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**ST. ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY**

The Most Reverend John O. Barres, STD, JCL is the fifth Bishop of the Diocese of Rockville Centre (Long Island, NY). Previously, he served as the Bishop of the Diocese of Allentown (PA) from 2009 to 2016. He is a graduate of Phillips Academy (Andover), Princeton University and the New York University Graduate School of Business, and holds advanced theological degrees from the Catholic University of America and the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome. Bishop Barres is a Fellow of the Catholic University of America where he serves on the Board of Trustees and is the Chairman of the Academic Affairs Committee. His Episcopal motto “Holiness and Mission” is taken from Pope St. John Paul II’s encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* which emphasizes the universal call to holiness and mission in the Catholic Church. It also expresses Bishop Barres’ commitment to Pope Francis’ emphasis on global Catholic missiology and evangelization and the call for a “missionary transformation” of Catholic parishes, universities and every dimension of Catholic life and witness to the world. Bishop Barres was mentored in the Carmelite tradition by Fr. Steven Payne, OCD, Fr. Daniel Chowning, OCD, and Fr. Jude Peters, OCD. His doctoral dissertation focused on the 17th Century French School of Spirituality.

**St. Elizabeth of the Trinity: The Pauline Audacity of  
her *Lectio Divina* and her Trinitarian Praise of Glory  
Catholic Mysticism**

**Carmelite Symposium at The Catholic University of  
America**

**Bishop John O. Barres, STD, JCL**

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**1) Introduction: Bishop Barres' History with St. Elizabeth of  
the Trinity**

Some of us may remember the 1984 film *Amadeus* which was inspired by an 1830 play by Alexander Pushkin called *Mozart and Salieri*.

In short, the fictional plot goes like this. Antonio Salieri is a rising, accomplished and celebrated composer in Vienna at the Court of the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II.

Salieri suddenly encounters the meteoric musical composing genius of the young Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Salieri is consumed with jealousy since he recognizes that his own work is completely eclipsed by the almost effortless stream of masterpieces produced by this young musical genius.

As a result, Salieri sets out to sabotage and destroy the genius of Mozart.

We too come to this Carmelite Symposium not as jealously destructive Salieris but as magnanimous and open Salieris.

We realize that our own prayer lives, our own writing perhaps are completely eclipsed by the mystical Carmelite geniuses we study, interpret and try to learn from at this Symposium.

They humble us but they also intercede for us and for the contemplative mission of the Church that we love. They call out the best of our ecclesial charisms, gifts and missions.

They encourage the progress of our contemplative mental prayer and its integration, at this time of Eucharistic Revival, with our contemplative liturgical prayer and particular 21<sup>st</sup> Century ecclesial missions.

So in that spirit, I'll begin my presentation.

In academic year 1988-1989 here at the Catholic University of America, I was preparing for Ordination to the Diaconate and Priesthood. I was also finishing an STL in Systematic Theology and writing my STL dissertation with Fr. James Wiseman, OSB and Fr. Carl Peter on Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity which would be entitled *Elizabeth of the Trinity: Spiritual Transformation in the Last Retreat*.

This study was both a theological and spiritual thematic analysis of the treatise and a close reading of every meditation point in the treatise from the interdependent vantage points of the literary critic and the spiritual theologian.

A decade later I did a doctoral dissertation at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome on the 17<sup>th</sup> Century French School of Spirituality and the founder of the Sulpicians, the great instrument of Church reform and priesthood reform, Jean-Jacques Olier (1608-1657).

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity could be considered a rich heir of this 17<sup>th</sup> Century French School of Spirituality. In his book *The French School of Spirituality: An Introduction and Reader*, Fr. Raymond Deville writes: “Paul Cochois has pointed out that ‘it is not a coincidence that Elizabeth of the Trinity lived in a monastery [Dijon] where Berulle had always been honored.’”<sup>1</sup>

Fr. Deville once said to me in a personal conversation: “To understand St. Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, you need to understand Elizabeth of the Trinity.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Deville, *The French School of Spirituality: An Introduction and Reader*, (Pittsburgh, PA: The Duquesne University Press, 1987), 222.

<sup>2</sup> Fr. Raymond Deville, PSS (Superior General of the Society of Saint Sulpice at time of the interview, now RIP), Interview, Spring 1988. Fr. Raoul Plus, SJ (1882-1958), a Jesuit spiritual writer who focused on the indwelling, said: “St. Paul for the theory, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity for the practice: with them you have the whole substance of the

When my friend and Carmelite studies mentor, Fr. Steven Payne, OCD, invited me to speak at this Symposium, I immediately said yes and that immediate yes has opened the door to many graces and an even deeper intercession of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity in the life and ecclesial mission of an American Bishop.

It gave me the opportunity to have some powerful *Elizabeth of the Trinity Revisited* moments. I reviewed carefully my STL dissertation and discovered thirty-five years later that it remains a fine and relevant work that I could build on as I caught up with the new critical editions, Elizabeth's October 16, 2016 canonization, and some of the new biographies, research and articles that have appeared in the period between 1989 and 2024.

From 1989 to 2024, scholars have thoroughly mined St. Elizabeth of the Trinity's many letters to great advantage. They have further explored the biblical, theological and literary influences on Elizabeth's texts as well as her place among and her relationship to the great mystical feminine geniuses.<sup>3</sup> Many analyses have further refined her view of spiritual transformation and her biblical-doctrinal-ecclesial Carmelite vocation and mission as a Trinitarian Praise of Glory.

