

Abandoned to Love: The *Proceso* of María de Cazalla and the *Mirror of Simple Souls*

On 22 April 1532, the Holy Office of the Inquisition detained María de Cazalla for “being a heretic, an apostate from [the] Holy Catholic Faith, an abettor and defender of heretics, and a defamer of the Holy Office and its ministers and officials, [holding and believing] in Lutheran errors, and those of people called *alumbrados* but who rather should be called blind, and other types of heresy.”¹ Over the next two years, inquisitors would interrogate and torture María in hopes of restoring her to the orthodox fold. At the end of it all, they failed in convicting this *alumbrada*, instead abjuring her *de levi* and fining her one hundred ducats.

The process of María de Cazalla is an example of the episodic campaigns of detection and repression launched by the Inquisition against those known as *alumbrados* or “illuminated ones.” The *alumbrado* movement occupied an ambiguous middle ground for inquisitors, who deemed some (but not all) of them heterodox, who recognized some of their leadership as *conversos*, and who mistook some of their beliefs for the *luteranismo* that the inquisitorial core so roundly condemned. José Nieto captured the sensibilities of modern historians when he described the contest between Inquisition and *alumbrados* as “one of the most bizarre cases in the religious history of Spain.”²

But just how bizarre were these “illuminated ones”? No medieval inquisition ever reached the kingdom of Castile until the late fifteenth century, unlike the Crown of Aragón where the inquisitorial probe uncovered various forms of propheticism and Lullism around a century earlier. To ascribe the *alumbrados* a peculiar position in the religiosity of the sixteenth century would be off the mark, for their practices echoed many traditional aspects of medieval spirituality. In comparing the trial of María de Cazalla

¹ “Offiçio, que presente ésta, por hereje, apóstata de nuestra sancta fee cathólica, fautora y defensora de herejes e infamadora del Scto. Offiçio y de sus ministros e offiçiales...seguendo, tenyendo, creyendo los errores luteranos e de los que se dizen alunbrados que mejor se llaman çiegos, e otras espeçies de heregía” Milagros Ortega-Costa, *Proceso de la Inquisición contra María de Cazalla* (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1978), 127. Henceforth *Proceso*. Use of the term *alumbrado* refers to the *dejados*—those who subscribed to the meditative practice of *dejamiento* (i.e. María de Cazalla and the original *alumbrados*)—as opposed to the practitioners of *recogimiento*—the *recogidos*—or the *visionarios*, active more in the south of Spain during the late sixteenth century.

² José C. Nieto. “The Franciscan Alumbrados and the Prophetic-Apocalyptic Tradition.” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 8, (1977), 3.

with Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls*,³ one of the most notable works of medieval mysticism, the present study aims to demonstrate how the main components of *alumbradismo* may be discerned in a single normative example of medieval mystical theology. Limitations of space require the focus on two fundamental aspects: the practice of spiritual abandonment to the love of God, and the superiority of an interiorized spirituality grounded in severe self-abnegation. Although the *alumbrados* practiced certain fundamental elements of Christian mysticism, they should be remembered not as mystics, but rather as radical, modern evangelical thinkers inspired by the literal message of sacred texts.

The sixteenth century in Spain manifested many difficulties for inquisitors. Here is a time of transition from old to new; from medieval to modern; a period of dynamism marked by fierce religious enthusiasm and political unrest as seen in the *Comuneros* revolt in the early 1520's. Cultural advancements resulting from scientific breakthroughs and globalization through the discovery of the New World transformed the world into a *casa común o comunidad humana*.⁴ The contagious germ of religious fervor filled the air as prophetic apocalypticism, and illuminated *beatas* flourished amidst the wider European thought explosions initiated by the *Devotio Moderna*. Fully invested in its paranoid campaign of *limpieza de sangre*, the Inquisition fought to preserve the purity of Spanish Christianity against the taint of Judaism and—from around 1520 onwards—the specter of *luterantismo*, the humanist teachings of Erasmus, and just about anything heterodox through what some have called a “pedagogy of fear.”⁵ Indeed, given the mere scope of issues touched upon within the process of María de Cazalla alone, we are given insight into the *grave confusión ambiental* reigning during the time of the *alumbrados*.⁶

³ Marguerite Porete, *El espejo de las almas simples*. Blanca Garí (ed.) Madrid: Edicions Siruela. 2005. Chapter numbers will follow all quotations, rather than appearing in the footnotes. Translations into English are my own.

⁴ Ángel Alcalá y otros, *Inquisición española y mentalidad inquisitorial*. Barcelona: Ariel, 1984. 375; Melquiades Andres. *Historia de la mística de la edad de oro en España y America*. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1994. 261.

⁵ Bartholomé Bennassar, “Modelos de la Mentalidad Inquisitorial: Métodos de su ‘Pedagogía del Miedo.’” In Ángel Alcalá y otros, *Inquisición*, 174-182. Also see, Edward Peters. *Inquisition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. 90

⁶ Melquiades Andres. “Los alumbrados de Toledo segun el proceso de María de Cazalla (1532-1534).” *Cuadernos de investigación histórica* 8 (1984):” 70. Some of these include: the existence of Hell (445), pure love (49, 99, 100, 106, 112, 115, 405); confession and communion (79, 80, 83, 105-107, 221-222, 230-231); papal bulls and indulgences (79, 80, 84, 110, 214, 221); vocal prayer (73, 109); enthusiasm for Erasmus (77-79, 110, 209, 235); for Luther (28, 82, 109, 117, 226-227, 240); evangelical liberty (80, 84,

