*) is the "way of the perfect." As Dicken clarifies, such "perfection" is not the inscrutable perfection of God but a relative human perfection. Teresa does not use "*via unitiva*" in any of her works, but she occasionally speaks of "the perfect" (*los perfectos*),⁵⁰ an expression clearly assimilable to the souls dwelling in the Fifth to Seventh Mansions. In Spiritual Theology the *via unitiva* is considered "the highest state of holiness and conformity to the will of God possible in this world."⁵¹

⁴⁷ Teresa employs the qualifier "*iluminativa*" only once, preferring to speak of those "in the middle" (*medianos*) (V 11,5), or of "those who are advancing" (*los que van aprovechando*) (V 22,1), which is understood as referring to those in 4M.

⁴⁸ Arthur Devine, "State or Way (Purgative, Illuminative, Unitive)," CE, 541.

⁴⁹ Baldomero Jiménez Duque "Vía Iluminativa," http://www.mercaba.org/Rialp//iluminativa_via.htm

⁵⁰ Teresa: "One day on the vigil of Pentecost [I went to a secluded spot after Mass where I often prayed, and I began to read about this feast in a volume by the Carthusian. Reading of the signs beginners, proficient, and the perfect" (V 38,9).

⁵¹ Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 171.

5.7.4 “Purification of Mind” and Teresa’s prayer path beyond *via purgativa*

5.7.4.1 Introduction

Having overviewed “Purification of Mind” and Teresa’s path beyond the *via purgativa*, in this section we elaborate on the claim that, although *samatha* meditation and Teresa’s path of prayer have different soteriological ends, enough structural, functional and experiential similarities exist between the two to warrant a comparison and explore their interrelationships.⁵² In subsequent sections we will explore these similarities. However, let us remark first on differences between both processes which should not be obviated.

5.7.4.2 Differences between *samatha* and Teresa’s path after *via purgativa*

The contrast between *samatha* meditation and Teresa’s prayer-path in terms of nature is so conspicuous that it *prima facie* suggests the impossibility of any relationship between them. Teresa defines prayer as “nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us” (V 8,5). Christian prayer “is always determined by the structure of the Christian faith”⁵³ and, as Castellano puts it, “assumed by Christ and raised to the Father in the one Spirit.”⁵⁴ In addition, a Christian prays, among many other “good things,” for God’s Kingdom to come. In stark contrast, Buddhist meditation is not dialogical, has no theistic undertones and, unambiguously, it is not addressed to the Buddha nor does it seek communion with him, or any deity for that matter. The ultimate aim of Buddhist meditation is *nibbāna*.⁵⁵

Moreover, while in *samatha* meditation the object is always a natural object, Christian prayer involves “concentration of the activity of our faculties on a supernatural reality.”⁵⁶ Besides, while Christians recognize their dependence on God for growth and salvation, hoping to receive God’s purifying grace,⁵⁷ the Buddhist path is individual engagement for liberation as Buddhism denies supernatural efficacy to meditation. As it becomes clear then, both paths are oriented towards distinct soteriological ends and by different means. *Samatha* meditation purifies the mind preparing it for *vipassanā*, which leads to *nibbāna*. Teresa’s prayer-path readies the soul for union with God, which occurs by God’s grace.

⁵² For a collection of essays on Buddhist meditation in dialogue with Christian prayer see R. M. Gross and T. C. Muck, eds., *Christians Talk about Buddhist Meditation; Buddhists Talk about Christian Prayer* (London: Continuum, 2003).

⁵³ “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation” (Oct. 15, 1989).

⁵⁴ Jesús Castellano Cervera, *Pedagogía de la oración cristiana* (Barcelona: Centro de Pastoral Litúrgica, 1996), 18. For Christians, Christian prayer always mature during a personal and loving relationship with Christ.

⁵⁵ Denise Lardner Carmody and John Tully Carmody, *Serene compassion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 82.

⁵⁶ Marie-Eugene of the Child Jesus, *I Want to See God*, 235.

⁵⁷ Keith J. Egan, *Carmelite Prayer: A Tradition for the 21st Century*, ed. Keith J. Egan (Paulist Press, 2003), 7.

5.7.4.3 “Purification of Mind” and Teresa’s prayer path beyond *via purgativa*

The differences set out, plus the fact that the systematicity of Buddhist meditation and any form of Christian prayer should never be overlooked, signal an obvious contrast between these two sets of practices, amplified by the different meanings of the words “prayer” and “meditation.”⁵⁸ This, however, should not prevent us from noticing significant structural, functional and phenomenological parallels, some of which are next discussed.

5.7.4.3.1 Structural, functional and phenomenological similarities

Structurally and functionally, much of what happens in connection with our dynamics of the spiritual development occurs on the frontlines of Buddhist *samatha* meditation and Christian prayer. Both are defining and inalienable components of their own processes. As Conze says, “meditational practices constitute the very core of the Buddhist approach to life. As prayer in Christianity, so meditation is [...] the very heartbeat of the religion.”⁵⁹ Similarly, constant prayer is a defining and essential element of Carmelite spirituality.⁶⁰ While in Buddhism meditation is the path to *nibbāna*, for Teresa the royal road to heaven is prayer (C 21,1). Prayer is not only the gate of the castle (1M 1,7) but also the Theseus thread that guides the journey through what might otherwise be a labyrinth of mansions. Besides, in the paths described by Buddhaghosa and Teresa, spiritual life is, essentially, meditation and prayer and, to a very large extent, spiritual progress is measured by it. In addition, from a systemic and transformative point of view, meditation and prayer behave as functional counterparts or homologues.⁶¹ Therefore, on account of these structural and functional parallelisms alone, it would not be a stretch to comparatively analyze *samatha* meditation and the Teresian prayer-path beyond the first three mansions.

Phenomenologically, although *samatha* meditation is characteristically nonverbal, in its developmental stages—that is, before *jhāna*—reflection and verbalization do occur.⁶² Analogously, Christian meditation—i.e. discursive or reflective prayer, or *consideración*, as Teresa calls it—entails concentrated attention on a single subject of meditation or contemplation making use of both reason and imagination. In both cases, these reflective practices prepare the ground for non-discursive modes of meditation and contemplation.

⁵⁸ As Drew notes, the aphorism “Christians pray; Buddhists meditate” sounds like a truism or a cliché” (Rose Drew, *Buddhist and Christian? An Exploration of Dual Belonging*, London: Routledge, 2011, 165).

⁵⁹ Edward Conze, *Buddhist Meditation* (London: Unwin, 1972), 1.

⁶⁰ “Carmel in the church stands for prayer” (Welch, *The Carmelite Way*, 75); “all of us who wear this holy habit of Carmel are called to prayer and contemplation” (5M 1,2); and “unceasing prayer is the most important aspect of the rule” (C 4,1).

⁶¹ Winston L. King, *Buddhism and Christianity: Some Bridges of Understanding* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 136. Keown, *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*, 10.

⁶² Rita M. Gross, “Meditation and Prayer: A Comparative Inquiry,” BCS 22 (2002): 78.

Moreover, in her works Teresa discusses specific forms of prayer that quite resemble stages of *samatha* meditation. In particular, the phenomenological borderlines between the prayer of recollection and Buddhist meditation are so blurred that Cousins remarks: “Prayer of Recollection would have been quite recognizable to Buddhaghosa as part of the process of developing *jhāna*.”⁶³ Furthermore, there is a non-discursiveness, silence and stillness in contemplative prayer that parallels the non-verbal phases of *samatha*.⁶⁴ Even more importantly, as earlier mentioned, the phenomenological similarities between the four *jhānas* and mystical prayer and its degrees have been often noted by scholars.⁶⁵

Another telling aspect of similarities and interconnection between Buddhist meditation and Christian prayer path is the on-going cross-fertilization, adaptations and borrowings between these two practices.⁶⁶ Due to all of the above, *samatha* meditation and Teresa’s path of prayer are not polar opposites, but present more relatedness than meets the eye. In light of this, these affinities shall be explored further in succeeding chapters.

5.7.4.3.2 Other general areas of intersection

As this study intends to show, our two pathways also intersect in a shared need for: (1) broader and deeper ethical purification; (2) intertwined with a steadier concentration of the attention, the elimination of distractions, and the unification of consciousness; (3) the transformation of unwholesome emotions; (4) the purification of consciousness. These are not goals exclusive to “purification of mind” but major issues along Teresa’s path of prayer, even though they are conceptualized and approached differently. We will now discuss comparatively each of these issues in turn.

5.7.4.3.2.1 A broader and deeper ethical purification

In the *Visuddhimagga*, the practice of *samatha* entails the previous stabilization of *sīla* (PP 3.1).⁶⁷ Once virtue is well established in the monastic’s character,⁶⁸ he takes up *samatha* seeking the purification of his mind for which the suppression of the Hindrances

⁶³ Cousins, “The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification,” 110.

⁶⁴ King writes: “Christian saints and mystics know of ‘infused contemplation,’ nonverbal and imageless forms of prayer which may well be analogous to certain forms of Buddhist meditation” (Ursula King, “A Response to Reflections on Buddhist and Christian Religious Practices,” *BCS*, Vol. 22, 2002, 106).

⁶⁵ We shall devote Section 11 of Chapter Five to quote these scholars and analyzing those similarities.

⁶⁶ Christian authors, such as Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle and Susan J. Stabile, seek to integrate aspect of Buddhist meditation into Christian prayer. Centering prayer is a modern way of praying that adopts elements of Buddhist meditation.

⁶⁷ Vajirañāza writes: “Right concentration is not possible without that moral purity that purges one of impure deeds, words, and thoughts, and, therefore, it presupposes right speech (*sammāvācā*), right action (*sammā-kammanta*), and right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*). These are the three principles of *sīla*, or ‘moral purity’, which are, necessarily, the preparatory ground to meditation” (Vajirañāza, *Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice*, 3).

⁶⁸ *Sīla-visuddhi* is attained when the monastic becomes firmly established in virtue (PP 3.1).

is essential. Khāntipālo points out that the Five Hindrances, in the context of *samatha*, should be understood as a deeper layer of impurities that “are not so coarse as the defilements which bring about the breaking of the Five Precepts, but they are not so fine as the three or four taints.”⁶⁹ Success in the temporary removal of the Five Hindrances brings access concentration (*upacāra-samadhi*) and, eventually, full absorption (*jhāna*).

On the Christian front, Teresa only attains real success in prayer with her second conversion (1554), and her “vow of the most perfect,” aimed at the eradicating of vice. This coincides with the outset of *via iluminativa*, with which a soul enters a life of higher purity,⁷⁰ and overcomes venial sin and what theologians call “common faults” (e.g., the presence of some egoism, lacking in generosity and charity, harboring a subtle pride, having doubts). Such strenuous ethical purification allowed Teresa to better dispose her soul preparing it for the *via unitiva* seeking its union with God. It is through the passive purifications of the mystical mansions, however, that Teresa finally enters 7M (6M 11,6). It can be observed then that in both cases after an initial purgation (i.e. *sīla* and the initial three mansions), and with an ever-growing awareness, a moral deepening occurs. The pursuit of virtue leads now beyond mere ethical conduct and seeks a sturdier purification by overcoming dispositions that may lead to defilements and moral imperfections. It is from these evil dispositions that destructive emotions like greed, hate, and envy stem.

In order to remove these wicked dispositions, and further strengthen the virtues, reflection on a series of meditation subjects (e.g. the virtues of the Buddha or of Christ), is recommended in both traditions. These essential meditative practices help to develop positive emotions like love, patience and calm that are opposed to those evil tendencies. Beyond discursive meditation, the practice of non-discursive meditation is essential, also in both cases, to the transformation of negative emotions as we will consider later on.⁷¹

In summary, in both Teresa’s and Buddhaghosa’s systems the initial stage comprises the gradual avoidance of *kilesas* and vices, respectively.⁷² Moral conduct eliminated the manifestation of major defilements—and with it the paramount causes for wrong doing—but, subtler forms of vice remain. With *samatha* and *via iluminativa*, the *kilesas* and “common faults” are gradually suppressed (not uprooted) and with it the virtues flourish.

⁶⁹ Khantipalo, *Calm and Insight*, 48.

⁷⁰ Royo Marin writes: “When the soul has decided to enter upon a life of solid piety and to advance along the way of virtue, it has entered upon the illuminative way. This is what many spiritual authors call the second conversion” (Antonio Royo Marin, *The Theology of Christian Perfection*, trans. Jordan Aumann, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2012, 220).

⁷¹ For what it refers to Teresa’s path, we are speaking here about purification along the ascetical path. Purification is passive along the mystical path; here is God who purifies the soul like the gold in the crucible to enter it into the 7M.

⁷² Success in *adhisīla-sikkhā*, and initial mansions, cast away hindrances (PP 1.12) and vices but they are not suppressed.

5.7.4.3.2 The concentration of attention and unification of consciousness

Developing the ability to maintain steadfast attention on the object of meditation or contemplation and the appearance of states of increasing absorption are also common denominators between *samatha* and Teresa's path of prayer after *via purgativa*.⁷³ There are parallels between attentive practices and experiences of Buddhists and Christians, as well as between absorptive occurrences culminating these attentive and concentrative processes. It is therefore not strange that themes regarding the development of attention have been suggested as points of dialogue between our two traditions.⁷⁴

A casual observer could believe that "development of concentration" is a theme idiosyncratic to Buddhism and other Indian religions.⁷⁵ But, as Novak notes, the mind's natural inability to concentrate is a universal religious problem.⁷⁶ Also in Christianity, as Kavanaugh says, "the primary complaint of people about their prayer is distractions."⁷⁷ Several reasons explain this shared need for concentrated attention, as well as that the cultivation of attention has been posited as "key to Buddhism and Christianity dialogue."⁷⁸ First, as noted earlier, the development of a focused attention and higher awareness is an ethical imperative,⁷⁹ and it is necessary for the attainment of the soteriological goal.

Monastics of both traditions must confront the mind's inability for sustained attention due to its natural tendency to dispersion. Buddhist canonical texts often explain how the mind constantly wanders and is difficult to control. The *Dhammapada* famously reads: "As a fish when pulled out of water and cast on land throbs and quivers, even so is this mind agitated. Hence should one abandon the realm of Māra" (*Dhp* 34). Like the Buddhist, inattentiveness and distractions trouble the Christian seeking to be prayerful.⁸⁰ Teresa herself was painfully aware of how the mind wanders during prayer.⁸¹ The causes for such lack of concentration, however, are conceptualized and expressed differently.

⁷³ For the importance of developing the attention in Christian prayer see Marie-Eugene, *I want to see God*, 234; Zaleski writes: "Attention, rightly directed, is prayer" Carol G. Zaleski, "Attention as a Key to Dialogue," BCS, 14 (1994), 105.

⁷⁴ Carol G. Zaleski, "Attention as a Key to Dialogue," BCS, 14 (1994) 89-110.

⁷⁵ The development of concentration plays a significant role not only in the Buddhism but also in other the Indian religious systems such as Jainism and Hinduism. Cf. Dhāraṇa ("concentration") is the sixth rung in Patanjali's ashtanga yoga.

⁷⁶ Novak writes, "attention appears to be a *sine qua non* and common denominator of many of the forms of mental prayer and meditation found in the traditions" (Philip Novak, "Attention," ER, 60).

⁷⁷ Kieran Kavanaugh, "Contemplation and the Stream of Consciousness" in Egan, *Carmelite Prayer*, 101.

⁷⁸ Zaleski, "Attention as a Key to Dialogue," 89-11.

⁷⁹ Alan Wallace, *The Attention Revolution: Unlocking the Power of the Focused Mind* (Wisdom Publications, 2006), 3; Francisco de Osuna writes: "The principle of all evil is the distraction and outpouring of the heart" (Osuna, TAE Ch. Two).

⁸⁰ See Vilma Seelaus, *Distractions in Prayer: Blessing or Curse? St. Teresa of Avila's Teachings in the Interior Castle* (Staten Island: Alba House, 2005); and Eugene Boylan, *Difficulties in Mental Prayer* (Dublin: M. H. Gill, Ltd., 1944).

⁸¹ Teresa exclaims: "I have been very afflicted at times in the midst of this turmoil of mind" (4M 1.8). Teresa is attributed with calling the imagination "the madwoman in the house" (*locus de la casa*), and explains how the thought is like an agitated bird (*tortolito*) always hopping from one branch to another.

In Buddhism, mental diffusion is born of the Hindrances⁸² and beginningless ignorance. For Teresa, mental diffusion is due to the fallen human faculties (2M 1,4), originated from the weakness and “misery they left by the sin of Adam, with many others” (4M 1,11).

Concentration is directing the attention of the mental faculties toward a single object. In *samatha* meditation one concentrates the mind using a meditation subject. The use of various meditation subjects in Christianity also entails the development of concentration. In Christianity the subject of meditation *par excellence* is Christ. Teresa sought undivided and wholehearted attention to Christ in prayer, but complained of her inability to be with one thing (*estar en una cosa*).⁸³ She was persistently distracted by wandering thoughts, imagination and memories that intruded upon her mind and caused her great distress.⁸⁴ Therefore, overcoming distractions was a great preoccupation for her. At some point, the mind’s instability becomes a problem that monastics in both traditions must tackle.⁸⁵

Buddhists believe that mental training can overcome mental dispersion and diffusion. As a method of mental cultivation, *samatha* is an elaborate meditative process that leads to a highly attentive and collected state of one-pointedness of mind (*cittassa ekaggatā*).⁸⁶ Turning to Teresa, she believed that distractions in prayer can be reduced with a better disposition to God. In *Castillo*, she describes nurturing devoted attention to God. In order to rest the mind in God, Teresa’s itinerary of prayer progresses by focusing the attention gradually through reading, discursive meditation, the prayer of recollection and so forth.⁸⁷

Notwithstanding the similarities in concentration of attention between *samatha* and Teresa’s path there are differences. In both cases, the attention is focused on support, which reduces dispersion and increases the intensity and duration of attention. However, in Buddhism, concentration is a deliberate goal to which the mediator directs his effort. Conversely, for Teresa, the concentration of attention is a by-product of the love of God.

⁸² Khantipalo, *Calm and Insight*, 48.

⁸³ Teresa did not use the modern term “concentration.” She spoke instead of “being at one thing” (*estar en una cosa*). Cf. CC 16; C 17 and C 26. But, the true equivalent to the meaning of concentration in Teresa is “recollection” (*recogimiento*).

⁸⁴ A reader of Teresa is familiar with the suffering distractions caused in her life of prayer. Álvarez: “even in the last years of her life—she had to confess humbly that distractions assail her in the liturgical prayer” (“Distracciones,” DSTJ, 242).

⁸⁵ Dispersion of attention existed during *sīla* and the initial three mansions, but was cloaked by more serious difficulties.

⁸⁶ Nānamoli believes the compound *citta-ekaggatā* should be read here as “agreement or harmony of consciousness and its concomitants in focusing on a single object” (PP 3.1, note 2).

⁸⁷ In this way, Teresa developed the ability to place all the attention on Christ in prayer, to the exclusion of everything else. She did so by focusing on Christ, but also by “concentrating” on water, flowers and the like (“Distracciones,” DSTJ, 242) and by practicing the prayer of active recollection which, ultimately, is a method of recollecting and concentrating the mind. Osuna writes: “an old man [...] who had had more than fifty years of experience in such matters [practice of recollection], told me as a great secret that, among other mystic happenings [...] his understanding was so stilled and occupied from within that nothing of creation could take form in it” (quoted by McGinn in *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain*, 26).

As O’Donoghue says, “by recollection St. Teresa means a certain concentration or unified attention of the mind—an attention, that is, to God and divine things” (Noel O’Donoghue, *Adventures in Prayer: Reflection on St Teresa of Avila, St John of the Cross*, New York: Burns & Oates, 2006, 79). Teresa knew however, that only God can stop the mind when He ties it to Him in union (4M 1,8).

5.7.4.3.3 The transformation of emotions

A transformation of the heart occurs throughout *samatha* and Teresa's prayer-path after *via purgativa* consisting of the rejection of emotions such as anger, hate, envy and the like and the cultivation of emotional dispositions such as empathy and generosity. This progressive transformation of the heart in both processes, where the emotional field is purified, and unwholesome or evil inclinations are transformed into wholesome ones, occurs at different substages of development and through different methods, and is deeper and more refined than the cultivation of virtue in both *sīla* and the *via purgativa*. The adoption of topics contrary to the meditators' evil emotions or "main faults" is a way to balance the person's character and clear obstacles to deeper states of meditation.

In Buddhism, most *kammaṭṭhānas* are practiced, among other benefits, to develop such wholesome emotional dispositions. The practice of all the meditation topics before the attainment of the access concentration—particularly the recollections of the Buddha, *Dhamma*, *Saṅgha*, morality, generosity, deities, mindfulness of peace and of death, and perception of the repulsiveness in food—are oriented to the relinquishing of the Five Hindrances and the cultivation of wholesome emotions at the level of tendencies. The *brahmavihāras* are conducive not only to the development of ethical qualities,⁸⁸ but also to the transformation of intention and subliminal dispositions culminating in equanimity. This transformation of emotion continues during *jhāna* training. The first three *jhānas* can be developed based on the first three *brahmavihāras*: *mettā*, *karuna*, and *muditā*.

In the Teresian tradition there are numerous kinds of prayer and meditation subjects nonetheless meditation on Christ is the meditation subject *par excellence* as Christian prayer and contemplation are ultimately oriented to developing Christ-like qualities.⁸⁹ Like *samatha* meditation, then, Christian meditation is oriented to transforming the heart. But, although the cultivation of positive emotions (even for enemies in both traditions) is similar, some affective aspects of it differ. Teresian meditation is a living conversation with God, wrapped in adoration, in which the transformation of the emotions occurs in dyadic fashion; it is a two-way relationship sustained by mutual love and filled with emotion, which is not the case in *samatha* meditation.

⁸⁸ The *brahmavihāras* or "divine abidings" are so called because Brahma, the supreme god, is said to dwell (*vihāra*) in loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity. Through the *brahmavihāras* these four emotions are developed at the level of dispositions. P. de Silva writes: "part of the power of the *Brahmavihāras* comes from the intention to love, not just the feelings or emotions themselves" (Padmasiri de Silva, *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 59.

⁸⁹ Whatever the type of orative activity, all forms of Christian prayer are oriented toward the transformation of the heart. The goal is to develop the qualities of goodness, truth and humility represented by Christ and Mary which probe sainthood. Christ says, "By your fruits you will know them" (Mt 7:16) See also Gal 5:22.

5.7.4.3.4 The purification of consciousness

A deeper purification, in *samādhi* and the *via iluminativa* and *via unitiva*, is not limited to the removal of the hindrances and venial sin and moral imperfections, respectively. More is needed: purity of consciousness.⁹⁰ As Smart says, purity of consciousness is a universal pursuit extant in most systems of meditation.⁹¹ An emptying of mental content, the washing away of images, thoughts, memories and so forth that distract in meditation is another feature shared by *samatha* meditation and Christian prayer-contemplation. This process of emptying occurs gradually. The highest state, in both cases, is void of content, quasi-blank and timeless although not free from feelings of peace and quiet. The *samatha* process is definable as a progressive purification of consciousness. It is not only a sustained effort to cleanse the mind of defilements, but also a gradual emptying of identification with mental content. It involves the surmounting of identification with the senses, thoughts, sensations, feelings, memories, emotional states and the like. Referring specifically to the *jhāna* training, Griffiths states, the “concentrative techniques are aimed at the progressive reduction of the contents of consciousness.”⁹² The seventh *jhāna*, in particular, is described as quasi “contentless experience.”⁹³

The “negative way” in the Christian tradition,⁹⁴ also known as “negative theology” or “apophatic theology” (apophatic from the Greek ἀπόφημι *apophēmi*, “to deny”), is usually associated with void and silence and also implies a gradual emptying of consciousness. The apophatic approach is exemplified by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, the “Cloud of Unknowing” and Teresa’s pupil John of the Cross in his *Dark Night of the Soul*—were purification of consciousness advised to see God—rather than by Teresa who is not traditionally associated with the imagelessness and wordlessness of negative theology but with a more kataphatic (“positive”)⁹⁵ approach to meditation. [Research by Tyler has sought to show,⁹⁶ in Teresa can be found both the kataphatic and apophatic approaches]. Already in 4M Teresa advises those of restless mind like herself not to dwell on reasoning during prayer and to set aside time for contemplation. As the soul enters deeper into the castle, love gradually replaces thought, memory and understanding in contemplation.

⁹⁰ By “purity of consciousness” (a term coined by Smart) we mean here purification of mental contents from consciousness.

⁹¹ Ninian Smart, “The Purification of Consciousness and the Negative Path,” in Steven T. Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 117-129.

⁹² Griffiths, *Buddhist Jhāna: A Form-Critical Study*, 55-68.

⁹³ Bucknell writes: “I identify jhāna 7 as contentless experience, and jhāna 8 as what one might call contentless nonexperience” (Bucknell, “Reinterpreting the Jhānas,” 401, note 42).

⁹⁴ The “negative way” emphasizes the incomprehensibility and absolute transcendence of God and the incapacity of human imagination and understanding to grasp His nature.

⁹⁵ Kataphatic or Cataphatic theology (from the Greek *kataphasis* “affirmation”) uses “positive” descriptions to refer to God.

⁹⁶ Peter Tyler, Teresa of Avila: Master of the Negative Way? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0hUpS1nl80>

5.7.4.4 Conclusion

In summarizing this section, we have highlighted essential differences in nature between the processes of spiritual transformation established in *samatha* meditation and the Teresian path of prayer beyond *via purgativa*, as well as other critical points in which both paths radically differ (e.g. ultimate goals, systematicity, Christology). Nonetheless, despite the differences, we have found numerous similarities in methods of purification, the cultivation of a more focused and vigilant attention and unification of consciousness, the transformation of harmful emotions, calming the mind and purifying consciousness.

Regarding the arrangement of the following sections of the comparative part of our study, *samatha* meditation is conceptually divisible into its *pre-jhānic* and *jhānic* phases. Teresa's path beyond *via purgativa* can be conceptualized as being constituted by *via iluminativa* (4M), and *via unitiva* (5M-7M). To highlight structural and phenomenological correspondences between these respective sub-stages, to gain a greater clarity, and to prepare the ground for a synoptic comparison, in the next sections we shall juxtapose: (1) the *pre-jhānic* phase of *samatha* meditation and *via iluminativa* (4M); (2) and the *jhānic* phase of *samatha* and *via unitiva*. A few comments are made below justifying a comparison between the *pre-jhānic* phase of *samatha* and *via iluminativa* (5M to 7M).⁹⁷

The *pre-jhānic* phase of *samatha* manifests major similarities with the *via iluminativa*. Before starting *jhānic* training, the meditator practicing *samatha* focuses his mind upon a subject using concepts, discourse and reason until access concentration is attained. After access concentration, but before 1JH, mental activity, including thought is reduced. As shown earlier, Teresian scholars equate 4M (some include 3M) to *via iluminativa*. At all times, but especially in prayer, the soul in 4M becomes aware of the distance between God's purity and its own imperfections. At the same time, the soul desires wholeheartedly to unite itself to God, but is bewildered by distractions (images, thoughts, memories) that prevent such a union.⁹⁸ Hence, after the ethical purging of the initial three mansions, the soul's task in *via iluminativa* is to redouble effort to further purify the heart of wicked intentions and reduce a myriad of distractions, attachments and desires, which though illegitimate and morally harmless still linger and impede union with God. Similarities between these two processes will be explored in more depth in the following chapters.

⁹⁷ Arguments for a comparison between the *jhānic* phase of *samatha* and mansions 5 to 7 are put forward in Section 5.11.

⁹⁸ As Devine put it, "The illuminative way is that of those who [...] have their passions better under control [but] still take pleasure in earthly things and allow their minds to be distracted by various imaginations" (Devine, "State or Way : Purgative, Illuminative, Unitive," 541).

5.7.5 Requisites of meditation and prayer⁹⁹

5.7.5.1 Introduction

But before starting a comparative analysis of *samatha* meditation and Teresa's prayer-path, let us first address a question that can be suitably formulated at this juncture. How do our two authors' recommended conditions that favor meditation and prayer compare?

As we saw earlier in this section, Buddhaghosa declares that *samādhī* should be developed "by one who has taken his stand on virtue that is quite purified" (PP 3.28). Once the monastic is well established in virtue, he should then sever the Ten Impediments, approach a "good friend," apprehend a meditation topic that suits his temperament, avoid monasteries unfavorable to the cultivation of *samādhī*, live in one favorable to this end, remove lesser impediments, and not overlook any direction of development (PP 3.28).

D. de Pablo reminds us that Teresa's prayer also requires preparation.¹⁰⁰ Teresa wrote about external and internal conditions that benefit prayer and should accompany it,¹⁰¹ although "not systematically, but spontaneously, as a means to an end,"¹⁰² and not as "requisites," but as favorable conditions for growth in prayer.

Unsurprisingly, the conditions for growth in meditation and prayer advised by our two authors are similar: they mostly relate to distractions. According to her life and works, Teresa would likely subscribe to many points raised by Buddhaghosa, who would also likely sanction some of the recommendations put forward by Discalced Carmelite nun.

5.7.5.2 Morality and virtue

In the prototypical and abstract path drawn by Buddhaghosa the monastic should be "established in virtue" before attempting the practice of purification of mind (PP 3.1 and 3.28). It seems clear that, even from an ethical and ascetical viewpoint alone, a monastic guarding the *Vinaya* precepts closely resembles the person entering the Third Mansions.

⁹⁹ It is only in a very loose sense that we speak here of "requisites" about Christian prayer, as there can be not "conditions" for an intimate relationship of the soul with God.

¹⁰⁰ Pablo, *Dinámica de la oración*, 250.

¹⁰¹ In Teresa, the question of "requisites" for growth in prayer is closely related to the restoration of the primitive charisma of the Carmelite Order installed by Teresa's reform (silence, simplicity of life, a good spiritual direction, regularity in prayer).

¹⁰² Pablo, *Dinámica de la oración*, 50. On the basic conditions for growth in prayer see: Pablo, *Dinámica de la oración*, 247-65; and Dubay, *Fire Within*, 111-31.

Let us read Teresa's description of the souls dwelling in the Third Mansions:

They long not to offend His Majesty, even guarding themselves against venial sins; they are fond of doing penance and setting aside periods for recollection; they spend their time well, practicing works of charity toward their neighbors; and are very balanced in their use of speech and dress and in the governing of their households — those who have them (3M 1,5).

Theravādins and Carmelites, before starting the path of *samatha* and *via iluminativa* respectively, behave righteously; they conduct their lives in a well-ordered manner.¹⁰³ Peers' depiction of the Third Mansions as the "mansions of the exemplary life,"¹⁰⁴ and Marie-Eugène's description of the inhabitants of these mansions as "pious persons," strongly evoke the moral qualities of the monastic about to start the practice of *samādhi*. What Buddhaghosa says regarding *samatha* can also be applied to Christian prayer: without a stable presence of virtue, the person will not advance on the path of meditation. Teresa writes:

I repeat, it is necessary that your foundation consist of more than prayer and contemplation. If you do not strive for the virtues and practice them, you will always be dwarfs. And, please God, it will be only a matter of not growing, for you already know that whoever does not increase decreases. I hold that love, where present, cannot possibly be content with remaining always the same (7M 4,9).¹⁰⁵

Without a firm ground in virtue, both the edifices of meditation and prayer will tumble. Among virtues to be developed by Buddhists before beginning, and alongside, *samatha* that also influence prayer and Christian meditation are the following: truthfulness, compassion, generosity, detachment, solitude,¹⁰⁶ silence, humility and calm and serenity. The absence of virtue in monastics of the two traditions would create conditions of guilt and regret opposing a successful practice.

On the other hand, the development of the virtues influences meditation and prayer. The gradual suppression of the *kilesas* and the "usual defects" (*defectos habituales*), respectively, is one of the beneficial results of a fruitful practice of *samatha* meditation, and of having successfully gone from the Third Mansions onwards. The presence of a well-established virtue in monastics of both traditions would pacify and calm their minds and ready them for progress in meditation and prayer.

¹⁰³ Tanqueray writes: "Once the soul is purified from past faults [...] (and) has been grounded in virtue through the practice of meditation, of mortification, and resistance to the disordered inclinations and to temptations, then it enters into the illuminative way" Adolphe Tanqueray, *The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology* (Tournai: Society of St. John the Evangelist, Desclée, 1932), 590.

¹⁰⁴ E. Allison Peers, "Introduction" to *The Interior Castle*, translated by E. Allison Peers (Wilder Publications, 2008), 4.

¹⁰⁵ "The whole aim of any person who is beginning prayer—and don't forget this, because it's very important—should be that he work and prepare himself with determination and every possible effort to bring his will into conformity with God's will. Be certain that [...] the greatest perfection attainable along the spiritual path lies in this conformity. It is the person who lives in more perfect conformity who will receive more from the Lord and be more advanced on this road" (2M 1,8).

¹⁰⁶ Egan asserts: "incomprehensible is Carmelite life without solitude. Solitude lays at the heart of the original charism of Carmel" (Egan, *Carmelite Prayer*, 692-94).

5.7.5.3 The impediments to meditation and prayer

What might Teresa have thought about the ten impediments listed by Buddhaghosa? The ten impediments (*palibodhas*) to meditation¹⁰⁷ are understandably derived from an accumulated experience in Buddhist monasteries. Although some of these impediments are irrelevant to a cloistered convent, Teresa would likely have endorsed their removal as diversions that may also obstruct progress in prayer. In relation to the impediment of “dwelling” (PP 3.30-34), for example, Teresa would have reproved attachment to the lodging where the monastic resides, whether this be a single room or the whole convent. Although “family” cannot be considered an impairment *per se*, she frequently declared that relatives could be a major source of attachment and distraction to a life of solitude and recollection, as it had been for the young Teresa. At one point she says: “I am astonished by the harm that is caused from dealing with relatives [...] I don’t know what it is in the world that we renounce [...] if we do not give up [...] our relatives” (C 9,2). About “aspirations of gain,” “class students,” “construction work,” or “going on travel,” these are impediments equally for both meditation and a life of contemplative prayer. Teresa would have much to say regarding “affliction,” having had illnesses throughout all her life, but she surely would have added that “illness itself is true prayer” (V 7,11). For Teresa, “books” were very important but attachment to them can be an impediment. Teresa does not speak of “supernormal powers,” as an impediment, but she considered all sorts of paranormal phenomena as much an annoyance as Buddhaghosa does.

5.7.5.4 Favorable monastery

Buddhaghosa recommends that a monastic “should avoid a monastery unfavorable to the development of concentration and go to live in one that is favorable” (PP 3.28). The subject of the suitability of a monastery for the practice of *samatha* is discussed from PP 4.2 to 4.19, where our Indian commentator points out eighteen faults that make a monastery unsuitable,¹⁰⁸ and the five factors any favorable monastery should have.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ As a reminder, the ten impediments are: dwelling, family, gain, class, building work in the monastery, travel, kin, affliction, books, and supernormal powers (PP 3.28).

¹⁰⁸ To repeat these eighteen are: “(1) Largeness (2) newness (3) dilapidatedness, etc. (4) to be nearby a road; (5) to have a pond; (6) one with [edible] leaves (7) or with flowers; (8) or with fruits; (9) famousness; (10) to be nearby a city; (11) one among timber trees; (12) or one nearby arable fields; (13) or with presence of incompatible persons; (14) nearby a port; (15) nearness to border countries; (16) nearness to the frontier of a kingdom; (17) one with unsuitability; (18) one without a spiritual teacher (viz. ‘good friend’)” (PP 4.2-18).

¹⁰⁹ These five are: “(1) to be not too far or too near from the alms resort with a path for going and coming; (2) quiet, not frequented; (3) absence of insects, wind, burning [sun], creeping things; (4) easily to obtain robes, alms, food, lodging, and the requisite of medicine as a cure for the sick; (5) to have access to a spiritual teacher. All these factors are beneficial for the progress of *yogāvacara*” (PP 4.163).

The *suttas* endorse the following types of “dwellings” as conducive to concentration: a secluded abode in the forest, the foot of a tree, abode on a mountain, in a cleft, in a cave, in a cemetery, on a wooded flatland, in the open air or on a heap of straw (M I, 181). Teresa would have endorsed without reservation that a monastic should avoid residing in a monastery unfavorable to a life of prayer and stay instead in one favorable to it, a stance supported by her own experience. Actually, Teresa’s reform partly arose from the realization that she had lived twenty unfruitful years in the monastery of *La Encarnacion*, which was too large, noisy, full of unsuitable persons, and with over-lenient rules (V 5, 1). In brief, it was disturbing for a life of prayer.¹¹⁰ The convents that Teresa herself founded over the next decades were for a few selected nuns,¹¹¹ and were quiet, “little frequented”, and had proper spiritual guides (*confesores*). All these are good conditions that the life of silence and solitude in a cloistered convent should provide.¹¹² These are conditions of which Buddhaghosa would have approved, although in Teresa’s convents food was not always available,¹¹³ nor were they ever free from insects and other inconveniences.

5.7.5.5 Spiritual friendship and spiritual direction

After severing the ten impediments, the monastic should approach a “good friend” (*kalyāṇamitta*), “giver of the meditation subject (*kammaṭṭhāna-dāyaka*). A “good friend” is a revered and esteemed teacher of deep speech, solicitous of the welfare and progress of the disciple that assigns him a meditation topic suitable for his temperament (PP 3.57-103) and guides and supports him throughout the meditative process (PP 3.61-73).¹¹⁴ In the *Vimuttimaggā*, Upatissa states seven qualities that any *kalyāṇamitta* must have: “loveableness, esteemableness, venerableness, ability to counsel well, patience (in listening), ability to deliver deep discourses and not applying oneself to useless ends.”¹¹⁵ No such reference to *kalyāṇamitta* is made in the *Visuddhimaggā*. For Buddhaghosa, ideally, a “good friend” should one with the defilements destroyed; if such person is not available, a non-returner, once-returner or a very conscious person will also do (PP 3.63).

The need for good spiritual direction in one’s life of prayer is stressed by Teresa.¹¹⁶ In

¹¹⁰ The convent of *La Encarnacion* housed about one hundred fifty nuns, some of them well dowered, and free to come and go. See Efrén de la Madre de Dios and Otger Steggink, *Tiempo y vida de Santa Teresa* (Madrid: BAC, 1977), 70.

¹¹¹ There were thirteen nuns initially, later twenty.

¹¹² Egan, *Carmelite Prayer*, 50.

¹¹³ “Distracciones,” DSTJ, 241.

¹¹⁴ For more information on the “good friend” (*kalyāṇamitta*) see Bhikkhu Bodhi, “Association with the Wise,” in BPS Newsletter 26, 1994; Steven Collins, “Kalyāṇamitta and Kalyāṇamittatā,” *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 11 (1987), 51-72.

¹¹⁵ Upatissa, *The Path of Freedom (Vimuttimaggā)* (Kandi: BPS, 1995), 48-50.

¹¹⁶ Marie-Eugene writes: “The care that St. Teresa took to procure for herself the help of spiritual direction is sufficient in itself to show the importance that she attached to it” (Marie Eugene, *I want to See God*, 273).

Vida, she explains how, for years, she had suffered because of the improper guidance of “half-learned confessors,” which did more harm than good to her soul (V 5,1),¹¹⁷ and hence how crucial it is to have good direction throughout one’s spiritual life (V 23,1-8). *Constituciones* reads “The novice mistress should be very prudent, prayerful, and spiritual [...] taking daily account of how the novices are progressing in prayer, how they get along with the mystery on which they must meditate, and of the benefit they are deriving from it. She should teach them how to proceed with this practice” (Co 40);¹¹⁸ Teresa also highlights the following, among the qualities of a good spiritual director: seeking a life of perfection,¹¹⁹ prudence, understanding, good learning,¹²⁰ and, if possible, experience in the spiritual life,¹²¹ charity and the ability to encourage, comfort and inspire. Teresa also commends the goodness for prayer of seeking association and spiritual friendship, with those more advanced in its practice, at least at the beginning (V 7,20). Having said this, and as Timpte notes, “the relationship between master and disciple is more important in Buddhism than it is in Christianity.”¹²² This is mainly because of the nature of the spiritual formation in Christianity, and the dependence on God for growth.

5.7.5.6 Meditation subject and temperament

In both traditions, the spiritual guide may recommend a meditation subject suitable for the meditator’s temperament or situation. In Theravāda the “good friend” (*kalyāṇamitta*) advises one among forty meditation subjects to balance the meditator’s temperament. The six temperaments (*carita*) are: greedy (*rāga carita*), hating (*dosa carita*), deluded, (*moha carita*), faithful (*saddhā carita*), intelligent (*buddhi carita*), and speculative (*vitakka carita*) (PP 3.74). By giving a specific topic, the goal is to transform the monastic’s temperament by conforming to new tendencies contrary to his habitual inclinations. The suitability and convenience of specific topics to fit the prayful’s person character is well-known and predicated in the Catholic tradition. Michael and Norrisey, in *Prayer and Temperament: Different Prayer Forms for Different Personality*,¹²³ for example, discuss the appropriateness of one type of subject or another to a person’s temperament. They

¹¹⁷ Teresa, commenting on the suffering caused by the lack of proper preparation of the Carmelite friars of *La Encarnacion*, writes: “...What was venial sin they said was no sin at all, and what was serious mortal sin they said was venial...I went on in this blindness for more than seventeen years until a very learned man, enlightened me about many things” (V 5,1).

¹¹⁸ *Constituciones*: “All the Sisters should give the prioress a monthly account of how they have done in prayer” (Co 41).

¹¹⁹ Giallanza comments: “A director will often be a model for those who come to him or her for help. Therefore, according to Teresa, it is necessary for a director to seek holiness” (Joel Giallanza, “Spiritual Direction According to St. Teresa of Avila,” *Contemplative Review*, 12, 1979, 2).

¹²⁰ Teresa: “It is of great importance, then, that the director should be a prudent man—of sound understanding, I mean—and also an experienced one” (V 13).

¹²¹ Teresa often states that a confessor should be a person of learning and, if possible, with spiritual experience (6M 8,9).

¹²² Thomas Timpte, “Community, obedience, and authority in Christian monasticism,” in *Monasticism, Buddhist, and Christian: the Korean experience*, ed. Süng-hye Kim, James W. Heisig, Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2008, 151.

¹²³ Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Norrisey, *Prayer and Temperament: Different Prayer Forms for Different Personality Types* (Charlottesville, VA: Open Door, 1984).

also comment on the importance of this knowledge for good spiritual direction and the spiritual transformation of the meditator. This knowledge is part of a long tradition through the history of Catholic spirituality of helping the person reach full spiritual maturity. Teresa was well aware that psychological constitutions differ, and that the confessor should be aware of the monastic's temperament to provide good spiritual guidance.¹²⁴ She understood that different topics suit different temperaments and discusses the appropriateness of one type of meditation or another for particular times and conditions. By her own admission, Teresa's kind of temperament was more intuitive than discursive. She didn't feel comfortable with variations of *lectio divina* that she found impersonal and dry. For those who, like her, lacked the capacity of imagination needed for the Ignatian visualizations, or were uncomfortable with rationalist meditations, Teresa advised more affective modes of prayer. This does not mean that Teresa rejected reflective meditation for temperaments more given to rational and logical way of thinking.

5.7.5.7 Lesser impediments

Lastly, a Buddhist monastic should sever the "minor obstructions" that he may still have (PP 3.28): "long head hair, nails, and body hair should be cut, mending and patching of old robes should be done, or those that are soiled should be dyed. If there is a stain on the bowl, the bowl should be baked. The bed, chair, etc., should be cleaned up" (PP 4.20). These are norms of hygiene and décor, and negligence of them may distract from meditation. Similar norms are not strange to the Carmelite. As an example: *Constituciones de San Jose* stipulate that "The sisters must keep their hair cut" (Co 14).

5.7.5.8 Teresa's recommendations

Let us mention some points raised by Teresa that are not present or readily noticeable in the tradition of Buddhaghosa. Teresa considered that prayer should always be underlined by omnipresent self-knowledge, elevated ideals (*grandes pensamientos*), and "determined determination"¹²⁵ (*determinada determinacion*). But above all, the love to God and of the neighbor and good works. According to Teresa God's help never fails and is the dynamic force that move the person to pray. The communality of the life of prayer in the convent is as important as solitude and the regularity of the hours of prayer.

¹²⁴ Teresa writes: "The prioress should carefully consider the temperament and perfection in virtue of that Sister so that she might advise the confessor and provide for better understanding" (F 8,9).

¹²⁵ "returning to those who want to journey on this road [of prayer] and continue until they reach the end... They must have a great and very resolute determination to persevere until reaching the end, come what may, happen what may, whatever work is involved, whatever criticism arises, whether they arrive or whether they die on the road, or even if they don't have courage for the trials that are met, or if the whole world collapses" (C 21,2). In a similar vein V 11,14; V 19,14; and C 20,2.

5.8 SAMATHA (REFLECTIVE) MEDITATION AND MEDITATIVE PRAYER

5.8.1 Introduction

The previous section outlined and compared the guidelines of the “purification of mind” (*citta visuddhi*) and Teresa’s path of prayer following *via purgativa*. In the present section, we identify the first analogous segment within these two divisions, characterized by the extensive engagement of the person’s conceptual, discursive and reflective capabilities. Let us examine the rationale in both traditions that may explain this commonality.

In their ongoing process of ethical-ascetical purification, monastics in both traditions may feel compelled at some point to nurture a deeper commitment to their paths. This earnestness may involve enhanced attentiveness, strengthening of self-awareness, self-vigilance and transforming entrenched habits and attitudes contrary to their religious ideals, replacing them with habits and dispositions more conducive to them. Thus, at this juncture then, in both traditions, monastics may develop a sense of deeper dedication to reflective meditation on their tradition and the assimilation of its truths, values and ideals. In the *Visuddhimagga*, this coincides with the initial phase of *samādhī*—ranging from the stabilization of *sīla* and the beginning of purification of mind to the attainment of access concentration—and consists of conceptual, discursive and reflective engagement with the forty meditation subjects described in Buddhaghosa’s book. In the Carmelite tradition, discursive and reflective engagement includes practices such as reflexive reading and meditative prayer—mainly, but not exclusively, on Christ’s life and words—which are important in transforming the person’s mentality and complementary and/or ancillary to morality and asceticism in regulating the persons’ passions and purifying the soul. In both traditions conceptual, discursive and reflective meditation are also instrumental in developing more focused attention, and higher awareness through sustained narrowing of the attention and concentration of the person’s capabilities on the individual. Reflective and discursive engagement is also auxiliary in channeling, discharging and transforming the religious emotions of the monastic (e.g., anguish, fear, excitement, and elation). Finally, reflective meditation gradually suppresses an array of unwanted thoughts and desires and detrimental intentions that obscure the mind and impede spiritual progress.

This section aims to show that meditative reflection and discursive engagement are integral constituents of the paths of the Theravāda and Catholic traditions and conduct a comparative analysis of such reflective engagement in different aspects of its practice.

Before we begin, however, some preliminary semantic clarifications are necessary regarding the terminology used in this section to preclude terminological complications. Etymologically, “meditation” has its root in the Latin *meditārī*, which means “to reflect on,” “to think over,” “to ponder,” and it is synonymous with the also Latin word *consideratio*. In English, “meditation” is “the act of focusing one’s thoughts; to ponder; to think on, or to muse over.” In a theistic context, “meditation” suggests deep and sustained reflection on a religious theme. “Christian meditation” denotes concentrated reflection on God and His Word or another religious subject, being a reflective form of prayer. In Teresa’s lexis, “meditation” is expressed as “to think about” (*pensar*), “to reflect on” (*discurrir*), “to scrutinize” (*escudriñar*), and it is synonymous with “discursive reflection with the intellect” (6M 7,10) and “consideration” (*consideración*), and is often contraposed to contemplation.

When applied to Buddhism, the English “meditation” has a different connotation.¹ It is commonly used as a poor translation of the Pāli word *bhāvanā*,² which has the much wider meaning of mental cultivation, including the practice of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*.³ The belief is prevalent that “Buddhist meditation” refers exclusively to non-discursive practices in which thoughts are observed but not encouraged or voluntarily guided. This however, is always not the case. As this section shows, *samatha* meditation begins with conceptual engagement or discursive reflection applied to a series of meditation subjects.

In view of the above, a semantic problem arises when comparing the two practices. To avoid confusion and distinguish meditation in Christianity from its Buddhist homonym, it seems wise to follow King’s advice when he proposed the term “meditative prayer”—we will employ the term “meditative prayer”—as a more suitable expression for Christian meditation when comparing it with Buddhist meditation.⁴ For our part, to distinguish the discursive phase of *samatha*⁵ from its non-discursive phase, we will use the expression “*samatha* (reflective) meditation”—or “reflective meditation”—for the former and simply “meditation” for the latter.⁶ With the foregoing stipulations in mind, we will next analyze “reflective meditation” and “meditative prayer” separately, to compare them afterward.

¹ Eifring says: “The term ‘meditation’ has a long and complex history in the West, and it has no exact correspondent in the Asian traditions. The modern usage of the term, however, is strongly influenced by encounters with Asian” (Halvor Eifring, “What is Meditation,” in *Asian Traditions of Meditation*, ed. Halvor Eifring, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2016, 1). Only as a secondary meaning the *Oxford Dictionary* defines “meditate” as “focus one’s mind for a period of time, in silence and with the aid of chanting, for religious or spiritual purposes or as a method of relaxation” (“Meditate,” OED, 1100).

² Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 68.

³ “Meditation,” EB, 660.

⁴ King, *Buddhism and Christianity*, 145-46.

⁵ The term “discursive meditation” applied to *samatha* meditation and within the Theravāda context is not totally unheard of. Bhikkhu Bodhi, for example, speaks of the “recollection of peace,” as “discursive meditation on *Nibbāna*.” See Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Noble Eightfold Path: The Way to the End of Suffering*, *The Wheel Publication*, No. 308/311, (1984), 100.

⁶ Context permitting, we speak of “discursive meditation” as an umbrella term that encompasses the practice of reflection in both traditions. Having clarified the use of words, we occasionally speak of “Christian meditation” or “*meditatio*.”

5.8.2 *Samatha* (reflective) meditation

It is a general misconception that *samatha* meditation is neither conceptual, discursive or reflective at any point.⁷ However, even a cursory reading of the *Visuddhimagga* reveals that the use of discourse and analytic reflection is a defining aspect of the pre-*jhānic* phase of *samatha*,⁸ and plays an important though limited role in a meditational process which, as Anālayo describes it, “eventually leads to what is beyond thought.”⁹

That ten of the forty *kammaṭṭhānas* bringing the state of access concentration must be dropped after this attainment—because they involve an excessively-complex thought process that precludes full absorption (*jhāna*) from arising—is already clear evidence of the substantial involvement of the conceptual and reflective faculties of the mind in the pre-*jhānic* phase of *samatha*. The view that both discourse and reflection are involved in the pre-*jhānic* stage of *samatha*—that being the reason why *jhāna* does not take place at this stage therein—is also supported by Buswell and Lopez when they write that the state of “[*upacāra-samādhi*] is *too discursive* to lead to full meditative absorption.”¹⁰

As we have learned earlier, the cultivation of *samatha* (*samatha-bhāvanā*) requires the meditator’s engagement with one or more of forty meditation topics or “places of work” (*kammaṭṭhānas*). All these forty subjects are conducive for developing concentration, overcoming the Five Hindrances, and preparing for the attainment of full absorption (*appanā-samādhi*) or *jhāna*. However, not all forty meditation subjects may bring *jhāna*. Ten topics bring access concentration only, without ever reaching *jhāna*. Buddhaghosa writes: “as to which bring access only and which absorption: the eight recollections—excepting mindfulness occupied with the body and mindfulness of breathing—the perception of repulsiveness in nutriment, and the defining of the four elements, are ten meditation subjects that bring access only. The others bring absorption” (PP 3.106). Why do only thirty subjects bring *jhāna*, while the other ten do not lead beyond *upacāra-samādhi*? This has to do with the nature of these topics, which are too intricate or discursive, precluding the concentration and one-pointedness needed for *jhāna* to arise.

⁷ Collins notes that “it is not often realized that Buddhist meditation is very often very discursive” (Stephen Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias of the Pali Imaginaire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 151).

⁸ *Samatha* meditation is not always uniform. It comprises various phases and different approaches to mental purification. When it refers to the use of words, concepts and analytical thought, a distinction will prove useful in dealing with our topic: based on the type of mental engagement, two stages can be distinguished. First, what we call the initial phase of *samatha* meditation covers from the beginning of the *samatha* practice to the attainment of access concentration. The second stage of *samatha* meditation covers from access concentration until the attainment of the first *jhāna*, where *vicāra* and *vitakka* are *jhāna* factors. From the first *jhāna* onwards, we dwell in non-conceptual states. We aim to show that analyzing the method of practice to access concentration there is, for all the meditation subjects, considerable weightier involvement of the conceptual and reflective mind in this stage than in the process that leads from access concentration to the first *jhāna*.

⁹ “*Vitakka*,” EB, 712.

¹⁰ [Author’s emphasis]. “*Appanāsamādhi*,” PDB, 58.

Eight of the ten subjects that do not lead beyond the *upacāra-samādhi* are discussed in Chapters Seven and Eight of the *Visuddhimagga*. All the ten topics included in these chapters are branded “recollections” (*anussati*). Among these ten “recollections,” eight bring access concentration only. Of these eight, seven are specifically called *anussatis*¹¹—we will call these seven meditational topics “recollections proper”—and, only one of them, mindfulness of death (*maraṇasati*), is not branded “recollection” but “mindfulness” (*sati*). The remaining two “recollections”—i.e., mindfulness occupied with the body and mindfulness of breathing¹²—both in Chapter Seven of the *Visuddhimagga*—are of the nature of mindfulness rather than recollection and lead beyond access concentration.

The terms used for the mediational subjects included in Chapters Seven and Eight of the *Visuddhimagga* also indicate the need to distinguish between two different meditative techniques. The word “*anussati*” suggests a more discursive or pensive form of meditation than the word “*sati*.” “*Anussati*” (*anu*, toward/again + *sati*) is often translated as “remembrance,”¹³ “recollection,” and “thinking of.”¹⁴ As Shaw rightly observes, *anussatis* are “things to be thought about or brought to mind again and again.”¹⁵ The *anussatis* involve “recollection,” “calling to mind,” and “memory,” but likewise “thought” and “reflection” on a preformulated object of meditation. Both *anussati* and *sati* bring the object to awareness by holding it there. But, *anussati* suggests thought and reflection while *sati* suggests what can be appropriately called a “direct awareness of the object.” As the *anussatis* are more discursive or reflective than the *sati* subjects, they do not lead beyond *upacāra-samādhi*, while mindfulness subjects are more conducive to this aim.¹⁶

¹¹ Recollection of the Buddha (*buddhānussati*), of the Dhamma (*dhammānussati*), of the Saṅgha (*saṅghānussati*), of virtue (*sīlānussati*), of generosity (*cāgānussati*), of the deities (*devatānussati*) and recollection of peace (*upasamānussati*).

¹² “Mindfulness occupied with the body” brings about the first *jhāna* and “mindfulness of breathing” brings all four *jhānas*.

¹³ Tse-fu Kuan observes: “The term *anussati* (Skt. *anusmṛti*) derives from the verb *anussarati* which means ‘to remember,’ ‘to recollect,’ or ‘to call to mind’” (Tse-fu Kuan 2008, 52).

¹⁴ “*Anussati*,” PED, 53.

¹⁵ Quoted in Tse-fu Kuan, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism*, 52.

¹⁶ Possibly pertinent to our discussion is that of the seven *anussatis* proper, six are located in Chapter Seven of the *Visuddhimagga* (i.e., Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, virtue, generosity and the deities) while only one—recollection of peace (*upasamānussati*)—is located in Chapter Eight. The remaining three meditative subjects—i.e., mindfulness of death, mindfulness of in-and-out breathing (*ānāpānasati*) and mindfulness of the body (*kāyagatāsati*)—are all mindfulness (*satis*) subjects and are located in Chapter Eight. As Tse-fu Kuan explains, the sixfold series of *anussatis* is commonly found in the *Nikāyas* while the tenfold classification “could be a later accreditation in that it is rarely found in the *Nikāyas*, and it seems heterogeneous as the last four kinds of *anussati* [...] are apparently different in nature from the former six” (Tse-fu Kuan 2008, 52). It also seems that these two groups (*anussatis* and *satis*; division in Chapter Seven and Eight) originated from different frameworks and amalgamated together. The kind of mental activity and the meditational object involved may be the criteria used by Buddhaghosa for the division. As several authors have noted, those subjects in Chapter Eight involve mindfulness (*sati*) of the object rather than reflection and they are termed *sati* and not *anussatis* like the previous six [except the last] (Tse-fu Kuan 2008, 52) setting them apart. The order in the enumeration also seems significant. In addition, it is puzzling why the recollection of peace (*upasamānussati*) is included in Chapter Eight. Like the rest of the *anussatis* that do not lead beyond access concentration, *upasamānussati* does not bring full absorption “owing to the profundity of the special qualities of peace or owing to his being occupied in recollecting special qualities of various kinds, the *jhāna* is only access and does not reach absorption” (PP 8.249). Against a distinction between *anussati* and *sati* meditational subjects, it might be objected that “Buddhaghosa seems to make an equation between them and justify it.” Buddhaghosa writes: “Now, ten recollections were listed next after the ten kinds of foulness” (PP 3.105). As to these: “Mindfulness (*sati*) itself is recollection (*anussati*) because it arises again and again; or alternatively, the mindfulness (*sati*) that is proper (*anurūpa*) for a clansman gone forth out of faith, since it occurs only in those instances where it should occur, is ‘recollection’ (*anussati*)” (PP 7.197). And “Buddhaghosa’s commentator Dhammapāla in his subcommentary tries to explain it without questioning” (Pieris, personal communication, 16/3/15). The equation also appears in Arahant Upatissa’s

Regarding the seven recollections proper, Buddhaghosa specifies that they bring access concentration only due to the profundity of the special qualities recollected and that in them the meditator is “occupied in recollecting special qualities of various kinds.”¹⁷ To our understanding, this means that these topics involve deep and complex reflection.

The mental activity, or way of practice, required in the seven recollections proper is recitation and consideration of specific formulas pre-established in the *Visuddhimagga*. The practice requires careful and attentive consideration of the words reflected upon and assiduous repetition (hundreds of times, if needed) to assimilate their meaning (PP 8.57). To give one example, the recollection of the Buddha involves consideration of the special qualities of the Buddha by reflection and repetition on previously-specified formulae.¹⁸ The meditator recollects each attribute with a plurality of reasons without visualization.

Mindfulness of death (*maraṇasati*) is the only mindfulness (*sati*) that brings access concentration only. The reason given is not the profundity or intricacy of the meditational topic,¹⁹ but that “since the object is stated with individual essences, and since it awakens a sense of urgency, the *jhāna* does not reach absorption and is only access” (PP 8.40).

The remaining two meditation subjects that bring access concentration, but not go beyond that—i.e. the perception of repulsiveness in nutriment and the defining of the four elements—are neither discussed in Chapters Seven and Eight of the *Visuddhimagga*, nor are branded *anussatis*, but are also characterized by deep and complex reflection.

In light of this, it is significant that the topics that bring access concentration only are all characterized by complex thought and reflection. In “recollections proper” it is the profundity and diversity of the qualities recollected that impede the one-pointedness of mind required to attain *jhāna*.²⁰ In *maraṇasati*, which is not *anussati* but a *sati* meditation, it is the nature of the object, and not deep reflection or diversity, that impedes *jhāna*.²¹

Vimuttimaggā. However, “canonically, *sati* and *anussati* are not identical strictly speaking” (Pieris, personal communication 16/3/15). These distinctions point to the existence of two meditation models within this initial stage.

¹⁷ With respect to *upasamānussati*, Buddhaghosa writes: “But owing to the profundity of the special qualities of peace or owing to his being occupied in recollecting special qualities of various kinds, the *jhāna* is only access and does not reach absorption” (PP 8.249). This explanation is included in all seven recollections proper [e.g. Saṅgha (PP 7.99)].

¹⁸ “That Blessed One is such since he is accomplished, fully enlightened, endowed with [clear] vision and [virtuous] conduct, sublime, the knower of worlds, the incomparable leader of men to be tamed, the teacher of gods and men, enlightened and blessed” (PP 7.2).

¹⁹ Mindfulness of death entails reflection on a formula: “One who wants to develop this should go into solitary retreat and exercise attention wisely in this way: “Death will take place; the life faculty will be interrupted,” or “death, death” (PP 8.4).

²⁰ “Anussati,” EB, 778.

²¹ In our view, this alone already reveals a different kind of mental engagement and suggests the need to differentiate between *anussati* and *sati* meditations on the basis of the mental activity involved and the nature of the mediational subjects. This differentiation is not unheard of. Several authors have made similar differentiation on the basis of the mental activity involved. In EB it is mentioned that the four subjects in Chapter Eight of the *Visuddhimaggā* “are strictly speaking not recollections (*anusatti*) but forms of mindfulness (*sati*)” (“Anussati,” EB, 778). Ṭhānissaro writes: “Strictly speaking,

Concerning the thirty remaining subjects²² that lead beyond access concentration, in all of them the practice does not involve complex thought and reflection and is more akin to mindfulness than recollection. We will discuss these topics in the next section, but it can be said that the mental activity in which meditators engage in these thirty topics before the attainment of access concentration—which differs from the activity after access concentration in being more reflective than before access—also shows that there is a conceptual and discursive phase in *samatha* meditation before access concentration.

In the case of the earth *kaṣiṇa*, for example, after the required preparatory practices,²³ the arising of access concentration begins by first “apprehending the sign” (*nimitta*) and then “developing the sign” out of the so-called preparatory image (*parikamma-nimitta*). The yogi without previous experience apprehends the sign by visualizing the earth disk concentrating on the *concept* of earth (*paṭhavi*), and naming it internally (earth, earth) repeatedly in order to conceptualize it, until the “learning sign” or “acquired image” (*uggaha-nimitta*) is generated. The learning sign or acquired image is generated when the sign comes into mental focus exactly the same with the eyes shut as with the eyes open (PP 4.30). Eventually, the Five Hindrances are suppressed, access concentration is attained, and the “counterpart sign” (*patibhāga-nimitta*) arises (PP 4.31).²⁴ There is a similar use of concepts, or discursive engagement, in the other thirty meditation subjects before the attainment of access concentration. This mental activity can be considered a predecessor of *vitakka* and *vicāra* that will later appear as *jhāna* factors in the first *jhāna*.

A lingering question is: If *samatha-bhāvanā* is directed at *jhāna*, and the ten subjects do not accomplish this purpose, then—it seems natural to ask—what is their function? The “recollections” (*anussatis*), and the other topics that bring access concentration only, are primarily oriented at overcoming the defilements, purifying the meditator’s mind and transforming his emotions. What we call “*samatha* mindfulness meditation” (in Section 5.9.2) and covers the other thirty topics before access concentration, also perform some of these functions but it is more absorptive than the reflective. In our view, that in *samatha* we encounter two kinds of meditational models is also shown by this dissimilar purpose.

only seven of the ten are actually ‘recollections’ (*anussati*) [...] The other three are called mindfulness (*sati*) practices” Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, *A Meditator’s Tools: A Study Guide on the Ten Recollections* (The Dhammayut Order), 1.

²² The ten meditation on foulness and mindfulness of the body all lead only to the first *jhāna*. The four divine abidings and the four immeasurable states may lead beyond the first *jhāna*. Only the ten *kaṣiṇas* and mindfulness of breathing may lead to all four *jhānas* (PP 3.107).

²³ That is, arousing happiness, confidence, resolve, adopting an adequate posture, reflecting on danger of sense desires.

²⁴ The direct goal of the practice is to meditate so that the object is visualized as exactly and vividly with the eyes closed as opened, with all its details and flaws (PP 4.27, note 6). When apprehending the sign, the characteristics color of the *kaṣiṇas* should not be reviewed but “attention should be given by setting the mind on the [name] concept as the most outstanding mental datum” (PP 4.29).

5.8.3 Teresa and meditative prayer

The Church calls for the priesthood to seek Christ “in the faithful meditation on God’s word.”²⁵ Christian meditation, or meditative prayer,²⁶ is defined by Egan as “reflective prayer which awakens the love of God and neighbor and which may prepare for contemplation.”²⁷ Meditative prayer is more structured and composite than vocal or mental prayer. It engages all the faculties but particularly reasoning, which is focused on the religious subject to the exclusion of everything else. What is considered per antonomasia in Christian meditation is God’s word as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.²⁸

Christian meditation is rooted in the Bible²⁹ and in the tradition of the Desert Fathers. The Benedictine practice of *Lectio divina* (4th century C.E.), that is, reflective reading of the Scripture, became methodical with Guigo II’s *Ladder of the Monks* (12th century CE) and was systematized with the advent of *devotio moderna* (14th century CE). The latter entered Spain by the hand of Cardinal X. de Cisneros, influencing Teresa through her readings of Francisco de Osuna, Luis de Granada and also her contact with the Jesuits.³⁰ For the Carmelite tradition, ruminating over the Scriptures is essential. The Rule of St. Albert reads: “each one of you is to stay in his own cell or nearby pondering the Law of the Lord day and night and keeping watch at his prayer” (Rule No. 8). Teresa discusses meditation in *Vida* Chapter Four, 11-13, *Castillo* 1-3, *Camino* 20-26, among other places. She describes it thus: “By meditation (*meditación*) I mean much discursive reflection with the intellect in the following way: we begin to think about the favor God granted us in giving us His only Son [...] go on to the mysteries of His whole glorious life” (6M 7,10).³¹

Teresa’s teachings on meditative prayer are scarce but subtle.³² For her, meditative prayer is always desirable and beneficial. She says “this kind of reflection is an admirable and very meritorious prayer” (6M 7,10). However, Teresa does not consider meditative prayer to be the most adequate prayer for all kinds of mentalities, neither is it what she was most interested in,³³ believing one should not dwell on it extensively or exclusively.

²⁵ “Decree on Priestly Training (*Optatam Totius*)” Proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965.

²⁶ In this chapter the terms “Christian meditation” and “meditative prayer” are used as synonymous.

²⁷ Egan, *Christian Spirituality*, 84.

²⁸ A significant source on Christian meditation is: Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Christian Meditation* (Ignatius Press, 1989).

²⁹ In the Old Testament meditation is on God’s law. The Psalms read: “his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:2). See also Joshua 1:8 and 2 Timothy 3:16.

³⁰ D. de Pablo, *Dinámica de la oración*, 91-92; Cf. Jordan Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 180.

³¹ John of the Cross describes meditation as “a discursive act built on forms, figures, and images” such as for example, “imagining Christ crucified or at the pillar or in some other scene” (A2, 2, 12).

³² For Teresa’s views on meditative prayer see Mary Frohlich, “Teresa of Avila’s Evolving Practices of ‘Representing’ Christ in Prayer,” in *Meditation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Cultural Histories*, edited by Halvor Eifring (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 137-152; and Peter Thomas Rohrbach, *Conversation with Christ: Teaching of St. Teresa of Avila About Personal Prayer* (Charlotte, North Carolina, Tan Books, 2012).

³³ Frohlich, “Teresa of Avila’s Evolving Practices of ‘Representing’ Christ in Prayer,” 138.

A point that must be duly stressed is that, although Teresa recommended meditative prayer habitually to her nuns (C 19,1 and 4M 1,6), as was generally practiced in her time, the *Constituciones de San José* reserve time for it, and she did endeavor to practice it, Teresa did have trouble with sustained thinking and visualization (V 13,11), favoring a more affective mode of prayer (V 13,5 and 5M 3,4), particularly the prayer of recollection.

Contrary to contemplation, Christian meditation is an active and ascetic mode of prayer. Its fruits are acquired, and its practice involves all the senses and faculties of the soul. Teresa says that “prayerful reflection” is done “through our own efforts” (V 12,1), and its fruit can be attained by the prayerful with God’s help: “These are the things we can do of ourselves, with the understanding that we do so by the help of God, for without this help as is already known we cannot have so much as a good thought” (V 11,5). Writing on Teresa’s meditation, Morello says: “this is the first thing to note, that meditation for Teresa is a category of prayer. It is the prayer of effort, effort to think about and love the Lord. Meditation is all prayer this side of contemplation; it is the prayer of the first three dwelling-places of the Interior Castle and of the first waters of the Life.”³⁴ Teresa compares meditative prayer to watering the garden of the soul by drawing water from a well with a bucket (V 11,4), while recollection is compared to watering with a wheel, and contemplation to watering with rain; in them there is a gradual lessening of human effort.

For Teresa meditative prayer can be practiced at any stage of spiritual life,³⁵ but belongs characteristically to the first three mansions and particularly to the Second Mansions³⁶ which, as already shown, are the mansions *per excellence* of asceticism.³⁷ Jerónimo Gracián wrote: “The second state of the spirit is ruminating with meditation and prayer the leaves of the white mulberry that are concepts drawn from pious books.”³⁸

As we will see in the succeeding subsections of this chapter, Teresa reflects on many subjects (e.g., the inevitability of death, the transiency and vanity of all, the effects of sin, God’s love) but, like the entire Christian meditative tradition, her prayer is always Christological. We will further elaborate on Teresa’s topics when comparing them with Buddhaghosa’s. We will also consider the transformative effects of reflective meditation.

³⁴ Sam Anthony Morello, *Lectio Divina and the Practice of Teresian Prayer* (Washington D.C: ICS Publications, 1995), 6.

³⁵ Teresa wrote repeatedly that even in the most advanced states meditation is always necessary.

³⁶ “In the first three mansions of the interior castle [...] it’s where she [Teresa] puts discursive meditation” (Pablo Maroto, *Teresa en Oración*, 361). However, it is more necessary in 2M where God speaks through sermons, the Bible, good books, and teachings imparted by Him (2M 1,3), and continues in 3M where it begins to lead to non-reflective prayer.

³⁷ As we know, in this stage the monastic is already accustomed to prayer, struggles for moral improvement (2M 1,2) and reflects on God’s law and His word in order to deepen his faith and know God’s will.

³⁸ [Author’s translation]. Jerónimo Gracián, *Dilucidario del Verdadero Espíritu*, 86, in Jerónimo Gracián, *Obras del P. Jerónimo Gracián de la Madre de Dios*, Vol. 1., edited by Silverio de Santa Teresa, Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 1932-33.

5.8.4 Comparison of *samatha* reflective meditation and meditative prayer

This section aims to show that some of the functions of *samatha* reflective meditation and Christian meditative prayer are analogous and occupy a somewhat homologous position relative to their overall systems. A series of distinctions between these practices, however, is telling of their different natures and reveals major divides between them.

5.8.4.1 The nature of *samatha* reflective meditation and meditative prayer

The distinctiveness of reflective meditation and meditative prayer in their final aims³⁹ and systematicity⁴⁰ is assumed, as they are rooted in and belong to different religious systems. But there are other differences. Meditative prayer is always Christocentric.⁴¹ This is not because Christ is an exclusive theme for meditation in the Christian faith, which He is not, not even for Teresa. (In fact, as Heiler pointed out,⁴² the Buddhist and Christian traditions share many topics, among them: death and the impermanence of all). Meditative prayer is Christocentric because it involves the person of Christ, the Mediator between man and Father.⁴³ It is its Christ-centered nature that makes it truly Christian. In contrast, *samatha* reflective meditations are, for the most part, not centered on the Buddha, nor are they addressed to, mediated by or dependent on the Buddha.

Another fundamental difference is that whereas *samatha* meditation is an individual engagement with any of the forty meditation subjects and is not logically dialogical,⁴⁴ meditative prayer is prayer, that is, a dialogical process of loving colloquy between the soul and God, which brings the soul closer to Him. Buddhist and Christian approaches to meditation not only differ with respect to being addressed to, and their receptiveness by God, but also because, for Christians the Holy Spirit is who reveals the Mysteries of God (1Cor 2: 6-12) hidden for the ages but to those who love Him (1Cor 2: 9,10,13). Aside from the above essential differences, there are close similarities in other aspects.

³⁹ The ultimate goal of *samatha* meditation in general is the cessation of craving, the end of suffering, realization of *nibbāna*. Christian meditation is aimed instead at knowing God and loving Christ, seeking union with Him. John of the Cross writes: "the purpose of discursive meditation on divine subjects is the acquisition of some knowledge and love of God" (A2.14.2).

⁴⁰ Probably, because of the revealed nature of the Christian faith, discursive meditation is more essential in Christianity, though it is not neglected in Buddhism.

⁴¹ Cf. "Letter on certain aspects of Christian meditation October 15, 1989." Rohrbach points out that "[t]he aim of meditation is to provide a framework or setting for a personal, heart-to-heart conversation with Christ" (Rohrbach 1980, 3).

⁴² Heiler says "among the topics of meditation of Christian mystics we meet all the Buddhist viewpoints" (Heiler 1922, 53). Although "all the Buddhist viewpoints" seems unwarranted, Heiler refers to topics of meditation mentioned by Pedro de Alcántara, among which we find "the frailty, inconstancy and mutability [...] of this life," "the death," and meditation on "*corruptio et foeditas corporis*" (Latin for "corruption and ugliness of the body") which makes Heiler think of the ten "consideration of the ugly" (i.e. meditation on foulness) of the Buddhist (Heiler 1922, 53).

⁴³ 1 Tm 2:5. Cf. Mt 11:27; Jn. 1:18.

⁴⁴ Susan J. Stabile, *Growing in Love and Wisdom: Tibetan Buddhist Sources for Christian Meditation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 73.

5.8.4.2 Characteristics of *samatha* reflective meditation and meditative prayer

One common use of reflective meditation and meditative prayer is to purify the mind. Buddhaghosa states that the recollections (*anussatis*) are practiced so the noble disciple may purify his mind and attain further purification in the ultimate sense (PP 7.123), and as to effect “the gradual cleansing of the mind still sullied by imperfections” (PP 7.125). Similarly, meditative prayer helps to purge from the soul iniquitous desires and intentions, and flawed thoughts and ways of thinking that avert spiritual growth. The general primary function of discursive-reflective meditation is thus to be morally transformative. Both reflective meditation and meditative prayer are instrumental in suppressing harmful tendencies (vices) and cultivating wholesome qualities (virtues) at the level of intention. In both cases, specific meditations help to suppress particular noxious attitudes and develop the opposite healthy virtues. To give an example, meditating on the patience of the Buddha or Christ on the Cross the meditator cultivates and develops a similar quality. Let us elaborate briefly on this point.

All *kammaṭṭhānas* are instrumental in developing virtue, and conducive to abandoning the Five Hindrances—a required feat for the attainment of *jhāna*⁴⁵—and balancing the temperament of the meditator, coinciding with the goal of Right Effort (*sammā vāyāmo*). Turning to Christianity, through devout reflection on God’s law and will, Christ’s life and virtues (divine compassion), the perfection of the saints and the like, one considers the goodness of God and sheds light on one’s own imperfections, thus growing in virtue⁴⁶ as for example, humility,⁴⁷ without which Teresa says there can be no lasting contemplation. Through the assiduous practice of discursive meditation or meditative prayer, then, the mind is purified, unwholesome emotions suppressed, and virtues are gradually amplified. The six *anussatis* in Chapter Seven of the *Visuddhimagga* “gladden the mind when it has fallen prey to distress and to induce insight in the course of higher progress” and help to cultivate qualities as charity and liberality. Meditation on Christ develops feelings of love for God and others—including our enemies—altruism, generosity, self-sacrifice and the like.

⁴⁵ The *brahmavihāras*, for example, may help to develop the positive qualities of loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity and purge contrary unwholesome attitudes such as hatred, envy and the like. In another example, recollection of the virtues of the Buddha may contribute to the uprooting of the root-causes of attachment, namely, greed, hatred and delusion and foster and develop in the meditator the Buddha’s special spiritual qualities.

⁴⁶ Teresa writes: “for in thinking about and carefully examining what the Lord suffered for us, we are moved to compassion; and this sorrow and the resulting tears bring delight. In thinking about the glory we hope for, the love the Lord bore us, and His resurrection, we are moved to a joy that is neither entirely spiritual nor entirely of the senses” (V 12,1).

⁴⁷ Teresa says: “We shall never learn to know ourselves except by endeavoring to know God; for, beholding His greatness, we realize our own littleness; His purity shows us our foulness; and by meditating upon His humility we find how very far we are from being humble” (1M 2,9). Merton adds “in meditation we should not look for a ‘method’ or ‘system,’ but cultivate an ‘attitude,’ an ‘outlook:’ faith, openness, attention, reverence, expectation, supplication, trust, joy” (Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, New York: Image Books, 2009, 10).

Both reflective meditation and meditative prayer are spiritual exercises designed to guide and improve thought and reflection. They are envisioned to subdue the monastic's mind and develop purer and improved ways of thinking that move away from fixed or habitual harmful mental responses. One of the proximate functions of the *kammaṭṭhānas* is to cultivate the monastic's mind.⁴⁸ Christian meditation is a practice of mental purification and amelioration before God that cleanses and alters the ascetic's mind producing wanted changes in patterns of thinking.

Both are exercises of concentrated attention that focus the mind on one thing. Reflection in *samatha* meditation contributes to the goal of "purification of mind" or concentration that is, the attainment of one-pointedness of mind and calm. On the Christian side, "progress in the life of prayer—Merton says—means the emergence of one dominant attraction—a concentration of the interior life on one objective, union with God."⁴⁹ However, although concentration is consubstantial with meditative prayer, in Buddhism the attainment of single-pointedness is explicitly an immediate goal of the practice, whereas in Teresa the emphasis is on God and concentration comes as a result.

Both reflective meditation and meditative prayer engage all the person's capabilities (e.g. senses, imagination, memory), the whole being,⁵⁰ thus preventing their dispersion, but preponderantly it engages reason. Reflective analysis occupies the wandering mind by concentrating it on a meditation topic. Both combat the mind's propensity to constantly switch from one object to another, thus gaining a measure of control over it, and are adjuvant to the attainment of stillness. In Buddhism focusing the attention on a meditation subject to the exclusion of everything, helps to tame the "monkey mind" (SN 2.94). In Christianity meditation keeps the mind movements constricted to the object of attention, avoiding distractions (e.g. senses) and keeping it from wandering off unattended.⁵¹ As Merton says, "to meditate [...] implies certain absorption or concentration which does not permit our faculties to wander off at random or to remain slack and undirected."⁵² However, for both Buddhists and Christians, discursive and reflective meditations are not a merely intellectual but are principally religious activities.⁵³ In both cases, reasoning does not lead to speculation or the danger of intellectualism but to spiritual transformation.

⁴⁸ "Rahula writes: "[t]he word meditation is a very poor substitute for the original term *bhavana*, which means 'culture' or 'development', i.e., mental culture or mental development" (Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 67).

⁴⁹ Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, 83

⁵⁰ Reflective meditation is more than intellectual exercises, as de Pablo suggests, it is religious reflection on an object of faith that involves the whole person and with which the meditator is engaged.

⁵¹ Teresa is testimony of what happens when reflection is not applied and the field of attention narrowed. See, V 4,3.

⁵² Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, 52.

⁵³ What Merton wrote about Christian meditation can be applied *mutatis mutandis* to Buddhism: "that reflection here does not refer to a purely intellectual activity, and still less does it refer to mere reasoning. Reflection involves not only the mind but also the heart, and indeed our whole being" (Merton 1960, 52).

In both cases, discursive and reflective meditation develop awareness,⁵⁴ and pave the way to modes of introversion less dependent on analytical thought and reflection. *Samatha* reflective meditation is also instrumental in bringing about access concentration. Meditative prayer occupies a middle ground between “ordinary prayer” and less reflective and structured modes of introspection; it prepares one for non-discursive awareness. Teresa’s meditation leads to prayer of recollection, prayer of quiet and contemplation. In this sense, Merton writes that “meditation is the normal path to contemplative prayer.”⁵⁵ Both traditions similarly recommend not ceasing reflection until one is ready to do so.⁵⁶

Reflection on particular meditation topics inspires confidence and faith in the monastic. As Vajirañāza states, the first three *anussatis* (i.e., Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha) are recommended for self-protection and promote confidence (*pasāda*) and faith (*saddhā*).⁵⁷ The aim of discursive meditation in Christianity is oriented to “deepen our convictions of faith, prompt the conversion of our heart, and strengthen our will to follow Christ.”⁵⁸

Our two traditions observe that meditative rumination presents similar limitations. In Buddhism reflective meditation may lead by itself only to access concentration due to its density and complexity. In Teresa, meditative prayer is a means to an end; it cannot effect union with God either, as God cannot be apprehended by reason nor the intellect.⁵⁹ A point of contrast must be emphasized, which relates to the feelings and emotions of the meditator towards the object. Christian meditation is inspired by love. Teresa says: “the important thing in mental prayer [and no doubt in meditative prayer] is not to think much but to love much” (4M 1,7). For her prayer is essentially an “exercise of love” (V 7,12). To meditate is to love, leads to love, and seeks union with the object of love.⁶⁰ Another difference is that, Frohlich puts it, “prayer for her [Teresa] is never simply a technique that can be expected to yield predictable results.”⁶¹ Finally, meditative prayer can generate strong emotions of exaltation, joy happiness but also sadness and fear. Although in Buddhist meditation the *kammaṭṭhāna* is held in high esteem, even revered, Buddhist meditation is methodical and systematic and not so emotionally charged.

⁵⁴ Eifring explains how all forms of meditation are forms of “awareness training.” See Eifring, “What is Meditation”, 8.

⁵⁵ Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, 83.

⁵⁶ This is suggested by the fact that the attainment of access concentration must precede the attempt to develop *jhāna*. Merton says: “At the beginning of the life of prayer it would be a manifest error to seek this simple and obscure unification of our faculties in God by simply abandoning all efforts to think, to reason, or to meditate discursively” (Merton 1960, 83).

⁵⁷ Vajirañāza, *Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice*, 167.

⁵⁸ CCC, 2708.

⁵⁹ Dubay comments: “Because discursive meditation proceeds by means of images and concepts, themselves of the created order, it cannot effect union with God” (Dubay, *Fire Within*, 53).

⁶⁰ As Merton put it, in Christian tradition the person who thinks loves and by this love “enters into that reality and knows it so to speak from within, by a kind of identification” (Merton 1960, 52).

⁶¹ Frohlich, “Teresa of Avila’s Evolving Practices of ‘Representing’ Christ in Prayer,” 138.

5.8.4.3 Meditation subjects compared

To purify the heart a series of meditation topics are employed in both traditions. As Conze rightly observed,⁶² the systematized list of *kammaṭṭhānas* enumerated by Buddhaghosa does not exhaust all possible meditation subjects, but is the standard list recommended in the Theravāda meditative praxis for the purpose of *samatha-bhāvanā*. Other subjects (e.g., a stanza) could also be used to develop concentration.⁶³ Likewise, in the Christian tradition a variety of subjects are used in meditative prayer.⁶⁴ As Merton explains “the normal subject of meditation according to the ascetic Christian tradition will be some mystery of the Christian Faith.”⁶⁵ This could be, for instance, God’s love or law, the Incarnation, the holiness of the Saints, the Sign of the Cross or the Apostles’ Creed. No systematized list of topics could exist on something as intimate as meditative prayer. In the Christian tradition, however, the meditative subject *par excellence* is the Humanity of Christ⁶⁶ which, in Teresa’s words, is a “very excellent and safe way” (V 13,10).⁶⁷ It was by meditating on Christ’s life and words that Teresa learned and acquired the virtues. Nonetheless, not even in Teresa does Christ exhaust all subjects.⁶⁸ Even so, meditation in Teresa is always Christological, that is, done in dialogue with and addressed to Christ.

At any rate, meditation in both traditions, whatever the religious subject, is where the spiritual work is done. If *kammaṭṭhāna* literally means “place for work,” meditation on Christ is “the office of the religious.” The next subsections offer an analytical comparison of some of the meditational subjects mentioned by Buddhaghosa and Teresa, hoping it may clarify their functions and effects. In particular, it discusses topics mentioned by Buddhaghosa in Chapter Seven of the *Visuddhimagga* (i.e., the first six recollections) and the last recollection of Chapter Eight, “recollection of peace”, all of which meditations bring access concentration only, and compares them to Teresa’s meditation topics.⁶⁹ The comparison continues with the reverse process; comparing themes reflected upon by Teresa with Buddhaghosa’s. It is not our aim to be comprehensive, an impossible task bearing in mind the nature of this study but to suggest analytical possibilities. But before we start the comparison, let us return briefly to the discussion on the relationship between the meditation subject and the meditator’s temperament in our two traditions.

⁶² Conze, *Buddhist Meditation* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1972) 16.

⁶³ A *samatha* meditator may also reflect, for example, on a passage from the Pāli Canon, a verse of the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha’s life or a poem. Other subjects are used in *vipassanā* meditation that involve the doctrines of Buddhism.

⁶⁴ “The success of meditative prayer depends on our ability to apply our faculties to these revealed truths collectively referred to as [...] ‘The Word of God.’ Therefore, meditation must have a definite subject” (Merton 1960, 84).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ V 12,2, V 4,7, V 9,3-6, and C 26,3.

⁶⁷ Teresa particularly recommends reflecting on a passage of Christ’s life, chiefly “the sacred passion” (V 4,8),

⁶⁸ Teresa praises, *inter alia*, “self-knowledge” (V 13,15 and C 39,5), humility, the vanity of all, death and heaven.

⁶⁹ The remaining subjects discussed by Buddhaghosa will be compared with Teresa’s topics in the next section.

5.8.4.3.1 The selection of a meditation subject and the meditator's temperament

In Theravāda, the choice of meditation topic is given by the “good friend” (*kalyāṇamitta*) to counteract major weaknesses in the monastic's character and help him to cultivate the reverse wholesome qualities. In the *Visuddhimagga*, the forty *kammaṭṭhānas* can be divided into two kinds: “generally useful,” so-called because they are always useful for a monastic's progress (e.g. mindfulness of death, perception of foulness), and “special”⁷⁰ (PP 3.57-60), which are suitable and beneficial for some meditators and are provided by the “giver of a meditation subject” according to their temperaments, which Buddhaghosa classifies into six types: greedy, hating, deluded, faithful, intelligent and speculative.⁷¹ Recollection on foulness, for instance, is helpful for those of greedy nature (PP 3.59). Color *kasīnas* are suitable for those who hate. Mindfulness of breathing is advantageous for deluded persons. The first six recollections are for devotional types. Mindfulness of death, recollection of peace, the defining of the four elements and repulsiveness of food may be employed for those of an intellectual nature. The rest of meditational topics are for all sorts of temperaments. Nonetheless, all meditations suppress greed (PP 102.1). These “special” (*pārihāriya*) subjects must be carried (*parihāritabbattā*) constantly with the meditator and are a “proximate cause for higher stage of development” (PP 57-60).⁷² In the Christian tradition, the particular topic of meditation depends on the needs and natural gifts of the meditator, although the selection of subject matter is more personal. Although, it can be suggested by the confessor or the spiritual director, in meditative prayer most people do not meditate on a preselected topic decided by someone else.⁷³ The main subject is always Christ's life, particularly, the Passion, but as Teresa writes:

There are many souls that benefit more by other meditations than those on the sacred Passion. For just as there are many mansions in heaven, there are many paths. Some persons find it helpful to think about hell, others about death; some if they have tender hearts experience much fatigue if they always think about the Passion, and they are refreshed by considering the power and grandeur of God in creatures (V 13,13).

As Merton says, “the precise way in which each individual makes his meditation will depend in large measure upon his temperament.”⁷⁴ Those intellectually inclined, break down the subject analytically, while others of less abstract mind approach it intuitively. In any case, “all mental prayer, whatever may be its beginnings, must terminate in love.”⁷⁵

⁷⁰ The appellative “special” is used (*pārihāriya*) because the *yogin* carries the selected subject (*parihāritabbattā*) constantly with him, and it is the immediate cause for a higher stage of development (PP 3.60).

⁷¹ (PP 3.74) The diverse temperaments and counteracting subject are explained in detail from PP 3.75 to 3.102.

⁷² As Pieris notes, the ability of the meditation master to identify the monastic's temperament and give him a *kammaṭṭhāna* judiciously “is a tradition that is fast disappearing with very few traditional formators living today” (personal communication).

⁷³ Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, 84.

⁷⁴ Idem, 103.

⁷⁵ Idem, 104.

5.8.4.3.2 Comparison of Buddhaghosa's meditation subjects

The Recollection of the Buddha is the mindfulness that arises inspired by the special qualities of the Enlightened One (PP 7.2). Buddhaghosa dedicates sixty-five paragraphs (PP 7.2 to 7.67) to expound upon the meditation on the special attributes of the Buddha, which shows the import of this first-listed recollection. The attributes of the Buddha, expressed in a formula,⁷⁶ should be kept in mind, repeated and reflected upon during the recollection. Due to its characteristics and position in Theravāda meditative praxis, it is interesting to compare Recollection of the Buddha with meditation on Christ's life and words. We will attempt such a comparison when discussing Teresa's meditative subjects in Section 5.8.4.3.3.

Recollection of the Dhamma (PP 7.68-88) is recollection inspired by special qualities of the Dhamma (Law)⁷⁷ of the scriptures and by the ninefold supramundane Dhamma.⁷⁸ Those who develop it should recollect the Dhamma as per the given formula (PP 7.68). *Dhammānussati* is a highly-inspiring *kammaṭṭhāna*. Those who practice it attain fullness of faith, reverence for the Dhamma, conquer fear and dread and feel gladness (PP 7.88). If any functional resemblance can be found to *dhammānussati*, Teresa often reflects upon the word of God. She says: "I have always been fond of the words of the Gospels [...] and found more recollection in them than in very cleverly written books" (C 21,4).⁷⁹

Recollection of the Saṅgha is inspired by the special qualities of the community of monastics (PP 7.89-100) and is practiced reflecting on the given formula (PP 7.89). For one who practices *saṅghānussati*, his mind is not obsessed by greed, hate or delusion, and he tends towards the attainment of the Saṅgha's special qualities (PP 7.100). As Álvarez states: "Teresa is a mystic of the Church."⁸⁰ She has the Holy Mother Church constantly in her thoughts,⁸¹ and the Church as an institution is an object of inspiration not alien to her reflection. She submits herself to the authority of the Catholic Church,⁸² and regularly reflects on the Church and its state of splintering apart at the time (C 1,2).

⁷⁶ For development of the recollection of the Buddha Buddhaghosa instructs that the meditator with absolute confidence who wants to develop it should recollect the special qualities of the Enlightened One as follows: "That Blessed One is [...] such since he accomplished, fully enlightened, endowed with [clear] vision and [virtuous] conduct, sublime, the knower of worlds, the incomparable leader of men to be tamed, the teacher of gods and men, enlightened and blessed" (PP 7.2).

⁷⁷ For the different meanings of the Pāli word *dhamma* see Section 5.4.2.

⁷⁸ The Ninefold Supramundane Dhamma is the Fourfold Noble Path, The Fourfold Fruition and *Nibbāna*.

⁷⁹ In *Meditaciones sobre los Cantares* Teresa writes: "each time I [...] read some words from Solomon's Song of Songs [...] my soul is stirred and recollected more than with any other devotional books" (CAD, Prologue 1).

⁸⁰ Tomas Alvarez, *St. Teresa of Avila 100 Themes*, 438.

⁸¹ Álvarez, "Iglesia," DSTJ, 345.

⁸² Teresa "strives to proceed in conformity with what the church holds" (V 25,12). Similar declaration at the beginning of *Camino*, *Castillo interior* and *Fundaciones* and at the end of *Castillo interior* (M Epilogue, 4). See also R.4,7 and C 33,5.

Recollection inspired by virtues of the deities (*devatānussati*) is recollection of one's own virtue with deities standing as witnesses (PP 8.115). Through it, one gladdens, is not obsessed by greed, hatred and delusion, and develops inner rectitude. Stabile finds affinities between the Buddhist practice of meditation on the deities and the Catholic veneration of the saints, which includes recollection of their virtues.⁸³ Evidently, in a monotheistic faith like Christianity, there is no recognition of other deities. Nevertheless, functionally and structurally meditation on the saints in Catholicism comes as close as anything else to the role played by recollection of the deities in the Theravāda system. Teresa had special devotion to various saints and carried a list of thirty in her breviary.⁸⁴ Memory and reflection on the saints, and her readings of hagiographies, inspired faith in Teresa and helped her to develop virtue and understanding,⁸⁵ transforming her greatly.⁸⁶

Recollection on virtue (*sīlānussati*) arises inspired by virtue as its object. It is practiced by recollecting the monastic's virtue in being "untorn," and so forth (PP 7.101). We have discussed, in Section 5.4.3.3, aspects of virtue in our authors at some length. We should just add that Teresa reflects on virtues such as humility, love and obedience, begging God "to increase the fragrance of the little flowers of virtue that were beginning to bloom" (V 14,9). Like Buddhaghosa, Teresa considers that the virtues are liberating since they free from transgressions and facilitate communion with those in the life of purity (C 4,10). If a difference must be made, Teresa does not recollect her own virtues, as a Theravāda meditator does, and it is God who waters the virtues and makes them grow (V 14,5).

Recollection of generosity (*cāga*) is recollection inspired by liberality. The inclusion of *cāga* as one of the forty selected "places of work" for development of *samatha* meditation is telling of the importance of the practice of giving and sharing in the Theravāda tradition. For Teresa, generous souls are royal souls (C 6,4, V 1,5), always more inclined to giving than receiving (C 6,7). The epitome of generosity is God, who gave His life for mankind. Generosity is a theological attribute of God upon which Teresa frequently reflects.⁸⁷

The last "recollection" of Chapter Eight of the *Visuddhimagga* is "recollection of peace" (*upasamānussati*) which is mindfulness on *nibbāna*. If a comparison can be drawn here, Teresa has "the eyes in the true and everlasting kingdom we intend to win" (V 15,11).

⁸³ Stabile, *Growing in Love and Wisdom*, 202.

