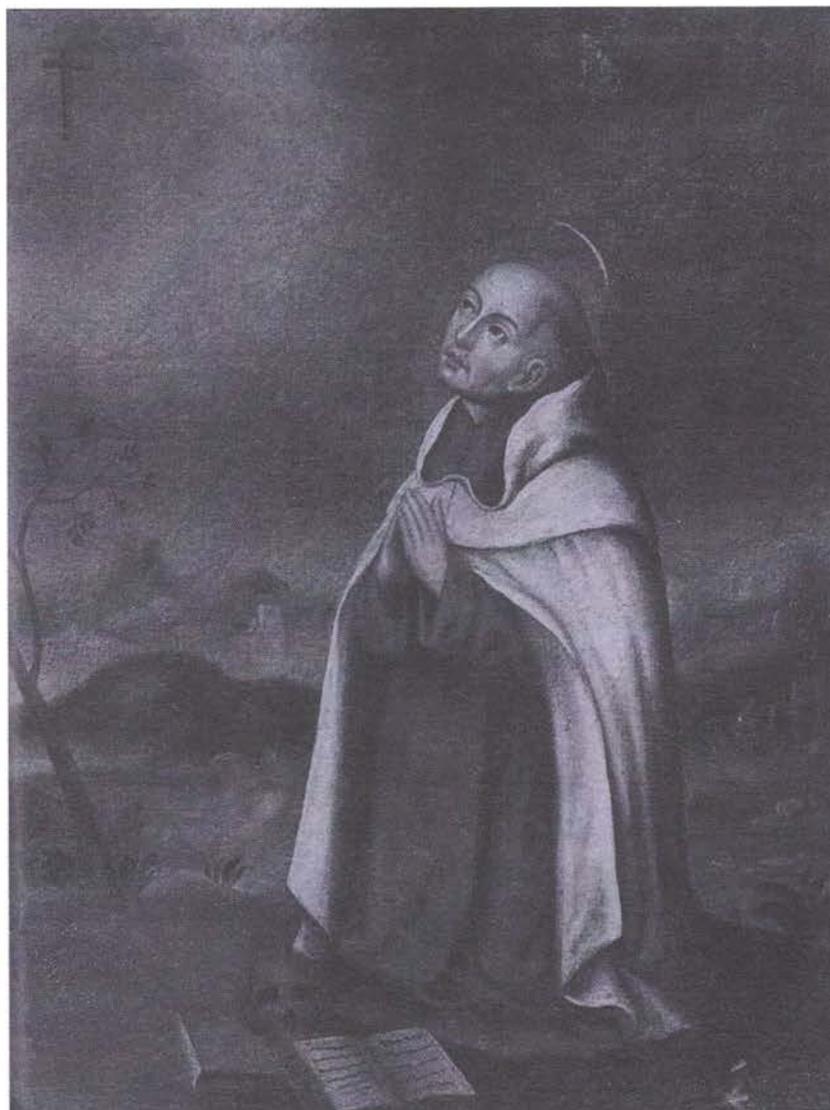


CARMEL CLARION

January - February 2007 Volume XXIII No. 1

*The Spirituality of
St. John of the Cross*



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January - February 2007 Volume XXIII No. 1

Disalced Carmelite Secular Order, Washington, D.C.

I

Editorial
Fr. Regis Jordan O.C.D.

2

Main Lines of the Spirituality of
St. John of the Cross
Jose Vicente Rodriguez, OCD

12

St. John of the Cross and the
Seasons of Prayer
Iain Matthew, O.C.D.

18

Letters to the Editor

21

St. John of the Cross and
Private Revelations
David J. Centner, OCD

25

News from the
Northeast Region

26

Elizabeth of the Trinity:
the Witness of Her Letters from Carmel
Christina Nunn

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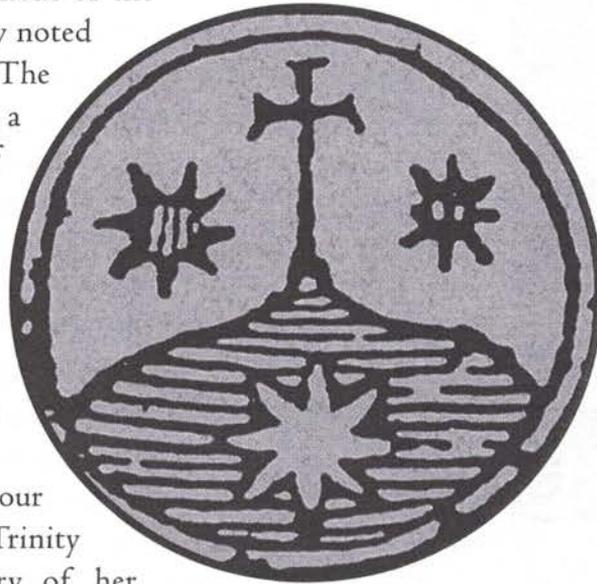
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Editorial