The rise of Spanish mysticism has concerned many scholars, especially since, as Otis H. Green reminds us, “that no mystical works were produced in Castile during the Middle Ages.” Some, for example, viewed Spanish mysticism as an importation from the Low Countries and Germany, while others pointed to the influence of Neo-Platonism and the martial character of chivalric novels. Others likened it to a symptom of the Counter-Reformation as moments of intense crisis enflamed the inherent “stoicism of the Spanish people” into asceticism and “mystic ecstasy.” Green, however, attributes the rise of Spanish mysticism to *Führertum*, that is to say, a leadership of genius in which “a few outstanding personalities whose genius was able to impress itself upon the age.”⁷

Green’s attribution of *Führertum* fits the evidence. One of the most important figures in the efflorescence of mysticism in the *Siglo de Oro* was Cardinal Jiménez de Cisneros.⁸ Personal confessor to Queen Isabella, archbishop of Toledo, and courageous warrior against Islam in North Africa, Cisneros became a paragon of religious enthusiasm; the notion of cleansing reform made manifest as he induced mass conversions of Jews while advancing scholarship in Spain through the establishment of the University of Alcalá. Cisneros belonged to the Observant Franciscan order, a branch devoted to the idyllic life of poverty laid out by St. Francis and, more importantly, sympathetic to the millennial apocalyptic elements of Joachimism making him “very permissive towards visionaries, prophets, and the like.”⁹ “Yet although there was no shortage of works on mysticism in the late Middle Ages,” explains Hamilton, “few were in the vernacular.”¹⁰ Thomas á Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ* was an exception however, being in popular circulation ever since the late fifteenth century—in Catalan since 1482, in Castilian since 1490, and in Valencian since 1491. Utilizing the printing press, Cisneros amplified the corpus of accessible mystical literature throughout Castile when he began publishing the translated works of John Climacus, Angela of Foligno, Catherine of Siena, and Pseudo-Dionysius.¹¹ The injection of such concentrated doses of mysticism

110); love, merit, and interiorization (49, 100-101, 112-114, 390, 405); *dejamiento* (397, 406); women and preaching (228, 260, 404); and the rejection of meditation (89).

⁷ Otis H. Green. “The Historical Problem of Castilian Mysticism.” *Hispanic Review* 6 (1938): 94, 102-103.

⁸ For more on Cisneros and his role in the cultivation of sixteenth-century spirituality, see the first chapter in Marcel Bataillon, *Erasmus y España*. Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1949. 1-83.

⁹ Charles F. Fraker Jr. “The ‘Dejados’ and the Cancionero de Baena.” *Hispanic Review* 33 (1965): 116.

¹⁰ Hamilton, *Heresy and Mysticism*, 13.

¹¹ Alastair Hamilton. *Heresy and Mysticism in Sixteenth-Century Spain: The Alumbrados*. Cambridge: James Clark, 1992. 13.

into the spiritual reservoir initiated a “tidal wave of mysticism”¹² soaking the minds of all; in effect “democratizing”¹³ the practice of mysticism by reinforcing the belief that these spiritual *atajos* could be utilized not only by a spiritual elite, but also by the unlearned *idiotae et illiterati*.

By the time of Cisneros’ death in 1520, the group of religious dissidents known as the *alumbrados* had already been active in their own spiritual campaigns. Witty, intelligent, and critical, María de Cazalla was a charismatic *alumbrado* preacher who never abandoned her spiritual values. She never blamed any of her colleagues when pressed by inquisitors, but rather endured interrogation and torture with stoic courage. She was the daughter of an Andalusian merchant, and, like many of the original Toledan *alumbrados*, of *converso* origin.¹⁴ María read the Bible in Castilian and preached the literal message of the Pauline Epistles to the women of Pastrana. Through her brother, Juan de Cazalla—chaplain to Cisneros—she encountered much scholastic work emerging from the University of Alcalá such as the *Doctrina cristiana* of Juan de Valdes. María found employment with the Mendoza family in whose courts she would have encountered much theological speculation led by troubador poets. Since the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, works like the *Cancionero de Baena* introduced the Castilian nobility to sentiments of predestination arguing that only a chosen few could attain the grace of God and spiritual perfection on earth, an assumption also held by María and the other *dejados*.¹⁵

More still, Maria agreed with some of Luther’s ideas though never fully supported all that he taught. She had a strong affinity to the works of Erasmus, particularly the *Enchiridion* which “was like a Gospel to her.”¹⁶ María, along with Isabel de la Cruz and Alcaraz, adopted a passive form of spirituality known as *dejamiento* or “abandonment” to the love of God. This method contrasted to the more systematic form of *recogimiento* codified in the *Tercer abecedario espiritual* of Franciso Osuna, the chosen method of

¹² Steven Fanning. *Mystics of the Christian Tradition*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 150.

¹³ Bernard McGinn. *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism, 1200-1350*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1998. 13.

¹⁴ *Proceso* 101. “Gonçalo Martínez, vezino de Palma, que entendíaen cosas de grangería e hera de los confesos antiguos e que sospecha que fue reconciliado...Ysabel de Caçalla que así mismo hera confesa e que sospecha que fue reconciliada...”

¹⁵ See Charles F. Fraker Jr. “The ‘Dejados’ and the Cancionero de Baena” for more on troubador poetry.

