

St. Catherine of Siena:



An Historic and Prophetic Synthesis of the Consecrated Life

A Lived Experience of the Espousals with Jesus Christ
and His Sacred Stigmata

[Extract from the *Acts of the International Congress of Catherinian Studies*.
Siena-Rome: April 24-29, 1980.
Roma: Curia Generalizia OP, 1981 - pp. 632-652]

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**A Lived Experience of the Espousals with Jesus Christ
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... [Hers] was a message of most pure faith, of an ardent love, of a humble and generous dedication to the Catholic Church as the Mystical Body and Spouse of the divine Redeemer ... a message, typical of the new doctor of the Church, Catherine of Siena, to enlighten and give example to all who glory in belonging to the Church. Let us receive this message in a grateful and generous spirit, that it may be a light for our earthy life and pledge of future secure membership of the Church triumphant in heaven. So be it!¹

In an age dedicated to reflections on the Church and commitment to its renewal, the person and the message of St. Catherine of Siena stand out as a beacon of hope. She has much to offer those in the consecrated life for their share in today's mission within the Church. St. Catherine not only "gives example", but her doctrine will "enlighten" those who pray over and are dedicated to their particular role in this great effort of the Church. By reflecting on her writings from one's own vocational perspective, it can be discerned that hers is a hope-filled inspiration to persevere.

The lives and teachings of the great mystics of the Church clearly indicate a kind of compact, unified personality, despite the fact that they are formed from a variety of influences from God, the Church and society.²

A good example of this is the Ignatian Spirituality. The lived experience of the Spiritual Exercises was later codified to form the very soul of the Jesuit Constitutions.

¹ Pope Paul VI, *Homily* in St. Peter's Basilica at the ceremony proclaiming Catherine of Siena a Doctor of the Church, October 4, 1970 - cf. AAS LXII 1970, pp. 675-678. For the English translation, cf. *The Teachings of Pope Paul VI 1970*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Citta' del Vaticano, p. 343.

² cf. Alvaro Huerga, OP, in: *Teologia Spirituale* 14, 1970, p. 381.

The Society was planned as a permanent gathering of true “Friends of the Lord”,³ to continue the apostolic mission of Jesus, as His Companions.⁴

The scope of this paper is to consider the union of two apparently unconnected realities in the life of St. Catherine of Siena: the espousals theme and the Sacred Stigmata, and to note their application in other charisms of the consecrated life.⁵

The Nuptial Metaphor and the Stigmata in various traditions of the Religious Life

The Espousals theme offers at least three major aspects in the history of the Spiritualities of various religious families. These may be considered:

- I. *The Franciscan Aspect: The “Mystical Nuptials” with “Lady Poverty.”*
- II. *The Dominican-Carmelite Aspect: the Mystical Nuptials of the Unitive way as exemplified by St. Catherine of Siena and St. John of the Cross. This is known as the “Union of Transforming Love.”*
- III. *The Jesuit Tradition: the Church as the Spouse of Christ.*

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³ Gérard Wilkens, *Compagnons de Jésus - La Genèse de l'ordre des Jésuites*. Rome: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, Recherches 14, 1978.

⁴ cf. *Ejercicios-Constituciones: Unidad Vital* - Congreso Ignaciano Loyola, Setiembre 2-7, 1974, Bilbao: Ediciones Mensajero 1975.

⁵ As devotions, the Espousals of Mary and Joseph - and the Sacred Stigmata of Our Lord Jesus Christ are an essential part of the spiritual heritage of Gaspar Bertoni [b. October 7, 1777 - d. June 12, 1853], who was declared ‘Blessed’ by Pope Paul VI, on All saints’ day during the recent Holy Year, 1975. He was canonized on the same date in 1989 by Pope John Paul II]. Fr. Bertoni was a diocesan priest of Verona, Italy - and Founder of the Congregation of the Sacred Stigmata of our Lord Jesus Christ. The 30th General Chapter of the Stigmatine Congregation [1976] declared Devotion to the Sacred Stigmata as the principal devotion of the Institute, and that of the Espousals of Mary and Joseph as its patrons. [A subsequent General Chapter, in 1994, made the Founder himself the principal devotion].

Fr. Bertoni did not receive the Stigmata in the formal sense. In his own personal writings, he not infrequently used terminology associated with the Sacred Stigmata to refer to his illnesses: as, ‘my wounds are not too bad’ [Letter 22]; ‘it seems the Lord wants me wounded, not dead.’ [Letter 104].

In his earlier sermons and also letters [cf. Letter 21], he often used the nuptial theme to describe individual union - and one of his most beautiful texts on ‘Abandonment’ sees the Church as the Spouse of Christ, waiting on His Word [cf. Letter 38]. [cf. *Epistolario del Ven. Servo di Dio, P. G. Bertoni*, Stigmatini, Verona 1954.

I. ***The Franciscan Aspect: “Mystical Nuptials” of St. Francis and His Companions with Lady Poverty***

1. The very intimate relationship between St. Francis [1182-1226] and poverty has assumed the characteristic configuration of “mystical nuptials.” This theme has been developed to a great extent in both virtue and art - not to speak of Franciscan spirituality as such. It is interesting to note that this little work which has come to be known generally as *Mistiche Nozze*; in Latin, bears the title: *Sacrum commercium beati Francisci cum Domina Paupertate* - it was St. Bonaventure who was the first to give the name ‘Spouse’ to this ‘Lady Poverty.’ There was thus a kind of “Canticle of Canticles” from the Franciscan tradition.⁶

2. One of the early biographers of St. Francis, Tommaso da Celano, brings out the Christological and Nuptial aspect of this Song of Songs:

... While living in the valley of tears, this blessed Father disdained the poor riches of the sons of men - and through an ambition of the highest type, with all his heart, he yearned after poverty.