With this issue we begin the year dedicated to the teachings of our Holy Father, St. John of the Cross. As we did in the case of our holy Mother St. Teresa, each issue of the Clarion will contain articles by noted scholars of St. John's teaching. The material presented will include a wide spectrum and points of view regarding the Saint's teaching. As with Our Holy Mother, you will see that there is a variety of opinions and interpretations of his teaching, indicating the richness of his spiritual doctrine.

We will also be continuing our series of Bl. Elizabeth of the Trinity commemorating the centenary of her death. As you have seen, there is a wealth of spiritual teaching in the writings and life of this young Carmelite.

The Clarion is also undertaking a new project, which will be called Carmel Clarion Communications. ICS Publications has decided to terminate its Tape/CD section so we agreed to take it over in order to continue producing CDs on Carmelite spirituality. In this issue you will find an advertisement for all the CDs now available. In the near future we hope to add CDs taken from our present tape albums (such as the various Carmelite Forum albums, etc.) and offer them as CD singles. The various ways you can contact us in order to purchase a CD are in the advertisement. We hope to provide an on-going source of Carmelite spirituality for you through this media. We ask your prayers for this new endeavor.



Main Lines of the Spirituality of St. John of the Cross

Jose Vicente Rodriguez, OCD



We discover the main lines of the doctrine of St. John of the Cross by reflecting on his life and examining his teaching—written and oral. The events of his life illustrate his doctrine; likewise his teaching throws light on his life. And in that way, we understand better his intimate biography. The life of St. John was not long—just forty nine years. It was lived within the confines of Spain, even though in the course of it he traveled 27,000 kilometers. In those days, that involved much more stress than today because of the type of transport and the state of the roads. Though restricted geographically, his life abounded in history and doctrine—to the great benefit of the Carmelite Order up to now and into the future. By what criterion are we to view the life of St. John? For myself, I like to view it in the light of a great principle formulated by St. Teresa. In a letter to Maria de San Jose, prioress of Seville and Lisbon, she writes: “He has become a fully developed person through the hardships he has endured.”

Trials and Suffering

That judgment of St. Teresa observing how trials and tribulations contributed to St. John’s personality was verified in a most eminent way when he was a prisoner in Toledo from December 1577 to August 1578. She was not to know about the final persecution that St. John was destined to endure; otherwise I do not know what she might have said. She had striven to find out where he was being kept and did everything to obtain his freedom. When finally he obtained freedom and she learned how much he had suffered, she said: “I did not merit to suffer as much as John did” (letter to Roque de Huerta, October 1578).

Prison was the pinnacle of St. John’s suffering in the development of his personality. But his “apprenticeship” had begun in his infancy and lasted until his death. We may note the following experiences:

1. Becoming an orphan on the death of his father.
2. The poverty, indeed misery, of the family.
3. The frequent family migrations in search of a decent subsistence.
4. Being accepted in the college (“Los Doctrinos”) in Medina del Campo and later in the hospital “de las bubas”—a hospital for syphilitics and other incurable cases. To-

gether with his studies and nursing of the sick, he had another special task. He had to go through the town begging for alms, first for the college and then for the hospital. One who engages in such a task is always liable to scorn and insult.

5. Becoming a Carmelite led to further experiences in the development of his personality. We are all familiar with his prison experience: nine months' incarceration in total solitude. And then his final illness and the attempts at defamation by Diego Evangelista in 1591. He lived constantly the "science" of the cross, transformed into the theology, wisdom, and mysticism of the cross. Edith Stein, with much perspicacity, spotlighted this; and in the preface to her book, *The Science of the Cross*, she noted that the message of the cross is "the key to understanding the personality of St. John of the Cross in its integrity as it is manifest in his life and writings." The positive aspect of this existential situation is admirably brought out in verse 36 of *The Spiritual Canticle*. Commenting on this verse, "Let us enter further deep into the thicket," he notes that this thicket is the life of God full of incomprehensible riches—the wisdom and knowledge of God, immense and profound. Also, "the thicket into which the soul wishes to enter signifies the multitude of trials and tribulations, for suffering is very delightful and beneficial to her. Suffering is the means of her penetrating further, deep into the thicket of the delectable wisdom of God" (n. 12).