¹⁶ On María receiving the *Doctrina cristiana* from those at Alcalá, see *Proceso*, 118. On María’s affinity to Erasmus, see *ibid.*, 110. On preaching the literal message of the Pauline epistles to women in Pastrana and other witness testimony concerning María’s proselytizing, see *ibid.*, 43-45.

meditation for many future mystics like Teresa of Avila.¹⁷ The *dejados*, believing in their possession of divine grace, often met in secret conventicles apart from the rest of the community to discuss their spiritual ideals.¹⁸

El amor de Dios en un hombre es Dios. Such was the acclaimed statement made by Alcaraz and the cornerstone of *dejado* spirituality that sought to abandon their souls to the Divine Love of God. Geronimo Olivares, Illumnist of Pastrana, gave this definition of *dejamiento* in 1525: “*Dejamiento* is to make no effort at mental prayer, but to subject oneself to whatever God wills, to let thoughts pass through the mind without heed, for Our Lord so permits it that our spirit may be purged, on condition that our will not give in to our thoughts.”¹⁹ María’s spirituality, then, was in need of neither institutional intercession nor the observation of any sacramental rites or outward acts of faith. Rather it emphasized a intimate relationship with God initiated through mental prayer and a profound understanding of the Holy Scripture; one made clear through the revelatory power of the Holy Spirit that entrenched the love of God deep within one’s heart.

Such notions, however, were not new ones. Inquisitors themselves discerned past connections in their initial condemnation of the *alumbrados* when referring to the antinomian beliefs of the beguines.²⁰ The beguines, like the *alumbrados*, were loosely organized groups of lay spirituals that emerged around the mid-thirteenth century in northern Europe. They led unstructured lives of ascetic poverty and visionary mysticism—although not always—and typically had high membership among women. Often associated with the so-called *secta spiritus libertatis* and the heresy of the Free Spirit, the beguines—who often gathered in secret and therefore, dangerous, conventicles—automatically attracted the purgative enthusiasm of the Church that viewed such esotericism as the seedbed of all heretical depravity. From the time of

¹⁷ For more on *recogimiento*, see Melquiades Andres *Historia de la mística de la edad de oro en España y América*. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1994. 223-256. John Edward Longhurst *Luther’s Ghost in Spain (1517-1546)*. Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1969. 100-102. Marcel Batillon *Erasmus y España*, 195-200, Hamilton, *Heresy and Mysticism*. 14-16.

An online version of the *Tercer abecedario* can be found at

http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/14921541_Osuna_de_Francisco_Tercer_Abecedario_Espiritual_ES.pdf.

¹⁸ For references to secret meetings, see *Proceso* 61.

¹⁹ Geronimo de Olivares as cited in Longhurst. *Luther’s Ghost in Spain*. 101.

²⁰ Prop. 34 of the *Edict of the Alumbrados*: “...Afirmar que no ay desigualdad de merescimiento es heregia y negar el habito de la caridad infussa es contra la commun doctrina de los theologos y por semejante dezir que alguno puede venir a tan gran perfeccion que no pueda mas merescer es proposicion condenada por la yglesia contra los Vegardos. Márquez, *Los alumbrados. Orígenes y Filosofía. 1525-1559*. Salamanca: Taurus Ediciones, 1972. 281.

Albertus Magnus' polemical *Compilatio novu spiritu* targeting the Free Spirits in the Swabian Ries, the "sect" encountered increasing hostility towards their alleged antinomianism and autotheism until their official condemnation in the 1311 papal bull *Ad nostrum*.²¹

Compilers of *Ad nostrum* surely referenced the writings of the French beguine mystic Marguerite Porete in the formulation of their condemnations. Burned as a relapsed heretic in 1310, inquisitors aimed to suppress Marguerite's alleged teachings of quietism, antinomianism, and pantheism contained within her book *Le mirouer des simples âmes*. Three key points of the book, as pointed out by Winfried Corduan, are as follows: (1) that the soul is saved without any works of virtue; (2) that God produces virtue in the soul without the benefit of the Church's mediation; and (3) that the soul enjoys direct union with God insofar as she is totally absorbed by divine love.²² Although the title might suggest a wide audience, the *Mirror* is rather esoteric in that it cannot be understood by those governed by Reason and Holy Church the Little (clergymen, established authorities), but by those already in possession of an elevated state of grace in the congregation of Holy Church the Great under the aegis of Love.²³ The *Mirror* relates several dialogues between *Dame Amour*, Reason and the Soul (along with other cameo appearances by Truth, the Holy Spirit, and others) that aim to instruct readers on how the Soul and Love can ultimately defeat the faculty of Reason in the quest for knowledge of Divine Love. *Dame Amour*, in fact, is the author of the book and—perhaps anticipating the maxim of Alcaraz—is likened to God Himself: "I am God, says Love, for Love is God, and this Soul is God through its condition of Love..." (21) To achieve the understanding of Love, *ce livre* takes the "hearers of the book" through a seven stage mystical journey through which the Soul suffers three deaths as it pursues the ultimate

²¹ Robert Lerner, in fact, called this bull the "birth certificate of the heresy of the Free Spirit", For more on the Free Spirits in the Swabian Ries, see Robert E. Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Late Middle Ages*. Berkeley: University of California Press 13-19. For "birth certificate", see 83. For a description of the bull, see *Ibid.*, 82.

²² Winfried Corduan. "The Gospel According to Margaret." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35 (1992): 530.

