Abstract
The chapter argues that Teresa of Avila provides a critical treatment of several connected issues: the relation of history and theology, of nature and grace, and of human activity in relation to the divine initiative. These questions arise first in Teresa’s response to what she regards as the direct intervention of God in ecstatic states which disorientate her. Her autobiography or Life can be read as an attempt to reconcile such interventions with the ordinary progress of human living, making a critical approach to these questions. Over time, Teresa develops her theoretical understanding, reaching a mature view only in her later Interior Castle. But the relation of human activity and divine intervention, once recognised in this work, can be seen taking shape in the narrative of the Life (if not in Teresa’s early treatment of union), and it enables us to tease out the careful relation between the divine and human partners that Teresa develops in moving, in the Life, from ecstatic states to her fully human work of reform. This is the period from her second conversion to the foundation of St. Joseph’s in Avila, which lies at the heart of the narrative. The divine and human elements are found to be both carefully distinguished and united in her treatment, revealing critical resources for understanding these focal questions of Christian enquiry.

Chapter
The critical question of how history and theology relate to each other is a real one for Teresa of Avila. It arose with particular force with the onset of frequent ecstatic experiences following her second conversion, which provoked her to question how or whether they were from God and what action should follow on her part. How exactly was her personal history to be properly understood in relation to this theological invasion? In her autobiography or Life, she recounts her experience of debilitating ecstasies, which left her paralysed for days at a time. Mystical ecstasy presents the disjunction between history and theology in possibly its most intense form, because it introduces an unavoidable break between the God of these extraordinary events and the ordinary circumstances and progression of life. In classical theological terms, the question concerns the relation of nature and grace: how human nature is changed and affected by the gift of God’s grace. The distinction between nature and grace is brought sharply into view: the profound difference between God’s intervention and the recipient’s previous understanding of human nature cannot be avoided. What I want to examine here is how Teresa develops her own tools for discerning this relationship,
particularly in terms of what the soul can do in response to, and in preparation for, the immediate divine presence. Teresa develops a truly critical understanding here, of a kind that I hope to explain.

How to bring history and theology together has always been a prominent theme in Christianity. It was for Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* of the early church, and it arose with particular force for modern New Testament scholarship in debates about how to reconcile the ‘Jesus of history’ with the ‘Christ of faith’, which continue today. In the case of Teresa, there are enough sources for her history to be known in considerable detail, but these same sources also contain her theological agenda. Her *Life*, unlike a modern biography that might make some claim to be ‘objective’ and to present facts unaffected by the author’s self-understanding, is a work on the model of Augustine’s *Confessions*.¹ It is the story not just of Teresa’s independent trajectory but also of God’s story in relation to her, in terms of how she became part of the journey of the incarnation, to remake a fallen creation. As Marie-Dominique Chenu pointed out in his *Nature, Man and Society* (1957), there is a particular challenge for the historian of spirituality in how to recognise both the strong connections between theology and history in the sources and the critical distinction that must be made in order to study them, at once.² I shall suggest that Teresa can help us to make such a critical distinction, out of her own resources, while acknowledging the highly theological nature of her view of history.

The relationship of the divine initiative to Teresa’s self-understanding is exemplified by an often repeated saying found in her *Soliloquies (Exclamaciones)*: she exclaims, ‘May this “I” die, and may another live in me greater than I and better for me than I, so that I may serve him’.³ The saying begins by stating the element of opposition between God and the ‘I’, demanding the loss of the ‘I’ in favour of the divine. Paralleling Teresa’s experience of the onset of mystical ecstasy, the divine is introduced as something wholly other, marked by the lack of continuity with the ‘I’ of previous experience. But at the same time, looking harder, one notices that she asks for God to ‘live in me’ and to ‘serve him’, which must require the continuation of the ‘I’, even while it dies. The ‘death’ of detachment turns out to be, simultaneously, entry into new life, in which another level or iteration of the ‘I’ opens up, which is capable of working positively with God. Later in the *Soliloquy*, she asks for a union in which you ‘see yourself drowned in the infinite sea of supreme truth’.⁴ The overt loss of personal identity in being ‘drowned’ in a sea is offset by the phrase ‘see yourself’, which signals a new and deeper engagement between God and the ‘I’. Significantly, the divine initiative provides the opportunity to ‘see oneself’ in a new way, no longer in opposition to