One other development I discovered is that the Swedish Carmelite Spiritual theologian, Lars Anders Arborelius, OCD, whose articles I relied on in 1989, is now Cardinal Arborelius, the Bishop of Stockholm, and a second tier "papabile" for the next conclave!

My synthetic review of the scholarship from 1989 to 2024 resulted in a focus on two themes in this presentation as reflected in the title: **St. Elizabeth of the Trinity: The Pauline Audacity of her *Lectio Divina* and her Trinitarian Praise of Glory Catholic Mysticism.**

## **2)St. Elizabeth of the Trinity and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Call to a *Contemplative Revolution***

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interior life" (S2, p. 279). As quoted in: Joanne Mosley, *Elizabeth of the Trinity: The Unfolding of Her Message, Volume 2 In the Infirmary & After her Death*, (Oxford: Teresian Press, 2012), 334.

<sup>3</sup> See especially : Virginia Azcuy's "La Transformation Dans Le Christ Crucifié chez Elisabeth : Mystique Sponsale et Ascèse du Détachement, » in *Elisabeth de la Trinite: L'Aventure Mystique* (Sous la direction de J. Clapier, OCD), (Toulouse: Editions du Carmel, 2006), 381-412.

Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity lived from 1880 to 1906. In 1901 at the age of twenty-one, she entered the Carmelite monastery in Dijon, France. After months of physical suffering, she died at the age of twenty-six on November 9, 1906.<sup>4</sup>

At the end of her life, while experiencing intense pain and fatigue, Elizabeth wrote seventy-six letters in seven months.<sup>5</sup> From August to October, 1906, this Carmelite nun wrote four spiritual treatises: *Heaven in Faith*, *The Greatness of Our Vocation*, *Last Retreat* and *Let Yourself Be Loved*.<sup>6</sup> Her writings also include a diary, a collection of letters from the Dijon Carmel, letters of her youth, personal notes and poetry.

Elizabeth read the Scriptures and the mystics daily. She loved the writings of St. Paul and St. John. She first read St. John of the Cross in 1903. During her final illness and the writing of her four spiritual treatises, she read an anthology of Blessed Jan van Ruusbroec's works.<sup>7</sup>

A complete three-volume critical edition of her works in the original French, edited by Conrad De Meester, O.C.D., appeared in 1979. The English translation of the third volume should be finished soon.

Like Therese of Lisieux, Elizabeth believed deeply that she had a specific ecclesial mission in the Church that would continue to unfold after her death. On October 28, 1906, twelve days before her death, Elizabeth wrote a brief but important letter to a Sister Marie-Odile.

This letter contained both her view of spiritual transformation and a statement of her ecclesial mission as *Laudem Gloriam*, "Praise of Glory," a phrase from Paul's letter to the Ephesians (1:4-6):

I believe my mission in heaven will be to draw souls to interior recollection, by helping them to go out of themselves in order to adhere to God by a movement of pure simplicity and love, remaining in that great interior silence that permits God to imprint himself upon them.... Let us live in love in order to die of love and to glorify the God of all love.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> P. Denis Marion, "Elisabeth de la Trinité et Saint Paul," *Carmel* (1981): 61.

<sup>5</sup> P. Denis Marion, "Elisabeth de la Trinité et Saint Paul," *Carmel* (1981): 61.

<sup>6</sup> P. Denis Marion, "Elisabeth de la Trinité et Saint Paul," *Carmel* (1981): 61.

<sup>7</sup> Conrad De Meester, *Elizabeth of the Trinity: I Have Found God, Complete Works, Vol. 1: General Introduction, Major Spiritual Writings* (Washington: ICS Publications, 1980), 69.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Joseph de Sainte-Marie, "A l'image du Fils: Soeur Elisabeth de la Trinité," *Ephemerides Carmeliticæ* 19 (1968): 215, 221-222 (my translation).

This statement is a lens to interpret Elizabeth's teaching mission. She expresses her belief that in heaven she will intercede for souls seeking a deeper union with God.

What the global mission of the Catholic Church and the world needs right now and always is a contemplative revolution, a contemplative revolution of people – so deeply grounded in the liberating truths of the Sacred Scriptures and the Creed, the Sacraments, Catholic Moral Theology and Spiritual Theology – that they open themselves radically to the indwelling of the Trinity and the Trinitarian ecclesial mission that the Spirit drives them on.

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, like all Catholic saints and mystics, volunteers to intercede for us. Her invaluable treatises, texts and letters are a concrete sign of her living intercession for all of us who seek it.

She is one of the many contemplative feminine geniuses that animate the mission of the Catholic Church long after the day of their deaths.