²³ For examples of the elitist and esoteric nature of the *Mirror*, see the introductory poem, and chapters 5, 9, 53, 84, 85, 122, and 132. The process of Alcaraz also contains similar ideas: 'A saint says that he whose knowledge is infused speaks as a man with experience, like one who has tasted the honey and says it is sweet. He who has not tasted of it says that it is sweet, but he has only tasted of it through knowledge. This is the difference between the men.' Cited in Hamilton, *Heresy and Mysticism*. 38.

goal of self-annihilation, that is, the death of one's will and the surrender of the self to the love of God in a state of unwanting Nothingness.²⁴

The goal of self-annihilation brings us to the first point of community between Marguerite and María. "The emphasis on mystical identity found within many late medieval mystics," writes McGinn, "was rooted in the notion of annihilation, especially the annihilation of the created will."²⁵ Blanca Garí, too, reminds us of the kenotic model of the *Mirror* when she states that the Soul needed to enter into an "ejercicio radical de abandono de la voluntad y de vacío de sí que tiene como espejo la *kenosis* crística."²⁶ The interior stripping-away through either the destruction of the soul or its abandonment created the necessary space in which God might place the gift of his Divine Love. One of the charges laid against Marguerite was that of quietism or, in other words, the "indifference to the ecclesiastically mediated means of salvation"²⁷ by means of a virtuous life. Such judgments had some truth:

This Soul, says Love, takes no heed of shame or honor, of poverty or of riches, of comfort or of hardship of love or of hate, of Hell or of Paradise...And such a soul, having become nothing, at once has everything and has nothing, wishes for everything and wishes for nothing, knows everything and knows nothing. (7)

Reason is astounded by such rejections and Love continues: "This Soul neither longs for nor despises poverty or tribulation, Mass or sermon, fasting or prayer; and gives to Nature all that it requires, with no qualm of conscience..."(9) Much like the definition of *dejamiento* given above, Marguerite's itinerary here explains how the Soul suffers no disturbance from the hating of one thing or yearning for another, making no effort to dwell on any one thought or created thing regardless of its nature.

Inquisitors similarly suspected the *alumbrados* of such quietist errors. Item twelve of the *Edict*, for example, attacks *dejamiento*:

They could withdraw themselves from all created things...And such people could refuse all thoughts that occurred to them, even if the thoughts were good, because they should look to God alone. They thought refusing such actions was virtuous.

²⁴ For the description of the seven stages, see chapters 61 and 118.

²⁵ Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany 1300-1500*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2005. 56.

²⁶ Blanca Garí. "Marguerite Porete y la Biblia. Imágenes de la *kénosis* en el *Espejo de almas simples*." *Crítica del texto* 15 (2012): 9.

²⁷ McGinn, *Flowering of Mysticism*, 245.

Being in that state of quietude, *they even thought it was a temptation to remember God*, in order not to be distracted.²⁸

How, though, would such detachment from created things actually play out in daily life? In the case of María de Cazalla, we find that this *alumbrada* often shirked her familial responsibilities, usually describing her husband and children as distractions from her concentration on God. For example, proposition four of the *calificadores*' assessment of María's case reads: "que dezía esta rea que todas las vezes que querían algo bien, ora fuese marido o hijos o otra cosa qualquiera por amor de Dios que pecavan mortalmente e siéndole replicado, se quedó en la misma opinión."²⁹ To love anything other than God represented the most serious of sins and thus it comes as no surprise to hear that María frequently denied her husband, Lope de Rueda, the marital debt:

[Testimony of Mari Nuñez] María de Caçalla...la dixo qué hazia para allegarse a Dios a este testigo la dixo que toviere limpieza el ányma en la carne e que con su marido, syno fuese para lo que tocara a la generación, que se abstoviese e fuese linpia e que ella tomó extremo por lo questa testigo la dixo e negava a su marido el débito carnal en tal manera que sus confesores la dezían que no hazía bien...³⁰

On not loving her children, María had this to say:

...que no quería a mis hijos como a propios hijos que no me acuerdo dezirlo. Reprehenderme a mí y a otras personas porque cada hijo nos llevaba un pedaço de corazón muchas vezes lo he hecho y dezía la desorden con que amamos nuestros hijos y aun también riñendo a mis hijos les dezía que no los amava como a hijos ni ellos a mí como madre.³¹

To account for this, María explained that "she was busy in acts of penitence and in observing and restraining her senses the best she could."³² Moreover, María's disregard for worldly things seemed so strong that even Alcaraz, known for being rather austere himself, raised an eyebrow: 'For she attached little importance to the sorrows of the world, even to death, and since I knew our weaknesses I regarded her as presumptuous.'³³

²⁸ Prop. 12 "...y que se desocupassen de todas las cosas criadas...e que desechassen todos los pensamientos que se les ofreciessen aunque fuesen buenos porque a solo dios debian buscar e que era merito el trabaxo que en desechar los tales pensamientos se tenia y que estando en aquella quietud por no distraerse tenia por tentación acordarse de dios." Márquez, *Los Alumbrados*, 276.

²⁹ *Proceso*, 32.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 139.

³² *Ibid.*, 114. "...dixo que la causa hera porquesta declarante se ocupava en obras de penitencia e en guardar e refrenar sus sentidos lo mejor que podía."

³³ Alcaraz as cited in Hamilton, 27. Alcaraz often quoted the Epistles and Gospels in the defense of *dejamiento* and his ascetic piety including Col 3:5 and Matt 16:24. Alcaraz told inquisitors that he

In fact, María's ascetic behavior and spiritual exercises caused many women in the community to think she had gone crazy.³⁴ These instances bear a curious resemblance to a portion of the eleventh chapter of the *Mirror*:

This Soul finds no comfort, sets no affection or hope in any creature made by God, not in heaven nor on earth, but only in the goodness of God. Such a soul begs or asks nothing from any creature. She is the solitary phoenix, for this Soul is alone in love and satisfies herself with herself.

