

Another Super-Soft Critique of Romanism from *Lighthouse Trails*

by Jeremy James



Everyone knows that it is possible to condemn something with faint praise. However, it is also possible to enhance the reputation of something that is harmful by letting it off with faint condemnation.

When we post papers on this website, we try to leave no room whatever for ambiguity or misunderstanding. The field of Christian discernment thrives on simplicity and clarity, but it also demands that error be roundly rebuked, that the scriptural basis for the rebuke be clearly set out, and that the tricks and wiles of the Enemy be exposed.

Increasingly, the popular discernment ministry, *Lighthouse Trails*, is producing material which fails to meet this basic standard. We have already written critiques of three of its tracts, one on the Virgin Mary, one on the divinity of Christ, and one on Freemasonry (#66, #93 and #116, respectively, in our index). All three are so ambivalent, so deficient in scriptural content, and so heavily imbued with loaded or uncontested material, that they could easily end up "**beguiling unstable souls**" (2 Peter 2:14).

The latest tract

Its latest tract, *Teresa of Avila – An Ancient Mystic Who Helped Shape Today's Spiritual Formation Movement*, is also seriously flawed. Anyone who was not already familiar with this woman and her teaching could feel sufficiently enthused by the extracts reproduced in the tract to go out and get a copy of her most famous work, *The Interior Castle*. She is portrayed in such a sympathetic light, almost like the heroine in a teenager's novel, that, despite her alleged flaws and shortcomings, she must surely have much to teach us.

That's the message – and it's the wrong message!

Psychologists tell us that, if you read through a block of text which is preceded by a cautionary note, the caution soon loses its effect if it is not reinforced. This happens even more quickly if the block of text includes words and phrases which neutralize the caution given at the outset. This is why advertising works and why big corporations spend millions convincing the public that they need to buy a product they don't want. The message affects our attitude even though we know it is phony.



**"Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him."
- Leviticus 19:17**

This tract has just two 'cautionary' remarks, one at the beginning and one at the end of a long block of text. Quite a long stretch of road runs between these two lampposts. It is badly lit and filled with obscure ideas which may or may not be true. The reader has no way of knowing what these figures and shadows might signify because the author of the tract never tells us! We are simply told at the beginning, *Don't believe what you are about to see*, and at the end, *Don't believe what you have just seen*. As a result the tract is hardly more than an advertisement for the Catholic Church.

Specifics

Let's look at some specifics.

Here's the introductory caution:

While some readers may find some of Teresa's mystical experiences (that at times included involuntary levitating) troubling to read, it is important to understand that the "spiritual ecstasies" Teresa of Avila encountered were the result of her practicing a meditative prayer, much like one that is being practiced by countless Christians today through the Spiritual Formation (i.e. contemplative prayer) movement. We pray this booklet will illustrate how mystical prayer methods are dangerous and introduce the practitioner to occultism and its tormenting "fruit," something you will not be warned about by those who recommend you study the ancient mystics.

The emphasis is good – "dangerous," "occultism," "tormenting" – but lacks real impact because it is so general. Why are her teachings dangerous, occultic or likely to lead to torment? This is never explained in the tract. It is unreasonable to sound a warning and then expect the reader to figure things out for himself, especially when the text that follows never once alludes to the dangers involved, the occultic nature of the practices, or the factors that blight this bizarre spirituality.

If the reader expects the closing caution to be more helpful, he will be disappointed:

A Christian is not taken over by the Holy Spirit like a demonically possessed person. While God often works in ways we can't understand, we will not experience weird things like levitation and psychic detachment that knocks us out and leaves us feeling physically sore. Anyone who practices the contemplative prayer techniques of mystics like Teresa of Avila is stepping into dangerous spiritual territory.

Again, the analysis is sound and the emphasis is in the right place. But the reader is still left in the dark. Why exactly are these practices harmful? Are they harmful only if they are not properly used? Is the tract saying that Teresa was "demonically possessed" or simply that "weird things" can sometimes happen to really spiritual people? Since the majority of the tract portrays Teresa as a unique individual, with many conspicuous personal qualities, many readers will put her in the latter category. And this is wrong. This is something a good tract should never do.



Teresa as heroine

This closing caution is not even the final paragraph in the tract. Instead it ends with the following;

After founding the Discalced Carmelites (barefoot nuns), Teresa of Avila fell ill and died at the age of sixty-seven. Even though her writings were controversial and she was interrogated during the Inquisition for heresy, she was later declared a Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church for her teaching on prayer and today, she is often looked to as a viable resource on prayer.

