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## The Metaphor of the Interior Cell for Jesus in Writings of Elizabeth Catez – St Elizabeth of the Trinity

Metafora wewnętrznej celi dla Jezusa w pismach Elżbiety Catez –  
św. Elżbiety od Trójcy Świętej

**ABSTRACT:** The article addresses the “interior cell for Jesus” in the writings of St Elizabeth of Dijon. Her writings (poetry, *Dairy*, *Spiritual Records*, letters, *Recent Retreats*) in which the term cell (in the French original *cellule*) or cellar (in the French original *cellier*) is used about God’s dwelling (unification) in a man were examined chronologically. The metaphor of the “interior cell” in this Saint’s writings reflects her spirituality precisely: the intense experience of God’s presence in a man, simplicity towards Him, as well as a constant and zealous concern not to left Him alone in the human heart. Moreover, she recalls that this kind of union with God is not reserved exclusively for those endowed with the vocation to the consecrated life. God wants to dwell in every soul that opens its doors to Him.

**KEYWORDS:** Elizabeth of the Trinity, interior cell, unification, God’s dwelling

**ABSTRAKT:** W artykule przeprowadzono studium zagadnienia „wewnętrznej celi dla Jezusa” w pismach św. Elżbiety z Dijon. Chronologicznie przebadano jej pisma (poezje, *Dziennik*, *Zapiski duchowe*, listy, *Ostatnie rekolekcje*), w których występuje termin *cela* (w francuskim oryginale *cellule*) lub *piwnica* (w francuskim oryginale *cellier*) w odniesieniu do zamieszkania (zjednoczenia) Boga w człowieku. Metafora „wewnętrznej celi” w pismach świętej bardzo dobrze odzwierciedla jej duchowość: intensywne doświadczenie obecności Boga w człowieku, prostotę wobec Niego, stałą i gorliwą troskę, aby nie pozostawał sam w ludzkim sercu. Przypomina również, że tego rodzaju zjednoczenie z Bogiem nie jest zarezerwowane wyłącznie dla osób obdarzonych powołaniem życia konsekrowanego. Bóg chce zamieszkać w każdej duszy, która otworzy mu swoje drzwi.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** Elżbieta od Trójcy Świętej, wewnętrzna cela, zjednoczenie, zamieszkanie przez Boga

I offer You [Jesus] the cell of my heart;  
 may it be Your little Bethany;  
 come to rest there,  
 I love You so much...

St Elizabeth of the Trinity  
*Spiritual Records*, 5

A man who has been endowed with the grace of direct union with God often tries, by obedience or by the need of faith, to describe the experience that in theology is called “mystical experience” or more broadly “mysticism.”<sup>1</sup> Faced with the difficulty of describing God’s affairs with the human language, mystics have repeatedly used a metaphor<sup>2</sup> to express, by making them similar to commonly known and understandable images, what exceeds the possibilities of perception and transmission of the human intellect. The metaphor mobilises the recipient to “see double” a given term or entire expression.<sup>3</sup> They first see and understands the semantic field of a lexeme or a set of lexemes (first glance) and then make an effort to interpret it, i.e., give an answer concerning the content, sense and message of the metaphor used (second glance).

The metaphor encourages discovering, exploring and contemplating the object used, which is particularly crucial in statements about God.<sup>4</sup> It also allows transferring about it all the richness of emotions and valuations accompanying the carrier.<sup>5</sup> In the religious language (theology of mystical life), this

<sup>1</sup> See: *Mistyka chrześcijańska*, J. Wilk (ed.), Katowice 2015 (Dni Duchowości 10); M. Chmielewski, *Mistyka*, [in:] *Leksykon duchowości katolickiej*, idem (ed.), Lublin–Kraków 2002, pp. 536–542.

<sup>2</sup> The term metaphor is a transcription of the Greek lexeme “metaphor” and means: “other use,” “change,” “figure of speech” – see: *Słownik grecko-polski*, term: “metafora,” Z. Abramowiczówna (ed.), Warsaw 1962, vol. 3, p. 130. Apart from metaphors, mystics also use comparisons. These terms, although close to each other, are not the same. In comparison (e.g., “dry as pepper”) all constituent expressions retain their literal sense, while in a metaphor at least some expressions acquire a new sense – cf. J. Breś, *O przydatności substytucyjnej i interaktywnej teorii metafora w analizie metaforycznych wypowiedzi o Bogu*, “Zeszyty Naukowe KUL” 45 (2002), no. 3–4, p. 106.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. E. Balcerzan, *Metafora a interpretacja*, “Teksty. Teoria literatury. Krytyka. Interpretacja” 54 (1980), no. 6, p. 42.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. J. Breś, *O przydatności substytucyjnej i interaktywnej teorii metafory w analizie metaforycznych wypowiedzi o Bogu...*, p. 108; idem, *O semantycznej teorii metafory i możliwości jej stosowania w analizie języka religijnego*, “Zeszyty Naukowe KUL” 45 (2002), no. 1–2, pp. 53–55.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. Breś, *O przydatności substytucyjnej i interaktywnej teorii...*, op. cit., p. 110.

phenomenon makes it possible to identify oneself with the experience lived. It does not close a mystic within the framework of purely literary description.

