Saint Teresa of Avila, beatified in 1614 and canonized along with Saints Philip Neri, Ignatius Loyola, and Francis Xavier in 1622, was perhaps the most striking saint of the Counter-Reformation period. The force of her many-sided personality revealed in her extraordinary accomplishment shows her to have been unique in history and at the same time thoroughly typical of the world she lived in. Her intense Mediterranean ardor and energy had a special attraction in this age of profound religious enthusiasm and mysticism. And her vivid mystical experiences, so pictorially presented and analyzed in her own writings, made the life and visions of Saint Teresa a rich source of material for representations in works of art.

Among the many seventeenth-century artists who found sympathetic subject matter in Saint Teresa or episodes from her life, was Rubens, who was all his life a devout practicing Catholic and furthermore, as ambassador to the court of Philip IV, was always in close contact with Saint Teresa’s mystic Spain. In the last decade of his life, when he was at the very peak of his powers, he painted for the chapel of Saint Teresa in the church of the Discalced (Barefoot) Carmelites in Antwerp a picture of Saint Teresa saving Don Bernardino de Mendoza from purgatory, now in the Museum of Antwerp. It was widely copied, and a brilliantly executed version of it, once in the collection of King Leopold II of the Belgians, belongs to the Metropolitan Museum. This picture, about one third the size of the original altarpiece, was long thought to be Rubens’ sketch for the large work. But judging by its completeness and by the color, which is in the range of Rubens’ finished works, it is neither a sketch nor a model, but a reduced repetition, produced in Rubens’ own workshop.

Don Bernardino de Mendoza was a rich and dashing young Spaniard, a brother of the Bishop of Avila, with whom Saint Teresa was so often closely associated. The manner in which Don Bernardino’s eternal happiness came to depend upon Saint Teresa is related with characteristic detail and vividness in Chapter x of her Book of the Foundations. There she recorded the young man’s suggestion that if she wished to found a convent at Valladolid he would give her a house which he had with a fine big garden and a large vineyard. Saint Teresa was engaged at the time in founding a new convent at Malagón but accepted the offer because of the value of the gift and a desire not to be an impediment to the devotion of the donor, whom she described as “a person of some importance” and “deeply immersed in the things of this world.”

The house was farther from the town than she might have wished for the convent, and she had done nothing about a foundation when Don Bernardino died two months later, “attacked by a sudden illness which deprived him of the power of speech, so that he was unable to make a proper confession, though he made a great many signs to show that he was asking pardon of the Lord.” Soon after, Christ appeared to Saint Teresa, warning her that the knight’s salvation had been in great jeopardy “but that He had had compassion,” adding, however, that Don Bernardino would not be delivered from purgatory until the first mass had been said in the new convent. Then, giving up for the time being a plan to found a convent in Toledo, she went with all possible haste to Valladolid. But she was detained more than once on her way, and the Lord appeared to her again, telling her to make haste, as that soul was in great suffering. Arriving in Valladolid, she was dreadfully distressed, for it seemed to her that unless a great deal was spent upon the house it would be foolish to have nuns there. It was a beautiful place, and the garden was delightful, but it was
so near the river that she feared it could not fail to be unhealthy. Nevertheless she went ahead, engaging workmen to construct the fences necessary for the seclusion of the nuns and sending off the priest Julián de Avila, who was in her party, to see about getting a license. She had with her also two other companions, a nun who was to become the first prioress of the new convent and a young and very holy friar who was waiting to enter a monastery of Discalced Carmelites as soon as one should be founded. This, incidentally, was Saint John of the Cross, the author of the beautiful *Dark Night of the Soul*, probably one of the most moving and mysterious of all religious mystical poems.

There was still some delay occasioned by the obtaining of the license, but finally permission was granted to have a mass said, even before the actual foundation of the convent, in the place where they had decided to have their church. "When the priest was approaching us in the place where we were to communicate, holding the Most Holy Sacrament in his hands, and as I was preparing to receive it, I saw a vision of the young man in question, with a happy and resplendent countenance, standing beside the priest with his hands joined together, and thanking me for what I had done to enable his soul to be freed from purgatory and go to Heaven."

