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Spirituality, discernment and tradition in Ignatius Loyola, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross

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SPIRITUALITY, DISCERNMENT AND TRADITION IN
IGNATIUS LOYOLA, TERESA OF AVILA AND JOHN OF THE CROSS

BY

CARLOS S. PEREZ

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARTS

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April, 1991
ABSTRACT

Spirituality, Discernment and Tradition in
Ignatius Loyola, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross

by

Carlos S. Perez

This thesis examines the process of discernment as described by three Spanish Catholic mystics of the sixteenth century: Ignatius Loyola (1492-1556), Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), and John of the Cross (1542-1591). Discernment refers to the process of distinguishing those things which are of God from those which are not. This thesis demonstrates that all three of these mystics had specific criteria by which they evaluated their mystical experiences to determine whether or not they were from God, shows that there are important commonalities between their discernment criteria, and argues that these criteria in large part derive from their social and historical setting.
"... And so each venture
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
Undisciplined squads of emotion. And what there is to conquer
By strength and submission, has already been discovered
Once or twice, or several times, by persons whom one cannot hope
To emulate— but there is no competition—
There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business."
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Introduction

This thesis will examine the topic of discernment in the thought of three sixteenth-century Spanish Catholic mystics: Ignatius Loyola (1492-1556), Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), and John of the Cross (1542-1591). The mystics start from the premise that God is present and active in the world, and present and active to individual persons. Discernment refers to the process of distinguishing those things which are of God from those which are not. The thesis will be organized around two questions:

a) How are we to understand the process of discernment in the thought of Ignatius, Teresa and John? Of special interest in this inquiry, what role do extraordinary mystical experiences play in the process of discernment?

b) Is there a connection between the criteria which the mystics used for discernment and the social and historical conditions of sixteenth-century Spain in which they lived?

Discernment in the thought of Ignatius, Teresa and John is a multi-faceted process with many dimensions. I shall discuss discernment in these mystics at three levels: First, with regard to living an authentic spiritual life; second, with regard to discovering the will of God; third, with regard to evaluating extraordinary mystical experiences. My thesis shall show that these three mystics each had specific criteria guiding their discernment at these various levels, and I will argue that these criteria in large part derive from their social and historical environment, especially from the Christian tradition in which they formed their ideas.

‘My thesis will deal exclusively with Christian mystics. I will
begin with a discussion of Christian mysticism, including definition(s) and characteristics. I characterize the Christian mystic as a person who reports to have especially intense experiences of God, in which direct contact with God is claimed. I also emphasize mystical experience as a form of knowledge. Historically, in the Catholic church, mystical knowledge of God has been placed alongside natural knowledge of God and revelatory knowledge of God.

Much scholarship is now devoted to the question of whether there is a common essence to different forms of mystical experience (which only appear different due to interpretation) or whether there are different forms of mystical experience. From this controversy there has emerged a new appreciation of the importance of historical investigation in understanding the mystics, and an increased recognition of the interaction between the mystics and religious traditions.

There are two commonly held (mis)conceptions concerning mystics. One (mis)conception, fostered by those unsympathetic to mysticism, is that the mystic is simply crazy, irrational, and given to subjective, non-critical experiences. An examination of the great Christian mystics will demonstrate that the great mystics have always been aware of the dangers of subjectivism, of being misled by "false" mystical experiences. This is very evident in the three Spanish mystics I will examine. While their thought is not systematic, their writings demonstrate a constant concern to separate inspirations from God from self-created inspirations and from inspirations due to "false spirits" or "demons".
The second (mis)conception comes from those persons more sympathetic to the mystics, and asserts that the mystical experience is a pure, unmediated experience, an unadulterated transmission from God to the mystic. This (mis)conception is similar to the first in that it again assumes that the mystic does not critically evaluate his/her experiences, but simply accepts them as they are.

Another problem with this second (mis)conception is that it fails to recognize the historical rootedness of any human experience. Many of the earlier scholars on mysticism, such as Evelyn Underhill, and William James, neglected this factor. Modern scholarship has reacted against the idea of a "pure" mystical experience and stresses the historical conditionedness of the mystic.

Although I have discussed the above as popularly held views, my thesis argues that these are both misconceptions. As should be evident, my two central questions set forth at the beginning of this thesis correspond to, and address, these two areas. To answer the first question involves reading the spiritual works left by these Spanish mystics and extracting those statements concerning evaluation of their experiences. As this is not the central concern in the writings of any of the mystics, this requires a thorough reading of their works. In the last twenty years the topic of discernment has been a subject of growing concern for many Catholic writers, especially among the Jesuits, and much groundwork has already been done in compiling references to discernment in these Spanish mystics.

Addressing the second question involves studying the history and
the social conditions of sixteenth century Spain, especially in terms of the religious life at the time, and seeking to correlate these conditions to the mystics' interpretations of their experiences.

I see my thesis as both a defense and a critique of Christian mysticism. I think it can be of value both to those with a religious interest, and those with a purely intellectual interest. While my personal opinion is not specifically relevant to the central questions I will examine in my thesis, I would affirm that the "true" mystical experience is an authentic one, and therefore the mystical tradition in Christianity is a valuable source of study. I believe my thesis will counter many popular misconceptions concerning Christian mysticism.

While affirming the importance of mysticism, I also recognize that mysticism can be "demonic" as well as "holy", and can be used to justify all sorts of actions. For this reason I think it is important to lay the grounds for a theology of discernment. This issue seems especially relevant in the modern age, particularly in the United States where so much emphasis is placed on "religious experience." The main purpose of this thesis has been to compile in summary form the various thoughts of Ignatius, Teresa and John in the area of discernment.

In the comprehensive survey of Christian spirituality, *The Study of Spirituality*, the editors give two important justifications for the study of spirituality. The first is to aid those individuals seeking guidance in their spiritual life but unaware of the resources available to them in the Christian tradition and "of the immense possibilities that are open to them for growth under the guidance of
the Holy Spirit using the writings of earlier pilgrims in the way." The second is the practical reason that persons counseling others on spiritual matters need to be familiar with the various aspects of spirituality that they may better advise the individuals they seek to help.¹

For anyone who has studied theology, I think it will be noticeable that these are very concrete goals, applicable at a different level than most modern theological discourse. Hopefully, this thesis will be of practical usefulness in the two areas mentioned above, for those interested in deepening their spirituality, and for those in position to aid others spiritually.

For those who approach the problem from a more intellectual viewpoint, I think it will be valuable to recognize the critical dimension present in the great mystics, and to further explore the interaction between the mystic and his/her environment. Recognizing the historical rootedness of the mystic is an important step in better understanding mysticism. I believe my thesis contributes to a more complex picture of the interaction between the mystic and the religious milieu, or "tradition" if you will, than is normally recognized, and leads to more serious thought concerning the relation between mystics and the institutional Church.
End Notes for Introduction

Chapter One: Spirituality, Mysticism and Discernment

The central topic of this thesis is Christian discernment, as seen in three sixteenth-century Spanish mystics: Ignatius Loyola, Teresa of Avila, and John of the Cross. The broader framework of this topic is mysticism, a sub-category of the larger area of spirituality. To place the study at hand within its larger context, it is helpful to begin with a brief discussion of the recent interest, both popular and academic, in the areas of spirituality and mysticism, and to describe briefly these terms. To understand discernment we must understand its interrelationship with mysticism and spirituality; as we shall see, the interrelationship is a complex one.

Spirituality and Mysticism in the Modern World

The ongoing publication by Paulist Press of the Classics of Western Spirituality series demonstrates the recent upsurge in interest in Western forms of spirituality and mysticism in the United States, and the Western world in general.1 Paralleling this upsurge is the increased interest in non-Christian world religions. Especially noticeable is the interest in Eastern religions, most prominently, Buddhist and Vedantic expressions of religion. Another recent religious trend has been the rise of the so-called New Age movement. This broad conglomeration of beliefs and practices is very diverse, and attracts people from various backgrounds. Many people argue that these developments are related. What is behind such phenomena? Sociologists cite several reasons, one of the foremost being a greater emphasis on personal experience in these
movements. People today are not satisfied with simply accepting traditional beliefs; they desire religion to be a personal experience, a transforming phenomenon.

I bring attention to these trends in modern American religion because I believe it is out of reasons such as these that there has been an increasing interest in what is commonly referred to as "spirituality." This interest has been expressed with regard to spirituality in general, and, for the concern of this work, Christian spirituality as well. Specifically, many Western people have turned from intellectual or rationalistic explanations of religion in search of a more holistic interpretation of religious faith, one which incorporates an experiential dimension. Many have turned away from Christianity and found such interpretations in non-Christian religions, believing Christianity to be hopelessly deficient in this regard. However, others have found such interpretations within the Christian religion, especially in the "spiritual classics." It is in large part out of this search for the experience of God that the modern interest in Christian "spirituality" has arisen.

As a fledgling discipline, the area of spirituality as such is still struggling with its identity and scope of study. The definition of spirituality at this time is ill-defined and rather amorphous, and provides an area for discussion in itself. The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality describes the term spirituality as: "A word which has come much into vogue to describe those attitudes, beliefs, practices which animate people's lives and help them to reach out towards super-sensible realities." In an essay in Spirituality in Church and World, the well-known Catholic theologian
Hans Urs von Balthasar writes: "Spirituality may be approximately
defined as that basic practical or existential attitude of man which
is the consequence and expression of the way in which he acts and
reacts habitually throughout his life according to his objective and
ultimate insights and decisions." The Encyclopedia of Religion
describes Christian spirituality as: "an existence before God and
amid the created world. It is a praying and living in Jesus Christ. It
is the human spirit being grasped, sustained, and transformed by
the Holy Spirit."  

As is apparent from this sample, the definitions can vary widely.
However, it is safe to say that the area of spirituality revolves
around the life of the religious person, especially the interior
dimension. Spirituality refers to religion as it is expressed in the
life of the believer. I believe a good working definition of
spirituality exists in the introduction to Bouyer's three volume
work, A History of Christian Spirituality, where Bouyer describes
Christian spirituality as "the lived experience of Christian belief in
both its general and more specialized forms." I would like to
emphasize Christian spirituality as lived experience of Christian
belief. The study of spirituality examines the concrete form in
which religious belief is manifested in the life of the individual, as
well as in the community which is composed of numerous
individuals. Because this thesis deals solely with Christian
mystics, my use of the term "spirituality" should be understood as
referring to Christian spirituality in particular.

The more common focus of religious scholarship in recent times
has been on religious doctrine and the philosophical and/or
scriptural justification for doctrine. Doctrinal beliefs are included in the area of spirituality, but more emphasis is laid on the attitudes, beliefs and practices which compose and are expressed in the everyday life of the believer. Following his previously mentioned definition of spirituality, Bouyer goes on to say: "It is possible to distinguish spirituality from doctrine in that it concentrates not on faith itself, but on the reaction that faith arouses in religious consciousness and practice." Spirituality involves all dimensions of the believer's faith; it is not merely an intellectual matter.

Currently, spirituality and theology are commonly referred to as separate areas of inquiry. Spirituality is distinguished from theology in that while theology focuses on religious dogma and doctrine, spirituality focuses on the impact of the religious reality on the believer. It should be noted however that this distinction between spirituality and theology is a rather recent one, and within Catholic theology there remains a discipline specifically called "spiritual theology." Until the seventeenth century spiritual theology was considered an integral part of theology as a whole. According to the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, it is "the task of spiritual theology to establish the true nature of Christian perfection and to determine the means, both in general and in particular, that are to be used in the soul's advance on the way to perfection." I would put it in simpler terms by saying that spiritual theology links spirituality and theology by extrapolating from theological doctrine the concrete manner in which these doctrines should be actualized in the life of the believer.
The increased popular interest in Christian spirituality has been reflected in increasing academic interest in the area. In a recent article in *Theological Studies* entitled, "Spirituality in the Academy," Sandra M. Schneiders notes the increasing interest in spirituality in both the Catholic and Protestant churches, and discusses the birth of "spirituality" as a discipline in academics.8 As indicators of this development the World Council of Churches convened consultations on spirituality in 1984, 1986, and 1987. Also, academic consultations on spirituality, resulting in published proceedings, have been held at Oxford, Louvain, Villanova, and elsewhere. The American Academy of Religion, the Catholic Theological Society of America, and the College Theology Society now have ongoing seminars on spirituality.9

Within the academic community, Schneiders notes two developments which demonstrate the growth of spirituality as an area of academic interest in the past 30 years. The first is the increase in number of courses and programs in spirituality. She considers especially significant the development of research doctoral programs in spirituality. She also claims that the graduates of these programs are finding teaching positions in the area of spirituality, demonstrating that interest in the field at the undergraduate level is also increasing.10

Schneiders also points to the rapid increase in the number of publications in the field of spirituality as an indication of its growth as an academic discipline. The monumental *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique* has arrived at the letter "S." The aforementioned *Classics of Western Spirituality* series has been
joined by the World Spirituality encyclopedia, a 25-volume Crossroad series. Introductory volumes such as The Study of Spirituality and the Compendio de teologia spirituale, bibliographical tools such as the Bibliographia internationalis spiritualitatis, introductions to classic texts, and a number of series of both critical texts and translations of spiritual classics have greatly expanded available sources in the field. 11

Within the Christian community interest in spirituality can be seen in the large increase in literature dealing with spiritual practice, such as centering prayer, as well as an increased participation in retreats and workshops.

This thesis takes place within the context of a particular form of spirituality, that of mysticism. Mysticism is a subcategory of spirituality, for while spirituality can refer to a variety of forms in which persons live out their religious beliefs, mysticism refers to a certain type of spirituality characteristic of those individuals referred to as mystics.

What is meant by the term mysticism? As with the definition of spirituality, definitions vary widely. In describing mysticism I choose to give central importance to the element of experience in the life of the mystics, experience referring to the direct apprehension of God's presence. This does not mean that God appears directly to the mystic in the same manner as one person confronts another, but it does mean that God communicates to the mystic directly, and not simply through secondary phenomena such as creation or Scripture. The mystics emphasize the possibility of direct communion between human beings and God.
Rufus M. Jones defines mysticism as "that type of religion that puts the emphasis on immediate awareness of relation with God, on direct and intimate consciousness of the divine Presence."\(^1\)\(^2\) Similarly, Evelyn Underhill states that "the central fact of the mystic's experience is an overwhelming consciousness of God and of his/her own soul: a consciousness which absorbs or eclipses all other centers of interest."\(^3\)\(^4\) The quality and intensity of their experience of God is what distinguishes the mystics from other religious persons. It can be argued that all persons living in faith have something of the mystic in them, but the term "mystic" usually refers to those persons whose religious experience-- the experience of God-- is especially intense, and habitual.

While it is the element of experiencing God which characterizes the mystic, mysticism is much more complicated and multifaceted than this simple description would imply. For this reason many commentators have turned to listing commonly found characteristics of the mystical experience as a means of defining the experience. Perhaps the most well known is that of William James. In his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, James gives four characteristics of the mystical experience:\(^1\)\(^4\)

1) **Ineffability**-- invariably the mystics claim that the experience cannot be accurately described in language.

2) **Noetic quality**-- the mystical experience is described as a state of knowledge in which a sense of the authority of the experience derives from the contact with ultimate reality.

3) **Transiency**-- in general, the mystical experience is short in duration, lasting only minutes, or even seconds.
4) Passivity-- in the end, the mystical experience is beyond the control of the subject; the subject does not create the experience but receives it.

Based on other study, I would also add the following characteristics in describing the mystical experience.

5) Sense of unity-- the subject experiences a sense of unity with the divine; in Christian mysticism this does not mean the dissolving of the self or unqualified identification with God; often, this sense of unity extends to all reality, as God is viewed as present in all things; this feeling of unity is usually accompanied by a feeling of bliss, or of ecstasy.¹⁵

6) Paradoxicality-- the experience is described in paradoxical terms; often, seemingly contradictory statements are made with regard to the experience.¹⁶

People often associate mysticism with emotions, with feelings, with ecstasy and with rapture. However, I would here like to emphasize the noetic aspect of mystical experience, the sense that mystical experience involves a communication of divine knowledge. According to Ignatius, Teresa and John, the mystical experience is not simply one of feeling, but also of knowing. Especially important in this regard is the idea of perceiving God's will, a central idea in the thought of these mystics.

This aspect of the mystical experience has been recognized by many persons. Thomas Aquinas described mysticism as "knowledge through experience."¹⁷ In his book, The Idea of the Holy, Rudolf Otto maintains the autonomy and uniqueness of "a particular sort of
'knowing', a unique kind of apprehension, not to be reduced to intellectual knowing, yet still a genuine 'knowing'."¹⁸ Charles Addison writes: "[Mysticism declares] that spiritual truth cannot be apprehended by the logical faculty, nor adequately expressed in terms of the understanding... that truth can also be received by some function of the subliminal self."¹⁹ All three of these statements capture the idea of mystical experience as a means of knowledge.

What is meant by "knowledge through experience"? In the academic world we more often than not associate knowledge with the intellect, with our ability to assimilate knowledge through our powers of reasoning and analysis. For the Spanish mystics, mystical knowledge is not primarily a matter of reason; it is knowledge imparted to human beings by God through spiritual senses, often unclear to our ordinary powers of perception.

Perhaps by comparing knowledge through experience to what it is not, we may better understand it. David Knowles, in his *English Mystical Tradition*, says there are three ways of knowing God:²⁰

1) natural reasoning and natural theology,
2) revelation through scripture,
3) mystical form of knowledge.

The first two involve intermediary forms through which we know God—we know God through the created world or through divinely imparted scripture. In contrast to the first two, the emphasis in the mystical form of knowledge is on direct knowledge and experience of religious truths. "Knowledge through experience" refers to the experience of this direct contact, which is accompanied by emotions or feelings, but which is also a means of
knowledge.

Ignatius, Teresa and John claim to speak of an ultimate knowledge of God, and at the establishment of a conscious relation with God. In their language this is expressed in the idea of discovering the will of God, that is, discovering what God wishes the individual to do. The one supreme desire of these Spanish mystics is to conform to God's will, to follow the model of Christ, who in the garden of Gethsemane said, "Let not my will but yours be done." The mystics believe that through direct communication with God, the mystic can discover what she/he is to do, how his/her religion is to be concretized. According to Ignatius, Teresa and John, mystical experience is not to be pursued for its own sake; it is only valuable insofar as it allows us to discover God's will and increases conformity with God's will. I would ask the reader to keep in mind the emphasis on mysticism as a means of knowledge for it is a central issue in the question of discernment which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Concerning terminology, I would like to make clear that in speaking of these mystics, spirituality and mysticism are interchangeable terms. As stated earlier, mysticism is a subcategory of spirituality. The mode of spirituality for Ignatius, Teresa, and John is mystical, and they take it for granted that all spirituality is based on direct encounter between God and the human being. For them, experience of God is not the domain of an elect few, but can be attained by all. This mystical spirituality does not necessarily involve fantastic visions or revelations, and may be very subtle. Following this understanding of the mystics, I shall
use the terms mysticism and spirituality interchangeably. When speaking in particular of those supernatural occurrences most commonly associated with mysticism, I shall make this clear.

**Modern Scholarship on Mysticism**

Before moving on to the area of discernment, I here present some issues being raised by modern scholarship on mysticism which have bearing on this thesis. While earlier scholarship on mysticism concentrated on delineating the phenomenon of mysticism and outlining its various characteristics, recent scholarship has turned to the problem of interpreting the mystics' descriptions of their mystical experiences. Scholars such as Steven Katz accuse earlier pioneers such as Evelyn Underhill, William James, and William Stace, of too easily accepting the premise that the mystics, even those from very different religious traditions, were talking about the same objective experience. Earlier scholars often emphasized similarities between the mystics, and tended to explain away differences as simply "differing interpretations" of the same experience. To scholars such as Steven Katz, this perspective is ahistorical and ignores the historical rootedness of the human subject.

In his book, *Mysticism and Religion*, Robert Ellwood states that there are two types of necessary conditions for genuine mystical experiences: inner psychological force and outer symbolic and social support. According to Ellwood, even if a "pure" mystical experience exists, the manner in which it is received and the manner in which it is expressed is dependent on historical factors.
The concepts and symbols by which mystical experiences are communicated come ultimately from society. Also, the attitude of the surrounding society toward mysticism is important. If it encourages and expects some kind of mystical experience, mysticism will be reinforced.

Ellwood points out an important distinction within the theoretical expression of mysticism between what he calls primordial symbol and the conceptual expression. The primordial symbol represents the most immediate and strongest mental association with the experience. This primordial symbol is pre-rational—it provides the material for interpretation. The conceptual expression attempts to explain and integrate the experience, making it understandable to the individual.

Ellwood describes three basic stages to the mystical experience, based on the work of Laski, Bharati, and others. These three stages are the background influence or trigger, the ecstatic moment, and the afterglow.

Background influence refers to the events in one's past which led up to the mystical experience(s). Important factors in one's background might be one's reading, religious upbringing, social contacts, or a crisis in one's life. The background influence contributes to the interpreted meaning of the experience by providing possible explanations for the origins of the experiences, and influencing the way the individual will think about the event afterward.

The second stage involves the actual mystical experience. This comes as the first moment in the mystical experience proper and is
its most intense point: a sudden, seemingly spontaneous flash of ecstasy.

The third stage is the afterglow, when the intensity begins to fade and the subject begins to assimilate the experience into his/her consciousness. While the afterglow is not primarily a rational state, the subject begins to make associations based on the experience. The actual process of interpretation has several stages. In the afterglow associative interpretation, fundamental images and block-concepts are connected with the experience. According to Ellwood, the associations are from three sources: the remote influences--the experiencer's recent spiritual background, his or her reading and practice; the proximate and immediate influences--the present sights and symbols, the immediate state of mind, even the physiology of the experience itself; and, the afterglow itself, the influences present during the time of interpretation and integration.26

After the afterglow, there occurs a period of in which the individual seeks meaningful reinforcement outside of the experience. The individual commonly turns to other people who may be able to help explain the experience. Often, the experiencer looks to books explaining similar experiences, or seeks social reinforcement in a religious circle.27

In the last stage of interpretation, which may take place weeks, months, or even years later, the individual moves toward a broader, more universal interpretation, and while the sense of importance attached to the experience still remains, the individual may discover that the meaning associated with the experience may
change from its original one.

Ellwood stresses the social nature of the mystic. Mystical experience is often pictured as an isolated affair, occurring apart from worship or technique, and outside of organized religious structures. However, a substantial portion of mystical experience occurs within the context of group worship or of individual practice shaped by tradition. Almost invariably, such mystical experiences will be influenced by the religious environment in which they occur.