⁸⁴ See Álvarez, "San José," DSTJ, 375. The list of saints in her breviary was headed by "the glorious St. Joseph" (V 6,3).
⁸⁵ "we should set our eyes on Christ...and on His saints. There we shall learn true humility" (1M 2,11). Cf. V 11,7; 3M 1.6.

⁸⁶ Apart from obvious theological differences, an important point of contrast when comparing "recollection inspired by virtues of the deities" and veneration of the saints is that in *samatha* one first recollects the qualities of the deities and, later on, recollects those qualities as existing in oneself (PP 8.115). Teresa does not recollect the qualities of the saints in herself, nor are these recollections as systematic, programmatic and epigraphically expressed as in the *Visuddhimagga*.

⁸⁷ 3M 1,8; C 23,3; and 6M 11.1.; Cf. V 3,3; 5M 1,5; C 6,12; 6M 4,12; C 23,3; Cta. 294,13; and V 22,15.

5.8.4.3.3 Comparison with Teresa's meditational subjects

The humanity of Christ is the essential subject of Teresa's reflection (V 22,4).⁸⁸ Teresa is, above all, "of Jesus," and the person of Christ is the core of her religious life,⁸⁹ saying that one is safe "as long as one often reflects on the Passion and life of Christ from which has come and continues to come every good" (V 13,13). Teresa reflects on the "sacred Humanity of Christ," that is, on the historical person of Jesus and considers His life, the Passion,⁹⁰ and "on what we owe Him and the death He suffered for us" (2M 1,12). Meditation on Christ occurs all along the spiritual path, but it is central in 2M and 3M.⁹¹ Teresa writes that, along with sermons, good readings and the like, those already at beginning spiritual life (i.e., 1M and 2M) "must strive to consider the life of Christ" (V 11,9).

The point to emphasize when comparing meditation upon the Humanity of Christ with Buddhaghosa's *foci* is that several of the qualities cultivated through meditation on the *kammaṭṭhānas* are developed through meditation on Christ in Christianity. The parallels between meditation on Christ and the *kammaṭṭhānas* are best shown when comparing it to the Recollection of the Buddha. If meditation on Christ seeks and leads to *imitatio Christi*,⁹² to be Christ-like, Recollection of the Buddha seeks *imitatio Buddha*. As Zaleski rightly explains: "Meditation, as Buddhaghosa sees it, is a kind of *imitatio Buddha*. Those who persevere on the Buddhist path may taste, on a lower level, what the Buddha attained in his famous vigil under the bodhi tree."⁹³ Both Jesus Christ and the Buddha Gotama are masters and models of perfect virtue. If the Buddhist reflects on the moral qualities and attributes of the Buddha, Teresa reflects of the virtues of Jesus Christ. In his book *Cristología Teresiana*, S. Castro enumerates and comments on a series of titles and offices of Christ with which Teresa expresses her thoughts on the mystery of Christ. Among other titles are those of: "Son," "Teacher," "Husband," "King," and "Judge."⁹⁴ It is through meditating upon Christ that Teresa is inspired to love, be patient and sacrifice herself (V 3,6) beyond the monastic rules of the Carmelites. If through meditation upon Christ Teresa cultivates the virtues of Christ inspired by the life and works of Christ, through Recollection of the Buddha the Buddhist cultivates the qualities of the Buddha.

⁸⁸ Christ's life is the subject of meditative reflection *par excellence* as, for Christian, He is "the way and the truth and the life" (Jh. 14:6).

⁸⁹ Castro, *Cristología Teresiana*; Ángel María García Ordas, *La persona divina en la espiritualidad de Santa Teresa* (Rome: Teresianum, 1967); Álvarez, "Santa Teresa de Jesús contemplativa," 22-25.

⁹⁰ For Teresa, the Passion should be the central meditation for all as from this meditation comes every good (V 13,13).

⁹¹ Castro notes that in 3M great emphasis is placed on meditation of the life of Christ. Castro, *Cristología Teresiana*, 95.

⁹² Christ is Teresa's guide and teacher, the model to imitate. She meditates on Christ to follow him, "to pass through what He passed through" (CV 26,5), to be inspired by Him, and to gradually be transformed and taken possession by Him.

⁹³ Zaleski 2005, 355.

⁹⁴ See Castro, *Cristología Teresiana*, 331-60.

There are obvious and fundamental differences, though, between the two meditations. The eminent Teresian scholar S. Castro has demonstrated how essential the person of Christ is in Teresa's spirituality and how Teresa's development constitutes a process of spiritual growth as the living experience of the presence of Christ in her soul deepens.⁹⁵ If Teresa's meditation is ultimately centered on the person of Jesus Christ, Buddhist meditation is not centered on the Buddha and the Buddhist meditator is not progressively transformed into the Buddha as the Christian is transformed into Christ by God's grace.

Although the primary subject of Teresa's reflection, and of the Christian tradition in general, is Jesus Christ and His life and words, there are other topics that could be covered in discursive meditation that Teresa learned in prayer books of her time that are impossible to enumerate. Among them, she mentions that of "self-knowledge" (which is never to be abandoned; e.g. V 13,15; CV 39,5; 1M 2,8-9; 6M 5,6), "the greatness and majesty of God (1M 2,8), the Beatitudes "what the world is," "death," "heaven," "hell" (V 13,13), redemption, the effect of sin, "this life," and other theological topics, some of them idiosyncratically Christian. But she also reflects on books, images, nature and the like.

We hope that this section has started to reveal a crucial point of this study: that, albeit there are essential differences between the two meditative systems, several functions that the Buddhaghosa's *kammaṭṭhānas* have in the Theravāda tradition (e.g. meditation on death, recollection of virtue, or of generosity, or of the deities, etc.) are accomplished by meditations on Jesus Christ and other subjects in the Christian tradition and vice versa. This rather similar transformative effect in the nature and quality of the person's emotions would be an important element to consider in the interpretive part of this study.

5.8.4.5 The effects of reflective meditation and meditative prayer

The long-lasting effects of reflective meditation and meditative prayer include the deepening of conversion. The *anussatis* proper foster conviction and arouses devotion. Buddhaghosa explains that a monastic devoted to the recollection of the Buddha, for example, "attains fullness of faith, mindfulness, understanding and merit" (PP 7.67).⁹⁶ Through the recollections (*anussatis*) the monastic generates right motivation, clarity of thought, knowledge and understanding. For the Christian, by ruminating, digesting and assimilating the truths of the tradition one enhances love and becomes acquainted and agrees with God's revelation, mobilizing the faculties as to deepen the convictions of the

⁹⁵ Castro 2009, 33.

⁹⁶ See PP 7.88, for recollection of the Dhamma.

faith, prompting conversion of the heart, and strengthening the will to follow Christ.⁹⁷

Habitual pensive meditation brings about a more focused and unified state of mind.⁹⁸ Reflection concentrates the mind, reduces distractedness, and silences inner chatter. Buddhaghosa says that in the meditator, by recollecting the qualities of the Buddha, the Saṅgha and so forth, even only according to hearsay, his consciousness settles down” (PP 7.127). Teresa similarly says that meditative prayer “ties the understanding” (C 19,1). The exercise of *meditatio* requires loving attention to the divine person, lessens distractions that keep away from God and helps to control thoughts and wandering mind.

Reflective meditation, in any tradition, generates a higher awareness and enables the person to better control his life. To give an example, Buddhaghosa states that for one devoted to *buddhānussati* “when he encounters an opportunity for transgression, he has awareness of conscience and shame as vivid as though he were face to face with the Master” (PP 7.67). For Teresa, meditation on Christ is a way to emulate Him and keep away sin.

Reflective meditation harvests transformation by changing the meditator’s mentality. *Samatha* reflective meditation alters fixed patterns of thought prevailing in the monastic’s mind. The main purpose of the recollections is that of “purification of mind” (*samādhī*), namely, to cultivate the meditator’s mind, but, more immediately, to stop unreflective mental flow and to think correctly. A similar effect can be predicated on Christian meditative prayer.

But reflective meditation in both cases is not mere intellectual activity; it has affective aspects to it; although there is an important distinction to be made here. Aumann says, “the most important element in (Christian) meditation is the act of love aroused in the will on the presentation of some supernatural truth by the intellect. As St. Teresa points out, meditation consists not so much in thinking a great deal but in loving a great deal.”⁹⁹

5.4.5 Conclusion

The practice of discursive and reflective meditation in both traditions is multifaceted. First, the reasoned application of the mind to the religious subject is conducive to their

⁹⁷ CCC 2708.

⁹⁸ Meadow, *Congruent Spiritual Paths*, 183.

⁹⁹ Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 319. For Teresa “the knowledge of Christ awakens devotion for Him.”

respective soteriological goals. In *samatha* it brings access concentration and leads to awakening. In Christianity, as Merton says, “Meditative thought is simply the beginning of a process which leads to interior prayer and is normally supposed to culminate in contemplation and in affective communion with God.”¹⁰⁰

In both traditions the practice of reflective meditation transforms the meditator’s mind. A foreseeable consequence is an increased capacity for reflection and self-examination. The practice tends to create a state of heightened awareness, an enhanced ability to pay attention to what is happening both in formal practice and daily life, and less reactivity.

Among its psychological effects, reflective meditation produces supreme gladness: By recollecting the special qualities of the Buddha supreme gladness arises (PP 7.127). Teresa says: “In thinking about [...] the love the Lord bore us, and His resurrection, we are moved to a joy that is neither entirely spiritual nor entirely of the senses” (V 12,1).

For all of the above, conceptual, discursive and reflective meditation are necessary for spiritual development. But, reflection has a limited scope, which is true of Buddhism and no less of Christianity. In Theravāda, although conceptual, discursive and reflective meditation remove the Hindrances, bring access concentration, and prepare the mind for meditative absorption, it does not bring *jhāna* due to the heavy involvement of thought. In this sense, as Tse-fu Kuan puts it, “*anussati* cannot lead to the *jhāna* proper, but can be practiced as a transition from normal consciousness to absorption.”¹⁰¹ For Teresa, meditative prayer predisposes to infused contemplation but also may generate strong emotions (e.g., uncontrollable love of God, regret for past sins fits of sobbing)¹⁰² or aridity, dryness, and even desolation in meditation that may hinder high states of contemplation.

Comparing both systems in relation to conceptuality and reflection, in both cases the practice moves from the conceptual to the non-conceptual, paving the way to a reality that is beyond concepts and reflection. However, this crossing is gradual. In both cases, what is required is a way to apply the mind that surpasses the rational and discursive mind. The next step in both traditions is then an exercise of meditation that consists of mindfulness of the contemplative subject in which reflection is not abandoned but leads to states free from discursiveness. To this we shall turn our attention in the next section.

¹⁰⁰ Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, 54.

¹⁰¹ Tse-fu Kuan, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism*, 63.

¹⁰² In her youth Teresa often broke out into outburst praise, adoration and emotion.

5.9 SAMATHA MEDITATION AND PRAYER OF ACTIVE RECOLLECTION

5.9.1 Introduction

The preceding section discussed the efficacy of *samatha* reflective meditation and meditative prayer in identifying and altering patterns of thought and feeling prevailing in a monastic's mind. They concentrate the faculties on the religious subject, instill positive emotions, generate faith and conviction¹ and, for Christians, strengthen the will to follow Christ.² Yet, both Buddhism and the Christian tradition recognize that as transformative implements conceptual, discursive and reflective meditations have significant limitations.

Some of these downsides³ include, although they are not limited to: First, reflective meditation alone does not develop the awareness necessary for a lasting transformation. Entrenched habits die hard, new attitudes and ways of thinking take root with difficulty. To establish long-lasting changes one must guard his own mind,⁴ pay watchful attention to every situation and have presence of mind: in a word, the person must be mindful. Secondly, if from the Buddhist standpoint, reflection impedes the unification of mind and the silence required to rise above access concentration, from the Christian perspective, as Guerra puts it, meditation “keeps man in a false gravity center and as a consequence the totality of the human person becomes fragmented and feels divided and dispersed.”⁵ Thirdly, meditative reflection entails the risks of excessive thinking, exhausting the mind,⁶ turning it into an intellectual exercise,⁷ and perpetuating one's identification with the intellect. Fourthly, reflection often turns out to lead to assertion of one's ego, a potential source of pride, and sustains a sense of duality and separation from other human beings.⁸ Fifthly, as in Teresa's case, meditative prayer is not suitable for all characters.⁹ Some *kammaṭṭhānas* are too only fit for those endowed with a strong intellectual faculty. Moreover, from the Christian standpoint, meditative prayer might move the person emotionally and generate strong passions and feelings of sadness, or exalted joy, that quite excite the person who prays. Another objection raised against meditative prayer in the Christian tradition is that logic and reflection are not adequate tools for knowing God.

1 Through the proper conceptualization and the assimilation of the religious truths of the tradition and the like.

2 CCC, 2708.

3 We already mentioned some of these limitations in Section 5.8.

4 Santideva writes: “Those who wish to guard their practice should very attentively guard their minds for those who do not guard their minds will be unable to guard their practice” (Santideva, *Bodhicaryavatara*, Section V 1,1).

5 Guerra, “Meditación,” NED, 1222 [author's translation].

6 Teresa says: “those who practice discursive reflection [and] reason a great deal with the intellect [...] not pass the whole time thinking [...] and, without tiring the intellect [...] and delight in Him and not wear out in composing syllogisms” (V 13,1).

7 Stabile, *Growing in Love and Wisdom*, 61.

8 Guerra comments that meditative prayer may give “the illusion of the rational and competent self, mastering its situation” (“Meditación,” NED, 1222).

9 See V 13,1 and V 4,7.

Given these downsides of both reflective meditation and meditative prayer, our two traditions offer alternative, and often complementary (V 13,1), models of meditation that, without repudiating reason, are less intellectual and circumvent some of these limitations. On the Buddhist side, what we shall name “*samatha* (mindfulness) meditation”—and below we will distinguish from mindfulness in *vipassanā* meditation—accomplishes such a function. On the Carmelite side, the prayer of active recollection plays a similar role.

Parallels between Buddhist mindfulness in general and the prayer of recollection and mental prayer have been noted by Christian scholars such as Larkin¹⁰ and Pieris.¹¹ Williams states: “mindfulness means awareness [...] Although it is central to the Buddhist tradition, mindful awareness is also found in the Christian contemplative tradition.”¹² Some of these similarities between mindfulness meditation and the prayer of recollection have captured the attention of Teresian specialists such as Pablo Maroto.¹³ Tyler, discussing Teresa’s mental prayer says: “I would suggest, Teresa [here] is advocating something closer to the Buddhist practice of mindfulness.”¹⁴ Other writers like Cousins,¹⁵ Heiler,¹⁶ Stead¹⁷ and García Campayo¹⁸ have expressed themselves in a similar vein.

For Novak, the training of the attention, “especially in the form of mindful engagement in the present moment,” is a universal phenomenon with variants in all world religions, and a “fundamental category of religious experience.”¹⁹ Indeed, Buddhist mindfulness and Teresa’s recollection—both resulting in enhanced awareness and attention—are critical practices in their respective systems. Moreover, the Buddhist-Catholic dialogue on the cultivation of mindfulness is an encouraging interaction between both traditions²⁰ that is helping Catholics rediscover their own contemplative tradition.²¹ The concept of mindfulness is not foreign to Christianity and overlaps with the prayer of recollection in many points, as we will see next. However, both practices exhibit differences, some essential, that should be pointed out. This chapter examines what *samatha* (mindfulness) meditation and Teresa’s recollection have in common and in what aspects they differ.

10 Larkin comments on the similarities between Buddhist mindfulness and Teresa’s recollection. See Ernest E. Larkin, “Christian Mindfulness” in *Contemplative Prayer for Today: Christian Meditation* (Singapore: Medio Media, 2007).

11 Aloysius Pieris, “Spirituality as Mindfulness: Biblical and Buddhist Approaches,” *Spiritus*, Vol. 10, 1 (2010): 38-51.

12 Mark Williams, Prologue to Tim Stead, *Mindfulness and Christian Spirituality: Making Space for God* (SPCK, 2016), x.

13 Pablo Maroto puts recollection (*recogimiento*) in relation with Yoga and Zen Buddhism in Daniel de Pablo Maroto, “La oración de ‘recogimiento’ en el *Camino de Perfección*: Franciscanismo y teresianismo,” 519.

14 Tyler, “Mindfulness, Mental Prayer and ‘The Centre of the Soul’” in Tyler, *Teresa of Avila: Doctor of the Soul*, 184-203.

15 Cousins, “The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification,” 110.

16 Friedrich Heiler, *Die Buddhistische Versenkung: Eine Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Munich, 1922), 52.

17 Stead writes: “something very similar to mindfulness has been around in the Christian tradition” (Stead 2016, 16).

18 Javier García Campayo, “Las nuevas terapias de meditación (*mindfulness*) y su relación con la mística de santa Teresa,” in F. J. Sancho Fermín and R. Cuartas Londoño, *Las moradas del Castillo Interior*, 482-99.

19 Novak, “Attention,” ER, 501-09.

20 Carol G. Zaleski, “Attention as a Key to Buddhist-Christian Dialogue,” BCS, Vol. 14 (1994): 89-110.

21 Tyler, *Teresa of Avila: Doctor of the Soul*, 3.

5.9.2 *Samatha* (mindfulness) meditation and the *Visuddhimagga*

5.9.2.1 Introduction

“Mindfulness” is the usual translation of the Pāli *sati* (Skt. *smṛti*), elsewhere translated as “awareness,” “collectedness,” or “alertness.”²² Etymologically, *sati* is derived from the Vedic root *smṛ*, meaning “memory” and is related to the Pāli verb *sarati*, to remember.²³ In the *Sutta Piṭaka* the teachings on mindfulness meditation are largely found in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*,²⁴ and the application of *sati* to the fourfold successive contemplation of body, feelings, mind, and *dhammas* in connection with *vipassanā* meditation. This way of establishing mindfulness in insight meditation is considered essential in Buddhism. The Buddha spoke of it as the “sole path” (*ekāyāna-magga*) for overcoming suffering, an expression understood by some authors as the “only way” to the realization of *nibbāna* (*nibbānassa sacchikiriya*) and by other authors as meaning “direct way” to liberation.²⁵ Mindfulness is one of the factors of awakening (*bojjhaṅgā*). In the Noble Eightfold Path, Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*)²⁶ is between Right Effort and Right Concentration.²⁷ The cultivation of mindfulness is also relevant in *samatha* meditation as we shall see below. As Anālayo states, *sati* “constitutes an important requirement for attaining absorption.”²⁸

“Mindfulness” can be understood as both a meditative practice and as a mental state. As a *practice*, mindfulness training is an essential element on the path to *nibbāna*. By cultivating *sati* (*sati-bhāvanā*), mindfulness is methodically developed as a prerequisite for avoiding entanglement in subjective experience—that is, the world (*samsāra*). During practice, the meditator observes carefully, without rejecting, whatever arises in the mind: being conscious of the inner world and mindful of the various mental activities. By keeping the mind constantly on the object and alert, the meditator is protected from the intrusion of unwholesome states, proliferation of thought, and is vigilant to automatic or habitual responses. In this sense, *sati* practice is essential to the process of purifying the mind. As a *state*, mindfulness is “a quality of crucial importance in Buddhism,”²⁹ which can be defined as a detached, calm and tranquil and bare attention to one’s experience. It implies “wakefulness,” “presence of mind,” and being present in the present moment.

22 “Sati,” PED, 745.

23 “Sati,” EB, 11.

24 The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* is found twice in the Pāli Canon: MN10 and DN 22.

25 According to this understanding “this ‘direct path’ [...] if not the ‘only path’ to *Nibbāna*, but is the paradigmatic path, ‘the Way’, per excellence, discovered by the Buddha through his own attainment” (“*Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*,” EB, 15).

26 Bodhi writes: “The practice of the four foundations of mindfulness is identical with right mindfulness” Bhikkhu Bodhi *Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma: The Philosophical Psychology of Buddhism* (Sri Lanka: BPS, 1993), 279.

27 “Sati,” EB, 9.

28 *Idem*, 11.

29 *Idem*, 7.

5.9.2.2 *Samatha* (mindfulness) meditation and the *Visuddhimagga*

Among the forty meditation subjects listed in the *Visuddhimagga* for the purpose of the cultivation of *samatha*, in Section 5.8.2.1 we distinguished between ten topics that bring access concentration only, and thirty subjects that lead to full absorption (*jhāna*).³⁰ It is noteworthy that the kind of mental engagement required in the thirty *kammaṭṭhānas* that lead to *jhāna*—even in the phase that only produce access concentration—is more akin to mindfulness meditation than reflective meditation, contrary to the ten subjects that only bring access concentration, which are more comparable to reflective meditation.

This points to the existence of the two models of meditation in *samatha* that we call “*samatha* reflective meditation” and “*samatha* mindfulness meditation,” respectively. The existence of two models of *samatha* meditation is seen when distinguishing, within the subjects termed “recollections” (*anussatis*), between *anussati* proper and *sati* subjects; only the *anussatis* (proper) are reflective and do not bring *jhāna*.³¹ Shankman supports this reading describing the recollections that bring access as “reflective meditations.”³² If these two sets of subjects are called “recollections” (*anussati*), as Ṭhānissaro notes, it is because *sati* (mindfulness) and *anussati* (recollection) are intimately interconnected.³³ Both imply memory, holding something in mind for the aim of developing concentration.

Even in the phase preceding the attainment of access concentration, these two models of meditation seem to exist. For those meditation topics that do not lead beyond access concentration, visualization and naming exercises are absent. They are mostly exercises of guided reflection on a series of preconceived formulas. The meditation topics that bring *jhāna* are akin to mindfulness of the type involved in *kaṣiṇa* meditation.

30 Buddhaghosa says: “as to which bring access only and which absorption: the eight recollections—excepting mindfulness occupied with the body and mindfulness of breathing—the perception of repulsiveness in nutriment, and the defining of the four elements, are ten meditation subjects that bring access only. The others bring absorption” (PP 3.106).

31 Although the ten *kammaṭṭhānas* under Chapters Seven and Eight of the *Visuddhimagga* are all labelled “recollections,” the list seems to include two meditative models. The first group is formed by the six recollections discussed in Chapter Seven, namely *buddhānussati*, *dhammānussati*, *saṅghānussati*, *silānussati*, *cagānussati* and *devatānussati*. These six recollections are devotional in nature involving discursive or reflective meditation on the special qualities associated with their subjects. These seven subjects bring access concentration only. The second group of “recollections,” is discussed in Chapter Eight and is constituted by the last four subjects namely, *ānāpānasati*, *marāṇasati*, *kāyaḡatā sati* and *upāsamānussati*. The first three subjects are termed “mindfulness” (*sati*) instead of *anussati* and are of a different nature (*sati*), involving a non-reflective mental engagement similar to the kind seen in the *kaṣiṇa* or foulness meditation which is more akin to mindfulness than reflection and all bring full absorption. Finally, the last of the four subjects in Chapter Eight, *upāsamānussati*, is termed *anussati* and involves analytical reflection and leads not beyond access concentration. As Ṭhānissaro points out: “strictly speaking, only seven of the ten are actually “recollections” (*anussati*): recollection of the Buddha, recollection of the Dhamma, recollection of the Sangha, recollection of virtue, recollection of generosity, recollection of the *devas*, and recollection of peace. The other three are called mindfulness (*sati*) practices: mindfulness of in-and-out breathing, mindfulness of death, and mindfulness immersed in the body” (Ṭhānissaro, *A Meditator’s Tools*, 1). This understanding is supported by both groups being divided into different chapters and under different categories (*anussati* and *sati*), except for recollection of peace.

32. Richard Shankman, *The Experience of Samadhi: An In-depth Exploration of Buddhist Meditation* (Boston: Shambhala, 2008), 194.

33 Ṭhānissaro, *A Meditator’s Tools*, 1. See also Tse-fu Kuan, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism*, 52-3.

5.9.2.3 Mindfulness and concentration

What is the connection between mindfulness and concentration? Tse-Fu Kuan examines the relationship between mindfulness and concentration concluding that they are different but interrelated.³⁴ For Gunaratana both practices involve a different quality of attention: “Concentration is exclusive. It settles down on one item and ignores everything else. Mindfulness is inclusive. It stands back from the focus of attention and watches with a broad focus.”³⁵ Even so, the cultivation of mindfulness contributes to concentration. DN 3.279 reads: “Being mindful, I attain this concentration; being mindful, I emerge from it.” Kuan states: “ideally mindfulness and concentration work together as a team” and cites Gunaratana who holds that “mindfulness picks the objects of attention, and notices when the attention has gone astray. Concentration does the actual work of holding the attention steady on that chosen object.”³⁶ Anālayo too notes that: “[concentration and mindfulness] perform complementary functions. Thus, during *jhāna* attainment, both are present together, when mindfulness becomes mainly presence of mind, losing its natural breadth due to the strong focusing power of concentration.”³⁷ The *Visuddhimagga* also indicates that a constant presence of a firmly-established mindfulness is a required condition for the attainment of absorption.³⁸

Mindfulness restricts, guards and protects the six senses and increases vigilance. It contributes to the abandonment of the Five Hindrances that pave the way for absorption. In the *Cūḷavedalla Sutta* the four *satipaṭṭhānas* are called “the *nimittas* of concentration”³⁹ and the objects of mindfulness in the *Visuddhimagga* are also objects of concentration. Mindfulness objects of *samatha* meditation (e.g. breathing) help to develop concentration.

Referring to the role of mindfulness in higher levels of absorption, Anālayo writes: “*sati* becomes particularly prominent when the third level of absorption (*jhāna*) is reached, expressed in the standard descriptions of the *third jhāna* by explicitly mentioning *sati* as a qualifying factor of this absorption.”⁴⁰ Anālayo adds, “With the attainment of the fourth absorption, when the mind has reached such a degree of proficiency, [...] *sati* also reaches a high degree of purity, due to its association with deep equanimity.”⁴¹

34 Tse-Fu Kuan, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism*, 59-70.

35 Henepola Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2011), 147.

36 Tse-Fu Kuan, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism*, 70.

37 *Ibid.*

38 *Ibid.*

39 Tse-Fu Kuan, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism*, 65.

40 “Sati,” EB, 11.

41 *Ibid.*

5.9.3 The prayer of active recollection

5.9.3.1 The prayer of recollection

The prayer of recollection (*recogimiento*) is the next rung on Teresa's ladder of prayer, after meditative prayer. It is a straightforward prayer, Teresa's method *par excellence*, and the solution to the aridity (*sequedad*) and emotionality prompted by meditative prayer. If for Teresa prayer is a loving relationship between God and the soul, recollection is a mode of prayer that occurs within the soul's interior with the exclusion of everything else, and in which love prevails over reason and imagination, which are reduced to a minimum.

For Teresa recollection is the mode of prayer appropriate to the Third Mansions. She discusses it in *Castillo* 4.3,⁴² *Vida* Chs. 13-15, *Camino* Chs. 26-29 and *Relaciones* 5.1. Her terminology is not always consistent, as she sometimes equates "recollection" and "quiet."⁴³ The need for mindful attention is grounded in the Bible. Jesus calls on disciples to always be awake and vigilant (Mt. 26:41). The New Testament warns: "watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming" (Mt. 25:13).

An issue that requires immediate clarification is whether recollection is a passive or an active form of prayer,⁴⁴ as two distinct forms can be found in Teresa's works. Most Teresian scholars agree that "prayer of recollection" has two manifestations: one active, "the prayer of acquired recollection;" another infused, the "prayer of passive recollection." Pablo Maroto one of the most qualified experts in Teresian prayer, explains:

[Recollection] has two manifestations, active and passive. The first is a method of prayer, a kind of Christianized yoga, a psycho-physical exercise and an excellent form of Christian mental prayer, still in the realm of the ascetic life. The passive recollection succeeds the active, but not necessarily, as it is passively induced by God when He wants.⁴⁵

The present section deals with the prayer of active recollection which will be compared to *samatha* (mindfulness) meditation owing to their similar phenomenological features, method of practice and effects. The next Section 5.10 will be devoted to the comparison of access concentration and the "state" of active recollection. The prayer of passive recollection will be discussed in comparison with the first *jhāna* in Section 5.12.

42 As noted, in terms of its location in the schema of *Castillo*, Teresa does not deal with recollection in its proper place (3M) but, for reasons of exposition, reserves its treatment to Fourth Mansions, as a preamble to prayer of quiet (4M 3,1).

43 In *Vida*, the "second water" is designated interchangeably with the terms "*recogimiento*" and "*quietud*" (V 15,1-4).

44 As described in Chapter Four, Section 4, of *Castillo*, recollection is a passive form of prayer (4M 3,1), the first manifestation of infused prayer that prepares, and "almost always" precedes the prayer of quiet and it takes place without the absolute need for previous active recollection. However, experts in Teresian prayer emphasize that in the works before *Castillo* such as *Camino* (C 29,5), recollection has an active nature. In R 5,3-4, written shortly before *Castillo*, the prayer of passive recollection is a preamble or "access step" to the prayer of quiet and has a passive nature, as in 4M 3.

45 Pablo Maroto, *Teresa en Oración*, 364.

5.9.3.2 The prayer of active recollection

The “prayer of active recollection” (*oración de recogimiento activo*) (hereafter, “PAR”), is not a denomination that can be found in Teresa’s works, but is instead a scholarly nomenclature for an orative practice well-established in Teresa’s theology of prayer. “Prayer of active recollection” has also been named in a variety of ways, though not always referring to the same exact reality. Several authors called it the “prayer of simplicity,”⁴⁶ or “simplified affective prayer.”⁴⁷ Teresa’s discussions about PAR are found largely in *Vida* Chapter 13, but also in *Vida* 4,6-8 and 9,4-6, *Camino* Chapters 26-29.⁴⁸

In Section 4.1.1, we recounted the Teresa’s historical discover of Osuna’s method of recollection, which is based on the inalienable presence of God in the soul.⁴⁹ Of Osuna’s method, Teresa said it was a “praiseworthy custom” (C 28,6), that “brings with it many goods” (C 28,2), recommending it to her nuns (C 29,4). However, with the practice, Teresa improved on Osuna’s method which in her hands acquired originality. A succinct Teresian definition that appears in *Camino* leads us into this orative method:

This prayer is called “recollection,” because the soul collects its faculties together and enters within itself to be with its God. And its divine Master comes more quickly to teach it and give it the prayer of quiet than He would through any other method it might use. For centered there within itself, it can think about the Passion and represent the Son [...] and not tire the intellect by going to look for Him on Mount Calvary or in the garden or at the pillar. (C 28,4)

In this quotation, the key features of this method can be clearly delineated, which will be discussed next in contraposition to the *samatha* mindfulness meditation. But first, recall that recollection, as presented in *Camino* and *Vida*, is an active form of prayer⁵⁰ and, as with other active prayers, it may refer to a mode of prayer or an orative state.

As a *method* (not technique) active recollection is an ascetic prayer though advanced. As a *state* it is an acquired condition, brought about by the positive efforts of the prayerful. Teresa writes: “You must understand that this is not a supernatural state but depends upon our volition, and that, by God’s favor, we can enter it of our own accord [...] For this is not a silence of the faculties: it is a shutting-up of the faculties within itself” (C 29,3).⁵¹

46 Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, Vol 1. Translated by M. Timothea Doyle (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1989), 451-53. See also Poulain *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, 9.

47 Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, Vol 1., 451-53.

48 Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 107.

49 Before its adoption, Teresa had earnestly practiced discursive meditation but soon discovered that it was not appropriate to her mentality—more affective and emotional than intellectual—producing endless distractions and great frustration and fatigue (V 4,7). In this period of difficulty, after having tried many ways, she discovered the method of “recollection” by reading the *Third Spiritual Alphabet* by Francisco de Osuna which would be the manual of the recollected.

50 Dicken writes: “It is important to point out that there is no question here [the prayer of active recollection] of a passive recollection produced by the special intervention of God Himself in the soul; the recollection defined by Saint Teresa is effected by an effort of the will” (Dicken 1963, 130-32).

51 See also C 29,4 and V 12,1.

5.9.4 Comparison of mindfulness meditation and active recollection

5.9.4.1 “*Sati*” and “*recogimiento*”

A convenient approach to the comparison is through semantics. The Spanish word *recogimiento* is usually rendered into English as “recollection,” which means “the action or power of recollecting,”⁵² and implies memory, the faculty of remembering something. “Recollection” matches well with the meaning of *sati* as “memory,” and, in fact, “*sati*” has been translated as “recollection,” though this rendition is usually reserved for “*anussati*.” However, the Spanish “*recogimiento*” does not suggest the meaning of “remembrance” but “collectedness.” It means “the action and effect of collecting something or oneself.”⁵³ In a religious context, “*recogida*” is a person withdrawn from contact with other people to devote oneself to spiritual life. Such meaning is not foreign to *sati* which is occasionally translated as “collectedness.”⁵⁴ “Recollection” and “*recogimiento*” share etymological origins in the Latin word *recolligere*, which means “to gather again, recover, collect.”

The rendition of *sati* as “mindfulness” is most accepted among scholars,⁵⁵ since it was first introduced by T. W. Rhys Davis.⁵⁶ *Sati* signifies “wakefulness,” or “alertness.”⁵⁷ The Sanskrit root of *sati* (*smṛ*), in addition “to remember” also means “to be mindful of.” The meaning of *recogimiento* as “collectedness,” and orientation of the attention to God, also implies “wakefulness,” “to be mindful of God and oneself as being in His presence” “presence of mind to something present,” “absence of distraction,” “minding one’s steps.” The connotation of *recogimiento* as mindfulness is recognized by Christian scholars.⁵⁸ Finally, the meaning of “recollection” as a “quiet” and “tranquil” state of mind and self-possession (also called “religious composure”) is present in the meaning of *recogimiento*. Thus, it can be said that, albeit the undeniable differences, both “*sati*” and “*recogimiento*” evoke similar notions of attentiveness, awareness, collectedness, and presence of mind. For the rest of this section, “mindfulness” will be occasionally used as an umbrella term for *samatha* mindfulness and “Teresian recollection,” and *sati* and *recogimiento*.⁵⁹

52 “Recollection,” WMD, 602.

53 “Recogimiento,” DRAE, 1915.

54 Anālayo states: “*Sati* is required not only to fully take in the moment to be remembered, but also to bring this moment back to mind at a later time. To ‘re-collect, then, becomes just a particular instance of a state of mind characterized by ‘collectedness’ and the absence of distraction” (“*Sati*,” EB, 7–12).

55 Tse-Fu Kuan, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism*, 1.

56 See Rupert Gethin, “On Some Definitions of Mindfulness” in *Contemporary Buddhism*, Vol. 12, 1, (2011): 263-79.

57 “*Sati*,” PED, 745.

58 William Rehg, “Christian mindfulness: A path to finding God in all things,” in *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 34 (3), (2002): 4.

59 Pieris advocates: “to persuade Christians that it is both appropriate and necessary to employ the category of mindfulness not only in explaining and expounding but also in practicing and promoting their experience of God in Christ” Aloysius Pieris, “Spirituality as Mindfulness: Biblical and Buddhist Approaches in *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, Vol. 10, 1, Spring (2010): 38-51. The Carmelite author Ernest E. Larkin also speaks of “Christian Mindfulness” in his book *Contemplative Prayer for Today: Christian Meditation* (Singapore: Medio Media, 2007).

5.9.4.2 The nature of mindfulness meditation and active recollection

Let us next compare the nature, value and place that mindfulness meditation and active recollection occupy in their respective systems. The ultimate goal of mindfulness meditation is the attainment of liberation (*nibbāna*); the end of suffering.⁶⁰ The final goal of recollection can only be conceived as fostering awareness and love of God for union with Him. The prayer of recollection is prayer, defined as a friendly relationship with God. In prayer of active recollection the soul enters within itself to be with its God (C 28,4).⁶¹ Similarly, on their systematicity, *sati* and *recogimiento* belong to two religious systems endowed with paradigms that—to reiterate—cannot be reconciled. Neither practice can be extracted from its religious habitats without an inevitable loss of meaning.⁶²

As to their centrality and significance, both practices occupy an equally central place in the economy of deliverance of their respective systems and play a fundamental role in the religious practice and experience of Theravāda Buddhists and Catholics. The cultivation of mindful attention is so important in Buddhism and central to the Buddha's teachings that Nyanaponika described it as the “heart of Buddhist meditation.”⁶³ The Buddha proclaimed that “all things can be mastered by mindfulness” (AN 8,83) and taught that one's progress towards *nibbāna* depends greatly on attentiveness. Similarly, the prayer of recollection is very important of Teresian spirituality.⁶⁴ She declares “this kind of prayer even though it may be vocal... brings with it many blessings” (C 28,4). Those who grow accustomed to recollection “are following an excellent path and [...] will not fail to drink water from the fount; for they will journey far in a short time”(C 28,5).⁶⁵ However, notwithstanding the importance and centrality of mindfulness in Buddhism, the soteriological necessity of the process that mindfulness (*sati*) entails in Buddhism should be contrasted with the exceptional prominence of the *recogimiento* along Teresa's path.

From another angle, both practices are carried out by their practitioner's own efforts. Like Buddhist mindfulness meditation, the prayer of active recollection is an active or ascetical modality of prayer (C 29,3), though on the verge of the mystical states of prayer.

60 Any other practical goal of *samatha* mindfulness meditation is logically secondary to the attainment of perfect liberation which is achieved with the accumulative practice of *samatha* and *vipassanā*.

61 Egan states poetically that recollection ultimately aims “to find God in the solitude of the heart ... [it is] a way of fostering a contemplative awareness of Christ's presence” (Egan 2003, 38-62).

62 The practice of Buddhist mindfulness extricated from a religious context has been criticized from different angles.

63 Nyanaponika, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation. The Buddha's Way of Mindfulness* (Kandi, BPS, 1992).

64 As Caballero states, the prayer of active recollection is “the fundamental basis of Teresa's teaching” Nicolás Caballero, *Cómo enseñaba a orar Santa Teresa* (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2003), 69. Teresa taught the prayer of recollection to her barefoot sisters from 1560 until the end of her life (C 26) and it was recognized as one of the keys to her success.

65 Teresa exclaims: “Once this recollection is given by the Lord, you will not exchange it for any treasure” (C 29,7).

5.9.4.3 Comparison of the characteristics of mindfulness and recollection

Teresa's definition of recollection introduces us to the first phenomenological feature shared by mindfulness and recollection: the gathering and interiorization of the senses. Teresa writes: "This prayer is called 'recollection' because the soul collects (*recoge*) all its faculties together and enters within itself to be with its God" (C 28,4).⁶⁶ See 4M 3,2. What is being "re-collected" are the external senses and the powers of the soul, which are removed from their objects and directed to the interior. As to the senses, recollection means "to get accustomed to caring nothing at all about seeing or hearing" (V 11,9), and "refusing to be where the exterior senses in their distraction have gone" (C 28,4).⁶⁷ As to the powers of the soul, they are collected within and their activity reduced to a minimum. Like recollection, Buddhist mindfulness meditation fosters interiorization. It entails the gathering or collecting of the six senses (five external senses and the mind) and their restraint in detached observation, preventing them from running after their objects. Deprived of the excitement caused by the external senses, the mind turns to the internal sense causing mental proliferation. Mindfulness curbs proliferation reducing thought. But, mindfulness, like recollection, does not mean total removal of intellectual activity.⁶⁸

Another converging feature of mindfulness meditation and the prayer of recollection is full attentiveness to and awareness of the object of meditation and God, respectively. The reverse of the internalization of the senses and mental capabilities that occurs in mindfulness and recollection is their reorientation towards the meditative object or God. In mindfulness meditation awareness of the object occupies the entirety of the mind. Similarly, in active recollection all the person's attention is centered on God. In PAR, the senses and faculties are orientated inside to be with God and "away from all other care" as if—paraphrasing Teresa—there were only God and one's soul on earth (V 13,9).

But it is in the nature of the "object" that mindfulness and recollection contrast starkly. The objects of *samatha* are natural phenomena. In Teresa the quintessential—not exclusive—recollection is in Christ.⁶⁹ Pieris rightly says, "true to its non-theistic character, Buddhism does not identify the object of mindfulness as God [...] On the contrary, one

66 Recollection is, of course, a metaphor. It means an internalization by which one enters the "little heaven of our soul" (C 28,5) leaving everything else outside, to be "within herself with her God" (C 27,2).

67 Osuna speaks of silencing senses becoming "deaf, blind and dumb" (TAE, Tr. 3, Ch. 3). Teresa writes: "there is a withdrawing of the senses from exterior things and a renunciation of them in such a way that, without one's realizing it, the eyes close so as to avoid seeing them and so that the sight might be more awake to things of the soul" (C 28,6).

68 Tyler writes: "where Teresa's account of mindfulness converges with the Buddhist accounts [...] is the importance of drawing attention away from intellectual and mental activity to the location of what she calls 'the heart'" (Tyler 2013, 190).

69 Castellano says that in recollection "all is to disconnect external and internal senses of their own objects to attract them to another reality [which is God]" (Castellano 1982, 114). Recollection is not practiced by emptying the heart, but by its occupation in God (C 28,6).

is called to be mindful of all things including oneself as impermanent (*anicca*), therefore utterly frustrating (*dukkha*) and consequently, 'without substance' (*anatta*).⁷⁰ In a similar vein, Larkin writes: "the Buddhist practice [mindfulness] is transferable to a Christian setting by the simple but immensely important addition of the presence of God."⁷¹

The person's intentionality and activity during the two practices are also different. In recollection, the soul enters within itself not to be idle, or abandoned to the calm that comes with the interiorization of senses and faculties, but to be in loving communication with God (C 29,6).⁷² During recollection the soul remains open to the action of God. It may be thought that this intentionality of devotion and attitude of reverence found in recollection is not at all present in Buddhist mindfulness. However, as Hollenback writes:

It is clear from Buddhaghosa's description [...] that fixing the attention in this manner [mindfully] requires more than just the act of staring at the *kasina*. The meditator must also mobilize his emotions during the act of gazing at the disc. Thus, Buddhaghosa tells the monk that when he starts to concentrate his attention on one of these colored discs, he ought to regard this inanimate object of his meditation as though it were "a precious jewel," adopt a "reverential attitude" toward it, and bind his heart to it "in a loving mood." Elsewhere in the same text, Buddhaghosa states that "ecstasy arises in a short time ... [to one] who is devoted to the sign [meditation object]." Eliciting feelings of devotion makes it easier for the meditator to concentrate his attention on the object.⁷³

There is an attitude of reverence and love towards the object in mindfulness then, but the love for God in recollection is entirely Christian. Recollection is "a pure act of love."⁷⁴ As the form of prayer it does not entail "in thinking much but in loving much" (4M 3,2).

Both practices train the person's attention and develop a heightened awareness. Mindfulness consists of cultivating wakefulness, awareness, attention and vigilance. The word "Buddha" means "one who is awake."⁷⁵ The attention nurtured by mindfulness is thorough or full attention (*yoniso manisikāra*). Profound attention entails bare attention, that is, "the clear and single-minded awareness of what actually happens to us and in us, at the successive moments of perception."⁷⁶ Like mindfulness, *recogimiento* connotes attentiveness, alertness, presence of mind⁷⁷ and the development of undivided attention. But, in contrast to Buddhist practice, the mindful attention that recollection cultivates is not a practice *ad hoc* but is derivative of the attentiveness to God at the soul's center.⁷⁸

70 Pieris, "Spirituality as Mindfulness: Biblical and Buddhist Approaches," 38-51.

71 Ernest E. Larkin, "Christian Mindfulness" <http://carmelnet.org/larkin/larkin017.pdf>

72 Recollection implies devoted attention, an "active" search for God. See Marie-Eugene, *I Want to See God*, 211-213.

73 Jess Hollenback, *Mysticism: Experience, Response, and Empowerment* (Pennsylvania University Press, 1996), 100.

74 Pablo Maroto, "La oración de 'recogimiento' en el *Camino de Perfección*. Franciscanismo y Teresianismo," 519.

75 Pieris, "Spirituality as Mindfulness," 45.

76 Nyanaponika, *The Power of Mindfulness* (Kandy: BPS, 1972), vii. Mindful attention can be defined as the quality of attention that has alertness, no daydreaming, and concentration focusing on what is at hand without diversion.

77 Larkin writes: "the two disciplines, recollection and mindfulness, together and separately, emphasize full commitment of one's whole being to the moment at hand" (Larkin, "Christian Mindfulness" <http://carmelnet.org/larkin/larkin017.pdf>)

78 Herráiz García observes that *recogimiento* is not a psychological but a theological exercise; it responds to God's calling and is an act of faith. See Herráiz García, *La oración, historia de amistad*, 163.

5.9.4.4 Mindfulness subjects in the *Visuddhimagga* and Teresa's recollection

Heiler opines that “we find all the Buddhist points of contemplation [*kammaṭṭhānas*] among the meditation themes of the Christian mystics.”⁷⁹ Is Heiler's opinion justified? The *kaṣiṇas* are meditative devices representing the fundamental elements of the world. Nothing comparable to a *kaṣiṇa* can be found in Teresa's recollective experience. But, for a meditator with prior experience (acquired in former lives), the object of meditation can be a natural phenomenon and not necessarily a manmade disk. To recollect herself, Teresa envisions Christ in the Garden, looks at holy pictures, reads “good books” (V 9,4), but also contemplates natural phenomena such as fields (*campos*) or flowers as objects of recollection and remembrance of God.⁸⁰ If water is a *kammaṭṭhāna* (i.e., water *kaṣiṇa*), it is also an important element of contemplation throughout Teresa's works (4M 2,2).⁸¹ She meditates upon light, another constant in her work, where this is the light of mystical experience (V 28,5) and not the natural light of the *Visuddhimagga* (light *kaṣiṇa*). Nevertheless, contemplation on cultivated fields, flowers, water or light in Teresa does not have the instrumental function, systematicity, and concentrative depth required by Buddhaghosa. She recollects herself with these things because they are God's creations.

“Meditation on foulness” (*asubha-kammaṭṭhāna*) is a distinctive Buddhist meditational subject with precedents in the *suttas*.⁸² For cultural, social and religious reasons, Teresa did not meditate on repulsiveness, contemplating a decomposing corpse. Nevertheless, she “reflects that many worms are swarming over the corpses” (2M 1,4).⁸³ The presence of skulls and images of skeletons (i.e. tenth foulness meditation) was typical in Christian monasteries throughout the Medieval period.⁸⁴ The pictorial representation and visualization on the livid body of Christ trickling blood or crucified was also common.⁸⁵ The theme of foulness, though, is not the particular state of a corpse but “repulsiveness;” and it is not unusual in Christian tradition to seek or contemplate highly unpleasant objects for their severing effect.⁸⁶

79 Heiler, *Die Buddhistische Versenkung*, 53.

80 “Those who follow this path of no discursive reflection will find that a book can be a help for recollecting oneself quickly. It helped me also to look at fields, or water, or flowers. In these things I found a remembrance of the Creator” (V 9,4).

81 Teresa notes: “I am so fond of this element [water] that I have observed it more attentively than other things” (4M 2,2). Teresa contemplates daily the flow of a river from her cell in the convent of San José in Ávila and frequently contemplates water (4M 2,2). See A. Moreno, “Water as Symbol in St. Teresa,” *Review for Religious*, Vol. 46. 4 (1987): 565-70.

82 For example, DN 28, MN10, MN 28, SN 51.20, AN 10.60.

83 Heiler writes: “Contemplation of the repulsive is also to be found in western mysticism; like the Buddhist, the Christian ascetic also considers the *corruptio et foeditas corporis*. The Buddhist teaching of viewing oneself as a disgusting ulcer and a horrible boil, spoke to none as thoroughly as it did the founder of the Society of Jesus. Meditation over the fate of the corpse is a popular issue in Christian books on observation and edification. Petrus of Alcantara warns in his “golden booklet”: “View yourself as a Lazarus, who has already lain four days in the tomb, as a decomposed, worm-filled, foul-smelling corpse, by which passers-by are horrified and made to shudder” (Heiler 1922, 53).

84 Shaw, *Buddhist Meditation*, 104. Teresa was shocked by the number of skulls in the Church of Medina (F 14,7).

85 A vision of a statue of Christ “heavily wounded” (V 9,1) was crucial to Teresa's second conversion.

86 Allegedly Catalina of Siena drank pus from the sick to overcome repulsiveness towards those secretions of the body.

“Recollection of death” (*maraṇānussati*) is a recollection of the termination of life. As a meditation subject, death is as powerful in Buddhism as in Christianity. It goes to the core of the human predicament, and the prospects of humans in the world. It reminds us of the inevitability and unpredictability of death, and the impermanence and transitoriness of all things.⁸⁷ It provides a proper perspective on reality and gives a sense of urgency.⁸⁸ The young Teresa grew up surrounded by death and was much afraid of it (V 38,5).⁸⁹ Since childhood she thought about the finiteness and shortness of life, “how it all passes and is nothing,” the vanity of all early things (V 1,5), and always reflected upon the death of Christ on the Cross. For years, the memory of death assaulted her during meditation,⁹⁰ and there is evidence that she reflected on death as recollective subject (e.g., 2M 1,4).

“Mindfulness occupied with the Body” (*kāyagatāsati*) is commended by the Buddha. It is oriented to develop repulsiveness towards the body which, to this effect, is meditated upon as a conglomeration of filth, urine, diseases, ugliness and the like (PP 8.47). Teresa does not meditate systematically on the body, but her consideration of the body is rich and complex. She refers to the body as “mortal” and “made of foul clay” (V 20,7), a “vile thing, however beautiful they are” (C 6,4), the “outer wall of the castle” (1M 1.2). Nevertheless, neither Buddhaghosa nor Teresa condemns the body which in Christianity is made by God and is therefore “good” and in Buddhism is a precious tool of liberation. In both traditions the body is esteemed and must be taken good care of. In both authors, we are dealing with strategies of detachment from the most basic human identification.⁹¹

“Mindfulness of Breathing” (*ānāpānasati*) is an essential practice towards liberation. The practice consists of observing mindfully one’s breath going in and out. Together with the *brahmavihāras*, *ānāpānasati* is the most taught meditation in Buddhist practice.⁹² It is the only one of the forty meditations that can lead the meditator from the beginning of the practice to all four *jhānas* and through *vipassanā* meditation lead to awakening.⁹³

87 One of the eight ways of recollecting death [for the initially unsuccessful] is “[death] as the ruin of success” (PP 8.15). Compare with Teresa: “I began to understand the truth I knew in childhood (the nothingness of all things, the vanity of the world, and how it would soon come to an end)” (V 3,5).

88 Merton writes: “one who never thinks of the hour of his death cannot make really spiritual decisions during his life” (Merton 1960, 90). Teresa writes to one of her nuns: “It seems to me, my daughter, that everything passes so quickly, that we had to bring more thought into how to die than how to live” (Cta. 326,6 to M. María de San José).

89 Only after assuming death (C 11,4) and growing in sainthood and detachment (7M 3,7), is Teresa finally able to remove “the sting of death” and overcome her existential anguish (V 38,5).

90 “The memory shows it where all these things end, holding before it the death of those who found great joy in them. Through the memory it sees how some have suffered sudden death, how quickly they are forgotten by all. Some whom it had known in great prosperity are under the ground, and their graves are walked upon” (2M 1,4). Buddhaghosa writes: “he should look at beings that have died, and advert to the death of beings already dead but formerly seen” (PP 8.6).

91 See 1M 1.2. Teresa says: “the first thing we must strive for is to rid ourselves of our love for our bodies” (C 10,5). In Buddhism, clinging to the aggregate of form or materiality (*rūpa-khandā*) constitutes one of the delusions of the self.

92 Kate Crosby, *Theravāda Buddhism: Continuity, Diversity, and Identity* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 152.

93 Buddhaghosa writes that mindfulness of breathing “is foremost among the various meditation subjects of all Buddhas, Paccekabuddhas and Buddhas’ disciples as a basis for attaining distinction and abiding in bliss here and now” (PP 8.155).

Mindfulness of breath is significant in other religious traditions (Sufism, Hesychasm).⁹⁴ Teresa is aware that in recollection the breathing (*el huelgo*) lessens. In deep states of mystical prayer, the breath decreases until it seems suspended (CAD 5,4), which causes her amazement. However, breathing in itself is not an object of meditation in Teresa.

Let us compare the four *brahmavihāras*⁹⁵ and Teresa's meditations on God's love. The function of the *brahmavihāras*, or divine abidings, as integral to *samatha* meditation, is to purify noxious and malicious human feelings towards other beings⁹⁶ and transform them into wholesome feelings conducive to internal and external peace and awakening. Hence, the *brahmavihāras* act as a medium for the control and "purification of emotions." In Christianity, the meditation on Christ and His ubiquitous examples of compassion and boundless love (*agape*) share an analogous function. The goal of the Christian life is to be "Christ-like," to emulate Christ's love and self-sacrifice. By meditating on Christ's love, a disciple develops the greatest of the Commandments (Mk. 12:33); by reflecting on Jesus's compassion, the Christian learns to be compassionate (Mt. 15:32).⁹⁷ Several Christian authors have observed similarities between the four *brahmavihāras* meditations and meditations on Christ's love, among them Meadow⁹⁸ and Stabile,⁹⁹ whose books are adaptations of these Buddhist meditations to the Christian practice. Christian *agape* and the emotions raised by the *brahmavihāras* share qualities,¹⁰⁰ to the point that it has been said that the *brahmavihāras* resemble Christian love in four parts.¹⁰¹ Both meditations seek to instill universal love. If *mettā*, *karuṇā* and the rest are extended to all sentient beings,¹⁰² Christ says: "love one another as I have loved you" (Jn. 13:34). Universal love without distinction, including love for the enemy, is postulated in both faiths. While *mettā* meditation includes development of benevolence towards the enemy (PP 9,12), Christ says: "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt. 5:44). Notwithstanding the theological differences, compassion, non-discriminating love, empathetic joy and equanimity are attributed to the supreme god Brahma, as they are

94 "Breathing," ER, 303-8.

95 These four are loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*).

96 Silva, *Introduction to Buddhist psychology*, 59-60.

97 Mt. 9:36. Teresa's meditations on Christ's selfless sacrifice awake her to greater love and to imitate Him. Teresa says, "the dwelling places will be in conformity with the love with which we have imitated the life of our good Jesus" (F 14,5) and adds, "The will is inclined to love after seeing such countless signs of love" (2M 1,4) Cf. V 12,1 and V 9,1.

98 Meadow says: "the Buddha's teaching in the Metta Sutta is strikingly similar to the Christian understanding of *agape* love" (Meadow 1994, 22).

99 Stabile says "A Christian has no difficulty saying [...] that the feelings expressed in the "four immeasurables" are ones we wish to generate toward everyone, although a Christian would frame the fourth in terms of union" (Stabile 2012, 129).

100 Like *brahmavihāras*, Christian meditations on God's love contribute to generating virtues leading to an equanimous love. Thus, these Catholic and Theravāda meditations contribute to healing harmful emotions and purifying the heart.

101 Christian love is equated to the Buddhist central virtue: *karuṇā*. But, as Smart says "the proper comparison would be with the four *brahmavihāras*, which could cover both love and justice in the Christian tradition" (Smart 1992, 106).

102 In the *Sutta Nipata*, Buddha says: "Just as a mother would protect her only child even at the risk of her own life, even so let one cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings" (SN 1.8).

his divine qualities. Hence, the *brahmavihāras* are four “divine states of mind.”¹⁰³ Love is the most recognizable attribute of God in Christianity as “God is Love” (1Jn. 4:8).

Regarding the “development of the definition of the four elements,” like in Buddhism the elements of earth, air, water, and fire in Christianity “constitute both the essence of the microcosm, which is man, while also distinguishing the spheres of the macrocosm as envisioned in ancient and medieval cosmology.”¹⁰⁴ But Teresa does not discuss the elements nor does John of the Cross offer a sustained discussion on the elements as elemental qualities.

About the “perception of repulsiveness in nutriment” (*āhāre paṭikūlasaññā*), we saw that this is a meditation theme recommended to enhance awareness of the repulsiveness of food and overcome attachment to food and that is suited to those who are intelligent. Teresa does not meditate on the perception of loathsomeness in food. In Christianity food is given by God and is thus good, but Teresa distinguishes heavenly food from food to sustain the body and excessive attraction to worldly food is a deadly sin: gluttony.

In this section we have compared subjects of *samatha* mindfulness meditation with themes of recollection in Teresa and other Christian contemplatives. Needless to say, there are many other themes of recollection in the Christian tradition that could have been compared with Buddhist topics. Some examples are the Sign of the Cross, the contemplation of the Virgin Mary, the visualization of a saint or of the glory of Heaven. But these comparisons would not lead us beyond the point we would like to make here, namely, that most of the functions that the *kammaṭṭhānas* have in the development of mindfulness meditation are provided by meditation on Christ or other transformative topics in the prayer of active recollection in Christianity, once again, notwithstanding the obvious theological differences. Yet, as Tyler observes: “Where Teresa’s method of prayer differs so clearly from the Buddhist mindfulness [...] is the role that visualization and symbolic representation of Christ play in her meditations (V 9,1-4).”¹⁰⁵ In Teresa, the visualization of Christ has, by definition, a symbolic and transformative value that cannot be predicated (in the same nature and effects) on the *samatha* objects of meditation.

Next, we shall consider comparatively the effects of the *samatha* mindfulness meditation and the prayer of active recollection on their practitioners.

103 “Brahmavihāras,” CPED, 212.

104 Elizabeth Howe, *Mystical Imagery: Santa Teresa de Jesús and San Juan de la Cruz* (N.Y.: Peter Lang, 1988), 265.

105 Tyler, *Teresa of Avila: Doctor of the Soul*, 190.

5.9.4.5 The effects of mindfulness meditation and active recollection

Mindfulness meditation and recollection are not practices designed for particular times and/or irrelevant to daily life. On the contrary, sustained and repeated over time they produce benefits that manifest in their practitioners' lives; they extend to everyday life.¹⁰⁶

There is considerable overlap between these effects, but let us start by saying that some benefits derived from recollection are absent in mindfulness due to their theistic nature. Herráiz remarks that recollection facilitates communication (*trato*) with God.¹⁰⁷ Through recollection the person becomes increasingly aware of the presence of God in the soul (V 4,7), creates the conditions necessary for perfecting the virtues, fosters a greater desire for God and urgency for communion with Him and establishes a loving, open and silent disposition of the soul for its union with God (C 29,5). Teresa explains that recollection disposes the soul so that God can be in it as "His own house" (C 28,12).

A shared effect of mindfulness and recollection is a moral purification; both have an essential ethical quality and religious function. Cultivation of virtue demands heightened self-awareness and self-control, which protect against moral weakness and wrongdoing. Presence of mind breeds the watchful attention required to strengthen moral awareness. The *Dukkhadhamma Sutta*, for example, reads that by constantly practicing mindfulness one avoids "evil unwholesome states of covetousness and dejection" (SN 35.203). For Teresa, *recogimiento* is equally a way to moral purification. By its practice one becomes aware of and combats compulsions, attachments, sinful thoughts and other evils (C 29).

Both mindfulness meditation and the prayer of active recollection curb destructive emotions and strengthen wholesome character traits. Those who practice mindfulness or recollection grow in and perfect their virtues. One of the goals of *samatha* mindfulness meditation is the suppression of the Five Hindrances and the development of the opposite wholesome qualities. In Teresa, the prayer of recollection and growth in virtue, mainly love and humility,¹⁰⁸ go hand in hand. Both mindfulness and recollection remove harmful or evil states like anger, sloth, agitation, ill-will hatred and skeptical doubt. Through them, the person gradually becomes less prone to egoism and more loving and humbler as marks of character.

106 Teresa speaks of recollection as an "admirable custom" (C 28,4) and of the "great benefits" (C 29,4) a soul gains from it. Pablo Maroto asserts that "the method of recollection [...] does not only serve for the moments of prayer in a certain place, but it influences in the same chores of life and transforms the same being of man" (Pablo Maroto 2011, 520).

107 Herráiz García, *La oración, historia de amistad*, 166.

108 "Humility is thus the touchstone of the spiritual graces received from the prayer of recollection" (Weber 1996, 47).

Another benefit is self-mastery; greater control over the senses and bodily impulses through heightened self-awareness. Teresa explains how by becoming accustomed to the habit of recollection one tames the body and facilitates the withdrawal of the senses at will (C 28,5).¹⁰⁹ With progressive self-mastery,¹¹⁰ one is not easily distracted by outside events and maintains stable concentration and constant remembrance of God (C 29,4).

The relationship between mindfulness and the emotions is explained in both traditions. By circumventing reflection, *sati* prevents the emotions from causing mental turmoil.¹¹¹ Also, recollection involves the quietening of one's emotions by curbing the thinking mind, leading to the attainment of a more relaxed, peaceful and equanimous state of mind.¹¹²

Another value for daily life derived from both practices is the development of a more concentrated mind and firm and sustained attention. Mindfulness aids concentration. As Nyanaponika noted, by cultivating mindfulness "the centrifugal forces of mind, making for mental distraction, will peter out; the centripetal tendency, turning the mind inward and making for concentration, will gather strength."¹¹³ The prayer of recollection likewise reduces common distractions and helps to concentrate the attention "on one thing."¹¹⁴

Through the cultivation of both mindfulness and recollection, one also becomes more conscious of oneself at all levels. One becomes less biased and prejudiced and more equanimous and authentic, being able to manifest one's true feelings and beliefs and less identified with old habits of thought and recurring patterns. The person experiences more freedom and spontaneity due to the deautomatization of associative thought and habitual responses. In brief, one begins to experience oneself anew.

The regular practice of *samatha* mindfulness meditation facilitates the attainment of access concentration, while the assiduous interiorization of the senses, the weakening of the faculties of thought and imagination and the love felt in the prayer of active recollection prepare the soul to receive the grace of passive recollection.¹¹⁵ To these two states we will turn our attention in the next Section 5.10.

109 "Above all, in this type of prayer, one experiences a strengthening of the inner man" (Castellano 1981, 119).

110 "I conclude by saying that whoever wishes to acquire it -- since, as I say, it lies within our power -- should not tire of getting used to what has been explained. It involves a gradual increase of self-control and an end to vain wandering from the right path; it means conquering, which is a making use of one's senses for the sake of the inner life" (C 29,7).

111 Tse-fu Kuan: "mindfulness prevents feelings from developing into emotional disturbances" (Tse-fu Kuan, 2008, 10).

112 As we discussed, recollection is the solution to the states of anxiety and excitement generated by meditative prayer.

113 Nyanaponika, *The Power of Mindfulness*, 31.

114 "O Sisters, those of you who cannot [...] keep your mind from distraction, get used to this practice! Get used to it! See, I know that you can do this; for I suffered many years [...] of not being able to quiet the mind in one thing" (C 26,2).

115 "Repeating these exercises [recollection] often, the person praying can receive and experience 'infused recollection'" (Pablo Maroto 2011, 520). See C 28,5; V 4,8; and C 30,7.

5.9.5 Conclusion

Having concluded the present comparison, let us summarize the main points covered, starting by saying that the weight of evidence supports the view that both practices generate a comparable extraordinary gravitational force in their own religious systems. If the practice of mindfulness meditation is the core of the Buddhist way of liberation, the prayer of active recollection is central and fundamental in the Teresian path of prayer. Likewise, both practices dispose the person to and facilitate the attainment of higher levels of mental concentration and absorption. If, according to Buddhaghosa, the constant presence of well-established mindfulness is a necessary condition for the attainment of *jhānic* absorption, the prayer of active recollection—according to Teresa—is the most appropriate way to dispose the soul for the mystical states of prayer.

In light of the evidence gathered, it is also safe to conclude that mindfulness and recollection share similar characteristics. Having juxtaposed the two practices, we have seen how they both overcome the limitations of discursive and reflective meditation,¹¹⁶ and surmount the person's identification with thinking. In both practices the person's attention is wholly oriented and fixed on the object, or Christ, respectively in Buddhism and the Christian tradition to the exclusion of everything else. Both practices restrict, guard and protect the senses. Both awaken appropriate attention, develop a deeper awareness and presence of mind and imply wakefulness, alertness, watchfulness and the absence of distraction. Finally, both produce an ethical, psychological and spiritual transformation in the person that is similar in many aspects, and transpire in daily life.

In conclusion, we would say that we agree with Tyler when, in his careful comparison of Teresa's mental prayer and Buddhist mindfulness meditation,¹¹⁷ he states that, with mental prayer [here we understand the notion includes the prayer of active recollection] "Teresa is advocating something closer to the Buddhist practice of mindfulness."¹¹⁸ The main differences are in the symbolic value of recollection on Christ, the feelings of mutual love and friendship and the dialogic nature of the prayer of recollection on the Christian side versus the more instrumental function of the objects of *samatha* mindfulness meditation on the Buddhist side.

116 Tyler writes: "where she [Teresa] comes close to the Buddhist masters is her challenge to the discursive power of the intellect and the necessary use of symbol and image to allow this power to be 'short-circuited'" (Tyler 2013, 194-195).

117 This comparison is found in Chapter 8, entitled "Mindfulness, Mental Prayer and 'The Centre of the Soul' by Peter Tyler, *Teresa of Avila: Doctor of the Soul* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 184-202.

118 *Idem*, 190.

5.10 ACCESS CONCENTRATION AND ACTIVE RECOLLECTION

5.10.1 Introduction

As previously indicated, the first predictable outcome of *samatha* meditation is the state of “access concentration” (*upacāra-samādhi*). This is a state of high concentration, but still within the bounds of ordinary consciousness, that precedes *jhāna*. Analogously, the prayer of active recollection may develop into the “state”¹ of active recollection that, although being of elevated concentration, does not exceed the limits of the ordinary state.

There are parallels between the state of access concentration and active recollection. These noticeable commonalities have not escaped the attention of several authors. In the book *Christian Insight Meditation*, Meadow and her Carmelite co-authors write: “Our efforts finally reach what Christians call active recollection and Buddhists name access concentration. These states indicate having a sufficient stability of mind, developed by our own efforts, to stay on the meditative object for some time. It protects us from the hindrances to practice.”² The authors of *Christian Insight Meditation* did not, regrettably, elaborate on this assertion. For his part, Cousins writes: “We may nevertheless assume that in practice the Prayer of Recollection would have been quite recognizable to Buddhaghosa as part of the process of developing *jhāna*.”³ We agree with Cousins’ identification of similarities between the prayer of active recollection and the process that leads to *jhāna*. Cousins’ following statement, though, seems unfounded: “we can loosely affirm that the access concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*) which precedes full *jhāna* in the *Visuddhimagga* account corresponds reasonably closely to St. Teresa’s Prayer of Quiet without necessarily ruling out the possibility that there are also significant differences.”⁴ Later on, in Section 5.13, we will return and comment on this statement by Cousins.

In this section we compare the *states* of access concentration and active recollection. As customary, these two absorptive states will first be presented separately and, afterward, will be comparatively analyzed in terms of their nature, experience and effects. But, first, a state mentioned by Buddhaghosa that precedes access concentration, that is, “preliminary concentration” (*parikamma-samādhi*), will be compared with apparently analogous state described in Teresa’s works. To this first task we turn now our attention.

¹ Poulain writes: “This state [prayer of simplicity] has been called active recollection” (Poulain 1921, 9).

² Meadow et al., *Christian Insight Meditation*, 75-6. See also Mary Jo Meadow, Kevin Culligan, and Daniel Chowning, *Gentling the Heart, Buddhist Loving-Kindness Practice for Christians* (New York Crossroad, 1994), 138-39.

³ Cousins, “The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification,” 103-20.

⁴ *Idem*, 110.

5.10.2 Preliminary Concentration. Is there a homologue in Teresa's work?

5.10.2.1 Preliminary concentration (*parikamma-samādhī*)

Of the three kinds of *samādhī* mentioned by Buddhaghosa,⁵ *parikamma-samādhī* is the initial and the less absorptive. *Parikamma* means “arrangement,” or “preparation.”⁶ *Parikamma-samādhī* is usually translated as preliminary or “preparation concentration.”⁷ “Preliminary concentration” is an incipient level of concentration defined as “a preliminary degree of concentration established at the beginning of a meditative development.”⁸ It is a degree of concentration not entirely different from what can be attained in ordinary life. It can be developed at early stages of meditation as a result of preparatory efforts by the meditator to focus the attention on the physical or mental object selected for meditation. It can be attained through any of the forty *kammaṭṭhānas* mentioned by Buddhaghosa. It is significant that the notion of “preliminary concentration” does not appear in the *suttas*.⁹

The object of “preliminary concentration” is an initial mental image of the object called preparatory sign (*parikamma-nimitta*).¹⁰ In preparation meditation (*parikamma-bhāvanā*) the *parikamma-nimitta* is developed by visualizing (or conceptualizing) the subject of the meditation (e.g., water *kaṣiṇa*, bloated body in foulness meditation, and the breathing). The preparatory sign is attained when the original sign is replaced with its mental image. In contradistinction to the “acquired sign” (*uggaha-nimitta*), which is an eidetic image of the original sign, and/or the radiant image of the “counterpart sign” (*paṭibhāga-nimitta*), the *parikamma-nimitta* is an initial mental image that appears frail and unstable.¹¹

Unlike the state of access concentration (*upacāra-samādhī*), in state of *parikamma-samādhī* the Five Hindrances—namely, sensory desire, ill-will, sloth-and-torpor, restlessness-and-worry and doubt—are not yet suppressed. Buddhaghosa explains that attaining the state of *parikamma-samādhī* can be challenging for the meditator and that “only one in a hundred or a thousand can do it” (PP 12.8). By strengthening the concentration, *parikamma-nimitta* becomes gradually stronger and more refined until, eventually, the learning sign (*uggaha-nimitta*) appears.

⁵ The three kinds of *samādhī* are: (1) preliminary concentration (*parikamma-samādhī*) (2) access concentration (*upacāra samādhī*); and (3) absorption concentration (*appanā samādhī*).

⁶ “Parikamma,” PED, 470.

⁷ “Parikammasamādhī,” PDB, 628.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Shankman *The Experience of Samadhi*, 102.

¹⁰ As previously mentioned, in Section 5.8.2, there are three kinds of signs throughout the process of *samatha* meditation: (1) the preparatory sign (*parikamma-nimitta*); (2) the acquired sign or learning sign (*uggaha-nimitta*); (3) the counterpart sign (*paṭibhāga-nimitta*).

¹¹ “Parikammasamādhī,” PDB, 628.

5.10.2.2 Is there a comparable state to *parikamma-samādhī* in Teresa's works?

One need not dig deep into Teresa's works to locate references to a level of ordinary mental concentration comparable to *parikamma-samādhī*.¹² If preliminary concentration "is the degree of concentration established at the beginning of a meditation session,"¹³ such a degree of concentration is that to which Teresa aims as preparation for prayer. The agitation of Teresa's mind made her seek objects on which to anchor her attention and recollect her mind before beginning of meditative or contemplative prayer. The Carmelite nun refers to classic themes that help to recollect the soul such as "heaven"—which Teresa says, "ties much the wandering mind and recollects the soul" (C 28,1)—"self-knowledge" and the "greatness of God as revealed in His creatures" (C 12,10). The best way to concentrate the mind, though, is a passage of Christ's life. The use of a book always helps (V 4,9). Other suitable objects for fastening the mind are cultivating fields, water, flowers (V 10, 4) or familiar objects such as a cross or a sacred image (C 34,11).

Teresa does not offer a description of the state of mental concentration induced by such objects. But, psychologically, it cannot differ radically from the Buddhist description. As with *parikamma-samādhī*, this state of concentration is preparatory to further practice, and does not involve a degree of absorption outside of what is possible in ordinary life. Although they imply a higher level of interiorization than in ordinary consciousness, in this state all the powers of the person are fully functional, including the external senses.

A crucial difference is that none of the recollective exercises mentioned by Teresa seeks concentration per se. Even apparently-neutral acts such as contemplating flowers have a theological meaning. If these objects are concentrative, it is because Teresa sees the presence of God in them.¹⁴ Another difference is that there is no explicit mention in Teresa's writings of these objects causing an "initial mental image of the object." This cannot be said regarding Christ. It is in meditation on Christ that a mental image similar to *parikamma-nimitta* can be found. Christ is Teresa's "image" par excellence. Christ iconography surrounds her, and she always begins prayer by bringing His "image" to her mind and in Him she rests before starting recollection (C 28,2). The image of Christ is "engraved" on her soul, though not always with the same degree of perfection (V 22,2).

¹² See, for example, V 10,4 and V 4,3.

¹³ "Parikammasamādhī," PDB, 628.

¹⁴ "Those who follow this path of no discursive reflection will find that a book can be a help for recollecting oneself quickly. It helped me also to look at fields, or water, or flowers. In these things I found a remembrance of the Creator. I mean that they awakened and recollect me and served as a book and reminded me of my ingratitude and sins" (V 9,4). As Howe says, for Teresa "imagery based on flora provides a sensual adumbration of the soul in preparation for and in enjoyment of the experience of mystical union" (Howe 1988, 94). Cf. Castellano, *Pedagogía de la oración cristiana*, 181-82.

5.10.3. Access concentration and the state of active recollection

Access concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*)¹⁵ is a state of mental concentration beyond *parikamma-samādhi*, but still within the limits of the ordinary mind, that usually precedes full absorption (*appanā-samādhi*). *Upacāra* means access, neighborhood, or entrance.¹⁶ *Upacāra-samādhi* is habitually translated as “access (or neighborhood) concentration” and is so called because of its proximity to *jhāna*. Access concentration is the predictable outcome of a proper practice of any of the forty *kammaṭṭhānas* and is “the highest level of concentration that may be developed from the more discursive topics of meditation.”¹⁷

Upacāra-samādhi is a state of intense and stable concentration on the meditation subject, although it does not reach the degree of absorption that characterizes *jhāna*. As Buswell and Lopez explain, *upacāra-samādhi* is “characterized by the visualization in the mind of a luminous “counterpart” or “representational,” “image” (*paṭibhāga-nimitta*) of the object of meditation. It is through further concentration on this stable representational image that one finally attains full absorption (*appanā-samādhi*).”¹⁸ Even though access concentration is a state with a considerable degree of concentration, in it the meditator is aware of his surroundings (i.e., external sensory input) and internal processes (e.g., thought, imagination, desires, memory), although he is not greatly distracted by them.

The attainment of access concentration coincides with the temporary suppression of the Five Hindrances (*pañca-nīvaraṇas*). *Upacāra-samādhi* is produced by a level of concentration powerful enough for these Five Hindrances to be temporarily suppressed. Coinciding with the disappearing of these unwholesome states is when the unblemished and intense image of the meditative object known as “counterpart image” emerges.¹⁹

In access concentration the five combined factors that constitute *jhāna* (*jhānaṅgas*)—i.e., *vitakka*, *vicāra*, *pīti*, *sukha*, and *ekaggatā*—have not emerged but are in embryonic form. This is because at this stage of concentration the *jhānaṅgas* are strong enough to suppress the Five Hindrances, but too weak and unstable to yield the rising of *jhāna*.²⁰ The nature or intricacy of the some *kammaṭṭhānas* may block the attainment of *jhāna*.²¹

¹⁵ It is significant that the notion of *upacāra-samādhi* does not appear in the *Nikāyas*. Polak, “Reexamining Jhāna,” 29.

¹⁶ “Upacāra,” PED, 159.

¹⁷ “[*Upacāra-samādhi*] is the highest level of concentration that may be developed from the more discursive topics of meditation, viz., the first eight of the ten recollections on the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, morality, generosity, divinities, death and peace, as well as the contemplation on the loathsomeness of food, and the analysis of the four material elements” (“Upacārasamādhi,” PDB, 937-38).

¹⁸ “Upacārasamādhi,” PDB, 937-38.

¹⁹ Shankman, *The Experience of Samādhi*, 56-7.

²⁰ Polak, “Reexamining Jhāna,” 21-2.

²¹ Referring to “the analysis of the four material elements,” Buddhaghosa states that the concentration that may arise from that meditation “is only access and does not reach absorption because it has states with individual essences as its object”

Directing our attention to Teresa now, ‘prayer of active recollection,’ as stated earlier, is not a term that can be found in Teresa’s works, but a heuristic scholarly construct designed to clearly distinguish between the active and the passive forms of recollection. Like always with Teresa, “prayer” may refer to a *mode* of prayer or to a *state* of prayer. Below, we will discuss recollection as an active *state* of prayer, that is, a state of recollection brought about by one’s own efforts (although God’s help is always needed). Active recollection as a *mode* of prayer was already discussed earlier, in Section 5.9.

An explicit consideration of active recollection as a *state* cannot be found in *Camino*, but the notion of a *state* of active recollection is sufficiently clear from the context. With reference to semantics, Teresa speaks of one “being recollected” [*recogida*] in prayer,²² and says that in recollection the faculties of the soul are recollected within itself with God. In *Vida*, “recollection” is occasionally treated as a state somewhat synonymous to rapture.²³ In *Camino* she says that recollection can be attained by growing accustomed to the practice (C 28,5) and discusses ways to attain this state of recollection (C 28,6).

Let us explore how access concentration compares to the state of active recollection. If parallelisms were found, in Section 5.9, between active recollection as a mode of prayer and the pre-*jhānic* phase of *samatha* meditation, similarities can likewise be found between access concentration and the state of active recollection.²⁴ This, of course, without forgetting the essential differences in nature between these two states.²⁵ Access concentration is the expected fruition of a proper and sustained practice and should be fully mastered until it this state of concentration can be brought about at will. The state of active recollection is also the result of a proper and continuous practice²⁶ of the prayer of active recollection,²⁷ until this state can likewise be attained almost at will (C 29,8).²⁸

As Meadow and her Carmelite co-authors state, “these states [i.e., active recollection and access concentration] indicate having a sufficient stability of mind [...] to stay on the

(PP 11,42). Referring to meditation of death he states that the reason is that it “awakens a sense of urgency” (PP 8,40).

²² See V 22,3; V 38,6 and V 9,5.

²³ See C 31,12.

²⁴ Meadow, *et al.*, *Christian Insight Meditation*, 75-6.

²⁵ Before starting a phenomenological comparative analysis of the two states, a familiar caution must be spelled out. If access concentration is a state of a high of concentration on one of the forty subjects described by Buddhaghosa, we should never lose sight that active recollection is a Christian state of prayer. Teresa is recollected in God (C 28,4), a notion foreign to Buddhism. The systematicity and different soteriological function of these two states should not also be obviated. Apart from this essential point, a comparative phenomenological analysis does show common elements in other aspects.

²⁶ Teresa says to her nuns “if we cannot succeed in one year, we will succeed later” (C 26,2).

²⁷ Recall *recogimiento*, as defined in *Camino*, is active or natural; it does not depend on the intervention of God (C 29,3). Teresa describes active recollection as made “with artifice” [*con artificio*] as “to be in the dark, to close the eyes” (4M 3,1).

²⁸ Access concentration is a state that can be brought about more easily and intensely with time and continued practice. Teresa find grades in practice of recollection (C 28,5). She describes difficulties in the beginning and how one must make efforts (C 26,8). However, with time, recollection becomes easier (C 29,6) and deeper until the person enters into this state almost at will (C 28,4-5). If the state of recollection diminishes, with a little fire (e.g., reflection) it reignites (C 28,5).

meditation object for some time.”²⁹ Indeed, both states, as described, share having deepened concentration in which one is attentive to, and mindfully of only “one thing.”³⁰ In Teresa this “one thing” (*una cosa*) is typically a loving awareness of the Humanity of Christ. In Buddhaghosa, it is one of the forty subjects of meditation but, in both cases, the relatively intense and quite stable concentration on the object of contemplation does not entail complete absorption, nor are they outside the capabilities of the ordinary mind.

In both cases as well, the senses are withdrawn and internalized but not suspended. In *upacāra-samādhi* the meditators’ attention is absorbed in the object but, as Shankman puts it, one “is not completely cut off from outer stimuli that takes place in the *jhānas*.”³¹ Also, in active recollection “there is a withdrawing of the senses from exterior things” (C 2,6), which remain “enclosed in this little heaven of our soul” (C 28,5), occupied in God, but the bodily senses are not entirely lost: one may perceive the surroundings (C 28,5).

Both access concentration and active recollection are also states of reduced thought. Apart from sustained attention and withdrawal of the senses from external things, in both states “guided” discursive reflection and continued speculative thinking are not present, but, thought and reflection do not cease entirely although they are diminished. As Shankman puts it, “[in *upacāra-samādhi*] the mind is still liable to wander, but much more infrequently, and if the mind does drift from its object, it tends not to be for long.”³² In a person actively recollected the thought is “recollected,”³³ and “appeased” [*sosegado*], but not suspended. The soul dwells in a loving, and progressively quieter dialogue with God. In both states the person’s other capabilities are gathered in but not relinquished.³⁴

A defining mark of *upacāra-samādhi* is that, to have attained this concentrative state, the meditator has had to temporarily suppress the Five Hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇāni*).³⁵ We first discussed the Five Hindrances in relation to purification of *sīla* (Section 5.4.3.2). We mentioned that stabilization of *sīla* in the monastic is attained by abandoning them. However, purification of *sīla* does not achieve the suppression of the Five Hindrances. One of the goals of *samādhi* is the temporary suppression of these deterrents that persist as defiling tendencies during meditation and hamper the person’s ability to attain a stable

²⁹ Meadow *et al.*, *Christian Insight Meditation*, 75-6.

³⁰ C 26,2, C 28,4; and C 28,2.

³¹ Shankman, *The Experience of Samadhi*, 56-7.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ “This prayer is called ‘recollection’ because the soul collects its faculties together to be with its God” (C 28,4). Cf C 28,2.

³⁴ It is our understanding that during access concentration the meditator can still reflect, imagine or remember something. In a state of active recollection, the soul’s powers are recollected not ‘united or ‘suspended.’ Teresa says that recollection “is not a silence of the faculties: it is a shutting-up [*encerramiento*] of the faculties within itself by the soul” (C 29,3).

³⁵ A defining characteristic of the *jhānas* is that, to have attained them, a meditator has had to temporarily eliminate the Five Hindrances, an elimination that already occurred in access concentration.

and concentrated state of mind. Access concentration is attained precisely coinciding with the temporary suppression of these distractions. Cousins notes that in commentarial literature the suppression of the Hindrances is synonymous with access concentration.³⁶ [As we learned, in *samādhī* (purification of mind) the Five Hindrances are suppressed but not eradicated. Only via the cultivation of *paññā* are they cut off].

Of the Five Hindrances, sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*) and ill-will (*byāpāda*) refer, respectively, to attraction and aversion to sensory objects. Sloth-torpor (*thīna-middha*), and restlessness-worry(/remorse) (*uddhacca-kukkucca*) are also opposites and a mid-point between them is required to attain the balance for access concentration to arise. About skeptical doubt, (*vicikicchā*), Anālayo says, “the doubt that at this point obstructs the deepening of concentration is caused by the unfamiliarity with what happens.”³⁷

According to Buddhaghosa, the Five Hindrances are detrimental because each them obstructs the ability of the mind for concentration in its own way (PP 4,86). They are enumerated by degree of harmfulness and the order how they should be suppressed. The Pāli scriptures offer various similes to illustrate the harmful effects of the Hindrances. They are compared to five kinds of calamities,³⁸ or impurities affecting a bowl of water.³⁹ The Five Hindrances are overcome and subside through mindfulness and examination. Buddhaghosa states that with the suppression of Hindrances, “the defilements subside, and the mind becomes concentrated with access concentration and the counterpart sign arises” (PP 4.31). The suppression of the Hindrances is experienced as a great joy.⁴⁰

Teresa herself, and her Carmelite interpreters,⁴¹ mention a number of difficulties and distractions that may hamper prayer in general, and active recollection in particular. Some of these difficulties, such as the presence of ill-health or great tiredness (C 24) are discussed by Buddhaghosa although not as Hindrances proper but as impediments. Other difficulties and distractions mentioned by Teresa and other Christian authors refer more precisely to the prayer of recollection. Among them: “ill-restrained passions,” “vacillations of the will,”⁴² or several causes of aridity and concern such as “drowsiness,

³⁶ See Cousins, “Buddhist Jhāna,” 115-31.

³⁷ Anālayo, “The First Absorption (Dhyāna) in Early Indian Buddhism – A Study of Source Material from the Madhyama-āgama,” in *Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist Meditation Cultural Histories*, ed. H. Eifring (Oslo: Hermes Publishing, 2014), 77. See also Fujimoto, Akio, “How to Enter the First Jhāna,” *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* 54, No. 3 (2006): 59-63.

³⁸ The Buddha compares sensual desire to a debt, ill-will to a disease, sloth-torpor to imprisonment, restless-worry to slavery, and doubt to being lost in a desert. Freedom from the Five Hindrances yields the exact opposites (DN 2.70-73).

³⁹ The Buddha likens sensual desire to a bowl of water mixed with paints, ill-will to a bowl of boiling water, sloth-torpor to water covered by plants, restlessness-worry to water blown into ripples by the wind, and doubt to muddy water (SN 46.55).

⁴⁰ “He sees himself purified of all these evil unwholesome states, he sees himself liberated from them. When he sees this, gladness is born in him. When he is glad, rapture is born in him; in one who is rapturous, the body becomes tranquil; one whose body is tranquil feels pleasure; in one who feels pleasure, the mind becomes concentrated” (MN 4, 40).

⁴¹ Álvarez, “Distracciones” DSTJ, 241-42. See Eugene Boylan, *Difficulties in Mental Prayer* (Sinag-Tala. Scepter, 1998).

⁴² Rohrbach, *Conversation with Christ*, 76.

worries, absorbing preoccupations, temptations.”⁴³ All these problems and disturbances may intrude upon the mind during recollection and are similar to the Five Hindrances. If sensual desire (*kāma-chanda*) is often expressed as “covetousness for the world,” Teresa says that to be recollected one must detach oneself from everything that is not God (CV 28,12). One must not to fill the palace of the soul with “low people and trinkets.” Cupidity, malice, hate, that is, sinfulness (seven deadly sins) and whatever displeases God and cannot be present in a recollected spirit. Being recollected in God clearly implies as well absence of apathy or anxiety during the contemplation of His image and attributes.

Teresa imputes these distractions to the structure of the human mind, like Buddhism does,⁴⁴ though the two traditions attribute the cause of this structure to dissimilar reasons. In Buddhism the Five Hindrances are identified as unwholesome or detrimental mental factors (*cetasikā*). Álvarez states: “According to her [Teresa], the distraction is due to the very structure of the psyche [...] a psychological disorder that comes, she thinks ‘from the misery left to us by the sin of Adam, with many others (4M 1,11).”⁴⁵

We should recall that to “be recollected” (*estar recogido*), even if actively, is a state of Christian prayer and, as B. de Laredo states, “there is no prayer without a clean heart.”⁴⁶ The state of active recollection is an ascetic state of prayer bordering the mystical states, and certainly implies an elevated degree of detachment, charity and moral purification.⁴⁷ Its practice begins with the examination of consciousness, and confession. To be recollected, in Teresa’s says, one must have “the house clean for the King” (CV 28,11). To be recollected in God keeps away sin and calls on virtue. Furthermore, the peace that exists when recollected speaks of the absence of sin during the experience (C 28,8).

Access concentration is the state that precedes, is nearest to, and accesses *jhāna*; the prayer of active recollection is the closest state to the mystical states of prayer. Access concentration is also called neighborhood concentration because is close to or in the neighbor of *jhāna*. Teresa states that recollection inflames the soul, preparing and disposing it for passive recollection and the prayer of quiet better than any other way.⁴⁸ To these states, the *jhānas* and mystical prayer and its degrees, we turn our attention.⁴⁹

⁴³ Idem., 83.

⁴⁴ Gil Fronsdal, *Unhindered: A Mindful Path Through the Five Hindrances* (Redwood City, CA: Tranquil Books, 2013),10.

⁴⁵ Álvarez, “Distracciones” DSTJ, 241.

⁴⁶ Bernardino de Laredo states: “there is no prayer without a clean heart” (B. de Laredo, 1535, 102). Teresa succeeds in recollection after a period of disarray and infidelity in prayer after her father’s death following the advice of Vicente Barron.

⁴⁷ See Pablo Maroto, *Teresa en oración*, 368.

⁴⁸ See C 28,4; C 28,2; C 28,6; C 28,5 and C 23,3.

⁴⁹ After having attained access concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*), the meditator is in ideal position to cultivate the *jhānas* which, as we shall discuss in the next chapter are eight successive states of absorption (*appanā-samādhi*). On Teresa’s path, prayer of recollection predisposes the soul to mystical states in a better way than any other form of prayer (C 28,3).

5.11 THE BUDDHIST *JHĀNAS* AND CHRISTIAN MYSTICAL PRAYER

5.11.1 Introduction

This section is devoted to the comparison of the essential and dynamic aspects of the *jhānas* and mystical prayer. We undertake this task in view of the apparent similarities between these two varieties of religious experiences and the number of scholars who—for more than a century—have found parallels between them. The testimonies of some authors, although only a sample of available literature, will suffice to illustrate this point.

From the beginning of Western Buddhology, Buddhologists acquainted with Christian mysticism noticed similarities between the *jhānas* and the states of mystical prayer. For example, T. W. Rhys Davids writes: “In the descriptions of [...] the religious experiences of Christian saints and mystics, expressions similar to those used in the *jhānas* are frequent.”¹ Conze notes parallels between the *jhānas* and Christian contemplative prayer (i.e., Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite).² More recently, Bhikkhu Bodhi believes it conceivable that practitioners of religions other than Buddhism could attain *jhānic* states in the context of their own traditions.³ Shaw notices affinities between Christian mystical prayer and the second to the fourth *jhāna* which are “characterized by an internal silence, and a successive purification of feeling through joy, happiness and one-pointedness.”⁴ Gimello, while denying that Buddhist meditation has a mystical nature, points out that Christian mystical prayer corresponds closely to *samatha* meditation and the *jhānas*.⁵ Tilakaratne considers Gimello’s remarks justified, bearing in mind that the *jhānas* have “no connection with what is called mystical union with a transcendent being or an entity” and have “a value in the Buddhist practice only so far as their concentrating and calming effect on the mind is concerned.”⁶ The recognition of close commonalities between the Buddhist *jhānas* and the Christian mystical states is also implicit in two articles written by Bucknell on the subject of Buddhist meditation and mystical experience.⁷ Nyanaponika believes that mystical union is a *jhānic* experience misconstrued as union with God.⁸

¹ “Jhāna,” PED, 322.

² Conze, *Buddhist Meditation*, 18; Edward Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* (Oxford, Cassirer 1953), 101.

³ Bhikkhu Bodhi speaks about the possibility of Christians developing the *jhānas* based on meditations similar to that of loving-kindness (*mettā*) meditation. Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Khuddaka Nikāya, Sutta Nipata, Metta Sutta - Loving Kindness*, audio digital, 2009: <http://www.buddhistdoor.net/audio/khuddaka-nikaya-sutta-nipata-metta-sutta-loving-kindness>

⁴ Shaw, *Introduction to Buddhist Meditation*, 271.

⁵ Robert Gimello, «Mysticism and Meditation», in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. S. Katz (OUP, 1978), 189.

⁶ Asanga Tilakaratne. *Nirvana and Ineffability: A Study of the Buddhist Theory of Reality and Language* (Sri Lanka: Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies, University of Kelaniya, 1993), 62.

⁷ Roderick S. Bucknell, *Buddhist meditation and the study of mystical experience* (Perth: AASR, 1989); and Roderick S. Bucknell, “Buddhist jhāna as Mystical Experience,” in *Exploring the paranormal, perspectives on belief and experience*, ed. G. K. Zollschan, J. F. Schumaker and G. F. Walsh (Prism Press, Bridgeport, 1989), 131–49.

⁸ Nyanaponika Thera, *Buddhism and the God-Idea. Selected Texts* (Kandy: BPS, Wheel Publication No. 47, 1970), 7-8.

Speaking more specifically on Teresian mystical prayer, Buddhist scholars versed in its phenomenology consider it has consonances with the *jhānas*. Reputed Buddhologist Cousins, a professor of Comparative Religion at the University of Manchester writes: “It is quite clear that there is much similarity between that type of consciousness [*jhāna*] and St. Teresa’s Prayer of Union.”⁹ Shaw concurs with the British author saying: “Cousins has demonstrated that the stages of prayer described by St. Teresa seem to have close affinity with the stages of *jhāna* described by Buddhaghosa.”¹⁰ Ayya Khema believes the *jhānas* are the “same” experiences as those reported by Christian mystics and, particularly, those described by St. Teresa of Ávila.¹¹ For his part, Brahm asserts: “mystics such as Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, who were probably two of the greatest meditators in the Christian tradition of the middle ages ... did attain these stages we call *jhānas*, it seems.”¹² Other Buddhist authors have expressed similar ideas.¹³

From the Christian side, these close similarities have likewise been observed. Helier, for example, writes that: “the mind processes that take place during the transition stages of mystical prayer are similar to those in the four-stepped *jhāna* of the Buddhists. The psychological categories with which the mental states are described frequently concur in a surprising manner.”¹⁴ Mascaró, a lecturer on Spanish mystics at Cambridge, points out that: “Teresa [...] describes in Christian terms four ways of prayer which can be compared to what the Yoga Sutras tell us, or to the Buddhist meditations.”¹⁵ Stabile, a former *bhikkhuni* reconverted to Catholicism, find similarities between Teresa’s descriptions of her religious experiences and Buddhist meditation.¹⁶ Meadow, and her two Carmelite co-authors. Culligan and Chowning, likewise find consonances between the Buddhist levels of absorption and the Teresian degrees of mystical prayer.¹⁷

These affinities have also been noticed from non-confessional academic perspectives. Comparing *jhānas* and “Christian ecstasies” is frequent in the field of transpersonal psychology,¹⁸ general psychology,¹⁹ and in the academic disciplines of religious studies and comparative religion. Rose, professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at

⁹ Cousins, “The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification,” 111.

¹⁰ Shaw, *Introduction to Buddhist Meditation*, 271.

¹¹ Ayya Khema, *I Give you my Life. The Autobiography of a Western Buddhist Nun* (Boston: Shambala Public. 1997), 193.

