

As was indicated earlier the "meaning" of an act is, in ethogenic terms, represented by the function of its purpose—i.e., by what it is felt to achieve. Every act associated with continuing to be a member of a religious group, therefore, no matter how senseless some of these acts may be to an outsider, contains meaning for the actor. The ethogenic theory argues that this individual feels that the purpose of every act justifies its performance rendering it intelligible to him or herself, and to all members of the group. From this perspective the causal/mechanistic model of traditional psychology clearly has no part to play in attempts to understand such behaviour. An individual who maintains allegiance to a religious group is seen by the ethogenic theory to be a self-directing agent whose behaviour is self-monitored. Such an individual is knowingly carrying out particular actions which have both social and personal meanings. While it is both relevant and makes sense to attempt to understand the reasons for this behaviour, it clearly has little explanatory value to attempt to isolate "causes." The "meaning" of a behaviour includes the reason for enacting it, and in ethogenics this "meaning" is both social and personal.

It has been argued<sup>29</sup> that the explanatory value of traditional psychology's inductive generalizations and "covering laws" is limited, partly because the individual is subsumed by the generalizations. Adopting that explanatory model moves the investigator some distance from the individual's intentions, desires, hopes, fears and anxieties—factors which may explain the reason for behaviour which, prior to investigation, is enigmatic and must therefore be elucidated.

Ethogeny conceives of individuals as both social and personal beings, and never removes them from the social and personal contexts within which they are functioning. The theory is interested in developing the grammar of social life, and it would appear that its perspective is able to make a useful contribution to the efforts of investigations to understand more deeply the meaning of religious behaviour.

29 Gauld and Shotter, *Human Action*, p. 86.

## Maladjustment and self-actualization in the life of Teresa of Avila

LAURENCE NIXON

A psychological criterion is frequently used in the evaluation of religious mysticism. For some mysticism is an expression of mental disorder; for others it is a process of self-actualization or personality integration. The apparent contradiction between the two can be resolved by clarifying the definition of psychopathology. If this term refers to a low threshold for anxiety arousal and a slow recovery rate then mystics can indeed be so defined. But highly creative persons would also have to be placed in the same category. Clearly this is unacceptable.

However mystics share more than a common temperament with neurotics and schizophrenics. They also experience episodes that bear a marked resemblance to such pathological states as conversion hysteria and psychosis. But although similar in some respects, such altered states of consciousness and behaviour are not identical to the pathological ones. The effect of the bizarre states experienced by mystics is growth-promoting, whereas in the average person suffering from mental illness, this is not the case.

The primary purpose of this study will be to demonstrate this fact in the life of the 16th-century Spanish mystic, Teresa of Avila, by evaluating the stages of her life from the perspective of Kazimierz Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration. Teresa of Avila, a reformer of the Carmelite order of nuns and a declared doctor of theology in the Roman Catholic Church, was chosen because her autobiography provides one of the most complete descriptions of the mystical life currently available. Dabrowski's theory is well suited to the task of examining Teresa's life because he interprets non-normal behaviour within a developmental context and his stage-

Laurence Nixon is a Lecturer in the Department of Religion, Brandon University, Brandon, Manitoba.

model is sufficiently comprehensive to include the advanced levels of development reported by mystics. A Dabrowskian analysis of Teresa's life makes it possible to establish the growth-promoting nature of Teresa's "abnormal" experiences as well as to identify their specific functions in the process of her personality development.