María's passionate devotion to God often came at the expense of ignoring or at least being distant from her loved ones. The abandonment of one's soul to the illuminating power of God's love is a solitary process, one to be undertaken without the intervention of any imperfect creature, but with the aid of the Divine Love of God that satisfies all things in a space of abandoned Nothingness.

Since the state of abandonment rendered these women indifferent to all things around them, what value did they ascribe to external acts of faith and the sacraments? Here, too, the pair agrees in disregarding external acts since the abandonment of the will was enough to save one's soul.³⁵ Although good works are necessary preparatory components of the first three stages of Marguerite's mystical itinerary, one must later abandon them lest they interfere with the Soul's ultimate ascent to salvation.³⁶ "This Soul is saved by faith without works," says Love, "for faith surpasses every work, as Love itself testifies." (11) The Soul later calls the practice of Virtues "a labor full of troubles" (69) while María explains how "performing exterior works for the sole purpose of going after pardons [from God] amounts to a business transaction."³⁷ The Soul furthermore emphasizes the futility of works and alludes to a certain element of pantheism:

It seems to beginners that men such as these, who seek God in this way in valleys and mountains, and think that God is subject to his sacraments and to his works. Alas, they suffer such trials that it is pitiful, and they will go on suffering them, says the Soul, so long as they maintain this way of life and such practices. But those men spend their time well and profitably who do not worship God only in

interpreted the words to mean that men should deny their own will, refrain from mortal sin, relinquish vanities and refuse to love anything temporal and contrary to the will of Christ in adversity. See Hamilton, *Heresy and Mysticism*. 36.

³⁴ *Proceso* 61; "...e la veyta mudada en todas sus cosas y exerçijos, en tanto que dezían las labradoras de Orche que estava loca la dicha María de Caçalla."

³⁵ See Prop. 11 of the *Edict*: "Que despues que uno uviesse dexado a dios solo esto le bastaba para salvar su anima y no tenia neccesidad de hazer ayunos ni obras de misericordia..." Márquez, *Los alumbrados*, 276.

³⁶ Corduan, "The Gospel According to Margaret." 524.

³⁷ *Proceso*, 138: "que la cosas exteriores an de tener el intento que tengo dicho y que sin él son inperfetos, que hazellas con tener el principi pl intento a los perdones que era propiedad."

temples and in churches, but worship him everywhere through union with the divine will. (69)

Maria stands in agreement:

que buscásemos a Dios en los tenplos bivos mas no negava esta declarante que no estava Dios en los tenplo, en sus sacramentos, e que se avía de yr a buscar a los tenplos materiales e si otra cosa se le acordare que lo dirá... que buscases a Dios en todo lugar y en todo cabo.³⁸

Alcaraz also informed inquisitors of María's pantheistic tendencies when he told them that she claimed to also "see God in all things" (*Yo en todo veo a Dios*).³⁹

For these women, only after the abandonment of the soul to the love of God do exterior works have any merit; for then it is God performing the act *through* the man, not *from* him.⁴⁰ On this, Love explains how "the work of the creature, that is to say the work performed by man, cannot be compared with the divine work, performed by God in the creature, out of his goodness for the creature." (71) Francisca Hernández, former friend of María, testified that she once heard Juan de Cazalla say that "his sister excelled so much and was so wise that she attained perfection in the matter of exterior works (praying, fasting, disciplines, bowing to statues, and other similar things)."⁴¹ María, like Marguerite, argued that exterior works are beneficial only when inspired by an already existing state of disinterested love:

Acuérdome dezir muchas vezes questas cosas exteriores y penitençia son imperfectamente hechas si el que las haze no tiene intento de por ellas y en ellas buscar a Dios y que diziendo que en espíritu y en verdad quiere Dios ser adorado, no entendía que por esto estortas obras se avían de dexar, antes dezía y digo que si supiésemos adorarle en spíritu y en verdad, estortas cosas exteriores son de mucho peso y meresçimiento.⁴²

And: "...que estas cosas exteriores an de ser medio para las interiores y que hechas sin esta intençión son de nuestra parte inpefetas, que ellas en sí santas y nesçesarias son y así lo he tenido y así lo dezía."⁴³

³⁸ Ibid., 106.

³⁹ Ibid., 76.

⁴⁰ Cf. Albertus Magnus *Compilatio spiritu novu*: "He says in reply that a person is able to be equal to God and that God works all things through him" Cited in Bernard McGinn. *The Harvest of Mysticism*, 55.

⁴¹ *Proceso*, 74-75. "...e que tanbién le oyó dezir que las obras exteriores que no eran nada e que en esto su hermana estava tan prima e sabía que alcançava toda la perfección dello. Preguntada por qué obras dezía el dicho obispo, dixo que por el rezar e ayunar e disçiplinas e hazer reverençia a las ymágenes e otras cosas semejantes."

⁴² Ibid., 390.

⁴³ Ibid., 140.

