

A biblical rereading of the spiritual experience and Vision of Elizabeth of the Trinity

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Introduction

Bible is the result of a process of communication between God and human beings, between elected persons or communities as voices of God and fellow human beings. Hence the inner dynamism of the formative process of biblical texts is that human beings saw their life experiences in and through God, and God or his representative voices revealed himself or his values through the life experiences of human beings. So, every act of interpretation of a biblical text is also an act of interpretation of the life of the interpreter. In other words, interpretation process must take the communicative context necessarily into consideration. In this vein, it has been for me a dream, to develop the hermeneutics for reading Bible from the Carmelite point of view and for reading Carmelite spirituality from biblical point of view and thus to let the new deeper dimensions of both the Biblical texts and the Carmelite Spirituality emerge through interculturalization¹.

In this paper we shall apply this hermeneutical principle to the spirituality of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity. The procedure is the following. First we shall reflect on the biblical rottenness of Carmelite spirituality. After having made our sketch of the spiritual journey of Elizabeth of the Trinity, we shall expatiate how she is a living interpretation of biblical spirituality. Then, the biblical foundations of Elizabethan Spirituality are expounded to substantiate that Elizabeth is the embodiment of realized discipleship. Finally we

¹ For a model of this hermeneutical principle applied to Carmelite Spirituality, Cfr. A. MULLOOR, "Life Journey of Edith Stein: A Rereading from Biblical Perspective", in: *Jyotir Dhara*, 1/1 (1999) 116-126.

demonstrate that her Prayer to the Trinity which is synthesis of her spirituality is essentially a biblical prayer.

1. Biblical Rootedness of Carmelite Spirituality

Carmel is essentially biblical in its origin, spirit and expressions. Geographically Carmel originated on Mt. Carmel in the Bible Land. Enveloped by the atmosphere of silence and prayer, the naturally beautiful Mt. Carmel is pervaded by God's presence². The spirit of Carmel was essentially Elianic from its very genesis. The Spirit of Elijah consists of the liberative inward journey and prophetic action for the transformation of the society after the model of Moses the liberator of Israel. The Spirit of Carmel was inevitably Marian from the very beginning. Mary is the primary and perfect embodiment of the life style of listening to the word and keeping the word³. The primitive rule envisages as fundamental way of life of Carmelites the word centeredness which is expressed "in meditating on the word of God day and night." If the Primitive Rule is biblical throughout, its essential message is specifically biblical as synthesized in the "exhortation" at the centre in terms of a journey from the actual situation to the identification with the word of God, the Sword of the Spirit, wearing the armour of God, faith, hope and love expressed in the vowed life⁴. It is the Carmelite reinterpretation of Pauline Spiritual vision⁵.

St. Teresa was captured by the experience of the singleness of God and His sufficiency and sought Him uncompromisingly in friendship through prayer and experienced him in the innermost depth of her being walking "the way of perfection" to the "Interior Castle" and taking the responsibility for his mission through the "foundations". The teaching of Jesus, "in my Father's House, there are many rooms... I go to prepare a place for you...." (Jn 14, 1-6), became the source of inspiration for St. Teresa of Avila for the inward journey to the indwelling God in terms of a journey to the interior castle. The Johannine vision of the relationship between Jesus and the disciples partaking the living water i.e. drinking from Him and becoming fountains of living water (Jn 4,1-42; 7,37-39) and realizing

² E. FRIEDMAN, *The Latin Hermits of Mount Carmel: A Study in Carmelite Origins*, Rome, 1979.

³ Cfr. N. GEAGEA, *Maria, Madre e Decoro del Carmelo*, Roma, 1988.

⁴ Cfr. A. MULLOOR, "An Indian Rereading of "The Primitive Rule" of Carmelites", *Teresianum* (2000) 457-479.

⁵ *The Rule of Carmel*. New Horizons, ed. il Calamo, Rome, 2000.

the intimate friendship with him having shared all the family secrets (Jn 15,1-17) is the biblical culture behind Teresian God-experience⁶.

St. John of the Cross is radically biblical in his experience of God and in its expression through the writings presented in the "Ascent of Mt. Carmel" leading to the experience of "Dark Night", reaching the transforming union in the "Spiritual Canticle" and culminating in the "Living Flame of Love". Research has revealed that the basic biblical principles energizing the spiritual vision of St. John of the Cross are: Oneness of God and the first commandment, God's uniqueness and the second commandment. This is the essence of biblical revelation⁷. The path of unknowing that he tread and taught has the biblical foundations in the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus, the discourse on the Bread of life and the living Bread and the healing of the man born blind (Jn 3. 6. 9.)⁸.

St. Therese became the transparent Gospel by living the essence of it crystallized in the teaching of Jesus on "revelation to the simple" and a prophetic sign of the radical reversal of the logic of the worldly wisdom⁹. St. Therese, therefore, is incomprehensible if not in the mirror of the Bible¹⁰.

We must locate the Spirituality of Elizabeth within this Carmelite Biblical tradition. Let us reread her spiritual vision not so much as the response given by a person to God, but rather as the fruit of a life that was penetrated and interpreted by the word and thus made a tangible, visible and audible habitation of God himself¹¹.