#### Psychopathology and self-actualization

At the turn of the century a number of authors employed pathological explanations to account for the phenomena of religious mysticism.<sup>1</sup> In later works contemplative states have been characterized as artificial catatonia<sup>2</sup> and a form of oceanic fusion with the mother that is regressive and maladaptive.<sup>3</sup> And as recently as 1976 a report by the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry classified mystical phenomena as "intermediate between normality and frank psychosis." Teresa of Avila, in particular, has been considered hysterical<sup>4</sup> and—at least in her early years—"a rather neurotic and purposeless nun."<sup>5</sup> Her mystical raptures, in the tradition of Freud, have been called a reliving of the proverbial bliss of the infant at the breast.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand two recent studies portray Teresa as someone who achieved self-actualization. Kevin Culligan demonstrates that Teresa possessed an integrated personality by a "phenomenological-existential" analysis of her letters,<sup>7</sup> J. Ruth Aldrich by showing that the saint's behaviour corresponded to some of Abraham Maslow's characteristics of a self-actualized person.<sup>8</sup> Both studies are convincing but they describe Teresa's mature years and do not examine those traits and experiences that others have found pathological.

#### The mystical temperament

That mystics possess a peculiar temperament has been noted by a number of students of mysticism. It has been variously referred to as psychophysical sensitivity,<sup>9</sup> a general sensitivity to all stimuli,<sup>10</sup> a capacity for hyperarousal,<sup>11</sup> nervous instability<sup>12</sup> and nervous temperament.<sup>13</sup> Friedrich Von Hugel specifically mentions Teresa of Avila as an example of psychophysical sensitivity.

Efforts to determine the etiology of neurosis and schizophrenia have led to descriptions of the underlying predisposition that are very similar to the above definitions of the mystical temperament. Thus, after a review of recent research Florence Schumer concludes that "anxiety patients do indeed differ from normal subjects in their tendency to experience higher levels of autonomic arousal and in maintaining these levels over more prolonged periods before returning, if at all, to basal levels."<sup>14</sup> Sarnoff Mednick, a pioneer in high-risk longitudinal schizophrenia research, came to the same conclusion regarding preschizophrenics: they have a low threshold for anxiety arousal, slow recovery rate and high generalization reactivity.<sup>15</sup> This similarity in temperament is, of course, one of the reasons why earlier writers on mysticism have attempted to reduce it to psychopathology.

Yet such a reduction cannot withstand critical scrutiny given that creative geniuses apparently share the same disposition. Frank Barron studied 56 professional writers and found that while they measured high on tests of aspiration level, range of interests and ego strength, their scores on the MMPI schizophrenia and hysteria scales were significantly above average.<sup>16</sup> J. L. Karlsson found that adopted preschizophrenics who did not become schizophrenic (presumably because their new homes provided them with support and stimulation) were spontaneous, worked at highly creative jobs and followed the most imaginative hobbies.<sup>17</sup>

- 9 Friedrich Von Hugel, *The Mystical Element of Religion* (1908; rpt. London: James Clark, 1960), Vol. 2, p. 41-42.
- 10 W. H. Clark, *The Psychology of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), p. 279.
- 11 Roland Fischer, "On Creative, Psychotic and Ecstatic States," in John White, ed., *The Highest State of Consciousness* (New York: Anchor, 1972).
- 12 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902; rpt. New York: Modern Library, 1929), p. 24-26.
- 13 A. Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer* (1910; rpt. Westminster, vt: Celtic Cross, 1978), p. xcii.
- 14 Florence Schumer, *Abnormal Psychology* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath, 1983), p. 224.
- 15 Sarnoff A. Mednick, "Schizophrenia: A Learned Thought Disorder," in G. S. Nielsen, ed., *Proceedings of the XIV International Congress of Applied Psychology* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1962).
- 16 Frank Barron, "The Creative Personality: Akin to Madness," in Richard Woods, ed., *Understanding Mysticism* (Garden City, NY: Image, 1980).
- 17 J. L. Karlsson, *The Biological Basis of Schizophrenia* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1966).