The present-day convent of Discalced Carmelites at Valladolid, the Convento de la Concepción de Nuestra Señora de Carmen, is no longer located on Don Bernardino’s property. The nuns fell ill, as Saint Teresa had foreseen, and a wealthy lady, the sister of Don Bernardino, understanding their predicament, took over the house and bought them a better one.

If Rubens’ picture had been painted in the fifteenth, rather than the seventeenth century, Saint Teresa would probably have been shown with her companions kneeling before the priest, beholding in a vision the effects of her intercession. In fifteenth-century renderings of miraculous other-worldly events the story is told on two levels; the setting is laid on earth, and the heavenly apparitions float in a vision above. Fifteenth-century paintings of the Assumption, for instance, nearly always include the Virgin’s open rose-filled sarcophagus and the surrounding group of wondering apostles. In Rubens’ various repeated treatments of the same subject, on the other hand, the entire picture space is filled with the ascent of the Virgin to heaven, borne up on clouds of cherubim, all reference to her earthly life omitted. It is of the very essence of Counter-Reformation mysticism that the vision, instead of the story, becomes the subject of the picture.

The figure in the lower left corner to whom the angel gives a helping hand represents Don Bernardino. The other figures lapped by flames are other suffering souls. Critics some years ago suggested that Rubens used the likeness of his assistant Van Dyck for the head of Don Bernardino, whose appearance is not recorded, and his own features for those of the other man in purgatory. But there is no real similarity between the faces of the two artists and those in the picture. In painting Saint Teresa Rubens does seem to have followed fairly closely the early portraits and descriptions of the saint, in making her a stocky, rather plain middle-aged woman.

An authentic portrait of Saint Teresa was painted from life by Fray Juan de la Miseria in 1570. Three paintings contest a claim to be Fray Juan’s original portrait—one each at Avila, Seville, and Valladolid. It would be more difficult in this than in most such cases to decide which is the original, for little is known of the style of Fray Juan, though one may assume that it was very bad, and no other work by him is extant. Judging from these three versions of the portrait of Saint Teresa, which have little to recommend them as works of art or as likenesses vivid enough to carry the conviction of veracity, he is to be respected more for his pious life than for his art.

Fray Juan seems to have been an Italian, a Neapolitan sculptor who made a pilgrimage to the shrine of Santiago de Compostela and, instead of returning to Italy, took up residence in Spain, working at sculpture. Later he became a painter and is said to have been a pupil of Sánchez Coello. He was staying in a Franciscan convent painting some pictures for the titled Spanish lady who had endowed it when Saint Teresa
stopped there in 1569 on her way to found a convent at Pastrana, near Alcalá. Saint Teresa founded there not only a convent, but also a monastery for Discalced Carmelite monks, which Fray Juan immediately entered as a lay brother. The saint went off soon after to Toledo but in the following year paid a visit to her new foundations at Pastrana and probably at this time sat to Fray Juan.

In the engraving made after the portrait,
Hieronymus Wierix—or perhaps an earlier engraver who first adapted the portrait to a print—added to the simple likeness of the saint as Fray Juan painted her numerous allusions to events in her life. Saint Teresa is shown with her hands folded, wearing the white cloak and black headdress of her order. Behind her on a table are a book and an inkwell referring to her many literary works, all written in obedience to her confessors; beside her are a spindle and distaff, for she was much given to spinning and even complained of being called away from this employment. On one occasion this peerless mystical author is said to have exclaimed, “For the love of God, let me work at my spinning wheel and go to choir and perform the duties of the religious life, like the other sisters. I am not meant to write: I have neither the health nor the intelligence for it.”