She also reveals a process of transformation:

The soul must first forget itself to be free of the web of self-absorption. Then the soul can adhere to God in a movement of pure simplicity and love. Silence is essential for God to imprint himself upon us, as is a willingness to accept the particular crucifixions that God sends to us. Only in adoring silence and submission to the hidden plan of Divine Providence can we be conformed to Christ crucified. Praising and giving God glory is the goal of this life and the next.<sup>9</sup>

Describing the focus and originality of Elizabeth's writing, Hans Urs von Balthasar concludes:

The result is a work of very high rank, both spiritually and theologically, an organic and vital growth from a single germinating idea. It pulsates with a vigor and confidence which is not to be found in any of her predecessors, in spite of their eminence as theologians. Admittedly it is narrow in range, but this makes for a magnificent simplicity and concentration of force.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Joseph de Sainte-Marie, "A l'image du Fils: Soeur Elisabeth de la Trinité," *Ephemerides Carmeliticæ* 19 (1968): 215, 221-222 (my translation). This article gives a very helpful analysis of Elizabeth's statement of her mission and her view of spiritual transformation.

<sup>10</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Elizabeth of Dijon: An Interpretation of Her Spiritual Mission* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), 15.

The mystery of the world-wide influence of an obscure cloistered Carmelite nun from Dijon, France points to a fundamental reality in the spiritual life. People who pray—regardless of their obscurity or limitations—spiritually energize the world around them.

Many of you have read Joanne Mosley's fine two-volume biography, *Elizabeth of the Trinity: The Unfolding of Her Message*.

In Volume 2, Mosley discusses St. Elizabeth's influence on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

What particularly struck me was St. Elizabeth's impact in the trenches of World War I. As we know, St. Elizabeth dies in 1906 and World War I occurs between 1914 and 1918.

Trench warfare was extremely brutal and horrendous. Whether described by the poetry of Wilfrid Owen or a film such as *1917*, many fine young men lost their lives to no real purpose.

Mosley describes the impact St. Elizabeth's *Souvenirs* had on World War I soldiers: "Letter after letter arrived at the Dijon Carmel revealing this amazing fact: the *Souvenirs* was being read in the trenches! One chaplain at the front expressed it powerfully: 'Faith in the divine Indwelling in our souls, which Sister Elizabeth has revealed to [the soldiers], is a powerful comfort to them when, under the hail of bullets and gunshot, they see themselves deprived even of the assistance of their chaplain'(S2, p. 289)."<sup>11</sup> So we see that her writings were nourishing many very soon after her death.

Little did Elizabeth of the Trinity know, when she wrote the treatises and letters, that her spiritual pedagogy would spread far beyond her small circle of correspondents. Yet her spiritual outreach would one day cause a twentieth century pope, Pope St. John Paul II, who beatified her in 1984, to point to Elizabeth as one of the greatest influences in his life.<sup>12</sup>

The impact of this young French nun upon the church, the Carmelite Order, and a whole host of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century spiritual theologians is rooted in her own silent

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<sup>11</sup> Joanne Mosley, *Elizabeth of the Trinity: The Unfolding of Her Message, Volume 2 In the Infirmary & After her Death*, (Oxford: Teresian Press, 2012), 335-336.

<sup>12</sup> P. Denis Marion, "Elisabeth de la Trinité et Saint Paul," *Carmel* (1981): 2.

experience of the indwelling Trinity and her vocation as a Pauline Ephesians Praise of Glory. Her reflection on that experience is forcefully preserved in her treatises and letters.

### **3)The Pauline Audacity of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity’s *Lectio Divina***

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity is an early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Contemplative Master of *Lectio Divina* and has much to teach us in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Hans Urs Von Balthasar states: “Few have ever exposed themselves so unreservedly to the *word* in its entire breadth and depth in order to let sanctification take place in them as did Elizabeth of the Trinity.”<sup>13</sup>

In his Apostolic Exhortation *The Word of the Lord* (2010), Pope Benedict XVI gives us an excellent process of praying individual biblical passages, a process of *lectio divina* or sacred reading of the text that includes reading, meditating, praying, contemplating and living the biblical text (86-87).

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity’s *lectio divina* had the contemplative rigor, attention to detail and zeal described by Pope Benedict.

In St. Paul’s Second Letter to Timothy 2: 8-10, he writes: “The Word of God is not bound” or another translation could be “The Word of God cannot be chained.”

Underneath the Church of Santa Maria in Via Lata in Rome, traditionally understood to be the site of St. Paul’s imprisonment in Rome, there is an ancient free standing excavated granite column that I visited and prayed at this past May 17, 2024.

Onto that ancient column is scratched the Latin phrase for “The Word of God is not bound.” The column also has rust marks indicating that a chain – possibly the one discovered in the adjacent well – was wrapped around it.

In her recent Catholic University of America doctoral dissertation on biblical inspiration, Sr. Maria Veritas Marks, OP, writes: “Paul, in chains, a ‘prisoner for the Lord,’ proclaimed triumphantly that the Word is not bound. From his small cell, from the chained body of a man treated, like Jesus, as a common criminal, the

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<sup>13</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Therese of Lisieux and Elizabeth of the Trinity*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 412.



*evangelium* rippled out across the world and down the centuries, unbound. That word is ‘living and effective,’ and Paul knew himself to be that Word’s servant. By juxtaposing his own unfreedom and the Word’s freedom, Paul simultaneously presumes an intimate connection between himself and the Word and highlights a power possessed by the Word that transcends all human limitations, especially his own at that moment.”<sup>14</sup>

How powerful it was this past May 17th to place my hands on that granite column in my ecclesial mission as the Successor of the Apostles on Long Island and to ask St. Paul for his intercession that I could be as bold and as audacious in proclaiming that the Word of God cannot be chained!

