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The Seduction of the Word. The Biblical Humanism of Hipólita de Jesús in the Spanish Golden Age

Abstract: In this study, I deal with the case of a most unusual nun, whose life mission was to spread the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures in vernacular languages during the Counter Reformation period. This nun, Hipólita de Jesús, was born in Catalonia (Spain) in 1551 and spent all her life in a Dominican monastery in Barcelona, where she died in 1624. As is well known, the *Index librorum prohibitorum* did not allow the reading of the Bible in any form except for the Latin version of Saint Jerome. Despite this prohibition, she wrote more than twenty treatises. In them, she constructed a discourse about the Bible, and its spiritual and moral contents. Her method of teaching and living Christianity, based on direct contact with the sources of the Catholic faith as well as on Pauline thinking, made her one of the most outstanding cases of biblical Humanism of the Golden Age. However, until now, she has remained almost unknown.

Keywords: Counter Reformation, Bible, spirituality, humanism, education, women.

Introduction

Sor Hipólita de Jesús was a most unusual figure. Indeed, one does not often find, in a Dominican convent in Barcelona around the turn of the seventeenth century, a nun who knew Latin perfectly and wrote more

than twenty large spiritual treatises to spread the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. This remarkable fact is brought even further into relief if we take into account the historical context of great hostility towards the Scriptures in Spain; as we know, after the Lutheran schism, it was forbidden to read the Holy Scriptures in any language other than Latin.¹ The response of the Catholic Church, through the Council of Trent, was essentially to encourage the holy texts to be read only by those who knew Latin, that is to say, clerics and prelates, in an attempt to 'control' readings or interpretations that might fall outside the teachings of the Catholic Church. This severe, extreme position, taken in response to the Lutheran challenge, was questioned by many intellectuals, Hebrew scholars, biblicists and eminent prelates within the Church. Some, such as Fray Luis de Granada,² were shocked, while others, like Fray Luis de León,³ were indignant, but these critical voices soon faded away and had no effect. However, perhaps direct evidence of the enormous importance attached to controlling the Gospel in the Spain of the *Siglo de Oro* or Golden Age can be found in one of the bitterest inquisitorial cases of the sixteenth century, that of the unfortunate archbishop of Toledo, another Dominican, Bartolomé de Carranza. In his *Catechismo Christiano*, thinking above all of those parts that were not subject to interpretational dilemmas, this great theologian argued that the prohibition of the Gospel should be relaxed somewhat. His treatise, which contains more than 2,000 biblical citations and was printed in Antwerp in 1558, was also his death sentence.⁴ In 1559, the Inquisition

¹ The Spanish Index of 1551 condemned translations of the Bible into "Castilian Romance or any other vulgar language", a prohibition repeated in Gaspar de Quiroga's Catalogue of 1583. For further information on this controversial subject, see: Fernández López, S. (2003). *Lectura y prohibición de la Biblia en lengua vulgar. Defensores y detractores*. León: Universidad de León.

² Huerga A. (1950). Fray Luis de Granada en Escalaceli. Nuevos datos para el conocimiento histórico y espiritual de su vida. *Hispania*, X, 328–331.

³ León, Luis de. (1991). "De los nombres de Cristo". *Obras completas castellanas de Fray Luis de León*, Madrid: BAC, 403.

⁴ Giordano M. L. (2018). La reforma católica que no pudo ser: los *Comentarios al Catechismo Christiano* de Bartolomé de Carranza. In Boeglin M., Kahn D., Terricabras I. *Reforma y disidencia religiosa*. Madrid: Casa de Velázquez.

accused Carranza of Lutheranism, and the Dominican died in Rome soon after receiving an ambiguous sentence absolving him at the end of a seventeen-year inquisitorial trial. The *Catechismo Christiano* was never read in Spain, although it was finally approved by the Council of Trent.⁵

The thought control apparatus, censorship and the Holy Office continued to prohibit not only the Bible in the vernacular, but also any book that included a direct reference to biblical passages, quashing any opposition to this programme in the process.