The dove entering the scene from the upper left corner, as we are accustomed to see it in pictures of the Annunciation, does not allude to any claim on Saint Teresa's part to divine inspiration, as it does when shown in representations of the doctors and fathers. It refers rather to one of her mystical visions experienced on the vigil of Pentecost, and indeed a script issuing from her mouth bears the words Misericordias Domini in Aeternum cantabo, “I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever,” a verse from the eighty-ninth psalm used in the liturgy for the vigil of Pentecost. In her biography the saint describes this vision with characteristic simplicity and accuracy:

“One day—it was the vigil of Pentecost—I went, after Mass, to a very solitary spot, where I used often to say my prayers, and began to read about this festival in the Carthusian's Life of Christ. As I read about the signs by which beginners, proficients, and the perfect may know if the Holy Spirit is with them, it seemed to me, when I had read about these three states, that by the goodness of God, and so far as I could understand, He was certainly with me then. . . . While I was meditating in this way a strong impulse seized me without my realizing why. It seemed as if my soul were about to leave my body, because it could no longer contain itself and was incapable of waiting for so great a blessing. . . . I had to seek some physical support, for so completely did my natural strength fail me that I could not even remain seated.

“While in this condition, I saw a dove over my head, very different from those we see on earth, for it had not feathers like theirs but its wings were made of little shells which emitted a great brilliance. It was larger than a dove; I seemed to hear the rustling of its wings. It must have been fluttering like this for the space of an Ave Maria. But my soul was in such a state that, as it became lost to itself, it also lost sight of the dove.”

A pious biographer, comparing the portrait by Fray Juan with the famous, and to him deplorable, sculpture by Bernini, the Ecstasy of Saint Teresa (see p. 107), remarks that though the friar made Saint Teresa an ugly woman he at least made her a holy woman. The saint herself, who recorded in her autobiography that she had been very beautiful when young, found fault with the painter and the portrait in typically pungent words which reflect how irked she had been by the sittings: “God forgive you, Brother John, that after all you have made me go through you have finally brought me out very old and ugly.” She was at the time of the painting only fifty-five years old and still, according to Father Ribera, one of her confessors and her first biographer, possessed of much of the fine physical endowment of which she had once been so vain:

“She had a fine figure,” he writes; “of remarkable beauty in her youth, she still made a very good appearance at an advanced age. She was corpulent, with very white flesh. Her face was round and full, very fine in outline and well proportioned. Her complexion lilies and roses; it lit up when she was at prayer, giving to her a ravishing beauty. . . . Her hair was black and curly, . . . her eyes were round and black, protruding a little, of ordinary size but admirably placed, lively and gracious, . . . her mouth was neither large nor small; the upper lip slender and straight, the lower thick and a bit loose, . . . her hands small and very beautiful; she had on the left side of her face three little marks which gave it a great deal of charm. . . . Finally everything about her appeared perfect. Her bearing
Saint Teresa, an engraving by Hieronymus Wierix (1553?-1619) after a portrait from life

was majestic, her step full of dignity and grace; she was so agreeable, so gentle that it sufficed to see her and to hear her to pay her respect and love."

These attractions and charms are affirmed directly by all her biographers and indirectly by the great host of friends who loved her, and by the enormous size of her following, numbering all the men and women whom her prayers and persuasions led into the far from easy life of the monks and nuns of the order of Discalced Carmelites. But Saint Teresa’s persuasive appeal is only one evidence of her power as a person. For enthusiasm and vigor, patience and endurance, and a colossal capacity for unremitting work are all facets of her many-sided character. Among all the saints of Christendom there is no female saint with a more remarkable range than Saint Teresa. The only one who might challenge her position is Saint Catherine of Siena, who, like Saint Teresa, took a very active part in the social and political life of her time and
like her was repeatedly honored by deeply personal divine visitations, culminating in Saint Catherine’s case with the tangible manifestations of heavenly favor in the form of the stigmata. One of Saint Teresa’s biographers, indeed, has marveled that her trances and visions never led to the same evidences.