Ellwood summarizes his position succinctly when he says: "Mysticism is not just ecstatic experience, however cognitive. Instead mysticism is this experience plus interpretation, an interpretation fired by associations and feelings evoked by the experience but drawn from the setting." 28

Even more so than Robert Ellwood, Steven Katz attacks the assumption that there is any such thing as a "pure" mystical experience. 29 He starts from the working hypothesis that there are no pure, i.e. unmediated, experiences. All experience is organized in our consciousness through various epistemological categories. According to Katz, a correct understanding of mysticism cannot be restricted to accepting the reports of the mystic after the experience but must recognize that the experience itself, as well as the form in which it is reported, is shaped by concepts which the mystic brings to his/her experience. The mystical experience is predetermined by the language and symbols the individual is familiar with. 30

According to Katz, such a hermeneutical understanding requires a fresh perspective with regard to mysticism. Above all, examining
the influence of the religious tradition out of which the mystic emerged, must be viewed as a central concern requiring a new approach. According to Katz, a conditioning of consciousness is produced by the theological context in which a mystic lives. As he says, "What one reads, learns, knows, intends and experiences along the path of a specific religious tradition creates to some degree the anticipated experience made manifest. That is to say, there is an intimate even necessary connection between the mystical and religious texts studied and assimilated, the mystical experience had, and the mystical experience reported."31

Robert Gimello, a contributor to Katz's book, *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, stresses the religious context from which mystics usually emerge. He writes: "Interpretation is actually ingredient in and constitutive of mystical experience. All mystical experience, like all experiences generally, have specific structures, and these are neither fortuitous nor sui generis. Rather they are given to the experiences, at their very inceptions, by concepts, beliefs, values, and expectations already operative in the mystics minds. These structures or meaning are not mere 'forms', but are of the essence of the mystical experience. They engender it, and inform its very identity."32 Gimello bluntly states that "Mysticism is inextricably bound up with, dependent upon, and usually subservient to the deeper beliefs and values of the traditions, cultures, and historical milieux which harbour it."33 Like Katz, Gimello argues that the very nature of the mystical experiences is predetermined by doctrines which the mystic has agreed to.
An important point to examine is the relation between the mystic and organized religion. Katz argues that mysticism is often thought of as an autonomous realm of experience which is at odds with more traditional and religious beliefs, practices, and communities. He thinks it is erroneous to juxtapose the mystic and his/her tradition, the mystic individual and his/her socio-religious environment. He asserts: "While it is true that mysticism, in its many different guises, contains elements of radical challenge to established religious authority and tradition, at the same time it also embodies characteristics which are anything but radical."\(^{34}\)

Both Ellwood and Katz recognize the importance of various influences on the mystic. Ellwood argues the influence presents itself especially during the interpretation of the experience; Katz goes further, arguing that these influences affect the experience itself. I agree more with Ellwood than with Katz and Gimello. Katz's model is too restrictive--it does not explain those mystical experiences which do go against the established authorities, which are innovative and radical given the environment in which the mystic lives. Also, it fails to fully account for the importance of the "afterglow" period in which intensive interpretation of the experience takes place. If it were simply the influences previous to the "flashpoint" which determined the experience, then the interpretation of the experience would already be largely present. From my studies of Ignatius, Teresa and John, I know this is not the case; in their lives the full interpretation of their experiences often took years to be realized. Also, as a point against Katz and Gimello, there are examples in which these mystics were only able
to interpret their experiences in light of influences which encountered them only after the experience. Finally, while Katz and Gimello concentrate on the literal transmission of ideas and doctrine, I do not think their discussion demonstrates an appreciation for the experiential dimension of the mystical experience. Ideas and doctrinal beliefs are not all that is transmitted through religious tradition, as I will argue in my conclusion.

I agree with Ellwood that the mystical experience should be thought of in terms of various stages, not merely in terms of its "flashpoint." Also, I agree with Katz that the influences which inform the mystics' experiences have often been overlooked. Drawing on the arguments of these scholars, I believe that an appreciation of the various historical and social factors which impacted the ideas of the Spanish mystics treated here is very important. For this reason, in addition to providing a chapter with a short sketch of Spanish society in the sixteenth century, each chapter dealing with a mystic will include two sections: First, a short biographical section mentioning some of the more prominent influences on the mystic, and secondly, a section dealing with the criteria each mystic used in evaluating his/her experiences. In the conclusion I will explore the importance of the relationship between these two areas of study.

Discernment and Spirituality

The heightened interest in spirituality and mysticism has been accompanied by an increased interest in the area of discernment,
and understandably so. After noting the everpresent dimension of experience in the history of Christianity, the Concilium volume, *Spirituality in Church and World*, goes on to say, "History teaches us as well that the most arduous task of spiritual people in all times has been to distinguish between true and false experience; there is no area more difficult to handle than this." Some people see the difficulties as insurmountable and therefore seek to disparage religious experience. Others recognize the problems, but rather than discount religious experience, explore the area of discernment.

In common use, when we refer to a "discerning person" we usually refer to a quality of perception, discrimination, observation, and judgment. "Discernment" is a term used to describe the ability to distinguish the important from unimportant information and the insightful interpretations from the uninsightful. In the domain of spirituality, discernment refers to the attempt to distinguish that which is divine from that which is not.

The theme of discernment can be traced to the earliest times of the Christian tradition. In the Old Testament, two main types of discernment are shown to be necessary: the necessity of the prophet to discern within himself what comes from God's word from his own "dream" (Jr. 23:28; Am. 7:2-9, 15; 8:1-2; Mi 7:1-10; Is 6:5-12, 16:9-11), and secondly the need for the people to discern the false prophet from the true (Is 28:7-13; 29:15-24; 56:9-12; 57:1-5; Jr 5:4, 31; Ez 13; La 2:14; Ho 4:5; Dt 13:2-3).

In the New Testament there is much more stress than in the Old
Testament on the need for discernment. The Dictionary of the New Testament lists the following under the word "discern":

1. Gk. "dokimazo": "to put to the test, examine, reckon."
The word suggests the idea of 'weighing,' to verify in that action the quality and worth of something, from which comes the associated aspect of 'testing' someone or something. (Lk. 12:56 (cf. Mt. 16:3); Rom. 2:18; 12:2; 1 Cor. 3:13; 11:28; Gal. 6:4; Phil. 1:10; Thes. 5:21; 1 Jn 4:1)

2. Gk. "diakrino" (from "krino": "to separate, to choose, to cut"): "to distinguish, to discern." The word underlines the discursive aspect of knowledge and judgment; it also corresponds to interpretation.39

In the Gospels, Jesus stressed the need for discernment because there would be many who would claim his authority to speak (Mt 24:6).

The first letter of John stressed the fact that spiritual phenomena in the Church needed to be discerned: "But do not trust any and every spirit, my friends; test the spirits, to see whether they are from God" (1 Jn 4:1).

Both in his own life and in his instructions to others Paul emphasized the need for discernment. In his letters he insisted many times on the need for discernment in the early Christian communities. The term Paul most often used was dokimazo which means to test or prove: "Try to discover what the Lord wants of you, having nothing to do with the futile works of darkness but exposing them by contrast" (Ep 5:10-1). "Bring all to the test" (1 Th 5: 21). "Put yourselves to the test" (2 Co 13: 5). "A man must test himself before eating his share of the bread and drinking from the cup" (1 Co 11: 28). There is also a special gift of discernment which belongs to
the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit: "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit... and another the ability to distinguish true spirits from false" (1 Co 12: 4-10). This is the gift of discerning whether the spirits are truly spiritual, or evil.40

The concept of discernment is often associated exclusively with Paul's sense of the discernment of spirits. But, as can be seen, the concept of discernment extends far beyond this narrow understanding. Broadly speaking, discernment involves separating those things which are of God from those which are not. I use the inclusive "those things" because discernment can focus on various objects (such as interior motions or judging if a prophet is genuine), and take place at various levels (such as individual decision-making or communal decision-making).

In this thesis I shall concentrate on three interrelated dimensions of discernment in the thought of Ignatius, Teresa and John. The first dimension involves discernment concerning the question of what constitutes authentic Christian spirituality. The second dimension of discernment addresses the question of discerning God's will. The third dimension is the question of separating mystical experiences which are from God from those that are not, that aspect of discernment usually referred to as "discernment of spirits." The reader should keep in mind these three different areas of discernment. As we shall see, these three dimensions of discernment are related, overlapping in an oftentimes confusing manner.

The interrelationship between these different areas of discernment raises many important questions. For example, which
dimension of discernment is given the most importance in the thought of Ignatius, Teresa and John? How is spirituality related to the question of discerning God's will? What is the relation of extraordinary mystical experiences to the spiritual life in general? What role does the discernment of spirits play in the process of discerning God's will? How do discernment of God's will and discernment regarding extraordinary mystical experiences fit together?

Briefly, discernment in the area of living an authentic spiritual life is the most fundamentally important of the three dimensions for Ignatius, Teresa and John, because it makes possible the other two. This dimension of discernment is not discussed as such in the writings of these mystics, but is implicit in their discussion of discernment at the other two levels— they assume that anyone seriously interested in discernment at the other two levels must be living an authentic spiritual life. When they believe this may not be the case, they begin by pointing out the necessary characteristics of an authentic Christian spiritual life

While I have stated that discerning and living an authentic spiritual life is of fundamental importance, in another sense, discernment of God's will is the most important dimension, because Ignatius, Teresa and John all agree that obeying God's will is the goal of authentic Christian spirituality— the line between these two areas of discernment is a bit fuzzy. This situation is further complicated by the fact that discernment in the dimension of discovering God's will can overlap with discernment of spirits, as God's will can be communicated through supernatural experiences.
While the interrelationships between these three areas of discernment may be confusing, the following considerations might help clarify the situation. Discernment of God's will can only follow the first level of discernment because as far as these three mystics are concerned, proper discernment of God's will can only take place in the context of an authentic Christian spirituality. Similarly, discernment with regard to extraordinary mystical experiences is never discussed as a process in isolation from the broader spiritual life of the individual, as it also presupposes an authentic spiritual life. Because such mystical experience is a subcategory of spirituality, we shall see that the criteria used to determine authentic spirituality also apply to extraordinary mystical experiences. The overriding principle of discernment at all three levels is that those experiences which promote progress in the spiritual life, as measured by obedience to God's will, are authentic and can be considered of God, while those which do not promote progress are not. In the following chapters I shall discuss specific ways in which this principle emerges in the thought of Ignatius, Teresa and John.

Separating authentic expressions of Christian mysticism from inauthentic expressions was a major concern in sixteenth century Spain, where heresy, real and imagined, appeared everywhere. For the mystics examined here, the question of proper discernment was not simply a personal matter, but could mean the difference between freedom and imprisonment, or even life and death. All three of the Spanish mystics examined here emphasize the need for critical self-appraisal by persons having mystical experiences. As
discussed earlier, the problem of trying to distinguish the authentic manifestation of God from inauthentic forms was a problem which was present even in the earliest period of Christianity. The current interest in religious experience makes critical discernment regarding religious experience an important issue. It is in light of the importance of critically appraising our religious experiences that I turn to the experts of the past, to see what they have to offer to us today.
END NOTES FOR CHAPTER ONE


6. Ibid., p. xv-xvi.


10. Ibid., p. 679.

11. Ibid., pp. 679-680.


15. Ibid., p. 419.


23. Ibid., p. 87.
24. Ibid., pp. 68-71.
25. Ibid., p. 71.
26. Ibid., p. 71.
27. Ibid., p. 71.
28. Ibid., p. 185.
31. Ibid., p. 6.
32. Ibid., p. 62.
33. Ibid., p. 63.
34. Ibid., p. 3.
37. Ibid., p.101.
Chapter Two: The Spain of Ignatius, Teresa and John

Stanley Payne, a historian of Spain, has written: "Though always fully orthodox in its formal doctrines, Spanish Catholicism is the product of a unique historical and cultural experience. The peculiar conditions of its history, together with the emphatic qualities of Spanish culture, have given a tone to Spanish Catholicism that is recognizably distinct, however unexceptionable its theological foundation."¹

Before turning to Ignatius, Teresa and John, I would like to present a background for better understanding them by providing a short sketch of Spanish history and the society which they lived in. Above all, I hope this sketch will give the reader a sense of the tone of Spanish Catholicism which Stanley Payne wrote of. As noted in the last chapter, I believe there is an important correlation between the social and historical milieu which these mystics lived in, and the spirituality which they lived out. By understanding the factors which influenced these mystics, we will gain insight into certain characteristic features of their thought.

A Short Sketch of Spanish History Up Until the Sixteenth Century²

The importance of the Christian religion in Spanish history is noted universally by historians of Spain. During its long and varied history which begins with the alleged missionary work of St. James in the first century, Catholicism in Spain developed a uniquely Spanish character. Important factors in the formation of this character were the crusade against the Moors, the discovery of the New World, and the leading role of Spain in the Counter-Reformation.
Perhaps the most important historical factor in the formation of Spanish Catholicism was the seven-century long crusade against the Moors. The period between 722 C.E. and 1492 C.E. is called "La Reconquista." During this period the indigenous Spanish population recaptured the Iberian peninsula from the Moors who had invaded in the seventh century and gained control of all but a small area in northwest Spain. Starting from this small base in the region called Navarone, the Spanish bit by bit, century by century, recaptured the Iberian peninsula.

The Reconquest covered a period of eight centuries and was of critical importance in the development of the Spanish national character. Not only was it a war against foreign invaders who had occupied the land of Spain, it was also a war against a foreign religion, Islam. Two of the great forces of medieval times, war and religion, were joined in Spain into one: religious war. While fighting was intermittent, and not always along strictly religious lines, the dominant tone was of Spanish Christians fighting Moslem Moors.

Until the end of the fifteenth century there was no united kingdom of Spain. Rather, there were various kingdoms controlled by different rulers. Increasingly, Christianity served to bring together the various political forces. By the end of the fifteenth century, as the Moorish territories shrunk to the southern coast of Spain, Christianity dominated the peninsula. The church was a central element of every town in medieval Spain, the clergy promising heaven for those who fell in battle against the Moors. Santiago, or St. James, became the patron saint of the Reconquest.
By the end of the fifteenth century the various Spanish kingdoms had combined into two, Aragon and Castile. In 1469 Isabel of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon were married, thus symbolically uniting the Spanish in their fight against the Moors. The union was truly in name only as it did not involve an integration of both kingdoms into one administrative state. While both kingdoms recognized the two monarchs, they had no common political, judicial, or administrative institutions. There was little or no Spanish national feeling and even the language varied from one region to another. The strongest common feeling throughout Spain was the sense of belonging to the Spanish Catholic church; the common heritage was the memory of the Christian crusade against the Moors.4

The reign of Ferdinand and Isabella is called in Spanish history the reign of "los reyes catolicos," or the Catholic sovereigns. Faced with the heterogeneous nature of the situation, the sovereigns used the Catholic church as the principal means by which to unify the diverse elements of their kingdom. The one common institution whose officials had equal authority and equal access to all the kingdoms was the Inquisition, which was authorized by Pope Sixtus IV in 1478. The royal Inquisition in Spain endured for almost 350 years, and played a crucial role in strengthening the monarchy and unifying the country.5

"Los reyes catolicos" insisted on religious conformity. National feeling was church feeling; the sense of "Spanishness" was a sense of Catholicity. Spanish life became rigidly orthodox. Thousands of persons were brought before the Inquisition, where torture could be
employed to extort confessions. No one was immune from the arm of the Inquisition, as demonstrated by the fact that even Archbishop Carranza of Toledo, primate of all Spain, was indicted and deposed by the Inquisition because of his admiration of Erasmus.

The religious fervor of Christian Spain led to persecution of non-Christians following the final expulsion of the Moors from Grenada in 1492. Previously one of the most tolerant European countries, Spain in the fifteenth century showed a growing intolerance of non-Christians, especially Jews. This intolerance was expressed through mob violence as well as in law. Three months after the capture of Grenada, an edict was instituted that presented all the Jews in Spain with the alternative of Christian baptism or exile. All Jews who did not convert were ordered to leave the country within four months on pain of death.6

The Inquisition allowed the Moors to maintain their Muslim beliefs and practices for several years, but here too intolerance prevailed. In 1499 Archbishop Jimenez de Cisneros piled all the Arabic religious books that he could find in a huge mound in a public plaza and burned them. This was followed by pressure against those who did not convert to Christianity, and imprisonment of dissenters. Eventually practically every Moslem in Grenada accepted baptism. In 1502 a royal decree proclaimed that the only alternative to baptism was exile. The majority of Moslems remained, becoming at least nominal Christians.7

The religious persecution of unbelievers did not disappear with the conversion or exile of the openly non-Christian population. Suspicious of former Jews or Moslems who had perhaps only
accepted Christianity to avoid exile, the religious authorities in Spain carried on a campaign to uncover "false Christians." A distaste for eating pork, or an inclination not to work on Saturday, was enough to arouse suspicion. Moriscos were forbidden to wear their customary clothes, and were expressly prohibited from taking baths, as bathing was presumed to be a sign of apostasy. Proving one's Christian roots through several generations became very important, and people of Jewish or Moslem descent sought to hide their ancestry.⁸

All of these factors promoted a heightened sense of religious consciousness and religious orthodoxy. The temper of Spain approaching the sixteenth century can be described as that of a great crusade, extending both within and without Spain. Immediately following the completion of the Reconquest, Christopher Columbus discovered the New World, giving Spain's religious spirit a new outlet, and fanning it even further. Then, with the outbreak of the Reformation set off by Luther in 1517, Spain's attention turned to Europe.

Charles V, grandson of Isabel and Ferdinand, became king of Spain in 1516. In 1519 he succeeded Maximilian I as ruler of the Hapsburg dominions in Austria and Bohemia, and as emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. With the outbreak of the Protestant revolt, Spain became Charles' main instrument in his attempt to subdue the Protestant forces. Determined as he was to reunify Europe under the Catholic Church, Charles was never to achieve his aim. The signing of the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 marked the acknowledgement that the Protestant forces were permanent. In 1556, disillusioned and
exhausted from his many campaigns, Charles V abdicated and retired to an isolated monastery where he passed the final two years of his life.

Charles' son, Philip II, succeeded his father in 1556. Like Charles, Philip II was a devout Catholic and was determined to stamp out heresy in Spain. His reign began with an auto-de-fe at Valladolid at which several heretics were burned at the stake. Philip exercised absolute control over his empire, and believed deeply in his divine inspiration as ruler. His spirit is reflected in the new royal residence, the Escorial, which he had constructed in honor of St. Lawrence, on whose feast day he won a battle against the French. The great pile of connecting buildings was laid out in the shape of a grill, since, according to martyrologists, St. Lawrence, in the year 258, had been roasted alive on a grill over burning coals.9

As we know, Charles V and Philip II were unsuccessful in their attempts to reestablish Catholic hegemony over Europe. Despite the massive outlay of Spanish soldiers, materials and money, the Protestant forces succeeded in establishing themselves as permanent forces. The price Spain paid for its involvement was a heavy one. The huge debts compiled during the Reformation struggle deeply affected the economy of Spain. In 1575 Spain was forced to repudiate part of the foreign debt. Taxes inside Spain became increasingly high, and the tax system began to break down completely. Unemployment and inflation were high and there were drifters of all sorts roaming around Spain. The Spanish picaresque novel, in which the protagonist is a vagabond of sorts, gives
colorful witness to the situation in Spain at this time.\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{Spanish Society in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries}

The most distinctive historical traits of Spanish Catholicism were acquired during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a time of fundamental change in religious policy and emphasis. Especially notable is the high intensity of religious feeling in Spain which accompanied the Reconquest and the Counter-Reformation. The late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were a time of significant deepening and intensification of religious spirit in Spain. According to R. Trevor Davies: "It is impossible to understand the history of sixteenth-century Spain unless one recognizes the intensity of Spanish religious feeling."\textsuperscript{11} Given the importance of these centuries whose historical events I have briefly outlined, it is worthwhile to examine them a little further by investigating their impact on Spanish society.

During the sixteenth century, the Iberian peninsula became a prominent center of Catholic thought. This was due first of all to the remarkable expansion of education in Spain during that period. Six universities existed in Spain by 1450, but during the next century and a half, twenty-seven new universities were founded. A list of some of the major universities founded gives an indication of this growth: Siguenza (1472), Saragossa (1474), Avila (1482), Barcelona (1491), Valencia (1500), Santiago (1504), Seville (1516), Granada (1526), and the greatest of the new universities, Alcalá (1508).\textsuperscript{7} By the late sixteenth century, some kind of Latin school existed in almost every Spanish town of 2000 or more.\textsuperscript{12}
In addition to the growth in universities, the early institution of the printing press in Spain contributed to the intellectual development of Spanish culture. While the date of 1468 imprinted on a certain Spanish book is disputed, there is evidence that a Lambert Palsmart was busy printing at Valencia in 1474. Studies demonstrating the rapid increase in printed materials in the sixteenth century also indicate the increased intellectual activity in Spain.\textsuperscript{13}

The growth in religious culture and activism was paralleled by expansion of religious involvement among part of the population as a whole. The increased literacy helped produce an intensified awareness of the personal and interior dimensions of religion which became more common than in the Middle Ages. Serious standards of religiosity were disseminated to the literate upper and middle levels of society through a large number of new devotional books written in Spanish, and in general, there was an intensification of religious consciousness.\textsuperscript{14}

The interiorization of religion which accompanied the increasing literacy of the Spanish population is an important factor to bear in mind when discussing Spanish religion in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The increasing wealth and level of education in Spain produced a large number of spiritual books and manuals, many of which dealt with mystical experience and prayer. In a survey of mystical literature in Spanish history, Marquez finds several factors which are characteristic of a Spanish mystical tradition.\textsuperscript{15} He lists the following as especially distinctive: an emphasis on practical versus abstract thought, on pedagogy, on free will and
individual effort, on works, on charity, on love of neighbor, on morality, and on saving souls. Marquez says these emphases reflect the Spanish national philosophy in which the ethical has always predominated over the metaphysical, and practical teaching has been preferred to purely speculative thinking.16

Compared to many other parts of Europe at the time, the Church in Spain was in good condition. Shortly before 1500 the Spanish church carried out a reform which eliminated much of the excess of disreputable behavior which was so common in much of the European clergy at the time. Clerical concubinage was abolished (1480) and various reforms were instituted by the ecclesiastical councils of Aranda (1473) and Seville (1512).17 Religious vocations were high; it was from the Spanish clergy that pioneering missionaries such as Francis Xavier and Cosmo de Toreses emerged.

Development of Spanish Catholicism was strongly influenced by the general historical and international situation, and particularly by the consequences of the Protestant Reformation. Confrontation with Islam and Judaism had already led the Spanish to stress absolute Catholic orthodoxy--Spain's role in the Counter-Reformation further aroused this sentiment. The church began to censor certain books, and published its first index of banned works in 1546.18

While the religious fervor in Spain resulted in many ways from the particularities of Spanish history in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it is important to understand that the increasing intensity of religious consciousness taking place in Spain paralleled a broader religious revival that in other European countries preceded
the Reformation. The Catholic movement corresponding to the appearance of Protestantism is known as the Catholic Reformation or the Counter-Reformation, the former term being preferred by Catholics, the latter by Protestants. Many historians now agree that both are applicable. On the one hand the Catholic church underwent a genuine reform, driven by forces previous to the Protestant reformers. On the other hand the manner in which this reform took place obviously interacted with the challenge of the Protestant challenge.19

In his book, The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation, H. O. Evennett argues that the concept of the Counter-Reformation as essentially "reactionary" and backward-looking has tended to obscure the recognition that it was in many ways the adaptation of the Catholic religion and of the Catholic Church to new forces both in the spiritual and in the material order.20 Modern scholars no longer see the Counter-Reformation as simply a reaction to Protestantism, but trace it back to earlier roots. Especially notable for this thesis is the increasing recognition that the Reformation was not simply a political or doctrinal matter, but also resulted from the pressure of popular spiritual movements at the grass-roots level. These spiritual movements laid special emphasis on religious practice such as prayer, devotion and worship.