¹² Brahm, *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond*, 158.

¹³ David N. Snyder, *The Complete Book of Buddha’s Lists – Explained* (Las Vegas, Nevada: Vipassanā Foundation, 2006), 165; Shinzen Young, *The Science of Enlightenment: How Meditation Works* (Boulder, Colorado: Sounds True, 2016), 53.

¹⁴ Heiler, *Die Buddhistische Versenkung*, 55.

¹⁵ Juan Mascaró, “Introduction” to *The Dhammapada* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 1973), 17-8.

¹⁶ Stabile, *Growing in Love and Wisdom*, 66.

¹⁷ Meadow *et al.*, *Christian Insight Meditation*, 75-83.

¹⁸ Michael Washburn, “Transpersonal cognition in developmental perspective,” in *Transpersonal Knowing: Exploring the Horizon of Consciousness*, edited Tobin Hart, Peter L. Nelson, and Kaisa Puhakka (Nueva York: SUNY Press, 2000), 185-212; and Michael Washburn, *Transpersonal Psychology in Psychoanalytic Perspective* (Nueva York: SUNY Press, 1994).

¹⁹ Daniel Goleman, *The Meditative Mind: The Varieties of Meditative Experience* (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1988), 59.

Christopher Newport University, for example, writes: “these stages of concentration [i.e. of mystical union] unfold in the Catholic tradition in a sequence that is virtually identical to their unfolding in the schema described in the Visuddhimagga and the Yoga Sūtra.”²⁰

These citations should suffice to illustrate that much has been written on the close parallels between the levels of absorption described by Buddhaghosa and the mystical stages described by Christian mystics, albeit proposed on different grounds. Much also has been written to qualify or absolutely reject these parallelisms. One of the great experts in Teresian path of prayer, the French Jesuit priest Poulain, opposed attempts to compare the prayer of mystical union with God to non-Christian experiences.²¹ This is also the case for Zaehner, who refused to draw parallels between Christian mystical experiences and those of other religions, arguing that the doctrinal differences are too profound.²² Hollenback, from a constructivist perspective, also refuses to establish correspondences between the *jhānas* and Teresa’s mystical prayer and its degrees.²³

Undoubtedly, in many respects, the *jhānas* and the states of mystical prayer manifest similarities. We could list: sensory seclusion, diminution or suspension of mental faculties, contemplative absorption, the fact that they are experiences of stillness, bliss and peace, the presence of light, the stilling of the breath, and the extraordinary phenomena connected with them. These parallels could be considered “family resemblances” in the sense granted by Wittgenstein to this expression. Nonetheless, it is no less true that an insurmountable abyss separates the Christian experiences as described by the mystics, and how Buddhist authors explain experiences similar to the *jhānas* in other religions.

But, in spite of everything written, it is rather surprising that systematic and extensive comparative analyses of the *jhānas* and mystical prayer cannot be found in available literature. This lacuna should be filled by a comparative research based on the original sources, and on their sociohistorical, religious, cultural and linguistic contexts, which, as far as we know, is carried out here for the first time in a systematic way. Our objective here is not to establish whether an equivalence between both contemplative states can be justified (an equivalence we do not believe exists). The purpose is rather to present a coherent analysis of the two experiences and to identify the extent to which the parallels and differences are present and to what extent the observed affinities are substantial.

²⁰ Kenneth Rose, *Yoga, Meditation, and Mysticism: Contemplative Universals and Meditative Landmarks* (New York, N.Y.: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 128.

²¹ Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, 268-277, 591-608 and 612-620.

²² Robert Charles Zaehner, *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane* (Oxford: OUP, 1957).

²³ Hollenback, *Mysticism: experience, response, and empowerment*, 531.

5.11.2 The *jhānas*

The Pāli word *jhāna* (Skt. *dhyāna*²⁴), in the context of Buddhist meditation, denotes a specific state of consciousness that can be induced and experienced in Buddhist meditative practice and that can be described as profound “meditative absorption.”²⁵ “*Jhāna*” stems from the verb *jhāyati*, which in turn comes from the Sanskrit verbal root *dhī*, which means “to think about something” or “to meditate.” “*Jhāna*” has been translated in different ways: “trance” (Conze, 1953), “rapture,” “ecstasy” (T. W. Rhys Davis, 1922), translations that, as we discuss later, may cause confusion. The word “absorption”²⁶ is probably the most accurate translation, although it is still ambiguous. In the words of Buswell and Lopez, *jhāna* “refers to the attainment of single-pointed concentration, whereby the mind is withdrawn from external sensory input and completely absorbed in an ideational object of meditation.”²⁷ This type of absorption in a single point is progressively attained through stages and leads to the suspension of sensory and mental activity, accompanied by sensations of great peace and happiness, experiences of light, diminution or suspension of the breathing and body animation. Mastery of the *jhānas* also allows the development of a series of paranormal abilities. *Jhāna* is therefore no ordinary absorption and hence along with Gunaratana and other authors,²⁸ we leave *jhāna* untranslated due to its specific features and religious context. *Jhāna* is related to the word *samādhi*, of which it is, in many cases, synonymous. In a restricted sense, *jhāna* is the proximal cause of *samādhi*, the goal of *jhānic* practice. In an extended sense, “the *jhānas*” may refer to the whole process of *samatha* meditation.

“*Jhāna*” is a pre-Buddhist word. The Buddha learned the technique that leads to *jhāna* in the *śramaṇic* environment of his time and adopted the term, although giving it a new meaning. It also should be noted that the *jhānas* are states that can be generated by establishing the right conditions for their occurrence,²⁹ and they can occur spontaneously. The *jhānas* are discussed abundantly in the Canon.³⁰ In the *Visuddhimagga*, they are dealt with at length,³¹ mainly in its Chapter Four devoted to the earth *kaṣiṇa* (PP 4.119).

²⁴ The Sanskrit word *dhyāna* is the origin of the Chinese word *chan* and the Japanese word *zen* in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

²⁵ “*Jhāna*,” PED, 322.

²⁶ Paravahera Vajirañña, *Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice* (Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1975), 20; and Nyānātiloka, BD, 137.

²⁷ “*Jhāna*,” PDB, 960.

²⁸ Cf. Cousins, “Buddhist *Jhāna*,” Paul Griffith “Buddhist *Jhāna*: A form-critical study,” *Religion* 13 (1983): 55-68.

²⁹ It is generally recognized within Buddhism that the *jhānas* are not exclusively Buddhist, but experiences that may be present in other traditions. See Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), 199-200.

³⁰ Grzegorz Polak, *Reexamining *Jhāna*: Towards a Critical Reconstruction of Early Buddhist Soteriology* (UMCS University Press, Lublin, 2011), 25.

³¹ As Gethin states “Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga* provides what is the most detailed and comprehensive account of how to develop *jhāna* in ancient Buddhist literature” (Rupert Gethin, “The *jhānas* in the Buddhist path to liberation, the Theravāda perspective,” presentation given 30th July, 2017 in “1st. World Encounter Teresian Mysticism and Interreligious Dialogue Theravāda Buddhism and Teresian Mysticism.”).

As we will see in this section, there are different interpretations about the nature of the *jhānas* as well as important differences between how they are presented in the Pāli Canon and in the *Visuddhimagga*, in which they seem to be a more powerful experience.

Regarding the position of the *jhānas* in Buddhist soteriology, these experiences are not the last station on the path of liberation, since their attainment does not imply insight into the nature of reality or the cessation of suffering, the ultimate goals of Buddhism. Nor are they an end in themselves, but training for spiritual life. In this sense, the *jhānas* have a soteriological function—to concentrate, purify and tranquilize the mind—but, as Gunaratana says, they are “neither sufficient nor indispensable for reaching liberation.”³² Nonetheless, the *jhānas* are indeed a crucial aspect in the Buddhist meditation system and in the Buddha’s own experience as he experienced the first *jhāna* in his youth, and went through the fourth *jhānas* immediately preceding his awakening. The fruitful practice of the *jhānas* allows the attainment of a purified, stable, serene, ductile, adaptable, calm and focused mind, which is indispensable for the practice of *vipassanā*. But mastery of *jhānas* may only lead to liberation of the mind (*ceto-vimutti*), which is not final liberation, for that comes together with liberation through wisdom (*paññā-vimutti*).

In the path described by Buddhaghosa, the goals of *jhāna* praxis—unification of mind (*ekaggacitta*), mental purification (*citta-visuddhi*) and perfect calm (*samatha*)—are not attained all at once. They result from a sequence of progressively more refined states of absorption in which the attainment of each *jhāna* paves the way for the next (PP 4.140). The *jhānas* are reckoned as eight.³³ The eight *jhānas* are of the same nature (absorption) and, experientially, can occur sequentially. The first four are called “fine-material *jhānas*” (*rūpa-jhānas*). The last four are called “immaterial” or “formless *jhānas*” (*arūpa-jhānas*). Collectively, the eight *jhānas* are known as the eight attainments (*samāpattis*). However, the Buddhist tradition usually speaks of “the four *jhānas*,” as the four immaterial *jhānas* are understood as refinements of the four material *jhānas*. With practice, the four or eight *jhānas* can occur as a continuum. The first *jhāna* is accompanied by the five *jhāna* factors (*jhānaṅgas*), which are mental qualities already present in access concentration but not strong enough at that stage for *jhāna* to arise (*appanā-samādhi*).³⁴ Without these factors, there is no *jhāna* (PP 4.106). In each *jhāna* the *jhāyin* becomes familiar with that state until he masters it. Then, seeing its flaws, the *jhāyin* or *jhāyī* (the practitioner of *jhānic* meditation) abandons its grosser *jhānaṅgas* and begins to practice the next *jhāna*.

³² Henepola Gunaratana, “The *Jhānas* in Theravada Buddhist Meditation” (Kandy: BPS, *The Wheel*, 1988), 3.

³³ In the Canon there are several enumerations of the *jhānas*. For example, the *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta* (MN 26, 34-42).

³⁴ These five *jhāna* factors, in Nāṇamoli’s translation, which we adopt provisionally here, are: “applied thought” (*vitakka*), “sustained thought” (*vicāra*), “happiness” (*pīti*), “bliss” (*sukha*) and “one-pointedness of mind” (*cittassa ekaggatā*).

5.11.3 Mystical prayer and its degrees

The degrees of mystical prayer are supernatural states infused by God in the soul. These “infused” states are called “supernatural” and “passive” because they cannot be triggered naturally, nor actively acquired by sheer human effort. The mystical states of prayer are a subject matter of Spiritual Theology and can be defined as experiences of union without mediation between God and the soul. It should be pointed out that Teresa does not use the phrase “mystical prayer” in her works; she speaks of “contemplation.”³⁵

It is also relevant to point out, as Sancho Fermín does, that when we speak of mystical prayer and its degrees we refer to a didactic or prototypical model in which the soul reaches union with God through a series of stages that occur successively and linearly. But, in fact, as Sancho Fermín writes: “Teresa goes beyond this distinction. And while it makes a pedagogical presentation marking the characteristic of each level, the truth is that it presupposes a spiral ascent, where one stage precedes not necessarily always the other, but can intermingle, anticipate or overcome.”³⁶ It should also be emphasized, as Teresa does insistently and often in her works, that mystical prayer, as extraordinary phenomenon, is not the only way to achieve the union of love and will with God. There is also the more “sure way” of what Teresa calls “true union” (*union verdadera*) that consists of the perfect cultivation of the virtues and faithful fulfillment of the will of God.³⁷

Christian mystical prayer has its roots in the Bible,³⁸ where references to union of the soul with God abound, as the erotic symbolism of the *Song of Songs* well illustrates. Specifically, Teresa is the “Mystical Doctor” par excellence. She wrote about mystical prayer as few Christian mystics have done, in terms of abundance of experiences, detailed descriptions and analytical depth. In *Castillo*, the “mystical mansions” cover from the prayer of infused recollection in Third Mansions to the fullness of mystical life in the Seventh Mansions.³⁹ The Carmelite devotes much of *Castillo* to the mystical mansions, which comprise two-thirds of the work. This is because Teresa is most interested here in

³⁵ “Mística Teología,” DSTJ, 429-48.

³⁶ Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín, “La oración ‘mística’ y sus grados a la luz del Castillo Interior de Teresa de Jesús,” in “1st. World Encounter Teresian Mysticism and Interreligious Dialogue,” presentation 30th July, 2017.

³⁷ Ibid. “True union” (*union verdadera*) is described in Section Three of Chapter Five of *Castillo interior* (Fifth Mansions).

³⁸ Rómulo Cuartas Londoño (coord.), *La Biblia. Libro de Contemplación* (Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2010).

³⁹ As Álvarez noted, the mystical mansions match specific periods in Teresa’s life: passive recollection (1553-1554), prayer of quiet (1554-1555), prayer of union (1560-62), spiritual betrothal (1562-1572), and spiritual matrimony (1572-1582). See Álvarez, *Santa Teresa de Jesús contemplativa*, 11. See also Álvarez, “Mística Teología,” DSTJ, 429-48. They include the unitive experiences Teresa categorizes as “*mística teología*” (V 10,1); Groot writes: “Teresa uses the term mystical theology to refer to all the states of infused contemplation, the prayer of quiet, the prayer of union, and rapture” Jean de Groot, “Teresa of Avila and the Meaning of Mystical Theology,” in *Hispanic Philosophy in the Age of Discovery*, ed. Kevin White (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 145.

describing the experiences she had lived since writing *Vida* (fourteen years earlier).⁴⁰

Teresa affirms that these mystical or unitive states are “supernatural” (*sobrenaturales*) (V 14.5), but their supernatural condition is not the only aspect that defines them. She explains that mystical states are experiences of God and can only be granted by Him. Even if someone died of yearning for them, it would be useless, because only God can bestow them (R 5). Teresa says that she can testify to the divine origin of these elevated states not only by how they are felt in the soul, but by the effects they leave on it.

The Teresian degrees of mystical prayer, for most Teresian scholars, consist of the prayer of passive recollection⁴¹ (*oración de recogimiento pasivo*) of the Third Mansions; the prayer of quiet (*oración de quietud*) of the Fourth Mansions, which bridges the ascetical and mystical mansions and coincides with the *via iluminativa*; and three stages of union with God, namely, the prayer of union (*oración de unión*) of the Fifth Mansions; the spiritual betrothal (*desposorio espiritual*) or “ecstatic union” of the Sixth Mansions; and the spiritual marriage (*matrimonio espiritual*), or “transforming union” of the Seventh Mansions.⁴² These three stages of union constitute the *via unitiva*. It is important to bear in mind that the difference between these states of prayer is not of nature but of degree. Teresa describes the mystical degrees as levels of closeness and love with God and the soul. There is a progression in intensity and duration between these mystical states,⁴³ and also important differences between them. The prayer of passive recollection is very brief in which there is withdrawal of the senses but no suspension of the faculties. In the prayer of quiet the suspension is only of the will. In Fifth Mansions the soul experiences the first proper “union:” the prayer of union, of which the soul had a first fleeting glimpse in the prayer of quiet. By “union” Teresa means here not only “union of the soul with God,” but also “union,” or “suspension,” of the soul’s faculties (i.e., understanding, will, memory). In contradistinction to the prayer of passive recollection and the prayer of quiet, in union there are no interruptions during absorption. The prayer union is followed by the ecstasies of the Sixth Mansions. Unlike the prayer of union of the Fifth Mansions, where the unions are temporary and sporadic, ecstatic unions they are more intense, prolonged, and frequent. In the spiritual marriage of the Seventh Mansions, the soul is continually united with God and ecstasies and supernormal phenomena cease for the most part.

⁴⁰ Also, in contributing to a greater understanding of this stage of spiritual life (V 17,5). In Teresa’s time there was little literature and much confusion about mystical prayer, and the Inquisition viewed it with reluctance and distrust.

⁴¹ For Arintero mystical prayer includes the prayer of passive recollection. Cf. J. González Arintero, *Cuestiones Místicas* (Madrid, BAC, 1956), 59. Some scholars do not consider the prayer of passive recollection as a form of mystical prayer.

⁴² This nomenclature is not unanimous. There are numerous designations for the degrees of union as we will see later on.

⁴³ “The Lord comes to take this tiny bird from one degree to another” (V 18,9). In the prayer of quiet there is the briefest suspension (*suspensioncilla*) of the faculties. In the prayer of union, the suspension is over quickly (*pasa presto*) (R 5,6). In the sixth mansions, the suspensions are more intense and deeper. In the seventh mansions union is permanent.

5.11.4 Comparison of the *jhānas* and mystical prayer and its degrees

5.11.4.1 Introduction

As indicated in opening remarks to this section, the phenomenological similarities, or “family resemblances,” between the *jhānas* and the states of mystical prayer described by Teresa have not escaped the attention of numerous authors. These parallels, however, have limits: there are essential differences in the nature of these two states.

The existence of relative agreement between the *jhānas* and mystical prayer fits well with Buddhism, which does not rule out that the *jhānas* can occur in traditions other than Buddhism,⁴⁴ allowing for their attainment in theistic traditions.⁴⁵ It also connects with the Buddhist understanding that the *jhānas* may occur naturally, even spontaneously. These widespread ideas would explain the similarities from a Buddhist perspective.⁴⁶ Furthermore, as has been observed, in Hinduism and Jainism there is a phenomenology similar to the *jhānas*.⁴⁷ From a Christian perspective, however, the correspondences between *jhānas* and mystical prayer and their degrees are more difficult to explain. Certainly, both are usually preceded by similar segments of spiritual life (cultivation of virtue, asceticism, reflective meditation, etc.), are states that may occur during meditation or contemplation, where a deep absorption is a common denominator, among other affinities already mentioned. But, the nature of the Christian experience, as described by the Christian mystics, quashes further similarities within the experiences themselves.

In the present chapter, we trust that a comprehensive and systematic comparative analysis will reveal the actual extent of these parallels, but also significant departures. In undertaking this analysis, we shall look primarily at the main features of these two phenomena as presented in the selected literature—in the *Visuddhimagga* and *Castillo*—but also in other works on the *jhānas* and mysticism. But before we attempt such a direct comparison, we will begin with a terminological analysis of the main concepts involved, as a philological approach may help us in clearing the ground for a proper comparison.

⁴⁴ As Gethin points out: “the *dhyānas* can thus even be seen as in a sense not characteristically ‘Buddhist’, since they can be attained in the absence of the liberating insight which brings direct knowledge of nirvana” (Gethin 1998, 199-200). In fact, “*jhāna*” is a pre-Buddhist term and it is said in the canon that laymen can experience the *jhānas* (SN 4.301).

⁴⁵ Polak, *Reexamining the Jhānas*, 20. In fact, Siddhārtha Gautama learned the *jhānas* in the context of the *Śramaṇic* culture of his time and, after attaining Buddhahood, adopted the term, but gave it a new interpretation.

⁴⁶ Although, in this understanding, other traditions misinterpret the experience, “[there is a] Buddhist tradition of seeing the highest understanding of other religions as based on misinterpreted *dhyānas* experiences” (Gethin 1998, 199-200).

⁴⁷ There are studies that compare *jhānas* and states of *samādhi* in the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali, with interesting results: S. N. Tandon, *A Re-Appraisal of Patanjali's Yoga-Sutras in the Light of the Buddha's Teachings* (Igatpuri, Maharashtra: Vipassanā Research Institute, 1995); Koichi Yamashita, *Patanjala Yoga Philosophy with Reference to Buddhism* (Calcuta: Firma KLM Ltd., 1994).

5.11.4.2 Terminology and conceptual analysis

5.11.4.2.1 Translations of “*jhāna*”

As noted in Section 5.11.1, the early translations into English and other Western languages of Pāli *jhānic* terms such as *pīti*, *sukha*, *samāpatti*, *samādhi* and *pharaṇatā*⁴⁸ were based on the lexicon of Christian mystical theology and mystical experience adapted to a Buddhist environment, in the absence of a more appropriate or theologically neutral vocabulary.⁴⁹ The borrowing of English words such as “ecstasy,” “rapture,” and “trance” to render *jhāna*, already suggests phenomenological affinities between the *jhānas* and Christian mystical prayer. However, there is a clear need to differentiate between these Christian terms and *jhāna*, which we shall attempt in the present section.

The word “ecstasy” is often used to convey the meaning of *jhāna*.⁵⁰ Poulain, an expert in mystical theology, defines ecstasy as “a state which, while it lasts includes two elements one, interior and invisible, when the mind rivets its attention on a religious subject; the other, corporeal and visible, when the activity of the senses is suspended, so that not only are external sensations incapable of influencing the soul, but considerable difficulty is experienced in awakening such sensations.”⁵¹ Teresa’s use of the word ecstasy (*estasi*, in her spelling) refers to the union in spiritual betrothal of 6M (*desposorio espiritual*) (V 20,1), the stage preceding the final stage of mystical life (spiritual matrimony). It does not thus refer to all forms of mystical union. As we shall see, a diminished sensory awareness and an expanded interior consciousness are elements common to the *jhānas* and ecstasy, as well as feelings of happiness and spiritual joy. But, in Christianity, “ecstasy” connotes a divine origin, and a surge of emotion,⁵² that does not match the notion of *jhāna*, which is not considered a supernatural occurrence infused by God, but a natural phenomenon triggered by deep concentration on the object of meditation. Ecstasy also denotes a very distinct feeling, arising after the experience, of having been in God’s presence,⁵³ as well as an intense religious fervor not predicated by the *jhānas*. Consequently, “ecstasy” does not suitably convey the meaning of *jhāna*.

⁴⁸ T. W. Rhys Davids left the word *jhāna* untranslated but defined rendered “*pharaṇatā*” as a “state of being pervaded with joy, joyous rapture, ecstasy” (“Pharaṇatā,” PED, 529).

⁴⁹ Johannes Bronkhorst, *Absorption. Human Nature and Buddhist Liberation* (Paris: UniversityMedia, 2012), 202. Heiler wrote: “it is not rarely that we are met, in the description of the different prayer steps, with the same or similar terms and concepts, as those we learnt about in the canonical *Jhāna* formulation” (Heiler 1922, 51).

⁵⁰ Nanayakkara writes: “Very often writers use the term ‘ecstasy’ to render into English the sense connoted by such Pāli terms as *jhāna* and *samāpatti*” (“Ecstasy,” EB, 10). Karunaratne defines *jhāna* as a “state of ecstasy reached in meditation” (“Jhāna,” EB, 55).

⁵¹ Poulain, “Ecstasy,” CE, 277.

⁵² James H. Austin, *Zen and the Brain: Toward an Understanding of Meditation and Consciousness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1998), 26.

⁵³ Álvarez writes: “Ecstasy is primarily an immersion of man in the divine mystery” (“Éxtasis,” DSTJ, 289).

Another word often employed for translating *jhāna* is “rapture,” although this term is often reserved to translate *pīti*. Teresa occasionally speaks of *rabto* (rapture), a term she understands as synonymous with or a modality of ecstasy.⁵⁴ “Rapture” conveys a sense of being seized and carried off forcefully. In the Christian context, “rapture” is “a mystical phenomenon in which the soul is borne out of itself and exalted to a knowledge of divine things.”⁵⁵ This sense of being seized out of oneself by God is consistent with the etymology of “ecstasy,” from the Greek *ékstasis* [*ex* (out) and *histanai* (to place)], which means “standing outside oneself.”⁵⁶ In rapture one cannot say whether or not he is in the body.⁵⁷ Teresa typically uses “*raptō*” to refer to some experiences in the Sixth Mansions. Although during *jhāna* there is an alienation of the senses, there is no sense of being seized by God or be outside oneself. Besides, as with ecstasy, Gunaratana comments that rapture “might suggest a degree of elation and exuberance inappropriate to the higher *jhānas*.”⁵⁸ Therefore, “rapture” is not an adequate translation for “*jhāna*” either.

Jhāna has also been translated as “trance.”⁵⁹ Although in a religious context trance may mean “a state of profound abstraction or absorption accompanied by exaltation,” this word also evokes the idea of a state of unconsciousness, lethargy, catalepsy or hypnotic state, that has nothing to do with *jhāna* nor with mystical union. We agree then with Khantipalo when he says: “some authors have translated *jhāna* with ‘trance’ but this is very misleading as the experience of these two is quite distinct.”⁶⁰ Gunaratana also discards the translation “trance” as “misleading, as it may suggest a sub-normal state, quite the opposite to *jhāna*.”⁶¹ To be in *jhāna* state is certainly not to be “entranced.” The term “absorption,” frequently used for *jhāna*, seems more appropriate. However, a disadvantage is that it does not suggest the sense of “altered state of consciousness.”⁶²

If all these translations seem in one way or another inadequate, the use of the word *jhāna* should be promoted without translation, as some authors do, including Cousins.⁶³ Nonetheless, the adoption of these English terms do indeed suggest that the *jhānas* and Christian mystical union share an intersection of cross-cultural commonalities, despite important variances. These will be further elucidated as we proceed with the comparison.

⁵⁴ 6M 4, title. See also V.20,23 and V.21,8.

⁵⁵ The archetypal rapture is of Paul who was “raptured to the third heaven” (2 Cor. 12,2.4).

⁵⁶ “Ecstasy,” *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford: OUP, 1966).

⁵⁷ Teresa, evoking St. Paul, says, “whether all this takes place in the body or not, I wouldn’t know” (6M 5,8). Cf. V 38,17.

⁵⁸ Henepola Gunaratana, *The Path of Serenity and Insight: An Explanation of the Buddhist Jhānas* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1985), 3.

⁵⁹ For example, see “Jhāna,” in *Chillers Dictionary of the Pāli Language* (BPS, 1952), 169.

⁶⁰ Khantipalo, *Calm and Insight*, 51.

⁶¹ Gunaratana, *The Path of Serenity and Insight*, 3.

⁶² Paul J. Griffiths, “Indian Buddhist Meditation,” in *Buddhist Spirituality: Indian, Southeast Asia, Tibetan, and Early Chinese*, ed. T. Yoshinori *et al.*, Vol. 8 (New York: Crossroads, 1997), 38.

⁶³ Cousins, “Buddhist Jhāna,” 116.

4.2.2 The *jhānas* and “mysticism”

Another conceptual issue that deserves attention—especially when comparing Christian mysticism with a non-theistic religion like Buddhism—is the tendency to relate *jhāna* to “mysticism.”⁶⁴ “Buddhist mysticism” is a label occasionally used by Buddhist and non-Buddhist authors alike.⁶⁵ As Ling notes, “mysticism” serves here to draw attention to certain similarities in religious experience in both Western and Eastern religions.”⁶⁶ Although these similarities surely exist, the use of “mysticism” in the context of Buddhism has been criticized from various angles.⁶⁷ Is it desirable to speak of “Buddhist mysticism”? Is it really justified to refer to *jhāna* as a “mystical experience,” as some authors do?⁶⁸ Before answering these questions we will analyze the meanings of “mysticism” in order to see if they are really applicable to Buddhism in general and, in particular, to *jhānas*.

“Mysticism” is an ambiguous and certainly problematic word. In Christianity, “mystical” refers primarily to the union of the soul with God and supernatural experiences closely connected with mystical union (e.g. ecstatic visions, preternatural events).⁶⁹ For Teresa, “*mística teología*”⁷⁰ denotes experiential knowledge of the presence of God in the soul (V 10,1),⁷¹ and is synonymous with divine union and related phenomena now commonly known as “mysticism.” In this sense, “Buddhist mysticism” is an oxymoron since the goal of Buddhism is insight into the nature of reality and not union with God or a “higher self.”⁷² Hence, “mysticism” applied in a Buddhist context, would imply points in common as to the nature of *jhāna* and mystical union, which are not confirmed by scriptural evidence. Therefore, the *jhānas* should not be categorized as “mystical” experiences in this sense.

“Mysticism” is also understood, mainly among perennialists, as the “core experience at the heart of all religions,” an experience that James characterized by four essential

⁶⁴ On Buddhism as “mystical” see Ilkka Pyysiäinen, *Beyond language and reason, Mysticism in Indian Buddhism* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1993); Roger R. Jackson, “How mystical is Buddhism?” *Asian Philosophy* (1996): 147-53.

⁶⁵ For example: Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki, *Mysticism, Christian and Buddhist* (New York, Harper, 1957); and D. B. Gray, “The Mystical Dimensions of Buddhism,” in *Teaching Mysticism*, ed. William B. Parsons (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 68.

⁶⁶ Trevor Ling, “Buddhist Mysticism” in *Religious Studies*, April 1966, 163-75.

⁶⁷ Some of these criticisms are stated in this section. See Tilakaratne, “Mysticism,” EB, 75-6; and Stepan Lisy, “Preliminary remarks for the comparative study of mysticism: Mysticism is What Unio mystica is.” *Communio Viatorum* (2012): 88-107.

⁶⁸ Bucknell, *Buddhist meditation and the study of mystical experience*, 3.

⁶⁹ For valuable studies on the evolution of the concept of mysticism see Louis Bouyer, “Mysticism, An Essay on the History of the Word,” in *Understanding Mysticism*, ed. Richard Woods (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981), 42-45; and Michel de Certeau, *La Fable Mystique, vol. 1, XVIe-XVIIe Siècle* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1982).

⁷⁰ Teresa did not use “mystical” in her works, and only wrote four times the expression “*mística teología*” (V 10,1; V 11,5; V 12,5; and V 18,2) which, for her, as S. Ros García los explains, means “the mystical experience itself, the knowledge gained from the lived union with God and of His operations on her” (“Teología Mística,” DSTJ, 429).

⁷¹ St. Thomas Aquinas defined mysticism as “experiential knowledge of God” (*cognitio Dei experimentalis*).

⁷² This can be extended to the notions of “ultimate reality” or “absolute.” Here the position taken by W. Stace and others (e.g. J. Pérez-Reimon, A. K. Coomaraswamy), arguing that the Buddha did not deny the existence of a “Universal Self,” has been criticized by Y. Karunadasa—in his book *Early Buddhist Teachings: The Middle Position in Theory and Practice* (Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong, 2013), 41-45—among other Buddhist scholars.

characteristics, namely: ineffability, noetic quality, transiency and passivity.⁷³ With this connotation, “mysticism” appears at times in literature on Buddhism.⁷⁴ Contrary to applying this term in the context of Theravāda, Gombrich categorically holds that “there is nothing in that tradition or culture corresponding to James’ idea of the mystical.”⁷⁵ Is Gombrich right? First, we must bear in mind that, when writing on mysticism, James had a theistic framework in mind that is not applicable to Buddhism.⁷⁶ Secondly, the *jhānas* are not the core experience at the heart of Buddhism. Next, we analyze comparatively the four features cited above that James attributed to mystical experience (i.e, ineffability, noetic quality, transience, and passivity) to discern how they relate to the *jhānas*.

As it is known, James conceptualized mystical experience as ineffable.⁷⁷ It has often been said that ineffability is a distinctive feature of Teresa’s states of mystical union.⁷⁸ At the beginning of the Chapter on the Fourth Mansions, Teresa states that, from these mansions onwards, the experiences that are given therein are unutterable, and asks God’s help to say something about them.⁷⁹ Ecstasy, in particular, is unspeakable. As with all her unitive experiences, Teresa doubts how to describe it (6M 3,2). She gives reasons for this ineffability: Words cannot convey the experience to those who have not lived it (4M 1,1),⁸⁰ thus these experiences remain unintelligible for those persons;⁸¹ the understanding cannot not provide “traces” of what happens in these states (4M 1,1); language is inadequate for this purpose and analogies cannot be used because the things of the world are too ‘low’ for a valid comparison (5M 1,1). However, at the same time, Teresa describes her unitive experiences profusely and in great detail.⁸² Therefore, if we understand the term ineffability as indescribability, Teresa’s unitive experiences are not ineffable. How to solve this apparent contradiction? We believe that Teresa is saying something more specific here: the subjective experience, the *qualia* of these states cannot be communicated to those who have not had lived the experience for themselves.

Can we speak of ineffability in relation to the *jhānas*? For most Buddhist authors,

⁷³ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience, A Study in Human Nature* (Longmans, Green & Co, 1902), 367.

⁷⁴ Mahinda Deegalle, “The Theravāda Monk as a Buddhist Mystic, Mystical Attainments of a Twentieth-Century Sri Lankan Monk,” in *Mysticisms East and West, Studies in Mystical Experience*, ed. C. Patridge *et al.* (New York Continuum, 2003), 34–43; and D. B. Gray, “The Mystical Dimensions of Buddhism” in *Teaching Mysticism* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 68.

⁷⁵ Richard F. Gombrich, “Religious Experience in Early Buddhism?” (Eighth BASR Lecture, University of Leeds, 1997).

⁷⁶ This can be seen throughout James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. The same opinion in Jonathan Bricklin, *The Illusion of Will, Self, and Time William James’s Reluctant Guide to Enlightenment* (New York, SUNY Press, 2015).

⁷⁷ On ineffability and mysticism see Ben-Ami Scharfstein, *Ineffability, the failure of words in philosophy and religion* (Albany, SUNY Press, 1993); and Guy Bennett-Hunter, *Ineffability and Religious Experience* (Oxford, Routledge, 2014), 15–22.

⁷⁸ Cf. R. V. Young, “Ineffable Speech, Carmelite Mysticism and Metaphysical Poetry” In *Communio* 17, 2 (1990): 238-60; and Hans Akerberg, “The Unio Mystica of Teresa of Avila” in *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis*, 11, (1982): 275-306.

⁷⁹ 4M 1,1. See also 5M 1,1; 6M 3,2 and 6M 8,9.

⁸⁰ 1M 6,6 and 6M 8,9.

⁸¹ 4M 1,1 and 1M 6,6.

⁸² For example, in 6M 3,3, 6M 5,7 and 6M 6,10.

nothing is inexpressible or mysterious about the *jhānas*; they are fully accessible, utterly comprehensible, and can be perfectly described with words.⁸³ For other Buddhist authors, such as Ajahn Brahm⁸⁴ and Bhikkhu Khāntipālo,⁸⁵ *jhānic* experience is indescribable.⁸⁶ Undoubtedly in Theravāda literature descriptions of *jhāna* abound but, since the *jhānas* are characterized by the absence of sensory experience and mental activity, and the higher *jhānas* are empty of content, language cannot describe their *qualia* with words.⁸⁷

As Smart points out, the “purification of consciousness” that occurs in a state of deep absorption is closely related to ineffability: “if the normal flow of inner experience is replaced by a ‘blank’ state, then that state is not ordinarily describable.”⁸⁸ As these states are other than ordinary consciousness and beyond words, the experiences of the *jhānas* and of mystical unions can only be fully known by those who have experienced them. The analogies with waking consciousness do not adequately express the otherness of what, in both cases, is described as something that surpasses the things of the world.⁸⁹ We must conclude that the *jhānas* and the states of mystical union are *not* ineffable experiences. What they both share is the impossibility of adequately describing the subjective experience of these states to those who have not had a similar experience.⁹⁰

Related to ineffability, James categorized mystical states as having a noetic quality, that is, “mystical experiences reveal an otherwise hidden or inaccessible knowledge” that James describes as “insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect.”⁹¹ If both deep *jhāna* and ecstatic union are “empty of a differentiated mental content,” as we shall see later, it may seem paradoxical to consider them as sources of knowledge. What knowledge do they provide? For James, the noetic quality of mystical experience has nothing to do with a “knowledge-about” (conceptual, discriminative) but with “knowledge-by-acquaintance” (intuitive, immediate),⁹² or by-participation that is acquired by having experienced the object and cannot be imparted to those who have not had it.

⁸³ For Tilakaratne in Theravāda “ineffability does not seem to have been an issue or a problem” (“Mysticism,” EB, 77).

⁸⁴ Ajahn Brahm writes: “With all *jhānas*, the experiences are next to impossible to describe. The higher the *jhāna* [...] the more difficult it becomes to describe. These states and their language are remote from the world” (Brahm 2006, 162).

⁸⁵ Ineffability of *jhāna* is implied in this statement by Khāntipālo: “The *jhāna*-experience is so different from the usual states of wholesome and unwholesome ‘minds’ that a meditator with a theistic background could easily identify the bliss, rapture, and sense of oneness with God, or as his true Self or Soul” (Khāntipālo 2003, 56).

⁸⁶ In particular, it is said that *jhānas* without form (*arūpa-jhānas*) are beyond words.

⁸⁷ All subjective experience is in a sense ineffable. However, contrary to ordinary experience (e.g. of the color blue), the *jhānas* and the states of mystic prayer are inexpressible in ordinary language as this is an inadequate tool to describe an experience that is beyond words and foreign to conceptualization and distinctions.

⁸⁸ Smart, “The Purification of Consciousness and the Negative Path,” 118.

⁸⁹ It must be stressed that the ineffability of *jhānic* experience should not be understood as denoting a supernatural state.

⁹⁰ Teresa’s reasons for ineffability (described above) are related to the impossibility of describing the experience.

⁹¹ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 295.

⁹² Barnard states: “Knowledge-by-acquaintance is inarticulate, it is a pre-verbal, un-mediated knowledge of the simple ‘thatness’ of something. Knowledge-about, on the other hand, is connected with the ‘whatness’ of something” William Barnard, *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* (New York: SUNY, 1997), 112.

Can it be said that both the *jhāna* and unitive Christian experiences provide such “knowledge-by-acquaintance” of the contemplative object? It is clear that, as per Teresa’s and other mystics’ descriptions, mystical experience provides knowledge of God.⁹³ There are doubts about whether the *jhānas* confer participatory knowledge of the object. On the noetic quality of the *jhānas*, Anālayo says, “Another example of the distinct character of the *jhānic* experience is the kind of cognition operating during the first *jhāna*, which DN I 182 calls a “subtle but real” cognition (*sukhumasaccasaññā*). This expression indicates the attenuated form of cognition that takes place during absorption, different from the way in which the ordinary world is cognized.”⁹⁴ This indicates that there is some kind of knowledge that is retained after the *jhānic* experience. Thus, both *jhāna* and union confer noetic quality of the object. In both cases, this knowledge is an insight of great significance for the experiencer. However, this significance differs in both traditions.⁹⁵

William James also spoke of transiency as one of the four basic characteristics of the mystical experience, attributing a time of “half an hour, or at most an hour or two.”⁹⁶ It is likely that James was not familiar with the *jhānas*, which are transitory states but not in the ephemeral sense that James attributes to the term. Any *jhāna* can be mastered and sustained for a long period of time.⁹⁷ Since the question of duration will be discussed further when comparing the experiences of *jhāna* and union, we will not go into it here.

Lastly, regarding the question of passivity in relation to *jhānas* and mystical union, none of the experiences of Buddhism, including the *jhānas*, can be called “passive” in the Christian sense, that is to say that they cannot be described as being infused by God. Buddhist purification is gradual and deliberate. The *Dhammapada* reads: “Purity and impurity belong to oneself: no one can purify another” (*Dhp.* 166). Concluding then, we can point out that, if we compare James’ four characteristics of the mystical experience with the *jhānas*, we do not find exact correspondences for all of them, specially passivity. Therefore, also in James’ sense, the term “mysticism” cannot be applied to the *jhānas*.

“Mysticism” has a connotation of “mysterious,” “concealed” and “enigmatic” and, as McGinn explains, the term was once used in the sense of “something hidden.”⁹⁸ In

⁹³ Describing ecstasy Teresa says that while in it the faculties are dead to the world one mysteriously discovers that one “was never so awake to the things of God nor did it have deep enlightenment and knowledge of His Majesty” (6M 4,4).

⁹⁴ Anālayo, *Satipaṭṭhāna*, 77, note 47.

⁹⁵ The mystical union is transformative at the vital level; it cannot be forgotten (see Akerberg, “The Unio Mystica of Teresa of Avila”), which does not to happen in the same degree with the *jhānas*.

⁹⁶ “William James regarded transience as one of the four marks of the mystic state, but allowed only for “half an hour, or at most an hour or two” (“Ecstasy,” ER, 2681).

⁹⁷ Any *jhāna* can be monitored and mastered in duration and intensity.

⁹⁸ Bernard McGinn, “Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” ER, 6336.

Theravāda nothing is “mystical” in this sense since nothing is secret or hidden in this Buddhist tradition.⁹⁹ Mysticism has also the connotation of “supernatural,”¹⁰⁰ and in fact Teresa characterizes mystical prayer with this same qualifier. Although Theravāda has “supernormal” aspects to it, and extraordinary experiences abound, the *jhānas* occur when the proper causes and conditions concur, and are not “supernatural.”¹⁰¹ “Mysticism” has likewise been associated with the transcendental. To speak of *jhāna* as “mystical” in this latter sense is unjustified since the *jhānas* do not reveal a transcendental reality.¹⁰²

Finally, as mentioned above, “‘mysticism’ is sometimes used ‘to draw attention to certain similarities between religious experience in Eastern and Western religions.’”¹⁰³ There are indeed common features between the *jhānas* and the mystical states of union. “Mysticism,” in this last sense, could certainly be used to refer to the *jhānas*. Nonetheless, the theistic connotations of the word make this use inadvisable in the Buddhist context.¹⁰⁴

In light of these reflections, we believe that “mysticism” is part of the lexicon of Christian lore, and applying it to Buddhism is problematic, as its referent does not match the Buddhist experience. “Buddhist mysticism” is a ill-conceived notion inviting confusion. The *jhānas* may indeed be considered religious experiences,¹⁰⁵ as they are soteriological, but not mystical ones. It is better to leave the terms “mystic” and “mystical experience,” as heuristic tools for theistic religions, and avoid their use in non-theistic contexts.¹⁰⁶ Their theological connotations are alien to Buddhism. As Gombrich puts it, “Neither Pāli nor Sinhala contains any word for ‘mystical’ or ‘mysticism’ or anything remotely like it.”¹⁰⁷

We conclude then by saying that there is indeed a shared phenomenology between the *jhānas* and Christian states of mystical prayer,¹⁰⁸ that justifies talking about “family resemblances” and explains the use of the “mystical” for the *jhāna*, although referring to the *jhānas* as “Buddhist mystical states,” as sometimes appears in the literature,¹⁰⁹ presupposes a uniformity with mystical prayer not found in descriptions of Pāli literature.

⁹⁹ In the Theravāda scriptures, the Buddha often says that nothing is concealed or hidden in his teachings.

¹⁰⁰ Poulain writes: “We apply the word mystic to those supernatural acts or states which our own industry is powerless to produce, even in a low degree, even momentarily” (Poulain 1921, 1).

¹⁰¹ Even a seemingly otherworldly state like the “attainment of cessation” (*nirodha-samāpatti*) is “natural” in this sense.

¹⁰² Spencer writes: “The four trances may, indeed, lead to a higher plane of being, but their characteristic quality is subjective” Sidney Spencer, *Mysticism in World Religion* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1971), 76.

¹⁰³ Ling, “Buddhist Mysticism.”

¹⁰⁴ In modern times, “mysticism” is used rather loosely, almost synonymously with “spiritual” and “religious.” We consider this meaning as too general and vague to be useful for our discussion.

¹⁰⁵ Gombrich, “Religious Experience in Early Buddhism?”

¹⁰⁶ Gimello, “Mysticism and meditation,” 173.

¹⁰⁷ Gombrich, *Religious Experience in Early Buddhism?*, 4.

¹⁰⁸ Gray, “The Mystical Dimensions of Buddhism,” 69.

¹⁰⁹ To put an example, Barendregt speaks of “The Buddhist mystical states are called *jhānas*” Henk Barendregt, “Mindfulness meditation, deconditioning and changing view,” in *Neuroscience, Consciousness and Spirituality*, ed. Harald Walach, Stefan Schmidt y Wayne B. Jonas (Springer, 2011), 199.

5.11.4.2.3 Mystical union and the *jhānas*

Cousins wrote about the parallels between the *jhānas* and Teresa's prayer of union.¹¹⁰ It is interesting to compare Buddhaghosa's notion of *jhāna* with Teresa's notion of union, where, the starting point would be a conceptual analysis. Within the category of mystical prayer, mystical union must be differentiated. Mystical union (*unio mystica*) has been defined as "contact with the divine presence."¹¹¹ As McGinn notes, the Christian mystics have used diverse "linguistic strategies" to refer to this divine contact and, among them, mystical "union" is a metaphor with a long history in the Christian tradition.¹¹² The image of "union" is implicit in the biblical allegory of the marriage of God (the bridegroom) with the soul (the bride) in a nuptial symbolism that permeates the *Song of Songs*. This bridal symbolism is key to Teresa's description of the mystical mansions, in which all states are of the same nature (union with God) experienced in ascending degrees of intensity.¹¹³ If the initial contacts of God with the soul in the Fourth Mansions are brief encounters (*vistas*), the union of the Fifth Mansions gives way to the spiritual betrothal of the Sixth Mansions and culminates in the Spiritual Matrimony of the Seventh Mansions.

In relation to the nature of mystical union, some of Teresa's statements may seem pantheistic.¹¹⁴ However, as Laksi states, "Catholic theologians may explain that any seemingly pantheistic statement by an accepted Catholic mystic as not really meaning what it seems to mean."¹¹⁵ Although it may appear sometimes that Teresa's symbolism points to "mystical identity,"¹¹⁶—as when she speaks of union as two separate things becoming one,¹¹⁷ as a fusion of identical substances (7M 2,4)—her unitive language should not be construed as denoting pantheism or monism but panentheism ("all-in-God").¹¹⁸ In Christianity, God transcends the world, thus pantheism is not an accurate account of mystical union, which is a union between two persons; a relationship famously characterized by Buber as I-Thou.¹¹⁹ Teresa's unitive experiences are interpersonal, dialogic, a loving relationship between God and the soul that brings her to the intimate imagery of spiritual matrimony. They can be appropriately described as unions of man's

¹¹⁰ Cousins, "The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification," 111.

¹¹¹ McGinn, "Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam," 6334.

¹¹² Ibid 6336. What has been called "Unitive mysticism" permeates the Christian tradition. It is found in St. Paul's letters." (1 Cor. 6:17), Origen (d. 254 CE), Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153), among many others.

¹¹³ Cf. "Union, in fact, is nothing more than a very great intensification of the prayer of stillness" (Gabriel de Santa María Magdalena: *El Camino de la Oración*, 238). Poulain includes the prayer of quiet as one of four degrees of prayer of union together with semi-ecstatic union (5M) and ecstatic union (6M) saying that fundamentally is one and the same grace, distinguishing them from transforming union. See Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, 53.

¹¹⁴ Walter Terence Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (New York, Macmillan, 1960).

¹¹⁵ Marghanita Laski, *Ecstasy: A Study of Some Secular and Religious Experiences* (London: Cresset Press, 1961), 123.

¹¹⁶ McGinn, "Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam," 6338.

¹¹⁷ Teresa writes: "what union is we already know since it means that two separate things become one" (V 18,3).

¹¹⁸ Panentheism, from the Greek *pan*, all + *teos*, God, is the view that "the world is in God, but God is not the world."

¹¹⁹ Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Scribner's, 1958), 123-24.

will with the will of God, or union by participation in God.¹²⁰

In comparing Teresa's notion of divine union with Buddhaghosa's definition of *jhāna*, there is an insurmountable disagreement in the nature of the two religious experiences: Buddhaghosa does not describe *jhāna* as union. It is true that the Sanskrit word *samādhi* in the context of Hinduism and yogic philosophy means "placing together," and implies the "merging of subject and object, the essential characteristic of the mystical state of unification to which it refers."¹²¹ However, this understanding of *samādhi* is not found in the Buddhist tradition, where *samādhi* means mental concentration or meditative absorption. The notion of divine union as the communion of the soul with God, expressed so eloquently by Teresa in her nuptial symbolism, is utterly alien to Buddhism. This is, above all, because Buddhism consistently denies the notion of an eternal Creator God.

Furthermore, the human person (*puggala*) in Buddhism, in contrast with Christianity, is not a substantial entity but a conglomeration of the five aggregates (*pañca-khandha*) and, therefore, there can be no "union" between the human person and anything else, since, to begin with, there is neither a human "I," nor a god with whom the person can unite.¹²² For this reason, any attempt to equate the *jhānas* with mystical union in terms of nature is unacceptable and surely predestined to fail. It is precisely when considering the *jhānas* and mystical union in this light that both notions appear informed by paradigms that are irreducibly opposing. This irreconcilable nature is probably the most unbridgeable gap between both religious experiences.

But the fact that the *jhānas* and mystical union are irreconcilable in nature, does not mean that comparing other aspects is meaningless in answering our research question. Cousins states that *jhānas* and mystical union are both "ecstatic trances" that involve the suppression of sensory experience and all ordinary mental activities. We can add that both states are described as entailing great happiness, spiritual bliss, calm and peace, full of light and during which, in their deeper states, there is a total immobility of the body and suspension of breathing, among other shared characteristics as we will see later.¹²³ In the rest of this section, we explore these shared features in the form of a comparative examination of the essential characteristics and effects of the two states. But, let us first delve a bit deeper into the nature of the *jhānas* and the Christian states of mystical prayer.

¹²⁰ Richard H. Jones, *Philosophy of Mysticism: Raids on the Ineffable* (New York: SUNY Press, 2016), 195.

¹²¹ Georg Feuerstein, "Samadhi," ER, 8006.

¹²² Jones, *Philosophy of Mysticism*, 197.

¹²³ Cousins, "The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification," 111.

5.11.4.3 The nature of *jhāna* and mystical prayer

This section focuses on differences in nature between the *jhānas* and mystical prayer. But first note that the *jhānas*, as shown by their numerical order, “are not four separate discrete states”—as Shankman states— “[but] each is a marker along a continuum.”¹²⁴ They constitute stages in a progressive process of increasing absorption, calm and serenity in which the factors that become coarser are gradually abandoned. As per Teresa’s states of mystical union, they are also not disconnected from each other either. They are degrees of the same experience that vary in intensity, duration and effects.

The essential nature of the *jhānas* and the states of mystical prayer are not equivalent. While the *jhānas* are defined as experiences of unification of mind and deep calm, the degrees of mystic prayer are described as states of the union with God. “*Unio mystica*” is known as a “direct and immediate transformative contact with the divine presence.”¹²⁵ Teresa speaks of union as an experience (*morada*) of God: “His Majesty Himself, as He does in this prayer of union, becomes the dwelling place we build for ourselves” (5M 1,5). Our Spanish Carmelite saint knows that her unitive experiences are from God because, although the soul “neither sees, hears, nor understands” anything during them (5M 1,9), God places Himself in the soul during these experiences in such a way that, afterward, it is certain He has been in it.¹²⁶ Teresa also realizes that she has been experiencing God by the feeling of love, and other beneficial effects that union leaves in the soul.¹²⁷

As for the *jhānas*, they have a precisely-described phenomenology, which does not include any reference to God, as the notion of God (in the Christian sense) is precluded from the beginning, since Buddhism is not a theistic faith. Nor are the *jhānas* related to gods (as understood in Buddhism), which of course do not have any place in Christianity and *a fortiori* in Christian mysticism. In addition, the Buddhist tradition repeatedly and expressly warns that *jhānas* should not be confused with experiences of divine union.¹²⁸ In this sense and closely related to the erroneous notion of “Buddhist mysticism,” a mistaken equivalence between *jhānas* and union with God or a higher being has been proposed.¹²⁹ Indeed, without a proper understanding of Buddhist teachings, the *jhānas*,

¹²⁴ Shankman, *The Art and Skill of Buddhist Meditation*, 104.

¹²⁵ McGinn, “Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” 6334.

¹²⁶ Teresa writes: “For during the time of this union [one] neither sees, nor hears, nor understands, because the union is always short and seems to the soul even much shorter than it probably is. God so places Himself in interior of that soul that, when it returns to itself it can in no way doubt that God was in it” (5M 1,9). Teresa also says that those that are uncertain if they were in God and God in them “I would not say that it was ‘union of all the soul with God’” (5M 1,9).

¹²⁷ Hollenback states that each mystical experience “either conveyed to the individual who experienced it an acute sensation that God stood beside him as a loving companion or else it deepened the individual’s love of God” (Hollenback 1996, 528). Teresa writes that during mystical union, God impresses upon the soul by His true wisdom (5M 1,9).

¹²⁸ Brahm, *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond*, 158.

¹²⁹ The *jhānas*, especially the *arūpa-jhānas*, can easily be misinterpreted as experiences of union with a deity.

particularly the *arūpa-jhānas*, could be misinterpreted as experiences of communion with a deity.¹³⁰ It is true, as Anālayo says, that the *jhānas* may feel otherworldly,¹³¹ but they are never described as experiences of union but of purity, unification and peace.¹³² Consequently, in their reported nature, the two experiences could be more different. Teresa's mystical prayer is, above all, an experience of God, whereas the *jhānas* are experiences of deep absorption on the meditative object and unification of the mind.¹³³

Another essential difference that sets the *jhānas* and mystical prayer apart is the reported cause or origin of these experiences. It may seem a truism to say that the *jhānas* are the result of sheer individual effort, while mystical prayer is infused by God. The *jhānas* take place by the concurrence of the right conditions for their occurrence. These includes, the removal of the Five Hindrances,¹³⁴ and deepening of concentration on the meditative object, while excluding everything else from the field of consciousness. The meditator alone takes on the attempt as no outer power intervenes in its realization. Consequently, *jhānas* are attainments (*jhāna-samāpattis*), meditative absorptions naturally caused by the meditator's effort that, with his growing skill, he must master.¹³⁵ Teresa, on the other hand, knows that her mystical experiences are not only experiences of God, but come from Him and through Him. They are "favors" (*favores*) or "gifts" (*dones*) granted by God to the soul for its purification and elevation. Teresa insists that these unitive states are supernatural and infused by God. There is nothing the soul can do to induce them,¹³⁶ though much can do to receive them by being well disposed to them.

It remains now to analyze how *jhāna* and mystical prayer actually occur in practice. Causation by self-effort versus God's grace is an unbridgeable gap between the *jhānas* and union.¹³⁷ As J. Hollenback states:

[Teresa's] persistent emphasis on the essential incapacity of the human being to generate beneficial mystical experiences sharply differentiates her from both the followers of Patanjali's system of Yoga and the Buddhists that not only assume that all such phenomena originate from deep within the human mind but also take it for granted that one can bring them about without any divine assistance.¹³⁸

¹³⁰ Khantipalo writes: "The *jhāna*-experience is so different from the usual states of wholesome and unwholesome 'minds' that a meditator with a theistic background could easily identify the bliss, rapture, and sense of oneness with God, or as his true Self or Soul. [...] A Buddhist is careful not to do this" (Khantipalo 2003, 56).

¹³¹ Anālayo, *Satipaṭṭhāna*, 77.

¹³² Indeed, "recollection of the gods" is one of the *kammaṭṭhānas* but, as Gombrich states, in terms of the development of concentration it is not considered a significant attainment. See Gombrich, *Religious Experience in Early Buddhism?*, 18.

¹³³ Tilakaratne, *Nirvana and Ineffability*, 62.

¹³⁴ The Five Hindrances (*pañca nīvarāṇas*) are, namely: (1) sensory desire (*kāmacchanda*); (2) ill-will or heated (*vyapada*); (3) sloth-and-torpor (*thīna-middha*); (4) restlessness-and-worry (*uddhacca-kukkucca*); (5) and doubt (*vicikiccha*).

¹³⁵ We saw that, in Snyder's words, "*jhāna* appears only when the conditions for it are ripe [...] you cannot force the awareness into full absorption or make it happen. You must be vigilant while relaxing into the process—balancing proactive and receptive effort" (Snyder 2011, 71).

¹³⁶ Since the Augustine-Pelagius controversy and the Council of Carthage, denying the need for divine aid is heretical.

¹³⁷ Teresa explains that any attempt to induce mystical experiences (e.g. holding breathing, not thinking) will fail.

¹³⁸ Hollenback, *Mysticism: Experience, Response, and Empower*, 528.

Or, as Khantipalo put it from a Buddhist perspective:

Buddha has shown how factors give rise to other factors through repeated practice, and the culmination of this process, here *jhāna*, is the natural result of this. *Jhāna* in Buddhism is never looked on as 'a gift' or as 'supernatural, it just happens to those who patiently cultivate. And though it is so different from ordinary five-door consciousness which does not operate at all in *jhāna*, it is not something from outside oneself [...] As it is a conditionally produced dhamma, however, it cannot be forced to occur. All the other factors [...] which make for it must be present— among them, purity of virtue and effort are the most important.¹³⁹

Both the *jhānas* and mystical prayer can occur suddenly. However, they are usually preceded by meditation or contemplation.¹⁴⁰ When comparing the unfolding of the *jhānas* and mystical prayer in the terms of “active” and “passive,” lose they clear contours. This is particularly when we study *vis-à-vis* the attitude of the meditator or the person praying in practices declared by both traditions as facilitators or predisposing to these states. In both cases, these states do not occur by acts of the will. The *jhānas* are not enabled but impeded by an assertive will. It is an attitude of disposition that facilitates their occurrence. As Ledoux explains: “when one attempts more closely to the sophisticated understanding each tradition has of its own doctrine, it is far more common ground between these two traditions on this question [grace versus effort] than may at first appear.”¹⁴¹

Continuing with the nature of *jhāna* and mystical prayer, we cannot lose sight of the systemic character and the contextuality of these states without an inevitable loss of their meaning. Both states are mutually exclusive in belonging to distinct religious systems that cannot be reduced into each other’s vocabularies, practices or paradigms. Both are integral elements of intricate wholes, interconnected and interacting with other components of their systems, and can only be understood in their systemic contexts.

The *jhānas* and mystical union are significant experiences in their own traditions. But, none of them is liberating by itself, as they are solely means to achieving the purpose of their respective systems. Both traditions caution against confusing these states with final liberation or salvation. The *jhānas* are certainly memorable¹⁴² and crucial events in the transformation of the mind. However, they do not constitute the experiential core of Buddhism¹⁴³—which is liberation from suffering¹⁴⁴—but are a means to attaining it.¹⁴⁵ If

¹³⁹ Khantipalo, 2003, 53-4.

¹⁴⁰ The *jhāna* are preceded by preliminaries of *samatha* meditation and access concentration. For Teresa, the prayer of recollection is the best way to dispose to infused contemplation.

¹⁴¹ Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 93.

¹⁴² The Buddha entered *jhāna* spontaneously in his youth while sitting under a rose-apple tree watching his father ploughing croplands, and he remembered clearly the experience after his near-death ascetic struggle of six years.

¹⁴³ The formless were climactic experiences in the *śramaṇic* systems of the Buddha’s teachers who understood them as absorption into Brahman. Buddha considered these attainments wrongly conceptualized and insufficient for liberation.

¹⁴⁴ T. W. Rhys Davids: “The *jhānas* are only a means, not the end. To imagine that experiencing them was equivalent to Arahantship (and was therefore the end aimed at) is condemned as a deadly heresy” (“*Jhāna*,” PED, 322).

¹⁴⁵ Brasington clarifies that “the *jhānas* themselves are not awakening, but they are a skillful means for concentrating the mind in a way that leads in that direction” Leigh Brasington, *Right Concentration: A Practical Guide to the Jhanas* (Boston & London: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2015), 158-159. The *jhānas* lead to a mind ductile and able to for *vipassanā*. A

we are speaking of Christianity, some people assume that mystical union (and mysticism in general) is the heart of this religion. It is hard to exaggerate the importance of mystical union for the mystic.¹⁴⁶ Unitive experiences totally transform the person and impact his life.¹⁴⁷ But Teresa did not consider that mystical union to be the essence of her faith,¹⁴⁸ which in reality is to have one's will so totally united to that of God that in no way can anything separate them, rather than the mystical experiences themselves. Both the *jhānas* and mystical union lead the person who experiences them beyond ordinary consciousness, and they have a cathartic function when it comes to purifying the person, but neither of them constitutes the nucleus of their respective religious systems.

Another crucial issue is whether the *jhānas* and mystical union are indispensable in the economy of liberation or salvation within the context of their systems. The role of *jhāna* in Buddhist soteriology is a controversial subject in Buddhist academicism. This scholarly controversy has scriptural bases, and is related to the relation between *samatha* and *vipassanā*. Summarizing, in Buddhaghosa's account of the path to *nibbāna* purification of the mind is always necessary as preparation for *vipassanā* meditation, while *jhānic* training is not required if the mind has been purified in previous lives.¹⁴⁹ If we focus on Teresa, and as Martin del Blanco puts it, the phenomena of mysticism "are not necessary for sainthood nor are they constitutive elements of Christian perfection."¹⁵⁰ Mystical unions are favors granted by God as passive purification to perfect the virtues¹⁵¹ but, as Teresa often says, they are not essential to the Christian way of salvation.

To conclude this point, we agree with Cousins when he writes that the *jhānas* and Teresa's prayer of union coincide in being "in a slightly ambiguous position in relation to the larger path: the prayer of union is really only a kind of shortcut and not the direct route which is the union of the will with that of God's will, while the *jhānas* are sometimes portrayed as a side-track to the more direct development of insight."¹⁵² Certainly, "shortcut" and "side-track" do not bring to mind the idea of indispensability.

sutta reads: "Bhikkhus, just as the river Ganges slants, slopes, and inclines towards the east, so too a bhikkhu who develops and cultivates the four jhānas slants, slopes, and inclines towards Nibbana" (SN 53.1).

¹⁴⁶ Teresa, for example, calls divine union "the greatest earthly good possessable" (V 18,3).

¹⁴⁷ Teresa had her first union at an early age, although she didn't know what it was and remembered it all her life.

¹⁴⁸ Teresa warns not to confound ecstatic union with salvation. Even those who are not "in grace" may have unitive experiences (R 29,1). The true goal of the Christian life is union of the will with God's will.

¹⁴⁹ The analysis of the true nature of reality cannot be done by a distracted and restless mind. One-pointedness and calm are essential requisites that must be attained for the acquisition of *paññā*. This is the goal of *samādhi* (purification of mind), which can be subsumed by the Noble Eightfold Path and corresponds to Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. However, they are what is needed to attain an undistracted, ductile and calm mind. The *jhānas* contribute the goal of samadhi, but the *jhānas* are not indispensable when this kind of mind already exists (for instance when *jhānas* have been mastered in previous lives). Therefore, *paññā*, or even arahantship, can be attained without practicing *jhāna*.

¹⁵⁰ Martin del Blanco calls these experiences "epiphenomena" of the spiritual life Mauricio Martin del Blanco, "Los fenómenos extraordinarios en la mística de Santa Teresa de Jesús," *Teresianum* 33 (1982), 366.

¹⁵¹ Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 402-03.

¹⁵² Cousins, "The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification," 111.

5.11.4.4 Comparison of the essential features of the *jhānas* and mystical prayer

In this section, we will focus our attention on essential characteristics common to the four *jhānas* and the states of mystical prayer with the purpose of examining if their phenomenology justifies the use of similar expressions when defining both states.¹⁵³ Methodologically, we will in parallel consider the aspects in which these states differ.

Having already discussed, in Section 5.11.4.2.3, the four essential features of mystical experience mentioned by James (i.e., ineffability, noetic quality, transitivity and passivity) it will not be necessary to repeat them here. In the following sections, we will compare and contrast the features of specific *jhānas* with particular degrees of the Teresian mystical prayer.

5.11.4.4.1 Altered states of consciousness

The *jhānas* and mystical prayer are described in modern psychological literature as “altered states of consciousness.” They are states removed from ordinary consciousness. Referring to the *jhānas* Shankman writes: “*jhāna* is dramatically different from the ordinary daily consciousness in which most of us spend our lives.”¹⁵⁴ Some scholars of Buddhism specifically speak of the *jhānas* as “altered states of consciousness.” Brasington writes: “the *jhānas* are eight progressive altered states of consciousness.”¹⁵⁵ Focusing now on Teresa, she mentions how different the states of infused contemplation are from the ordinary waking state.¹⁵⁶ Nor is it strange that scholars of Christianity refer to the states of mystical union with the expression “altered states of consciousness. McLean, for example, refers to Teresa’s mystical states as states of “altered consciousness.”¹⁵⁷ Therefore, without judging whether the psychological notion of “altered state of consciousness” is an entirely appropriate appellation for both the *jhānas* and mystical prayer and its degrees, we conclude that both states are, indeed, other (*alter*) than the state of waking awareness.

¹⁵³ Apart from W. James, several authors have put together compilations of essential characteristics of mystical union and mystical experience which will be used here as references in the comparison of the *jhānas* with the mystical states prayer. They include: Arthur J. Deikman, “Deautomatization and the Mystic Experience,” in *Psychiatry*, Vol. 29 (1966): 324-38; Frederick C. Happold, *Mysticism: A Study and an Anthology* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970), 45-50; Walter T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 43-79; Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism. A Study in the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness* (London, Methuen, 1967), 70-94; Louis Dupré: “Mysticism,” in ER, 245-261; J. H. Austin, *Zen and the Brain: Toward an Understanding of Meditation and Consciousness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998), 19-30; Robert M Gimello: “Mysticism and Meditation,” 170-99; and Juan Martín Velasco, *El fenómeno místico: estudio comparado* (Madrid, Editorial Trotta, 1999), 160, and 319-56.

¹⁵⁴ Shankman, *The Art and Skill of Buddhist Meditation*, 103; King typifies the *jhānas* as “those meditative states most radically separated from ordinary consciousness by their deep inward abstraction from outer stimuli” (King 1980, 41).

¹⁵⁵ Brasington, *Right Concentration*, xi; Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism*, 152; Bucknell, *The Meditative Way*, 204.

¹⁵⁶ Thus, substantially, throughout the first section of the chapter on the Fifth Mansions.

¹⁵⁷ McLean, *Towards Mystical Union*, 49.

5.11.4.4.2 States of absorption

Both the *jhānas* and the mystical unions can be described—and indeed usually are—as states of “absorption.” Needless to say, the word “absorption” here is a metaphor. To absorb is to suck or swallow something completely.¹ In the figurative sense that we often find in religious contexts, the word “absorption” denotes “occupation of the mind with the contemplative object.” “Religious absorption” can then be defined then as a state in which the person’s attention is completely fixed, stably and without distraction on the object of contemplation for religious purposes, with the exclusion from awareness of any other phenomena. In this sense, both the *jhānas* and the states of mystical union are, indeed, states of absorption since, in both cases, the person’s attention is absorbed in the object, in a firm and stable manner, for a period of time, to the exclusion of everything else.

As mentioned previously, the word *jhāna* is usually translated as “meditative absorption,”² “absorption concentration,”³ “full absorption” or simply as “absorption.” The expression *appanā-samādhi* (“absorption concentration” or “full concentration”⁴) similarly denotes a state of complete absorption. During *jhāna*, the counterpart image (*paṭibhāganimitta*) occupies the totality of the meditator’s consciousness, which remains fixed on it.

Mystical union is an infused state—i.e., induced by divine power—in which the soul is fully absorbed in the contemplation of God. Teresa uses the qualifier “absorbed” (*absorto*) several times in her writings to refer to the faculties of the soul during contemplation. For example, when she writes: “after the time is past in which the soul is in union (for when it is in union the faculties are totally absorbed [*absortas*]...)” (V 40,7), or when she asks: “if the faculties are so absorbed [*absortas*] that we can say they are dead, and likewise the senses, how can a soul know that it understands this secret?” (6M 4,4).⁵ Teresa similarly uses synonyms of “absorption” common in her time, such as *embebecimiento*,⁶ or *embelesamiento* when describing the state of mystical union.⁷ Teresian experts and other Christian scholars also normally describe mystical union as a state of “absorption,”⁸ (in the contemplation of God), and the term is quite commonly used in religious studies.⁹

¹ Etymologically, “absorption” comes from the Latin *absorptionem*. Nominative *absortio*. *Absorbere* means “to swallow up” [*ab-*+ *sorbere*: to suck in, to swallow up something].

² Nyanatiloka, for example, translates *jhāna* as “absorption” or “meditative absorption” (*Jhāna*, BD, 83).

³ Gunaratana, *Beyond Mindfulness in Plain English*, 13.

⁴ *Appanā* from *appeti*, “to fix” (“Appeti,” PED, 58).

⁵ Teresa writes: “When His Majesty desires the intellect to stop, He occupies it in another way and gives it a light so far above what we can attain that it remains absorbed (*absorto*)” (4M 3,6). Cf. C 31,3; 6M 4,4; R 5,5; V 25,4; and 4M 3,6.

⁶ “*Embebecimiento*” means to be totally immersed or absorbed in something (e.g. a task or an image). Teresa speaks of “some absorptions (*embebecimientos*) however delightful they may be, that have been given the name ‘union’” (F 5,13).

⁷ *Diccionario Covarrubias* (1611), the closest dictionary of the Spanish language to Teresa’s times, defines “*embelesar*” as to remain without senses or movement; and “*embelesado*” as to be stunned or dumbfounded.

⁸ See Garrigou-Lagrange, *Three Ages of the Interior Life*, Vol 1, 873; and Arintero, *La evolución mística*, 443.

⁹ Throughout his study, Arbman refers to mystical union as a “state of absorption.” See Arbman, *Ecstasy*, Vol. 2, 8.

5.11.4.4.3 The *jhānas* and mystical union as states of great moral purity

The *jhānas* and mystical union share what is described as being states of great purity. The attainment of complete absorption (*appanā-samādhi*)—and access concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*) before it—is conditioned by the total seclusion from consciousness, although temporary, of the Five Hindrances which are unwholesome states that hinder concentration. During *jhāna*, these defilements are temporarily removed through concentration and subside (PP 4,31).¹⁰ As Teresa starts to describe the Fifth Mansions, she says that from these mansions onwards, they are states of great perfection and the entrance into them requires absolute disposition of the soul, because God “does not give himself wholly until He sees that we are giving ourselves wholly to Him” (5M 1,3).¹¹ Nonetheless, Teresa insists that God can grant these favors even when undeserved.

Interestingly, in both cases it is said that these are states “the Devil” cannot enter. As Anālayo says, according to the Pāli Canon “already the first absorption ‘blindfolds’ Māra, since on entering this state one goes beyond the range of Māra’s vision (M I 159).”¹² Teresa also states: “if the prayer is truly that of union with God the Devil cannot even enter or do any damage. His Majesty is so joined and united with the essence of the soul that the devil will not dare approach, nor will he even know about this secret” (5M 1,5).

5.11.4.4.4 The withdrawal of the external senses

Both in *jhāna* and mystic union, the withdrawal of the senses from external things and their internalization towards the “object” are the reverse (negative) aspects of absorption. In both states, the senses are oriented inward and absorbed in contemplation, until, in deep states, they cease to function and there is a complete absence of sensory stimuli.

In Pāli literature, *kāma* denotes both “sense-objects” and the desire for such objects.¹³ The phrase “quite secluded from sense desires” (*vivicc’eva kāmehi*), as it appears in the pericope of the first *jhāna* (PP 4.79), refers to the isolation of the person’s attention from both the objects of the senses and the desire for such objects during *jhāna*. Buddhaghosa says that, while the meditator is in *jhāna* there is no sensory awareness,¹⁴

¹⁰ “*Jhāna* (from a root meaning ‘burning-up’— of defilements)” (Khantipalo, *Calm and Insight*, 51).

¹¹ Teresa states that even among the nuns of the *Convento de San José de Ávila* few have what is required to receive these elated states (5M 1,3). Arbman explains how, according to Saint Augustine, ecstatic absorption “had reduced all its normal operations and activities to silence and in which there are neither any lusts to be checked or any adversities to overcome nor any unrighteousness to be punished nor any evil thing to avoid and where the senses no longer meditate any impressions from the body and the outer world” (Arbman, *Ecstasy*, Vol. 2, 136).

¹² Anālayo, *Satipaṭṭhāna*, 77, note 47.

¹³ “*Kāma*” Nyānātiloka, BD, 87-8; “*Kama*,” PED, 203-6; and “*Kāma*,” EB, 102-4. See Section 5.12.4.2.3.

¹⁴ The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN 16) reads that while the Buddha was fully conscious and awake in deep meditation,

because “consciousness at that time does not occur by way of the five doors” (PP 10.17). The states of mystical union are likewise characterized by the alienation of the senses. Such alienation starts with the prayer of passive recollection and gradually deepens. In ecstatic absorption, the ability of the senses is fully suspended.¹⁵ Teresa writes that while in ecstasy, God “removes the soul from its senses” (*la saca de los sentidos*) (6M 4,2).

Interestingly, as we will see in the next subsection, Theravāda and Teresa use analogous images to describe this withdrawal. The image of a tortoise pulling its limbs into its shell,¹⁶ as a metaphor for guarding the senses from Māra, is usual in the *suttas*.¹⁷ Although Buddhaghosa does not illustrate withdrawal with this simile, we agree with Cousins when he says that, “his [Buddhaghosa’s] description of *jhāna* do[es] imply such a withdrawal.”¹⁸ In describing the prayer of passive recollection, Teresa employs both the simile of a turtle drawing its limbs into the shell and that of a hedgehog curling up.¹⁹

Buddhaghosa declares that during *jhāna* the physical senses do not arise (PP 10.17), an opinion stated in most *suttas*.²⁰ However, according to some *suttas*, it is still possible to hear sounds while in *jhāna* when this state has not been sufficiently purified. Anālayo, notes that in Vin III 109, some monks accuse Moggallāna of falsehood because he claimed that while in the deep *jhāna* he had heard sounds. The Buddha, however, explains that it is possible to hear sounds, even in deep *jhāna*, if the attainment is impure (*aparissuddho*).²¹ In deeper states, however, the *jhāyin* is not able to sense anything.

Teresa’s description shows a gradation. The inhibition of the senses increases in intensity and duration according to the depth of the mystical union. In the prayer of quiet, the senses can still register outer sensory stimuli, even though with great difficulty (4M 2). In the absorption of the union of the Fifth Mansions, the inhibition of the senses occurs at the peak phase of the experience. In ecstatic absorption, the sensory faculties are inhibited to a point of almost ceasing to be active during the whole experience.²²

he “neither saw nor heard the great rainfall and floods and the thunder and lightning” (Walshe 2005, 259).

¹⁵ Arbman writes: “the ecstatic absorption leads to a complete cessation of all sensory functions” (Arbman, 1968, 159).

¹⁶ As Griffith explains, “The tortoise’s limbs usually represent the practitioner’s senses (including the mind, the organ of thought): their proper place, the image suggests, is within, turned away from the potential disturbances and disruptions of contact with sensory objects external to the practitioner.” (Paul Griffith, “Indian Buddhist Meditation,” in *Buddhist Spirituality: Indian, Southeast Asia, Tibetan, and Early Chinese*, ed. T. Yoshinori *et al.*, New York: Crossroads, 1997, 38).

¹⁷ The *Kumma Sutta* (“The Discourse of The Tortoise”) reads, “When you dwell with the doors to your senses well-guarded, Māra, not getting any opportunity, will lose interest and leave, just as the jackal did with the tortoise. Like a tortoise with its limbs withdrawn in its shell, so the monk, the thoughts of the heart. Not dependent, harming no others, totally unbound, he would berate no one” (SN 35.199). Cf. The *Kummōpama Sutta* (SN 35.204).

¹⁸ Cousins, “The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification,” 110.

¹⁹ 4M 3,3. Francisco de Osuna uses similar similes in his *Third Spiritual Alphabet* (TAE, Book Sixteen, Ch. 2).

²⁰ Ver Ajahn Brahm *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond*, 25

²¹ Anālayo, *Satipatthāna*, 77.

²² Arbman writes: “[n]ot even in the still more advanced form of suggestive absorption she [Teresa] calls ecstasy may this paralysis of the activity of the senses be said to be absolute, as long as the state in question has not attained its full depth” (Arbman, 1968, Vol. 2, 157).

5.11.4.4.5 Reduction or suspension of ordinary mental activities

Apart from reducing or suspending sensitivity to impressions and external stimuli, as Cousins observes, both the *jhānas* and Teresa's prayer of mystical union "are ecstatic trances involving [...] the suppression of many of the ordinary mental activities."²³ Heiler notes that in both 3JH and union there is a "reduction and binding of normal mental life."²⁴ Indeed, a reverse (negative) aspect of absorption (apart from the sensory withdrawal) is the total or partial inhibition of the person's conceptual, reflexive, recollective, intellectual and volitional capabilities. As both the states of *jhānas* and of mystical prayer deepen, these non-sensory capacities are gradually absorbed until they fully cease to function.

Referring to the *jhānas*, Griffiths states that the "concentrative techniques are aimed at the progressive reduction of the contents of consciousness."²⁵ Similarly, Cousins explains that "when Buddhaghosa declares that in *jhāna* absorption it is possible for the mind to remain for long periods with the semblance *nimitta* as its object, this is equivalent to saying that there is no articulated thought, no sense perception, no remembering the past and no awareness in the ordinary sense."²⁶ If while in *jhāna*, all mental activity is quieted or stopped, in Teresa's works, *unión* is often used as abbreviation for "union of all the powers of the soul with God" (*unión de todas las potencias del alma con Dios*), a well-known mystical phenomenon that Catholic theologians refer to as "ligature"²⁷ (when the inhibition of the faculties is weak) or "suspension"²⁸ (when the inhibition is strong).²⁹ In *Relaciones*, Teresa describes such union of the powers of the soul with God.³⁰

Commenting on the inhibition of the faculties in the states of ecstatic union described by Teresa, and with words that resemble those used by Cousins in the quote above, Arberman writes: "the ecstatic trance manifests itself in a systematic inhibition of all the normal expressions or functions of the mind successively increasing in strength with the depth of absorption, and finally, where it has reached its culmination, resulting in their complete suppression, i.e. in a total extinction of the entire waking life of the mind."³¹

²³ Cousins, "The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification," 111.

²⁴ Heiler, *Die Buddhistische Versenkung*, 53.

²⁵ Griffiths, "Buddhist Jhāna," 55-68.

²⁶ Cousins, "The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification," 111.

²⁷ "Ligature" derives from the Latin *ligatus* (to tie or bind). A. Poulain states: "The word *ligature* indicates that the soul is in the condition of a man whose limbs are *bound* [...] and who can only therefore move with difficulty" (Poulain 1921, 151).

²⁸ "'Suspension' is not here suppression but that the faculties no longer apply to their ordinary object" (Poulain 1921, 151).

²⁹ "Ligature," or "suspension, of the faculties during divine union, is a phenomenon reported by many Christian mystics (e.g., St. Catherine of Siena). See Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, Chapter 15; and Arberman, *Ecstasy*, Vol 2, 1-3.

³⁰ Teresa declares: "When there is union of all the faculties [...] none of them is able to function. The intellect is as though in awe; the will loves more than it understands, but it doesn't understand in a describable way whether it loves or what it does; there is no memory at all, in my opinion, nor thought; nor even during that time are the senses awake" (R 59).

³¹ Arberman, *Ecstasy*, Vol. 2, 157.

In both states, the inhibition of mental activity occurs gradually, in increasing degrees of completeness, intensity and duration. The deeper the *jhāna*, or the state of union, the more restricted or silenced are the ordinary workings of the mind. It is said that there is no place for thought in “any *jhāna*,”³² but, as we will see when discussing the first *jhāna*, some thinking activity (*vitakka* and *vicāra*) occurs during this meditative experience, although we cannot speak of “reflection” in a strict sense.³³ As *jhāna* becomes deeper the activity of the mind is further reduced until, at the deepest point of absorption, all mental activity comes to a halt.³⁴ Also in Teresa, the suspension of powers of the soul is not uniform throughout all the degrees, but progressively increases. While in the prayer of quiet there is still some thinking activity, in the intense union of the Fifth Mansions and during ecstasy, as Merkur puts it, “sustained reasoning or discursive reflection form no part of the experiential moment.”³⁵ If in the prayer of quiet the will is “tied,” or “united,” while memory and understanding are free (because the absorption is not strong enough), this is not the case in union where the activity of both faculties is suppressed. In summary, in union “the faculties are unable to occupy themselves with anything other than God.”³⁶ In Teresa’s terminology, in the prayer of quiet the memory and understanding are “free” (*libres*), “sedate” (*sosegadas*), “dormant” (*adormecidas*), whereas during the prayer of union they are “united” (*unidas*), “suspended” (*suspensas*), “tied” (*ligadas*), “bound” (*atadas*), “lost” (*perdidas*), “asleep” (*dormidas*), “dead to the world” (*muertas al mundo*). In unitive states the person remains as if unconscious (*sin sentido*), unable to speak, incapable of understanding or remembering what is happening (V 18,6; V 18,14; 5M 1,4). To conclude, in view of the intrinsic phenomenology of these two contemplative states, we agree with Cousins in that, also with respect to reduction or suspension of mental activity “it is quite clear that there is much similarity between that type of consciousness [*jhāna*] and St. Teresa’s Prayer of Union.”³⁷ Rose likewise identifies this similarity with respect to mental activity.³⁸ The main difference is that in mystical union, the ligature or suspension is generated by God’s gravitational influence on the soul, while the *jhānas* unfold by the confluence of the necessary and adequate conditions for their occurrence.

³² Brahm, *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond*, 25.

³³ Anālayo, *Satipaṭṭhāna*, 77.

³⁴ King explains how “*jhāna* [...] signifies a state of trance in which all sensory input, aside from the subject of meditation, is totally excluded from awareness. At the higher *jhānic* levels the meditator is also incapable of speech or movement, and in the highest possible, attention is said to be without ordinary consciousness and to reach the trance of cessation” Winston L. King, “Theravāda in Southeast Asia,” in *Buddhist spirituality: Indian, Southeast Asian, Tibetan, and early Chinese*, ed. Takeuchi Yoshinori, Jan Van Bragt, James W. Heisig, Joseph O’Leary and Paul L. Swanson (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1995), 88; Polak also states that by the time the *jhāyin* experiences the base of neither perception-nor-non-perception (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*) “the activity of perception has been reduced to such a subtle level, that one cannot anymore say whether one is still percipient or not” (Polak 2011, 51).

³⁵ Dan Merkur, *Mystical Moments and Unitive Thinking* (Nueva York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 13.

³⁶ See V 18,13 and 5M 1,4.

³⁷ Cousins, “The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification,” 111.

³⁸ Rose writes: “As defined by Poulain [...] the “ligature of the faculties,” [...] arises suddenly as a novel experience after a period of actively cultivated recollection (*recueillement actif*), a practice that can be assimilated to *dhāraṇā* in the *Yoga Sūtra* and the sequence of *parikamma-nimitta* and *uggaha-nimitta* in the *Visuddhimagga*” (Rose 2016, 129-30).

5.11.4.4.6 Three additional essential characteristics

Shankman identifies three additional features essential to all the *jhānas*: “for anyone in *jhāna* the mind is utterly undistracted and incapable of wandering even for a moment, it is extraordinarily lucid and clear, and the meditation proceeds entirely on its own, with no sense that you are doing anything to sustain it. Whenever these three aspects are present, regardless of the experiences accompanying them, *jhāna* has been reached.”³⁹ Are these attributes distinctive properties of mystical union? Let’s analyze them in turn.

On the sustained undistractedness or unification of mind during *jhāna*, Shankman asserts that one of the qualities of the *jhānas* is “sustained, unbroken mindfulness.”⁴⁰ Khāntipālo says that during the *jhānas* “[the mind] does not wander. It has one subject continually.”⁴¹ Teresa, writing about the steadiness or unbrokenness of the attention during mystical union, says that only God can make the mind stop wandering when He unites with it (4M 3,4-6). In both cases, this non-distractibility of the mind is imperfect at first but deepens over time. At the beginning of the *jhānas* practice the mind is easily distracted but, as *jhāna* deepens, all instability disappears.⁴² During the prayer of quiet, the mind still wanders, but it stops when God puts it in simple union or in ecstasy (V 17,6).

The second quality stated by Shankman is “heightened clarity and mental lucidity.” Although the activity of the senses and the mind is diminished or completely suspended both in deep *jhāna* and mystical union, in neither case does this mean unconsciousness. Quite the contrary, our two authors agree in describing these states as an enhanced awareness and heightened mental clarity compared to normal states of consciousness. *Jhāna* is not a state of trance,⁴³ but of “enhanced vitality and efficacy of the mind, for it is *samādhi* which is attained through *jhāna* that enables one to intuit the truth which leads to the realization of freedom.”⁴⁴ Cousins says that during any *jhāna* “the mind remains [...] alert, lucid and qualitatively superior to ordinary consciousness.”⁴⁵ He adds that “stripped of the technical terminology [...] this is to say that the state of *jhāna* is not merely

³⁹ Shankman, *The Art and Skill of Buddhist Meditation*, 108.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Khāntipālo, *Calm and Insight*, 51.

⁴² Shankman writes: “Once you are in *jhāna* all of that movement is gone. The mind cannot wander or even have an impulse to wander at all as long as you are in that meditative state” (Shankman 2015, 108).

⁴³ We refer here to trance as “a state of partly suspended animation or of inability to function; a daze; a stupor” or “a sleeplike state such as that of deep hypnosis” (“Trance,” *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, Springfield: Merriam-Webster 1973).

⁴⁴ “Jhāna,” EB, 50-55.

⁴⁵ Cousins adds: “for Buddhists this is the consciousness of the Brahma gods” (Cousins 1995, 111). On this heightened clarity, Shankman writes: “Heightened Clarity: The second quality universal to everyone in *jhāna* is increased clarity of mind. [...] Once you have entered *jhāna*, that clarity of awareness is heightened to a whole new level that was previously inaccessible. [...] It is like bringing a light to a darkened room. Where you previously could only make out shadows or vague forms, now you see everything in sharp detail” (Shankman 2015, 109).

conscious, it is much more conscious than the normal state of mind.”⁴⁶ Khāntipālo also writes: “the Commentaries do rightly emphasize that in the *jhānas* there is no experience of sensual consciousness. [...] But their mind-door consciousness is super-concentrated and bright, so that *jhāna* cannot be mistaken for a hypnotic or cataleptic trance.”⁴⁷ According to Teresa’s description, an increased lucidity and purity also occur in union. Speaking of the prayer of passive recollection, Teresa says that here “the senses and exterior things seem to be losing their hold because the soul is recovering what it had lost” (4M 3,1).⁴⁸ And, about ecstasy, she states that it is not a swoon, nor a state of unconsciousness (V 20,13), nor catalepsy, but rather a state of increased awareness, and absorption of the attention into God (6M 4,3). Teresa emphasizes that, in this state, “the soul was never so awake (*despierta*) to the things of God nor did it have such deep light (*gran luz*) and knowledge (*conocimiento*) of His Majesty” (6M 4,4). Teresa adds that all the unitive experiences are to “awaken” (*despertar*) the soul (6M 2,2 and 6M 8,4).

The last of Shankman’s three additional defining features common to all *jhānas* is that when the experience begins “*jhāna* is self-sustaining, proceeds entirely on its own.”⁴⁹ The fact, described by Teresa, that the soul cannot initiate, maintain, modulate, or stop the experience of mystical union by itself is an essential characteristic of mystical union. Although in the prayer of quiet the person can still do something to resist the experience, in the prayer of union there is nothing the person can do to maintain, modulate or stop it.

5.11.4.4.7 Exceedingly pleasant feelings

In relation to the subjective feelings of the *jhānas* and union, Cousins observed that “both [the *jhānas* and Teresa’s prayer of union] are characterized by peace and joy.”⁵⁰ Indeed, in the descriptions of the *jhānas* and the states of mystical union references to extremely pleasant feelings are frequent.⁵¹ As stated earlier, some of the translators of the Pāli words that appear in Buddhaghosa’s definition of *jhāna* in relation to such highly pleasant feelings and emotions—such as *pīti*, *sukha* or *somanassa*⁵²—often employed terms and expressions that could have perfectly been extracted from any glossary of mystical theology, to describe similar feelings of joy and extreme happiness during union.

⁴⁶ Lance S. Cousins, “Buddhist: Its Nature and Attainment according to the Pali Sources,” *Religion*, Vol. 3, 2 (1973), 123.

⁴⁷ Khāntipālo, *Calm and Insight*, 56-57.

⁴⁸ See also 6M 4,4.

⁴⁹ Shankman, *The Art and Skill of Buddhist Meditation*, 108.

⁵⁰ Cousins, “The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification,” 111.

⁵¹ Bronkhorst writes: “expressions such as joy, rapture or ecstasy are frequent in descriptions of mystical and meditative experiences” (Bronkhorst 2012, 202).

⁵² *Somanassa* (*su+manas+ya*), literally “happy-minded-ness,” means happiness, joy.

The word *pīti* has been rendered as “happiness,”⁵³ “gladness,” “delight,” and “zest.”⁵⁴ *Sukha* as “bliss,”⁵⁵ “joy,” “ecstasy,” “pleasure,”⁵⁶ “pleasant feeling.”⁵⁷ These pleasurable sensations and emotions are factors that positively characterize the first three *jhānas* and are central to the definitions of the second and third *jhānas* respectively. For her part, Teresa has plentiful references in her works to the perfect contentment, spiritual joy, indescribable bliss, great consolation that the soul experiences in union with God. Her narrative includes expressions such as *grandísimo contento* (greatest happiness), *gran satisfacción en el alma* (great satisfaction in the soul),⁵⁸ *deleite grandísimo y suave* (great and gentle delight) (V 20,3), *gustos de Dios* (spiritual delights) (Fourth Mansions). In *Vida*, Teresa describes the glory (*gloria*) and enjoyment (*goce*) that the soul feels in ecstasy (V 20,3). Teresa also explains how in mystical union, the soul experiences a “taste” of what is in heaven and does not know whether it is in this world or in Paradise.

Both traditions also concur in saying that, compared to these spiritual emotions, all the happiness and joy that can be experienced in the world are nothing. Speaking on the *jhānas*, Polak states: “In states of deep absorption, one becomes sensitive to extremely pleasant feelings, which cannot be compared to any worldly, ordinary pleasure.”⁵⁹ For Teresa, the delight and joy that the soul experiences in mystical union are far superior to the pleasures and happiness that can be experienced on earth (CAD 4, title).⁶⁰

Buddhaghosa and Teresa agree that these exceedingly-pleasant feelings are experienced both in the body and the mind and use similar analogies to describe them. Buddhaghosa writes: “during *jhāna* the whole body is showered with bliss owing to pervasion by happiness. And the pain faculty has absolutely ceased in one whose body is showered with bliss, since it is beaten out then by opposition” (PP 4.187).⁶¹ Teresa says that in the prayer of quiet “a person feels the greatest delight in his body” (C 31,3). In another place, she says that no pain is felt in any state of infused prayer (4M 1,11).

In particular, several authors have noticed the similarities between the “spiritual

⁵³ Nāṇamoli justifies his choice of “happiness” for *pīti* by saying that it is better than the alternatives of “joy” (needed for *somanassa*), “interest” (which is too flat), “rapture” (overcharged). See Nāṇamoli, 2010, in relation to PP 3.82, note 6.

⁵⁴ Gunaratana, *The Jhānas in Theravada Buddhist Meditation*, 351-53.

⁵⁵ “Sukha,” BD, 324.

⁵⁶ Shankman, *The Experience of Samadhi*, 66; and Bucknell, “Reinterpreting the Jhānas,” 379.

⁵⁷ Gunaratana, *The Jhānas in Theravada Buddhist Meditation*, 351-53.

⁵⁸ “So glad is it merely to find itself near the fountain that [...] seems nothing left for it to desire” (C 31.3). Cf. V 14,4.

⁵⁹ Polak, *Reexamining the Jhanas*, 23.

⁶⁰ Teresa says, “It sees clearly that one moment of the enjoyment of glory cannot be experienced here below, neither are there riches, or sovereignties, or honours, or delights that are able to provide a brief moment of that happiness” (V 14,5).

⁶¹ Describing the prayer of quiet, Teresa says that in it “the whole exterior man enjoys this spiritual delight and sweetness” (4M 2,4). In *Vida*, speaking of prayer of quiet describes it as a “feeling a “great internal and external satisfaction” (V 14,4)

delights" (*gustos de Dios*) of the Fourth Mansions and the *jhāna* factors *pīti* and *sukha*.⁶² The coincidence in the parallel image of a water inundation as metaphor to describe the bodily sensation experienced in both *jhāna* and prayer of quiet is particularly surprising. Describing *pīti* in *jhāna*, Buddhaghosa explains: "when pervading happiness (*pīti*) arises, the whole body is completely pervaded, like a filled bladder, like a rock cavern invaded by a huge inundation" (PP 4.98). Teresa's description of the sweetness felt while experiencing *gustos de Dios* (a synonym with the prayer of quiet), equates it to water that comes from the source (God) and fills everything producing "this delight with the greatest peace and quiet and sweetness in the very interior part of ourselves" (4M 2,2); "this water overflows through mansions and faculties until reaching the body" (4M 2,6).

The quasi-interchangeable use of words for labeling these delightful feelings certainly reflects phenomenological affinities between the *jhānas* and the states of mystical union. However, the use of similar words and expressions should not suggest that we are contemplating feelings and emotions with an exact correspondence. Careful analysis also reveals some differences, despite the clear overlap. When describing the feelings of happiness associated with union with God, Teresa shows a fervor absent in the *jhānas*. Moreover, in both traditions these pleasant feelings are attributable to different causes. *Pīti* and *sukha* arise because of the very nature of the *jhānic* state. As Khāntipālo explains: "the experience of rapture and bliss arises due to its [*jhāna*] purity and concentration,"⁶³ whereas the happiness and delight that accompanies the mystical union of the soul with God, and the intrinsic moral purity of this state, is due to the presence of God in the soul.

Although, for the most part, the pleasant feelings alluded to are integral components of all the *jhānas* and states of union, we must also consider their dynamic aspects. These spiritual feelings are not uniform during the *jhānas* or throughout all the degrees of union. *Pīti* and *sukha* are *jhānaṅgas* transcended, respectively, upon access to 3JH and 4JH. Equanimity (*upekkhā*) replaces *pīti* and *sukha* in 4JH, but this does not entail the disappearance of happiness, but instead is a more balanced feeling. Mystical union, seems more emotionally intense. There seems to be an *in crescendo* in feelings of elation along the degrees of mystical union. As union becomes deeper and longer-lasting it intensifies and seems more emotionally charged, culminating with the overwhelming exultation of ecstasy. Yet, also throughout the mystical mansions all the emotions are appeased and lived in a more integrated way. In 7M equanimity sets in, and extraordinary experiences practically disappear, a sign of the integration and unity in the person.