It is in this context that we must view the intellectual activity and missionary attitude of Sor Hipólita de Jesús. Little by way of biographical details has come down to us. We know that she was born in Girona in 1551,⁶ into an aristocratic Catalan family, the illegitimate daughter of Viscount Francesc de Rocabertí.

As an illegitimate daughter,⁷ her fate could not be anything other than the convent. Everything occurred according to the customs of the time: in 1561, Isabel took the habit, and in 1569, at the age of eighteen, she took her vows at the Dominican convent of Nostra Senyora dels Àngels in Barcelona (at that time located outside the city itself).⁸ On entering the convent, she took the name of Sor Hipólita de Jesús. She received the habit from her aunt, Sor Jerónima de Rocabertí. Jerónima, who had become prioress there at the age of just nineteen, made Els Àngels an enclosed convent and transferred it to within the city walls of Barcelona,⁹ where its remains, recently restored, can still be admired. Sor Jerónima

⁵ Tellechea Idígoras J. I. (1987). La aprobación del Catecismo de Carranza en Trento con noticias sobre la comisión del Índice (1563), *Scriptorium Victoriense*, 34, 348–402.

⁶ This detail contradicts her biographer, Antonio Lorea, who claimed that she was born in Barcelona. Cf. *La venerable madre Hipólita de Jesús y Rocabertí*, in Valencia por Vicente Cabrera, Impresor de la Ciudad, en Plaça de la Seo, MDCLXXIX, p. 21.

⁷ Only her father's name has come down to us; her mother's identity is unknown.

⁸ Ahumada L. Hipólita de Jesús (2013). Biografía y Bibliografía. In Alabrús R. M. *La vida cotidiana y la sociabilidad de los dominicos*. San Cugat: Arpegio.

⁹ Galmés P (2002). *Monestir de Nostra Senyora dels Àngels y Peu de la Creu*. Sant Cugat del Vallés.

was prioress for forty-four years, so a large segment of Hipólita's life took place under her aunt's 'reign'. And it was there, on 6 August 1624, that Sor Hipólita died, in the odour of sanctity, at the age of seventy-three.

Hipólita's work comprises around twenty-six volumes, all enriched by numerous biblical excerpts, which she glossed according to the teachings of the most eminent spiritual guides: Saint Paul and Saint Augustine, the most beloved, and, less frequently, Saint Jerome, Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, Saint Thomas and Saint Dominic, among others. As her hagiographer, the Dominican Antonio Lorea notes, her works "are Holy Scripture, or the Holy Scripture composes all her works".¹⁰ No more and no less than a simple equation.

Her education as a Latinist and her enormous knowledge of the Scriptures is as yet completely unexplained. All the signs would indicate that she was self-taught or that, after her entry into the convent at an early age, she had the kind of teacher that her aristocratic origins would permit. As a Dominican, Sor Hipólita de Jesús was well aware of the pedagogical value of preaching and of the potentialities of the Bible as a tool at the service of educating novices. We find the proof of this in her treatises, written in colloquial language, which reveal her attachment to the oral register and the style of the sermon or Bible lesson.

Great daring *versus* absolute prohibition

"The devil places many impediments against saying or knowing the Word of God", wrote Hipólita in one of her treatises,¹¹ thinking of all those who are charged with the mission of instructing the Christian flock in God's ways, basically teaching the Scriptures, but failing to discharge this duty. For their refusal to undertake this task, so essential for the life of

¹⁰ Antonio Lorea, *La venerable madre Hipólita de Jesús y Rocabertí*, en Valencia por Vicente Cabrera, impresor de la Ciudad, en la Plaça de la Seo, año MDCLXXIX, s.p.