In contrast with Saint Catherine, however, Saint Teresa, though only two centuries nearer to us in time, seems much more a product of the world we know; her accomplishments and her writings, both considerable, though illumined and impassioned by her matchless fervor, nevertheless strike us as peculiarly practical and brisk, one might almost say efficient. She founded seventeen convents, effecting reforms in the Carmelite order operative to this day. Journeying in Spain, furthermore, which travelers even now report to be more arduous than journeying elsewhere abroad, was beset in Saint Teresa’s time with every sort of hazard and discomfort. She left, besides her famous autobiography, mystical works in prose and verse and countless letters to unknown persons as well as to contemporary Spaniards of worldly and ecclesiastical importance, including King Philip II. Her tremendous activity and achievement are the more impressive when we reflect that she appears to have been a real invalid during the first part of her life—suffering horribly from catalepsy or paralysis—and never really well at any time, subject to throat infections and other diseases which hard work and the rigors of her asceticism surely did not lessen.

For the biographical details of her life, as well as for the most lucid and factual descriptions of ecstasy in all the literature of mysticism, we are indebted to the autobiography which Saint Teresa’s confessors commanded her to write, largely as a kind of spiritual exercise with the implicit virtue of testing the validity of her visions. In 1562 she had done a first draft, of which no copy remains. At the end of the same year or early in the next she began the second version of the book, the one we know today, of which the autograph manuscript is in the Escorial. It was probably finished late in 1565 and was eagerly circulated among her confessors, who, with the Inquisitor Francisco Soto, had commanded her to undertake it. As the work passed from the hand of one theologian to another, a number of copies were made; although Saint Teresa recognized the indiscretion of wide circulation interested laymen were permitted to see the manuscript. Eventually, thanks to the malice or carelessness of the Princess of Eboli—an early prototype of the well-to-do mischief-maker in women’s church organizations—the Life was denounced to the Inquisition, but received a judgment entirely in its favor.

Saint Teresa was born in a palace at Avila in 1515, the daughter of Don Alonso Sánchez de Cepeda, and his second wife Doña Beatrice de Ahumada. She grew up among the numerous children of her father’s two marriages, with two sisters and nine brothers, one of whom, Rodrigo, four years older than Teresa, was her favored companion. He seems to have shared in her early religious enthusiasms, reading the lives of the saints with her, and when “told that both pain and glory would last forever” they “would spend long periods talking about this” and repeating again and again, “For ever—ever—ever!” It was Rodrigo, too, whom she constrained to accompany her in a search for early martyrdom. Teresa implies that this youthful project resulted from their common wish: “We agreed to go off to the country of the Moors, begging our bread for the love of God, so that they might behead us there.” But when the two children were found and brought back home to their frightened mother the boy blamed the escapade on his little sister and her eagerness to see God. A pictorial life of Saint Teresa consisting of twenty-five engravings, published in Antwerp in 1613, begins with a plate showing the would-be martyrs overtaken on the outskirts of Avila by their uncle, an elegant knight on horseback.

When Teresa was thirteen, her invalid mother died. Though she had been a very good woman, she was much addicted to the reading of romances, and her daughter later attached some significance to the spiritual harm she had done herself by devouring her mother’s escapist literature. Indeed, with Rodrigo as collaborator, Teresa is said to have written a tale of chivalry herself—if we had it, what an anomaly it would
Saint Teresa and her brother overtaken in their quest for martyrdom, an engraving from a pictorial life of Saint Teresa published in Antwerp in 1613