In *Evangelium Gaudium*, Pope Francis states: “God’s word is unpredictable in its power...The Church has to accept this unruly freedom of the word, which accomplishes what it wills in ways that surpass our calculations and ways of thinking.” (22)

This “unruly freedom of the Word” is an adventure of discovery that St. Elizabeth of the Trinity embraced.

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity has a Pauline *audacity* in her confidence in the Word of God and in the words of St. Paul that she read, meditated, prayed, contemplated and lived so profoundly. This same word “audacity” is used to describe her bold interpretation of the musical notes on a page as an accomplished pianist within the Dijon conservatory.<sup>15</sup>

For St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, the Word of God cannot be chained!

Her *lectio divina* of St. Paul and St. John the Evangelist occurred in an enclosed and constricted Carmelite monastery at specific moments in time in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century but that very *lectio divina* and her contemplatively silent reverence for Pauline and Johannine passages could not be chained to that cloistered monastery.

Nor could the Word of God and her *lectio divina* on that Word be chained to the year 1906 when she wrote most of her major treatises since St. Elizabeth is being studied

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<sup>14</sup> Sr. Maria Veritas Marks, OP’s Catholic University of America doctoral dissertation entitled, *Biblical Inspiration Revisited: Karl Rahner and Thomas Aquinas*, Washington DC, 2024, 1.

<sup>15</sup> See Pierre Barthez, “Elisabeth Catez: Une Vraie Musicienne!” in *Elisabeth de la Trinite: L’Aventure Mystique* (Sous la direction de J. Clapier, OCD), (Toulouse: Editions du Carmel, 2006), 553-579, especially 564.

and prayed all over the world more than a century later, as evidenced by this Carmelite Symposium in Washington DC, in July 2024.

For St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, the Word of God cannot be chained!

Her *lectio divina* of St. Paul and St. John the Evangelist occurs as her body is shutting down with Addison's disease<sup>16</sup> and as she is preparing to die. The Word of God cannot be chained as her body shuts down, as she suffers terrible physical pain and as she carries the mystery of being configured physically and mystically to the Cross of Jesus Christ.

For St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, the Word of God cannot be chained!

As she was dying, the French government was persecuting the Church, unjustly seizing Church properties and violating the Church's religious liberty. We are not unaware of this dynamic in our current experience in the United States and around the world. Still, despite her understanding of this persecution of the Church as she died, she forged on in her *lectio divina* and her written reflections on that *lectio divina*, confident that the Word of God cannot be chained. She urges us and beckons us to join our contemplative vocations to the Second Vatican Council's *Declaration on Religious Liberty* in solidarity with those persecuted for the Catholic faith in this country and around the world.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *The Word of the Lord*, Pope Benedict XVI asserts that the saints of every decade and century inspire us since "the most profound interpretation of Scripture comes precisely from those who let themselves be shaped by the word of God through listening, reading, and assiduous meditation." (48)

Could each one of us individually and together, united in communion and mission as a Church, take one step with the Holy Spirit during this Symposium, and with the

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<sup>16</sup> Conrad De Meester, OCD describes what she experienced physically: "Probably following tuberculosis, Elizabeth was attacked by Addison's disease, a then-incurable chronic disease of the adrenal glands, which no longer produce the substances necessary for metabolism. This results in the characteristic debility, gastrointestinal troubles, nausea, arterial hypotension, virtual inability to eat, emaciation, all of which lead to total physical exhaustion and death. Elizabeth also had other complications, such as internal ulcerations, severe headaches, and insomnia. The closer she got to death, the more violently all these symptoms manifested themselves." See Conrad De Meester, OCD, *Elizabeth of the Trinity, The Complete Works, Volume Two, Letters from Carmel*, (Washington DC: Institute for Carmelite Studies, 2014 (English translation by Anne Englund Nash)), 256.

intercession of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, deepen and refine our love for the inspired Sacred Scriptures and our contemplative *lectio divina*?

Could all of us come away from this Symposium with a deeper conviction that the Word of God cannot be chained in our own lives and ecclesial missions and in the worldwide global mission and contemplative revolution of the Catholic Church called to “make disciples of all nations”?

I would like to bring to your attention a collection of excellent studies on St. Elizabeth of the Trinity that were produced in a 2006 collection celebrating the Centenary (1906-2006) of her death.

It is entitled *Elisabeth de la Trinite: L’Aventure Mystique/Elizabeth of the Trinity: The Mystical Adventure* and published by Editions du Carmel, Toulouse, 2006.

The first essay by the Benedictine biblical scholar, Jean-Michel GRIMAUD, OSB, *Ouvrir Les Ecritures avec Elisabeth de la Trinite: Les Sources Pauliniennes et Johanniques de sa Pensee Theologique/Opening the Scriptures with Elizabeth of the Trinity: The Pauline and Johannine Sources of her Theological Thought* is an excellent synthesis of the perennial significance of her *lectio divina* of St. Paul and St. John.