Our heroine triumphs in the end, apparently. She is tried for heresy but ended up a Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church. What is more, we are even told that her teaching is still viewed today "as a viable resource on prayer."

The rest of the tract is a straightforward account of her life and teachings, with numerous direct quotations from her writings. It could have been taken from a Catholic lay journal or a study aid for novitiate nuns. Apart from the two cautionary remarks (which we have just discussed) a Catholic bishop would have no qualms about giving the text his official imprimatur.

The tract is filled with statements that are clearly designed to win the reader's sympathy, some of which are subtly interwoven with the idolatry, false doctrines, and vain rituals of the Catholic Church. Here are just a few examples:

She soon learned to practice "the prayer of quiet," a state where the soul is completely absorbed.

Teresa later wrote about receiving "favours" that the Lord granted her as she continued to practice her "mental prayer" and the prayer of quiet, two stages of mystical prayer.

In despair, she threw herself before an image of the Virgin Mary and begged her to be her new mother.

Fictionalised quotation by a fellow nun: "Pray to Our Lady that you will never be ordered to do mortification..."

[Comment: *The tract never refers to the deeply disturbing fact that "Our Lady" is a gross occult deception.*]

Fictionalised quotation by a fellow nun: "We must not talk about our dear sister in this manner. If one decides to practice penance, it is only to share the sufferings of the Lord as His bride to be one flesh with Him."



Relic of the foot of a Catholic 'saint', Basilica of San Giovanni dei Fiorentini in Rome.

The purpose of such self-inflicted trials was to attain self-detachment, something of which Teresa often talked. Surely, she reaped the benefits of such disciplines, having much more tranquility and self-mastery than the rest of them.

[Comment: *This is a shameless endorsement of her methods.*]

But Teresa was desperate to explain that these revelations she received were from the Lord!

Mere words were not enough to explain the spiritual marriage she had experienced.

But she wasn't the only one. There were others, even in this place, to whom her Lord was granting the same special graces as the ones He had granted her. Others too had experienced raptures so deep that they would appear as though dead or in a trance, sometimes for days.

[Comment: *Incredibly the reader is left to assume that Teresa's 'methods' get beneficial results.*]

During one such time of obedience, her spirit was carried out of her body in such a state of ecstasy that she heard words instructing her not to have conversations with men, but with angels.

[Comment: *Satan wanted to ensure that Teresa listened only to him.*]

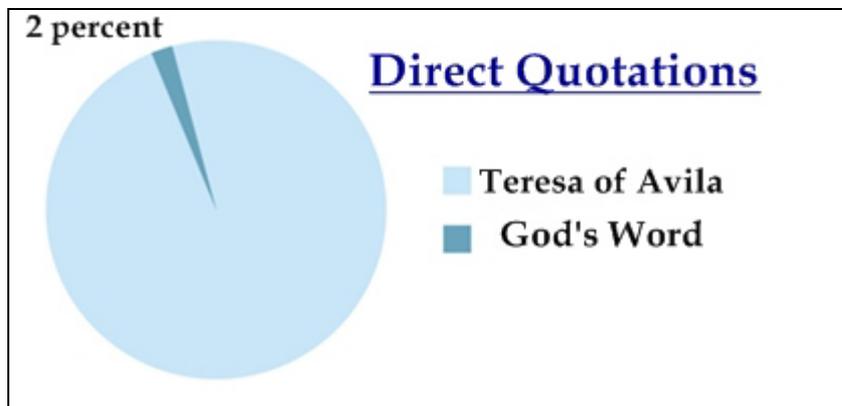
Teresa had often found herself falling into a deep trance, later pondering the exquisite state of bliss she experienced during these mysterious episodes

Sister Teresa had always called these experiences "Favors of His Majesty."

Teresa referred to the final stage of her "spiritual betrothal" prayer process as "rapture." In this deepest trance state, she experienced "delectable pain" that penetrated the bowels of the soul.

[Comment: *To include remarks like these, without clarification or counsel, is simply irresponsible.*]

On top of all this the reader is treated to a number of extensive quotations by Teresa herself, amounting to one third of the tract! Compare her word total (1,544) with the total cited from Scripture – a paltry 29 words. Something is seriously wrong.