be among the extant writings of the saint! She tells of other worldly interests to which she devoted her attention: “I began to deck myself out and to try to attract others by my appearance, taking great trouble with my hands and hair, using perfumes and all the vanities I could get—and there were a good many of them, for I was very fastidious.” She tells, too, of companions and friendships made about this time which later seemed unfortunate and hints so darkly of learning “every kind of evil” that it is not surprising to find her, after her elder sister’s marriage, put under the chaperonage of the Augustinian convent of Our Lady of Grace in Avila. She stayed there for eighteen months, but only as a boarder, and it was not until five years later, in 1536, that she entered the Carmelite convent of the Incarnation in Avila as a novice. A year later, in the same convent, she was professed a nun. Serious illnesses, enforcing inaction and providing time for meditation, had brought her to a deep dissatisfaction with her temperament and the kind of interior life she had lived in her youth and had led the high-spirited, intensely intelligent, and warm-hearted young Spanish girl to so decisive a step. But not without pangs and misgivings, for although her passionate nature and vivid imagination made her extraordinarily susceptible to the lively pictorial imagery in which the Spanish church presented the punishments of sin and the rewards of virtue, a strong attachment to the world and
its vanities and a deep affection for her father, who opposed her becoming a nun, struggled within Teresa. "I began to fear that, if I had died of my illness, I should have gone to hell; and though, even then, I could not incline my will to being a nun, I saw that this was the best and safest state, and so, little by little, I determined to force myself to embrace it."

Soon after her profession illness again interposed. She had to leave the convent, going to stay with her half-sister and in 1539 undergoing treatment at Becedas. In the summer of 1539 she had an attack of catalepsy which laid her low for more than eight months. She returned to the Incarnation the following Easter, but for more than a year was an invalid and suffered recurrences until about 1554. Here a turning point seems to occur in her life. At this time she was nearly forty. The years of illness, of spiritual turmoil, and of apparent lapses from her purposeful direction toward God begin to show constructive results. Within the next decade the three aspects of her life that have made her famous, her reforms, her writings, and her visions, are all realized. From this time on until her death at Alba de Tormes in 1582, neither discouragement, accident, nor serious illness stemmed the flow of her formidable spiritual and physical activity.

One is tempted to make wide divagations on her busy life of travel throughout Spain establishing convents and to study in detail her literary output, but only the briefest summary of her life and writings is justified here. As early as 1558, finding the rule of her order too laxly observed in the convent of the Incarnation where she was staying, Saint Teresa had begun to dream of another convent where she and a small group of sympathetic nuns—twelve beside herself seemed at first the limit—should live more strict and secluded lives. There was much opposition and many setbacks, but in July of 1562, through the influence of Saint Peter of Alcántara, came the brief of authorization, and the following month Saint Teresa founded in Avila her first convent of Discalced Carmelites, called in accordance with an explicit vision describing the new house, Saint Joseph’s. Saint Teresa lived at Saint Joseph’s for five years, which she describes as the most restful years of her life. New houses of the order were then founded in rapid succession—at Medina del Campo in 1567, at Malagón and Valladolid the following year, then at Toledo, Pastrana, and Salamanca, until there were seventeen in all, terminating in 1582, the year of her death, with the foundation at Burgos.

How this busy, efficient life allowed time for the writing of so many books can only be explained by the saint’s own description of her literary method. In the course of the Way of Perfection she says, “It is a long time since I wrote the last chapter and I have had no chance of returning to my writing, so that, without reading through what I have written, I cannot remember what I said. However, I must not spend too much time at this, so it will be best if I go right on without troubling about the connection.” The four major works, besides the book of her life, include this Way of Perfection and the Interior Castle, known in Spanish as the Mansions. Both are vividly descriptive devotional works, arranged with extraordinary clarity and logic, the first destined as a guide for other aspirants to the mystical way, and the second an elaborate description or architectural plan of the spirit’s inner life. Then there are also the Meditations on the Songs of Solomon and the Book of the Foundations, a historical account of her convents. There are several minor works, including the practical and the purely poetic or spiritual: the Method for the Visitation of Convents, the Exclamations, the Spiritual Maxims, and the Spiritual Relations, as well as some verses and a series of letters. The Relations, incidentally, contains many passages even more revealing than the autobiography for an understanding of the mystical life of Saint Teresa.