Evennett emphasizes the role of three influential forces used by the Catholic Church in its response to the Protestant Reformation. Two of these the Jesuits and the Inquisition, were based in Spain. The third was the Council of Trent, from which there flowed the new legislation on the Church and religious practice that provided
the guidelines for Catholic spirituality in the second half of the sixteenth century. Here too, Spanish influence was so pronounced that the Council has been described as a "Spanish council."21

The Council of Trent, whose influence in the development of subsequent Catholicism was formative, met intermittently for almost twenty years, from 1545 to 1563. The council declared justification to be by works and faith combined, listed the seven sacraments and defined them exactly, affirmed a sacrament to be a vehicle of grace independent of the spiritual state of the person who received it, reaffirmed transubstantiation, and declared the priesthood to be a special estate set apart from the laity by the sacrament of holy orders and endowed with a supernatural power transmitted from Christ and the Apostles. As sources of Catholic faith, the council put Scripture and Tradition on an equal footing. The right of individuals to believe that that their own interpretation of Scripture was more true than that of Church authorities was denied.

The spirituality promoted by the Council of Trent stressed works, sanctification and advancement in the virtues, zeal for good works of mercy and charity, and labor for the salvation of souls -- "a spirituality which was to reflect the bustle and energy and determination of sixteenth-century man, feeling at last that he had a power over himself and over things to be applied, in the Counter-Reformation."22 According to Evennet, the spirituality of the Counter-Reformation sprang from a triple alliance between the Tridentine clarifications of the orthodox teaching on grace and justification, the prevalent mood which stressed active works, and
developments in ascetical teaching and practice which promoted this outlook.\textsuperscript{23}

Evennet writes of the importance of developments in the practice of prayer in the late middle ages, especially the emergence of a system of ordered meditations. These took the form of a systematic method of private, meditative prayer which exercised a wide influence. A system of meditation was developed which was to be regularly followed, and was designed to promote habits of self-control, advancement in perfection of the virtues, and the fostering of a single-minded devotion. This system of meditation was integrated with the traditional mystical concepts of purgation, illumination and union. While these works on prayer and meditation were written specifically for the clergy, the self-control, attention to prayer, perseverance in virtue, and sense of dedication that applied to the religious life, were said to apply in some degree to all Christians.\textsuperscript{24}

While stressing human effort and the need for good works, Counter-Reformation spirituality was at the same time based on the doctrine that it is God who does all. For the spiritual leaders of the Counter-Reformation it was the sacramental system which was the central means by which God's grace reached human beings. There was close connection between the personal discipline involved in regular periods of daily mental prayer and the new fervour for the sacraments of confession and communion. These two aspects of Counter-Reformation piety, one stressing human effort, the other stressing the importance of channeled grace, were linked together.\textsuperscript{25}
The revival of the sacramental life, the spread and development of meditative prayer and eucharistic devotions, and the emphasis outward activity and good works as a factor in personal sanctification, are all important aspects of Tridentine doctrine. According to Evennet, these are the essential elements of Counter-Reformation spirituality.²⁶

As shall become apparent later in this thesis, many of the characteristics of Spanish Catholicism and Counter-Reformation spirituality are found in the spirituality of Ignatius, Teresa and John. Clear examples are the importance attached to prayer, the emphasis on morality and freee will and the need for personal effort in the spiritual life, and the importance of the institutional Church and the sacraments. It is noteworthy that many of the characteristics of Counter-Reformation spirituality coincide with many of the characteristics of Spanish Catholicism, for example, the emphasis on personal effort and free will, the importance of good works, and obedience to the Church. While an investigation of the relationship between the two would be interesting, I would here simply point out that both overlap in many areas, thus reinforcing one another, and both are influences on the mystics to be examined in this thesis.

**Mysticism in Spain in the Sixteenth Century**

How do these historical factors relate to the discussion of mysticism and discernment? As we have seen, religion in Spain played a very important role in the sixteenth century. Religion permeated all levels of society, and God was believed to be actively
working in Spanish history. In his book, *Mysticism and Religion*, Robert Ellwood has written of the importance for mysticism of an atmosphere supportive of such religious experience.\(^{27}\) If, as I have described it, mysticism is an especially intense form of religious experience, we could expect to see it in a society such as sixteenth century Spain where religious devotion was very high and favorably regarded, and God was thought to be actively involved in the world. This favorable environment would have been reinforced by the dissemination of literature promoting interior religious experience.

It is also important to consider the state of decay and economic hardship which began to make itself felt in Spain in the sixteenth-century. Both in the political sphere as well as the economic sphere, Spain found itself sliding from its previous station. At times of disillusionment with the state of society, people often turn to other-worldly concerns; without making any value judgments, mysticism certainly tends to be "a flight from 'reality'" in some sense.

I think both of these historical factors can be seen as conducive to the presence of mysticism in sixteenth century Spain. An atmosphere existed in which it was universally believed that the most intimate intercourse could take place with the spiritual world. Given the presence of such factors, it is not surprising that mysticism was a common phenomena in Spain in the fifteenth and sixteen century, and historically, the importance of mysticism in Spanish Catholicism cannot be overlooked. Trevor Davies goes so far as to say: "It is impossible to understand the religious life of Spain or even the history of the Spanish race unless one grasps the
importance of Spanish mysticism."²⁸

In Spain there was much respect and veneration for mysticism. The works of leading mystics became a prominent part of the national literature and were read as classics. Mystics arose everywhere, many attracting large followings. Yet, while the atmosphere of support for religious experience was conducive to the rise of mysticism, there was an ambivalence in Spain towards mystics, especially on the part of religious authorities.

As has been noted, due to the formative influences of the Reconquest and its central role in the Counter-Reformation, sixteenth-century Spain was very concerned to maintain Catholic orthodoxy. Because of the centrality of the individual in mysticism, many people associated mysticism with Lutheranism and Illuminism, movements which the Catholic reformers thoroughly condemned. The view that justification by faith alone most logically led to Illuminism or other heresies was widely held in Spain. In addition to this problem, there were many charlatans who claimed to be mystics, persons intent simply on gathering followers and attention.

With the challenge represented by Luther and the Reformers, the Spanish Church tightened up control over religious opinion; the Inquisition was the main instrument for this purpose. While it would be extremely interesting to examine the criteria which the Inquisition used in "discerning" heresy, such a study is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is relevant to discuss some of the more common heresies associated with mysticism by the Inquisition, as these are directly relevant to understanding the
thought of Ignatius, Teresa and John.

The most widespread heresy associated with mysticism in sixteenth-century Spain was that of the "Alumbrados," often called Illuminists in other countries. The term encompasses a wide range of unorthodox views, but there are common themes which make the designation useful. The alumbrados claimed to be recipients of a special revelation which rendered them free and independent of all ecclesiastical guidance. The heretical view assumed that there was an interior voice from God, or an illumination of the soul by the Holy Spirit, which served as an infallible guide for thought and action. The problems arose when the thought and action of the alumbrado contradicted the official position of the Catholic Church. Some of the common deviations which brought persecution to the Alumbrados were the depreciation of external works, the assertion of the right of private judgment, disobedience of religious superiors, and the veneration of certain miracle-working women. Also, there were antinomian variations of the heresy as some of the alumbrados claimed to have attained moral perfection through union with God, and claimed that such a union set them free from all moral laws. The assumption of perfectibility, gained by mental prayer or contemplation, came to be a belief which principally distinguished the alumbrado from the orthodox mystic.\(^{30}\)

When in 1568 the Edict of the Inquisition concerning heresies assumed the final form which it long retained, there was a section devoted to the Alumbrados. From its final shape we learn that they were considered to teach that mental prayer is of divine command and accomplishes all that is requisite; that mental prayer alone
matters, while oral prayer is unimportant; that those united with God through prayer should not be distracted from their prayer by manual labor, even if this means disobeying their superiors; that outward signs such as trembling and ecstasy are proof of a state of grace and possession by the Holy Spirit; that the perfected do not need to perform good works; that on reaching a certain stage of perfection the Divine Essence and the mysteries of the Trinity can be seen; that the Holy Spirit directly governs those who live in this fashion, and that this interior inspiration is to be followed in all things; that the perfected ought not to look at holy images or to listen to sermons. 31

A related problem to that of the Alumbrados was the problem of Quietism, which became most pronounced in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Quietists stressed passivity over and against action, holding that human perfection lay in the annihilation of all the faculties and all activities, and the complete absorption of the soul in God. The Quietists emphasized that God was the prime mover of all that is good, and held that human effort only obstructed God's actions. Because it involved human effort, vocal prayer was denied any importance. It was held that the sole purpose of prayer is to love, and pure love was said to be completely devoid of any self-interest; even to desire to do God's will was considered a sinful degree of willfullness. In its heretical forms, Quietism emphasized prayer to the exclusion of any outward devotion to the Church or the sacraments. 32

The line between heretics and orthodox mystics often became blurred in sixteenth century Spain. Much of what was condemned in
those labelled heretics can be found in lesser shades in orthodox mystics, and much is an exaggeration of what had long been accepted as essential in mystical theology. All three of the mystics examined in this thesis came under the investigation of the Inquisition, and both Ignatius Loyola and John of the Cross were imprisoned for short periods of time. All three had to counter charges of heresy. What distinguishes these three orthodox mystics from those who were labelled heretics?

As we shall see, many of the criteria used in the discernment process by Ignatius, Teresa and John are directly opposed to many of the above-mentioned characteristics of those positions labelled as heretical. In the conclusion I will argue that the criteria used by these three mystics in many ways reflect, and derive from, the larger problem of sixteenth century Spain--separating "true" mystics from "false" mystics, i.e., Alumbrados, "Lutherans," and Quietists.

This chapter provides a broad outline of the historical and societal context in which Ignatius, Teresa and John lived, and I have tried to highlight some of the more important factors which may have influenced them. I have made clear the importance I attach to appreciating the historical situation from which Ignatius, Teresa and John emerged. I believe the religious intensity, the extraordinary mystical experiences, of these three mystics reflects the state of heightened religious consciousness in Spain in the sixteenth century, and I believe their conscientious efforts to analyze their mystical experiences for error reflects the ultra-orthodox nature of the society in which they lived.
In the next three chapters I shall present the central characteristics of their spirituality and examine the process by which these mystics evaluated their own experiences. While each of the three mystics to be discussed grew out of the conditions of sixteenth-century Spain as broadly described in this chapter, it should go without saying that the numerous influences on each mystic varied according to each individual life—no two individuals ever have the same history. For this reason I provide biographical information on the individual mystics, in addition to their teachings concerning discernment.

While certain remarks may bridge the gap between biography and thought in the following three chapters, it is not my intention to tie them closely together. What is important is that the reader recognize that there were important influences on the formation of the spirituality of each mystic, that their ideas developed over a period of time, and they received inspiration from various sources. I will discuss the matter further in the concluding chapter.
END NOTES FOR CHAPTER TWO

2. This is a historical sketch based on various sources which I will refer to throughout the chapter.
7. Ibid., 148.
8. Ibid., 149.
11. Ibid., pp. 172-173.
15. Payne, *Spanish Catholicism*, p. 44.
23. Ibid., p. 32.
24. Ibid., p. 35.
25. Ibid., p. 40.
26. Ibid., p. 40.
Chapter Three: Ignatius Loyola (c. 1491-1556)

The first mystic I shall discuss is Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the influential Jesuit order, and chronologically the earliest of the three mystics to be examined in this thesis. Many people are not aware that Ignatius was a mystic. But to be unaware of Ignatius's mysticism is to be unaware of the very core of Ignatian spirituality, and it is this spirituality which forms the center of Jesuit spirituality. I begin with a short biography of this dynamic individual who founded one of the most influential religious orders in history.

The Life of Ignatius Loyola

Inigo Lopez de Loyola was born to noble, wealthy Basque parents in northernmost Spain. The family belonged to provincial nobility whose members had fought with the kings of Castile since 1200. The traditions of soldiering characteristic of his family, can be seen in Ignatius's strong sense of duty, of obedience, and of high-minded chivalry. As a child, loyalty to Catholic doctrines was unquestioning, and observance of religious practices and moral standards was about average for his social class.

When Ignatius was in his early teens, his father accepted the invitation of Juan Velasquez de Cuellar to receive the boy into his home at Arevalo in Castile, and there raise him as if he were is own son, while preparing him for a career in politics, public administration, and arms. The wealthy and famous Velazquez was the master of the royal treasury and a confidant of King Ferdinand; his wife was an intimate friend of the queen. Velasquez acted as
the boy's patron at the royal court, while utilizing his services as a page.

During his service at the court, Ignatius read many tales of chivalry, which were very popular at this time. As he later admitted, his mind was filled with the military and romantic adventures of fictional figures such as Amadis of Gaul. These novels proved an important formative influence, for they increased Ignatius's ambition to gain fame by great feats of arms. The time he served in the court probably heightened his chivalrous attitude and the desire he felt to excel in deeds.

As Ignatius grew older his activities included gaming, dueling, and romantics affairs. In 1515 he and his brother Pero, a priest, were brought before a court on some unspecified deeds of premeditated violence perpetrated at night during the carnival at Azpeitia. They escaped sentence. A few years later in Pamplona, while Ignatius was walking along the street, a group of men headed in the opposite direction shoved him against a wall. Drawing his sword, he chased them and would have run them through had he not been restrained. Examples such as these are indicative of Ignatius's high-spirited temperament and lifestyle.

When Velazquez died in 1517, Ignatius entered the service of the duke of Najera, viceroy of Navarre, as a courtier, with obligations to military duty if needed. During the revolt of the Comuneros, Ignatius fought at the forefront of the duke's forces in the victorious storming of Najera (September, 1520), but he refused to participate in looting the town. When the French invaded Navarre in 1521 and attacked Pamplona, its capital, the townsfolk surrendered without a
struggle. Almost alone at a council of war, Ignatius advocated resistance to the death in the fortress above the city. In the absence of a priest, he prepared for the end by following a medieval custom of confessing his sins to a comrade-in-arms. During the six-hour bombardment of the citadel on May 21, a cannon ball struck Ignatius, injuring his left leg and breaking his right one below the knee. In danger of death after his injury, Ignatius received the Sacrament for the dying, but recovered from the close call with death.

Ignatius returned to Loyola to convalesce. While recovering, Ignatius turned to reading. Since the family library lacked his preferred tales of chivalry, he turned to Spanish versions of Ludolph of Saxony's Life of Christ and Jacopa de Voragine's Golden Legend, a collection of saints' lives. These books turned Ignatius's thoughts to religion, and it was at this time that Ignatius decided to serve and imitate Christ and to follow the example the saints.

In 1522 Ignatius left his family and started on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Soon after embarking on his journey he took a vow of chastity, dismissed his two servants, and gave away all his money. At the Benedictine monastery of Montserrat, he gave away his mule and his fine clothes, donning a coarse pilgrim's garb of sackcloth. Then he made a knightly vigil of arms, praying all night before an alter of Mary, where he discarded his sword and dagger. He then took a ship for Barcelona and on the way stopped off at a small town called Manresa. Because of developments beyond his control, Ignatius ended up staying in Manresa for eleven months.

During his stay at Manresa, Ignatius experienced many
extraordinary mystical experiences. Periods of great depression, doubts, temptations, disgust, and scruples alternated with periods of great spiritual joys. So intense were these fluctuations of consolation and desolation that Ignatius found himself examining the nature of discernment with regard to these experiences. He led a life of great austerity and ascetism, begging for food and lodging. Besides devoting seven hours daily to prayer on his knees, he read pious books, especially the Imitation of Christ, by Thomas a Kempis, and performed works of charity. He made copious notes based on his readings, and it was at Manresa that Ignatius began writing his Spiritual Exercises.\(^\text{10}\)

In his autobiography, Ignatius describes the sources where he found his inspiration for his Spiritual Exercises. In addition to the interior illumination of grace, the various experiences, his own and those of others to whom he had given the Exercises, Ignatius drew chiefly from three books: The Imitation of Christ, the Carthusian Ludolph of Saxony's (d. 1370) Life of Christ and The Golden Legend of the Dominican Jacopo de Voragine (d. 1298).\(^\text{2}\) Ignatius tells us that he first made the acquaintance of the Imitation of Christ during his stay at Manresa. There is no doubt that its influence on his thinking was profound, for he referred to it as the devotional book he liked most and echoes of its doctrines appear throughout the Exercises. Thus, Christian literature reached Ignatius through the medieval devotional writings of the Franciscans, Carthusian, Dominican, and Cistercian schools.\(^\text{3}\)

The German Carthusian Ludolph of Saxony's Life of Christ had been translated into Spanish by Fray Ambrose Montesino in 1503. While
convalescing in the family castle at Loyola from the leg wound received at Pamplona Ignatius read the book avidly. He made lengthy notes from Ludolph's book, and prayed over them diligently. Ludolph's Life, expanding the Meditaciones Vitae Christi, long attributed to St. Bonaventure (d. 1274), embodied the Franciscan tradition of poverty and love, especially the love for Christ in the crib and the cross. Ludolph presented in order meditations on the Incarnation, Nativity, stay in the temple, hidden life, public life, Passion, Resurrection, risen life and Ascension. A similar method was used by Ignatius in his Spiritual Exercises, which is based on a series of meditations in the history of salvation using the images of the life of Christ. In reading Ludolph he also began the practice of imaginative contemplation of Christ in the Gospel mysteries and many of the methods of praying which he later taught in the Exercises.

Another important influence in Ignatius' religious development was The Golden Legend. In the preface to the translated work, the Cistercian, Gauberto Vagad, formerly a soldier, talked of the "knights of God," the saints, who did resplendent deeds in the service of the "Eternal Prince, Jesus Christ," and whose ever "victorious flag" these knights were following. Gauberto's imagery of the saints as knights under Christ's banner is reflected in Ignatius' concept of the Two Kingdoms in his Exercises. After learning of the great deeds that Augustine, Dominic, and Francis had done for Christ, Ignatius was inspired to imitate their deeds.

Ignatius was especially attracted by the examples of the Egyptian monks of the desert, whose lives and deeds were recounted in The
Golden Legend. These monks, with their severe disciple and penances, appealed strongly to Ignatius, and he described them as "Knights of the Cross" of Christ. Ignatius mentions in particular his desire to imitate St. Onuphrius--one of his favorites among the saints whose lives he had read in The Golden Legend.

Two of the most important meditational themes of the Exercises, the Kingdom of Christ and the Two Standards, both clearly reveal the influence of The Golden Legend, where Christ is described as the King of Kings, and Christ's followers are depicted as spiritual warriors.

Ignatius, in his autobiography, and later the Jesuit tradition, has always affirmed the importance of Ignatius's experiences at Manresa. In this period Ignatius describes himself as being taught by God like a schoolmaster; he tells us his mind was enlightened and his understanding immeasureably deepened. In his autobiography, which he dictated in 1555, Ignatius describes several of his mystical experiences. These experiences ranged from visions of Mary, to a vision of the Trinity in the form of three organ keys, to the manner in which God created the world.

Ignatius was especially influenced by an experience at the river Cardoner, at which he claimed to receive much supernatural knowledge. Of this experience he later wrote in his autobiography: "It is impossible to explain the particulars he understood at that time, though they were so many, other than by saying that he received great clarity in his understanding. This was such that in the whole course of his life, through sixty-two years, even if he put together all the many gifts he had had from God and all of the many
things he knew and added them all together, he does not think they
would amount to as much as he had received at that one moment. 7

From Manresa Ignatius traveled by foot and by ship to Jerusalem,
arriving on September 4, 1523. Denied permission to stay there, he
decided to return to Spain.

Motivated by a desire to help souls, Ignatius spent the next eleven
years studying at universities. After applying himself to Latin in
Barcelona (1524-26), Ignatius undertook university courses in
philosophy at Alcala (March 1525- June 1527) and Salamanca
(July-September 1527). Outside of his studies, he continued to
administer the spiritual exercises, and his effectiveness won the
student a number of followers, and aroused official suspicions
regarding an alleged adherence to the Alumbrados. During their
investigations, diocesan officials at Alcala imprisoned Ignatius for
forty-two days and those at Salamanca for twenty-two, and forbade
him to help others by preaching; in both cases he was ultimately
exonerated. Because of the suspicion in Salamanca, Ignatius
migrated to the University of Paris (1528-1535) where he gained a
master of arts degree in philosophy in April 1534 and then studied
theology for a year and a half under the Dominicans on the Rue St.
Jacques.

In Paris, new followers were attracted by Ignatius's spiritual
exercises. On August 15, 1534, he and six companions vowed to
dedicate their lives to the good of their neighbors, while observing
strict poverty, and to journey to Jerusalem on pilgrimage or, if this
proved impossible (as it did because of war), to place themselves at
the disposal of the pope. Three others joined in the renewal of this
vow a year later, bringing to ten the original membership of the future Society of Jesus.

Heading for Jerusalem, Ignatius traveled in December 1535 to Venice, where his nine companions joined him in January 1537. Forced to cancel their pilgrimage to Jerusalem because of war with the Turks, Ignatius remained in Venice where he had many mystical experiences such as those in Manresa. He and six of the nine were ordained priests there the following June. After long deliberations with the whole group, Ignatius resolved to make their association a permanent, structured one, to be called the Society of Jesus. They traveled to Rome in October 1937 to petition the pope. During a brief stay at a chapel in La Storta, just north of Rome, Ignatius experienced more mystical visions confirming him in his mission. He says that he "felt a great change in his soul and so clearly did he see God the Father place him with Christ, His Son, that he had no doubts that God the Father did place him with His Son."8

In Rome, while waiting for the announcement of the pope, Ignatius continued his service ministry by giving the spiritual exercises, teaching children catechism, preaching and hearing confessions. During the extreme Roman winter of 1538-9, Ignatius and his companions were busy caring for those in need. Once again, under suspicion, Ignatius was summoned before the authorities. Again, he was exonerated.

On September 27, 1540, Paul III formally recognized the establishment of the Society of Jesus. The new order aimed at the salvation and perfection of its members, popularly known as Jesuits, and of all humankind.
In 1541 the other nine cofounders of the Society unanimously elected Ignatius superior general for life. Under his leadership, membership rose to about 940 at the time of his death, on July 31, 1556. As head of the highly centralized society, Ignatius played the key role in the activities and development of the order. It was he who devised, organized, supervised, or at least approved all these ministries, keeping in close contact with them through an enormous correspondence; some seven thousand of his letters have since been published.