Here are some highlights:

1)Grimaud asserts that St. Paul and St. John the Evangelist are the two inspired authors of the New Testament that Elizabeth uses to root, verify, deepen and confront her spiritual experience of the indwelling Trinity and her vocation as an Ephesians-inspired Praise of Glory.<sup>17</sup>

Grimaud’s point brings to mind Pope Benedict XVI’s emphasis on biblical realism in *The Word of the Lord*. He writes: “The word of God makes us change our concept of realism: the realist is the one who recognizes in the word of God the foundation of all things.” (10) The true realist is the person who is in touch with both the natural and supernatural landscapes of life. The true realist is the biblical mystic contemplative. St. Elizabeth of the Trinity is truly an audacious Pauline biblically

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<sup>17</sup> *Elisabeth de la Trinite: L’Aventure Mystique* (Sous la direction de J. Clapier, OCD), (Toulouse: Editions du Carmel, 2006), Jean-Michel GRIMAUD, OSB, “*Ouvrir Les Ecritures avec Elisabeth de la Trinite: Les Sources Pauliniennes et Johanniques de sa Pensée Theologique*,” 15. This section of my analysis relies heavily on the fine work of Grimaud.

contemplative realist. Hans Urs Von Balthasar points to Elizabeth's "exemplary balance of...worldly realism and heavenly realism."<sup>18</sup>

2)Elizabeth was a trained and disciplined pianist and musician at the Dijon conservatory. She has a trained "musical ear"<sup>19</sup> and with grace building on nature, she hears the Word of God with the discipline of the musician and the discipline of the Holy Spirit. If grace builds on nature, Elizabeth's mysticism builds on her musical training as a pianist.

Her Trinitarian Praise of Glory Catholic mysticism involves a contemplative listening to the "silent music"<sup>20</sup> of the Holy Trinity in her soul. Her musical training is evident in her treatises as her repetitions can be seen as almost musical refrains. She believes with the Letter to the Hebrews that the Word of God is living, effective and penetrating. She is a hearer of the Word but a contemplatively apostolic doer as well. She resonates with a point made by Hans Urs von Balthasar, in his classic work *Prayer*, when he states: "If we fail to let the word's sharp edge have its effect on us, we shall always be meeting a merely imaginary Redeemer."<sup>21</sup>

Part of Elizabeth's contemporary significance is for the many people who claim to be spiritual and yet reject "institutional-doctrinal religion." How often have we heard this said with a sort of pseudo-profundity and pseudo-originality while in reality the only thing deep about this statement is its shallowness and superficiality. And yet we need the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the intercession of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity to be patient and to bring people gently and apostolically out of this wasteland and vapid reasoning.

Elizabeth shows that authentic mystical experience and progress are guided by the truths of the Nicene Creed and Catholic doctrine. As we know historically, mysticism without doctrinal truth often devolves into pantheism. Whereas, Catholic mysticism with a doctrinal backbone can easily embrace the balanced and reasoned Catholic

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<sup>18</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Therese of Lisieux & Elizabeth of the Trinity*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 379. This observation was made in the context of praising the guidance of the Prioress Sr. Marie of Jesus and St. Elizabeth's Dominican Spiritual Director, Pere Vallee, OP.

<sup>19</sup> Grimaud, 19.

<sup>20</sup> See Pierre Barthez' "Elisabeth Catez: Une Vraie Musicienne!" in *Elisabeth de la Trinite: L'Aventure Mystique*, 553-579. This is a very helpful and extensive analysis of the relationship between St. Elizabeth's training as a musician and her mysticism.

<sup>21</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 224.

integral ecology expressed so powerfully in Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato 'Si* (2015). More on this theme in the next section.

3) Elizabeth's treatise *The Last Retreat* is woven and forged with Pauline texts in a dense and intense way. Elizabeth approaches the Word of God through a deep, compelling and audacious Pauline Catholic Faith.

Her life and writing are living commentaries on Psalm 119: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

4) She discovers her vocation as *Laudem Gloriam*, Praise of Glory in St. Paul. It is her audacious lectio divina "confrontation" with the Ephesians biblical text that leads her to her conviction about her Vocation as a Praise of Glory and it is the reason why Raymond Deville states: "To understand St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, you need to understand Elizabeth of the Trinity."<sup>22</sup>

In his 1985 *Teresianum* article, "The Church, the Mystery of Communion and Friendship according to Elizabeth of the Trinity," Anders Arborelius points to the interdependence of the biblical and doctrinal dimensions of her spiritual life and view of transformation. He writes: "As we study her conception of her office of 'Praise of Glory', we find once more the most fundamental lines of her spirituality: silence, absolute detachment, love of the Trinity, worship of the will of God and increasingly earnest identification with the soul of Christ crucified. We find them, however, in another life, one which changes everything: in the pure light of the glory of the Trinity."<sup>23</sup>

5) Grimaud says that Elizabeth comes from the school of St. Paul and integrates his vocabulary into her own texts. It is her "dear St. Paul" who helps her to know, to love and to live in Christ. The themes of Filial Adoption, Life in Christ, the Love of God, the Indwelling of the Trinity and her vocation as Praise of Glory all have these deep Pauline foundations.

With St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, we are called to believe with Pauline audacity and confidence and a spirit of apostolic adventure that the Holy Spirit is dazzlingly

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<sup>22</sup> Fr. Raymond Deville, PSS (Superior General of the Society of Saint Sulpice at time of the interview, now RIP), Interview, Spring 1988.