An example of a metaphor reflecting the union of God with man is the image of living in the soul (heart) of man, to which God comes to meet (be) its host (owner).<sup>6</sup> The Scripture employs it (see: Jn 14:23; Rom 8:10-11; Eph 2:22 – a man as the dwelling place of God; 1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:16; 1 Peter 2:5 – a man as the temple of God). It enables the introduction of various predictions relevant to the era in which the mystic lived or related to his/her lifestyle or recipients of his/her writings.

For the sake of exemplification: St Gertrude the Great of Helfta (1256–1302) writes about the dwelling that Jesus<sup>7</sup> creates in the soul of man. St Catherine of Siena (1347–1380) uses the image of a cell<sup>8</sup> and a city.<sup>9</sup> St Theresa of Jesus (1515–1582) describes it as an inn<sup>10</sup> and an interior fortress.<sup>11</sup> St John of the Cross (1542–1591) applies a whole range of expressions such as a shelter,<sup>12</sup> a secluded and secret place,<sup>13</sup> a compartment, a chamber<sup>14</sup> or the most intense in terms – an interior cellar.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>6</sup> He expresses God's desire to be as close to man as possible. It means a mutual personal community between man and God – cf. J.K. Miczyński, *Łaska niestworzona jako zaproszenie do modlitwy*, "Homo Orans" 1 (2000), pp. 311–317, especially p. 312; J. Machniak, *Zamieszkanie Trójcy Świętej*, [in:] *Encyklopedia katolicka*, E. Gigilewicz (ed.), Lublin 2014, vol. 20, col. 1225; J.D. Szczurek, *Tajemnica zamieszkania Trójcy Świętej w duszy*, [in:] *Niebo w mej duszy. Materiały z sympozjum poświęconego duchowości bł. Elżbiety od Trójcy Świętej (1880–1906) w stulecie jej śmierci*, A. Ruszała (ed.), Krakow 2007, pp. 30–33. See the development of this thought from the first centuries of Christianity: W. Granat, *Dogmatyka katolicka*, Lublin 1959, vol. 5, pp. 258–266, 267–275 (*Na czym polega zamieszkanie Trójcy Świętej w duszy człowieka usprawiedliwionego*). See also: *Katechizm Kościoła Katolickiego*, Poznań 1994, no. 260.

<sup>7</sup> See: Gertruda z Helfty, *Zwiastun Bożej miłości*, I,16,2, transl. B. Chądzyńska, E. Kędziorek, Krakow 2009, vol. 1, p. 86 (*Źródła Monastyczne* 24).

<sup>8</sup> See: Katarzyna ze Sieny, *Listy*, transl. L. Grygiel, Poznań 2016, pp. 224, 601.

<sup>9</sup> See: Katarzyna ze Sieny, *Dialog o Bożej Opatrzności czyli Księga Boskiej Nauki*, transl. L. Staff, Poznań 2001, pp. 372–376 (*Biblioteka Christianitas* 8).

<sup>10</sup> See: Teresa od Jezusa, *Droga doskonałości*, 34,8, [in:] idem, *Dzieła*, transl. H.P. Kossowski, Krakow 1987, vol. 2, p. 173.

<sup>11</sup> See: Teresa od Jezusa, *Twierdza wewnętrzna*, [in:] idem, *Dzieła*, op. cit., pp. 219–446.

<sup>12</sup> See: Jan od Krzyża, *Pieśń duchowa*, 1,7, [in:] idem, *Dzieła*, transl. B. Smyrak, Krakow 1995, p. 535.

<sup>13</sup> See: ibidem.

<sup>14</sup> See: ibidem, 1,10, p. 536.

<sup>15</sup> See: ibidem, 2,6,3, p. 648.

Contemporary mystics, e.g., St Mary of the Crucified Jesus (1846–1878)<sup>16</sup> or St Faustina Kowalska (1905–1938),<sup>17</sup> also referred to the metaphor of a cell (house) as a description of union with God. Among them, we also find the Carmelite St Elizabeth of the Trinity.<sup>18</sup> As seen in her preserved writings, she used the image of a cell eight times to express the indwelling of God in the soul of a man. These writings will constitute the material object of our study. Using the descriptive method (epistemological aspect),<sup>19</sup> we want to study the spiritual experience of the intense relationship of love between Christ and Elizabeth Catez. She expressed it through the metaphor of the interior cell (the formal object of the work). When analysing the texts of interest to us, we will maintain the chronological order of their creation.

## The metaphor of a cell for Jesus in poetry

The first surviving poem by Elizabeth Catez dates from May 1894 and the last one from October 22, 1906. Their collection is located in *Œuvres Complètes*.<sup>20</sup> However, it is not complete since Conrad De Meester OCD, the editor of all writings of Elizabeth of the Trinity, found and described two previously unknown poems at the end of the last century.<sup>21</sup> In the second one (P 72 ter),<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See: F. Zampini, *Małenka Nic. Życie i myśli św. Marii Baouardy, Małej Arabki*, transl. A. Zielińska, Krakow 2018, pp. 120, 322.

<sup>17</sup> See: Faustina Kowalska, *Dzienniczek. Miłosierdzie Boże w duszy mojej*, 16, Warsaw 1995, p. 26.

<sup>18</sup> She was born on July 18, 1880 in France. She entered the Carmel in Dijon on August 2, 1901. She died of Addison's then incurable disease on November 9, 1906. She was beatified on November 25, 1984 and canonized on October 16, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. M. Chmielewski, *Potrzeba metodologii w teologii duchowości*, "Duchowość w Polsce" 12 (2010), pp. 36–37.