Considering poverty as a very special friend of the Son of God, and choosing instead to abandon this entire world, Francis wishes to espouse poverty with a bond of eternal love. Having fallen in love with the beauty of poverty and wishing to be united to her most intimately as his wife, so that *from the two of them, one sole spirit might be formed* - Francis not only abandoned his father and mother - but he put distance between himself and all created things, and embraced poverty in a most chaste manner - and never for a single hour did he ever fail to be her most faithful husband...⁷

3. The Little booklet of the *Sacrum commercium* has been considered by many to be “the pearl of Franciscan literature.” Its evangelical spirit, lived and experienced by Francis and his first companions in all its sublime beauty, is the inspiration lying behind the account contained in the “Canticle.” “Lady Poverty” is a *Spouse* and *Mother*, a true noble lady. After hard years of struggle and personal renunciation, Francis finally discovered his treasure, and bereft of all on the naked earth, he went to sleep in the Lord - exhorting all the Friars Minor that they “would always love and observe our Lady Poverty.”

⁶ cf. *Fonti Francescane. Scritti e biografie di S. Francesco d'Assisi. Cronache e altre testimonianze del primo secolo francescano. Scritti e biografie di S. Chiara d'Assisi.* Seconda ristampa. Assisi: 1978, pp. 245, f.; 1629-1666.

⁷ *La poverta' - Antologie del pensiero spirituale Franciscano*, a cura di fr. Gaudenzio Melano, OFM, Santa Maria degli Angeli - Assisi 1967, p. 314.

4. In this tradition, Lady Poverty is presented as going out to meet the Friars. Before receiving them fully as her sons, she [because she remembered so many others, who later regretted that they had chosen her, and turned back to the empty quest of lowly and base comforts], puts them all to the test:

... What moves you, my brothers, to come here to me? Why have you hastened to come here from the valley of miseries to the mount of charity? If you are looking for me, don't you see that I am poor, harried by storms on all sides, and without anyone to console me?⁸

The response to this is a "Hymn to Poverty" and to the ideal of perfection that is incarnate in it:

... We come to you, Lady Poverty, our Lady, and we ask you to receive us in peace. We desire to be the Servants of the Lord of all virtues, because He is the King of Glory. We have heard and we know it by experience that you are the queen of virtues. We cast ourselves at your feet, humbly begging you to *accompany us through life*...⁹

5. The essential element of "Franciscan Espousals" seems to be the intimate union between the individual and the community, with poverty, that establishes a single spirit. This is a biblical teaching that was truly lived and 'experienced' by Francis and his companions.

In her *Dialogue*, St. Catherine states that Francis was the first to accept true and holy poverty as a *spouse* - and that few [*pochi*] follow this way, because there are not many who choose perfection¹⁰.

6. In one of the master-pieces of Franciscan preaching, St. Bernardine of Siena delivered a magnificent discourse on "The Sacred Stigmata of the Glorious Francis".¹¹

An Italian translation of excerpts of this Lenten sermon may be found in a recent Franciscan Journal.¹²

⁸ l.c., p. 318.

⁹ l.c.

¹⁰ S. Caterina da Siena, *Il Dialogo della Divine Provvidenza, ovvero Libro della Divina Dottrina*, a cura di Giuliana Cavallini [testi Caeteriniani, I] Roma 1968, c. 158, p. 458.

¹¹ S. Bernardino da Siena, "De Evangelio Aeterno", Sermo 59, "De Sacris Stigmatibus gloriosi Francisci", in: *Opera Omnia* ed. Quaracchi, Vol. 5, 1956, pp. 204-230.

a. In the presentation of this sermon, Fr. Batazzi points out that he removed from the original work numerous citations which St. Bernardine took from the *Legenda Maior*¹³ and the *Legenda Minor*¹⁴ of St. Bonaventure, as well as from the *Arbor Vitae* of Hubertine of Casale. The basic theme is that the Stigmata of Francis authenticate his full conformity to Christ - the Stigmata are but the external sign of a most perfect interior *unity* and *conformity* to Christ. Evangelical perfection is “cruciform” and consists in following the crucified Jesus. This sermon was given the Tuesday after Easter. The signs of the Passion impressed on the body of Francis are a gift of the resurrected Christ. The “Glorious Stigmata” indicate a great power - they are as a kind of letter, sealed with the ring of the king.

b. While the word “sponsal union” is not used, the Stigmata are presented as being the *Signaculum*, the “seals” of the Book of the Apocalypse which only the Lamb which had been immolated was worthy to open [cf. Rv 5:2, 9]. Quoting Denis, the preacher states that love always takes the form of what is loved - Francis so loved his Lord that he was transformed into Christ Jesus, as manifested by the conferral of the Sacred Stigmata by the Resurrected Christ. The stigmata, in this sense, are seen as the result of union.

II. The Dominican-Carmelite Aspect: *The Mystical Nuptials of Transforming Union*

After many purifications, the individual finally achieves that calm and lasting union which is called “Transforming Union”. This seems to be the last term of mystical grace and the immediate preparation for the vision of the blessed. The principal characteristics of this union are *intimacy*, *serenity* and *indissolubility*.

Among the effects of this union, there is *holy abandonment* into the hands of God, to the extent that the individual becomes almost indifferent to all that is not God. There follows a great willingness for sharing Christ’s sufferings, an ardent zeal for the apostolate and mission.

The “spiritual nuptials” seems to comment on the biblical concept of marriage:

... They are no longer two, but one *body* [cf. Mt 19:6; Gn 2: 4; Ep 5:31; 1 Co 6:16; 7:10].

¹² cf. Ferdinando Batazzi, OFM, “Le Stimate di S. Francesco nell’insegnamento di un grande maestro, S. Bernardino da Siena, in: *Studi Francescani*, Anno 71 1975, nn. 1-4, gennaio-dicembre, pp. 177-197.

¹³ *Fonti Francescane*, o.c., marginal numbers 1330-1393.

¹⁴ *ib.*, pp. 501-528.

St. Paul is often quoted:

... Anyone joined to the Lord is *one spirit* with him... [cf. 1 Co 6:17].

Two of the better known examples are the Dominican and Carmelite traditions.

