‘Espirituación’:
Juan de Ávila’s Doctrine of Union with the Holy Spirit

Saint Juan de Ávila a joué un rôle majeur dans la réforme catholique espagnole. Son programme de réforme s’est concentré principalement sur la formation morale du clergé catholique. Toutefois, Ávila a aussi envisagé une réforme dépassant les limites de l’institution ecclésiastique, inspirée par le concept médiéval du corpus christianum. La réforme, selon Ávila, incluait en effet l’ensemble de la société, c’est-à-dire ses membres aussi bien que sa tête. Sa théologie répondait aux réalités de la société espagnole de l’époque, fortement marquée par la stratification sociale et raciale. Une étude minutieuse des sermons d’Ávila sur l’Esprit Saint révèle que sa doctrine à ce sujet était au cœur de son programme de réforme. Ses sermons montrent qu’à la base de ce programme se trouvait plus particulièrement sa notion d’espiritación ou d’union avec le Saint Esprit.

Introduction

Saint Juan de Ávila (1499–1569) is certainly one of the most significant figures of the Catholic Reformation in Spain. Born to a judeoconverso father and an Old Christian mother, Juan de Ávila’s preaching throughout Andalusia gave rise to what is better known as Ávila’s “sacerdotal school.”1 This movement of the lower clergy was inspired by Ávila’s stress on the moral and spiritual formation of the clergy. He studied at the University of Salamanca from 1513 to 1517, although his academic advancement there might have been hampered by his judeoconverso background. He continued his education at the University of Álcala, where he studied from 1520 to 1526. His views were very influential in the second and third periods of the
Council of Trent (1551–52, 1562–63), while at home he participated in the foundation of several schools for children and the instruction of clergy, including the Colegio de Santa Catalina in Granada (1537), the University of Baeza (1538, 1540), and the schools of Jerez de la Frontera and Córdoba.

The years surrounding the canonization of Juan de Ávila in 1970 witnessed a continuous flow of studies and publications centred on his life and work. While more is known today about Ávila’s missionary activity and thought, there are still abundant lacunae in our knowledge of the depth and breadth of his theology. In fact, Ávila’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit has attracted little attention from scholars, and his sermons remain neglected in many studies of early-modern preaching. In response, this article will devote particular attention to Juan de Ávila’s doctrine of espirituación, or union with the Holy Spirit, as articulated in Ávila’s surviving sermons on the Holy Spirit. The main thesis of this article is that Juan de Ávila’s doctrine of espirituación constitutes the doctrinal centrepiece of his program of moral reform.

The emerging figure of Juan de Ávila in recent scholarship and the history of transmission behind Ávila’s sermons on the Holy Spirit provide an important background for the ensuing discussion. Accordingly, this article provides a literature review, to focus our inquiry, and an outline of the early transmission of Ávila’s sermons. The next part of the article deals directly with Juan de Ávila’s doctrine of espirituación as it appears in his sermons on the Holy Spirit. This is followed with a discussion of Ávila’s application of his doctrine of espirituación to his surrounding social context. In particular, I discuss the function of espirituación as a critical theological formulation against early-modern Iberian racialism and rigid social stratification.

The Apostle of Andalusia and His Theological Heritage in Recent Scholarship

Studies in the last fifteen years by Bilinkoff, Nalle, and Coleman have brought about a major reassessment of the figure and significance of Juan de Ávila. Set against the background of a highly stratified society, the figure of Juan de Ávila emerges as champion of a complex array of mainly urban factions. According to Jodi Bilinkoff, in her groundbreaking *The Avila of Saint Teresa*, Ávila’s appeal primarily rested in his articulation of a piety and a reform program that skewed traditional systems of patronage—systems that secured the privileged position of the landed aristocracy within the church. Juan de Ávila’s Christian humanism placed a premium on the interiority of religious experience over religious ceremonial, moral formation over spiritual coercion. His reform program was particularly attractive to the urban poor, but
Ávila’s reform agenda was also attractive to judeoconversos of all social backgrounds who, like him, were the target of estatutos de limpieza de sangre, or pure-blood statutes. Pure-blood statutes were legal codes adopted by different religious and civil entities as early as 1414, not too long after the massive forced conversions of Jews that followed the pogroms of 1391. Pure-blood statutes originated as a reaction to the prosperity and social mobility experienced by prominent judeoconversos, or “New Christians.” They were meant to keep the descendants of Christianized Jews excluded from full participation in early-modern Spanish society. The effectiveness of these codes is now the object of debate. As Linda Martz has concluded in her study of judeoconverso families in Toledo, “the enforcement of pure-blood statutes was arbitrary.” Wealth and associations often prevailed over the statutes themselves.

Nevertheless, pure-blood statutes certainly cast a permanent shadow of uncertainty on the life of the judeoconverso population. This is the social background, according to Bilinkoff, that made the figure of Juan de Ávila appeal to another well-known judeoconverso reformer, namely Saint Teresa de Jesús. In fact, Teresa de Jesús felt unceasing anxiety about her autobiographical work Libro de la vida (1562, 1565). As she noted in her autobiography, many of her contemporaries warned her that she was living in “harsh times” (tiempos recios). Accordingly, in 1568 she successfully sought and obtained the approval of Juan de Ávila for her work. Ávila’s approval came as a solid endorsement of her own person and mission. However, for a time it seemed that Ávila’s backing was to no avail; her autobiography was seized by the Inquisition in 1575. Eventually, after a long and tortuous road, the work was published by fray Luis de León in 1588.

While Bilinkoff concentrates her attention on the city of Ávila, Sara T. Nalle looks at religious reform in the region of Cuenca from 1500 to 1650. Nalle argues that Juan de Ávila’s emphasis on mass religious education in the vernacular language functioned as a cornerstone of the early phase of the Catholic Reformation in Spain. Also, Juan de Ávila, along with Bernal Díaz de Luco (1495–1556) and Archbishop Pedro Guerrero (1500–1576), were responsible for promoting in the Council of Trent ideas favouring the training of a reformed clergy. Juan de Ávila inspired the mid-sixteenth century reformers who sought in religious indoctrination an answer to the pressing needs of an expanding church. According to Nalle, he believed that instruction in prayer, personal discernment, and other aspects of the catechism would significantly contribute to the “regeneration” of the people. Lastly,
for Nalle, Juan de Ávila was part of the reform-inspired movement to change sermons in order to make them more spontaneous and stirring.\textsuperscript{15} The work of David Coleman magisterially builds upon the contributions of Bilinkoff and Nalle.\textsuperscript{16} Coleman’s most important contribution to the emerging picture of Juan de Ávila is his sharp delineation of Ávila’s reform program. Coleman brings into focus the distinctiveness of Ávila’s reforming genius by providing a contrast between the agendas of Archbishop Gaspar de Avalos (d. 1545) and of Saint Juan de Dios (1495–1550). For Coleman, the reforming efforts of Archbishop Gaspar de Avalos in the former Moorish Kingdom of Granada were frustrated by his own authoritarian style. Gaspar de Avalos’s tenure as archbishop of Granada between 1529 and 1541 was characterized by constant litigation between his office and ruling elites of Granadine society, including the ecclesiastical hierarchy.\textsuperscript{17} Juan de Dios’s mission to the poor, on the other hand, while first received with suspicion, made significant inroads to a wide variety of interest groups within the city of Granada. Juan de Dios, like other reformers inspired by the figure of Juan de Ávila, also managed to overcome a rigid system of patronage that placed significant strains upon charity work, especially upon the foundation of hospitals for the poor.\textsuperscript{18}

Finally for Coleman, Juan de Ávila stands out as a reformer for his ability to contextualize, to adapt the goals and ideals of Christian humanism to concrete and specific circumstances. According to Coleman, Ávila’s appeal in Granada cannot be understood as the “successful ‘implementation’ of pre-packaged ideas that he brought into the community from outside.” Instead, Coleman argues that Ávila’s ideas on reform “grew in response to local conditions” only to reshape local practices.\textsuperscript{19} Coleman adds that Ávila’s ideas emerged out of a unique combination of humanist education and practical experience throughout Andalusia.

Certainly the universal stature of Juan de Ávila has for long been recognized. However, the works of Bilinkoff, Nalle, and Coleman have deepened our understanding of Ávila by allowing us to see his distinctiveness in light of his particular historical context. Juan de Ávila was not only the source of inspiration for many of the reforms introduced by the Council of Trent. Juan de Ávila was also the judoconverso preacher of Andalusia, whose apostolic ministry takes form in the midst of a highly stratified society, dominated by medieval concerns over personal honour and shaped by racial and religious tensions that were both inherited from a not too distant past and constantly in the making.

This body of scholarship, moreover, invites us to engage with the figure of Juan de Ávila at a different level. If Coleman is correct in calling our at-
tention to Ávila’s creative adaptation and contextualization of reform ideas stemming from the brand of Christian humanism distilled at Álcalá, then, one must ask, how did Ávila contextualize Christian doctrine? What did different segments of Andalusian society find appealing in Juan de Ávila’s message, in his catechism, in his letters, but primarily in his sermons? How did Ávila reconstruct Christian doctrine for his audience and for his readership? What are the metaphors and other rhetorical or literary devices that he employed?