⁶ Cfr. E. RENAULT (Ed.), *Alle Sorgenti dell' aqua viva*, Roma, 1982. For more bibliography on this theme cfr. M.D. SANCHEZ, *Bibliografia del Centenario Teresiano*, Roma, 1983.

⁷ Cfr. F. FORESTI, *Le radici bibliche della Salita del Monte Carmelo di S. Giovanni della Croce*, Roma, 1981.

⁸ For further bibliography on St. John of the Cross and Bible cfr. B.M. AHERN, "The use of scripture in the Spiritual Theology of St. John of the Cross", *CBQ* 14 (1952) 6-17; M. ALONSO JOAQUINI, "Biblia y mística en San Juan de la Cruz", *RevEsp* 9 (1950) 18-40; 330-357; 467-477; A. ERNS, *Studien zu den Quellen des allegorischen Bibelexegesen bei San Juan de la Cruz*, Aachen, 1967; S. FUMET, "Saint Jean de la Croix et la Bible", *VieSpr* 67 (1942) 11-27; F. GARCÍA, "San Juan de la Cruz y la Biblia", *RevEspr* 1 (1941-42) 372-388; J. VILNET, *Bible et Mystique Chez Saint Jean de la Croix*, Paris, 1949.

⁹ A. MULLOOR, "Revelation to the Simple". St. Therese as a paradigm of the prophetic reversal for a counter culture", in D. KANJIRAMUKKIL-A. MULLOOR (eds.), *Therese of Lisieux: A Gift for our Times*, Kalamassery, 1997, pp. 63-73.

¹⁰ Cfr. J. PALLIPARAMBIL, "St. Therese and Sacred Scripture: The Data", in D. KANJIRAMUKKIL-A. MULLOOR (eds.), *Therese of Lisieux*, pp. 58-62.

¹¹ Cfr. A. SICARI, *Elisabetta della Trinità: Un'esistenza teologica*, Roma, 1986, p.7.

2. Spiritual Journey of Bl.Elizabeth: Key Junctures

Elizabeth is a person who made a long journey in a short time, in a simple and straight way and in an undisturbed and all-pervading stillness and silence. It was a unique personal synthesis of the Teresian and San Juanist Spiritual itineraries. Thus, on the one side, she journeyed to the depth of her own being, a thorough inward journey leading to the awareness and experience of the indwelling God in the interior castle of the soul, as St.Teresa envisaged. On the other side, like St.John of the Cross, she came out of herself into the wilderness searching for the one who wounded her with love, and climbed up the mountain, leaving the nature, the senses, the reason and experienced on the mountain the presence of the beloved and union with Him, transformed by the flame of love. But the Elizabethan journey is imprinted by her characteristic personal traits that make it unique and different.

Hers was a deeply theological existence, characterized by a journey of faith, experience of love and dynamism and empowerment of hope. Her faith journey was pervaded by the deep creative silence of the soul, Carmelite solitude, being "Alone with the alone"¹². That is what she desired from her early days, "to live alone with thee"¹³, which later deepened itself and found expression in the words, "soon I shall be all Thine; I shall dwell in solitude, alone with Thee, concerned only with thee, living only with thee, talking only with Thee"¹⁴. The darkness of pure faith led her, as a sure guide, into the land of the experience of love. This love coexisted with deep suffering and brought to her interiority a heavenly joy which was inexplicable. As the suffering increased even on physical level, so too the joy on the spiritual level, so that she was as though already in eternity¹⁵. And it was said, "we could no longer follow her; she was already a being of the world beyond"¹⁶. About this joy she writes, "...I am experiencing unknown joys: the joys of suffering... it is my dream, before I die, to be transformed into Jesus crucified"¹⁷ And she walked with utter joy like a bride beside her crucified Lord. So it became a transformation into Christ by love, as she raised herself to the love which exceeds

¹² Cfr. M.M. PHILIPON, *The Spiritual Doctrine of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity*, Bangalore 2006, p. 34.

¹³ ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY, *Poems*, August 1896.

¹⁴ ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY, *Diary*, March 27, 1899; *Last Retreat*, 4th day.

¹⁵ Cfr. M.M. Philipon, *The Spiritual Doctrine of Bl. Elizabeth of the Trinity*, p.25.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY, *Letter to G. de G.*, October 1906.

suffering. And she said, "All passes away... in the evening of life only love remains.... We must do everything for love... we must constantly forget ourselves... the good God so loves us to be forgetful of ourselves. Oh! If I had always been so!"¹⁸ and she exclaimed, "oh! Love, love, love, love, consume my whole substance for thy glory"¹⁹.