⁶² Cousins "The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification," 112; Heiler, *Die Buddhistische Versenkung*, 53.

⁶³ Khantipalo, *Calm and Insight*, 51.

5.11.4.4.8 Tranquility and peace

The *jhānas* and mystical union are both states of great quietness, calmness and inner peace. The word *samatha* is habitually translated as “calm,” “serenity,” or “tranquility.” The cultivation of *samatha* (*samatha bhāvanā*) consists of increasing inner tranquility and “the quietude of heart.”⁶⁴ The outcome is inner silence and profound quiescence,⁶⁵ the four *jhānas* are a constituent element and a crucial aspect of *samatha* meditation. “The four *jhānas*—as Shankman rightly elucidates—are described in the Buddhist texts, comprising progressively subtler stages of increasing calm, clarity, and peace.”⁶⁶ The elimination of the Five Hindrances, the attainment of the five *jhāna* factors, and the gradual removal of *vitakka*, *vicāra*, *pīti* and *sukha* leave the mind quieted, calmed and in a deep peace, which is why the *jhānas* are considered to be tranquillizing. This quietness, great tranquility and inner silence increase as the *jhānas* become deeper and more stable. As Harvey says: “the fourth *jhāna* is a state of profound stillness and peace.”⁶⁷

Teresa describes mystical union as a state of great peace (*paz*), quietude (*sosiego*) and rest (*descanso*). In describing the prayer of infused (passive) recollection, she writes: “From this recollection a great gift of quietude and peace comes at times” (R 5,4). The prayer of “quiet” (*oración de quietud*), as its name suggests, is a state in which the person experiences an extraordinary quietness. Teresa explains: “This quietude and recollection is something that is clearly felt through the satisfaction and peace bestowed on the soul, along with great contentment and calm and a very gentle delight in the faculties” (V 15,1). The states of union are characterized by spiritual feelings of great tranquility, peace and rest. Teresa says that “when [God] is pleased to grant some supernatural favor, He produces this delight with the greatest peace, quiet and sweetness in the very interior part of ourselves” (4M 2,4). In *Camino*, she seems to suggest that this peace comes from the appeasement of the faculties (C 31,1), speaking of “quietude of the powers and stillness of the soul” (C 30,6).

To conclude this subsection, we summarize by saying that both the *jhānas* and the mystical union are states of great quiet, tranquility, inner silence, rest and peace, of both the body and of the mind. In both cases, this extraordinary peace and calm increase as the absorption in the object, or the mystical union, deepens and becomes longer lasting.

⁶⁴ “Samatha,” PED, 756.

⁶⁵ Spencer writes: “The outcome of *samādhi* is a tranquility which renders a man immune to the disturbances of senses. The saint is called ‘the tranquil’ (*samāhita*)” (Spencer 1971, 75).

⁶⁶ Shankman, *The Art and Skill of Buddhist Meditation*, 104.

⁶⁷ Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 330.

5.11.4.4.9 Light, interior illumination

The *jhānas* and the states of mystical union are also both described as being filled with light. They are experiences of inner illumination. Adjectives such as brilliant, shining, luminous, dazzling, radiant and resplendent appear recurrently in their descriptions.⁶⁸ The *jhānas* are said to be light-filled experiences. In the Canon, they are accompanied by flashes of blinding light. In the *Upakkilesa Sutta* (MN 128), once the stains (*upakkilesa*) are removed, the eidetic image (*nimitta*) appears surrounded by shining light (*obhāsa*).⁶⁹ Bodhi writes: “At [AN] 3:102, I 257,7 the word *pabhassara* [radiant] is used to describe the mind (*citta*) that has attained concentration (*samādhi*). It thus seems that it is in deep *samādhi* that the intrinsic luminosity of the mind emerges, at least temporarily.”⁷⁰ The Buddha explains how, after having attained the *jhānas*, “darkness was banished and light arose, as happens in one who abides diligent, ardent, and resolute” (MN 4.18). Why does light appear during *jhāna*? The Buddha says: “Radiant, monks, is this mind. And it is freed from transient defilements” (AN I 6.1,2). During *jhānic* experience, a mental illumination takes place due to the removal of the mental defilements (Five Hindrances), through concentration and the ensuing shining forth of the original purity of the mind.⁷¹

Teresa’s states of mystical union are also associated with light.⁷² As Kapstein notes, the imagery of light suffuses Teresa’s writings.⁷³ She perceives a divine light during her mystical experiences (V 27,3; V 28,5). Other Christian mystics also perceive light in union. Teresa writes: “While I was in this state, there suddenly came upon me a recollection with an interior light so great it seemed I was in another world” (R 39). Cf. V 32,3; 5M, 7 and F 6,4. She describes this infused light as white, radiant, of a great beauty (V 28,5), very different from that of this world (6M 5,7),⁷⁴ which allows the soul see its lingering imperfections (V 20).⁷⁵ An analytical distinction must be made: that both traditions describe experiences of light does not mean that the referent is the same phenomena. The light experienced by Teresa is associated with the presence of God and holiness. The light experienced during *jhāna* is related to the original nature of the mind.

⁶⁸ Kapstein remarks: “Light is a favorite color religious palate, a preferred key in the music that is mysticism” T. Kapstein Matthew, “Rethinking religious experience: seeing the light in the history of religions,” in *The Presence of Light: Divine Radiance and Religious Experience*, ed. Matthew T. Kapstein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 265.

⁶⁹ Cousins, “Buddhist Jhāna,” 119.

⁷⁰ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012), 1598.

⁷¹ The mind is radiant (*pabhassaram*) refers to the mind freed from defilements as it occurs in *samādhi*.

⁷² Poulain writes: “ecstatic contemplation is a mixture of light and darkness” (Poulain 1921, 64).

⁷³ Kapstein, *The Presence of Light*, 27. For the presence of light in Teresa’s works, see María de la Concepción Andueza, *Agua y luz en Santa Teresa. IV centenario de la muerte de Santa Teresa*, Universidad Autónoma de México, 1985.

⁷⁴ Teresa says that this “interior light,” a divine sun of justice (V 20), dazzles the soul and cannot be compared to that of the sun. Teresa speaks of a light that has no night and does not disturb the soul at all (*no la turba en nada*) (V 28,5).

⁷⁵ It is not entirely clear if the light experienced in mystical union is the same light that shines forth from the sun at center of the diamantine castle of the soul (1M 2,14 and F 6,4)—that is, the light intrinsic to the purity of the soul as reflecting the light of God, (7M 1,3)—or if is an infused light different from it. Teresa states that, in the mystical mansions, the soul is closer to the palace of the King and, cleansed by active and passive purifications, so can reflect better the light from God.

5.11.4.4.10 Feelings of love, sacrality and awe

One of the most important distinctions between the *jhānas* and the mystical unions, counteracting the claim that they are somewhat equivalent experiences, is the intense feelings of love felt by the soul in mystical union, especially during ecstasy.⁷⁶ In this sublime state, Teresa explains, the love of God is felt in the depths of the soul (R 5,6). The extraordinarily emotional experience of the soul's sublime love for God is a shadow of the love of God of which the soul is recipient (CAD 6,11). This love is transformative, liberates the soul (V 37.4), purifies it deeply, and allows it to love even more (V 24,8). For Teresa, in union, the soul loves but it does not know how it loves: "in loving, if it does love, it doesn't understand how or what it is it loves or what it would want" (5M 1,4).⁷⁷

It is true that *jhāna* has a strong emotional quality prior to 4JH. The *jhāyin* is immersed in spiritual feelings of sublime joy and unparalleled happiness during these experiences. Buddhaghosa also mentions that the meditator must consider the meditational object "as a treasure, building up respect for it, making it dear to him [...] thinking 'Surely in this way I shall be freed from aging and death'" (PP 4.22). But, the affective experience of intense love felt in infused contemplation, as reported of during mystical union, cannot be found in the descriptions of the *jhānas*, which are experiences not so emotionally charged.

Another important distinction between the *jhānas* and the states of mystical union is the sense of sacrality and awe reported by the Christian mystics. The sense or feeling of the holy or sacred predicated on mystical experience by Christian mystics themselves or by authors like R. Otto, W. James, W. Stance,⁷⁸ and others, is not described of the *jhānas*.

5.11.4.4.11 Disappearance of sense of "I," oneness, and time-spacelessness

Happold describes three properties of mystical experience that seem to occur in *jhānic* experience: the conviction that the phenomenal self is not the reality of the person, consciousness of the unity of everything, and a sense of timelessness to which it we can add an overcoming of the sense of space.⁷⁹ Let us analyze next these three properties.

⁷⁶ Arberman, *Ecstasy*, Vol. 2, 373-75; Merkur, *Mystical Moments*, 16.

⁷⁷ In *Concepciones* Teresa restates this idea: "She, if she loves, does not know how, or understands what she loves" (CAD 6 11); And in *Relations* writes: "the will loves more than it understands, but it doesn't understand in a describable way whether it loves or what it does" (R 59,6).

⁷⁸ Walter Terence Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 43-79.

⁷⁹ See F. C. Happold, *Mysticism. A Study and an Anthology* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970), 45-50. In similar vein, Philip Richter: "Mysticism is a mode of religious experience typically involving [...] the dissolution of sense of self" Philip Richter, "Charismatic Mysticism: A Sociological Analysis of the "Toronto Blessing" in *The Nature of Religious Language, A Colloquium Roehampton Institute London Papers*, ed. S. E. Porter (Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 124.

An attribute consistently ascribed to both *jhānic* absorption and mystical union is a temporary diminution or disappearance of the ordinary or habitual sense of self, which is experienced as a loss of *self-awareness*, *self-consciousness* and *self-forgetfulness*. Kornfield says, “the *jhāna* states transcend our ordinary sense of self.”⁸⁰ As identification with the senses, body, thought, speech, emotions, memory and the rest vanish along the path of *jhāna*, there is a temporary loss of the habitual sense of self by deafferentation. *Unio mystica* is also described as a state in which the empirical sense of self is temporarily transcended.⁸¹ Teresa speaks of being “asleep to ourselves” or being “dead” during mystical union (5M 1,4). In Christian mystical union, *self-consciousness* or *self-awareness*⁸² is dissolved in God’s love. In ecstasy, the mystic feels taken outside of himself, which is the meaning of “ecstasy.”⁸³ As we shall return to this point more in detail in Section 6.2.11 of the interpretive part of this thesis, we shall not dwell in it now.

Another element commonly attributed to *jhāna* and union is the feeling of oneness. Along with the temporary dissolution of the sense of “I,” there is absence of differentiation of object-subject polarity, and disappearance of the sense of self as a separate entity, characteristically attributed to the experiences of *jhāna* and mystical union. An immediate experience of this kind is often labeled as a oneness with the universe and other beings.⁸⁴ However, such consciousness of wholeness or unity is labeled differently in Buddhism and Christianity. Such oneness in Christianity is experienced as “all being in God.” As Happold clarifies: “In theistic mysticism God is felt to be in everything and everything to exist in God.”⁸⁵ Buddhism declines the characterization of such feelings as unity in God or universal oneness preferring to speak of the interconnectedness of all things.⁸⁶

The absence of a sense of time⁸⁷ and space is also usually reported. On timelessness, as Smart remarks: “eternity is ascribed to God; timelessness characterizes *samādhi*.”⁸⁸ In descriptions of both the *jhānas* and union, the person is not aware of the passage of

⁸⁰ Jack Kornfield, *Bringing Home the Dharma: Awakening Right Where You Are* (Shambhala Publications, 2011), 94; Brahm stated that “one of the features of the second, third and fourth *jhāna* is ‘absence of a doer’” (Brahm 2006, 164).

⁸¹ “Abolition of self should not be confused with abolition of consciousness” Mario Beauregard and Denyse O’Leary, *The Spiritual Brain: A Neuroscientist’s Case for the Existence of the Soul* (Harper Collins, 2007), 192.

⁸² For Arberman “the climactic moments of mystical union consist of a loss, not of consciousness, but of self-consciousness. It is this process that mystics have described, metaphorically as death or annihilation” (Arberman 1968, 371-73).

⁸³ Teresa says: “One day, [...] I began the hymn [*Veni Creator*]; while saying it, a rapture came upon me so suddenly that it almost carried me out of myself” (*me sacco de mi*) (V 24,5).

⁸⁴ Snyder write: “After *jhāna* has ended, there remains a deeply-felt peace. In our experience, the purified personal sense of consciousness merges into unobstructed, impersonal, universal consciousness” (Snyder 2009, 72).

⁸⁵ Happold, *Mysticism*, 46.

⁸⁶ Scott A. Mitchell y Natalie E. F. Quli, *Buddhism beyond Borders: New Perspectives on Buddhism in the United States* (Nueva York: State University of New York Press, 2016), 171-72.

⁸⁷ Happold, *Mysticism*, 46.

⁸⁸ Smart, “The Purification of Consciousness and the Negative Path,” 124.

time, and only after the experience knows how many minutes or hours have passed.⁸⁹ The meditators of *jhāna*, particularly in formless *jhānas*,⁹⁰ and the Christian mystics, also testify to a sense of spacelessness. Dissociated from the senses and mental activity, the *jhāyin* in formless *jhānas* may enter a state called “boundless space.” In the *jhāna* of “boundless consciousness” even that consciousness of boundless space eventually fades away. In Teresa’s descriptions of union, a sense of spacelessness or unconfined space during the experience seem to be a characteristic of these states (6M 5,7).

Another parallel aspect is the otherworldliness reported of the *jhānas* and union. Being an altered state of consciousness, atemporal and spaceless, *jhāna* feels unworldly. As Khantipalo says, *jhāna* is “different from ordinary five-door consciousness which does not operate at all in *jhāna*.”⁹¹ As Williams reminds us, the *jhāna* is “said to take the meditator outside, as it were, the desire realm (*kāmadhātu*) in which we humans normally live, and to pertain to the realm of (pure) form, the *rūpadhātu*.”⁹² In a very similar way, Christian mystics of all times have described mystical union as otherworldly.⁹³ Teresa describes ecstasy thus: “It seems to him that he was entirely in another region different from this in which we live, where there is shown another light so different from earth’s light that if he were to spend his whole life trying to imagine that light, along with the other things, he would be unable to do so” (6M 5,7). Paradoxically, both states are said to feel more real, authentic, certain and immediate than the state of ordinary consciousness.⁹⁴

5.11.4.4.11 The externalities of the *jhānas* and mystical union

Having considered the effects of the *jhānas* and mystical union on their experiencers’ mental processes (5.11.4.4.1-11) let us discuss now their effects on the body and its organic functions. Buddhaghosa writes: “since upon entering any of the *jhānas* the mind becomes absorbed into the *jhāna* factors, awareness of the physical body is lost” (PP 4.175).⁹⁵ The *Vibhaṅga*, however, says that in 3JH the person “feels bliss with his body” (*Vibh* 245). To reconcile this apparent incongruity, Buddhaghosa clarifies that in 3JH the *jhāyin* experiences “bliss associated with his mental body” and only after emerging from it “he would also feel bliss since his material body would have been affected by the exceedingly superior matter originated by that bliss associated with the mental body” (PP

⁸⁹ In descriptions of both the *jhānas* and the mystical union, the person is not aware of the passage of time and only after the experience knows how many minutes or hours have passed.

⁹⁰ The fifth *jhāna* is called *jhāna* “of infinite space” (Pali: *ākāsānañcāyatana*).

⁹¹ Khantipalo, *Calm and Insight*, 53-54. Griffiths called *jhāna* an “enstatic method designed progressively to withdraw its practitioner from cognitive and affective involvement with his environment.” (Griffiths 1983, 55).

⁹² Paul Williams, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2000), 55.

⁹³ Otherworldliness is often predicated of mysticism and sometimes synonymous with it.

⁹⁴ Teresa says that ecstasy it is felt in the innermost part of the soul (*en el fondo del alma*).

⁹⁵ Shankman, *Experience of Samadhi*, 70.

4.175). The Christian mystics describe how in union the person loses consciousness of the body. Teresa describes the bodily sensations experienced during the prayer of quiet (6M 2,2), but in the semi-ecstatic union of 5M, awareness or consciousness of the body seems to vanish. In ecstasy, one does not know if he is still in the body or not (6M 5,7).

Cousins writes: “Both [*jhāna* and prayer of union] are ecstatic trances involving immobility of the body.”⁹⁶ Some authors uphold that it is impossible for the meditator to move the body during *jhāna*.⁹⁷ Buddhaghosa does not mention the subject, but the phenomenology of *jhāna* implies such immobility. While Teresa is explicit on the issue. Bodily immobility may occur in different degrees depending on the depth of the union. As mystical union deepens and becomes more frequent, the body is gradually quieted, and, in climactic states, there is complete immobility of the body. In the prayer of quiet, the person is still able to move, but does not dare to do so for fear of losing the state (4M 3,6). In the union of 5M, one can only move but with great difficulty, or not at all.⁹⁸ Ecstasy is like a state of paralysis or catalepsy;⁹⁹ immobility of the body is absolute here.

Both in *jhāna* and union the person is temporarily deprived of the power of speech. This inability to speak is not discussed in the *Visuddhimagga*, but the absence of the power to speak and total silence during any *jhāna* are mentioned in the Pāli Canon.¹⁰⁰ SN 36.11, for example, states that, on entering 1JH, the *jhāyin* loses the power to speak. Teresa explains how in the prayer of quiet it is difficult to speak (C 31,2), and how, at its height, only a few words can be pronounced (V 15,6).¹⁰¹ In the union of Fifth Mansions, one is unable to speak. Teresa says: “In vain do they try to speak because they don’t succeed in forming a word, nor if they do succeed is there the strength left to be able to pronounce it” (V 18,10). In ecstasy one remains speechless, awestruck, dumbstruck. Along the *jhānic* path as the *jhāyin* experiences deeper *jhānas*, the breathing gradually slows down, becoming subtler and shallower until it seemingly ceases totally.¹⁰² Teresa states that in the prayer of quiet the person does not dare to breathe for fear of losing the state. In ecstasy, says Teresa, the breath becomes thin until it seems to fade away.¹⁰³

⁹⁶ Cousins “The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification,” 111.

⁹⁷ For example, see Brahm writes that: “within any *jhāna* not only can one not move, but also one cannot know where one is nor where to move to!” (Brahm 2006, 166).

⁹⁸ Teresa says this union “comes about in such a way that one cannot even stir the hands without a lot of effort” (V 18,10).

⁹⁹ Teresa says that, with regard to the body, union is a kind of swoon where the person cannot move. She writes: “neither a hand nor a foot stirs, as we say here below when a person is in such a swoon that we think he is dead” (5M 1.4). Cf. Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 408. There are many examples in mystical literature of the body remaining paralyzed in whatever position it was previous the ecstasy occurred (e.g. sitting or kneeling in prayer).

¹⁰⁰ Shankman, *The Experience of Samadhi*, 39.

¹⁰¹ The prayer of quiet is also known as the “prayer of silence.”

¹⁰² “In the first *jhāna* breath becomes very subtle; in the second it becomes subtler; in the third *jhāna* it becomes even subtler; and in the fourth *jhāna* it stops completely.” Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw, *The Only Way for the realization of Nibbāna*. (Singapore: PAMC, 2013), 40. The next sections describe changes in breathing along the two paths of progression.

¹⁰³ Arbman, *Ecstasy*, Vol. 2, 78.

Other common physical symptoms are deceleration of the metabolism, reduction or apparent suppression of bodily animation and circulation and drop in bodily temperature. Several *suttas* mention that in 4JH one is free “from breathing in and out, which is called *kāyasamkhāra*, or the vital current of the body”¹⁰⁴ Teresa describes similar symptoms. She explains that prayer of union is “a kind of swoon in which breathing, and all the bodily energies gradually fail” (V 18,10). In this mystical state “all the external energy is lost, and that of the soul is increased so that it might better enjoy its glory” (V 18,10).¹⁰⁵

5.11.4.4.12 Duration, frequency, and intensity

We focus now on the duration, frequency and intensity of the *jhānas* and mystical union. At the beginning of the practice of any *jhāna* the duration is most likely short (a few minutes) until sounds, smell, thoughts or some other disturbance intrude upon mind. As the *jhāyin* develops “power” (*vasi*), in the sense of skill, he gradually suffers fewer impediments and can remain in the state of *jhāna* for longer periods of time. But there is more. The meditator must master each *jhāna* before beginning the next. This proficiency consists of the “five masteries in the practice of *jhāna*.”¹⁰⁶ With it the *jhāyin* acquires the ability to enter into, maintain and exit any *jhāna* more nimbly every time. With the mastery in maintaining *jhāna* called “mastery of resolving” (*adhitthāna-vasi*), the meditator should decide on how long he will stay in *jhāna* before starting the session (PP 4.131). During practice, there may be fluctuations between *jhānas*, they may occur at intervals, or one may sink back into the ordinary state and return to *jhāna* afterwards.

Regarding the duration, frequency and intensity of the states of mystical prayer, Teresa explains that, in her case, they did not last long and, in general, she had no control over them.¹⁰⁷ The duration varies from the prayer of passive recollection and prayer of quiet, which only lasts for a moment, to union whose duration can range from a few minutes to a half hour.¹⁰⁸ Teresa affirms that, in general, ecstatic union does not last more than two hours,¹⁰⁹ although to the person it may seem a much shorter time. Teresa describes ecstasies with fluctuations and intervals that last for many hours.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ “Jhāna,” EB, 52.

¹⁰⁵ Teresa adds that, externally, union is like a person who is so faint that we think she is dead” (5M 1,4). See also V 18,6.

¹⁰⁶ These five skills are: 1) skill in adverting the mind to *jhāna* (*āvajjanavasi*); 2) skill in entering *jhāna* (*samāpajjana-vasi*); 3) skill in “resolving”, that is in maintaining *jhāna* (*adhitthāna-vasi*) or be established in *jhāna* as long as the person wishes; 4) skill in emerging from *jhāna* (*vuthāna-vasi*) and; 5) skill in reviewing *jhāna* (*paccavekkhana-vasi*) (PP 4.131).

¹⁰⁷ One can exercise some control over the prayer of quiet, but no control is possible over prayer of union or ecstasy.

¹⁰⁸ Teresa writes: Suffice it half an hour to last (R 5,13). As W. R. Inge states, a full suspension of “half an hour is frequently mentioned by the Roman Catholic Mystics” cited by Arbman, *Ecstasy*, Vol. 2, 90.

¹⁰⁹ See V 10.10 and V 39,15. It is necessary here to distinguish between the suspension of the senses and faculties itself (union) and the effects of the experience, which can last days.

¹¹⁰ Teresa writes: “Your Reverence will ask how it is that the rapture sometimes lasts so many hours and occurs so often. What happens in my case, as I said in speaking of the previous prayer, is that the rapture is experienced at intervals. The soul is often absorbed or, to put it better, the Lord absorbs it in Himself suspending all the faculties for a while and then,

These unitive experiences can fluctuate between the prayer of quiet, complete union, ecstasy and the reverse. In full union and ecstasy, the experiences may have different degrees of intensity and duration (C 31,4). As Teresa enters deeper into the mystical mansions, we see find an increase in the frequency and intensity of these experiences.

5.11.4.4.13 The effects of the *jhānas* and mystical unions

Neither the *jhānas* nor the states of mystical union are an end in themselves. Both are described as serving the purpose of inner transformation. In the words of Nanayakkara: “the *jhānas* are only a means to an end, and are not an end in themselves.”¹¹¹ The *jhānas* transform the mind, but this should not be confused with awakening.¹¹² In similar terms Howells says: “For Teresa ecstatic states serve mystical transformation, but they are not its essence.”¹¹³ What are the lasting effects of the *jhānas* and the states of mystical union?

The *jhānas* and the mystical unions are not temporary states irrelevant to daily life. On the contrary, both have lasting beneficial effects on those who experience them. Certainly, the *jhānas* are transient meditational states but, as Harrison points out, “their effects are expected to trickle back into ordinary life.”¹¹⁴ With an assiduous and diligent practice, the *jhāyin*’s mind becomes focused, tranquil and equanimous in all situations. As regards Teresa, in the second section of the Fifth Mansions¹¹⁵ she declares the effects that the union with God leaves in the soul in a description of its metamorphosis from an ugly silkworm into a beautiful butterfly, after which the soul cannot recognize itself (5M 2,7). When comparing the enduring effects of the *jhānas* with those of mystical unions some of them have correspondences, while others are specific to each tradition.

Throughout *jhānic* training as well as throughout the mystical dwellings, an exhaustive purification occurs. Both result in states quite free of moral stains. The practice of the *jhānas* takes place throughout an arduous process of purification of mind (*citta visuddhi* or *samādhi*), the second of the seven stages of the path of purification (*visuddhi-magga*). If *jhāna* temporarily suppresses the impurities, *jhānic* training gradually purifies the mind.

afterward, holding only the will suspended. It seems to me that the activity of these other two faculties is like that of the little pointer on the sundial that never stops. But when the Sun of Justice wants to, He makes the faculties stop. This suspension of the two faculties, I say, is brief.” (The “other two faculties”, of course, are intellect and memory. These are not continuously absorbed, whereas the will may be absorbed for a considerable length of time” (V 20,19). Cf. 5M 18,12.

¹¹¹ “Ecstasy,” EB, 12.

¹¹² Rupert Gethin, “On the Practice of Buddhist Meditation According to the Pāli Nikāyas and its Exegetical Sources,” in *Buddhismus in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 10 (2004): 17–37.

¹¹³ Edward Howells, “Teresa of Avila: Negative theologian?” in *Teresa of Avila: Mystical Theology and Spirituality in the Carmelite Tradition*, ed. Edward Howells and Peter Tyler (New York: Routledge, 2017), 60.

¹¹⁴ Eric Harrison, *The Foundations of Mindfulness, How to Cultivate Attention, Good Judgment, and Tranquility* (The Experiment, 2017), 207.

¹¹⁵ Teresa also deals with the effects of ecstasy in the sixth section of the Sixth Mansions.

According to the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* the *jhānas* yield a mind that is purified (*parisuddhe*), unblemished (*anaṅgaṇe*), free of impurities (*vigatūpakkilese*) (DN 2,97).¹¹⁶ However, we must point out that *jhānic* training overcomes iniquitous tendencies but does not root them out. Total eradication only occurs through the “path and its fruits.”¹¹⁷ Returning to Teresa, an effect of the experiences and “works” of the mystical mansions is moral cleansing (5M 2,5). The unitive states of prayer are passive purifications by God, whose aim “is to purify this soul so that it might enter the seventh dwelling place, just as those who will enter heaven must be cleansed in purgatory” (6M 11,6).¹¹⁸ Throughout the experiences of the mystical abodes, the soul grows in virtue (V 14,6),¹¹⁹ and obtains a renewed willingness to submit lovingly and completely to the will of God.¹²⁰

After passing through the *jhānas* or the mystical abodes, one becomes more unified and focused.¹²¹ Having attained 4JH, the meditator’s mind is described as “concentrated” (*samāhite*). The attainment of the four *jhānas* is typically understood as synonymous with the realization of *samādhi* (concentration) and *sammā-samādhi* (right concentration).¹²² Directing our attention again to Teresa, if in mystical union the faculties of the soul are gathered and absorbed in God, this too is not merely a transitory phenomenon. If, as O’Donoghue says “by recollection St. Teresa means a certain concentration or unified attention of the mind—an attention, that is, to God and divine things.”¹²³ The path of prayer and recurrent mystical unions leave the soul unified, entirely focused on God.¹²⁴

With the fourth *jhāna*, the mind becomes flexible, sensitive or pliant (*mudubhūte*), malleable or workable (*kammanīye*). Such adaptability is predicated of the soul after the mystical mansions. For Teresa, the soul after mystical union “neither knows nor wants anything more than what He wants with her [...] He desires that, without understanding how, it may go forth from this union impressed with His seal. For indeed the soul does no more in this union than does the wax when another impresses a seal on it” (5 M 2,12).

¹¹⁶ The *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, reads: “And he with mind concentrated, purified and cleansed, unblemished, free from impurities, malleable, workable, established and having gained imperturbability, applies and directs his mind to the knowledge of the destruction of the corruptions” (DN 2,97).

¹¹⁷ See Cousins, “Buddhist Jhāna,” 117.

¹¹⁸ Supernatural prayer illuminates the stains and bad habits a soul might still have so they appear may clearly visible to it (V 40,7 and C 35,4) and cleanse them preparing the soul for the transforming union of 7M.

¹¹⁹ Chiefly, humility and detachment (V 14,3).

¹²⁰ Teresa states that after experiencing the prayer of quiet, “there is [in the soul] an improvement in all the virtues. It will continue to grow if it doesn’t turn back now to offending God” (4M 3,9).

¹²¹ The attainment of a concentrated mind is a common denominator of all contemplative systems. See Rose, *Yoga, Meditation, and Mysticism*, 74.

¹²² Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, 116.

¹²³ O’Donoghue, *Adventures in Prayer*, 79.

¹²⁴ On the unification and concentration of the mind in relation to Teresa, Ribot says: “In order to trace this ascending progression toward absolute unity of consciousness...I find in the Castillo Interior of St. Theresa a description, step by step, of this progressive concentration of consciousness” (Ribot 1890, 96).

The four *jhānas* produce a mind that is steady (*thite*) and unshakeable (*ānejjappatte*) (DN 2.97).¹²⁵ On the chapter devoted to 7M, Teresa explains how, in spiritual matrimony, the soul remains always inalterable at its center (7M 2,6). After *jhānic* training the mind is also described as peaceful, serene and tranquil. Harrison puts it this way: “over time, a good practitioner [of the *jhānas*] will be peaceful under all circumstances, not just when she has withdrawn from the world to meditate.”¹²⁶ Teresa describes the peace and calm of those who reach the Fifth Mansions thus: “I don’t mean to say that those who arrive here do not have peace; they do have it, and it is very deep” (5M 2,10).

The fourth *jhāna* transcends *pīti* and *sukha*. These qualities, however, are replaced by a timeless equanimity and serenity that, paradoxically, is also a form of spiritual joy. Teresa says that after the experiences of the mystical mansions the soul attains great peace and joy: “For the trials [of the mystic mansions] are so valuable and have such good roots that although very severe they give rise to peace and happiness” (5M 5,10).

Of the path of *samatha* meditation (we understand here also referring to the *jhānas*) AN 1.61 says that it allows one to give up passion (*rāga*, in the sense of *taṇhā* “thirst” or “craving”), whereas *vipassanā* meditation allows one to give up ignorance (*avijjā*). Teresa describes how through the mystical mansions the soul discovers the nothingness of the things of the earth compared with God and puts all its passion into the search for God.

Both the *jhānas* and mystical unions produce a spiritual happiness and enjoyment so intense that they eclipse the pleasures of the world and make it easy for one to detach from them. After experiencing the *jhānas*, in Shankman’s words, “the allure of worldly pleasure fades.”¹²⁷ Teresa insists that after union, the world loses its attraction.¹²⁸ Khantipalo says that those who have experienced the *jhānas* have few attachments.¹²⁹ Teresa says, “Since it [the soul] has experienced such wonderful rest, all that it sees on earth displeases it, especially if God gives it this wine often [...] Everything wearies it, for it has learned through experience that creatures cannot give it true rest” (5M 2,8). The *jhānas* are delightful, but one should not cling to them as they do end ignorance or suffering. Teresa warns her sisters not to cling to the desire to receive favors from God.

According to the *Samaññaphala Sutta*, the mind after in 4JH is luminous, bright

¹²⁵ Polak, “Reexamining Jhāna,” 51.

¹²⁶ Harrison, *The Foundations of Mindfulness*, 207-8.

¹²⁷ Shankman, *The Art and Skill of Buddhist Meditation*, 121-22.

¹²⁸ “Since it has experienced such wonderful rest, all that it sees on earth displeases it, especially if God gives it this wine often [...] Everything wearies it, for it has learned through experience that creatures cannot give it true rest” (5M 5,8).

¹²⁹ Khantipālo, *Calm and Insight*, 57.

(*pariyodāte*). Of the Seventh Mansions, where the King resides, a divine light comes out that reaches the other dwellings (1M 2, 14). In the purified soul, in the center of the castle, Teresa describes a new world, in which everything has a clear and luminous aspect.

Paired with both mastery over the *jhānas* and the Sixth Mansions, a series of supernormal phenomena such as visions, locutions, levitation, premonition or ubiquity appear in both traditions. Several of these phenomena are specific to each tradition. These phenomena are described in Chapter 12 of the *Visuddhimagga* and throughout the chapter dedicated to the Sixth Mansions (Spiritual Betrothal) in *Castillo interior*.

There are effects or benefits that are specific to each tradition. As regards the *jhānas*, among other benefits, their attainment provides blessed permanence here and now for *arahants* (Buddhist saint) and those noble persons who have destroyed the corruptions. *Jhānic* training produces dominion of the mind, which is not explicit of mystical union. More significantly, the *jhānic* training prepares for the practice of *vipassanā* meditation.

Teresa says that after having had many mystical unions, the soul becomes more courageous in the service of God and grows in faith, inner strength and love (V 10,6). The main effect of the mystical mansions, which finds its zenith in the Seventh Mansions, is a call to the active exercise of charity. Teresa speak of “works, works” (*obras, obras*) which is the final end of prayer for Teresa; good works of love for the neighbor (7M 4,6). All these effects of the Teresian mystical path of prayer are temporary since the final goal of the mystical mansions is to favor a permanent state of union with God which occurs when consciousness reaches the Seventh Mansions, when all life is already prayer.

Summarizing, with regard to the effects of the *jhānas* and the states of mystical union, both have a great impact on who experiences them and, in the case of mystical union, changes his life radically. Several of the lasting effects of both experiences are similar, not identical, and some are typical of each tradition without apparent correspondence. Both the *jhānas* and mystical unions also have some of the features of the respective final states (*nibbāna* and Seventh Mansions), but they are not equal to these states.¹³⁰ In the final section of the comparative part of this study, we shall return to the effects of both paths, when drawing some conclusions from present comparison.

¹³⁰ Gethin states: “while the state of mind cultivated in *jhāna* may fall short of awakening because it involves only the temporary suspension defilements and not their final eradication, it nonetheless shares many features that characterize awakening and as such is the gateway to various knowledges that are directly conducive to awakening.” Rupert Gethin, “The *jhānas* in the Buddhist path to liberation, the Theravāda perspective,” presentation given 30th July, 2017 in “1st. World Encounter Teresian Mysticism and Interreligious Dialogue Theravāda Buddhism and Teresian Mysticism.

5.11.5 Conclusion

Having juxtaposed Buddhaghosa's definition of *jhāna* and Teresa's explanations of mystical prayer, the comparison now put us in a better position to respond both to those who consider them "identical," and those who see no relationship between them. Judging purely from the descriptions given by our two authors, the comparative analysis reveals that, although there are certainly points of congruence—as observed by Cousins, Heiler and others—the points of divergence, at the same time evident, are more fundamental.

The ultimate purpose of the *jhānas* is the *telos* of Buddhism: liberation from suffering and ignorance. Christianity aims to recover the lost unity of the soul with God and achieve salvation from sin and its effects and the mystical states of prayer are tributary to this aim. Although there have been attempts to reconcile both *teloi*, the differences in self-understanding (from basic conception to symbolic language) clearly show that we are faced with two different soteriological systems, with dissimilar principles and purposes. Speaking specifically about the two experiences under comparative scrutiny, the most important difference is that Teresa describes her experiences as encounters with God, while the *jhānas* are described as states of absorption, unification of the mind, and calm. As Meissner says about mystical experiences "within the Judeo-Christian tradition they share a note of passivity, ineffability, the sense of submissive immersion in the experience of divine love, and the sense of formless fusion with the object of that love."¹³¹ This "immersion in the experience of divine love" is a description fully alien to Buddhism.

As regards the points of resemblance, and summarizing our comparative exploration, the phenomenological affinities between the *jhānas* and the degrees of mystical prayer are already conspicuous in how revealing the borrowed terminology is that is used in translations. The two experiences, at their peak, are described as "ecstatic trances"¹³² or "raptures." In them, the person's attention remains absolutely absorbed in the object or in God, respectively, and there is a sensory abstraction of all external phenomena. In both states of there is inhibition or complete suppression of all mental activity of the person (articulated thought, will, understanding and memory), and, in deep states, a total immobility of the body, inability to speak, and a slowing down of circulation, metabolism and breathing. Both are described as states of a great peace, satisfaction, serenity, and spiritual enjoyment. And both have profound purifying and transformative effects on the person who experience them and are accompanied by similar paranormal phenomena.

¹³¹ Meissner, W. W. *Psychoanalysis and religious experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984, 151.

¹³² Cousins, "The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification," 111.

One more point of contact is the structural position that the *jhānas* and the states of union occupy in their linear, step-by-step descriptions, of the respective spiritual paths. Both the *jhānas* and the states of mystical union have as their comparable consecutive antecedents the cultivation of virtue, asceticism and the practice of discursive mediation. Both states are also usually preceded by a unification and deepening of attention: mindfulness leads to *jhāna*, recollection leads to the door of mystical prayer. Besides, as Teresa also declares about mystical prayer, Buddhaghosa affirms that the *jhānas* are neither the goal of spiritual path, nor the only way to it and nor are they indispensable.

In light of this comparison, we conclude that, although the *jhānas* and the states of mystical prayer belong to different soteriological realms and differ in their essential nature, from the psycho-spiritual viewpoint they share enough phenomenological characteristics and structural and functional parallels so that it does not seem inappropriate to apply Wittgenstein's notion of "family resemblance" to categorize their relationship.¹³³

Considering that the two religious systems were developed in a relatively isolated manner from each other, in different continents, cultures, languages and eras, and that they are fundamentally independent, the consensus between them deserves an adequate explanation. The unresolved task then is to provide a satisfactory justification for the aforementioned "family resemblances," especially considering that the path of the *jhānas* and that of mystical prayer produce remarkably similar interior transformations.

Our working hypothesis, which we elaborate in Part IV of this study, points out that in both cases we are facing something essential in the human condition: the transcendence of the person's erroneous identification with the experiential self. Both the *jhānas* and the states of mystical union purify the person who experiences them, giving rise to a gradual deconditioning, transformation, and disidentification with the contents of the mind and are experiences where the person transcends his identification with and attachment to the phenomenological self, as in both *jhāna* and union there is dissociation or temporary loss of the sense of self. We believe that this progressive transformation, deidentification and loss of I-consciousness is the explanatory key for the similarities between both experiences. What progressively fades away in the *jhānas* is identification with those contents of the mind that sustain the empirical self. What dies through mystical mansions is pride, the ugly worm of self-love and self-will and the identification of the person with an "I" self-sustained, separated and independent of God (5M 6,2).

¹³³ Cousins states: "One might perhaps sum up by saying that *jhāna* is certainly what St Teresa would call union, but whether she would call it union with God is perhaps another matter. For Buddhaghosa the Prayer of Union would perhaps be acceptable as a form of *jhāna*, but probably not as *lokunara* or transcendent *jhāna*" (Cousins 1995, 110).

5.12 THE FIRST *JHĀNA* AND THE PRAYER OF PASSIVE RECOLLECTION

In this section, we begin a comparison of each of the *jhānas* with specific degrees of mystical prayer, starting with the first *jhāna* and the prayer of passive recollection. Having already discussed the essential features common to all the *jhānas* and states of mystical prayer, in the present and following sections (Section 5.13 through 5.16), we shall only deal with salient aspects of each *jhāna* and the “corresponding” degree of mystical prayer.

5.12.1 Introduction

For thirty of the forty meditation subjects listed Buddhaghosa in the *Visuddhimagga*, the deepening of access concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*) brings the first *jhāna* (“1JH”). As per Teresa, the prayer of active recollection (PAR) disposes the soul to the grace of the “prayer of passive recollection” (hereafter, “PPR”) better than any other form of prayer. Despite the doctrinal abyss between 1JH and PPR, and that PPR is infused by God and not attained, enough congruencies exist between these states to warrant a comparison. All the more, when in the usual course of events these states are: (1) preceded by a chain of structurally and experientially similar segments of spiritual life (asceticism, etc.); (2) ensue after access concentration and the prayer of active recollection, respectively; and 3) are followed by states of deeper absorption (second *jhāna* and the prayer of quiet).

The affinities between the first *jhānic* absorption and the prayer of infused recollection have attracted the attention of students of both traditions. In *Christian Insight Meditation*, Meadow and her two Discalced Carmelite co-authors, comment on these consonances.¹ Theravādin nun Ayya Khema, who was acquainted with Teresa’s work, likewise identified parallels between 1JH and the “second waters” of *Vida* (the prayer of passive recollection and the prayer of quiet).² Heiler finds accords between 1JH and the “first prayer step,”³ although it is not entirely clear whether by the latter expression he refers to the prayer of passive recollection or the prayer of quiet. Cousins writes about parallels between Teresa’s prayer of recollection and “the process of developing *jhāna*,”⁴ although he does not make explicit associations between 1JH and the prayer of passive recollection.

¹ M. J. Meadow, Kevin Culligan, and Daniel Chowning write: “When we can easily stay with the object for some time, we have reached the first level of absorption [...] With the first absorption Teresa’s task of ‘haling buckets’ becomes much easier [...] Buddhist texts refer to the feeling of mental seclusion here; distracting experiences no longer yank us about. However, when we are still new to absorption, we easily fall out of it. For Christians, this is the flickering start of the receptive passivity of contemplation -the move from Active Recollection to the Prayer of Simplicity [As noted by the authors themselves, here “prayer of simplicity” is synonymous with “prayer of passive recollection]” (Meadow *et al.* 2007, 76).

² Ayya Khema, 1991.02.12. St. Teresa de Ávila. A Comparison with the Jhanas. (F. C. Happold: Mysticism). Khema Archive (Buddha Dhamma Hermitage, Bundanoon, Australia) <http://dharmaseed.org/teacher/334/talk/7613/>

³ Heiler, *Buddhistische Versenkung*, 53.

⁴ Cousins, “The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification,” 110.

5.12.2 The first *jhāna*

As already stated, Buddhaghosa defines each one of the four *jhānas* by transcribing the corresponding pericope of the *Vibhaṅga* (*Vibh* 245), which he later comments upon in great detail. Buddhaghosa's definition of the first *jhānic* absorption⁵ read:

Quite secluded from sense desires, secluded from unprofitable things he enters upon and dwells in the first *jhāna*, which is accompanied by applied thought [*vitakka*] and sustained thought [*vicāra*] with happiness [*pīti*] and bliss [*sukha*] born of seclusion (*Vibh.* 245), and so he has attained the first *jhāna*, which abandons five factors, possesses five factors, is good in three ways, possesses ten marks, and is of the earth *kaṣiṇa* (PP 4.79).⁶

It should be noted that there are significant departures between the definition of the 1JH found in the *Visuddhimagga* and its description in the *suttas*. The Pāli scriptures describe aspects of 1JH that do not appear in the *Visuddhimagga*. Buddhaghosa speaks of five *jhāna* factors (PP 4.79), whereas the *suttas* only mention four.⁷ Adding to the definition in PP 4.79 above, the *Dīgha Nikāya* reads: "One [dwelling in 1JH] drenches, steep, saturates, and suffuses one's body with this rapture and happiness born of seclusion, so that there is no part of one's entire body which is not suffused by this rapture and happiness" (DN 2.77). The *Visuddhimagga* does not include this mention.

Khāntipālo underlines that the meditator already experiences the five *jhāna* factors before the first *jhānic* experience (namely, during access concentration), "but in that case they are isolated from each other or not in balance." Khāntipālo continues by saying: "they [the five factors] have to be carefully cultivated and harmonized so that one leads on to the production of the next until when they are complete, *jhāna* is experienced."⁸

In this section, we consider the first *jhānic* absorption as presented in Buddhaghosa's work, in which it seems a stronger experience than the one described in the Pāli Canon. However, even in Buddhaghosa's presentation in the *Visuddhimagga*, there are several interpretations of the meaning and main features of 1JH that we will review summarily. For example, we shall consider the notions of *vitakka* and *vicāra*, which are two *jhāna* factors whose natures have been interpreted in quite different fashion by various authors. In subsequent sections, we will deal with the remaining four *jhāna* factors in more detail.

⁵ For an in-depth discussion on 1JH in early Buddhism discourses, although mostly based the *Madhyama-āgama*, see Anālayo, "The First Absorption (*Dhyāna*) in Early Indian Buddhism-A Study of Source Material from the *Madhyama-āgama*," *Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist Meditation Cultural Histories*, ed. H. Eifring, 69–90 (Oslo: Hermes Publishing, 2014); See also Akira Fujimoto, "How to enter the first *jhāna*," *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies*, 54.3, 2006, 59-63.

⁶ The description of the *jhānas* in *Vibh* 245, transcribed by Buddhaghosa in PP 4.79, is the *locus classicus* for the definition of the *jhānas* in Theravāda with precedents throughout the *Sutta-Piṭaka*. A corresponding text in the Chinese āgamas can be found in the *Madhyama-Āgama*. See Anālayo, "The First Absorption," 70.

⁷ The *Visuddhimagga* includes "onepointedness of mind" (*ekaggatā*) as the fifth *jhāna* factor of 1JH, a mental quality not mentioned anywhere in the *suttas* as belonging to 1JH. The Abhidhamma also reckons five *jhāna* factors.

⁸ Khantipalo, *Calm and Insight*, 53.

5.12.3 The prayer of passive recollection

When discussing the prayer of recollection, Teresian scholars distinguish two modes: one acquired, the “prayer of active recollection” (PAR), already examined in Section 5.10; and another infused, the “prayer of passive recollection” (PPP) dealt with in this section. In this latter type of recollection, the senses are gathered together within the castle, not by the souls’ efforts, but by God, who brings them within the soul like a loving Shepherd. Teresa discusses PPR in *Castillo* (4M 3,1-7),⁹ *Relaciones* 54,3, and *Vida* Ch. 14,¹⁰ where she equates it with the second way to irrigate the garden of the soul (“second waters”). There are brief references to PPR in *Camino*, Chs. 28-29.¹¹ Unfortunately, in essence, Teresa says little about this infused recollection in her works other than the following:

It is a recollection that also seems to me to be supernatural (*un recogimiento que también me parece sobrenatural*), because it doesn’t involve being in the dark or closing the eyes, nor does it consist in any exterior thing, since without first wanting to do so, one does close one’s eyes and desire solitude. It seems that without any contrivance the edifice is being built, by means of this recollection, for the prayer that was mentioned. The senses and exterior things seem to be losing their hold because the soul is recovering what it had lost (4M 3,1).

A point of nomenclature regarding “prayer of passive recollection” is that this is a technical designation given by Christian theologians to emphasize the infused nature of this prayer.¹² This denomination, though, is not found in Teresa’s works nor was it in use in her time. We will use “prayer of passive recollection,” however, as it is widely accepted. A problem for our analysis is that Teresa does not always distinguish clearly between the active and the passive manifestations of the prayer of recollection in her works. Another strain is that in *Vida* she speaks of recollection and quiet as one (V 15,1-4).

As per Teresa’s own account, PPR was her first experience of mystical prayer (R 5,3)¹³ and is generally considered among Teresian scholars as the first manifestation of contemplative prayer.¹⁴ Pablo Maroto describes PPR as “a prelude to the mystical life.”¹⁵ Usually, it comes after the prayer of active recollection,¹⁶ and it prepares and is followed by the prayer of quiet which is a more intense experience than passive recollection.¹⁷ Yet, there are no hard rules as PPR is a grace that can occur under any circumstances.

⁹ As indicated earlier, Teresa discusses the prayer of infused recollection in Section 3 of the Chapter Four of *Castillo* (4M) when, by her own admission, she should have dealt with it in Chapter Three, devoted to the Third Mansions.

¹⁰ As Dicken states: “passive recollection in the Mansions corresponds to the recollection which is equated with the prayer of quiet in the Life, of which the saint uses almost identical words” (Dicken 1963, 192).

¹¹ As presented in *Camino* recollection is an active mode of prayer. Only a few comments in *Camino* seem to refer to PPR.
¹² Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 107.

¹³ Teresa probably first experienced PPR in her youth, after reading Osuna’s *Tercer Abeceadario Espiritual* (V 4,7).

¹⁴ Arthur Devine, “Recollection,” EC, 1742-43.

¹⁵ Pablo Maroto, *Dinámica de la Oración*, 217.

¹⁶ Teresa clearly implies that the prayer of passive recollection very frequently follows the prayer of active recollection, but in *Castillo* she emphasizes that passive recollection may occur without previous practice active recollection (4M 3,1).

¹⁷ Teresa states that PPR almost always (*casi siempre*) precedes the prayer of quiet although not necessarily. Cf. 4M 3,1.

5.12.4 Comparison of the first *jhāna* and the prayer of passive recollection

5.12.4.1 The nature of 1JH and PPR

The general discussion in Section 5.11.4.3.1 on the nature of *jhāna* and mystical union is applicable here. However, there is an issue about the nature of infused recollection that merits particular attention. But, first, let us state that PPR, in Tanquerey's words, is: "a gentle and affectionate absorption of the mind and the heart in God, produced by a special grace of the Holy Ghost."¹⁸ Without such understanding of PPR as a state of absorption in God, and infused by God's grace into the soul, PPR cannot be considered a Christian state of prayer. In contradistinction, any *jhāna* is a state of absorption in a selected meditative object, attained by the *jhāyin*'s efforts, and not externally induced.

Dicken writes that infused recollection is "essentially"¹⁹ a supernatural state of prayer. Why "essentially"? We already considered Teresa's notion of "supernatural."²⁰ PPR is a supernatural state because it occurs without "any contrivance" (*sin artificio*) on the part of the person (V 24,2). In several places, however, Teresa seems to cast doubts on the supernatural character of this recollection. In *Relaciones* 5, Teresa writes to B. Álvarez: "the first prayer of which I was conscious—in my opinion, supernatural." In *Vida* she says, "before this [her entry into mystical theology, writes Álvarez], I felt very habitually a tenderness that, *it seems to me*, can in part be acquired" (V 10,2). And in *Castillo*, Teresa reiterates, "it also seems to me (*me parece*) supernatural recollection" (4M 3,1). This uncertainty might be attributable to the frequently subtle nature of the transition from active to passive recollection. In Buddhism, according to some Buddhist scholars, the states of access concentration and 1JH can also sometimes be difficult to distinguish.²¹ However, importantly, the *jhānas* can never be described as supernatural states caused by God, but instead arise from one's own efforts and from deep within the human mind. This is a crucial distinction, for Teresa says that infused recollection only comes when God grants this favor (e.g., R 54,3 and 4M 3,3). During PPR, in Devine's words, God "summons together the faculties and manifests His presence and perfections."²² However, as we have mentioned before, Teresa emphasizes that the soul can do much to receive the gift of passive recollection by being adequately disposed to it (R 54,3).

¹⁸ Adolphe Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life a Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology* (Tournai: Desclée, 1932), 675.

¹⁹ [Author's emphasis]. Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 192.

²⁰ Teresa declares: "[it] doesn't involve being in the dark or closing the eyes, nor does it consist in any exterior thing, since without first wanting to do so, one does close one's eyes and desire solitude" (4M 3,1). PPR is not attained "by the intellect striving to think about God within itself, or by the imagination imagining Him within itself" (4M 3,3).

²¹ Shaila Catherine, *Focused and Fearless: A Meditator's Guide to States of Deep Joy, Calm and Clarity* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2008), 126.

²² Devine, "Recollection," EC, 1743.

5.12.4.2 Comparison characteristics of the first *jhāna* and passive recollection

5.12.4.2.1 Introduction

In the definition of 1JH in *Vibh* 245 quoted by Buddhaghosa the next elements of 1JH can be identified: (1) seclusion from sense desires and unprofitable things; and (2) four *jhāna* factors, namely, initial application of the mind (*vitakka*), sustained application of the mind (*vicāra*), *pīti* and *sukha* (born of seclusion). To these four factors, Buddhaghosa adds a fifth one, “unification of mind” (*cittass’ ekaggatā*), and writes: “so he attained the first *jhāna*, which abandons five factors,²³ [and] possesses five factors” (PP 4.79).²⁴

Returning to PPR, this state of prayer has all the defining marks of the prayer of active recollection but with a profounder and more stable presence and infused by God. Pablo Maroto summarizes these features as a “strong internalization of the senses and the higher powers of the soul,” and a “decrease of the reflective process of understanding.”²⁵ In what follows, we offer a comparative analysis of some particular features of 1JH and an analogous phenomenology observable in PPR, as an experience reported by Teresa.

5.12.4.2.2 States of absorption, deep interiorization and altered states

Both 1JH and PPR are the first states of full absorption in their respective systems. 1JH is the first state of full absorption (*appanā-samādhī*) beyond access concentration and is less intense and profound than the successive *jhānas*. In the Carmelite tradition, PPR is often presented as the first state of mystical prayer and, as Dicken explains, it is “the lowest gradation of contemplation mentioned in St. Teresa in any of her works.”²⁶ Teresa describes PPR as “much less intense than the prayer of spiritual delights from God (*gustos de Dios*) and beginning through which one goes to the other” (4M 3,8). PPR is not a state of “union” since the absorption of the faculties here is not strong enough.²⁷ Thus, although both 1JH and PPR are states of absorption, beyond what is possible in ordinary states, they are not the most profound states of absorption in their own systems.

²³ The factors of abandonment in 1JH are the Five Hindrances, whose abandonment is necessary for 1JH to occur (PP 4.104-105). Buddhaghosa says: “no *jhāna* arises until these [Hindrances] have been abandoned, thus they are called the factors of abandoning” (PP 4.105). The Five Hindrances, disruptive to *jhāna*, are first abandoned in access concentration.

²⁴ The five “factors of possession” are the five *jhānaṅgas*: *vitakka*, *vicāra*, *pīti*, *sukha*, and *ekaggatā* (PP 4.106). He adds that “the factors of possession are so called because “when these are arisen that *jhāna* is said to be arisen” (PP 4.107). As mentioned earlier these *jhāna* factors were already present in access concentration but too weak to manifest then (PP 4.108). The attainment of each factor occurs by the surmounting of the factors obstructing their emergence (i.e. “factors of abandonment”) and the acquisition of those factors constituting its attainment (“factors of possession”).

²⁵ Pablo Maroto, *Teresa en Oración*, 371-2.

²⁶ Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 192. PPR is always described as an absorption less intense than prayer of quiet (4M 3,1).

²⁷ Fr. Ermanno, “The Degrees of Teresian Prayer,” 88.

Both 1JH and PPR can be described as altered states of consciousness but, in both cases, the dividing line between ordinary and altered states of awareness is not clear. Some authors, observe that it is frequently difficult to distinguish 1JH from access concentration,²⁸ and even from ordinary states of consciousness. For Teresa, it was also difficult at times to distinguish PPR from its active counterpart.²⁹ Teresa says, “it is a recollection that also *seems to me* to be supernatural” (4M 3,1). This uncertainty, in both cases, probably comes from the lingering presence of some sensory input and thought.

Another similarity between 1JH and PPR is that both are significant experiences. As Arbel notes, “the attainment of the first *jhāna* has a momentous place in the Buddha’s own awakening story.”³⁰ Arbel describes 1JH as “a turning point in the spiritual path.”³¹ For her part, Teresa writes in *Vida* that she experienced the prayer of quiet (a designation here synonymous with or assimilable to PPR) in her youth after practicing the method of recollection she learned reading *The Third Spiritual Alphabet* by F. de Osuna (V 4,7). This experience left a deep impression on her, and she remembered it vividly all her life.

5.12.4.2.3 Withdrawal of the external senses

The pericopial expression “quite secluded from sense desires” (*vivicc’eva kāmehi*) describing 1JH (PP 4.79), refers to the *jhāyin’s* seclusion from “*kāma*.” In Pāli literature, “*kāma*” denotes both the “objects of the senses” and the desire for such sense-objects.³² This phrase means that the meditator, being now “quite” (*eva*) [“quite” is here understood as “absolutely”³³] absorbed in the sign, dwells isolated (*vivicca*)³⁴ from the sense-objects and the desire for such objects (*kāmehi*). This is traditionally understood to mean that in 1JH the objects of the senses are not perceived³⁵ and that without such absolute sensory seclusion 1JH does not come to be.³⁶ In some *suttas*, sensory input is a major obstacle for attaining 1JH.³⁷ In AN 9.38 it is said that “[a *bhikkhu* in the first *jhāna*] is called a *bhikkhu* who, having come to the end of the world, dwells at the end of the world [viz. of the five senses]” (Kv 181). In other *suttas*, however, it is possible to hear sounds in *jhāna*, when this state is not purified,³⁸ but in deeper states, the meditator cannot sense at all.

²⁸ For example, see, Catherine, *Focused and Fearless*, 126.

²⁹ Meadow mentions this difficulty in seeing PPR “as different from ordinary mental functioning” (Meadow et al. 2007, 76).

³⁰ Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, 45. The Bodhisattva (the Buddha-to-be) experienced the 1JH in his youth and right before his Awakening.

³¹ Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, 45.

³² “*Kāma*,” BD, 87-88; “*Kāma*,” PED, 230-31; “*Kāma*,” EB, 102-04.

³³ Buddhaghosa says that quite (*eva*) here conveys the idea of absoluteness, that is, of having secluded (*kāmehi viviccitvā*) or having gone away (*apakkamitvā*) absolutely from both the sense-objects and the desire for such objects (PP 4.80).

³⁴ “*Vivicca* (indecl.) [ger. of *viviccati*] separating oneself from (instr.), aloof from” (“*Vivicca*,” PED, 638).

³⁵ See Anālayo, “The First Absorption,” 79.

³⁶ The Pāli parallel can be found in MN 75, III MN I 508, 21.

³⁷ Several *suttas* mention that sounds are an impediment, or a thorn, to attaining 1JH (e.g. AN 5 135 and AN 10:72).

³⁸ Anālayo notes that in Vin II 109, some monks accuse Moggallāna of falsehood because he claimed that while in deep

Regarding how such withdrawal of the senses occurs, in an image that Teresa similarly employs in her works and was alluded to in the previous section, the *suttas* give the simile of a tortoise that withdraws its limbs into its shell. The *Kumma Sutta* reads:

When you dwell with the doors to your senses well-guarded, Mara, not getting any opportunity, will lose interest and leave, just as the jackal did with the tortoise. Like a tortoise with its limbs withdrawn in its shell, so the monk, the thoughts of the heart (SN 35.199).³⁹

In PPR, what de Pablo describes as “a strong internalization of the senses”⁴⁰ occurs. This withdrawal from outside things and entrance into the castle-soul⁴¹ is a defining feature of infused recollection that John of the Cross calls “passive night of the senses.”⁴² In PPR, the senses thus collected inwards by God become fixated on the divine object. For the most part, the person does not perceive in PPR.⁴³ As the soul enters within itself, the senses recoil. The senses, thought, are not “lost” (R 5,3) here but occupied with God. Teresa labels it as a heightening of the interior at the expense of the exterior (4M 3,1).

To illustrate how the person experiences this withdrawal of the senses, Teresa uses the similes of both a turtle drawing its limbs into its shell and a hedgehog curling up.⁴⁴

I don't know in what way or how they heard their shepherd's whistle. It wasn't through the ears, because nothing is heard. But one noticeably senses a gentle drawing inward, as anyone who goes through this will observe, for I don't know how to make it clearer. It seems to me I have read where it was compared to a hedgehog curling up or a turtle drawing into a shell (The one who wrote this example must have understood the experience well.) But these creatures draw inward whenever they want. In the case of this recollection, it doesn't come when we want it but when God wants to grant us the favor (4M 3,3).

This withdrawal, says Teresa, is made by God who, like a shepherd, summons the senses with a whistle and draws them inward into the castle even before one thinks of God.⁴⁵ When this occurs, the person does not hear a whistle through the ears but feels like a gentle drawing inward (*un encogimiento suave a lo interior*) bringing the senses inside. It seems, however, that in PPR the suspension of the senses is not absolute. The soul is still able to hear sounds, yet they are perceived as if they were from far away, or dimly; it can even see things although it cannot recognize them. This point, then, is a departure from Buddhaghosa who maintains that in any *jhāna* the internal and external senses are inactive.

jhāna he had heard sounds. The Buddha, however, explains that it is possible to hear sounds, even in deep *jhāna*, if the attainment is impure (*aparissuddho*). See Anālayo, *Satipaṭṭhāna*, 77.

³⁹ Cf. *The Kimsuka Sutta* (SN 35.204). Commenting on this simile, Griffith states: “The tortoise’s limbs usually represents the practitioner’s senses (including the mind, the organ of thought): their proper place, the image suggests, is within, turned away from the potential disturbances and disruptions of contact with sensory objects external to the practitioner” (Griffith 1997, 38).

⁴⁰ Pablo Maroto, *Teresa en Oración*, 372.

⁴¹ Teresa explains how, employing the language of her time, some authors (probably Francisco de Osuna) spoke of the prayer of passive recollection saying that, in this state, the “soul enters within itself” or “that it rises above itself” (4M 3,2).

⁴² Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, Vol. 1, 492.

⁴³ Teresa describes such withdrawal saying: “The senses and exterior things seem to be losing their hold because the soul is recovering what it had lost” (4M 3,1).

⁴⁴ Examples likewise used by Osuna (TAE, Tr. 6 Ch. 4).

⁴⁵ 4M 3.2 and C 28.5.

5.12.4.2.4 Seclusion from sensuality and evil desires

The expression “secluded from unprofitable things” (*vivicca akusalehi dhammehi*), in the canonical formulae for 1JH, involves the second sense of *kāma* referred to in the preceding section. It alludes to the seclusion of the meditator from craving for perceptible objects (i.e., sensuality), as a condition for entering the first *jhānic* absorption. It should be stressed that *akusalehi dhammehi*, translated by Ñāṇamoli as “unprofitable things”—and alternatively rendered by other scholars as “unwholesome” or “unskillful things,” or “evil qualities”⁴⁶—should be understood as defilements or blemishes, and synonymous with the word *kāmacchanda* (sense-desire)—the first of the Five Hindrances—and standing for the Five Hindrance as a whole.⁴⁷ Buddhaghosa states that the meditator temporally escapes the Five Hindrances by acquiring the opposite qualities or wholesome states. Without such inhibition of the Five Hindrances or “stains,”⁴⁸ there can be no entry into any of the *jhānas* as they are the exact opposites of the five *jhāna* factors. Only when these five impairments are suppressed may the *jhāna* factors arise (PP 4.86).

PPR is a passive phenomenon; the will cannot trigger this prayer. The soul, however, can help itself by adopting a proper disposition to God. Teresa states that the prayer of active recollection predisposes the meditator better to receive the prayer of quiet (C 28,3) than any other way because it implies a moral deepening, greater detachment, and leaving aside inclinations of the heart contrary to God’s will.⁴⁹ If 1JH is born of seclusion from sense-objects and craving for sensual pleasures,⁵⁰ Teresa asserts that God “does not give himself wholly until He sees that we are giving ourselves wholly to him” (5M 1,3). Teresa adds that when God grants infused recollection “He does so to persons who are already beginning to despise the things of the world” (4M 3,3). There is therefore a detachment from the senses in active recollection that prepares the soul for PPP.⁵¹ Detachment from needless socializing and communication is likewise a shared feature.⁵²

⁴⁶ “*akusalehi dhammehi*” is alternatively rendered as “unwholesome”, “unskillful” or “evil qualities.” See in Anālayo, 2015.

⁴⁷ The isolation of the meditator from the Five Hindrances is precisely what triggers the raising of access concentration. Concentration must then deepen to arouse the *jhāna* factors which may cause *jhāna* to unfold.

⁴⁸ In several *suttas* the Hindrances are equated to stains (*upakkilesa*).

⁴⁹ The Third Mansions represent a well-ordered life. Teresa attained this state after abandoning most moral imperfections. As Dicken says, Teresa “entered the state only after a long period of comparative infidelity in prayer” (Dicken 1963, 191). Probably, Teresa first experienced PPR in her youth after reading Osuna’s book. In her biography, PPR comes after a period of strong moral improvement. Teresa says that before starting to practice Osuna’s method she did not pay attention to venial sins and imperfections and that this was her perdition. Only after she morally improved, she did experience PPR.

⁵⁰ As Anālayo says, “the obstruction caused by sensual pleasures to the gaining of the inner peace of deeper concentration is a recurrent topic in the early discourses” (Anālayo 2014, 73).

⁵¹ Referring to such a level of detachment, Osuna explains that in the prayer of recollection, “you have to withdraw in the heart and separate yourself from all things created.” de Osuna (TAE 15, 2). Andrés Martín, summarizing Osuna’s advice, writes: “[The praying person] must be deaf and mute for all things and noises from outside and from ourselves: bodily and spiritual senses, images, bad thoughts, concupiscible, intelligible and executive powers” (Andrés Martín 1975, 628).

⁵² An important element present in Buddhist text and related to the letting go of senses desires is relinquishing craving for company (socializing) and human communication (Anālayo 2014, 75). Teresa explains how in her life PPR occurred after

5.12.4.2.5 Mind activity during 1JH and PPR

5.12.4.2.5.1 *Vitakka* and *vicāra*

Neither Buddhaghosa nor the *suttas* provide precise definitions of *vitakka* and *vicāra*. A proper conceptualization of these notions, though, is crucial for a proper understanding of 1JH and its comparison with PPR. This therefore entails elucidating whether conceptual thinking or discursive reflection is present in the first *jhānic* experience, which, as Sujato observes, is “one of the most often contested issues in Buddhist meditation.”⁵³

The etymology of *vitakka* denotes thought, “discursive thinking,” “logical reasoning.”⁵⁴ In his translation of the *Visuddhimagga*, Ñāṇamoli renders *vitakka* as “applied thought.”⁵⁵ Alternatively, *vitakka* has been translated as “reflection,” “thinking,”⁵⁶ and “initial thought.” Ñāṇamoli translates *vicāra* as “sustained thought,” a word elsewhere given as “applied thought,” “consideration,” “examination,” and “deliberation,”⁵⁷ denoting a comparatively more focused and sustained thinking process than *vitakka*. In trying to elucidate these concepts, T.W. Rhys Davids pointed out that *vitakka* and *vicāra* are degrees that are one and the same “reflection” process in which it seems difficult to distinguish them apart.⁵⁸ Stuart-Fox has also suggested that *vicāra* reinforces the sense of *vitakka* as “thinking.”⁵⁹

These interpretations of *vitakka* and *vicāra* in the context of *jhāna* support the opinion that thought and reflection are always present during 1JH which, to a very large extent, is the “received view” on this matter.⁶⁰ Yet, this reading is problematic as Buddhaghosa’s descriptions do not seem to support it, but there are also other substantial reasons for discarding this interpretation.⁶¹

years of futile colloquy and superficial or banal socializing and after feeling a deep need for silence and solitude. The prayer of passive recollection is often accompanied by a natural desire for solitude (4M 3,1). Cf. R.5,3.

⁵³ <https://sujato.wordpress.com/2012/12/06/why-vitakka-doesnt-mean-thinking-in-jhana>

⁵⁴ The Sanskrit *vitarka*, equivalent to *vitakka*, is related to the word *tarka*, which means “thought” and “logical reasoning.”

⁵⁵ See also “*Vitakka*,” PEG, 95.

⁵⁶ “*Vitakka*,” PED, 688.

⁵⁷ “*Vicāra*,” PED, 683.

⁵⁸ “*Vitakka*” PED, 620.

⁵⁹ Martin Stuart-Fox, “*Jhāna* and Buddhist Scholasticism,” 82.

⁶⁰ See Griffiths, “*Buddhist Jhāna*,” 60; Stuart-Fox, “*Jhāna* and Buddhist Scholasticism,” 94.

⁶¹ It has been noted that in the *suttas* *vitakka* and *vicāra* typically stand for “thought” and “reflection” (Bodhi, 2003, 56-57). It is far from obvious, however, that this is the correct meaning when considering *vitakka* and *vicāra* as *jhāna* factors. Some authors object that conceptualizing *vitakka* and *vicāra*, as *jhānaṅgas*, denoting “thinking” and “reflection” contradicts the categorization of 1JH as a state of one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*). Cf. Rahula, 1962, 193 and Anālayo, 2014, 79. It also denies 1JH as an experience of profound absorption. See Anālayo, 2010, 67, or as a state of higher consciousness. In addition, several *suttas* mention that leaving thought behind is in fact what leads to 1JH (e.g. MN 19 and AN 3.101). Another argument for discarding “thought” and “reflection” as accurate descriptions of *vitakka* and *vicāra* in the context of *jhāna* is that, for all the forty *kammaṭṭhānas*, those subjects entailing a more discursive mode of thinking are precisely those that should be abandoned in order to gain access to 1JH. Besides, *vitakka* and *vicāra* make their appearance as *jhānaṅgas* in 1JH only. Therefore, the mind’s activity preceding *jhāna* cannot be the same as after the attainment of absorption. It should be noted that the *Vibhaṅga* formulaic expression for 1JH does not state that *vitakka* and *vicāra* in 1JH are “born of seclusion,” from which Bucknell deduces that *vitakka* and *vicāra* do exist prior to the temporary elimination of the Five Hindrances (Bucknell 1993, 379), although to a lesser degree of concentration (Bucknell 1993, 398).

What then is the meaning of *vicāra* and *vicāra* in the context of *jhāna*? The scope of meaning of *vitakka* includes the nuance of “initial application of the mind,” or simply “inclination of the mind,”⁶² as intentionally directing awareness toward the object.⁶³ This nuance is applicable in the context of *jhāna* where *vitakka* and *vicāra* mean “initial application” and “sustained application of the mind [to the object]” respectively, or, as Anālayo puts it, “directing of the mind towards a theme or object and sustaining it there.”⁶⁴ This meaning of *jhānic vitakka* and *vicāra* is established in the *Abhidhamma*,⁶⁵ where *vitakka* stands for “the mental factor that directs the mind into the object” and *vicāra* means the “sustained application for the mind [into the meditative object].”⁶⁶ This meaning excludes the presence of deep conceptual thinking and reflection during 1JH.⁶⁷ This interpretation is supported by those Buddhist scholars who understand *vitakka* as “initial application of the mind (to the object)”⁶⁸ and *vicāra* as “sustained application of the mind (to the object).”⁶⁹ These are the meanings of these terms in relation to *jhāna*. With Karunadasa we also consider that *vitakka* “is a technical term for which it is difficult to give a proper English word”⁷⁰ and thus we prefer to leave the two terms untranslated. This reading *vitakka* seems closer to Buddhaghosa’s description below:

And, though sometimes not separate, [*vitakka*] is the first impact of the mind in the sense that it is both gross and inceptive, like the striking of a bell. [*Vicāra*] is the act of keeping the mind anchored, in the sense that it is subtle with the individual essence of continued pressure, like the ringing of the bell. [*Vitakka*] intervenes, being the interference of consciousness at the time of first arousing [thought], like a bird’s spreading out its wings when about to soar into the air, and like a bee’s diving towards a lotus when it is minded to follow up the scent of it. The behaviour of [*vicāra*] is quiet, being the near non-interference of consciousness, like the bird’s planing with outspread wings after soaring into the air, and like the bee’s buzzing above the lotus after it has dived towards it (PP 4.89).

Buddhaghosa adds that *vitakka* has the mark of “directing the mind on to an object.” Its function is to strike at the object; its manifestation is “leading of the mind onto an object” (PP 4.88). He then describes *vicāra* as “continued occupation with the object.” Its function is to keep consascent mental states occupied with it (PP 4.68). As we can see, Buddhaghosa’s descriptions do not suggest “thinking” and “reflection” as the meanings, but rather as initial and sustained awareness. This view seems to be supported by Anālayo who renders these concepts as “[directed] awareness” and “contemplation.”⁷¹

⁶² Anālayo: “Vitakka” in *From Grasping to Emancipation*, 65.

⁶³ Anālayo, “The First Absorption,” 65-7.

⁶⁴ Anālayo, “The First Absorption,” 79.

⁶⁵ Bodhi notes that only with the *Abhidhamma* were *vitakka* and *vicāra* distinguished technically (Bodhi 2003, 56-57).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Sujato says that in *vitakka*, “the coarse verbal reflection is long gone, and in its place is the gentle holding or pressing of the mind with its object” (<https://sujato.wordpress.com/2012/12/06/why-vitakka-doesnt-mean-thinking-in-jhana>). Anālayo writes: “Such inclining of the mind has to leave behind conceptual thinking in order to lead the mind into the attainment of the first absorption” (Anālayo, “The First Absorption,” 65-7).

⁶⁸ Anālayo, “Vitakka,” *From Grasping to Emancipation*, 65. “Initial” has here the sense of initial focusing or application or inclination of the mind to the object.

⁶⁹ “Vitakka,” PED, 688. Buswell and Lopez translate *vicāra* as “sustained application of attention” (“Vitakka,” PDB, 966).

⁷⁰ Karunadasa, *Early Buddhist Teachings*, 59.

⁷¹ Anālayo, “The First Absorption,” 79.

Let us analyze the intrinsic characteristics of *vitakka* and *vicāra* in this interpretation. First, the directing and sustaining of awareness onto the object imply “intentionality” as a component of *vitakka* and *vicāra*, which is habitually connected with right intention.⁷² In this sense, Anālayo observes that in the *Mahācattāriśaka Sutta* (MN 117) *vitakka* is synonym with right intention, along with “application of the mind” (*cetaso abhiniropānā*).⁷³

Second, *vitakka* and *vicāra* consist of focusing and sustaining attention onto the object, which is essentially an activity of awareness. As Anālayo notes, this meaning is in accord with the *Āgamas* where translators into Chinese used the Chinese character that expresses “awareness” instead of “thought” for “*vitakka*.”⁷⁴ Anālayo says:

I prefer to translate [*vitakka* and *vicāra*] as ‘application’ and ‘sustaining,’ on the understanding that in the context of absorption attainment the term *vitakka* does not imply the presence of conceptual thought. This accords with the understanding of the translators into Chinese [...], as, instead of using a Chinese character that expresses the meaning of ‘thought,’ the counterpart to *vitakka* is rather “awareness.”⁷⁵

Vitakka and *vicāra* are both subvocal processes responsible for verbal formation and construction preceding meaningful vocal utterance. Karunadasa brings it out well:

Both initial and sustained application have a causal connection with meaningful vocal expression. Hence they are defined as verbal constructions, i.e., sub-vocal operations of the mind preceding vocal utterance. Hence we read: ‘Having first had initial thought (*vitakka*) and discursive thought (*vicāra*), one breaks out into speech.’ Therefore, the reference to initial application (*vitakka*) in the cognitive process shows the participation, at least in a very subtle form, of language, the tendency to give a label to the object.”⁷⁶

In *vitakka* and *vicāra*, there is naming of the word related to the object of meditation at a subvocal label, as for example “earth.” This is subvocal naming is needed because in any label there is a shaping of concept, which depends on thinking and communicating through words that express thoughts. In 1JH this thought (concept) is brought to the surface of consciousness and identified through pronouncing the name of the object.

Thus, the conclusion—if our interpretation is correct—is that the mental activity in 1JH is one of directing and sustaining attention onto the object with lesser thinking, and not deliberate and guided logical thought or abstract reasoning. Nonetheless, some thinking may be present during 1JH. There is still present intentionality towards the meditative object and some thought involved as the noise in 1JH that will be eliminated in 2JH.

⁷² Anālayo, “*Vitakka*,” *From Grasping to Emancipation*, 65.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Anālayo, *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies* (Barre, Massachusetts: Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, 2017), 163-67.

⁷⁵ Anālayo, *A Meditator’s Life of the Buddha: Based on the Early Discourses* (Windhorse Publications, 2018), 36.

⁷⁶ Karunadasa, *Early Buddhist Teachings*, 59.

5.12.4.2.5.2 The activity of the mind leading to PPR and during PPR

The passage from PAR to PPR is momentous, as this is crossing the boundary from active prayer to contemplation: the latter defined as “a loving, simple, and fixed attention of the mind on divine things.”⁷⁷ However, PPR is not yet contemplation strictly speaking since, as Álvarez explains, in contemplation, the understanding and fantasy are tied.⁷⁸

What is the mental activity that best leads to PPR, according to Teresa’s descriptions? As noted, Teresa says that the prayer of active recollection—where discursive meditation is relinquished in favor of a non-reflective and more loving approach to God—is a better way to dispose the soul for infused recollection than any other mode of prayer (C 28,4).

This does not mean trying to stop thinking but reducing deliberate reflective activity of the mind. Teresa adamantly opposed a view, prevalent in her time, which held that the person who prays should stop thinking to attain, maintain, or deepen infused recollection. To her, the understanding cannot be stopped by the will and she discouraged any such attempt as fruitless and counter-productive. The activity of the understanding has been incessant since the Fall and only God can stop it. Any attempt to “think nothing” (*no pensar nada*) to attain, maintain, or deepen PPR is futile and results in increased activity. Instead, Teresa advocated that “[in] recollection, meditation, or the work of the intellect, must not be set aside” (4M 3,8). What the soul can do—both on the path leading to PPR and during it—is to be well disposed by not exciting thinking but not trying to suspend it, be attentive to God’s work in the soul, and saying few words of love and gratitude to Him.⁷⁹ Once PPR occurs, this lessening (not total silencing) of thought becomes infused.

As already noted, Pablo refers to this diminution (not cessation) of reflective thinking activity during the prayer of infused recollection as “a strong internalization of the senses and powers and a decrease in the reflective process of the understanding.”⁸⁰ However, such a reduced activity of thought and the understanding during PPR may vary according to the intensity of the recollection. During the height of the experience, the mind’s activity is lesser and there could at times be an extremely brief suspension of the soul’s faculties.

⁷⁷ Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, Vol. 1, 280.

⁷⁸ Álvarez, “Contemplación,” DSTJ, 168-73.

⁷⁹ Teresa recommends: “What I understand to be most fitting for the soul the Lord has desired to put in this dwelling place is that [...] without any effort or noise the soul should strive to cut down the rambling of the intellect—but not suspend either it or the mind; [...] Let the soul enjoy it without any endeavors other than some loving words, for even though we may not try in this prayer to go without thinking of anything, I know that often the intellect will be suspended, even though for only a very brief moment” (4M 3,7).

⁸⁰ Garrigou-Lagrange: “during this time a certain involuntary wandering of the imagination may be produced, since the imagination, which is not yet lulled, cannot become interested in a purely spiritual object” (Garrigou-Lagrange 1989, 56).

5.12.4.2.5.3 Comparison of mental activity leading to, and during, 1JH and PPR

We have elucidated the nature of *vitakka* and *vicāra* in their roles as *jhāna* factors of 1JH as “initial awareness” and “sustained awareness of the object” respectively. Now, let us examine how this mental activity compares with that leading to, and during PPR.

Deliberate thinking is abandoned before attempting 1JH (after access concentration), for the less discursive and more contemplative mental activity leading to 1JH.⁸¹ Likewise, PPR is usually preceded by the prayer of active recollection where thought and reflection are also substituted by a more contemplative attitude. Therefore, the lessening of thought, and increase in contemplation, are defining hallmarks of the meditative processes that bring or dispose one to both 1JH and PPR, as well as of the two states themselves.⁸²

Regarding memory and the will, in PPR a deep internalization of all the soul’s faculties occurs. If before PPR, these faculties were outside the castle, associated with strangers [meaning, “the things of the world”] (4M 3,3), now they are internalized, recovered for interior things (4M 3,1). But in PPR such interiorization of the faculties does not imply their “suspension.”⁸³ The faculties of memory and will, are “free” (not united), although, probably there is an incipient ligature of the will.

In conclusion we would say that a lessening of thought occurs both in 1JH and PPR.⁸⁴ During both experiences, the mind remains absorbed in the object of contemplation, but there is some mental activity involved which can be properly described as application of the mind to the object with attenuation of thought; this is more akin to contemplation than reflection. There is still some thought and use of words present but no discursive thinking.

5.12.4.2.6 Pleasant feelings and feelings of peace in 1JH and PPR

The *Vibhaṅga* formulaic phrase *vivekajaṃ pītisukhaṃ* that appears in Buddhaghosa’s definition of 1JH (PP 4.79) and is rendered by Ñāṇamoli as “with happiness (*pīti*) and bliss (*sukha*) born of seclusion,” refers to *pīti* and *sukha* as essential attributes of 1JH.

⁸¹ As shown, the appearance of *vitakka* and *vicāra* coincides with the arising of 1JH and announces a change of mental activity in meditation where the thought and reflection that were present during access concentration are substituted by a more contemplative mental activity consisting of “direct awareness” and “contemplation.”

⁸² According to Teresa, the practice of prayer of active recollection is often preceded by tiredness in reflective meditation.

⁸³ Bagger writes: “recollection does not mean a silence or sleep or suspension of the faculties. It simply refers to a shutting-up of the faculties within the soul itself” Matthew Bagger. *Religious Experience, Justification, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 169.

⁸⁴ The soul in PPR can continue with its meditation exercises, but gradually the reflective acts diminish and derive to a tranquil and loving contemplation.

In Section 5.11.4.6.2, we commented on the presence of “extremely pleasant feelings” as aspects of the experiences of both the *jhānas* and the states of mystical prayer. As we shall examine these exceedingly pleasant feelings in more detail when comparing 2JH with the prayer of quiet, and 3JH with the prayer of union, where these feelings become central, suffice here to mention that deep feelings of spiritual joy and happiness are also present in both 1JH and PPR in their experienter’s mind⁸⁵ and body.⁸⁶

5.12.4.2.7 Unification of the mind

The remaining factor of first *jhāna*-consciousness is *cittass’ ekaggatā* (PP 4.106), term that Ñāṇamoli renders as “unification of mind” and other scholars as “one-pointedness.”⁸⁷ *Cittass’ ekaggatā* is generally understood as synonymous with “concentration of mind.”⁸⁸ In the stock formula for 1JH in *Vibhaṅga* 245, *cittass’ ekaggatā* is not mentioned as a factor, although, as Buddhaghosa notes in PP4.109, it appears as such in *Vibhaṅga* 257. Stuart-Fox notes that *cittass’ ekaggatā*, as a component of 1JH, is not found anywhere in the *Nikāyas* only becoming a *jhāna* factor in 2JH. Consequently, Stuart-Fox concludes that its inclusion as a component of 1JH is an Abhidhammic development.⁸⁹ Contrary to the interpretation of *cittass’ ekaggatā* as a mental quality of 1JH, Stuart-Fox further notes that: “[it] is thinking [...] that the meditator suppresses through concentration when he attains one-ness of mind and thus moves from first to second *jhāna*.”⁹⁰ Stuart-Fox concludes that *vitakka-vicāra* and *ekaggatā* are incompatible and thus their coexistence impossible.⁹¹ Bucknell also concludes that *cittass’ ekaggatā* as a factor ascribed to 1JH is a post-Canonical revision present in the *Vimuttimaggā* and the *Visuddhimagga*,⁹² that—while an accurate description of meditative experience—contradicts the *Nikāyas*.⁹³

⁸⁵ In the pericope for 1JH, *pīti* and *sukha* are said to be “born of seclusion” (*vivekajam*), and not “born of concentration” (*samādhi*), as stated later in the pericope of 2JH. *Viveka*, translated here by Ñāṇamoli as “seclusion,” means “detachment,” “isolation” and refers to the subduing of the Five Hindrances that allows such pleasant feelings to arise. Thus, in 1JH, *pīti* and *sukha* are the outcome of purity. At the same time 1JH, like in all *jhānas*, is a state of peace. Yet, due to the simultaneous presence of *vitakka* and *vicāra*, 1JH is considered as a less calm state than the subsequent *jhānas*. Teresa’s scarce report on PPR deprives us of evidence on key aspects of this state. Nonetheless, some words she uses in describing PPR point to this state as being pleasurable. Teresa says: “Let the soul enjoy (*gozar*) it [infused recollection] without any endeavors other than some loving words” (4M 3,7). And, most probably referring to PPR, she says: “a very pleasing interior quiet and peace sometimes flow from this recollection, so that it doesn’t seem to the soul it is lacking anything” (CC 54.4). As PPR is an infused state, we cannot think of Teresa’s spiritual joy in PPR being “born of seclusion,” but she says that God gives PPR to those who are leaving behind the things of the world.

⁸⁶ Buddhaghosa says: “during absorption the whole body is showered with bliss owing to pervasion by happiness. And the pain faculty has absolutely ceased in one whose body is showered with bliss, since it is beaten out then by opposition” (PP 4.187). Teresa does not mention feelings of joy suffusing the body in relation to PPR but, referring to the prayer of quiet, she speaks of a great internal satisfaction (V 14,4) saying that after filling everything, “this water overflows through all the dwelling places and faculties until reaching the body” thus “the whole exterior man enjoys this spiritual delight and sweetness” (4M 2.4). She adds that no pain is felt in any infused prayer.

⁸⁷ *Ekaggatā* is a compound of *eka* (one) and *aggata*, abstract noun of *agga* meaning “prominence.”

⁸⁸ Concentration of mind is defined as the ability to keep the attention unwaveringly absorbed into a single object.

⁸⁹ Stuart-Fox, “Jhāna and Buddhist Scholasticism,” 79-110.

⁹⁰ Idem, 82.

⁹¹ Idem, 96.

⁹² Bucknell, “Reinterpreting the Jhanas,” 386.

⁹³ Idem, 390.

Turning now to the Carmelite side, is there any kind of unification or one-pointedness of mind during PPR? Infused recollection is a state of absorption, but not a state of union in the sense of full suspension of the faculties. “One-pointedness” or “unification of mind” could be applied to it, because the person’s attention is centered on God by His unifying grace, but the presence of some thought limits the absorptive nature of this prayer.

5.12.4.2.8 Externalities and duration of 1JH and PPR

Buddhaghosa states that “the abandoning of bodily pain” takes place at the moment of accessing 1JH (PP 4.185), and that “bodily bliss” (pleasure) exists during 1JH and 2JH and is only abandoned at accessing 3JH (PP 4.185). Buddhaghosa then adds that in 1JH pleasure suffuses the body completely. Teresa speaks of “delightful and painless absorption of the prayer of quiet” (*embebecimiento sabroso que carece de pena*)” (6M 2,2). Such delight and absence of pain can also be understood as applying to PPR.

As discussed in Section 5.11.4.6.3, our understanding it that is not possible for the *jhāyin* to move the body during any state of *jhāna*. Brahm says: “within any *jhāna* not only can one not move, but also one cannot know where one is nor where to move to!”⁹⁴ In *Castillo*, Teresa says that in PPR one does not dare to stir (*no se osa bullir*) for fear of losing that delight (6M 3,6),⁹⁵ which implies that the person can still move.

Jhāna is traditionally understood as a state in which the meditator cannot speak.⁹⁶ In SN 36.11, for example, it is said that on entering 1JH the *jhāyin* loses the power to speak. Teresa explains how during the Prayer of Quiet it is difficult to articulate speech (C 31,2). And, at the peak of the experience, only a few words can be pronounced (V 15,6).⁹⁷ Due to Teresa’s difficulties in distinguishing PPR and the Prayer of Quiet in *Vida*, and the similarities between these two states, it is possible that the impossibility or difficulty in speaking is a characteristic also of PPR.

Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw writes that “in the first *jhāna* the formation of breath becomes very subtle.”⁹⁸ Teresa does not make references to breath in relation to PPR.

⁹⁴ Brahm, *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond* 166.

⁹⁵ “We shall thus be justified in holding that the phenomenon of ‘not daring to stir’, no osar bullirse, for fear of losing delight in prayer, is properly placed only in the Mansions, and is strictly associated only with passive recollection. Even though three works place it in the prayer of quiet, we must reckon the Mansions as authoritative” (Dicken 1963, 208).

⁹⁶ See Shankman, *The Experience of Samadhi*, 39.

⁹⁷ The Prayer of Quiet is also called “orison of silence.”

⁹⁸ Pa-Auk, *The Only Way*, 40.

5.12.4.2.9 The effects of 1JH and PPR⁹⁹

The recurring experience of 1JH has long-term benefits for the *jhāyin*.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, Teresa states it is a great help to the soul when God grants the favor of PPR (C 28,7).

The two experiences have shared positive effects, among which is a greater control over the external senses, which should be highlighted. As already pointed out, the main common feature of 1JH and PPR is the withdrawal of the senses. Mastery over 1JH allows then greater control over the external senses. Teresa says that one of the benefits of the repeated occurrence of PPR is greater dominion over the senses (C 28,7).¹⁰¹

The comparative analysis of mental activity in 1JH and PPR, and the noted lessening of thought during these two experiences, indicate a progressive disassociation of the person from thought and conceptuality as another common trait of 1JH and PPR which, in both cases, indicates a transition from conceptual to non-conceptual states of mind.

Both 1JH and PPR prepare or predispose the person for states of greater absorption. Just as 2JH is attained from the conquered ground of 1JH as a stepping stone for JH, for Teresa, PPR predisposes to, and “almost always” precedes, the Prayer of Quiet (4 M 3,1),¹⁰² and prepares for the grace of contemplation better than any other way (C 28.5).

5.12.5 Summary and conclusion

The comparison of 1JH and PPR shows that these experiences are analogous in many respects and the inherent problems they tackle are similar. Both are significant and thus memorable events in a person’s life. Both are important steps in releasing the person from constraints, particularly the identification of and attachment to the senses and “guided” thought. Both also help the person to exercise greater control over himself. The obvious difference is that in 1JH this sensory absence occurs because of one’s own efforts while in Teresa it is a God-given grace. Next, we will turn to the comparison of the second *jhāna* and the prayer of quiet.

⁹⁹ We have already discussed, in Section 5.11.4.7, the effects of the *jhānas* and mystical prayer in their experiencers in general. In this section, we limit our observations to 1JH and PPR.

¹⁰⁰ See Bucknell and Chris Kang, 1997, 94.

¹⁰¹ Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, Vol. 1, 854-855.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*; Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 21.

5.13 THE SECOND *JHĀNA* AND THE PRAYER OF QUIET

5.13.1 Introduction

Upon attaining the five kinds of mastery over 1JH, the meditator is now in the position to attempt 2JH defined by silence of reflection, feelings of joy and unification of mind. As for Teresa, after the prayer of passive recollection (PPR) the soul may experience the second degree of mystical prayer: the prayer of quiet (hereafter “PQ”). As Teresa defines it, in PQ the soul receives the supernatural grace of God, experiences great quietness and silence, feelings of joy and happiness, and starts to lose its longing for earthly things.

As in the preceding sections, a comparison of 2JH with PQ is justified by similar phenomenological characteristics of these two states and how these have captured the attention of several authors. For example, Hailer, a Christian scholar, writes:

In the second prayer step [i.e., PQ] the characteristic feature of willfully applied attention disappears; discursive mental activity wanes; the bright fantasy-images fade, there is great peace and void in the soul of the observer [...] the intense meditation has given way to a sublime state of spiritual peace and delightful tranquility [...] The characteristic terms, denoting the second *jhāna* step: *ajjhāta sampasādana, avitakkam avicāram samādhijam pīti-sukham* are easily recognized in the Spanish mystics' description “*oración de quietud*” [PQ].¹

Meadow and her two Carmelite co-authors also identify affinities between “the second level of absorption [i.e., 2JH] and the prayer of quiet.”² A Buddhist writer, Ayya Khema, makes a similar pronouncement.³ For Young, Teresa’s “prayer of quiet [...] is, roughly speaking, the Christian term for *samādhi*,”⁴ and approximately lines up with the *jhānas*.⁵ Cousins disagrees, believing that PQ corresponds roughly to access concentration, not *jhāna*.⁶ As stated, Shaw finds analogies between Christian contemplation (prayer without discursive thought) and the second to fourth *jhānas*, “characterized by an internal silence, and a successive purification of feeling through joy, happiness, and one-pointedness.”⁷

In the pages that follow, we shall argue that there are enough phenomenological correspondences between 2JH and PQ to warrant a comparison. In both 2JH and PQ absorption deepens, mental activity further vanishes, and a profound tranquility, silence, and quietude set in. It must be noted, however, that these states have also essential differences, which we will explore comparatively.

¹ Heiler, *Buddhistische Versenkung*, 53 [translation from German].

² Meadow *et al.*, *Christian Insight Meditation*, 75-76.

³ Ayya Khema, *I Give you my Life*, 193.

⁴ Shinzen Young, *The Science of Enlightenment*, 53.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Cousins writes: “we can loosely affirm that the access concentration [...] which precedes full *jhāna* in the *Visuddhimagga* account corresponds reasonably closely to St. Teresa’s Prayer of Quiet” (Cousins 1995, 110).

⁷ Shaw, *An Introduction to Buddhist Meditation*, 271.

5.13.2 The second *jhāna*

The pericope for the second *jhāna* in the *Visuddhimagga* reads:

And at this point, “with the stilling (*vūpasama*) of *vitakka* and *vicāra* he enters upon and dwells in the second *jhāna*, which has internal confidence (*ajjhataṃ sampasādanam*) and singleness of mind (*cetaso ekodibhāvaṃ*), without *vitakka*, without *vicāra*, with *pīti* and *sukha* born of concentration’ (*Vibh* 245).” Buddhaghosa then adds, “and so he has attained the second *jhāna*, which abandons two factors, possesses three factors, is good in three ways, possesses ten characteristics and is of the earth *kaṣiṇa* (PP 4.139).

Vitakka and *vicāra* are “factors of abandonment” in 2JH. According to Buddhaghosa, the “stilling” (*vūpasama*) of these two factors means they are quieted, non-manifested, abandoned by development, or surmounted, to attain 2JH (PP 4.140). Buddhaghosa explains that, while the Five Hindrances are abandoned at the moment of accessing 1JH, in 2JH, *vitakka* and *vicāra* “are not abandoned at the moment of its access. It is only at the moment of actual absorption that the *jhāna* arises without them” (PP 4.149). This means that the abandonment of *vitakka* and *vicāra* is the proximate cause for entering 2JH.

In 2JH, the “factors of possession” are *pīti*, *sukha* and *cetaso ekodibhāvaṃ* (PP 4.139). The notions of *pīti* and *sukha* have been merely alluded to in the preceding sections. In this section, we will consider them in greater detail. The *jhāna* factors of *pīti* and *sukha*—which in 2JH are said to be “born of concentration” (PP 4.139)—are now experienced as more peaceful and subtler than in 1JH because of the overcoming of *vitakka* and *vicāra*. This means that 2JH is a calmer and more absorptive state than 1JH. In this section, we will also examine briefly the notion of “internal confidence” (*ajjhataṃ sampasādanam*).