- 1 H. Murisier, *Les maladies des sentiments* (n.p.; n.d.), cited in Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (1911; rpt. London: Methuen, 1960), p. 60; Pierre Janet, *L'état mentale des hystériques*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1893-94), cited in *ibid.*; Pierre Janet, "Une extatique," *Bulletin de l'Institut Psychologique* (1901), cited in *ibid.*; T. Ribot, *La psychologie des sentiments* (Paris, 1896), cited in *ibid.*
- 2 F. Alexander, "Buddhistic Training as an Artificial Catatonia," *Psychoanalytic Review*, 18 (1931): 129-45.
- 3 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1928; rpt. New York: W. W. Norton, 1962).
- 4 G. Hahn, "Les phénomènes hystériques et les révélations de Sainte Thérèse," *Revue des Questions Scientifiques*, 13 (1883): 568-69.
- 5 Robert T. Peterson, *The Art of Ecstasy: Teresa, Bernini and Crashaw* (New York: Atheneum, 1970).
- 6 B. Lewin, *The Psychoanalysis of Elation* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1950).
- 7 Kevin Culligan, "Teresa of Jesus: A Personality Profile," *Spiritual Life*, 29 (1983): 131-39.
- 8 J. Ruth Aldrich, "Teresa, a Self-Actualized Woman," in John Sullivan, ed., *Contemporary Psychology and Carmel* (Washington: ics Publications, 1982).

Roland Fischer refers to Wilhelm Lange-Eichbaum's book, *Genius, Madness and Fame*, a collection of "pathographies" of a large number of creative persons throughout history from Aristotle down to the present, and notes that it is impossible to find one *normal* creative person in the lot.<sup>18</sup> The temperamental similarity between schizophrenics, neurotics, creative individuals and mystics challenges any superficial equation between hypersensitivity and mental illness. Hypersensitivity is a potential either for creativity, mystical personality transformation or mental illness, but it is not synonymous with the last-named.

#### Hysterical and psychotic episodes in the life of Teresa of Avila

Even when a low-anxiety threshold is no longer seen to be equivalent to psychopathology there still remains the question of the peculiar states of consciousness and behaviours found in the mystic. For example, subsequent to her entering the convent in her early twenties Teresa of Avila suffered from fainting spells, heart pains, nausea, fever, hyperaesthesia, inability to eat and finally a paroxysm followed by a paralysis that lasted four years. In a psychoanalytic interpretation of Teresa's life Catherine Romano attributes this "flight into illness" to conversion hysteria, the alleged purpose of which was to resolve inner anxiety and to acquire love and attention.<sup>19</sup> As stated above Teresa's raptures, including her first experience of rapture at the age of 42, are considered to be regressive psychotic episodes. In order to show that her paralysis and first rapture were not dysfunctional—rather that they served a developmental purpose—Teresa's life will be examined from the perspective of positive disintegration theory.

In the opinion of James Leuba<sup>20</sup> a fourfold division can be made of Teresa's life: (1) the period prior to her decision to embrace the monastic life; (2) the period of her twenties and thirties ending with her conversion; (3) the period between her conversion and her first rapture; and (4) the remainder of her life. Otilio Rodriguez, one of the two translators of a recent edition of her autobiography, distinguishes three periods: the first he calls her Christian period (her life until her conversion); the second covers the time until her mystical marriage; and the third consists of the final 10 years until her death.<sup>21</sup> As will be seen below an analysis of

her life using the positive disintegration model confirms the combined distinctions made by Leuba and Rodriguez.

#### Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration

Dabrowski's personality theory grew out of his reflection on events in his personal life during the First World War in Poland, his clinical experience, a careful reading of other psychological theories, analyses of biographical data on a number of saints and geniuses and an examination of relevant empirical research.<sup>22</sup> Dabrowski and his colleague, Michael Piechowski, have devised a number of methods of determining personality level and developmental potential for use in clinical work, experimental research and the analysis of autobiographies and other personal documents.<sup>23</sup> The theory has a wide range of applications. In addition to its clinical use<sup>24</sup> the theory of positive disintegration has been considered relevant to moral education,<sup>25</sup> gifted child education<sup>26</sup> and creativity studies.<sup>27</sup>

Dabrowski's personality model—which he called the theory of positive disintegration—consists of a hierarchy of stages.<sup>28</sup> Both the first and the last stages are ones of personality integration; the three intermediate levels consist of one type or another of disintegration. Individuals at the first and last stages of integration are virtually free from debilitating inner conflict. And in both behaviour is spontaneous and unselfconscious. But behind surface similarities there are important differences. The person at level I is spontaneously controlled by basic biological impulses, whereas in the person at level V biological drives are spontaneously and effortlessly directed by a fully manifest personality ideal. At the fifth level the intellec-

22 Kazimierz Dabrowski and Michael M. Piechowski, *Theory of Levels of Emotional Development*, 2 vols. (Oceanside, NY: Dabor Science, 1977), Vol. 1, p. ix-xii.