The experience of love empowered Bl. Elizabeth to be dynamically hopeful. The hope was the basis of her awareness of the mission to be fulfilled in the Church on earth. In a note written to one sister before the last retreat she writes, "...that is what I am going to teach myself: conformity, identity with my adored master who was crucified of love! Then, I shall be able to fulfill my office of praise of glory and even here below to sing the eternal "sanctus" while waiting to go and chant it in the heavenly courts of the Father's house"²⁰. This deep consciousness of her mission was the result of interior intimacy she experienced in her depths that she wanted to share with everyone and so she exclaims: "...Oh! Would that I could tell all souls..."²¹. The dynamism of her life in favour of God's mission is very impressive when we know she wrote 78 letters and 27 poems just during her stay in infirmary ie. from the end of March to November 9, 1906. Her mission was to keep souls in that great inner silence and thus to cleave to God uninterruptedly and unfailingly. Describing this mission, she summarizes the dynamism of faith, love and hope in her theological existence: "it seems to me that in heaven my mission will be to draw souls, by helping them to go out of themselves in order to adhere to God, by a very simple and wholly loving movement and to maintain them in that great inner silence which allows God to imprint himself on them and to transform them into Himself"²². Her last intelligent words sum up her spiritual journey: "I am going to light, to love, to life", to light through faith, to love through charity and to life through hope.

3. Bl. Elizabeth: A New Living Interpretation of Biblical Spirituality

Biblical Spirituality is the vision of life and way of life that emerges from the story of the self-revelation of God in human histo-

¹⁸ ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY, *Diary*, Nov. 1, 1906.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Cfr. M.M. PHILIPON, *The Spiritual Doctrine of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity*, p.28.

²¹ ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY, *Letter to Her Mother*, August 3, 1906.

²² ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY, *Words to a Lay Sister*, (a few days before her death)

ry and the resultant redimensioning of human existence. It is the fruit of the dialectical process between the divine action and the human response or reaction. Our identification with the logic and pedagogy of God, who gratuitously reveals and elects, hides and rejects in the process of unfolding of his salvific plan of which he Himself is the sovereign and His fundamental preferential predilection for the poor who are the beneficiaries of salvation²³ as the logic of the unfolding process redimensions our life. God who is revealed is creator, liberator and judge. Provider, saviour, and Father are other dimensions of the image of God. God gratuitously takes initiative to accept human beings as partners through the acts of call, election, promise and covenant. The pragmatic purpose is the realization of a transformed humanity, a new community. The partnership between God and human beings reached the perfect form in Jesus and human person who responds at the same time. The risen Jesus is the transformed humanity, the basis of the new covenantal life²⁴.

Elizabeth, through her radical journey of faith, love and hope, embodied in her life the humanly possible perfect harmonization of the call of God and the response of human beings. The basis of Elizabeth's relationship with God was faith and pure faith alone. She remained totally yielded and surrendered to God the creator and provider. Recognition or acknowledgement of and submission to the sovereign authority of God came naturally to her. The decisiveness of the divine interventions in human history through the person of Christ was essentially realized in her life through the love experience and expression of her christocentric life i.e. "faith active through love" (Gal 5,6). She was the new concrete spatio-temporal expression of the definitiveness and crucial nature of Christ-event. The words of the author of letter to the Hebrews about the uniqueness of Christ-event and the life of Elizabeth find perfect concordance to each other: "... in these last days he has spoken to us through a Son... he is the reflection of his glory and the very stamp of his nature" (Heb 1,2-3). Inspired by the Pauline words in Eph.1,12, she calls herself "praise of His glory" and writes, "I live in the heaven of faith, in the centre of my soul, and I try to give joy to my master by being even here on earth, the "praise of glory"²⁵. Hence Elizabeth was the transparently and authentically alive Gospel, the message of Salvation, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Liberator and Saviour.

²³ Cfr. A. MULLOOR, *Jesus' Prayer of Praise*, Delhi 1996, p. 300.

²⁴ Read Jer 31, 31f; Ez. 36, 20f.

²⁵ ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY, *Letter to Canon A.*, May, 1906.

In her life, Elizabeth fulfilled the future eschatological fulfillment of salvation History, already proleptically made present in the resurrection of Jesus. Her encounter with God included the encounter with the judge and deliverer. For her eternity had already started on earth. Every desire, thought, decision and action of Elizabeth was well-tuned to the rhythm of eternity. She writes, "I believe that we should give immense joy to the heart of God by imitating, in the heaven of our soul, this occupation of the Blessed"²⁶ and again, "since my soul is a heaven, where I dwell, while awaiting the heavenly Jerusalem, this heaven too, must sing the glory of the eternal, nothing but the glory of the eternal"²⁷.

So, the life of Elizabeth was the History of salvation in nuce, in its past, present and future dimensions, pervaded by the presence of God the creator, liberator and judge, made visible, tangible and audible. She is therefore the living testimony of the realized Biblical Spirituality by drinking from the rivers of revelation, assimilating its Spirit and being transformed by it and expressing the same in words and deeds.

4. Biblical Foundations of the Spirituality of Bl.Elizabeth

Now, we are moving to the in-depth reflection on the biblical nature of Elizabethan Spirituality.

4.1 *Accumulation of Biblical Citations*

If Bl.Elizabeth of the Trinity had imbibed and assimilated the biblical spirituality, the fruitfulness of this deeprootedness in the Biblical culture was manifested, besides in the embodied testimonial presence of Biblical values, in the impressive accumulation of the citations from scripture, leaving aside the abundant allusions to biblical themes and personalities. The biblical citations are more numerous in the "Last retreat" than in "Heaven in Faith". Among the various books of the Bible cited by the Saint, the Pauline and Johannine writings and the book of Psalms take the first places²⁸.