¹¹ Hipólita de Jesús, *Tomo octavo de los estados, dividido en cinco libros*, Valencia, Vicente Cabrera, 1682, in Biblioteca Universidad de Barcelona, Sign. R. XVII, 4361, p. 187.

a Christian, she condemned them to hell and to answer for their actions before divine justice.¹² Hipólita herself, however, not only avoided any “impediments” but wrote “so many good books”, with the purpose that:

...he who wishes to know God and to love Him, should do these things: hear and read the word of God often. How great is our guilt if we do not, for there are so many good books.¹³

This declaration instructed the reader as to how to fulfil their duty of knowing the source of their faith: they should read “so many good books”. Indirectly, then, Hipólita took on the mission of teaching the Holy Scriptures through her books, works that she, of course, would place among the “good” ones that she mentions. In her works, biblical citations appeared in Latin, and through this expository style, Hipólita showed her obedience of the prohibition of spreading the Scripture in the vernacular. However, she then provided a translation and gloss of the text in Spanish. Moreover, at times, almost as if it were an oversight, she gave the biblical text directly in Spanish.

The educational value of the Scriptures in the teachings of Sor Hipólita de Jesús is manifested in the very structure of her works: as Teresa of Ávila also so often did, Sor Hipólita spoke through writing, or wrote by speaking. In other words, the way in which she writes reveals an oral mental genesis: her writing is characterised by a functionality that is closely linked to the oral register. The spiritual architecture of her long treatises constantly repeats the same structure: a citation is translated before becoming the

¹² Hipólita de Jesús, *Tratado del redimimiento del tiempo perdido*, Valencia, Francisco Mestre, 1680, in Biblioteca de la Universidad de Barcelona, Sign. R. 84/3/23, p. 64. Hipólita wrote an even more energetic reprimand directed at the clergy and the bishops for neglecting their pastoral duties than that cited here. In an earlier treatise (*El tomo octavo de los estados*, p. 29), citing the words of the Prophet Ezekiel, Hipólita described a situation that had reached a degree of severity identical to the time when, according to the prophet, God, observing his shepherds’ failure to care for His sheep, revoked their leadership of the flock and replaced them with others.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p.112.

subject of a long commentary, an explanation nearly always based on experience rather than doctrine or theology. The teachings of Paul and Augustine provided a permanent, solid foundation, while other authors and fathers of the Church were relegated to a secondary position. All the Dominican nun's treatises have the appearance of written sermons which circulated around the convent in ways that we still do not know. Perhaps copies were made of her treatises, or perhaps Hipólita herself transcribed her lessons so as not to forget them or so that others could learn from them.

All this leads us to recognise one of the categorical imperatives, summarised in the maxim of Saint Jerome: *Ignoratio Scripturarum Ignoratio Christi est*.¹⁴ Jerome is among the authors that the nun mentions as teachers of the Scriptures who were particularly concerned with the education of women; Saint Jerome invites, exhorts and cries out not only to men, but also to women:

Read the divine Scriptures frequently; rather, may your hands never set the Holy Book down.¹⁵

The extraordinary work that Hipólita performed as an author, and her imperturbable faith in the evangelist mission, lead us to conclude that the Dominican nun must have caused a veritable pedagogical revolution in the training of novices. This educational reform, based on something that was lacking, prohibited and 'forgotten',¹⁶ could only be introduced through a narrative, whether oral or written, in which a third party acted as a mediator. Since the Holy Word was God itself, according to Hipólita, she – of her own accord – would perform the task of leading people *towards the divine*. In consequence, the role she played was one

¹⁴ Comm. Is., Prolog. CCSL 73, p. 1; PL 24, col. 17.

¹⁵ Hipólita de Jesús, *Tomo octavo de los estados*, pp.168–169: "Mirad hijas que nunca se os caíga de las manos el libro de la santa y divina Escritura".

¹⁶ "There is for the others, neither a book nor a thing in the world more forgotten than the Divine and Holy Scripture" ("*No hay para los demás, libro, ni cosa en el mundo más olvidada, que la Divina y Santa Escritura*"): Hipólita de Jesús, *Tomo octavo de los estados* (1682), Valencia, p. 168.

of interpreting a constant, seductive dynamic into which she could insert the divine word encapsulated in a colloquial narrative, one liberally scattered with anecdotes and exemplary and edifying stories.