For such beliefs to have flowered, however, they had to be rooted in a rather pessimistic conception of human nature. The Superexalted Spirit explains in chapter 117 how, prior to receiving God's love, she embodied the "height of all evil" and "total wretchedness." "Since I am total wretchedness and he is total goodness," she explains, "it is necessary for me to have the totality of his goodness before my wretchedness can be terminated." Similar feelings of worthlessness also weighed on María de Cazalla. When commenting on the New Testament, she often quoted Romans 7:19: *que lo malo que no quiero hago y lo bueno que quiero aquello no fago*.⁴⁴ "Since she has been weak and tempted by the flesh," writes the inquisitor, "she forced herself and with great pain paid her debt, and in order not to fall into disorder and delectation she made herself think of some step of the Passion or of the final judgment."⁴⁵ María's deep sense of sinfulness, as observed by Hamilton, made her all the more receptive to the 'inner and outer man' as described in the *Enchiridion* of Erasmus.⁴⁶ Moreover, María often claimed the desire to see God face to face, without a veil, and apart from her body.⁴⁷ For María, the wickedness of the soul could only be purged "in battling wicked thoughts and not giving into them." Only after the cleansing of her soul through could María "[speak] with the freedom that God wants His Christians to have (a freedom granted only through Him and not through Christians' own interests)."⁴⁸

For both Marguerite and María, then, the recognition of one's complete sinfulness and unworthiness became essential components in their pursuits of spiritual amelioration. In its natural state, the soul is entirely imperfect and unworthy of God's divine love. For Marguerite, the annihilation of the soul created the necessary vacuum in which God might place his love while María shunned the wicked thoughts constantly bombarding her. Only after such purging could the love of God begin working through the passive receptacle of the body and give real meaning to anything the otherwise wretched creature

⁴⁴ Ibid., 223.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 119: "...que como esta declarante ha sido muy flaca y tentada de la carne...hazía mucha fuerza y con muy gran pena pagava la deuda y por no caer en desorden y delectación se ponía en pensar un paso de la Pasión o en el juicio universal..."

⁴⁶ Hamilton, *Heresy and Mysticism*. 34.

⁴⁷ *Proceso*, 99. "Dezía que mi ánima algunas vezes se le movía un deseo congoxoso de ver a Dios ya sin velos e sin mi cuerpo." Alcaraz also made certain statements concerning the evil nature of mankind. For example, he taught: "que debía el hombre siempre andar contra sí venciendo nuestras pasiones, porque la naturaleza viciosamente nos inclina." Bataillon, *Erasmus y España*. 202.

⁴⁸ *Proceso*, 100: "...que a las vezes lo permitía Dios porque en la batalla con ellos, por no consentir, hera materia en que se purgava el ánima...Hablando en la libertad que quiere Dios que tengan sus christianos e que por sólo É y no por sus ynteresses..."

might perform. Corduan sums it up nicely: “The bottom line is that, according to this beguine [we might extend this to María as well], good works contribute nothing to our salvation. To attempt to save ourselves by our own works will only lead us to perish. Salvation comes by the love of God alone.”⁴⁹

In very briefly comparing the process of María de Cazalla with the *Mirror of Simple Souls* of Marguerite Porete, we see how the main components of *alumbradismo*—that of *dejamiento* and *amor puro*—found particular expression in one way or another in previous methods of spirituality. This has not been to suggest a direct link of continuity between the two cases, but to highlight the repetition of certain spiritual approaches over time. Both women advocated a form of spiritual abandonment and interiorized spirituality in reaction to elevated levels of material concern and doctrinal frivolity. Both were charismatic and influential women fueled by sentiments of self-deprecation who posed serious attitude problems for inquisitors. Both belonged to misunderstood groups of believers who met in secret conventicles, eliciting the fears and suspicions of those around them. The two cases, of course, are not the same nor is the work of Marguerite Porete the only point of intersection between medieval cases and the *alumbrados*. María de Cazalla and her retinue, for example, would not have agreed with the systematic, seven-step approach to the annihilation of the will as prescribed by Marguerite. Moreover, the theocentric approach of the *dejados* stands in opposition to the Christocentric tendencies of Marguerite.⁵⁰

Furthermore, these components of pure love and abandonment had a firm historical footing. The centrality of love in one’s spiritual life is a notion as old as Christianity. For example, 1 John 4:8 (Vulgate) reads: *qui non diligit non novit Deum quoniam Deus caritas est*. From the intellectualist traditions of Origen to the more emotional outpourings of Bernard of Clairvaux; and from the emergence of the Mendicant orders and the *Frauenbewegung* (like Beatrice of Nazareth in her *Seven Levels of Loving* to name just one example), the role of love figured prominently throughout the

⁴⁹ Corduan, “Gospel According to Margaret.” 524.

⁵⁰ For example, María once stated: “más alta cosa es contemplan en la divinidad que no en la humanidad”, that a person “no podía tener su ánima en ninguna cosa criada ni parava en la Pasión de Cristo porque no le entendía...porque Dios quería ser adorado en espíritu y no en templos por mano y arte...” *Proceso*. McGinn points out a noticeable “Christocentric turn” in Marguerite’s treatment of sin in chapters 102-109. McGinn, *Flowering of Mysticism*. 255.

various geological strata of Christian mysticism.⁵¹ Passive forms of spirituality through the abandonment of the will, too, occupied important space in the medieval period. The *Gelassenheit* of the Rhineland mystics such as Meister Eckhart and Heinrich Suso is a good example of this. We know that Eckhart almost certainly read the *Mirror* while Luther himself edited the *Theologia Germanica* and drew influence from teachings similar to Gerson as found in the *Anónimo de Frankfurt*.⁵² Strong parallels of *dejamiento* and the message of the *Mirror* can even be discerned in the ancient Vedic text of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*.⁵³

