

**THE CHURCH, THE MYSTERY
OF COMMUNION AND FRIENDSHIP
ACCORDING TO ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY**

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A beatification or canonization is not merely a devotional fact but a doctrinal message to all the Church. In the beatified person, in this case Elizabeth of the Trinity, an aspect of Christ's life and mystery has been incarnated. The personal sanctification of Blessed Elizabeth bears witness to the transformative power of the Gospel. In her person, Christian life and doctrine have been amalgamated into a fruitful unity. As a matter of fact, few Christians have to such an extent been identified with one single dogma as has Blessed Elizabeth of the *Trinity*. The dogma in question is, of course, that of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in the human person. This most central, and simultaneously somewhat forgotten and neglected, mystery of faith has been widely « popularized » by Elizabeth. Owing to the testimonial character of her writings many a Christian — and even non-believer — has discovered the true nature of the triune God. This is of great importance, especially in the contemporary pastoral situation, where a truth of faith seems more likely to be accepted when proclaimed by someone who has had a personal and authentic experience of it.

Blessed Elizabeth's spiritual experience can thus be of great help to the Church in the current pastoral and theological situation, where the mystery of the Trinity tends to be overlooked. She is really a living reminder of God's inmost being. Here, we can only concentrate upon one facet of her Trinitarian vision, namely its ecclesial implications. Or rather, we can only touch upon one of the many ecclesial aspects of her experience and vision of the Trinity. One could even assert that quite an extensive amount of material on the *Ecclesia de Trinitate* is to be found in the writings

of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity. It is not by pure chance that this aspect has been chosen here: just as the mystery of the Trinity seems to be widely forgotten today, that of the Church tends to be neglected and even devalued. Even many of those who claim to be Christians have a sense of estrangement with regard to the Church. Elizabeth's experience may help them to distinguish the real nature of the Church as well as that of God himself, i.e. to be the mystery of communion and friendship.

As a matter of fact, these notions of communion and friendship are keywords in order to understand Elizabeth's personality and writings. In this respect she corresponds completely with our contemporary craving for fellowship and community, but she gives this anthropological and often vague desire « a solid doctrinal foundation » through her Trinitarian and ecclesial outlook¹. This intuition of hers, that is by no means elaborated into any explicit doctrinal system, is still surprisingly similar to the vision of the Second Vatican Council on the *Ecclesia de Trinitate* as formulated in its documents, e.g. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 2-4 and *Ad Gentes*, no. 2-4.

These facts seem to justify our attempt to consider Elizabeth's experience of the Church in its relation to the Trinity under the auspices of the catchwords « communion » and « friendship ». Evidently, there is the peril of an exaggerated use of catchwords of the kind in theology, especially in our time of simplification and propaganda. On the other hand, there is also a real need for *Kurzformeln* in contemporary theology². As with all other sciences, theology threatens to split up into innumerable branches and this entails the danger of losing sight of the fundamental unity. This would be disastrous for theology, and the faith as a whole, owing to its wholistic character and all-encompassing task, i.e. to try to describe the inconceivable mystery of communion uniting the infinite and uncreated Being called God to the highly finite and created being called man.

The notions of communion and friendship and Elizabeth's use

¹ As to the existence of a « doctrine » in Elizabeth's writings cf. the opinion of C. DE MEESTER, *Thérèse de Lisieux et Elisabeth de Dijon*, in *Carmel* (1981) 12: « Il est moins approprié de parler d'une 'doctrine' chez Elisabeth que chez 12: « Il est moins approprié de parler d'une 'doctrine' chez Elisabeth que chez plicite, une élaboration d'un plus grand nombre d'éléments, une plus grande originalité de la pensée. Mais nous préférierions parler chez Elisabeth d'un solide *soubassement doctrinal*, d'*harmoniques* théologiques et d'un climat scripturaire néotestamentaire ».

² Cf. K. RAHNER, *Grundkurs des Glaubens, Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums*, Freiburg 1977, pp. 430-440.

of them are furthermore in total harmony with the Carmelite tradition, above all in its Teresian form. We do not want to enter into discussion on the essence of Carmelite spirituality, whether it is *sacrifice* or *divine intimacy*³, Somehow, both aspects have to be encompassed, both « passion and contemplation »⁴, just as Christ's own Paschal mystery, source of all the various forms and facets of Christian spirituality, consists of both the cross and the resurrection. This becomes quite evident in one of Blessed Elizabeth's poems, where she sums up what it means to be a Carmelite:

« The Carmelite is a soul who has given herself away,
 Immolated to the glory of God.
 She is crucified with her Christ,
 But her Calvary, oh, it is so full of light!
 When looking upon the Divine Victim
 A light has risen in her soul,
 And when she realized her sublime mission,
 Her wounded heart cried aloud: 'Here I am!' » (P 83)⁵.

In Elizabeth's very immolation in union with the crucified Christ, the glory of God shines through and, simultaneously, she realizes her mission. Just as in the Gospel of St. John that she loved so dearly there is a fundamental harmony between a *theologia crucis* and a *theologia gloriae*. Through her communion in immolation or sacrificial friendship with God, she becomes fruitful for the Church and the world. She becomes a bride, just like Our Lady, as she loved to say⁶. Thus, Elizabeth's ecclesial experience is woven into a network of various components and implications: Trinitarian, Christological, Mariological etc. Or rather, perhaps we should express

³ According to ERICH PRZYWARA SJ the notion of *sacrifice* is the core of the Carmelite spirituality. Cfr. the articles of L. ARÓSTEGUT, *La gloria de la Cruz, en Erich Przywara*, in *Revista de Espiritualidad* 35 (1976) 275-300 and *El Carmelo, como símbolo teológico, en Erich Przywara* in the same review 41 (1982) 613-634. The titles of two famous works written by Carmelites in this century seem to reveal another aspect: *Divine Intimacy* by GABRIEL OF ST MARY MAGDALEN and *I want to see God* by MARIE EUGENE OF THE INFANT JESUS.

⁴ H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Schwestern im Geist*, Einsiedeln 1970, p. 9.

⁵ The citations from Blessed Elizabeth's writings — sometimes in a provisional translation — refer to the French edition prepared by C. DE MEESTER, « *J'ai trouvé Dieu* », *Oeuvres Complètes*, Paris 1979-1980 (in three volumes: I/A, I/B, II). We use the abbreviations from this edition; CF = *Le Ciel dans la foi*; DR = *Dernière retraite*; GV = *La grandeur de notre vocation*; J = *Journal*; L = *Lettres*; LA = *Laisse-toi aimer*; N = *Notes intimes*; P = *Poésies*.

