Changing Faces: Imagery of Saint Teresa of Ávila

Despite the vast number of images of Saint Teresa from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, little scholarship has been dedicated to the study of these pictorial representations. Teresa became a central figure in religious images, expressing the ideals of the Counter Reformation, when she was beatified (1614), canonized (1622), and ultimately promoted to the status of co-patron with Saint James, known in Spain as Santiago (1627). Because Saint Teresa was most famous for her mystical visions, her convent reforms, and her religious writings, artists tended to focus on these accomplishments when depicting her. However, the imagery of Saint Teresa changed between 1613 and 1630, reflecting society’s struggle with the reception of a woman as a symbol of Spanish pride. In particular, the few surviving images of Saint Teresa as co-patron saint (1617-1630) demonstrate the transformation of her role within Spain’s modern society.1

In this thesis, I will employ a comparative study of the pictorial representations of Saint Teresa, including paintings, engravings, and sculptures. I will begin by looking at the original portrait of Saint Teresa painted by Fray Juan de la Miseria in 1576, a few years before Saint Teresa’s death (figure 1). I will compare it and other portraits of Saint Teresa to the images of her theological promotions after her death, up through the “end” of the Counter Reformation, circa 1650.2 This study will help to reveal the changing iconography of this highly regarded female saint.

1 Erin Rowe, Disrupting the Republic: Santiago, Teresa de Jesús, and the Battle for the Soul of Spain, 1617-1630, (PhD. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2005), 7. Rowe gives this range of dates as the time period of the co-patronage debate. She also divides the debate into two attempts: 1617-1618 and 1626-1630.
2 Jonathan Brown, Painting in Spain 1500-1700, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 191. Brown cites the middle of the seventeenth century as the “end” of the Counter Reformation due to the containment of Protestantism as well as a change in the taste for religious art.
Saint Teresa reformed the Carmelite Order by creating convents that allowed nuns to participate in mental prayer in defense of the Church. Men believed that women were less rational than men and thus more likely to be deceived by the devil during acts of mental prayer. Teresa wrote books to defend herself as a religious authority while at the same time building convents and monasteries. Although the majority of congregations and religious orders approved of Saint Teresa’s rise to beata in 1614 and saint in 1622, her promotion to co-patron caused major conflicts. Supporters, in an attempt to persuade non-supporters, changed the manner in which they discussed Saint Teresa by focusing on her spiritually manly virtues. The resulting written rhetoric, specifically sermons and letters, seemed to dictate the changes in the imagery. By comparing these texts with contemporary images, I will examine how teresiano artists, or those in favor of Saint Teresa as co-patron, manipulated images to advance Saint Teresa’s position. Despite the efforts of teresiano writers and artists, the co-patronage movement ultimately failed; after the Pope officially declared Saint Teresa co-patron with Saint James in 1627, the title was revoked in 1629 due to incessant complaints from santiaguistas, or those in favor of Santiago.

The changes in teresiano iconography are evident in the art created for her beatification and co-patronage. A set of prints by the Flemish artists Adriaen Collaert and Cornelio Galle from 1613 depicts twenty-five events from Teresa’s life and may

---

6 Rowe, “Spanish Minerva,” 574.
have been used to advance her beatification in Spain (figures 2). One engraving portrays Saint Teresa sitting at her desk writing. While this is the manner most artists depicted her, the rest of the engravings show Teresa participating in other activities, placing importance on her religious devotion from a young age to the founding of convents and monasteries to her death (figure 3). Flanders was ruled by the King of Spain at this time; although not created in Spain, these images probably would have been widely circulated throughout the Iberian Peninsula. A poster for a poetry contest in Granada, portraying Teresa and Santiago together, served an entirely different function. It was used to promote Teresa as co-patron in 1618 and features Saint Teresa and Santiago defending Spain, which is represented by the Spanish coat of arms (figure 3). To my knowledge, this is the only image of Saint Teresa and Santiago together that has been published, and it will play an important role in my study. Few images survive due to a papal decree in 1629 declaring that all images of Saint Teresa as co-patron be destroyed after the Pope nullified her co-patron status. Nevertheless, these images are important because they do not simply exemplify Teresa as the writer inspired by God, but rather they depict a female with religious and political agency.

In my thesis, I will also place the images of Saint Teresa in a larger historical context by examining the Counter Reformation and issues of gender. This will involve not only a consideration of the decrees of the Council of Trent, but also of artistic treatises from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Francisco Pacheco’s *Arte de la

---

7 Adriaen Collaert and Cornelio Galle, *Estampas de la vida de la Santa Madre de Jesús*, Madrid: Carlos Sanz, 1962. I will be using this modern facsimile to view this set of prints. The original set was published in 1613 in Antwerp.
8 Brown, 110.
9 Rowe, “Spanish Minerva,” 590. Rowe cites this image in her article.
pintura (completed 1638, published 1649), and Vicente Carducho’s Diálogos de la pintura: su defensa, origen, esencia, definición, modos y diferencias (1633), are relevant because they discuss Counter-Reformatory art, including images of female saints, as well as portraiture. Pacheco wrote an entire treatise in favor of Saint Teresa as co-patron of Spain, and I hope to link his discussion of Saint Teresa as potential co-patron with observations in his artistic treatise. I will also research women’s role in society in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Spain in order to explore how men and women regarded Saint Teresa.