3 ‘Muera ya este yo, y viva en mi otro que es mas que yo, y para mi mejor que yo, para que yo le pueda server.’ E 17:3, p. 648 (vol. 1, p. 462); similar statements are to be found in V 6:9; 23:1; recalling Gal. 2:20, ‘it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me’.  
God but intimately related to God at a deeper level, and this is the key to Teresa’s later view that deliberate good works flow directly from the state of union.

A complicating factor is that Teresa’s own understanding of the relationship between the divine initiative and the events of her life developed over time, and she had not reached her mature understanding at the time that she wrote what remains our main source of her history, her Life (1562-5). Teresa’s excursus on the ‘four waters’ of prayer in Chapters 11-22 of the Life presents an ecstatic model, in which God’s role is overwhelming, reducing her human contribution to one mostly of pure passivity, in a kind of total paralysis or, as she says, being ‘unable to stir’. There is a strong distinction between history and theology in this view and little room for understanding their interplay. In contrast, by the time that she wrote the Interior Castle (1577), Teresa saw such paralysing experiences as transitional, and not even as necessary for all, introducing a more active human role in relation to both the goal of union with God and the preparation for union. It is this more synergistic account of her mature years, which draws together the divine and the human, while still emphasising the distinction between them, that I want to uncover here. I shall look to her Interior Castle for this mature understanding, but then use it to shed light on the narrative sections of her Life, especially the period from her second conversion to the foundation of St. Joseph’s. Teresa’s developed intellectual clarity serves to uncover intuitions that were already present in the Life, in her descriptions of her story, even though they took a while to filter into her teaching.

Turning briefly, then, to the Interior Castle for a sketch of her mature understanding, we find her position first summarised succinctly in the image of the silkworm metamorphosing into a butterfly in the Fifth Mansions. The discontinuity of the ‘I’ in relation to God’s work, first of all, is evident in the apparent ‘death’ of the silkworm in the cocoon: the silkworm ‘dies’, and the butterfly that emerges is unimaginably different from and more beautiful than the cocoon. But the cocoon is life as well as death, and notably, the ‘death’ of the cocoon is actively fashioned by the silkworm, which spins the silk to construct the cocoon, to ‘build the house wherein it will die’. ‘Death’ is not simply loss but something that the soul can ‘build’, by collaborating with ‘the general help given us all by God . . . by going to confession, reading good books’ and so on. Therefore, the key moment of ‘death’ is no longer a wholly passive state, but both passive and active, an active waiting for transformation into the butterfly which God alone can provide, in which one can work with the process.

The combination reappears in Teresa’s view of union at the end of the book, in the Seventh Mansions, in the joining of Mary and Martha, the types of contemplation and action, which she relates back to the silkworm image by saying that the ‘little butterfly’ of ecstatic suspensions now dies. Union is now possible without the element of debilitating passivity, in which the opposition between God and the ‘I’ is to the fore, because the marriage

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5 The soul does not work (e.g., V 14:2; 18 (all); 21:11.19; 40:7) and is paralysed or unable to stir (e.g., V 15:1; 20:21; 29:12).
6 I have charted this change in Teresa’s thought elsewhere: Edward Howells, John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila (New York: Crossroad, 2002), pp. 70-92. Teresa retains some moments of sheer passivity (e.g., 4M 1:10-11; 6M 4:5; 10:2) and paralysis in her treatment of union (e.g., 6M 2:3), but they come earlier in the mystical itinerary and are left behind in the Seventh Mansions.
7 5M 2:2-8.
relationship of bridal union at the centre of the soul unites human activity with passivity in relation to God. The soul’s passivity is included in the surrender of the soul as Bride to the divine Bridegroom, while the Bridegroom’s reciprocal surrender invites the Bride to share actively in this movement and positively to welcome her own surrender. Activity and passivity are joined in union in an act that is simultaneously both complete self-gift to the other and recognition of one’s own positive contribution in this self-gift, because it is valued by the other, in the union of love. There is a kind of self-enhancing dynamism in this mutual surrender, which Teresa describes as ‘overflow’ from the centre of the soul to the outskirts of the castle, bringing the whole soul and body in all its parts within the ambit of the union, and making virtuous works flow directly from union. Teresa calls this final state one where the soul’s ‘life is now Christ.’