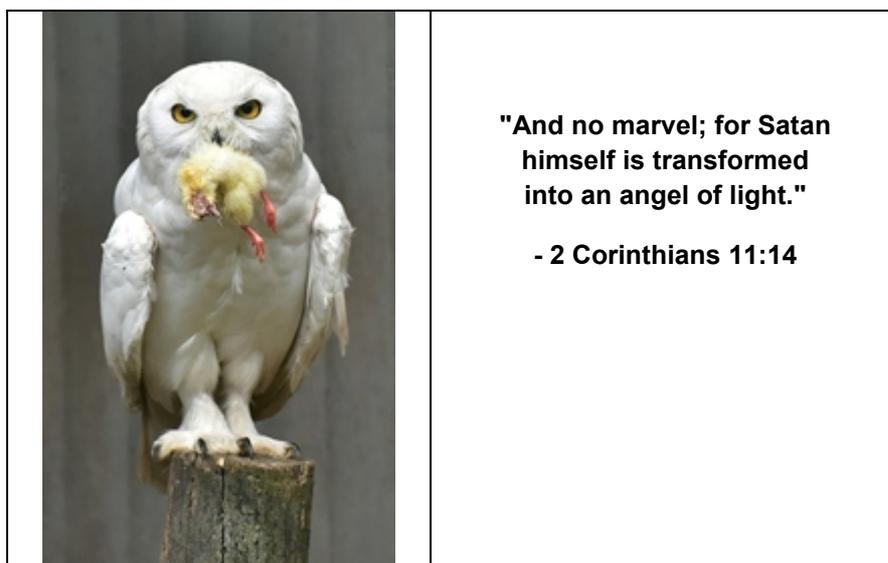
What is left out?

In addition to these numerous omissions, the tract leaves out a lot of information that would shed considerable light on this strange nun and her mystical teaching.

Firstly, mysticism by its very nature is utterly opposed to Biblical truth. It tries to substitute, for the way of salvation prescribed by God, an enticing method based on one's own strength, perseverance and self-discipline. Of course, the Catholic mystic never admits that this is what he is doing. He describes his techniques in Biblical language and interprets his obsessive quest for ecstatic experiences as a mark of true spiritual devotion.

All mystics are being deceived by the Great Deceiver. Teresa was no different from all the rest. Satan uses these people to mislead mankind, to formulate and teach doctrines and pseudo-truths which hold our attention and keep us from Christ. The most dangerous mystics are those who profess to be guided by Christ and who give stirring accounts of their mystical encounters with our Saviour. These accounts lend credence to their various revelatory claims and lure the gullible into a version of Christianity which denies the Gospel.

The tract should have stated that Teresa taught a false Gospel, that she was utterly deceived by Satan, and that her experiences were supernaturally induced illusions. The Enemy can appear as an angel of light, and the 'light' that Teresa saw in her visions was the false light of Lucifer ("His Majesty"). For those who are foolish enough to open themselves to this 'light' – through meditation, contemplation and yoga – the experience can be incredibly intense. Nothing in our normal human state can compare with it. So, when professing Christians deliberately ignore the Word of God and lust after 'inner experiences' they are opening themselves to one of the most beguiling and delectable traps of the Enemy.



Darkness Visible

In her writings Teresa herself refers many times to nuns who had experiences they couldn't handle and became deranged. Other Catholic mystics, including the Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, have also spoken of the many casualties along the mystical path. It never occurs to them that the 'light' itself is harmful, that it is darkness made visible, and that these unfortunate individuals are victims of a system that invades and enslaves the soul.

Teresa of Avila, Thomas Merton and many others try to justify their homemade 'path of perfection' by claiming that it was all based on prayer and true submission to the will of God. Teresa spent her life opening convents where her dangerous methods were taught to thousands of naïve and vulnerable young women. They thought they were doing something that was pleasing to God, but they were deceived. Instead they were engaged in a practice that was doing them real spiritual harm.

Biblical ignorance

Teresa had a very poor understanding of theology. She hardly knew the Bible and was in many ways as ignorant as the unfortunate nuns she 'instructed'. The Church of Rome ensures that its members never read the Bible as God's Word. Instead they are taught to see it mainly as a useful indication of what God intended for mankind, a work that can *only* be interpreted by qualified people, namely Vatican-approved bishops and theologians.

The 'angel of light' had a very powerful hold over Teresa and used her to record his false mystical teaching for a wider Catholic audience. Her writings are very accessible, using uncomplicated language and everyday metaphors. Her self-effacing style and disarming simplicity ensure that they continue to attract a wide audience. These factors have also convinced many that she is both objective and truthful in all that she says.