The relationship between Elizabeth and the Sacred Scripture is so natural and spontaneous that she cannot write without having fre-

²⁶ ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY, *Last Retreat*, 3rd day.

²⁷ ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY, *The Last Retreat*, 7th day.

²⁸ Taking the "Last Retreat" as a specimen, we have in it 40 citations from St.Paul, 4 from St. John and 18 from the Book of Psalms.

quent recourse to the Scripture. For her the Scripture is the treasure of the truth; the basis of the objectivity of faith. It is the revelation of God's plan, His "mystery", His "secret", His "dream" and His "desire". They contain the "explanations" of God's "counsels", His "will", of "Christ's work" and "our vocation". It shows us "the way" and is the "rule of life", "teaching" and "instructing"²⁹. In fact, Bl. Elizabeth nourished herself on the Word of God and assimilated it in her own flesh, reproduced it as her own "soaked in her heart, sometimes in the blood of her suffering"³⁰. She "listened" to the Word of God and stored it "in the depths" of her heart. To have recourse to Scripture meant for her "to say 'yes', to commit herself, to disappear in the beloved and to pray"³¹.

4.2 *Johannine Roots*

Among the Gospels, St. John is the one most cited by Bl. Elizabeth. An evangelist who flies in the heights of Christ-event or who delves into the depths of Christ-event and presents the discipleship with an emphasis on the mystical, contemplative dimension, in terms of personal intimate and abiding friendship between Jesus and the disciples is close to our Saint whose spiritual experience is imprinted by the mystery of the indwelling of the Trinity in her soul.

While she uses the whole Gospel according to John, there is an accumulation of citations from the particular section of the Gospel, namely chs. 14-17 which present the final discourse and the final prayer of Jesus as part of the second book, i.e. the book of glory. The book is centered on the theme "abiding in Jesus". It narrates the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. This is addressed to only those who have come to Jesus by believing in him. It is about the principles of deeper and more intimate relationship. Of less than hundred citations from the Gospel and the letters of John, around 30 are from these chapters. "Heaven in Faith" begins with the citation of Jn 17, 24. Commenting on this "last wish" of Jesus expressed in His "Supreme Prayer" before returning to the Father, she writes, "He wills that where He is, we should be also, not only for eternity but already in time which is eternity begun and still in progress"³². Then, she cites St. John of the Cross to tell us where Son is: "The place where the Son of God is hidden, is the bosom of the Father or the Divine Essence, invisible to every mortal eye, unattainable by every hu-

²⁹ Cfr. ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY, *I have found God*, The complete works, Vol. I, Trivandrum, 1996, p. 137.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

³¹ *Ibid.*; Cfr. J. TAURO, "Bl. Elizabeth, Her Mystical Insights, A Biblical Perspective", *Dhyanajala*, 1/1 (2006) 23.

³² ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY, *Heaven in Faith*, 1.

man intellect"³³. The language used by John of the Cross is also Johannine. As Elizabeth goes on, we have further citations from the Evangelist the rest of the work at least six times. This observation is applicable to the "Last Retreat" as its second paragraph begins with citation of Jn 1,18 and a few more follow in the course of the work.

In the theological vision of the fourth Evangelist the first part of the Gospel narrates the models of various kinds of people "coming" to Jesus³⁴. Jesus is revealing the Father through signs and discourses. It is a revelation that is open to all, Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles and finally the Greeks. All who respond to Jesus' revelation go through the process of "coming and seeing", "eating and drinking", "entering", "hearing", "walking in the light" etc. which are Johannine equivalents of "believing"³⁵. The act of believing consists of "recognizing" Jesus and "deciding" for Him. This experience, in the Johannine language, is described also as "filling up" (2,1-12), "taking away" (2,13-25) and "being born anew" (3,1-11). These express the encounter of Jesus in faith. The journey of faith that characterizes the first part of the spiritual journey of Elizabeth is a reflection of the first part of the process and experience of discipleship according to John.

Blessed Elizabeth cites frequently texts from the First Letter of John which may be identified as the practical commentary on the Gospel of John. The first part of this letter (1,5 – 3,11) focuses on faith presented as light. To have fellowship with God, one is demanded to walk in the light. This theological principle has a lot of affinity to the basic spiritual experience of Elizabeth. In the "Heaven in Faith", she writes: "To approach God we must believe.... Faith makes so present and so certain future goods, that by it they take on existence in our soul and subsist there before we have fruition of them it serves as "feet" to go "to God"... it alone can give us true light, concerning Him whom we love.... Thus even in this life faith gives us God, covered it is true, with a veil, nonetheless God himself.... it no longer rests in inclinations or feelings; it matters little to the soul whether it feels God or not, whether He sends it joy or suffering, believes in His love..."³⁶.

The second part of the Gospel (13, 1-20. 29) is centred on "how to abide in Him". Just as the theme shifts, the audience is restricted

³³ *Spiritual Canticle*, 22.

³⁴ Cfr. A. MULLOOR, *The Gospel According to John*, Vol. I, Bangalore 2006, pp. 12-14.