<sup>23</sup> Anders Arborelius, "The Church, the Mystery of Communion and Friendship according to Elizabeth of the Trinity," in *Teresianum* 36 (1985/1), 3-24, found on page 14.

present in the biblical texts we pray and that the Holy Spirit's tongues of flame are connecting the text to our souls transforming us in mysterious and profound ways.

We remember too that Elizabeth is a Praise of Glory liturgically in the Liturgy of the Hours and in her cosmic experience of the Catholic Mass and her understanding of the unity of the earthly and heavenly liturgy. We remember that Eucharistic Prayer IV makes direct reference to the Ephesians text and phrase "Praise of Glory."

The Word of God cannot be chained!

#### **4)The Trinitarian Praise of Glory Catholic Mysticism of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity as Lived Doctrine in her Prayer Experience**

In his article, "L'Originalite Chretienne de L'Experience Mystique chez Elisabeth de la Trinite/The Christian Originality of the Mystical Experience of Elizabeth of the Trinity," Jean Clapier, OCD writes: "La vie mystique est le dogme vecu/The Mystical life is dogma lived."<sup>24</sup>

The Trinitarian Praise of Glory Catholic Mysticism of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity is an expression of lived doctrine in her prayer experience.

Hans Urs Von Balthasar states: "The most hidden depths of Elizabeth's spiritual teaching reveal themselves in this Christological and, through Christ, trinitarian foundation for adoration, all of which circles back to her starting point in the doctrine of predestination. Just as Paul understood this teaching solely in a trinitarian manner, so too Elizabeth can only interpret the praise of glory, which she knew to be her name and her calling, in a trinitarian manner: the phrase simply makes explicit the trinitarian meaning of Christian worship, the trinitarian meaning that unifies the Christian actions of faith, love, surrender and humiliation."<sup>25</sup>

When we celebrate the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, we celebrate the central and unifying Mystery of our Catholic faith that drives us on Biblical and Eucharistic mission.

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<sup>24</sup> Jean Clapier, OCD, "L'Originalite Chrétienne de l'Experience Mystique chez Elisabeth de la Trinite," in *Elisabeth de la Trinite: L'Aventure Mystique*, 447.

<sup>25</sup> Von Balthasar, *Sisters in the Spirit*, 461.

We proclaim all these liberating doctrinal truths when we profess the Nicene Creed. Each Sunday at Mass, after the readings and the homily, we stand together and profess the Nicene Creed.

We profess the Creed together in a spirit of communion and mission as Catholics but notice how we begin: “**I believe** in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. **I believe** in one Lord Jesus Christ...”

We are proclaiming the liberating doctrinal truths of our Catholic faith together but we are also proclaiming them very personally, very individually and very existentially.

This is the great charism and ecclesial mission of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity. She was *existentially* a Nicene Creed mystic.

We remember that every time we stand to proclaim the Nicene Creed at a Catholic Mass, we are not superficially going through the motions or yawning in boredom.

We are tying our very existences and grounding our very lives on the liberating truths of the Creed we profess not just with our lips but with our hearts, minds and souls.

At the very heart of the Creed and our Catholic Faith is our belief in the Holy Trinity.

All the other truths of our Catholic faith flow from our central and foundational belief in the Holy Trinity which is at the very apex of what we Catholics call “the Hierarchy of Truths.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 234)

The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* describes the work of the Trinity in this way: “*The Face of God progressively revealed in the history of salvation, shines its fullness in the Face of Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead. God is Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; truly distinct and truly one, because God is an infinite communion of love. God’s gratuitous love for humanity is revealed, before anything else, as love springing from the Father, from whom everything draws its source; as the free communication that the Son makes of this love, giving himself anew to the Father and giving himself to mankind; as the ever new fruitfulness of divine love that the Holy Spirit pours forth into the hearts of men (cf. Romans 5:5).*” (31)

The lives of great saints like St. Elizabeth of the Trinity teach us about these great truths and how they are lived out in history through specific charisms and ecclesial missions. Her vocation and ecclesial mission as a Trinitarian Indwelling Praise of Glory is nourished by the Pauline Praise of Glory texts in Ephesians as related to the eschatologically apocalyptic Book of Revelation mystical texts concerning the Blood of the Lamb and the communion of saints.<sup>26</sup>

The saints open their souls contemplatively to the indwelling presence of the Holy Trinity and it is precisely this indwelling of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in their souls that launches them on their unique Trinitarian ecclesial missions to make disciples of all nations.

Many of us have seen and remember reading the rather haunting Trinitarian examination of conscience that Karl Rahner called the Church to in the 1960s. It appeared in *Theological Investigations IV* in a chapter entitled, “Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise ‘De Trinitate.’” Rahner simply said that if the dogma of the Trinity were to vanish, the vast amount of religious literature would not have to change.”<sup>27</sup>

Many excellent theological works on the Holy Trinity have been published since Rahner made this comment but St. Elizabeth of the Trinity can continue to serve in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as an ongoing bridge between Trinitarian theological development and progress and the pastoral progress involved in people progressing in Trinitarian mental and liturgical prayer.

Hans Urs Von Balthasar captures the essential insight at the end of his Introduction to *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Therese of Lisieux & Elizabeth of the Trinity*. He writes: “...few things are so likely to vitalize and rejuvenate theology, and therefore the whole of Christian life, as a blood transfusion from hagiography.”<sup>28</sup>

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity put a point and emphasis on this in her Pauline *lectio divina* prayer experience and her written reflections on that Praise of Glory, Indwelling of the Trinity prayer experience in her treatises and letters.