We must not, of course, forget about the climate in which María operated and its effects on the *alumbrados*. Due to *la renovación y la amplificación de la cristiandad*⁵⁴ of Cardinal Cisneros and his encouragement of enthusiastic *beatas*, the *alumbrados* could operate relatively unhindered until the jealousies of a few women with declining reputations mixed with inquisitorial paranoia to bring the *alumbrados* under attack. The highly interiorized nature of *alumbrado* spirituality placed them on common ground with evangelical Erasmists, Franciscan *recogidos*, and Lutherans alike.⁵⁵ It must be noted, though, that the *alumbrados* operated well before the works of Erasmus penetrated the Iberian Peninsula, before Luther nailed his theses to the door at Wittenberg, and before the *Doctrina cristiana* entered the home of María de Cazalla.⁵⁶ Although in conversation with other surrounding movements, we must ultimately treat the *alumbrados* as parallel to them, not a consequence of them.

In an environment of religious confusion and political unrest, the *dejados* had nowhere to turn but inside themselves. Here we must keep the *converso* element in mind and consider how such times of hardship might have aggravated characteristic Jewish

⁵¹ For the geology metaphor, see Bernard McGinn. "Mysticism and Sexuality." 52.

⁵² On Eckhart and the *Mirror*, see Blanca Garí (ed.) *Espejo*, 30-31. On Luther and his connection to late-medieval mysticism, see Corduan, "The Gospel According to Margaret", 530 and Maria Dolors Esteve de Llobet. "Los carceles interiores de María de Cazalla. Analisis de un proceso inquisitorial." *Lectora* 2 (1996): 98. On the *Theologia Germanica*, see Lerner, *Heresy of the Free Spirit*, 190.

⁵³ Text 55, for example, reads: "The Supreme Personality of Godhead said: O Pārtha, when a man gives up all varieties of desire for sense gratification, which arise from mental concoction, and when his mind, thus purified, finds satisfaction in the self alone, then he is said to be in pure transcendental consciousness." For more passages see, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, *Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is*. Lichtenstein: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1983.

⁵⁴ Marcel Bataillon. *Erasmus y España*. 82.

⁵⁵ For more on the overlap between these groups, see Melquíades Andrés, "Alumbrados, erasmistas, 'luteranos' y místicos, y su común denominador: el riesgo de una espiritualidad más 'intimista.'" In Ángel Alcalá y otros. *Inquisición española*. 374-409.

⁵⁶ Mary E. Giles, *Women in the Inquisition: Spain and the New World*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. 100

millennial tendencies. This might very well account for the radical zeal with which the *dejados* employed their preparations for the dawning of a new Christian era.⁵⁷ Much like the Messalians of the 4th century and the Free Spirits, the amorphous nature of *alumbradismo* transformed the term “alumbrado” into a pejorative catch-all accusation leveled against anyone remotely smacking of imposture and dangerous enthusiasm. It comes as no surprise, then, to learn that prominent scholars like Juan de Vergara and other influential figures of the *Siglo de Oro* like John and Teresa of Avila, and Ignatius Loyola all faced charges of *alumbradismo*.⁵⁸

But would it be reasonable to label the *alumbrados* as mystics? Not quite. To begin with, it is necessary to define what “mysticism” actually denotes. We might follow McGinn in defining mysticism as “a special consciousness of the presence of God that by definition exceeds description and results in a transformation of the subject that receives it.”⁵⁹ True, *dejado* spirituality did contain some fundamental elements of orthodox mystical practice: the emphasis on experience, hostility towards learning, the pursuit of permanent prayer, the centrality of God’s love in one’s life.⁶⁰ But as McGinn points out, “there is a difference between expressing fundamental theological truths that underlie mysticism and a teaching that sets out a program of mystical transformation, whether expressed in exegetical, theoretical, or biographical terms.”⁶¹ One, then, is not a mystic merely based on the presence of certain mystical elements or tendencies. Rather, a certain level of sophisticated language and explication must be involved in detailing a systematic pathway by which one might achieve union with God. Mystical experiences, despite cultural and linguistic differences, are intensely personal ones and, as such, are best described (if they *really* can be) in the words of the recipient himself. Here the documentation works against us. Besides two letters written by Alcaraz and Isabel de la Cruz while confined in prison, there are no first-hand, unfiltered accounts of *alumbrado* belief; no *Mirror* of María de Cazalla through which we might catch a glimpse of what they really believed. The only other information pertaining to the *alumbrados* comes to

⁵⁷ Alastair Hamilton. “The *Alumbrados*: *Dejamiento* and its Practitioners.” In Hilaire Kallendorf. *A New Companion to Hispanic Mysticism*. Leiden: Brill. 2010. 122. Nieto, ‘Fransican Alumbrados, The authoritative account of the *converso* element in the development of the *alumbrado* movement can be found in Stefania Pastore, *Una herejía española. Conversos, alumbrados, e Inquisición(1449- 1559)*. Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2010.

⁵⁸ Hamilton, *Heresy and Mysticism*. 92-102. 115. 121-123. For a discussion of the other terms, see McGinn *Harvest of Mysticism*. 55.

⁵⁹ McGinn, *Flowering of Mysticism*. 26.

⁶⁰ Hamilton, *Heresy and Mysticism*. 39.