Ignatius was beatified in 1609 and canonized in 1622. In 1922 Pope Pius XI officially designated Ignatius as the patron saint of spiritual exercises.

**Ignatius Loyola: Spirituality and Discernment**

Unlike Teresa and John of the Cross, Ignatius did not leave an extensive or systematic body of writings concerning the spiritual life or mystical experience. As his biography attests, Ignatius was a very active and practically oriented person. His responsibilities as the superior of the Jesuit order did not leave him much time to write books. In this section I shall refer primarily to Ignatius's famous *Spiritual Exercises*. I shall also draw on his *Spiritual Diary*, and the original Constitution of the Jesuit order.

The main resource for an examination of the thought of Ignatius is the collection of *Spiritual Exercises* left by him. As noted in the previous section, the Exercises were based on Ignatius's own experiences, and were given by him to countless other people. These exercises are designed to be used as the basis for a four week
retreat in which the individual is to discover God's will concerning a specific action the person wishes to be enlightened on. The Exercises are written not for the person doing the retreat to use, but for the retreat director.

Of the three mystics examined in this thesis, Ignatius provides the most detailed instructions concerning discernment as a process. As mentioned in the first chapter, discernment takes place at several levels. Overall, Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises* are designed to enable the individual to discern God's will concerning a particular action. Within this framework, the Exercises includes a detailed discussion of "discernment of spirits" in which interior motions are evaluated as to their origin, divine or non-divine; this discernment with regard to interior mystical experiences serves as an aid in the discernment of God's will.

Discernment at the level of living an authentic spiritual life is not openly spoken of in Ignatius's Exercises, but as I shall discuss, the structure of the Exercises presupposes this level of discernment. There are certain characteristics of thought concerning the spiritual life which are so integral to the thought of the Spiritual Exercises that one can see them as essential for the process of Ignatian discernment. Briefly, the characteristics of this spirituality which I shall discuss are the emphasis on God's action on the individual, detachment, active service, imitation of Christ, examinations of conscience, and obedience to the Church.

In examining the Spiritual Exercises, the most distinctive feature is its point-by-point methodical nature. Reading through the exercises, one realizes that the goal of the exercises is very
specific: to allow the individual to make the choice which God imparts to him/her. It is not exaggerating to say that the Spiritual Exercises reads like a manual outlining a method for discerning the will of God. For Ignatius the goal of the spiritual life is correctly discerning God's will for the individual, and then carrying out this will.

Because of the methodical nature of the Spiritual Exercises, some commentators have viewed them as an exercise in reason, and some have even described them as "anti-mystical." This view is erroneous; Ignatius makes clear that during the Exercises God works directly on the individual. Early on, the Exercises state that "Anyone making the Exercises will benefit greatly if he enters into them with great courage and generosity with his Creator and Lord, offering Him his entire will and freedom, that His Divine Majesty may make use of his person and of all that he possesses in accordance with His most holy will."10

The retreat director plays a very important role in administering the Spiritual Exercises, but this does not detract from the importance of God working on the individual. It is understood that most exercitants, especially beginners, will need the guidance of an experienced person who is familiar with the dynamics of the spiritual exercises and can help the exercitant through them. Yet, it must be understood that important as the director may be, the director's role is secondary to that of God. Ignatius counsels the retreat director not to lead the exercitant any one way, for "it is much better and more convenient in seeking the Divine Will, that our Creator and Savior should communicate Himself to the devout soul,
embracing it with His love and praise, and disposing it to the way in which it can best serve Him in the future."¹¹

Clearly indicating his view concerning the spiritual process of the Exercises, Ignatius also states: "The one who gives the Exercises should not show bias nor lean either to one side or the other, but standing in the middle like the balance of a scale, he should allow the Creator to work directly with his creature, and the creature with its Creator and Lord."¹² Given this understanding, the purpose of the Exercises can be understood as enabling the individual to detect God's work upon him/her. For Ignatius, discernment of God's will is not simply a matter of rational choice or decision-making; it is a matter of detecting God's direct action on the individual.

The Spiritual Exercises begin with the statement that: "The name of spiritual exercises applies to any method of preparing and disposing the soul to free itself from all inordinate affections, and after it has freed itself from them, to seek and find the will of God concerning the ordering of life for the salvation of one's soul."¹³ In a nutshell, for Ignatius the heart of discernment can be summarized by the second part of this statement: seeking and finding the will of God concerning the ordering of life for the salvation of one's soul. As is evident from this opening statement, this consists of two parts--first preparing the soul to be able to detect the will, and then actually doing this. Discernment of God's will is inextricably bound up with the preparation of the soul for being able to perceive this will. Again, as stated earlier, discernment of God's will is inextricably bound up with the broader area of spirituality. To
understand Ignatius's understanding of the process of discernment of God's will we must understand the two-fold process described by Ignatius in his opening statement.

The first part of Ignatian discernment of God's will lies in "freeing oneself from all inordinate affection." Basically, all affection not directed towards God is improper and an obstacle to discerning God's will. Ignatius starts from the simple premise that "Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul." Other things are only of value insofar as they aid in the fulfillment of this goal. Any attachment to worldly things which detracts from this goal must be eliminated. In order to accomplish this, Ignatius counsels indifference to all created things. He says: "Acting accordingly, for our part, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long life to a short one, and so in all things we should desire and choose only those things which will best help us attain the end for which we are created." It should be noted that this first movement in the Spiritual Exercises does not amount to an outright rejection of the material world. The key word here is detachment. Ignatius does not counsel that we must embrace sickness over health, poverty over riches, dishonor to honor, and a short life to a long one. He counsels that we must be indifferent to either outcome as far as our own desires are concerned. What matters is that we desire and choose those things which best help us to glorify and serve God.

Inordinate affections are demonstrated in sin, for sin obviously stems from affections which are not directed towards God. For this
reason, Ignatius stresses avoiding sin--a person cannot hope to discern God's will when he/she is hampered by inordinate sin. In the Spiritual Exercises Ignatius gives practical instructions, the most obvious being the examinations of conscience, for combating sin in the life of the individual.

A regular part of the Spiritual Exercises consists in the frequent examinations of conscience. This exercise is to be made three times a day. The first thing to be done each day is to resolve to guard oneself against a particular sin or defect which one wishes to correct or amend. At noon the individual is to make an examination of conscience in which he/she reviews each hour of the morning and determines how many times he/she fell into the particular sin or fault he/she was attempting to resolve. The number of times is to be kept track of on a sheet of paper. The individual should then make again a resolution to improve in this particular aspect. This process is to be repeated once more after dinner. Ignatius gives several guidelines for the carrying out of these examinations of conscience, including a discussion of the different ways of sinning, and how to carry out the examination of conscience.¹⁶

Ignatius's call for regular examinations of conscience should not be considered an exercise simply for beginners, nor simply for special occasions or periods, but an ongoing part of the spiritual life for even the advanced on the spiritual path. The purpose of this continual reflection is to maintain oneself on guard against sin. Ignatius himself followed a routine involving extensive notetaking and bookkeeping; many of his associates remarked on how he took care to compare week with week, month with month, day with day.¹⁷
Ignatian spirituality, as exemplified by the Spiritual Exercises, is very goal-oriented: the goal is to serve God. This statement does not contradict the earlier one that the goal of the Spiritual Exercises is to detect God's will--one seeks God's will in order to determine how one can best serve God. According to Ignatius, proper discernment of God's will should issue in concrete action; if one is not actively serving God then correct discernment has not taken place.

The Exercises are designed to promote a commitment by the exercitant to pursue an active faith. Ignatian spirituality does not promote a mysticism of introversion directed towards union with God, but a spiritual life directed towards service to God and demonstrated in action. DeGuibert writes: "The main aim of the Spiritual Exercises is not the abstract idea of perfection, nor even of union of the soul with God or Christ. Assuredly, Ignatius did not exclude these ideas; but the fact is that with him they stood out slightly or not at all. On the other hand, what he emphatically emphasized from the beginning, and what came ceaselessly under the eyes of the retreatant, is the thought of doing God's will, of the service due to the Sovereign Lord of all things--a service, moreover, in which man will find salvation and happiness."\(^18\) In this way, Ignatian spirituality is very practical and very active.

Despite its emphasis on active service, the Spiritual Exercises clearly does not oppose such service to contemplation; service comes from contemplation. The Spiritual Exercises are an exercise in prayer--this must not be forgotten. It is through prayer that the exercitant discovers the will of God. The whole of the Spiritual
Exercises can be seen as one long process of prayer. In addition to the various meditations which make up the bulk of the exercises, there are specific instructions to pray throughout. For example, before each exercise the exercitant is instructed to make a preparatory prayer, and once a choice has been made in the Exercises, this choice is to be confirmed through prayer.

While Ignatius did not view service in opposition to prayer, when he did see the two coming into conflict, he made clear that all other aspects of one's life had to be subordinated to service to God, including prayer. During the formative years of the Jesuit order, Ignatius had to counter a tendency for many to concentrate on prayer to the detriment of action. Especially in Spain at this time, there was a fondness for long prayers, often involving several hours a day. Ignatius was forced to reprimand even some of his earliest followers over precisely this issue.¹⁹

Ignatius's emphasis on action stands in rebuttal to those who view mystics as passive persons concerned only with prayer. In his own time, this meant opposing quietist tendencies among persons who felt contemplation in itself was sufficient. Ignatius in several instances expresses concern that prayer should not interfere with service to others. He recommended that scholastics need spend only an hour a day in prayer and wrote: "Keeping in mind the end of study, because of which the scholastics cannot spend a long time in prayer... they can exercise themselves in seeking the presence of our Lord in all things, in their conversation, walks, in all they see, taste, hear, learn, and in all they do. For it is true that the divine majesty is in all things by His presence, His power, and His
For Ignatius, prayer was simply one way of glorifying God; God could be served in other ways as well as in a prayer or meditation. He asserted that works carried out of love of God were as good as, and even better than, union through contemplation. As he wrote: "For distractions undertaken for His greater service and in conformity to His diving will interpreted by obedience, not only can equal the union and recollection of deep contemplation, but may even be more acceptable as proceeding from a stronger and more fervent charity."21

Ignatius's attitude towards prayer may surprise persons who associate mystics with a life of constant prayer. It is clear that length of prayer, continual devotion to prayer, or high stages of prayer (in terms of visions or other supernatural phenomena) are not central to Ignatius's criteria for the proper discernment of God's will. If anything, Ignatius takes pains to make the point that service, not prayer, is the central criteria for measuring one's spiritual life.

An implicit criteria for living an authentic spiritual life is following the example of Christ. Ignatius emphasized imitation of Christ, especially in suffering. In his own life, Ignatius in the early years sought literal imitation, undergoing serious acts of penance to the extent that his health was permanently affected. The Spiritual Exercises contain continual references to the cross. In general, there is an emphasis on the humanity of Christ and on the imitation of Christ. The contemplation of the mysteries of Christ's earthly life constitutes by far the greatest part of the material in the text.
of the exercises, and this contemplation is especially focused on the poverty and humiliation of Christ. A colloquy with Christ fills the entire first week. The second week concentrates on helping the individual to choose Christ poor, suffering, and rejected. The third week focuses upon Christ's passion, death and entombment. In the Spiritual Exercises Christ is presented as the model of perfect service of God.

Also implicit as an integral part of the authentic spiritual life is a respect for the sacraments of the Church as an aid in improving one's spiritual state, and hence, improving one's ability to discern God's will. Ignatius recommends, although he does not require, confession and Holy Communion for participants of the exercises. He says confession is useful for it increases awareness of one's sinfulness and causes sorrow for one's life, which makes one more humble. The confession also better prepares the exercitant for Holy Communion, which according to Ignatius "will help [the individual] not only to avoid sin but also to preserve and increase grace."\textsuperscript{22}

An important assumption in the Ignatius process of discernment is that proper discernment must be in accord with the official teaching of the Catholic Church. This is made clear in an addendum to the main body of the Spiritual Exercises\textsubscript{1}, in which Ignatius gives several rules for having a proper attitude as a member of the Church. The first rule states: "Putting aside all private judgement, we should keep our minds prepared and ready to obey promptly and in all things the true spouse of Christ our Lord, our Holy Mother, the Hierarchical Church."\textsuperscript{23} Ignatius goes so far as to say: "If we wish to be sure that we are right in all things, we should always be ready
to accept this principle: I will believe that the white that I see is black, if the hierarchical Church so defines it."\textsuperscript{24}

In rules two through eight of this section, the individual is urged to praise sacramental confession and the reception of Holy Eucharist once a year, and better once a month, and better still every week. In addition, the individual is commended to praise the frequent hearing of mass, and the recitation of prayers of all kind; also, to praise religious life, virginity, and continence, as well as marriage (although not as highly as the religious life); to praise the vows of religion, obedience, poverty, chastity, and other works; to praise the relics of saints, pilgrimages, indulgences, and the lighting of candles in the churches; to praise the rules concerning fasting and abstinence during seasons such as Lent; to praise the adornments of churches, including sacred images.\textsuperscript{25}

In these rules, Ignatius shows a concern for preserving the important role of works. For example, he writes of the care which should be taken in speaking of predestination, acknowledging that while "it be true that no one can be saved unless it be predestined and unless he have faith and grace," this should not be said in such a way as to make persons become apathetic and neglectful of works.\textsuperscript{26}

He says the same concerning discussion of free will, expressing the opinion that "in these dangerous times of ours, it must not be done in such a way that good works or free will suffer any detriment or be considered worthless."\textsuperscript{27}

As stated earlier, the essentials of authentic spirituality in Ignatius's thought are mostly implicit in the Spiritual Exercises. In the original constitution for the Society of Jesus we find again many
of the same themes which I have discussed. The Constitutions deal with the principles which ought to direct training, studies, apostolate, and government of the order, and there is a stress on detachment, obedience, and service. In the Constitution's description of the qualities the general of the Society should have, we see a good summary of the central characteristics of authentic spirituality which Ignatius stressed. It reads:

"Above all, he should possess the greatest possible union and familiarity with God our Lord in prayer no less than in all his actions. He should be a model of all the virtues for all the others, especially of those virtues which make resplendent in him the charity toward the neighbor and genuine humility which cause him to be loved by God and by men. He should be free from disordered affections, having so overcome them by God's grace that they do not trouble the serenity of his judgement and that nothing in his exterior actions or his words proves offensive to others. He should have both severity and kindness, and know how to sympathize with the unfortunate. He should be persevering, and ready to sacrifice his life for the Society. He should be intelligent, prudent, and experienced in matters of the spiritual life, discernment in affairs, and vigilant in the carrying out of projects."28

Having described the framework of Ignatian spirituality which forms the background for the process of discernment in Ignatius's thought, and having stressed the central role given the discernment of God's will within this process, I now come to the area of discernment regarding mystical experiences. As mentioned, the Spiritual Exercises are designed for a four-week retreat. At the center of the Exercises is the idea of election, of making a choice regarding how one is to best serve God. For Ignatius, discernment
most specifically concerns making the right choice in this matter.

According to the Spiritual Exercises there are three times when a good election can be made:

The First Time "is when God our Lord moves and attracts the will that the devout soul, without question and without desire to question, follows what has been manifested to it." Ignatius gives the examples of St. Paul and St. Matthew demonstrating such an election when they each chose to follow Christ.\(^{29}\)

The Second Time "is present when one has developed a clear understanding and knowledge through the experience of consolations and desolations and the discernment of diverse spirits."\(^{30}\) As we shall see, Ignatius discusses this second type of election in his "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits."

The Third Time "is in a time of tranquillity." Ignatius elaborates on this phrase when he describes this state as "when the soul is not agitated by diverse spirits, and is freely and calmly making use of its natural powers."\(^{31}\) Ignatius describes two methods which may be used to make this election; in these cases reason takes a more central role than in either of the first two types of election.

In the first method the exercitant is told to use reason to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the position to be decided upon, and after carefully examining the matter from every side, to choose the most reasonable.

In the second method the exercitant is to consider the matter from three vantage points: First, as if he or she was counseling someone else for the greater perfection of this other person's soul; second, as if he or she were at the point of death and looking back on
this decision; third, as if he or she were looking back from the day of judgement. It is true that in both of these methods the exercitant must first reflect on the love of God, and in the end pray for confirmation of the election, but clearly reason plays a central role in the choice at hand.

Following the spiritual exercises, there is a section entitled "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits." Ignatius describes the Rules for the Discernment of Spirits as "Rules for perceiving and understanding to some degree the different movements that are produced in the soul--the good, that they may be accepted; the bad that they may be rejected."\textsuperscript{32} Again, there should be a distinction made between discernment of spirits and discernment in the broader sense; the discernment of spirits is a narrower area of discernment as a whole.

While the process of discernment in Ignatius's thought should not be restricted to the "discernment of spirits," it is clear that during the exercises the exercitant is expected to be "troubled by various spirits."\textsuperscript{33} The Rules for the Discernment of Spirits seem to apply to the second time of election, as described previously, and as we shall see in Ignatius's \textit{Spiritual Diary}, this seems to be the method which Ignatius himself followed in seeking to make a decision.

Ignatius gives fourteen rules for discernment in the first week and eight in the second. The rules for the first week are more suited to those "tempted strongly and openly;" they focus more on coping with the struggles, desolation, and discouragements of following Christ's call.\textsuperscript{34} The rules of the second week are for those "being attacked and tempted under the appearance of good." They help in
"the greater discernment of spirits," and center more on consolations and the subtle temptations encountered by those more advanced in the spiritual life.35

Of central importance in the Rules for the Discernment of Spirits are "consolations" and "desolations." Ignatius describes spiritual consolation as follows: "I call it consolation when the soul is aroused by an interior movement which causes it to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and consequently can love no created thing on the face of the earth for its own sake, but only in the creator of all things. It is likewise consolation when one sheds tears inspired by love of the Lord, whether it be sorrow for sins or because of the Passion of Christ our Lord, or for any other reason that is directly connected to His service and praise. Finally I call consolation any increase of faith, hope and charity and any interior joy that calls and attracts to heavenly things, and to the salvation of one’s soul, inspiring it with peace and quiet in Christ our Lord."36

In contrast to consolation, desolation appears as "darkness of the soul, turmoil in the soul, inclination to low and earthly things, restlessness resulting from several disturbances and temptations which lead to loss of faith, without hope, and without love."37 Ignatius saw an explicit connection between following the movements of consolation and desolation and discovering what God wished for the individual doing the Exercises.

Depending on the spiritual orientation of the individual, the effects of the various spiritual movements can be different. If the individual is directed toward earthly delights, the "enemy" will suggest "apparent pleasure," or "sensual delights and pleasure." The
"good spirit," on the other hand, counters this by harassing the person's conscience "to a sense of remorse through the good judgement of reason." If the individual is directed towards God, the effects are the opposite. The evil spirit will cause confusion, and discouragement, while the good spirit consoles and makes everything easy, and bestows joy, courage, and strength. Because of this factor, following the movements of consolation and desolation can be a confusing and ambiguous matter.38

Ignatius devotes several rules to how to counter times of desolation. According to the Exercises, "in times of desolation one should never make a change, but stand firm." The exercitant should never make major decisions during this time because "in desolation the evil spirit guides and counsels." The exercitant should battle desolation through prayer, penance, examinations of conscience, and patience. While this is a very difficult time, the person should remember that consolation will eventually return.39

Although desolation must be countered, it may still be a special grace that brings "true knowledge and understanding." Desolation teaches that consolations, progress in the mystical life, and even the desire for God itself are all "a gift and grace of God our Lord." Ignatius reminds the exercitant in desolation to find strength in God. Both consolation and desolation may effectively initiate the "flight from self-love, self-will, and self-interest" and lead to a willingness to follow Christ poor, suffering, and humiliated.40

Most important is the individual's attitude of fidelity to God, even in times of desolations. In speaking of periods of consolation, Ignatius still concentrates on desolations, saying that during
consolations, one should look to the past to remember how powerless he/she was during periods and desolation, and to the future in order to prepare for the next period of desolation.

Ignatius believes that it is during times of desolation that the individual is most likely to fall prey to the deceptions of the evil spirit; it is at times such as these that the spiritual director is so important. Ignatius counsels the individual to turn to the director and reveal the nature of any temptations. He says: "Our enemy may also be compared in his manner of acting to a false lover. He seeks to remain hidden and does not want to be discovered... he earnestly desires that [his wiles and seductions] be received secretly; and kept secret. But if one manifests them to a confessor, or to some other spiritual person who understands his deceits and malicious designs, the evil one is very much vexed. For he knows that he cannot succeed in his evil undertaking once his evident deceits have been revealed."\(^4\)

In his rules for the second week, Ignatius gives additional rules to better help the individual to evaluate his/her interior spiritual movements. Central to these set of rules is the concept of the "consolation without previous cause." Ignatius describes the CSCP in the following manner: "It belongs to God alone to give consolation without previous cause, for it belongs to the Creator to enter into the soul, to leave it, and to act upon it, drawing it wholly to the love of his Divine Majesty. I say without previous cause, that is, without any previous perception or knowledge of any object from which such consolation might come to the soul through its own acts of intellect and will."\(^4\)\(^2\) As the CSCP is the one type of
consolation in which the human has no role, this is the one type of consolation free from deception. This consolation occurs completely without the aid of the human being, and cannot be traced to any previous object or perception from which it might have come. These consolations can only be caused by God.

Ignatius recognizes that problems can arise in the interpretation of these mystical experiences. Consolations, as well as desolations, can be products of the evil spirit. Ignatius notes that the evil angel often tricks the individual by presenting thoughts which seem good, but in the end, work for evil. For this reason Ignatius says that it is important to examine the beginning, middle, and end of the course of the individual's thoughts. If these are all good and directed to what is right, then they are inspired by a good angel. But, if the course of thoughts leads to something evil, or less good than originally conceived, or if these thoughts ruin the peace, tranquillity, and quiet which existed before, then this is a clear sign that these thoughts have an evil origin.43

Ignatius also notes that the effects of the consolations inspired by the good angel and the bad angel differ. Again, how they affect the individual depends on the orientation of the individual. For those individuals oriented towards God and making spiritual progress, the action of the good angel is "gentle, light, and sweet, as a drop of water entering a sponge." The effect of the bad angel on such a person is "sharp, noisy, and disturbing, like a drop of water falling upon a rock." In souls turned from God, or going from bad to worse, the affects described above occur in the reverse.44

Even in the case of the consolation without preceding cause,
which Ignatius says can only come from God, Ignatius counsels the individual to be careful in interpreting the results. In the afterglow of the actual time of consolation, he warns that it is easy for a person to make plans which he/she believes to be inspired by God, but which are actually of his/her own making. Therefore, these plans must be carefully examined and approved by the director before they should be acted on.45

The process of discernment in Ignatius's spirituality is rather complex; as we shall see, the process is much more intricate and specific than in either Teresa or John. Ignatius links much more closely than either Teresa or John discernment of God's will to discernment regarding mystical experiences. The very detail into which Ignatius goes in describing the discernment of spirits process perhaps reflects the great confidence Ignatius had that the will of God could be discerned through the method described in the Spiritual Exercises. Ignatius's process of discernment, with its talk of consolations and desolations, and so on, may be rather confusing. Perhaps it would be helpful to recount a specific instance of discernment using Ignatius's method.