The term “singleness of mind” (*cetaso ekodibhāvaṃ*), which denotes one-pointedness of mind or unification of mind, is synonymous with “concentration.”⁸ Buddhaghosa writes: “that much is actually stated in the *Vibhaṅga* too with the words ‘singleness of mind’ is steadiness of consciousness [...] right concentration (*Vibh* 258)” (PP 4.145). As previously stated, *cetaso ekodibhāvaṃ* in the *Visuddhimagga* is a *jhāna* factor present in 1JH (PP 4.106). In *Vibhaṅga* 245, nevertheless, and repeatedly through the *Sutta Nikāya*, it is said that *cetaso ekodibhāvaṃ* becomes established in 2JH only. Buddhaghosa says that one-pointedness of mind in the *Vibhaṅga* refers only to 2JH because it is only here that concentration becomes strong by having “faith (confidence) as its companion” (PP 4.144). In a similar vein, Gunaratana explains that “concentration only gains special mention in 2JH since it is here that it acquires eminence.”⁹

⁸ Cousins observes that *cetaso ekodibhāvaṃ* here “refers specifically to a state in which the mind is absorbed in a single object. In the present context it is the ability to keep the attention, without wavering or trembling, aware only of the object of meditation” (Cousins 1973, 122).

⁹ Gunaratana, *The Jhanas in Theravada Buddhist Meditation*, 37.

5.13.3 The prayer of quiet

As we saw in the preceding section, in PPR sensory input and deliberate reflection almost vanish, which otherwise would distract from prayer. Nonetheless, the activity of the “understanding” (*el entendimiento*)¹⁰ persists in PPR, causing much suffering to the person who prays. PQ, which Arbman characterizes as “a diminutive of the ecstasy,”¹¹ is the next rung in Teresa’s ladder of prayer after PPR, the prayer symptomatic of 4M, and the infused solution to the continuous and involuntary activity of the “understanding” during prayer, as in PQ the activity of the “understanding” is much reduced temporarily.

Teresa deals with PQ in most of her works: *Vida* Chapters 14-15, *Camino* Chs. 30-31, *Relaciones* 54,4; *Meditaciones sobre los Cantares*, *Conceptos de Dios* 4, and, extensively, in the second section of Ch. Four (The Fourth Mansions) of *Castillo*. Regarding nomenclature, “prayer of quiet” (*oración de quietud*) has various designations in Teresa’s works. In *Vida*, it is called “recollection and quiet” (V 15,1), or “quiet” (V 14), and is the second way of watering the soul (by drawing water from the well) (V 14,1). In *Camino*, Teresa writes: “those who experience this prayer call it the prayer of quiet” (C 31, title). In *Castillo*, she refers to PQ by the descriptive synonym of “*gustos de Dios*,” an expression with various English renditions. Some authors translate it as “divine tastes,”¹² or “infused consolations.”¹³ Kavanaugh and Rodriguez render it as “spiritual delights.”¹⁴ We adopt this last translation. In *Spiritual Theology*, PQ is also called “prayer of silence” or “prayer of simplicity,” and is understood as the first form of infused contemplation.

Teresa first experienced PQ in her youth, though she did not know what it was (V 4,3), and she was not to experience it again until more than twenty years later. PQ is a prayer of transit, an intermediate state between the active (ascetical) and passive (mystical) forms of prayer. Unfortunately, Teresa’s writings do not offer a monolithic understanding of PQ, as it was a concept that matured over time.¹⁵ It is only at the time of *Castillo* (4M 1,2), that the notion acquires clarity, being differentiated from PPR on the one hand (4M 3,1) and the “dream of the faculties” (*sueño de las facultades*) on the other.¹⁶ The following comparative analysis is based predominantly on PQ as it is described in *Castillo*.

¹⁰ Let us recall that in PPR, the prayerful faces the obstacle of the continuous involuntary activity of the understanding (*entendimiento*) which is a background noise that distracts and prevents him or her from closer approximation to God. This activity of the understanding differs from reflective thought in being involuntary and produced by the nature of mind. As the person attempts greater loving abandonment to God, this involuntary activity of the mind causes much suffering.

¹¹ Arbman, *Ecstasy or religious trance*, Vol. 2, 1.

¹² Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, Vol. 2, 301.

¹³ Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 193.

¹⁴ Teresa writes: “The experiences that I call spiritual delight in God, that I termed elsewhere the prayer of quiet” (4M 2,2).

¹⁵ For a discussion on the evolution of the notion of PQ in Teresa’s work see Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 205-10.

¹⁶ By “dream of the faculties” Teresa refers in her earlier work to an incipient for union that is not mentioned in *Castillo*.

5.13.4 Comparison of 2JH with PQ

In this section, we shall compare the most salient features of 2JH and PQ in order to show their strong parallels, but also their essential differences, which are mostly found in the nature described for both states, as we will discuss next

5.13.4.1 The nature of 2JH and PQ

2JH is of the same nature as the previous and following *jhānas* (absorption). But, this state is deeper and more intense than 1JH due to the absence of *vitakka* and *vicāra*,¹⁷ a higher purity of *pīti* and *sukha*, the rising of inner tranquility (*ajjhattam sampasādanam*), and a stronger one-pointedness of mind (*cetaso ekodibhāvam*) (PP 4.139).

PQ is a degree of mystical prayer¹⁸ and essentially of the same nature of union.¹⁹ Merton describes PQ as “the first definite taste of mystical prayer”²⁰ and Gabriel writes: “union, in fact, is nothing more than a very great intensification of the prayer of quiet.”²¹ PQ does not reach the level of union since there is no suspension of the faculties here, but it is close to it. Teresa says that in PQ the soul closely approximates union (C 31,1) and God begins to communicate with it (V 14,3), and give it His Kingdom (C 31,10).

The advent of 2JH and PQ likewise reflects the different nature of these two states. 2JH is a meditative state attained by the deliberate overcoming of *vitakka* and *vicāra*. When these two grosser *jhāna* factors subside, 2JH arises. Therefore, 2JH is attained through the meditator’s “efforts,” although these “efforts” are negative. The *jhānas* do not arise by merely an act of the will but by creating right conditions for their occurrence. With Teresa, in contrast, PQ is a supernatural prayer.²² It cannot be acquired by one’s positive or negative efforts (V 14.2), “no matter how hard one tries” (C 31,1).²³ PQ is granted by God as a special grace and should be received with humility (C 31,6). The soul, however, can do much by disposing itself appropriately to receive it (4M 2.1). Teresa adds that, when PQ is about to occur, one still can do something to prevent its advent or interrupt it when it occurs, which is not possible in the states of mystical union.

¹⁷ Gunaratana, *The Jhanas in Theravada Buddhist Meditation*, 37.

¹⁸ For Poulain, PQ is the “first stage of mystical union” (Poulain 1922, 187). If we define union (Section 5.11.4.2.3) as a state in which there is suspension of the powers, there is a contradiction in Poulain’s characterization of PQ as union.

¹⁹ Teresa speaks of PQ as “first encounters” between the groom and the bride, following the allegory of spiritual marriage.

²⁰ Thomas Merton, *The Ascent to Truth* (Harcourt Brace & Co., 1951), 218.

²¹ Gabriel de Santa María Magdalena, *El Camino de la Oración*, 238.

²² Teresa says that in 4M “begin to be supernatural things” (4M 1,1).

²³ In *Castillo* Section 2 Chapter Four Teresa compares PQ to a basin filled with water that emanates directly from the source in contrast to a basin that is filled by aqueducts and artifice (i.e., endeavors in discursive meditation) (4M 2,3).

5.13.4.2 Comparison of the characteristics of 2JH and PQ

Having compared their natures, let us turn to other salient features of 2JH and PQ.

5.13.4.2.1 Deeper moral purity, sensory withdrawal, and absorption

Both 2JH and PQ exhibit the phenomenology of their preceding states more intensely. Both are states of a higher moral purity: 2JH is further removed from the Five Hindrances and, consequently, is a state of higher purity than 1JH. Speaking of 4M, of which PQ is the paradigm, Teresa asserts that “poisonous creatures [i.e., wicked thoughts or desires] rarely enter these dwelling places. If they enter they do not harm” (4M 1,3).

Another shared feature is an intensified sensory withdrawal. In both cases, the person withdraws further from the external senses and is unaware of the surroundings. In 2JH, the *jhāyin* is further detached from the external senses and secluded from sensory input, having no awareness of external things; during 2JH the *jhāyin* cannot hear, feel or see.²⁴ Similarly, Teresa says that in PQ the soul has entered into itself and all the attention rests in God with oblivion of the world.²⁵ In PQ this sensory deprivation is not absolute, however. A number of Christian mystics²⁶ report that sounds can still be heard in PQ, although as from far away, and these sounds can be recalled, although with difficulty.

Both 2JH and PQ are states of a deeper absorption than 1JH and PPR respectively. Like any *jhāna*, 2JH is a state of meditation of deep quietness, silence and concentration in which the mind is entirely absorbed in the object of meditation. The disappearance of *vitakka* and *vicāra* at the moment of access to 2JH means that, in 2JH, the concentration is more one-pointed, and the absorption even stronger, than in 1JH. Likewise, it can be assumed that in PQ the person’s attention is further absorbed in God than in PPR,²⁷ due to the almost total absence of reflection and the reduced activity of the understanding.²⁸ In PQ, the soul remains totally “engulfed and absorbed” (*embebida y absorta*) in God, with forgetfulness of everything else,²⁹ as if God and the soul were alone in the world.

²⁴ Ayya Khema, *Who Is My Self?*, 54.

²⁵ Teresa writes: “It does not seem to them that they are in the world, nor would they want to see or hear about anything other than their God” (C 31,3).

²⁶ Devine comments: “As to the bodily senses St. Francis de Sales tells us that persons during the prayer of quiet can hear and remember things said near them” (Devine, “Prayer of Quiet,” CE, 1575).

²⁷ C 31,3 and 4M 2,6.

²⁸ 1M 3,4 and 1M 3,13.

²⁹ Teresa writes: “While this prayer lasts, they are so engulfed and absorbed (*embebidas y absortas*) with the satisfaction and delight they experience within themselves that they do not remember there is more to desire” (C 31,3). Cf. 4M 2,6 and 1M 3,13. Teresa explains that such loving absorption is not like ordinary concentration (*embebecimiento ordinario*) (4M 1,3), but a granted (infused) absorption (*embebecimiento regalado*) (F 5,13), a holy absorption (*embebecimiento santo*) (CAD,4,5).

5.13.4.2.2 The absence of inner chatter in 2JH and PQ

The absence of inner chatter is another common feature. We already quoted Heiler who observed that in both PQ and 2JH “willfully applied attention disappears; discursive mental activity wanes; the bright fantasy-images fade, [and] there is great peace and void in the soul of the observer.” Heiler adds: “the characteristic terms, denoting the second *jhāna* step: *ajjhāta sampasādana, avitakkam avicāram samādhijam pīti-sukham* are easily recognized in the Spanish mystics’ description ‘*oración de quietud*.’”³⁰

Both 2JH and PQ are described as states of internal silence, absent of inner chatter. In the *Kolita Sutta*, for instance, the process that leads to 2JH is named “noble silence” (*ariya tuṇhībhāva*).³¹ As noted in Section 5.13,2, the prayer of quiet is similarly known as the “prayer of silence.”³² These appellations are given because, in both states, sensory inhibition intensifies, while the inner chatter and pre-vocal verbalization also lessen.

In Section 5.12.4.2.5.1 we discussed the notions of *vitakka* and *vicāra* in the context of *jhāna* and concluded that they mean, respectively, “initial” and “sustained application of the mind to the object”, and not “thought” and “reflection” as frequently interpreted. *Vitakka* and *vicāra* are the two “factors of abandonment” in 2JH. Their disappearance coincides with the advent of 2JH (PP 4.147), where this element typifies this state.³³ It entails the cessation of the mind’s inclination towards the object (intentionality),³⁴ and also the inactivation of those mental factors accountable for constructing speech, including the cessation of verbal formation (*vacī-saṅkhāra*) and the internal “naming,” both associated with language. Due to the absence of *vitakka* and *vicāra*, “concomitant with the spoken word” (*vacī-saṅkhāra*), 2JH is described as a state of “internal silence.”³⁵

Turning now to the Christian side, a feature of PQ is the absence of deliberate thought and the reduced activity of the “understanding” (*entendimiento*). To dispose the soul to receive this grace, Teresa advises the lessening of discursive thought and reflection and engaging in acts of praising God and “rejoicing in His goodness” (4M 1,6). In time, and by God’s grace, the activity of the “understanding” lessens. It is the cessation of the

³⁰ Heiler, *Buddhistische Versenkung*, 53 [translation from German].

³¹ The *Kolita Sutta* reads: “Then, friends, it occurred to me: ‘Here, with the subsiding of thought and examination, a *bhikkhu* enters and dwells in the second *jhāna*, which has internal confidence and unification of mind, is without thought and examination, and has rapture and happiness born of concentration. This is called noble silence’” (SN 21.1).

³² Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, 108.

³³ In the *Anguttara Nikāya* *vitakka* and *vicāra* are described as “a thorn to the second *jhāna*” (AN 10:72).

³⁴ Anālayo states: “With the second absorption, then, even this last vestige of mental activity through inclining the mind is left behind, hence the mind reaches true inner silence (SN II 273; cf. also Th 650 and Th 999). Such silence is not only free from conceptual thought, but also free from the ‘noise’ of deliberate mental application” (Anālayo 2014, 65-67).

³⁵ Anālayo, *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies*, 126.

interior noise caused by mental rumbling that explains the name “prayer of inner silence.” However, PQ does not necessarily mean a total absence of thought therein. PQ may have different degrees of intensity. It may be an infused quieting (*ligature*) of thought when it is weak, allowing some thoughts to occur, or total inhibition (*suspension*) of thought, when it is strong. In this very sense, referring to *ligature*, Poulain states, “In the [prayer of] quiet [...] the *ligature* is not tantamount to a complete impossibility. Thus, one may begin to recite a vocal prayer, for instance, the Paternoster. But I do not know what secret force [it is] that often, after two or three words, prevents one from continuing.”³⁶ In light of the above discussion, we may conclude, that what Gimello rightly calls the non-appearance of the “distraction of discursiveness,”³⁷ and the even deeper absence of inner chatter and pre-verbalization, are the most striking parallels between 2JH and PQ. However, it must be noted that in 2JH this absence is absolute while in PQ it is relative.

A crucial point of divergence is that, whereas discursive thinking and interior chatter are not present in PQ, the person’s mind in this state is loving. As Gabriel puts it, in PQ “the soul does not proceed with images and concepts, but through the love and delight in the Lord.”³⁸ For Pablo, due to the “eminently emotional character of the prayer of quiet, the will is the main architect of the soul’s relationship with God”³⁹ Such love towards the object is not being described for the *jhāna* as having a comparable nature and intensity.

5.13.4.2.3 Exceedingly pleasant feelings in 2JH and PQ

In comparing the defining traits of the *jhānas* and mystical union, we have identified “extremely pleasant feelings” as a standard feature in both 2JH and PQ.⁴⁰ In this regard, Cousins unambiguously states: “Teresa’s description of the distinction between spiritual enjoyments [*contentos*] and spiritual joys [*gustos de Dios*] makes it quite clear that we are dealing with the *jhāna* factors of joy [*pīti*] and happiness [*sukha*], especially the former.”⁴¹ Heiler, as noted in Section 5.13.1, observed that “*pīti-sukham* are easily recognized in the Spanish mystic’s description of ‘*oración de quietud*’ [prayer of quiet].”⁴² In this section we investigate whether Cousins’ and Heiler’s opinions are justified, with a particular focus on phenomenological resemblances between *pīti* and *gustos de Dios*.

³⁶ Quoted by Arbman, *Ecstasy*, 4.

³⁷ Gimello, “Mysticism and meditation,” 186.

³⁸ Gabriel de Santa María Magdalena, *El camino de la oración*, 235.

³⁹ Daniel de Pablo Maroto, *Teresa en Oración. Historia-Experiencia-Doctrina* (Madrid: Editorial Espiritualidad, 2004), 375.

⁴⁰ Section 5.11.4.6.2.1. We made reference to these pleasant feelings in relation to 1JH and PPR in Section 5.12.4.2.5.2.

⁴¹ Cousins, “The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification,” 112.

⁴² Heiler, *Buddhistische Versenkung*, 53 [Translation from German].

5.13.4.2.3.1 *Pīti* and *sukha* in 2JH

Few words have problems with conceptualization and translation as *pīti* and *sukha*. Ñāṇamoli renders *pīti* (Skt. *prīti*) as “happiness.”⁴³ PED translates it as “emotion of joy, delight, zest, exuberance.”⁴⁴ Gunaratana renders it as “gladness,” “trance,” “rapture,”⁴⁵ while Anālayo translates this word as “bliss.”⁴⁶ As per descriptions in the Pāli Canon and the *Visuddhimagga*, *jhānic pīti* is a phenomenon that exclusively occurs in *jhāna*, a particularity that makes these above translations rather problematic. For Cousins, given its phenomenology, translating the word *pīti* as “happiness” or “satisfaction” is inadequate. The translations “joy,” “delight,” “trance,” “rapture,” and “bliss” seem also unsatisfactory to us, so we will follow Cousins’ rationale here and leave the term *pīti* untranslated.⁴⁷

Pīti is a mental factor (*cetasika*) concomitant with 1JH and 2JH, categorized under the “aggregate of mental formations” (*saṅkhāra-khandha*), and not under the “aggregate of feeling” (*vedanā-khandha*) (PP 4.100). In the *Subha Sutta*, the Buddha says that *pīti* is not dependent on the senses being a noble happiness leading to liberation (MN 99.17) Buddhaghosa describes *jhānic pīti* as “pervading” and says that in it “the whole body is completely pervaded [...] like a rock cavern invaded by a huge inundation” (PP 4.98), Buddhaghosa adds that the defining property of *pīti* is “endearing.” Its key function is “to pervade body and mind with the thrill of rapture,” and is manifested as “elation” (PP 4.94). As per its disappearance as a factor, *pīti* is abandoned at the moment of access of 3JH.

Turning now to *sukha*, this *jhānaṅga* accompanies *pīti* in 1JH and 2JH. As noted, for Buddhaghosa *sukha* belongs to the “aggregate of feeling” (*vedanā-khandha*) (PP 4.100). Referring to 3JH, Buddhaghosa says that *jhānic sukha* is experienced with the body. For Arbel “this suggests that *sukha* is a physical pleasure while *pīti* is a mental one.”⁴⁸ Outside the *jhāna* context, “*sukha*” means “agreeable,” “pleasant,”⁴⁹ “happiness,” “joy.”⁵⁰ As the fourth *jhāna* factor, “*sukha*” is rendered by Ñāṇamoli as “bliss” or “pleasure.”⁵¹ *Jhānic sukha* also denotes happiness, for which Anālayo renders it as “happiness,”⁵² probably the closest translation, but one that compounds problems of terminological

⁴³ Ñāṇamoli in PP 3.82, note 6.

⁴⁴ “Pīti,” PED, 513-14

⁴⁵ Gunaratana, “The jhanas In Theravada Buddhist meditation,” 351-53.

⁴⁶ Anālayo, *Excursions into the Thought-World of the Pali Discourses* (Onalaska, WA: Pariyatti Publishing, 2012), 160.

⁴⁷ Cousins, “Buddhist Jhāna,” 123.

⁴⁸ Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, 59.

⁴⁹ “Sukha,” PED, 792.

⁵⁰ Gunaratna, “The jhanas in Theravada Buddhist meditation;” and Nyānātīloka, DB, 206.

⁵¹ Shankman, *Experience of Samadhi*, 66; Bucknell and Stuart-Fox, *The Twilight Language*, 379.

⁵² We can talk of “spiritual happiness.” For a consideration of worldly and unworldly *sukha*, see “Sukha,” EB, 164.

distinction with *pīti*, which Nāṇamoli has rendered as well as “happiness.”⁵³ The Buddha describes *sukha* as a “divine happiness” (*dibba sukha*) and, after experiencing it, all interest in sensual happiness ceases.⁵⁴ Buddhaghosa defines *sukha* as “mental pleasure, mental happiness, the felt pleasure and happiness born of mind-contact, pleasurable and happy feeling born of mind-contact.” It has the mark of being “gratifying.” Its function is “intensify associated states,” and it is manifested as “aid” (PP 4.100).

Regarding the difference between *pīti* and *sukha*, according to Buddhaghosa: “wherever the two are associated, *pīti* is the contentedness at getting a desirable object, and *sukha* is the actual experiencing of it when got” (PP4.100).⁵⁵ In 1JH, *pīti* and *sukha* are “born of seclusion,” while in 2JH they are “born of concentration” (*samādhijam pītisukham*).⁵⁶ Based on Buddhaghosa’s description, we conclude then 2JH is a state of higher spiritual happiness than the 1JH, attained by the suppression of *vitakka* and *vicāra*.

5.13.4.2.3.2 *Los contentos, gustos de Dios and satisfacción del alma*

In starting to describe the Fourth Mansions, Teresa explains the difference between two distinct phenomena that may occur during prayer: the *contentos* (“consolations”) and the *gustos de Dios* (“spiritual delights”). She further describes a kind of spiritual satisfaction (*satisfacción*) felt in PQ. These distinctions are relevant to our discussion on pleasant feelings in relation to PQ and their comparison with *pīti* and *sukha* in 2JH.

5.13.4.2.3.2.1 *Los contentos (“the consolations”)*⁵⁷

The Spanish word *contento* means “happy,” “pleased,” “satisfied,” “contented.”⁵⁸ In the context of Teresa’s mystical prayer, *contentos* are states of great happiness or strong emotion, and one of the first phenomenon concomitant to mystical prayer.⁵⁹ But, *contentos* are natural,⁶⁰ “acquired with our meditation and petitions to our Lord” (4M 1,4). The *contentos* may manifest as tears of happiness, fits of sobbing, strong feelings of

⁵³ Nāṇamoli PP 3.82, note 6. “Happiness” is not a proper translation as it can be easily confused with ordinary happiness.

⁵⁴ See Anālayo, *From Craving to Liberation*, 105.

⁵⁵ Buddhaghosa adds, “if a man, exhausted in a desert, saw or heard about a pond on the edge of a wood, he would have happiness; if he went into the wood’s shade and used the water, he would have bliss” (PP 4.100).

⁵⁶ Some authors interpret “born of concentration” as referring to 2JH (e.g. Solé-Leris, *Tranquility and Insight*, 63).

While others, consider that it refers to *pīti* and *sukha* (Bucknell 1993, 380). Buddhaghosa’s explanation that 2JH is born in toto out of the abandoning *vitakka* and *vicāra* (PP 4.148) confirms the latter interpretation.

⁵⁷ “Consolations” is the translation by Kavanaugh and Rodríguez of the word *consuelos*, a synonym of *contentos*.

⁵⁸ Teresa writes on the *contentos* in *Castillo*, particularly 4M 1, and other places in her works (e.g. V 13,22; C 16,20-29).

⁵⁹ As Álvarez explains, in Teresa’s writings these two terms (*contentos* y *consuelos*) have “a technical connotation [...] to designate the first manifestations of mystical prayer” (Álvarez, “Consolaciones espirituales,” DSTJ, 163). In Teresa’s works, the expression *ternura en la oración* (“sweetness in devotion”) is a synonym of *contentos*, *consuelos*.

⁶⁰ As Álvarez notes “consolations” are ascetical while “spiritual delights” are mystical. Cf. “Contentos,” DSTJ, 173.

devotion and the like,⁶¹ and derive from meditations on the Passion of Christ, petitions to the Lord or “as a recompense for the same virtuous work that we do” (4M 1,4). Teresa explains that the *contentos* are phenomena characteristic of 3M and occur because the reasoning employed here, in meditative prayer, is accompanied by the passions. Teresa then adds that, although the object of the *contentos* is God, they do not cease to be natural and similar to the happiness that one feels for thousands of things in ordinary life such as an unexpected luck, an unforeseen meeting with someone whom we deeply love, or a valuable business solution that everyone applauds. He says that in both *contentos* and ordinary happiness one may weep of pure joy, but the *contentos* are always about the things of God and therefore “of a more noble lineage.” The *contentos*, do not “expand the heart” but instead oppress it slightly. These “sensitive devotions,” although they should not be overvalued, must be highly esteemed as they may help one—if there is enough humility—“to understand that they are not better thereby” (4M 1,6).

5.13.4.2.3.2 *Gustos de Dios* (spiritual delights)

The Teresa’s expression *gustos de Dios*, translated by Kavanaugh and Rodriguez as “spiritual delights,” is a peculiar designation that Teresa uses as a synonym for PQ.⁶² It describes supernatural feelings of spiritual delight or pleasure,⁶³ infused by God into the soul, and essential to this state.⁶⁴ Teresa says that these feelings come from a deeply within oneself, “the principle of heart” or “the soul’s center” where God dwells (4M 2,4).

Gustos de Dios are not distressing emotional states like the *contentos* but involve calmer feelings. Nor do they feel like ordinary happiness. When God bestows *gustos de Dios*, one experiences “the greatest peace, quiet and sweetness in the inmost depths of its being” (4M 2,4). This is so, Teresa clarifies, because, contrary to the *contentos*, *gustos de Dios* do not come from us, or originate in our passions, but are gifts from God. Teresa further distinguishes *contentos* from *gustos de Dios* by making use of the image of how two basins fill with water (4M 2,4). *Contentos* are brought about by us like water that is channeled by aqueducts, with much artifice and producing a great amount of noise. *Gustos de Dios*, on the contrary, come from the very source of the water, that is God, and, without artifice, the basin is filled in deep silence and pours into the whole person.

⁶¹ Teresa speaks of those who feel tightness in the chest, uncontrollable motions violent as to cause nosebleeds (4M 1,2).

⁶² Teresa often equates *gustos de Dios* and *oración de quietud* (e.g., 4M 2,2).

⁶³ The word “gusto” means taste, flavor (of something) but also pleasure, delight. Speaking of the prayer of quiet, Teresa says: “In this prayer the faculties are gathered within so as to enjoy that satisfaction with greater delight (*gusto*)” (V 14,2).

⁶⁴ *Spiritual delights* are supernatural favors. Cf. 4M 2,4.

Teresa says that *gustos de Dios* do not contract the heart like the *contentos* but dilates and expands it reminding her of the biblical phrase *dilatasti cor meum* (4M 2,5). She also describes how in PQ the soul notices like a “fragrance” (4M 2,6 and CAD 4,2-3).⁶⁵ Teresa adds that *gustos de Dios* begin in God and spread through the body (4M 2,4) producing a bodily delight and satisfaction in the soul (C 31,2 and V 14,4). After it fills everything, “this water [*gustos*] overflows through all the mansions and faculties until reaching the body [so] the whole exterior man enjoys this spiritual delight and sweetness” (4M 2,4). About the effects of *gustos de Dios* Teresa says: “hence this interior sweetness and expansion can be verified in the fact that the soul is not as tied down as it was before in things pertaining to the service of God, but has much more freedom” (4M 2,9).

5.13.4.2.3.2.3 Satisfacción (satisfaction)

According to Teresa, in PQ one experiences “great satisfaction in the soul” (C 31,3).⁶⁶ This satisfaction may be experienced in parallel with the *gustos de Dios* but is different from it. The idea of satisfaction in connection with PQ is found in several of Teresa’s works.⁶⁷ The presence of God in the soul gives such delectation that it is satiated (V 15,1). Teresa writes: “so glad is it merely to find itself near the fountain that, even before it has begun to drink, it has had its fill. There seems nothing left for it to desire” (C 31,3).⁶⁸ This satisfaction is incomparably greater than any worldly satisfaction (CAD 4,T). In PQ the faculties are “calmed and at peace,” which translates into a mental and physical calm.

5.13.4.2.3.3 Comparison of *pīti* with *contentos* and *gustos de Dios*

5.13.4.2.3.3.1 *Pīti* and *contentos*

As said above, *contentos* are strong emotional states prompted by the confluence of the use of reason and the passions during discursive meditation. According to Teresa, these “feelings of devotion” are common to those in the early mansions and can be bent by lessening reflection, praising God, and eliciting whatever most excites love (4M 1,7). In our view, and contrary to the opinion expressed by Cousins, no correspondence can be established between *contentos* and *pīti*, or can anything comparable to *contentos* be

⁶⁵ Here Teresa mentions that in *Vida* she says otherwise (4M 2,7).

⁶⁶ Teresa writes: “while this prayer lasts, they are so absorbed and engulfed with the satisfaction and delight they experience within themselves ...that they do not remember there is more to desire” (C 31,3). In addition to *satisfacción* Teresa speaks of *delight* (*deleite*), and gladness (*contento*), in reference to PQ (V 15,1).

⁶⁷ See, for example, V 15,1.

⁶⁸ In *Vida*, she says “This quietude and recollection is something that is clearly felt through the satisfaction and peace bestowed on the soul [...] It seems to the soul, since it hasn’t gone further, that there’s nothing left to desire and that it should willingly say with St. Peter that it will make its dwelling there” (V 15,1).

found in relation to the four *jhānas* or *samatha* meditation. The ten *kammaṭṭhānas* that involve deep thought and reflection are abandoned beyond access concentration, and the Five Hindrances—which could be potentially a homologue to *contentos* (e.g., relentlessness)—are transcended at the moment of entry into access concentration.

5.13.4.2.3.3.2 *Pīti* in 2JH and *gustos de Dios*

In comparing *pīti* and *gustos de Dios*, it is first noticeable that both phenomena are inherent to the definitions of 2JH and PQ respectively. If *pīti* is one of the three factors of possession in 2JH, *gustos de Dios* is synonymous with PQ itself (4M 2,2). *Pīti* and *gustos de Dios* are both described as feelings of spiritual joy, delight, happiness. The *Vibhaṅga* describes *pīti* as “gladness, rejoicing, rapture, mirth, merriment, felicity, elation, delight of consciousness” (*Vibh* 567). The Spanish word *gusto* conveys the meaning of joy, pleasure, enjoyment. Teresa uses *deleite* (delight) as a synonym of *gusto*. However, both *pīti* and *gustos de Dios* do not describe ordinary feelings of joy or pleasure but particular spiritual feelings that only occur in *jhāna* and the prayer of quiet respectively. If in both traditions a new expression (i.e., *gustos de Dios*) or unique use of an existing term (i.e., *pīti* in context of *jhāna*) has been called for and coined, it is precisely because merely speaking of joy or delight would not convey the meaning of these experiences.

Regarding their phenomenology, *pīti* and *gustos* are specific kinds of joy connected with states of calm and peace. *Pīti* arises in the process of *samatha* (calm) meditation. Teresa states that *gustos de Dios* are not states that cause discomfort, like the *contentos*, but calmer feelings. In PQ, one experiences “the greatest peace, quiet and sweetness (*grandísima paz y quietud y suavidad*) in the inmost depths of its being” (4M 2,4). *Pīti* and *gustos de Dios* are both described as unlike the joys one can experience in the world. As Tse-fu Kuan remarks, in SN 4 235–236 sensual pleasure, which is worldly (*sāmisa*), is contrasted with the *pīti* of *jhāna*, which is an unworldly (*nirāmisa*) pleasant feeling.⁶⁹ *Jhānic pīti* is not born out of contact with the senses or depending on sensual pleasure. Teresa states that *gustos de Dios* are different from carnal delights of the world (4M 2,4), which are nothing compared to them (CAD 4). Of both *pīti* and *gustos*, it is similarly said that both are spiritual feelings or emotions,⁷⁰ that satisfy entirely the person. Teresa writes: “while this prayer lasts they are so absorbed and engulfed with the satisfaction and delight they experience within themselves [...] that they do not remember there is more to desire” (C 31,3) Cf. 4M 2,6 and 1M 3,4.

⁶⁹ Tse-fu Kuan, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism*, 36.

⁷⁰ Arbel translates *nirāmisa* as spiritual (versus *sāmisa* or “carnal”). See Arbel, *Earl Buddhist Meditation*, 96-97

Both *pīti* and *gustos de Dios* are both felt in the body. Buddhaghosa states that *jhānic pīti* thoroughly pervades the whole body (PP 4.98). He adds that the function of *pīti* “is to refresh the body and the mind” (PP 4.94). In *Camino*, Teresa explains that in PQ “a person feels the greatest delight in his body” (C 31,3). In *Castillo*, she adds that *gustos* begin in God and are felt “in our natural” [the body] (4M 1,4). In *Vida*, it is said that *gustos* affect both the inner and outer man producing interior and exterior satisfaction (V 14,4).

It is noteworthy that both Buddhaghosa and Teresa use the simile of an inundation with water to describe *pīti* and *gustos de Dios*. When commenting on the five kinds of *pīti* according to their intensity—*minor*, *momentary*, *showering*, *uplifting* and *pervading* (PP 4.94)—Buddhaghosa describes the *pīti* felt in *jhāna* as “pervading,” because in it “the whole body is completely pervaded [...] like a cavern invaded by a huge inundation” (PP 4.98).⁷¹ Describing *gustos de Dios* in comparison with *contentos*, Teresa writes that in *contentos* the water is conveyed through aqueducts, that is, through our efforts (i.e., reflection), while in *gustos de Dios* the water springs from the source (God) and fills everything noiselessly and overflowing all (body) and forming a large stream (4M 2,2-6).

This physical aspect suggests that *pīti* and *gustos* are emotions instead of feelings. In the *Visuddhimagga* however, *pīti* is included in the aggregate of mental formations (*saṅkhāra khandhas*) and not in the aggregate of *vedanā khandha* as *sukha*. To Arbel, this suggests *pīti* is a kind of mental pleasure while *sukha* is a physical pleasure.⁷² The essential difference is that *pīti* is a natural feeling whereas *gustos* are “of God” (*de Dios*).

5.13.4.2.3.2 *Sukha* in 2JH and *satisfacción* in PQ

Both *sukha* in 2JH and satisfaction (*satisfacción*) or spiritual delight (*deleite espiritual*) in PQ are described as feelings of spiritual contentment or gladness both bod and mind. These feelings satiate the person who experience them in way that worldly satisfaction does not. Both are accompanied by feelings of great peace and calm and quite different from the excitement that characterizes *pīti* and *gustos de Dios*, respectively.

5.13.4.2.4 Feelings of quiet and calm in 2JH and PQ

2JH is a quieter and more tranquil state than 1JH.⁷³ As Gunaratana elucidates: “By reflecting upon the second *jhāna* as more tranquil and sublime than the first, the

⁷¹ Buddhaghosa adds that the function of *pīti* is to pervade body and mind with the thrill of rapture” (PP 4.94).

⁷² Arbel, *Earl Buddhist Meditation*, 59.

⁷³ It is often said that 2JH is a state less “agitated,” more “refined,” “sublime” and “peaceful” than 1JH. It is more “silent.”

meditator ends his attachment to the first *jhāna*.⁷⁴ This quietness is due to the fact that *vitakka* and *vicāra* have disappeared in 2JH and, with it, *pīti*, *sukha* and one-pointedness “have acquired a subtler and more peaceful tone.”⁷⁵ Shaw writes, “in the absence of the factors associated with speech, it [2JH] is ‘calmed inwardly’ (*vūpasama ajjhataṃ*).”⁷⁶ Accordingly, 2JH further contributes to a goal of *samatha*: the attainment of tranquility. Also in PQ, the soul feels an extraordinary rest, peace. To qualify this prayer as “of quiet” suggests that for its duration “quietness” is the essential element that shapes that state.⁷⁷ Writing on *gustos de Dios*, Teresa says that when God bestows this supernatural gift, one feels “the greatest peace, quiet and sweetness in the inmost depths of its being” (4M 2.4). This because the Lord puts the soul’s powers at rest (*se sosiegan*) with His presence (C 31,1).⁷⁸ This leaves the soul in a state of inner peace (4M 2,4) and silence, the reason for which the prayer of quiet is also called “prayer of silence.”⁷⁹

In summary, 2JH and PQ overlap in describing feelings of almost other worldly peace and quiet. In 2JH, this quiet and calm is due to the silencing of *vitakka* and *vicāra* present in 1JH. In PQ, this quiet and calm are due to the supernatural pacification of thinking and understanding that were still active in the prayer of passive recollection.

5.13.4.2.5 Internal confidence, unification of mind, and mindfulness

As formulated in the definition of *Vibhaṅga* 245, 2JH possesses “internal confidence” (*ajjhataṃ sampasādanaṃ*) and “singleness of mind” (*cetaso ekodibhāvaṃ*) (PP 4.139). PP 1.141 mentions that “internal confidence” is a state of “internal” (*ajjhata*) enhanced faith (confidence) that is tranquilizing (*sampasādana*).⁸⁰ “Internal confidence” is not a *jhāna* factor but a consequence of 2JH⁸¹ that manifests because of the temporary suppression of *vitakka* and *vicāra* (PP 4.144).⁸² Teresa does not describe PQ as a state of internal faith that is tranquilizing. Yet, one of the effects of PQ is that “this soul is left with great confidence that it will enjoy Him” (4M 3,9). Both tranquility and faith are defining marks of PQ,⁸³ as the cessation of thought and the presence of God eliminates doubts.

⁷⁴ Gunaratana, *The Jhanas in Theravada*, 36. Gunaratana speaks of the “serenity of 2H” (Gunaratana 1988, 38).

⁷⁵ Idem, 37. See also Catherine, *Focused and Fearless*, 135.

⁷⁶ Shaw, *Buddhist Meditation*, 64.

⁷⁷ Poulain, “Mystical Theology,” CE, 621–22. See also Arberman, *Ecstasy*, Vol. 2, 80.

⁷⁸ “This prayer [...] I call quiet because of the calm that it does in all the faculties” (CAD 4,2); Cf. C 30,5 and C 31,6.

⁷⁹ A prayer similar to the prayer of quiet in the Eastern Orthodox Church is called Hesychasm prayer. Hesychasm means quiet [...] Hesychasm (Greek: ἡσυχασμός, *hesychasmos*, from ἡσυχία, *esychía*, “stillness, rest, quiet, silence”).

⁸⁰ “*Sampasādana* [*san+pasādana*] means “tranquilizing.” Shaw says that *pasādana* [*pa+sad*] relates to *saddhā* (faith/confidence) and suggest a state of confidence that infuses tranquility and translates *sampasādana* as “tranquil confidence,” (Shaw *Buddhist Meditation*, 63). *Vibhaṅga* mentions “confidence is faith, having faith, trust, full confidence” (PP 4.145).

⁸¹ Solé-Leris, *Tranquillity and Insight*, 63.

⁸² Brahm, *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond*, 159.

⁸³ Teresa says that in PQ “its [the soul’s] faith is more alive” (4M 3,9).

The phrase “*cetaso ekodibhāvaṃ*,” given by Ñāṇamoli as “singleness of mind,” and rendered elsewhere as “unification of mind,” means one-pointedness, unwavering absorption in a single object;⁸⁴ and is synonymous with “right concentration” (PP 4.145). In the *Visuddhimagga*, unification of mind is a *jhānaṅga* already extant in 1JH (PP 4.106). But, in *Vibhaṅga* 245, and the *Nikāyas*, unification of mind is established only in 2JH. Buddhaghosa states that in *Vibhaṅga* one-pointedness refers to 2JH because only here is concentration strong “by having faith as its companion” (PP 4.144).⁸⁵ Several scholars, among them Stuart-Fox, Griffiths and Bucknell⁸⁶ have criticized this interpretation. They argue that in the *Vibhaṅga cetaso ekodibhāvaṃ* is not mentioned as a *jhāna* factor in 1JH because absorption is still not strong enough in this stage due to the presence of *vitakka and vicāra*, which are incompatible with one-pointedness of mind, concluding that *cetaso ekodibhāvaṃ* should be understood as a new factor in 2JH.

Teresa does not speak of “unification of the mind,” nonetheless PQ is the first degree of contemplation proper, understood as the soul’s encounter with “divine company,” where the presence of God occupies the totality of consciousness. PQ is defined then by a degree of higher interiorization and unifying absorption of the soul in God. All mental wavering disappears. In Buddhist meditation, like in PQ then, the object occupies the entire consciousness, but in Buddhist meditation, the unshakable conviction that the state of contemplation is an experience of God’s presence within oneself does not exist.⁸⁷ Only in 2JH is mindfulness properly established. As Arbel notes, “mindfulness is established and fulfilled properly only when one enters and abides in the second *jhāna* (and presumably when one abides in the third and fourth *jhānas*).”⁸⁸ It is clear that heightened mindfulness is essential to PQ. The “prayer of quiet” is mindfulness of God.

5.13.4.2.6 The externalities and duration of 2JH and PQ

It is traditionally understood (§5.11.4.6.3) that during *jhāna* the body remains immobile. Teresa says that in PQ one can move the body but “does not dare to move” (*no se osan bullir*), remaining still in order not to lose the feeling of peace and calmness (C 31,2). Inability to speak while in *jhāna* is reported in the Canon. Teresa says that in PQ it is difficult to speak (C 31,2); at its height, only a few words can be pronounced (V 15,6).⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Cousins: “it refers specifically to a state in which the mind is absorbed in a single object. In the present context it is the ability to keep the attention, without wavering or trembling, aware only of the object of meditation” (Cousins 1973, 122).

⁸⁵ Gunaratana, *Jhanas in Theravada Buddhist Meditation*.

⁸⁶ Bucknell, “Reinterpreting the Jhānas,” 389.

⁸⁷ In PQ, Teresa says, God makes His living presence felt in the center of the soul (C 31,1; and 4M 2,8). The soul experiences His proximity (4M 2), she is “before God” (*delante de Dios*) (4M 3,4), within God (*cabe su Dios*) (C 31,1).

⁸⁸ Arbel, *Earl Buddhist Meditation*, 88.

⁸⁹ As mentioned earlier PQ is also called “orison of silence.”

5.13.4.2.7 The effects of 2JH and PQ

Buddhaghosa does not elaborate on the effects of 2JH, but some are implicit in his descriptions of this state. 2JH purifies the mind further and is a step closer to the goal of calm. It permits a greater dominion over thought processes and detachment from them. It establishes mindfulness leading to greater concentration, and control over the mind.

Teresa elaborates on the effects of PQ mainly in the third section of 4M (4M 3,9-14). The spiritual fruits of PQ that manifest in daily life, in Poulain's words, are "interior peace which remains after the time of prayer, profound humility, aptitude and a disposition for spiritual duties, a heavenly light in the intellect, and stability of the will in goodness."⁹⁰ Teresa says that the interior peace felt in PQ continues during daily life. She adds that the first glimpses of God in PQ improve the soul greatly, make it grow further (V 14,3), and strengthen the virtues, especially humility (CAD 4,4, 4 M 2,9). Having known God's greatness and his own misery, the person is eager for penance, grows in determination and faith in God and has greater detachment from all things of the world (V 15,14). Teresa adds that PQ leaves greater wisdom in the soul, clearer divine light in the intellect and stability in the truth (V 15,10). The person begins to have a certain sense of God. When the experience is intense, its aftermath can occasionally last for days (C 31,4-5).

5.13.5 Conclusion

As a conclusion, it can be stated that, according to Buddhaghosa's descriptions, 2JH can be characterized as a state of inner silence, deep concentration, and exalted joy, "tempered" with peace and internal tranquility, derived from the suppression of cognitive functions. In this regard, the state of 2JH presents strong similarities with Teresa's PQ, although both experiences differ greatly in their nature.

⁹⁰ "Mystical Theology," CE, 621–22.

5.14 THE THIRD *JHĀNA* AND THE PRAYER OF UNION

5.14.1 Introduction

This section explores convergences and divergences between the *jhānas* in general—and 3JH in particular—and Teresa’s prayer of union. As in the preceding chapters, this comparison is justified by the commonalities between these two experiences as well as by the number of authors who have remarked them, of which we include a few below.

Cousins, in his already familiar article, is unambiguous in pronouncing the similarities between the state of *jhāna* in general and Teresa’s prayer of union. He writes:

It is quite clear that there is much similarity between that type of consciousness [*jhāna*] and St. Teresa’s Prayer of Union. Both are ecstatic trances involving immobility of the body and the suppression of many of the ordinary mental activities. Both are characterized by peace and joy. Both are also in a slightly ambiguous position in relation to the larger path [...] Many more similarities could be elaborated.¹

Ajahn Brahm, from another perspective, writes:

The way she [Teresa] writes about her meditation is not methodical, so it is very difficult to be sure, but she does give some of the tell-tale signs that she has attained some *jhānas* in her practice. However, it is interesting to consider how she interpreted those experiences. Instead of unification of mind, she saw such states as unification with God.²

Shinzen Young similarly observes:

In her “Interior Castle,” the 16th-century Spanish saint, Teresa of Avila, vividly describes the various levels of the prayer of quiet culminating in what she calls perfect union, which roughly corresponds to the very deep *jhāna* in Buddhism or “*samādhi*” in Patanjali’s yoga.³

Heiler also finds the same kind of similarities:

The third prayer-step [the prayer of union] constitutes a variation not in manner but merely in degree, from the previous step. The reduction and binding of normal mental life continues its progress; psychological activity lessens further. Teresa names this state the “union of all soul power” (*unión de todas las potencias*), the expression brings to mind the *cetaso ekodibhāva* in the wording of the second *jhāna*. – or also as the “slumber of spiritual power.” The blissful mood increases however, in the third *jhāna*.⁴

We shall return to these testimonials greater detail, all of which point to the presence of phenomenological similarities between the state of *jhāna* and Teresa’s prayer of union. For our part, we intend to show that these commonalities are especially noticeable between 3JH, specifically, and Teresa’s prayer of mystical union of the Fifth Mansions. What follows is an outline of some of the defining and agreeing features of these two states in terms of their nature, experience and main effects.

¹ Cousins, “The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification,” 111.

² Brahm, *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond*, 158.

³ Shinzen Young: <http://here-and-now.org/wwwArticles/stray.html>

⁴ Heiler, *Die Buddhistische Versenkung*, 53.

5.14.2 The third *jhāna*

The pericopial formula for 3JH in the *Visuddhimagga* reads:

With the fading way of happiness as well he dwells in equanimity, and mindful and fully aware, he feels bliss with his body; he enters upon and dwells in the third *jhāna*, on account of which the Noble Ones announce: 'He dwells in bliss who has equanimity and is mindful' (*Vibh* 245), and so he has attained the third *jhāna*, which abandons one factor, possesses two factors, is good in three ways, possesses ten characteristics, and is of the earth *kaṣiṇa* (PP 4.153).

Upon entering 3JH, the *jhānaṅga* abandoned is *pīti* which, when reviewing 2JH, appeared to the meditator as a factor less peaceful than *sukha* and *ekaggatā* (PP 4.152). In the formulaic phrase “with the fading away of *pīti* as well” (*pītiyā ca virāgā*), *virāga* signifies “fading away” or “surmounting of.”⁵ The conjunction *ca* (“and”) means that this “fading away” occurs concurrently with the stilling of *vitakka* and *vicāra* (PP 4.154-55). Having surmounted *pīti*, the factors of possession in 3JH are *sukha* and *ekaggatā*. With only these factors present, the *jhāyin* in 3JH dwells now in an intense state of absorption and elevated spiritual happiness. The pericope for 3JH states that with the surmounting of *pīti*, the meditator dwells now “in equanimity, mindful and fully aware” (PP 4.153). Equanimity, mindfulness and full awareness are not considered to be *jhāna* factors but constituents of 3JH as mental concomitants (*cetasikā*), now emerging to prominence.

Concerning “equanimity” (*upekkhā*), the stock formula states that in 3JH the meditator “dwells equanimous” (*upekkhako viharati*). Equanimity is a mental quality that emerges fully only in 3JH.⁶ Buddhaghosa explains that in 3JH the *jhāyin* “watches [things] as they arise [...] fairly, without partiality,” and with an equanimity “clear, abundant and sound” (PP 4.156). Buddhaghosa then explains that among ten kinds of equanimity—which he describes in detail from PP 4.156 to 4.170—the intended sort of equanimity here is “equanimity of *jhāna*” (PP 4.171), which he defines as “producing impartiality towards even the highest bliss” (PP 4.165). According to Buddhaghosa, the distinctive feature of equanimity is “neutrality.” Equanimity should not to be confused with a “neutral feeling,” with which it can co-exist or not.⁷ The main function of equanimity is to be “unconcerned.” It is manifested as “uninterestedness” and its proximate cause is “the fading away of *pīti*” (PP 4.171). Buddhaghosa adds that equanimity was already present in previous *jhānas* but stands out in 3JH because *vitakka-vicāra* and *pīti* have been overcome (PP 4.171).

⁵ “Virāga,” PED, 634.

⁶ Shankman, *Experience of Samadhi*, 70

⁷ Gunaratana writes: “the Pāli word for equanimity, *upekkhā*, occurs in the texts with a wide range of meanings, the most important being neutral feeling—that is, feeling which is neither painful nor pleasant [...] The equanimity referred to in the formula is a mode of specific neutrality which belongs to the aggregate of mental formations (*saṅkhāra-khandha*) and thus should not be confused with equanimity as neutral feeling. Though the two are often associated, each can exist independently of the other” (Gunaratana 1988, 25).

As to “mindful and fully aware” (*sato ca sampajāno*), it is in the stock formula of 3JH that this expression first appears.⁸ Buddhaghosa elaborates on it in PP 4.172 saying the meditator “remembers,” thus is “mindful” (*sata*), and in “full awareness” (*sampajānāti*).⁹ He clarifies that these special qualities already existed in previous *jhānas*, but the subtlety of 3JH is such that it requires now the mind to be mindful and clearly comprehending “like that of a man on a razor’s edge” (PP 4.173). It is precisely the mindfulness and full awareness of 3JH that keep the *pīti* at bay (PP 4.174). Buddhaghosa elaborates further on mindfulness saying: “mindfulness has the characteristic of remembering. Its function is not to forget. It is manifested as guarding. Full awareness has the characteristic of non-confusion. Its function is to investigate. It is manifested as scrutiny” (PP 4.172)

5.14.3 The prayer of union

In the Fifth Mansions, Teresa “begins to deal with how the soul is united to God in prayer” (5M 1, title). She does not provide a narrow definition of mystical union: “how this prayer they call union comes about and what it is, I do not know how to explain. These matters are expounded in mystical theology; I would not know the proper vocabulary” (V 18,1). Nonetheless, Teresa offers useful descriptions of what mystical union is. The prayer of union (hereafter “PU”) is a state in which the senses and faculties are “united” (*unidas*), which means that they are “suspended,” “detached,” “stripped of all things created” (*despojo de todo lo criado*), “tied” (*atadas*), “captivated,” or “taken” by God. The prayer of union may manifest in three degrees of intensity and duration. Of these three, the prayer of union of 5M is the first degree, the ecstasy of 6M is the second, and the spiritual matrimony of 7M, also known as “transforming union,” is the third and final.

The prayer of union of 5M is referred to in various ways. Teresa habitually refers to it as “the prayer of union” (*la oración de unión*), a designation often synonymous with 5M itself. It must be noted, however, that PU in 5M, as presented in *Castillo*, has two modalities. The first is a mystical state of prayer that Teresa calls “delightful union” (*unión regalada*) or simply “union” (*unión*). Although some theologians use another terminology, it is common in Spiritual Theology to designate this supernatural prayer as “simple union” (*union simple*), in contradistinction to the full, “whole” (*entera*) or “ecstatic” union of 6M.¹⁰ In keeping with Teresa’s use, we refer to this supernatural state as “prayer of union.”

⁸ Shankman, *Experience of Samadhi*, 70.

⁹ Griffiths explains: “mindful and aware’ (*sato ca sampajāno*) refer to a kind of non-judgmental awareness of every event in the meditator’s physical and psychological environment as it occurs [...] and it seems appropriate here since such awareness has no directly cognitive or verbal component; does not involve intellectual analysis or classification of phenomena, but rather a simple noting of things as they occur” (Griffiths 1983, 61).

¹⁰ Contemplation,” CE, 847; and Dubai, *Fire Within*, 94.

The second modality of union of 5M is “another form of the union,” that is “natural,” which means that it “can be acquired by our efforts” (*la podemos ganar por nosotros mismos*), with God’s help. Teresa names this state of prayer “true union” (*unión verdadera*).¹¹

Teresa deals with the “delightful” or “granted” form of union in *Vida*, Chapters 8, 19, 20 and 21, *Camino*, Chapters 32 and 33 and, principally, in *Castillo* Chapter 5, Sections 1, 2 and 4, and, to a lesser extent, in *Relaciones* 5 and *Fundaciones*. What Teresa calls “true union” (*unión verdadera*), is discussed mainly in the *Castillo* Chapter 5, Section 3. Following, we will compare 3JH and the supernatural “delightful union” (*unión regalada*).

5.14.4 Comparison of the third *jhāna* and the prayer of union

5.14.4.1 The nature of 3JH and PU

In Section 5.11.4.2.3, we compared the states of *jhāna* and mystical union in terms of their nature and concluded that there is an irresolvable gap between them, and therefore the two are not equivalent. Let us here restate that if we define union as a state in which all the soul’s faculties are “united,” PU is the first experience of union proper. While in the prayer of quiet (PQ) only the will is “united,” and memory and understanding are “free,” in PU all the faculties are “tied.”¹² In 3JH there is also “suppression of many of the ordinary mental activities,”¹³ but *jhāna* is not described by Buddhaghosa as a “union,” nor a state infused by God, but as a state of full absorption and unification of the mind.

Another essential difference between 3JH and PU, already touched on Section 5.11, is how they occur in practice. Like any *jhāna*, 3JH is the result of a deliberate training. While the advent of 3JH may take place after mastering 2JH in the five familiar ways, the source of mystical union is always God.¹⁴ Teresa also describes union as occurring in the very interior of the soul (5M 1,9), in its essence or “center of the soul” (5M1,12).¹⁵ These descriptions are incommensurable with how *jhāna* is described in the Pāli Canon and the *Visuddhimagga*, where *jhāna* results from the concurrence of the necessary causes and conditions for its occurrence and is not induced by an external force.

¹¹ In contradistinction to the “given” or “granted” union (*unión regalada*) mentioned above.

¹² Teresa says that in PU, God captivates all the soul’s faculties and powers and the divine operations are carried out in the essence of the soul (5M 1,5). It is only in the wake of the experience that the union is recognised for what it has been because of the benefits. See Dubay, *Fire Within*, 94 ff.

¹³ Cousins, “The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification,” 111.

¹⁴ In *Conceptos e Amor de Dios*, Teresa portrays God as a mother who puts milk into the soul’s mouth. The infant soul suckles nourishment from the divine breast ignorant of its origin (CAD 4,7).

¹⁵ According to Teresa, God dwells in the center of the soul, in the very interior of the castle. Teresa says that to get to the more interior rooms of the castle of the soul, God must bring us there (V 19,2).

5.14.4.2 Comparison of the phenomenological characteristics of 3JH and PU

5.14.4.2.1 The basic features of 3JH and PU

In Section 5.11.4.2.2 we concluded that neither *jhāna* nor union is ineffable, but their *qualia* cannot be conveyed to those who have not experienced them. About the higher *jhānas*, Brahm says, “With all *jhānas*, the experiences are next to impossible to describe. The higher the *jhāna*, however, the more profound the experience and the more difficult it becomes to describe. These states and their language are remote from the world.”¹⁶ When Teresa starts to write about 5M, of which PU is its paradigm, she explains that the riches therein are impossible to describe, nor can the mind conceive of comparisons suitable for their depiction, for “earthly things are too coarse for such a purpose” (5M 1).

Both *jhāna* and union are states of moral perfection that the Devil cannot access.¹⁷ To attain *jhāna*, the *jhāyin* must remove the unwholesome mental states that impede absorption (Five Hindrances); 3JH is further removed from the Five Hindrances, and thus is a purer state. Mystical union is also a state of high moral purity. To be able to receive this infused prayer, the soul must be ready and disposed towards it (5M 1,4).¹⁸

As we have discussed in Section 5.11.4.4.1.3, *jhāna* and union can also be defined as altered states of awareness and religious absorption. In 3JH, the “counterpart image” captivates the meditator’s consciousness and becomes immovable in his awareness. Similarly, during mystical union, the attention is “absorbed” (*absorta*)¹⁹ in contemplation of God for a length of time. In PU, God temporarily occupies the entire consciousness.²⁰ Both 3JH and PU frequently occur following less absorptive states, namely, 2JH and PPR respectively, and can be understood as an intensification of those lesser states.

5.14.4.2.2 Suspension of the senses and mental activity in 3JH and PU

We will discuss how 3JH and PU affect the external senses and the mental activity of those who experience either of them.

¹⁶ Brahm, *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond*, 162.

¹⁷ See Section 5.11.4.4.1.

¹⁸ Teresa writes: “few of us dispose ourselves that the Lord may communicate it to us. In exterior matters we are proceeding well so that we will reach what is necessary; but in the practice of the virtues that are necessary for arriving at this point we need very very much and cannot be careless in either small things or great” (5M 1,2). In detachment and virtue, even among the nuns of the Convent of Saint Joseph few are worthy of this favor (5M 1,3). Cf. 5M 1,4 and C 16,5.

¹⁹ Teresa speaks of the soul’s powers in union being absorbed (*absortas*) in God’s presence. See V 40,7 and 4M 3,6.

²⁰ Teresa speaks of “absorptions, however delightful (*embebecimientos muy regalados*) they may be, that have been given the name “union” (F 5,13).

5.14.4.2.2.1 The suspension of the senses

As discussed in Section 5.11.4.4.1.4, in both *jhāna* and union the senses are gathered inward and absorbed until sensory input is absent. Compared with their preceding states, in both 3JH and PU the suspension of the external senses is accentuated further here. As in 3JH the person's awareness becomes farther removed from the external senses,²¹ he is now less distracted by them, and the absorption is deeper and easier to maintain.²² Similarly, in PU God suspends the senses so that the soul "neither sees nor hears."²³ The inhibition of sensory functions in PU, however, is not always absolute. The person can still perceive sensory stimuli, if God's induced absorption is not strong enough.

5.14.4.2.2.2 Suspension of deliberate thought and verbalization in 3JH and PU

Buddhaghosa declares in PP 4.154-55 that upon entering 3JH the fading away of *pīti* occurs in conjunction with the abandonment of *vitakka* and *vicāra*, already stilled in 2JH. In 3JH, *vitakka* and *vicāra*—near enemies in 2JH—are farther removed from awareness. The 3JH is a state not only free of the spoken word and verbalization, but also of verbal formation, articulated thought, and conceptualization that could disturb the absorption. If 2JH is called in the *suttas* "noble silence" (SN 21:1), in 3JH, this silence now intensifies. Similarly, during PU thought, imagination and verbalization are not present. Teresa says: "during the time that the union lasts the soul is left as though without its senses, for it has no power to think even if it wants to" (5M 1,4). She further elucidates that in PU there is no place for "little thoughts proceeding from the imagination [...] for there is neither imagination, nor memory, nor intellect that can impede this good" (5M 1,5), this because mystical union is something so secret that God does not entrust it to our minds (5M 1,5).²⁴

5.14.4.2.2.3 The suspension of mental activity in 3JH and PU

As stated earlier, Cousins writes that both *jhāna* and Teresa's prayer of union "are ecstatic trances involving [...] the suppression of many of the ordinary mental activities."²⁵ In a similar vein, Heiler opines that in both 3JH and PU there is a "reduction and binding of normal mental life."²⁶ Let us next examine whether these two assertions are truly justified.

²¹ Brahm, *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond*, 162-63.

²² Snyder and Rasmussen, *Practicing the Jhanas*, 80.

²³ Teresa says: "during the time of this union it neither sees, nor hears, nor understands" (5M 1,9). Dubay, *Fire Within*, 99.

²⁴ See C 25,1; V 16 and R 1,1. The absence of thought in PU distinguishes it from PQ though is still somewhat active.

²⁵ Cousins, "The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification," 111.

²⁶ Heiler, *Die Buddhistische Versenkung*, 53.

5.14.4.2.3.1 The suspension of mental activity in 3JH

Cousins' statement below is particularly valid for 3JH:

When Buddhaghosa declares that in *jhāna* absorption it is possible for the mind to remain for long periods with the semblance *nimitta* as its object, this is equivalent to saying that there is no articulated thought, no sense perception, no remembering the past and no awareness in the ordinary sense. The mind remains aware of the pure concept that is its object and is alert, lucid and qualitatively superior to ordinary consciousness. For Buddhists, this is the consciousness of the Brahma gods.²⁷

As already mentioned in Section 5.14.2, any articulated thought, even the intentional application of attention to the object, is abandoned at the moment of entrance into 2JH. Now, in 3JH, because the attainment is a deep degree of concentration, unification of the mind (*cetaso ekodibhāvaṃ*), equanimity and mindfulness, mental absorption is such that memory and the capacity for understanding or any other mental activity are absent.²⁸

5.14.4.2.3.2 Suspension of the soul's faculties in the prayer of union

At the beginning of 5M Teresa writes:

During the time that the union lasts the soul is left as though without its senses, for it has no power to think even if it wants to. In loving, if it does love, it doesn't understand how or what it is it loves or what it would want. In sum, it is like one who in every respect has died to the world so as to live more completely in God. Thus, the death is a delightful one, an uprooting from the soul of all the operations it can have while being in the body (5 M 1,4).

In PU, all the soul's faculties are "united" (*unidas*).²⁹ If in PQ only the will is taken up in God, in PU understanding and memory are also absorbed. If in PQ the soul's faculties were merely "sedate" (*sosegadas*), "dormant" (*adormecidas*), but "free" (*libres*), in PU they become "tied" (*atadas*), "suspended" (*suspendidas*), "lost" (*perdidas*) (V 18,13), "asleep" (*dormidas*) (5M 1,4) and "dead to the world" (*muertas al mundo*) (5M 2,7).³⁰

Some authors maintain that in PU the soul's faculties are not suspended to the point that all conscious mental activity disappears entirely, but only decrease in intensity.³¹ We must distinguish here between the degrees of intensity during PU. In the initial phase, the faculties may still be active but in the climactic phase their activity ceases entirely.

²⁷ Cousins, "The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification," 113-14.

²⁸ In 3JH the attention is occupied with the object to a degree that all other mental processes cease. Griffiths writes: "the enstatic meditations are designed to reduce the contents of consciousness, to focus awareness upon a single point and ultimately to bring all mental activity to a halt" (Griffiths 1991, 13). In 3JH this occurs on a higher level than in prior *jhānas*.

²⁹ Teresa says "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 [...] 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. It doesn't seem to me that it understands, because, as I say, it doesn't understand-I really can't understand this!" (V 18,14). See also R.5,6.

³⁰ As Dubay puts it, "the divine invasion occurring in the fourth mansions now grows to the point where all of one's inner energies are in union with the Trinity's indwelling" (Dubay 1989, 94).

³¹ Pablo Maroto, *Teresa en Oración*, 380; Arintero, *Cuestiones Místicas*, 598; and Dubay, *Fire Within*, 94.

Speaking of PU proper Teresa states, “and I say that if this prayer is the union of all the faculties, the soul is unable to communicate its joy even though it may desire to do so—I mean while being in the prayer. And if it were able then this wouldn’t be union” (V 18,1). In the climactic phase, the soul is entirely unaware of the environment, time, place and even itself,³² although only briefly. Teresa describes PU as a “delightful death,” as:

Do not imagine that this state of prayer is like the one preceding it [PQ] a sort of drowsiness. In the prayer of union, the soul is asleep, fast asleep, as regards the world and itself: in fact, during the short time this state lasts it is deprived of all feeling whatever, being unable to think on any subject, even if it wished. No effort is needed here to suspend the thoughts: if the soul can love it knows not how, nor whom it loves, nor what it desires. In fact, it has died entirely to this world, to live more truly than ever in God. This is a delicious death, for the soul is deprived of the faculties it exercised while in the body (5M 1,3).³³

5.14.4.2.3 The disappearance of *pīti* and *gustos de Dios*

Let us now compare the extraordinarily pleasant feelings felt by those who experience either 3JH or PU.

5.14.4.2.3.1 The relinquishing of *pīti*

We discussed the notion of *pīti* in Section 5.13.4.2.4.1. Upon entering 3JH, this *jhāna* factor is relinquished because its exciting nature renders 2JH unstable. Buddhaghosa states that, in the pericopial phrase “with the fading away of *pīti* as well” (*pītiyā ca virāgā*), “fading away” (*virāga*)³⁴ means “surmounting of” (PP 4,154), and that the conjunction *ca* (“as well”) means that the overcoming of *pīti* occurs in addition to the stilling of *vitakka* and *vicāra*, which happened on accessing 2JH (PP 4.154-55). He then adds that in 2JH, *pīti* is felt in the body and that the “abandoning of [bodily] *pīti*” takes place at the moment of accessing 3JH (PP 4.184-185). For Buddhaghosa, the statement “with the abandoning of pleasure and pain” means “with the abandoning of bodily pleasure and bodily pain” (PP 4.184).³⁵ The abandoning of bodily pleasure occurs because in 3JH the factor of *pīti* “as a condition for the bodily pleasure has ceased entirely” (PP 4.189). The cessation of *pīti* means its non-appearance as a pervading and uplifting experience in 3JH.

³² Renault and Abiven write that in PU, “it is no longer this or that power [...] that are affixed in the divine object, but the whole being that feels trapped, captive, to the point that all his psychic activities are suspended. Which usually produces a loss of consciousness of oneself, of time and of what surrounds it” (E. Renault and J. Abiven, *La Oración Teresiana* (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2000), 96). [author’s translation].

³³ “Nonetheless, its whole intellect would want to be occupied in understanding something of what is felt. And since the soul does not have the energy to attain to this, it is so stunned that, even if consciousness is not completely lost, neither a hand nor a foot stirs, as we say here below when a person is in such a swoon that we think he is dead” (5M 1,4).

³⁴ “Virāga” (*vi+rāga*), apart from absence (*vi*) of desire (*rāga*), may mean “ceasing, fading away” (“Virāga,” PED, 634).

³⁵ Buddhaghosa also refers to “the previous disappearance of joy and grief,” that is, the previous abandoning of “mental bliss” (pleasure) and “mental pain” (PP 4.184). He further clarifies that “[mental] joy” is only abandoned “at the moment of the fourth-*jhāna* access”, while the “abandoning” of [bodily] pain, [mental] grief, and [bodily] bliss (pleasure)” take place at the times of access to the first, second, and third *jhānas* (PP 4.185).

5.14.4.2.3.2 Disappearance of *gustos de Dios*

As we learned in Section 5.13.4.2.3.2.2, *gustos de Dios* is a mystical phenomenon specific to 4M and synonymous with PQ (4M 2,2). It does not appear to be a feature of the PU, and it is never mentioned again after 4M. In 4M, Teresa states of *gustos de Dios* that “this water overflows through all the mansions and faculties until reaching the body” so that “the whole exterior man enjoys this spiritual delight and sweetness” (4M 2, 4). Such “physical delight” and dilatation of the heart, is not predicated on PU of 5M. The disappearance of *pīti* and *gustos* is thus a characteristic of 3JH and PU, respectively, as well as the water inundation in 2JH and PQ, which do not occur in 3JH and PU.

5.14.4.2.4 *Sukha* and *satisfacción*

Feelings of happiness, satisfaction and fulfillment are reported of both 3JH and PU. In this section we comparatively explore the phenomenology of these pleasant feelings.

5.14.4.2.4.1 *Sukha* in 3JH

In Section 5.11.4.6.2 we examined the notion of *sukha*. In Section 5.12.4.2.5.2 we considered *sukha* as a *jhāna* factor emerging in 1JH. In Section 5.13.4.2.2.1, we also analyzed *sukha* in contradistinction to *pīti*. We concluded there that *sukha* is a quieter feeling than *pīti*. With the fading away of *pīti*, the meditator enters upon 3JH (PP 4.153) where *sukha* remains a *jhāna* factor, together with single-pointedness of mind.

Anālayo notes a gradual refinement of *sukha* through the *jhānic* process. In each *jhāna*, *sukha* becomes subtler and purer: *pīti* and *sukha* emerge in 1JH being born of seclusion, and in 2JH *sukha* coexists with *pīti*, so with *pīti* fading away the meditator enters 3JH (PP 4.153) in which *sukha* remains, but as a calmer feeling after the excitement of *pīti* is removed.³⁶ Buddhaghosa also says that while *pīti* is included in “formations aggregate,” *sukha* is included in the “feeling aggregate” (PP 4.101). The pericope for 3JH reads: “he feels *sukha* with his body” (PP 4.153). This means that with the relinquishment of *pīti*, *sukha* continues to suffuse the *jhāyin*’s mind and body, but, due to the presence of mindfulness, equanimity and awareness, there is no longing for or attachment to this happiness, nor is there any change in the *jhāyin*’s mind.³⁷

³⁶ Vajirañāza, *Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice*, 37.

³⁷ Idem, 40.

5.14.4.2.4.2 *El gozo de la unión* in PU

In PU the soul feels the “joy of union” (*el gozo de la union*), which we will call *gozo* for short. Teresa describes PU as a state of “great joy” (*gran goce*), “delight” (*deleite*), “satisfaction” (*satisfacción*), and “peace” (*paz*) (5M 1,6). In *Vida*, she explains that in PU the soul feels “delight and satisfaction of soul, peace and joy” (V 18.6). This joy is described differently than *gustos de Dios*.³⁸ In PU the person feels “tenderness” (*suavidad*),³⁹ “glory” (*gloria*),⁴⁰ as a way of never wanting to lose this state. Teresa writes:

In this fourth water the soul [...] rejoices (*goza*) 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 (*gozo*) in such a way that none is free to be taken up with any other exterior or interior thing. In the previous degrees, the senses are given freedom to show some signs of the great joy they feel. Here in this fourth water the soul rejoices incomparably more; but it can show much less since no power remains in the body, nor does the soul have any power to communicate its joy (V 18,1).

In trying to describe the joy a person feels in 5M, Teresa says that a comparison with earthly things will not do as these are vile (5M 1,1). The title of *Conceptos 4* reads: “speaks of the prayer of quiet and of union and of the sweetness and delight they cause in the spirit; in comparison, earthly delights are nothing.” In *Vida*, Teresa says that the satisfaction one experiences in union is above all earthly joys and comes from a different place than them (V 18.6). The soul feels great joy (*gozo*) but does not understand how it enjoys nor what it is enjoying (V 18,1). This enjoyment is “felt” in the innermost of the soul (V 18,6), as coming from the depths of our being (in the marrow of the bones) (5M 1,6). But this satisfaction is not a sensory or emotional feeling.⁴¹ The joy the person feels in PU is so intense that abundant tears of joy are shed although the soul is not aware of them until it returns to itself (V 19,1). Dicken notes that, according to Teresa, in PU “not only is the soul filled at the time with a deep sense of well-being, but physical malaise experienced before the union is later found to be greatly alleviated (V 5,18).”⁴²

5.14.4.2.4.3 Comparison of *sukha* and *gozo*

Let us now compare the phenomenology of the *sukha* of 3JH and the *gozo* of PU. Both are essential to the definitions of 3JH and PU, respectively. In both cases, a sublime happiness is described. In 3JH, one feels “that happiness of which the noble ones say:

³⁸ Arbman, *Éxtasis*, Vol. 2, 80.

³⁹ “Being thus the soul looking for God, I feel with a great, tender (*suave*) delight” (V 18,10). Teresa describe unión it as a “delightful death” (5M 1,4).

⁴⁰ Dubay, *Fire Within*, 94. See V 18,1.

⁴¹ Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 409.

⁴² Dicken writes: “The subject feels nothing but joy, although the joy is quite incomprehensible to it and, we may conjecture, not even ‘felt’ in any way comparable to sensory feeling, still less to emotional feeling” (Dicken 1963, 409).

Happily lives he who is equanimous and mindful" (*Vbh.* 245). Vajirañāza describes 3JH as "the most blissful state of happiness, exceedingly sweet, for it is free from even the slightest disturbance [...] A person who has attained this state of *jhāna* is said to be happy (*sukhavihārī*)."⁴³ Teresa asserts that a soul in PU, "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" (V 18,1). Both *sukha* and *gozo* are forms of happiness but not in the conventional sense; they are spiritual enjoyment. Both are experienced in states of deep absorption and are not connected with the senses. *Sukha* is a non-sensual happiness, a "happiness of renunciation" (*nekkhamma-sukha*).⁴⁴ Similarly, Teresa says the *gozo* experienced in union is not related to sensual pleasures. Both *sukha* and *gozo* are likewise described as unworldly feelings. The *sukha* that arises during absorption is defined as "unworldly" (*nirsāmisa*).⁴⁵ As Anālayo observes, in the *suttas* the *sukha* experienced in absorption is far superior to any happiness obtainable by the senses and, after experiencing such meditative happiness, the person loses all interest in all worldly sensual pleasures (M I 504).⁴⁶ In particular, "the peacefulness of the third *jhāna* [...] is far greater than anything we can experience in the world."⁴⁷ Teresa asserts that the *gozo* the soul experiences in PU is not of this world and far superior to any enjoyment experienceable in this world. For Teresa the blessing of mystical union "is the greatest that can be tasted in life, even if all the delights and pleasures of the world were joined together" (CAD 4,7).⁴⁸ If the Buddha describes the *sukha* of *jhāna* as "divine *sukha*" (*dibba sukha*), the joy and satisfaction of PU is born of the union with God; although the Pāli word *dibba* should not suggest "divine" in the theistic Christian sense, in both cases we are referring to a happiness not provided by anything of this world. The *jhānic sukha* is a peaceful kind of happiness (*upasama-sukha*).⁴⁹ Teresa speaks of the peace of union. Both experiences are calmer than *sukha* in 2JH and *gustos de Dios*. The *sukha* of 3JH and *gozo* are felt with the body. Buddhaghosa says that while *pīti* belongs to the formations aggregate, *sukha* belongs to the feeling aggregate (PP 4.101).⁵⁰ The 3JH pericope reads: "he feels *sukha* with his body" (PP 4.153). The Buddha says:

Again, with the fading away as well of *pīti*, a *bhikkhu* dwells equanimous and mindful and clearly comprehending, he experiences *sukha* with the body; [...] He makes the happiness divested of rapture drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body that is not pervaded by the happiness divested of rapture" (AN 5.28).

⁴³ Vajirañāza, *Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice*, 40. For Karunaratne 3JH "is the most blissful state of happiness, for it is free from all disturbances. He who attains it is 'truly happy by the 'Aryan' standards'" ("Jhāna," EB, 52).

⁴⁴ Anālayo, *From Craving to Liberation*, 105.

⁴⁵ As Anālayo states "while 'worldly' manifestation of pleasant feeling arises in relation to sensual pleasure, unworldly" pleasant feeling arise during absorption (*jhāna*)" ("Sukha," EB, 164).

⁴⁶ Ibid. In M I 94 it is said that this happiness is superior to the happiness experienced by the king of the country.

⁴⁷ Ayya Khema, *Who Is My Self?*, 61-2.

⁴⁸ Teresa also says that this divine union "is above all earthly joys, above all delights (*deleites*), above all consolations (*contentos*), and still more than that" (V 18,6). Cf. 5M 1,6; "earthly things are too coarse for such a purpose" (5M 1,1).

⁴⁹ Anālayo, "Sukha," EB, 164.

⁵⁰ "There is no bliss belonging to the aggregate of feelings (*vedanā*) greater than this" (Vajirañāza 1975, 40).

The Buddha likens how *sukha* permeates the body to a lotus immersed in water.⁵¹ In PP 4.175 Buddhaghosa clarifies that when the 3JH pericope says “experiences *sukha* with the body,” it means the “mental body” of the meditator, not his physical body. Several of Teresa’s statements seem to point out that the *gozo* of union is also physically felt: “All the external energy is lost, and that of the soul is increased so that it might better enjoy its glory. The exterior delight that is felt is great and very distinct” (V 18,10).⁵²

The *sukha* felt in 3JH and the *gozo* of PU differ importantly in terms of their nature and teleological orientation. *Jhānic sukha* is a spiritual happiness that develops through concentration, leads to awakening (*sambodha-sukha*) and, As Anālayo says, “constitutes a crucially important factor for progress on the path.”⁵³ The joy of union with God helps the soul detach from earthly things and be more attracted to God.

5.14.4.2.5 Unification of mind versus union of the soul with God

The pericope of 3JH does not mention “unification of mind” (*ekaggatā*) as a *jhānaṅga*, but it is understood to be an intrinsic factor. It refers to the fixation of the attention on the object during absorption. In Teresa’s prayer of union, the soul is absorbed into God. This theological underpinning is alien to Buddhism, but the one-pointedness in union is not. Brahm interprets Teresa’s mystical union with God as the unification of mind:

The way she [Teresa] writes about her meditation is not methodical, so it is very difficult to be sure, but she does give some of the tell-tale signs that she has attained some *jhānas* in her practice. However, it is interesting to consider how she interpreted those experiences. Instead of unification of mind, she saw such states as unification with God or complete marriage with God.⁵⁴

For Teresa, the notion “union” stands for “suspension of the faculties of the soul,” meaning that during union the faculties of the soul are “united” or “tied” to God. *Ekaggatā* too implies a lessening or suspension of all mental activity during *jhāna*. As Hailer says:

The third prayer-step [PU] constitutes a variation not in manner but merely in degree, from the previous step. The reduction and binding of normal mental life continues its progress; psychological activity lessens further. Teresa names this state the “union of all soul power” (*unión de todas las potencias*) – the expression brings to mind the *cetaso ekodibhāva* in the wording of the second *jhāna* – or also as the ‘slumber of spiritual power.’ The blissful mood increases, however, in the third *jhāna*.⁵⁵

⁵¹ The Buddha gives an illustration: “Just as, in a pond of blue or red or white lotuses, some lotuses that are born and grow in the water might thrive immersed in the water without rising out of it, and cool water would drench, steep, fill, and pervade them to their tips and their roots, so that there would be no part of those lotuses that would not be pervaded by cool water; so too, the bhikkhu makes the happiness divested of rapture drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body that is not pervaded by the happiness divested of rapture” (AN 5.28).

⁵² “Unlike a transport, *ímpetu*, or a spiritual wound, *herida*, this prayer of union is in no way painful, but shares with trances proper and raptures, *arrobamientos* and *arreatamientos*, the quality of bringing intense consolation and delight to the soul. The subject feels nothing but joy, although the joy is quite incomprehensible to it and, we may conjecture, not even ‘felt’ in any way comparable to sensory feeling, still less to emotional feeling (V 18,1; V 19,1).” (Dicken 1963, 409).

⁵³ “Sukha”, EB, 164-68.

⁵⁴ <https://journal.samatha.org/issues/issue-7/travelogue-four-jh%C4%81nas-questions-and-answers> (27/04/18).

⁵⁵ Heiler, *Die Buddhistische Versenkung*, 53.

5.14.4.2.6 Equanimity, mindfulness and full awareness

In addition to the fading away of *pīti*, the pericopial formulae for 3JH adds that a possessor of this state “dwells in equanimity and mindful and fully aware” (PP 4.153).⁵⁶ In Section 5.14.2, we already mentioned these three special qualities briefly. Equanimity (*upekkhā*), mindfulness (*sati*) and full awareness (*sampajañña*) are not new *jhāna* factors but mental concomitants (*cetasikā*) which only emerge fully in 3JH, allowing the meditator to “maintain the process of mental flux in a well-balanced state.”

With regard to equanimity, the expression *upekkhako viharati* means that in 3JH the *jhāyin* dwells equanimous. Buddhaghosa states that, among the ten kinds of *upekkhā*, the intended sort here is “equanimity of *jhāna*” (PP 4.171) defined as “impartiality towards even the highest bliss” (PP 4.165). Does Teresa dwell in equanimity in PU? Teresa and other mystics counselled submission and “holy indifference” towards the experience.⁵⁷

A *jhāyin* in 3JH is said to be “mindful and fully aware” (*sato ca sampajāno*) (PP 4.172).⁵⁸ *Sampajāno* is often translated as being “fully aware,” “discerning” or “clearly comprehending,”⁵⁹ which means that the meditator dwells comprehendingly on the nature of the object. Can we say that Teresa dwells in mindfulness and “clearly knowing” or fully aware of God in PU? According to her descriptions in PU, the person is mindful and fully aware of God to the exclusion of everything else. Teresa explains that:

During the time that the union lasts the soul is left as though without its senses, for it has no power to think even if it wants to. In loving, if it does love, it does not understand how or what it is it loves or what it would want. In sum, it is like one who in every respect has died to the world *so as to live more completely in God*. Thus, the death is a delightful one, an uprooting from the soul of all the operations it can have while being in the body. The death is a delightful one because in truth it seems that in order to dwell more perfectly in God” (4M 1,4)

However, the person does not seem to be aware, in the general meaning of the word:

For during the time of this union, it neither sees, nor hears, nor understands, because the union is always short and seems to the soul even much shorter than it probably is. God so places Himself in the interior of that soul that when it returns to itself it can in no way doubt that it was in God and God was in it (5 M 1,9).⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Buddhaghosa writes: “A possessor of the third *jhāna* is worthy of praise since he abides with equanimity, perfect bliss, and is mindful and fully aware as special qualities” (PP 4.176).

⁵⁷ Heiler, *Die Buddhistische Versenkung*, 53-54.

⁵⁸ “Mindful” (*sato*) means that he “remembers” he constantly bears the object in mind. Mindfulness (*sati*), in this context, means the remembrance of the meditation object, the constant bearing of the object in mind without allowing it to float away” (Gunaratana 1988, 173).

⁵⁹ “*Sampajanati* [*sal + pajanati*] to know” (“*Sampajanati*,” PED); Gunaratana renders it as “clear comprehension” or “discerning,” saying that “Discernment is an aspect of wisdom which scrutinizes the object and grasps its nature free from delusion” (Gunaratana 1988, 39).

⁶⁰ “This fifth dwelling place; for there is neither imagination, nor memory, nor intellect that can impede this good” (4M 1,5)

5.14.4.2.7 The externalities of 3JH and PU

As for the physical senses, in 3JH the *jhāyin* is farther removed from sensory perceptions, thus, less distracted by them compared to prior *jhānas*, and cannot speak. Teresa says that in PU the mystic can hardly see or hear anything and likewise cannot articulate a word.⁶¹

Buddhaghosa also says that “since upon entering any of the *jhānas* the mind becomes absorbed into the *jhāna* factors, awareness of the physical body is lost” (PP 4.175). Many Christian mystics describe how in union the person loses awareness of the body. Teresa also describes how in a deep state of union awareness of the body disappears the person not knowing if he is in the body or not (“*While in the body or not I cannot say*”).

The *jhānas* and the degrees of mystical union “both are ecstatic trances involving immobility of the body.”⁶² During *jhāna* the body remains totally immobile. Similarly, in PU the bodily forces abandon the person (V 18,10) therefore, one can only move with great difficulty.⁶³ Teresa likens the experience of ecstasy to a swoon, where one appears as dead (5M 1,4). In both cases one does not experience pain during the absorption. We have already discussed with point in relation to Buddhaghosa. For her part, Teresa writes: “This prayer causes no harm, no matter how long it lasts” (V 18,11).

As for breathing, Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw states that in the 3JH breathing becomes even subtler than in the previous *jhānas* but does not stop completely as in 4JH.⁶⁴ The person in PU feels as if breathing ceases (“*siente [...] que le va faltando el huelgo*” (V 18,10). At the height of the state he does not even know if he is breathing or not.⁶⁵

In terms of externalities, the soul’s enjoyment in PU is so intense that many tears might fall, but Teresa is not aware of them until she regains consciousness (V 19,1). The experience is so notable that it can be observed by third parties. Teresa says: “The external effects are so apparent that one cannot doubt that a great event has taken place” (V 18,11).

⁶¹ See V 18,10. See also 5M 1.4.

⁶² Cousins, “The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification,” 111.

⁶³ Teresa explains: “This experience comes about in such a way that one cannot even stir the hands without a lot of effort” (V 18,10); “neither a hand nor a foot stirs, as [...] when a person is in such a swoon that we think he is dead” (5M 1,4).

⁶⁴ Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw, *The Only Way for the Realization of Nibbāna*, 40.

⁶⁵ “I don’t even know if it has life enough to breathe (*resolgar*). (I was just now thinking about this, and it seems to me that it doesn’t -- at least if it does breathe, it is unaware it is doing so.)” (5M 1.4). Cf. V 18,14; R 5,6; and 6M 12.

5.14.4.5 The effects of 3JH and PU

Attainment of 3JH has a particular effect: The qualities of *sukha*, *sati*, *sampajāna* and *upekkhā*, that are manifest during *jhāna* will impact daily life, with the person becoming more mindful, fully aware, and equanimous.⁶⁶ The stabilization in the *jhāyin* of these four qualities is related to detachment and the transcendence of certain aspects of self.⁶⁷

Although PU never lasts long (5M 2,7), it leaves an indelible mark on the soul (5M 1,9)⁶⁸ and cannot be forgotten (2M 12).⁶⁹ After the experience the soul wishes to praise God, die a thousand deaths and suffer great trials for Him. It desires penance, solitude, and that all might know God. These purifications by God (5M 1,7-9) bestow the person with higher virtues, mainly humility and a stronger moral resolution (V 19,1).⁷⁰ He sees more clearly his faults, the greatness of God, and feels unworthy of His favors (5M 2,7). He also feels greater renunciation of his self-will, honor, pride, and courage to serve God (5M 2,8). The experiences cause contempt for the world, to which it is dead (5M 2,7).⁷¹ The most important effects, however, are a gradual union of one's will with God's will,⁷² an increase in love⁷³ and the progressive death of the old self. Teresa says by the infused action of God the soul remains imprinted with a divine wisdom.⁷⁴ After many unions the soul will emerge so transformed that it cannot recognize itself, as the worm cannot recognize itself in the white moth. As per the comparison between the effects of 3JH and PUS, it must be pointed out, therefore, that in the effects two experiences greatly vary.

5.14.4.5 Conclusion

As a conclusion, we would agree with Cousins and Heiler in that there are remarkable similarities between *jhāna* in general, and 3JH in particular, and Teresa's prayer of union, however, on the nature of the two absorptive states, and on some of their defining effects, they cannot be more different.

⁶⁶ Gethin says: "*Upekkhā* plays a significant part in the process of the mind's becoming stiller, less agitated and more settled, and so less prone to becoming unbalanced or obsessed" (Gethin 2001, 159).

⁶⁷ Arbel: "When *upekkhā* ... is combined with *jhānic-sati* and *sampajāna*, I believe it relates to experience without making it 'I' or 'mine'" (Arbel 2017, 119).

⁶⁸ Teresa discusses the lasting effects of PU in several of her works: V 18,6, 5M 2,7 and 5M 3,1.

⁶⁹ Dubay, *Fire Within*, 94. Teresa vividly recalls her first experience of union many years after it happened.

⁷⁰ Teresa uses the word *fortalecida* ("strengthened"). J. González Arintero uses the word *endiosada* ("deified"). Juan González Arintero, *Cuestiones místicas* (Madrid, BAC, 1956), 451.

⁷¹ Teresa states that after many unions, the soul is no longer disturbed by worldly events and discovers that true peace cannot be found in the creatures (5M 2,8), or the things of the earth (5M 2,9).

⁷² Marie-Eugene writes: "a divine reward is offered to the soul, a veritable transformation: union of the will" (Marie-Eugene, *I am a Daughter of the Church*, 169).

⁷³ "Haven't you heard it said of the bride -- for I have already mentioned it elsewhere here but not in this sense—that God brought her into the inner wine cellar and put charity in order within her?" (5M 2,12).

⁷⁴ See 5M 1,9; C 31; and C 32,12.

5.15 THE FOURTH *JHĀNA* AND THE PRAYER OF ECSTASY

5.15.1 Introduction

We come now to compare 4JH with its possible counterpart in Teresa’s prayer-path, that is, the prayer of ecstasy (PE). In focusing on these two states the general similarities and differences between the *jhānas* and mystical union described in Section 5.11.4 still hold. But we must focus now on accords and discords between these two specific states.

In 5.11.4.2.1, we mentioned how some authors relate the *jhānas* to Christian ecstasy, and how early translators of Buddhist texts even rendered *jhāna* as “ecstasy.”¹ Indeed, some defining elements of 4JH are present in Teresa’s prayer of ecstasy and vice versa: 4JH shares the nature and some basic characteristics of the preceding three *jhānas* but, here, the mental activity further diminishes. Also, the prayer of ecstasy does not vary in nature but in degree and intensity from the prayer of quiet and the prayer of simple union. Nonetheless, in the prayer of ecstasy the suspension or binding of the soul’s faculties is deeper than in prior unions and, therefore, the mental activity is diminished still further.² In addition, just as 4JH is the basis for developing a series of the supernormal powers,³ the Sixth Mansions is where a multitude of supernatural phenomena manifest.

Regardless of the above points of agreement, it must be noted at this point that there is no other segment between the two paths here compared, where they contrast most markedly. In 4JH, the *sukha* present in 3JH is replaced by equanimity and mindfulness. But, in Christian ecstasy one experiences “incomparably greater bliss and indescribable joy” than before, “ecstasy” being the proper qualifier for this state of exaltation. Besides, Teresa describes other experiences the Sixth Mansions that lack parallel in the *jhānas*.

In this section then, we will compare 4JH with an array of ecstatic experiences of 6M as described by Teresa. In the next Section 5.16, we will compare the formless *jhānas*—which are refinements of 4JH⁴—with apophatic modalities of Christian contemplation. We defer until Section 5.17, our discussion on visions, locutions and the extraordinary phenomena described in the Sixth Mansions and comparable phenomena in Theravāda.

¹ Caesar Childers, *A Dictionary of the Pāli Language* (London: Trübner Company, 1875), 169; Sharma writing about the *jhānas* says: “In Buddhism ecstasy plays an important role in the trances” (“Ecstasy,” ER, 2680).

² Heiler, *Buddhistische Versenkung*, 53.

³ Nāṇamoli renders *abhiññā* as “direct knowledges.” A better translation is “higher knowledge” as given by Karunadasa. See Karunadasa, *Early Buddhist Teachings*, 46.

⁴ As previously mentioned, 4JH is the basis for the formless *jhānas*.

5.15.2 The fourth *jhāna*

On attaining the fivefold mastery over 3JH, and having entered upon and emerged from this state, the *jhāyin* should review its factors and realize that this attainment is endangered by its proximity to *pīti*. Now *sukha*, one of the defining constituents of 3JH, is identified as a gross factor capable of generating attachment, compared with the new *jhāna* factor of equanimity (*upekkhā*) which is more stable and refined. Consequently, the meditator strives now to get rid of *sukha* and attain 4JH, which is also more peaceful and secure than 3JH. The meditator then deepens his concentration to abandon the factor of *sukha*, and, eventually, enters upon 4JH. The pericope of 4JH reads as follows:

And at this point, ‘With the abandoning of pleasure (*sukha*) and pain (*dukkha*) and with the previous disappearance of joy (*somanassa*) and grief (*domanassa*) he [the *bhikkhu*] enters upon and dwells in the fourth *jhāna*, which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure (*adukkhamā-sukha*) and has purity of mindfulness due to equanimity’ (*Vibh* 245), and so he has attained the fourth *jhāna*, which abandons one factor, possesses two factors, is good in three ways, possesses ten characteristics, and is of the earth *kaṣiṇa* (PP 4.183)

In this definition, the “factor of abandoning” on entering 4JH is *sukha*. The “factors of possession” are equanimity and unification of mind (PP 4.197). In 4JH, equanimity or “neutral feeling”—likewise called “neither-pain-nor-pleasure” (*adukkhamā-sukha*)—is the *jhānaṅga* which replaces *sukha*. The *jhāna* factor of one-pointedness of mind (*ekaggatā*), or mental unification, is not explicitly mentioned in the definition of 4JH in PP 4.197 but is understood to be an implicit constituent of this advanced state of *jhāna*. It is also mentioned in the definition that 4JH has “purity of mindfulness due to equanimity.”⁵

Regarding the formulaic phrase “with the abandoning of pleasure (*sukha*) and pain (*dukkha*) and with the previous disappearance of joy (*somanassa*) and grief (*domanassa*)” in PP 4.197, Gunaratana writes that “this formula specifies the conditions for the attainment of this *jhāna*—also called the neither-painful-nor-pleasant liberation of mind (M.i, 296)—to be the abandoning of four kinds of feeling incompatible with it, the first two signifying bodily feelings, the latter two the corresponding mental feelings.”⁶

It must be mentioned that, due to their simplicity, only the mindfulness of breathing and the ten *kaṣiṇas* are appropriate meditation subjects for the meditator to enter 4JH. 4JH is the base from which to attempt the formless *jhānas*, with which it shares the *jhāna* factors of equanimity and one-pointedness. In fact, the immaterial *jhānas* are refinements of 4JH. It is also from 4JH that the “higher-knowledges” (*abhiññā*) can be developed.

⁵ “Purifying equanimity is a name for equanimity purified of all opposition, and so consisting in uninterestedness in stilling opposition described thus: “The fourth *jhāna*, which [...] has mindfulness purified by equanimity” (*Vibh* 245)” (PP 4.166).

⁶ Gunaratana, “The *Jhānas* in Theravada Buddhist Meditation,” 40; Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, 125.

5.15.3 The Sixth Mansions

5.15.3.1 Introduction

Before discussing the concept of ecstasy, let us consider the Sixth Mansions briefly. As Dicken explains, provided that the soul stays faithful to God, and He continues to bestow his graces upon it, the Sixth Mansions follows the Fifth Mansions without solution of continuity and precedes the spiritual marriage of the Seventh Mansions.⁷ The chapter on the Sixth Mansions is the largest of the *Castillo*, occupying eleven of the twenty-seven sections of the book, which bespeaks of the importance of this stage.⁸ In addition to *Castillo interior*, Teresa discusses this stage of Christian spiritual life in *Vida*, Chapters 16-21 and 23-40; *Relaciones* 54; and *Meditaciones sobre los Cantares*, 4. In Teresa's works, "Sixth Mansions" (*sextas moradas*) has various designations, being synonymous with spiritual betrothal (*desposorio espiritual*) and the Fourth Waters of *Vida* Chapter 11.