Moreover, Américo Castro has already suggested that the intellectual and spiritual foundations of pure-blood statutes rested in the self-identification of Old Christians with the biblical image of the chosen people of God. Castro argues that in sixteenth-century Spain, contrary to the contemporary scene, the Bible and biblical imagery played a much more important role in the formation of a collective identity. Castro’s insight, backed by examples of biblical passages seemingly conducive to a mentality of castes, draws attention to the actual practice of interpreting the biblical text (ἐρμηνευόμενον) and the art of its public presentation (ὁμιλία). Accordingly, we can come to a fuller comprehension of the figure of Juan de Ávila and his reform movement only after careful consideration of his hermeneutical and homiletical works.

The study of Ávila’s hermeneutical corpus, including his extensive devotional and theological production, has remained to a large extent the province of church historians and theologians. The traditional themes of the intellectual and moral formation of the clergy, silent prayer, and the juxtaposition between the interiority of religious experience and its ceremonial dimensions are with good reason commonplace in the literature. In the case at hand, however, this body of scholarship, or Avilista scholarship, has failed to take into consideration the strong social dimensions of the preaching ministry of Juan de Ávila. Specifically, the literature does not reflect Ávila’s creative social contextualization of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

Pierre Jobit had already called attention to the singularity of Juan de Ávila’s doctrinal treatment of the Holy Spirit in his collection, Bienheureux Jean D’Avila: Sermons sur le Saint-Esprit. For Jobit, Ávila’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit is better understood in its ecclesiological dimension. Ávila’s Holy Spirit, according to Jobit, is the “soul of the mystical body, the spiritual engine of this society of souls saved and to be saved, the soul of our souls and of the whole.” However, Jobit’s observation is superficial and he does not elaborate on the sense in which Ávila’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit can be considered original.

Asserting the prevailing consensus in Avilista scholarship, Melquíades Andrés Martín has explored the contours of Ávila’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit within the framework of Ávila’s spirituality. Andrés Martín describes
Ávila’s spirituality as “Trinitarian.” Andrés Martín rightly calls attention to the continuous references made by Ávila to the Trinity and the images used by Ávila to convey this theological mystery. According to Andrés Martín, Juan de Ávila attributes to the Holy Spirit the role of comforter and transformer of the human person. Yet Andrés Martín does not pursue the wider dimensions of Ávila’s Trinitarian theology; nor does he explore Ávila’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This is simply out of his purview.

Like Jobit, Juan del Río Martín sees a strong ecclesiological dimension to Ávila’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who continues the work of Christ in the church. For Ávila, according to del Río Martín, the Holy Spirit has a mission to bring the work of the Son of God to perfection. Del Río Martín argues that in Ávila the reformation of the church is predicated upon the inner reformation of believers. The holiness of the church is truly reflected to the extent that its members are led and transformed by the Holy Spirit.

Del Río Martín makes a very useful contribution in asserting the pneumatological foundations of Ávila’s reform program. In Ávila, the reformation of the church is the work of the “soul of the soul,” namely the Holy Spirit. The renewal of the church begins with the renewal of its members by the Holy Spirit. However, del Río Martín’s theological reading of the sources removes Juan de Ávila from his historical context and as a result misses the social dimensions of Ávila’s doctrine. As I shall demonstrate, the reform of community, family, and personal life is as important for Ávila as the reformation of the church. Del Río Martín’s is a modern theological perspective predicated upon different social and political premises. In Juan de Ávila the medieval ideal of the corpus christianum is the crucial socio-political assumption that allows him to see the reform of church and society as concomitant processes.

Juan Esquerda Bifet provides a broader treatment of the Holy Spirit. In his Introducción a la doctrina de San Juan de Ávila—the most complete study of the teachings of Ávila available to date—Esquerda Bifet outlines Ávila’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit in its multidimensionality. Esquerda Bifet rightly places Ávila’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit in connection to other such theological topics as the incarnation, the Virgin Mary, Pentecost, the church, sacraments, and Scriptures. In fact, Esquerda Bifet characterizes Ávila’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit as “charismatic, experiential, and contemplative.” Yet, Esquerda Bifet does not relate Ávila’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit to his reform program, nor take any notice of the significance of del Río Martín’s contribution in this regard.

Juan de Ávila’s notion of espiritualización has proven to be even more elusive for scholars than his doctrine of the Holy Spirit. In his introduction to
the French-language edition of Ávila’s sermons on the Holy Spirit, Pierre Jobit simply renders the idea of espirituación as equivalent to “divinization.” Indeed, in his summary of the sermon entitled, El Hijo y el Espíritu Santo vinieron a remediarnos, Jobit uses the French verb diviniser to describe the union with the Holy Spirit that Ávila describes in his sermon. Yet, the term “divinization” is nowhere used by Ávila in this sermon. The term endiosar is retained from previous editions by the editors of the Nueva edición crítica as part of their editorial subdivision of this particular sermon into thematic components. Elsewhere the term used by Ávila is espirituación, and in this particular sermon he finds his religious intuition to be simply beyond words.

Again, the work of Melquíades Andrés Martín is important here. Andrés Martín has explored the theme of mystical union as part of his study of the spirituality of Juan de Ávila. According to Andrés Martín the idea of mystical union in Juan de Ávila is dominated by a strong Christocentrism. Andrés Martín points out that Ávila constructs the idea of mystical union around motifs of encounter with God (toparse con Dios). Juan de Ávila, argues Andrés Martín, sees the divine and the human as two opposite extremes of reality. Mystical union is that encounter with God upon God’s own initiative which breaches the distance between both extremes. It is the encounter that brings with it the transformation of the human person.

The motif of encounter is complemented, suggests Andrés Martín, by classical nuptial imagery. It is in terms of nuptial imagery that Andrés Martín tries to explain the recurring theme in Ávila of melancholy. The human sadness or melancholy often addressed by Ávila is a result of the absence of the groom. As such it can only be overcome by mystical union of the bride with the groom. Andrés Martín correctly asserts that such a union, for Ávila, amounts to moral union, or union of wills, and not to ontological union.

Andrés Martín, as noted earlier, pays no attention to Juan de Ávila’s idea of espirituación. Yet Ávila’s doctrine of mystical union turns around the work of the Holy Spirit. It is a pneumatological doctrine and not solely Christological. The distinction, in terms of Christian theology, is not purely semantic. Instead, in the case of Juan de Ávila we find a creative and well-articulated view of humanity’s experience of the diversity and unity of God’s self-disclosure in history. In his sermons on the Holy Spirit, Ávila describes God in a way that is open to human experience. That is, in Ávila’s theology salvation is not complete with the historical work of Christ on the cross. God’s work of salvation is actualized in every believer by the action of the Holy Spirit. The work of salvation is actualized in the midst of historical circumstances, giving salvation a special meaning for every believer.
For del Río Martín, *espirituación* is better understood within the framework of Ávila’s pneumatic ecclesiology. Del Río Martín argues that *espirituación* designates the new age (*nueva era*) of the church begun at Pentecost. This is the age in which the members of the church, as possessed by the Holy Spirit, act in harmony with the Holy Spirit. Since Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has become the life-giving principle of the church, in its head and members. Again, however, del Río Martín overemphasizes the ecclesiastical dimensions at the expense of the originally more comprehensive reforming vision of the Apostle of Andalusia.

Finally, Esquerda Bifet has come closer than any other scholar to an understanding of Ávila’s notion of *espirituación* as found in the sources. In his *Diccionario de San Juan de Ávila*, Esquerda Bifet defines *espirituación* as a “transforming presence of a divine ‘Guest’ who ‘gives comfort and joy’.”41 Again, in his *Introducción*, Esquerda Bifet defines *espirituación* as “transforming presence.”42 Nevertheless, he does not connect this “transforming presence” with Ávila’s reform program. Neither does he pay attention to the implications that Ávila draws from this “transforming” presence for the moral reformation of community, family, and person.

Indeed, one of the major deficiencies of *Avilista* scholarship is that not enough attention has been paid to the social dimensions of Juan de Ávila’s teachings. While interest in his character as a reformer is well attested in the literature, the scope of Ávila’s reforms has been limited to the institutional aspects of the church. Yet, the scope of his reformist impulse was wider and broad enough to include different sectors of Andalusian society. Ávila’s reform program encompasses families and communities, landlords and peasants, the learned and the illiterate, men and women, “Old” and “New” Christians. In this sense, the studies generated by Bilinkoff, Nalle, and Coleman on the Catholic Reformation in Spain demonstrate that a change in the direction of *Avilista* scholarship is needed.