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<sup>26</sup> See Francois Girard, “Je vais a la Lumiere, a l’Amour, a la Vie” in *Elisabeth de la Trinite: L’Aventure Mystique* (Sous la direction de J. Clapier, OCD), (Toulouse: Editions du Carmel, 2006), 651-679 but especially 671-678.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Karl Rahner, “Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise ‘De Trinitate’”, *Theological Investigations IV* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), 78-79.

<sup>28</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Therese of Lisieux & Elizabeth of the Trinity*, 39.



The great saints like Elizabeth are Trinitarian Praises of Glory in their mental prayer and their liturgical prayer. They understand that the Biblical and Eucharistic mission of the Church is animated by the presence of the **Trinity -- Father, Son and Holy Spirit** – and expressed in the mission mandate of Matthew 28: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

Pope Benedict XVI states: “The Trinity is at the same time unity and mission: the more intense love is, the stronger is the urge to pour it out, to spread it, to communicate it.”<sup>29</sup>

What a powerful commentary on the life and Trinitarian Praise of Glory ecclesial mission of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity.

Pope Benedict explains how the Trinity is imprinted in the universe. He writes: “[God is] is the Creator and merciful Father; he is the Only-Begotten Son, eternal Wisdom incarnate, who died and rose for us; he is the Holy Spirit who moves all things, cosmos and history, toward their final, full recapitulation. [God is] Three Persons who are one God because the Father is love, the Son is love, the Spirit is love. God is wholly and only love, the purest infinite and eternal love. He does not live in splendid solitude but rather is an inexhaustible source of life that is ceaselessly given and communicated. To a certain extent, we can perceive this by observing both the macro-universe: our earth, the planets, the stars, the galaxies; and the micro-universe: cells, atoms, elementary particles. The ‘name ‘ of the Blessed Trinity is, in a certain sense, imprinted upon all things because all that exists, down to the last particle, is in relation; in this way we catch a glimpse of God as relationship and ultimately, Creator Love, All things derive from love, aspire to love and move impelled by love, though naturally with varying degrees of awareness and freedom.”<sup>30</sup>

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity would deeply resonate with this. Anders Arborelius writes: “One might say that the Holy Trinity is the atmosphere, the spiritual climate wherein Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity lives. Her entire spiritual life and doctrine have their foundation in the Trinity. Of course, we may not expect an elaborate

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<sup>29</sup> Pope Benedict XVI’s May 18, 2008 Homily on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity.

<sup>30</sup> Pope Benedict XVI’s June 7, 2009 *Angelus*.

Trinitarian doctrine in one who lacks a formal theological education. Anyhow, this basic mystery of faith becomes an existential reality in her personal life and spiritual experience. This mystery, which rarely is as central as it ought to be in the minds of Christians, dominates her whole outlook and being. Elizabeth wanted to live all her life in the Holy Trinity, because ‘it is so beautiful in the Trinity, everything is so clear and full of charity.’ (P 74).”<sup>31</sup>

In *The Day is Now Far Spent*, Cardinal Robert Sarah sees the relationship between faith, prayer and silence. He writes: “Faith grows in an intense life of prayer and contemplative silence. It is nourished and strengthened in a daily face-to-face meeting with God and in an attitude of adoration and silent contemplation. It is professed in the Creed, celebrated in the liturgy, lived out in keeping the Commandments. It achieves its growth through an interior life of adoration and prayer. Faith is nourished by the liturgy, by Catholic doctrine, and by the Church’s tradition as a whole. Its principal sources are Sacred Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, and the Magisterium.”<sup>32</sup>

Faith, prayer and contemplative silence are interdependent. They grow and expand together or they shrink and contract together.

Objectively true Catholic doctrine – whether it is Trinitarian doctrine, Christological doctrine, Pneumatological doctrine, Ecclesiological Doctrine, Anthropological, Eschatological or Missiological Doctrine -- guides prayer and contemplation and grounds them in reality and truth, the truth that always sets us free to pray and courageously go on mission.

Prayer and contemplation without doctrine evaporates.

Contemplation founded on solid doctrine expands, grows and deepens.

We once again remember Pope Benedict XVI’s emphasis on biblical realism in *The Word of the Lord*. He writes: “The word of God makes us change our concept of realism: the realist is the one who recognizes in the word of God the foundation of all things.” (10) The true realist is the person who is in touch with both the natural and supernatural landscapes of life.

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<sup>31</sup> Arborelius, 7.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Cardinal Sarah (with Nicolas Diat), *The Day Is Now Far Spent*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2019), 26.

Authentic contemplation requires a house built on the rock of objective truth. Similarly, authentic contemplation must rest on the objective truths of Catholic moral teaching. We see in the Church a powerful retrieval of the unity and interdependence of Spiritual theology and Moral theology.

The distorted philosophical underpinnings of the dictatorship of moral relativism destroy any authentic approach to prayer and contemplation. Prayer that is based on a house built on the shifting sands of moral relativism collapses quickly.<sup>33</sup>

Every interdependent truth in our Catholic faith – the truths of the inspired Sacred Scriptures, the Creed and our Catholic doctrine, the Sacraments, the Ten Commandments and Catholic Moral Teaching, and the Saints and Mystics teaching on prayer – are the foundation of authentic contemplative prayer and creative evangelization that meets the signs and the crises of our times.