⁶ The spousal dimension of faith is a constant theme in Elizabeth's works, perhaps it is most intensely expressed in NI 13. Cf. also VALENTINUS DI S. MARIA, « *Conforme à sa mort* », *Elisabeth de la Trinité, Epouse du Christ Crucifiée*, in *Carmel* (1961) 47-60.

it the other way round: her communion with the Holy Trinity, Christ, and Mary also has ecclesial dimensions. The Church is no central object in her reflection upon faith. God is the sole object of her contemplation. But ever since 1897, and especially since 1899, when she took part in the mission preached by the Redemptorist Fathers at Dijon, there is an apparent apostolic commitment in her writings⁷.

Although the Church never catches Elizabeth's attention in the same measure as in the case of Teresa of Avila and Thérèse of Lisieux, it remains present constantly, but discreetly, in her consciousness. Through her ever growing communion with the Holy Trinity, which also includes an intensification of her spousal friendship with Christ, the Marian and ecclesial attitudes of adoration and service become incarnated in her. Succinctly, her approach towards the mystery of the Church may be described as an interior configuration and identification with the ecclesial ideal⁸. The spiritual climate of « interiority », so typical of Elizabeth, is clearly perceptible in her attitude towards the Church. The mystery of the Church gradually becomes more and more integrated and « interiorized » into her very being.

IN COMMUNION WITH THE TRINITY

One might say that the Holy Trinity is the atmosphere, the spiritual climate wherein Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity lives. Her entire spiritual life and doctrine have their foundation in the Trinity⁹. Of course, we may not expect an elaborate Trinitarian doc-

⁷ Cf. C. DE MEESTER, *Thérèse de Lisieux et Elisabeth de Dijon*, in *Carmel* (1981) 117-119.

⁸ A similar aspect of the ecclesial experience of Teresa of Avila has been described as « la Iglesia como íntimo reino de Dios en las almas » by TOMÁS DE LA CRUZ, O.C.D., *Santa Teresa de Jesús, contemplativa*, in *Ephem. Carm.* 13 (1962) 41. Cf. also A. APARICIO, *Sor Isabel y los grandes maestros del Carmelo*, p. 159 in « *Alabanza de Gloria* », *Isabel de la Trinidad*, (Estudios Monte Carmelo, 7), Burgos 1984 and F. RUIZ SALVADOR, *Camino del Espíritu, Compendio de Teología espiritual*, Madrid 1978, pp. 158-160.

⁹ Not all authors seem to accept this view completely. Thus, the role of the *Holy Spirit* in Elizabeth's works is regarded to be still more central by H.U. VON BALTHASAR, o.c., p. 356 and that of *Jesus Christ* by ADOLFO DE LA MADRE DE DIOS, O.C.D., *Nuestra incorporación a Cristo según Isabel de la Santísima Trinidad*, in *Revista de Espiritualidad* 6 (1947) 458. Obviously, Elizabeth's concentration on the Trinity does not prevent her from giving due consideration to the Christological and Pneumatological aspects of faith. This fact is asserted clearly by I. SAINZ DE BARANDA, *Aventura y hallazgo de un nombre*, in *Monte Carmelo* 75 (1967) 188 by M.M. PHILIPON, O.P., *The Spiritual Doctrine of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity*, Westminster 1955, p. 180.

trine in one who lacks a formal theological education. Anyhow, this basic mystery of faith becomes an existential reality in her personal life and spiritual experience. This mystery, which rarely is as central as it ought to be in the minds of Christians, dominates her whole outlook and being. Elizabeth wanted to live all her life in the Holy Trinity, because « it is so beautiful in the Trinity, everything is so clear and full of charity » (P 74).

Our author was so convinced of the presence of God, the Holy Trinity, in her, that all her life gradually became concentrated around this theme: « Little by little the soul grows accustomed to living in this delightful company; she understands that she bears within her a little heaven in which the God of Love has established his abode. Then it is as though she breathed a divine atmosphere, I might almost say there is nothing but her body left on earth, while her soul lives beyond the clouds and veils, in him who is Immutable » (L 249)¹⁰. Here God is looked upon as a reality « interiorized » into her soul, and at the same time, the soul is regarded as living beyond herself in the transcendent sphere of God. There are no distances whatsoever. It is as if God were the very air she breathed. She is, as it were, haunted by the thought of God present in everything. The Trinity is really the foundation of everything existing. God is present here on earth as truly as he is in heaven. « He is totally present in everything, and everything is, in a sense, an emanation of his love » (L 264).

Elizabeth sees everything in relation to God; everything is, in a way, a sacrament reflecting the creative and generative power of God. The Trinity is the source of everything, the mutual relations of love between the three divine Persons are reproduced in innumerable ways in all creation. Everything is seen as an emanation of this Love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

1) *Salvation: the redemptive Trinity*

Elizabeth of the Trinity prefers to look upon the mysteries of faith in their relation to us human beings, rather than scrutinize the mysteries in themselves. This is also so in her way of treating

¹⁰ Cf. also L 58: « Let us lose ourselves in this Holy Trinity, in this God who is all Love »; L 62: « This presence of God is wonderful... It (the Trinity) is an abyss in which I lose myself »; L 185: « The Trinity which, even here on earth, is our cloister, our abode, the Infinite in which we can live and move no matter what happens »; L 197: « I feel full of respect for this little temple of the blessed Trinity. Her soul seems to me like a crystal radiating God ».

the Trinity; nearly always her interest is concentrated upon the redemptive Trinity working in the world and dwelling in man rather than upon the Trinity *in se*. Naturally, she regards the redemptive Trinity as being the same as the immanent One, it is a true revelation of the very essence of God himself¹¹. God Triune reveals himself as he is.

In Elizabeth's outlook, the Trinity is nearly always related to man. The very first time she mentions the Trinity in her writings, she refers this mystery to herself in an existential manner. This occurs in her poem for Pentecost 1898, when she speaks about herself as « this bride of the Trinity » (P 54)¹².

Thus, in Elizabeth's opinion, the Trinity is fundamentally regarded as a saving mystery; obviously this does not mean that our author denied the totally transcendent character of God. Anyhow, the Trinity is no distant reality, but something very close to us men, even closer to us than we are to ourselves. The Trinity dwelling in man is the very core of him, and keeps transforming and divinizing him. Thus she can write to a friend of hers: « My very dear Antoinette, I am leaving you my faith in the presence of God, of the God who is all love, dwelling in our souls. I confide to you that it is this intimacy with him which has been the bright sunshine lighting up my life, making it already an anticipated heaven » (L 333)¹³. God, who is present in the soul here on earth, is the same God who is present in heaven. This presence of God, or rather this present God: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is the bond establishing a continuity between this life on earth and the next one in heaven. All Christians are called to have a deep, heartfelt relationship to the Holy Trinity dwelling in them. The indwelling of the Trinity is essentially a redemptive truth that has an immense importance for all Christian lives.