³⁵ Cfr. R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, Vol. I, New York 1981, pp. 78-79; T. BAROSSE, "The Johannine Relationship of Love to Faith", in M.J. TAYLOR (ed.), *A Companion to John*, New York 1977, pp. 153-176; I. DE LA POTTERIE, *Studi di cristologia giovannea*, Genova 1986, pp. 290-302.

³⁶ ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY, *Heaven in Faith*, Sixth Day.

to only those who have accepted Jesus through faith. Hence Jesus is teaching the inner circle of his intimate disciples (with the exception of Judas) about the secrets of how to remain in him. The final discourse as well as the final prayer are revelations of these principles of abiding in Jesus. The context is that of intimate and unique interior relationship or close friendship³⁷. In the First Letter of John parallelly we have the second part centred on the theme of "love" (3,11-5,12). One who has come to light and walks in the light, must abide in the light through love. So in the letter, "light and love" are equivalents of "faith and life" in the Gospel.

Now, the nature of relationship of a disciple to Jesus gains a radically new dimension in the second book. Earlier, this relationship was articulated through historical verbs, indicating external actions. But now, it is interior, and especially close. This is the context in which the usage of special phrases such as *einai en* and *menein en* are to be evaluated. Essentially they belong to the language of radical discipleship.

The immanence of God is an essential aspect of any religious experience. That is the language for articulating the union between God and human being³⁸. In the Old Testament the covenantal relationship between God and the people of Israel is expressed through the presence of God with the people. In the covenant God offered himself to the people (Hesed) and remained unfailingly faithful to His word to give himself (Emet). Thereby he declared himself as "their God". He dwells with them and among them. The fidelity to the covenant was realized by people through their self offering to God and perseverance in the same. Thereby they dwell in their God (Ex 19, 3-6). The tent of meeting, the temple etc. are the concrete forms of this deep relationship between God and people. God dwells with them and they dwell in God³⁹.

The theme of the covenant is central to the fourth Gospel. The Evangelist shows through the various events in the ministry of Jesus that the new covenant as prophesied by Jer 31, 31f. and Ezek 36, 20f. is being established. The event at Cana (2,1-12), the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman (4,1-42) the teaching on the new commandment (13,31-35), the teachings in the final discourse

³⁷ Cfr. D.A. CARSON, *The Farewell Discourse and the Final Prayer of Jesus*, Grand Rapids, 1980.

³⁸ Cfr. MARIE DE LA CORIX, *The Biblical Spirituality of St. John*, New York, 1966, p.319; C.H. DODD, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge 1965, pp.190-192.

³⁹ Cfr. J. TAURO, "Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity: Her Mystical Insights: A Biblical Perspective", pp. 24-32.

(14,1-16, 33) are all expositions of this theme. Jesus' ministry is the process of ratification of the new covenant and his death is the final act of ratification. The new covenant is centred on a heart of flesh which is transformed and has become the dwelling place of the spirit ("I will put my Spirit in it... Ez 36, 20f.). The second book of the Gospel, presents the union between God and the new people as an interior relationship in the teaching on Father's house and many rooms and places in the house (14, 1-6), on the mode of presence and function of the Spirit in the disciples (14, 15f., 14, 25f., 15, 26; 16,7; 16,13) and on the intimate relationship between Vine and branches (15,1-17).

The language used in 14, 1-6 (House, rooms, place) belongs to the vocabulary related to the temple. The temple is the dwelling place of God and by entering the temple one encounters God and through sacrifice and prayer one has communion with God. The temple is the sign of the Old Covenant. In Jesus the new covenant is established and through Jesus we are able to come into the presence of the Father i.e. heaven itself and to have real communion with him through faith and love.

The focus of the teaching on Vine and branches too is the same. There Jesus characterizes his relationship with the disciples as friendship. The relationship between Vine and branches is invisible and intimate and familial. It is friendship because the family secrets are shared by the disciples. "For all that I heard from my Father, I have made known to you" (Jn 15, 15). It is a communion effected through faith and love.

This is the language of discipleship especially in its fuller and final stage in terms of deep-rooted relationship of communion⁴⁰. This fellowship or union is the language and sign of the new covenant relationship. In this context we must interpret the expressions "menein en" and "einai en" in John. Both expressions have essentially the same meaning. However "menein" is preferred by John as it implies the nuance of permanency of the relationship, be it between Father and the Son or between Son and a Christian⁴¹. The phrase occurs more than 118 times in the New Testament; but out of this 68 times it is used in John. It is employed to refer to the mutual abiding of Father and Son, to the communion of believers with Father or with Son and to the mutual abiding of believer and the Word of Christ or love or truth⁴².

⁴⁰ Cfr. M. VELLANICKAL, *Studies in the Gospel of John*, Bangalore 1997, p. 126.

⁴¹ R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, Vol. I, p. 510.

⁴² Cfr. M. VELLANICKAL, *Studies in the Gospel of John*, pp.172-188.