**The Spiritual Diary: A Case Study in Discernment**

The *Spiritual Diary* of Ignatius de Loyola remained practically unknown until very recently and has not been published for general use until even more recently. Not until 1892 was the first part of the Diary published in the Constitutiones S.I., and the complete work was only published in 1934. The early Jesuits were very cautious because of the fear of the Inquisition, and kept the
Spiritual Diary a secret for many years.47

The Spiritual Diary consists of entries made by Ignatius concerning the performing of an election on the matter of whether the new order should accept regular income or take a vow of poverty. This election is done in accordance with the method outlined in the Spiritual Exercises, specifically, the method described in the Rules for the Discernment of Spirits. The period covered by the election is forty days--February 2, 1544 to March 12, 1544.

Ignatius's basic goal in the Spiritual Diary is to analyze the various "movements of the spirits" which affect him during these forty days of prayer. The Diary is a fascinating collection of observations in which Ignatius speaks of positive feelings of "profound devotion," of tears, of increased confidence, of deep affection, warmth, feeling firm, elevation of the soul, deep peace, feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit, perceiving the various persons of the Trinity or Mary, and receiving "clarity beyond explanation," as well as negative feelings of heaviness, dryness, impatience, and desolations.

In Ignatius's Spiritual Diary, it is the Mass which serves as the focus of his reflection on his spiritual life. The majority of the references in the Diary involve his awakening and his rising with the thought of the Mass on his mind, his prayer and his interior preparation for the Mass, his preparing the altar and the vestments, the beginning of the Mass and its different parts, and his thanksgiving.

From early on in the election (the third day), Ignatius writes of inclining towards no revenue.48 During the second week he writes
that the example of Christ sending the examples to preach in poverty strengthened him in his inclination towards no revenue. Throughout the election, he seeks "confirmation" of this inclination through prayer. Several times Ignatius offers up the proposal of no revenue in prayer, seeking assurance in the form of consolations (ideally the CSCP discussed earlier) that he has made the correct decision. The first time he feels confirmed in his decision; the second he experiences dryness; the third he is unsure and becomes impatient with the process; the fourth he experiences confirmation; the fifth, despite small doubts, he accepts as final confirmation of the decision to accept no revenue.

Ignatius's search for confirmation through election in the Spiritual Diary can only be described as painstaking and even agonizing at times. Although inclined to no revenue apparently from the beginning, he sought a sure mystical sign that he was correct in his choice. By this I mean that he sought a clear communication from God that he was making the correct decision. In the end he speaks of being confirmed in his decision, but ambiguity is evident in his reference to "slight hesitations." It is important to note an explicit reference to the example of Christ as the model for poverty; this example made his lean strongly towards no revenue. Also, in a document apparently written earlier than the Spiritual Diary, Ignatius outlines the pros and cons of income versus poverty and lists eight disadvantages to having no income and fifteen advantages to having no income. While he sought confirmation in prayer, it is apparent that other factors, such as the model of Christ, and the use of reason, were important in reaching a final decision.
I think this example of the Spiritual Diary is an important one. Besides illustrating the method of discernment which Ignatius describes in the Spiritual Exercises, it also discloses a certain ambiguity concerning the discernment process at the level of mystical experiences. Of the three mystics examined for this thesis, Ignatius is the most confident concerning the ability to discern God's will through discernment concerning mystical experiences. Yet, despite all this, in the Spiritual Diary it is difficult to see this confidence fully validated. While Ignatius felt confirmed in his final decision, he also admits to feelings of doubt and uncertainty even in the end. Progressively, in Teresa and John, we shall see a decreasing confidence in the ability to discern in the sphere of mystical experiences; increasingly, the mystics seem to become more critical of discernment at this level, attaching less importance to this area of discernment and greater importance to the area of discerning an authentic spiritual life. More and more, the ultimate goal of conforming to God's will is separated from the process of discernment with regard to mystical experiences and tied more closely to living an authentic spiritual life. Ultimately, in John, we find an attitude towards discernment of spirits which in many ways can be described as diametrically opposed to Ignatius's.
END NOTES FOR CHAPTER THREE


3. Ibid., p. 13.
4. Ibid., p. 13.
5. Ibid., p. 13.
8. Ibid., p. 88.
11. Ibid., p. 108.
12. Ibid., p. 108.
13. Ibid., p. 108.
15. Ibid., pp. 110-111.
16. Ibid., p. 111.
17. Ibid., pp. 111-113.
19. Ibid., p. 127.
23. Ibid., pp. 170-171.
24. Ibid., p. 172.
25. Ibid., p. 171.
26. Ibid., p. 172.
27. Ibid., p. 173.
30. Ibid., p. 135.
31. Ibid., pp. 135-136.
32. Ibid., p. 163.
33. Ibid., p. 106.
34. Ibid., p. 107.
35. Ibid., p. 107.
36. Ibid., p. 166.
37. Ibid., p. 164.
38. Ibid., p. 164.
39. Ibid., p. 164.
40. Ibid., p. 164.
41. Ibid., pp. 164-165.
42. Ibid., p. 138.
43. Ibid., p. 166.
44. Ibid., pp. 166-167.
45. Ibid., p. 167.
46. Ibid., pp. 189-217.
47. Ibid., p. 180.
48. Ibid., p. 189.
49. Ibid., p. 216.
50. Ibid., p. 201.
51. Ibid., pp. 186-187.
Chapter Four: Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

Teresa of Avila is one of the best loved mystics of the Christian tradition. Her down-to-earth character and her conversational style of writing make her the most accessible of the three mystics studied here. In addition, the example of this courageous woman who accomplished so much in medieval Spain is an inspiration for many women. Once again, before turning to her thought on discernment, I begin with a short biographical sketch of Teresa of Avila, pointing out various important influences in her spiritual formation in order that the reader may better understand the context from which her spirituality came forth.

The Life of Teresa of Avila

Teresa was born at Avila in Castile on March 28, 1515, the third child of Don Alonso Cepeda, a moderately wealthy merchant. In her autobiography Teresa speaks of her parents as "devout and God-fearing." She talks of her father reading holy books, and of the children reading them in Spanish. The mother took care to teach the children to pray and to educate the children in devotion to Mary and certain saints. The father was charitable to the poor and compassionate to the sick and to his servants. Teresa apparently was a spirited child, and early in life she demonstrated deep religious feelings. She mentions reading about the lives of the saints with her brother and being impressed by the martyrs. Inspired by these accounts, at the age of seven she and her eleven-year-old brother ran away from home, intending to go to the country of the Moors and offer themselves for martyrdom. She also mentions
playing at being a hermit and at being a nun.

In her early teens Teresa took a great interest in clothes, read romantic stories, and apparently had a romance with a cousin. When she was fifteen her mother died at the age of thirty-three, having produced nine children, and her father sent Teresa to board at Our Lady of Grace Convent, a kind of finishing school for girls from comfortable families. She remained there for a year and a half, and during that period her contact with the Augustinian nuns prompted her to start thinking about a religious vocation.

Teresa speaks of the impression made upon her by one of her uncles who in his old age gave up all his possessions and became a friar. She stayed with this uncle for a while and would read religious books to him. She says: "Although I remained only a few days with my uncle, yet thanks to the impression which the words of God, both heard and read, made upon my heart, and thanks to his good conversation, I began to understand the truth which I had heard as a child, that all is nothing, and that the world is vanity which quickly passes away."3 Teresa says it is from this point that she began to consider the religious life.

Illness forced Teresa to leave the school, and she went to live with a sister to recuperate. She reiterates her love for books and mentions reading a lot during her illness; in particular, she mentions the Epistles of St. Jerome. She began to visit the Carmelite Convent of the Incarnation in Avila to talk about becoming a nun. In 1535, at the age of twenty, Teresa entered the Convent of the Incarnation, where she remained for twenty-eight years until she left to found her own reformed Carmelite convent.
Teresa mentions the importance of a book, *The Third Alphabet*, by Francisco de Osuna, which her previously mentioned uncle had given her. This was a popular book which contains lessons in the prayer of recollection. She says that previous to reading this book she did not know how to practice prayer or how to recollect herself. This book was an importance influence in the development of Teresa's spiritual life. She mentions the effect this book had on her and says, "I was delighted with this strength. Since the Lord had already given me the gift of tears and I liked reading, I began to spend time in solitude, to confess frequently, and to start on the way of prayer, with this book as my guide. For I found no other guide-- no confessor I mean -- who understood me, though I sought one for the next twenty years."4

It was not until mid-life that Teresa was to have the mystical experiences which she would later write about. In the interim, between her entrance into the convent and the beginnings of these mystical experiences, she speaks of eighteen years of aridity in prayer. She attributes this aridity to an inability to meditate. Again, Teresa mentions the importance of books in her spiritual life. She says, "All the time, except immediately after taking communion, I never ventured to start praying without a book... But always when I was without a book, my soul would at once become disturbed, and my thoughts wandered."5

Teresa discusses the fact that for a period of seventeen years she gave up the practice of prayer due to feelings of unworthiness, what she later termed false humility. She continued in this "blindness" or "sin" until corrected by a Dominican father, "a man of great
learning." She makes many references in her work to this person, and gives much credit in her spiritual growth to him. This Dominican father charged her to practice regular prayer and not give it up. He also made her take Communion fortnightly and admonished her to refrain from evil. So Teresa once again began to practice prayer, although she admits that, "I led a very wretched life, for as I prayed I gained a clearer knowledge of my faults."6

At about the age of forty she experienced what she called her "conversion" while reading the Confessions of Augustine. From that point until the end of her life, she followed a rigorous personal program of discipline and prayer that culminated in frequent religious experiences in which she saw the Lord and heard him speak.

Teresa discusses the various stages of spiritual growth in her writings, starting with the earliest stages. She describes the beginnings of God's favors to her in prayer: "When I made that inward picture in which I threw myself at Christ's feet, and sometimes also when I was reading, there would come to me unexpectedly such a feeling of the presence of God as made it impossible for me to doubt that He was within me, or that I was totally engulfed in Him."7 Teresa talks about the things we can do in the beginning stages of prayer, and refers to a book entitled The Art of Serving God which "discusses acts to confirm the soul in its resolution to serve God, and to help the growth of its virtues."8

Teresa begins writing of favors bestowed on her in form of prayer of quiet and often the prayer of union. She was at first disturbed by these experiences because there was much suspicion of such experiences at this point in Spain. She explicitly says: "Since there
had been cases lately of women who have been grossly deceived and subjected to great illusions through the machinations of the devil, I was very much afraid. In a footnote to this reference, the editor notes that this refers most probably to Magdalena de la Cruz, a nun of Cordoba, who was convicted of willfull deceptions by the Inquisition, and burnt in 1541.

For a while, Teresa was afraid to confide in anyone about her experiences. Despite her fears of confiding with other persons, Teresa decided to consult with a "spiritual person and ask him what kind of prayer I was practising, also to make things clear to me if I were going astray." She decided to consult with "a learned cleric", Gaspar Diaz, who was known for his holiness, and he became her confessor for some time. Diaz's initial response was to tell Teresa he believed maybe her experiences were the result of an evil spirit, which distressed Teresa. According to Teresa, the trouble was that she could not describe the nature of her prayer, for it was beyond her understanding. In order to try to articulate her experience, Teresa looked through various books, to see if she could learn some way of describing her prayer. She found one called The Ascent of Mount Sion, by Bernardo de Laredo, which discusses the union of the soul with God, and says that here she found a full description of the state she experienced in prayer. She underlined the book and gave it to Gaspar Diaz telling him to read it and tell her what he thinks, and advise her as to what she should do.

Teresa was distressed further when Gaspar Diaz, after consulting with another cleric, told her that they both thought she was being deluded by the devil. They advised her to discuss the matter with a
member of the Society of Jesus, as the Jesuits were skilled in spiritual matters.

Teresa discussed her experiences with a Jesuit, Father Juan de Pradanos, and was relieved when he told her that her experiences were the work of the spirit of God, and told her to resume prayer. He stressed the importance of laying a good foundation of prayer and learning the meaning of mortification. Teresa was impressed by the father, especially when he asked her, "How do you know that the Lord does not wish to benefit many people and do much else through you?"^13

Father de Pradanos directed Teresa to base her prayer each day on one incident of the Passion, and concentrate on that image. He told her to think only of Christ's humanity and, as far as possible, resist recollections and delights, until he directed otherwise. Teresa says that after getting advice from this Jesuit her soul "began to make a notable improvement."^14 A visiting Jesuit, Francis Borgia, also encouraged her to keep up prayer, and like de Pradanos, told her to begin her prayer with a meditation on some incident in the Passion. Of her discussions with the Jesuits, Teresa says, "I was delighted by the many conversations I had with the Jesuits, for my soul profited greatly by observing the holiness of their way of life."^15

For seven years after her "conversion" Teresa continued to live at the Incarnation, but she began to plan the establishment of a small Carmelite convent that would follow the original Carmelite rule of 1209, which had been mitigated by Eugenius IV in 1435. She claimed that she had been encouraged to do this in her visions, but at first, there was much opposition from the nuns in the convent and other
ecclesiastics. She finally obtained permission from Rome, and on August 24, 1562, along with four other nuns, she established in Avila a convent of Discalced Carmelite nuns. The rule instituted a much stricter observance of such conventual disciplines as fasting, silence, and restriction of contact with outsiders.

Teresa remained at that first convent for just over four years. Her original intention had been to establish only that single reformed convent, but in 1567 the Carmelite general, Giovanni Rossi, on a visitation from Rome, approved Teresa's work and commanded her to establish other convents. During the next fifteen years she would personally found about one convent a year in Spain.

In 1582 Teresa founded the last of her fifteen convents, at Burgos. On her return trip to Avila she was taken ill and stopped at her convent at Alba de Tormes. She died there, at age sixty-seven, of uterine cancer, on October 4, 1582.

Paul V beatified her in 1614; Gregory XV canonized her in 1622; and Paul VI, who called her "the light of the universal church," declared her a doctor of the church in 1970.

Teresa of Avila: Spirituality and Discernment

Teresa's narrative style contrasts sharply with the methodical nature of Ignatius's writings, as well as with the scholastic style of John of the Cross. Teresa is best known for her autobiography, here referred to as The Life, and for The Interior Castle. She has also written a book, Foundations, which tells of her actions to reform the Carmelite order, and a smaller work, The Way of Perfection. In Teresa discernment takes place at all three levels mentioned in the
first chapter: concerning the spiritual life, concerning God's will, and concerning mystical experiences. Again, I shall approach the question of discernment by first beginning with the broader area of spirituality, highlighting major characteristics of Teresa's thought, such as the importance of prayer, humility, detachment, virtue, the carrying of the Cross, the fruits of the spiritual life, and conformity with Church doctrine and Scripture.

As we shall see, for Teresa, when it comes to discernment concerning authentic Christian spirituality, the best measure is conformity with God's will. In Teresa, more explicitly than in Ignatius or John, this is bound up with, and dependent upon, a strong foundation of prayer. Thus, at the level of discernment with regard to the spiritual life, as well as with regard to discerning God's will, prayer is an important part of the discernment process.

A good point at which to start an examination of Teresa's thought is her small work, The Way of Perfection. The Way was written in response to the requests of several of the nuns in Teresa's order who asked her to write something about prayer, which according to the Discalced Rule, they were supposed to engage in without ceasing. It is evident from the tone of Teresa's work that nuns in her order were particularly interested in extraordinary mystical experiences which were associated with contemplative prayer. Teresa consistently downplays this aspect of the spiritual life. Her aim in The Way, she writes, is to convince the readers that "we should surrender ourselves wholly to the Creator, place our will in His hands and detach ourselves from the creatures."

While in The Way Teresa sets out to write on prayer, she begins
by saying she cannot begin directly with the subject of prayer, but must first speak of three things which those who wish to pray authentically must accomplish. She is very clear about the importance of these things, saying: "So necessary are these that, even though not greatly given to contemplation, people who have them can advance a long way in the Lord's service, while, unless they have them, they cannot be great contemplatives, and if they think they are, they are much mistaken."17 Clearly, any discussion of discernment in the area of prayer or extraordinary mystical experience is subordinated to discerning an authentic spiritual life.

There are only three things which Teresa lists in The Way as essential elements of a successful prayer life: love for one another, detachment from all created things, and humility. In The Way she discusses other important facets of prayer, but they are dependent on these three. Teresa makes clear the organic connection between these three, saying: "I cannot understand how humility exists, or can exist, without love, or love without humility, and it is impossible for these two virtues to exist save where there is great detachment from all created things."18 These three attributes are recurrent themes in Teresa's thought, as shall become evident.

In her work, The Interior Castle, Teresa describes the human soul as an extremely beautiful castle of clear crystal or diamond that contains many rooms, in a way that parallels the many heavenly mansions. God dwells in the center of this castle and continually invites the person to come inside and remain in God's truth and love. Teresa describes the mystical path as a journey through the castle, making one's way through seven stages of "Mansions" in order to
reach the King in the central mansion. In examining this work, we encounter many of the prominent criteria which Teresa sees as essential elements of authentic Christian spirituality.

The main entrance to the castle is through prayer and meditation. For Teresa, Christian life is impossible without prayer. As in _The Way_, Teresa makes clear that any authentic spirituality must be based on prayer. "Souls without prayer," she writes, "are like people whose bodies or limbs are paralyzed."19 Out of a sense of false humility, Teresa gave up prayer for a period of over a year, and writing later she said this was a serious mistake, and that no one should ever give up prayer for whatever reason.

With regard to the characteristics of authentic spirituality which makes possible discernment of God's will and discernment in the area of extraordinary mystical experiences, one theme above all others pervades Teresa's writings: an emphasis on humility. Teresa states: "What I have learned is that the entire edifice of prayer must be founded on humility, and that the lower a soul abases itself in prayer, the higher God raises it."20 Without humility there can be no advance: "As the whole edifice is founded on humility, the nearer we draw to God the more this virtue must be developed, and if it is not, all is lost."21

Another central characteristic of Teresa's discussion of authentic spirituality is her stress on virtue. Again and again she says that advance in prayer must be accompanied by advances in perfection, and she says that we must avoid occasions of sin. According to _The Way_, "The King of glory will not come to our souls-- that is, so as to be united with them-- unless we strive to
gain the greatest virtues."

The seeking of virtue must be kept in the focus of Teresa's emphasis on humility. For Teresa any advancement in virtue must be based on a realistic self-appraisal and a reliance on the grace of God. She says, "By considering the state of true virtue, we can deduce our own distance from it." Only through God's grace are we allowed to grow in virtue. Speaking of herself, Teresa says, "I know how little my strength and small virtue can achieve if You are not always granting me Your grace and helping me not to forsake You." 

While maintaining that all virtue is from God, Teresa asserts that we have the power to advance in perfection. At the same time that we recognize our dependence on God's grace, "It is most certain that, so long as we at the same time recognize our poverty, the richer we see ourselves to be, the greater will be our progress and the truer our humility." She asserts that if virtue is not developed, there will be no advance, and no favors bestowed on the soul. With regard to her own spiritual life, she says that it was only when she abandoned all those practices distasteful to God that she began to receive His favours.

Because in the beginning virtue is weak, Teresa advises the beginner on the spiritual path to be careful to avoid occasions of sin. She compares the soul just beginning on the spiritual path to an unfledged bird-- "It can leave the nest, and God is taking it out, but it is not yet able to fly, for its virtues are still not strong; it has not enough experience to recognize danger, and it does not know what harm self-confidence does it. This is what ruined me."
Another precondition for the bestowal of God's favor, according to Teresa, is detachment from worldly goods. She speaks of disdain for material goods as well as of honor or status. Echoing Ignatius's position, she says that as long as a person is too attached to created goods, there can be no spiritual progress, "For all transitory things are as nothing or less than nothing, and are displeasing to God." 27

In addition to detachment from material and psychological attachments, Teresa also counsels detachment from spiritual "pleasures" or "consolations." By this she means the feelings of joy and of peace which often derive from mystical experience. While Teresa found herself gifted with many such experiences, and gained much benefit from them, she does not see them as the ultimate goal to be derived from the mystical experience. Teresa emphatically states: "The love of the Lord does not consist in tears or in those consolations and tenderness which we so much desire and in which we find comfort, but in our serving Him in justice, fortitude, and humility." 28 To be attached to the pleasures which one gains from mystical favors is to pursue God out of self-interest rather than out of selfless devotion; it is important to renounce this clinging to self-satisfaction. Teresa says: "It is of special note-- and I say this because I know it from experience-- that the soul which begins resolutely to tread this path of mental prayer, and can manage not greatly to care about consolations and tenderness in devotion, neither rejoicing when the Lord gives them nor being discouraged when He withholds them, has already gone a large part of the way." 29
In contrast to persons who associate mysticism solely with the "consolations" which Teresa speaks of, Teresa repeatedly refers to the regular experience of dryness and aridity as an integral part of the spiritual path. In these periods of "desolation," the individual feels confused and restless; often, the person feels distant from God. According to Teresa, the individual must face these periods with patience and humility. According to Teresa, these periods serve to make us humble: She writes: "I believe that it is our Lord's pleasure to send these torments and many other temptations, which often occur at the beginning and sometimes later also, in order to test his lovers, and to discover whether they can drink of the cup and help Him to bear His Cross, before He entrusts them with great treasures. I believe that it is for our good that His Majesty chooses to lead us in this way, so that we may thoroughly realize our own worthlessness."30

As in the preceding example, Teresa makes an analogy between the bearing of periods of dryness, and Christ's bearing of the Cross. Teresa asserts that the way of the Christian is the way of the Cross, and this applies even to the mystic favored by special experiences from God. According to Teresa, a refusal to accept this fact stops many from advancing on the spiritual path—"For there must be many who have made a beginning and never succeeded in reaching the end. It is, I believe, mainly due to their not having embraced the Cross from the first, that they are now distressed and think they are making no progress."31 Teresa repeatedly comes back to the subject of the cross. She states: "I repeat my advice, then, and I do not mind how many times I do so. It is most important, I say, that no one
should be distressed or afflicted because of aridities or disturbances or distractions in his thoughts. If he wishes to gain freedom of spirit and not always be troubled, let him begin by not being afraid of the Cross." 32

For Teresa, this attitude of spiritual poverty is of crucial importance when it comes to discernment, for people are commonly drawn to the pleasurable path, and are then open to delusions of their imagination or of the devil. Even at the more advanced stages of prayer Teresa counsels that it is wise to be cautious, for even if an experience is from God, the devil can fool people into misusing the experience. She says, "Even though a favor may certainly come from God, the devil can subsequently delude us by using all his ability to make treacherous use of that very favor, against such persons as have not grown strong in the virtues, and are not mortified or detached. Such people have not the strength to confront occasions for sin and other such dangers, however great their desires and resolutions." 33 The best protection against such delusions is an attitude of humility and of indifference to spiritual consolation. She once again brings up her former reference to the Cross, saying: "...The fundamental means of delivering ourselves from the snares and pleasure that the devil sends is to begin with the determination to desire no pleasures but to walk in the way of the Cross from the very first. For the Lord Himself showed us this way of perfection, when He said: 'Take up your Cross and follow me.' (Matthew 16:24). He is our example, and those who follow His counsel, with the sole desire to please Him, have nothing to fear." 34

So far I have outlined some of the characteristics which Teresa
associates with authentic spirituality, characteristics which form an integral part of the discernment process as she considers them necessary for discerning and following God's will, and for experiencing genuine mystical experiences. I now turn to the question of discernment regarding mystical experiences, on which Teresa has much to say. Since it is often assumed that when it comes to discernment mystics attach greatest importance to extraordinary mystical experiences such as visions and locutions, it is of special interest to see what Teresa has to say concerning such experiences. As we shall soon see, while Teresa believes God communicates directly to human beings through such supernatural favors, she is very careful to critically evaluate the various forms of mystical experience. Basically, the criteria by which she judges whether or not a mystical experience is authentic depends on whether or not it furthers conformity to God's will. In this way, discernment at the level of mystical experience is subordinated to discernment at the level of discerning God's will, which as we have already seen, takes place within the level of discernment concerning an authentic spiritual life.

