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# *Saint Teresa of Ávila's Martyrdom:*

## *Images of Her Transverberation in Mexican Colonial Painting*

**I**N HER AUTOBIOGRAPHY, known as the *Book of Her Life*, the extraordinary Spanish nun St. Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582) describes her most re-nowned mystical experience, the Transverberation, or piercing of the heart. Of this ecstatic vision, which occurred around the year 1560, she writes:

I saw close to me toward my left side an angel in bodily form [...] in his hands [was] a large golden dart and at the end of the iron tip there appeared to be a little fire. It seemed to me this angel plunged the dart several times into my heart and that it reached deep within me. When he drew it out, I thought he was carrying off with him the deepest part of me; and he left me all on fire with great love of God. The pain was so great that it made me moan, and the sweetness this greatest pain caused me was so superabundant that there is no desire capable of taking it away.<sup>1</sup>

Within a few decades of Teresa's death this episode became known to audi-

1. Teresa of Ávila, *The Book of Her Life*, 29.13. Unless otherwise noted, all English quotations of Teresa's writings are taken from the three volume *Collected Works of St. Teresa of Ávila*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodríguez, Washington, D. C., Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1976-1985. I use chapter and paragraph citations to facilitate reference to other editions. The term "Transverberation" is derived from the Latin *transverberare*, "to thrust through, pierce through, transfix, perforate."

ences throughout Catholic Europe, as the saint's books were disseminated in numerous best-selling editions, and as painters, sculptors, and engravers took up the theme of the piercing of her heart. Teresa's vision was also officially highlighted by the Church on the day of her canonization in 1622, when a banner depicting the Transverberation adorned the interior of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.<sup>2</sup> This subject captured the attention of Baroque artists such as Peter Paul Rubens, who around the year 1614 painted a *Transverberation* for the church of the Discalced Carmelites in Brussels, and Gianlorenzo Bernini, whose magnificent mid-seventeenth-century sculpture in the Cornaro Chapel of Rome's Santa Maria della Vittoria is the most famous rendition of Teresa's Transverberation in the history of art.<sup>3</sup>

Like their counterparts in Europe, many of the greatest painters of New Spain also took up their brushes to paint representations of the Transverberation. Teresa's image was a favorite one in the viceroyalty, featured in the decoration of many churches, convents, and monasteries, especially those associated with the reformed Order she had founded, the Discalced Carmelites. Beyond the Virgin Mary, few other female subjects were so often depicted in Latin American art of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as Teresa of Ávila, and the Transverberation was among the most popular

2. An engraving by Matthäus Greuter, issued at Rome in 1622, shows a view into the interior of St. Peter's on the day (March 12) of that year when Teresa, Francis Xavier, Isidore of Seville, Ignatius of Loyola, and Philip Neri were canonized. Banners depicting each of the figures can be seen hanging in the crossing. Teresa's banner bears a depiction of the Transverberation.

3. Rubens' painting remained at the Discalced Carmelite Church in Brussels until the eighteenth century. It then passed into private collections, and was destroyed by fire in England in 1940. See Hans Vlieghe, *Saints (Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard, VIII)*, 2 vols., London, Phaidon, 1972-73, II, pp. 159-161. The most comprehensive study of Bernini's *Transverberation* is contained in Irving Lavin, *Bernini and the Unity of the Visual Arts*, 2 vols., New York and London, Oxford University Press, 1980, I, pp. 127-34. Lavin (113-18) asserts that Teresa's reclining position in the sculpted altarpiece reflects a contemporary trend that identified her Transverberation with her ecstatic love-death, a point relevant to colonial depictions of the subject, as shown in this paper.

4. For studies of Teresa's image in art of New Spain, see Christopher C. Wilson, *Mother, Missionary, Martyr: St. Teresa of Ávila in Mexican Colonial Art*, Ph. D. diss. (The George Washington University), Ann Arbor, UMI, 1998; Elisa Vargaslugo and José Guadalupe Victoria, "Theresia Magna," in Elisa Vargaslugo *et al.*, *Juan Correa: su vida y su obra*, 4 vols., México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1985-1994, IV, pp. 417-452; Héctor H. Schenone, *Iconografía del arte colonial*, 2 vols., Argentina, Fundación Tarea, 1992, II, pp. 731-747; and Santiago Sebastián, *El Barroco iberoamericano: mensaje iconográfico*, Madrid, Encuentro, 1990, pp. 291-293.



Figure 1. Luis Juárez, *St. Teresa and Her Brother Rodrigo on Their Way to the Land of the Moors*, first half 17<sup>th</sup> century. Museo Nacional de las Intervenciones, Churubusco. Photo: Ricardo Martínez, Archivo Fotográfico IIE-UNAM.