23 Dabrowski and Piechowski, *Theory of Levels of Emotional Development*, Vol. 2; and David F. Gage, Philip A. Morse and Michael M. Piechowski, "Measuring Levels of Emotional Development," *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, 103 (1981): 129-52.

24 Kazimierz Dabrowski, *Personality-Shaping through Positive Disintegration* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967); and Kazimierz Dabrowski, *Psychoneurosis Is Not an Illness* (London: Gryf, 1970).

25 William Hague, "Positive Disintegration and Moral Education," *Journal of Moral Education*, 5 (1975-76): 231-40.

26 M. Kay Ogburn-Colangelo, "Giftedness as a Multilevel Potential: A Clinical Example," in N. Colangelo and R. T. Zaffrann, eds., *New Voices in Counseling the Gifted* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1979); and L. K. Silverman, "Personality Development: The Pursuit of Excellence," *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 6 (1983): 5-19.

27 Michael M. Piechowski and K. Cunningham, "Patterns of Overexcitability in a Group of Artists," *The Journal of Creative Behavior*, 19, 3 (1985): 153-74; and Michael M. Piechowski, L. K. Silverman and R. F. Falk, "Comparison of Intellectually and Artistically Gifted on Five Dimensions of Mental Functioning," *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 60 (1984): 539-49.

28 Dabrowski and Piechowski, *Theory of Levels of Emotional Development*, Vol. 1, p. 18-30, 37-56.

18 Fischer, "On Creative, Psychotic and Ecstatic States."

19 Catherine Romano, "A Psycho-spiritual History of Teresa of Avila: A Woman's Perspective," in Matthew Fox, ed., *Western Spirituality: Historical Roots, Ecumenical Routes* (Santa Fe, NM: Bear, 1981).

20 James H. Leuba, *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism* (1925; rpt. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972).

21 Otilio Rodriguez, "Saint Teresa and Death," *Spiritual Life*, 28 (1982): 2-14.

tual, imaginal and especially the emotional dimensions of the personality are highly differentiated and at the same time thoroughly integrated. In primary integration (level I) these functions have not yet undergone differentiation. Persons in primary integration are indifferent to altruistic concerns whereas those in secondary integration, although fully autonomous, are spontaneously and dispassionately ready to sacrifice themselves for others even to the point of giving up their lives. In interpersonal disputes persons at level I come into conflict with others when the satisfaction of basic drives is threatened, while persons at level V do so when human ideals are threatened.

In order to move from primary to secondary integration it is necessary to pass through three stages of disintegration which Dabrowski calls unilevel, spontaneous multilevel and organized multilevel. All three are marked by inner conflict. In level II (unilevel disintegration) the individual feels inferior toward others and is susceptible to social opinion and as a result experiences conflict between the various internalized expectations of others and biological urges. This stage is also marked by ambivalence. Multilevel conflict (at the third and fourth levels) is between two sources of motivation: biological impulses and expectations of others on the one hand, and an intrinsic set of higher values on the other. At level III the individual is alternately subject to *both* motivational sources and this gives rise to dissatisfaction and astonishment with the self, a sense of shame and guilt. At this stage one no longer feels inferior toward others but rather toward one's intrinsically accepted standards. This is in contrast to the tendency of persons at level II to avoid any genuine self-criticism by having recourse to various defence mechanisms. The third stage is the level of the scrupulous and authentic conscience (ego morality as opposed to super ego morality—the latter belonging more to level II). While persons at level II attempt to resolve inner conflict by rebellion, conformity and psychosomatic illness, those at level III think in terms of a need for self-transformation.