If there is one point on which Teresa is clear concerning the interpretation of mystical experience, it is that we cannot trust ourselves. In her discussion of the mystical life she continuously refers to reference points by which the mystic may measure his/her experience. For Teresa the mystical enterprise is never a self-evident one. She speaks of the possibilities of self-deception based on imagination, and of deception by the devil, who can supply misleading mystical experiences.
Following the understanding of her time, Teresa recognizes three main categories of visions, the corporal, the imaginary and the intellectual, although she admits to experiencing only the second and third. Corporal visions arise when God presents supernaturally to the physical senses an impression which they will convey to the higher faculties just as they would convey the impression of a natural object which they might perceive through the physical senses, such as a vision of a distinct object or person. These communications bypass the physical sensory organ, as God impresses directly upon the exterior sense that which he wishes to communicate. The knowledge gained from corporal visions is considered to be of the same order as the knowledge gained from perception of material, natural things, and is therefore subject to ordinary rational processes of thought.

Imaginary visions consist of those communications which are supernaturally impressed directly upon the interior sense or imagination. Unlike the corporal visions, these do not pass through the exterior senses in any form; nor are they something we can imagine for ourselves.

In the third category of visions, intellectual visions, the communication bypasses the physical senses and the imagination as well, and is given directly to the higher part of the soul.\(^{35}\)

Teresa insists that these supernatural experiences are not a sign of spiritual advancement or of virtue, and those who receive them are no better or worse than those who do not. While she is confident that such experiences come from God, she also recognizes that similar types of experiences may not. While expressing reservations
about our ability to distinguish between genuine and inauthentic experiences, she does advance some characteristics of genuine experiences of the imaginary and intellectual type (as she did not experience corporal visions she does not discuss them).

According to Teresa, intellectual visions are those least able to be counterfeited or interfered with by the devil. These are received wholly passively, and the perceptive faculties of the soul are not involved at all. Because of the intense beauty and glory of that which is revealed in intellectual vision, Teresa claims that any person experiencing them will know that they must be from God.

Imaginary visions can also be very compelling, but according to Teresa, the danger of deception is much greater in their case than in the case of intellectual visions. She describes imaginary visions as very brief, lasting only a split second, but if genuine, leaving behind a lasting impression of glorious intensity.

Teresa says she stopped having visions after a certain point of her life, but continued to be granted locutions, communications experienced analogously to the hearing, until the end of her life. As with her discussion of visions, Teresa is rather ambiguous about the reliability of such phenomena, disparaging them as deceptive and unnecessary, but then giving advice on how to distinguish true locutions from false locution.

Teresa believed that one could distinguish true locutions from false locutions simply by carefully observing to see whether the words were the products of our own imaginations, or were truly from an external source. Genuine locutions are beyond our control, while self-induced locutions can be produced or suppressed at will.
While imagined locutions soon fade from memory, divine locutions persist in the memory with uncommon clarity, even after a period of several years. Teresa also says that certain locutions can be recognized as authentic from the fact that they carry out what they communicate. For example, if a communication which tells someone "Be not afraid," removes all fear, then it can be considered genuine.

Teresa also discusses the phenomena of trances and raptures, which for her often linked to visions and locutions, as the latter often occurred during the former experiences. In the case of trances and raptures, the soul is described as being taken out of the body, and shown divine matters.

Because of the difficulties involved in evaluating mystical experiences, Teresa makes clear that no one should rely on their own judgement regarding such experiences, but should disclose them to a learned confessor and obey the confessor's advice regarding the experience. A reluctance to tell a confessor about such experiences, or to obey the confessor's advice, is seen by Teresa as a sign of an inauthentic spiritual life.

While Teresa gives several pointers on how to distinguish authentic mystical experiences from inauthentic ones, there is an ambiguity present in her confidence that one should attempt to do so. In *The Way* she discusses how unreliable these forms of devotion are and asks, "Why do you want to serve the Lord in so doubtful a way when there are so many ways of [serving Him in] safety?" \(^{36}\)

The most important of Teresa's criteria for evaluating supernatural mystical experiences lies in observing the effects of the experience. According to Teresa the aftereffects of an
experience from God are quite different from the aftereffects of an experience from the imagination or the devil. Those which are genuine will produce increased faith, peace, detachment, humility, love and zeal for God in the soul; those which are not genuine will not produce such effects. Unless these after-effects are seen in the individual, Teresa doubts that the experiences were genuine.

It is not necessarily the immediate effect of the experience which is most telling. However, Teresa says that examining the later effects tells us the origin of the experience. She says: "I believe that it is possible to tell whether this state comes from the spirit of God or whether, starting from devotion given us by God, we have attained it by our own endeavors. For if, as I have said before, we try of our own accord to pass on to this quiet of the will, it leads to nothing. Everything is quickly over, and the result is aridity. If it comes from the devil, I think an experienced soul will realize it. For it leaves disquiet behind it, and very little humility, and does not do much to prepare the soul for the effects which are produced when it comes from God. It brings neither light to the understanding to the soul nor strength to the will." 37 Summarizing from this statement, marks of the true mystical experience are durability, peace, and the empowering of characteristics such as humility, understanding, and strength of will. Opposite traits marking "false" mystical experiences would be lack of after-effects, pride, confusion, and disquiet.

As in Ignatius, most important for Teresa are not extraordinary mystical experiences, but the genuine surrender of our wills to God. In The Way Teresa seems to be criticizing nuns who viewed
extraordinary experiences as measures of their sanctity; she contends that progress in the spiritual life has nothing to do with enjoying the greatest number of consolations in prayer, or with raptures, visions, or the like, but rather lies in "humility, mortification and obedience."

Another mark left by authentic mystical experiences is an increase in love. Like Ignatius, Teresa insists that love consists in deeds. For example, care of a sick woman takes precedence over prayer. Indeed, compassion for the woman and fasting so that the woman may eat, "that is true union with His will." Advancement in prayer always produces great benefits for others by making the person compassionate and sensitive to others' needs.

As in Ignatius, in Teresa prayer is subordinated to service. Teresa specifically criticizes some of her nuns who spent too much time in prayer, fasts, severe penances, and vigils. These nuns frequently claimed to experience "raptures," but Teresa called their experiences "foolishness, for they are doing nothing but wasting their time at it and ruining their health." In these instances, she counseled more food, sleep, and physical activity, and less prayer and fewer penances.

For Teresa, as for Ignatius and John, the spirituality of the individual is not viewed in isolation from the rest of humanity. One of Teresa's central reference points for the mystic is the spiritual director. In all of her works she counsels persons to speak openly to their spiritual director or confessor about their spiritual experiences. She stresses that the mystic should find a qualified spiritual director and follow the director's commands without fail.
As we have seen in her biographical sketch, spiritual directors were very influential in Teresa's own spiritual development. She writes that in the beginning of her spiritual life, when she mistakenly gave up the practice of prayer out of a sense of false humility, it was the Dominican father who she first consulted, and later the Jesuits, who made her return to the practice of prayer.

In the end, Teresa's most important criteria for evaluating mystical experience are quite orthodox. Ultimately the two most important factors are agreement with official Church doctrine and agreement with Scripture. Despite all the pitfalls that may befall the mystic, Teresa expresses her confidence in the guidance of the Church. She says: "I am positively certain that the devil will not deceive, nor will God permit him to deceive, a soul that puts no trust whatever in itself, that is fortified in the faith, and that is absolutely certain that it would suffer a thousand deaths for any single article of it. With this love for the faith, which God then infuses into it, comes a living and strong belief. The soul always tries to act in conformity with the Church's teaching, asking advice from this person and that, and acting as one already so deeply grounded in these truths that no imaginable revelation, even if it saw the heavens open, would cause it to swerve an inch from the doctrine of God."41

Again and again, Teresa pauses in the middle of her writing to tell her confessor, as representative of the Church, to review all of her material to see if it is in accordance with Church doctrine, and if it is not, to destroy it. She writes: "If it is not [consistent with the truths of the Catholic Church], your Reverence must burn it
immediately, and I agree to its destruction. I will set down my experience, so that, if it conforms to Christian belief, it may be of some use to your Reverence. But if it does not, you will deliver my soul from its delusion so that the devil may have no gain where I think that it is I that am gaining."42

Teresa counsels her readers that genuine mystical experience must be in accordance with the Scriptures, and that if it diverges from Scripture, it is from a source other than God. Teresa is quite emphatic about this: "For from what I can see and know by experience, the proof that something comes from God lies in its conformity to Holy Scripture. If it diverges in the least from that, I think I should feel incomparably more certain that it came from the devil than I had previously been of its divine origin, great though my belief in this may have been. In such cases there is no need to go in search of signs, or to ask from what spirit it comes. For this is so clear a sign that it comes from the devil that if afterwards the whole world were to assure me that it was of God, I should not believe it."43

**Teresa and the Foundation of St. Joseph's Convent**

As with Ignatius, I think it will be useful at this point to recount an instance of discernment in Teresa's life. As in Ignatius's case, the discernment involved seeking to discern God's will concerning a specific action she thought God wanted of her. On this occasion, Teresa sought to discern God's will concerning the building of a new convent. She felt called to reform her order, and open up a new covenant, but wished to make sure that this was really what God
wanted of her.

In her autobiography, Teresa describes the events leading to her foundation of St. Joseph's Convent, the first convent for Discalced nuns. The idea had been in her thoughts for a while, and when a friend of hers brought up the possibility, she began concentrating on it more and decided to commend the matter to God. One day, after Communion, she claims to have received explicit commands from God to pursue this goal, and says God promised her the venture would be successful. The Lord also commanded her to inform her confessor of this communication, and to tell the confessor not to oppose her in her goal.

Teresa says the effects of this vision upon her were very powerful, and that she had no doubt that they were from God. Yet she hesitated to act on the directions for she foresaw a lot of difficulties in carrying out the founding of the convent. But, according to Teresa, "the Lord appeared and spoke to me about it again and again, and so numerous were the motives and arguments which He put before me, in such a way that I saw that they were valid and that the project was His will, that I dared not do otherwise than speak to my confessor about it and give him a written account of everything that took place."

When Teresa actually spoke to her confessor about the venture he was very skeptical, because Teresa had no funds or resources with which to carry out her goal. He suggested that she speak to her Superior and do as he advised. The Superior was sympathetic to the idea and Teresa and a friend began making preparations. However, as soon as word got out about the project, an uproar ensued, with
people either being antagonistic or ridiculing Teresa. Although troubled by the persecution, Teresa prayed to God for guidance and he gave her consolations and encouragement.

When Teresa's superior, the Provincial, heard all the commotion about the new convent he decided it would be better to suppress the project; so he changed his mind and told Teresa to forget about the matter. Although sorely troubled and disappointed, Teresa resolved to obey her superior. Before she received the final word from her superior she also consulted another "learned man," a Dominican. She says: "For my own part, although, as I say, the abandonment of the project seemed to me impossible, I believed the revelation to be true only in the sense that it was not contrary to what is in Holy Scripture or to the law of the Church which we are obliged to keep; for, despite my belief that it really came from God, if the learned man had told me that we could not act upon it without offending Him and that we were acting against our conscience, I think I should at once have abandoned the plan and sought some other way."

As mentioned, after deliberating, Teresa's superior forbade her to continue with the project, and obeying his order, she returned to her normal duties at her convent. Despite increased criticism and ridicule, Teresa claims to have been perfectly happy in obeying her superior and giving up the project. However, she also admits, "I could not, however, give up my belief that the task would be duly accomplished, and, though I was unable to forecast the means and knew neither how nor when the work would be done, I was quite sure that it would be done in time."

For a period of five or six months Teresa left off from her plans
for the new convent, and although she received no communications from God during this time she still believed that the foundation would eventually be accomplished. When a new Rector took over at her convent, Teresa confided in him concerning her visions, and he was sympathetic to her goal; soon after, Teresa began once more to feel God was calling her to the task of building a new convent. When her confessor lifted his ban against the project she once again began planning for the new foundation, but in secret as her Provincial still rejected the idea. Eventually the Provincial discovered the facts, and was very angry with Teresa; there was a huge uproar in the town where the convent was built. Although initially the Provincial denied Teresa the right to reside the convent, once the commotion had died down he relented and allowed her to start a convent of Discalced nuns, thus, in her mind, confirming Teresa in her communications about the new convent.
END NOTES FOR CHAPTER FOUR

1. The following biographical sketch is based primarily on Teresa’s autobiography, with supplementary material from other books listed in the bibliography.


3. The Life, p. 31.
4. The Life, p. 35.
5. The Life, p. 37.
8. The Life, p. 84.
10. The Life, p. 162.
11. The Life, p. 163.
12. The Life, p. 166.
15. The Life, p. 172.

17. Ibid., p. 53.
18. Ibid., p. 117.
20. The Life, p. 158.
21. Ibid., p. 85.
23. The Life, p. 158.
24. Ibid., p. 49.
25. Ibid., p. 72.
27. Ibid., p. 145.
28. Ibid., p. 81.
29. Ibid., p. 81.
30. Ibid., p. 80.
31. Ibid., p. 82.
32. Ibid., p. 83.
33. Ibid., pp. 133-134.
34. Ibid., p. 110.
40. Ibid., p. 131.
42. Ibid., p. 75.
43. Ibid., p. 179.
44. Ibid., pp. 236-276.
Chapter Five: John of the Cross (1542-1591)

Of the three mystics examined in this thesis, John of the Cross is the one we know least about. Not only do we lack any autobiographical materials, but in his writings, John offers no personal insights. Information we do have concerning his life comes from outside sources, and we can only reconstruct a rather scanty biography which lacks the personal insight which we had into the spiritual lives of Ignatius and Teresa. Because of the nature of this enterprise, it is more difficult in John’s case to locate the most important influences on his spiritual development. However, there can be seen several factors which would have had an impact on John’s spiritual formation.

The Life of John of the Cross

John was born in Fontiveros, Spain, the youngest of three sons. His father died while he was young, leaving the family in poverty. His mother sought to support her family through weaving, and often depended on the charity of others to survive. Economic conditions were difficult as the harvest in the region had been bad for several years, and inflation was high due to the steady flow of silver from America. All in all, John’s childhood was a difficult one.

Early on John demonstrated a high intellectual aptitude, and an interest in spiritual matters. He received a rigorous education in the humanities at the Jesuit college in Medina del Campo, and in 1563 he entered the Carmelite order at the Monastery of Santa Ana. He completed further studies at Salamanca and in 1567 was ordained to the priesthood.
Salamanca at this time was at the height of its fame with seven thousand students and some of the most eminent professors in Europe. The teaching of philosophy in Salamanca at this time followed strictly scholastic lines—Aristotle and Aquinas with a certain leaning to Plato and St. Augustine. Little attention was paid to mental prayer, or mysticism, and in fact the whole spirit of the university authorities was against it and it was largely through the influence of its professors that a number of works on the subject had been placed on the index. Through the curriculum John read the *Mystica Theologica* of Dionysius the Areopagite, as well as Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* and a treatise on the Song of Songs attributed to St. Gregory. He also probably read other more recent books on these subjects for during his last year at Salamanca he wrote a dissertation (no longer existing) in which he distinguished between certain new, apparently illuminist methods of prayer that were being talked of and which he rejected, and the tradition of ascetic and mystical practices which had come down from the early Fathers.

John's writing demonstrates the influence on him by the official courses of the university in the field of humanism. The teaching of the great Salamancan humanist, Francisco de Vitoria, who had attached great importance to the study of the Bible and of the early Fathers still held a large place in the curriculum. This teaching may well have influenced John, for in his later life, he referred to the Bible extensively in his works. During his studies he lived at the Carmelite College, and his personal lifestyle was austere, including severe penance and extended fasting.
Shortly after ordination John returned to Medina del Campo, where he met Teresa of Avila. Teresa, fifty-two years old at the time, convinced John to become her spiritual director and collaborator in the Discalced reform movement. In 1568, John took vows with the reformed Carmelite order.

Controversy soon arose over the reform movement. The friars of the original order were increasingly jealous of the reform and afraid it would threaten their influence. A full scale political conflict arose, with the Calced supported by the Carmelite general in Italy, Father Rubeo, while the reform found an ally in the papal nuncio, Ormaneto, who had the king's backing. When the nuncio Ormaneto died and was succeeded by an unsympathetic nuncio, things took a turn for the worse for the Discalced.

John lived at Avila and served as confessor to the nuns of Teresa's old convent. In October 1577 a controversy arose over the election of a prioress at Teresa's convent. The general's emissary, Tostado, did not wish to see Teresa reelected, and sought to influence the nuns vote. But, contrary to his wishes, a majority of the nuns, supported by John of the Cross, voted Teresa into office once more. The Calced's response was quick; the election was declared null and void, and John and another were taken prisoner.

Imprisoned in a monastery at Toledo, John spent nine months in an isolated jail cell. The Calced sought to persuade John to renounce the reform movement, but he would not. He was deprived of adequate food and was regularly flogged. His conditions were deplorable, and his health suffered because of this. It was during this low point in his existence, that John began to write the
mystically based poetry for which he would later become famous.

In 1578 he managed to escape from the prison and make it to a friendly convent. From there he was taken to a hospital to convalesce. He then returned to the Discalced order.

The 1570's and 80's were a relatively peaceful time for the Discalced Carmelite order. Following his recovery from his ordeal, John began a twelve-year period of administration within the reformed branch of the order. He was an able superior and much sought after as a spiritual director. It was during the 1580's that John composed the commentaries to his prison poems and began his other major works.

In 1590 hostilities again broke out between Calced and Discalced Carmelites, and John again became the object of persecution, this time by jealous members of the reform movement. An effort was made to expel him from the movement, but he died on December 13, 1591, at the age of forty-nine after complications arising from an infection in his leg.

John of the Cross was beatified in 1675 and canonized in 1726. In 1926 Pius XI declared him a doctor of the church under the title "Mystical Doctor."

**John of the Cross: Spirituality and Discernment**

Of the three mystics examined in this study, John of the Cross is the most detailed and the most scholarly in his writings. Compared to Ignatius, and even more so to Teresa, his approach is very intellectual. His Aristotelian orientation, taught to him during his scholastic training at the university, is very evident. He is much
more systematic than the other two mystics, especially compared to Teresa. Unfortunately, we have only four major works by John, and then some letters, various maxims and counsels, and a few poems. Interestingly enough, despite his scholastic mindset, John's wrote his primary mystical works in the form of poetry; it is in the commentary to these poems that John fully explicates his mystical doctrine.

John's advice concerning discernment is perhaps the most surprising of the three mystics, because, in effect, his advice is to ignore discernment—but he rejects the attempt to know God's will directly or to distinguish between the various mystical phenomena. For John, there is no process of discernment; paradoxically, discernment means rejecting the idea of discernment as a process the human being has any control over. As we shall see, because of the ambiguous and treacherous nature of the discernment process, John's final counsel concerning mystical experiences is to reject all extraordinary mystical phenomena. Ultimately, according to John, authentic mysticism does not rely on such phenomena. In the end, the only criteria in John regarding discernment is that which relates to living an authentic spiritual life. I shall therefore address the question of discernment in John's thought by discussing John's view on authentic spirituality, and the most important characteristics of this spirituality, for example, the authority of Scripture, the importance of detachment, the place of virtue, and the unreliability of supernatural phenomena.

In his commentary to his first work, The Ascent of Mount Carmel, John of the Cross makes clear that he does not believe
individual mystical experience, certainly not his own, to be sufficient unto itself for describing mystical states and separating the genuine from the inauthentic. After discussing the pitfalls of individual interpretation he writes: "In discussing this dark night, therefore, I shall not rely on experience or science, for these can fail and deceive us. Although I shall not neglect whatever possible use I can make of them, my help in all that, with God's favor, I shall say, will be Sacred Scripture, at least in the most important matters, or those which are difficult to understand. Taking Scripture as our guide we do not err, since the Holy Ghost speaks through it. If I should misunderstand or be mistaken on some point whether I deduce it from Scripture or not, my intention will not be to deviate from the true meaning of Sacred Scripture or from the doctrine of our Holy Mother the Catholic Church. If this should happen, I submit entirely to the Church, or even to anyone who judges more competently about the matter than I.  

More so than either Teresa or Ignatius, both of whom have numerous references to Scripture, John links his commentary on mystical experience with the Scriptures. His works are filled with constant Scriptural citations.

Like both Ignatius and Teresa, John stresses the necessity of the mortification of the appetites, the detachment from any physical or spiritual appetites. To a higher degree than either of the other two, John directs the reader to leave behind all previous attachments. For John the approach to God is along the lines of the apophatic tradition, the tradition best exemplified by Pseudo-Dionysius. In this tradition the approach to union with God
is based on unknowing rather than knowing. Only when the soul is emptied of all earthly attachments can union with God take place. John writes: "The road and ascent to God, then, necessarily demands a habitual effort to renounce and mortify the appetites; the sooner that this mortification is achieved, the sooner the soul reaches the top. But until the appetites are eliminated, a person will not arrive, no matter how much virtue he practices! For he will fail to acquire perfect virtue, which lies in keeping the soul empty, naked, and purified of every appetite."\(^3\)

Many people view mortification as the total annihilation of our sensory appetites. But, as Harvey Egan points out, John does not suggest a suppression, repression, or destruction of the sensory appetites. Rather, "It is a question of reordering all our desires and affections toward God; only then can the proper love for his creatures grow... Authentic human living demands, therefore, a radical transformation of desires and the affective life."\(^4\)

As in Ignatius, John's thought is guided by the principle that all else must be subordinated to love for God. Excessive attachment to created goods detracts from our love of God. The result in our spiritual lives is weariness and dissatisfaction; the more we give in to our sensory appetites, the more demanding they become. Our mistake is to seek fulfillment in things other than God when only God can fulfill us.