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I.] ***The Dominican Tradition: St. Catherine of Siena [1347-1380]***

1. St. Catherine never uses the expression “Mystical Espousals” with the Lord. Her biographer and Confessor, Blessed Raymond, describes her intimate union with Christ, using this terminology. In Chapter 12, the conclusion of the First Part of his Biography of the Saint, he states:

... From now on Catherine’s soul increased in grace daily. She flew rather than walked along the way of virtue, and a holy desire developed within her soul to attain to perfect faith, so that, utterly subject to her *Bridegroom*, she might be utterly pleasing to Him. She began to pray to the Lord as the disciples had done, to increase her faith and to make it perfect and solid as a rock. The Lord spoke to her and said: *I will espouse you to me in faith.*

Near Lent when the faithful abstain from meat and fats in the days when men celebrate the vain festival of the stomach [“Mardi Gras”, 1367], the virgin was to be found alone in her little room seeking through prayer and fasting the face of the eternal *Bridegroom*, praying for the same thing. Then the Lord said to her:

‘Since for love of Me you have forsaken the vanities and despised the pleasure of the flesh, and fastened all the delights of your heart on Me, now, when the rest of the household are feasting and enjoying themselves I have determined to celebrate *the wedding feast* of your soul and *to espouse* you to me in faith, as I promised.

‘Keep this faith unspotted until you come to me in heaven and celebrate *the nuptials that have no end.* From this time forward, daughter, act firmly and decisively in everything that in my Providence I shall ask you to do. Armed as

you are with the strength of faith, you will overcome all our enemies and be happy...¹⁵

In her *Dialogue* [c. 78] we read:

... These souls [in the unitive state] are thrown into the furnace of My charity, no part of their will remaining outside, but the whole of them being inflamed in Me, are like a brand, wholly consumed in the furnace, so that no one can take hold of it to extinguish it, because it has become fire. In the same way, no one can seize these souls, or draw them outside of Me, because *they are made one thing with Me through grace*, and I never withdraw Myself from them by sentiment, as in the case of those whom I am leading to perfection...¹⁶

In this same Chapter 78, describing such union, Catherine speaks of the Stigmata and the following of the Lamb.

2. It is interesting to note that the image of the Crucifix from which St. Catherine received the Stigmata is very similar to the Franciscan Cross which spoke to St. Francis at San Damiano, Assisi. This latter is an imitation Byzantine Cross, depicting the serenity of the Crucified Christ. There may also be included St. John's idea [and he is sometimes represented at the foot of the Cross with Mary], of the exaltation theme [cf. Jn 12:32]. These Crucifixes are outstanding for the fact of the wide opened eyes which are gazing out on a suffering world. Its countenance is one of compassion, pity and love.

3. The "mystical nuptials" of Catherine with Jesus were sealed with the Stigmata. Blessed Raymond explains:

... After the incomparable *Bridegroom* had proven His chosen one in the fire of many tribulations, and taught her how to beat the old adversary in all her battles with him, the one thing that remained for Him to do was to give her the full reward for her triumph. As, however, the souls on earth who by the eternal decree and promise of this same *Bridegroom* were to be helped by her had not yet received the full benefit of her aid, it was necessary for her to remain a little while longer among the living. But she was given a *token* of the eternal reward.

¹⁵ cf. *St. Catherine of Siena, Biography by Blessed Raymond of Capua*. Part I, c. XII, tr. by George Lamb, London: Marvill Press 1970, pp 99, ff. Cf. also Johannes Jorgensen, *St. Catherine of Siena*. tr. from the Danish by Ingeborg Lund, London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1938, pp. 57, ff.

¹⁶ cf. A. Thorold, *The Dialogue of the Seraphic Virgin, Catherine of Siena*. London: Burns & Oates & Washburne 1925.

And so that Lord and Heavenly *Bridegroom* willing that *His bride* and servant should begin to lead a heavenly life in this vale of tears, and at the same time continue to heave dealings with those on earth, prepared and trained her with ... revelation...¹⁷

4. The actual account of St. Catherine's Stigmata, which she experienced on April 1, 1375, during the celebration of the Eucharist, is given by her confessor. After receiving Communion in the Church of St. Christian in Pisa, St. Catherine experienced an ecstasy. She gave Blessed Raymond this account:

... At once the days changed color from blood-red to a bright light, and these rays of purest light rested on my hands and feet and heart...¹⁸

a. The Church does not generally affirm the supernatural character of the extraordinary manifestations of the saints. What always matters is the heroicity of virtue, their example and apostolic commitment.¹⁹

b. In the Papal Bull of Canonization of St. Catherine, Pope Pius II on June 29, 1461, gave lavish praise to her serving in her father's house, her goodness to the poor and to the sick; there is no mention of how she struggled with temptation and practiced great mortifications. While there is mention of her "infused doctrine", there is no insistence on her Stigmata.²⁰

c. However, Divine Offices honoring the Stigmata of St. Catherine of Siena were approved by Popes Urban [1625-1655] and Benedict XIII [1724-1730], in which the Stigmata are mentioned, as well as their "invisibility":

... vulnerum formam miserata Christi exprimis ipsa.

¹⁷ cf. *Biography by Blessed Raymond*, o.c., Part II, c. 5; cf. *Il messaggio di S. Caterina da Siena, dottore della Chiesa. Tutto il pensiero della vergine senese esposto con le sue parole ridotte a forma moderna*. Roma, ed. Vincenziane 1970; cf. especially, "Le nozze con la verita' mediante l'anello della santissima fede", o.c., pp. 160-175; 480, ff..

¹⁸ cf. René Biot, *The Enigma of the Stigmata*, tr. from the French, New York: Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Catholicism, Hawthorne Books Publishers 1962, p. 48. Biot follows the account of this given by Imbert Gourbeyre, *La Stigmatisation, l'extase divine, les miracles de Lourdes, réponses aux libres penseurs*. Clermont: Billet 1894; cf. also "Opere di S. E. Alfonso Capecelatro, *Storia di S. Cataerina da Siena e del papato del suo tempo*. Tipografia liturgica di S. Giovanni. Desclée, Lefebvre e Cia., Roma 1886, pp. 567, f..

¹⁹ cf. A. Hueriga, OP, "Estigmatización", in: *Gran Enciclopedia Rialp*, Madrid. Tomo IX, pp. 376, ff.