God's inmost life, the intratrinitarian intercourse of love, is

¹¹ Elizabeth seems to agree completely with the theological accentuation of K. RAHNER, *o.c.*, p. 141: « Die 'ökonomische', heilsgeschichtliche Trinität ist die immanente ».

¹² Hitherto, Elizabeth's poems have hardly received due attention either from the ordinary, assiduous reader of her works or from the scholars. Though they may not be literary masterpieces, they have a very rich message. Many of them are written for the great liturgical feasts of the Church and give us a unifying view of the connection between liturgy, doctrine and contemplation. As to the role of liturgy in Elizabeth cf. J. CASTELLANO, *Liturgia e contemplazione*, in *Elisabetta della Trinità, Esperienza e dottrina*, Roma 1980, pp. 143-170 and R.M. VALABEK, O. CARM., *Elizabeth of the Trinity and the Liturgy*, in *Carmelus* 24 (1977) 12-42.

¹³ Cf. also L 172, L 185, L 197; DR 28.

reproduced on earth. The Trinity « loves to contemplate its beauty in a soul. That is what draws it to give of itself more and more and dwell in her more intimately so as to produce the great mystery of love and union » (L 131)¹⁴. The transformative and redemptive power of the Persons of the Trinity is reflected in the human persons; they become more and more inhabited by the divine Persons as they grow closer to the Christian plenitude. The indwelling of the Trinity is not a static reality, but a dynamic process of sanctification reflecting the motions of love and union existing within the Trinity *in se*. The interior life of the divine Persons is bestowed on man reproducing their mutual love in him. Even God's own unity is reflected in man: « The soul thus simplified and unified, becomes the throne of the unchanging God, for 'unity is the throne of the blessed Trinity' » (DR 5)¹⁵.

Elizabeth does not regard the individual man only as a receptacle of the Trinity. She is indeed most conscious of the collective implications of this mystery. The Trinity is the source of salvation and sanctification for every man — and for the entire community of men. Our author, being very sensitive to human friendship, looks upon this anthropological reality as a reflection of the intercourse of love between the divine Persons. So she writes to her mother prioress: « The mystery of the Three has been reproduced on earth, since our two hearts (*her own and that of another sister*) have found their union in yours » (P 101)¹⁶. The ultimate foundation of human fellowship and friendship is the unity of love reigning within the Trinity. As a reflection of the mystery of God himself, the friendship between men becomes a redemptive reality for the persons involved.

¹⁴ Obviously, the neutral *it* used in English for the Trinity does not have the same personal touch and warmth as the feminine *elle* used by Elizabeth in her mother tongue. Thus, the very grammatical structure of some languages seems to be more responsive to the aims of a feministic theology!

¹⁵ The last words are a citation from Ruysbroeck, an author who had a great influence on Elizabeth during this latter period of her life. In his writings, Ruysbroeck gives much attention to the interior life of the Trinity. In his words quoted here he also speaks about the unity of God in himself. It is interesting to see that this perspective is given a more redemptive accent by Elizabeth: the unity of God as reflected in the perfectly unified soul. Cf. C. DE MEESTER, « *J'ai trouvé Dieu* », I/A, p. 159, footnote 17. As regards Ruysbroeck's influence on Elizabeth cf. GIOVANNA DELLA CROCE, O.C.D., *Juan Ruusbroec en Isabel de Dijon*, pp. 213-229 in « *Alabanza de Gloria* », *Isabel de la Trinidad*, (Estudios Monte Carmelo, 7), Burgos 1984.

2) *Unification: the ecclesial process*

As we have seen, Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity refers the mystery of the Trinity to the redemptive process in, and transformation of, the individual and to the unification of men. Of course this has ecclesial implications as well. In one important text, she gives us something like a panorama on the *Ecclesia de Trinitate*. She says: « I love this thought: the priest's life (and the Carmelite's life) is an advent, preparing the incarnation in souls. In one of the psalms, David sings: 'See where the Lord comes, fire sweeping on before him' (Ps. 96, 3). And what is this fire of love? Is it not our mission also to prepare the way of the Lord, by our union with him whom the apostle calls 'a consuming fire' (Heb. 12, 29)? At this contact, our souls will become like a flame of love spreading among all the members of the Body of Christ which is the Church. Then we shall console our Master's heart, and showing us to the Father he will be able to say: 'In them my glory is achieved' (John 17, 10) » (L 250).

According to Elizabeth it is the office of all members of the Church, in this case the priest and the religious, to co-operate in the work of redemption¹⁶. Through their prayer, sacrifice, and apostolate they take part in the unification of men with God. Our author has often the tendency to see this union of love as an « interiorized » reality, thus she speaks of the incarnation in souls. The Son is, as it were, incarnated anew in the inmost being of every Christian. Furthermore, Christians not only have this intimate relationship to Christ, but also to the Holy Spirit. The third divine Person, who is the bond of love between the two other Persons, wants to transform man in his own essential Love, and make him into a flame of love. This flame is to be spread among all the members of the Church. Love always has an apostolic dimension.

Thus, men may take part in the salvific task of the two divine Persons who have been sent on a mission, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Mystical Body of Christ, the Church, is seen as an object of the transforming power of the Spirit. Man is allowed to participate in this action of the Spirit, but the action of man will only be efficient when he is really united to the Spirit, and when he has

¹⁶ Cf. also P 104; L 179; CF 2, CF 14.

¹⁷ Cf. B. MATTEUCCI, *Vita e Pensiero*, pp. 21-22 in E. ANCILLI, « *Ho creduto al Dio presente* », *Saggi sulla spiritualità di Sr. Elisabetta della Trinità*, Roma 1971.

been made participator of his pure love¹⁸. This action of love taking place in the Church consoles Christ, the Head of the entire Mystical Body. In turn, he is then able to show all his Body, which has been transformed in love, to his Father, who is the ultimate goal of everything. This dynamic process of transformative love — or ecclesial unification — achieves the glory of Christ. He is so united to his Body, the Church, that the plenitude of his glory, the *plerôma*, can only be achieved totally when all his Body shares in his love.