Teresian themes treated by Mexican painters.<sup>4</sup>

This paper proposes that in New Spain the iconography of Teresa's Transverberation communicated not only mystical experience, but also martyrdom. Such an idea is made explicit in a late-seventeenth-century canvas by Juan Correa, sent at some point from Mexico to the Spanish Church of Santo Tomás in Teresa's hometown of Ávila.<sup>5</sup> Based on a seventeenth-century Flemish engraving by Richard Collin (1626-1687), the emblematic work places Teresa within a landscape, in the left background of which is a precipice labeled "Mons Carmeli" (Mount Carmel), the supposed birthplace

5. For an analysis of Correa's painting now in Ávila, see , Vargaslugo *et al.*, II, part 2, pp. 359-360.

of the Carmelite Order in the Holy Land. While she holds her attributes as author, a pen and open manuscript, an angel guides an arrow into her breast.

Surrounding the image of Transverberation in Correa's painting are small angels with Latin-inscribed shields that identify Teresa as virgin, doctor, patriarch, and most interestingly, martyr: "Having once looked for martyrdom in Africa, and thenceforth always desiring it, and finally having attained it when she expired at the impetus of the tyrant, divine love."<sup>6</sup> Twentieth-century medical assessments have suggested that Teresa died of cancer of the uterus, but as the inscription suggests, in the Baroque period a different view enjoyed widespread circulation.<sup>7</sup> According to this way of thinking, Teresa's demise, while not brought about by the same earthly arrows that killed the early Christian virgin-martyr St. Ursula, resulted from wounds inflicted by the arrows of divine love, a martyrdom visualized in art by the image of the Transverberation.

How did Teresa come to be viewed as a martyr? The saint's writings, replete with expressions of desire for martyrdom, were largely responsible for this perception. In her *Life* Teresa relates that as a child, she and her brother Rodrigo became so inspired by reading stories of martyrs that they attempted to run away to "the land of the Moors" (presumably northern Africa), where they hoped to be decapitated.<sup>8</sup> This episode was retold in subsequent Teresian hagiographies, and, like her childhood pastime of pretending to be a nun, was viewed as a foreshadowing of her future saintly endeavors. According to such typology, Teresa's youthful attempt at self-sacrifice, though unsuccessful, marked her as one destined to receive the martyr's palm and crown. The event became the moment of Teresa's childhood most often represented in art, including that of colonial Mexico. During the first half of the seventeenth century, Luis Juárez treated the subject in a painting now at the Museo Nacional de las Intervenciones in Churubusco (figure 1), taking his inspiration from a 1613 Flemish engraving, one in a series of twenty-five scenes of

6. "Martyrio, semel ab Africa quaesito, semper deinde desiderato, tandemque supplente tyrannum divino Amore (cuius impetu expiravit) consummato."

7. Modern physicians have made the diagnosis of uterine cancer by studying the existing descriptions of Teresa's last illness, which mention the saint's severe hemorrhaging. See the introduction by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodríguez to the *Collected Works of St. Teresa of Ávila*, III, p. 76.

8. *Life*, I.4.

9. An analysis of the painting is included in Rogelio Ruiz Gomar, *El pintor Luis Juárez: su*

Teresa's life by Adriaen Collaert and Cornelis Galle (figure 2).<sup>9</sup> The two children are shown leaving Ávila with walking sticks, Teresa wearing a traveler's hat surrounded by a halo. She gestures toward the road ahead, explaining her intentions to her uncle, who has just arrived on horseback to intercept the children. For audiences of New Spain, the image of Teresa and Rodrigo as would-be martyrs associated them with children who laid down their lives in defense of the faith. Prominent Mexican paintings of child martyrs include a mid-seventeenth-century work by José Juárez, depicting the early Christian martyrs St. Justus and St. Pastor (Mexico City, Pinacoteca Virreinal), in which the two brothers, of seven and nine years old, hold palm fronds and receive floral wreaths from angels as scenes of their martyrdom are enacted in the background. There were also pictorial testimonies of the sixteenth-century martyrs known as the children of Tlaxcala, Native American youngsters who converted to Christianity and, on that account, were slaughtered by their parents.<sup>10</sup>

As the inscribed shield in Correa's painting affirms, once Teresa sought martyrdom in Africa, she thenceforth always desired it. But if her young age had impeded her early attempt at martyrdom, her gender soon proved to be an even greater obstacle. Jodi Bilinkoff has pointed out that Teresa aspired toward an essentially male model of sanctity: she longed to preach, to convert souls, even to die in defense of the faith.<sup>11</sup> Envious of priests who operated free of misogynist constraints, she experienced deep frustration, along with some resentment, that her status as a woman in the sixteenth century Spain made these apostolic activities unavailable to her. Her books reveal that instead of giving up on such seemingly impossible aims, however, she designed a means for achieving them through her life as a Discalced Carmelite nun and foundress of convents. In the *Way of Perfection*, addressed to the nuns of her Carmelite reform, Teresa informs her readers that they can be both missionaries and martyrs, though they are women. She insists that prayer is a powerful weapon by which they can bolster the Church's

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*vida y su obra*, México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1987, pp. 204-207.