In his sermons on the Holy Spirit, Ávila invites everyone in his audience to call upon the Holy Spirit and to experience its transforming presence. The transformations that Juan de Ávila envisions include the humbling of the wealthy as well as the faithful commitment of husbands to their spouses. As I will demonstrate, Ávila’s reform program stems directly from his doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Ávila’s notion of *espirituación*, or union with the Holy Spirit, plays a significant role in the potential materialization of moral reform.
A Note on the Canon of Ávila’s Sermons on the Holy Spirit

Ávila’s early preaching activity was not always popular; it was also controversial. From 1527 to 1529 he preached in the areas surrounding Seville. His preaching in the town of Écija was particularly notorious. Ávila’s exposition of Jesus of Nazareth’s beatitude of the poor—“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20)—caused commotion among the landed and wealthy families of Écija. He was eventually accused before the Inquisition in 1531, which arrested him in 1532. He was absolved the next year, 1533. The charges against Ávila were later summarized by Fray Luis de Granada: Ávila “closed the gates of heaven before the rich and wealthy” (“cerraba a los ricos las puertas del cielo”).

Nevertheless, Ávila’s writings enjoyed a considerable degree of popularity from very early on. This is well illustrated by a distinguished history of transmission and reception of his writing in Spanish as well as in other European languages. Ávila’s first published work, *Audi, filia*, appeared in 1556. The earliest edition of his works appeared in 1588, accompanied by the first biography of Ávila penned by his disciple, the Dominican Fray Luis de Granada. The next biography of Juan de Ávila appeared in 1635, but by then many of his works had already been translated throughout Europe. By 1601 there were already translations of *Audi, filia* into Italian (1581), French (1588), and German (1601). *Audi, filia* was among the first works of Ávila to appear in English (1620), closely followed by his *Epistolario* (1623, 1631).

Ávila’s sermons were not as widely disseminated as his other writings. The first Spanish edition of his sermons was published in two volumes, as the third part of his collected works that Juan Díaz began publishing in 1588. There is no evidence of his sermons being translated into English in the seventeenth century, and the earliest recorded translations into Italian consist of two isolated sermons.

In Spain, however, Ávila’s sermons remained popular—a fact that is well attested by an uninterrupted history of transmission and reception. There have been at least ten editions of his sermons, from the first one published in 1596 to the most recent one in 2002. The corpus of sermons attributed to Ávila has expanded over the years. The 1596 edition consisted of 41 sermons: 25 on the Eucharist, five on the Holy Spirit, and eleven on the Virgin Mary. Since then, especially in the twentieth century, scholars have discovered and identified an additional 41 sermons, bringing the corpus of Ávila’s sermons to a total of 82.
The history of transmission of Ávila’s sermons has placed a permanent limit on the kinds of readings to which they can be subjected. In their historical reconstruction, Sala Balust and Martín Hernández have identified four kinds, or forms, of surviving manuscripts. These forms account for the variations among manuscripts. The first form, made up of autographs, consists of notes and outlines written by Ávila. A second form consists of notes taken by Ávila’s disciples while he was preaching. These notes were read back to Ávila and corrected according to his indications. A third form consists of manuscripts that incorporate revisions made by Ávila as he prepared to forward the text to some disciple or friend. The last form of surviving manuscript consists of sermons that Ávila preached a second or third time, and in which the order of ideas may appear significantly altered.

The processes of redaction identified by Sala Balust and Martín Hernández account for the transformation of many of Ávila’s sermons into spiritual treatises. Indeed, Juan Díaz’s 1596 edition of Ávila’s sermons refers to them as *tratados*. Ávila corresponded extensively with friends and disciples who sought his spiritual guidance. This is well attested by his *Epistolario*, which has expanded from 147 letters included in the 1578 edition, to 252 in the 2003 fourth volume of the *Nueva edición crítica*. As part of his correspondence, Ávila effectively turned many of his sermons into treatises meant to serve as devotional reading for his addressees. The *Tratado del amor de Dios* is, according to Sala Balust and Martín Hernández, the best example of a sermon that was further refined and elaborated to the point of turning it into a theological treatise in its own right. In fact, Ricardo García-Villoslada has referred to Ávila’s letters as “long distance sermons” (*sermones a distancia*). The process by which many of Ávila’s sermons were turned into spiritual treatises might have been completed before his death in 1569. It is clear, however, that 41 of them were preserved as spiritual treatises by Juan Díaz.

The transmission and reception of Juan de Ávila’s sermons on the Holy Spirit ought to be given serious consideration. Ávila reflects on the Holy Spirit elsewhere in his sermons; in fact, the Holy Spirit is a recurring theme throughout all his writings. Nevertheless, in his 1596 edition Juan Díaz grouped a series of sermons together under the rubric of “five treatises on the Holy Spirit” (…*16 tratados, los cinco son del Espíritu Santo*…). Given the fact that Juan Díaz was both a relative and a disciple of Juan de Ávila, his grouping of these sermons indicates that they contain important and distinctive aspects of Juan de Ávila’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Juan Díaz’s editorial decision is more than a private judgment on the quality and worth of these sermons. As a disciple of Juan de Ávila, Díaz’s decision must also
be considered an important expression of the communal reception of Ávila’s teachings. Hence, they provide a significant starting point for the reconstruction of Ávila’s doctrine. The existing canon of Ávila’s sermons on the Holy Spirit consists of six sermons. To the five originally preserved in the 1596 edition, a sixth one has been added since 1947. In the *Nueva edición crítica*, the sermons on the Holy Spirit are numbered from 27 to 32.

As the sermons on the Holy Spirit were turned into devotional reading material, they were effectively detached from their unique historical situation. These sermons can no longer be linked to events in the life of a particular locality. However, Ávila’s sermons can be correlated with the general contour of early-modern Spanish society. His sermons were an original tool of moral and social reform. Moreover, they demonstrate Ávila’s vision of a social order moulded by the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit.

**Espirituación, or Union with the Holy Spirit**

As Andrés Martín has indicated, Ávila’s spirituality is thoroughly Trinitarian. This affirmation is true not only of Ávila’s spirituality, but of his theology as a whole. Furthermore, because of his Trinitarian concentration, Ávila carefully develops the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in rich and nuanced ways. Accordingly, in his sermons on the Holy Spirit we find affirmations that range from the role of the Holy Spirit in the incarnation to *espirituación*, or moral union of the Holy Spirit with the human soul.

The specific mention of the term *espirituación* occurs in Sermon 30, *¿Ha venido a ti este tal consolador?* This sermon was preached on Pentecost Sunday of an unknown year. The sermon was based on John 14:26: “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.” After a series of mounting questions, Ávila finally asks, “What shall we call this union that the Holy Spirit seeks to bring about and does bring about with your soul?” In answering this question, Ávila provides a key characterization of what he calls *espirituación*:

It is not incarnation. Nevertheless, it is such a degree of union of the soul with God and a marriage so intimate and peaceful that it quite resembles incarnation, although in another way they are very different. For the incarnation was such a sublime union of the divine Logos with its holy humanity, that it elevated humanity to personal union with itself. That is not the case here; this is a union of grace. And just as the former is called incarnation of the Logos, the latter is called *espirituación* of the Holy Spirit.
The union of the Holy Spirit with the human soul entails the indwelling of a divine “advisor,” “tutor,” or “administrator” that “guides,” “admonishes,” and “sets in the right path” the human person.61

While Ávila employs the term espiritualización only in Sermon 30, in all his sermons on the Holy Spirit he explicitly addresses and discusses the idea of mystical union with God through the Holy Spirit. At the core of this idea is the analogy with the incarnation that Ávila develops in the passage just quoted. That is, just as in the incarnation the Logos acquired flesh, in espiritualización the Holy Spirit takes upon itself human corporeality. This analogy is complemented in all six sermons with the image of the “divine guest” (Huésped Divino). The image of the “divine guest” is drawn from John 14:23: “Jesus answered him, ‘Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them’.”62

Indeed, Ávila’s sermons on the Holy Spirit often deal with preparations to be a worthy host of the Holy Spirit. In Sermon 27, Esperando al Huésped Divino, Ávila outlines the steps of purification that are needed.63 This purification is in fact a blueprint for Ávila’s vision of moral reform. Ávila delineates three main steps. First, one must cultivate an earnest desire for the Holy Spirit: the Holy Spirit will come and inhabit only those who eagerly expect the Spirit’s arrival. Second, the host must be thoroughly cleansed: abstinence from all evil thoughts and actions is an expression of the earnest desire for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Third, Ávila points out that in order to host the “divine guest” the finest meals and banquets ought to be served. These are the works of charity that must be undertaken.64 Works of charity are instrumental for the mortification of the body since the best meal that can be served to a guest like the Holy Spirit is one’s own body.65 Because the Holy Spirit is bountiful in the bestowal of gifts, one must also give and serve with liberality. One must feed the hungry, clothe the orphan and the widow, and be a provider for all in need. The purification of the body that can be achieved through works of charity is also called by Ávila, “the reformation of the heart.”66

The image of the “divine guest” in its earthly abode is one that Ávila also impregnates with Trinitarian content. Ávila’s Trinitarian casting of the imagery of the “divine guest” finds lucid expression in Sermon 29, Maravillas hace el Espíritu Santo en la Iglesia.67 Noticing the plural construction of John 14:23, the orator asks the audience: “Who are they who shall come?” And he quickly replies: “The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; for wherever they go, the Holy Spirit goes as well…”68 The genius of Ávila lies in taking a Johannine affirmation of the identity of the Father and Jesus of Nazareth and turning it into a Trinitarian affirmation; the latter in the context of his doctrine of union.
The advent of the Holy Spirit to the earthly abode of the human soul is also described by Ávila as a divine “embrace.” This is how espirituación is described in Sermon 32, El Hijo y el Espíritu Santo vinieron a remediar nos.\(^6^9\) Yet, the embrace of the Holy Spirit remains ineffable for Ávila. “There is no one,” exclaims Ávila, “who can articulate this embrace, this kiss; there is no one who can explain it.”\(^7^0\) Through the embrace, the Holy Spirit and the embraced become one. While the nature of the embrace cannot be explained, its consequences are clear for Ávila. The Holy Spirit works through the embraced, bestowing innumerable gifts. Drawing on nuptial imagery, Ávila argues that while the Holy Spirit bequeaths the embraced-one with all sorts of gifts, the gifts do not exhaust the actual marriage. The union is far more profound and deeper than what the external gifts can convey.\(^7^1\) For Ávila, the union of the Holy Spirit and the human soul cannot be explained; it can only be earnestly desired.