None of the treatises that Hipólita wrote were published in her lifetime, for the simple reason that they would have been banned by the censor. However, just as the prohibition of the Bible did not deter her from forging on with her educational project, nor did the impossibility of introducing her books to the wider world outside the convent discourage Hipólita from her tireless, solitary work as a writer.

The liberation of time

In her last work, Hipólita bequeathed to us one of her most heartfelt spiritual lessons. Indeed, this final treatise can well be considered her spiritual 'last will and testament'. In it, we find a passionate conviction in the educational value of time; it is a ceaseless teaching *by God about God*, a practically infinite 'work in progress' on the wonders of the Christian God.

In *Tratado del redimimiento de tiempo perdido* (*Treatise on the Redemption of Time Lost*), her last work, presumably written in around 1622, Sor Hipólita proposed a reorganisation of monastic time. The theme running through this final treatise was the ambitious goal of 'redeeming' time; a new place needed to be found for the Scriptures within time devoted to God, as time in the convent was. Hipólita did not choose the verb 'to redeem' by chance: monastic time was 'sequestered' by things that were unnecessary for a good, healthy Christian life. Here, then, is the Dominican nun's pedagogical proposal: that the organisation of time in the convent should provide for reading the Holy Scriptures, not only collectively, but also individually. In her call for the increasing of Bible reading in monastic time, she found support in Saint Jerome, who recommended it, as we have seen, both for lay and ordained women.¹⁷ She also cited

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 168–169.

Saint Paul, who was the first to speak of the 'redemption' of the Christian's time.¹⁸

From Latin to Castilian Spanish, the obscurity of the Latin used in the Vulgate would make anyone who read it, and the novices who heard it read to them, wonder about the meaning that was locked away in the biblical words. That is why a movement began to 'redeem' them from the darkness in which these words were shrouded, incomprehensible to most in Latin, and to make it possible to understand them through the translation and explanation of the Bible text. Hipólita undertook both these tasks in her classes for novices, as well as in her spiritual treatises. The pages of her works are filled with thousands of excerpts from biblical passages, which she translated, summarised and commented upon. It would be impossible to count them all: in the twenty-six tomes that she wrote, Hipólita produced a titanic work, teaching Bible stories and creating a careful catechism based on the Scriptures.

The Bible gives useful instructions for moral life and conduct, as it provides models of human behaviour, such as the Prophetess Anna,¹⁹ the widow Judith,²⁰ and, above all, King David²¹ – all are examples due to their faith in God and their virtues.

As we have seen, then, for Hipólita, the Bible was both method and content in learning Christianity. This aspect of the Dominican nun's teaching method, based on what we might call an integrist approach as regards the source of the Christian faith, confirms the fact that she was not willing to negotiate with the censor.²²

The idea that teaching the faith was a way of redeeming time wasted and of giving meaning to present time in itself reveals the great importance that Hipólita attributed to the Bible as a tool for educating and forming the

¹⁸ Hipólita de Jesús, *Tratado del rendimiento del tiempo perdido*, p. 62–64.

¹⁹ Hipólita de Jesús, *Tomo octavo de los estados*, 105–106.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, 183–188.

²¹ Hipólita de Jesús, *Tratado del rendimiento del tiempo perdido*, *passim*.

²² Giordano M. L. (2013). I salici sterili della religione esteriore. Sor Hipólita de Jesús e la Controriforma (1551–1699). *Quaderni Storici*, 144/3, 857–888.

individual. In short, knowledge of God gave meaning to time both past and present because it 'rescued' this time from the darkness of ignorance, that breeding ground for sin. Hipólita's narrative also fostered an experience in which studying the Bible and knowing oneself become fused into a single reality, apparently a reality that was most attractive to the human spirit.