⁶¹ McGinn, *Flowering of Mysticism*, 53-54.

us from inquisitorial records in which defendants often sought to prove their orthodoxy despite what they might have *actually* thought. Still more, rivalries and bruised egos served to skew witness testimony leaving historians to speculate over the truth of the matter. To make matters worse, the little evidence we do have is often times contradictory and confusing suggesting that, as Hamilton points out, “they did not, perhaps, have time to work their ideas out to the full.”⁶²

The point is that we might only guess as to which direction the *alumbrados* might have gone had the Inquisition not suppressed them. As I see it, María de Cazalla and the *dejados* represent a group of morally radical evangelical Christians; as modern day experimenters in the *vita apostolica* driven by a genuine, deep-seated faith and desire for reform. The literal meaning of sacred texts, especially the Pauline Epistles, inspired their pursuit of a refined and purified state of spiritual perfection. María herself admitted that she only preached the literal message of the Bible with her words often being erroneous and poorly stated.⁶³ Here, of course, may be an attempt by María to downplay the nature of her preaching, but the possibility nevertheless remains. With this in mind, the more borderline mystical statements like María’s desire to see God apart from her body and without veils loses its mystical connotation when we compare it to the words of 2 Cor. 3:14-16.⁶⁴ Using the letters of Isabel de la Cruz and Alcaraz, Nieto has further shown how these *alumbrados* had a less metaphysical and mystical vision of the world, but instead grounded their spiritual attitudes in Biblical notions of an anthropomorphic God. Certain conceptual interpolations in the evidence against the pair suggest that linguistic problems emerged when the theologically trained inquisitors began to *assume* what the two tried to profess.⁶⁵

In the case of *dejamiento*, we might follow Angela Selke in treating it not as a mystical pathway to God but rather as an attitude, *algo presente en todos los momentos*

⁶² Hamilton, *Heresy and Mysticism*. 42.

⁶³ “...que por la larga costumbre y por aver yo rezado mucho tiempo en romance entiendo alguna palabra mas nunca dixe más de al pie de la letra.” “...y mis palabras bien podieron herrar en el modo de dezir mas esto es a lo que yo tenía intento y me acuerdo aver dicho.”; “...que mis palabras bien pueden herrar, mas ser hereje sin querello, yo no lo puedo ser.” *Proceso* 140, 135, 137.

⁶⁴ But their minds were hardened...that same veil remains unlifted because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their minds; but when a man turns to the Lord the veil is removed.”

⁶⁵ José C. Nieto. “El carácter no místico de los alumbrados de Toledo, 1509 (?)-1524.” In Ángel Alcalá y otros. *Inquisición española*. 410-424.

de su vida.⁶⁶ Lerner and Leff came to similar conclusions about the heresy of the Free Spirits.⁶⁷ Unlike the itinerary described in the *Mirror*, there is no progression in the passive methodology of María de Cazalla and no focused attempt to reach some higher form of prayer. Indeed, the very practice of *dejamiento* emerged as a reaction and rejection to that of *recogimiento* that advocated a tripartite method of prayer that might be codified in a book. If we are to believe the accusation that to even *think* about God was too much work for these *dejados*, is it easy to understand why they might reject a system involving concentrated efforts of systematic oratory practice. Modern day attitudes concerning spirituality are especially clear when María “said that this was a hard thing [to understand] that God had obliged us to tell our sins to another man...”⁶⁸ When inquisitors asked María which type of meditation she preferred (between *dejamiento* or *recogimiento*), she wisely replied that she sought “the best way, closest to the doctrine of the saints, to reach God and know His will so as to obey it.”⁶⁹ I tend to believe her in this case. The extreme oscillations in her behavior, her confused sex life, and her enthusiastic asceticism reveal her to be a genuinely devout (perhaps a bit *too* devout) woman trying to figure out the best way to spiritually improve herself in a time of considerable confusion and uncertainty. There is nothing mystical about that.

Unlike Marguerite Porete, María’s defiance in the face of inquisitorial pressure resulted in her release from custody. Through the proceedings of her trial, we see how the times in which one lives ultimately determines the acceptable methods of experiencing the divine. The *dejados* were doomed to suppression from the outset: in a time that favored overly enthusiastic and expressive displays of religious fervor, their passive asceticism and anti-social behavior by meeting in secret conventicles made the *dejados* immediately suspicious and especially dangerous. To make matters worse, the *dejados* were led by influential *converso* women who had the audacity to read and profess Holy Scripture in the vernacular. Despite their comparatively reserved and quietist nature to that of other

⁶⁶ Angela Selke de Sánchez, “Algunos datos nuevos sobre los primeros alumbrados. El Edicto de 1525 y su relación con el proceso de Alcaraz.” *Bulletin Hispanique* 54 (1952): 150.

⁶⁷ Robert E. Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit*. 8. Gordon Leff. *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages: The Relation of Heterodoxy to Dissent c. 1250–1450*. 2 vols. Manchester University Press: New York, Barnes and Noble, 1967. 400, 404, 330.

⁶⁸ *Proceso* 107: “...que hera cosa rezia ésta que Dios nos avía obligado a dezir nuestras faltas a otra onbre...”

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 116: “...que buscaba esta declarante por todas las manera que podía, el camino mejor e más conforme a la doctrina de los santos para buscar a Dios e saber su voluntad para complilla.”

practitioners, their beliefs—partially mirroring those of *luterantismo*—threatened to corrupt the doctrinal integrity of the church by undermining the value of the entire ecclesiastical hierarchy and the institution of sacramental rites. The *alumbrados* thus fit the boiler-plate model of heresy firmly fixed in the mindset of inquisitors from the time of Marguerite Porete. Thus, the *alumbrados* became the ideal target for the Inquisition who sought them out—or something like them—like a child overturning stones in search of a certain type of insect.