Far more than her concrete accomplishments, her visions pertain directly to the subject of Saint Teresa and representations of her in art. And if these visions, which have formed the subject for so many sculptures, paintings, and prints, have dazzled and bewildered posterity, believers and doubters alike, they were no less of a problem to her confessors, and primarily to the intellectually acute saint herself. Though
in the periods between the granting of these divine favors she suffered consciously from what she describes as aridity and loneliness, she seems never to have given herself up to the abandoned enjoyment of her visions, making great efforts at their onset, she records, to withstand them. Often she mistrusted them as emanations of the devil instead of God, or when accepting their validity, eagerly described and classified them as intellectual or spiritual, analyzing the differences between “raptures” and “union” for the edification of others. As early as 1555 when she first suspected that she heard interior voices and experienced certain visions and revelations, she sought counsel from her confessors and other holy men, especially from the Jesuits, and though sometimes the verdict came that she was being used as a tool by Satan himself, she was in the main encouraged to persevere in the practice of her saintly life and to believe in the divine source of these manifestations. It must be remembered that Saint Teresa lived in an age of magic and fear, in which it was quite natural to find her advisors recommending that she make the Spanish sign of contempt at a vision, so as to convince herself that it came from the devil. Certain churchmen even wished to exorcise her, but Teresa, who never feared human disapproval, gradually acquired confidence in her own discrimination, until she was able to say: “The thing is very easy to recognize; and, unless a soul wants to be deceived, I do not think the devil will deceive it if it walks in humility and simplicity.”
The extremely vivid form in which Saint Teresa's visions are clothed bears witness not only to the peculiar immediacy of her experiences, but perhaps also to a genuine fondness for pictorial art, to which she confesses. In comparing her visions of Christ to images, she observed that she had seen a great many good paintings, and elsewhere in describing an apparition of the Virgin she noted that she looked rather like a picture which had been given her. Once when she "had read in a book that it was an imperfection to have nice pictures" she decided to give up one which she had in her cell, substituting for it from henceforth only "paper ones"—probably the devotional woodcuts which enjoyed so much popularity in the sixteenth century. The Lord himself reproved her for this, reminding her that she must not give up anything that awakened love, nor take such things from her nuns, adding that this sort of renunciation was what the Lutherans were prompted by the devil to do and that she must do the reverse. Another time, referring to the story of Christ and the woman of Samaria, which she says she has loved since she was a child, she adds, "I had a picture of the Lord at the well, which hung where I could always see it." And her description of the fierce and abominable form in which Satan appeared to her when she was praying, his horrible mouth, and the great flame coming out of his body, suggest that she knew one of the German or Netherlandish prints of the Temptation of Saint Anthony, which usually are replete with just such devils.

Other visions recall famous works of art. Once, while in a rapture, she saw a great battle between devils and angels, and on another occasion when she was with her nuns in the choir she "saw Our Lady in the greatest glory, clad in a white mantle, beneath which she seemed to be sheltering" them all. A picture representing this vision is said to have been the customary property of all convents of Discalced Carmelites; the image certainly stems from beautiful renaissance conceptions of the Virgin of Mercy like that of Piero della Francesca at Borgo San Sepolcro. Finally, one vision in particular calls to mind Flemish scenes of Paradise, if not actually the central panel of the great Ghent Altarpiece of the worship of the mystic Lamb: "I suddenly became recollected, and saw a great light within me . . . and my spirit found itself inwardly in a most delightful rustic garden." There she saw Father Gracian, one of her dearest counselors, "having a strange beauty; around his head he had a garland of precious stones. And walking before him were many maidens, with palms in their hands, all singing hymns of praise to God" and "there seemed also to be music made by birds and angels."

Her visions of the Virgin are rather infrequent. Once she saw her at the right and Saint Joseph at the left, who together placed upon Saint Teresa a garment of great whiteness and brightness; she refers also to the whiteness and the "amazing splendor" of the Virgin's vestments. Another time she saw the Virgin placing a pure white cope on a prelate of the Dominican order.