Natural appetites are inherent in our physical existence and do not have to be eradicated. However, desires which lead to sin through action are a different matter. It is clear that for John, perfect union with God and transformation are impossible without
rejection of all voluntary imperfections, large or small. Inordinate appetite brings with it confusion, weariness, and general disruption, the opposite of the fruits of an authentic spiritual life.  

As in Teresa, the mortification of the appetites is discussed in conjunction with the growth of virtue. The act of giving in to voluntary appetite is directly opposed to the acts of virtue, and gives rise to many bad effects. The two produce contrary effects: "An act of virtue produces in a man mildness, peace, comfort, light, purity, and strength, just as an inordinate appetite brings about torment, fatigue, weariness, blindness, and weakness. Through the practice of one virtue all the virtues grow, and similarly, through an increase of one vice, all the vices and their effects grow." While these evil effects are overlooked because of the immediate pleasure derived from satisfying the appetite, the effects are evident once this immediate pleasure abates. These evil effects produce afflictions, blindness, and lukewarmness in virtue, which make it impossible for the soul to advance. Hence, John states that "The chief concern of spiritual directors with their penitents is the immediate mortification of every appetite. The directors should make them remain empty of what they desire so as to liberate them from so much misery."  

John has several counsels for the conquering of appetites in beginners. First of all, he counsels to "have a habitual desire to imitate Christ in all your deeds by bringing your life into conformity with His." The person who seeks union with God must try to act as Christ would in all situations. Second, all appetites must be eliminated, insofar as they interfere with the soul's movement to
God: "In order to be successful in this imitation, renounce and remain empty of any sensory satisfaction that is not purely for the honor and glory of God."\textsuperscript{9}

The path which John presents in his works is very severe and ascetical. The following maxims, which he claims are a complete guideline to mortifying the passions, well represent the tone of much of John's writings:

Endeavor to be inclined always:
not to the easiest, but to the most difficult;
not to the most delightful, but to the harshest;
not to the most gratifying, but to the less pleasant;
not to the consoling, but to the unconsoling;
not to the most, but to the least;
not to the highest and most precious, but to the lowest and most despised;
not to wanting something something, but to wanting nothing;
do not go about looking for the best of temporal things, but for the worst, and desire to enter for Christ into complete nudity, emptiness, and poverty in everything in the world."\textsuperscript{10}

For John the path of purgation is even more severe than in either Teresa or Ignatius, for in John the practice of detachment extends not only to physical pleasures but to spiritual pleasures as well; while Teresa counseled the same, John is more consistent than Teresa in renouncing spiritual consolations. John's most famous legacy is his discussion of "the dark night of the soul," that final stage of purgation in which the soul feels confused, naked, and blind, totally abandoned by the grace of God. It is in this most difficult time that one's faith is most severely tested, and in order to reach union with God, one must persevere through this period of absolute desolation. For John, faith is ultimately a "dark night for the soul", 
an "obscure habit of the soul."\textsuperscript{11} He says: "We must take faith as a dark night of the soul as our guide, and hence we must darken and blind ourselves not only in the sensory part of our nature, but in the spiritual as well. The soul must empty itself perfectly and voluntarily--in its affection and will--of all the earthly and heavenly things it can grasp. It must through its own efforts empty itself as far as possible; then God will do what He wills with the soul."\textsuperscript{12}

For many people who associate mysticism exclusively with a sense of the presence of God, of feelings of peace, joy, and other "good feelings," such a thoroughgoing negation of the consolations as John systematically carries out seems strange. John recognizes that many people think this way and notes that because of such ignorance many beginners in the spiritual path fail to advance because they reach the stage of the dark night of the soul and out of ignorance or laziness do not persevere. John also notes that there are persons who believe themselves to be experiencing the dark night, when in fact they have simply fallen away from God. Oftentimes, these problems are exacerbated by spiritual directors who do not recognize the signs of the dark night, and mislead their directees. John says: "Some souls--or their confessors--may think that God is leading them along this road of the dark night of spiritual purgation, but perhaps this is not the case. What they suffer will owe its origin to one of the deficiencies. Likewise, many individuals think they are not praying when, indeed, their prayer is intense. Others place high value on their prayer, while it is little more than nonexistent."\textsuperscript{13} For these reasons, John says the main
purpose of his writings is "to help souls advance on the spiritual path who are delayed by ignorance and misunderstanding."\textsuperscript{14}

John criticizes those persons who believe that simple withdrawal in worldly matters is sufficient, and neglect withdrawal from spiritual attachments. He writes of those persons as having a "spiritual sweet tooth," seeking only sweetness and consolations in prayer but retreating from dryness and trial.\textsuperscript{15} In opposition to this, John recommends true self-denial and poverty of spirit. John says: "A genuine spirit seeks the distasteful in God rather than the delectable, leans more toward suffering than toward consolation, more toward going without everything for God rather than toward possession. It prefers dryness and affliction to sweet consolation."\textsuperscript{16} What is important above all is poverty of spirit: "If a man resolutely submits to the carrying of this cross, if he decidedly wants to find and endure trial in all things for God, he will discover in all of them great relief and sweetness. This will be so because he journeys the road denuded of all and with no desire for anything. If he aims after the possession of something, from God or elsewhere, his journey will not be one of nakedness and detachment from all things, and consequently there will be no room for him on this narrow path nor will he be able to climb it."\textsuperscript{17}

For John as for Teresa and Ignatius, the embracing of suffering is linked to the imitation of Christ. Because Christ suffered, we should also be willing to suffer. John says: "A man makes progress only through imitation of Christ, Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one goes to the Father but through Him... Accordingly, I should not consider any spirituality worthwhile that would walk in
sweetness and ease and run from the imitation of Christ."\textsuperscript{18}

In the beginning of his work, \textit{The Dark Night}, John describes some of the typical imperfections of beginners on the spiritual path. By looking at these marks of inauthentic spirituality, we may infer that their opposites are marks of genuine spirituality. One of the most common faults is that of pride. Rather than increasing in humility, these persons take pride in their mystical experiences and become vain and intolerant. They desire to speak of spiritual things, rather than listen, and condemn others for lack of devotion while refusing to address their own shortcomings. Rather than follow the advice of their spiritual director, they criticize and may become hostile to their director. Often, they will leave their spiritual director and seek one who is more to their liking.\textsuperscript{19}

Persons who become vain constantly seek public approval, and may have frequent raptures in public. They want to be the favorites of their confessor, and are envious of other persons advancing on the spiritual path. They dislike praising anyone else, but love to receive praise, and may seek it through various means. They minimize their faults, or become angry at themselves for having faults. John notes that they wish to remove personal faults not so much for God's sake, but to give themselves peace.\textsuperscript{20}

John says that almost all beginners fall victim to these faults. But in order to advance on the spiritual path, one must rid oneself of these faults. In contrast to the former, souls who advance in perfection are humble and place little importance on their deeds; they take little self-satisfaction from them. They think other people are better than them and wish to emulate others. Even as
their good works and rewards increase, their humility makes them aware of their debt to God and the inadequacy of their service to Him. The more they do the less satisfaction they derive from their deeds. Rather than always trying to teach others, these souls desire to be taught by others.21

Another fault common in beginners is the fault of spiritual avarice. Persons possessing this fault are not content with the experiences which God supplies them and are always desiring more. They become unhappy and upset at a lack of consolations which they are receiving. As another example of spiritual avarice, John points to those persons who concentrate on books on counsels and maxims, and not on striving for mortification and the perfection of interior poverty.22

Similar to the problem of spiritual avarice is that of spiritual gluttony. Drawn to the delights which one may experience in spiritual exercises, persons often strive more for spiritual gratification than for spiritual purity and discretion. In pursuit of greater delights, persons may overdo penances, fasts, or other debilitating exercises. Rather than obey their spiritual directors, some want to follow their own impulses, even if they must do so secretly. If they do not get their way they become angered and sulk. John says of these spiritual gluttons, "They think that gratifying and satisfying themselves is serving and satisfying God."23

Because they concentrate on the "sweet" side of spiritual experience, these people "do not have a sufficient knowledge of their lowliness and misery, and have a lack of loving fear and respect for God."24 Rather than worshiping God humbly and reverently, these
persons are busy trying to satisfy their own needs. Such people are especially inclined to give too much weight to sensory benefits of spiritual experience. John compares these persons to children who are prompted to act not by reason but by pleasure.\textsuperscript{25}

John says it is important for beginners to go through the dark night in order to purge them of this inclination. He says of them: "They strive to procure this by their own efforts and tire and weary their heads and their faculties. When they do not get this sensible comfort, they become very disconsolate and think they have done nothing. Because of their aim they lose true devotion and spirit, which lies in distrust of self and in humble and patient perseverance so as to please God."\textsuperscript{26} He continues: "Those who are inclined toward these delights have also another serious imperfection, that is, they are weak and remiss in treading the rough way of the cross. A soul given up to pleasure naturally feels aversion towards the bitterness of self-denial."\textsuperscript{27}

For the proper attitude, John says one must not attach any importance to mystical experience. Rather, one should foster an attitude of "spiritual sobriety and temperance," of mortification, fear, and submissiveness in all things. The perfection and value of one's works does not depend upon their number, or the satisfaction found in them, but upon knowing how to practice self-denial in them.\textsuperscript{28}

Given John's rejection of spiritual "consolations" as well as physical pleasures, it is not surprising that his advice concerning supernatural phenomena such as visions and locutions is the most stringent of the three mystics examined here. While John
acknowledges visions, locutions, sensations, smells, etc., which may come from God, he counsels that one must never rely on them or accept them as important. According to John, anyone who attaches any significance to such phenomena opens themselves to deception; the result of following false phenomena is often error, presumption, and vanity. A person who follows after these communications believing that they are the means to union with God is actually straying from faith; rather than pursue such experiences. John says, "A man should rather flee from them completely, and have no desire to determine whether they be good or bad."29

John refers to several different types of supernatural communications, such as visions, revelations and locutions. Like Teresa, John makes a distinction between corporal and incorporeal communications. Those which are corporal, the closest to our physical senses, are the most suspect. However, for John, those which are spiritual and bestowed immediately upon the soul through supernatural means, are also unreliable.

For John, as for Teresa, the great difference between communications which are from God, and those which are imagined or of the devil, lies in their effects. Authentic communications promote humility, selflessness and love of God, while inauthentic communications lead to spiritual dryness, pride, and self-aggrandizement. However, while Teresa gives advice on how to evaluate these experiences based on their effects, John takes a different tack. According to John, the effects of God-given mystical experiences take place regardless of the disposition of the individual towards the communication. Hence, the individual can
ignore a supposed vision or revelation, yet still derive the greater benefit of the effects.

Like Teresa, John gives some signs by which the various spiritual communications can be evaluated, but his final word of advice is consistently to counsel that rather than get into the complicated and treacherous attempt to separate the good from the bad, one should avoid the whole matter of discernment by rejecting all such experiences. This is not to say that no benefit is derived from such experiences, for through such experiences God infuses the soul full of devotion. While diabolical communications leave behind agitation, dryness, and vanity or presumption, the effect by which one can recognize a divine communication is that it moves the soul to humility and to love. John says with regard to visions: "The only reason for admitting and valuing them would be the profit and good effect the genuine one brings to the soul. But admitting them is unnecessary for the obtainment of this good effect; for the sake of progress, rather, one should always deny them." Rather than focus on the visions or locutions themselves, one should focus on the feeling of devotion engendered by authentic divine communications.

In order that one not fall into harm caused by reflection upon supernatural communications, John says they should consider two truths. First, "virtue does not consist in apprehensions and feelings of God, however sublime they may be, nor in any similar experience. But on the contrary, it comprises what they do not experience, that is, deep humility, contempt for themselves and for all things..." Second, "all the visions, revelations, and feelings from heaven, or whatever else one may desire to think upon, are not worth as much
as the least act of humility. Humility has the effects of charity: it neither esteems nor seeks its own, it thinks no evil save of self, it thinks no good of self but of others.\textsuperscript{32}

Like the other mystics examined here, John stresses the importance of works in the spiritual life. In fact, for John, the mystical experiences are only valuable insofar as they empower the person to live a more authentic spiritual life and perform more good works. He says: "A man should rejoice, then, not in the possession and exercise of these graces, but in the procurement of the second spiritual benefit: serving God by them with true charity, for in charity lies the fruit of eternal life... Hence it should be understood that a man ought only to rejoice in treading the path that leads to life, in doing works with charity."\textsuperscript{33}

Like Teresa, John stresses the importance of having a spiritual director and of following the directions of one's director. Despite all his admonitions against accepting supernatural communications, John does allow that there are rare instances where one should act on such a communication. However, one should never do so on one's own initiative, but only on the advice of a competent director. "It should be kept in mind that a person must never follow his own opinion, nor do or admit anything told to him through these locutions, without ample advice and counsel from another."\textsuperscript{34}

The opposition between the correct attitude towards mystical experience and the most common faulty attitude towards mystical experience as depicted in John's writings is well summed up in the following two passages. The first states: "I should like to persuade spiritual persons that the road to God does not entail a multiplicity
of considerations, methods, manners, and experiences-- though in their own way these may be a requirement for beginners-- but demands only the one thing necessary: true self-denial, exterior and interior, through surrender of self both to suffering for Christ and to annihilation in all things. 35

In the second, John says, "Many of these beginners want God to desire what they want, and become sad if they have to desire God's will. They feel an aversion toward adapting their will to God's. Hence they frequently believe that what is not their will, or that which brings them no satisfaction, is not God's will, and, on the other hand, that if they are satisfied, God is too. They measure God by themselves and not themselves by God, which is in opposition to His teaching in the Gospel: that he who loses his life for His sake will gain it, and that he who desires to gain it will lose it (Mt. 16:25)." 36

Like Ignatius and Teresa, John makes clear his allegiance to the authority of the Church. John's ecclesial concept cannot be separated from his Scriptural emphasis: it is the authority of the Church which guarantees the correct interpretation of the Scriptures. Again, it is the social dimension of discernment which is stressed, as opposed to a strictly individual discernment.

With John we do not have any personal accounts of discernment in a concrete situation so we cannot recount in detail any such example. In fact, we have no autobiographical accounts of any sort, and no personal accounts of any types of mystical experience, except implicitly the poetry which forms the basis for his mystical commentary. However, as I have shown, the process of discernment
was not a concern in the thought of John of the Cross. For John, there is nothing we can actively do to discern God's will, or to discern divine communications through mystical experiences. Paradoxically, in giving up the idea of discernment, we attain the goal of discernment; all we can do is live authentic spiritual lives and allow God to work on us.

While we do not have any specific examples of discernment in John's life, I think it is noteworthy that the poetry which formed the foundation for his mystical works was allegedly written during his imprisonment under the opposing Carmelite order. It is no wonder that many of the "dark" emphases in John's writings, such as detachment, abnegation of the will, and the dark night of the soul, emerged from this experience. Yet it should also be noted that it was his mystical experiences which gave John the strength and will embodied in his poetry to survive the ordeal. Despite counseling detachment from all spiritual phenomena, and in spite of his notable lack of personal accounts of mystical experience, the centrality of mysticism to John's thought cannot be overlooked. John does acknowledge that supernatural mystical experiences can be a great aid to bringing us closer to God, and much good can be gained from them. The problem arises when we place too much importance on them and seek to control them or to use them. The best thing to do is therefore to remain receptive to God in pure and passive faith.


3. Ibid., p. 83.


6. Ibid., p. 100.


8. Ibid., p. 102.

9. Ibid., p. 102.

10. Ibid., pp. 102-103.

11. Ibid., p. 110.

12. Ibid., p. 112.

13. Ibid., p. 72.

14. Ibid., p. 70.

15. Ibid., p. 122.

16. Ibid., p. 123.

17. Ibid., p. 123.

18. Ibid., p. 124.

19. Ibid., p. 300.

20. Ibid., p. 300.

21. Ibid., p. 301.

22. Ibid., p. 302.

23. Ibid., p. 308.

24. Ibid., p. 308.

25. Ibid., p. 309.

26. Ibid., p. 309.

27. Ibid., p. 309.

28. Ibid., p. 309.

29. Ibid., p. 132.

30. Ibid., p. 154.
31. Ibid., p. 227.
32. Ibid., p. 227.
33. Ibid., p. 268.
34. Ibid., p. 209.
35. Ibid., p. 124.
36. Ibid., p. 310.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

I now return to the two questions with which I began this thesis:

1) How are we to understand the process of discernment in the thought of Ignatius, Teresa and John? Of special interest, what role do extraordinary mystical experiences play in the process of discernment?

2) Is there a connection between the criteria which these mystics used for discernment and the social and historical conditions of sixteenth-century Spain in which they lived?

This thesis has shown that the three mystics examined here all expressed a concern with the problem of discernment. While they dealt with the problem in different ways and at different levels, there are important commonalities to be found when comparing their thought on discernment. Far from accepting their mystical experiences unreservedly, all three express serious reservations about the ability of an individual to make judgments concerning extraordinary mystical experiences without external guideposts to help discern what is authentic from what is inauthentic. While it is often assumed that mystics place paramount importance on the extraordinary and fantastic visions or locutions which are popularly associated with mysticism, this is not the case in Ignatius, Teresa and John. The overriding concern of these mystics is to conform to God's will. All aspects of the spiritual life are subordinated to this end, including mystical experience and the matter of discernment concerning mystical experiences. Religious experiences, including the most extraordinary mystical experiences, are considered of value only insofar as they promote conformity to God's will; if they
do not contribute to this goal, they are considered insignificant.

As I have stressed, according to Ignatius, Teresa and John, correct discernment concerning God's will and the nature of mystical experiences can only take place in the context of discerning an authentic spiritual life. Ignatius begins with the assumption of an authentic spiritual life, and gives detailed instructions on discerning God's will and discerning spirits, which in his Spiritual Exercises are closely connected. In Teresa, advice on specifically mystical experiences is preceded by advice concerning characteristics of authentic spirituality; Teresa sees the latter as being of more fundamental importance than the former. In John, all discussion of discerning God's will or discernment regarding mystical experiences is subordinated to a discussion of authentic spirituality; in fact, he rejects any attempt at active discernment.

While differing in the emphases which they give to the different levels of the discernment process, all three mystics ultimately base their discernment on the level of discerning authentic Christian spirituality. Hence, accurately representing the question of discernment in its fullest sense involves a discussion of the prerequisite signs of an authentic spiritual life.

It is difficult to pinpoint the juncture at which the concrete discernment of the authentic mystical experience took place. Except for Ignatius, there is little written concerning discernment as a process in itself, and as we have seen, in practice Ignatian discernment as practiced by Ignatius himself seemed less than clear. Similarly, while Teresa writes of being guided by God in
specific actions, the actual details of this communication are rather scant. Instead of discussing in detail the point of communication itself, these three mystics give greatest attention to first, the conditions which are necessary for proper discernment, and second, the signs by which proper discernment can be measured after the fact.

The following is a summary of the major conditions and signs of discernment as found in Ignatius, Teresa and John. Each of these is present in all three mystics, although the emphasis which each receives varies according to the mystic. These apply equally to the various different dimensions of discernment I have discussed. It should be noted that many are both conditions and signs--they are necessary for correct discernment and are also present as signs which increase when correct discernment takes place. After listing these conditions and signs I will discuss some of the major commonalities between the three mystics.

**Conditions and Signs for Discernment**

1) A life of prayer  
2) Detachment from worldly goods and matters  
3) Humility  
4) Sanctification, i.e. advancement in the virtues  
5) Sound doctrine (based on accordance with Scripture and the Church)  
6) Obedience to the Church and to one's religious superiors  
7) Carrying of the cross, i.e. suffering  
8) Love of God and neighbor
9) Mortification or control of the natural passions
10) Experience of joy, peace, and attraction to the good
11) Faithfulness, perseverance through trials
12) Reliance on outside advice, especially a spiritual director

I have listed prayer as the first condition for discernment. I said earlier that the Spanish mystics only discuss the process of discernment in the context of the spiritual life as a whole. I would extend this statement and say that because prayer is the essential component of the spiritual life, one which permeates every dimension, the Spanish mystics assume that discernment can only take place in the context of a prayerful life. Improvising on a statement made by Dom Chapman concerning prayer and life, I would interpret the mystics to say, "We discern as well as we pray, and we pray as well as we discern."\(^1\) To go into all the details concerning what the Spanish mystics have written concerning prayer is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the reader must remember that this is the broader context in which the material presented here must be placed.

Another of the most important themes concerning discernment in the Spanish mystics is that of detachment. All three mystics stress that in order to correctly discern the will of God one must be free of attachment to material goods, to one's passions and desires, and even to spiritual consolations. This should not be interpreted as an outright negative view of the world and self, as is often done. These attachments are not bad in themselves, but only insofar as they impede the greater goal-- to love and serve God. The mystics follow
completely the Gospel commandment to love God "with all your heart, all your mind, and all your soul."\(^2\) Anything which obstructs this goal must be eliminated.

Because the attachment to objects which do not promote the love of God are seen to arise from our self-centered inclinations, another important condition for discernment in these Spanish mystics is humility. As we have seen, for Teresa of Avila, it is the cornerstone of the whole spiritual life. As long as we cling to our egotistical concerns and self-centered desires, we cannot discern the will of God, for our attempt to discern God's will is inevitably clouded by our own inclinations. Also, without humility we cannot love God or love other people, for love is selfless and reaches out to the other.

Ignatius, Teresa and John are guided by the Gospel admonition that "You shall know them by their fruits."\(^3\) The fruits of the spirit are internal as well as external. Internally, there are feelings of peace, joy, and hope associated with correct discernment. Externally, correct discernment demonstrates itself in good deeds.

According to these three mystics, the mystical path is morally highly structured; any advance in one's spiritual life must be accompanied by advance in the virtues. The mystics stress that sin must be avoided. At times this emphasis seems to be carried to extremes. One need only look at the title of Teresa's work, *The Way to Perfection*, or Ignatius' emphasis on daily examinations of conscience, to recognize how high the standards are which these Spanish mystics aspire. The advancement in virtue is never a process which is completed or relaxed. In this life we never reach the final stage of perfection.
The highest virtue extolled in the writings of the Spanish mystics is that of love. This love must be demonstrated in service, in concrete works. The emphasis is on the selfless, giving nature of love, a model of love based on an imitation of Christ. In this model, suffering plays an important role. All three mystics describe the spiritual path in terms relating to the Cross. The most common complaint concerning those who fail to advance in the spiritual path is that they refuse to embrace the Cross; as long as they receive benefits from the spiritual life they are content, but at the first sign of affliction they fall away from the path. Mystics are often thought to be unconcerned with the world, wrapped up only in themselves. As these three mystics demonstrated in their own lives, contemplation and action can go hand in hand. In fact, these mystics insist that it must.

The mystics stress on love expressed through service can also be seen in their desire to guide others along the spiritual path. While mysticism is often criticized as promoting individual salvation, these mystics bely this stereotype. Their concern for "saving souls" can be seen as a demonstration of love in concrete form. According to Ignatius, Teresa and John, to help guide another person closer to God is the highest service that one can accomplish. One notable feature of their writings is their practical nature. These works are not intellectual abstracts on spiritual matters. Rather, they are books written expressly for the purpose of helping others to advance on the spiritual path. For these mystics, the spiritual life is not simply an individual enterprise, but one with communal dimensions.