This text in Elizabeth's *oeuvre* opens a wide perspective on the Trinitarian process going on within the Church¹⁹. It proves the fact that she gives much attention to the Trinity and strives to relate it to the other realities of Christian existence. Here she also emphasizes that the redemptive process of unification of all men in the Church has its ultimate goal in the glorification of God. In the truly sanctified, Christ's glory is achieved, and he, in turn, brings them all back to the Father, who is glorified by the total Christ, the Head and all his Mystical Body.

3. Sanctification: transformation in the Holy Spirit

In the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is the personal Love of the Father and the Son. This intratrinitarian bond of love between the first and second Persons of the Trinity is reflected in the office of the Spirit in the Church, which is also an office of establishing a profound unity of love between the persons who make up the Church. The way that the Spirit acts in our world reproduces his task within the Trinity. As we have already seen, Elizabeth gives more attention to the redemptive aspects of the truths of faith than to the mysteries *in se*. This is also evident in her way of dealing with the Holy Spirit. Mostly she refers the august intratrinitarian task of the Spirit to his work among men. Thus she writes to a priest: « I promise to pray especially for you every day at Terce, that the Spirit of Love who seals and completes the unity of the Trinity may pour himself out abundantly in you, and bear you away in the light of faith to those distant summits where one lives only

¹⁸ In this context we may refer to St. John of the Cross, who in his *Spiritual Canticle* — *Cántico-B* 29, 2 — emphasizes the importance of this pure love for the Church.

¹⁹ Cf. J. LAFRANCE, *Apprendre à prier avec Soeur Elisabeth de la Trinité*, Paris 1963, pp. 79 and 82.

in peace, love and union, already illumined by the rays of the divine Sun » (L 193)²⁰.

In these words we can recognize the typical way our author has of uniting the intratrinitarian life to the concrete reality of the Church on earth. The divine office, as part of the Liturgy of the Church, so beloved by Elizabeth, provides her with an opportunity to unite the Holy Spirit to the life of a fellow-member of the Church. Through the outpouring of the Spirit, man is led into the very life of the Trinity. The sublime life of love and union reigning between the divine Persons becomes a reality that can be experienced in faith already here on earth.

As an assiduous reader of the *Llama* of St. John of the Cross, our author was aware of the participation of the baptized in the very act of aspiration within the Trinity: « At present I am reading some very beautiful pages of our father St. John of the Cross on the transformation of the soul into the three divine Persons... Our holy father says that then the Holy Spirit raises the soul to such a wonderful height that he renders her capable of producing in God the same aspiration of love that the Father produces with the Son, and the Son with the Father, the aspiration that is none other than the Holy Spirit himself! To think that God is calling us by our vocation to live in such heavenly light; what an adorable mystery of love! » (L 185)²¹.

In this text Elizabeth emphasizes the vocation of every Christian, i.e. to take part in the intratrinitarian procession of the Holy Spirit. Although she is no theologian, she fully realizes the extent of the Christian vocation. The baptized are to enter into the eternal circulation of love between the divine Persons. This reality that is established ontologically in man through baptism has to be made conscious in the minds of all men, most of whom unfortunately never come to grasp the full measure of this dignity that has been bestowed upon them. As a disciple of St. John of the Cross, Elizabeth gives her correspondents a glance into the centre of their baptismal riches. She has an extraordinary pedagogic capacity of opening their eyes to the transformative, sanctifying activity of the Spirit in them, and to their own activity of co-producing the Spirit as members of Christ. As adopted sons in the Son, they may share in all his works, including the intratrinitarian one of bringing forth the Holy Spirit. The entire Church is called to take part in this

²⁰ Cf. also CF 14: « The furnace of love burning within them which is the Holy Spirit himself, the same love which, in the Trinity, is the bond between the Father and his Word ».

intratrinitarian task of the Son; Elizabeth was indeed convinced of this fact. But in order to be conscious of this, one has to be transformed in and by the Spirit. The gradual work of sanctification in the Spirit is necessary for every member of the Church in order to attain the heights of the Christian life²².

4) *Glorification: predestined to glory*

The ultimate aim of the combined work of salvation, unification, and sanctification is the glorification of God; the recapitulation of everything in Christ will manifest the glory of the Father in a perfect manner. But already here on earth, man is capable of glorifying God: by accepting his gifts and letting himself be transformed by the grace of God. The perfect beings, the saints, are the manifestation of the glory of God. Thus there is a complete harmony between the redemptive-sanctifying order and the glorification that is due to God. Blessed Elizabeth had a keen consciousness of this glory that man is supposed to give to God. Already in 1900, in her commentary on the mission preached by the Redemptorist Fathers, she writes: « In heaven I will not be able to suffer for you. Oh, I do hope I will be able to work for your glory » (J 148)²³.

A few years later Elizabeth grasped the full meaning of glorification. This happened through her famous discovery and insight into the words of St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians (1, 12), where he says that man is meant to be the « praise of glory » of God: *Laudem Gloriam*. This more or less casual, but surely providential, discovery, which can be discussed exegetically — and grammatically! — was to be of immense importance in her personal life and her spiritual doctrine²⁴. Gradually she was to develop a

²¹ Cf. L 239, L 274, L 299; CF 5, CF 14; DR 19, DR 28.

²² Cf. L 239; P 54, P 86.

²³ Cf. the words of St. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX: « Je compte bien ne pas rester inactive au ciel, mon désir est de travailler encore pour l'Eglise et les âmes » (in the first edition of her *Histoire d'une Ame*, edited in 1899). The similarity is obvious, even if there is no possibility of any influence from St. Thérèse at that moment. St. Thérèse emphasizes the salvific task, her office as *co-redemptrice*, whereas Blessed Elizabeth gives more attention to the direct glorification of God. There is no opposition between these two aspects, they just reflect the complementary accents that are so typical of the two contemporary Carmelites.

²⁴ Cf. the footnotes of C. DE MEESTER in « *J'ai trouvé Dieu* », I/B, pp. 210-212; II, pp. 409-410. Also D. MARION, *Elisabeth et saint Paul*, in *Carmel* (1981) 57-58 and F. BRÄNDLE, « *Para alabanza de su gloria* »: *temas-paulinos en la espiritualidad de sor Isabel*, pp. 72-75 in « *Alabanza de Gloria* », *Isabel de la Trinidad*, (Estudios Monte Carmelo, 7), Burgos 1984.

synthesis of her whole life and spiritual vision under the auspices of this citation²⁵. Actually, nothing new was added, but she penetrated the Christian mystery more profoundly. Especially her last months on earth, between February and November 1906, were very fruitful in this sense. « As we study her conception of her office of 'Praise of Glory', we find once more the most fundamental lines of her spirituality: silence, absolute detachment, love of the Trinity, worship of the will of God and increasingly earnest identification with the soul of Christ crucified. We find them, however, in another light, one which changes everything: in the pure light of the glory of the Trinity »²⁶.