10. For a discussion of the iconography of martyrdom, including that of American martyrs such as the children of Tlaxcala, see Elisa Vargaslugo, "Martirio, agonía, resurrección," in *Arte y mística del barroco*, México, Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1994, pp. 327-331.

11. Jodi Bilinkoff, "Woman with a Mission: Teresa of Ávila and the Apostolic Model," in *Modelli di santità e modelli di comportamento*, Torino, Rosenberg and Seller, 1994, pp. 295-305.



Figure 2. Adriaen Collaert, *St. Teresa and Her Brother Rodrigo on Their Way to the Land of the Moors*, 1613.

efforts to combat heresy and save souls. By remaining occupied in prayer for priests and defenders of the faith —those on the front lines of the Church’s militant offensive— “we shall be fighting for Him [God] even though we are very cloistered.”<sup>12</sup> And though they might not die at the hands of infidels, Teresa assures her nuns that the austerities practiced in each of her houses —poverty, silence, enclosure, penance— can lead to an interior death which is nothing less than “a long martyrdom.”<sup>13</sup> Trials and illnesses should be welcomed, since they serve as catalysts in this process of dying. Teresa sums up the attitude to be adopted by the Discalced Carmelite nun: “Be determined, Sisters, that you came to die for Christ, not to live comfortably for Christ.”<sup>14</sup>

According to the saint’s early biographers and those who knew her, Tere-

12. *Way of Perfection*, 3.5.

13. *Way*, 12.2.

14. *Way*, 10.5.



Figure 3. Anton Wierix, *Transverberation of St. Teresa*, early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

sa's lifelong quest for martyrdom reached its climactic conclusion in the sufferings of her final days. These authors' texts constructed for Teresa the martyrdom that she had always sought. Ana de San Bartolomé, Teresa's nurse, secretary, and traveling companion, characterizes the saint's excruciating final journey from Burgos to Alba de Tormes, the city where she died in 1582, as "a prolonged martyrdom."<sup>15</sup> Francisco de Ribera, author of the first published biography of the saint (1590), suggests that her last days were reminiscent of Christ's sacrifice on the cross.<sup>16</sup> And Diego de Yepes, in a biography published nine years later (1599), asserts, "Though she was not a martyr in blade and blood, she was one in spirit, and her travails earned her the crown

15. Ana de San Bartolomé, *Obras completas de la Beata Ana de San Bartolomé*, 2 vols., ed. Julián Urkiza, Roma, Teresianum, 1981, I, p. 26.

16. The most recent edition of Francisco de Ribera's biography of Teresa (Salamanca, 1590) is Jaime Pons, ed., *Vida de Santa Teresa de Jesús por el P. Francisco de Ribera*, Barcelona, 1908, p. 333.

17. Diego de Yepes, *Vida, virtudes y milagros de la Bienaventurada Virgen Teresa de Jesús* (Madrid, 1599). Quoted in translation in Carlos M. N. Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory: The Art and Craft of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Spain*, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 403.

that others earned through the sword."<sup>17</sup>

This way of thinking was further strengthened by accounts of a curious event reported to have occurred at the moment of Teresa's death. One of the nuns at Alba de Tormes reported seeing a multitude of heavenly figures, each dressed in resplendent white, proceed through the convent as the saint passed away in her cell.<sup>18</sup> The phenomenon was reported during the proceedings conducted for Teresa's beatification and canonization, and was highlighted in both Yepes' and Ribera's biographies. Members of the Order interpreted the figures as the Ten Thousand Martyrs, a throng of second-century Christians who, according to legend, were crucified on Mount Ararat. Teresa was devoted to these martyrs during her life (she included them in a handwritten list of favorite saints that was kept in her breviary), and, as reported during the canonization proceedings, she once had a vision in which they promised to accompany her to heaven at the hour of her death.<sup>19</sup> The assertion that they appeared at Alba de Tormes to retrieve the dying Teresa, accepting her into their number, fueled the notion that the saint's true identity as a martyr was revealed at her death.

In art, the idea of Teresa's martyrdom became inextricably linked with her experience of the Transverberation. Such an association was fostered, in large part, by the saint's own comparison of ecstasy with death. In the midst of certain mystical experiences, she declares, the force of God's love almost sundered her soul from her body, bringing her to the brink of demise. She calls the experience of union with God during prayer "a delectable death" (*una muerte sabrosa*), and advises her Discalced Carmelite nuns, "Do not think, my daughters, that it is an exaggeration when I speak of dying [in

18. Efrén de la Madre de Dios and Otger Steggink, *Tiempo y vida de Santa Teresa*, Madrid, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1979, p. 988. The nun who witnessed this vision was Catalina de San Ángelo.

19. Madre de Dios and Steggink, p. 988, n. 201. For the list of Teresa's favorite saints, contained within her breviary, see *Santa Teresa de Jesús: Obras completas*, ed. Efrén de la Madre de Dios and Otger Steggink, Madrid, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1986, p. 1426. Devotion to the Ten Thousand Martyrs was strong on the Iberian Peninsula during this period. Their relics were venerated in Spain at Ávila and Cuenca, and in the Portuguese cities of Lisbon and Coimbra. At least one version of their legend endows the Ten Thousand with special relevance for Spaniards, claiming that prior to death they were baptized on Mount Ararat by Saint Hermolaus, Bishop of Toledo. See S. Baring-Gould, *The Lives of the Saints*, vol. VI, Edinburgh, 1914, pp. 299-304.