Two further examples from the Interior Castle help to expand this view. In the Third Mansions, speaking of people who are held back in their preparation for the divine presence by their use of reason, Teresa says:

‘Love has not yet reached the point of overwhelming reason. But I should like us to use our reason to make ourselves dissatisfied with this way of serving God, always going step by step. . . . Wouldn’t it be best to make this journey all at once? . . . Let’s abandon our reason and our fears into his hands. . . . We should care only about moving quickly so as to see this Lord.’

Overtly, Teresa expresses the now familiar contrast between human work and the divine presence: the work of reason stands in the way and must be ‘overwhelmed’ by love, in a complete self-abandonment to God. Reason produces only a pedestrian ‘step by step’ mentality that is a hindrance to union and must be bypassed: ‘we should only care about moving quickly so as to see this Lord’. Reason is not simply rejected, however, but is drawn into a larger realm by love. In the service of love, we should ‘use our reason to make ourselves dissatisfied with this way of serving God’. Reason cannot anticipate the divine presence, and its usual course is to obstruct it, but in view of love it can work constructively in anticipation of God’s action. It can actively engage in promoting its own failure. Paradoxically, we need reason to overcome reason.

The paradox is expressed most tightly in Teresa’s phrase ‘let’s abandon our reason’. She implies a discipline, driven by reason, which produces a deliberate act of letting go. Reason and love are, thus, initially contrasted by Teresa, in the same way that the silkworm and the butterfly are contrasted, as death and life, but then reunited in the larger view provided by love. Reason and love remain distinct but are joined in a greater unity. The perspective of union is asserted in the possibility of the soul contributing to its own transformation by using reason to open itself to the infinite divine presence, even though it cannot grasp this infinite nature. At the end of the Third Mansions, Teresa changes the image to signal this element of continuity: the soul is like a fledgling bird learning to fly, which has now been made ‘bold to fly’. It cannot fly without the gift of God’s immediate presence, but it can do God’s will to the extent of boldly desiring to receive the gift, whatever it is, when it is given. To know that one wants to serve God, without any holding back, is itself an active work, in which the soul is already working with God.

12 ‘No está aún el amor para sacar de razón; más querría yo que la tuviésemos para no nos contentar con esta manera de servir a Dios siempre a un paso paso . . . . ¿No valdría más pasarlo de una vez? . . . Dejemos nuestra razón y temores en sus manos. . . . Nosotros, de solo caminar aprisa por ver este Señor.’ 3M 2:7-8, p. 492 (vol. 2, p. 312).
By the time that Teresa wrote the *Interior Castle*, she was in no doubt that the soul’s work, though wholly unlike God’s immediate presence, could be allied with the divine activity *within* the soul’s mystical self-understanding, rather than being seen in opposition to it. We cannot transform ourselves, but there is some human activity which contributes to joining us to the one who can. A second significant passage on this point is to be found in the Second Mansions where she discusses the activity of the ‘cross’. The cross in this sense means the work of conforming the will to God, understood according to the scriptural metaphor of ‘taking up your cross’ to follow Jesus. Teresa says that the intellect, for instance, though not yet able to see God as it will in union, strives to remind the soul that Jesus, already present by faith within the ‘castle’ of the soul, is its ‘true lover’ who ‘never leaves it’: it can ‘realise that it couldn’t find a better friend’, because ‘outside this castle neither peace nor security will be found’. The cross at this point forms a bridge between the negative associations of self-abandonment, marked by great fears and uncertainties, and the approaching intimate companionship of Christ. To suffer like Christ, in the work of giving oneself to God, should not, Teresa says, be seen as a war against oneself. The feeling of opposition between the soul and God, though real, is not the whole picture. There is no need to be ‘ill at ease’, she says, because the soul is sharing in the suffering of the cross, which overcomes the felt opposition between the soul and God in favour of the inner ‘peace’ of companionship with Christ. To pursue such a path is not easy and requires great determination, as she frequently reminds her readers, but the cross points to a deeper continuity between our work and God’s work, as yet hard to see but still capable of freeing us from our fears. She notes the importance of this insight by calling the cross the ‘foundation’ on which the whole edifice of the soul’s transformation will be built.