Main Lines

What then are the main lines of the spirituality of St. John? It is not too difficult to list the most significant of them that emerge from his writings and which are the foundation of his doctrine, his commentaries, and their message. We can list the following.

1. Spirituality of love.
2. Ecclesial spirituality.
3. Christ-centered spirituality.
4. Espousal spirituality.
5. Biblical spirituality.
6. Anthropological spirituality.
7. Humanistic spirituality.
8. Apostolic spirituality.
9. Liberation spirituality.
10. Transcendent and immanent spirituality.
11. Spirituality for daily life.

"the thicket into which the soul wishes to enter signifies the multitude of trials and tribulations, for suffering is very delightful and beneficial to her. Suffering is the means of her penetrating further, deep into the thicket of the delectable wisdom of God"

It would be tedious to deal with all these categories; we will consider just a few.

Spirituality of Love

St. John was well aware of the spiritual and moral disintegration of the human person. By his teaching, he strove to unite all the created energies, to reintegrate in

people all these God-given energies. He knew that the greatest energizing force available to mankind was love. And he aimed in all his teachings at the acquisition and possession of love. As he begins to speak of the active night of the will, he surprises us by asserting that “all that I can teach and all that the spiritual person has to achieve is found written in Deuteronomy 6, 5: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, soul, and strength’ (A3,I6, I).

Thus speaking of the active night of the will, he centers it totally in love. Likewise for the passive night of the spirit. This the Lord sends so that the soul may be concentrated totally and absolutely in God and expend all its energies in that love, and thus come to fulfill in truth the first precept: “You shall love the Lord with your whole heart, mind, soul, and strength” (Dt 6,5). This is one of the most profound texts of St. John, of those that highly exalt the dignity of the human person. In fact, he emphasizes that union with God is achieved without casting aside anything that is truly human or excluding anything worthy in human love. That is to say, it is not a question of underestimating, casting aside, or excluding what is not human—that which is designated by the word “sin.” To understand fully the dynamic of St. John’s spirituality of love, we need to reflect on a word that we use frequently: enamored-as when we say the soul is enamored of God, or inflamed with the love of God. This is the key, not only to *The Spiritual Canticle*, but to St. John’s entire teaching. In *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, I,I4,I, we read: “Not only is it necessary to love your spouse, but to be enamored with love.” We must also note

that the journey of love is also that of faith and hope as can be seen from his synthesis of the three virtues in AI,6 and DN2, 2I, in conformity with his statement: “These three virtues go together as one” (A2 24, 8; A2 29, 6). That is to say, they function in unison in the spiritual life. So that an act of faith is at the same time an act of hope and love, an act of hope is at the same time an act of faith and love, and an act of love is at the same time an act of faith and hope. In one of his letters, he highlights his theological program: “To walk along the level road of the law of God and of the Church, and live only in dark and true faith and certain hope and complete charity, expecting all our blessings in heaven, living here below like pilgrims, the poor, the orphans, the thirsty, without a road and without anything, hoping for everything in heaven” (letter to Dona Juana de Pedraza, Oct. 12, 1589).

Should anyone surmise that St. John is referring only to love of God and not also to love of neighbor, one has only to read the thirteenth stanza of *The Canticle* where he speaks of the espoused love and the love necessary to acquire it: “To acquire this love, one ought to practice what St. Paul taught: love is patient, love is kind...” referring to I Cor 13, 4-7. Thus he speaks of love of one another; and it is through that love of one another that we have to love Christ, our brother.



soul! And
what else

do you search for outside,
when within yourself you
possess your riches,
delights, satisfaction,
fullness, and kingdom -
your Beloved whom you
desire and seek? Be
joyful and gladdened in
your interior recollection
with him, for you have
him, so close to you.
Desire him there, adore
him there.

- St. John of the Cross
The Spiritual Canticle

Ecclesial Spirituality

The primary and total objective of St. John's teaching is union with God. In the first lines of *The Ascent* as he reflects on the language he wishes to use, he changes the word "perfection" to "union of the soul with God." He wishes the reader to understand that union with God is much more personal and "inter-relational" than perfection. Thus from the beginning, he identifies the two "protagonists," so to speak, of the spiritual life: God and the human person—the two lovers, even though he will enunciate clearly that God is the principle lover (CB 31, 2). In pointing out that relationship, he touched on the deepest element of the Church of God. Pope Paul VI underlined it with great emphasis: "The reality of the Church is not exhausted in its hierarchical structure, in its liturgy, its sacraments, its institutions; its innermost essence, the original source of its efficacy in the sanctification of peoples is rooted in its mystical union with Christ" (closing session of the Council, Nov. 21, 1964).