The vocation of glorifying God is common to all men, to all the members of the Church, here on earth as well as in heaven. All men united in Christ are to return to the Trinity where they have their origin. There they are to glorify God for ever²⁷. In Elizabeth's outlook there is a fundamental continuity: God has from all eternity predestined mankind to take part in his own glory. Predestination is a most important theme in her personal experience and doctrinal synthesis. « In the light of this mystery she saw the real nature of her vocation as a Carmelite; it gave direction to her strong impulse to prayer, contemplation, and suffering. Above all, it set her on the way to a clear knowledge, in the light of faith, of what before she had only glimpsed vaguely, the meaning of creation, the redemption, the Church. From this time on, the mystery of predestination filled her horizon; it was both the starting point and the goal of her life, the motive of all her decisions and acts of sacrifice »²⁸.

In accordance with Catholic tradition, predestination, in Elizabeth's viewpoint, is linked to the Church; it is a mystery of universal salvation regarding the ecclesial totality and not, as in the Calvinistic outlook, rather a question of redemption or reprobation of the individual. After Calvin, there has prevailed a certain amount of uneasiness at the mere mention of the word predestination. Even in

²⁵ One might compare Elizabeth's all-encompassing vision which becomes evident in her notion *Laudem Gloriam* with the adage of St. IRENAEUS, *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 20, 7; PG 7, 1037: « Gloria Dei, vivens homo, vita autem hominis, visio Dei ».

²⁶ M.M. PHILIPON, O.P., o.c., p. 88. Cf. also G. PESENTI, *Il cielo sulla terra*, p. 103 in E. ANCILLI, « *Ho creduto al Dio presente* », *Saggi sulla spiritualità di Sr. Elisabetta della Trinità*, Roma 1971.

²⁷ In order to get some complementary aspects on the key concept of *Laudem Gloriam* it is expedient to read the following texts: P 98, P 100, P 106, P 115, P 121; CF 41-44, and above all her entire *Last Retreat* (DR).

²⁸ H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Elizabeth of Dijon, An Interpretation of her Spiritual Mission*, translated by A.V. LITTLEDAY, London 1956, p. 23. Cf. also the entire chapter on *Predestination*.

Catholic theology the theme has been somewhat avoided and forgotten. Elizabeth of the Trinity can help us to re-discover this mystery of divine mercy in all its implications: Trinitarian, Christological, ecclesiological etc.

The decree of predestination had its beginning in the bosom of the Trinity. When man has attained his goal, his perfection as *Laudem Gloriam*, then he will be transformed into the Holy Trinity and can depart into the life of everlasting glory. His personal predestination is, as it were, fulfilled; the mystery of the Church is totally realized in him. The adorable Trinity is the supreme Good towards whom he, as every single Christian, had striven. It was in order that we should be able to enter into « fellowship » with the divine Persons that the Father created the world, the Son, became man and the Holy Spirit was sent to overshadow the Church. The intrinsic significance of the mystery of the Church is to lead the whole Christ to the contemplation of the Trinity. Predestination was meant for everyone. According to Elizabeth the final outcome of predestination is not so much a reward for the single person as the beginning of a mission, a service to the Church. Thus, she wrote in a posthumous letter to her mother prioress: « I bequeath to you this vocation which was mine in the bosom of the Church militant and which I shall fulfil henceforth unceasingly in the Church triumphant: A PRAISE OF GLORY OF THE BLESSED TRINITY » (LA 5).

In these words, as in many others, it is conspicuous with what evidence our author proclaims the continuity of this life and the next, between the Church militant and triumphant. This makes us think of the final words of *Cántico-B*, where St. John of the Cross declares that the spiritual plenitude of man is attained in heaven as a continuation of his life of faith in the Church here on earth. The mission that Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity is fulfilling is the same in heaven as it was here on earth, and on the point of leaving this world she fully realizes the implications of her vocation as *Laudem Gloriam*²⁹. All the aspects of faith are unified: redemption and glorification, adoration and salvation, sanctification and mission, predestination and divinization. Her personal life and doctrinal vision are unified in the mystery of the Holy Trinity, and from there she also fulfils her service to the Church; the Church that is the *Ecclesia de Trinitate*.

²⁹ Cf. M.M. PHILIPON, *Itinerario spirituale e missione nella Chiesa*, p. 63 in E. ANCILLI, *o.c.*

COMMUNION OF SAINTS

Although Elizabeth of the Trinity speaks so much about intimacy with God, she does not regard this intimacy as something exclusively individual or isolated from the fellowship of the Church. Christ became man in order to let man share in the very life of communion within the Trinity. Through the incarnation, God's sociableness has been revealed. In Jesus Christ, God has established an intimate friendship with man³⁰. Through Christ's death and resurrection the power of sin has been broken, and a profound union between him and all the members of his Mystical Body has been established, producing consequently a mutual union between all the members of the Church³¹. The intraecclesial solidarity has its foundation in the intratrinitarian communion. The life of the Church is a faithful reflection of the life of the Trinity.

The fellowship between the members of the Church has been formulated in the dogma of the communion of saints. The Church — the bride of Christ — does not consist of separate and isolated individuals, but of souls who, in turn, are brides of Christ. They have everything in common, there is a total solidarity in faith and on all levels of their lives³². This union between all Christians is so intense that not even death can cause any separation. We can pray for the dead in the process of purification, and the blessed of heaven can intercede for us. Redemption and its fruit, divine intimacy, was meant for everyone, therefore a profound solidarity prevails between all the members of the Church, wherever they are³³.

1) *Intraecclesial friendship*

In the case of Blessed Elizabeth, this intraecclesial solidarity implied in the notion of the communion of saints is most evident on the level of human friendship. She was always very sensible to this aspect of human love. In 1899 she writes thus in her diary: « O my Jesus, I feel it, I have loved creatures too much, I have given myself too much to them, and I have desired their love too much. Or rather, I have not known how to love, how to love in a divine way! But now, I feel that I belong to you alone, and above

³⁰ Cf. CECILIA DEL NACIMIENTO, *Segunda Relación de Mercedes*, 18 in «Obras Completas», Madrid 1971, p. 336.