²⁰ cf. Capecelatro, o.c., pp. 585-593.

Hanc itaque gratiam amantissimus Dominus nova gratia cumulavit, ut sentiret dolorem illapsa vi vulnerum et cruenta signa non apparerent...²¹

5. In an earlier controversy,²² allegations were made on the manner of Blessed Raymond's compiling Catherine's biography. One of the accusations was that not only was Catherine honored with the Stigmata, as was St. Francis - but, beyond that, she died at the age of 33, as Christ did! One scholar seems to have seen a kind of rivalry between the two Orders - the marvels of Francis' life were then duplicated by Catherine and presented by the future Master General of the Dominican Order as a superior experience.²³

6. If one tries to summarize Catherine's doctrine, it would be in her *sublime faith that God is indeed Love*. Generally, among the mystics, the nuptial metaphor is emphasized.

a. In Catherine, while there is use of the nuptial symbolism, she seems more inclined to consider herself as 'daughter', and emphasizes more *maternal love* - of the Church for all human beings; in herself, for all who become part of her family. Catherine's spirituality seems much more directed to her fellow human beings, to the Church and to the entire world.²⁴

b. While Catherine renounced every having her own family after her mystical nuptials with Jesus, in 1368 she did establish her first 'family'. Imbued with her union with Christ, and experiencing mystically and sacramentally the Divine Blood by her participation in the redemptive Passion, Catherine fully dedicated herself to the life of the Church.²⁵ Her dedication was to the Church, considered as "Mother" and "Spouse of the Redeemer."

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²¹ cf. Capecelatro, p. 157.

²² R. Fawtier, *St. Catherine de Sienne - Essai de Critique des Sources*. Tome I: *Sources Hagiographiques* [1921]; Tome II: *Les Oeuvres de Sainte Catherine de Sienne* [1930] Paris.

²³ cf. F. Wever, SJ, "Controversie di S. Caterina de Siena", in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 101, 1950, I, pp. 309-317; cf. also Maxime Gorce, "Sainte Catherine de Sienne", in: *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique*, Paris: Beauchesne 1953, Tom II, col. 327-348.

²⁴ cf. A. Huerga, OP, "Santa Catalina da Siena, Doctora de la Iglesia", in: *Teologia Espiritual* 14, 1970, pp. 381, ff.

²⁵ cf. D. Mondron, SJ, "Santa Caterina da Siena. Dottore della Chiesa Universale", in: *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 1970 IV p. 24.

II.] *The Carmelite Tradition: St. John of the Cross [1542-1591]*

1. According to John of the Cross, the most complete perfection possible in this life is found only in the transforming union, or spiritual marriage²⁶. This is an intimate union with God, coming only after a long arduous winter [as Tauler described it], or an intense “dark night” [John of the Cross]. The scrolls of the *Megilloth* sing of the spring-time festival of nuptials:

... For see the winter is past, the rains are over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth. The season of glad songs has come, the cooing of the turtle dove is heard n our land... [cf. Sgs 2:11, ff.].

This is a state of the full development of charity - which is “abandoned” to every work and whatever sufferings may come. This is all accepted for the interests of God and His Kingdom. St. Peter even speaks of joy in this situation:

... If you can have some share in the suffering of Christ, be glad, because you will enjoy a much greater gladness when His glory is revealed... [cf. 1 P 4:13].

2. In this state of mind and heart, there is no longer fear of death, but a willingness to accept it under whatever form it will come. The individual attributes nothing to him/herself, but all to God - and the person s “transformed” into God.

3. In this union, the Lord communicates Himself so that one is “transformed” into God through a kind of participated “divinization.” This is the state of *perfect union between the individual and God* - as intimately united as the window and the light; coal and fire; as the light of the stars and moon, and the sun. Despite the extraordinary depths of this union, it is never as “essential” or as complete as the eternal union with God.²⁷

a. In the classical poem of St. John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle*²⁸, the perfection of love is described as a kind of “spiritual espousals.” Before the formal “marriage” takes place, there is a time of “engagement”.²⁹

²⁶ cf. P. Laureano Zabalza de la Inmaculada, OCD, *El Esposorio Espiritual segundo San Juan de la Cruz*, Pars Dissertationis, Teresianum Roma, Burgos 1964.

²⁷ cf. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, OP, *The Three Stages of the Interior Life*, tr. from the French, St. Louis: Herder Book CO., 1947, pp. 352, ff.].

²⁸cf. *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, tr. by K. Kavanaugh, OCD and D. Rodriguez, OCD, Washington DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies [ICS] 1973.

²⁹ Biblically this is explained by Hoseah 2:14-16 - cf. the extensive note in the Jerusalem Bible at this point.

b. St. John of the Cross comments on the “marriage” theme in his poem [cf. stanzas 14, 24, 27, 28, 29] - in this “spiritual marriage” there is also the recurring theme of *piercings*, *wounds* and *death* [cf. stanzas 20-21]. The following are some of the principal stanzas as the Saint wrote them:

... After *wounding* me, I went out calling you [1] ... Tell Him that I sicken, suffer and die [2]... All *wound* me more, and leave me dying [7] ... Why, since you *wounded* this heart, don't you heal it? [9]... For the sickness of love is not cured except by Your very presence and image [11] ... The *wounded* stag is in sight on the hill [13] ... He alone also bears in solitude the *wound of love* [35]. And then we will go on to the high caverns of the rock which are so well concealed. There we shall enter and taste the fresh juice of the pomegranates [37]...

4. By means of a complete sharing, the two parties participate a certain consummation of the union of love - the individual is “divinized” in so far as all that is temporary is concerned - one “becomes” God by participation. The individual enters this state in that it has not been bogged down by anything that is merely temporal, material or emotional. While sharing in these as well, they are seen as a means to reach God and to lead others to Him.