Hipólita was aware that her proposal for reforming time at the convent, in accordance with her idea of making knowledge of the Scriptures central to the training given to novices, was revolutionary in her time. Her struggle reminds us of that of Don Quixote. Cervantes' book was published just two decades before Hipólita wrote her *Tratado del redimimiento del tiempo perdido*. The battles that Don Quixote charged into, nearly always lost causes in the name of ideas outdated in those pragmatic, arid times, are similar in a certain way to the battle that Hipólita fought. The nun's ideas were similarly outdated, since the instrument of her catechesis was a book sequestered in the hands of an intransigent orthodoxy whose critics were many in Spain and included leading personalities from the Church, as we have mentioned. To get around this prohibition without infringing it, Hipólita had to intermediate between the literal nature of the Holy Scripture, enclosed in its 'captivity' of incomprehensibility, and its complete understanding in the light of Paul's teachings about Christ's grace.

In her *Tratado del redimimiento del tiempo perdido*, Hipólita noted the difficulties of those "harsh times" within the context of her attempt to "rescue a captive Bible". In her own lifetime, she made this rescue possible among her novices and later, some fifty years after her death, her mission came to fuller fruition when her books were finally published during the closing two decades of the seventeenth century. Her entire work was included in the Index of Prohibited Books²³ from 1687 to 1693. This was despite the fact that her nephew, the Dominican monk Fray Juan Tomás de Rocabertí, who managed and paid for the publication of all of Hipólita's books, was archbishop of Valencia and, after 1695, Inquisitor General.

²³ To view in full the works by Hipólita included in the Index, see Callado E. (2007). *Por Dios y por el Rey. El inquisidor general fray Juan Tomás de Rocabertí*. Institució Alfons el Magnànim: Valencia, p. 350, note 833.

Rocabertí was a highly scrupulous, prudent man who had persuaded censors to sing her praises in their prologues to her works, which were printed with the authorisation of the Inquisition.²⁴ The gravity of the affair can also be gauged by its consequences: the process of the canonisation of the Dominican nun, promoted by her illustrious nephew, was frustrated, despite the support of the Catalan clergy.

It was not until the eighteenth century that Hipólita gained some recognition, one of the few historiographic rehabilitations of a certain significance for her work as a biblicist to date. An enlightened canon, the Valencian Joaquín Lorenzo Villanueva, mentioned Sor Hipólita in his most important work, which was published in Valencia in 1791. This Spanish clergyman, who fought all his life to teach the Bible in Spanish, named the Dominican nun as the only woman among such exalted figures as Juan of Ávila, Fray Bartolomé de Carranza and Fray Luis de Granada as the authors that he considered to have championed the cause of spreading the word of the Bible in the vernacular.²⁵

Words and silences

In this complex, two-fold work as both a writer and a teacher of novices, we can glimpse the continuity between knowledge of the Scriptures and the mysticism of mental prayer.²⁶ This is because, for Hipólita, both were

²⁴ Poutrin has shown that Hipólita's nephew, Fray Tomás de Rocabertí, took pains to secure, through a "large apparatus of approvals and censorship", the introduction to the outside world of his aunt's monumental body of work. Cf. Putrin I. (2015). *Censuras y elogios. Los paratextos de las obras de Sor Hipólita de Jesús (1679–1683)*. *Criticon*, 125, 107–119 and Zaragoza Gómez V (2016). *Censura y edición póstuma de la obra de Hipólita de Rocabertí: a propósito de unos poemas manipulados*. *Scripta*, 8, 194–223.

²⁵ Joaquín Lorenzo Villanueva, *De la lección de la sagrada Escritura en lenguas vulgares*, Valencia: Oficina de D. Benito Montfort, MCLLXCI, ff. LXXXVII-LXXXIX.

²⁶ I discuss this aspect of Hipólita's religiosity in Giordano, M. L. (2011). *La Contrarreforma y sus críticos. Biblia y oración mental en Hipólita de Rocabertí*. In Alabrus, R. M. (ed.), *Tradición y modernidad. El pensamiento de los dominicos en la Corona de Aragón en los siglos XVII y XVIII*. Madrid: Sílex.

direct paths to the divine. Mental prayer takes us back to silence as inner space, as this is quiet prayer, silent, as ordained by Saint Teresa of Ávila.