³¹ Cf. H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *o.c.*, p. 95.

³² Cf. M. PHILIPON, O.P., *Le sens de l'éternel*, Brugge 1949, p. 27.

³³ Cf. K. RAHNER, *Gemeinschaft der Heiligen*, p. 129 in W. SANDFUCHS, *Ich glaube, Vierzehn Betrachtungen zum Apostolischen Glaubensbekenntnis*, Würzburg 1975.

all, o Beloved of my heart, I only want to be loved by you » (J 15)³⁴. These words show us that Elizabeth had a sensitive, affectionate heart, but also that her bonds of friendship needed to be purified. She realized herself that all human friendship must have its foundation in Christ, only then can it be a reflection of the intratrinitarian love. We find many examples of this view of friendship being connected with the Trinity, in Elizabeth's works. We may even call her an apostle or mystic of friendship. In this respect her vision and experience could be compared to those of Aelred of Rievaulx and Egied Van Broeckhoven³⁵.

Already in some early poems, the friendship in Christ is expressed clearly. Later on, this experience of friendship is, as it were, elaborated more explicitly into a doctrine. The Trinity is seen as the origin of all friendship³⁶. The intratrinitarian relations of love are somehow reflected in the relationship between friends on earth. At the same time, the blessed Trinity is seen as the mutual goal of the friends living together here on earth³⁷, and as their meeting-place already in this life³⁸.

In a letter to a friend of hers, Elizabeth tries to make her aware of this Trinitarian view on friendship: « The whole Trinity dwells in us, the whole of that mystery which will be our vision in heaven. Let it be your cloister... I too, Germaine, want to be holy, holy to make him happy. Ask of him that I may live no more but by love — 'it is my vocation', and then let us join together to make of our days a continual communion. In the morning, let us wake in Love. All day long let us surrender ourselves to Love, by doing the will of God, under his gaze, with him, in him, for him alone » (L 172)³⁹. Here it is not merely a human and emotional friendship that is described, but an ideal of a mutual « competition » of love of God. The foundation of everything is the indwelling of the Holy Trinity; from within we are moved by the three divine Persons to love. This immense gift of God (the Pauline indicative) has to be followed by a conscious effort of man (the Pauline impe-

³⁴ In this diary the influence of St. Teresa of Avila is evident. She, too, was a person most sensitive to human — and divine — friendship. Elizabeth was reading her *Way of Perfection* at that time, a book through which she was much influenced on the matters of the Church, friendship, prayer etc. Cf. L 36, L 41, L 57, where the Christocentric character of a truly Christian friendship becomes quite evident.

³⁵ Cf. AELRED OF RIEVAUX, *De spirituali amicitia*, PL 195, 659-702; E. VAN BROECKHOVEN, *Dagboek van de vriendschap*, Brugge 1970.

³⁶ Cf. P 16, P 19, P 101.

³⁷ E.g. P 104, P 105.

³⁸ E.g. P 99.

³⁹ Cf. also L 124, L 252, L 298, L 304.

rative). Love is not only a gratuitous gift, but a giving up of oneself. Mysticism is prepared by man's ascetic strivings. Those who live according to this ideal will spontaneously become friends; their continual communion with God will be reflected in their mutual friendship.

2) *Union between heaven, earth, and purgatory*

This intense communion cannot be limited to this life on earth. In Elizabeth's writings we get constant hints about the union of love between us here on earth, and the dead. Thus she can write: « As by the communion of saints we keep in touch with those who have left us, let us enclose in the same prayer the soul of your dear father, so that, if he has not already reached it, he may soon go to enjoy the eternal vision 'face to face' (1 Cor. 13, 12). I remain united with you in this light from the face of God » (L 200)⁴⁰. Owing to the communion of saints there are no obstacles to the union between the members of the Church militant and the Christians who have to pass through a process of purification. They are all on their way to the eternal vision of the Trinity. This letter and several others of our author bear witness to a twofold friendship: firstly, the profound friendship between herself and her correspondent, and secondly, the profound friendship with the deceased members of the Church.

The union between the Church militant and the Church triumphant is as real and intense as between the Christians on earth and those in purgatory. « The saints of heaven and the souls on earth are united in one and the same Love » (P 80). Death does not imply any essential separation. This is most conspicuous in Elizabeth's way of speaking about her own death; she never seems to consider the possibility of not going directly to heaven, and from there she wants to remain united with all her dear ones. Thus she writes to a friend of hers: « Goodbye, dearest sister, everything speaks to me of my departure to my 'Father's house' (John 14, 2). If you only knew with what calm joy I am waiting to see him 'face to face' (1 Cor. 13, 12). In the midst of the dazzling light I shall always be bending down to my darling child to keep her white as a lily for her Master, that he may be able to pluck her joyfully for his virginal garden » (L 293)⁴¹.

⁴⁰ Cf. also P 37; L 134, L 163, L 195.

⁴¹ Cf. also P 89; L 323, L 331 L 335, L 340.

In this text it is quite evident that Elizabeth is convinced of the essential unity between this life and the next one; God is the object of our faith here on earth, and in heaven we shall be able to contemplate him in the vision of glory. Just as God is the same, the realms of faith and glory are aspects of one and the same reality. « He whom the blessed contemplate in glory and whom we adore in faith is one and the same » (L 165). God Triune, being himself a communion, is the well-spring from whom the communion of saints arises. He unites those living in glory with those living in faith. The love of God brings them all together in a communion of mutual love.

It is also remarkable that Elizabeth sees this life on earth as a reflection of the life in heaven. In some texts she gives us a truly eschatological outlook on our present life, which is a participation in the life that the blessed are living in the sphere of God. She writes: « St. Paul tells us that we are 'no longer exiles or aliens; the saints are our fellow-citizens, and we belong to God's household' (Eph. 2, 19). There, in that supernatural and divine world in which we already dwell by faith, my soul feels very close to yours in the embrace of God who is all love » (L 191)⁴². As usual, our author appears as a faithful disciple of St. Paul in this text; just as he does, she feels herself closely united to the eschatological reality. The saints of heaven are really present to her mind, not as distant creatures, but as fellow-citizens. God is capable of creating a profound unity between all his children, wherever they may be; all of them belong to his household. Their mutual relationship is always a theocentric reality, here on earth and in heaven.