20. *Interior Castle*, v, 1.4, and *Meditations on the Song of Songs*, 7.2, quoted in translation in Eire, pp. 397-398.



ecstasy], because —as I have already told you— it really does happen.”<sup>20</sup> Describing the effects of being wounded with love for God, as during the moment of her Transverberation, she writes, “You can’t exaggerate or describe the way in which God wounds the soul and the extreme pain this wound produces, for it causes the soul to forget itself. Yet this pain is so delightful that there is no other pleasure in life that gives greater happiness. The soul would always want, as I said, to be *dying of this sickness*.”<sup>21</sup>

In view of these statements, it is not surprising that the saint’s nuns and early biographers characterized her physical death in 1582 as the result of a fatal ecstasy, so forceful that it thrust her soul out of her body. Though the physicians attending her attributed Teresa’s demise to loss of blood, Diego de Yepes had a different diagnosis: “It would certainly be impossible to deny that these ailments greatly contributed towards severing the thread of her life, but the knife that finally killed her was the great force of God’s mighty and powerful love, which wrested not only her spirit from her soul, but also her soul from her body.”<sup>22</sup> Teresa’s companions concurred with this diagnosis, affirming that the peaceful expression on her face when she died was the same she often had while in ecstasy.

In his classic study of Bernini’s decoration of the Cornaro Chapel, Irving Lavin cites a hymn by Pope Urban VIII (reigned 1623-1644), contained within the divine office for Teresa’s feast day (15 October), that underlines the perceived connection between Teresa’s ecstatic love-death and her experience of

21. *Life*, 29.10. Emphasis added.

22. Quoted in translation in Eire, p. 411. The idea of dying from the force of divine love can also be found in the writings of Saint John of the Cross, Teresa’s close friend, confessor, and co-reformer: “It should be known that the death of persons who have reached this state is far different in its cause and mode than the death of others, even though it is similar in natural circumstances. If the death of other people is caused by sickness or old age, the death of these persons is not so induced, in spite of their being sick or old; their soul is not wrested from them unless by some impetus and encounter of love, far more sublime than previous ones, of greater power, and more valiant, since it tears through the veil and carries off the jewel, which is the soul” (*Living Flame of Love*, second redaction, stanza 1, paragraph 30, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, Washington, D. C., Institute for Carmelite Studies, 1979, pp. 591-592).

23. The office of St. Teresa was first decreed by the Sacred Congregation of Rites in 1629 for the Discalced Carmelite Order. After having been extended optionally to the Universal Church in 1636, it was made obligatory in 1644 and remains so today. Urban VIII composed two hymns, one to be sung at matins (the one cited here), the other at first vespers. See Lavin, I, pp. 116-117.

the Transverberation.<sup>23</sup> The first stanza alludes to her childhood attempt at martyrdom; the next two stanzas suggest that the Transverberation was the actual wound by which she was eventually martyred:

Messenger of the heavenly King,  
Your father's home you desert,  
to bring to barbarous lands, Teresa,  
Either Christ or your blood.

But a sweeter death awaits you,  
A milder penance calls.  
With the dart of divine love  
Thrust into your wounds you will fall.

O victim of love!  
Inflame our hearts  
And free from the fire of hell  
Those entrusted to your care.<sup>24</sup>

Urban VIII's characterization of Teresa as a "victim of love," wounded by divine love's darts, has a visual counterpart in some early seventeenth-century engravings, produced in the Spanish Netherlands. These were among the first works of art to present the Transverberation as an evocation of saintly death. Lavin has shown that such images influenced Bernini's work at the Cornaro chapel; surviving Mexican paintings reveal that they were circulated among artists in the Americas as well. A print by Anton Wierix (figure 3) shows Teresa kneeling on a flower-strewn floor that juts out toward the viewer, like a stage. She spreads her arms in surrender as an angel plunges a fiery arrow into her heart. God the Father surveys the scene from above, as angels shower blossoms upon the wounded saint. At the bottom of the print is an inscription from the Song of Songs that interprets the scene as a fatal ecstasy: "Sustain me with flowers and surround me with apples, for I am dying of love." (Sg. 2:5)<sup>25</sup> This engraving was

24. Quoted in Latin and in translation in Lavin, 1, pp. 116-117.

25. In her *Meditations on the Song of Songs*, Teresa devotes an entire chapter (7) to this Scriptural passage.



Figure 4. Anton Wierix, *Transverberation of St. Teresa with the Holy Family*, early 17<sup>th</sup> century.