<sup>20</sup> Élisabeth de la Trinité, *Œuvres Complètes*, édition critique C. De Meester, Paris 2017. Polish edition: Elżbieta od Trójcy Świętej, *Pisma wszystkie*, vol. 1: *Listy młodzieńcze*, vol. 2: *Listy z Karmelu*; vol. 3: *Pisma pomniejszych*, transl. and ed. J.E. Bielecki, Krakow 2006.

<sup>21</sup> See: C. De Meester, *Deux poésies inédites*, "Carmel" 2000, no. 2, pp. 33–44. Jan K. Miczyński translated these poems into Polish and provided them with theological commentary – idem, *Komentarz teologiczny do dwóch niepublikowanych w Polsce wierszy św. Elżbiety od Trójcy Świętej, odnalezionych i opisanych przez Conrada de Meestera OCD*, "Itinera Spiritualia" 10 (2017), pp. 41–54. In 2017, the Les Éditions du Cerf publishing house reissued all of Elizabeth of the Trinity's writings. However, these two poems were not included.

<sup>22</sup> The numbering of this poem was adopted after the French numeration and the article by J.K. Miczyński, *Komentarz teologiczny do dwóch niepublikowanych w Polsce wierszy św. Elżbiety od Trójcy Świętej...*, op. cit. The numbering in the Polish edition of *All Writings*

dated December 16, 1899, the metaphor of an interior cell for Jesus appeared in her writings for the first time:

1. Jesus, my Love and my Life,  
Help me, please,  
Create, beloved Saviour,  
Une cellule in my heart.
  
2. It will be Your little locutory,  
A humility and very modest apartment,  
Where I will be sure every hour  
To find You and see You.
  
3. There, in peace and quiet,  
I am delirious at Your presence,  
And entrusting myself to You,  
I will listen to Your voice... (...) <sup>23</sup>

This poem consists of ten verses and deals with two topics: the indwelling of God in man (verses 1–3) and the indwelling of man in God (verses 4–8). The last two are a prayer for Elizabeth's constant contact with God and total surrender to His will.

Due to the theme of our study, we will focus on the first part of this poem. It constructed around the metaphor of the cell, which nineteen-year-old Elizabeth Catez wishes to prepare in her heart for her Beloved, who is her Love and Life. She does not want to create it alone, but with Him. She does not impose her will or her ideas on Him. She is open to Jesus' proposals (verse one).

She wants to prepare a specific kind of spiritual space and clearly defines its purpose – the possibility of constant contact with God. She directs her daily life towards God: meeting Him – regardless of the time of year and day (verse two) and listening to Him in peace will be a source of joy. She is ready to be entrusted entirely to Him (verse three). The cell is to strengthen the mutual bond. Her further life and writings will confirm the validity of this spiritual decision.

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(*Pisma wszystkie*, op. cit.) does not correspond to the French one. If it were taken into account, this poem would receive the signature P 73. The abbreviation P (adopted after the abbreviations used in the work *All Writings*) means *Poetry*.

<sup>23</sup> Polish transl. J.K. Miczyński, [in:] idem, *Komentarz teologiczny do dwóch niepublikowanych w Polsce wierszy św. Elżbiety od Trójcy Świętej...*, op. cit., p. 48. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are by the WTR.

However, the question arises from where nineteen-year-old Elizabeth took the image of a cell to express her love for Jesus and desire for permanent presence with Him. The very idea of God's dwelling in man was probably known to her from reading the writings of Theresa of Jesus and Theresa of the Infant Jesus.<sup>24</sup> Besides, she could read or hear about the metaphor of the interior cell for Jesus in some sermon, conference, or conversation.<sup>25</sup> The possibility that she derived this term from the vocabulary of the Carmel in Dijon, which she had already visited several times, is not ruled out.<sup>26</sup>

## The metaphor of a cell for Jesus in Diary

*Diary*, which Elizabeth Catez led before joining the Carmel in Dijon, stopped the inner fights, struggle and joy of a young person who wanted to be as close to God as possible and at the same time longed for a contemplative life in the Carmel. Furthermore, its pages are summaries of the sermons and conferences that Elizabeth was listening to at the time, and the advice she received from the priests in anticipation of her mother's consent to her entering the Carmel. Nonetheless, Elizabeth Catez's *Diary* is above all her conversations with Jesus on subjects she could not discuss in detail with the people around her for various reasons.<sup>27</sup>

The timeframe for the creation of the preserved text is January 30, 1899 – January 27, 1900.<sup>28</sup> Under the date “Wednesday morning, January 24 [1900]” we read a prayer:

May in these blessed days I live in the fullest union with You, may I live only inside, in this cell [*dans cette cellule*] that You build in my heart, in this corner of

<sup>24</sup> For Elizabeth's fascination with the writings of these holy Carmelite saints, see: C. De Meester, *Święta Elżbieta od Trójcy Świętej. Biografia*, transl. K. Rogalska, Poznań 2015, pp. 218–223; 266–289.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, note 23.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. J.K. Miczyński, *Komentarz teologiczny...*, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>27</sup> Dzk 140 (the abbreviation Dzk, adopted after the abbreviations used in the work of *Pisma wszystkie*, means *Diary*). Cf. *Wprowadzenie do Dziennika*, [in:] Elżbieta od Trójcy Świętej, *Pisma wszystkie*, vol. 3: *Pisma pomniejszych...*, op. cit., p. 186; R. Moretti, *Introduzione a Elisabetta della Trinità. Vita – scritti – dottrina*, Rome 1984, pp. 79–83.