This union with the Lord, forming one sole spirit with Him, is “spiritual marriage” in the sense of the mystics. Others have developed this idea of God, or Christ, as the Spouse of the consecrated person [de Liguori]. More recently, Dom Marion used this same theme.³⁰

5. In the theology of John of the Cross there is described the very harsh trials of the “dark night” of the senses and spirit. To purify and reform the human person, God leaves the mind in darkness and the will in total aridity, the memory almost without consoling recollections, and the affections seem immersed in affliction. God Himself works out this profound purification with the light of contemplation - this “light” is vivid in itself, but to one in this state, it seems dark and painful, because of the limitations of the recipient.

a. In the *Dark Night of St. John of the Cross*, these [and so many others] expressions of the *wounded spouse* are found with some frequency:

³⁰ *The Complete Ascetical Works of St. Alphonsus de Liguori*. Vols. X, XI. *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ*. Brooklyn, Redemptorist Fathers, edited by Rev. Eugene Grimm, 1926; cf. Dom Columba Marmion, OSB, *Sponsa Verbi - the Virgin Consecrated to Christ - Spiritual Conferences*. London: Sands and Co. 1925.

... The Spouse of the Canticle consequently says of His *bride* that she *wounded* His heart by merely the look of her eye [cf. Ct 4:9].³¹

The love [of God] finds that the soul is equipped to receive the *wound* and *union* in the measure that all its appetites are brought into subjection, alienated, incapacitated and unable to be satisfied by any heavenly or earthy thing.³²

When the soul is *wounded*, touched and impassioned, all its strength and its appetites are recollected in this burning of *love*. How will we be able to understand the movements and impulses of all this strength and these appetites?³³

'My soul thirsts for you...' [cf. Ps 62:2]. As a result the soul proclaims in this verse: fired 'with love's urgent longings', and not 'with a urgent longing of love.' In all its thoughts and in all its business and in all events, its loves in many ways and desires and also suffers in its desires in many ways, and at all times and in many places. It finds rest in nothing, for it feels this anxiety in the *burning wound*...³⁴

b. This same thought permeates so much of *The Spiritual Canticle*:

... After *wounding* me... In further explanation of this verse, it should be known that besides the many other different kinds of visits God grants the soul in which He *wounds* and raises it up in love, He usually bestows some secret touches of love, which like *fiery arrows pierce and wound it*, leaving it wholly cauterized by the fire of love. And these *wounds* mentioned here, are properly called *wounds of love*. They so inflame the will in its affection that it burns up in this flame and fire of love. So intense is this burning that the soul is seemingly consumed in that flame and the fire makes it go out of itself, wholly renews it, and changes the manner of being, as in the case of the phoenix which burns itself in the fire and rises anew from the ashes...³⁵

³¹ II, c. 21, n. 8 - ICS translation, o.c., p. 380.

³² I.c., II, c. 11, n. 2 - p. 353.

³³ ib., n. 5 - p. 353.

³⁴ ib., n. 6 - p. 354.

³⁵ *Canticle* I, 17 - p. 422.

I went out calling for You, and You were gone... *No medicine can be gotten for these wounds of love except from the One who causes them.* Thus, the *wounded* soul, strengthened from the fire caused by the wound, went out after her Beloved who *wounded* her, calling for Him, that He might heal her...³⁶

c. In Stanza 7, the saint distinguishes the kinds of "wounds":

n. 2. We can deduce that in this matter of love, there exist three ways of suffering for the Beloved corresponding to the three kinds of knowledge for Him:

The first is called *wound* [*herida* in Spanish, *ferita* in Italian]. It is the mildest and heals the most quickly, as does a *wound*. This *wound* arises from the knowledge the soul receives from creatures, the lowest of God's works. The Bride of the Canticle refers to this *wound*, which we also call sickness, saying, 'I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my Beloved that you tell Him that I am sick with love.' [cf. Ct 5:8]. By the 'daughters of Jerusalem' she refers to creatures.

n. 3 The second is called a *sore wound* [*llaga* in Spanish, *piaga* in Italian] and cuts more deeply into the soul than the *simple wound*. As a result it is longer-lasting because it is like a *wound* that has now become sore, from which she feels she is indeed sorely wounded by love. This sore wound is produced in the soul by knowledge of the Incarnation of the Word and of the mysteries of faith. Since there are more remarkable works of God, embodying in themselves a greater love than that shown forth in creatures, *they produce in the soul a more intense love.* Thus, if the first is like a *wound*, the second is like a *sore wound*, which lasts longer. Speaking of this to the soul in the Canticle of Canticles, the Bridegroom says: 'You have *wounded* my heart, my sister, with one of your eyes and with one hair of your neck.' [cf. Ct 4:9]. The eye refers to faith in the Incarnation of the Bridegroom and the hair signifies love for this very Incarnation.³⁷

n. 4 The third kind of suffering of love is like dying. It is equivalent to have a *festered wound*, since the soul is now wholly festered. She *lives by dying* until love, in killing her, makes her live the life of love, *transforming her in love.* This death of love is caused in the soul by means of a touch of supreme knowledge of the divinity...³⁸

³⁶ *ib.*, n. 20 - p. 423.

³⁷ *ib.*, I, Stanza 7, n. 2 - pp. 438, ff.

³⁸ *ib.*, nn. 3-4, pp. 438, ff.

d. Almost all of Stanza 9 concentrates on the wounds, the “sore wounds” [i.e., *llagas*] of the Spouse:

... Why, since you wounded this heart, don't you heal it?

And why, since you stole it from me,

Do you leave it so,

And fail to carry off what you have stolen?

e. Again, Stanza 13, n. 9, has this theme:

... The *wounded stag* :

The Bridegroom in this verse compares Himself to a stag.

It is characteristic of the stag to climb high places and when wounded to race in search of refreshment and cool waters. If he hears the cry of his mate and senses she is wounded, he immediately runs to her to comfort and coddle her. The Bridegroom now acts similarly. Beholding that the bride is *wounded with love* for Him, He also, because of her moan, is *wounded with love* for her. Among lovers, the *wound* of one is the *wound* for both, and the two have but one feeling. Thus, in other words, He says:

Return to Me, My *bride*, because if you go about like the stag *wounded with love* for Me, I, too, like the stag, will come to you *wounded by your wound*....³⁹

Among the “effects” of love, St. Thomas lists the following: union, inherence, ecstasy, *vulneratio*.⁴⁰

III. **The Jesuit Tradition: St. Ignatius of Loyola [1493/5-1556].**

St. Ignatius' idea was an unlimited service of the Church, considered to be the Spouse of Christ - an apostolic mission under the direction of the Roman Pontiff.