In stage IV multilevel disintegration becomes organized—that is to say, persons at this level actively and effectively plan their own development. Autonomy from biological drives and social pressures is much stronger as is the intrinsically determined hierarchy of values. And behaviour is increasingly integrated with the highest values, resulting in an orientation toward self-perfection and the autonomously determined service of others.

#### Teresa's adolescence

In the process of individual maturation there occurs at least some measure of personality disintegration, noticeable particularly during adoles-

cence. According to Erik Erikson<sup>29</sup> this is caused by the physiological revolution initiated at puberty and by the anticipation of the demands of adulthood. Dabrowski sees in the increased thyroid activity of the period a physiological substrate for adolescent disintegration<sup>30</sup> which may or may not pass beyond the unilevel stage.<sup>31</sup> Although signs of multilevel disintegration are not absent during Teresa's adolescence, on reading her account of those years one has a marked impression of unilevel disintegration. As Dabrowski notes, even at this stage "there may arise certain [but] short-lived glimpses of the 'ideal' " which occur "in the transitions from one set of tendencies to another."<sup>32</sup>

In level II there is a "concern for the preservation of one's line or tradition."<sup>33</sup> Teresa mentions more than once that at this time she had a fear of losing her honour and reputation. Also characteristic of level II are what Dabrowski and Piechowski refer to as ambitendencies: indecision, wanting and not wanting, or wanting two irreconcilable things at once.<sup>34</sup> This dynamism can be seen in Teresa's request to the nuns in the convent school for prayers that God show her what vocation she is to follow. Then she adds immediately that as yet she has no desire to be a nun and even asks God not to give her this vocation. At the same time she informs the reader that she also feared the prospect of marriage.<sup>35</sup> Finally she does decide to become a nun, but the decision is one that she forces on herself out of fear of going to hell.<sup>36</sup> Such a motive typifies the level II approach to religion.<sup>37</sup>

One of the most prominent traits found in unilevel disintegration is the susceptibility to social opinion, guidance of one's behaviour based on a need for recognition and approval and internalization of values from external sources.<sup>38</sup> Teresa speaks repeatedly of her desire to please, of how she enjoys being esteemed, or of how she is worried that others will see how vain she is,<sup>39</sup> and this concern remained with her up until the time of her illness, after her religious profession.<sup>40</sup>

29 Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), p. 261.

30 Dabrowski, *Psychoneurosis Is Not an Illness*, p. 60.

31 Dabrowski, *Personality-Shaping through Positive Disintegration*, p. 64-65, 71-72.

32 Dabrowski and Piechowski, *Theory of Levels of Emotional Development*, Vol. 1, p. 178.

33 *Ibid.*

34 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

35 *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, translated by Otilio Rodriguez and Kieran Kavanaugh (Washington: ICS Publications, 1976), Vol. 1, p. 39.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

37 Dabrowski and Piechowski, *Theory of Levels of Emotional Development*, Vol. 1, p. 142.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

39 *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, p. 35, 38, 39.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

### The period prior to Teresa's conversion

Following her illness there is a marked change in the quality of Teresa's inner conflict. Gone are the concerns with what others will think of her and the concern for her reputation, and in their place can be seen a typical multilevel conflict. There are numerous expressions of this new dynamic in her autobiography. The following examples will serve as illustrations:

On the one hand God was calling me; on the other I was following the world. All the things of God made me happy; those of the world held me bound. It seems I desired to harmonize these two contraries—so inimical to one another. . . .<sup>41</sup>

For more than eighteen of the twenty-eight years since I began prayer, I suffered this battle and conflict between friendship with God and friendship with the world.<sup>42</sup>

