

Doing Theology Through Discernment: An Analysis of Teresa of Avila's Interior Castle

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Modernism's notion of reason-based knowledge as the most valid has greatly impacted the practice of theology. As theology moved into the academic world, experiential modes of gaining knowledge of God began to be viewed with skepticism and were divorced from intellectual modes of gaining knowledge of God. "Doing theology," as pre-modern Christians understood it, is no longer widely practiced in the field of theology. While modernism narrowed what is considered valid knowledge to reason-based inquiry, post-modernism has found modernism's conclusion not entirely adequate and is broadening the scope for gaining modes of valid knowledge. Applying the post-modernist approach to Teresa of Avila's Interior Castle, I found that Teresa provides the field of technology with a route which would allow it to again "do theology" in the pre-modern sense. Teresa's ability to express her process of "doing theology" exemplifies experiential knowledge as a mode of gaining theological knowledge and displays a deep integration between experiential and intellectual knowledge of God. Teresa validates this mode of inquiry and counters the skepticism embedding in "doing theology" through her discernment practices. Teresa's work displays the importance of allowing the field of theology to again "do theology," as "doing theology" allows us to gain deeper knowledge than that which reason alone is able to acquire.

Information about the Author:

Lydia Hawkins is a senior majoring in psychology and theology. Interested in the concept of discernment, she has done much reading in early Christianity's desert mothers and fathers and key figures throughout the history of Christian spirituality. After graduation, she will be serving in a year-long volunteer program in Chicago's Amate House. She is currently discerning a vocation in ministry, spiritual direction, and/or pastoral counseling.

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