1. The original **Formula** of the Company of Jesus was entitled: *Regimni Militantis Ecclesiae*, of Pope Paul III, dated September 27, 1540. This document reads as follows:

³⁹ ib., pp. 460, ff.

⁴⁰ cf. I-II, q. 28, as cited by A. Huerga, OP, “L'amore nei mistici”, in: *Sacra Dottrina*, anno XXIII - quaderno 86, gennaio-aprile 1978, p. 121.

... Whoever desires to serve as a soldier of God beneath the banner of the cross in our society, which we desire to be designated by the name of Jesus, and *to serve the Lord alone and the Roman Pontiff, His Vicar,* here on earth...⁴¹

2. After Ignatius and his companions had experienced the life for ten years, Pope Julius III, on July 21, 1550, acting upon their request, published a slight modification of the Bull of Paul III. This second document, entitled *Exposcit Debitum*, contains the following:

... Whoever desires to serve as a soldier of God beneath the banner of the cross in our Society, which we desire to be designated by the name of Jesus, and *to serve the Lord alone and the Church, HIS SPOUSE, under the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth...*⁴²

3. The slight addition in these early lines is that the Church is to be considered the Spouse of Christ. The document then continues:

... should after the solemn vow of perpetual chastity, poverty and obedience keep what follows in mind. He is a member of a Society, *chiefly [potissimum]* founded for this purpose:

to strive *especially [praecipue]* for the defense and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine, by means of:

public preaching,

lectures,

and any other ministration whatsoever of the word of God,

and further:

by means of the Spiritual exercises,

the education of children and unlettered persons in Christianity,

and the spiritual consolation of Christ's faithful through hearing confessions and administering the other sacraments.

⁴¹ St. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, translated with an Introduction and a Commentary by George E. Ganss, SJ, of St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources 1970, pp. 44, ff.

⁴² *Formula* I, o.c., pp. 66, ff.

Moreover this Society should show itself no less useful

in reconciling the estranged,

in holily assisting and serving those who are found in prisons or hospitals,

and indeed in performing any other works of charity, according to what seems expedient for the glory of God and the common good.

Furthermore, all these works should be carried out *free of charge*...⁴³

4. It has been pointed out that the two Latin words: *potissimum* and *praecipue* are really a repetition. However, St. Ignatius has conserved them in three separate texts, as though to underline the importance of the first list of ministries. The enumeration is by no means complete - but, it does contain the essential points.⁴⁴

5. Therefore, the **Formula** of the Company as this was contained in the Bull of Paul III was modified to express better the meaning of the universal service to the Church - as this is the scope, or “end” [*el fin*] of the Company. The second **Formula** of Julius III added the word “Spouse” after “Church”, to reflect better the universality of the service to the Church. The word “Spouse” applied to the Church recalls still one more time the Christocentric experience, which is the common font for all love, for all service to the Church, to the Pope, to the Bishops, and to all humanity.⁴⁵

... *To serve the Church, the Spouse of the Lord, under the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth...* in this service, the Company of Jesus seeks from the Roman Pontiff the *decisive discernment* for its field of apostolate...⁴⁶

6. One clear characteristic note of the Spiritual Diary of Ignatius, as of all the documents of his regarding the interior life, is the total absence of the “nuptial aspect” of mystical union. In the *Spiritual Exercises* [cf. nn. 353; 365], Ignatius presents the Church as *the Spouse of Christ* - but Ignatius in no place represents the individual soul as the Spouse of God, or of Christ. The union of Ignatius with the Most Holy Trinity and with Jesus is described in various ways, and as something that was intensely intimate: but, in no text does Ignatius ever speak of “spiritual marriage”.⁴⁷

⁴³ l.c.

⁴⁴ cf. G. Botreau, “Il fine della Compagnia di Gesù”. in: *La Formula dell’Istituto*, Recherches 12, Roma: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis 1977, p. 34.

⁴⁵ cf. I. Salvat, SJ, *Servir en misión - Aportación al estudio del carisma de Ignacio de Loyola y de la Compañía de Jesús*, Pars Dissertationis, Facultas Juris Canonici, Rome: Gregoriana 1971, p. 106.

⁴⁶ o.c., p. 181.

⁴⁷ cf. J. DeGuibert, SJ, *The Jesuits - Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice*. Chicago: Loyola Press, p. 55.

a. The texts from the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius regarding the Church as “the Spouse of Christ” are these:

... Putting aside all private judgment, we should keep our minds prepared and ready to obey, promptly and in all things, *the true spouse of Christ, our Lord, our Holy Mother, the hierarchical Church* [n. 353].

For I believe that between the *Bridegroom, Christ our Lord, and the Bride, His Church*, there is but one spirit which governs and directs us for the salvation of our souls, for the same Spirit and Lord, Who gave us the Ten Commandments, guides and governs our Holy Mother Church... [n. 35].

These are the rules for interpreting his fundamental ideal: *sentire cum Ecclesia*.⁴⁸

b. The Spouse of Christ and the Vicar of Christ, sign of contradiction, seemed to Ignatius and to his companions, to be the object in which there was *incarnate their adherence to Christ*.⁴⁹

To express the idea of service to the universal Church, considered as the *Spouse of Christ* is one of the concrete means behind the special vow of obedience to the Roman Pontiff, in relation to the “Apostolic Missions”.⁵⁰

7. There is an intimate connection between the various motives for the vow to the Pope, particularly the first and the third: the obedience and devotion to the Holy See, and the more certain direction of the Holy Spirit have a common denominator, already expressed in those rules which can be entitled *to feel with the Church*. St. Ignatius has proposed that between Christ our Lord, as *Spouse* - and the *Church, His Spouse*, there is one and the same Spirit which governs us and directs us toward the salvation of our souls. The love for Christ, under Whom the Company of Jesus places all its life, is encountered in its incarnation in the love for the Church, where the Company finds the direction of the Spirit of Christ, and this is the most ‘manifest vocation’ of the Society.⁵¹

8. The key affirmation of the “Pneumatology” of St. Ignatius is found in the rules: *sentire cum Ecclesia*. It is stated in this rule that the aspect of union of the Church with Jesus Christ is precisely through the same Spirit of Christ which governs us in the

⁴⁸ *Obras Completas de S. Ignacio de Loyola*. Madrid: BAC 1973, pp. 272, ff.