The mutual abiding of the believer and the Father or the Son is, patterned on the mutual abiding of Father and Son. The latter is the source of the former⁴³. Through discipleship the mutual abiding of Father and Son is reproduced in the believers: "Even as thou Father, art in me, and I in thee that they also may be in us..." (Jn 17, 21). John speaks of the indwelling of the Trinity: "If a man loves me he will keep my word and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him" (Jn 14, 23). John presents the indwelling of the Spirit in the disciples: "... And I will pray to the Father and he will send you another counsellor to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth.... You know him for he dwells with you and will be in you... (Jn 14, 15-17). John presents also the mutual abiding of Jesus and the believers (Jn 15, 1-17). This is a progressive understanding of the discipleship. They may be three stages in the development of Johannine theology. So in the final stage it is the indwelling of the Spirit. That is why ch. 16 of the John speaks only of the indwelling of the Spirit where as Ch.14 speaks of indwelling of Father and Son. The Trinitarian indwelling is realized through and in the spirit, the living reciprocity of love in the Trinity. Docility to the word and dynamism of love are fruits of this experience.

The reference is to the intimate union and enduring relationship through which the believer gets immersed in the Divine Stream. It is an invisible and hidden but real union. This is the result of discipleship by which the believers realize and possess the eschatological promise of salvation. It is the essential constitutive principle of Christian life⁴⁴.

Elizabeth had experienced the discipleship in its final full stage and form. She penetrated into the meaning of her baptismal vocation and understood that she was called to live in the "fellowship" of the Trinity⁴⁵. She begins "Heaven in Faith" with the citation of Jn 17,24 and comments on it saying: "... it is important then to know where we must live with him in order to realize His divine dream. The place where the Son of God is hidden is the bosom of the Father or divine essence, invisible to every mortal eye, unattainable by every human intellect... And yet, His will is that we should be established in him; that we should live where he lives in the unity of love..."⁴⁶. Further she writes, "this heaven, Our Father's house, is in the centre of our soul. When we are deep within ourselves, we are in God"⁴⁷. Her

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp.176-177; R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, vol. I, p. 511.

⁴⁴ Cf. R. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, Vol. I, p. 512.

⁴⁵ Cf. M.M. PHILIPPON, *The Spiritual Doctrine*, p. 57.

⁴⁶ ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY, *Heaven in Faith*, p. 1.

⁴⁷ *Letter to Her Sister*, August 1905.

words, written a few hours before her death is a comprehensive testimony to the fact that she had experienced and had become a perfect embodiment of the discipleship as presented by St. John: "the belief that a being whose name is love is dwelling within us at every moment of the day and night. And that he asks us to live in his company"⁴⁸. Faith led her to life. Light led her to love. The word was the principle of unity. The indwelling spirit was the fountain head of all this.

Pauline Fruits

Bl. Elizabeth of the Trinity was a perfect disciple of St. Paul. She had journeyed with Paul from the experience of justification to salvation and glorification and actualized in the perfect union with Christ, in the Spirit. A text from Paul which she cites with special interest is Eph. 1,11-12.. "We have been predestined by the decree of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will so that we may be the praise of His glory"⁴⁹. But the reflection on it is begun with a reference to Eph. 1,4: "God chose us in Him before creation that we might be holy and immaculate in His presence, in love". Elizabeth understood the depth of the mystery of God's eternal plan penetrated by Paul. She finds here the meaning of her vocation, election and mission. She identified that the mission of being "praise of his glory" is possible only by "remaining in the presence of God". Further, she draws the conclusion on the inevitability of Christocentrism to respond to the dignity of this vocation. She writes: "but how do we respond to the dignity of this vocation? This is the secret: "Mihi vivere christus est!... vivo enim, jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus..." We must be transformed into Jesus Christ; again it is Paul who teaches me this: "Those whom God has foreknown, He has predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son"⁵⁰. So Elizabeth discerns the meaning and relevance of her vocation, actual Christian existence, and its final fulfillment with the help of Pauline theological vision regarding the mystery of Christ event.

For Paul, the three dimensional understandings of Christian existence is the result of the Trinitarian commitment to human history for the salvation of humanity. One is justified by God, the Father, through faith in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit. The effects of

⁴⁸ *Letter to Madame G. de. B.*, 1906.

⁴⁹ *Last Retreat*, The Third Day: Fourteenth Day, 6, 36.

⁵⁰ *Last Retreat* (Fourteenth Day): 36-37.

Christ event are justification, salvation, reconciliation, expiation, redemption, freedom, transformation, new creation and glorification. They are essentially three: justification (“dikaiosis”) which is christological, salvation (“soteria”) which is soteriological and glorification (“doxa”) which is eschatological⁵¹. This threefold aspects of Christian existence is based on the personal experience of Paul himself. His encounter with the risen Jesus was the beginning of “life in Christ” for him (“en Christo”). But the risen Jesus is the presence of the living Spirit. So when Paul expounds the meaning of life “in Christ”, he actually speaks of life “in the Spirit” (“en Pneumato”). So Christian existence is essentially life “in the Spirit”.

The Pauline expression “in Christo” is, in meaning, parallel to “menein en” in the Johannine Theology. The accumulated presence of this phrase (124 times) in Paul articulates how the Apostle crystallizes a central idea through this, namely “communion with Christ”. Phil. 3,1-11 synthesizes the Pauline understanding of communion with Christ. “... Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ... For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him...”⁵².