Espirituación is for Juan de Ávila a “union of grace.”\(^7^2\) This union of grace is a moral union between the Holy Spirit and the human soul. It means for Juan de Ávila that while it is God’s initiative, the faithful can be moved by an earnest desire to ask for and to seek this union. Over and over the orator asks the audience, “Who wants the Holy Spirit… who wants this Guest… who wants this Comforter?”\(^7^3\) Likewise, the moral union between the Holy Spirit and the human soul lasts as long as there is conformity of the human soul to the will of the Holy Spirit.

The Virgin Mary is for Juan de Ávila a significant example of the penitent human being in search of union with the Holy Spirit. Early in Sermon 30, Ávila exalts the virtues of the Virgin that allows the church to call upon her as “friend” of the Holy Spirit. “The Virgin did nothing, nor did she think nor speak a word that was wanting before the Holy Spirit,” argued Ávila.\(^7^4\) In everything Mary was found to be pleasing to the Holy Spirit. On account of her prayers, supplications, groaning, and earnest desires, the Holy Spirit “brought the Eternal Logos and placed [the Eternal Logos] in her womb.”\(^7^5\) The union of the Holy Spirit with the Virgin, therefore, is the prelude to the incarnation.

In Ávila’s view, in her exemplarity the Virgin is second only to Jesus. In fact, Ávila exhorts his audience to call upon the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus. In dying on the cross Jesus demonstrated his obedience to the Father and the Holy Spirit.\(^7^6\) The cross was not a dignifying place for the redeemer, Jesus Christ. Nor is humanity a dignifying place for the Holy Spirit. However, since it was the Holy Spirit who inspired and encouraged Jesus to humble himself and take up the cross, and since Jesus was obedient and submissive
to the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, now the Holy Spirit grows humble and takes up the burden of humanity.\textsuperscript{77}

The Holy Spirit, according to Ávila, is intimately related to the work of Jesus. Not only did the Holy Spirit inspire and encourage Jesus to take the cross upon him; the Holy Spirit also continues working in a special way to complete the redemptive work of Jesus, commenced on the cross.

For Ávila the work of redemption is incomplete without the work of the Holy Spirit. This is nowhere made clearer, in Ávila’s view, than after the ascension of the risen Christ to heaven. After Jesus’s departure from among his disciples, they fell into a deep sense of sorrow; they were overtaken by sadness. Indeed, Ávila claims that this feeling of sadness, or melancholy, among the disciples was tantamount to a scab over a bodily injury.\textsuperscript{78} The departure of Jesus left a deep void among the disciples that only God could fill. Accordingly, Jesus’s promise of an advocate that would come after him to give comfort to his disciples was fulfilled by the coming of the Holy Spirit. Sadness for Ávila is one of the weightiest consequences of original sin. “Since we are all sad,” observes Ávila, “we need to seek after the one who can console us in our misery.”\textsuperscript{79} The office of the Holy Spirit is to give solace to those who are broken; to relieve humanity of the weight of wretchedness in the form of melancholy.

The last point is succinctly asserted in Sermon 32. In an imaginary dialogue with his audience, Ávila asserts the significance of Pentecost. For him Pentecost not only marks the season of the coming of the Holy Spirit; it also marks the season in which the forgiveness of sin won by Christ through his death was made available to all the faithful: “… the death of Jesus Christ won forgiveness of sins, but without the grace that today is imparted, it is of no avail to you.”\textsuperscript{80}

Again, in Sermon 32, Ávila calls attention to the feeling of desolation that dominated the disciples in the absence of Jesus. Using Genesis 2:7, Ávila draws a parallel between the account of creation and the day of Pentecost. The redemptive work of Christ is parallel to the work of God in the formation of the human body out of the dust. But as in the creation story, the body without breath remains inanimate. In creation God breathed into the nostrils of the first human being; now the Holy Spirit breathes into the soul of the faithful. Without the breath of the Holy Spirit, humanity remains dead.\textsuperscript{81} Indeed, as Ávila later on in the same sermon would have Mary declare to the disciples, the Holy Spirit gives a soul to the soul.\textsuperscript{82} That is, the Holy Spirit gives life to the human soul. This is the essence of espiritución.

In Sermon 32, Ávila once more depicts Mary as agile intercessor, this time between the disciples and the glorified Christ. Ávila recreates the dra-
matic scene of the day of Pentecost related in Acts 2. With the disciples hopeless, Mary took it upon herself to console them and to pray on their behalf, beseeching her son to send the Holy Spirit. It was shortly before nine o’clock, or the third hour. The third hour of the day was the time at which Peter reportedly addressed the multitude in Jerusalem with his legendary sermon of Pentecost. But Mary, before Peter, addressed the disciples with words of comfort and encouragement. Moved by the desolation of the disciples, she assumed the role of advocate and intercessor and reminded the disciples of the promise of the Holy Spirit. Finally, Mary’s efforts were rewarded with the felicitous advent of the Holy Spirit. Thereafter, the disciples live in joy and the knowledge that only those who do not take care of the earthly abode of the Holy Spirit can fall into the great sorrow of sin.

Juan de Ávila’s assertion of the continuation of the work of Christ by the Holy Spirit is rooted in his understanding of the Trinitarian nature of the union of the Holy Spirit with the human soul. For Ávila, espiritualización closes a loop of divine/human interaction shaped after the interaction of the divine persons of the Trinity. In Sermon 30, Ávila draws a metaphor centred on the image of the Holy Spirit as wind. Just like the wind on open sea, the Holy Spirit blows upon ships, leading them to safe harbour. The Holy Spirit does not blow in any direction. The Holy Spirit blows only back to where it comes from—namely heaven.

Here Ávila draws upon the formulaic expression of the Second Council of Lyon (1274), according to which the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son not as from two origins, but as from one; not as from two aspirations, but as from one. The formula was intended to reconcile eastern concerns over the implications of the Latin affirmation of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son. This is the well known filioque clause added in the West to the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed over the course of at least 600 years. The formula was intended to abate concerns that the Father and the Son constitute two different principis of the Holy Spirit. By affirming the singularity of the spiritus, or “aspiration,” the Council of Lyon sought to affirm the divine unity of the Trinity.

For Ávila, the Holy Spirit as the single aspiration of the Father and the Son is experienced in the world in the same way as the wind is experienced on open sea. Not only does the idea of a single aspiration describe the relation of the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son in terms of the immanent life of the Trinity. For Ávila it also describes the sending of the Holy Spirit to the world, and the work of the Holy Spirit in the world—work that includes union with the human soul. This union is grounded in the divine aspiration. Sent into the world, the Holy Spirit leads the faithful back to God: “From there the wind
blows, and thither it returns, to the Father and to the Son; from there they breathe [aspiran] him, and thither He breathes [espira] his friends; he guides them there, he carries them there, to where he wants them to be.” 86

Juan de Ávila further pursues the image of the Holy Spirit as wind in Sermon 30. Drawing on a vision found in Ezekiel 37:3–10, Ávila asserts that the Holy Spirit is the vivifying wind blowing over the Valley of Dry Bones. In the vision, Ezekiel is commanded by the Lord to utter words over a valley full of dry bones. As he speaks for the first time, the bones are covered first by sinews, then by flesh, and lastly by skin. Yet the reconstituted bones are not alive. The Lord then commands Ezekiel to utter words for a second time. This time the prophet calls upon the “spirit” to “breathe” upon the bones and the bones are restored to life as soon as the “breath” comes into them.