⁴⁹ cf. Salvat, o.c., p. 13.

⁵⁰ o.c., p. 64.

⁵¹ o.c., p. 68.

Church, and rules us for the salvation of our souls. Between Christ, our Lord, as Spouse - and the Church, His Spouse, there is one and the same Spirit.

This sense of “total giving” to the Church seems reflected in a few key Ignatian expressions: this might be a kind of “play on words”, or a near alliteration of the same, or similar sounds. These words seem to express a kind of “total abandonment” to the Church under various aspects: personal, geographic and apostolic:

a.] **Quicumque** [everyone]:⁵²

The ‘missions’ are among the principal ministries of the Society; and therefore, **all** ought to be sent on them, *always prepared [semper parati]* to travel to different places and to live in sections of the world where the greater service of God [**obsequium**] might be hoped, or the greater assistance of souls.

b.] **Quodcumque** [every ministry of the Word of God whatsoever]:⁵³

In selecting the ministries, the Society will follow this rule, that they will always seek the greater divine service [**obsequium**], and the more universal usefulness. A good is the more universal, the more divine it is. Therefore, all else being equal, those ministries will be preferred which bring about greater and longer lasting good.

c.] **Quocumque** [anywhere in the world]:⁵⁴

The intention of the fourth vow pertaining to the Pope was not to designate a particular place but to have the members distributed throughout the various parts of the world. For those who first united to form the Society were from different provinces and realms and did not know into which region they were to go, whether among the faithful, or unbelievers; and therefore, to avoid erring in the path of the Lord, they made that promise or vow in order that His Holiness might distribute them for the greater glory of God. They did this in conformity with their intention to travel throughout the world, and when they could not find the desired spiritual fruit in one region, to pass on to another and another, ever intent on seeking the greater glory of God our Lord and the greater aid of souls.

Ignatius’ was a Mysticism of Service, a spiritual abandonment to the Church, the Spouse of Christ.

⁵² *Epitome . Constitutiones S.J.; cf. Formula: Quicumque in Societate nostra...*, n. 1. *Epitome* 612.

⁵³ *Formula S.J.*, n. 1; *Epitome* # 602.

⁵⁴ *Constitutions SJ*, # 605 B.

9. In recent years, the *Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis*, situated in the Jesuit General Curia in Rome, offered a five week course from about mid-January to mid-February. At the conclusion of the course in 1978, Fr. Pedro Arrupe presented a conference, entitled: *To serve the Lord alone, and the Church, His Spouse, under the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth*, words taken from the **Formula** of the Jesuit Constitutions. Fr. Arrupe stated:

... Service is the key idea of the charism of St. Ignatius. It is an idea whose moving power achieved in the life and spirituality of Ignatius - even in his mystical phase - a total realization: *unconditioned and limitless service*, Service that is large-hearted and humble. It could be said that even the Trinitarian "lights", which enriched his mystical life, rather than leading to a passive and contemplative quieting, spurred him to a *greater service* of this God he contemplated with such great love and reverence.

The service of Christ to which the Society is dedicated and with which the service of His Vicar is identified is total and unlimited ... What is surprising is the fact that at a time when it was not yet a common opinion that religious are bound to obey the Pope, as a supreme superior, by reason of the ordinary vow of obedience, St. Ignatius, speaking of this vow in Part VI of the Constitutions, exhorts us all to apply 'all energies with very special care to the virtue of obedience shown first to the Supreme Pontiff, and then to the superiors of the society [cf. *Const.* n. 547].

Thus, it is clear that in the thought of St. Ignatius this entire doctrine on obedience applies to obedience to the Pope and to that in the first place *in a special and outstanding manner*. Consistent with this attitude of loving obedience is the concern of Ignatius to reject everything that could seem as opposition, or criticism directed to the Vicar of Christ.

To serve the Vicar of Christ was replaced in the second **Formula** of the Society [that of Julius III] by a phrase that is the equivalent, but more clear:

... *to serve under the Vicar of Christ [sub **fideli obedientia Romani Pontificis**]*.

Explicit mention is made in the new formulation of the service of the Church; but, it is a service to it as *the Bride of Christ*. We remain, thus, within the framework of service to the Lord alone. For the loving union between Christ and His *Spouse* is so intimate that the Patristic tradition did not hesitate to speak of a single, mystical person, the "whole Christ" of St. Augustine. The groom is the Head of the Bride - St. Paul says - just as Christ is the Head of His Bride, the Church, that lives and works in her, making visible His action through

the supreme and universal ministry of His Vicar, the Pope, and the subordinate ministry of the bishops and priests.

The Ignatian vision of the Church is supernatural. In his mystical experience, Ignatius reached the point of glimpsing the mystery of the Church which became one of the principal teachings of Vatican II [cf. LG 1-8]. He proposes the Church to us in the first place as the Bride of Christ, vivified and guided by the Spirit of Christ; and it is on this that the fundamental attitude of a Christian is based.