<sup>28</sup> Three of the five notebooks of *Diary* have survived to our times, and these also lack in individual pages. Before entering the Carmel, Elizabeth destroyed the missing notebooks and cut out some of the remaining pages. Before leaving *Diary* to her sister Margaret, she had probably removed everything that referred to her mother, who did not agree to her daughter entering the Carmel, and that referred to her conversations in the confessional and Carmel's locutory – cf. *Wprowadzenie do Dziennika...*, pp. 195–198.

me, where I feel You so clearly! Unfortunately, I often leave You alone there as if You were in the desert. Oh, that is all me: I'm so small...<sup>29</sup>

“Blessed Days” is the time of the retreat given by the Jesuit Father Joseph Hoppenot in Dijon, Dames Pérard Chapel. The notes from these days begin on Tuesday evening, January 23 and end on Saturday evening, January 27, 1900. They also constitute the fifth volume of the Diary. Elizabeth referred to the image of the interior cell on Wednesday morning, January 24, i.e., after her second retreat. From the notes left and own reflections on the theme of the morning conference on Wednesday morning (the issue of the salvation of the soul), we can assume that Father Hoppenot did not raise (also on Tuesday's conference) the question of God's dwelling in the human soul. St Elizabeth, after more than a month's break,<sup>30</sup> again took up the metaphor of the interior cell for Jesus. It is Jesus who builds it in the heart of the twenty-year-old girl (*gratia increata* – uncreated grace), allowing Elizabeth to experience His presence. The cell of her heart becomes a space for their meetings. However, when she receives this gift, the owner of this cell is aware of her negligence – she leaves Jesus alone in it.

Elizabeth does not broaden the question of her own smallness, but confesses love to God. Thereby she sets the direction of the road to Jesus – she wants to focus not so much on her weaknesses as on the presence of God in (at)<sup>31</sup> a man. Working on her own frailty is then an expression of love for God present in the human soul.

## The metaphor of a cell for Jesus in Spiritual Records

While *Diary*, which Elizabeth Catez left behind, is a compact whole “rewritten” by the author, her *Spiritual Records* (Notes intimes) intimes are a collection of various reflections and prayers, recorded between April 1894 and July 1906 on the writing materials available to her at the time (loose pages, reverse sides of a letter, coal advertisements, or an invitation to a choir rehearsal, and in a small

<sup>29</sup> Dzk.

<sup>30</sup> Since writing on December 16, 1899, P 72 ter.

<sup>31</sup> Like in the pages of the New Testament, also in this paper we distinguish: “the presence of God in man” (e.g., Ga 2,20) and “presence of God at man/being of God with man/being of man with God” (e.g., 1 Thes 5:10) – for more see: H. Langkammer, *Być z Chrystusem i być w Chrystusie. Egzystencjalna sekwencja chrystomorficzna w soteriologii św. Pawła*, “Roczniki Teologiczno-Kanoniczne” 29 (1982), vol. 1, pp. 67–78.

personal notebook). She wrote them to the saints: Elizabeth (ZD 1),<sup>32</sup> Anthony (ZD 3), Theresa of Jesus (ZD 9), she recorded in them spiritual programs and observations (ZD 2; 12; 14; 16; 17). However, most often they were a confident conversation with God (ZD 4-8; 10-11; 13; 15). Among the latter group two texts deal with the question of an interior cell for Jesus.

The first one was estimated by the editor to be dated January 23, 1900 and entitled *Niech to będzie Twoja Betania* (Let it be Your Bethany).<sup>33</sup> It was probably written in the context of the beginning retreats,<sup>34</sup> as can be seen from the sentence: "Oh, now that You come into my heart every day, let our union be even more profound" (ZD 5). It exposes the gift of daily holy communion. At that time, this privilege was granted to lay people during the retreat. In the context of prayer, the desire for silence and loving longing for the contemplative life in the Carmel, Elizabeth writes: "I offer You the cell of my heart [*la cellule de mon coeur*], may it be Your little Bethany; come to rest there, I love You so much..."<sup>35</sup>

It refers to the visit of Jesus to the house of Martha and Mary in Bethany<sup>36</sup> (see: Lk 10:38-42). This house is a symbol of open doors for Jesus, hospitality and rest.<sup>37</sup> In this context, Elizabeth invites Jesus to visit, as during her earthly apostolic activity, a house in Bethany that is friendly to Him, so that He may now rest in the heart that loves Him. It is always ready for Him, hence her request and at the same time invitation: "Come." Not a one-time visit but a permanent place of rest where love is the space for a meeting. It is this that

<sup>32</sup> The abbreviation ZD (taken after the abbreviations used in the work of *All writings* [*Pisma wszystkie*, op. cit.]) means *Spiritual Records*.

<sup>33</sup> Some of the entries were given a date and title by Elizabeth, others were estimated to be dated and given a general title by the publisher of her writings, which is clearly indicated in the individual texts.

<sup>34</sup> See: the previous paragraph of this study. The idea of a "cell for Jesus" has taken on a special intensity, because probably at the same time (retreat) Elizabeth took on this issue in Dzk 140 and ZD 5.

<sup>35</sup> ZD 5.