Ávila’s retelling of the vision of Ezekiel allows him to reiterate his main point about the work of the Holy Spirit by means of the image of the wind. In the Latin Vulgate the Lord commands Ezekiel to utter words to the “breath” (spiritum) and it is the breath that, coming from the four winds (“a quattuor ventis”), gives life to the bones in the valley:

Et dixit ad me, ‘vaticinare ad spiritum, vaticinare fili hominis, et dices ad spiritum, haec dicit Dominus Deus: a quattuor ventis veni spiritus et insufla super interfectos istos et revivescant.’ Et prophetavi sicut praeeperat mihi et ingressus est in ea spiritus et vixerunt…. (Ezekiel 37:9–10) 87

Ávila, however, provides a creative paraphrase of the text that prolongs his rhetorical focus on the wind. In his paraphrase, the prophet calls upon the wind (viento) to blow (soplar) over the dead (los muertos), and then the dead are brought to life. 88 Hence, while in the Latin Vulgate the prophet addresses the “breath” (spiritum), in Ávila the prophet addresses the “wind” (viento). In the Latin Vulgate the spiritum comes from the “four winds.” However, in Ávila the wind, and no longer the “breath” coming from the “four winds,” blows upon the dead when called by the prophet. Ávila’s paraphrase reinforces the image of the Holy Spirit as wind and is a clear reading of Ezekiel 37:3–10 in light of the Catholic doctrine of the single aspiration of the Holy Spirit. This reading in turns helps Ávila present the union of the human soul with the Holy Spirit as the culmination of a movement originating in God and returning to God.

Ávila uses the vision of Ezekiel to illustrate the work of the Holy Spirit. In particular, Ávila employs the vision to represent the practical implications of espirituación for the faithful. After retelling the vision of Ezekiel, the orator again directly addresses the audience, exhorting it to seek after the Holy Spirit, and then exclaims: “How many, with all hope of life lost, his Spirit
raised, and gave life and new desires, and gladdened and fortified with new hope! Who does all of this? The Holy Spirit, who breathed and carried all back to God, without resistance.”89 Espirituación is the vivifying union of the Holy Spirit with the human soul that gives joy and hope. It is, for Ávila, tantamount to the resurrection in that it brings the faithful to a full experience of the power of God.

However, the vision of Ezekiel is for Ávila more than an illustration. Instead, it is a powerful parable that captures Ávila’s own vision of reform and spiritual renewal. Like the prophet, Ávila is standing before the valley of dry bones. Like the prophet, Ávila is uttering words and calling upon the Spirit. Like the dry bones, the faithful are about to experience the vivifying power of the Holy Spirit. The new life imparted to the faithful by the work of the Holy Spirit is the new life of a renewed church. We shall now turn our attention to a few important elements of Ávila’s vision of moral reform.

Espirituación: Ávila’s Vision of Moral Reform

Ávila’s doctrine of espirituación provides an important theological underpinning for his vision of renewal and moral reform. Certainly, the theme of ecclesiastical reform is recurrent throughout the corpus of Ávila’s works. Yet, ecclesiastical reform does not exhaust Ávila’s overarching vision of renewal—which is personal and communal, as well as ecclesiastical. While elsewhere Ávila will articulate a vision of the ideal bishop, also built around the work of the Holy Spirit, in his sermons on the Holy Spirit he focuses his attention on personal renewal, that is, a renewal that irradiates from the faithful to the surrounding community and to the church.90

Accordingly, in the remainder of this article I want to highlight two instances in which Ávila launches a stern indictment against the ordering of early-modern Iberian society. Of course, the traditional reform themes of sexual chastity, marital fidelity, and commitment to household responsibilities abound in Ávila’s sermons on the Holy Spirit. But here I want to focus on two not so traditional reform themes that may give us a better grasp on the originality of Ávila’s theology. The first theme is that of early-modern forms of religious and racial marginalization. The other theme turns around the problem of the concentration of wealth and power in early-modern Iberia. Both of them have particular resonance in the Andalusia of the 1500s.

Indeed, espirituación plays an important function in Ávila’s vision of church reform and renewal. This is made clear in Sermon 30, when Ávila comments on the sacrament of baptism.91 For Ávila, moral union with the Holy Spirit is the essential “sign” (señal) of the Christian. “Of what good
is it to me,” asks Ávila, “to be baptized and to believe in Jesus Christ, if I do not have the Holy Spirit?” Drawing on Ephesians 1:13–14 Ávila interchangeably calls the Holy Spirit the “token” (prenda) or “sign” of the Father. For him the “sign” — that one will be saved and will reach the promises of Christ — is not to be called Christian, nor is it to be baptized. If one is baptized but the presence of the Holy Spirit is lacking, one is like an “illegitimate child” (bastardo) and not a true child of God. Illegitimate children, according to Ávila, do not inherit from the Father. Again, those who are baptized but are not obedient to God are illegitimate children because they are lacking the “mark” that makes children rightful inheritors of the possessions of the Father. The only “mark” that gives this right of inheritance is the Holy Spirit.

The “mark” of the Holy Spirit that comes with espiritación has clear social implications for Ávila. The moral union of the human soul with the Holy Spirit brings about the sort of changes that question and challenge the existing social order. One such aspect of early-modern Spanish society is cautiously addressed by Ávila in Sermon 30, namely the question of limpieza de sangre, which I addressed near the beginning of this article.

In Sermon 30, Ávila issues a carefully worded indictment against the distinction made between Old Christians (Cristiano viejo) and New Christians (Cristiano nuevo), or Conversos and their descendants. This indictment comes as part and parcel of Ávila’s discussion of the Holy Spirit as the true “sign” of God and the insufficiency of baptism when not complemented by obedience to God. In Ávila’s own words:

Just like the circumcision was the sign for the Jew, baptism is the sign for the Christian, on the outside. For it is all worthless for your salvation, if you do not have the Holy Spirit. And the sign in which one will be saved and reach the promises of Christ our Redeemer, is not to be called Christian, it is not solely to be baptized. For even though these may be present, if the Holy Spirit is absent it is not enough; the baptized are children, but they are not legitimate children, they are illegitimate […] He who is baptized and does not obey God our Lord, is not a legitimate child; he who is baptized and does not have the Holy Spirit, is not a legitimate child; he is an illegitimate child for he does not have the sign that legitimizes children and makes them inheritors of the riches of the Father, which is the Holy Spirit.

Ávila sets up an important order in the foregoing discussion. Indeed, Ávila is thinking in terms of stages or dispensations. First was the dispensation of circumcision, when circumcision was the “sign” of the Father. After circumcision came the dispensation of baptism. In this new dispensation baptism replaced circumcision as the “sign” of the Father. However, baptism without the moral union of the soul with the Holy Spirit is, in Ávila’s mind,
worthless. In fact, bearing the title of “Christian” is not enough for Ávila. One can be called a Christian, but this remains, like baptism, an external token that falls short of conveying rightful possession of the heavenly inheritance. Only the presence of the Holy Spirit can convey rightful ownership of the heavenly inheritance that is due to legitimate children. Only those who are obedient to God, that is baptized and in union with the Holy Spirit, can be considered legitimate children.

In this way Ávila indicts dominant cultural norms that set strict differences between Jews and Christians and, more importantly here, among Christians themselves. Neither “Old” nor “New” Christians could fall back on privileges rooted in cultural norms. Baptism as such is only an external token. To be called Christian is also an external token. Only the presence of the Holy Spirit and its union with the soul can convey rightful ownership of the inheritance of the Father.

Ávila’s indictment against cultural norms and institutions based on religious and racial prejudice is all the more evident in Sermon 28, *El que no tiene Espíritu de Cristo, no es de Cristo.* The sermon was preached on a Sunday within the Octave of the Ascension, of an unknown year. The gospel reading, as indicated in the body of the sermon, was John 15:26. Yet, the central biblical passage of the entire sermon is Romans 8:9: “Vos autem in carne non estis, sed in spiritu. Si quis spiritum Christi non habet, hic non est eius.” Again Ávila uses a Pauline text to articulate a religion of interiority as opposed to a religion of externals. The presence of the “divine guest” in its earthly abode is for Ávila an assurance that the faithful do not live by the flesh, but by the spirit.

The assertion that the faithful ought to live by the spirit and not by the flesh has important implications for Ávila. The most important one is that the faithful cannot glory in the flesh, but only in the Holy Spirit. Drawing on Isaiah 40:6–7, Ávila concludes that “all flesh is like grass.” He takes as an example the philosophers. The writings of the philosophers are of such a quality that they appear to come from heaven. In the philosophers one will find clearness of understanding, a will that abhors vice and loves virtue. The wisdom of philosophers is the glory and honour of humanity and is its highest achievement. The wisdom of philosophers is even better than riches and honour (*honra*). Yet, all that glory is nothing; it is like the flower of grass.

But if it is vain to glory in human wisdom, it is also vain to glory in one’s blood, or one’s ancestry. Ávila quotes John 1:12–13 to the effect that the right to be a child of God is not founded in “blood lineage” (*non ex sanguinibus*), nor in the will of the flesh (*neque ex voluntate carnis*), nor in the will of man (*neque ex voluntate viri*). The children of God are born of God (*ex Deo nati*).
sunt). After praising the gospel writer, Ávila moves on to make the following reproof against a social order founded on religious and racial privilege:

To be children of God and ascend to heaven, it is not enough to be born of blood. To be the child of a count or of a duke or to have royal blood will not help you; that is of no importance. The greatest seraph in heaven, if it did not have the spirit of Christ, would not be beatific. Heaven is not given away on account of lineage, non ex sanguinis, neque ex voluntate carnis; they [the children of God] are not born of a will conformed to what their flesh wants; they are not born of a will that has affection for the flesh.