On the one hand I found great comfort in sermons, while on the other I was tormented for through them I understood that I wasn't what I should have been—not by a far cry. I begged the Lord to help me. But I must have failed . . . because I did not put all my trust in His Majesty and lose completely the trust I had in myself. I searched for a remedy; I made attempts, but I didn't understand that all is of little benefit if we do not take away completely the trust we have in ourselves and place it in God.<sup>43</sup>

In the above quotations can be discovered virtually all the dynamisms of spontaneous multilevel disintegration. There is a hierarchy of values: in Teresa's case it is God versus the world. Her concern to trust in God is not a desire to please other nuns but a value to which she is intrinsically committed. There is dissatisfaction, disquietude and astonishment with herself. There is anguish over moral failures and frustration that she is unable to live according to her chosen ideal. This is an advance over the unilevel situation since her conflict now has a directional focus. She is no longer dominated by ambivalent tendencies—she has one tendency, to surrender herself completely to her highest value.

### The period following the conversion and first rapture

Life-span psychologists unanimously consider the midlife transition to be at least as critical a turning point as that from adolescence to adulthood. Here also Dabrowski assigns a causal role to the increased thyroid activity at this period.<sup>44</sup> Another cause may be the increasing awareness of one's mortality.<sup>45</sup> Whatever gives rise to this point of transition it is particularly

41 Ibid., p. 62, 63.

42 Ibid., p. 66.

43 Ibid., p. 70.

44 Dabrowski, *Psychoneurosis Is Not an Illness*, p. 70.

45 Daniel J. Levinson et al., *Seasons in a Man's Life* (New York: Ballantine, 1978), p. 215, 218.

intense and dramatic among highly creative people (those who possess a low threshold for anxiety arousal). In his study of painters, composers, poets, writers and sculptors of "undoubted genius" Elliot Jacques discovered that the crisis attending the midthirties to midforties transition expressed itself in three ways: it ended a creative career; began one; or marked a distinctive shift in its quality or direction.<sup>46</sup> For Teresa of Avila this transition period was the occasion of a shift from spontaneous to organized multilevel disintegration.

The critical features of the organized phase of multilevel disintegration are increased self-awareness and control over the developmental process. Again there is no better way to demonstrate the change that occurred within Teresa than to quote her own words:

It was the first time the Lord granted me this favor of rapture. I heard these words: "No longer do I want you to converse with men but with angels. . . ." These words have been fulfilled, for I have never again been able to tie myself to any friendship or to find consolation in or bear particular love for any other persons than those I understand love Him and strive to serve Him . . . from that day on I was very courageous in abandoning all for God, as one who had wanted from that moment . . . to change completely. . . .<sup>47</sup>

Her reference to "particular love for any other persons" should not be misunderstood. As Culligan's analysis of her letters reveals, Teresa took an active interest in the welfare of others. She wrote to the King in an effort to get John of the Cross freed from prison; she was constantly concerned with the spiritual and material conditions of her nuns and defended them against unjust accusations; and she encouraged many priests and laypersons in their spiritual journey. At the same time she was devoted to her family, assuming an active role in the raising of her brother's illegitimate son and succeeding in persuading the parents of her 21-year-old niece, who had been having an affair, to let her move to Avila in order to restore her reputation. But what made this human concern possible was the freedom she had from the opinions of others. Her desire was no longer to please others but to please God by serving others. She now possessed fortitude<sup>48</sup> and a heightened intuitive capacity.<sup>49</sup> Whereas at level III she felt remorse following her failures, now she was able to anticipate and therefore avoid them.<sup>50</sup> But Teresa's struggle was not over; it had merely undergone a qualitative shift:

46 Elliot Jacques, "The Midlife Crisis," in S. I. Greenspan and G. H. Pollock, eds., *The Course of Life: Psychoanalytic Contributions Toward Understanding Personality Development* (Adelphi, MD: National Institute of Mental Health, 1980), Vol. 3.

47 *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, p. 161.