<sup>36</sup> The name Bethany is missing in the pericope about Martha and Martha. The evangelist writes only about "a certain village" (Lk 10:38). The name is given from the information contained in J 11:1-44. Bethany is a village on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives (see: Mk 11.1), by the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, about 15 stages, or about 2.7 km (see: J 11:18). In Christ's day there was another Bethany in Transjordan, "on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptised" (J 1:28). For hypotheses about the place(s) of residence of the siblings see: S. Mędala, *Ewangelia według świętego Jana rozdziały 1-12. Wstęp, przekład z oryginału, komentarz*, Częstochowa 2010, pp. 796-797 (Nowy Komentarz Biblijny. Nowy Testament IV/1).

<sup>37</sup> It can be assumed that Jesus returned there several times (see also: Mt 21:17; Mk 11:11).



shapes in the twenty-year-old Elizabeth the desire to comfort Jesus, but also the ability to make a sacrifice (victim) for Him. This ability comes from her desire to belong entirely to Jesus.<sup>38</sup>

The future saint wishes not only to invite Jesus to her interior cell to let Him rest there but also to provide Him with all the conveniences he needs. Under the date of August 15, 1900, she includes a description of “the cell for my Beloved” in her Spiritual Records (*La cellule de mon Bien-Aimé*).

His bed will be to God’s will. He will have a comfortable armchair, which will be mortification, and a soft carpet, which will be humility. To make the Beloved God’s will pleasant in my imperfect cell [*dans ma pauvre petite cellule*], I will decorate it with flowers as much as I can; these flowers will be little sacrifices made at any time, and for food, I will give my Jesus renunciation and self-denial. The little lamp will always burn: its flame will be love, a love that burns the heart taken by Jesus.<sup>39</sup>

Elizabeth does not yet know the simplicity and poverty of the Carmelite cell.<sup>40</sup> The description of her cell presents the homeroom (armchair, carpet, flowers) that she is preparing for Jesus. As the bed occupies a special place in a room, hence she begins to furnish the cell for Jesus from the bed, which symbolises the will of God. For Elizabeth, the latter was a primary issue in looking at reality and trusting God.<sup>41</sup>

The further furnishing of this cell – an armchair (= mortification), a carpet (= humility), flowers (= small sacrifices made at any time) – testifies to Elizabeth’s constant, active and conscious commitment to all the acts that shape her will for the will of Jesus. Elizabeth is continually working on her spiritual development, motivating it by giving comfort and pleasure to the Beloved Guest. She also wants to provide Him with food, which will be sacrifices and self-denial. By giving up something for herself, Elizabeth wants to give it to Jesus. She clearly defines the addressee of her various ascetic endeavours and the time of her free activity – “always,” which in her cell is symbolised by a continuously burning little lamp whose flame will be the love for Jesus.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. the continuation of ZD 5.

<sup>39</sup> ZD 8.

<sup>40</sup> See the presentation of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity’s cell at Dijon Monastery: C. De Meester, *Święta Elżbieta...*, op. cit., pp. 585–588.

<sup>41</sup> It should suffice to look at the material index – Elżbieta od Trójcy Świętej, *Pisma wszystkie*, vol. 3: *Pisma pomniejsze...*, op. cit., p. 561.

The idea of the spiritual furnishing of the interior cell for Jesus presented by Elizabeth Catez is not something new in the literature of Catholic spirituality,<sup>42</sup> but it certainly reflects her spirituality precisely. The design of this cell evidences Elizabeth's total dedication to God's will. Her action – illuminated by the flame of love – is focused on Jesus. While waiting to enter the Carmel,<sup>43</sup> she carefully planned and arranged the cell for her Beloved. Her heart was ready for His reception.

## The metaphor of a cell for Jesus in the letters

Letters are the most extensive collection of Elizabeth Catez's writings.<sup>44</sup> In three of them, written already from the Carmel in Dijon, she refers to an interior cell. Four weeks after entering the Carmel (August 30, 1901) she writes a second<sup>45</sup> letter to her sister Margaret.<sup>46</sup> Although they differed significantly in character (Elizabeth was more impulsive and dominant), they got on well with each other. Not only did they spend much time at home but also rested during holidays.<sup>47</sup>

Elizabeth proposes to “beloved Maggie”<sup>48</sup> to continue their meetings. Although the monastic rule allowed for visits from families only once a month (except for Advent and Lent, when they were suspended), the young postulant found a way to be with her sister. She defined precisely when and where to meet: “Do you think of the cell [*la petite cellule*]? I assign you a meeting place there

<sup>42</sup> See a similar picture drawn by St Mary of the Crucified Jesus: M. Zawada, *Antologia mistyczna*, Krakow 2004, p. 315.

<sup>43</sup> On March 26, 1899, Elizabeth received permission from her mother to enter the Carmel, but this involved the necessity to be 21 years old (see: P 69; Dzk 105).

<sup>44</sup> In the Polish edition of all her writings they form the first two volumes – see: Elżbieta od Trójcy Świętej, *Pisma wszystkie*, vol. 1: *Listy młodzieńcze*, 84 preserved letters; vol. 2: *Listy z Karmelu*, 262 preserved letters, op. cit. The first letter (written with the hand of the child, guided by the hand of the mother) dates to the end of April 1882, and the last one (dictated by the Prioress – Mother Germanie of Jesus OCD) dates to early November 1906.

<sup>45</sup> The first (L 87) was dated August 9, 1901.