Here, too, we observe an interesting sign of her feminine authority, which returned visionary experiences or profound communication with God to the sealed space of intimacy, in this way preserving the unutterable nature of such events. One of her models, Teresa of Ávila, maintained very much the same modesty. Accordingly, the divine, like all experiences of extreme pain or pleasure, was “a failure of language”.²⁷ Anyone who read Hipólita’s work carefully would intuit that she had mystic contacts, perhaps daily, a gift of her nearness to God. However, precisely because of this frequency, her contacts were not imbued with heroic or exceptional overtones. As a result, they were often protected by the silence of a relationship of ineffable love.

For her, the word was the beating heart of the active life, the way in which the mystic entered the outside world. On the other hand, silence was the time for contemplation, mystery, denoted by seclusion and the ineffable nature of the *unio Dei*.

This alternation between word and silence, between the active and the contemplative life, found its material form in the pages intentionally left blank that abruptly interrupt her extensive *Tratado del redimimiento del tiempo perdido*. Like a musical score, communication with God was enriched by this alternation, in which silence and word are both vital elements in the relationship with God.

By a strange twist of fate, Hipólita experienced this alternation between words and silence in her own life, and to an extreme degree. Take, for instance, the mysterious, contradictory fact of her enormous output as a writer and the fact that not one of her many works was published in her lifetime. This cannot fail to disconcert us, as it directly questions the ultimate significance of her activity as the author of a voluminous body of work.

Of course, it must also have been personally very frustrating for her to write so much and never to be read, at least during her lifetime.

²⁷ Le Breton, D. (1999). *Antropología del dolor*. Barcelona: Seix Barral.

Nevertheless, writing for a select audience must surely have mitigated this frustration. She was not interested in 'saving' lost souls, but rather in leading to God those that had already decided that this was their goal: her readers were "the children of the light".²⁸ In order to devote herself to her work as a teacher, she renounced the post of prioress at the convent; she knew what such a position involved and, perhaps, feared that its duties would take away time from her activities as a writer and a teacher of novices, missions that she pursued for thirty years *sicut aquila provocans ad volandum pullos suos*.²⁹

Hipólita believed in the highly formative value of the Bible, in a moral and spiritual sense, as well as in its curative, almost thaumaturgical value for the health of the soul.³⁰ Accordingly, although she wrote with enormous regret that, in the midst of "this Babylon" and "exiled" from the "instruments" of the word of God, she had renounced touching those instruments,³¹ the truth is that she never truly gave them up. On the contrary, she included the Bible as part of the nun's education. We see this in her *Tratado del redimimiento del tiempo perdido*, in which she organises the preaching of the word according to the days of the week. This order is abruptly altered when we come to a series of blank pages, which correspond to a certain number of days devoted to meditation. During that period, it was silence that wrote in its invisible ink. Hipólita was keen to record those moments, detailing the days and their duration. Her decision to leave her pages blank in order to denote the time for contemplation is highly instructive, giving physical shape to the alternation between silence and writing, listening and speaking that, according to the Dominican nun, characterised prayer and the relation with God.

²⁸ Hipólita de Jesús, *Tratado del redimimiento del tiempo perdido*, p. 102.

²⁹ "As an eagle pushes its chicks to fly". Antonio Lorea, *La venerable madre...* p. 30.

³⁰ Antonio Lorea, *La venerable madre...* p. 30.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p.11.

Conclusions

Hipólita de Jesús was one of the greatest religious writers in the Counter Reformation period. This is the conclusion we reach from the overwhelming evidence: a huge body of work and an impressive educational and evangelical mission. Her greatness is magnified by the constant challenges that governed her life and the peaceful, orderly way in which she built up a didactic canon based on the Bible at a time when the sources of Christianity were forcibly silenced.