With this sketch in mind, I would like to return to Teresa’s *Life*, to ask whether a similar pattern of discontinuity and continuity between the divine activity and Teresa’s activity can be seen. My suggestion is that just as Teresa ‘forefronts’ the element of discontinuity, with the death the silkworm and the abandonment of reason, so in the *Life* we hear most prominently about how God overturns the direction of Teresa’s life, putting discontinuity in the way of a smooth progression from her past to her present. Most obviously, this is to be seen in what is called her ‘second conversion’, and also in the dramatic experiences of ecstasy that follow. But whereas this discontinuity remains utterly dominant in her teaching on the ‘four waters’ of prayer, by contrast, in the narrative – especially in the events between her second conversion and the founding of St. Joseph, which lie at the heart of the book – there is a deeper attempt to establish lines of continuity: to show how God’s action, including the disorientation of painful ecstasies, can be discerned and reconciled in relation to the events of everyday life, in transformed human action. If we look at the *Life* using the mature schematic understanding of the *Interior Castle*, we can see how Teresa is seeking to find the same paradoxical unity between the divine and the human that she asserts there. Indeed, by linking her later schema to her *Life*, we can find a rich development of the same ideas in terms of her autobiography.

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14 2M 1:6-7.
15 ‘Cómo nunca se quita de con él este verdadero Amador… El entendimiento acude con darle a entender que no puede cobrar mejor amigo…. Fuera de esta Castillo no hallará seguridad ni paz.’ 2M 1:4, p. 483 (vol. 2, p. 299).
16 ‘¿Puede ser mayor mal que no nos hallemos en nuestra misma casa? ¿Qué esperanza podemos tener de hallar sosiego en otras cosas, pues en las propias no podemos sosegar?… Paz, paz… dijo el Señor.’ 2M 1:9, p. 485 (vol. 2, p. 302).
17 2M 1:7-8.
Teresa describes her second conversion as a turning point in the direction of her life. The story she tells is that after about twenty years as an unremarkable and not very good nun, one day on entering the oratory of the Encarnación in Avila, she saw a new statue placed there which showed Christ in great suffering. ‘My heart broke’, she says, and feeling ‘how poorly I thanked him for those wounds . . . I threw myself down before him with the greatest outpouring of tears’.\(^{18}\) The period of her life which followed was marked by a series of dramatic ecstasies of a kind which, she says, she began to receive ‘habitually’, seeing them as part of the prayer of quiet.\(^{19}\) She would go into ecstasy, feeling her soul to be torn between heaven and earth; it was an experience in which her soul is ‘suspended in such a way that it seems to be completely outside itself’.\(^{20}\) These ‘grandeurs’ included her famous ‘transverberation’, described in Chapter 29, of the piercing of her heart by the arrow of God’s love, and were accompanied by physical swoons which caused her ‘deep affliction’.\(^{21}\) She clearly saw these experiences, like her second conversion, as a demonstration of the discontinuity that was introduced into her life by the direct intervention of God. They showed that her former religious and spiritual understanding was not enough. A demand was placed on her to reassess everything that she had known of herself and her history up to this point. God did not seem to ‘fit’ in any of the categories with which she was familiar. As she says in her first mention of ‘mystical theology’ in Chapter 10, the intellect is ‘amazed by all it understands’ and yet is also aware that ‘it understands nothing’.\(^{22}\) Her life has been turned into a conundrum.