<sup>46</sup> She was born on February 20, 1883 and died on May 7, 1954. Like Elizabeth, she was a talented pianist. On October 15, 1902 she married Jerzy Chevignard. They had nine children – see more: J. Rémy, *Guite. La sorella di Elisabetta della Trinità*, trad. dal francese di Loredana Cecon Terranova, Milano 2004.

<sup>47</sup> See their joint photographs: *Elżbieta od Trójcy Świętej. O świącie Ciebie szukam. Wspomnienie pewnego oblicza i pewnego serca*, P.P. Furdzik (ed.), Krakow 2006, pp. 34, 36, 40, 44, 48–50, 53–54, 56–57, 60–63, 66–68, 71, 103.

<sup>48</sup> L 90.

every day at 8 a.m.”<sup>49</sup> It is the only surviving text in which Elizabeth took up the question of the interior cell without referring it directly to God. The cell becomes a meeting place also with her sister, who probably understood the message correctly. Both leading deep spiritual lives were able to maintain strong family ties despite Elizabeth’s voluntary isolation. In this context, the interior cell becomes a space for common thoughts and mutual prayer.

Elizabeth of the Trinity also explains the idea of the interior cell for Jesus to Francis de Sourdon.<sup>50</sup> The impulsive by nature 15-year-old girl (“when you lose your nerve”) receives simple instructions on where to seek inner peace and respite:

You must, like me, build yourself a small interior cell [*une petite cellule audehors*] in your soul. Then think that God is in it and enter it from time to time. When you feel that you are losing your nerves or you are unhappy, quickly protect yourself there and entrust it all to the Master. Oh, if you knew Him a little bit, prayer would not bore you. I think it’s a rest, a respite. Simply, we come to the One we love, we abide by Him like a small child in the arms of a mother, and let the heart act. You loved sitting right next to me and confessing so much. That’s how you must go to Him. If you knew how He understands... You wouldn’t suffer any more if you could realize it. It is the secret of life in the Carmel. The life of a Carmelite is a union with God from morning to evening and from evening to morning. If He hadn’t filled our cells [*nos cellules*] and our monasteries with Himself, oh, how empty they would be. But we see Him in everything, for we carry Him in us, and our lives are anticipating heaven. I ask the Lord God to instruct you in all these secrets, and I guard you in my little cell [*en ma petite cellule*]. For your part, guard me in yours. This way we will never part with each other.<sup>51</sup>

Elizabeth, once violent and impulsive,<sup>52</sup> perfectly understands an overactive teenager. Then, on June 19, 1902, she shares with her own experience of working

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>50</sup> Francis de Sourdon (born on June 25, 1887) was the second and youngest daughter of Countess Margaret de Sourdon, a faithful friend of Maria Catez, Elizabeth’s mother. As a child and a teenager, she had a complicated character. Endowed with friendship by Elizabeth, she received 26 letters from her within 8 years. 7 years older Elizabeth gave this friendship a specific maternal aspect. When she joined the Carmel, she called herself Francis’ “mother” (e.g., L 99; 129). Frequently, due to the similarity to French words, she tenderly transformed her name Francis (Françoise) into Framboise (e.g., L 272; 312). She had an outstanding influence on her.

<sup>51</sup> L 124.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. C. De Meester, *Święta Elżbieta...*, op. cit., p. 56. Elizabeth even writes: “you have my nature” (L 99).

on herself, which involved working with Jesus (work for Jesus). Meetings with Him (through prayer) in this “small interior cell” bring rest and respite. At least this is the case with Elizabeth. Her life is a union with Jesus, which she does not have to look far as He dwells in her soul (heart). Her interior cell is like the vestibule of Heaven, in which Christ has prepared not small cells, but spacious apartments for those who love Him (see: Jn 14:1-3).

When explaining to Francis the essence of the interior cell, she also presents to her the ideal of the life of the Carmelite, which is a constant, selfless and unifying love with God that underlies all desires, decisions, and actions.<sup>53</sup> The monastic cell, as well as the inner cell, become the place where Jesus lives. The Carmelite is to be always with Him and for Him, regardless of the current activities.

Just like her Elizabeth’s sister, Margaret, Francis de Sourdon has a permanent place in Elizabeth’s interior cell. Although it is “tiny,” she can welcome and host the people whom the Mystic of Dijon has given love and care. Besides, the nun encourages the teenager to guard her in her cell. In this way, she instructs her about God’s dwelling in the human heart but also strengthens their friendship. Francis’ young age and her impulsive nature do not prevent the Carmelite from showing her the essential things. She shares her Treasure. She teaches how to receive and host Him.

The third letter, in which Elizabeth of the Holy Trinity raises the issue of the interior cell for Jesus, was addressed to Antonina de Bobet on April 27, 1903.<sup>54</sup> It has a specific context related to the social and political situation in France at the time. It heralded the intensification of various difficulties and the expansion of intolerance to persecution for the followers of Jesus.<sup>55</sup> However,

<sup>53</sup> Cf. A. Ruszała, *Ideal karmelitanki bosej według bł. Elżbiety od Trójcy Świętej*, [in:] *Niebo w mej duszy...*, op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth’s friend, mother of Simon and Joan Mary. They kept a constant correspondence with each other. Elizabeth received from her the book of John of the Cross (*Pieśń duchowa; Żywy płomień miłości* – see: L 107) and a rosary purchased during her pilgrimage to Lourdes (for which she had asked: L 243; 263). See: *Elżbieta od Trójcy Świętej. O świecie Ciebie szukam...*, op. cit., p. 146.