48 Ibid., p. 171.

49 Ibid., p. 314, 315.

50 Ibid., p. 171.

During the remaining years [subsequent to her first rapture] . . . the cause of the war [between friendship with God and friendship with the world] changed, although the war [that remained] was not a small one. But since it was . . . for the service of God and with knowledge of the vanity that the world is, everything went smoothly. . . .<sup>51</sup>

In continuing with this struggle Teresa was preparing herself for the culmination of her spiritual and psychological development.

#### The last ten years

Although the extant version of Teresa's autobiography was written when she was about 49, and therefore contains nothing about the last years of her life, there are other sources of information including the letters already mentioned. There are also the Spiritual Testimonies, or short accounts of her experiences and state of mind. In one of these,<sup>52</sup> written at the age of 66, she explains how she no longer experiences the anxieties and fears that were so much a part of her earlier years. She lives in a state of inner peace without any need for the learned men she once depended upon for guidance. The periodic imaginative visions she had formerly enjoyed have ceased but in their place is a constant intellectual vision of the Trinity and the humanity of Christ. She continues to suffer—in fact more intensely than ever—but it is only on the surface and it never occasions a loss of inner peace for, as she puts it, "The soul is [now] like a Lord in his castle. . . ." And she adds that the soul "goes about so forgetful of self that it thinks it has partly lost its being." According to Teresa, in this state everything is directed to the honour and glory of God. All conflict between higher and lower values is resolved. One final indicator of the condition Teresa experienced in these last years can be found in her attitude toward death. For someone in the final state of personality development, death is deeply felt to be the door to the transcendent and at the same time death is placed within the context of responsibility for others.<sup>53</sup> Teresa longed for death in order to be permanently united to her God, and yet these desires were overcome by another desire: to be able to serve God more by serving others. An expression of the radical altruism that characterizes secondary integration (Dabrowski's level v) can be found in the following lines: "And if through my intercession I could play a part in getting a soul to love and praise God more, even if it be for just a short time, I think that would matter more to me than being in glory."<sup>54</sup>

51 Ibid., p. 66.

52 Ibid., p. 363-65.

53 Dabrowski and Piechowski, *Theory of Levels of Emotional Development*, Vol. 1, p. 172, 173.

54 *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, p. 365.

#### Teresa's paralysis

Some measure of personality disintegration is normally constitutive of the adolescent period, finally ending in the choice of a marriage partner and a career. At this point the exigencies of the adult role result in a superficial or socially conditioned integration with a concomitant atrophy of the disintegrative dynamisms. In those with a low threshold for anxiety arousal, however, the disintegrative process continues with its attendant ambivalences and ambtendencies so that it is very difficult to make a firm commitment to any given career choice.<sup>55</sup>

For Teresa this was clearly the case. No stereotyped role within or without the convent could really satisfy her. And because she was incapable of moving directly from unilevel to multilevel disintegration—the developmental alternative—Teresa chose an indirect way. The stimulus was her observation of another nun who endured a very serious and painful illness with great patience. This so impressed Teresa that she prayed that God would send her the "illnesses by which He would be served."<sup>56</sup> Shortly thereafter she became ill, suffering all the symptoms described above including a paralysis that lasted for three years.

A desire to become ill in order to serve God better would be seen by Karl Menninger as having its source in self-punitive, erotic and aggressive drives.<sup>57</sup> In fact according to Menninger all forms of religious asceticism have their origin in just such subconscious motivations. While he admits that some (secular) self-sacrifice serves the common weal as well as enabling the individual to attain realistic goals, religious asceticism is a chronic or slow form of suicide, a manifestation of the dominance of destructive forces over the forces of life. But in Teresa's case the illness resulted in the emergence of positive developmental factors: confusion and indecision gave way to a meaningful life direction. In an overall evaluation of Teresa's paralysis and her other symptoms, subconscious motivations are less significant than the effects produced in her personality since these latter demonstrate that there was no triumph here of destructive forces—rather just the opposite.