The conundrum, however, is one that sparks a new kind of understanding, which emerges directly in response to her sense of division between life with God and life in the world. Teresa says that although ‘I clearly understood that I loved him . . . I did not understand as I should have what true love of God consists in’.\(^{23}\) Her love of God was enkindled in a new way by her second conversion, which led her to want to reassess what it really is to love God. She notes that there was an immediate effect on her manner of prayer. She began to seek Christ, she says, by picturing him in ‘those scenes where I saw him more alone. It seemed to me that being alone and afflicted, as a person in need, he had to accept me. . . . The scene in the garden, especially, was a comfort to me; I strove to be his companion there’.\(^{24}\) Teresa contrasts this new attempt to find God’s presence with her previous way of prayer in which, for those twenty lost years, she was ‘having great trouble’, because she could only see herself as a ‘slave’ in relation to the Lord, on account of her failings.\(^{25}\) Now her attention is drawn to the notion that God shows himself as one ‘in need’. This gives her a new insight both into God and into herself: her previous sense of need, which she had seen as a barrier to prayer, because it emphasised her incapacity to love God and her difference from God, is turned on

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18 ‘Fue tanto lo que sentí de lo mal que havía agradecido aquellas llagas, que el corazón me parece se me partía, y arrojéme El con grandisimo derramamiento de lágrimas.’ V 9:1, p. 63 (vol. 1, p. 101).
20 ‘Suspende el alma de suerte que toda parecía estar fuera de sí.’ V 10:1, p. 66 (vol. 1, p. 105).
22 ‘Está como espantado de lo mucho que entiende . . . ninguna cosa entiende.’ V 10:1, p. 66 (vol. 1, p. 105).
23 ‘Bien entendía yo – a mi parecer – le amava, mas no entendía en qué está el amar de veras a Dios.’ V 9:9, p. 65 (vol. 1, p. 103).
24 ‘Los partes a donde le vía más solo. Pareciame a mí que, estando solo y afligido, como persona necesitada me havía de admitir a mí. . . . En especial me hallava muy bien en la oración del Huerto: allí era mi acomparable.’ V 9:4, p. 64 (vol. 1, p. 101).
25 ‘En la oración pasava gran trabajó, porque no adava el espíritu señor, sino esclavo.’ V 7:17, p. 57 (vol. 1, p. 91).
its head by the notion of God’s need. Here God is even weaker than Teresa, making it possible for her to understand how she can love him: ‘I strove to be his companion there’.

It is not fanciful to see in this transition the first sketch of her mature position of the Interior Castle, where God’s immediate presence first of all presents the soul with an irreconcilable difference between God’s activity and human activity, yet then, on closer examination, opens the soul to a deeper unity which establishes a new form of action. The former barrier that Teresa had set between herself and God in prayer, in terms of her need, turns out not simply to be removed, but to be the essential point of connection between her and God. She experiences God by seeing the continuity between her need and God’s. The discontinuity introduced by need is now also the continuity: a sharing with God in a need that has become mutual. This anecdote precisely reflects the logic of her later position, where the discontinuity associated with God’s presence becomes, paradoxically, a vital element in the intimate companionship between the soul and God.

Further flesh can be put on this scheme by observing how Teresa structures the narrative between this point and the founding of St. Joseph’s. Without retelling the whole story, I would like to draw attention to certain elements. First, when Teresa returns to the narrative after the interlude of the ‘four waters’ of prayer, she reiterates the words also found in the Soliloquy with which I began, saying that the life she had lived up to her second conversion ‘was mine’, whereas now, by contrast, her life was ‘the one God lived in me’. This discontinuity, however, is quickly followed by a reference to the way that the experience has changed her, and changed her gradually, for ‘it would have been impossible in so short a time to get rid of so many bad habits and deeds’. There is a narrative to be told which, even with discontinuity at its heart, relates the old Teresa to the new and reveals a deeper connection.