As Álvarez notes, the Sixth Mansions was a period of ecstatic experiences in Teresa's life that covered nearly fourteen years, from when she was 43 to 57. "Sixth Mansions" also refers to ecstatic experiences that God grants the soul at this stage of which ecstasy is the paradigm and the inaugural experience of these mansions. After the "brief sights" (*vistas*) between God and the soul in 5M, and as long as the soul continues to develop the virtues, 6M is marked by a growing frequency and intimacy in the encounters between God and the soul, which the image of the spiritual betrothal suitably symbolizes. As the soul grows through the trials and mystical experiences bestowed by God in 6M, He gradually purifies it for more lasting, intense and recurrent unions in these mansions.⁹ In this way, God keeps giving news of His greatness and beauty and increasing the soul's awakening and the recognition of its nothingness without Him, until the soul's desire for God is vehement, concluding in the spiritual marriage of 7M (6M 4,2). As a stage, 6M is typified by a multitude and variety of supernatural phenomena, such as visions, locutions, levitation and so forth. Through these "communications," God reveals His secrets to the soul enabling it "to have the courage to be joined with so great a Lord and to take Him as its Spouse" (6M 4,1). 6M are also marked by a required heroism on the soul's part and the trials that occur in them. This is the stage of the highest ecstasies but also of the lowest notes of desolation and desires for death because absence of God (6M 1,2).

⁷ Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 426.

⁸ As explained, one of Teresa's aims in writing was to describe the mystical experiences she had since the composition of *Vida* twelve years before, and clarify the nature of mystical phenomena which require a high level of discernment.

⁹ Teresa says that in 6M: "the raptures are very common and there is no means to avoid them even though they may take place in public" (6M 6,1). This is because "this little butterfly [the soul] is unable to find a lasting place of rest; rather, since the soul goes about with such tender love, any occasion that enkindles this fire more makes the soul fly aloft" (6M 6,1).

5.15.3.2 Ecstasy

The term “ecstasy” is used by Teresa (which she spelled “*estasi*”) with two meanings, one general and the other more specific. We will handle the more general meaning in this subsection and will come to the stricter sense in the next. Ecstasy, in the general sense, is the forms that mystical union adopts in the spiritual betrothal, in which the encounters between God and the soul become more intense, frequent and enduring.¹⁰ The Carmelite describes these ecstatic phenomena as “jewels that the Lord starts to give as gifts to his wife” (6M 5,11). It merits mention that ecstasy is here a concept inclusive of a plurality of unifying events of 6M with a single reality as their nature and function.¹¹

With regard to the terminology employed, the terms “rapture” (*rapto*) and “suspension” (*suspension*),¹² among others, are synonyms for “ecstasy.”¹³ Teresa writes: “I should like to know how to explain [...] the difference there is between union and rapture (*arrobamiento*) or, as they call it, elevation (*elevamiento*) or flight of the spirit (*vuelo de espíritu*), or transport (*arrebataimiento*) which are all the same. I mean that these latter terms, though different, refer to the same thing; it is also called ecstasy” (V 20,1). In her life, Teresa experienced her first ecstasy in 1555, when she was forty years old (V 24,5). Later, these occurrences multiplied during the spiritual betrothal of 6M culminating with the spiritual matrimony of 7M, although did not end entirely (7M 3,11; Cta. 177, 3-1577), as Teresa still had ecstatic experiences as late as in 1580 (F 28,36), although they had become extremely sporadic. Following, we consider worthwhile provide a full quotation of Teresa’s description of ecstasy:

Let us consider now that the last water we spoke of is so plentiful that, if it were not for the fact that the earth doesn’t allow it, we could believe that this cloud of His great Majesty is with us here on earth. But when we thank Him for this wonderful blessing, responding with works according to our strength, the Lord gathers up the soul, let us say now, in the way the clouds gather up the earthly vapors and raises it completely out of itself. The cloud ascends to heaven and brings the soul along and begins to show it the things of the kingdom that He prepared for it. I don’t know if this comparison is holding together, but the truth of the matter is that this is what happens.

In these raptures it seems that the soul is not animating the body. Thus there is a very strong feeling that the natural bodily heat is failing it. The body gradually grows cold, although this happens with the greatest ease and delight. At this stage there is no remedy that can be used to resist. In the union, since we are upon our earth, there is a remedy; though it may take pain and effort one can almost always resist. But in these raptures most often there is no remedy; rather, without any forethought or any help there frequently comes a force so swift and powerful that one sees and feels this cloud or mighty eagle raise it up and carry it aloft on its wings” (V 20, 2-3).

¹⁰ Teresa deals with ecstasy, *sensu lato*, in Chapter 6 of *Castillo*, which deals with the Sixth Mansions, especially in Sections 4 to 6. Also in *Vida* Chapters 18-21 and 24 and final chapters *Relaciones* 5, 7-15; *Camino* Chapter 32 Section 12; *Conceptos* 6-7; *Fundaciones* Chapter 4-5 and *Carta* 177, 3-4. See Álvarez, “Éxtasis” DSTJ, 288.

¹¹ Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 396-97.

¹² See R 5,7; 6M 4, title; 6M 6,1; and 6M 6,5.

¹³ As mentioned earlier, ecstasy equals the “Fourth Waters” in *Vida*. See Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, 244.

5.15.3.3 Varieties of the ecstasy

Within the category of ecstasy, Teresa distinguishes several varieties. Following the order as set out in *Castillo*, the varieties of the ecstatic experience are: “spiritual wound” (*herida espiritual*); “ecstasy” or “trance” (*éxtasis* or *arrobamiento* in a strict sense); “rapture” (*arrebato* or *rapto*)—which for several authors also includes the so-called “flight of the spirit” (*vuelo de espíritu*)¹⁴—and, finally, “transport” (*ímpetu*) (6M 2).¹⁵ The enumeration in this list reflects an incremental relationship between these varieties of a single experience, as gradually deepens in intensity and effects,¹⁶ and also matches the historical order in which these varieties occurred in Teresa’s life. Teresa emphasizes that this typology, though, is not exclusive to her experience but that of many souls (6M 5,6). It is a taxonomy that comes from an experience accumulated over many decades.

“*Spiritual Wound:*” In 6M, Section 2, *Vida* 29,10 and *Relaciones* 5,16, Teresa speaks of “spiritual wounds” or “wounds of love” (*heridas de amor*). The image of a wound of love originally appears in the *Song of Songs* (“you have wounded my heart”) (Sg 4:9). Teresa claims that “spiritual wounds”¹⁷ are “quite an ordinary mode of prayer” (R 5,14).¹⁸ As Dicken notes, within ecstasy, “‘wound’ is reckoned the earliest and least advanced of all the different classes of phenomenon the saint deals with.”¹⁹ Teresa explains that this divinely-inspired prayer is felt differently than anything experienced thus far (6M 2,2); it occurs often out of the blue, even when the person is not thinking about God (6M 2,2), and “sometimes, especially in the beginning, it made one to tremble and even complain without there being anything that causes it pain” (6M 2,2). With these wounds, God awakens the soul, which “feels that it is wounded in the most exquisite way” (6M 2,2).²⁰ With respect to the spiritual wounds, Teresa says that God calls the soul with an identity so clear that one could never doubt it is Him,²¹ and a whistle so penetrating that one cannot help hearing it (6M 2,3). As to the duration of a wound, Teresa declares that “even though it sometimes lasts for a long while, it comes and goes” (6M 2,4). In wounds the soul’s faculties are not suspended (6M 9,2-3); it is not a state of entrancement (6M 2,5).

¹⁴ Dubay, *Fire Within*, 100.

¹⁵ As Dicken points out, other Teresian terms such as rapture (*rapto*), exaltation (*levantamiento*) and impulse (*impulso*) “are either synonymous [...] or describe a variation of one of the main categories” (Dicken 1963, 396).

¹⁶ Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 397. For an example of the use of ecstasy encompassing all these modes see V 20,2,3.

¹⁷ “Spiritual wounds” is another term for “wound of love” often used by Christian and Teresian scholars.

¹⁸ In the sense that they occur often in these mansions. Teresa spent several years only with “wounds of love” and claimed to have been very satisfied with these gifts.

¹⁹ Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 401.

²⁰ Teresa adds that God does this to the soul, which melts in desire but does not know what to ask for (6M 2,4). The soul wants to complain to God, and declare words of love, but does not dare as it does not want the pleasure to stop (6M 2,2).

²¹ According to Teresa, there is no doubt that the wound is not caused by anything natural, or melancholy or self-deception. Teresa cites reasons why she is sure they are from God: the delight it leaves in the soul is sweet pain, the great benefits that remain in the soul, the determination to suffer for God and detach from mundane things (6M 2,7).

Ecstasy: Teresa speaks of ecstasy, *sensu stricto*, in *Castillo* 6M Section 4, and *Vida* Chapter 24. She had her first ecstasy in 1577, at forty-two years old, describing it as “an ecstasy came upon me so suddenly that it almost carried me out of myself” (V 24,5). This first ecstasy was accompanied by words from God, which she heard in the depths of her soul.²² Teresa says that this experience scared her greatly, due to the movement of the soul, and because these words she heard were said deep inside her spirit (V 24,5).

The experience of ecstasy is difficult to convey (6M 3,2). It normally occurs during prayer (6M 4, title), but not always. At times, it happens when the soul is touched by some word that reminded it of God (6M 4,4). Unlike “rapture” (*arreatamiento*), ecstasy unfolds gradually. The soul slowly starts to distance itself from mundane things (R 5,8). Ecstasy is purely “passive,” as the soul can do nothing to encourage or resist it. The person’s senses and faculties freeze totally during ecstasy.²³ The eyes close and the person cannot move or speak. He cannot feel the body, and even the bodily animation and blood circulation seem to cease (V 20,4). The breathing slows or apparently stops (6M 4,13; V.20,18 and R 5,7). The body temperature also seems to drop. The limbs remain as if paralyzed and in the position they were in before the ecstasy happened. It may be accompanied by levitation (V 20,4). Ecstasy makes the desire for God grow. Through ecstasy, God purifies the soul and lifts it up for its union with Him (6M 4,2). How long does ecstasy last? Dicken notes that “although the state appears to the onlooker to last for as much as two or three hours, in fact the subject is aware of a good deal of fluctuation in its intensity and is truly united to God for only the shortest space of time.”²⁴

With regard to the criteria of discernment, ecstasy is often accompanied by some type of spiritual communication. During ecstasy, it seems the soul has never been so awake to the things of God nor has had such “light and knowledge of His Majesty” (6M 4,4).²⁵ During ecstasy God reveals secrets from heaven and “imaginary visions” that are imprinted on the soul, never to be forgotten, and can be spoken of—after the ecstasy. But, when they are “intellectual visions,” these secrets cannot be spoken of, since it is not advisable for those of the Earth to understand and speak of such visions (6M 4,5).²⁶ Knowledge of these secrets in ecstasy is so essential that Teresa insists that if this knowledge does not occur, it may not be ecstasy, but rather natural weakness (6M 4,9).

²² Teresa writes: “I heard these words: ‘No longer do I want you to converse with men but with angels’” (V 24,5).

²³ Cf. 6M 4, title; 6M 4,13; 6 M 4,2; and 6M 4,9.

²⁴ Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 397-98.

²⁵ Teresa wonders how the soul can understand this secret when the powers and senses are so absorbed. She responds that perhaps only God comprehends this mystery (6M 4,4).

²⁶ Teresa asks herself: if one cannot remember these visions, what benefit do they have for the soul? She thinks that there are multiple and great benefits. If there are no images of them, and the powers are not even understood, how could one remember the visions? Teresa says that she does not understand God’s workings either (6M 4,8).

Teresa describes the effects of ecstasy saying that, after it, the soul is almost always more detached (V 20,7-8). This is God's way of moving the person towards saintliness, although it is not essential for fulfilling God's will. Ecstasy has a great impact on the mystic who might need days to readapt to the world, which may seem unreal to him during this period (V 20,21).²⁷ During ecstasy the soul undergoes a great transformation: it receives knowledge of God. After it, the soul feels displeasure for earthly things (R 5,7), is highly aware of its own imperfections and distance from God, and wishes to become better, as it learns that the world is a mockery and garbage compared to having God (6M 4,10-11). All these spiritual outcomes are signs that the ecstasy is genuine (V 20,22). The mystic gains humility and a burning love of God and desire to serve Him (6M 4,15).

Rapture, the term we would use for the Spanish words *arrebataimiento* or *rapto*, is the next variety of ecstasy. It is described in *Castillo*, Chapter Six, Section 5, among other places.²⁸ In *Castillo*, Teresa employs another term for this state: "flight of the spirit"²⁹ (*vuelo del espíritu*), a synonym for rapture.³⁰ Teresa describes rapture in the following passage:

suddenly a movement of the soul is felt so swift that it seems the spirit is carried off, and at a fearful speed especially in the beginning [...] Do you think it is a small disturbance for a person to be very much in his senses and see his soul carried off (and in the case of some, we have read, even the body with the soul) without knowing where that soul is going, what or who does this, or how? At the beginning of this swift movement there is not so much certitude that the rapture is from God (6M 5,1)

On the relationship between rapture and ecstasy, Teresa says that although rapture is "substantially the same as other ecstasies, it is interiorly experienced very differently" (6M 5,1). Rapture occurs suddenly, and it comes on out of the blue.³¹ The person feels suddenly like a "wave" or a "shot" (6M 5,9), being "snatched,"³² or "raised" (*levantada*).³³ One has the impression of "going out" of oneself (6M 5,7), "separating from oneself" (6M 5,12), or "flying" out of the body. In rapture one does not know if he is in the body or not.³⁴ During rapture, the senses and powers of the soul are suspended (6M 5,1). During rapture, Teresa says "the soul loses its senses, and doesn't understand why" (6M 5,12).

²⁷ Teresa says that after ecstasy, the will seems "drunk" and the understanding deranged for days (6M 4,14.).

²⁸ For descriptions of rapture (*arrobamiento*) in Teresa's other works, see R 54; V 20,1; and V 18,7.

²⁹ Teresa writes: "There is another kind of rapture—I call it flight of the spirit—which, though substantially the same as other raptures, is interiorly experienced very differently" (6M 5,1). Cf. R.54 and 6 M 5,7.

³⁰ Cf. R 5,9. That "flight of the spirit" and rapture are synonymous in Teresa is also Dicken's opinion, who says that "in the Mansions [flight of the spirit] seems to be equated with rapture" (Dicken, 1963, 399). In *Vida*, Teresa does not speak of "flight of the spirit," but of "rapture" or "elevation" (V 20,1). As Dicken points out, the only distinction—if there is one—between rapture and "flight" would be in the suddenness of the appearance of rapture (Dicken, 1963, 398) and that there is "already a consciousness in the soul of a burning love for God which persists during the 'flight of the spirit,' whereas in rapture the suddenness of the phenomenon is in no way foreshadowed in the soul and the shock, if not necessarily more intense, affects the whole consciousness" (Dicken 1963, 399).

³¹ See 6M 5,1 and 6M 5,2.

³² See 6M 5,7, 6M 5,2.

³³ Teresa says that here "God lifts (*levanta*) the soul" (6 M 5, title).

³⁴ Cf. 6M 5,1; 6M 5,7; 6M 5,8; and R 5,1,1. "Raptus" is the word used in the Gospel to describe Saint Paul's experience.

The soul leaves the body “without knowing where that soul is going, what or who does this, or how. At the beginning of this swift movement there is not so much certitude that the rapture is from God” (6M 5,1). There is nothing the soul could do to resist it (6M 5,2), which if it tries would be even worse. The experience entails a lot of fear, especially at the beginning (6M 5,1), and makes one receiving it shaken (6M 5,1; V 20 3-7; 6M 5,12). It takes courage to confront it (6M 5,1). When it occurs, it is better to leave oneself in God’s hands (6M 5,1-2).

How does the “flight of the spirit” take place? To explain this phenomenon and how it occurs, Teresa turns to the image of the pillar of water in the Fourth Mansions (4M 2,2). In rapture it is as if God stops these springs, and not letting the waters flow out of their boundaries, they accumulate until such a powerful wave forms that when it is unleashed, this powerful wave has such great force that it raises the soul up to the highest level and there is nothing that the soul could do before the fury of this rapture (6M 5,3; R 5,1).

Teresa says this experience is brief (6M 5,9), “the whole rapture is of very brief duration” (6M 5,10), but a delightful (6M 5, title) and further describes it thus:

I have often thought that just as the sun while in the sky has such strong rays that, even though it doesn’t move from there, the rays promptly reach the earth, so the soul and the spirit, which are one, could be like the sun and its rays. Thus, while the soul remains in its place, the superior part rises above it (6M 5,9).

During “flight of the spirit,” God reveals Himself with power (6M 5,4). It is as if the soul has been in a region different from that in which we live in (6M 5,7). Through rapture God shows the soul the place where it is going and gives it strength “so that it may suffer the trials of this laborious path, knowing where it must go to get its final rest” (6M 5,9).

The experience is generally compounded with visions in which, Teresa explains, the soul learns, instantly, many great things and secrets of God that in many years of hard work with imagination and thought it could not make one thousandth of it (6M 5,7). In rapture the soul experiences a supernatural light, a white light which is very different from the earth’s light (6M 5,7). The effects of rapture are similar to those of the other types of ecstasy. After the initial fright, the experience leaves great “peace and calm in the soul” (6M 5,10) that feels greatly improved (6M 5,9). The souls also become aware of the grandeur of God and His perfection and its own imperfections (6 M 5,5), it has greater self-knowledge and humility (6M 5,6), a huge love for God and resolution to not sin (6 M 5,4), total disdain and detachment from mundane things (6M 5,9), It is due to these effects, that one knows rapture does not come from the imagination or the devil.

Transport (ímpetu) is another of the modalities of ecstasy. Teresa describes it in 6M 4,3, *Vida* Chapter 20, and R 5. It is less severe than rapture (*arrobamiento*) but, as Dicken says: “the swiftness of its onset is the more surprising since it may happen at any time, irrespective of the subject’s occupation or thoughts” (R 5,13 and 6M 4,3).³⁵ Transport may be caused by some words the person remembers or hears about God (6M 4,3). Transport dumbfounds the person. Teresa says that sometimes this memory of God is so powerful that in an instant the person seems to lose his mind (R 5,13). The Carmelite saint compares it to the shock on receiving news of a calamity, which leaves the mind blank and the soul absorbed (R 5,13). The person remains in a state of sorrow and solitude, with a desire for God that is so intense that only death can quench it (R 5,14). The soul seems to be suspended between heaven and earth until, little by little, God gives news of Himself so that the soul can see what it loses (R 5,14). Regarding its duration, Teresa says that transport never lasts for more than half an hour (R 5,14).

Teresa explains that transport leaves the body so disjointed that the person cannot even use the hands to write, and with very great pains (R 5,14). It is a suffering severe although unbelievably sweet, a fierce yet sweet martyrdom (V 20,11).³⁶ Although the subject cannot walk, he can perceive and talk whilst it is going on. The higher faculties of the soul are able to function somewhat normally. The pain at the time is purely interior, although when the transport itself has passed there remains a racking physical pain that persists for some time (R 5,11-12; V 29,13-14), which can also be felt on the inside.³⁷ Frequently, says Teresa, transport develops into ecstasy or rapture R 5,16; V 29,14. “Visions, both imaginary and intellectual, are often associated with transports” (6 M 4,8). Transport leaves great effects and gains in the soul. The soul understands that is great mercy of God. If it happened very often, life would not last (R 5,15). Transport also leaves a great desire to serve God and tenderness and tears to get out of this exile (R 5,13-16). In *Castillo*, Teresa says that here “the soul is renewed like the phoenix, and one can devoutly believe that its faults are pardoned. Now that it is so pure, the Lord joins it with Himself, without anyone understanding what is happening except these two” (6M 4,3). Dicken writes: “Teresa asserts that this is the most advanced of all the different kinds of trance, and came to her only after she had experienced all the others (V 20,15).”³⁸

³⁵ Dicken remarks: “a word or momentary thought of God suffices unaccountably to throw the soul into complete confusion” (Dicken 1963, 400).

³⁶ According to Dicken there is little doubt that the celebrated transverberation of St Teresa was a typical example of “transport” (V 29,13). see Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 400.

³⁷ Teresa adds: “nor does the soul itself understand in a way that can afterward be explained. Yet, it does have interior understanding, for this experience is not like that of fainting or convulsion; in these latter nothing is understood inwardly or outwardly” (6M 4,3). Cf. R 5,13-16.

³⁸ Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 401.

5.15.4 Comparison of the fourth *jhāna* and the prayer of ecstasy

5.15.4.1 Introduction

In 5.11.4.2, we pointed out that “ecstasy” has been used to translate *jhāna*.³⁹ In view of canonical descriptions of *jhāna*, though, we noted the inappropriateness of so doing. “Ecstasy,” or “ecstatic,” also appear often in descriptions in English of *jhānic* experiences. Is it justified to speak of 4JH as the “highest level of “ecstasy” as some authors do?⁴⁰ Do 4JH and PE display shared features beyond the general consistencies between the *jhānas* and mystical union already analyzed in Section 5.11.4? Teresa’s usage of the word “ecstasy” is precise: it only refers to the forms that mystical union adopts in 6M. Although specific common features of 4JH and PE become apparent, their undeniable differences are equally obvious, particularly in terms of the nature of both experiences.

5.15.4.2 The nature of 4JH and PE

As said earlier, the *jhānas* and Christian mystical union are not compatible in nature.⁴¹ This incompatibility is more noticeable when comparing 4JH and PE. As Bucknell notes, there is a suspension of mental activity in the higher *jhānas* that closely resembles ecstasy.⁴² To compare the *jhānas* and ecstasy as states of suspension of the senses and mental activity is then reasonable, but not reading 4JH as a state of union with God. PE is an undeserved gift from God; the soul cannot attain it on its merits. *Jhāna* is never described and understood this way.

4JH and PE differ essentially, for the latter is a dyadic relationship between the divine “You” and a human “I” (Bubber). Teresa describes her ecstatic experiences as “delicate means” by which God awakens the soul and makes it desire Him vehemently (6M 2,1).⁴³ “Ecstasy,” therefore, in Teresa’s usage, connotes a divine origin and nature which does not aligning with the notion of 4JH which, by contrast, is not a divine experience. Besides, the Buddhist tradition warns against confusing the formless *jhānas*, a refinement of 4JH, with experiences of union with Brahman.

³⁹ Karunaratne defines *jhāna* as a “state of ecstasy reached in meditation” (“Jhāna,” EB, 55). Nanayakkara writes: “Very often writers use the term ‘ecstasy’ to render into English [...] Pāli terms as *jhāna* and *samāpatti*” (“Ecstasy,” EB, 10).

⁴⁰ Elaborating on 4JH, Nanayakkara writes: “The ecstatic feeling that arises when the meditator permeates his whole personality with the sublime and translucent mind is the highest level of ecstasy that could be reached through *jhānic* practices” (“Ecstasy,” EB, 12).

⁴¹ Both 4JH and PE are of the same nature as their preceding experiences. 4JH is of the same nature that 3JH but is a deeper state of concentration and absorption. Ecstasy is also a more intense and lasting union than that of 5M but of the same nature (C18,3). It is also of the same nature of the spiritual marriage, but the union in 7M is permanent (7M 2,1).

⁴² Bucknell, “Buddhist *jhāna* as Mystical Experience,” 131-49.

⁴³ These passive purifications prepare the soul for the consummation of union with God (6M 4,2).

Another striking difference is the often sudden and unexpected onset of ecstasy, which contrasts with the methodical attainment of 4JH. Teresa describes how ecstasy is often triggered by God suddenly, and the courage required for these favors. The *jhānas*, in contrast, are natural phenomena triggered by concentration on the meditational object.

There is a major similarity, though: neither 4JH nor PE is considered by their systems to be the culmination of religious life. Sharman puts it well: “The final goal of a Christian existence is the ‘eternal life’ of the beatific vision or the kingdom of God, and not transient ecstasies; and the final goal of Buddhism is the attainment of the lasting happiness of *nirvana*, which is attained for good, unlike the temporary ecstasies of the trances.”⁴⁴

5.15.4.3 Comparison characteristics of 4JH and PE

Let us compare next the salient characteristics of 4JH and PE

5.15.4.3.1 The basic characteristics of 4JH and PE

Both 4JH and PE exhibit some of the common features of the *jhānas* and mystical union in their highest degree. First, both are described as states of great purity and perfection. The mind in 4JH is defined as pure, clean and spotless.⁴⁵ Referring to the purity of 4JH, a *sutta* turns to the simile of “as if a man were to sit wrapped from head to foot in a white garment, so that no part of him was untouched by that garment” (DN 2,82). As for Teresa, the trials and hardships described in 6M 1 and the passive purifications by God that the soul experiences in 6M, prepare it for its permanent union with God.⁴⁶

Second, the *qualia* of both experiences seem particularly incommunicable. The higher the *jhāna* the more difficult its *qualia* to be communicated. Some authors uphold that 4JH—and particularly the formless *jhānas*, which are a refinement of 4JH—is ineffable.⁴⁷ In Teresa’s attempt to describe PE and its modalities, she finds herself unable to express these “certain delicate means the soul itself does not understand. (Nor do I believe I’ll be successful in explaining them save to those who have experienced them)” (6M 2,1).

⁴⁴ Sharma, “Ecstasy,” ER, 1-17; T. W. Rhys Davids writes: “The *jhānas* are only a means, not the end. To imagine that experiencing them was equivalent to Arahantship [...] is condemned (D i.37 ff.) as a deadly heresy” (“Jhāna,” PED, 286).

⁴⁵ The *Samaññaphala Sutta* reads: “And he with mind concentrated, purified and cleansed, unblemished, free from impurities, malleable, workable, established and having gained imperturbability, applies and directs his mind to the knowledge of the destruction of the corruptions” (DN 2,97).

⁴⁶ Teresa says that in PE “the soul is renewed like the phoenix, and one can devoutly believe that its faults are pardoned. Now that it is so pure, the Lord joins it with Himself” (6M 4,3). Union cannot be other than a state of great purity.

⁴⁷ Shaw, *Buddhist Meditation*, 174 (quoting Khantipalo, *Calm and Insight*, 61). See also Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development*, 101.

Thirdly, 4JH and PE are the deepest states of absorption reported in their systems. 4JH is the deepest state of absorption and one-pointedness in *samatha* meditation. During 4JH, the mind remains entirely adsorbed into the meditative object, without awareness of anything else external to it. For Teresa, PE is a state of infused absorption in which the soul remains completely enraptured in God,⁴⁸ without awareness of the environment or memory of the world. In ecstasy the soul feels “engulfed in God” (V 10,1).

Fourth, in both 4JH and PE, all mental activity (i.e. the sensitive, cognitive, intellectual, volitionally, mnemonic capabilities of the person) remain maximally arrested. Both states are farthest removed from the ordinary uses of the senses and faculties. In 4JH the meditator is not affected by the senses,⁴⁹ and mental activity ceases. The same can be said of Teresa’s ecstasy, where the soul’s senses and faculties are totally suspended.⁵⁰

In neither state is the person unconscious but remains intensely aware of the object of absorption. Karunaratne writes: “the person in this state [i.e., 4JH] is not by any means in a state of hypnotic trance or subconscious state [...] On the contrary, he is intensely conscious and mindful of the theme whereon his mind is fixed, free from all mental disturbances, having eliminated every kind of activity, both physical and mental.”⁵¹ Teresa insists that PE is not a swoon, or catalepsy or unconsciousness but rather a state of full awareness of God (6M 4,3).⁵² In PE “the soul was never so awake to the things of God nor did it have such deep enlightenment and knowledge of His Majesty” (6M 4,4).⁵³ Nonetheless, in PE there could be a brief loss of awareness (V 20,13). See also V 20,15.

Accompanying PE, the person may experience supernormal phenomena and receive divine locutions and visions:

When the soul is in this suspension, the Lord likes to show it some secrets, things about heaven, and imaginative visions. It is able to tell of them afterward, for these remain so impressed on the memory that they are never forgotten. But when the visions are intellectual, the soul doesn’t know how to speak of them. For there must be some visions during these moments that are so sublime that it’s not fitting for those who live on this earth to have the further understanding necessary to explain them (6M 4,5).

Supernormal phenomena and visions are also closely connected with 4JH.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ To describe the state of the person in ecstasy Teresa uses the expression *embebida* (“embedded”) (6M 4,8).

⁴⁹ *Anālayo, Satipaṭṭhāna*, 91.

⁵⁰ For Teresa ecstasy occurs when God “gives to the soul raptures that draw it out of its senses” (6M 4,2). During it, “the powers are so absorbed (*absortas*), that we can say that they are dead, and the senses the same” (6M 4,4) and “one’s joy in God is so profound that it simply suspends the normal operation of the inner and outer senses” (V 20,11). Cf. V 20,13.

⁵¹ “Jhāna,” EB, 50-55.

⁵² Dubay, *Fire Within*, 97-98.

⁵³ Teresa describes ecstasy, in all its modalities, are delicate means by which God “awaken” (*despierta*) the soul (6M 2,2).

⁵⁴ Teresa’s visions and supernormal phenomena and its comparison with similar phenomena in Theravāda is the subject matter of Section 5.17 of this thesis.

5.15.4.3.2 Equanimity and mindfulness versus ecstasy?

Let us next also discuss some emotional aspects of 4JH and PE

5.15.4.3.2.1 The absence of *sukha*, and equanimity and purity of mindfulness

Sukha is the factor of abandonment in 4JH. According to Buddhaghosa, the formulaic phrase “with the abandoning of *sukha* and *dukkha*,” found in the pericope of 4JH means “with the abandoning of bodily *sukha* and bodily *dukkha* and the previous disappearance of joy (*somanassa*) and grief (*domanassa*)” (PP 4.184). Buddhaghosa clarifies that bodily *dukkha* ceased at accessing 1JH (PP4.187), while [mental] grief (*domanassa*),⁵⁵ and [bodily] *sukha*, vanished at accessing 2JH and 3JH, respectively (PP 4.188-189). Now, [mental] joy (*somanassa*)⁵⁶ is too abandoned at accessing 4JH (PP 4.185). This means in 4JH one does not experience *sukha* or *dukkha*, bodily or mental. Buddhaghosa adds that the abandonment of these four feelings is a condition for entry into 4JH (PP 4.192) and that if they are abandoned, is so that a subtle and hard to recognize new feeling called “neither-pain-nor-pleasure” (*adukkhamasukha*) can be grasped (PP 4.190).

For Gunaratana neither-pain-nor-pleasure is synonymous with equanimity (*upekkhā*), the feeling that remains once the other four feelings above-mentioned have subsided.⁵⁷ “Neither-pain-nor-pleasure” then is not only the absence of *sukha* and *dukkha* but a new feeling—“equanimity”—that replaces *sukha* as a concomitant factor in 4JH (PP 4.193). This is how Buddhaghosa describes this new “neutral feeling,” in Ñāṇamoli’s translation: “It [i.e. the neutral feeling] has the characteristic of experiencing what is contrary to both the desirable and the undesirable. Its function is neutral. Its manifestation is unevident. Its proximate cause should be understood as the cessation of *sukha*” (PP 4.193).

In addition to the “neutral feeling,” the pericope of 4JH mentions that 4JH arises with a “purity of mindfulness” born of equanimity (PP 4.194). Mindfulness existed in previous *jhānas*, “but it is not purified since it is outshone by opposing states consisting in *vicāra*, thus why only this *jhāna* is said to have purity of mindfulness due to equanimity” (PP 4.195). In 4JH, the *jhāyin* dwells equanimous and with purity of mindfulness. Shankman remarks that in 4JH, “because the mind is not reactive, it is naturally clear and awake, able to be more present and mindful, unmoving and unperturbed by any experience.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ñāṇamoli translates *domanassa* as “grief” (e.g., PP 17,48).

⁵⁶ Ñāṇamoli renders *somanassa* [lit. ‘glad-minded-ness’ (*su+manas+ya*)] as “joy.” In PED is “mental ease, happiness, joy.”

⁵⁷ Gunaratana, “The Jhānas in Theravāda Buddhist Meditation,” 40.

⁵⁸ Shankman, *The Experience of Samadhi*, 49.

5.15.4.3.2.2 Teresa's subjective experience of ecstasy

Teresa describes 6M as a place where the soul “enjoys” (*goza*) the vision of God (6M 1,1), and ecstasy as a state of a great joy and happiness. Speaking of the “fourth waters” (a term synonymous with ecstatic spiritual union or ecstasy), Teresa says that here:

[T]he work is accompanied by so much glory and consolation [*consuelo*] 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 [*gloria*]. In this fourth water the soul [...] rejoices [*goza*] without understanding what it is rejoicing in [*sin entender lo que se goza*]. It understands that it is enjoying [*goza*] a good in which are gathered together all goods, but this good is incomprehensible. All the senses are occupied in this joy [*gozo*] in such a way that none is free to be taken up with any other exterior or interior thing. In the previous degrees, the senses are given freedom to show some signs of the great joy [*gran gozo*] they feel. Here in this fourth water the soul rejoices incomparably more [*goza más sin comparación*]; but it can show much less since no power remains in the body, nor does the soul have any power to communicate its joy [*gozo*] (V 18,1).

In this passage, the words “glory” (*gloria*), “consolation” (*consuelo*), “rejoicing” (*goza*), “great joy” (*gran gozo*) convey feelings of boundless joy experienced in ecstasy, a word that denotes an “overwhelming feeling of great happiness or joyful excitement.” When the soul is in ecstasy (in the strict sense), says Teresa, “it can be so absorbed in enjoying Him (*gozarle*) that a sublime good like that is sufficient for it” (6M 4,8). Teresa exclaims: “Oh, what a mockery everything in the world [...] It is all loathsome dung compared to these treasures that will be enjoyed without end. Nor are these anything in comparison with having as our own the Lord of all the treasures of heaven and earth” (6M 4,10).

Teresa also describes feelings of overwhelming jubilation as one of the modalities of ecstasy in 6M.⁵⁹ These feelings of overwhelming jubilation are experienced by the soul “without understanding what it is they are enjoying or how they are enjoying” (6M 6,10). In these jublations “there is so much interior joy in the very intimate part of the soul and so much peace; and all the happiness stirs the soul to the praises of God” (6M 6,10). Speaking of “wounds of love” she defines it as “delightful wound” (*herida sabrosísima*), from which one would never want to be cured. In it, the soul enjoys the Spouse with a great pain, “although delightful and sweet” (6M 2,2). Teresa says: “The wound satisfies it much more than the delightful and painless absorption of the prayer of quiet” (6M 2,2).⁶⁰

In view of the above descriptions the prayer of ecstasy is an exalted state where the soul feels a “great happiness and joyful excitement,” which is the definition of ecstasy.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Teresa adds: “the joy is so excessive the soul wouldn’t want to enjoy it alone but wants to tell everyone about it so that they might help this soul praise our Lord” (6M 6,10). See also 6M 6,11.

⁶⁰ Teresa describes this pain saying that at times feels like an arrow or a spark that reaches the depths to the soul leaving a “delightful pain” that is not pain “and the soul is left with the desire to suffer again that loving pain” (6M 2,4).

⁶¹ “Ecstasy” in <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/ecstasy>

5.15.4.3.2.3 Equanimity, mindfulness, and stillness versus ecstasy?

As Harvey remarks “the fourth *jhāna* is a state of profound stillness and peace.”⁶² The *pīti* and *sukha*, mental joy and mental grief present in previous *jhānas* (PP 4.184) are now replaced by an equanimous or “neutral feeling” and higher purity of mindfulness. 4JH is likewise a state of deeper inner silence, one-pointedness than previous *jhānas*. Gunaratana concludes therefore that 4JH is “far more peaceful and secure than anything he [the meditator] has so far experienced, and therefore as far more desirable.”⁶³ Can such quietness, steadiness, equanimity be predicated of Teresa’s ecstatic experiences?

“Ecstasy” is “an overwhelming feeling of great happiness or joyful excitement” and, in a religious context, it denotes “an emotional or religious frenzy or trance-like state.”⁶⁴ Teresa’s descriptions of her ecstatic experiences are pictures of intense “joy” (*gozo*), exceeding that of the prayer of union (V 20,1-2).⁶⁵ She reports experiencing ecstatic feelings of the “greatest ease and delight” (*deleite*) (V 20,1-3). But some forms of ecstasy entail great turmoil or fear.⁶⁶ Such feelings of elation and their intensity, excitement, and disruption—hallmarks of both “flight of the spirit” and “rapture”—also contrast starkly with the equanimous feeling and mindfulness stillness and profound peace described of 4JH.

In sum, the “emotional” aspects of 4JH and ecstasy are markedly different, despite that other similarities can be discerned, such as absence of physical or mental pain in either state. We agree then with Gunaratana when he notes that the words “ecstasy” and “rapture” “might suggest a degree of elation and exuberance inappropriate for the higher *jhānas*.”⁶⁷ The delight and excitement of ecstasy contracts with the equanimity of 4JH.

Nonetheless, it seems also true, and should be investigated further, that throughout the Six Mansions there is a gradual purification unification and integration of the person in which all the emotions are quieted, pacified, and integrated, culminating in the Seventh Mansions where the soul dwells in perfect equanimity experiencing its permanent Spiritual Matrimony with God and where all extraordinary phenomena disappear.

⁶² Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 330. Shankman writes: “the four *jhānas* are described in the Buddhist texts, comprising progressively subtler stages of increasing calm, clarity, and peace” (Shankman, *The Art and Skill*, 104).

⁶³ Gunaratana, *The Jhānas in Theravada Buddhist Meditation*, 39.

⁶⁴ “Ecstasy” in <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/ecstasy>

⁶⁵ Arbman says: “one cannot avoid the assumption that the transition from mystical union to ecstasy must be in reality tantamount to a further enhancement of the intensity of the feelings referred to [the mystical euphoria and bliss felt in full mystical union]” (Arbman 1968, 83).

⁶⁶ Speaking of the “flight of the spirit,” Teresa explains that it shakes, disturbs, and even frightens its receiver, especially at the beginning (V 20 3-7; and 6M 5,12). A strong courage is needed (*menester ánimo*) to confront the experience (6M 5, title). She also mentions the fear at being carried away in “rapture” (6M 5,1).

⁶⁷ Gunaratana, *The Path of Serenity and Insight*, 3.

5.15.4.3.3 Light and glory

Teresa describes a spiritual light in ecstasy, a soft infused “white light” (*luz blanca*) of great beauty that gives the most intense delight to the “sight,” and is not like any light of the world.⁶⁸ This light is the glory of God expressed as light in the Bible (Lk. 2:9; Jn. 1:29). As discussed in 5.11, all *jhānas* are associated with the phenomena of light. In particular, it is said that in 4JH the body is filled from head to toe with a “diffused white light.”⁶⁹

5.15.4.3.4 Feelings of love, adoration and desire in PE versus 4JH

A point of contrast is the love between God and the soul at the heart of the Christian ecstasy, defined as a gaze of God’s love that penetrates the soul to its marrow (R 5,6).⁷⁰ During ecstasy, “this action of love is so powerful that the soul dissolves with desire, and yet it doesn’t know what to ask for since clearly it thinks that its God is with it” (6M 2,4). This reciprocal love in ecstasy is an essential difference with 4JH, which is characterized by a dispassionate equanimity. This distinction is important in the interface between Christianity and Buddhism as at the core of Christianity is this loving relationship between the soul and God while in Buddhism any attachment is a source of suffering.

5.15.4.3.5 Feeling of separation from the body in ecstasy

Teresa describes how, in some forms of ecstasy (i.e., flight of the spirit) the soul feels a separation or a gradual estrangement from the body.⁷¹ This disengagement accords with the etymology of the word “ecstasy,” which is “standing beside oneself.” Although “rapture” has been used occasionally for translating the word *jhāna*, the sense of separation from the body, or being seized and carried off forcefully out of the body is not predicated of any *jhāna*. As already observed in Section 5.11.4, although in *jhāna* there is alienation of the external and internal senses this experience is never described in the scriptures or commentaries as “being outside oneself,” mainly because in Buddhism there is no self from which the person can depart or stay aside.

⁶⁸ Teresa: “The splendor is not one that dazzles; it has a soft whiteness, is infused, gives the most intense delight to the sight, and doesn’t tire it; neither does the brilliance, in which is seen the vision of so divine a beauty, tire it. It is a light so different from earthly light that the sun’s brightness that we see appears very tarnished in comparison with that brightness and light represented to the sight, and so different that afterward you wouldn’t want to open your eyes” (V 28,5).

⁶⁹ Brasington, *Right Concentration*, 63-64.

⁷⁰ Salvador Ros, “El epistolario teresiano: un estilo en compromiso,” *Monte Carmelo*, 92 (1984): 381-401.

⁷¹ Following some authors of her time, Teresa says that in ecstasy the person may feel: “gone out of herself” (*salida de sí*); “exist herself” (*salir de sí misma*) (6M 5,9); “exit the body” (*salir del cuerpo*) (V 28,9; 6M 11,9); or flown out of the body. Teresa doubts if in ecstasy the body is without the soul (6M 5,8). Teresa also describes ecstasy as “going up on herself” (“*subir sobre sí mesma*”) (V 20,6; C 27,1; and 4M 3,2), “upliftment” (*elevamiento*) (V 20,2). [“*elevamiento*” is synonymous often with *arrobamiento* (rapture) (V 20,1)]; “*levantamiento de espíritu, o juntamiento con el amor celestial*” (V 18,3).

5.15.4.3.6 Selflessness, oneness, time-spacelessness 4JH and PE

Another feature shared by 4JH and PE is a further loss of sense of self in both states. With the disappearance of *sukha*, resulting in deeper mental absorption and equanimity, the sense of self is reduced further. For Brahm a feature of 4JH is the “absence of a doer, as in the second and third *jhāna*.”⁷² Arbel writes: “in the fourth *jhāna* there is no construction of a self; there is no movement of likes and dislikes which concoct a sense of self.”⁷³ During ecstasy the sense of self also acutely diminishes. Teresa declares that in ecstasy the soul seems “out of itself” (*fuera de sí*);⁷⁴ self-awareness and self-concern fade away in contemplative experience.⁷⁵ Self-forgetfulness⁷⁶ continues after the experience for a while (6M 6,13). Although there is a gradual loss of the sense of self throughout all the mystical mansions, Cousins notes that ecstasy is “a kind of spiritual dying which precedes entry to the Seventh Mansion.”⁷⁷

In both 4JH and PE the feeling of self reduces unto the point that is not felt. Nevertheless, these are not states of a definitive but transitory self-transcendence.⁷⁸ In both 4JH and PE there is similarly a further loss of the sense of time and space. As Yates puts it, “the four formless variants of the fourth *jhāna* [...] are called “formless” because they are entirely divorced from any subjective connection to the material space-time continuum.”⁷⁹ During ecstasy, the sense of time and space likewise vanish. Teresa says that much in her writings.

5.15.4.3.7 Duration, frequency and intensity

In the beginning, 4JH may be brief, falling into the lower *jhānas*, even ordinary consciousness or intermittently re-entering 4JH. Dexterity comes if the meditator persists with the practice. Distractions lessen; he enters 4JH more often, which may last longer and be more intensely felt. With the five masteries, the *jhāyin* must train himself to remain in 4JH for a time length decided in advance, which could be for many hours.

⁷² Brahm, *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond*, 164.

⁷³ Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, 161. Arbel also states: “The fourth-*jhāna* as a non-dual experience” (Arbel 2017, 161).

⁷⁴ As mentioned in 5.11.4, “ecstasy” comes from the Greek *ekstasis* [*ex* (“out”) and *stasis* (“the posture of standing”)] and means “a state of exaltation in which one stands outside or transcends oneself” (Sharma, *EncReligion*, 2678). Teresa describes feeling out of herself in ecstasy: the soul “seems it is not in itself” (*parece que está en sí*) (CAD 4,3). See also CAD 6,6 and V 10,1. It is only when the soul regains its faculties that it comes back to itself (6M 3,9). The notion of “rapture” entails similar idea of being seized by from the body and outside of itself.

⁷⁵ Kellenberger writes: “ecstasy [...] is marked by a kind of loss of self: the sense that one is outside oneself and distant from the concerns and tribulations of that self” (Kellenberger 2016, 111).

⁷⁶ After ecstasy there is “a forgetfulness of self (*un olvido de sí*) for truly the soul, seemingly, no longer is” (7M 3,2).

⁷⁷ Cousins, 1989, 113. See 6M 1,4.

⁷⁸ Kellenberger, *Dying to Self and Detachment*, 111-12.

⁷⁹ John Yates, Matthew Immergut and Jeremy Graves, *The Mind Illuminated: A Complete Meditation Guide Integrating Buddhist Wisdom and Brain Science for Greater Mindfulness* (Touchstone, 2017), 383.

In Teresian ecstasy *proper* (i.e., a total suspension of the inner and outer senses and faculties), is brief (V 10,10), but not as brief as the prayer of simple union (R 5,13).⁸⁰ The duration of an ecstasy depends on its particular modality but, usually, it does not last more than two hours. Teresa speaks of ecstasies that last two hours (V 39,15), although it may feel to last less time.⁸¹ Other Christian mystics report ecstasies that last for days. The mystic, however, may spend many hours in intermittent ecstasies (V 20,19).⁸² As 6M develops, ecstatic experiences are increasingly frequent until they become almost a continuous occurrence.⁸³ When the soul reaches 7M, all raptures end, or are very rare. The intensity of the ecstasies likewise varies in an *in crescendo* form as 6M develops. Teresa explains that any ecstasy has phases. If in simple union “all is one thing,” in ecstasy there seems to be a ripple of intensity. At the height of the experience the person cannot feel or think. When it subsides, sounds can be heard, but at as if from a distance.

5.15.4.3.8 The externalities of 4JH and PE

Cousins states that “both [the *jhānas* and the prayer of union] are ecstatic trances involving immobility of the body.”⁸⁴ During *jhāna*, the body remains still, like in a trance. The *Samaññaphala Sutta* reads that in *jhāna* the body is tranquilized (DN 1.75). According to Brahm, as stated, it is not possible to move the body during any *jhāna*.⁸⁵ In Teresa’s descriptions of her ecstasies, a total immobility of the body is patent. Externally, the body appears rigid as if dead (V 20,18). The person can hardly move the hands. The eyes remain closed. The body remains in the position it was before being seized by ecstasy. One cannot speak “because there is no strength for it” (6M 4,13). In both *jhāna* and union there is no awareness of the body or bodily sensations. Brahm writes: “In the *jhānas* the five senses do not operate, which means that there is no experience of a physical body. The body has been transcended.”⁸⁶ Catherine states that in 4JH “conventional body sensations are not registered,” for “the physical field is beyond the boundaries of interest to the mind absorbed in the fourth *jhāna*.”⁸⁷ Teresa says that in some modalities of ecstasy one does not know whether it is in the body or not (rapture).

⁸⁰ This is one of the many differences between these experiences. Teresa also talks about a half-hour for simple union.

⁸¹ Cf. Dubay, *Fire Within*, 99.

⁸² Teresa explains the reason for these fluctuations: the will can be suspended for a considerable period of time, but the memory and the understanding soon return to ordinary state (5M 18,12). When these two faculties are reabsorbed, one experiences ecstasy intermittently. Teresa gives a similar explanation of the phenomenon of intermittence in V 20,19.

⁸³ Teresa says this much when she states in 6M the ecstasies occur continually (6M 6,1). Teresa explains that this happens because the soul in spiritual betrothal is so tender in love, that the simple memory of God, or the mention of His name, can instigate it (6M 6,1). See Dubay, *Fire Within*, 99.

⁸⁴ Cousins, “The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification,” 111.

⁸⁵ Brahm says: “within any *jhāna* not only can one not move, but also one cannot know [...] where to move to!” (Brahm, *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond*, 166).

⁸⁶ Brahm, *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond*, 164.

⁸⁷ Catherine, *Focused and Fearless*, 147.

According to Buddhaghosa, during 4JH, the person does not experience physical pain or physical pleasure as these were abandoned on respectively accessing 1JH and 3JH (PP 4.184). The person does not feel cold or heat, for example.⁸⁸ Similarly, Teresa comments that, during suspension, she did not feel any physical pain (4M 1,10-11). This absence of pain or pleasure during ecstasy is also reported by other Christian mystics.⁸⁹ In both states, breathing diminishes until it seems to disappear. Buddhaghosa states that in 4JH breathing becomes exceedingly calm and ceases to function (PP 4.283).⁹⁰ The *Rahogata Sutta* reads: “having attained the fourth absorption, inhalation and exhalation have ceased” (SN 36.11). The *Kantakasuttam Sutta* also notes: “To one in the fourth *jhāna*, in breathing and out breathing are a thorn” (AN 10.72).⁹¹ On the Christian side, Teresa says that ecstasy takes away the respiration (*se le quita el huelgo*) (6M 4,13), and breathing becomes so shallow the person is unsure if he is breathing.

The Pāli *suttas* mention that during 4JH bodily animation, blood circulation also stops: “in the *fourth jhāna* [one] is free from breathing in and out which is called “*kaya sankhara*” or the manifestation of motion, the vital current of the body (S. IV. 217: cf. M., 201).”⁹² Similar lack of bodily animation exist in ecstasy according to Teresa: “in these trances (*arrobamientos*) the soul doesn’t seem to animate the body, and so its natural warmth is felt to ebb, and it gets cold even though it feels great sweetness and delight” (V 20,3). There is also a seeming lack of circulation: “other times everything is taken away at once, and the hands and the body grow cold so that the person doesn’t seem to have any life” (6M 4 13). The body cools as all the energy is concentrated in this attention. As for the effects of 4JH and PE, they do not vary greatly from those described in 5.11.4.4.13.

5.15.5 Conclusion

In concluding, it should be noted at this point and restated that, independently of the points of agreement indicated in this section, that there is no other comparative segment in our comparison between the two spiritual paths, where they contrast more markedly than 4JH and PE. Particularly, in relation to the equanimity and perfect mindfulness that characterizes 4JH, contrasted with the emotional experience (exaltation) of ecstasy.

⁸⁸ Shaw observes that: “Upatissa says that the man is ‘protected from extremes of heat and cold, experiences an even temperature and is undisturbed in body and mind’ (PF 112)” (Shaw 2006, 19).

⁸⁹ On the complete anesthesia felt by St. Catherine of Siena and other mystics, see Underhill, *Mysticism*, 359.

⁹⁰ “By the time a meditator is close to entering fourth *jhāna*, the normal breath has become very, very shallow and subtle. [...] Experientially, it feels as though it has stopped. What is important is not to be concerned about this issue. Any attention to whether there is, in fact, breath diverts the meditative concentration.” (Stephen and Rasmussen 2011, 81-82).

⁹¹ The *Samyutta Nikāya* (IV, 293) reads: “When one attains to the fourth *jhāna*, the physical element (*kāya-saṃkhāra*) of in-breathing (*assāsa*) and out-breathing (*passāsa*) becomes extinguished.” Cf. the *Anupubbanirodha Sutta* (AN 9.31).

⁹² “*Jhāna*,” EB, 55.

5.16 THE FORMLESS *JHĀNAS* AND CHRISTIAN APOPHATIC CONTEMPLATION

5.16.1 Introduction

On the path of *samatha* meditation, after attaining mastery over the fourth *jhānas*, the meditator may attempt the “immaterial” or “formless” *jhānas* (*arūpa-jhānas*), which are four successive meditative attainments defined by the absence of tangible content that are attained via four respective formless meditation subjects (*arūpa-kammaṭṭhānas*). The formless states are usually understood as being refinements of 4JH and the deepest forms of absorption in *samatha* meditation. These four incorporeal levels of meditative absorption are harder to attain than the *rūpa-jhānas*, and purify and free the mind further. Some Buddhist scholars argue for the pre-Buddhist origin of the formless meditations.¹ For Wynne “a strong case can be made for a Brahminic origin of formless meditation.”² The last two *arūpa-jhānas*, namely, the “formless base of nothingness” and “the formless base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception,” are said to be the highest attainments by Gotama’s *śramaṇic* teachers, Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, respectively (MN 26), who probably understood them as states of union of *atman* with Brahman. As a wandering ascetic, Gotama mastered these two attainments but rejected them as non-liberational,³ as the *arūpa-jhānas* were conditioned, impermanent, and unsatisfactory; although the defilements vanished therein, they resurface when these states end.

In Christianity, an apophatic theological tradition⁴ stresses the unknowability of God, approaching contemplation not through corporal images (e.g. the Humanity of Christ) but through the incorporeal divinity of Christ. This approach was intolerable to Teresa, and it is never recommended in her works, where Christ is always the living divine person. Authors like Conze⁵ and Smart,⁶ draw parallels between the Christian “incorporeal” approach to contemplation and the Buddhist formless meditation subjects. Yet, for a proper comparison, we must take first into account that the concept of an everlasting God, with or without form, is irreconcilable with the teachings of the Buddha.⁷ In this section, we will juxtapose the Buddhist formless meditations, and the formless *jhānas*, with the Christian apophatic approach to contemplation and Teresa’s attitude towards it.

¹ Alexander Wynne, *The Origin of Buddhist Meditation* (London & New York: Routledge, 2007), 29-33; Vajirañāza, *Buddhist Meditation*, 333; Tilmann Vetter, *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 64.

² Wynne, *The Origin of Buddhist Meditation*, 24.

³ Buddha says: “This Dhamma does not lead to dispassion, to fading, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna, but only to a base consisting of nothingness. I was not satisfied with that Dhamma. I left it to pursue my search” (MN 26).

⁴ The apophatic tradition maintains that knowledge of God can be obtained through negating concepts applied to Him.

⁵ Conze, *Buddhist Meditation*, 18.

⁶ Smart, “What would Buddhaghosa have made of The Cloud of Unknowing?,” 103-12.

⁷ Nyanaponika, *Buddhism and the God-Idea*.

5.16.2 The formless meditations and the formless *jhānas*

The “formless meditations” (*arūpa-kammaṭṭhānas*) are discussed in Chapter Ten of the *Visuddhimagga*. These four meditational subjects are called “formless” because they are absent of “form” or “matter” (*rūpa*),⁸ in contradistinction to the other thirty-six subjects qualified as “with form” (*rūpa-kammaṭṭhānas*). Each one of these “formless meditations” leads to a corresponding “formless *jhāna*” (*arūpa-jhāna*), or “formless attainment” (*arūpa-samāpatti*), which are offshoots of 4JH, and share with it the factors of equanimity and one-pointedness. In the Pāli Canon, the *classic loci* for the *arūpa-jhānas* are MN 111 and DN 22.⁹ Some scholars persuasively argue that there is no evidence in the *Sutta Nikāya* that the Buddha or his disciples ever termed these four immaterial attainments “*jhānas*,” and that such a designation is of an Abhidhammic origin.¹⁰ These formless *jhānic* states are considered the subjective correlates of the objective immaterial planes or dimensions of existence, known as the “formless realms” (*arūpa-loka*).¹¹ In the formless realms dwell the heavenly beings (*devas*) who remained in formless *jhānas* in previous lives (MN 26).

The four *arūpa-jhānas* follow on from the attainment of the *rūpa-jhānas*, without which they cannot be reached.¹² Each *arūpa-jhāna* is reached by surmounting the materiality of the preceding state, specifically the sign used as the object of the previous *jhāna*. As enumerated, there is a progression of subtlety and concentration between the four *arūpa-jhānas*, as in each developmental level the object becomes more refined (PP 10.59).¹³ Therefore, the four *arūpa-jhānas* should be attained in the original order in which they are given. The *arūpa-jhānas* are more difficult to attain than the *rūpa-jhānas*, as they purify and concentrate the mind further, reaching more refined states of consciousness.¹⁴ The *arūpa-jhānas* are cultivated on four successive “bases” or “spheres” (*āyatana*).¹⁵

The “base of boundless space” (*ākāsānañcāyatana*) leads to 5JH. The *jhāyin*, wishing to overcome the materiality of the *kaṣiṇa*, contemplates the danger inherent in matter because it leads to “thousands of afflictions” (PP 12.1). Starting from 4JH as a sign, the *jhāyin* developing this base may practice with any *kaṣiṇa* except that of limited-space,

⁸ Vajirañāza, *Buddhist Meditation*, 332. “*Arūpa*” [a + *rūpa*] literally means “without form,” “incorporeal” or “non-material.”

⁹ In the *Abhidhamma* the *arūpa-jhānas* are discussed in Chapter Three of *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* (*Dhs* 55) and *Vibh* 245.

¹⁰ Vajirañāza, *Buddhist Meditation*, 332. In the Canon the *arūpa-jhānas* are referred to as *āyatana* (“bases” or “spheres”).

¹¹ Gunaratana, *The Jhānas in Theravada Buddhist Meditation*.

¹² In the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (DN 1), the *Sallekha Sutta* (MN 8), the *Cūlasāropama Sutta* (MN 30), as well as in the *Vibhaṅga* (*Vibh* 245) and *Visuddhimagga* and other texts, the *arūpa-jhānas* are presented as succeeding the four *rūpa-jhānas*. In other texts, e.g., MN 121, they seem to be a set of attainments independent of the *rūpa-jhānas*.

¹³ Gunaratana, *The Jhānas in Theravada Buddhist Meditation*.

¹⁴ “*Āruppa*,” EB, 104.

¹⁵ A sphere or base (*āyatana*) is so called because “it provides a range for arising (*āye tanoti*) and because it also leads on that which has already arisen (*āyatañcanayati*)” (“*Ākiñcāññāyatana*,” EB, 351).

attending to the space touched by matter but not to the matter itself, and repeating internally “space, space.” What is surmounted in 5JH is consciousness of limited space.

Meditation on the “sphere of boundless consciousness” (*viññāṇañcāyatana*) leads to the second *arūpa-jhāna* or 6JH.¹⁶ As Shaw puts it, the object of *viññāṇañcāyatana* is “the nature of the attention that is required for the experience of boundless space.”¹⁷ The “subject” of the boundless consciousness meditation is the boundless consciousness pervading the space object of the first *arūpa-jhāna*, instead of space itself (PP 10.25). By practicing it repeatedly, the *jhāyin* eventually attains the second *arūpa-jhāna* (PP 10.26). What is surmounted here is “consciousness of bound space” (PP 10.27). The 6JH has the inherent risk of being misconceived as an experience of an “universal self.”¹⁸

The third *arūpa-kammaṭṭhāna* is the “base of nothingness” (*ākāṅkamaññāyatana*). Like the previous *arūpa-kammaṭṭhānas* this meditation subject is of a pre-Buddhist origin.¹⁹ Strictly speaking, Henri VanZeyst appropriately clarifies, the “base of nothingness” “is not a sphere of nothingness, which implies a contradiction [...] but a mental sphere in which the universality of space and consciousness is realized as an empty thought.”²⁰ The base of nothingness removes unlimited consciousness as an object of awareness.

The next *arūpa-kammaṭṭhāna* is the “base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception” (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*). Which is practiced by surmounting the base of nothingness (PP 10.42), and gives rise to the fourth *arūpa-jhāna* known as neither-perception-nor-non-perception.²¹ Nāṇamoli’s translation of *saññā* as “perception” is problematic as could be understood as refereeing to the external senses. As Harvey points out, “cognition” is probably a better choice.²² The practice “is not to be understood as an attempt to make consciousness not arise, cease or disappear [...] but as an attention to its non-existence, its voidness, its secludedness.”²³ This formless state is so subtle and sublime that it can easily be confused for *nibbāna*.²⁴ However, 8JH lacks the stability of the final attainment and in it still contains an “inexpressibly subtle trace of perception [cognition],”²⁵ and, thus, it is subject to deterioration. The Buddha noticed this problem and searched for a state free from *āsavas*: *nibbāna*.

¹⁶ For more information see “Viññāṇañcāyatana,” EB, 667–668.

¹⁷ Shaw, *Buddhist Meditation*, 173.

¹⁸ “Ākiñcaññāyatana,” EB, 350.

¹⁹ As indicated earlier, the Buddha learned the “base of nothingness” (*ākāṅkamaññāyatana*) from his teacher Ājāra Kālāma.

²⁰ “Ākiñcaññāyatana,” EB, 350.

²¹ The Buddha learned this formless *jhāna* from his teacher *śramanic* Uddaka Rāmaputta but rejected it as a means to awakening.

²² Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 141.

²³ “Ākiñcaññāyatana,” EB, 350.

²⁴ Vajirañāza, *Buddhist Meditation*, 338.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

5.16.3 “Incorporeal meditations” in Christian mysticism and Teresa?

Wynne asserts compellingly that the Buddha had learned the *arūpa-jhāna* from his Brahmanical training,²⁶ but construed these states not as forms of union with Brahman but as meditative absorptions free of material content. The *arūpa-kammaṭṭhānas* may have a theistic origin. We next consider whether “incorporeal meditations” in some way analogous to the *arūpa-kammaṭṭhānas* exist in Christian mysticism and Teresa’s works.

5.16.3.1 “Incorporeal meditations” in Christian mysticism

In Teresa’s time, there were writers on prayer who advised that to better dispose the soul for divine union, the contemplative should free himself from all “corporeal images,” or “corporeal imagination” (“*imaginación corpórea*”), including the Humanity of Christ, and only contemplate God in his Divinity (“*que se alleguen a contemplar en la divinidad*”). A passage in *Vida*, which merits a full quotation, shows Teresa’s thought on this idea:

In some books written on prayer it is said that even though the soul cannot reach this state of prayer by itself, since the work is an entirely supernatural one that the Lord effects in the soul, it will be able to help itself by lifting the spirit above all creatures and humbly raising it up, and that the soul can do this after having passed many years in the purgative life while it is advancing in the illuminative [...] They give strong advice to rid oneself of all corporeal images and to approach contemplation of the Divinity. They say that in the case of those who are advancing, these corporeal images, even when referring to the humanity of Christ, are an obstacle or impediment to the most perfect contemplation. In support of this theory they quote what the Lord said to the Apostles about the coming of the Holy Spirit -- I mean at the time of His Ascension. They think that since this work is entirely spiritual, any corporeal thing can hinder or impede it, that one should try to think of God in a general way, that He is everywhere, and that we are immersed in Him. This is good, it seems to me, sometimes; but to withdraw completely from Christ or that this divine Body be counted in a balance with our own miseries or with all creation, I cannot endure. May it please His Majesty that I be able to explain myself. 2. I am not contradicting this theory; those who hold it are learned and spiritual men and they know what they are saying, and God leads souls by many paths and ways. I want to speak now of the way He led my soul [...] and of the danger I found myself in for wanting to put into practice what I was reading. I really believe that anyone who reaches the experience of union without passing beyond -- I mean to raptures and visions and other favors God grants to souls -- will think what is said in these books is the best practice, as I did. But if I should have kept to that practice, I believe I would never have arrived at where I am now because in my opinion the practice is a mistaken one. Now it could be that I am the mistaken one, but I’ll speak of what happened to me (V 22,1-2).²⁷

Teresa is referring here to an ancient proposition in Christianity: the apophatic²⁸ approach to contemplation. This method stresses the unknowability of God and the “negative way” (*via negativa*), which is “the approach to theology which asserts that no finite concepts or attributes can be adequately used of God, but only negative terms.”²⁹

²⁶ Wynne, *The Origin of Buddhist Meditation*, 24.

²⁷ Teresa expresses similar ideas in Chapter Twelve of *Vida* and in 6M, Section 7.

²⁸ The word “apophatic” relates to “apophasis” from the Greek *apophanai*, “to deny” (*apo-*: “away from” + *phanai*: “to say”), and is defined as “the practice of describing something (such as God) by stating which characteristics it does not have” “Apophatic”: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/apophatic>

²⁹ “Via negativa:” https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/via_negativa; For more information on the “*via negativa*” see:

The Syrian mystic and theologian Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (c. 5th century CE) was one of the first known Christian mystics to advocate an apophatic approach to contemplation. In his *Mystical Theology*, Pseudo-Dionysius advises leaving behind in prayer all “the senses and the activities of the intellect and all things that the senses or the intellect can perceive.”³⁰ Laski quotes St. Augustine, who writes of seeing the brightness of the Lord “not by any symbolic vision, whether corporeal or spiritual.”³¹ Meister Eckhart famously said: “Let us pray to God that we may be free of God,”³² and cautioned that “whoever perceives something in God, and attaches thereby some name to him, that is not God [for] God is above names and above nature.”³³ Suso writes: “the less imagery there was in experiences of apprehending the divinity the higher they are and the nearer to absolute reality is the knowledge they impart.”³⁴ The anonymous *The Cloud of Unknowing* (14th century CE), a fundamental apophatic work in Christianity, advises seeking God not through thought but through love stripped of reflection.³⁵ For his part, John of the Cross advises that “since God cannot be encompassed by any image, form, or particular knowledge, in order to be united with him the soul should not be limited by any particular form or knowledge” (A2 16,7). Merton describes Christian contemplation as a “mystical ‘unknowing,’ by which we ascend to the knowledge of God ‘as unseen’ without ‘form or figure’ beyond all images and indeed all concepts.”³⁶ In the next two subsections we shall discuss concisely: (1) how the “negative way” and the “Christian incorporeal contemplations” compare with the *arūpa kammaṭṭhānas*; and (2) how the *arūpa-jhānas* compare with Christian infused incorporeal contemplation. Then, and for the rest of the present section, we shall juxtapose both the *arūpa kammaṭṭhānas* and *arūpa-jhānas* with Teresa’s approach to contemplation and her unitive experiences.

5.16.4 The *arūpa-kammaṭṭhānas* and Christian “incorporeal” meditations

Some authors identify affinities between the *arūpa-kammaṭṭhānas* and the apophatic approach to contemplation.³⁷ In discussing commonalities between the *Visuddhimagga* and *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Smart finds parallels between the *arūpa-kammaṭṭhānas* and the “cloud of forgetting,”³⁸ which he defines as “the systematic effort to blot out sense

Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

³⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *Mystical Theology*, Chapter One, Section, 1.

³¹ Quoted in Laksi, *Ecstasy*, 91.

³² Meister Eckhart, “Sermon 52” in *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 200.

³³ *Idem*, 204.

³⁴ Quoted in Laksi, *Ecstasy*, 91.

³⁵ “For He can well be loved, but he cannot be thought. By love he can be grasped and held, but by thought, neither grasped nor held.” *The Cloud of Unknowing and other works*, trans. A. C. Spearing (London: Penguin Classics, 2001).

³⁶ Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 104.

³⁷ Conze finds affinities between the *arūpa-jhānas* and the apophatic approach of Pseudo-Dionysius. See Conze, *Buddhist Meditation*, 18).

³⁸ Smart, “What would Buddhaghosa have made of The Cloud of Unknowing?,” 103-112.

perception, memories, and imaginings of the world of our sensory environment and of corresponding inner states.”³⁹ Smart opines that “for Buddhaghosa, this exercise would have been achieved through the *jhānas*,”⁴⁰ and adds: “Buddhaghosa would have had no trouble in understanding what was sometimes strange and even shocking to English commentators—the idea of the ‘cloud of forgetting’.”⁴¹ Smart also believes that the cloud of forgetting “would remind Buddhaghosa of the higher *jhānas*.”⁴² The elimination of material images in both the *arūpa kammaṭṭhānas* and the Christian apophatic approach to contemplation can be considered a significant common element between them.

However, these two practices have essential differences. The *arūpa kammaṭṭhānas* are based on the fourth *jhānic* attainment, which is a *jhānic* state (a *jhāna* “with form”). To reach the formless *jhānas*, one must leave 4JH and contemplate it as a meditational “object,” removing all materiality gradually, starting with the materiality of space. The Christian apophatic method of contemplation is based on the complete exclusion of any corporeal or material image or idea of God for a non-material or imageless approach. But, contrary to the *arūpa kammaṭṭhānas*, the Christian apophatic method is not based on any previous unitive or absorptive experience and is not as systematic as the Buddhist method. Further, the apophatic approach seeks union of the soul with God, whereas the notion of a creator God, with or without form, is incompatible with the Buddha’s teachings.

5.16.5 *Arūpa-jhānas* and Christian infused incorporeal contemplation (ecstasy)

We now compare the *arūpa-jhānas* and the Christian state of ecstasy and incorporeal contemplation. In Christian ecstasy nothing material or corporal is “seen” or experienced; they are not “visions.” Pike observes that “in mystical consciousness, nothing is given. There is no “what” that is directly experienced.”⁴³ One may think then, as Forman does, that “a *formless* trance in Buddhism may be experientially indistinguishable from one in Hinduism or Christianity.”⁴⁴ Is this so?

From a Buddhist perspective, some *arūpa-jhānas* can be confused with experiences of union of the self with a divinity. As stated earlier, Gotama learned the formless *jhāna* of the “base consisting of nothingness” and the “base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception” respectively from his teachers Ājāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, who

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Smart, “What would Buddhaghosa have made of The Cloud of Unknowing?,” 108.

⁴¹ Idem, 106.

⁴² Idem, 107.

⁴³ Nelson Pike, *Mystic Union: An Essay in the Phenomenology of Mysticism* (Cornell University Press, 1992), 93.

⁴⁴ R. K. Forman, *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (Oxford: OUP, 1990), 39.

probably considered them states of union of *ātman* with Brahman, and not purely absorptive experiences. Having mastered these attainments, Gotama thought to himself: “[these attainments] do not lead to dispassion, to the fading of lust, to cessation, to peace, to direct-knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna” (MN 26). The Buddhist tradition since old warns that the formless *jhānas*, particularly the second *arūpa-jhāna*, or 6JH, that, is the *jhāna* of the “sphere of boundless consciousness,” can be easily confused with union of a putative self with a deity, and the fourth *arūpa-jhāna* or 8JH that is, the *jhāna* of the “base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception” can be confused with the attainment of *nibbana*. The Buddhist tradition also cautions that although in these states the impurities disappear temporarily, they are still conditioned, impermanent and unsatisfactory.⁴⁵

When Forman’s proposition mentioned above is seen in a Christian light, the Christian tradition does not consider the experiences of union with God as “formless trances,” although no materiality, space, and time would appear in them. In the Christian tradition, the experience of God’s love in ecstasy and “interpretation” cannot be distinguished. Therefore, a formless *jhāna* and the Christian experience of union with God cannot be said to be “experientially indistinguishable,” although both are without “material content.”

5.16.6 “Incorporeal meditations” in Teresa?

From a comparative perspective, there might be a degree of reconciliation between the *arūpa kammaṭṭhānas* and the incorporeal contemplation as put forward by apophatic Christian authors. It is however important to note the sharp contrast between Teresa’s insistence on contemplation of Christ’s Humanity and the Buddhist *formless* subjects.

Let us revisit the long quote in the introduction to the present section. Teresa did not reject the validity of “incorporeal” meditations on God’s divinity *per se*. Of them she says, “this is good, it seems to me, sometimes” and adds “I am not contradicting this theory; those who hold it are learned and spiritual men and they know what they are saying, and God leads souls by many paths and ways” (V 22,1-2). Nonetheless, Teresa’s own orative experience told her, beyond doubt, that this way of contemplation was wrong for her,⁴⁶ and she would have none of it. In *Vida*, Teresa again says:

⁴⁵ Khantipalo writes: “Some meditators from all religions having mystical traditions experience them [formless concentrations], and as with the four jhanas, may be misled by their interpretation of them. However, the Buddha encourages one to see them as conditioned states and not as the ultimate goal. Meditators who lack good advice might take, for instance, the infinity of space experience to be voidness [...] and imagine therefore that they had arrived at the ultimate truth of not-self. But this is to confuse an experience of calm with an insight experience” (Khantipalo 2003, 56).

⁴⁶ “if I should have kept to that practice, I believe I would never have arrived at where I am now because in my opinion the practice is a mistaken one. Now it could be that I am the mistaken one, but I’ll speak of what happened to me” (V 22,1).

This method of keeping Christ present with us is beneficial in all stages and is a very safe means of advancing in the first degree of prayer of reaching in a short time the second degree, and of walking secure against the dangers the devil can set up in the last degrees. 4. Keeping Christ present is what we of ourselves can do. Whoever would desire to pass beyond this point and raise the spirit to an experience of spiritual consolations that are not given would lose both the one and the other, in my opinion; for these consolations belong to the supernatural. [...] It seems a kind of pride to desire of ourselves to ascend higher since, in view of what we are, God does too much just in drawing us near to Himself (V 12, 3-4).

Instead, Teresa praises “how safe a path it is for contemplatives not to raise the spirit to high things unless the Lord raises it and of how the humanity of Christ must be the means to the most sublime contemplation” (V 22, title). As the great Teresian Castro writes: “Teresa will always maintain firmly that the Humanity of the Lord is indispensable throughout the whole process of the spiritual life, either in its ascetic stage, or in its mystical stage. By ‘Humanity of the Lord,’ our Saint does not only understand the body, but the ‘Man-Jesus,’ in his historical reality, in his earthly existence.”⁴⁷ Castro concludes: “there is no conception in the Teresian doctrine of a prayer addressed to the ‘Absolute,’ or to the ‘Deity,’ in the ways of the German mystics Eckhart, Tauler and Suso.”⁴⁸

Howells also shows, Teresa cannot be regarded as a negative theologian with references to the unknowability of God and the darkness of the apophatic tradition.⁴⁹ In contrast to John of the Cross, who truly “values darkness as a transformative tool,”⁵⁰ Teresa’s discourse is cataphatic rather than apophatic. She always uses the “cataphatic notions of both (a) divine presence, and (b) the soul’s manner of apprehension of God.”⁵¹ For Teresa, contemplative prayer is contemplation of Christ the Man, the loving companion whose image always accompanies her. Hence, surmounting all materiality through formless topics cannot be reconciled with Teresa’s cataphatic approach to contemplation.

5.16.7 Comparison of formless *jhānas* and Teresa’s unions and ecstasies

Let us discuss now whether meaningful correspondences can be established between the formless *jhānas* and Teresa’s experiences of mystical union or ecstasy. Some authors like Stace and Almond accept as true that Christian mystical ecstasies, such as those described by Jan Van Ruysbroeck or Meister Eckhart or John of the Cross,

⁴⁷ Secundino Castro, *Cristología Teresiana* (Editorial de Espiritualidad, 2009), 13. [author’s translation]

⁴⁸ *Idem*, 11.

⁴⁹ Edward Howells, “Teresa of Avila: Negative theologian?” in *Teresa of Avila: Mystical Theology and Spirituality in the Carmelite Tradition* by Peter Tyler and Edward Howells (eds.) (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 51-63.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Howells, “Teresa of Avila: Negative theologian?,” 58.

are “contentless experiences,”⁵² or experiences of “pure consciousness,”⁵³ meaning that they are imagenless “experiences,” free of sensory input, devoid of thought, volition, sense of time, space, sense of self and so forth. For some authors these experiences could be understood as “undistinguishable” from the formless *jhānas*, particularly the “sphere of boundless nothingness” or seventh *jhāna*, where all materiality disappears. The affinity between the formless *jhānas* and Christian unitive experiences is implicit, for instance, in an article by Bucknell on Buddhist meditation and mystical experience.⁵⁴

Yet, as Katz points out, a “contentless experience,” would be like a dreamless sleep.⁵⁵ There is more: as Katz also notes, a contentless “experience” but no experience at all. But, in fact, as Bucknell observes, neither the formless *jhānas* nor Christian mystical union are in fact “contentless” experiences. Both are conscious experiences thus they should have some content, although this content is minimum, reduced to the awareness of the object, and wrapped in love, on the Christian side.

Certainty, there are similarities then between Teresa descriptions of some of her ecstasies and the formless *jhānas*. Teresa’s experiences of union are imagenless.

Well then, to return to the sign that I say is the true one, you now see that God has made this soul a fool with regard to all so as better to impress upon it true wisdom. For during the time of this union it neither sees, nor hears, nor understands (5M 1,9); have already said that in this prayer nothing is seen in a way that can be called seeing, nor is anything seen with the imagination (6M 1,1).

All the senses and faculties are “suspended” (5M 1,9).

In mystical union Teresa “sees” God. Teresa says:

The difference between of ecstasy and rapture, is that the ecstasy [one] is slowly dying these external things and losing the senses and seeing God (R 5,9).

But this “seeing” God is not the seeing of a form.

Let it die; let this silkworm die, as it does in completing what it was created to do! And you will see how we see God, as well as ourselves placed inside His greatness, as is this little silkworm within its cocoon. Keep in mind that I say “see God,” in the sense of what I mentioned concerning that which is felt in this kind of union (5M 2,6).

Thus, formless *jhānas* and ecstasy then can be both described as imagenless but not contentless. And neither of these experiences can be disassociated from their systemic context without losing their essential meaning within their traditions.

⁵² Almond speaks of some Christian mystical experiences as “contentless experiences” (Philip C. Almond, “Mysticism and its contexts” *Sophia*, Vol. 27, Issue 1, 1988, 40–49) or “contentless states” (Philip C. Almond, *Mystical experience and religious doctrine: An investigation of the study of mysticism in world religion*, Berlin: Mouton, 1982, 175).

⁵³ Expression coined by expression coined by Stance.

⁵⁴ Roderick S. Bucknell, *Buddhist meditation and the study of mystical experience* (Charles Strong Memorial Trust, 1989).

⁵⁵ Steven T. Katz, “Recent Work on Mysticism,” *History of Religions*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (1985): 76-86.

5.17 EXTRAORDINARY PHENOMENA, VISIONS AND LOCUTIONS

5.17.1 Introduction

Both the attainment of the *jhānas* and dwelling in the Sixth Mansions are intricately connected with supernormal religious phenomena such as levitation, visions and the like. This section considers these extraordinary phenomena as some of their features are similar and they present a comparable structural and diachronic emergence on the paths described by our authors. These unusual events appear in most religious traditions,¹ so they should be given due attention, though they are often ignored as a field of study.

After attaining the eight *jhānas*, the meditator may develop the “direct-knowledges” (*abhiññā*), which are a series of “supernormal powers” or “higher faculties,” first itemized in Chapter Eleven of the *Visuddhimagga* (PP 11.122). The fourth *jhāna* is the foundation for developing these “direct-knowledges” and the proximate cause for their attainment.

In the Christian tradition, preternatural religious phenomena abound, such as visions, divine locutions, levitation, ubiquity and glossolalia which Christian theologians categorize as mystical phenomena and discuss in relation with infused contemplation.² Some of these events proliferate in the Sixth Mansions of Teresa’s castle of the soul.

The notable affinities between some of the extraordinary phenomena in both traditions will be explored in this section. Such a comparison will also reveal significant differences. In fact, in the way they are reported, they could not be more different in their natures.

This section is divided into four parts. The first deals with supernormal phenomena such as levitation, bilocation, ubiquity and precognition or clairvoyance in both traditions. The second part discusses visions and locutions also comparing both traditions in this respect. The third part considers some phenomena specific to each tradition. The fourth and final part deals with the effects of these phenomena on those who experience them.

Attention to these extraordinary phenomena is necessary for our purposes, although their comprehensive analysis is neither feasible nor indispensable. It will therefore suffice to highlight here some of the main points that stand out in the comparison.

¹ Kenneth L. Woodward, *The Book of Miracles: The Meaning of the Miracle Stories in Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001).

² Nelson Pike, *Mystic Union*, ix.

5.17.2 Supernormal phenomena

After mastering the *jhānas*, including the formless *jhānas*, the *jhāyin* may develop the supernormal powers described in Chapters Twelve and Thirteen of the *Visuddhimagga*. On the Christian side, Teresa describes preternatural phenomena in the Sixth Mansions, where Spiritual Betrothal is a stage characterized by a plurality of mystical experiences. This section compares some of the extraordinary phenomena described by Teresa and Buddhaghosa. Several coincidences call for such a comparison. Firstly, as mentioned, some of the extraordinary events described in both traditions are similar (e.g., levitation), though others are tradition-specific (e.g., stigmata). Second, these unusual phenomena are closely connected with the fourth *jhāna* and mystical union, respectively in Buddhism and Christianity,³ which suggests they are in some way associated with profound states of absorption and manifest themselves at equivalent structural development times.

5.17.2.1 The five “direct-knowledges” (*abhiññā*)

According to Buddhaghosa, one of the benefits of the development of concentration is the attainment of five varieties of mundane “direct-knowledges” (*abhiññā*). These are: “(1) having been one, he becomes many; (2) the knowledge of the divine ear-element; (3) the knowledge of penetration of minds; (4) the knowledge of recollection of past lives; and (5) the “knowledge of the passing away and reappearance of beings” (PP 12.2). The *abhiññā* are mentioned in several *suttas*, such as the *Samaññaphala Sutta* (DN 2).

Ñāṇamoli translates “*abhiññā*” as “direct-knowledges,”⁴ although “higher-knowledges” is probably a better translation.⁵ Jayatilleke notes that “*abhiññā*” is often rendered as “direct-knowledges” since these higher faculties provide a kind of knowledge that is obtained outside the sensory apparatus and are thus a source of “direct-knowledge.”⁶ These five “direct-knowledges” or “higher-knowledges” are supernormal powers that are developed on the basis of 4JH, and facilitate a “more advanced” concentration (PP 12.1). The meditator is warned that he should never develop “*abhiññā*” for their own sake, but for moral purposes and in order to teach the *Dhamma*.⁷

³ Martin Velasco explains that “[extraordinary phenomena] accompany with a shocking frequency the life of a large number of Christian saints and, especially, of saints who have shown signs of having reached the mystical experience. Hence, they are often referred to as ‘physical phenomena of ‘mysticism’ or ‘extraordinary phenomena in mystical life’” Juan Martín Velasco, *El fenómeno místico*, 32 [Author’s translation].

⁴ This is the case, for example, throughout his translation of the *Visuddhimagga*.

⁵ *Abhiññā* derives from *abhi* + *ñā* (to know). The prefix *abhi* denotes the meaning of “higher.” See “Abhiññā,” PED, 74.

⁶ K. N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1963), 437.

⁷ PP 11.2. The Buddhist scriptures stress that the Buddha never displayed powers other than for moral purposes.

5.17.2.2 Extraordinary phenomena in Christianity and Teresa

In the Christian mystical tradition, extraordinary phenomena—some of them not unlike those described by Buddhaghosa (e.g., levitation, ubiquity)—are common. In Spiritual Theology these events are often referred to as “extraordinary phenomena of mysticism.”⁸ A broad range of such types of experiences are reported in literature on mysticism, a term often synonymous with these phenomena. Some are present in the life of Christ.⁹ The Apostles performed miracles in Christ’s name. Hagiographies attribute extraordinary phenomena—understood as signs of God or acts of the Holy Spirit—to Christian saints.

Specifically speaking of Teresa, Ahlgren writes: “For the Carmelites, the intensity of Teresa’s prayer life was rewarded by numerous spiritual gifts, including that of prophecy. Many of them mentioned instances of Teresa’s foreknowledge of events or her gift of knowing someone’s interior state.”¹⁰ In her works, Teresa mentions these phenomena.¹¹ There is a profusion of descriptions of such preternatural occurrences in Chapter Sixth of *Castillo*, the latter part of Teresa’s autobiography, and in some of her letters. Supernatural events are attributed to Teresa in testimonies of the time provided by eyewitnesses.¹² Teresa foresaw events foretold by God in locutions (V 25,2, V 34,9 and R 3,11) and levitated (V 20,4). Other examples are her “transverberation of the heart” (see below), her uncorrupted corpse, and her capacity to know a person’s spiritual state.

5.17.2.3 Comparison of extraordinary phenomena

This comparison will be brief, just to highlight the essential similarities and differences between Buddhaghosa and Teresa. This is so because both considered these unusual events as epiphenomena of the spiritual life and not indispensable for spiritual growth. Furthermore, a detailed comparison will not contribute significantly to this study due to the profusion and diversity of these extraordinary phenomena in the Christian tradition.¹³ It must be also noted that the attention dedicated by our two authors to these phenomena differs: Buddhaghosa describes them in detail; Teresa mentions them almost *passim*.

⁸ Martín Velasco, *El fenómeno místico*, 64.

⁹ Christ performed miracles like walking on water (Mk. 6:45-52), reading his disciples’ thoughts, foretelling events, seeing from a great distance, healing the sick (Mt. 1:29-34), casting out demons, calming a storm [Mk. 4:35-41] and feeding five thousand people (Mk. 6:32-44). Some of these miracles, though different from the *abhīññā*, have an echo in Buddhism.

¹⁰ Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity*, 151.

¹¹ Mauricio Martín del Blanco, “Los fenómenos extraordinarios en la mística de Santa Teresa de Jesús,” *Teresianum* 33 (1982): 361-409.

¹² Eyewitness accounts and contemporary reports testifying to such supernatural occurrences in her life can be found in *Procesos de beatificación y canonización de Santa Teresa* by Silverio de Santa Teresa, 3 vols. (Monte Carmelo, 1935).

¹³ Just to name a few: stigmatization, telekinesis, bilocation, tears and blood from images, and no corruption of the body after death. See Martín Velasco, *El fenómeno místico*, 65.

5.17.2.3.1 Nature of extraordinary phenomena

Comparatively, the crucial difference between the extraordinary phenomena in both traditions is in the reported cause/origin of these events, which is related to the terminology used to reference them. In Buddhism, they are considered “knowledges” or “powers,” that may be cultivated and, as such, they are induced by the meditator’s efforts. As Gunaratana elucidates, the yogin directs his concentration on the *abhiññā* he wishes to attain and, consequently, the *abhiññas* “do not come as automatic by-products of *jhāna* but require a prior resolution and determinate effort on the part of the yogin.”¹⁴ In Christianity, the “extraordinary phenomena of mysticism” are not personal “powers” or “skills” to be developed, but unmerited favors from God for the improvement of the soul. Teresa refers to these phenomena as “gifts” (*dones, regalos*) or “mercies” (*mercedes*). Christian mystical theology considers them “extraordinary mystical graces.” It would be incorrect to label the *abhiññā* “supernatural;” they are best described as “supernormal.” This is because in Buddhism these capabilities are indeed extraordinary, but they are neither outside the realm of nature, nor are caused by faith or an external power.¹⁵ Although exceptional, these “higher knowledges” are the result of causal processes,¹⁶ which consist of the removal of impurities and the deepening of concentration. They are causal occurrences and, therefore, in the nature of things (*dhammatā*).¹⁷ On the contrary, for Teresa these extraordinary phenomena are “supernatural” and caused by God. Although these phenomena have different causes in our two traditions—training versus divine grace—they are related as both they often occur in connection with meditation and contemplation. In Buddhism they are associated with the attainment of the *jhānas*.

In Christianity, these phenomena are called “phenomena concomitant with prayer,”¹⁸ and particularly with infused contemplation. They can occur at any time and in any circumstance but, like in Buddhism, they seem to manifest more when the person has attained a high degree of perfection,¹⁹ and are associated with deep absorption or altered states of consciousness.²⁰ Buddhism does not deny that *abhiññā* can be acquired in other traditions,²¹ and it probably inherited the *iddhis* from the Brahmanical tradition.²²

¹⁴ Gunaratana, *A Critical Analysis of the Jhānas*, 235.

¹⁵ Jayatilke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 426.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Gunaratana, *A Critical Analysis of the Jhānas*, 235.

¹⁸ Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 424.

¹⁹ Traditionally, asceticism is associated with extraordinary phenomena in almost all religious traditions.

²⁰ Hollenback, *Mysticism: Experience, Response, and Empowerment*, 276.

²¹ In the *Kevatta Sutta* (DN 11) the Buddha says that *iddhis* (supernormal powers) can be attained by non-Buddhist practitioners, although the power to teach the Dhamma can only be obtained after attaining perfect enlightenment.

²² The *siddhis* are also mentioned in the Vedas, the Upanishads, and centuries later in the Yoga-Sutras of Patañjali.

Although Buddhaghosa devotes two chapters of the *Visuddhimagga* to the *abhiññā*, these supernormal or higher-knowledges are not an indispensable aspect of the path; many *arahants* do not develop them, as their acquisition is not essential for liberation.²³ In the Christian tradition, these extraordinary experiences are traditionally considered to be “incidental,” “accidental,” or “secondary.” Teresa neither discusses them extensively, nor considers them necessary for salvation.²⁴ Many saints never had such experiences and many who had them are not saints. Nevertheless, Teresa seems to believe that these extraordinary phenomena are likely to occur as Spiritual Betrothal progresses.

Then, what is the relative value conferred to these phenomena by our two traditions? As yet another similarity, their value is *sui generis* and only ancillary to liberation or salvation.²⁵ For Buddhaghosa these phenomena are beneficial but not indispensable. These exceptional powers could be considered a sign of spiritual progress but, *per se*, they do not prove spiritual attainment as they can exist without spiritual maturation.²⁶ Teresa gives a similar answer regarding the extraordinary phenomena of mysticism.

Both traditions advise a similar attitude towards these phenomena. They warn of the danger in fascination with these prodigies is and recommend not flaunting them. Both consider the desire for them a hindrance. The Buddha warns that attachment to the *abhiññās* can lead away from awakening²⁷ and impede further spiritual progress.²⁸ Teresa cautions against captivation by these phenomena and attachment to or desire for them. Both traditions advise indifference and detachment towards these phenomena.

5.17.2.3.2 Comparison of individual extraordinary phenomenon

Since, as already mentioned, an in-depth comparison of all the categories of unusual phenomena alluded to in this section is infeasible and unnecessary, given the nature of this study and the space constraint, we will only comment on certain aspects of interest. We start with the five *abhiññā* discussed in Chapters Twelve and Thirteen of the *Visuddhimagga* (PP 12.2). Afterward, we will turn to some extraordinary mystical phenomena in the Christian tradition.

²³ “Iddhi,” EB, 508-510.

²⁴ Antonio Royo Marin, *The Theology of Christian Perfection* (Wipf & Stock Pub 2012), 558.

²⁵ For Teresa these graces could be beneficial but they are not perfection, which is conformity with God's will” (F 5, 10).

²⁶ Zeyst, writes: “The possession of such magical power is in itself no sign of virtue, for even Devadatta was able to make use of such power in order to win over prince Ajatasattu in his scheming against the Buddha” (Abhiññā,” EB, 99).

²⁷ Buddhism cautions against fascination with supernormal capabilities and desire to show them off in public (DN I, 23).

²⁸ “Iddhi” EB, 510.

5.17.2.3.2.1 Comparing the five “direct knowledges” (*abhiññā*)

The first *abhiññā* listed in PP 12.22 is the “kinds of supernormal power” (*iddhividha*). In the *Visuddhimagga*, the *iddhividha* are discussed from PP 12.1 to 12.139. In the term *iddhividha*, *iddhi* generally signifies “power,” or “potency.”²⁹ In the context of *jhāna*, *iddhi* signifies “supernatural power.”³⁰ The word *vidha* means “of all kinds.” *Iddhividha* are a variety of supernatural powers listed in the *Visuddhimagga* to show that variousness:

Having been one, he becomes many; having been many, he becomes one. He appears and vanishes. He goes unhindered through walls, through enclosures, through mountains, as though in open space, as though in water. He goes on unbroken water as though on earth. Seated cross-legged he is like a winged bird. With his hand he touches and strokes the moon and sun so mighty and powerful. He wields bodily mastery even as far as the Brahmā-world. (PP 12.48).

Iddhi, derives from the verb *ijjhati*, which means “to accomplish,” or “to succeed.” In our context, Gunaratana notes, the “main sense suggested by the word is an ability to perform feats which go against the normal course of natural events.”³¹ For Buddhaghosa, the “kinds of supernormal powers” consist of various manifestations of “power of the will” (*adhiṭṭhānā iddhi*) generated through the *jhānic* training. Jayatilleke observes that, in contrast to the remaining four *abhiññā*, *iddhividha* does not provide cognitive power.³² The *suttas* testify to the Buddha having mastered these powers and performed them.³³ One of the Buddha’s disciples, Mahā-Moggallāna, was called “master of the *iddhi*” (AN I, 23). Let us consider these supernatural powers from a comparative perspective next, always bearing in mind that comparable unusual phenomena in the Christian tradition are never conceived as supernatural “powers,” but as charismas of a divine origin.

The first *iddhi* is the power to “become one having been many, and to become many having been one” (PP 12.48-68). Buddhaghosa illustrates this power of a person to be simultaneously present in various places with the example of Cūḷa Panthaka, a monk who became many through meditation after receiving advice from the Buddha (PP 12.60-68). In the Canon there are examples of the Buddha’s multiplication of himself. Christian hagiographies are replete with instances of bilocation and multilocation.³⁴ A few cases of bilocation are attributed to Teresa, like when she visited her brother in Peru while she was in Avila,³⁵ or her consoling a sick sister in Salamanca while she was in Segovia.³⁶

²⁹ “Iddhi,” PED, 137.

³⁰ Idem.

³¹ Gunaratana, *A Critical Analysis of the Jhānas*, 235.

³² Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 438.

³³ Numerous episodes of supernormal powers are recorded in the *Mahāsīhanāda Sutta* (MN 12).

³⁴ For example, St. Clement, St. Ambrose, St. Dominic, St. Martin de Porres and St. Padre Pio. Marilyn Hughes, *Miraculous Phenomena in the Catholic Church: An Overview* (CreateSpace 2009), 22.

³⁵ Efrén, *Tiempo y vida de Santa Teresa*, 666.

³⁶ Diego de Yepes, *Vida, virtudes y milagros de la bienaventurada virgen Teresa de Jesús*, 1616, Book Two, Chapter 22.