Apart from the existence of the publication prohibition, an impassable frontier that, in itself, suffices to explain why Hipólita's works were not published in her lifetime, we should also take into account an environmental factor. It would appear that the day-to-day work of studying the Scriptures – learning Christianity through its sources – may not have been looked on with approval from outside the world of the convent and the Catalan clergy, which was, generally speaking, less strict and controlling than in other parts of Spain. The fear that this disapproval inspired might well have paralysed any move to get her books known in the outside world. Her greatest act of daring was, perhaps, to create a didactic method for the Bible that coincided perfectly with the didactic method for religion,³² and all this during the historic period in the late sixteenth century when biblical wisdom was treated as suspect and considered a sign of identity of the Protestant religion. We can also form an idea of the effectiveness of Hipólita's teaching method: learning the Bible enabled the pupil to understand the Christian faith better. Doubtless, Hipólita tested and consolidated this method with the novices at the Convent of Nostra Senyora dels Àngels and, with the Augustinians, at another Barcelona convent that she reformed, writing a new rule for the purpose.³³

³² Giordano, M. L. (2013). "La «Redención» del tiempo perdido. La dominica Sor Hipólita de Jesús y la Enseñanza de la Biblia en tiempos de la Contrarreforma". In Alabrú R. M. (ed.), *La vida cotidiana y sociabilidad de los dominicos*, San Cugat: Arpegio, 149–166.

³³ Hipólita de Jesús, *Libro tercero de las obras espirituales de la venerable madre Hipólita de Jesús [...] Contiene la explicación de la Regla de San Agustín*, in Valencia, Gerónimo Vilasagra in La calle de los barcos, 1660.

The authority that Hipólita exercised was that of knowledge, knowledge which was not cognitive but experiential, the result of her experience of the divine word, which brought together salvation and Scripture once more. Hipólita wanted to cause a “fire in the mind”³⁴ and the deliverance of the heart, that is to say, a faith that illuminates like the light from heaven that struck Paul blind.³⁵ Given her constant references to light as a metaphor for God’s love and grace, we might perhaps dare to describe her Christian faith as a ‘theology of life’. As a teacher, she proposed a balanced formula based on human and mental integrity and wholesomeness, a unison of heart and mind typical of the exemplary Bible characters in which she found the structure of humanity to imitate – those of Paul, Isaiah, King David and so on, though the main figure that we should follow is Christ.

Although accounts of visions and raptures are present in some of her narratives, Hipólita does not overload these experiences with resonance. Strangely enough, those that did revel in such phenomena were, rather, her biographers, who sought to demonstrate that her life and works were in accordance with the canons for sanctity in the Baroque period; this goal is also at the heart of Lorea’s insistent cultivation of the monochord register of bodily mortification, an expression of afflictive, weeping, insecure religiosity attracted by the tangible and ostentatious. Hipólita, however, occupies different ground due to her disagreement with the approaches to religion in the seventeenth century. In fact, she wrote ironically that: “Not all is weeping”.

It is possible that Hipólita was not the only author at the time who was engaged in this line of Christian humanism, closely linked to the sources of the faith. In fact, it seems that her concerns were shared by others in the city of Barcelona itself. She was aware of the presence there of Diego Pérez de Valdivia, around 1580–1589, a disciple of Juan of Ávila

³⁴ “Incendio de la mente”. Cfr., Hipólita de Jesús, *Libro primero de su admirable vida y doctrina*, in Valencia, por Francisco Mestre, impresor del santo tribunal de la Inquisición, junto al molino de Rovella, 1679, p. 19.

³⁵ Hipólita de Jesús, *Tratado del Redimiento del tiempo perdido*, Part I.

and Professor of Holy Scripture at the University of Barcelona, as well as the author of several spiritual treatises. This is an initial finding which opens up a new line of research, one that promises fresh information and which, for the moment, only serves to confirm the singular nature of the human and intellectual figure of Sor Hipólita de Jesús.

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