<sup>55</sup> This situation was the result of internal tensions in France, which became active after Captain Dreyfus, wrongly accused of treason to Germany, was sent to heavy labour in Cayenne. That gave rise to the political crisis, the centre of which was the relationship between the state and the Church. Opponents and supporters of the review of the Dreyfus trial faced each other. The “government of republican defence,” formed in mid-1899, with Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau at the head, led to the acquittal of the captain. Some religious congregations, though got involved in the campaign against Dreyfus, which resulted in the escalation of anticlericalism and a demand for a gradual liquidation of religious life in

being aware of the attack on the Church and bearing in mind a real vision of the dissolution of her order, Elizabeth writes with confidence to Mrs Bobet who is concerned about the situation of Christians:

Yes, the future is very bleak, and do you not feel the need to love Him more to reward... to comfort this praiseworthy Master?... Let us make Him a hermitage in the deepest interior of our soul and abide with Him, let us never leave Him, for this is His commandment: "Abide in Me and I in you." This interior cell [*cette cellule intérieure*] will not deprive us of anything. Also, what I care about the experiences we will go through. My only treasure I carry "inside me" and the rest is as if it were not!<sup>56</sup>

This kind of attitude of Sister Elizabeth to the real danger of expelling the Carmel from Dijon (or even France) shows her strong trust in God, her inner freedom and readiness to accept any scenario related to the functioning of the monastery ("what do I care about the experiences we will go through"), as long as Christ – her only Treasure – is always inside her, living in her interior cell.

The Carmelite defines the triple task of the functioning of her interior cell as follows: "to reward," "to comfort," and "to abide" (Jn 15:4) with a glorified Master. In the internal purposes of Sister Elizabeth and Antonina de Bobet, Jesus, who was insulted in France at the time, is to be rewarded for His contempt and open attack on Him and His Church, as well as for the consolation of those who still love Him and wish to remain with Him.

It is worth noting that before Elizabeth of the Trinity referred in this letter to the metaphor of the cell for Jesus, she reminded the addressee of the presence of God in the life of a man who "in the most difficult hours, even when He sometimes seems to be very far away, is so close, indeed, «inside» us

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France. The elections of April 27 and May 11, 1902, brought success to the government of Waldeck-Rousseau, after which Emil Combes took over the position of president of the Council of Ministers (1902–1905). Until 1904, due to his pressure, about 10,000 religious schools were closed in France, and thousands of priests and nuns had to leave France because of persecution. On Good Friday, 1904, by his decision, all crucifixes were removed from courtrooms, and in July of that year, diplomatic relations with the Vatican were broken. It was tantamount to the dissolution of the concordat. Cf. J. Misiurek, *Uwarunkowania życia i duchowości bł. Elżbiety od Trójcy Przenajświętszej*, [in:] „*Uwielbienie chwały*”. *VI Karmelitański Tydzień Duchowości z bł. Elżbietą od Trójcy Świętej. 5–8 maja 2003*, J.W. Gogola (ed.), Krakow 2004, pp. 17–18 (Karmel Żywy 6); Wikipedia.pl, term: „Émile Combes,” [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Émile\\_Combes](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Émile_Combes) [access: 2.04.2019].

<sup>56</sup> L 161.

(«au-dedans» de nous).<sup>57</sup> In this context, the cell for Jesus, which Elizabeth nurtures so carefully, reflects what is going on inside her and paints her deep spiritual life.

## The metaphor of a cell for Jesus in Last Retreat

In the effect of her deteriorating health (then incurable Addison's disease), at the end of March 1906, Elizabeth of the Holy Trinity is sent to the monastery infirmary, which will become her last place of earthly residence. There, from the evening of August 15 to the 31<sup>st</sup> of the same month, she gives individual retreats. At the request of the Prioress, Mother Germany writes down "her good meetings"<sup>58</sup> ("her inspirations").<sup>59</sup> Already in the first passus of a small notebook containing *Dernière retraite* (*Last Retreat*), its author refers to the issue that interests us. However, when describing the same spiritual experience, she uses a different term. In place of the previous noun *cellule* ("cell"), she inserts *cellier* ("cellar"):

"Nescivi." "I didn't know anything." Here is what the "Beloved from the Song of Songs" sings after she was led to an inner cell/ cellar [*le cellier intérieur*]. It seems to me that this should also be the chorus of glory on the first day of the retreat when the Master penetrated the bottomless abyss to teach her to do her duty in eternity. There she should practise already in the time that is the begun eternity that is in constant development.<sup>60</sup>

This change has been made under the influence of reading the *Spiritual Song* of St John of the Cross.<sup>61</sup> This is how the Mystical Doctor understands this issue: "through this cellar, the soul expresses the ultimate and closest degree

<sup>57</sup> Ibidem. "It is my consolation to focus and enjoy Your [God's] presence, for then I feel You so much in me, for my highest good" (Dzk 138). Continuing this note (January 23, 1900), waiting to join the Carmel, she used the adverb *au-dedans* to express her longing for life in the Carmelite cloister: "Shape the Carmelite woman in me, for internally [*au-dedans*] I can be her and I want to be her" (Dzk 138).

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *Wprowadzenie do Ostatnich rekolekcji*, [in:] Elżbieta od Trójcy Świętej, *Pisma wszystkie*, vol. 3: *Pisma pomniejszych...*, op. cit., pp. 391–392; C. De Meester, *Święta Elżbieta...*, op. cit., pp. 710–712.