Having been advised by her first Jesuit confessor to meditate in her daily prayer on an incident of the Passion and to "think only of Christ's humanity," it is natural that her most frequent visitations should have been of Christ himself. Like Saint Catherine of Alexandria, Saint Teresa was mystically wed to Christ, but not with a ring, playfully, to the infant Jesus throned on his Mother's knees, as in the appealing paintings of the Renaissance. Saint Teresa, true saint of the Counter-Reformation, was first betrothed to Christ with one of the nails of the Passion as token of their troth. A little later however, she records how he also gave her a beautiful ring, "with a brightness very different from that of earthly stones," and he once even took the cross of her rosary from her and returned it transformed into four large stones, "much more precious than diamonds."

Sometimes Saint Teresa was granted less rapturous visions which conveyed to her information about matters in which she was deeply concerned, or showed her the true underlying state of things in which she might otherwise be mistaken, or set her mind at rest about the souls of people for whom she felt affection and responsibility. The holy Fray Peter of Alcántara appeared to her three times after his death to ap-
prise her of the bliss he was enjoying and to advise and comfort her in the opposition she was encountering in founding the new convent. Once at a funeral she saw a great many devils taking possession of the corpse of a hypocrite, and another time, at mass, saw two monsters tormenting a priest. Her very pictorial description of this vision provided material for one of the most lively of the prints in the little Antwerp book of engravings referred to earlier. Her own writings supplied the Flemish engraver with his program: “Once when I was about
to communicate, I saw, with the eyes of the soul, more clearly than ever I could with those of the body, two devils of most hideous aspect. Their horns seemed to be about the poor priest's throat; and when I saw my Lord... in the hands of such a man, in the Host which he was about to give me, I knew for a certainty that those hands had offended Him and realized that here was a soul in mortal sin.

The most familiar of all Saint Teresa's ecstasies is the transverberation, or piercing, of her heart, which took place in 1559, while she was still at the convent of the Incarnation, and was celebrated forever by Lorenzo Bernini in his magnificent sculpture in the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome, which epitomizes the dramatic intensity of the Counter-Reformation in baroque art. Bernini's sculptured group was made in 1646, eighty years before Pope Benedict XIII instituted among the feasts of the Church that of the Transverberation of the Heart of Saint Teresa. Although Bernini showed the saint as a frail and delicately youthful figure, quite different from the sturdy, capable woman described by her biographers, his interpretation of the experience adheres with the closest exactitude to Saint Teresa's account of it, except that the angel appears on her right hand rather than her left, as she so explicitly stated. “It pleased the Lord that I should sometimes see the following vision. I would see beside me, on my left hand, an angel in bodily form... He was not tall, but short, and very beautiful, his face so aflame that he appeared to be one of the highest types of angels who seem to be all afire... In his hands I saw a long golden spear and at

the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a point of fire. With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out, I thought he was drawing them out with it and he left me completely afire with a great love for God.”

Although it is characteristic of Bernini and the seventeenth century to mingle with the religious content the erotic imagery which throughout the Renaissance had armed Cupid with the arrow of earthly love, the responsibility for the arrow must rest first and last with Saint Teresa herself; for in referring a second time in the Spiritual Relations to this “wounding of the soul” she uses the words “as if an arrow had pierced the heart, or the soul itself.”

Her works have been extensively translated, and she has interested widely diverse biographers, most recently the English writer Virginia Sackville-West, whose little book The Eagle and the Dove, which appeared in 1944, contrasts our vigorous Spanish Saint Teresa with the gentle and devout French saint, Thérèse of Lisieux. Miss Sackville-West's title is taken from the seventeenth-century poet Crashaw, who in a poem dedicated to Saint Teresa, addresses her with suitably fiery imagery and passion, symbolizing the impact she made on Catholic Europe:

O thou undaunted daughter of desires!
By all thy dower of lights and fires;
By all the eagle in thee, all the dove;
By all thy lives and deaths of love:

. . . .

Let me so read thy life, that I
Unto all life of mine may die.”