It is worth noticing that, following her increasingly public experiences of ecstasy, Teresa was forced to seek guidance outside her monastery, against the accusations of devil deception which she knew would inevitably be levelled against her, having seen the fate of other women. She did not remain passive, but actively sought the counsel of wise spiritual persons in the town. The first she consulted, she says, were a ‘saintly’ layman, Francisco de Salcedo, and a ‘learned priest’ of the city, Gaspar Daza, who gave a negative verdict, which frightened her very much. She saw danger everywhere, feeling that she was drowning, as if in the middle of a river (not the delightful drowning in the sea of union). But these men also suggested that she consult the Jesuits, recently arrived in Avila, with whom she gradually gained a more positive view. Teresa emphasises that it was a slow process and a struggle, between the immense fear of deception and the equally strong sense that God was singling her out for some great work. ‘Perfection is not attained quickly’, she says, adding that ‘many souls want to fly before God gives them wings’. She refers to the active courage required in this work of discerning the will of God, trusting that ‘His Majesty will bring it about that what they now have in desires they shall possess in deed’. She intersperses these chapters with guidelines for discernment of the different kinds of locutions and visions, imaginative

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26 ‘La de hasta aquí era mía; la que he vivido desde que comence a declarer estas cosas de oración, es que vivía Dios en mí.’ V 23:1, p. 126 (vol. 1, pp. 200-201).
28 V 23:2-24:3.
29 ‘La perfección no se alcanza en breve . . . . Creo se engañan aquí muchas almas que quieren volar antes que Dios les dé alas. . . . Lo que ahora tienen en deseos Su Majestad hará que lleguen a tenerlo por obra.’ V 31:17-18, pp. 169-170 (vol. 1, pp. 271-272).
and intellectual, showing again that there is work for the soul to do in relation to the divine work.

The picture of active cooperation, entirely shaped by God’s initiative but nevertheless requiring the soul to play a demanding part, is further developed in terms of the soul’s relations with other people. Not only is the soul moving out into activity in response to God’s activity but in relation to other people. As Jodi Bilinkoff’s book, The Avila of St. Teresa, nicely points out, Teresa’s contacts with the ‘reform party’ in Avila, through her quest for authoritative spiritual directors, was vital to her success in founding St. Joseph’s and starting a new movement of religious reform.\(^{30}\) Initially, her contact with these powerful men, who were generally inaccessible to a woman religious, was purely a response to the extraordinary ecstatic experiences which had attracted public criticism. The paradox cannot have been lost on Teresa: what started as a divine intervention entirely at the ‘interior’ level, with feelings of suspension and being cut off from the world, actually led her out to a new public engagement, and that in turn gave her the necessary experience in the public realm that finally enabled her to start a reform. Thus, through her Jesuit directors, Teresa met Doña Guiomar de Ulloa, the influential lady with whom she later sketched out her first plans for St. Joseph’s.\(^{31}\) Through Doña Guiomar, she also met Peter of Alcántara, whom she used as her greatest supporter during her worst periods of opposition in Avila.\(^{32}\) We find this paradox again articulated in Teresa’s comment on the banning of books on prayer, following the Valdes Index of 1559. She sees it first as a great loss, but quickly moves to point out how God used it to draw her into a new kind of action: ‘the Lord said to me, “Don’t be sad, for I shall give you a living book”’.\(^{33}\) It is the basis for her writing career.\(^{34}\) The structure is clearly present in the narrative: Teresa identifies precisely those moments where a sharp discontinuity opens up, between the divine initiative and the possibility for human action, as the places in which the divine companionship is discovered at a deeper level, which then leads her to new kind of active engagement in the world.