<sup>59</sup> Germana od Jezusa, *Wspomnienia. Siostra Elżbieta od Trójcy Św. Karmelitanka bosa (1880–1906)*, transl. A. Gmurowski, Lviv 1932, p. 238.

<sup>60</sup> OR I. The abbreviation OR (taken after the abbreviations used in the work *Pisma wszystkie*) means *Last retreat*.

<sup>61</sup> See: Jan od Krzyża, *Pieśń duchowa*, 26:3, [in:] idem, *Dzieła...*, op. cit., p. 648.

of love that can be achieved in this life. That is why [Beloved] calls it *the interior cellar*, i.e. the most interior.”<sup>62</sup> The whole *Last Retreat* is a confirmation that Elizabeth is already there. Her heart is an interior cell for the Beloved, and she lives in the most profound union with Him. This experience can be compared to the so-called spiritual nuptials (*matrimonio espiritual*) described by St Theresa of Jesus.<sup>63</sup> The Mystic of Dijon exactly knows what she lives for and what awaits her in eternity – she forgets herself to be “the constant glory of the Trinity” (Ef 1,12: *Laudem gloriae eius*).<sup>64</sup>

Referring (after John of the Cross) to the Latin version of the *Song of Songs* 6:11 (*nescivi anima mea*),<sup>65</sup> Sister Elizabeth emphasises the grace of the gift (“she was led”). Although the soul cannot merit the gift of such unifying love, it can accept it and cultivate with gratitude. God invites a man into the fathomless depths of His love. He wants his love, for him he has become “Crucified for love.”<sup>66</sup> Being love (1 Jn 4:8.16), He expects the love of man. He expects love, but does not force it.

## Conclusion

The metaphor of the inner cell for Jesus in the writings of Elizabeth Catez – Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity – is not new to Christian mysticism. The Carmelite is one of many people who have been endowed with the grace of experiencing God’s dwelling in the soul of man. This fact should rejoice and mobilise every Christian because God wants to live in a human heart. He still feels good there since He continues to choose souls to give them this kind of presence.

The chronological analysis of the writings of Elizabeth Catez allows us to conclude that her first (preserved) reference to the metaphor of the interior cell for Jesus dates from December 16, 1899 (P 72 ter) and the last one from August 16, 1906 (OR 1). Four of her writings including the issue of the interior cell are from the time before she entered the Carmelite community in Dijon (P 72 ter; Dzk 140; ZD 5.8) and four others – after she joined it (L 90; 124; 161; OR 1). She uses the lexeme cell (*cellule*) generally once in each of these letters. The exception is L 124, in which she applied the term three times when referring

<sup>62</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>63</sup> See: idem, *Twierdza wewnętrzna*, VII, 3, 1–15.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. OR 1. About her “second” name (*Laudem gloriae*), see: L 252, note 17.

<sup>65</sup> *Bible Sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*, B. Fischer, I. Gribomont, H.F.G. Sparks, W. Thiele et al. (eds.), Stuttgart 1994, *ad locum*.

<sup>66</sup> OR 1.

to the interior cell. There are more than three years and a change in the lexeme between the penultimate (L 161: April 27 1903) and the last use of this metaphor (OR 1: August 16 1906). After this slightly more extended period, the nun no longer writes the word cell (*cellule*), but cellar (*collier*), which may indicate an attempt to express her more profound union with Christ.

Elizabeth of Dijon consciously asked for this kind of grace (P. 72 ter), and through personal work on herself, she tried to provide Jesus with the best possible conditions to “live” in her soul.<sup>67</sup> Although this is an uncreated grace (*gratia increata*), she spiritually felt that man, out of the very fact of being created “in God’s image” (Genesis 1:27), is prepared to become a dwelling place for his Creator. Hence, Elizabeth did not associate this kind of union with God solely with the state of the consecrated life, but with a life of sanctifying grace (*gratia sanctificans*). She experienced a profound union with God even before she joined the Carmel, and while already in the monastery, she advised “building and nurturing” interior cells for Jesus also for those not connected with religious life (Francis de Sourdon, Antonina de Bobet).

What particularly resounds in the metaphor of the interior cell for Jesus in the writings is the need for presence (prayer, inner concentration, sensitivity to God’s affairs). God wants to come to man, but a man should be present in the house of his heart. Amid everyday matters, activities performed, and various socio-healthy stages, he must not lead to spiritual emptiness. Elizabeth of the Trinity clearly emphasises this need and at the same time exposes the simplicity and ease of this being with God. It is a unique colour of her spirituality. Hospitality, the care that Jesus has the best possible conditions in the cell of her heart and that He never stays alone in it, make Elizabeth spiritually creative and persistent. Everything she undertakes, which in recent years has also been associated with a devastating illness, she experiences in intense communion with the God living in her. Her Treasure is in her (L 161).

The metaphor of the interior cell for Jesus in the writings of St Elizabeth of Dijon reflects the constant presence of God with man and man with God. It is an expression of the dignity and beauty of the human soul in which God wants to be present. It is also a reminder that through *creatio*, each person is invited to *relatio* with his Creator. However, God does not use violence. He does not force the door to the chamber of the human heart. He stands at the door and cradles until the owner hears His voice and opens the door.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup> ZD 8.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Ap 3:20.



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