Figure 5. Alonso López Herrera, *Transverberation of St. Teresa*, first half 17<sup>th</sup> century, Private Collection, México City. Photo: Archivo Fotográfico IIE-UNAM.

carried to the Spanish colonies, where it formed the basis for a seventeenth-century *Transverberation*, by an unidentified Mexican painter, now in the Museo Nacional del Virreinato in Tepotzotlán.<sup>26</sup> The artist simplified the composition to show only Teresa and the large angel with the arrow, but on the floor surrounding the saint are the flowers seen in the print.

Another Wierix print shows the *Transverberation* being carried out not by an angel, but by the Christ Child, holding a bow and arrow (figure 4). This iconography epitomizes a Counter-Reformation tendency to identify the Christ Child with Cupid and the allegorical figure of Divine Love, both of whom were represented using arrows to inflame their subjects with love.<sup>27</sup> Accompanied by the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph, the Child draws back His bow, preparing to launch an arrow at the collapsed figure of Teresa, who falls backward as if in the final moments of dying, with one arrow already stuck in her breast. An angel rushes down to present Teresa with a palm frond, an attribute of martyrdom. Another angel flies down to crown Teresa's head with a flower wreath, a symbol of the heavenly reward she has merited. At the bottom of the print is an inscription that places the image of *Transverberation* in a liminal space between life and death. It says that Teresa, "on the point of death," asks of Mary and Joseph: "Why, parents, do you give weapons? Why do you incite the Archer of Life against a loving person?"<sup>28</sup> This print provided the basis for a Mexican rendition of the *Transverberation* with the Holy Family, probably of the eighteenth century, in Puebla's Church of Carmen.

26. This same Wierix print also underlies a painting of the subject by Luis Berrueto, in a private collection in Mexico City. See Manuel Toussaint, *Pintura colonial en México*, México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1990, fig. 341.

27. This theme is considered by Joseph F. Chorpennig in his introduction to *Just Man, Husband of Mary, Guardian of Christ: An Anthology of Readings from Jerónimo Gracián's Summary of the Excellencies of St. Joseph (1597)*, Philadelphia, St. Joseph's University Press, 1993, pp. 35-39.

28. "Quid parentes tela datis/ In amantem incitatis/ Vitae Sagittarium?! Quaerit ab hoc necis fortem/ Imo putat esse mortem/ Dum negat interitum." The first three lines are in the form of a question which Teresa asks of Joseph and Mary: "Why, parents, do you give weapons? Why do you incite the Archer of Life against a loving person?" The next three lines explain to the viewer, "She asks from this point of death, but on the contrary she considers it to be a heroic death, while denying that it is her annihilation". These lines reflect Teresa's own assertions that during ecstasy she came close to death and eagerly yearned for it, but, until 1582 at least, disappointedly found that her soul and body would have to reunite.

As the preceding examples suggest, it was through the medium of Flemish prints, the inscriptions of which often linked the piercing of Teresa's heart to death, that the iconography of the Transverberation traveled to the Colonial Americas. When considering this image in Mexican art, it is important to note that, beginning in the early seventeenth century, a piece of the saint's heart was in the possession of the Discalced Carmelite nuns in the city of Puebla.<sup>29</sup> The presence of this relic must have fueled local devotion to Teresa's best-known mystical experience, since, during the period under consideration, it was commonplace to associate her Transverberation with the actual organ that was removed from her incorrupt body.

The earliest surviving Mexican image of the piercing of Teresa's heart is a work painted in the first half of the seventeenth century by Alonso López de Herrera (figure 5).<sup>30</sup> His *Transverberation* contains the basic elements that will be seen in most subsequent Mexican renditions of the episode: one angel supports Teresa from behind as another aims the point of an arrow at the saint's heart. Transported out of herself during the ecstatic moment, Teresa looks toward heaven, where the Holy Spirit hovers, and spreads her arms in surrender to the sweet yet painful wounding. The composition derives from a print contained in Collaert and Galle's 1613 series of Teresa's life (figure 6), though the Mexican painter has eliminated the architectural background of the engraving and zooms in on the figures of Teresa and the two angels.

For New Hispanic viewers, a composition such as López de Herrera's would have summoned up associations with images of martyrs that hung on the walls of local churches, thus strengthening the identification of Teresa's Transverberation as a martyrdom. In the colonial Americas, as in Counter-Reformation Europe, visual representations of martyrdom ascended to special prominence, communicating the virtue of defending the faith even at the cost of one's life.<sup>31</sup> Such a message had particular resonance during the

29. Simon of Sts. Joseph and Teresa, *Wonders of the Heart of St. Teresa of Jesus*, Baltimore, 1882, p. 41. The relic of Teresa's heart remains today in the possession of the Discalced Carmelite nuns of Puebla.

30. Toussaint, p. 79.

31. The classic analysis of the theme of martyrdom in Counter-Reformation art is Émile Mâle, *L'art religieux de la fin du xvie siècle, du xviiie siècle et du xviiiie siècle: Étude sur l'iconographie après le Concile de Trente*, Paris, Librairie Armand Colin, 1951, pp. 109-149. For a summary of the theme in colonial art of Latin America, see Sebastián, pp. 218-220.