## **5) Conclusion: France as the Eldest Daughter of the Church, the Renovation of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris and the Ecclesial Mission of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity**

All of us are looking forward to the completion of the renovation of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris – a Catholic wonder of the world in its evangelizing Gothic architecture.

This morning we pray in solidarity with Parisians and people from all over the world who are gazing at Notre Dame Cathedral while experiencing the Summer Olympics and treasuring Notre Dame Cathedral's beautiful expression of the Catholic faith and the Catholic soul in Art, Architecture, Theology, Liturgy, Spirituality and History.

We remember that Notre Dame Cathedral expresses the soul of Paris and Parisians and the soul of the world so we are not intimidated by crass mockery and bigoted expressions of anti-Catholicism. Instead, we respond with radical and steadfast Eucharistic charity and we cast the nets of global Catholic mission and

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<sup>33</sup> For an effective analysis of the interdependence of Spiritual Theology and Moral Theology, see the works of Fr. Dennis J. Billy, CSSR: *Spirituality & Morality: Integrating Prayer and Action*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1996); *Conscience and Prayer: The Spirit of Catholic Moral Theology*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001); *Contemplative Ethics: An Introduction*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2011).

evangelization with even greater zeal, even deeper prayer and even more steadfast Spirit-driven determination.

The French Catholic Historian Henri Daniel-Rops (1901-1965) once stated: “Would not one of the most surprising paradoxes of our national history be this: that France, officially atheist, has been wholly penetrated with mysticism and that an immense current of fervor is circulating underground before surfacing through hundreds of springs?”<sup>34</sup>

We pray this morning here at the Catholic University of America and this Carmelite Symposium that as Notre Dame Cathedral is rebuilt so too may the Catholic Church in France, the “Eldest Daughter of the Church”, be rebuilt with the intercession of the great French Saints.

May the springs and geysers of French Catholic mysticism and mission spring up through Notre Dame Cathedral, throughout the experience of the 2024 Paris Olympic games and throughout France and the Universal Church.

So many of these great French saints prayed in Notre Dame and were inspired in their ecclesial missions by their experience of the Art, Architecture, Theology, Liturgy, Spirituality and History of Notre Dame.

We ask the intercession of: Saint Denis (3<sup>rd</sup> Century), St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), St. Louis IX (1214-1270), St. Joan of Arc (1412-1431), St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622) and St. Jane de Chantal (1572-1641), St. Vincent de Paul (1581-1660) and St. Louise de Marillac (1591-1660), St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690) and St. Claude de la Columbiere (1641-1682), St. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle (1651-1719), St. Louis de Montfort (1673-1716), St. John Eudes (1601-1680), St. Benedict Joseph Labre (1748-1783), Blessed William Joseph Chaminade (1761-1850), St. Madeleine Sophie Barat (1779-1865), St. Jeanne Jugan (1792-1819), St. John Vianney (1786-1859) and St. Pierre Julien Eymard (1811-1868), Blessed Frederic Ozanam (1813-1853), St. Catherine Laboure (1806-1876), St. Bernadette Soubirous (1844-1879), St. Terese of Lisieux (1873-1897), Sts. Louis (1823-1894) and Zelig Martin (1831-1877), St. Elizabeth of the Trinity (1880-1906), St. Charles

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<sup>34</sup> As quoted in Conrad De Meester, *Elizabeth of the Trinity: I Have Found God, Complete Works, Vol. 1: General Introduction, Major Spiritual Writings* (Washington: ICS Publications, 1980), 22.

de Foucauld (1858-1916) and many others, including the Mother of the Church, Our Lady of Paris.

We pray for all the souls of every century who have walked through, worshiped and prayed at Notre Dame Cathedral.

We hear in the *Exsultet* of the Catholic Easter Vigil Liturgy: “Rejoice, let Mother Church also rejoice arrayed with the lightning of his glory, let this holy building shake with joy, filled with the mighty voices of the peoples.”

Let the holy Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington DC just yards away shake with the joy of the Holy Spirit in such a way that the tremors are felt in Notre Dame Cathedral and may that joy light up the Rose Window with the Resurrected Light of Christ.

Bless the friendship of the Catholic Church in France and the Catholic Church in the United States of America.

G.K. Chesterton once described the purpose of Gothic architecture in these words: “The spired Church was not merely meant to strike the stars like an arrow; it was also meant to shake the earth like an explosion.”<sup>35</sup>

Permit me to use Chesterton’s image for Gothic architecture as an image also for the ecclesial mission of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity in France and in the Universal Church.

“The contemplative Trinitarian Praise of Glory ecclesial mysticism and mission of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity were not merely meant to strike the stars like an arrow; they were also meant to shake the earth like an explosion!”

Indeed they have. Indeed they do. Indeed they will.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Queen of Contemplatives, pray for us!

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, pray for us!

All Carmelite Saints, pray for us!

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<sup>35</sup> As quoted in Fr. William J. Slattery, *Heroism and Genius: How Catholic Priests Helped Build – and Can Help Rebuild – Western Civilization*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 200.