After having expatiated the process in the incorporation of a person into Christ through baptism in the sixth chapter of the letter to the Romans, Paul develops the theme of “life in the Spirit” in the following chapters, especially chapter 8. So actual experience of communion with Christ is pneumatological. Christians are the temple of God and the Spirit dwells in them (1 Cor 3, 16-19); they are the temples of the Spirit who is in them (1 Cor 6,19); they are the house of the living God (2 Cor 6, 16); they are built into Christ the corner stone for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph 2,22); they are God’s field, God’s building (1 Cor 3, 9); they live but not they but Christ lives in them (Gal 2, 20).

What impresses us about the life and spirituality of Bl. Elizabeth is that all the three dimensions of Christian existence are at the same time realized in her, during her life on earth: she was justified, saved and glorified; she was incorporated into Christ and conformed herself to Christ’s image and thus became the dwelling place of God, and she dwelt in God and finally became the “praise of his glory”, living in time yet really in eternity. In her we experience the actualized “tempiternidad”. Her attachment to the Pauline phrase “praise of his glory” (Eph 1,12) is the actual expression of her proleptic experience

⁵¹ Cfr. J.A. FITZMYER, “Pauline Theology”, *NJBC*, Bangalore 1991, pp. 1397-1401.

⁵² J. TAURO, “Bl. Elizabeth: Her Mystical Insights”, pp. 36-37.

of eschatological fulfillment. "Glory" (*doxa-kabod*) represents God's very being and presence. When human beings live according to the will of God revealed in the Christ-event, they become the praise of God. God is honoured by their lives or God's glory is experienced by all in and through their lives. They become the presence of God, dwelling place of God, the temple of the Spirit of God. This is a reinterpretation of the words of Christ: "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in Heaven" (Mt 5,16). Elizabeth writes, "I am going to tell you a secret: my dream is to be the praise of His glory". I read that in St. Paul, and my Bridegroom has made me understand that this is my vocation here in exile, while waiting to go and sing the eternal "Sanctus" in the city of the Saints. But this calls for great fidelity since in order to be a "praise of glory".⁵³ Elizabeth was a perfect disciple of Paul. She realized in her the Christological, soteriological and eschatological fruits of Christ event expounded by Paul. Through her life, we understand Pauline teaching more deeply.

5. Bl. Elizabeth's Prayer to the Trinity: An Epitome of Salvation History

In this final section we shall focus our attention on the classical prayer⁵⁴ of the saint addressed to the Trinity and demonstrate that this is basically a biblical prayer because it is an epitome of salvation History the essential biblical perspective, and a compendium of her integral spiritual experience. The whole biblical history of salvation can be read in this prayer, and this prayer serves as a key to read salvation history in a new way. Salvation history is the story of the active involvement of the living God, one and three, Father, Son and Spirit, in the human history. Through baptism we are introduced into this divine river so that through the process of Christification and divinization, we can experience the three divine persons manifested

⁵³ *Letter to Canon A.*, January 1906.

⁵⁴ The Prayer was written by her on 21st November 1904, on the day of the feast of the Presentation. The whole community renewed their religious profession on that day. Already during the pronouncement of the profession formula she was irresistibly moved by grace to the Holy Trinity. When she returned to the cell, she took up her pen and on common sheet of paper from a notebook without hesitation and without any correction, in one stroke she wrote the prayer. It came spontaneously as an outpouring of the heart. It sprang from the fullness of heart. Cfr. M.M. Philipon, *The Spiritual Doctrine*, p.53; Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Complete Worm*, Vol. I, 184-185. This prayer has a similarity to "The Act of oblation of St. Therese of Lisieux and to the prayer of St. Catherine of Sienna to the Trinity (Dialogue ch: 167).

as present in centre of the soul, "holding their almighty council day and night"⁵⁵ and "the Blessed Trinity can be our dwelling, our Home, our Father's House which we ought never leave."⁵⁶

A glance at the organization of this prayer, reveals that Elizabeth addresses God the Trinity at the beginning and at the end (O, my God Trinity, O, my unchanging one; O, my Three, O my All, O my Beatitude, O Infinite Solitude, O Immensity in which I lose myself). What does she pray for? "Give peace to my soul, make it your place"; "bury yourself in me". What are the effects she desires to experience in her life? "That I may be rooted in you as still and as peaceful as my soul were in eternity, that nothing may trouble my peace or make me leave you. May each minute I never leave you alone, may I be fully present, my faith wholly vigilant, wholly adoring, wholly surrendered to your creation action"; "that I may surrender myself as your offering that I may bury myself in you".

Elizabeth recognizes and proclaims the Trinity as the Sovereign God, the Lord of History, the creator, the Lord of heaven and earth, the incomprehensible God, experienced solely in the darkness of faith, realized through the attitudes of submission and surrender as the very fundament of our existence. The words of Isaiah, echoes in the words of the prayer: "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool... but this is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in Spirit and trembles at my word" (Is 66, 1-2).