Figure 6. Adriaen Collaert and Cornelis Galle, *Transverberation of St. Teresa*, 1613.

colonial period, when certain contemporary deaths were perceived as cases of martyrdom. In addition to the martyred children of Tlaxcala mentioned previously, there was a cult surrounding the Franciscan missionary St. Philip of Jesus, a native of Mexico City, who in 1570 was crucified in Japan with twenty six other friars, deacons, lay people, and Japanese tertiaries. This event was depicted in New Hispanic art, including a series of murals in the Franciscan church at Cuernavaca. The Jesuit Order also claimed to have contributed martyrs to the Church's missionary effort. Between 1594 and 1734, thirteen members of the Order were killed while propagating the faith at missions in Northern Mexico.<sup>32</sup>

Arrows figure in the iconography of two early Christian martyrs, St.

32. For accounts of sixteenth and seventeenth-century martyrdoms in New Spain and Asia, see Vargaslugo, "Martirio, agonía, resurrección," pp. 328-330, and Gustavo Curiel Méndez, "San Felipe de Jesús: figura y mito (1629-1862)," in *Historia, leyendas y mitos de México: su expresión en el arte*, México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1988, pp. 71-92.



Figure 7. Attributed to Baltasar de Echave Orio, *St. Sebastian*, 16<sup>th</sup> century, formerly Cathedral of México, until destroyed by fire in 1969. Photo: Archivo Fotográfico IIE-UNAM.

Sebastian and St. Ursula, both of whom were frequently portrayed by colonial artists. According to legend Sebastian (ca. 300), a captain of the praetorian guards in Rome, was shot through with arrows when the Emperor Diocletian discovered his Christianity.<sup>33</sup> In Mexican art, as in that of Europe, he is shown bound to a tree or stake, his body transfixed with arrows. Such iconography could be contemplated by worshippers at Mexico City's cathedral, where there was displayed a late sixteenth-century painting of Sebastian's martyrdom attributed to Baltasar de Echave Orio (figure 7).<sup>34</sup>

The third-century St. Ursula, according to legend, died by similar means. With a retinue of eleven thousand virgins, she made a pilgrimage to Rome, only to be besieged by Huns on the return trip. She and her companions were shot through with arrows.<sup>35</sup> The parallels that existed between the stories of Teresa and Ursula—both of them virgin-martyrs who suffered arrow wounds—did not go unnoticed in Golden-Age Spain. A 1628 painting by Antonio Bisquert (figure 8), now in the Cathedral of Teruel, shows Ursula, holding an arrow and triumphal banner, standing before a throng of virgins.<sup>36</sup> One other female has joined their company: Teresa, dressed in the Discalced Carmelite habit, stands at the right side of the composition with hands folded in prayer. In this painter's view, at least, Teresa's reputation for martyrdom earned her a place among Ursula's retinue.

Such an analogy must have been apparent to artists and viewers in Span-

33. Left for dead by the archers, Sebastian recovered from his wounds and then confronted the Emperor, denouncing him for cruelties perpetrated against the Christians. The Emperor ordered Sebastian to be beaten to death, and had his lifeless body thrown into a sewer. George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art*, London/Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 1961, p. 142. During the Middle Ages Sebastian's cult increased in popularity since he was regarded as a protector against infectious disease, including the plague. This avocation may have resulted from miraculous cures attributed to Sebastian in his legend, or to a metaphorical association of arrows with disease. His popularity in colonial Mexico may have stemmed from his being invoked against diseases that arrived in New Spain with the Spaniards and that, in the sixteenth century, devastated Native American populations.

34. José Guadalupe Victoria, *Baltasar de Echave Orio: un pintor en su tiempo*, Mexico City, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1994, pp. 129-133. Toussaint (65) attributes the painting to Francisco de Zumaya. The work was lost in a fire of 1969 and is now known only through photographs.

35. Ferguson, pp. 145-146. Teresa included Ursula on her list of saints of particular devotion.

36. Ernesto Arce Oliva *et al.*, *El pintor Antonio Bisquert, 1596-1646*, Teruel, Instituto de Estudios Turolenses, 1995, pp. 34-35 and 62-63.