Satan's spear

The tract should have addressed all of this. Instead it did something quite inexplicable and reproduced a photo of a statue by Bernini known as *The Ecstasy of St Teresa*. The 'angel' in this work is Satan himself, in his guise as an angel of light.



Photo reproduced in the tract

The Ecstasy of St Teresa, a life-size statue in marble by Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680), which sits in the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome.

Bernini completed several major sculptural projects with blatantly pagan themes in which many false gods are depicted, including Jupiter, Apollo, Neptune, Triton, and Pluto.

In case the reader failed to register the significance of this, the tract even reproduced the passage from her writings on which the work is based! –

"He was not large, but small of stature, and most beautiful – his face burning, as if he were one of the highest angels, who seem to be all of fire: they must be those whom we call cherubim. I saw in his hand a long spear of gold, and at the iron's point, there seemed to be a little fire. He appeared to me to be thrusting it at times into my heart and to pierce my very entrails; when he drew it out, he seemed to draw them out also, and to leave me all on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great, it made me moan; and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain, that I could not wish to be rid of it. The soul is satisfied now with nothing less than God. The pain is not bodily, but spiritual; though the body has its share in it, even a large one."

Some cynics have tried to interpret this passage as an erotic dream or something of that nature, but it's not. She is giving an accurate account of what the 'angel of light' did to her. Again, we would stress – this angel was Satan himself. The experience had NOTHING to do with the LORD God of the Bible or His wonderful Son, Christ Jesus of Nazareth. It was a wicked deception from start to finish.

The Spanish Inquisition

We are told nothing in the tract about the Inquisition that was then under way in Spain and the awful climate of fear that it generated. The ruling regime, led by high-ranking church-appointed officials, exercised a reign of terror over the masses. On the say-so of a jealous neighbor, a person could be hauled before a court, imprisoned under awful conditions, subjected to barbarous cruelties, and then left to die. His property could be confiscated and his family evicted. If he made any references under torture to other members of the community, they too could be brought before the judges and interrogated. Any statements or beliefs that were deemed vaguely heretical could have horrifying consequences. From time to time, in an awful demonstration of state-sponsored terror, a number of pitiful victims were burned to death in a grotesque public spectacle. All of this took place under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church, sanctioned by the Pope, overseen by senior prelates, and carried out by sadistic priests and their minions.



One of the many instruments of torture used during the Spanish Inquisition.

This particular device was designed to slowly crush the bones in the victim's hands. Presumably the torture stopped when he (or she) confessed what the priests wanted to hear.

This was the religious and political climate that prevailed throughout Spain in the 16th century, but there was not a hint of this in Teresa's writings. She worked for the Catholic regime and made sure everything she did was in conformity with their rules and expectations.

She was not someone who had found Christ – or who even understood the Gospel.

Nailed effigy of Christ

The tract also includes a bizarre picture of Teresa in which she is holding one of the most idolatrous Catholic icons, the "crucifix," a cross with a nailed effigy of Christ:



The inclusion of this gratuitous image is hard to understand. No explicit reference is made to it anywhere in the text. The word 'crucifix' appears three times in the tract but its meaning is never explained, and there is certainly no reference to the fact that, as far as Rome is concerned, Christ is still nailed to the cross – as shown through the "holy sacrifice" of the Mass – and the Pope now reigns in his place on earth.

The Queen of Heaven

The fact that Teresa prayed to 'Our Lady' is, of itself, conclusive proof that she did not know Jesus as her personal saviour. Nearly all of the Catholic mystics revere Mary as a goddess-type figure, the Queen of Heaven, and worship her with great emotional intensity. Many of them have 'apparitions' or visions of Mary and pass along messages to the world on 'her' behalf, not realizing that these are all the works of Satan. [See our earlier paper, *Satan in Satin* (#45).]

CONCLUSION

This tract is not fit for purpose and should be withdrawn. The three tracts discussed in our previous papers – #66, #93 and #116 – should also be withdrawn.

Christians who love God's Word and who are truly obedient to the words of our Saviour – "**If you love me, keep my commandments**" – will recognize, even without the evidence presented in this paper, that the tract is defective and potentially harmful.

I would urge born-again Christians to exercise continual vigilance in this age of great spiritual confusion and intrigue. Unless we immerse ourselves daily in God's Holy Word and seek His guidance in all matters doctrinal, we leave ourselves wide open to deception:

**"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men
liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.
But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering."
– James 1:5-6**

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For further information visit www.zephaniah.eu

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