The children of God are born of the Spirit. “Heaven is not given away on account of lineage,” affirms Ávila. Even the seraphim in heaven are in need of the spirit of Christ. Without the spirit of Christ their glory amounts to nothing. So, blood lineage also falls short of salvation; for it is not to be born of blood or the will of man but to be born of the Spirit that leads to salvation.

Ávila furthers his critique of a social order indifferent to the dictates of the Holy Spirit. In Sermon 28 we again find the contrast made between the exterior signs that distinguish Jews from Christians among themselves, and the interior sign that marks the true children of God. The true mark is the Holy Spirit. The Jews, while acknowledging God, stumble upon the notion that “God has a Son who is equal to the Father.” Christians, however, do confess one God and that God has a “Son who is equal to his Father.” Yet, whenever they hear mention of the Holy Spirit their hearts become troubled. For they are, “a people so antagonistic to the Holy Spirit, that they do not even want to hear it mentioned.” Indeed, for some to hear mention of the Holy Spirit is like hearing someone call upon the devil.

Doubtless, the root of enmity towards the Holy Spirit rests in the demands of the Holy Spirit as laid out by Juan de Ávila. The preparations that are necessary for the advent of the Holy Spirit to its earthly abode, which include charity as well as the renunciation of social status and privilege, are insufferable for many in Ávila’s audience. This is made clear in the way that Ávila defends his role as preacher in anticipation of reproach. He asks his audience, “What do you do when you hear a word being proclaimed that saddens you, and you are told, ‘God has spoken’?” He replies by drawing a parallel between his audience and Ahab, the Israelite king, who complained that the prophet never prophesized something good about him (1 King 22:8). But as the prophet, Ávila quickly adds, “I am only a herald, what can I do? God has sent this word for you.”

Ávila saw the scorn of the people as a necessary consequence of all faithful proclamation. For him, a word pronounced from the pulpit that does not unsettle the evil doer is not a word from God. Nor is it received as such.
No one should expect solace from God who has not first been unsettled by God. In the end, those who are unsettled by the proclamation should seek to be born by the Spirit, to make preparations, to mortify the flesh, and to become the worthy abode of the Holy Spirit.

Certainly the social implications of Juan de Ávila’s doctrine of espiritación are not limited to the perennial problem of limpieza de sangre in early-modern Spain. In fact, Juan de Ávila’s doctrine of the union of the Holy Spirit with the human soul often appears to be counter-cultural in its criticism of wealth and power. Ávila’s doctrine of espiritación challenged many early-modern social conventions and threatened to turn the world upside down. Further indications of the critical tendencies of Ávila’s doctrine are found in Sermon 31, Salva Dios al mundo por el Espíritu Santo. The central image of this sermon is the biblical figure of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon during the period of the exile. Ávila builds upon the madness of King Nebuchadnezzar to illustrate how God can bring down the proud and mighty. For Ávila the story of Nebuchadnezzar is a parable of how God saves the world by the Holy Spirit and how God rejects human honour and glory.

Sermon 31 captures Ávila’s ferocious engagement with his audience and his involvement of the audience in the unfolding of the sermon. Early in the sermon he acknowledges the presence of learned men in his audience who can read Latin, and invites them to read and ruminate over the gospel portion of the day, namely John 3:17. But Ávila quickly turns the tables around and summarizes the exchange between Jesus and Nicodemus. About Nicodemus, Ávila claims that he was “a good man and learned.” Yet he also observes that Nicodemus could not understand Jesus’s words about rebirth, and he poignantly declares, “Very learned indeed, but ignorant concerning salvation…” In Ávila’s view the predicament of Nicodemus is the same predicament of his learned audience; they are all ignorant of what is important for salvation.

In fact, what humanity knows well is how to seek glory. Here Ávila introduces the figure of King Nebuchadnezzar. The King of Babylon lived for his own glory and honour. He desired only more wealth and power, and to ascend to greater heights, never appreciating what he already had. But the King’s ambitions led him to lose everything, as God turned him into the likeness of a beast of the fields. Ávila is quick to indicate the parallel between king Nebuchadnezzar and his audience:

In sin, therefore, you pursue what your appetite wants and what your flesh demands. Is he not a man who lives according to reason; the one who rules himself by natural light? Of what good is a gentleman who dresses with brocade and silk, and yet on the inside is a beast? What sort of spectacle is it to watch someone who seems to rule others and
is himself guided and ruled by a beast? There is no greater dishonour than to be in sin; this is man become beast.\textsuperscript{110}

The fate of King Nebuchadnezzar, his seven years sojourn among the beasts of the fields, is rehearsed every day among the people being addressed by Ávila. Devotion is short lived, only to be followed by pride and self-confidence. The lack of piety among his listeners makes Ávila assert that they have been cast among the beasts of the fields so that there would be a renewal of devotion to God. “This madness and presumption,” declares Ávila, “this trust in our own strength is the root of our perdition.”\textsuperscript{111}

Finally, the story of King Nebuchadnezzar is all the more important as it helps illustrate the significance of Pentecost. Nebuchadnezzar’s sojourn with the beasts of the fields lasted for only seven years. Likewise, the fall of the faithful into a state of indifference and surrender to the lust for power and wealth will come to pass: “…seven seasons shall come to pass over you, until you realize that the strength and the power are in the one from heaven, not in cities, bricks, etc.”\textsuperscript{112} At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes to give a new heart to the faithful. This is the work of regeneration of the Holy Spirit. The new heart is the outcome of the union of the Holy Spirit with the human soul, or espirituación.

\textbf{Conclusion}

In this article I have demonstrated that Juan de Ávila’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit and, specifically, his idea of mystical union with God through the Holy Spirit are intimately connected to Ávila’s reform program. Juan de Ávila’s reform agenda emerges in his sermons on the Holy Spirit as a constructive reading of biblical texts that takes into serious consideration their relevance to remedy or address unjust social conditions. Ávila’s skilful adaptation of Christian doctrine to the pressing needs of his audience also becomes clear throughout his sermons on the Holy Spirit. In particular, I have demonstrated that the judeoconverso Juan de Ávila articulated his doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and his idea of espirituación in connection to the important question of limpieza de sangre. Ávila’s sermons on the Holy Spirit are a true response and protest against the caste mentality that pervaded significant sectors of early-modern Spanish society.

While these findings expand our understanding of the figure and thought of Juan de Ávila, they are still limited. Whereas there are 82 surviving sermons of Juan de Ávila, this article is solely focused on Ávila’s six sermons on the Holy Spirit. This is a small portion of Juan de Ávila’s literary corpus. The
questions that have been raised throughout the article ought to be raised in relation to other sermons, and to the remaining components of Ávila’s reformation corpus. How did Ávila interpret the Bible? How did he adapt Christian doctrine to his particular historical context? How did Ávila advance his reform agenda through his sermons in general? And finally, how did Ávila respond to the important question of limpieza de sangre elsewhere in his writings? Moreover, Juan de Ávila was not the first to address theologically the issue of limpieza de sangre. How do Ávila’s constructions of Christian doctrine compare to those of the judeoconverso Alonso de Cartagena (1385–1456), or the Old Christian Alonso de Oropesa (d. 1468)? These are questions that remain to be explored.

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**Notes**

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1. For a comprehensive biography see Luis Sala Balust and Francisco Martín Hernández, “Estudio biográfico,” in San Juan de Ávila, *Obras completas, nueva edición crítica* (hereafter *OCNEC*), ed., Luis Sala Balust and Francisco Martín Hernández, 4 vols. (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2000), vol.1, p. 5–373. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author’s. The author is also grateful to the editors of this journal and their anonymous referees for their valuable comments and suggestions.

vida del Bto. Juan de Ávila,” *Manresa* 18 (1946), pp. 43–74; Abad, “La espiritualidad de San Ignacio de Loyola y la del Beato Juan de Ávila,” *Manresa* 28 (1955), pp. 455–78. Also emblematic of this enduring interest in the pastoral theology of Ávila is Melquiades Andrés Martín, who in his history of mysticism during the Spanish Golden Age briefly sketches Ávila as the “doctor of priestly sanctity” (…*doctor de la santidad sacerdotal*…); see Melquiades Andrés Martín, *Historia de la mística de la edad de oro en España y América* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1994), p. 308.