The mystics repeatedly point out that the process of discernment
is a difficult one; even when one makes the correct discernment, it is easy to be led astray afterwards. For this reason, all three of the mystics stress external, objective guideposts to aid the individual in the interpretation of the experience.

The most immediate of these is the need for spiritual direction by a qualified individual. We see that for all three, spirituality is not simply an individual affair, but one involving other persons. Especially in the matter of discernment, the mystics often stress a social, or ecclesial dimension in the process. The *Spiritual Exercises* are expressly designed to be given by a spiritual director. Teresa and John both speak repeatedly of the necessity for a spiritual director who is familiar with the spiritual life and can help the individual progress along the spiritual path. Teresa also mentions the strength which can be gained from other persons interested in spiritual matters.

Another important resource for all three is the intellect. Many people think of the mystics as anti-rational, unconcerned with too much thinking. However, for all three of these mystics, the intellect plays an important role in interpreting the mystical experience. It is human reason, purified by the mystical experience, which must reflect on the experience and separate truth from falsehood. It is reason which must rise above the self-delusion which often clouds our perceptions of ourselves and the world.

The mystics' respect for the intellect can also be seen in the importance they attach to learning. It should be remembered that after his mystical experiences at Manresa, Ignatius spent twelve years studying at universities. While Teresa did not receive a
formal education, she read extensively, and in her counsels concerning spiritual directors, she always stressed the importance of learning. John comes across as an obvious intellectual; his scholastic training is easily apparent in his writings. While ultimate illumination comes only from God, knowledge concerning faith is an important tool in discerning God’s will.

These are some of the more important conditions and signs for discernment which apply to all three of the levels I have discussed.

What about discernment specifically in the sphere of extraordinary mystical experiences, which is the area of discernment usually associated with mystics?

Regarding discernment within the mystical experience itself, that is, those extraordinary phenomena usually associated with the mystics, such as visions, locutions and raptures, the three mystics studied here offer differing advice. Ignatius clearly believes the individual, with proper guidance, can accurately discern the supernatural motions within himself/herself, and make a decision based on an accurate observation of consolations and desolations. In his own life, Ignatius several times followed impressions caused by visions, and based his action on them. Teresa also allows that one can distinguish authentic visions and locutions from inauthentic ones, and gives several pointers in doing so. However, she does recognize the difficulty in doing so, and in the end, advises that one need not make these difficult decisions, for if the phenomena are authentic, one will receive the good effects of the experience regardless of how one regards them. John is much more stringent; he simply states that all such phenomena should be ignored.
According to John, one can too easily be deceived by such phenomena, and too easily led to pride, and in any case, these are not central to the mystic path to God.

The mystics are similarly ambiguous concerning the role of consolations and desolations in the discernment process regarding mystical experiences. For Ignatius, consolations are clearly from God, while desolations serve to draw us away from God. Ignatius sought to systematically discuss these, even going so far as to discuss their different meanings in persons oriented towards God and persons not oriented towards God. Teresa places much value on consolations from God, but cautions against becoming too attached to them. She warns that those who are not prepared to endure times of desolation will not advance along the spiritual path. Again, John is the most austere of the three. He counsels detachment from spiritual attachments; hence, for him consolations and desolations are equally to be rejected.

But, if Ignatius, Teresa and John offer differing advice concerning the discernment within the sphere of extraordinary mystical experiences, they are united in their advise concerning discernment in the broader sphere, and unequivocally subordinate discernment in the mystical sphere to living an authentic spiritual life. Such experiences are not considered an end in themselves by these mystics. Extraordinary mystical experiences are certainly of value, as they are gifts of God presented as consolation for the individual, and help lead the individual to love, detachment, humility and virtue. They do help advance the soul towards its goal of conformity to the will of God, but they are not necessary to that
purpose. Perfection does not lie in having extraordinary experiences, but in conformity to the will of God.

Can any connections be made between the criteria which the mystics used to evaluate their experiences, and the social and historical conditions of sixteenth-century Spain? I believe there are several external influences which were important in the formulation of these criteria, especially in the following areas:

1) Spanish society and history
2) The Alumbrados; the Inquisition; the Counter-Reformation
3) The Christian spiritual tradition-- as transmitted through the Church, Spanish culture, books, and individual persons.

One of the more obvious influences on these Spanish mystics is the Spanish society in which they lived and wrote. As we have seen, Spain in the late fifteenth century and sixteenth century was characterized by a high level of religious fervor. The reconquest of the Iberian peninsula from the Arabs, the discovery of the Americas, and the prominent role of Spain in the Counter-Reformation all contributed to a state in which religion permeated all levels of society. Mysticism represents an especially intense form of religious experience. As earlier mentioned, Robert Ellwood stresses that the phenomenon of mysticism in large part depends on the receptivity to such experiences of the society in which the mystics live. Because religious feeling was so high in Spain in the sixteenth century, and God’s action in the world was accepted as a given, mystical experiences were commonly accepted. While there were ambiguities regarding the relationship between Spanish society and
the mystics, on the whole Spanish society respected such phenomena.

As was discussed in the historical sketch of Spain in the sixteenth century, one of the most important institutions at the time was that of the Spanish Inquisition. The Inquisition influenced all parts of Spanish society, and would especially have had significance for those involved in religious matters. The emphasis on distinguishing true mysticism from false mysticism would have been especially important in a society where one could suffer severely for holding the wrong views. I noted earlier the difference in attitudes among the three mystics concerning the ability to differentiate between mystical experiences. In terms of their trust in mystical visions, locutions, movements of the spirits, and such, they can be ranked with Ignatius being the most trusting, Teresa in a position of ambiguity, and John outrightly rejecting attempts to evaluate such phenomena; it may be noted that this is also the chronological order in which these three mystics lived. It is tempting to hypothesize that as the Inquisition became more strict and attention focused on mystical experiences, each succeeding generation of mystics became more careful about trusting in such phenomena. In a different vein, it might also be argued that the mystics did not distrust their experiences so much as they claim, but were increasingly forced to use this language to avoid falling under the arm of the Inquisition. Of course such hypotheses are impossible to verify. However, I think it can be safely asserted that in a situation such as sixteenth century Spain where mystical experience becomes an increasingly delicate issue, mystics will be
increasingly careful about placing confidence in mystical phenomenon.

Another important influence on the mystics was the literature they were exposed to. As mentioned earlier, the sixteenth century in Spain gave rise to a vast increase printed material, much of it being spiritual works dealing with mystical experience and prayer. As discussed earlier, there were consistent themes in this literature, for example, emphases on free will and individual effort, on works, on charity, on love of neighbor, on morality, and on saving souls. Also mentioned was the practical nature of this literature, one intended to teach, not simply to speculate. The works of Ignatius, Teresa, and John, all fall clearly within Pedro Rodriguez's general description of Spanish mystical literature, demonstrating their continuity with this larger, national tradition.4

Another important consideration for examining discernment in these mystics is the problem of the Alumbrados in sixteenth century Spain. Ideas usually do not arise simply as unrelated projections into the world. In every idea we affirm, we reject other opposing views. Historically, at the societal level, those ideas which receive the most attention involve exactly those issues which are most in question. We gain insight into what the Spanish mystics wished to achieve in their teachings when we contrast them with many of their contemporaries who were considered heretical. Many of the emphases of the Spanish mystics directly oppose those of the Alumbrados. Examples of this are the emphasis on the importance of the will, the stress on works, the devotion to the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and confession, the denial that one is ever
confirmed in grace but instead, must always strive for moral perfection, and the submission to the authority of the Church.

The characteristics of the Spanish mystics may also be viewed in the context of their differences with Quietism. While noting that taken out of context Teresa and John may express ideas which approach Quietism, Dickens defends them against this charge. He writes: "St. Teresa and St. John are quite firm on the point that we can do nothing apart from the grace of God; but they are equally certain that the human soul never arrives at a passivity in which it may disclaim responsibility for all it does. Nor may we unconcernedly await divine guidance in prayer before we act." And, while the Quietists stressed inner peace and avoidance of strain and anxiety, Teresa and John both made clear that fellowship in Christ's suffering was a necessary element of authentic Christian spirituality. What has been said here concerning Teresa and John can also be said of Ignatius.

Beyond these particularly Spanish influences which would have influenced Ignatius, Teresa and John, there is the broader context of the Counter-Reformation. We must take into account the fact that all three of these mystics lived in the midst of this Counter, or Catholic, Reformation. Many of their criteria concerning discernment reflect the Counter-Reformation spirituality which emerged from the Council of Trent. This can be seen in the conformity between the mystics thoughts and the legislation which emerged from the Council of Trent. Examples are the emphasis on justification by works and faith combined, the importance of the sacraments, the authority of the institutional Church, the placing of
authority of tradition on an equal footing with Scripture, and the
denial of the right of individuals to believe that their own
interpretation of Scripture was more true than that of Church
authorities. There are also clear parallels between the spirituality
of the Spanish mystics and the spirituality of the
Counter-Reformation as described by H.O. Evennet-- "one in which
activity of all kinds was to play a very large part; in which active
striving after self-control and the importance of virtues would be
vital; in which zeal for good works of mercy and charity and labor
for the salvation of souls were to predominate."6

Ultimately, the influences upon the Spanish mystics must be
placed into an even larger context: that of the Christian tradition,
of Christian spirituality prior to them and transmitted to them in a
myriad of ways. Especially important in the formation of their
thought was the influence of the Christian mystical tradition,
including the early monastic traditions and the traditions of the
Church Fathers.

The vast influx of printed works in Spain in the sixteenth century
ensured that Ignatius, Teresa and John would have been exposed to
earlier forms of Christian mysticism, either directly or indirectly.
In an article "Early Monastic Elements in Ignatian Spirituality,"
Heinrich Bracht investigates the link between Ignatian thought in
the Spiritual Exercises and the spirituality of early Christian
monasticism.7 The connection is especially notable in the fact that
when writing the constitution for the Jesuit order, Ignatius first
studied various constitutions from early monastic orders. While he
says that Ignatius has forged a new and unique form of spirituality,
Bracht also says, "it still may not be forgotten that he received powerful and even determining impulses and directions from the documents of the early history of monasticism, even though for the most part indirectly." Although Bacht demonstrates direct links between Ignatian spirituality and early monastic spirituality, he does not believe that Ignatius derived his spirituality directly from earlier sources. As he describes it, "The entire spirituality of the age in which Ignatius lived was filled with and formed by themes, ideas, and values taken over from the writings of the great monastic Fathers of the East and West," and informed Ignatius' thought indirectly as well as directly.

In a similar vein, Dickens in his book *Crucible of Love* describes John as being heavily influenced by earlier sources, sources which cannot be pinpointed but which were part of the popular milieu of sixteenth century Spain. While John quotes very few specific authors, Dickens writes that he could have been influenced by countless authors: Augustine, Gregory the Great, Bernard, the Victorines, the Rhineland mystics, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Lull, Osuna, Laredo, Teresa of Avila, and Luis de Leon.

In the autobiographies of both Ignatius Loyola and Teresa of Avila, we see concrete examples of earlier works being referred to by the mystics at critical points in their lives. In Ignatius' life, we have seen the special importance of Ludolph of Saxony's *Life of Christ*, Jacopa de Voragine's *Golden Legend*, and Thomas a Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*. It is also important to recall Ignatius' 12 years of study, in which he would have been exposed to many more theological works. Finally, it is important to recall that in
formulating the Constitution for the new order, Ignatius carefully examined earlier monastic rules.

Teresa also makes reference to the importance of religious books in her life. Even at an early age she connects the beginning of her religious life with visiting an uncle who had many religious books. We will also recall that during a serious illness, at a point before entering the convent, she mentions reading a lot, and names the Epistles of St. Jerome as especially important. The reference to books as aids in her spiritual development continues throughout her biography. Of special note are The Third Alphabet, the Confessions of St. Augustine, The Art of Serving God, and The Ascent of Mount Sion.

It is important in noting the influence of earlier spirituality on these mystics that they are all grounded on the same common source, Scripture. What Heinrich Bacht writes about the relationship between Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises and early monastic spirituality can be extended to the other Spanish mystics as well: "It must always be kept in mind that early monastic spirituality on its part consciously and vigorously modeled itself on Holy Scripture, and that thus the Exercises-- quite apart from their direct roots in Scriptures-- are also indirectly grounded in biblical spirituality."¹¹

Thus, the spirituality of the Spanish mystics, while influenced by all the different factors mentioned, ultimately derives from Scripture. This influence is especially evident in Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, which are based on meditations pulled from Scripture, and contain many Scripture passages, and in the writings of St. John, who refers to the Bible extensively, filling every chapter with
quotes and always referring to Scripture as the authority for his statements concerning mystical experience.

In his book, *Authenticity: A Biblical Theology of Discernment*, Thomas Dubay investigates discernment in the Bible and forwards a system of criteria for discernment based on Scripture. He also stresses the conditions and signs of discernment as opposed to any conception of discernment as an autonomous area. A comparison of the results of Dubay’s work with the discernment criteria of the Spanish mystics will demonstrate just how Scripturally grounded these three mystics were.

Perhaps no less important than the influence of books as transmitters of earlier spirituality is the impact of individuals on the lives of the three mystics. Ignatius’ upbringing, his contact with his spiritual director at Manresa, his teachers, his companions— all these had an impact on the development of his ideas. Teresa’s parents, her uncle, her spiritual directors, the numerous priests who she consulted— all these were instrumental in her formation. Lacking an autobiography for John, we have less insight into the most important people in his life, but doubtless among his mother, his teachers, his spiritual directors, and his religious community, must be included important persons who influenced the development of his spiritual life.

All of these factors must be seen as important influences on the spiritual formation of Ignatius, Teresa and John. Following Ellwood and Katz, I agree with them that these influences would have been apparent even in mystical experiences. Whether the influence enters into the interpretation of the experience or the experience itself,
the fact remains that what the mystic communicates to us will be colored by the environment in which he or she lived. I have shown that Ignatius, Teresa and John all had very similar criteria which they used in evaluating their mystical experiences and discerning God's presence and will. I have also shown that these criteria reflect the common influences which affected all three of them, influences ranging from the Spanish society in which they lived to the Christian tradition in which they were all raised.

In concluding a comparative study on discernment in Ignatius of Loyola and Teresa of Avila, William K. Delaney writes: "The similarities between Ignatius and Teresa are so strong, that one can only conclude that they are dealing with basically the same experience, and have come to very similar conclusions concerning it." This is exactly the ahistorical thinking which Katz so strongly criticizes. Having noted all the historical and social influences which affected both Ignatius and Teresa, as well as John, it must be asserted that this is not the only conclusion which can be made. One can make the strong argument that it was the common influences which produced similar experiences and/or interpretations. I agree that such a simplified conclusion is unwarranted; a consideration of the many historical factors present is necessary.

I wish to make clear that in noting all of these sources which would have had an impact on the Spanish mystics I am not following a reductionistic line of thought. Even in cases where direct links may be found between these mystics' writings and earlier writings I do not see this as proof for direct dependence. In his book, Ignatius
the Theologian, Hugo Rahner does not seek to uncover the immediate literary sources which influenced Ignatius in his teaching on discernment, but says rather, "What we are concerned with goes rather deeper than mere literary dependence: between the teachings of patristic and medieval asceticism are links which transcend historical development."¹⁴

Within the Catholic Church the authentic mystical experience is recognized as a form of private revelation. In his book, The Meaning of Revelation, H. Richard Niebuhr takes on the difficult task of straddling the historical and the eternal, arguing that an appreciation for the historical nature of revelation does not entail a reductionist view of revelation.¹⁵ While Niebuhr does not discuss revelation as private, I find myself in a similar position regarding history and the mystical experience. Speaking from "within the theological circle," I, like Hugo Rahner, believe that in uncovering sources for the thoughts of the mystics we are uncovering links which transcend historical development. I would remind the reader of Robert Ellwood's description of the mystical experience. In this description there is a flashpoint followed by interpretation. While it is true, as Katz and his followers argue, that our interpretation will in part be performed by our previous history, if this were the only factor our interpretation should emerge completely and immediately following our flashpoint experience. But this is usually not the case. Rather, this process often takes months, even years to accomplish. Lacking categories with which to explain the experience, the mystic will be unable to interpret or even to express the total experience until he/she finds an appropriate
category. We see a graphic example of this in St. Teresa of Avila. In consulting the cleric Gaspar Diaz concerning her mystical experiences, Teresa says she could not describe the nature of her prayer, for it was "beyond" her understanding. In order to try to articulate her experience, Teresa looked through various books, and in was in *The Ascent of Mount Sion* that she found "a full description of the state she experienced in prayer." It was only through the words of this book that she was able to express her experience. In such an experience we see an example not of an experience predetermined by external sources, but an experience completed by an outside source. There is a resonance between the two which transcends direct dependence.

I would argue that an accurate model of the mystical experience must take account of both the "without" nature of the experience (that it comes from without, from outside the mystic), and the "within" (those factors internal to the mystic which to a degree preform the interpretation). While disagreeing with William K. Delaney's conclusion that the commonalities in discernment criteria between Ignatius and Teresa were attributable simply to their having had similar experiences, I would also disagree with the attempt to explain the criteria simply in terms of external influences. Rather, it is in the meeting between the two that the mystical experience is completed. This model of the mystical experience calls for a deeper look at the interaction between the mystic and his/her external environment, one which recognizes a connection between the two, but avoids the simple reductionistic tendency. This model especially calls for an examination between
the mystic and religious "tradition," in a manner which takes into account the complex, reciprocal nature of this relationship.

I believe pursuing a reciprocal model of the interaction between the mystic and tradition points to an even more complex picture of this relationship than Katz envisions. Katz, and other contributors to his books, are primarily confined to a notion of tradition as a purely historical and documentary conception. I would prefer to think of tradition in a broader sense, one which includes an appreciation for the experiential dimension of religion. I find myself siding with Andrew Louth, who his book, Discerning the Mystery, describes tradition as "the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church." The "living transmission" of this Spirit is carried out through documents and other external means, but is not confined to such.

Expanding on this idea, a parallel formulation can be found in Yves Congar's book, The Meaning of Tradition, in which Congar presents the thought of the philosopher Maurice Blondel, who at the turn of the century wrote on the problem of tradition:
The Church, said Blondel, possesses other sources of knowledge besides the mere documents. She has the experience of Christian reality as such continually present within her, motivated and directed by the Holy Spirit. Tradition, added Blondel, is precisely the place where the synthesis is realized between the historical transmission and the present experience which, thus united, produce, in the present and in preparation for the future, a profound knowledge of Christian reality transcending the text of the document with which it started. Tradition is not merely memory; it is actual presence of the experience.

Above all, Blondel makes the point that it is in the point of
correlation between the historical transmission and the present experience which authentic tradition truly lies. I would make a similar suggestion concerning the authentic mystical experience in the Christian tradition: it is in the point of correlation between the historical transmission and the present experience in which the authentic mystical experience lies.

Recent Catholic thinking has undergone a revolution in its understanding of the nature of tradition. In his book, The Reshaping of Catholicism, Avery Dulles examines the treatment of tradition which took place during Vatican II, and refers to the impact of Blondel's thinking on Vatican II's document, The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, in which a discussion of tradition plays a prominent role. After comparing the objectivist view of tradition and the modernist view of tradition, Dulles discusses Blondel's thought and writes: "I conclude, then, that the essential and primary function of Christian tradition is not to transmit explicit knowledge, which can better be done by written documents, nor simply to provide a method of discovery, but to impart a tacit, lived awareness of the God to whom the Christian Scriptures and symbols point."¹⁹ Tradition is not simply as a matter of communicating doctrine, but a means by which the church and its members can enter into a living relationship with God. As Dulles writes, the appropriation of tradition is not a matter of objective knowledge but of participatory knowledge. Often this process works at a level below conscious awareness.

I believe this examination of St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. John of the Cross supports this view of tradition. In
the question of discerning the authentic mystical experience from the inauthentic, they clearly appeal to the authority of tradition in formulating and validating their views. Yet, in the end, these outer guideposts only mark the limits for the experience--they do not in themselves provide the mystical experience. For the mystics the correct understanding of tradition cannot take place simply through human effort or transmission. The grace of God is the only power which allows the human being to enjoy participatory knowledge of God, and the method par excellence of participating in this knowledge is through a sound spiritual life based on prayer. While insisting that their experiences conform to tradition, especially in the form of Scriptures and the structure of the Church, it is their experiences which provide the impetus for their words and their actions.

What has been accomplished in this thesis? I hope I have accomplished the following two objectives:

First, I hope I have succinctly brought together the widely scattered thoughts on discernment of these three prominent mystics, demonstrating that critical thought and mysticism are not antithetical, and making their thoughts on discernment more accessible to persons interested in this area. I think such work is very important given the increasing importance given to experience in modern theology. I wholeheartedly support the recovery of the experiential dimension of Christian spirituality which is currently taking place; I think it is a welcome antidote to the anti-affective, highly intellectualized theology which has characterized the
dominant strands of Western theology since the Enlightenment. Hopefully the pendulum will not swing too far the other way and result in a depreciation of the intellect. As the Spanish mystics demonstrate there can be a union between an appreciation of the mystical and the rational.

Secondly, I hope this thesis helps to increase appreciation for the external influences which shape our religious beliefs, even in the case of religious experience, which people too often view as antithetical to taught doctrine or belief. Many people use the mystics as models for anti-authoritarian views and set up mystical experience as opposed to "organized religion." I think such a dichotomy is erroneous. No person can avoid being affected by the environment which surrounds him or her; there is no autonomous form of general "religious experience" which takes place in a vacuum. Even the mystics, those who are privy to the grandest heights of religious experience, are influenced by the environment they grow up in and live in. I think this realization has important ramifications for Christian religious education and pedagogy. It is not enough to simply promote "religious feeling," and then expect this to channel itself into authentic Christian spirituality on its own. In the language of the mystics, proper discernment of God's will can only take place in the context of authentic Christian spirituality. Following Blondel, I have argued that authentic Christian spirituality takes place at the point of correlation between the historical transmission of the Christian tradition and the present experience. It is the role of Christian tradition to transmit, to make possible, the passing on of this authentic
Christian spirituality. In formulating this relationship succinctly I can only defer to the eloquence of Avery Dulles who states: "By shaping our powers of perception, tradition enables us to perceive in the Christian symbols what the Church itself believes."\textsuperscript{20}

Discernment involves exactly these powers of perception, enabling us to recognize God in the world. There is always the danger that tradition will fail to take into account the importance of the correlation with present experience, in which case tradition fails to empower the continuation of authentic Christian spirituality. This has perhaps been the case in the Catholic Church up until recent times. Hopefully a balance between experience and tradition can be realized, one in which a dialectic can be maintained, without swinging too far one way or the other.
END NOTES FOR CHAPTER SIX


2. Matthew 22:37

3. Matthew 7:15-20


9. Ibid., p. 203.


20. Ibid., p. 86.
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