3) *Eucharistic friendship*

Jesus Christ has established this unity between heaven and earth. His Mystical Body consists of all those who believe in him. The dogma of the Mystical Body is intimately connected with that of the communion of saints. The first dogma primarily regards the ontological unity of Christians in and with Christ; the second one, in turn, can be seen as the consequence and outcome of the first. The glorified Body of Christ present in the eucharist can be regarded

⁴² Cf. also DR 12, DR 15; and especially L 124: « I think souls on earth and those glorified in the light of the beatific vision are so close to one another because they are all in communion with the same God, the same Father, who gives himself to some in faith and mystery, and feasts others on his divine glory. But he is the same God and we bear him within us ».

as the concrete bond of unity between the Mystical Body of Christ and the communion of saints. When the members of the Mystical Body take part in the celebration of the eucharist, they are united still more to Christ and to each other; their communion is one of saints, even if not all of them have been sanctified totally, they are all on their way to this goal. Tradition has always seen the sacramental Body of Christ, the eucharist, as connected to his Mystical Body, the Church⁴³.

In Blessed Elizabeth's writings we never find any explicit theological discourse on this matter. However, in some of her letters, she shows us that she really had realized how important the eucharist is in order to establish a communion between the members of the Church. So she writes to a friend of hers: « If you only knew how I have prayed for you on your fifteenth birthday! I offered my holy communion for that intention; then I gave you to the blessed Trinity, and I felt as though this gift were more real, more complete than last year's » (L 179)⁴⁴. Even if Elizabeth is not conscious of all the implications of the eucharist in the concrete union within the Church, this text shows us that she realized something of the great importance which this mystery of faith implies. The sacramental communion is intimately connected to the intraecclesial communion of saints. We might call this concrete application of Blessed Elizabeth's a eucharistic friendship. It is also noteworthy that she, in this text, refers to the Trinity as the ultimate origin and goal of the communion of saints. Thus, she unites the realities of the Holy Trinity, the eucharist, and the communion of saints, and also connects them with the notion on prayer.

4) *Solidarity in prayer*

As a matter of fact, prayer may be said to be the concrete actualization of the intraecclesial solidarity implied by the communion of saints. Prayer is the privileged expression of the unity existing between the members of Christ. Our author was fully aware of the apostolic-ecclesial dimension of her contemplative ideal. It is also evident that she, in accordance with tradition, often sees Mary Magdalen as an incarnation of this two-fold ideal⁴⁵.

⁴³ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 3 and 7; H. DE LUBAC, *Catholicisme, Les aspects sociaux du dogme*, (Foi Vivante, 13), Paris 1965, pp. 62-68.

⁴⁴ Cf. also L 36, L 57.

⁴⁵ Cf. L 234; GV 5, GV 8. St. John of the Cross speaks about Mary Magdalen in this sense in *Cántico-B* 29, 2. Exegetically, the identification between Mary Magdalen and Mary of Bethany can hardly be defended, but this does not

In 1903, Elizabeth writes in a letter: « Do you not find that in practice, when one is fulfilling the office of Martha, the soul may always remain in adoration, buried like Magdalen, in her contemplation, remaining at the source like one athirst? That is how I understand the apostolate for the Carmelite and for the priest; both are then able to radiate God, to give him to souls, if they remain always at these divine springs » (L 158). In this text, our author uses Mary Magdalen as a model of a Christian who has reconciled contemplation and action. Here we must think of what St. Teresa says in the *7th Mansions*⁴⁶. Blessed Elizabeth looks upon Mary Magdalen as an example to all the members of the Church; in this case she especially mentions the priest and the Carmelite. Contemplation of God is necessary in order to be able to radiate him and bring him to others. Prayer has an essential apostolic dimension. This theme is also evident in her poem, *To love*, written in 1905, and something like a synthesis of the entire Carmelite ideal. Here again, Mary Magdalen appears as a concrete illustration of the ecclesial dimension of the contemplative way of life. Our author summarises it in one sentence: « To love, is to be apostolic » (P 94).

Although Elizabeth lived a secluded, contemplative life in her enclosure, she was totally aware of the ecclesial and apostolic aims of her kind of life. She realized fully that her whole office of prayer and love had an inherent apostolic character. Apart from this, she sometimes fulfilled an exterior apostolate as well, mainly through her many letters. It is conspicuous that most of her letters are directed to lay people⁴⁷. We notice that for the most part, her task in these letters is one of exhortation of fellow Christians. But, at least in one case, her correspondent was an unbeliever, namely the doctor who took care of her during the last horrifying stages of Addison's disease. To him she wrote during the month of her death: « Let your soul vibrate to the breath of grace... let that grace inspire you with a determination to be faithful to the demands of God's law and to his holy Church » (L 340). Here she seems quite conscious

diminish the typological value of this character. Cf. A. LOUF, *Teach Us to Pray, Learning a Little About God*, translated by H. HOSKINS, London 1977, p. 67: « This Mary from Luke's gospel (Luke 10:39) may well be the most suggestive 'type' of womankind and her unique femininity a very transparent symbol of prayer ».

⁴⁶ *Mansiones VII*, 4, 13-15; cf. also *Meditaciones sobre los Cantares* 7, 3.

⁴⁷ As a matter of fact some 39 of her correspondents were lay people, 6 were priests or seminarians and 13 were nuns. The most characteristic trait in Elizabeth's letters is, as C. DE MEESTER puts it, a « culte d'amitié » (« *J'ai trouvé Dieu* », II, p. 139). This trait is also most typical of her entire personality, cf. C. LAUDAZI, *Fisonomía y personalidad de Sor Isabel*, pp. 33-35, in « *Alabanza de Gloria* », *Isabel de la Trinidad*, (Estudios Monte Carmelo, 7), Burgos 1984.

of the missionary aspect of her vocation. Through her testimony and her words, she wanted to show this atheist the way to Christ and the Church.

Our author was indeed aware of her mission in the Church; she looked upon it above all as an interior one. Being a Carmelite nun, she realized that her task in the communion of saints was one of prayer and contemplation. Her apostolate was primarily an invisible one. Even after her death, she wanted to continue this mission of hers. « It seems to me that in heaven my mission will be to attract souls by helping them to go out of themselves, in order to cling to God with a very simple and loving movement, and to keep them in the great interior silence which allows God to imprint himself on them, to transform them into himself » (L 335).

In these words, Blessed Elizabeth gives us a true picture of her ideal: to unite mankind to God. She looks upon her vocation in the communion of saints as one of establishing all her fellow-members in a climate of adoration of God, in order that they may be transformed into him. Thus her mission is apostolic, though invisible. She realized that the Church is above all a mutual communion of love, established by the action of the Trinity who wants to transform all Christians and let them enter into its eternal communion of love.