What is not present in the Life is the kind of distillation of this logic in her teaching on union that we find in the Interior Castle. At the end of the Life, Teresa gives just a brief intimation of what will follow, in two final visions, the first of her soul in union and the second of seeing all things together in God. She draws our attention to the way God and her soul appear as ‘mirrors’, both reflecting the other, so that ‘everything we do is visible’ in God, and all things in creation can be seen ‘joined together’, within union.\(^{35}\) The phrase recurs many times in Teresa’s later teaching, that the soul ‘sees itself in God’ in union. The significance of this phrase is that union is no longer understood simply as the vision of God and how God loves the soul, but of the soul in relation to God, where God lights up and makes room for the soul’s contribution. For instance, in the Interior Castle, Teresa says that in this union we can ‘see God, as well as ourselves placed inside his greatness’.\(^{36}\) The soul is aware of a new mutuality in relation to God, which dispels the former sense of opposition and self-loss. The soul finds, instead, space for a new understanding of itself as united with God, and in turn, for a new sense of vocation, and then of action, as this sense of self-understanding shared in


\(^{31}\) V 32:10.

\(^{32}\) Bilinkoff, p. 120.

\(^{33}\) ‘No tengas pena, que yo te dare libro vivo.’ V 26:5, p. 142 (vol. 1, p. 226).


\(^{35}\) ‘Todo lo que hacemos se ve . . . . Ver tantas cosas juntas.’ V 40:10, p. 225 (vol. 1, p. 358).

\(^{36}\) ‘Vemos a Dios y nos vemos tan metidas en su grandeza.’ 5M 2:6, p. 515 (vol. 2, p. 343).
relation to God becomes the ‘centre of the soul’ and flows outwards in world-directed activity.

In the *Life*, the seeds of Teresa’s later view are present not in her teaching on union but in the narrative. The experience of conversion and ecstasies is, as we have seen, one in which Teresa finds the space and confidence to examine her own resources. Gradually she examines herself in the light of her new experience of God. What she sees is mostly her failure: her past failure in prayer and her current fears. But these elements are now joined by ‘fortitude’ and ‘courage’, because they are found to be compatible with God’s intimate companionship with the soul. This is what Teresa later describes as ‘taking up your cross’, which is actively to use personal failure, not to attack oneself, but to open oneself to God’s companionship, in a way that shares in the divine peace and freedom rather than getting stuck in fear.

**Conclusion**

Teresa’s use of history is both a theological and a critical one. We know that her history is not critical in the sense of modern critical scholarship: she has not sifted her sources for the bare bones of a factual account. Rather, she directs her sources towards a theological story – the story of the incarnation and her own part in it. But neither is she a propagandist, in the sense of turning the facts in any direction to suit a predetermined script. She sees theology as interrupting the life that she would expect to have told, which in turn forces her and her readers to look harder at the facts. To tell the theological story is not so much to find an overarching narrative and to stick to it, as to point out where the expected thrust of the narrative seems to have been broken, and to offer theological resources at that point, introducing continuity not merely at the human level but in relation to the divine. Theology provides the critical task of distinguishing the divine from the human, and at the same time, for joining them together. So, looking back at her history, Teresa does not see herself as someone who, for instance, ceased to be weak and facing opposition after her second conversion. Her weakness is intensified rather than eradicated by theology: it is more obvious that one is weak as compared with God than as compared with anything else. But theology enables her to see human weakness as positively valued in a larger story, which she understands by bringing in the theological resources of the incarnation, where weakness can be central to divine companionship. Theology deepens her history, changing the perspective both of the teller and, she hopes, of the reader. She wants us to read her history as critically informed by theology, rather than eradicated or smoothed out. She provides critical resources which are to be appropriated for our own transformation, to enable us to see our own history as better understood – interrupted, yes, but only to be intensified and expanded – in relation to the divine perspective, as ‘placed inside God’s greatness’.

37 V 24:7; 26:5.
38 Teresa uses the image of fear as ‘mud’ in which the soul gets stuck, obstructing the flowing stream of free and active relationship with God (1M 2:10).