Figure 8. Antonio Bisquet, *St. Ursula and the Eleven-Thousand Virgins with St. Teresa*, 1628, cathedral of Teruel, Spain.

ish America as well, where Ursula was widely venerated and depicted. This devotion increased after 1587, when an urn containing the supposed relics of her and her martyred companions arrived at the college of Potosí, Bolivia.<sup>37</sup> There are numerous colonial paintings attesting to Ursula's popularity. A canvas by Hipólito de Rioja (figure 9), in Mexico City's Pinacoteca Virreinal, shows the members of Ursula's party in varying states of distress and surrender, gouged with arrows or being pierced with swords. Ursula kneels in the center of the composition, her hands folded in prayer, with an arrow entrenched in her breast. She looks up toward heaven, where the Virgin Mary and a retinue of virgin-martyrs have appeared to receive the dying Ursula and her party. There also survives a fragment of a canvas depicting this same subject, by Luis Juárez (Mexico City, Museo Nacional de Arte), showing a cluster of Ursula's companions.<sup>38</sup> Juan Correa painted an opulently-dressed figure of St. Ursula standing alone, holding a triumphal standard, with an arrow

37. Sebastián, p. 218.

38. Ruiz Gomar, pp. 184-186.

39. Vargaslugo *et al.*, II, part 2, pp. 361-362.

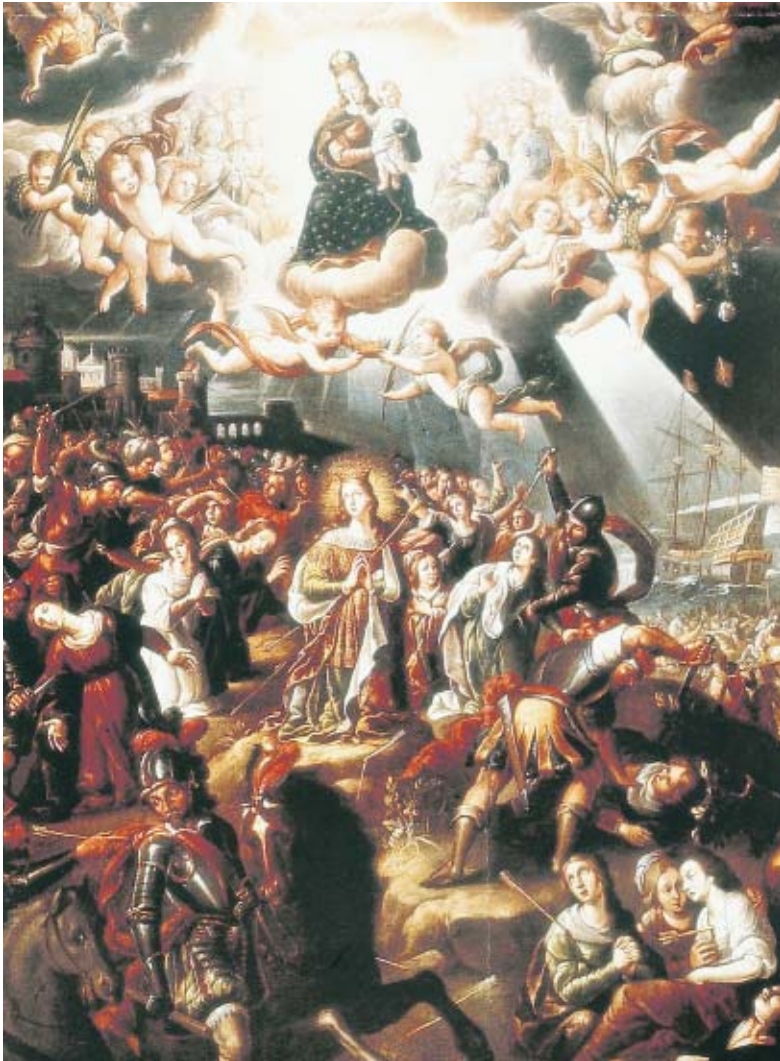


Figure 9. Hipólito de Rioja, *Martyrdom of St. Ursula and Eleven-Thousand Virgins*, second half 17<sup>th</sup> century, Pinacoteca Virreinal, México. Photo: Archivo Fotográfico IIE-UNAM.



Figure 10. Juan Correa, *Saint Ursula*, late 17<sup>th</sup> early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Convento de San Francisco, Ciudad Vieja, Guatemala. Photo: Guillermina Vázquez, Archivo Fotográfico IIE-UNAM.



Figure 11. Nicolás Rodríguez Juárez, *Transverberation of Saint Teresa*, 1692, Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlán. Photo: Pedro Ángeles, Archivo Fotográfico IIE-UNAM.



Figure 12. Juan Correa, *Transverberation of St. Teresa*, late 17<sup>th</sup> early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Museo Nacional de las Intervenciones, Churubusco. Photo: Cecilia Gutiérrez, Archivo Fotográfico IIE-UNAM.

piercing her chest (figure 10; Ciudad Vieja, Guatemala, Convent Church of San Francisco).<sup>39</sup>

These images of saintly death through the medium of arrows, in addition to the aforementioned literary sources, provided Mexican artists and viewers with a justified means for interpreting Teresa's Transverberation as a martyrdom. A canvas signed in 1692 by Nicolás Rodríguez Juárez (figure 11; Tepotzotlán, Museo Nacional del Virreinato) shows Teresa kneeling in submission to the wounding.<sup>40</sup> One angel prevents her from falling backward, while the second holds an arrow, the fiery tip of which is already embedded in the saint's heart. Teresa looks up toward the Holy Spirit, who hovers in a glory of light at the top of the composition. This recurring type of image has clear parallels in the iconography of St. Ursula, as exemplified by Hipólito de Rioja's canvas, which shows the saint kneeling in prayer, gazing up toward the inhabitants of heaven, with an arrow protruding from her breast.