The second supernatural power is that of “appearing and disappearing” (PP 12.69-88). This *iddhi* was performed by the Buddha when invited by Cūḷa Subhaddā (PP 12.71). In the archives of the Catholic Church, there are countless reports of apparitions of the Virgin Mary and saints. Miraculous apparitions of Teresa are not recorded in biographies but were reported by Ana de San Augustin in Malagón and by Anna de San Bartolome in the context of Teresa’s canonization process.³⁷

The ability of passing “unhindered through walls, mountains and the like, as if these were an open space” (PP 12.48) is a kind of teleportation not unheard of in Christianity. There are no such miracles in Teresa’s case, but the annals of the Church contain many examples of saints who experienced forms of miraculous transport, where St. Dominic is one of them.³⁸ Going through “unbroken water as though on earth” recalls Christ walking over the Sea of Galilee [Mk. 6:45]. There is another instance in the life of St. Hyacinth.³⁹

The superpower of “flying seated cross-legged like a winged bird” refers to levitation.⁴⁰ An allusion to this superpower is found in the *Iddhipada-vibhanga Sutta* (SN 51.20). Cases of defiance of gravity proliferate in the literature of Christian mysticism.⁴¹ Teresa is the levitating nun *par excellence*. She mentions several instances of rising above the ground level during ecstasy (V 22,4).⁴² There are several first-hand eyewitness accounts of such incidents included in the proceedings of her canonization.⁴³ Being lifted off the ground during prayer is a recurrent phenomenon among Christian mystics.⁴⁴ The powers of “touching the moon and the sun with the hand,” and wielding “bodily mastery even as far as the Brahma-world” (PP 12.48) have no parallels in the Christian tradition.

After the first *abhiññā*—the “kinds of supernormal power”—described in Chapter Twelve of the *Visuddhimagga*, the four remaining *abhiññās* are in Chapter Thirteen. The second *abhiññā* is the “knowledge of the divine ear”⁴⁵ (*dibba-sota*) (See PP 13.1-7).⁴⁶ We shall discuss this power in the next subsection in relation to Teresa’s divine locutions.

³⁷ Carlos M. N. Eire, “The saint’s heavenly corpse: Teresa of Avila and the ultimate paradigm of death,” in *From Madrid to Purgatory: The Art and Craft of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 1995.

³⁸ Other mystics who are said to have experienced miraculous transports included St. Anthony of Padua, St. Martin de Porres, St. John Joseph of the Cross and St. Peter of Alcantara. See Hughes, *Miraculous Phenomena*, 22.

³⁹ See Hughes, *Miraculous Phenomena*, 21.

⁴⁰ On levitation in the Buddhist tradition, see Anālayo, *Levitation in Early Buddhist Discourse*, JOCBS, 2016, 5, 11–26.

⁴¹ A well-known example of a levitating saint in the Christian tradition is St. Francis of Assisi. See Brother Ugolino, *Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi*, 97. Other well-known cases are those of St. Ignacio of Loyola and St. Francis Xavier.

⁴² See V 20,7; V 20.4-5; and V 20,13.

⁴³ Underhill writes: “According to Sister Anne of the Incarnation, Teresa levitated a foot and a half off the ground for about half an hour” (Underhill, 1950). Herbert Thurston, *The Physical Phenomena of Mysticism* (White Crow Books, 2013), 64.

⁴⁴ Mystics said to have levitated during their lives include St. Martin de Porres, St. Francis Xavier, St. Dominic, St. Philip Neri, St. Thomas Aquinas, and St. Ignatius Loyola. See Hughes, *Miraculous Phenomena*, 22.

⁴⁵ “Divine” in the sense that it is “gods-like.”

⁴⁶ This is the superpower of hearing divine and human sounds that are far away or very near. For a broader definition and discussion see Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 430.

The third *abhiññā*, “knowledge of penetration of minds” (*cetopariya-ñāṇa*) (PP 13.8-12), is a form of telepathy. In the Gospel, Christ knows his disciples’ thoughts (Mt. 9:4). The capacity to read other persons’ minds and discern their intentions is attributed to St. Francis of Assisi,⁴⁷ St. Catherine of Siena and St. John Bosco, among other known saints and mystics.⁴⁸ Ahlgren writes of Teresa’s “gift of knowing someone’s interior state.”⁴⁹

The last two *abhiññās*, the ability to remember one’s former lives (*pubbenivāsānusati ñāṇa*) (PP 13.13-71) and “the knowledge of passing away and reappearance of beings” (PP 13. 72-101) obviously are not recorded and have no analogues in Christianity.

5.17.3 Comparing visions and locutions

5.17.3.1 Introduction

Let us start with a definition. “Vision,” in a religious context, is “an experience of seeing someone or something in a dream or trance, or as a supernatural apparition.”⁵⁰ Religious visions appear real, but they are essentially and qualitatively different from normal vision. They are perceived outside the sensory apparatus and they seem to occur in another dimension of reality, one that is timeless, spaceless and beyond causation. They are neither dreams, hallucinations or delusions of a sick mind, nor are they visualizations obtained during the course of meditative practice. Religious visions occur spontaneously, but often in connection with ritual, asceticism or the practice of contemplation. If genuine, these visionary experiences are usually considered meaningful and beneficial by most traditions. “Locutions” relate to hearing, and share the features of visions just mentioned.

Visions, locutions and similar phenomena pervade the Christian mystical life.⁵¹ But it must be noted that these are cross-cultural phenomena and intrinsic to both theistic and nontheistic systems.⁵² Can we speak of “visions” in Theravāda? Some authors consider that “visions” exist in Theravāda and examples abound in the Pāli Canon and meditation texts. The Buddha experienced awakening after a series of “visions” in which he saw his previous rebirths, the appearance and passing of beings, and the cycle of *saṃsāra*.⁵³

⁴⁷ Francis of Assisi, *The Little Flowers* (fioretti).

⁴⁸ See Hughes, *Miraculous Phenomena*, 39-40.

⁴⁹ Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity*, 151.

⁵⁰ “Vision,” OED, 1985.

⁵¹ Visions and locutions appear in the Old and New Testament as theophanies (manifestations by God) (Exod. 13:21-22).

⁵² “Visions,” ER, 282-88.

⁵³ Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Awakened Ones: Phenomenology of Visionary Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 27-28

These events are often categorized as “visions” by Buddhist writers in English,⁵⁴ because they exhibit key features of “vision.”⁵⁵ However the use of “vision” in a Buddhist context should be qualified, as these events are not considered to be “supernatural,” but are instead generated by the meditator’s own powers. There are other differences between the “visions” reported in Christianity and Theravāda, to which we will refer in this section.

As per the outline of this section, Teresa discusses several categories of visionary experiences which we describe next. Buddhaghosa deals with phenomena in Chapter Eleven of the *Visuddhimagga*, some of which are related to visions and locutions, though a presentation of “visions” in Theravāda must be supplemented with canonical sources.

5.17.3.2 “Mystical communications” in Teresa

Other than ecstasy, God purifies the soul in the Sixth Mansions by means of visions, locutions, and “spiritual touches” that frequently accompany ecstatic union (V 25,4).⁵⁶ Speaking from her extensive experience with these supernatural phenomena, Teresa is deemed “the main authority in Western Christianity on these subjects.”⁵⁷ These were sensitive topics in the accusatory environment of the 16th century Spain, so her primary concern was to establish clear criteria for discernment of visions and locutions (6M 10,1).

5.17.3.2.1 Mystical locutions

God also awakens the soul through “mystical locutions” (*hablas de Dios*) (6M 3,1),⁵⁸ which are defined by the Carmelite saint as “words spoken by God to the soul,” some of which “seem to come from outside oneself; others, from deep within the interior part of the soul; others, from the superior part; and some are so exterior that they come through the sense of hearing, for it seems there is a spoken word” (6M 3,1) (See also V 27).

Auricular, imaginary and intellectual locutions are distinguished in Teresa’s works. *Auricular or corporeal locutions* are those perceived by the bodily ear (6M 3,1), which Teresa claims she never had. *Imaginary locutions* are voices “heard” internally through

⁵⁴ For literature on “visions” in the context of Theravāda: Obeyesekere, *The Awakened Ones*, 19-74.

⁵⁵ For example, being connected to deep states of concentration (*jhāna*) that are perceived outside the sensory apparatus.

⁵⁶ Teresa describes how raptures, flights, and other unitive experiences are often accompanied by visions and locutions. We see repeatedly how, in most cases, these events occur immediately before, during, or after ecstasy (V 25,69). Teresa even puts forth that the ecstasies are not real if they are not accompanied by some type of mystical communication.

⁵⁷ Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 387. See also Dubay, *Fire Within*, 244.

⁵⁸ Teresa deals specifically with these phenomena in Section 3 of the Sixth Mansions and Chapter 25 of *Vida*, among other places. Teresa had her first locution in 1557, when she was thinking about why God granted her favors when there were better people, and she heard “serve me and do not get into this” (V 19,9).⁵⁸ Teresa mentions other locutions she experienced, such as “Don’t be afraid, it is me” (V 25,18; 6M 3,5; V 32,1) or “From today you will be my spouse” (R 35).

the “imaginative faculty,” which are understood more clearly than when heard physically, and cannot be resisted. *Intellectual locutions* seem like a “well-formed voice” (like natural speaking), but the mystic “perceives” them in the innermost of the soul (6M 3,12; V 25,1) but nothing is “heard” in them. Regarding intellectual locutions, like during intellectual visions (see below), the mystic feels certain they are from God and what is prophesized in them will be fulfilled (V 34).⁵⁹ When Teresa speaks of locutions, she usually refers to intellectual locutions, which like all other mystical communications, are passive and occur when the soul’s powers are suspended (6M 3,18). During intellectual locutions, God captivates the mystic’s attention and he is unable to do anything (6M 3,18). Discernment is required for all kinds of locutions, to distinguish these internal voices from the acts of one’s imagination due to melancholy, delusion, or other psycho-pathological causes.⁶⁰

Locutions are transformative, awakening the soul and preparing it for new tasks (V 27). They convey knowledge from God. Teresa declares that much of what she writes is passed on from the Heavenly Master (V 25,2).⁶¹ One of their effects is great humility and awareness of sin (V 39,31). Some locutions are accompanied by intellectual visions.⁶² In *Relaciones* 66.3, written in 1581, when the Founder was already in Seventh Mansions, she says that she still experiences locutions when God considers it necessary.

5.17.3.2.2 Mystical visions

Teresa recognizes a threefold categorization of visions or “apparitions” (*apariciones*), well-established in the theology of her day: corporeal, imaginary and intellectual visions. In Sections 10 and 11 of Chapter Six of *Castillo*, she also speaks of the most sublime intellectual visions that reveal profound spiritual truths and secrets to the soul (6M 10,1). All these kinds of visions are communications between God and the soul (6M 10,1). They may occur at different times and under different circumstances. *Corporeal visions*, the first category, are those that can be seen with the bodily eyes and are the least perfect. They are not discussed in Teresa’s works; she says that she never had them (6M 9,4).⁶³

On the subject of *imaginary visions*, in Section 9 of Chapter Six of *Castillo*, Teresa delves into “how the Lord communicates with the soul through an imaginative vision” (6M

⁵⁹ Imaginary locutions do not leave such certainty of whether they are authentic or the fruit of the imagination.

⁶⁰ There is a danger of confusing locutions with the effects of the imagination, self-deception or the effects of melancholy (6M 3,2). Teresa always recommends—to both the sick and healthy alike—that they proceed cautiously in these unusual affairs and do not pay attention to them until they have grasped some deeper understanding of spiritual life (6M 3,3).

⁶¹ Teresa says that some of these locutions transmit prophecies (6M 3,8-9 and V 25,2).

⁶² See 6M 12-18. One example of which we can find in R 25.

⁶³ See for example: V 30; V 38,3; R 4,14, and 6M 9,4.

9). These visions are called “imaginary” or “imaginative” not because they are “imagined” (in the sense of being unreal or created by the person’s imagination) but because God communicates directly to the imaginative faculty in them and not through the five senses. For the soul, they are as real as a sensory vision and superior to corporeal visions.

According to Teresa, these imaginary visions have at a greater risk of deceit than intellectual ones, but when coming from God, they seem “more beneficial because they are in greater conformity with our nature” (6M 9,1).⁶⁴ The imaginary vision *par excellence*, she alludes to is the most sacred humanity of Christ, that appears as He desires “either as He was when He went about in the world or as He is after His resurrection” (6M 9,3). An imaginary vision is quick as lightning, but remains engraved on the soul for a lifetime (6M 9,3). It is a “living image” (6M 9,4). It may be accompanied by locutions and reveal great secrets (6M 9,4). The image occurs in a flash,⁶⁵ because the soul cannot otherwise sustain its radiance. Although beautiful, it shocks and overwhelms the soul (6M9,5). These visions occur only when God grants them;⁶⁶ if genuine, they cannot be induced or resisted (6M 9,7). They almost always occur when the soul enters into ecstasy (6M 9,4), or is in suspension (6M 4,5).⁶⁷ Teresa discusses the criteria for the genuineness of these visions in 6M 9,9-15. How important are the imaginary visions for spiritual development? Teresa insists that these visions are not for one’s glory but to serve God (6M 9,16). They are not at all essential for spiritual progress (6M 9,16) but can greatly improve the virtues. The imaginary visions are of a lower category than the intellectual visions (V 28,4-8), and their occurrence cease earlier than the intellectual visions.⁶⁸ All imaginary visions fill the soul with great knowledge, and can benefit spiritual and physical health (V 28,13). While imaginary visions only last only a moment, intellectual ones can last for years (V 28).

Intellectual visions are defined as “supernatural knowledge in which the mind receives an extraordinary grasp of some revealed truth without the aid of sensible impressions.”⁶⁹ In Chapter 6 Section 6 of *Castillo*, Teresa “discusses how God communicates Himself to the soul through an intellectual vision.” For Teresa intellectual visions are qualified as such because they are not communicated to the senses.⁷⁰ In R 4,19 she describes them:

⁶⁴ The imaginary visions are very beneficial to the soul (6M 9, 6-7).

⁶⁵ Their duration is very short (6M 8,3) but the soul, it seems just a moment (6M 9,7).

⁶⁶ To explain imaginary visions, Teresa says it is as if God were showing us “a precious stone of great value” enclosed in a golden room to which only God has the key. Although we have never seen it, we know with great certainty that it is there, and we benefit from its healing qualities. This is despite the fact that we cannot open the door to the room. When God wishes, He suddenly will open the door and give the soul these visions for its benefit (6M 9,2-3).

⁶⁷ Teresa says that this must be due to the frailty of human nature, which cannot withstand divine union (6M 9,7; V.28.9).

⁶⁸ In *Relation* 66.3, which she wrote in 1581 when she was already in the Seventh Mansions, Teresa says that the imaginary visions had ceased (CC 66,3).

⁶⁹ “Intellectual visions,” Fr. John A. Hardon S.J., *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (Eternal Life Publications 2000).

⁷⁰ Nor are they perceived with the faculties of the soul (V 17,7).

In the kind of vision you ask about, nothing is seen inwardly or outwardly, because it is not in the imagination; but although it sees nothing, the soul understands who the subject of the vision is, and to this extent it is represented to it more clearly than if it saw it. Yet there is nothing in particular represented to it. It is as if we were aware that someone else is beside us [...] because when it is dark we know by hearing a noise or by having seen the person beforehand or in some other way that he is there, or perhaps we knew it already. In this vision there is nothing like that, but the soul knows very certainly, without a word being spoken outwardly or inwardly, who it is and where he is and sometimes what it is that he wishes to make known. Whence or how this happens the soul doesn't know, but this is how it is (R 4,19).

Teresa offers many descriptions of intellectual visions, of which the first vision of Christ merits a special mention.⁷¹ In general these visions occur unexpectedly (6M 8,2). Their object is primarily Christ though the soul “does not see Him, either with the eyes of the body or with those of the soul” (6M 8,2). By these intellectual visions Christ shows us his love (6M 8,1). There are also intellectual visions of saints. Teresa was initially exhausted by her failure to understand what was happening, as she saw nothing. Yet, she was certain that it was Christ who manifested these visions for her (6M 8,2).⁷² Unlike the brevity of imaginative visions, intellectual visions can last “many days and sometimes even more than a year” (6M 8,3).⁷³ The soul is certain they are from God (6M 8,6)⁷⁴ and not self-deception due to their effects on a soul (6M 8,7). During the visions Teresa felt the presence of God by her side (6M 8,3). These visions are totally passive (6M 8,5). Regarding the criteria of discernment for intellectual visions, Teresa was certain that they come from God, because they bring great peace and humility to the soul (6M 8,4), and a particular knowledge of God (6M 8,4). The principal impact of these visions is a notable improvement of the soul (6M 8,5). When these intellectual visions end, the soul also feels great loneliness (6M 8,5). These visions, Teresa assures us, do not bespeak spiritual advancement of the virtues and, therefore, their recipients are not deemed better (or worse) than those who do not receive them (6M 8,10). The visions are not for one’s own delight, but to encourage higher service to God.

There are yet other forms of communication from God. Some persons experience “fragrances” or scents of divine origin when in a state of prayer. “Delightful inflammation” (*inflamacion deleitosa*) is another way of awakening a soul. According to Teresa:

The Lord also has other ways of awakening the soul: unexpectedly, when it is praying vocally and not thinking of anything interior, it seems a delightful enkindling will come upon it as though a fragrance were suddenly to become so powerful as to spread through all the senses. (I don't say that it is a fragrance but am merely making this comparison.) Or the experience is something like this, and it is communicated only for the sake of making one feel the Spouse's presence there. The soul is moved with a delightful desire to enjoy Him, and thereby it is prepared to make intense acts of love and praise of our Lord. (6M 2,8).

⁷¹ This startling intellectual vision came on St. Peter’s Day, probably in 1559, and she speaks of it in V 27,2 and 6M 8,2.

⁷² Yet, despite this certainty, she felt fearful because she had never heard of an intellectual vision (6M 8,2).

⁷³ Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 388-89.

⁷⁴ Especially when the soul hears the words “Don’t be afraid, it is me.” Cf. V 25,18; R 4,10; 6M 3,5; and 6M 8,3.

5.17.3.3 Visions and locutions in Theravāda?

“Visions” are known in Theravāda but cannot be considered communications by God, nor can the term “vision” be used for these experiences without proper qualifications.⁷⁵ “Visions” are ultimately spontaneous events, but they can be infused by God, like in Christianity, or obtained as a supernormal power, which is attainable and exercisable, as in Buddhism. Visions in Buddhism are first connected to the Buddha’s awakening, which occurred after having attained the *jhānas* and the attainment of the “divine eye.” However, visions in Buddhism are not limited to the Buddha’s Awakening. They may arise connected with the *jhānas* or states of concentration. About the content of these visions, Khantipalo says “[they] may be pleasant and delightful ones— of the *devas* for instance and their heavenly worlds, or fearful ones— of one’s own body decaying.”⁷⁶

The “divine ear-element” (*dibbasotadhātu*) is the second *abhiññā*, which consists of clairaudience or faculty to perceive sounds without intervention of the auditory organs. A monastic wishing to develop the divine ear-element, with his mind entirely concentrated, “he directs, he inclines, his mind to the divine ear element. With the divine ear element, which is purified and surpasses the human, he hears both kinds of sounds, the divine and the human, those that are far as well as near” (PP 13.1). the word “divine” here means similar to the hearing capacities of the gods (PP 13,2). It is also called divine because it is caused by good conduct, unimpeded by bile, and free of impurities, as well as due to the fact that it is obtained by means of divine abiding as its support (PP 13,2). The divine ear element is aroused via *jhāna* as the basis for “direct-knowledge.” Then, with consciousness belonging to the preliminary-work, he should advert first to gross sounds in a normal hearing range and successively attend to subtler sounds. When the divine ear is to arise, mind-door adverting arises, making one of these sounds its object as “when that has ceased, then either four or five impulsions impel” (PP 13,5). Herein, it is knowledge arisen together with the absorption that is called the divine-ear element. Having reached this absorption, divine ear becomes merged with the ear of knowledge.

After consolidating it, he should extend it by delimiting stages from a single finger up to the limit of the world-sphere, or even further. One who has reached direct-knowledge in this way also hears by means of direct-knowledge—without re-entering the *jhāna*— any sound that has come within the space touched by the basic *jhānas* object (PP 13.7).

⁷⁵ As mentioned earlier, “visions” differ essentially from visualizations, which result from the systematic practice of meditative procedures. Visions are also distinguishable from daydream and hallucinations, which could be pathological.

⁷⁶ Khantipalo, *Calm and Insight*, 51-52.

5.17.3.4 Comparison of locutions and visions

5.17.3.4.1 Comparison of locutions

The divine ear-element and Teresa's divine locutions differ in nature. In both cases, voices or sounds are heard but not through the sensory apparatus. But the power of *dibba-sota* is a capacity for knowledge (*abhiññā*) attainable through *jhānic* training, whereas the divine locutions are gifts from God to the soul for its improvement. The *yogin* can hear both deities and humans, but in locutions Teresa hears only the voice of God.

Although hearing other humans or sounds that are far off or extremely near is unheard of in the Christian tradition, *dibba-sota* is specifically related to clairaudience, which has been attributed to the Christian saints and mystics throughout history. Clairaudience, meaning, "the faculty of perceiving, as if by hearing, what is inaudible," is a habitual phenomenon in the lives of the saints and reported in hagiographies,⁷⁷ but this is different from divine locutions. There are some cases of clairaudience attributed to Teresa.⁷⁸

5.17.3.4.2 Comparison of visions

There are certain similarities between the visions reported in Theravāda and Teresa. In their structural and diachronic appearance, visions in both cases are often connected with the attainment of deep states of concentration and an elevated level of purification. In Theravāda visions may appear unexpectedly or as the result of the exercising supernatural powers, but they are always connected to the attainment of the *jhānas*. In Teresa, these exceptional events often manifest in connection with states of infused contemplation (next or preceding ecstasy).⁷⁹ In both cases, visions do not occur during the precise moment of *jhāna* or ecstasy (V 25,4), but are instead connected to them. There are also other important differences. While in Christianity visions are understood as "mystic apprehensions,"⁸⁰ namely supernatural phenomena of divine origin,⁸¹ in Buddhism they are natural phenomena, even when the object of the vision is a deity. As such, visions in Buddhism are not "mystical" in the Christian sense. Their functions also differ. In Christianity visions are given to the soul for its awakening and improvement.

⁷⁷ In our knowledge there are no references in the Christian tradition to hearing sounds "in another world system, as well as sounds that are such as the sounds of the creatures living in one's own body," mentioned by Buddhaghosa.

⁷⁸ Proceso de Alcalá, 1610, 81^o: BMC, T. 20, p.142. Efrén de la Madre de Dios, *Tiempo y vida de Santa Teresa*, 666.

⁷⁹ Visions are a sort of mystical phenomenon that take place mainly in the Sixth Mansions and in relation to mystical union.

⁸⁰ Pike, *Mystic Union*, ix.

⁸¹ All Teresa's visions or auditory experiences are supernatural, but some of them are mystical while others are not. This is because visions can be caused by the Devil. The ones we shall be referring to in this chapter are of divine origin.

5.17.4 Other extraordinary phenomena in Christianity and Buddhism

A multiplicity of extraordinary phenomena manifests in the lives of Christian mystics. Some of these phenomena are particular to Christianity, like several miracles described in the New Testament and in the hagiographies of the Christian saints.⁸² Some of these phenomena are shared by Buddhism, although others are particular to Buddhism. Let us discuss them, beginning with some miraculous phenomena particular to Christianity.

Writing on frequent mystical phenomena in the lives of the Christian saints, Martín Velasco observes: “stigmatization, prolonged fasting, luminous phenomena, telekinesis, hyperthermia, bilocation, emission of heterogeneous substances: special smells, tears and blood from images, lengthening of bodily organs.”⁸³ Some of these phenomena are uniquely Christian as, for example, the Stigmata—which are injuries that appear spontaneously and resemble the sores produced by the Passion in the body of Christ⁸⁴—tears/blood dripping from holy images, the gift of tongues (glossolalia)⁸⁵ and inexplicable mystical knowledge. The Carmelite experienced some of them, like the transverberation (i.e., spiritual wounding of the heart),⁸⁶ which occurred in 1562 and is described in V 29, the divine gift of prophesy,⁸⁷ the odor of sanctity,⁸⁸ incorruptibility of the body after death, and mystical knowledge.

Some other phenomena in Christianity have similarities with analogous phenomena in Buddhism. For example: supernatural healings, luminous phenomena, telekinesis,⁸⁹ inedia,⁹⁰ invisibility,⁹¹ precognition, and the multiplication of food.

Other extraordinary phenomena are entirely unique to Buddhism such as the ability to teach the Dhamma,⁹² or to know one’s previous rebirths, both powers of the Buddha.

⁸² Stanisław Głaz, “Characteristics of Extraordinary Religious Phenomena Accompanying the Christian Religious Experience—Reflection” in *Religions* 5 (2014): 1146–1160.

⁸³ Martín Velasco, *El fenómeno místico*, 65.

⁸⁴ Some mystics who bore the stigmata are St. Francis of Assisi, Padre Pio and Teresa Neumann.

⁸⁵ Glossolalia is the capacity to speaking in tongues not previously known by the experiencer. A list of saints who are said to have experienced it includes St. Anthony of Padua and St. Vincent Ferrer. Cf. Hughes, *Miraculous Phenomena*, 36-8.

⁸⁶ Transverberation, from the Latin *transverberare*, which means “cross from one side to the other,” is a mystical grace consisting of the piercing of the mystic’s heart with a dart of love by an angel when the mystic is inflamed with the love of God. Other mystics who are said to have experienced the transverberation are: Padre Pio, St. Therese of Lisieux, St. Mechtilde of Hackeborn, St. Augustine, St. John of the Cross, St. Catherine of Siena and St. Francis of Sales.

⁸⁷ The gift of prophesy is the gift of knowing future events. Examples are reported in the lives of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi, St. Martin de Porres, and St. Padre Pio. See Hughes, 2009, 11.

⁸⁸ Another example of person emanating by a saintly fragrance is Catalina de Cardona, a friend of Teresa’s (F 28,32).

⁸⁹ “Miracles,” EB, 7.1: 12–15; David J. Kalupahana, “Miracles in Early Buddhism”, in *Buddhist Studies, Essays in Honour of Professor Lily de Silva*, ed P. D. Premasiri, 105–134 (University of Peradeniya, Department of Pali, 2002).

⁹⁰ Inedia, the Latin for “fasting,” is “the apparent paranormal ability of the body to survive without food, and sometimes without drink.” Some of the most famous cases are Catalina de Siena (1347-1380) and Teresa Neumann (1898-1962).

⁹¹ The Spiritual Gift of Invisibility is the gift to become invisible in the presence of others. Mystics and saints of whom have been reported Invisibility is are St. Francis of Paola and St. Martin de Porres. See Hughes, *Miraculous Phenomena*, 14.

⁹² The Buddha favored, among all others, the “miracle of instruction.”

5.17.4 Benefits extraordinary phenomena

After the foregoing account, let us discuss the function and value that both traditions confer on supernormal phenomena. In modernity, paranormal experiences are usually considered unreal or pathological. However, an increasingly number of studies support a change of viewpoint, acknowledging these unusual events as religious phenomena,⁹³ and a legitimate object of study.⁹⁴

What is the role of these experiences in a person's spiritual development? Our two traditions agree that they are beneficial to the experiencer, conferring him with religious vitality and desire for further growth, but the experiencer should neither give them excessive significance, nor become attached to them. Buddhism cautions against becoming captivated by these extraordinary phenomena, as they can become a source of distraction, and recommends the guidance and council of the meditation teacher.⁹⁵

In Christianity, the phenomena of mysticism strengthen faith, provide knowledge and manifest the glory of God. However, they are not requisites for salvation, so their absence should never be understood as a lack of spiritual development. Similarly, in Buddhism, supernormal powers indicate some advancement but, as the Buddha told Sunakkhatta, "performing miracles has little to do with the destruction of the *āsavas* which is the goal of the Buddhist path to emancipation."⁹⁶ They do not then manifest spiritual perfection.

5.17.5 Conclusion

We conclude then that for Buddhaghosa and Teresa extraordinary phenomena are peripheral to spiritual life, yet they are not as insignificant as some seem to believe.⁹⁷ Paranormal phenomena are usually related to high levels of purity and concentration, which are in and of themselves valuable in a person's development. However, as already mentioned, the nature of these phenomena is understood differently by both traditions. Let us turn now to the effects of *samādhi* and Teresa's path before the Seven Mansions.

⁹³ "for most of the twentieth century it has been described in pathologizing terms in the bereavement literature. Recent decades have seen the publication of numerous studies that point to the normality of this experience and its potential benefits for the bereaved perceivers" E. Steffen and A. Coyle A, "Sense of presence' experiences in bereavement and their relationship to mental health. A critical examination of a continuing controversy," in *Mental Health and Anomalous Experience. Psychology Research Progress* (Hauppauge, New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2012), 33 - 56.

⁹⁴ Simon L. Dein "Religious Visions and Voices" in *Mental Health and Anomalous Experience. Psychology Research Progress* (Hauppauge, New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2012), 19-32.

⁹⁵ Khantipalo, *Calm and Insight*, 51-52.

⁹⁶ "Miracles," EB, 12-15.

⁹⁷ See Hollenback, *Mysticism: Experience, Response, and Empowerment*, 58. Hollenback provides examples of authors who downplay the role of paranormal phenomena such as: Rudolph Otto, Leuba or, more recently, Forman.

5.18 THE EFFECTS OF SAMĀDHI AND TERESA'S PRAYER-PATH

At the end of Chapter Eleven of the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa concludes the section entitled “How *samādhi* should be developed?” and begins “What are the benefits of developing *samādhi*?”. Teresa discusses the effects on the soul of the prayer-path up to the Seventh Mansions in Chapter Six, Sections 6 and 7 of *Castillo* among other places. In this section, we will compare the benefits and effects of “purification of mind” (*samādhi*) and the effects on the soul of Teresa’s prayer-path until reaching the Seventh Mansions. As we have discussed most of these effects earlier, our presentation here will be brief.

5.18.1 The benefits and effects of developing *samādhi*

5.18.1.1 The benefits of developing *samādhi*

In PP 11.120 Buddhaghosa states that the benefits of developing *samādhi* are fivefold: (i) For *arahants* with destroyed cankers, one benefit is “a blissful abiding here and now;” (ii) For ordinary people and trainees a benefit is insight as *samādhi* is proximate cause for insight; (iii) When ordinary people and trainees have attained the eight *jhānas*, and they aspire to obtain the “direct-knowledges” (*abhiññā*), a benefit is the attainment of these direct-knowledges by taking the fourth *jhāna* as the foundation for their acquisition; (iv) For ordinary people “who have not lost their *jhāna*,” a benefit is improved forms of existence (i.e. better rebirths); (v) For Noble Ones who have attained the *jhānas*, a benefit is the possibility of “cessation”—meaning being without consciousness for a maximum of seven days (PP 11.121-125). Let us now briefly discuss these benefits next.

The first benefit is for the *arahants*. An *arahant* is a person who has attained liberation from any form of rebirth. “Cankers destroyed” signifies that the *arahant* has destroyed all the defilements (*āsavas*) that perpetuate the cycle of death and rebirth (*saṃsāra*). “Blissful abiding here and now” refers to final freedom from suffering. The next benefit, which is for ordinary people and trainees, refers to their readiness for the practice of insight meditation as *samādhi* is the proximate cause for insight (PP 11.12). For those who have attained the four/eight *jhānas*, a benefit of *samādhi* is the acquisition of the “direct-knowledges” (*abhiññā*), which we dealt with in the preceding section (PP 11.122). The fourth benefit is for ordinary people “who have not lost their *jhāna*.” For these persons, a purified mind means the possibility of rebirth in the Brahma world (PP 11.123). Lastly, for Noble Ones who have mastered the *jhānas*, the benefit is the possibility of the attainment of “cessation” (*nirodha-samāpatti*) and, eventually, awakening (PP 11.124).

5.18.1.2 The effects of developing *samādhi*

Apart from the above benefits, *samādhi* yields a transformation of the meditator's mind that we have discussed when reviewing the effects of *jhāna* training in Section 5.11.4.7. Those effects can be extrapolated to purification of mind (*samādhi*) as a whole. Referring to the meditator who has attained the four *jhānas*, the *Samaññaphala Sutta* reads:

And he [the *bhikkhu*] with mind concentrated, purified and cleansed, unblemished, free from impurities, malleable, workable, established and having gained imperturbability, applies and directs his mind to the knowledge of the destruction of the corruptions. (DN 2,97)

As noted earlier, the goal of *samādhi*—here synonymous with “purification of mind” (*citta visuddhi*)—is clearly a purified mind. *Samādhi* cleans the pollution of defiling stains (PP 11.125). The four/eight *jhānas* yield a mind that is “purified” (*parisuddhe*), “cleansed” (*pariyodāte*), “unblemished” (*anaṅgaṇe*) and “free of impurities” (*vigatūpakkilese*).

Perfecting *samādhi* frees the mind from craving, attachment and passion (*raga*). Griffiths notes that a connection between craving (*taṇhā*) and *samatha* on the one hand, and ignorance (*avijjā*) and *vipassanā* meditation on the other is found in the Pāli Canon.¹ In AN 1.61 a result of *samādhi* is the abandonment of passion (*raga*), a term synonymous with “craving” (*taṇhā*) while *vipassanā* frees the mind from ignorance (*avijjā*). Anālayo explains: “While the practice of insight has the purpose of leading to the destruction of ignorance, the practice of tranquility is specifically aimed at the destruction of passion.”² As discussed in Section 3.2.3, both the eradication of passion and ignorance are required for liberation (AN 1 100).³

Developing *samādhi* settles and quiets the mind. *Samatha* means “tranquility,” “calm.” Those who have perfected *samādhi* have attained a steady, quiet, calm mind. With the attainment of *samādhi*, the meditator's mind is described as “concentrated” (*samāhite*).⁴ The unification of mind attained through the *jhānas* transpires in a more focused mind in daily life. According to the *Samaññaphala Sutta*, with the attainment of the four *jhānas*, the *jhāyin*'s mind also becomes bright (*pariyodāte*), pliant (*mudubhūte*), malleable (*kammaniye*), steady (*thite*) and attains imperturbability (*āneñjappatte*; e.g., DN 2). Nevertheless, mastery of the *jhānas*, and “purification of mind” or *samādhi* as a whole, only leads to “liberation of the mind” (*ceto-vimutti*), but not to perfect and final liberation, which can only arise when combined with “liberation through wisdom” (*paññā-vimutti*).

¹ Griffiths, *Concentration or Insight*, 619.

² Anālayo, *From Grasping to Emptiness*, 229.

³ Ibid. This is a re-iteration of the principle that *samādhi* alone cannot and does not lead to liberation.

⁴ Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, 116.

5.18.2 The effects of Teresa's prayer-path up to the Seventh Mansions

The transformation of the soul after experiencing the ascetical and mystical mansions is described by Teresa with the simile of the silkworm that metamorphoses into a butterfly. The transformation is such that, afterward, the soul cannot recognize itself (5M 2,7). In 5.11.4.7 we discussed the redemptive effects of the mystical mansions. These transformational effects can be extrapolated to all the path up to the Seventh Mansions.

The main effect of the ascetical mansions and the passive purifications of the mystical mansions is a thorough moral purgation and sanctification of the soul (5M 2,5). With this cleansing, God's will is "to purify this soul so that it might enter the seventh dwelling place—just as those who will enter heaven must be cleansed in purgatory" (6M 11,6).⁵

Another effect is a greater unification of the soul. The spiritual process harmonizes opposing tendencies and wants. If, before entering the castle, the soul was pulled in many directions by antagonistic drives and torn by inner conflict, after the first six mansions the virtuous person becomes unified internally through love for God and desire for final union with Him. The soul in the Sixth Mansions is already totally focused on God.

The soul feels "estranged from earthly things" (5M 2,9); everything seems new to it. It feels equanimity towards all the experiences of the world, including family and friends, "for it has learned [...] that creatures cannot give it true rest" (5M 2,8). The person desires, on the one hand, to flee from the people and live in the desert and, on the other, to be in the midst of the world to see if it can be made to praise God more (6M 6,3).

Teresa describes how at the zenith of the Sixth Mansions the soul experiences profound calm and peace and, simultaneously, an excruciating desire for God (5M 5,10). Nothing in the world can bring the inner peace the soul feels continuously, but the infused experiences of the mystical mansions, and having been in the presence of God, leaves the soul tormented by His absence and it yearns to enjoy Him definitively (6M 6,1).⁶ All the passions that once overpowered the will of the person now have become overcome,

⁵ Teresa explains how infused prayer illuminates the stains a soul may have so they appear visible to it (V 40,7; C 35,4), and cleans them, preparing the soul for the transforming union. Underhill says: "The first thing that the self observes, when it turns back upon itself in that awful moment of lucidity-entering, as St. Catherine says, into 'the cell of self-knowledge,'— is the horrible contrast between its clouded contours and the pure sharp radiance of the Real" (Underhill 1993, 199).

⁶ As for the aforementioned anxieties and desires to see God, Teresa advises that one must know how to govern oneself with good discernment, and "search first and foremost the will of God because He knows best what is best for us. And with this we will be rested and the devil will not have much room to make us fail" (6M 6,6-9). When the desires for God are pressing, and the person weeps and feels desolate, the soul needs to be rested and act with discernment (6M 6,6-9).

except for the desire for final union with God that now has increased exponentially.⁷

Teresa describes other effects. The soul experiences a great desire to praise God and die a thousand deaths for Him. It longs for solitude, wants to suffer penances and trials, that all might know and love God, and experiences great shame to see that God is gravely offended (5M 2,7). The soul also feels discontent with and detachment from the things of the world and that all it can do for God is so little. Having experienced many mystical unions, the soul is left between two worlds. Everything tires it except God and only in solitude can find relief (6M 6,1).

5.18.3 The effects of *samādhi* and Teresa's path up to Seventh Mansions

Buddhaghosa's path of purification up to the completion of the "purification of mind" and Teresa's prayer-path up to the Seventh Mansions of the soul exhibit similarities in their effects, as significant as the differences in the corollaries of the two processes. With regard to the main effect, both processes imply a thorough transformation of the person.

In both cases a purification occurs. Both processes imply a purgation of impurities and disruptive propensities in the person and an attainment of a higher degree of purity. The goal of "purification of mind" is a thoroughly purified, clean and stainless mind. Through *samādhi* the mind is transformed from a tainted state into a purified one. The completion of *samadhi* is simultaneous with the suppression of unwholesome states. This suppression, however, does not mean a total eradication of the *āsavas*, which only occurs with liberation through wisdom (*paññā*). Also, the complete transformation of the soul does not occur until the attainment of the Seventh Mansions, the final destination of the Christian soul in this life. Speaking of the souls in 6M, Teresa says: "God gives these souls the strongest desire not to displease Him in anything, however small, and the desire to avoid every imperfection" (6M 6,3). The passive purifications eliminate bad habits that the soul might still have and prepare it for the union of the Seventh Mansions.

In both cases there is a profound unification of the person's mind or consciousness. Through *samatha* meditation the mind becomes unified. As Anālayo says, development of *samatha* meditation requires "settling the mind," in the sense of making it unified and concentrated. *Samādhi*, *jhāna* training, is a process of "profitable unification of mind."

⁷ Writing on the effects of the mystical experiences of the Sixth Mansions, Teresa says: "Let us realize that such effects are undoubtedly left by these suspensions and ecstasies. The desires are not passing but remain, and when an occasion arises to manifest their presence, one sees that they are not feigned" (6M 6,5).

Teresa's prayer-path is a process through which the experience and love of God leads to the unification of the faculties and inherent potentials of the person. Sancho Fermín describes the experience of the sublimity of the Mystery as "a process of maturation and growth of the person, a process of unification and harmonization of all his faculties."⁸

A purification of consciousness through both processes also occurs. Discussing the affinities between the *Cloud of Unknowing*, a medieval Christian mystical text, and the *Path of Purification*, Smart says, "psychologically or phenomenologically, it could be that the purification of consciousness (Buddhist) is equivalent to the attainment of nakedness of being (the *Cloud*)."⁹ Although an exact equivalence between the state of mind of those who have completed purification of mind and the state of the soul after the Six Mansions is unwarranted, in both cases the mind has been purified of extraneous contents.

The process of purification in both cases transforms the tone, clarity and luminosity of the person's consciousness. The condition of the mind after the attainment of purification of mind is of transparency and luminosity (DN 2). Teresa speaks of the luminosity and clarity of the souls that passed through the mystical mansions (1M 1).

Other similarities already mentioned in previous sections are the transformation of unwholesome emotions, a growth in virtue, detachment from all things of the world and an enhanced freedom from the self. This latter effect is not completed through *samatha* meditation but occurs with the final realization of *anattā*. On the Christian side, the liberation from one's self, understood as renunciation of one's own will as different from God's will, is enhanced but not finalized with the completion of the Sixth Mansions.

Having outlined similarities in effects, let us next consider some essential differences. Apropos the benefits of developing *samādhi* described by Buddhaghosa—namely, "blissful abiding here and now" for *arahants*, readiness for insight meditation for all, possibility of rebirth in the Brahma world for those who have not lost their *jhāna*— we believe these are implications of *samādhi*, not effects, and unique to the Buddhist path.

On the Christian side, some effects of Teresa's path up to the Seventh Mansions, such as a yearning for final union with God, tenderness of love for God, wishes of redemption and apostolic service, are theistic in nature or idiosyncratic to the Christian tradition.

⁸ Sancho Fermín "Mystical prayer and its degrees."

⁹ Smart, "What would Buddhaghosa have made of The Cloud of Unknowing," 103-12.

5.19 RECAPITULATION AND CONCLUSION OF THE COMPARISON

We recapitulate our findings in this section. As a preamble, we restate two premises for comparability of our comparanda. The first premise is that Buddhaghosa's path of purification and Teresa's path of prayer are on the same level, in that neither one nor the other is soteriologically essential. Their role is auxiliary. The second assumption is that we are not directly comparing two soteriologies, Buddhism and Christianity, which is a more complex matter, but two processes within these traditions that exhibit substantial similarities, with the aim of understanding and explaining these similarities.

We start with the crucial differences. Both processes deal with the human condition and fundamental questions of life and meaning and provide paths of transformation. However, as revealed throughout the study, the principles and goals of both systems are different. The two paths at diametrically opposed extremes of a doctrinal spectrum. Teresa's spirituality is rooted in the knowledge of God, "Creator of Heaven and Earth," and the belief in a soul made in his image and likeness, which is like a castle made of a single diamond or clear crystal in which there are many rooms (1M 1,1). In stark contrast, Buddhism is a non-theistic religion, which postulates that everything that exists arises through dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), denies the existence of a substantive self or soul and professes, instead, the no-self doctrine (*anatta-vāda*). As DiNoia puts it: "recognizing differences is not equivalent to promoting discord. It is a way of taking other religious people seriously."¹ Because of such fundamental doctrinal differences, we must conclude that the two religious paths lead to different summits, which does not mean that a comparison between them is not possible and desirable.

Against the backdrop of these central differences, and in light of the extended terrain covered in the previous comparative examination, let us review other relevant findings. The comparison in Part III of this study identified analogous segments of spiritual life, configuring comparable broader structures. Taking the worldly condition as the point of departure, these analogous segments are: conversion, initiation and profession of vows (conversion *sensu lato*); the cultivation of morality and virtue; the practice asceticism; conceptual, discursive and reflective meditation; mindfulness or recollective meditation; deep states of absorption or infused contemplation; and extraordinary phenomena. Section 5.20 offers a synthesis of these shared elements presented in a tabular form.

¹ J. A. DiNoia, *The diversity of religions: a Christian perspective* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1992), 169.

Once again, we should restate that the prototypical or ideal spiritual processes described by both Buddhaghosa and Teresa constitute general frames of reference for a course of events that is often non-linear. The matching segments of spiritual life identified throughout our comparative analysis are, nonetheless, present in most cases, in one order or the other.

Having finished comparing and contrasting our samplings of spiritual life, it must be stressed that simplistic equalities and hasty conclusions must be avoided entirely. The evidence adduced reveals *real*, not just seeming and superficial points of convergence. The commonalities along the two paths are more than expected, with truly notable, substantial and credible similarities in our two author's phenomenological descriptions, in the alignment between segments of spiritual life identified throughout the comparison and in the structural sequence in which these analogous segments appear.

We must then conclude that—at their most fundamental level—we are in front of two processes which are endowed with paradigms that differ greatly in their natures and ultimate ends, being therefore of a drastically different order. Yet, phenomenologically, structurally and in their dynamism, both religious processes exhibit similar patterns, thus configuring analogous segments of spiritual progress.

That there are essential differences between the two processes is not surprising. Their similarities, however, are much more difficult to explain. How is it possible that similarities occur at the experiential level of praxis between two irreconcilable systems of meaning? From which perspective could these similarities be understood?

These similarities are neither fortuitous coincidences nor the outcome of superficial comparisons; they actually run deep and are extensive. This indicates that, although both processes are unrelated in their paradigms, their overall course of development is similar and, therefore, the person's transformation through them must also be similar.

The pending task then is to understand and explain the reasons for the similarities and overlaps between the individual segments identified throughout the comparison, for the sequence of their appearance, and the underlying reason for the larger structure of spiritual transformation, which is one of the research questions posed at the outset. This is the task that we shall attempt next in Part IV of this dissertation and, particularly, in Chapter Six, the Interpretative Synthesis.

TABLE 5.1. Comparison segments of spiritual life

Segment	<i>The Path of Purification</i>		<i>The Interior Castle</i>	
	Stage	Defining activity	Stage	Defining activity
Worldly Stage	<i>puthujjana</i>	Seeking pleasure and avoiding pain	“The soul outside castle”	Seeking pleasure and avoiding pain
Conversion	Conversion	“Turning around”	Conversion	“Turning around”
Initiation	Three Refuges and Five Precepts	Adoption moral code: Five Precepts	Holy Baptism and Confirmation; Ten Commandments	Adoption moral code: Renunciation mortal sin
Profession vows	<i>pabbajjā - upasampadā</i>	Adoption monastic life	Profession of vows: chastity, poverty and obedience	Adoption monastic life
Morality (virtue)	Purification of virtue (<i>sīla-visuddhi</i>)	Purification of virtue	Ethical living; Mansions I, II and III	Cultivation of virtue, avoidance of vice; vocal or mental prayer
Asceticism	Asceticism ingrained in monasticism <i>Dhutaṅgas</i>	<i>Vinaya, Paṭimokkha</i> Moderate ascetic practices	Asceticism ingrained monasticism Mansions II and III	<i>Constituciones de San José de Ávila</i> Moderate ascetic practices
Discursive Meditation	<i>samatha</i> (discursive and reflective) meditation meditation	<i>kammaṭṭhānas</i> (preceding access concentration)	Meditative prayer; <i>lectio divina</i> Mansions III	Thinking, reflection meditation subjects; meditative reading
Mindfulness Meditation / Recollection	<i>samatha</i> mindfulness meditation	<i>kammaṭṭhānas</i> (preceding access concentration)	Prayer of active recollection Mansions III	Acquired contemplation of the object of recollection
Preliminary Concentration	Access concentration (<i>upacāra-samādhi</i>)	Abandonment of deliberate reflection and of the Five Hindrances	Prayer of active recollection Mansions III	Abandonment deliberate reflection; active night of the senses
States of absorption / Infused contemplation	The <i>jhānas</i>	The practice of the four <i>jhānas</i>	Mystical prayer and its degrees	Passive contemplation (infused absorption)
	First <i>jhāna</i>	Seclusion sense desires; withdrawal of the senses; emergence <i>jhānaṅgas</i>	Prayer of passive recollection Mansions III	Infused contemplation; passive night of the senses
	Second <i>jhāna</i>	Stilling of <i>vitakka</i> and <i>vicāra</i> ; rise of internal confidence; <i>pīti</i> and <i>sukha</i> born of concentration	Prayer of quiet Mansions IV	Infused lessening of thought and imagination; rise of <i>gustos de Dios</i> and <i>satisfacción</i> ; state of deep calm and quiet

States of absorption / Infused contemplation (cont.)	Third <i>jhāna</i>	Suspension senses, deliberate thought and <i>vitakka</i> and <i>vicāra</i> ; fading away of <i>pīti</i> ; presence of <i>sukha</i> ; suspension of thought; dwelling in equanimity; mindfulness and full awareness; stronger unification of mind; immobility of the body.	Prayer of union Mansions V	Suspension of external and internal senses (thought - imagination), and faculties of the soul (will, understanding, memory); disappearance of <i>gustos de Dios</i> ; experience of <i>gozo de la unión</i> ; lessening verbalization, immobility of the body.
	Fourth <i>jhāna</i>	Suspension senses, deliberate thought and <i>vitakka</i> and <i>vicāra</i> ; Fading away of <i>pīti</i> ; Surmounting of <i>sukha</i> and <i>dukkha</i> ; neither-pain-nor-pleasure (<i>adukkhamā-sukha</i>); purity of mindfulness due to equanimity; immobility of the body.	Prayer of ecstasy Mansions VI	Ecstatic union; the activity of the external and internal senses and faculties of the soul totally suspended; purification of the spirit; immobility of the body. Lack of awareness of the body
	Formless <i>jhāna</i>	Formless meditation subject	Apophatic contemplation Mansions VI	Imagenless incorporeal contemplation
Paranormal Phenomena	Higher-knowledges (<i>abhiññā</i>)	Supernatural abilities (<i>iddhis</i>)	Supernatural phenomena; Mansions VI	Extraordinary phenomena (e.g. levitation, ubiquity); Divine locutions and visions
<p>Vipassanā meditation</p> <p>Purification of View Purification by Overcoming Doubt Purification by Knowledge and Vision of What is the Path and What is not the Path Purification by Knowledge and Vision of the Way Purification by Knowledge and Vision</p>			<p>Spiritual matrimony of the soul with God</p> <p>Permanent union of the soul with God; participation in life of the Trinary God; life according to God's will; perfect freedom and peace; active life of "good works" Mansions VII</p>	
nibbāna				

PART FOUR: INTERPRETIVE SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION

CHAPTER SIXTH: INTERPRETIVE SYNTHESIS

This investigative inquiry started by posing two interrelated research subjects: (a) to identify similarities and differences between the processes described by Buddhaghosa and Teresa, and (b) to determine if at an underlying level the two systems converge, despite their apparent differences. This has been the impulse behind our comparative engagement as explaining the interrelationship between the two systems is imperative.

Our investigation, consequently, is not merely descriptive and comparative. It is also exploratory, interpretive and explanatory. It seeks to provide reasons for the likenesses between both religious processes in their underlying structures and practices. After having conducted an extensive comparative analysis in Part III of this study, it is true that more intersections could have been established, but we have covered enough ground to attempt an interpretive synthesis¹ that may explain the essential interrelationship between both processes, and thereby answer the questions we have been investigating.

Studstill writes: “the attempt to understand mystical transformation across traditions indicates the need for an explanatory framework outside the traditions themselves.”² As regards Studstill’s view, we will not employ in our interpretive synthesis any pre-existing interpretive framework, nor will we subsume one tradition under the framework of the other. Instead, we will bring together intellectual tools, auxiliary schemes and relevant insights across several disciplines, without resorting to any pre-formulated framework. A proper framework of explanation is expected to emerge from the interpretive work itself.

Apart from the psychologies of the Theravāda and Carmelite traditions themselves, this interpretive research has guided our attention to a variety of sources of knowledge. We have drawn from a range of disciplines, including developmental psychology, the philosophy, and psychology of religion, philosophy of the mind, neuroscience, research on the self, psychoanalysis and the like, in the hope of explaining “why” and “how” the two processes converge regardless of their undeniable differences. The heuristic tools and insights of some renowned psychologists of religion such as J. W. Jones, H. F. de

¹ “Interpretive synthesis” does not mean syncretism here (i.e. combining two religious systems to create a *tertium quid*), or the desire to “integrate incommensurables,” or to develop a “middle way” between the two systems, but to use the findings resulting from our comparative analysis and related studies to explain the correlations, family resemblances and similarities between two seemingly unrelated religious systems, generating a new understanding.

² Randall Studstill, *The Unity of Mystical Traditions: The Transformation of Consciousness in Tibetan and German Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 17.

Wit, Robert H. Thouless, Ralph W. Hood and Paul W. Pruyser, philosophers such as Sergey S. Horujy, Pierre Hadot, and Thomas Metzinger, psychoanalysts such as Herbert Fingarette and Arthur J. Deikman, and neuroscientists such as Antonio Damasio, James H. Austin and Patrick McNamara have been most inspiring in our pursuit. The pioneering work of the North American psychologist William James at the turn of the 20th century has been a notable influence. It has also been helpful to look for neural correlates of spiritual practices from the vantage point of recent advances in the neurosciences since, in the end, all human beings share the same constitution and nervous system.

Our approach, in this interpretive part, is grounded in methodological naturalism,³ which does not mean reducing the multifaceted phenomena discussed in this study to naturalistic explanations. We agree with Jones⁴ that procedural naturalism is compatible with transcendental explanations and does not shunt any metaphysical commitment. Methodological naturalism is extensively accepted⁵ in the study of religious experiences.

We hasten to point out once again than arguing for the existence of convergences between our two religious processes regarding practices, underlying structures, and resultant spiritual transformations does not imply a denial of their essential differences. It is evident that the practitioners of our two traditions understand themselves in radically different ways. The spiritual paths discussed in our study are not different interpretations of one and the same reality but always remain distinct. It also cannot be emphasized enough that this research does not intend to explain away the similarities of both paths, but rather to seek a new understanding of the numerous intersections and conjunctions between them, which would be acceptable to both Theravāda Buddhists and Carmelites and without questioning the concept of the human being put forward by both traditions.

Bearing all of the above in mind, we will next revisit the comparative terrain covered in Part III of the study, for therein yields the insights pertinent to the research question. In the first section of Chapter Six, we present and discuss three interconnected working hypotheses. In the second section, we analyze the individual segments of spiritual life identified in the comparative part of the study but this time from the perspective of self.

³ Plantinga writes: "The philosophical doctrine of methodological naturalism holds that, for any study of the world to qualify as scientific, it cannot refer to God's creative activity (or any sort of divine activity)" (Alvin Plantinga, "Methodological Naturalism," in *Origins and Design* 18, 1, 1997, 18-27); Lerner explains: "Methodological naturalism is not a 'doctrine' but an essential aspect of the methodology of science, the study of the natural universe." (Lawrence Lerner: "Methodological Naturalism versus Ontological or Philosophical Naturalism," article published on the webpage: http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/articles/147_proposed_west_virginia_science_2_14_2003.asp)

⁴ Jones, *Philosophy of Mysticism*, 261. Cf. Leonard Angel, "Mystical Naturalism," *Religious Studies* 38 (2002), 317-38.

⁵ For a view on methodological naturalism and religious experience from the Christian standpoint see: Meissner, W. W. *Psychoanalysis and religious experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 6.

6.1 WORKING HYPOTHESES

6.1.1 Introduction

Three interrelated working hypotheses guide the interpretive synthesis of the findings that emerged from the preceding comparative analysis. These three hypotheses are next presented in turn and will be expanded upon in succeeding subsections of this chapter.

6.1.2 Three working hypotheses

6.1.2.1 Transformation and transcendence of the empirical self

Let us state at the onset that the main hypothesis driving this interpretive research is that the processes described by Buddhaghosa and Teresa, despite having unbridgeable paradigms and distinct frameworks and religious ends, intersect in both being matrixes for the transformation and transcendence of the empirical self. With the understanding that “empirical self” here is how the self presents itself phenomenologically to the person. “Empirical self” is consequently a psychological, not an ontological or metaphysical notion. This working hypothesis provides the most plausible explanation for the affinities found throughout the comparative part of the study and, therefore, the answer to our research question. It also explains the selflessness, love and compassion fruition of the two paths.

That for both Buddhists and Christians a fundamental problem of human existence is a wrong understanding of the nature of the experiential self, the person’s identification with it, and the need for change has been said numerous times.⁶ It has even been posited as a significant subject of dialogue⁷ and convergence between our two traditions.⁸ An erroneous identification with the empirical self, in both traditions, leads to the belief in its existence as independent and ontic entity which leads to self-centeredness and egotism. Both traditions also concur that the solution to this problem is the transformation and letting go of self, implying unselfishness and love typically associated with both traditions.

⁶ Among the authors who intuited “going beyond the self” to be the answer to the similarities between Christianity and Buddhism stands William James, who thought Christianity and Buddhism both “are essentially religions of deliverance: the man must die to an unreal life before he can be born into the real life” (James 1901, 162). For Merton: “both Christianity and Buddhism agree that the root of man’s problems is [...] an individual ego in the center of things” (Merton 1973, 332). Pieris says that the chance of a genuine conversation between Buddhists and Christians “lies in letting go of self” (cited by J. D. Gotz in “Catholic Monk, Buddhist Monk: The Monastic Interreligious Dialogue with Japanese Zen,” in *Converging Ways? Conversion and Belonging in Buddhism and Christianity* ed. John D’Arcy May (Ottilien: EOS Klosterverlag, 2007), 23. Roebert says that “For Buddhists and Christians alike, the central problem on the spiritual path is the problem of self” (Donovan Roebert, *The Gospel for Buddhists and the Dharma for Christians*, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub 2009, 211).

⁷ Lynn A. de Silva, *The Problem of the Self in Buddhism and Christianity* (Colombo: Study Centre for Religion, 1975).

⁸ Charlene Burns, “Soul-less” Christianity and the Buddhist empirical self: Buddhist Christian convergence?” in *Buddhist Christian Studies* 23, (2003), 87–100.

Speaking for Buddhism, Thānissaro says that suffering is caused “by any form of craving that leads to becoming. Thus, the end of suffering involves the end of becoming.”⁹ In Christianity, “I-ness,” understood as identity independent from God, it is “not-a-thing,” although it does lead to suffering, making it imperative to stop clinging to this notion.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the hypothesis “transformation and transcendence of the empirical self”, that is, that both processes coincide in transforming and transcending the empirical self, has not been posited as a major premise to explain the experiential and structural parallels along the paths of Theravādins and Carmelites, which is our research question. Furthermore, “why” and “how” the phenomenological similarities and structural parallels between both paths come to be in the first place, meaning how a similar transformation occurs in both traditions, can likewise be adequately explained through this hypothesis.

6.1.2.2 Transformation and transcendence of the self as a gradual process

A second proposition, subordinate to the primary hypothesis just stated above, is that the transformation and transcendence of the phenomenological self in our two traditions occurs as a result of a gradual process. As explained in the background part of this study, the paths described by Buddhaghosa and Teresa are best categorized as stage-based developmental models, involving both structural and dynamic aspects. Yet, the stages in both processes considered here will be those segments identified in Part III of the study.

6.1.2.3 Development according to the nature and structure of the human being

The third hypothesis is that the sequence of developmental segments in our two traditions is not arbitrary but consistent with their understanding of the nature the human being and, particularly, with how they present and expound on the structure of man. A complementary proposition, and another interesting finding is that in the descriptions of our systematizers both processes go from the external to internal, from gross to subtle.

As per the outline of this first section of Chapter Six, we will first define “empirical self,” and see how both traditions understand the empirical self as a problem. We elaborate next on the idea that both processes are matrixes of transformation and transcendence of the experiential self, where such transformation occurs as a gradual process. Finally, we consider a link between this gradual process and the structure of the human being.

⁹ Thānissaro Bhikkhu, *The Paradox of Becoming* (Metta Forest Monastery, 2008), 1.

¹⁰ McGinn, *Mysticism in the Reformation* (The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2017), 78. Teresa explains that we do not know our own nature and erroneously identify with our bodies. Pablo Moroto speaks of “kenotization of the personal ‘I’” (Pablo Moroto, 2014, 250).

6.1.3 The empirical self

Since we have built our main hypotheses based on “empirical self” as a heuristic device, some background work is necessary to define and expand on this psychological notion,¹¹ and examine its connection with our two author’s concepts of the human being.

6.1.3.1 The notion of empirical self

At the turn of the 20th century, the North American psychologist William James revived the notion of empirical self, to whom it meant the “ways people think about themselves,” the total sum a man can call “his.”¹² The empirical self is how the personal self appears phenomenologically to the person.¹³ It includes the empirical “sense of self” and consists of everything a person may call “I,” “me,” or “mine,” which may comprise the person’s body, senses, personality, social roles, possessions, thoughts, memories, and so forth. “Empirical self” is a psychological concept and differs from metaphysical concepts such as “universal self” or “soul,”¹⁴ thus not requiring ontological postulations or metaphysical or religious commitments to employ it.¹⁵ It also differs from such notions as “personality,” “person” and “personal identity,” and should not be understood in any essentialist or reified way, but as compatible with a variety of different conceptions of human nature. Other terms to refer to it are “phenomenal self,” and “experiential self.” For our purposes, we use “empirical self,” or simply “self,” for short.¹⁶ By “empirical self” we may also refer “to the mental apparatus that allows people to think consciously about themselves.”¹⁷

The empirical self appears so factual to the person who experiences it that common sense dictates it must be an existing and enduring reality, a separate entity or substance. For centuries, Western culture conceived the empirical self as a homunculus (“little man”¹⁸), or a substantial self, perceived as an object within the person. Hume and Locke rejected the Cartesian notion of the self as a “substance.”¹⁹ W. James also doubted the self as a substantial agent. Even Freud did not understand the self as an ontic entity.²⁰

¹¹ An extended elaboration on the notion of empirical self is beyond the limitations of this study. For a full explanation see William James, *The Principles of Psychology* Vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications 1950), 291-401.

¹² James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 291.

¹³ The concept of empirical self has been defined as “the self that is known to the self.” See Pam M.S. Nugent, “Empirical Self,” in Psychology Dictionary. Web source: <https://psychologydictionary.org/empirical-self> (accessed June 13, 2018).

¹⁴ The Oxford English Dictionary defines “empirical self” as “that aspect of the self knowable by experience; the conscious self (frequently contrasted with a higher or transcendental self beyond ordinary knowledge or awareness).” (“Empirical self,” OED, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/empirical-self>).

¹⁵ As we will see below, the notion “empirical self” is often employed by Buddhist scholars and Christian theologians alike.

¹⁶ Our study does not attempt a differentiation between self and ego since such distinction is not required for our purposes.

¹⁷ Mark R. Leary, *The Curse of the Self: Self-awareness, Egotism, and the Quality of Human Life* (Oxford: OUP, 2007).

¹⁸ “Homunculus” comes from the Latin *homunculus* [lit. “little person” = “*homo*” (man) with *-culus*, a diminutive suffix].

¹⁹ Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (New York: New York: Pantheon, 2010), 11.

²⁰ Mark Epstein, *Psychotherapy without the Self: A Buddhist Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 166.

Modern brain sciences are putting forward a new understanding of the nature of the empirical self that radically rejects its intellection as a substantial entity. Leaders in different areas of brain research fully agree on the subjective nature of consciousness, but they have arrived at the conclusion that the empirical self is not an ontic reality. Mental activity explains the empirical self, which means that, as such, it does not exist as a substantial entity but springs from a complex interrelation between brain processes. The current understanding among brain scientists is that the empirical self is a mental construct.²¹ Damasio, a leading neuroscientist, and arguably one of the main contributors to our current understanding of the self, considers it to be essential to consciousness. However, for Damasio, the self “is a process, not a thing.” For most brain scientists today, the self is not an agent or a substance (like for Descartes), but a mental function not specifically located in the brain. For some leading neuroscientists, the self is a built-in mechanism, an operational system, designed for the individual’s management.²² For other scientists, the self is an evolutionary adaptation for survival and optimization of the the human being created by associations and maintained by constant mental activity. The self-system generates the sense of self and the belief in its ontological existence.²³

Apart from modern brain sciences, in other areas of knowledge, our understanding of the nature of the empirical self is rapidly changing.²⁴ German philosopher T. Metzinger describes the human self as a “myth” and convincingly explains its created nature.²⁵ For Derek Parfit the question “what constitutes the self?” rests on the misunderstanding of the self as something that has existence in itself.²⁶ For another influential philosopher, Daniel C. Dennett, the self is “the center of narrative gravity” for the brain’s processes.²⁷ Other philosophers argue that self is “made possible by the ambiguities of language.”²⁸ Modern psychoanalytic theory understands the self as functional and representational.²⁹ For French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, we base our concept of empirical self on an “illusory image” (mirror), a mental reflection unconsciously mistaken for something real.³⁰ For the psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion the self is one of the complexities of being human.³¹

²¹ The neuroscientist Bruce Hood calls the self an “illusion.” See Bruce Hood, *The Self Illusion: How the Social Brain Creates Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), viii. See also Anil Ananthaswamy *The Man Who Wasn't There: Investigations into the Strange New Science of the Self* (New York: Dutton, 2015), 257.

²² Jonathon D. Brown, *The Self* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 32.

²³ Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, 9.

²⁴ The self has become an important subject of scientific investigation. Shaun Gallagher, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of the Self* (Oxford: OUP, 2011).

²⁵ Thomas Metzinger, *The Ego Tunnel: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of the Self* (New York: Basic Books, 2009).

²⁶ Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

²⁷ Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Back Bay Books 1992).

²⁸ S. A. Mitchell, *Hope and Dread in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 100.

²⁹ Epstein, *Psychotherapy without the Self*, 45.

³⁰ Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits, a selection*, translated by Alan Sheridan (W. W. Norton, 1977).

³¹ Wilfred Bion, *Attention and Interpretation* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970).

6.1.3.2 The functions of the self-system

Having touched on the contemporary understanding of the nature of the empirical self, let us next discuss some of the functions of the self-system briefly. As central mental apparatus, the self-system performs a series of functions, some indispensable for the survival for the organism. Without trying to be exhaustive, some of these functions are:

The self-system generates the empirical self, both as a function for the organism and as an experience, that is, the sense of having a separate and autonomous self. By doing so, reifies the empirical self, creating the illusion of its reality and representing it as ontologically existent, an autonomous agent, a separate subject of experience, making consequently possible to maintain a subjective sense of self and personal continuity. It creates the impression of a coherent psychological, synchronic and diachronic enduring unity, out of different feelings, sensations, thoughts, impressions, memories and the like.

The self-system generates self-awareness and self-consciousness for the organism, but also a self-perspective. One of the functions of the self-system is to organize all the information coming from the environment around self-referential cognitive structures. By putting itself at the center of mental life, with a keen interest in itself, it enhances the possibilities of survival for the organism and maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain.

The self-system performs a function of self-management and control for the person. As Suler puts it, the self acts “as a superordinate organizing principle of the psyche that embodies and unifies all the facets of selfhood.”³² The self is an intrapsychic structure that enables the coordination of the diverse aspects of a person’s mental functioning. The self-system manages frequently very contradictory impulses within the person, allowing the adoption of deliberate decisions and the control of inclinations and conduct.

The self-system creates a representational model for the person and what is called a “self-concept.” As Epstein says: “the representational self is an internalized concept of who or what we are, made up of a shifting amalgam of intrapsychic representations that coalesce in varying ways into our repertoire of self-images.”³³ This more or less unified self-referential model relates to personal identity and is a core function of the self-system. The self-concept binds manifold self-images and exterior inputs creating a self-image, a self-description, that allows the person to think about himself as unitary and consistent.

³² John R. Suler, *Contemporary Psychoanalysis and Eastern Thought* (New York: SUNY, 1993), 42.

³³ Epstein, *Psychotherapy without the Self*, 212.

As Metzinger puts it, this “representational model” is typically transparent to itself.³⁴

As Northoff explains, the person’s self “is based on summarizing, integrating, and coordinating the information from the body and brain creating a model of the person.”³⁵ This “self-concept” includes physical characteristics, gender, ethnicity, personality traits, likes and dislikes, social identity, relationships with others, status, ideology and the like.

The “self-concept,” and what Damasio calls the “autobiographical self,” is constructed by an internal and personal self “narrative”³⁶ that confers the sense of unity³⁷ and reality to the person’s self and is how the person experiences himself in interaction with others. This self-narrative confers the organism the possibility of a long-term sense of personal continuity, reviewing the past, planning for the future, and the sense of a personal self; Some philosophers have argued that “the demands of living in a postmodern society raise certain difficulties for an individual’s construction of a singular coherent identity.”³⁸

But how this personal sense of self comes to be? Physiological processes, emotions, feelings, thoughts and ideas, memories, likes and dislikes and so forth become “I,” “me,” or “mine” by identification. The sum of all these various layers of identification constitutes a particular personal self. As Northoff explains: “phenomenological philosophers assume that the special contribution of the self consists in what they describe as ‘belongingness’ or ‘mineness.’”³⁹ The raw contents of experience are then felt as belonging to a particular self, they are experienced as “me” or “mine,” because of attachment and identification.

In summary, the human self-system is a pivotal cognitive structure that performs a series of functions, some of them crucial for the individual’s survival and betterment. As a psychic mechanism, it creates a self-conceptualization that allows the person to think about himself, continually self-evaluating his own thoughts, attitudes and actions increasing in this way his chances of survival. It organizes all knowledge to maximize its well-being and continuity. However, not all the functions of the self are favorable for the individual. We will comment later in this chapter on the downside of the self-system; how the self—by creating a delusional sense of a fixed personal identity, continuity and separation—carries with it existential angst and, with it, the desire for self-transcendence.

³⁴ Thomas Metzinger, *Being No One. The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge: Ma: MIT Press, 2003).

³⁵ Georg Northoff, “Brain and self – a neurophilosophical account,” in *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health* (2013): 7-28.

³⁶ Ananthaswamy, *The Man Who Wasn't There*, 36.

³⁷ J. D. Brown, *The Self* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 32.

³⁸ “The Self,” *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, Vol. 2 (New York; Macmillan Reference, 2003), 792.

³⁹ Northoff, “Brain and self – a neurophilosophical account,” 7-28. William James offers a similar explanation of belongingness (“warmth and intimacy”) at the root of the empirical self (See Chapter Ten of his *Principles of Psychology*).

6.1.3.3 The empirical self in Buddhism and Christianity

In the background part of this study, we examined the anthropologies of Theravāda and Christianity and found entirely different concepts of the nature of the human being. This section aims to show how the concept of empirical self relates to our two traditions. It must be remarked that when we introduce the psychological concept of “empirical self,” we must proceed with caution, as we are introducing a paradigm alien to both traditions.

“Empirical self” is a psychological concept, metaphysically and ontologically neutral. By using it, we are not rebutting ontological or metaphysical commitments to the status of the person in both traditions. The observable self is the self as known to the person. Certainly, our two traditions would agree that the phenomenological self, that is, the self as it appears and is experienced by the person,⁴⁰ does not contradict or negate their respective concept of the nature of a person. The psychological or empirical self could be more or less close to the definition of the ultimate reality of the person as understood by each of our two traditions. It can be the crude and selfish self of the worldly person or the unselfish, loving and purified self of the quasi-liberated person or the Christian saint.

6.1.3.3.1 The empirical self in Buddhism

We have considered, in Section 3.3.1.1, the Buddhist doctrine of no-self (*anattā*) and learned that Buddhism denies the existence of an ontological, autonomous and enduring self. Such denial does not mean that Buddhism refutes the presence of an empirical self. When we speak of a phenomenological or empirical self in relation to Buddhism, we are not contradicting the doctrine of *anattā*. As Tao Jiang says: “the Buddha’s teaching does not reject an empirical self as constitutive of our everyday experience. Only the empirical self accounts for our sense of a self, which is nothing other than an empirical continuum vis-à-vis a series of psychophysical events mistaken as a metaphysical identity.”⁴¹ Albahari remarks: “given that losing the sense of self has been correlated with ditching *taṇhā*, on the road to *nibbāna*, the self, as construed in Buddhism, must be something we could plausibly have a sense of being.”⁴² Buddhism recognizes that man experiences a sense of self, with which the unenlightened person identifies and to which is attached.

⁴⁰ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “empirical self” as “that aspect of the self knowable by experience; the conscious self (frequently contrasted with a higher or transcendental self beyond ordinary knowledge or awareness)” (“Empirical Self” in *Oxford English Dictionary*. Web Source: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/empirical_self)

⁴¹ Tao Jiang, *Contexts and Dialogue: Yogācāra Buddhism and Modern Psychology on the Subliminal Mind* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 24.

⁴² Albahari, *Analytical Buddhism*, 50.

Several Buddhist notions imply such an awareness. For example, the word *ahaṃkāra*, which means the “I-maker,”⁴³ implies awareness of a sense of self; *svasaṃvedana* refers to the reflexive nature of consciousness, immediate acquaintance with conscious states, denoting a sense of self; the word *asmi-māna*, which means “I am,” “sense of I,” likewise implies a continuing sense of “I” through time; *sakkāya-dīṭṭhi* (personality view), that is the belief that the aggregates are the self, also implies the presence of an empirical self.

Some Buddhist scholars have adopted the notion of empirical self in their analyses. Kalupahana writes: “a careful reading of the early discourses reveals that these five aggregates also perform the positive function of clarifying what an empirical self is.”⁴⁴ For Harvey: “while [in Buddhism] an empirical self exists [...] no metaphysical Self can be apprehended.”⁴⁵ Harvey also states that “[Based on the analysis found in the Suttas of the Pali Canon]...the empirical person or self certainly exists: the changing, interacting bundle of mental and physical processes: body, feelings, perceptions/cognitions, constructing activities (will, emotions), and consciousness.”⁴⁶ Malalasekera concurs that Buddhism does not deny the presence of an empirical self, but the reality of a permanent individuality, an unchanging ontic self.⁴⁷ Buddhism does not deny human personality, subjectivity or a psychological “I.” “Empirical self” is used by these Buddhist scholars as an appropriate heuristic convention compatible with the doctrine of no-self. How the person experiences himself could be a source of attachment persisting in consciousness until the entrenched illusion of “I am” is eradicated. The Buddhist path is a process consisting of the gradual deconstruction of such a delusion, born of ignorance and attachment, and source of suffering and binding to cycle of death and rebirth. Liberation coincides with the dispelling of such an illusion and the final transcendence of the sense of “I am.” In enlightenment, the empirical self dissolves in realization on its lack of inherent nature.

6.1.3.3.2 The empirical self in Christianity and Teresa

When studying Teresa’s theological anthropology, in Section 4.3, we saw how the author of *Moradas* conceives the human being to be. Unlike in Buddhism, in the Christian worldview the soul exists, it has an ontological—not merely phenomenological—reality. But, as we will see next, the Christian idea of the self is not that of modern subjectivity.

⁴³ The word *ahaṃkāra* has the meanings of selfishness, egoism and arrogance but also implies “the sense of oneself as single entity enduring through time” (*ahaṃ* = “I” + *kāra* = “to do” = the I-maker).

⁴⁴ Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy*, 71.

⁴⁵ Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 33.

⁴⁶ Harvey, “Self-Development and Self-Transcendence in Theravada Buddhist Thought and Practice.”

⁴⁷ Malalasekera, “The Status of the Individual in Theravada Buddhism,” *Philosophy East & West* 14 (1964), 145-56.

On the one hand, Christianity asserts the ontological reality of the soul. Teresa speaks of the creatureliness, great capacity, beauty and sublime dignity of the soul (1M 1,1). On the other and, paradoxically, Christianity demands self-denial and the death of the self.⁴⁸ In Christianity, the soul is created by God and depends upon God for its existence.⁴⁹ It is at the very center of the soul that the human being come to know its source in God. The life of man is “hidden in Christ.” Teresa exclaims: “we do not see ourselves in this mirror that we contemplate, where our image is engraved” (7M 2,8). The soul can unite with God because “by sharing in our nature He has become one with us here below” (C 33,5).

As with Buddhism, the concept of the empirical self is compatible with the Christian concept of the soul and, indeed, Christian spiritual and psychological writers employ this psychological concept as a heuristic tool that does not conflict with the notion of soul.⁵⁰ “Empirical self,” as used by these Christian writers, does not relate to an ontological and metaphysical reality, but to how the person perceives himself depending on his degree of humility, selflessness, love and self-knowledge, which are the main threads to God.⁵¹

The Biblical and Teresa’s references to the “death of the self”⁵² do not refer to the soul itself, but to the sinful and ignorant self.⁵³ In Teresa’s parlance, what is transformed and dies is the ugly silkworm by being transformed from a chrysalis into a white graceful butterfly (5M 2,2). It is this self that, on a path to God, with increasing humility, love, self-knowledge, gradually realizes its nothingness and dependence on God for existence. It is this self of “pride and conceit,” McGinn explains, that changes into “Teresa’s new self [that] is not independent or autonomous, but is swallowed up in the love of God.”⁵⁴ Ciro García puts it well: “the ‘I’ [Teresa] discovers on her path to interiority is a subject open to an absolute dimension that overflows and transcends her. God appears on the horizon of her interiority as the savior of her own ‘I.’ It is the intimate Deus of St. Augustine.”⁵⁵

⁴⁸ In the Gospel we find phrases like: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn. 12:24). “no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again” (Jn. 3:3); “if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Cor 5:17). Cf. Mk 8:35 and Lk. 9:23;

⁴⁹ Teresa writes: “Oh Beauty exceeding / all other beauties! ...Oh, knot that binds / two so different [...] / bind the one without being with being unending” (Poetry, “Oh Exceeding Beauty”).

⁵⁰ See, for example: Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 26.

⁵¹ As the person passes through the seven concentric mansions to the castle’s center, his self-understanding changes from that of an autonomous self to the realization of the relative nature of the empirical self and his dependence on God. As the mystical self progresses, that flawed image of autonomous individuality recedes until the sense of separation between creature and Creator is transcended, though the personal distinction between the two persist.

⁵² Teresa says “¡let this silkworm die, as it does in completing what it was created to do! And you will see how we see God” (5M 2,6).

⁵³ As McGinn explains, annihilation of the self “is essentially a matter of the consciousness of the mystic and not the structures of reality themselves” (McGinn, “Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” 6335).

⁵⁴ Bernard McGinn, “True confessions: Augustine and Teresa of Avila on the mystical self,” in *Teresa of Avila: Mystical Theology and Spirituality in the Carmelite Tradition*, ed. Edward Howells and Peter Tyler (N.Y.: Routledge, 2017), 10.

⁵⁵ Ciro García Fernández, “Antropología teresiano-sanjuanista y oración,” in *Burgense* 44 (2003), 134.

The self of the person not yet realized as depended on God is perceived by the person as real, substantial, and independent entity when, in reality, it is “not-a-thing” in itself. Stein expresses this self-perceiving without God: “my being, as I find it and as I represent it to me, is a vain being; I do not exist for myself, and for myself I am nothing.”⁵⁶ Teresa: “We have our being from God, that He created us from nothing and sustains us” (v 10,5). The “I” experienced outside the castle and the “I” that dies in Christ are two dissimilar experiences at opposite ends of the spectrum. The self of the Seventh Mansion—what is called the “mystical self”—is the self purged of false identifications and ignorance about its “I” status, that has died to itself, and is conscious of its radical dependence on God.

Throughout the seven mansions, the experience of the personal self thus changes radically, in a transformation from the “natural self” to the “mystical self.” As Howell says: “the continuity of selfhood lies in the self-God relation rather than in the self as presently conceived.”⁵⁷ Through this process the personal self is not annihilated but transformed. The mystical self is constituted by its relation to God. About this relational mystical self Cerezo Galán eloquently writes: “In a circular relationship, the Teresian subject realizes the infinite experience of himself in God and finds the experience of God in himself.”⁵⁸

6.1.3.3.3 Empirical self in Theravāda and Teresa

When we compare the Buddhist and Christian doctrines on the nature of the human being, we are informed by vastly different anthropologies.⁵⁹ Both traditions hold a notion of the human being in precise opposition to each other—“no-self” (*anattā*) in Buddhism and “eternal soul” on the Christian side—without apparent possibility of reconciliation.⁶⁰ Nonetheless, although both traditions have an opposing view on the nature of the person, they both agree that: (1) the self-understanding of the ordinary person is wrong. The way he conceives his being to be is not what he really is; (2) this misunderstanding is noxious and constitutes an essential problem for the person; and (3) this understanding can be transformed. To these points we shall turn our attention next.

⁵⁶ Edith Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being* (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 2002), 55.

⁵⁷ Edward Howells, *John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila: Mystical Knowing and Selfhood* (N.Y.: Crossroad, 2002), 127.

⁵⁸ Pedro Cerezo Galán, “La experiencia de la subjetividad en Teresa de Jesús,” in *La recepción de los místicos Teresa de Jesús y Juan de la Cruz*, ed. S. Ros García (Salamanca: Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 1997), 173.

⁵⁹ For informative comparative studies between the Buddhist’s and Christian’s understandings of the human being see: Julia Ching, “Paradigms of the Self in Buddhism and Christianity,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 4 (1984): 31-50; Charlene Bums, “‘Soul-Less’ Christianity and the Buddhist Empirical Self: Buddhist-Christian Convergence?,” in *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 23 (2003), 87-100; Paul O. Ingram and David R. Loy, “The Self and Suffering: A Buddhist-Christian Conversation,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Theology*, Vol. 44, 1 (2005), 98-107; and Harry Lee Wells, “The Problem of the Phenomenal Self: A Study of the Buddhist Doctrine of Anattā with Specific Regard to Buddhist-Christian Dialogue,” PhD dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988.

⁶⁰ Although it is one of the fundamental differences, there have been attempts (in our view unsuccessful) of reconciliation. See Lynn A. de Silva, *The Problem of the Self in Buddhism and Christianity* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1979) for an intent of reconciliation between the Biblical/Judaic and Theravāda understanding of the nature of the human being.

6.1.4 The empirical self as a problem in Buddhism and Christianity

6.1.4.1 Introduction

Buddhists and Christians alike believe that something is fundamentally wrong with the ordinary human being that causes him to suffer, and they set out to liberate or save him from it. This “something” is actually many things but, essentially, a misconception of his real nature. Buddhism and Christianity have almost opposite anthropologies,⁶¹ but they reconcile in that the crucial problem of man is his misidentification with the empirical self.

Probably by constitution, the human being identifies with the empirical self, which is a sense generated by the person’s identification with the body, senses, memory, intellect and so forth.⁶² Through such identification, a product of the “analytical mind,”⁶³ the empirical self substantializes, perpetuates and reifies itself out of a non-substantial reality. Such a sense of selfhood sets the ground for the person’s self-understanding as a separate, autonomous, substantial individual, which is the root of self-centeredness, the sense of separateness, egoism, sinfulness, guilt, worry, anguish⁶⁴ and the inimical feelings that our two traditions traditionally associate with the mundane consciousness.⁶⁵

The fact that the human being has self-awareness and identifies with his body, which is destined to die, is also a cause of anguish and a repressed consciousness of death. Such anguish and suffering are recognized at the center of the Buddhist and Christian analyses of the human condition, but also are at the center of ego-psychology⁶⁶ and existential philosophy⁶⁷ and psychoanalysis. This existential angst seems intrinsic to the self,⁶⁸ as the menace of death disrupts the self.⁶⁹ The ontological problem of the self has another aspect: the empirical self by itself has no real existence which, as Loy observes, is another source of anxiety. All this deep human suffering, euphemistically called the “human condition,” is key to Buddhism and Christianity, although approached differently.

⁶¹ Silva comments: “Buddhism is supposed to deny precisely what Christianity affirms; one teaches the doctrine of no-soul (*anattā*) while the other teaches, it is assumed, just the opposite –the doctrine of the immortal soul” (Silva 1979, 1).

⁶² James H. Austin, *Selfless Insight Zen and the Meditative Transformations of Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009), 52.

⁶³ Jones, *Philosophy of Mysticism*, 8.

⁶⁴ David Loy, *Lack and Transcendence: Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism, and Buddhism* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1996).

⁶⁵ The sense of a separated self produces a sense of alienation from nature and causes our estrangement from reality.

⁶⁶ As Fingarette explains “the concept of anxiety is at the core of ego-psychology” (Herbert Fingarette, *The Self in Transformation: Psychoanalysis, Philosophy, and The Life of The Spirit* New York, Basic Books Inc., 1963, 71).

⁶⁷ The existential philosophies of Heidegger, Sartre, Camus and Tillich had an enormous impact on 20th century culture.

⁶⁸ Fingarette says: “I hold that anxiety is the other face of ego. It is not primarily an affect, one among many affects, which the ego must master; rather it is ego-disintegration” (Fingarette 1963, 73).

⁶⁹ Anxiety is a generalized sense of hopelessness, powerlessness, inability to deal with danger outside one’ own control. The essential source of anxiety is death.

6.1.4.2 The empirical self as a problem in Buddhism

The first Noble Truth states the truth of suffering (*dukkha*). The word *dukkha* means “discontent,” “dis-ease.” The eradication of *dukkha* is the ultimate goal of Buddhism. There are many kinds of *dukkha*. From a soteriological perspective, the deepest source of *dukkha* is misidentification with and clinging to the self.⁷⁰ According to Buddhism, the human being is not an enduring self (*attā*) but an amalgamation of five psychological and physical (*nāma-rūpa*) elements, called “aggregates” (*khandhas*), which are unsubstantial and always changing. The human being suffers because of his identification with and attachment (clinging) to the aggregates, through which he comes to believe that he is (or has) an ontic self or soul. The Buddha describes *dukkha* as the aggregates of clinging: “In brief, the five aggregates of clinging are *dukkha*. This, monks, is the Noble Truth of Dukkha” (DN 22). The belief that the human being is an ontological and enduring self is an illusion born out of ignorance (i.e., “the epitome of ignorance”) and the primary cause of *dukkha*, which Buddhism seeks to eradicate through the realization of *anattā*.⁷¹

The second Noble Truth declares that the origin of *dukkha* is *taṇhā*, a word frequently translated as “craving,” but that also can mean “attachment.” The human being suffers because he craves the objects of the senses, but also due to a craving for becoming and non-becoming, that is, for clinging to personal existence or for craving for nonexistence.

The third Noble Truth states that cessation of *dukkha* is possible and depends on the cessation of craving (*taṇhā*). With the cessation of craving the person realizes *nibbāna*. This means that the person can shed *dukkha* by the experiential realization that the sense of “I” at the core of subjective experience is not the “I,” “me” or “myself” of a substantial entity, as the way leading to the cessation of *dukkha* (SN III 44).

The fourth Noble Truth is the Truth of the way to remove suffering, or state of *nibbāna*. It is the path (*magga*) to the realization of unconditioned existence: the realization that no permanent self exists in or above the *khandhas*. The person on the path to liberation reaches his ultimate goal only upon the complete elimination of the clinging to self.

⁷⁰ The belief in the reality of the self is the principal cause and deepest source of the suffering Buddhism seeks to eradicate. Engler says: “from the Buddhist perspective the psychopathological problem is the presence of a self and the feeling of selfhood. According to Buddhist diagnosis, the deepest source of suffering is the attempt to preserve a self, an attempt that is both futile and self defeating. The severest form of psychopathology is precisely *attavadupadana*, the clinging to personal existence” (John H. Engler, *Paths Beyond Ego*, New Consciousness Reader, 1993, 118).

⁷¹ Buddhism understands that from ignorance (*avijjā*) there arises in the ordinary man (*puthujjana*) three defilements responsible for his misconception of selfhood: the personal-identity view (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*), “craving,” (*taṇhā*) and the conceit of “I am” (*asmīti*). It is due to the belief in the reality of self that man suffers from ageing, decay and dying, and experiences sorrow.

6.1.4.3 The self as a problem in Christianity and Teresa

In Christianity, pride (*superbia*) is the original and deadliest of the seven deadly sins. For Christians, spiritually, pride involves an inordinate self-love and the rejection of God. If, for Christians, sin is defined as “a vitiated state of human nature in which the self is estranged from God,”⁷² pride is the epitome of sin, as it means that the human being rejects recognizing his dependence on God and a rebellious self-assertion against God. In the Christian tradition, as Shaw explains, “sin is the self-reliant refusal of the creature to live in dependence on the creator, the rebellious self-assertion of the creature.”⁷³

For the ordinary person, rooted in sin and ignorance, the empirical self appears real, autonomous and independent of God, asserting it against God. Such understanding and self-assertion are aspects of pride and the basis of man’s suffering, as identification with the self and attachment to it imply the negation of God, the true source of man’s being. To be out of harm’s way, the person must give up sin and this deceitful notion of self.

In Christianity, giving up the self is expressed as dying to one’s self so as to live in Christ. The person must realize that the self or soul only exists in relation to God, as created in His image and likeness.⁷⁴ The mystical self is “transcendentally relational;”⁷⁵ recognizes its dependence on God for its existence. Throughout the mystical mansions, the immature, sinful and self-centered empirical self die and be born into a new life. The life Teresa lives from this point on, she says, is the one that God lives in her (V 23,1). As McGinn explains, for the Christian, “the self that we are meant to be, is not to achieve inner autonomy or to realize our ‘individuality’ (whatever that might be) [...] but is rather to work on the deepening appropriation of our image-nature, our being created in the image and likeness of God.” And McGinn adds, “Teresa’s new self is not independent or autonomous but is swallowed up in the love of God.”⁷⁶ At one point, Teresa exclaims: “May the Lord be praised who freed me from myself” (V 23,1). She realized that her self is not autonomous but relational, entirely dependent on God.⁷⁷ The process of giving up self-will and self-reliance and gaining trust in God can be painful.⁷⁸ But, at the other side of the process, it reappears a divinized self, a self in self-perceived participation in God.

⁷² “Sin,” MWD. Web source: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sin>

⁷³ Marvin C. Shaw, *The Paradox of Intention: reaching the goal by giving up the attempt to reach it* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1988), 88.

⁷⁴ McGinn, “True Confessions,” 17.

⁷⁵ *Idem*, 9.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Teresa “For in reflecting upon it carefully, Sisters, we realize that the soul of the just person is nothing else but a paradise where the Lord says He finds His delight” (1M 1,1).

⁷⁸ Teresa exclaims: “What a soul suffers and what torments it endures when it loses its freedom to be its own master! I am astonished now that I was able to live in such a state of torment” (V 9,8).

6.1.4.4 Conclusion

Having analyzed what both traditions have to say about the human condition and its cause, we can isolate common problems: debilitating suffering due to the precariousness of the human condition, anxiety due to awareness of death and lack of an intrinsic being (apart from God in Christianity), and self-preoccupation that comes with self-awareness. Our survey shows that identification with the empirical self, with resulting egocentricity and selfishness, is *the* common root of the religious malaise tackled by both Buddhism and Christianity,⁷⁹ which agrees with what has been observed in existential philosophy. The identification of the person with the empirical self and clinging to personal existence seem to be intrinsic to the human mind; a universal phenomenon. Man's relationship with death is undoubtedly complex. It would be an oversimplification to relate the origins of religion to this dimension of human anxiety alone. But death is a facet of human existence that has deep implications for the self as "that death poses very real danger to the ego."⁸⁰

The root cause of the empirical self as a problem in both traditions is ultimately ignorance. Buddhism defines the problem of human existence as one of selfhood, craving and suffering. This essential misconception is ultimately attributed to ignorance (*avijjā*), understood as not knowing one's own nature. Christianity analyzes the human situation in terms of the original sin. This seemingly separates the two traditions.⁸¹ However, a careful reading of Teresa shows that also for her sin is ultimately driven by, and rooted in ignorance. What the person outside the castle believes himself to be is not his true being (1M 1,2).⁸²

In summary, there are similarities between the consideration of the empirical self as a problem in Buddhism and Christianity, but there is likewise the need to differentiate. The fact that both traditions believe that the empirical self is not an independent and substantial reality is essential. But, for the Buddhist, the human person is contingent on causes and conditions. For the Christian, the person depends wholly on God for his existence.⁸³

⁷⁹ As Cooney says, Buddhist and Christian traditions "clearly see egocentricity as the root of suffering and damage" (Paula Cooney, "Response to Alan Sponberg's 'The Buddhist Conception of an Ecological Self,'" in *The Sound of Liberating Truth: Buddhist-Christian Dialogues in Honor of Frederick J. Streng*, ed. S. B. King and O. Ingram (Richmond: Curzon, 1999), 130; Mellor writes: "von Balthasar believed that 'both the eastern person beginning the religious path and the western Christian turning towards God experience a sense of dissatisfaction with the world as it appears and with the 'empirical I', by which he means our common understanding of self" Philip A. Mellor, "Self and Suffering: Deconstruction and Reflexive Definition in Buddhism and Christianity," *Religious Studies* 27 (1991): 49–63.

⁸⁰ W. W. Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 71.

⁸¹ Conze, *Buddhism: A Short History*, 8.

⁸² Ross ask herself: "Might it not be that, rather than fundamentally disagreeing. Buddhism and Christianity come at this problem of self-centredness from different angles?" (Ross 2011, 118).

⁸³ As Stabile puts it: "Although the 'I' seems like a self-existent, independent entity, we do not, in fact, exist as independent,

6.1.5 Transformation and transcendence of the empirical self

Having elaborated on the notion of empirical self, and dealt with the empirical self as a problem, let us return now to our main hypothesis. If the religious problem common to the Theravāda and Carmelite paths is the person's identification with the empirical self, the solution that both traditions seek is the transformation and transcendence of the phenomenological self. The processes described by our authors, despite having distinct paradigms and religious frameworks, intersect in being matrixes for transformation and transcendence of the empirical self. It is through these processes that persons following either path develop the selflessness and love typically defined as ideals of both traditions. Let us next discuss the notions of transformation and transcendence separately.

6.1.5.1 Transformation of the empirical self

“Transformation of the self” means identity change.⁸⁴ Both Buddhism and Christianity recognize the human being's capacity for change.⁸⁵ Both religious cultures maintain that human nature is perfectible; the self is not an inalterable entity and can be transformed.⁸⁶ Otherwise, spiritual growth would not be possible and would be no use for religious life. Quite the contrary, spiritual practice in both cases implies dynamism, continuous effort, gradual—albeit radical—change. Both traditions describe themselves with metaphors such as “path,” and “way.”⁸⁷ In fact, both systems are paradigms for inner transformation.

In their ultimate ends, the paths described by Buddhaghosa and Teresa diverge. The Buddhist path leads to liberation, while the Christian path leads to sanctification. But, regarding the transformative process, both traditions are analogous in many respects. Both seek the improvement or betterment of the person. From the viewpoint of the self, both transformations are extensive and genuine, not only psychological but also spiritual.

autonomous beings. Buddhists say the “I” exists in dependence on causes and conditions. We as Christians understand we exist in dependence on God” (Stabile 2012, 208).

⁸⁴ Fingarette, *The Self in Transformation*.