CONCLUSION: A CONTEMPLATIVE ECCLESIOLOGY

It may seem somewhat exaggerated to speak of an ecclesiology in the case of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity. Still, the Church is present in her spiritual outlook and experience. Here, we have just been able to take a quick glance at one of the aspects of her ecclesial vision. The climate and atmosphere of contemplative « interiority », so typical of Elizabeth, is most evident in her way of looking upon the Church. Or rather, it is not so much the Church which is the object of her contemplation, but God alone. In her very act of contemplating God, however, the Church is « interiorized ». Elizabeth is configured inwardly to the ecclesial attitude and ideal through her union with the blessed Trinity, the source and goal of the Church. The Church, the bride of Christ, is incarnated into Elizabeth who, in turn, becomes the bride of Christ with whom she lives in a continual communion. Thus, the Church is not an object of her contemplation, but rather the subject contemplating God *in* her. *In* Elizabeth the ecclesial mystery of divine intimacy and communion is realized.

Somehow, the preposition *in* could sum up Elizabeth's approach towards the Church, just as another preposition, *for*, could be an

adequate summary of St. Teresa's passionate love of the Church⁴⁸. To use prepositions in this way might seem a far-fetched simplification but, on the other hand, the beloved master of Elizabeth, St. Paul, did not hesitate to use prepositions in a similar manner. Immediately, though, one has to add that this preposition *in* does not render us Elizabeth's entire vision of the Church. As a true daughter and disciple of St. Teresa, she is also imbued with her « *for* » and her ecclesial « motivation »⁴⁹. It is a most characteristic trait of the Teresian charism to have amalgamated the contemplative love of God and the apostolic love of the Church, or rather, to have seen that love is always one and the same; and that, of course, is a fundamental truth of the Gospel. « The very nature of our charism demands that our prayer and our whole religious life be ardently apostolic »⁵⁰. Just as the adage *in contemplatione activus* can sum up the Jesuit ideal, the words *ecclesial in the very act of contemplation* could be a valid expression of the Carmelite, Teresian charism. One way or the other, the ecclesial commitment is present in the contemplating person who always remains a living member of the Church. Even if the Church is not being looked upon consciously as an object of contemplation, its inmost mystery is present, on a more unconscious level, in the subject contemplating God. This Carmelite way of realizing the mystery of the Church — evidently, this is no exclusively Carmelite privilege — can be experienced in many various ways. In the case of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, one can speak of an « interiorization » of the ecclesial mystery, whereas St. Teresa's vision could be called an ecclesial « motivation »; or if one prefers the use of prepositions: *in* in the case of Elizabeth and *for* in the case of Teresa. St. John of the Cross seems to be more similar to Elizabeth in his ecclesial approach, just as

⁴⁸ Cf. A. ALVAREZ-SUÁREZ, *Motivación eclesial teresiana*, in *Monte Carmelo* 89 (1981) 348: « Aquí estáis para aprender a orar *por* (our emphasis) la Iglesia. La oración será, pues, el medio más apto para servir a la Iglesia, desde el Carmelo de Teresa »; T. ALVAREZ, *Santa Teresa y la Iglesia*, (Colección Karmel, 4), Burgos 1980, p. 97: « Oración y contemplación son en la Santa, como es sabido, el plano de desarrollo de la vida espiritual. Pero ella los concibe desde la base en función de servicio de la Iglesia: orar *por* (our emphasis) la Iglesia, contemplar *para* (our emphasis) la Iglesia »; U. DOBHAN, *Gott — Mensch — Welt in der Sicht Teresas von Avila*, (Europäische Hochschulschriften, XXIII, 101), Frankfurt am Main 1978, p. 12: « In dieser auf die Kirche ausgerichteten Haltung sieht Teresa den gesamten Ablauf des geistlichen Lebens, so dass wir von einem Betrachten und Beten für (our emphasis) die Kirche sprechen können ».

⁴⁹ Cf. L. BORRIELLO, *Elisabetta della Trinità, Una vocazione realizzata secondo il progetto di Dio*, Napoli 1980, pp. 104-110; R. MORETTI, *Introduzione a Elisabetta della Trinità, Vita — Scritti — Dottrina*, Roma 1984, pp. 181-184.

⁵⁰ *Constitutions of the Discalced Friars of the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel*, Dublin 1984, no. 15d.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux is closer to St. Teresa's approach. The virginal, bridal aspect of the Church is thus evident in St. John and Blessed Elizabeth, and the maternal one is more obvious in the two Teresas.

Just like these other Carmelites, Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity concentrates her attention on the interior facet of the ecclesial mystery, she goes to the heart of the matter. Evidently, this fact does not imply any depreciation whatsoever of the more exterior aspects of the Church. It is just a question of priorities. This vision of hers can be a source of inspiration today, when there prevails a certain sense of unease and even alienation with regard to the Church as an institution. Her experience of the « interiority » of the Church could prove helpful to our contemporaries, and show them that the Church is not a mere institution among others, but something immensely more. Her *feminine* (rather than feministic!) approach to the Church could be a means of re-discovering its true nature. People living in a society characterized by such « masculine » phenomena as technology, efficiency, and bureaucracy, risk extending these criteria to the Church, and to faith as a whole, as well. That is why a contemplative approach to the Church, as that of Elizabeth, can be a remedy in the current pastoral situation.

Also, for theology in general, the ecclesial vision of Blessed Elizabeth could prove a source of renewal. The period of Vatican I and II — it is not unimportant to see the connection between these two Councils — is an « ecclesiocentred » period. As a theological topic, the Church has received an overwhelming amount of attention. Naturally, this fact has had many a positive effect, e.g. a more profound penetration into the heart of the ecclesial mystery. But there can also arise a serious disadvantage which could even turn into a mortal peril: i.e. the Church as a focus of interest could tend to overshadow the mystery of God himself. One might therefore speak of a certain *ecclesial narcissism*⁵¹, either as a fact or as a temptation. The Church, however, is not meant to proclaim herself, but God. She is not made for herself, but for man⁵². Though no theologian herself, Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity faithfully respects these two basic principles of theology. And that is another reason why her ecclesial vision remains valid today as a source of inspiration — and of correction — also for theologians.

⁵¹ J.B. METZ, *Sept problèmes capitaux de l'église*, Paris 1969, p. 37.

⁵² Cf. Y. CONGAR, O.P., *Jesus Christ*, translated by L. O'NEILL, London 1968, p. 27: « When we speak of the Church, and of her unity as well, we must never lose sight of the fact that she is not made for herself, but for apostolic service to the world ».