Prior to her illness Teresa did not—probably could not—practise mental prayer or meditation. As a result of her illness she acquired this ability as well as patience<sup>58</sup> and conformity to the will of God.<sup>59</sup> This latter is the essence of her hierarchy of values. In mental prayer attention is withdrawn from external stimuli and hence their influence is reduced. At the same time an inner space is created in which self-observation can take

55 Dabrowski, *Personality-Shaping through Positive Disintegration*, p. 106.

56 *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, p. 46.

57 Karl Menninger, *Man Against Himself* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1938).

58 *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, p. 49.

59 Ibid., p. 51.

place. This in turn leads to the manifestation of self-critical dynamisms, especially when there is a hierarchy of values already present.<sup>60</sup> Thus for Teresa her illness was not a flight from reality, if reality is defined as social integration, since she was not socially integrated in the first place. Furthermore in the light of Dabrowski's model of personality development it is questionable whether the type of social integration in which disintegrative dynamisms are atrophied is a desirable reality at all. What Teresa's illness did for her was not to provide an escape, but rather the means for shifting from a directionless state of unilevel disintegration to a multilevel state in which she could undertake a meaningful struggle toward spiritual and personal realization.

#### The first rapture

As indicated above, contemplative ecstasy has been considered by some a psychotic episode or a regression to a helpless infantile state. Dabrowski, on the other hand, sees ecstasy as resulting in the very opposite of helplessness. Contemplative states, he says, produce the following: (1) knowledge of a higher reality or ideal through love (i.e., a high degree of intrinsic motivation); (2) contact with transcendental values; (3) separation from the instinctive structure; and (4) psychic and moral strength for the task of one's internal reshaping.<sup>61</sup> As we have seen this is precisely what Teresa reports as having occurred to her following her first rapture.

She became unreservedly committed to the spiritual life and was freed from the need for recognition and praise from others. The moral anguish and remorse of spontaneous multilevel disintegration were replaced by undivided attention to her intrinsically determined values. And through the focussing of her energies their power was effectively increased for the pursuit of the one worthwhile goal. Teresa's conversion at 39 was a watershed in her life. After this event evidence of the fourth level of personality appears for the first time. But there are also numerous signs of the indecision that characterizes level III. In other words the four years between the conversion and the first rapture, the time of the midlife crisis, was a period of transition from spontaneous to organized multilevel disintegration. Then the dominance of physiological and approval needs was decisively overcome in rapture. Thus in Teresa's case it is a mistake to reduce her experience of contemplative ecstasy to a regression to a state of helplessness just as it would be to speak of sleep as no more than a regression to such a state. Furthermore, whereas sleep restores the individual to the *same* level of competence that was enjoyed on the previous

60 Dabrowski, *Personality-Shaping through Positive Disintegration*, p. 130, 133; and Kazimierz Dabrowski, Andrzej Kawczak and Michael Piechowski, *Mental Growth Through Positive Disintegration* (London: Gryf, 1970), p. 75.

61 Dabrowski, *Personality-Shaping through Positive Disintegration*, p. 34, 130.

day rapture would appear to bring about permanent changes in the mental structure such that the individual, far from being helpless, is enabled to take control of her or his development.

#### Conclusion

The concern of this article has been to indicate that the non-normal behaviour of mystics cannot reasonably be considered pathological. Persons who are truly mentally ill are dysfunctional and therefore powerless to control their own lives. This examination of the life of Teresa of Avila from the perspective of positive disintegration theory suggests that mystics may appear to be dysfunctional in the sense of rejecting societal values and withdrawing into the cloister, the forest or the desert; but while such retreats are motivated by a temperamental disposition (emotional hypersensitivity) held in common with neurotics, schizophrenics and creative persons, mystics are not crippled by their inner turmoil but are able to harness this emotional energy and progress through a series of developmental stages, ultimately arriving at a new synthesis of personality. Unusual behaviours and states of consciousness have a role to play in this process, as was seen in the life of Teresa of Avila, and precisely because they do play such a role they cannot be considered dysfunctional, and therefore are not pathological.