⁸⁵ Buddhism is founded on the premise that the person is not a substantial and permanent self. Karma is not deterministic. In several *suttas*, the Buddha assures his disciples that the person is changeable, otherwise religious life would be futile. Dynamic transformation is possible when causes and condition concur. Writing on the Buddhist notion of “no-self,” Gyatso says: “The *self* [...] is believed to be fluid and flexible, an ever-changing bundle of memories, dispositions, experiences, and conceptions. By being conditioned and constructed, then, the self is also viewed as changeable” (Janet Gyatso: “The Ins and Outs of Self-Transformation: Personal and Social Sides of Visionary Practice in Tibetan Buddhism,” In *Self and Self-Transformation in the History of Religions*, ed. David Shulman and Guy G. Stroumsa (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 184. St. Paul says: “Do not model yourselves on the behavior of the world around you, but let your behavior change, modeled by your new mind” (Ro. 22,2). The idea of transformation of the soul is intrinsic to Teresa's image of the seven mansions.

⁸⁶ Bhikkhu Bodhi remarks: “self-transformation is a fundamental goal of the Buddha's teaching [...] The Dhamma was never intended for those who are already perfect saints. It is addressed to fallible human beings beset with all the shortcomings typical of unpolished human nature [...] The purpose of the teaching is to transform such people—ourselves—into accomplished ones” (Bhikkhu Bodhi, “Self-Transformation,” *Newsletter*, 16, BPS, Summer-Fall 1994).

⁸⁷ Buddhism is based on the Noble Eightfold “Path,” the “way” (*magga*) to liberation. “*Yana*” (vehicle) also conveys the idea of change. Christ is “the Way.” Christianity is the path to salvation. Teresa speaks of “the way to perfection.”

Both processes imply a transformation not limited to a maladaptive self, but one that extends to all aspects of the person: perceptual, affective, cognitive, conative and so on. Both seek freedom from slavery to egotism, remedy to spiritual misery, the development of knowledge, love and compassion, and a state of happiness and spiritual perfection. This implies a transformation of the self. The Buddhist path, as Bodhi explains, is a path of “self-transformation;”⁸⁸ a progression from the *puthujjana*’s mind—filled by impurities and clouded by greed, hatred, and delusion—to the pure, luminous mind of the *arahant*. The Christian path is also a path in which a transformation occurs along a continuum.⁸⁹ Throughout *Vida*, Teresa’s “I” changes.⁹⁰ As O’Keefe puts it: “the way of transformation as taught by Teresa of Jesus begins with wonder at the beauty of the human person created in the image of God, and it ends, in this life, with a transforming union with God.”⁹¹

From the viewpoint of transformation, the initial stages in both traditions bring about a purification and integration of the person. Conversion is essential to identity change. By adopting a moral life, detrimental traits and habits (vices) are abandoned and wholesome moral qualities (virtue) are developed. Governing passions and impulses through the correct practice of asceticism constructs a new source of self-identification. Gradually, the fragmented and confused person, polarized by opposite intrapsychic forces and drives, grows in cohesion, self-understanding and self-image. Thought and reflection procure a change in the person’s habitual and obsolete ways of thinking. The internalization of each tradition values and principles also provides a new worldview. Further developmental integration and transformation occurs, helped by growth in self-awareness due to the development of pure attention, mindfulness and concentration. The purified and unified self that emerges from this process, is additionally transformed through the *jhānas* (i.e., self-effort in Buddhism), and passively experiencing the mystical unions of the Fifth and Sixth Mansions (i.e., works assisted by grace in Christianity). The religious paths described by Buddhaghosa and Teresa, therefore, provide the necessary contexts and means for a transformation of the basics conditions that sustain the self.

In the second part of this chapter, we shall revisit the individual segments delineated in the systemic blueprint for change identified in our previous comparative analysis, but now reconsidering each one of these individual segments from the viewpoint of changes in the empirical self.

⁸⁸ Bodhi: “Self-Transformation,” 1994.

⁸⁹ Benedict J. Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages: The Psychology of Spiritual Development* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 29. St. Paul “has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:16-17).

⁹⁰ Afra Sinnige-Breed, “Evolución normal y unitaria del ‘yo’ teresiano a la luz de su vida interior,” *Revista de Espiritualidad* (1963): 238-50.

⁹¹ Mark O’Keefe, *The Way of Transformation*.

6.1.5.2 Transcendence of the empirical self

Jones writes: “Virtually every religion has said that spiritual growth and transformation involve some dying to self.”⁹² “Spirituality” is habitually related to “self-transcendence.”⁹³ It may seem counterintuitive to speak of “transcendence of self,” or to question the nature of consciousness, considering the phenomenology of everyday consciousness, and the established tenet of the Western world that “consciousness cannot exist without self.” Yet, there is a growing recognition in forums as diverse as modern philosophy⁹⁴ and neuroscience, that self is a characteristic but not inalienable property of consciousness. What does “transcendence of the empirical self” mean in our context? It means moving beyond identification with the experiential self or, as defined, “the overcoming of the limits of the individual self and its desires in spiritual contemplation and realization.”⁹⁵ As a state, the transcendence of the empirical self consists of the loss of the sense of self, ego-consciousness, or consciousness of having an independent and separate identity. It specifically means putting an end to the person’s attachment to the experiential self. With it, ego-perspective and self-centeredness are overcome temporally or permanently.

Modern psychology, brain sciences and contemporary philosophy recognize the nature of the self as a process, but rarely that the empirical self might be transcended. Some scientists, however, have proposed that transcending the self is indeed possible. For the psychologist Maslow self-transcendence is a step beyond self-actualization.⁹⁶ Newberg, a leading neuroscientist in the intersection of brain research and religion, says: “the brain seems to have the built-in ability to transcend the perception of an individual self. We have theorized that this talent for self-transcendence lies at the root of the religious urge.”⁹⁷ The philosopher Krueger considers that “the phenomenal character of consciousness [...] does not require the existence of a stable, permanent, or unconditioned self.”⁹⁸ James wrestled all his life with the question of whether the self is an intrinsic aspect of consciousness, leaning toward transcendence.⁹⁹ For Metzinger “no such things as selves exist in the world.”¹⁰⁰ The debate continues with a rising number of authors, among them the neuroscientist Ananthaswamy,¹⁰¹ expressing similar ideas.

⁹² Jones, *The Mirror of God*, 148.

⁹³ Polly Young-Eisendrath and Melvin Miller, ed., *The Psychology of Mature Spirituality* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

⁹⁴ Joel W. Krueger, “The Who and the How of Experience,” in *Self, No Self? Perspectives from Analytical, Phenomenological and Indian Traditions* ed. Mark Siderits, Evan Thompson and Dan Zahavi (Oxford OUP, 2011), 27-55.

⁹⁵ “Self-transcendence,” OED. Web source: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/self-transcendence>

⁹⁶ Abraham H. Maslow, “The farther reaches of human nature,” *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 1, 1, (1969), 1–9.

⁹⁷ Newberg, *Why God Won't Go Away*, 174.

⁹⁸ Krueger, “The Who and the How of Experience,” 27-28.

⁹⁹ Jonathan Bricklin, *The Illusion of Will, Self*.

¹⁰⁰ Metzinger, *Being No One*, 1.

¹⁰¹ Ananthaswamy, *The Man Who Wasn't There*, 249-50.

Buddhism is an emancipatory system whose purpose is the end of suffering and for which the overcoming of identification with the illusion of having a self is the essence. The Four Noble Truths emphasize the role of self in the origination of suffering because of craving for existence (*bhava-taṇhā*),¹⁰² craving for non-existence (*vibhava-taṇhā*) and by giving rise to “I,” “me,” and “mine,” through “clinging” to the five aggregates. In order to put an end to suffering, attachment to the five clinging aggregates must be given up. As Bodhi explains: “The five aggregates are [...] the ultimate grounds of ‘identification’ and ‘appropriation’, the two basic activities by which we establish a sense of selfhood.”¹⁰³ For Holt, overcoming the sense of self is the goal of the Code of Discipline (*Vinaya*).¹⁰⁴ He puts it in non-ambiguous terms when writes: “The discipline of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* represents a systematic assault on the idea of ‘ego-consciousness’ [...] In essence, the discipline of the *Vinaya* is a means to overcoming the sense of ‘I-ness’ (*ahaṃkāra*).” Speaking about *vipassanā* meditation, Epstein states: “The focus and ultimate target of this form of Buddhist meditation is exclusively the sense of ‘I’ within the meditator.”¹⁰⁵ “*Nibbāna*” (lit. “blowing out”) is synonymous with the realization of *anattā*. The fruition of the Theravāda path to liberation is the *arahant*, that is, the person who has “extinguished the sense of self.”¹⁰⁶ Buddhism does then not only seek to dispel the “illusory ontology of the self,”¹⁰⁷ but also overcome the empirical sense of selfhood.¹⁰⁸ As Coward put it, “the goal [in Buddhism] is to transcend the sense of self and the attachment it spawns.”¹⁰⁹

It could be objected that transcendence of the self as hermeneutic paradigm for Buddhist soteriology clashes with the tenet of *anattā*, that is, that the absence of inherent self precludes any form of transcendence. But this objection would be based on a misunderstanding of the hermeneutic principle. We must insist once again that what is transcended in Buddhism is not a non-existing self but the illusion of having an ontic self. What is transcended is no “self” but the “empirical self.” The empirical self is understood as being illusory because of the recognition of its constructed nature (dependent arising). The Buddhist path of doctrine and practice allows the practitioner to gradually realize that the sense of having an ontic self is the result of an illusion that the person projects over the ordinary functioning of the five aggregates thus generating the sense of self. The Buddhist practitioner ultimately realizes that there is no real or ontic self behind or over the empirical self and transcends identification with it, realizing its composite nature.

¹⁰² Thānissaro, *The Paradox of Becoming*, preface.

¹⁰³ Bodhi, *In the Buddha's Words*, 22-23.

¹⁰⁴ John Clifford Holt, *Discipline: The Canonical Buddhism of the Vinayapīṭaka* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1995), 4.

¹⁰⁵ Epstein, *Psychotherapy without the Self*, 131.

¹⁰⁶ Albahari, “Nirvana and Ownerless consciousness,” 79.

¹⁰⁷ Epstein, *Psychotherapy without the Self*, 136.

¹⁰⁸ Albahari, *Analytical Buddhism*, xii.

¹⁰⁹ Coward, 2008, 4.

Transcending misidentification with the empirical self is also implicit in the Christian path. McGinn notes: “giving up of self is the fundamental pattern of the Christian life.”¹¹⁰ Underhill writes: “All the mystics agree that the stripping of personal initiative, the I [...] is an imperative condition of the attainment of the unitive life.”¹¹¹ Christ says: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself” (Lk. 9:23). And St. Paul declares: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God” (Gal 2:20). The self that must be given up is not the soul but the prideful and fallen self. The process of gradual transcendence of the empirical self occurs throughout the path (conversion, morality, asceticism, etc.). A temporary loss of the self occurs in mystical union. Merkur says “the climactic moments of mystical union consist of a loss—not of consciousness but of self-consciousness.”¹¹² Stace similarly holds that mystical experience involves the dissolution of the self.¹¹³ A final release from separate self-identity occurs with the dying and rising with Christ.¹¹⁴

For both Buddhism and Christianity then, transcending identification with the empirical self is possible, this being an implicit or explicit goal common to both traditions. Both are systems of liberation from an enslaving identification with a reputed self that in fact does not exist. Their metaphorical expressions of self-transcendence, though, are dissimilar. In Christianity it is expressed as “dying to the self,”¹¹⁵ an image rooted in the Gospels,¹¹⁶ symbolized by the death of Christ on the Cross (Gal 2:20) and close to Teresa’s heart. Merkur says: “the conceptualization of mystical union as the soul’s death [the death of the self, I would say], and its replacement by God’s consciousness, has been a standard Roman Catholic trope since St. Teresa.”¹¹⁷ Christianity also speaks of “self-renunciation,” “self-denial,”¹¹⁸ self-emptying (*kenosis*). For Teresa this is the deeper sense of “humility.” Buddhism does not speak of “dying to self.” Buddhism avoids reification of the empirical self by such characterizations. We only speak of “transcendence of the self” in Buddhism, as some authors do,¹¹⁹ in relation to the empirical self, because there is no ontological self to be transcended and the process leading to the transcendence of the empirical self is in essence, as the process conducting to the realization of its illusory nature.

¹¹⁰ McGinn, *Mysticism in the Reformation*, 78.

¹¹¹ Underhill, *Mysticism*, 508.

¹¹² Merkur, *Mystical Moments*, 12; Arberman, *Ecstasy*, 371-73.

¹¹³ Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*.

¹¹⁴ The Christian ideal of selflessness is found in the life of purity and renunciation of the saint.

¹¹⁵ O’Keefe, *The Way of Transformation*, 170.

¹¹⁶ Christ says “Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it” (Mt. 10:39) and “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn. 12:24). For more on dying to self, see: James Kellenberger, *Dying to Self and Detachment* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 2.

¹¹⁷ Daniel Merkur, The Formation of Hippie Spirituality: 1. Union with God,” in *Seeking the Sacred with Psychoactive Substances: Chemical Paths to Spirituality and to God*, ed. J. Harold Ellens (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2014), 225.

¹¹⁸ Self-denying or “denial of one-self” is a metaphor of biblical origin. See Lk 9:23 and Mk. 8:34-36.

¹¹⁹ Harvey, Peter. “Self-Development and Self-Transcendence in Theravada Buddhist Thought and Practice”. Wisdom Books Reading Room. www.wisdom-books.com

Some authors have compared “dying to self” in Christianity and realization of *anattā* in Buddhism and suggested transcendence of the self as where both traditions converge. The foundations of Buddhism and Christianity are different; their soteriological concepts and economies also differ, but both traditions advocate transcending attachment to the empirical self, which in both cases mean realizing the true nature of the human “I.” Merton considers detachment from self as a point of dialogue between Christianity and Eastern religions.¹²⁰ De Silva sees the realization of nothingness of man before God and *anattā* in Buddhism as a point of contact.¹²¹ Other authors suggest self-transcendence as the essence of all religions,¹²² a measure of spirituality. Epstein says: “The spiritual path is ultimately about confronting one’s own inherent narcissism, after all is said and done.”¹²³

How do both processes of self-transcendence work in practice? Positively described, both are processes of inwardness, of increasing interiorization.¹²⁴ Flood argues for the centrality of “inwardness” (without a self) in Buddhism.¹²⁵ Teresa’s path is centripetal,¹²⁶ oriented towards the center. Both are moral paths on which evil actions and dispositions change by the cultivation of virtue.¹²⁷ Understanding (*paññā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) in Buddhism, and self-knowledge and love in Teresa, are essential in both processes.¹²⁸ Negatively formulated, both processes are formulated in terms of detachment. We noted throughout the comparison that, because their emphasis is different—effort vs. grace—Buddhism stresses detachment while Christianity focuses on attachment to God. Thus the notion of renunciation (*nekkhamma*) is central to Buddhism.¹²⁹ But “letting go” is also essential in Christianity (Mt 6:24). For Teresa, “God alone is sufficient” (*solo Dios basta*) and advises: “detach your heart from all things, seek God and you will find Him.”¹³⁰

The two traditions also employ the image of an ongoing process of self-emptying.¹³¹ In Buddhism, emptiness (*suññatā*) is a notion often used in the sense of the gradual realization of the emptiness of the clinging aggregates. As Anālayo notes, the idea of the

¹²⁰ Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*.

¹²¹ Lynn A. de Silva, *The Problem of Self in Buddhism and Christianity* (Macmillan: Palgrave, 1979). Some theologians compare the religious experience of no-self in Buddhism to Luther’s Theology of the Cross.

¹²² Kellenberger, *Dying to Self and Detachment*, 2.

¹²³ Epstein, *Psychotherapy without the Self*, 169.

¹²⁴ Meadow and Culligan, “Congruent Spiritual Paths,” 182.

¹²⁵ Flood, *Truth Within*, 2-4.

¹²⁶ The Gospel reads “*the kingdom of God is within you*” (Luke 17:20-21). Teresa’s prayer-path is, as E. Underhill puts it, “a progressive inward retreat from circumference to center” (Underhill 1950, 312).

¹²⁷ Premasiri states: “the entire Buddhist spiritual training is understood as an attempt to transform the moral nature of man” (Premasiri, “Ethics”, EB, 150).

¹²⁸ In a reference to the teaching of Jesus in Mt 22: 34-40, Teresa says: “true perfection consists in love of God and neighbor; the more perfectly we keep these two commandments the more perfect we will be” (1M 2,17).

¹²⁹ “giving up the world and leading a holy life” or “freedom from lust, craving and desires.”[1]

¹³⁰ “Now that I wish for nothing, I have all without wishing. Now that I seek for nothing, I have all without seeking” (AIII.xx2)

¹³¹ Merton realized that the notion of emptiness could integrate Zen (Buddhism) and Christianity since “both religions [have] the [concept] of emptiness in which one has attained [an] egoless ‘primary state of being.’”

meditative process as a step by step “deepening on emptiness” is found in the *Cūḷasuññata Sutta* (MN III 104).¹³² The Christian path is one of *kenosis* (from the Greek for emptiness κένωσις, *kénōsis*) understood here as self-emptying of all that is not God to become fully receptive to God. Teresa’s path is a process of emptying of all that might fill one’s heart other than God.¹³³ Pablo Moroto speaks of the Teresian path of one of “kenotization of the personal and familiar I,”¹³⁴ image that points to self-transcendence.

Both processes are multifaceted implying a transformation of all aspects of a person. The Christian path is one of total purification and renovation of the mind, the heart, and the intellect.¹³⁵ Both journeys are also characterized as being difficult, narrow,¹³⁶ painful, requiring perseverance, and endurance, taken by people with wisdom and good-will.¹³⁷

Buddhism seeks the cessation of suffering while Christianity aims at union with God. But all their shared metaphors and images speak of common aspect: The purification of defilements / elimination of sins, the cultivation of virtue, asceticism in the form of contentment, the silencing of the reflective mind through meditation and contemplation, the emptying of imagery, memory, intellection and so forth from the mind. All are different practices and aspects of the process of transforming the fabric of the empirical self by changing the person’s self-defining desires, identifications and attachments. As Benner says “transformation affects our identity by changing our identifications and attachments. Identity is grounded in our attachments. We are what we most identify with.”¹³⁸

In summary, the concepts of transcendence of the self and selflessness provide a fertile ground where the two traditions meet. In the two cases, the empirical sense of self dissolves through its transcendence. By letting go of self, the person forgets or denies himself, thereby renouncing self-centeredness. What the loss of self ultimately brings is a feeling of oneness,¹³⁹ a sense of timelessness and compassion. With transcendence of the empirical self, both traditions agree, comes happiness, peace. Having clarified the notion of transcendence of the self and presented it as a common ground of Buddhism and Christianity, we will next examine how the self is deconstructed and transcended.

¹³² Anālayo, *From Grasping to Emptiness-Excursions*, 153-54.

¹³³ A. Vergote, “Una mirada psicológica sobre la mística de Teresa de Ávila,” in *ACIT*, Vol. 2 (Salamanca 1983), 888.

¹³⁴ Daniel de Pablo Maroto, *Santa Teresa de Jesús. Nueva biografía* (Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 2014), 250.

¹³⁵ The Dhammapada reads: “mind precedes all things; all things have mind foremost, are mind-made’ (*Dmp* verse 1). If for the Buddhist all bad things come from the heart, the Gospel reads: “out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man” (Mt 15: 19–20).

¹³⁶ “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it” (Matthew 7:13).

¹³⁷ Isaiah 35:8.

¹³⁸ David G. Benner, *Spirituality and the Awakening Self: The Sacred Journey of Transformation* (Baker Publ. 2012), 60.

¹³⁹ Kevin Fauteux, “Self-Reparation in Religious Experience and Creativity,” in *Soul on the Couch: Spirituality, Religion, and Morality in Contemporary Psychoanalysis* ed. Charles Spezzano, (Routledge, 2003), 11.

6.1.7 Transformation and transcendence of self as gradual processes

Let us now elaborate upon the second interpretive hypothesis introduced in Section 6.1.2.2, namely, that the transformation and transcendence of the self, as it transpires in our two authors' accounts, is a gradual process and not the fruit of an ecstatic moment. Between the blemished and bound individual and the perfected and unfettered one—as defined by both religious cultures—a deep transformation takes place that is gradual. As revealed in our prior comparative analysis, although their contexts and frameworks are different, both spiritual processes share patterns of transformation along their paths, bringing about a similar change through a homologue epigenetic sequence of stages. In both cases, this change means gradual giving up attachment to habitual ways of being. Buddhaghosa's path of purification and Teresa's way of perfection can both then be described as "processes," that is, "a series of actions or operations conducing to an end." The Buddhist path is one of progressive and cumulative development.¹⁴⁰ Teresa's symbols (e.g., mansions, metamorphosis, nuptials) also illustrate salvation as a process.

Both processes are described with shared metaphors and images of graduality. They entail a progressive purification that, in both cases, is likened to the refinement of gold. In AN 3:100 the stages of purification are compared to removing impurities from gold.¹⁴¹ Teresa speaks of the transmutation of a soul "purged like gold in the crucible" (V 20,16). The simile of cleaning a mirror or glass by removing stains or dirt from it is also shared.¹⁴² Other identical images include: progressive illumination (from darkness to light); gradual liberation (from bondage to freedom);¹⁴³ constant improvement (from inferior to superior states of being);¹⁴⁴ inner harmonization (psychological-spiritual aspects); and integration (from division to wholeness). Both processes gradually lead from suffering to happiness.

In both cases as well, the process of transformation and transcendence of the self prototypically proceeds through the stages identified in our earlier comparison. If in our archetypal comparative model of transformational dynamics, the stages are sequential,

¹⁴⁰ The Buddhist path is one of "accumulation" (*upacaya*). "Upacaya" means "heaping up, accumulation" ("Upacaya" PED).

¹⁴¹ Bodhi writes: "Text VIII, 4 [AN 3:100] compares the successive stages in the purification of the mind to the refinement of gold. The meditating monk begins by removing the gross impurities of bodily, verbal, and mental conduct; this is achieved by moral discipline and vigilant introspection. Then he eliminates the middle-level impurities of unwholesome thoughts: thoughts of sensuality, ill will, and harmfulness. Next come the subtle impurities of meandering thoughts. Finally, he must eliminate thoughts about the Dhamma, the subtlest obstacle. When all such distracting thoughts are removed, the monk attains 'mental unification' (*ekodibhāva*), the basis for the six 'direct knowledges' (*abhiññā*) culminating in arahantship, the knowledge of the destruction of the taints" (Bodhi 2005, 260).

¹⁴² Teresa speaks of sin as a stain on the mirror of the soul that must be cleaned to reflect the light of God (1M 2,4). She also uses the image of a piece of a glass covered in a very dark cloth (1M 1). In Buddhism the purification of mental defilements is also likened to removing dust or stains covering a mirror.

¹⁴³ The Buddhist path is one of "liberation." St. Paul says: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free" (Gal 5,1). Teresa speaks of the spiritual process as for the attainment of inner freedom (e.g. V 24,8).

¹⁴⁴ John of the Cross says "not going forward is going back and not winning is losing" (S I 11,5).

in practice, as stated earlier, the progression might be spiral-shaped and not always straightforward and linear. However, in both traditions the sequence of developmental stages, as presented, is the habitual progression for most practitioners. Also in both traditions their stages occur in similar order, yielding a common outline of spiritual development.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, both models follow what Meissner describes as an “epigenetic sequence,” meaning that the “successive phases of the process create, work through, and resolve certain developmental issues that provide the basis for maturational potentialities.”¹⁴⁶ That is, maturation in one stage facilitates the attainment of the next.

The developmental stages along both paths are also cumulative. Buddhaghosa’s and Teresa’s descriptions reveal that each stage builds upon and incorporates the preceding ones. Each stage then constitutes what Benner rightly describes as the “center of gravity of a person.”¹⁴⁷ Normally each stage is transparent to itself, so the person is unaware of it. In each transformational stage, a person is faced with new needs and problems, and new doctrines and practices are put forward by the two traditions to overcome them.¹⁴⁸

Each developmental segment relates to an aspect of the empirical self, and also points beyond it. In each stage there is a particular organization of the self in terms of coherence, integrity, meaning and so forth, the balance of which results from a certain structure of attachments and identifications.¹⁴⁹ In each stage, a transformation occurs connected to this particular balance that causes changes in identity and worldview.¹⁵⁰ The overcoming of that particular balance requires a process of what Piaget called “descentration.” Ethical living, asceticism, meditation and so on are as transformational as the *jhānic* or mystical experiences in releasing the empirical self from consciousness. The process, as Jones explains, “entails the stripping away, piece by piece, of the layers of personality until one experiences a ‘dropping out of the bottom of self’.”¹⁵¹ In both cases walking the spiritual path results in overcoming of the sense of selfhood, modifying and reorganizing the basic structures of the individual. The mechanics of transformation and transcendence of self in each particular stage will be examined in the next section.

¹⁴⁵ These linear developmental frameworks are descriptive of a normal course of events; they reflect the ordinary experience of most people. But, spiritual development along a linear continuum functions mostly as a pedagogical, exemplary, abstract heuristic model. In practice, both are ideal models and progress in fact occurs as a spiral. Some stages coincide with the developmental models contained in structural theories author such as Piaget, Kohlberg, Loevinger, Erikson and Fowler.

¹⁴⁶ W. W. Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and religious experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 138.

¹⁴⁷ Benner, *Spirituality and the Awakening Self*, 93.

¹⁴⁸ “The spiritual life is not a series of atomistic ecstasies but rather a continuous pattern of disciplines and practices.” J.W. Jones, *Terror and Transformation: The Ambiguity of Religion in Psychoanalytic Perspective* (Routledge, 2002), 81.

¹⁴⁹ Self, or personal identity, is based on identifications and attachments (e.g. with the body, possessions, beauty, and so forth). Each stage is a transformational step in the direction of changing attachments and identifications.

¹⁵⁰ Benner, *Spirituality and the Awakening Self*, 59.

¹⁵¹ Jones, *The Mirror of God*, 149.

6.1.8 The stages are according to human nature

As mentioned in 6.1.2.3, the last proposition complementary to our main hypothesis, is that the unfolding of our two stage-based processes in both traditions is according to their understanding of the nature and structure of the human being, and not in the least arbitrary. This is particularly the case in how the five aggregates (in Buddhism), and the senses and faculties (in Christianity), are presented and expounded. In both cases, the progression is from the outside to the within, and from the grosser to the subtler levels.

We postulate a close relationship between the sequencing of the stages along the path to liberation and the process of detachment from the five clinging aggregates, implying that the path stages and the structure of the human being are closely related. There is evidence that the order in the sequencing of path stages is related to the enumeration of the five *khandhas*. The Buddha explained human experience in terms of the five aggregates, which are given in the order of form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), apperception (*saññā*), mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). This enumeration goes from the most external to the most internal, from grosser to subtler.

A Christian scholastic *dictum* says: “God moves all things according to their nature.” Or, as John puts it, “God perfects people gradually, according to their human nature, and proceeds from the lowest and most exterior to the highest and most interior” (S 2 17,4). In Christian scholasticism there is a well-established interrelationship between the nature and the structure of the human being, as described in our Section 4.3, and God’s action. Some Christian authors relate the division of spiritual life into three *vias* with the composition of the human being. Tomas de Jesús says: “to the purgative way belongs purging and perfecting the senses; to the illuminative, the reason; to the unitive, the spirit or the mind that is the upper part of the soul.”¹⁵² Maréchal says, “there is, as several contemplatives have themselves remarked, a striking analogy between the formal framework of human psychology [...] and the most characteristic stages of the mystical ascent towards God.”¹⁵³ There is evidence that the seven Teresian mansions correlate with the structure of man.¹⁵⁴ The work of John of the Cross is most clarifying in this point in relating the order of spiritual progress to the senses and the faculties in the structure of *Ascent and Dark Night*. We will elaborate on this interpretive axis in the next section.

¹⁵² Tomas de Jesús, *Tratado de la oración mental*, 45.

¹⁵³ Joseph Maréchal, *The Psychology of the Mystics* (Dover Publications, 2012), 155. God first acts on the inferior part and the senses, next on reason, and last on the will, intellect, and memory. In PPR, God takes possession of the external senses. In prayer of quiet the ligature is of the will. In mystical union all the senses and faculties of the person are suspended. In spiritual marriage God’s hold on the internal and external faculties is permanent and irreversible.

¹⁵⁴ Teresa writes: “...this water overflows through all the dwelling places and faculties until reaching the body” (4M 2,4).

6.2 INDIVIDUAL SEGMENTS AND THE SELF

6.2.1 Introduction

In this section, we set out to analyze the individual developmental segments that emerged from our comparative analysis now from the perspective of the empirical self. For reasons of space, our exploratory and interpretive discussion can only be indicative. The aim here is to show that the analogous structures along both paths, the order of their occurrence, and the practices proposed in both traditions for overcoming them, are underpinned by the process of transformation and transcendence of the empirical self and similar spiritual conditions derived from the nature and constitution of the human being. By analyzing the individual segments of spiritual development along both paths, the larger pattern of the process of transformation and transcendence of the empirical self becomes discernible, which allows us better to understand the process of change.

6.2.2 The worldly person

The spiritual condition of the worldly person, identified in our study as the *puthujjana* and the soul outside the castle respectively, is the point of departure of our consideration. The situation of the ordinary person from the perspective of the empirical self is important for our purposes because, therein, all the functions of the self-system are in a raw state and in full swing; in this state, self-centeredness, selfishness and conceit reign absolute.

As shown in Section 5.2, for both traditions, the worldly person ignores his own nature, being infatuated with a false sense of selfhood. Just as the *puthujjana* understands himself as an ontic self instead of as an agglomerate of factors collectively known as the “Five Aggregates,” the soul outside the castle identifies itself with the body and faculties. In both traditions, the primary motivation of the worldly person is to seek pleasure and avert pain. Consequently, he turns outward looking for the satisfaction of his desires and is unwilling to engage in introspection and he is uninterested in the cultivation of virtue. The absence of reflectiveness and mindfulness are concomitant features of these states.

In our two traditions, the person at this level is pulled by conflicting interior forces (i.e., instinctual, psychological), leading to a state of fragmentation. The mundane person suffers in despair because of his misidentification with the physical self and its passions, and the lack of cohesion and guilt that comes with it. Likewise, because of the sense of isolation, and the alienation and threat of mortality that comes with such identification.

6.2.3 The converted self

The Latin word *conversio* (etym. “turning around”), synonymous with the Hebrew *sūb*, implies repentance consisting of an internal transformation or “change of mind” expressed by the verb *nhm* in Hebrew and *metanoia* (metanoēō/μετανοέω) in Greek. Conversion is a universal phenomenon.¹ Its significance is a profound transformation of one’s spiritual life. Genuine conversion is a complex and pervasive experience affecting all dimensions of the empirical self.² It is a paradigm shift that shakes one to its core.³ More often than not, religious conversion is preceded by a period of spiritual turmoil,⁴ or of a quest for meaning, and is always ultimately rooted in the human predicament.⁵ Often the convert-to-be feels the existential and spiritual darkness described by both traditions as the state of the worldly person (i.e., unsatisfactoriness with life). Religious conversion may manifest as an abrupt change of heart, or as gradual deepening of commitment, but, in all the cases, it is a milestone in religious development and spiritually significant.⁶

As modern psychologists note, conversion implies a radical change in the empirical self.⁷ Having exhausted the old self, the person recognizes a need for a reorientation (spatial metaphor “turning around”). In Buddhism and Christianity, the convert assumes a new outlook on life and forsakes noxious ways of thinking and acting for wholesome ones.⁸ In radically reorganizing the person’s mental structure, with religious conversion begins a process of re-centering, re-generation and transcendence of the empirical self.

As noted in Section 5.3,2, a result of conversion, initiation is the doorway into spiritual life, symbolized as the entrance to the path in Buddhism, and into the castle in Teresa. As the word “initiation” suggests (Latin *initium*), for the initiand the rite of passage marks a definite break with the past. Religious initiation is symbolized as a death and a rebirth,⁹ through which the initiand, in both Buddhism and Christianity, renounces his ideological

¹ Noteworthy studies are: Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (Yale University Press, 1993); and C. Lamb and M.D. Bryant, eds., *Religious Conversion: Contemporary Practices and Controversies* (London: Cassell, 1999).

² Intellectually, adhering to a new belief system entails a radical change in worldview. Morally, committing to new principles translates into a dramatic shift in behavior. Psychologically, it is no less than a transformation of personality that becomes habitual. Religiously, it means a change of conviction on how the convert relates to religious ideal. Spiritually, it implies a regeneration, an intimate change of will by which the convert abandons traditional self-understanding and gains a new affiliation and a new life. For a holistic approach to conversion see Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*.

³ See Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 162.

⁴ Paradigmatic is the urgency for liberation (*samvega*) which led the Buddha to spiritual life.

⁵ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 50. Teresa’s conversion showcases the need for change.

⁶ Virgil B. Gillespie, *Religious Conversion and Personal Identity* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1979).

⁷ Ralph W. Hood, Peter C. Hill and Bernard Spilka, *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach* (N. Y.: The Guilford Press, 2009), 209; Chana Ullman, *The Transformed Self: The Psychology of Religious Conversion* (N. Y.: Springer, 1989).

⁸ A. J. Krailsheimer, *Conversion* (London, SCM Press, 1980), 5. From a Buddhist perspective see “Conversion,” EB, 253. In Christianity conversion is experienced as a new birth (Jn. 3:3 and Mt. 18:3).

⁹ For St. Paul baptism is death of the sinful self and incorporation into Christ (Rm 6:3). Benedict J. Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages: The Psychology of Spiritual Development* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1984), 72.

framework and, assimilates a new worldview and a new set of spiritual values and views. Initiation changes one's spiritual situation; it is a regeneration, involving a new paradigm; a radical transmutation of one's personality, character, and self-understanding.¹⁰ As the person's old self is dismantled, the person discovers a new personality and way of being.

The profession of vows is highly significant from the viewpoint of the empirical self. This rite of passage means for the ordinand a ceremonial rupture and the acquisition of a new identity, symbolized by the adoption of a religious name, clothes and the tonsure.¹¹ By adopting a monastic way of life, the ordinand forsakes family and social roles, both central dimensions in self-identification.¹² Teresa's *Constituciones* (Co.18) empathizes this need for separation from the world and detachment from relatives. In Buddhism, this separation is symbolized by the ritual renunciation of the worldly state of the householder to become a homeless person devoted to ending suffering. And it is also instituted in the Buddhist monastic code, that is, the *Vinaya*. The adoption of the monastic life implies thus a radical parting with identification with societal roles. As with a Buddhist monastic, the Carmelite severs societal ties, renouncing worldly concerns and distractions. The profession of vows, in short, is decisive to what William James called "the material self."¹³ Separation from society means detachment from family, profession, reputation, social group, possessions, renown and the like, all part and parcel of the "extended self," which is crucial from the viewpoint of one's identity, self-perception, and self-understanding.

The full implications of religious conversion, initiation and the profession of vows—conversion *sensu lato*—from the vantage point of the empirical self are too intricate to elaborate on here. In essence, they initiate an arduous process of self-transcendence. The person overcomes identifications with societal views, status and the like which in any tradition are traditionally understood as obstacles to spiritual life.¹⁴ Conversion is also the basis for overcoming the self-fragmentation created by conflicting inclinations towards a more unified and peaceful state.¹⁵ This more cohesive identity will be bestowed with a higher integrity and freedom. Yet, for all its importance, conversion is the first step, for the monastics seek a transformation that comes with ethical living.

¹⁰ By abiding by the Precepts or the Commandments the identification with customary tendencies is curbed. Breaking old habits, one grows in awareness and physical, emotional, and intellectual energies are reoriented towards the new goal.

¹¹ In Catholicism, the symbolism of a new identity is present in all aspects of ritual. Like his Theravādin counterpart, at the acceptance into the order the person is given a religious name, a new robes, and partially shaves the hair of the head.

¹² In the Buddhist and Christian traditions, the monastic life entails a radical separation from family and relatives. Buddhist and Christian monastics leave behind ties of blood, to enter a family of kinder hearts: the monastic community. Both the Buddha and Christ emphasized to their disciples-to-be the great importance of parting with family attachments. Christ said "If a man come to Me and hate not his father and mother...and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Lk. 14:26).

¹³ James, *The Principles of Psychology*. Vol. 1, 291-92.

¹⁴ Teresa says of 1M "even though it may not be in a bad state, it is so involved in worldly things and so absorbed with its possessions, honor, or business affairs, does it seem that it can slip free from so many impediments" (1M 2,14).

¹⁵ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 166.

6.2.4 The moral self

For our comparanda, ethical living is the first stage and the basis of spiritual life.¹⁶ Why is virtue at the beginning of both processes, and so central to religion? How does morality fit into our self-paradigm? In both accounts, virtue comes first because adopting a moral life is a precondition for further growth and essential for self-transformation.¹⁷ Researchers in moral psychology have proven a close relationship between morality, identity, and the empirical self.¹⁸ For example, Nisan, a developmental psychologist, writes: “morality relates to the very essence of the individual, what he or she really is.”¹⁹ The adoption of virtue changes the person’s self-understanding and self-image.²⁰ How is this so? The primary function of religion is emphasizing moral conduct. Righteousness directly changes a person’s behavior. However, even at the first stages of spiritual growth virtue ethics is interior, not normativistic. It pivots primarily on conduct but goes deeper; it aims at the transformation of intention, as intention and the will are the roots of action.²¹ With adherence to a moral code, changes in motivation, development of moral feelings and a moral self, the person’s autobiographical appraisal embraces a new self-definition.

Moral purification also produces important changes in one’s character, which is crucial in transforming the empirical self. If conversion has a definite effect on personality, the adoption of a highly moral life has a decisive impact on the person’s character.²² Ethical living compels the person to intensify self-awareness, conscientiousness, and to exercise a greater self-control and mastery²³ over negative impulses and emotions.²⁴ An increased self-regulation redirects acting on harmful instincts and energies (vices), transforming them into moral dispositions which are conducive to spiritual goals (virtues).

¹⁶ Conversion can be called the beginning of spiritual life but, for our two authors, the commencement of the spiritual journey is a moral purification (PP 1.10), comprising the avoidance of the moral contraventions and the practice of virtue.

¹⁷ Feldmeier: “virtue is universally regarded as the logical foundation for all serious spiritual growth” (Feldmeier 2006, 59); H. F. de Wit says: “the psychology of the first stages of the contemplative way is especially governed by the discovery of one’s own sinfulness or corruption” (H. F. de Wit, *Contemplative Psychology*, Duquesne University Press, 1991, 197).

¹⁸ As Davidson and Youniss explain, for the Swiss developmental psychologist Jean Piaget “the construction of identity and the construction of morality are aspects of the same construction” (P. Davidson, and J. Youniss, “Which comes first? Morality or identity?,” in *Handbook of Moral Behavior Development*, ed. W. M. Kurtines & J. L. Gewirtz, Vol. 1. (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991), 105-21. Also, Augusto Blasi, a leading researcher on morality and identity, maintains that morality has a close relationship with self. See A. Blasi, “The development of identity: Some implications for moral functioning,” in *The Moral Self*, ed. G. G. Noam & T. E. Wren (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 99–122.

¹⁹ Mordecai Nisan, “Balanced identity: Morality and other identity values” in *The Moral Self*, ed. G. Noa. and T. Wren (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 253.

²⁰ In particular, Augusto Blasi’s “self-model” focuses on the interaction between moral development, character, and self. See Augusto Blasi, “Character, moral development, and the self,” in *Character Psychology and Character Education*, ed. D. K. Lapsley and F. C. Power (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004).

²¹ As Heim puts it, in Buddhism *cetanā* (intention) is “the origin from which action springs (*cetanāmūlakattā kamma*)” Maria Heim, *The Forerunner of All Things: Buddhaghosa on Mind, Intention, and Agency* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 40. In the *Upali Sutta* (MN 56) the Buddha prioritizes intention over action. D. Little, “Religion and morality in Theravāda Buddhism,” in *Comparative Religious Ethics: A New Method*, ed., D. Little and S. B. Twiss (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 217.

²² We have mentioned, in 5.4.4, how Buddhaghosa explains etymologically the connection between *sīla* and character. Similarly, we have pointed out that the Greek *ethikos* (ἠθικός) and the Latin *moralis* refer to a person’s moral character.

²³ In English the word virtue has a connotation of “power.” Etymologically, derives from a Latin *virtus* (manliness, vigor).

²⁴ At the start of *Castillo* Teresa explains how prayer (awareness) fosters greater interiorization and self-control (1M 1,6).

By repeatedly avoiding unwholesome acts and intentions and cultivating wholesome ones, the moral self acquires new dispositions to act spontaneously in particular ways; new habits of thinking and acting become ingrained in the empirical self radically altering the character. This is true for both traditions. Speaking for Buddhism, Premasiri says, “the cultivation of *sīla* consists of an attempt to change our patterns of behavior in such a way that it will ultimately lead to a radical transformation of our dispositional traits.”²⁵ In Christianity to live a highly moral life changes the preponderant dispositions of the heart. The egocentric gravitational forces of the psyche, such as self-absorption, are restrained and opposite tendencies (e.g. humility, self-forgetfulness, altruism), are strengthened. Likewise, egotism and its external manifestations like hate, greed, and envy gradually dissipate, and are replaced by healthy dispositions like generosity, patience and compassion, with all of them conducive to the transformation and transcendence of self. Naturally all these changes have a deep impact on the person’s self-conceptualization.

Moral living deepens the ongoing process of cohesion and unification of empirical self, which started with religious conversion. A religious person in our two traditions desires “psychic unity,” and a more integrated self. Morality procures such integration beyond the fragmented and friable self that led to the adoption of religious life in the first place.

In sum, there are multiple connections between virtue and empirical self.²⁶ Adopting a moral life is essential in the process of self-transformation and self-transcendence. The development of a moral self changes a person’s relationship with others and himself. As new values become integrated in the person’s character, self-identifying feelings such as remorse and guilt are reduced and the opposite feelings and emotions are enhanced. If conversion produces deep changes in personality, ethical living contributes to a nascent new identity and strong changes in character.²⁷ This starting anew is essential in the process of transforming and transcending the self. The cultivation of virtue leads to the transcendence of the self as selflessness is what defines the essence of virtue. Morality is also pivotal in constituting a more coherent self and creating a more positive self-image which, in turn, impacts the person’s self-definition and sense of moral identity. Consequently, the development of a moral self harvests changes that are both ethical and spiritual and is critical in restructuring, reforming, and transcending the empirical self.

²⁵ Premasiri, “Ethics”, EB, 150.

²⁶ Another researcher who has accentuated a relationship of morality and the self is Lawrence Kohlberg, in connection with his stages of moral development. See Lawrence Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development, Vol. 1: The Philosophy of Moral Development* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1981). For a collection of articles on morality, identity, and the self, see Daniel K. Lapsley and Darcia Narvaez, eds., *Moral Development, Self, and Identity* (Psychology Press, 2013).

²⁷ Heim writes: “Actions, in a fundamental way, create and condition and determine who and what beings are and are at the center, we might say, of their nature or identity” (Heim 2013, 34).

6.2.5 The ascetic self

In comparing Theravāda and Carmelite asceticism, in Section 5.5, we observed how, after an initial purification, monastics in both traditions may feel the pressing need for a further purgation of moral impediments that may still prevent their closest approach to the religious ideal.²⁸ The monastic may crave for getting rid of imperfections and fortifying the still tender virtues, which is requisite for the fruitful practice of contemplation and meditation.²⁹ Asceticism—both through the asceticism ingrained in the communal rules and as practice above and beyond the rules—is a way to this ideal of ethical perfection.

How does asceticism impact the self? Asceticism is a means of self-transformation. “Asceticism” is an unsavory word in modern times, as it evokes strenuous forms of self-denial and pathological excesses of the past. Yet, asceticism as a religious phenomenon, appears across cultures,³⁰ and is part and parcel of Buddhaghosa’s and Teresa’s paths. How should the ubiquity of asceticism be explained? Although an all-inclusive theoretical framework for the study of the psycho-spiritual function of asceticism is still unavailable,³¹ a considerable degree of agreement has been reached on asceticism being highly instrumental in the process of transformation and transcendence of the empirical self.³²

For Buddhaghosa (PP 2.1) and Teresa (C 4,2) alike, asceticism contributes to the reinforcement of virtue. The ascetic life ingrained in the monastic code in both traditions plays a significant role in both Buddhism³³ and Christianity³⁴ in removing “defilements” and “moral imperfections,” respectively, with which the person identifies. And in the development of moral attitudes (e.g. contentment, compassion, humility, and kindness) which are concomitant and conducive to the state of deliverance, however it is defined. By cultivating moral ways of thinking and acting (virtues), asceticism gradually transforms the ascetic’s temperament, which is a key source from which self-definition springs.

²⁸ Buddhaghosa states that the *dhutaṅgas* are ascetic practices that a trainee might undertake while in pursuit of *sīla*. They are aimed at perfecting the virtues described in “Purification of Virtue” Chapter One of the *Visuddhimagga* (PP 2.1). In Teresa’s castle after removing the more obvious dust from the mirror of the soul, the greater light and the purity of God become more evident as well as the remaining specks, and the ugliness and misery the soul tainted by sin.

²⁹ Teresa exclaims: “It’s an amusing thing that even though we still have a thousand impediments and imperfections and our virtues have hardly begun to grow [...] we are yet not ashamed to seek spiritual delights in prayer” (2M 7).

³⁰ See Walter O. Kaelber, “Asceticism,” ER, 526-31. Asceticism was ubiquitous the religious cultures of the past, from Greco-Roman antiquity and the India of pre-Buddhist times until recent times. The practice of asceticism is common in most religions, which generally consider them positively.

³¹ Wimbush and Valantasis, *Asceticism*, xv. The contemporary disinterest or bias toward asceticism translates in lack of literature on the psychology of asceticism. Although modern studies are few and poor, there are some exceptions: Oscar Hardman, *The Ideals of Asceticism: An Essay in the Comparative Study of Religion* (New York, Macmillan, 1924); and Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis, eds. *Asceticism* (New York, OUP, 1995).

³² See Gavin Flood, *The Ascetic Self Subjectivity, Memory and Tradition* (Cambridge: CMP, 2004), 1-34.

³³ The idea that asceticism contributes to overcoming the illusion of the self is recurrent in Buddhism. Holt, *Discipline*, 4.

³⁴ See Martin L. Warren, *Asceticism in the Christian Transformation of Self in Margery Kempe, William Thorpe, and John Rogers* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), 13.

More specifically, ascetic training subjugates instinctual urges³⁵—subsumable under “selfish desires” in Buddhism and “disordered appetites” in Catholic scholasticism—and develops opposite tendencies like contentment and self-restraint. Asceticism is normally understood as “the doctrine that through the renunciation of the desires of the flesh and of pleasure in worldly things and through self-mortification or self-denial one can subdue the appetites and discipline oneself so as to reach a high spiritual or intellectual state.”

³⁶ What Buddhist and Catholic ascetic cultures may have in common—and this could be the hermeneutical key of asceticism—is to control, overcome and sublimate unordered appetites, so as to be freed from the slavery to selfish desires and unruly passions,³⁷ without health risks or denying essential needs such as food, sleep and social interaction. Practices like moderate food intake, continence, or other forms of abstinence and self-restraint are then a means to attain purity and freedom from unrestrained instinctual drives and habitual needless wants, with which a person routinely identifies, liberating the ascetic from major sources of attachment and self-identification which underlie his self-image, self-definition and self-formation which is crucial in transcending self.³⁸ The main locus of asceticism then is the body, instinct, and attachment to the material self.

Another benefit of asceticism is mastery over binaries such as cold and hot, hunger and gluttony and other urges and tribulations. In attaining indifference towards pain and comfort—through applying opposite conditions—the ascetic gradually transforms his character, and strengthens the self, broadening its limits. This control over the habitual life processes³⁹ is described by both traditions as a source of happiness for the ascetic.

In sum, the moderate asceticism put forward by Buddhaghosa and Teresa, far from being an aberrant form of self-torture and self-denial,⁴⁰ is a transformational tool for the overcoming of identification with unwholesome habits and for the reformation of desire.⁴¹ By overcoming unruly impulses, and an innate tendency to avoid pain and seek pleasure, asceticism transforms both the practitioner’s character and temperament. Asceticism is universal because self-control and self-renunciation are means of self-transcendence.⁴²

³⁵ “Asceticism,” *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*.

³⁶ Buddhaghosa states that the meditator “should set about undertaking the ascetic practices in order to perfect those special qualities of fewness of wishes, contentment, etc” (PP 2,1). For Teresa, ascetic practices are to improve the soul.

³⁷ It has been shown how minor imperfections are the subject of *dhutaṅgas* and Teresian asceticism and how these are taken on to separate the monastic from attachments and unnecessary wants caused by *kilesas* and disordered appetites.

³⁸ As Odajnyk explains, “monastic rules and style of life are designed to overcome the dominance of instinctive impulses” (Odajnyk 1998, 38).

³⁹ See R. Thurman, “Tibetan Buddhist Perspectives on Asceticism” in *Asceticism*, ed. Wimbush and Valantasis 1995, 185.

⁴⁰ For example, see J. Moussaieff Masson, “The Psychology of the Ascetic,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 35/4, 1976, 611-25. “Asceticism” as self-discipline, self-control (*atta-danta* from *atta-damana*) has to be distinguished from the asceticism of self-torture (*atta-kilamatha*) which the Buddha condemns as not leading to *nibbana*.

⁴¹ See Christopher O’Donnell, *Insights from Carmel* <https://www.theway.org.uk/Back/s102ODonnell.pdf>

⁴² This is the reason why asceticism is often linked to “self-denial.”

6.2.6 Prayer, worship, ritual, religiosity and the empirical self

Another important dimension in the interface between Theravāda and Catholicism in relation to the transformation and transcendence of the empirical self is that of prayer, worship and ritual. Religiosity, in general, is transformative in any religious tradition,⁴³ ancillary to growth in virtue, and included in what Foucault calls “technologies of the self.”

From a psycho-spiritual perspective,⁴⁴ prayer and its non-theistic homologues or analogs,⁴⁵ enhance self-awareness, self-scrutiny and self-control.⁴⁶ Through “prayer,” heartfelt recitation and the like, the person develops interiority and the virtues,⁴⁷ acquires a good disposition and improves his moral character.⁴⁸ Genuine prayer, whatever the tradition, is uplifting. It cultivates an attitude of authenticity, sincerity and opens the person’s heart. It focuses and concentrates the attention, develops mindfulness and unifies the mind.⁴⁹ In summary, “prayer” is an exercise that transform those who pray.

Psychology of religion identifies a series of functions of worship, devotional practices, acts of religiosity and ritual some of which are common across religious traditions and are important for the spiritual development of the person, and deeply impact the empirical self.⁵⁰ This is not only true for Catholicism but also for Buddhism.⁵¹ Rituals and ceremonies assist the person to unify the self and develop wholesome qualities. Other practices of religiosity—such as pilgrimages and cult to images and relics—and of spiritual development—such as self-examination, confession, meditation retreats, deference and consultation with the spiritual director, guide or mentor, time devoted to spiritual reading, and the like, all have to do with purification, are universal and corrective in altering future behavior. These practices that Foucault categorize as “care of the self”, contribute to an enhanced self-knowledge, self-transformation and self-transcendence.

⁴³ On the often-dismissed importance of devotional practices and rituals in Theravāda see A. G. S. Kariyawasam, *Buddhist Ceremonies and Rituals of Sri Lanka* (Kandy: BPS, 1995).

⁴⁴ Bernard Spilka and Kevin L. Ladd, *The Psychology of Prayer: A Scientific Approach* (New York: Guilford Press, 2013). Leslie John Francis, Jeff Astley, *Psychological Perspectives on Prayer: A Reader* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2001).

⁴⁵ As indicated in Section 5.6, prayer in Christianity takes many forms; petition (i.e., asking something directly from God), has no equivalent in Buddhism; but its homologue is expressing a wish in the benedictine mood before the Buddha such “May this and this happen etc.”. Christian praise and thanksgiving have their homologue on the appreciative commemoration (*anussatiyo*) of the Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha.

⁴⁶ Teresa comments: “that souls who do not practice prayer are like people with paralyzed or crippled bodies” (1M 1.6).

⁴⁷ Prayers of praise, exhortations and the like, bring spiritual qualities to the forefront of the religious ideal contributing to the development of the virtues and subtly transforming the person’s character.

⁴⁸ Prayer helps to build an attitude of reverence and humility of which accompanying bodily postures (e.g. standing, kneeling, prostration), and gestures of performance (e.g. folding of the hands together, *añjali*) are external manifestations.

⁴⁹ George Albert Coe, *The Psychology of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1917), 312-13.

⁵⁰ Bernard Spilka and Kevin L. Ladd, *The Psychology of Prayer: A Scientific Approach*, New York: Guilford, 2012.

⁵¹ Premasiri writes: “Ritual can, from the Buddhist point of view, be justified only to the extent that it contributes to spiritual transformation.” P. D., Premasiri. “The Significance of The Ritual Concerning Offerings to Ancestors in Theravāda Buddhism” in *Buddhist Thought and Ritual* by D. Kalupahana (Ed.) (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2001), 126-7. Ritualism (*sīlabbataparāmāsā*) is an obstacle to liberation in Buddhism; so in Christianity, too ritualism is known as *sheret* (Hebrew for a mere rite) and *leitourgia* in Greek) in contrast with authentic worship (*abodā* in Hebrew and *douleia* in Greek).

6.2.7 Development of attention, concentration and unification of mind

In Section 5.7, entitled “Purification of Mind and Teresa’s path beyond *via purgativa*,” we discussed general common traits covering from the establishment of virtue up to the culmination of *samatha* meditation and the Sixth Mansions, respectively. Within this arch, we highlighted a series of common threads central to both dynamics of spiritual growth: (1) a deeper moral purification; (2) the development of attention and concentration; (3) the transformation of unwholesome emotions; and (4) purification of consciousness. These threads are highly relevant to the transformation and transcendence of the self.

The further purification of impurities that takes place in *citta-visuddhi*, and purification of imperfections that takes place in *via illuminativa*, together with the overcoming of subtle but harmful tendencies and evil dispositions throughout both processes, has deep impact on the person’s self-conceptualization, as moral purity characterizes the empirical self.

The development of attention and concentration relates to the self in a variety of ways. Attention is closely associated with agency and intentionality.⁵² Watson observes how neuroscientist and philosophers today concur that “attention is at the heart of selfhood.”⁵³ We attend to what we care about and what we care about defines us.⁵⁴ As the targets of conscious attention change, so does self-definition. Therefore, “attentional agency is one of the essential core properties underlying the conscious experience of selfhood.”⁵⁵ *Samatha* meditation and Teresa’s prayer-path transform the person by changing the targets of attention, reshaping self-definition. The meditation topics restructure the self. By redirecting the attention to a certain subject there is an induced change in the direction and disposition of the mind. The Buddha said, “whatever a *bhikkhu* frequently thinks and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of his mind” (MN 19). By changing the inclination of the mind, the self becomes newly defined. As Csikszentmihalyi puts it: “to change personality means to learn new patterns of attention.”⁵⁶ The intensity of attention also affects self as the person becomes more conscious of his thoughts and behavior. Taking deliberate control over the attentive process, that is, making attention conscious, likewise transforms the self, as patterns of attention and intention precede behavior.⁵⁷

⁵² A close relationship between attention and self is explored in Jonardon Ganeri, *Attention, Not Self* (Oxford: OUP, 2017).

⁵³ Gay Watson, *Attention: Beyond Mindfulness* (London: Reaktion Book, 2017), 67.

⁵⁴ “Tell me what you pay attention to and I will tell you who you are” José Ortega y Gasset, *Man and Crisis* (1962), 94.

⁵⁵ Metzinger quoted in Watson, *Attention*, 67.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Watson, *Attention*, 6.

⁵⁷ Ordinary attention is mostly an unconscious process, meaning below voluntary regulation. Ordinarily, we attend to what is relevant for us, but what is relevant is not normally the result of a conscious decision. By fastening attention to a meditation subject attention becomes more conscious and voluntary. Meditation facilitates the de-automatization of habitual mental processes, and the attainment of certain freedom in the creation of patterns of thought and intention.

Mindfulness meditation and the prayer of active recollection help to develop awareness, which liberates the mind of fixed patterns of attention and habitual behavior. Deliberate and continuous attention to the meditative object, or on God, in practices of mindfulness or concentration displaces the focal point of attention from oneself to another. Finally, in states of deep absorption, the sense of self temporarily disappears by deafferentation facilitating deidentification with the empirical and realization that attention is prior to self.⁵⁸

Along with a gradual development of the attention, a unification of the person's mind occurs which reverts in everyday life in a more unified empirical self. Monoideism unifies the phenomenological self. Such goal is attained in Buddhism through the practice of concentration (*samādhi*), which is defined by Buddhaghosa as *kusalacitta ekaggatā* (PP 3,2), an expression usually rendered by Ñāṇamoli as "profitable unification of mind."⁵⁹ Through her religious life, the love of God and the practice of meditative prayer, recollection and contemplative prayer, unified Teresa's mind.⁶⁰ In Buddhism, however, the unification of the mind is a deliberate objective to which the mediator directs his effort. For Teresa instead, unification of the mind is a by-product of the love of God.

Another common aspect of *samatha* and Teresa's path is the cultivation of wholesome traits of character. There is a well-established link between emotional life and the self.⁶¹ With the transformation of emotional dispositions, the person's self changes. Meditation on the *brahma-viharas*, for example, or on Christ's life and virtues, evoke and instill compassion and love, both targets of *samatha* meditation and Christian contemplation.⁶² Positive human qualities and emotional dispositions, such as lovingkindness, generosity, altruism and the like, are conducive to self-transcendence, as opposite to selfishness. Cultivating empathy and altruism by the habitual practice of meditation or contemplative prayer activates and reinforces systems in the brain's architecture towards selflessness.

The purification of consciousness, that is, the removal of mental content from the mind (e.g. intellections, images, memories) that takes place in meditation and contemplation gradually produces a de-identification of the person with the contents of consciousness. Since birth, the person is identified with consciousness intertangled with sensations, memories, imagination and the like. High states of absorption and mental emptiness become a powerful antidote against identification with the contents of consciousness.

⁵⁸ Ganeri, *Attention, Not Self*, 28.

⁵⁹ See PP 3.2. Ñāṇamoli believes that the compound *citta-ekaggatā* must be read here as "agreement or harmony (cf. *samagga*) of consciousness and its concomitants in focusing on a single object" (PP, 84, note 2).

⁶⁰ O'Donoghue, *Adventures in Prayer*, 79.

⁶¹ Antonio Damasio, "Feelings of emotion and the self," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 2003, 253–61.

⁶² Teresa advises her nuns to do that which helps more to develop love (4M 1,7).

6.2.8 Reflective meditation and meditative prayer

Samatha reflective meditation and Christian meditative prayer, jointly referred to here as “discursive meditation,” constitute the next segment identified in the comparison. In Section 5.8.4.5 we reflected on the effects of habitual practice of discursive meditation. How does discursive meditation relate to the transformation and transcendence of the empirical self?

Discursive meditation is practiced for inner transformation. It helps to develop a proper way of thinking and reflection, that is, “reason” (“consideration,” in Teresa’s lexicon) as the inner compass of one’s life, versus the passions and emotion. By cultivating reflection as the tiller of one’s life, and controlling the external and internal senses, reason becomes a source of self-definition. Descartes’ dictum “*cogito ergo sum*” (“I think, therefore I am”) comes to mind. Sears observes that “because many of us typically identify with our logical thinking mind, we tend to say we were “not ourselves” after getting lost in love, passion, lust, anger, or grief”⁶³

The habitual practice of discursive meditation alters what one habitually thinks about, and one’s usual ways of thinking, thus helping one to think differently: religiously. Deeply religious people focus their thoughts and imagination on themes of religious relevance or on thinking religiously about non-religious topics. Entrenched biases, preconceptions and flawed assumptions are thus eliminated. As most people identify with their thoughts, beliefs, opinions and ways of thinking, habitual discursive meditation transforms the empirical self.

Discursive meditation also helps to alter the person’s character and emotional life, which are highly significant sources of self-identification. By adopting themes contrary to the meditator’s main faults or defilements, discursive meditation removes ingrained negative predispositions and tendencies and instills positive tendencies and emotions, thus transforming the person’s character. We recall here Buddhaghosa’s classification of six kinds of temperament and their corresponding meditation subjects. Also, in the Christian tradition, the confessor or spiritual director aims to transform the person’s main “habitual defects,” or flaws in character, through particular themes of meditation.⁶⁴

⁶³ Richard W. Sears, *The Sense of Self: Perspectives from Science and Zen Buddhism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 47.

⁶⁴ See Section 5.8.4.3.1.

Another long-lasting effect of the assiduous practice of discursive meditation is to contribute to the deepening of conversion, confidence and conviction and, for Christians, it strengthens the will to follow Christ. Ruminating on religious subjects improves the person's self-control, enhances self-awareness, reduces inner chatter, removes doubt, and helps to focus the mind on the religious object and away from self-concerns, thus transforming the person's focal point of attention;⁶⁵ all these having great influence on the empirical self.

As a conclusion, we would say that discursive meditation is transformative, as it changes one's mentality and self-image. Reading, reflecting on the scriptures and the like contribute to one's transformation by reducing the gap (closing the discrepancy) between the actual self and ideal self.⁶⁶ Speaking for the Christian tradition, Rohrbach says that assiduous meditative prayer "effects a complete change in a person's life."⁶⁷ Similarly the topics of *samatha* reflective meditation are "places of work" (*kammaṭṭhāna*), — e.g., meditation on the Buddha—aimed at transforming the meditator's mentality. By stimulating and improving thought, discursive meditation decenters the empirical self, isolates it from external things, and helps to transcend its identification with the external senses and the body. In essence, discursive meditation unifies and transforms the empirical self.

But, for all its benefits, discursive meditation has its limitations. It may render spiritual life sterile and dreary.⁶⁸ One of its downsides, of which our two traditions warn against, is its tendency to strengthen a person's identification with the thinking mind and reason, thus the sense of self, as it has been demonstrated that, as Sears puts it, "our sense of self, of who we are, is at least partially created by verbal thinking."⁶⁹ The dominance of reason is closely related to the creation of the sense of self, an issue that will be dealt with in the next section.

6.2.9 *Samatha* meditation and active recollection

Samatha meditation and the prayer of active recollection are also closely connected with perfecting and transcending the empirical self. They help the person overcome the

⁶⁵ Teresa makes this point: "our intellects and wills, dealing in turn now with self now with God, become nobler and better prepared for every good. And it would be disadvantageous for us never to get out of the mire of our miseries" (1M 2,10).

⁶⁶ Recollection of the Buddha or meditation on Christ are, in this sense, inspiring.

⁶⁷ Rohrbach, *Conversation with Christ*, 10.

⁶⁸ Jones states: "Discursive reason alone renders human life sterile and flat." James W. Jones, *Terror and Transformation: The Ambiguity of Religion in Psychoanalytic Perspective* (Routledge, 2002), 94.

⁶⁹ Sears, *The Sense of Self*, 41.

Cartesian identification with reason.⁷⁰ As noted in Section 5.9, both mindfulness and recollection are preceded by reflective meditation and meditational prayer, respectively, which are practices preponderantly based on reflection. Mindfulness and recollection are instead practices based on feeling and attention, helping the person transcend identification with analytical mind, thought and language⁷¹ contributing to disassociating the empirical self from the discursive mind and letting go of attachment to reason.

The gradual lessening of thought derived from the habitual practice of *samatha* mindfulness meditation and the prayer of recollection breaks the reasoning process that constitutes the empirical self. It has been said that the sense of self is sustained, even created, by reasoning. Arbel writes: “thinking is a manifestation of the sense of self; it is that which sustains, at least, the grossest sense of ‘me’ and ‘I,’” and she adds, “the notions ‘I am’, ‘this is mine’ and ‘this is myself’ are certain types of thoughts.”⁷² Mindfulness meditation interrupts creation of the sense of self. For Teresa, the prayer of recollection is a way to self-forgetfulness.

As also discussed in Section 5.9, through mindfulness meditation and the prayer of recollection, a deepening of awareness occurs, which allows the person to become more conscious of what Cook-Greuter describes as “ego’s clever and vigilant machinations at self-preservation.”⁷³ Both mindfulness meditation and the prayer of recollection change self-willfulness into openness and acceptance. This letting go of self-will is key to self-transcendence and overcoming self-centeredness. The two religious practices differ, nevertheless, in that, as Stead puts it, for Christians “mindfulness might be making space for the Holy Spirit to work within us.”⁷⁴

Through mindful attention to the subject or object of meditation or recollection the person becomes increasingly attentive and aware, and may overcome firmly-established patterns of thought and action thus further decentering and de-automatizing the empirical self.⁷⁵ Through assiduous practice, mental habits such as recurrent thoughts, desires

⁷⁰ Contrarily to dictum “cogito ergo sum”, Teresa was adamant that “the soul is not thought” (*el alma no es el pensamiento*) and “the soul’s profit consists not in thinking much but in loving much” (*el aprovechamiento del alma no está en pensar mucho sino en amar mucho*) (F 5,2).

⁷¹ Jones remarks: “To mindfulness mystics, the analytical mind alienates us from what is real, and language is its tool: conceptualizations embedded in language stand between us and what is real” (Jones 2016, 14).

⁷² Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, 87.

⁷³ Susanne R. Cook-Greuter Ed. “Mature Ego Development: A Gateway to Ego Transcendence,” *Journal of Adult Development*, Vol. 7, No. 4, (2000): 227-40.

⁷⁴ Tim Stead, *Mindfulness and Christian Spirituality: Making Space for God* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 59-60.

⁷⁵ As Jones explains, “Arthur Deikman plausibly explains mindfulness in terms of the “deautomatization” of the habitual mental structures that organize, limit, select, and interpret perceptual stimuli leading to an expanded awareness of new dimensions of the total stimulus array (1980)” (Jones 2016, 155).

and aversions become exposed to consciousness,⁷⁶ letting the person be more genuine, authentic, present in the present moment, not so dependent on previous experiences. Therefore, the person experiences himself anew. In this way, mindfulness meditation and the prayer of recollection undermine the narrative self, self-definition,⁷⁷ contributing to the weakening of the old “I”.

Our sense of self is largely comprised of a continuous dialogue with ourselves.⁷⁸ This constant internal conversation has been explained in different ways.⁷⁹ But, self-talk, in essence, reifies the empirical self.⁸⁰ A decrease in both “guided” discursive thought and self-dialogue, together with an increase in mindful attention, brings to the surface of consciousness this constant inner speech, thereby attenuating it and the sense of self associated with it.

Mindfulness and recollection are key to overcoming detrimental emotions with which the person identifies. They disentangle from negative emotions toward others and self-perceptions changing them into positive ones, contributing to the transformation of one’s character. Mindfulness and recollection also contribute to a greater stability of character and self-control. Reflecting on the benefits of the prayer of active recollection, Teresa concludes that it is a form of conquering oneself, a gradual self-mastery (C 29,7).

Mindfulness and recollection help to unify the person and reduce inner fragmentation. The reflecting self creates duality within. Certain aspects of the person only come to surface through non-judging awareness, which brings unity to the person. Buddhist mindfulness unifies a person.⁸¹ Stead explains the effect from a Christian perspective.⁸² Finally, diminution of thought and self-transcendence prepares for non-discursive states.

In summary, mindfulness meditation and recollection make an immense contribution to transforming and transcending the empirical self in a variety of ways. Hence, cultivating these qualities is crucial in overcoming the identification with the empirical self.

⁷⁶ Stead, *Mindfulness and Christian Spirituality*, 59-60.

⁷⁷ In the case of Teresa recollection coincided with an abandonment of self-reliance and abandonment to God (V 8,13). “Teresa había descubierto el origen de su mal; la confianza en sí misma” (Castro 2009, 42).

⁷⁸ Blachowicz: “self-consciousness seems to be closely tied to the internal dialogue” (James Blachowicz, “The Dialogue of the Soul with Itself,” in *Models of the Self*, ed. S. Gallagher and J. Shear (Exeter, Imprint Academic, 1999, 199).

⁷⁹ For example, brain lateralization. Blachowicz, “The Dialogue of the Soul with Itself,” 177-202.

⁸⁰ Thinking about the past and anticipating what is to come is a source of self-creation. See Ricard Matthieu and Wolf Singer, *Beyond the Self: Conversations Between Buddhism and Neuroscience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), 153.

⁸¹ Through mindfulness, the Buddhist meditator unifies his mind.

⁸² “As we divide ourselves, we offend the unity of God who made all of us as a unity. In mindfulness the consistent practice of paying attention to aspects of ourselves with non-judging awareness is what can begin the process of bringing back into a relationship of unity that which has been divided” (Stead 2017, 42).

6.8.10 Access concentration and the state of active recollection

The bodily senses are the doors through which the person gains access to the world. Christianity and Buddhism concur in that the external senses are also the doors through which the person's desires, passions and attachments find the way to their objects. Unruly wants and the defilements in general are a dominant source of "I" consciousness as the human being typically identifies himself with its desires, wants and attachments. The psychologist Silva's following observation is valid, *mutatis mutandis*, for Christianity: "[The bodily senses are] avenues through which man's desires and passions may be excited. It is by the control of the sense organs (*indriyasamvara*) that a person can master his desires. When a person is able to control his sense organs, he will remain unaffected by sensory stimuli and indifferent to them, whether they be pleasant or unpleasant."⁸³

Access concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*) and active recollection (*recogimiento*) are both states of strong interiorization of the senses, mindfulness, and enhanced attention. Both are major developments in their systems in controlling and purifying the senses from unruly passions, emotions and attachments and transcending identification with them. It is in access concentration that the Five Hindrances—(1) sensual desire or lust; (2) ill-will or malice, (3) sloth-torpor, (4) restlessness-worry; and (5) skeptical doubt—as mental factors that hinder progress, are first temporarily transformed and transcended. Such deafferentation creates the distance needed for the person to radically disentangle consciousness from these defilements and helping gain further control over the senses. Similarly, in the state of active recollection, or what John of the Cross calls "active night of the senses," the person's consciousness is free from cupidity, malice, hatred, anxiety, indolence, and sinfulness in general (seven deadly sins) and whatever displeases God (CV 28,12).⁸⁴ In both cases, the person first experiences a radical disassociation of consciousness as distinct from harmful emotions (i.e., hindrances⁸⁵ and vices/sin) and realizes he is not them. Such radical separation and temporary overcoming of hindrances and vices/sins is due to an enhanced attention and strong mindful awareness, both of which are incompatible with such obstacles.⁸⁶ Letting go of sensuality, craving, evil desire and negative emotions and passions is a crucial step in both processes of deconstruction of the empirical self,⁸⁷ as identification with them is a powerful source self-identity.⁸⁸

⁸³ De Silva, *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*, 21.

⁸⁴ For Teresa recollection "presupposes a psycho-moral disposition: spiritual separation from excessive cares of life, not covering the eyes 'with the vanities of life' (CV 28,11), not to fill the palace with 'low people and trinkets' (CV 28,12), "not seek reward in this life" (CV 29,1) [...] to empty ourselves of all in order to reach God internally" (Pablo Maroto 2004, 368).

⁸⁵ For the hindrances as "emotions" that disturb and distract see Gethin, "The Practice of Buddhist Meditation," 208.

⁸⁶ "contractile emotions of anger and fear cannot be experienced in one-pointed consciousness" (Bricklin 2015, 159)

⁸⁷ Kornfield, *Bringing Home the Dharma*, 93.

⁸⁸ Jones observes that "emotions based on the false sense of an ego (such as the passions, fear, anger, and anxiety)

6.2.11 The *jhānas* and mystical prayer as the loss of the sense of self

Both the *jhānas* and mystical prayer play a crucial role in the dissolution of the sense of self. For Kornfield, “the *jhāna* states transcend our ordinary sense of self.”⁸⁹ Brahm writes: “one of the features of the second, third and fourth *jhāna* is ‘absence of a doer.’”⁹⁰ Particularly in formless *jhānas* the sense of self almost disappears. Brahm declares that in “the deep *jhānas* [...] 99 percent of the sense of self has vanished.”⁹¹ This temporary dissolution of the sense of self, however, does not mean its total eradication, which is the result of the Buddhist path through the practice of *vipassanā* meditation (the practice of *vipassanā* as a whole consists of transcending the illusion of self⁹²) and the attainment of *nibbāna*. Some feeling of self persists during *jhāna* but, as Snyder observes, “‘You,’ as you usually know yourself do not enter *jhāna* [...] A thinner, gauzelike sense of self is what is absorbed into *jhāna*.”⁹³ *Jhāna* is a state of absorption that decenters and disrupts one’s identification with feelings, emotions, thoughts, memories, the intellect and so forth. In radically stopping the habitual workings of the mind during *jhāna*, the person is allowed a firsthand experience of differentiation and disidentification from the Five Aggregates. This is a preliminary experience of the true nature of the empirical self. As Kornfield says, “attaining the transcendent stillness of the *jhāna* states helps in understanding the nature of self.”⁹⁴ It also facilitates the transcending of the identification with the self that comes with *paññā*. As Arbel notes: “[the *jhānas*] aid significantly the process of de-conditioning. They enable the mind to perceive reality without imposing on the experience the notion of ‘I’, ‘me’ or ‘mine’, thereby familiarizing itself with an awakened perspective.”⁹⁵

Mystical union is often described as a state in which the sense of self is temporary transcended.⁹⁶ As the mystic is passively absorbed in God during union, the sense of self is no longer felt. Christian mystics write about such a temporary loss of the sense of self. Teresa herself describes the feeling of being “out of oneself” (*fuera de sí*) and the “self-forgetfulness” of ecstasy.⁹⁷ Modern authors have commented on such temporary disappearance of the sense of self during mystical union. It is commented on by Underhill

melt away as one realizes the true state of things and accepts them for what they are” (Jones 2016, 28).

⁸⁹ Kornfield, *Bringing Home the Dharma*, 94.

⁹⁰ Brahm, *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond*, 164.

⁹¹ Ajahn Brahm, *The Art of Disappearing: Buddha’s Path to Lasting Joy* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2011), 107.

⁹² The third stage of the path of purification, namely, “purification of view,”—already in the realm of *vipassanā* meditation—William’s words, essentially consist of “breaking down the sense of Self through constant direct awareness (mindfulness) of experience in terms of actually being a bundle of e.g. the five aggregates” (William, *Buddhist Thought*, 85).

⁹³ Snyder, *Practicing the Jhānas*, 72.

⁹⁴ Kornfield, *Bringing Home the Dharma*, 94.

⁹⁵ Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, 122.

⁹⁶ Newberg and D’Aquili comment that the “[m]ystical states [...] usually involve a loss of pride and ego [...] and an emptying of the self—all of which is required before the mystic can become a suitable vessel for God” (Newberg and D’Aquili, *Why God Won’t Go Away*, 110).

⁹⁷ See 6M 3,10; V 28,9; R 15,1; V 32,9; and V 38,12.

for whom in mystical union the sense of separated life disappears.⁹⁸ For Stace mystical experience involves “the dissolution of individuality.”⁹⁹ Bronkhorst observes: “features commonly ascribed to mystical experience are easily explained by the weakening or disappearance of the web of symbolic representation. The ordinary self, for example, will tend to disappear.”¹⁰⁰ Jones says, “if you think “I am having a depth-mystical experience,” you are not having one.”¹⁰¹ Cook-Greuter writes: “unitive stage might be an early form of ego transcendence.”¹⁰² For Smart, “while the numinous experience carries polarity within it, generally mystical experience involves the vanishing of the subject-object polarity.”¹⁰³ Christian authors argue along the same line. Richter says: “Mysticism is a mode of religious experience typically involving [...] the dissolution of sense of self.”¹⁰⁴ Meissner, an eminent author and psychoanalytic theoretician, believes that “*unio mystica* represent a dissolution of the sense of self [...] so that its elements are absorbed into the transcended and sublimely loved object. This transcendent absorption of object love stands in opposition to psychotic self-absorption.”¹⁰⁵ Union shatters the belief in self as an entity independent of God; this persistent dualistic view is lost in an embrace of love. In Christian lore, the destruction of a separated identity is described as “ego-death.”¹⁰⁶ Teresa is one of the mystics who describes how, in union, the ugly worm dies to be reborn as a beautiful butterfly. Merkur writes: “the conceptualization of mystical union as the soul’s death [the death of the self, I would say], and its replacement by God’s consciousness, has been a standard Roman Catholic trope since St. Teresa of Ávila.”¹⁰⁷

The temporary dissolution of the sense of self during both *jhāna* and mystical union does not mean of course the dissolution of the person. What “dies” in mystical union is not the person but the sense of separate self. As Merkur puts it: “the climactic moments of mystical union consist of a loss—not of consciousness but of self-consciousness. It is this process that mystics have described, metaphorically, as death or annihilation.”¹⁰⁸ Although a reduction or disappearance of the sense of self is predicated of both *jhāna* and mystical union, this loss, in both cases, does not mean a complete and permanent transcendence of the self, but only a temporary transcendence of *self*-consciousness.

⁹⁸ Underhill, *Mysticism*, 32.

⁹⁹ Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 111.

¹⁰⁰ Bronkhorst, *Absorption*, 12.

¹⁰¹ Jones, *Philosophy of Mysticism*, 21.

¹⁰² Cook-Greuter, “Mature Ego Development: A Gateway to Ego Transcendence,” 228.

¹⁰³ Ninian Smart, “The Dramatic Effect of The Buddha on Western Theories of Religion” in *The Comity and Grace of Method: Essays in Honor of Edmund F. Perry*, ed. Thomas Ryba, George D. Bond, Herman, 324.

¹⁰⁴ Philip Richter, “Charismatic Mysticism: A Sociological Analysis of the “Toronto Blessing,” in *The Nature of Religious Language, A Colloquium Roehampton Institute London Papers*, ed. S. E. Porter (Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 124.

¹⁰⁵ William W. Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and religious experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 153.

¹⁰⁶ When mystics speak of annihilation of the self, what they are metaphorically describing is death of self-consciousness.

¹⁰⁷ Dan Merkur, “The Formation of Hippie Spirituality: 2. *Furthur* and Further,” in *Seeking the Sacred with Psychoactive Substances: Chemical Paths to Spirituality and to God*, vol. 1, ed. J. Harold Ellens (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2014), 225.

¹⁰⁸ Merkur, *Mystical Moments and Unitive Thinking*, 12.

This temporary dissolution of the sense of self in both *jhāna* and mystical union, is probably due to deafferentation of multifarious systems that create and support the self—i.e., sensations, emotions, thoughts, memories, language, symbolic representation,¹⁰⁹ and the like—which are at the core of the sense of self. Such deafferentation occurs in intense states of absorption which lessen the mental associations that engender the self.¹¹⁰ In referring to the stopping of the soul's faculties in mystical union, Arbman notes: “[it] clearly emerged from Teresa accounts that contemplative absorption is a state where one “died from this world [...] been stripped of his lower or natural human self.”¹¹¹ In both the *jhānas* and mystical union the object of contemplation substitutes the sense of self. Having suppressed the agent, one cannot assign ownership to what happens to oneself.

The occurrence of an intense absorption and of the temporary dissolution of the sense of self may also account for the feelings of bliss, calmness, interior silence and quiet, lack of symbolic representation, and other features commonly ascribed to both *jhāna* and mystical union and already discussed in Section 5.11. The dissolution of the sense of self probably explains the reported disappearance of the feeling of time and space during these experiences,¹¹² as the feelings of timelessness, or atemporality, spacelessness, otherworldliness extraordinariness and awe are often related to self-transcendence.¹¹³

The dissolution of the sense of self in *jhāna* and mystical union carries with it the feelings of oneness¹¹⁴ reported of both experiences and already discussed in 5.11.4.4. An effect of the transcendence of the feeling of being, or having, an independent and autonomous self is the simultaneous recognition of the interconnectedness of all things or sense of unity with the universe. This sense of interconnectedness or unity probably comes from transcending the feeling of separation with reality and other human beings.

The transcendence of the sense of self during the states of *jhāna* and mystical union, although temporary and incomplete, greatly transforms the person's self-understanding in daily life with a greater acceptance of and openness to reality, letting go of attachments and a deep appreciation of the value of life. The identification with and attachment to the empirical becomes thus relativized.

¹⁰⁹ Bronkhorst, *Absorption*, 27.

¹¹⁰ Bronkhorst says, “Absorption, we must assume, reduces the number and perhaps the intensity of associations, including unconscious associations. What remains is an experience in which the associations that are responsible for symbolic representations have been reduced or suppressed: a non-symbolic, mystical experience” (Bronkhorst 2012, 14).

¹¹¹ Arbman, *Ecstasy*, Vol. 2, 135.

¹¹² There are reports that link the sense of self with the areas of the brain connected with orientation in time and space.

¹¹³ Jonathan Scott Miller, “Mystical Experiences, Neuroscience, and the Nature of Reality.” Dissert. (Bowling Green, State University 2007), 2.

¹¹⁴ Ralph W., Jr. Hood, “A Jamesean Look at Self and Self Loss in Mystical Experience,” in *The Journal of the Psychology of Religion* 1 (1992), 1-24.

6.2.10 The individual *jhānas* and degrees of mystical union and the self

Each one of the four *jhānas* and each one of the four Teresian degrees of mystical union, when experienced recurrently, affects the empirical self in a very particular way, by detaching and transcending from the person's consciousness the identification certain aspects of it. Let us briefly discuss this point.

6.2.10.1 The first *jhāna* and the prayer of passive recollection

At the heart of 1JH and PPR, there is a disconnection of the person's consciousness from the senses. In the two cases, the person experiences a withdrawal of the senses. In 1JH the meditator abides "isolated" (*vivicca*) from the objects of the senses (PP 4.79). A similar withdrawal occurs in PPR. John of the Cross refers to PPR with the term "passive night of the senses."¹¹⁵ In both traditions, the image of a turtle that withdraws its limbs into the shell illustrates such differentiation from the sensory organs and input. Repeatedly experienced, such disconnection contributes to the person's de-identification with the external senses.¹¹⁶ Such recurring de-identification seems highly significant along the two spiritual processes because identification of the person with the senses is a strong source of self-definition of the person since birth.¹¹⁷

Both 1JH and PPR transcend deliberate reflection. The presence of *vitakka* and *vicāra*, in 1JH, as discussed in Section 5.12.2, does not mean that reflective or discursive meditation are present in this state—both were abandoned in access concentration—but "initial application of the mind," or intentionally sustained attention to the object with the pronouncement of few words. Similarly, in PPR is a state of infused contemplation almost absent of deliberate reflection. In both cases, the directing of the attention to the object, and its contemplation, implies that the person temporarily transcends reasoning as a means of approximation to the contemplative object. By experiencing such absence of deliberate reasoning repeatedly, the ingrained identification of the person with reason is exposed to consciousness. With overcoming of identification with reasoning continues the process of self-transcendence, and now emotion and feeling come to the fore. In both cases, there is as well a lessening of conceptual thought and verbal proliferation.

¹¹⁵ Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, 492.

¹¹⁶ Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, 69-70

¹¹⁷ In an interview with Shankman, Ajahn Brahm comments: "The first *jhāna* is the first time when the body and the five senses have disappeared. So when one gets into the first *jhāna*, that is the first occasion when one has completely let go of the body and the five senses [...] Only when you have leaped out from the world of the five senses and body are you able to know what a body is and what the five senses are. You cannot know what these five senses truly are when you are swimming around in them. You cannot know what a body is when it is always there for you" (Shankman 2008, 166).

6.2.10.2 The second *jhāna* and prayer of quiet

The core experience in 2JH and PQ is non-discursiveness, mental quiet and silence. In 2JH *vitakka and vicāra* are the *jhāna* factors of abandonment. This means that in 2JH not only discursive mental activity has faded but also applied intentional attention to the object. The mind is continuously upon the contemplative object without willing intention. As already shown in Section 5.13.3, the prayer of quiet (PQ), that Arbman characterizes as “a diminutive of the ecstasy,”¹¹⁸ is an infused state in which there is silence of thought and the will is fully captivated by supernatural action of God. The silence of thought and will, together with the absence of inner chatter and any form of deliberate verbalization, are the most striking parallels between the states of 2JH and PQ, which are both labeled with the qualifier “silence” in their description. The absence of thought and inner chatter in 2JH and PQ is an important step in transcending identification with empirical self.

The feelings of spiritual happiness, peace and tranquility experienced in both the states of 2JH and PQ are likewise crucial in attaining detachment from earthly pleasures giving place to greater freedom from the self.

6.2.10.3 The third *jhāna* and prayer of union

In both 3JH and PU there is a suspension of articulated thought and imagination, verbalization, and verbal construction. Both are states characterized as of inner silence. During the prayer of union, a suspension of the higher faculties of the soul takes place. The person's identification with the will, the understanding and memory is an important component of his sense of self. The suspension of the faculties of the soul is a key aspect in the process of transcendence of the sense of self. The intense state of absorption that takes place in 3JH likewise leads to the suppression of many ordinary mental activities with which the empirical self is identified and conform it.

6.2.10.3 The fourth *jhāna* and the prayer of ecstasy

As discussed in Section 5.15.4.3.6, the loss of sense of self is accentuated in both 4JH and PE. 4JH is a state characterized by transcending psychical and mental feelings and emotions which are substituted by equanimity (*upekkhā*). With the abandoning of pleasure (*sukha*) and pain (*dukkha*), and the previous disappearance of joy (*somanassa*) and grief (*domanassa*), 4JH is described as a state of “neither-pain-nor-pleasure”

¹¹⁸ Arbman, *Ecstasy*, Vol. 2, 1.

(*adukkhamā-sukha*) that has “purity of mindfulness due to equanimity” (PP 4.183). *Sukha* having disappeared, and with the presence of equanimity and a higher purity of mindfulness, the absorption becomes deeper and the sense of self is further reduced. Supporting this view, Arbel refers to “the fourth-*jhāna* as a non-dual experience”¹¹⁹ and, as mentioned earlier, observes that “in the fourth *jhāna* there is no construction of a self; there is no movement of likes and dislikes which concoct a sense of self.”¹²⁰

Christian mystics describe how during ecstasy the sense of self decreases acutely. As Kellenberger writes: “ecstasy [...] is marked by a kind of loss of self: the sense that one is outside oneself and distant from the concerns and tribulations of that self.”¹²¹ Teresa says that in ecstasy the soul seems “out of itself” (*fuera de sí*). As stated in 5.11.4, “ecstasy” comes from the Greek *ekstasis* [*ex* (“out”) and *stasis* (“the posture of standing”)] and means “a state of exaltation in which one stands outside or transcends oneself.”¹²² Self-awareness and sense of selfhood seems to disappear during this contemplative experience as the soul merges with God. Even after ecstasy, there is “a forgetfulness of self” (*un olvido de sí*) for truly the soul, seemingly, no longer is” (7M 3,2).

6.2.11 Formless *jhānas* and Christian apophatic contemplation

The purpose of the formless meditation subjects that Buddhaghosa discusses in Chapter Ten of *The Path of Purification*, and we have discussed in our Section 5.16, is “purification of the mind,” or what Smart calls “purify of consciousness.” For Smart the formless subjects (*arūpa kammaṭṭhānas*) serve “to achieve a state of consciousness that, looked at negatively, has none of its ordinary contents and even transcends the subject object intentionality that is characteristic of ordinary human states.”¹²³ Smart compares the *arūpa kammaṭṭhānas* described by Buddhaghosa and the imagenless or incorporeal meditations suggested in the anonymous Christian medieval text *The Cloud of Unknowing* concluding that the goal, in both cases, is the elimination of mental content.¹²⁴ Such removal of residual mental content, and even volition or intentionality, contributes to the giving up of attachment and the “annihilation of self-consciousness”

¹¹⁹ Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, 161.

¹²⁰ Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, 161. For Brahm a characteristic of 4JH is the “absence of a doer” (Brahm 2006, 164).

¹²¹ Kellenberger, *Dying to Self and Detachment*, 111.

¹²² Sharma, ER, 2678. Teresa describes feeling out of herself in ecstasy: the soul “seems it is not in itself” (*parece que está en sí*) (CAD 4,3). See also CAD 6,6 and V 10,1. It is only when the soul regains its faculties that it comes back to itself (6M 3,9). The notion of “rapture” entails similar idea of being seized by from the body and outside of itself.

¹²³ Smart, “What would Buddhaghosa have made of *The Cloud of Unknowing*?” 109.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

what, though temporary, is closely related to transcending the experiential self.¹²⁵ In formless *jhānas*, self-consciousness is attenuated so that it seems to disappear, nonetheless it is not extinguished, for which the Buddha sought beyond these attainments.¹²⁶ In Section 5.16, we also discussed how for some Christian writers in Teresa's time, the meditation subject in the final stage of contemplation should be incorporeal or imagenless and how to Teresa this proposal was unacceptable, she never leaving aside the Humanity of Christ.

6.2.12 Visions, locutions and the extraordinary phenomena

In Section 5.17, our discussion was about visions, locutions and the extraordinary phenomena described in the Sixth Mansions and comparable phenomena in Theravāda. How these phenomena may affect the empirical self? These unusual phenomena—whatever their nature and however comprehended, experienced and explained—may contribute to self-transcendence by their exceptionality and being external to the self. Levitation, extra-auricular hearing, , miraculous healings and the like, may upset the most basic assumptions about the world in which the empirical self rest, further decentering it. Unusual occurrences such as miracles, clairvoyance or prophesy, as they are reported are significant religiously and should have an impact on the person self-understanding.

6.2.13 Summary and conclusion

At the end of our interpretive synthesis we are in position to provide an answer to the inquiry we began positing, namely, how to make sense of the similarities and parallels between the processes described by Buddhaghosa and Teresa and determining if there is a deeper level where they converge, irrespective of their undeniable differences.

We must emphasize once more that we have not been comparing the soteriologies of Buddhism and Christianity but two particular spiritual processes within these traditions. The *telos* and *praxis* of the Theravāda and Carmelite paths are different. In Theravāda, virtue, mental development and meditation constitute the path while growth in love and compassion is part of it. In Christianity, selfless acts of love and divine grace constitute

¹²⁵ Smart comments "psychologically or phenomenologically, it could be that the purification of consciousness (Buddhist) is equivalent to the attainment of nakedness of being (the Cloud)." Ninian Smart: "What would Buddhaghosa have made of The Cloud of Unknowing?" 109.

¹²⁶ Khantipalo writes: "[The Buddha] was not satisfied with the conditioned nature of those formless attainments even though they were very pure and exalted. He saw in their conditionedness the possibility of deterioration, of unsatisfactoriness and that even with them a subtle sense of self existed and that self-identification was not cut off through them. He saw that by themselves they were not a way out." (Khantipalo 2003, 57).

the path whereas prayer, meditative prayer and infused contemplation are auxiliary. The soteriological differences are clear and provide a proper perspective. The multiple intersections between both processes, and their relationship, are then not soteriological coincidences but common steps in altering and transcending the empirical self.

In each of the individual segments identified in our extended comparative analysis, the deconstruction and transformation of a particular aspect of the empirical self takes place. In the comparison, we saw how, through a series of practices, the person changes. Practitioners in both traditions go through these deconstructive processes layer by layer in relation to the nature and structure of the human being as described by both traditions.

In a harmonizable psycho-spiritual development, the self is first shaken by conversion. Next a purification, unification and pacification of self takes place by the harmonization and cohesion of its various drives through ethics, asceticism and practices of religiosity. The resolution of inner conflict, integrity, stability and cohesiveness of the empirical self is the result, setting a structural progression that, together with the assiduous practice of meditation in Buddhism and mental prayer in Christianity, leads to self-transcendence. The repeated experiences of the four *jhānas* and the mystical unions respectively, further lead the person beyond the understanding of the empirical self as an independent, separate and substantial entity and towards a continuous selfless awareness.

As systemic wholes, both processes decenter, decondition, deconstruct and raise beyond the egocentric, selfish and deluded self, gradually transforming it into a more altruistic, loving, attentive one. Both processes therefore involve a maturation of the self. The result is a modified and transparent empirical self in which the common qualities of greater purity, selflessness, greedlessness and compassion, that the two traditions ascribe to all those who go through Purification of Mind and the first Six Mansions, respectively, shine. In both traditions these qualities are the result of a disappeared sense of separated and autonomous self. Although in many aspects the developmental lines of transformation in both traditions are different, in both cases self-transcendence, is not something considered to be soteriologically accessory but necessary.

We conclude therefore that, although the Theravāda and the Carmelite traditions clearly move in disparate dogmatic directions and have divergent soteriological aims, it is in the gradual transformation and transcendence of the empirical self, where we find an explanation for the patterns of intersection and convergence between them.

This conclusion is explanatory in many ways, as will we discuss in the final chapter of this study. It may explain why both traditions recognize each other in their way of life and practice. It may also explain the compatibility and sharing of techniques between them, and even the possibility of interreligious dialogue itself and interreligious learning.

But saying that the two traditions are efficacious and converge in purifying and rising above the empirical self, and produce similar results in many cases, we do not mean that they are “the same.” Our conclusion does not vindicate the “common core” theory. We have argued throughout the study that both traditions provide answers to different questions or solutions to different problems. It cannot be said that the paths described by Buddhaghosa and Teresa are equivalent and thus lead to the same mountain summit. What the Buddhist practitioner experiences during the course of training and what the mystic experiences along Teresa’s prayer-path have huge areas of intersection, which explains similar experiences and even similar transformation, and results. In this sense, we believe that both paths are “spiritual” inasmuch as “spiritual development” involves a process of self-transcendence. But, when compared carefully, essential differences between both traditions appear which make them incommensurable in their own terms. Nor are the processes of alteration and going beyond identification with the empirical self similarly understood. If in Buddhism this soteriological realization is central and explicit, in Christianity transcendence of the empirical self is the outcome of seeking God.

If a parallel truly exist between our two traditions in transforming and transcending the empirical self, this could tell us something interesting about the nature of human beings and can have implications for our understanding of spirituality and religion in general. We turn to the consideration of these consequences and implications in the final chapter.

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