It is an unconditional attachment to the Church, the Bride of Christ, and its decisions...⁵⁵

10. The union of the individual with God for the apostolate [*contemplativos en accion*] seems to flow from another aspect of Ignatian thought; his views in the Society being an *instrument* in the hands of the Holy Father. Ignatius emphasized the expression of love, as Christ's union, with the Will of His Father. The word "instrument" appears frequently in the Jesuit Constitutions.⁵⁶ Applied to the individual Jesuit it means that each one is meant to be an "instrument" at the disposition of the Church:

... for the attainment of the objective [that the Society seeks, which is to aid souls to reach their ultimate and supernatural end, the means which unite the *human instrument* with God, and so dispose it that it may be wielded more dexterously by His divine hand.⁵⁷

a. This union has two effects:

- when the "instrument" is the more united to the principal agent it may work more effectively, as a result of this union;
- and depend more completely on the divine power in the exercise of the apostolic mission.

b. This could explain the "intrepidity" and the "impetuosity" of the apostles in the Mission: these characteristics are based on the total availability of the Jesuit apostle to the will of the Lord, and to the "missions" of the Roman Pontiff. This

⁵⁵ An Italian translation of Fr. Arrupe's discourse may be found in: *Lo Spirito della Compagnia - Una sintesi*. Recherches 15, Rome: CIS 1978, pp. 111-136

⁵⁶ cf. Const. S.J., nn. 30, 638, 661, 813, 814.

⁵⁷ *ib.*, n. 813.

more effective apostolic mission, flowing from an intimate union with the principal agent was meant “for the greater glory of the One who sent them”.⁵⁸

c. In his letter to Fr. Diego Miron [December 17, 1552], named Provincial of Portugal under very difficult circumstances, Ignatius explained the dimension of obedience in his idea of “instrument.” The contact of the instrument with the principal cause is incarnate in obedience. This virtue unites the members of the Society to the whole body, to the Vicar of Christ, and to the entire Church. Ignatius explains to Fr. Miron:

... as we see by experience, that even ordinary talent, and that which is below average, are very often ‘instruments’ of great and supernatural good, by being entirely obedient - by allowing themselves *to be moved and possessed by this virtue* and by the powerful hand of the Author of all good.

On the contrary, we see those with great talent achieving far less than average results: because they are their own motivation, that is, they are inspired more by self-love; or, they do not achieve results that are truly proportionate to the omnipotent hand of God, Our Lord, Who only accepts as instruments those who are very weak and helpless.⁵⁹

d. This union with the principal cause is also an element of hope, as Ignatius explains in his letter of June 6, 1556, less than two months prior to his death:

... If one considers how powerful God is, Our Lord, Who achieves very great results even with very weak instruments of His, whenever these instruments are motivated by holy obedience, he would not be discouraged. The more lowly, who may be reflecting on their smallness, are all the more elevated by the divine power. God is accustomed to make use of the weakest instruments of His Company, through the exercise of His mercy...⁶⁰

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⁵⁸ cf. A. Ravier, SJ, *Ignace de Loyola fonde la Compagnie de Jesus*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer 1973, pp. 350, ff.; cf. Salvat, o.c., pp. 102, ff.

⁵⁹ *Obras completas de S. Ignacio*, BAC, o.c., p. 801

⁶⁰ o.c., p. 953. An example of the *tantum-quantum* rule of St. Ignatius.

CONCLUSION

A rich variety of traditions of religious life has considered service of Jesus Christ, in and through His Church, as a self-giving to the "Spouse."

St. Francis' spirit seems well expressed in his choice of Divine Poverty as the theme for the "Mystical Nuptials. St. Catherine sees rather the union with Christ in accord with the biblical union of God and His People, Christ with the individual and the Church. Ignatius' idea seems more along the line of the union in the Trinity between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Christ was such an admirable witness and servant, because of His union with the Father and the Spirit.

In a study commemorating St. Catherine of Siena as a Doctor of the Church, a letter of hers is quoted in which the Saint speaks of the "treasure of time" that has been committed to us.⁶¹ There is a sense of urgency to St. Catherine's appeal even now.

... St. Catherine has been described as one who 'exalted the redeeming power of the adorable Blood of the Son of God she on the wood of the Cross in expanding love, for the salvation of all generations of mankind' ... Catherine was the mystic of the mystical Body of Christ, that is, of the Church, the Spouse of the Divine Redeemer.⁶²

While she had a message for all in the Church, the late Holy Father's comment on her message for the consecrated life bears repeating:

... Catherine could not forget that she was the daughter of a Religious Order, one of the most glorious and active in the Church. She therefore had singular esteem for what she called 'the holy religions.' She considered them as a bond of union between the mystical body, constituted by representatives of Christ [according to a description of her own] and the universal body of the Christian religion, that is, of the ordinary faithful...⁶³

While St. Catherine is most remembered for her charism of faith - a charism of exhortation, wisdom, knowledge, and deep love for God, for the Church and for all eternity, hers is also a message of hope. She wrote:

⁶¹ D. Mondron, SJ, 'S. Catherina da Siena, Dottore della Chiesa universale', in: *La Civiltà Cattolica* 121, IV 1970, p. 21. The letter quoted is n. 314 a, addressed to a Monna Constanza.

⁶² *Homily* of Paul VI, I.c., pp. 340, ff.

⁶³ I.c., p. 341.

... You know that one cannot have hope in two contrary directions, this true and perfect hope is more or less perfect in accord with the perfection of love one has for God.⁶⁴

St. Catherine of Siena offers this hope to each of us in the service rendered to the Spouse of Christ:

... In whatever way and through whatever matter we tired ourselves out for the Church, it is all of such great merit and is so pleasing to our Lord, that our mind can neither see nor imagine it. All services that we render to Him are pleasing, but especially whatever we do in service of the Church in whatever manner and state that we serve her, it is pleasing to Him. It is true that the more one serves her out of a simple and selfless love, then,, this is all the more pleasing to God nonetheless, everyone who serves the Church is pleasing to Him, and one's merit is measured by God according to the measure of love. I write to you so that you might be totally dedicated to the sweet Spouse of Christ, wearing yourself out for her, for the honor of God...⁶⁵

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⁶⁴ *Dialogue*, ed. Cavallini, pp. 375, ff.

⁶⁵ *Il messaggio di Santa Caterina da Siena, dottore della Chiesa. Tutto il pensiero della vergine senese esposto con le sue parole ridotte a forma moderna.* a cura di un missionario vicenziano, Roma: Edizioni Vicenziane 1970, pp. 601, f.

[NB: The Biblical citations are from *The Jerusalem Bible*, Darton, Longman & Todd, Ltd., and Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1966.]