So Elizabeth is addressing the prayer to God as the very fundament of her existence. The desired effect of this prayer is that she may be rooted in Him and that He may bury himself in her. God is transcendent and hidden and so He can be experienced only in pure faith.⁵⁷ Faith is expressed through the attitudes of total surrender: "that I may surrender myself; that I may bury myself in you..." Through faith a relationship with God is established through live experience.

Now, within the inclusion of the address to the Trinity, there are addresses to Christ, Spirit and Father.

Christ is addressed "beloved, crucified by love, eternal word, interpretation of my God and beloved star". The Christocentrism of Salvation History is underscored by such an address. It focuses on the decisive and crucial nature of Christ event. Specially notable is the phrase, "interpretation of my God". Jesus is the only one who can interpret the Father (Jn 1, 18).

⁵⁵ This is the expression used by Elizabeth as she narrated her experience of special grace in the Ascension day, 1906.

⁵⁶ ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY, *Heaven in Faith*, 1st day, 1st prayer, 1.

⁵⁷ Cf. M.M. PHILIPON, *The Spiritual Doctrine*, p. 60.

The petitions to Christ are expressions of the conformity to Christ. God has predestined us "to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom 8,29). "We must be transformed into Jesus Christ".⁵⁸ That is why she requests that Christ may clothe her with himself, there may be identification of the movements of the soul, to that extent that Jesus can substitute himself for her. The petitions imply concrete intimate and close relationship by the use of spousal language. "Allure me" echoes in us the words of God to Israel through Hosea in 2, 14f..." God wants to allure her and take her into the wilderness to talk to her heart. So Elizabeth desires to be "the bride" for Jesus' heart, "love him until she dies of love". The life of love is the expression of actual Christian discipleship. Elizabeth's life became an explosion love.

The Spirit is addressed as "Consuming fire" and "Spirit of love". The Spirit is the source and energy of dynamism and mission. This is lived on through hope. The mission is to actualize the presence of Jesus Christ, the interpretation of the Father in the world today and thus to proclaim it, to be the Gospel and to proclaim the Gospel. Hence the request to the Spirit is "come upon me, create in my soul another incarnation of the word". "Come upon me" brings before us, the scene of annunciation and echoes in our ears the words of the angel to Mary: "the Holy Spirit will come upon you" (Lk 1, 35). So "another incarnation" and "another humanity" are articulations of the expected conformity of life to that of Christ so that one is a witness of Jesus through life. Bl. Elizabeth was already "the praise of his glory" on earth and the loud testimony of "Heaven in faith". Thus through and in our transparent lives God can "renew his whole mystery.." by realizing Christ's life of reparation, sacrifice, praise and adoration.

Then "Father" is addressed and the petition is: "bend lovingly over the little creature". This signals to the final eschatological intervention of God, the Father and Judge. The eschatological fulfillment of salvation history is verbalized in the petition: "Cover her with your shadow, seeing in her the beloved, well pleased". The words are taken from the scenes of Jesus' baptism and transfiguration. The perfect union with God through the union of wills is realized when we can be persons on whom the pleasure of God can rest, as Jesus was. So finally, God will be visible, tangible and audible through our lives. As she writes, "it is also without living it that the soul will live, like the immutable Trinity, in an eternal present, adoring Him always because of Himself and becoming by an always more simple, more unitive gaze, the "splendour" of his glory", that is, the unceasing 'praise of glory' of His adorable perfections".⁵⁹

⁵⁸ ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY, *Last Retreat*, 14th day, 37.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 16th day, 44.

Hence this prayer epitomizes the whole history of salvation, in the past, present and future dimensions, in the involvement of the Trinity in history, in the decisive turning point of Christ-event, in the spirit who empowers us to relive the humanity of Christ and in the Father to become the beloved in whom he is well pleased and be covered by His shadow. So the prayer to the Trinity is essentially a salvation-historical prayer, a biblical prayer.

Conclusion

Bl. Elizabeth of the Trinity, an authentic Carmelite, rooted and lived on the word of God, pondering it day and night, like "Mary who kept in mind and pondered in the heart, the depths of the mystery of Christ"⁶⁰ the Word of the Father, became the transparent presence of the biblical values. She journeyed inwardly to the depth of her soul, the dwelling place of God, and through the armour of God namely, faith, love and hope, identified herself with the Word of God, the Sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6, 13-17) and dwelt in God, in solitude and silence.⁶¹

As she was rooted in God, so God was dwell in her. Thus she realized in her life the salvation history in its various dimensions and fulfilled the ideal of radical discipleship according to John and the soteriological significance of Christian existence according to Paul. She became the visible sign of Salvation History in its inner dynamism with Johannine roots and Pauline fruits.

Thus, the more she was rooted in the Bible, the more Carmelite she became and the more she was rooted in the Carmelite tradition, the more biblical she became. So Bible is the key to interpret her life just as her life is another key to interpret Bible.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1st day, 2; 15th day, 40.

⁶¹ The meaning her name "Elizabeth" as proposed to her as she received it "House of God" is not etymologically correct. The Hebrew word is the combination of ELI + SB'. This means probably "My God is an oath" or "My God is Fullness or Fortune". But we may say that her actual life has given a new nuance to the Word, rather.