3. It is interesting to note that Ávila’s sermons have been seriously neglected in contemporary scholarship outside Spain. Hughes Oliphant Old is one of the few major scholars to have paid attention to Juan de Ávila’s career as preacher. Yet, Old’s treatment is superficial, as perhaps could only have been the case in light of the scope of Old’s history of preaching. See Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), vol. 4, pp. 168–70. The neglect of Juan de Ávila’s sermons is typical of a general lack of attention to the Iberian Peninsula in comparative studies dealing with religion in early-modern Europe. A striking example is the volume edited by Larissa Taylor, *Preachers and People in the Reformations and Early Modern Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2001). This volume has chapters dealing with preaching in France, Italy, Germany, England, Scandinavia and the Low Countries, but no chapter is dedicated to early-modern preaching in the Iberian Peninsula. For a discussion of Ávila’s theology of preaching, see Álvaro Huerga, “El ministerio de la palabra en el Beato Juan de Ávila,” *Conferencias pronunciadas en la Semana Avilista* (Madrid: Imprenta Avilista, 1969), pp. 93–147; Rafael María de Hornedo, “El estilo coloquial del Beato Ávila,” *Razón y Fe: revista hispano-americana de cultura* (1970), pp. 513–24; and Félix Herrero Salgado, *La oratoria sagrada en los siglos XVI y XVII*, 4 vols. (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1996–2004).


6. Albert A. Sicroff, *Les controverses des status de “pureté de sang” en espagne du XVe au XVIIe siècle* (Didier: Paris, 1960), pp. 25–62; Teofil F. Ruiz, *Spanish Society: 1400–1600* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), pp. 93–117. While there is still important disagreement among his biographers, it is possible that Juan de Ávila was affected by the so called *estatutos de limpieza de sangre* at two different junctures of his life. The first was the termination of his studies at the University of Salamanca, where he never graduated after several years of studies. Traditionally this has been attributed to a sudden change of heart or religious conversion on the part of Ávila. Nevertheless, Esquerda Bifet has suggested that Ávila was not allowed to graduate from Salamanca because of the existing *estatutos de sangre* in that university; see Juan Esquerda Bifet, *Introducción a la doctrina de San Juan de Ávila* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2000), p. 14, footnote 17. Sicroff argues that the *estatutos de limpieza* of the University of Salamanca were already in place by 1498; see Sicroff, pp. 89–90. The second juncture occurred during his stay in Seville, which lasted between 1527 and 1533. Juan de Ávila intended to travel to the New World as a missionary. However, he was never allowed to set sail. The reason is not clear. The argument that his spiritual gifts came to the attention of the ecclesiastical hierarchy early in his career, and that he was persuaded to stay in Seville, is commonplace in the literature. However, more than once it has been suggested that Ávila was held back in
Spain due to his “blood lineage,” or Jewish ancestry: see Esquerda Bifet, *Introducción*, p. 47; Juan del Río Martín, “El Espíritu Santo y la Iglesia en los escritos de San Juan de Ávila,” *Isidorianum* 7 (1998), pp. 51–85, p. 53; Sicoff also argues that Ávila never joined the Jesuits due to his background, in Sicoff, p. 276.


18. Coleman, *Creating Christian Granada*, pp. 130–37. Juan de Dios had a conversion experience upon listening to Ávila preach that led him to embrace a ministry of hospital consistency of care of the sick. José Luis Martínez has dated the conversion of Juan de Dios to 20 January 1537. Juan de Dios immediately became a devout follower of Ávila, joining Ávila’s circle of disciples. This long term relation was mediated by both letters and personal encounters for close to thirteen years; see José Luis Martínez, “San Juan de Ávila, director espiritual de San Juan de Dios,” *Salmanticensis* 47 (2000), pp. 433–74.


21. “Hoy sólo los eclesiásticos y algunos eruditos tienen bien presente el *Antiguo Testamento*; pero en el siglo XVI su texto estaba vivo y funcionaba con autenticidad.” Castro, p. 46.

22. Attention, of course, has also been paid to the Christocentric dimensions of his theology. The work of Manuel Martín de Nicolás focuses on the Christological aspects of Ávila’s ecclesiology: see “Imágenes sobre la Iglesia en San Juan de Ávila,” *Miscelánea Comillas* 45, no. 86 (1987), pp. 27–68. Ricardo García-Villoslada, on the other hand, has sought
to define Ávila’s Paulinism as centered on “the intimate experience of the benefice of Christ” (*beneficium Christi*); see “El paulinismo de San Juan de Ávila,” *Gregorianum* (1970), pp. 615–47. Santiago Cantera Montenegro, on the other hand, has asserted that an important strain of Franciscan influence runs throughout Ávila’s sermonology: “¿Franciscanismo en el Maestro Juan de Ávila?” *Verdad y vida, revista de las ciencias del espíritu* 54, no. 213–14 (1996), pp. 143–52.


27. This is also the case in Melquíades Andrés Martín’s earlier work, *Los Recogidos: Nueva visión de la mística española* (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1975), pp. 668–88.


29. “La misión de la Tercera Persona es hacer presente y conservar hasta el final de los tiempos la acción salvadora que Dios quiso realizar con los hombres mediante su hijo.” Del Río Martín, p. 57.

30. “La venida del Paráclito tiene la misión de llevar hacia su última perfección toda la obra realizada por el Hijo. El Espíritu Santo viene a ser, de algún modo, el poder personal con que Cristo gobierna y perfecciona a los suyos.” Del Río Martín, p. 58.

31. “Estamos ante un reformador que entiende la auténtica reforma de la Iglesia como algo que viene exigido desde lo interno. Por eso mismo pondrá el acento en los efectos del Espíritu en el alma de cada cristiano, porque él está convencido de que la Iglesia manifiesta más puramente su santidad cuando cada uno de sus miembros se deja llevar y transformar por la acción del Paráclito.” Del Río Martín, p. 66.


34. “Un mardi de Pentecôte, partant du récit de la résurrection d’un enfant par le prophète Élisée, Avila montre à ses auditeurs ces morts inombrables que sont les hommes en Adam. Champ de carnage et de douleur! Qui viendra redonner vie à cette humanité condamnée? […] Mais la Pentecôte complète l’œuvre rédémiptrice. Et le prédicateur de décrire la scène de la Pentecôte, et ensuite de broder sur ce thème de la descente de l’Esprit-Saint sur Marie et les apôtres… Puis il s’élève: l’Esprit est Dieu et nous divin-i-se.” Jobit, p. 27.


40. “Pentecostés representa toda una nueva creación que viene sellada con la reconciliación definitiva de Dios con la humanidad. Esto fue profetizado por el mismo Cristo a sus discípulos, de tal manera que a esta nueva era el Maestro Ávila la llamará ‘espiritualización’, porque los poseídos por el Espíritu obran de la misma forma que Él.” Río Martín, p. 64.


42. Esquerda Bifet, *Introducción*, p. 201, footnote 141.


46. *Obras del Padre Maestro Iuan de Ávila, predicador en el Andaluzia. Aora de nuevo añadida la Vida del Autor, y las partes que ha de tener un predicador del Evangelio, por el padre fray Luys de Granada, de la Orden de Santo Domingo, y unas reglas de bien biuir del Autor...* (Madrid: P. Madrigal, 1588); Sala Balust and Martín Hernández, “Bibliografía,” vol. 1, p. xlvi.

47. *Vida y virtudes del Venerable varón el P. Maestro Juan de Ávila, Predicador apóstolico, con algunos elogios de la virtudes y vidas de algunos de sus discípulos... Por el Licenciado Luis Muñoz* (Madrid: Imprenta Real, 1635); Sala Balust and Martín Hernández, “Bibliografía,” vol. 1, p. lxv.


49. *The audi filia, or a rich cabinet full of spirituall ievells. Composed by the Reuerend Father, Doctour Auila, translated out of Spanish into English* ([Saint-Omer: English College Press], 1620); *The cure of discomfort. Conteyned in the spirituall epistles of Doctour I. de Auila, most renowned preacher of Spaine. Most profitable for all, and particularly for persons in distresse* ([Rouen and Saint-Omer : Printed by John le Coustourier and the widow of C. Boscard], 1623). Sala Balust and Martin Hernández do not mention the 1623 English edition of the *Epistolario* in their “Bibliografía,” vol. 1, p. liv; *Certain selected spirituall epistles written by that most reuerend holy man Doctor I. de Auila a most renowned preacher of Spaine most profitable for all sortes of people, whoe seeke their salvation* (Rouen : By the widdow of Nicolas Courant, 1631); Sala Balust and Martin Hernández, “Bibliografía,” vol. 1, p. li.

tratados del Santissimo Sacramento de la Eucharistia (Madrid: P. Madrigal, 1596); Tercera parte... Este segundo tomo contiene 16 tratados, los cinco son del Espíritu Santo, los 10 de las festividades de N. Señora y el otro del glorioso S. Joseph (Madrid: P. Madrigal, 1596); Sala Balust and Martín Hernández, “Bibliografía,” vol. 1, p. xlvii.


54. Primera parte del Epistolario espiritual, para todos estados: compuesto por el Reverendo Padre Maestro Juan de Ávila Predicador en la Andaluzia (Madrid: P. Cosin, 1578); Sala Balust and Martín Hernández, “Bibliografía,” vol. 1, p. li; San Juan de Ávila, Epistolario, OCNEC, vol. 4.