Other prominent Mexican renditions of the Transverberation include a second version of the subject by Nicolás Rodríguez Juárez, housed in the Museum of the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City. The canvas shows a close-up of a half-length figure of Teresa, falling backwards in ecstasy, as an angel, with one arm behind the saint's neck, prepares to drive an arrow into her breast. Teresa's left hand and a fold of her white cape spill out over the edge of a *trompe l'oeil* frame, a Baroque device seen in seventeenth-century works such as Bartolomé Esteban Murillo's self portrait (London, National Gallery).<sup>41</sup> In addition to the canvas now in Ávila, mentioned above, Juan Correa painted two other surviving versions of this subject. One, in the Carmelite Church of San Joaquín, Tacuba, places the scene of the Transverberation in front of an altar, as if the experience came upon Teresa while she was in the midst of praying before a crucifix.<sup>42</sup> A second fragment, now at the Museo Nacional de las Intervenciones in Churubusco (figure 12), shows Teresa's limp body suspended by angels as the piercing takes place. Putti throw flowers down upon the scene, an element often seen in Flemish engravings of the subject.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, we should consider how this type of Teresian image functioned in its

40. Rogelio Ruiz Gomar, Catalogue 77 in *Arte y mística del barroco*, p. 276, and Roberto M. Alarcón Cedillo and María del Rosario García de Toxqui, *Pintura Novohispana: Museo Nacional del Virreinato*, I, México, Asociación de Amigos del Museo Nacional del Virreinato, 1992, p. 159.

41. Rogelio Ruiz Gomar, Catalogue 78 in *Arte y mística del barroco*, p. 278.

42. Vargaslugo *et al.*, II, part 2, p. 356.

43. The unsigned work is attributed to Correa in Vargaslugo *et al.*, II, part 2, p. 483.

original context. Before they entered museum collections, the majority of portrayals of the Transverberation must have been displayed in Discalced Carmelite churches attached to communities of nuns or friars. Elisa Vargaslugo has suggested that the fragment by Correa at Churubusco, for example, may have once formed part of the altarpiece of the convent church of Santa Teresa la Antigua in Mexico City.<sup>44</sup> The intended audience for an image such as Correa's would have been the laity, gathered for worship, and, in the case of a convent of nuns, the resident religious community, who in many cases could gaze on the altars through iron grilles that separated their enclosure from the church interior.

Members of the Order, especially the nuns, must have favored this iconography because it made a pronouncement about their Mother Foundress —presenting her as a female counterpart to contemporary martyrs such as Philip of Jesus— and also about their own cloistered lives. Like Teresa, they were not likely to die at the hands of infidels, though at least one Mexican nun, Madre Inés de la Cruz (1588-1663), one of the foundresses of the convent of Santa Teresa la Antigua, wrote that as a fourteen-year old girl she arrived in Mexico longing for this fate.<sup>45</sup> Instead they could pursue a “long martyrdom” —the inner death through love prescribed by Teresa. Images of her Transverberation are emblematic of this process; they measure out the potentials (and limitations) of female monastic life, presenting a form of martyrdom available to women in a male-dominated society. Paintings of the piercing of Teresa's heart, then, advertise something of the ethos of the Order to the resident religious community and to the public, including girls who might someday take the Carmelite habit.<sup>46</sup> Each image shows Teresa as if in the midst of a fatal ecstasy, dying, St. Ursula-like, from arrow wounds, and thereby consummating her paradigmatic pursuit of martyrdom.

44. The painting is one of five canvases from a now-dispersed altarpiece. See Vargas Lugo *et al.*, I, part 2, pp. 402-408. Supporting Vargaslugo's hypothesis that the paintings may have once formed the high altar of Santa Teresa la Antigua is the fact that Correa is known to have painted murals for the same community of nuns. See Vargaslugo *et al.*, III, p. 248.

45. Quoted in translation in Electa Arenal and Stacey Schlau, *Untold Sisters: Hispanic Nuns in Their Own Works*, translations by Amanda Powell, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico, 1989, p. 344. Nuns' texts contained in this volume demonstrate a phenomenon of importance for evaluating Teresa's popularity, and consequently that of her image, in Spanish America: colonial nuns viewed Teresa as the ideal model for the female religious.

46. The paradigmatic nature of Teresa's Transverberation is implicit in an eighteenth-century painting by an unidentified artist in the Museo Nacional del Virreinato, which shows the Christ Child piercing a novice's heart with a nail, in reference to the Transverberation and to Teresa's experience of mystical marriage, during which Christ presented her with one of the nails of His Crucifixion. See Roberto M. Alarcón Cedillo and María del Rosario García de Toxqui, *Pintura Novohispana: Museo Nacional del Virreinato*, vol. III, México, Asociación de Amigos del Museo Nacional del Virreinato, 1994, p. 190.