This thesis will apply a socio-historical approach to studying the images of Saint Teresa. While secondary sources will be employed, I will make extensive use of primary sources: the images themselves, but more specifically sermons celebrating Teresa’s beatification, canonization, and co-patron status. While doing research in the Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid, I read first-hand accounts concerning the festivals and sermons celebrated throughout Spain in honor of Saint Teresa’s beatification, canonization, and co-patron status. Saint Teresa’s own writings, including her Vida (completed 1565) and Fundaciones (completed 1582), which offer autobiographical accounts of her religious thoughts and visions, will help explain why her supporters, who also would have read these texts, felt that she should be canonized and later to co-patron

---


13 Some of these sources include: Cristóbal Avendaño, “En la fiesta del Patronato de nuestra preciosa Madre Santa Theresa de Jesus,” In Libro Intitulado, otra tomo de sermons, para muchas festividades de los santos, Folio 173r-90r. Valladolid: Ian de Rueda, 1629. Copia de un decreto de las Cortes de Castilla, en que reciben a la gloriosa madre santa Teresa de Jesus por Patrona destos Reynos, 1627. Diego de San José, Compendio a las solenes fiestas que en toda España hicieron en la Beatificacion de N. M. S. Teresa de Jesus fundadora de la Reformacion de Descalzos y Descalzas de N. S. del Carmen, Madrid: Alonso Martín, 1615.
of Spain.¹⁴

Surprisingly little has been written on the imagery of Saint Teresa, and no one has focused on the few surviving examples of images of Saint Teresa as co-patron. One of the earliest examples of Teresian scholarship, from 1949, by Margaretta Salinger, was a brief essay with an overview of a few images of Saint Teresa.¹⁵ Laura Gutierrez Rueda’s essay from 1964 for the Revista de Espiritualidad offered an in-depth discussion of the iconography of Saint Teresa. Gutierrez Rueda explored a wide array of paintings and sculptures of Saint Teresa as a youth, on her death bed, experiencing visions, and writing at her desk. No images depicting Saint Teresa as co-patron were included, but Gutierrez Rueda laid a solid foundation for the study of images of Saint Teresa.¹⁶ More recently, Christopher Wilson has focused on the iconography of Saint Teresa in Colonial Mexico. He has investigated how Mexican artists borrowed and took inspiration from Spanish traditions of illustrating Saint Teresa, and then changed them to fit their own spiritual needs and motives.¹⁷ Erin Rowe, a historian, has examined the co-patronage debate and has recovered one of the few extant images of Saint Teresa and Santiago together (figure 4). Rowe has explored how and why teresianos altered sermons, metaphors, and images of Saint Teresa from 1617 to 1630 to make a stronger case for a woman as co-patron of Spain.¹⁸ I will rely heavily on Rowe’s research, but I hope to expand on her findings by relating the history to the images of Saint Teresa.

This thesis represents an expansion of a paper I wrote for Tanya Tiffany’s spring colloquium, and I expect to finish by May 2009. Having completed some research while in Spain, I hope to obtain other hard-to-find sources soon. These include Pacheco’s treatise, two books in French on Teresian iconography, as well as additional sermons and letters concerning her beatification, canonization, and co-patron status. As part of my investigation, I will continue looking for images of Saint Teresa that will contribute to my study. In addition to this continued research, I am taking a Spanish literature course with Dr. John McCaw entitled “The World of Don Quixote.” This class will not only expand my knowledge of Spanish history and literature, but also help with reading and translating Spanish texts from the time.

The study of these images of Saint Teresa from 1576 until 1650 will shed a new light on Teresian iconography and devotion. At the same time this thesis will explore how history, literature, and art functioned together to record and shape changing perceptions of both gender and religion. Saint Teresa’s beatification, canonization, and co-patronage emphasized Spain’s changing modern society when a woman’s status in both religion and society was raised to that of a man’s, if only for a moment.
Figure 1: *Saint Teresa of Ávila*, 1576
Fray Juan de la Miseria
Figure 2: Frontispiece to *Vita B. Virginis Teresiae a Jesu ordinis Carmelitarum excalcaetroum piae restauratrix*, 1613
Adriaen Collaert and Cornelio Galle
Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid (ER 1638)
Figure 3: *Saint Teresa’s Vision of the Virgin and Saint Joseph*, 1613
Adriaen Collaert and Cornelio Galle
Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid (ER 1638)
Figure 4: Poster that accompanies the *Iusta Poetica en el Convento Real de los Santos Martires de la Ciudad de Granada – día de la gloriosa Virgen Santat Teresa, fundadora del Carmelo, 1618*
Unknown Artist
Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid (MS 4011)
Bibliography


*Copia de un decreto de las Cortes de Castilla, en que reciben a la gloriosa madre santa Teresa de Jesus por Patrona destos Reynos*, 1627.


López Estrada, Francisco. “Cohetes para Teresa: La relación de 1627 sobre las fiestas de Madrid por el patronato de España de Santa Teresa de Jesús y la polémica sobre el mismo.” *Congreso Internacional Teresiano* 2, no. 4-7 (1982): 635 – 681.


San José, Diego de. Compendio a las solenes fiestas que en toda España hicieron en la Beatificacion de N. M. S. Teresa de Jesus fundadora de la Reformacion de Descalzos y Descalzas de N. S. del Carmen. Madrid: Alonso Martín, 1615.


Wilson, Christopher. “Saint Teresa of Ávila’s Martyrdom: Images of Her Transverberation in Mexican Colonial Painting.” Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas no. 74-75 (1999): 211-233