60. “Mas ¿cómo la diremos a esta junta que el Espíritu Santo quiere hacer y hace con tu ánima? Encarnación no; pero es un grado que tanto junta el ánima con Dios y un casamiento tan junto y tan pacífico, que parece mucho encarnación, aunque por otra parte mucho diferencen. Porque la encarnación fue una tan alta unión del Verbo divino con su santísima humanidad, que la subió a si a unidad de persona; lo cual no es acá, sino unidad de gracia; y como allí se dice encarnación del Verbo, se dice acá espiritualización del Espíritu Santo” (emphasis in original). Sermón #30, OCNEC, vol. 3, p. 369.


62. NRSV.


64. “Así es menester, hermano; esperáis a este santísimo Huésped; pues Él es tan liberalísimo para con vos, sedlo vos para con Él; echad mano a la bolsa, y no deis poquedades: dad larga limosna, dad de comer al hambriento, vestid al huérfano y a la viuda, haced oficio
de padre con todos los necesitados. Mira tú, que eres padre de pobres y consuelo de desconsolados.” Sermón #27, OCNEC, vol. 3, p. 329.
66. “No seas como aquellas vírgenes locas y necias (cf. Mt 25:2 ss), no estés dormido ni emborrachado en cosas de este mundo; mas imita a las vírgenes prudentes en el cuidado y ornato y en tener aceite de misericordia para ti primero, teniendo mucha cuenta con tu ánima y reformación de tu corazón.” Sermón #27, OCNEC, vol. 3, p. 329.
68. “¿Quién son los que han de venir? El Padre y el Hijo y el Espíritu Santo; porque dondequiera que ellos van, va el Espíritu Santo…” Sermón #29, OCNEC, vol. 3, p. 351.
70. “No hay quien os pueda decir este abrazo, este beso; no hay quien lo pueda explicar.” Sermón #32, OCNEC, vol. 3, p. 399.
75. “Porque se puso Jesucristo tan de buena gana en la cruz, obedeciendo al Padre Eterno y al Espíritu Santo, por eso vendrá en nombre suyo a vosotros, y no tendrá asco de nuestra miseria; no dejará de venir; no se apartará las narices de ti.” Sermón #30, OCNEC, vol. 3, pp. 376–77.
76. “Así es verdad, que el hombre no es lugar propio para el Espíritu Santo, ni la cruz es lugar adonde pusieron a nuestro Redemptor Jesucristo; mas, por esta junta de Dios con la cruz, es esotra del Espíritu Santo con el hombre. El espíritu Santo amonestó e inspiró a Jesucristo que se pusiese en aquel lugar tan bajo y tan hediondo de la cruz, y por eso el Espíritu Santo viene a este otro lugar tan hediondo y bajo, que es el hombre.” Sermón #30, OCNEC, vol. 3, pp. 376–77.
77. “No otro sino Dios pudiera curar esta llaga; y éste es argumento muy grande para creer que el Espíritu Santo es Dios, porque, si fuera menos que Dios, no pudiera consolar y curar la llaga que Cristo había hecho con su ausencia.” Sermón #30, OCNEC, vol. 3, p. 367.
80. “Éste es el día en que sopló al montón de tierra. Y si cuando en la creación sopló en la tierra un ánima para el cuerpo que no tenía vida, hoy sopla y da el ánima que es la gracia; porque el ánima del hombre sin gracia, es estar muerta.” Sermón #32, OCNEC, vol. 3, p. 396.
“Dios os perdonará las deudas, no sólo a vosotros, pero a todos; porque determinado está que a la misma hora que dio Dios vida al cuerpo, que le dio Dios ánima, a esa misma hora dará ánima a nuestra ánima.” *Sermón #32, OCNEC*, vol. 3, p. 397.


“De allá sale el viento, y allá vuelve, al Padre y al Hijo; de allá lo espiran, y allá espira Él a sus amigos; allá los guía, allá los lleva, para allá los quiere.” *Sermón #30, OCNEC*, vol. 3, p. 370.

Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem, ed., Roger Gryson, 4th rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsches Bibelgesellschaft, 1969, 1994), p. 1320. Ezekiel 37:9–10: “Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.’ I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived...” *NRSV*.

“Pero después que el profeta llamó al viento para que soplase sobre los muertos, tuvieron los huesos vida; todo se muda, lo pesado se hace liviano, y lo muerto revive.” *Sermón #30, OCNEC*, vol. 3, p. 371.

¿Cuántos, perdida toda esperanza de vida, resucitó su Espíritu, y dio vida y deseos nuevos, y alegró y confirmó con nueva esperanza! ¿Quién hace todo esto? El Espíritu Santo, que sopló y llevó hasta Dios sin resistir.” *Sermón #30, OCNEC*, vol. 3, p. 371.


“¿Qué me aprovecha ser bautizado y creer en Jesucristo, si no tengo al Espíritu Santo?” *Sermón #30, OCNEC, Sermones*, vol. 3, pp. 373–74.

“Dice el glorioso apóstol San Pablo a los Efesios: In quo et credentes signati estis Spiritu promissionis, qui est pignus haereditatis.” *Sermón #30, OCNEC, Sermones*, vol. 3, pp. 373–74.

“Así como la circuncisión era señal para el judío, así el bautismo es señal de cristiano en lo de fuera; todo no vale para salvarte, si no tuvieres Espíritu Santo. Y la señal en que uno se ha de salvar y alcanzar las promesas de Cristo nuestro Redemptor, no es llamarse cristiano; no solamente es ser bautizado. Porque aunque haya esto, si falta la presencia del Espíritu Santo, no bastará aquello; hijos son los bautizados, pero no son hijos legítimos, son bastardos […] El que está bautizado y no obedece a Dios nuestro Señor, no es hijo legítimo; el que está bautizado y no tiene el Espíritu Santo, no es legítimo; bastardo es, pues no tiene la señal que hace a los hijos legítimos y herederos de los bienes de su Padre, que es el Espíritu Santo.” *Sermón #30, OCNEC*, vol. 3, p. 374.
96. Ávila paraphrases the text in Spanish: “Cuando viniere el Consolador, que yo os enviaré de parte del Padre, que es Espíritu de verdad, Él dará testimonio de mi, y vosotros daréis también, porque habéis sido testigos de vista, que dende que comencé a predicar me habéis conversado.” Sermón #28, OCNEC, vol. 3, p. 335.

97. As quoted by Ávila in the text of the sermon, Sermón #28, OCNEC, vol. 3, pp. 337–38. Ávila omits part of Romans 8:9. The entirety of Romans 8:9 reads as follows: “Vos autem in carne non estis, sed in Spiritu, si tamen Spiritus Dei habitat in vobis. Si quis autem Spiritum Christi non habet, hic non est eius.” Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem, p. 1758. Romans 8:9: “But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.” NRSV.


100. “Dedit eis potestatem filios Dei fieri his qui credant in nomine eius: qui non ex sanguinis, neque ex voluntate carnis, neque ex voluntate viri, sed ex Deo nati sunt.” As quoted by Ávila in the text of the sermon, Sermón #28, OCNEC, vol. 3, p. 340.

101. “No basta, para ser hijos de Dios y subir al cielo, que hayas nacido de sangre; nada sirve que seas hijo de conde, ni de duque, ni que seas de sangre de rey. Poco es eso. El mayor serafín que está en el cielo, si no tuviese el espíritu de Cristo, no sería bienaventurado. No se da el cielo por linaje, non ex sanguinis, neque ex voluntate carnis; no nacen de voluntad conforme a lo que quiere su carne; no nacen con voluntad afectada a la carne.” Sermón #28, OCNEC, vol. 3, p. 340.


104. “¿Qué hacéis cuando oís una palabra que os da pena, y os dicen: ‘Dios lo dijo’? ¿Qué dijo Acab? ‘Este Miqueas nunca me profetiza cosa que me agrade’ (cf. 1 Re 22,8). Yo soy pregonoer, ¿qué culpa tengo? Dios os lo envía a decir.” Sermón #28, OCNEC, vol. 3, p. 343.


106. Sermón #31, OCNEC, vol. 3, pp. 378–86. This sermon is highly significant since it was not included by Juan Díaz in the 1596 edition. It was first published in Ricardo García-Villoslada, “Colección de sermones inéditos”; see above note 57.


110. “En pecado, luego sigues lo que tu apetito quiere y tu carne te pide, etc. ¿No es hombre el que vive según razón, etc., el que se rige por lumbre natural? ¿Qué es un caballero vestido de brocado y seda, y dentro es bestia?, etc. ¿Qué cosa es ver uno que parece que rige a otros y él es guiado y regido por una bestia? No hay mayor deshonra que estar en un pecado; es un hombre estar hecho bestia.” Sermón #31, OCNEC, vol. 3, p. 381.

111. “Esta locura y presunción, esta confianza en nuestras fuerzas nos tiene echados a perder. Al fin perdióse el hombre por la honra, y vino a ser más bajo que bestia.” Sermón #31, OCNEC, vol. 3, p. 382.

112. “Que siete tiempos han de pasar sobre ti, hasta que conozcas que la fuerza y el poder está en el del cielo, no en ciudades, ladrillos, etc.” Sermón #31, OCNEC, vol. 3, p. 381.