Since perfect union with God is on the one hand the central nucleus of the Church and on the other hand the highest aspiration of the spiritual life, it is clear that when St. John of the Cross speaks of that union with God, he is in effect speaking about the Church. He is speaking about that Church, which according to the Council, "is in Christ as in a sacrament, namely, as a sign and instrument of that intimate union with God and the unity of the entire human race" (LG 1). It is constituted by God "to be for each and for all the sacrament of the salvific union of people in Christ. The Church is the sacrament of salvation" (LG 48), "which manifests and at the same time realizes the mystery of God's love for mankind" (GS 45).

Of the benefit to the Church, which is born of that love St. John speaks in a most vivid way in n. 29 of *The Canticle*: "A little of this pure love is more precious to God and the soul and more beneficial to the Church, even though it seems one is doing nothing, than all those other works put together." And even if active apostles might not have reached sublime prayer, "if they were to spend half of their time in prayer, they would certainly accomplish more and with less labor by one work than they otherwise would by a thousand" (*ibid.* 3).

To illustrate St. John's depth of conviction regarding this point of doctrine, we may refer to one clear example that he gives. When he criticizes and condemns the harm caused by inept spiritual directors in the lives of persons who are striving for union with God, he does not see the problem merely as harming one person or another. He considers it as harm to the whole Church.

Some think that the teaching of St. John is too personal and individualistic. On the contrary, when he comments on the verse "we shall weave garlands," he understands by garlands "all the holy souls engendered by Christ in the Church." Thus he applies all that is said about the espoused soul to the espoused Church, placing his commentary in the most pure ecclesial dimension. Hence the joys of the individual souls are the joys of the Church, and the harm that comes to the individual

soul is a disaster for the Church. Likewise, describing the joy of Christ: "it is wonderful to see his pleasure in carrying the rescued, perfected soul on his shoulders, held there by his hands in this desired union. Not only does he himself rejoice, but he also makes the angels and saintly souls share in his gladness" (C22, 1). In this manner, we understand that all our apostolate, all our attention to any single soul has an ecclesial aspect and so deserves the greatest care and attention.

At the conclusion of this section, I wish to underline something very important. If the teaching of St. John of the Cross concerning union with God is so outstanding, so also and in the same measure and for the same reason is his Church doctrine. The most profound ecclesiology born of the teachings of Vatican II was already expressed by the mystical doctor. Not only was he a teacher of that vital ecclesial reality, he was also an expert witness. Paul VI expressed it well (Oct. 2, 1974): "People of today listen more readily to witnesses rather than to teachers; if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." St. John of the Cross was both teacher and witness (*Rev. de Esp.* 49, 1990, 495).

**The California-Arizona Province of St. Joseph
2007 O.C.D.S. Congress**

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Monday, June 18th, 2007**

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Fount of Living Waters**

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Br. Thomas Reeves, OCD

Christ-Centered Spirituality

To understand this aspect of spirituality, already in a certain fashion comprised in ecclesial spirituality, we have to consult various texts in St. John concerning Christ's mission in the life of the world, of people, of the Church. His teaching about the mystery and its various dimensions is so extensive that all his references to Christ might be considered as a key to his entire teaching. We are all familiar with the vigor and force of his commentary (A2 22) on the words from the Letter to the Hebrews: *multifariam multisque modis olim Deus loquens ...* "The apostle indicates that God has become as it were mute, with no more to say, because what he spoke before to the prophets in parts, he has now spoken all at once by giving us the All, who is his son" (A2 22, 4). He thus reproves those who question God, who seem to ask for further revelation as if we had not gotten all that is necessary in the person of Christ. That would be an offense twice over-to the heavenly Father and to Christ.

The force of his language here is remarkable as he strives to clarify his teaching. "In giving us his Son, his only Word (for he possesses no other), he spoke everything to us at once in his sole Word-and he has no more to say" (A2 22, 3). And again: "For he is my entire locution and response, vision and revelation, which I have already spoken, answered, manifested, and revealed to you by giving him to you as brother, companion, master, ransom, and reward" (*ibid.* 5). That chapter and some of its clauses were cited in the Vatican Council (Session 92, Oct. 1, 1964) by sixty-seven African bishops led by Archbishop (later Cardinal) Zoungrana, in order to correct and enrich the Constitution *Dei Verbum*.

Spirituality of Daily Life

Under this heading would come all that St. John tried to achieve in writing *Las Cautelas (the Precautions)*, teaching us to live the theological virtues in community: faith, foundation of obedience, hope, poverty, love, and the ideal of chastity. Also to be considered-his style of forming community; Gospel simplicity in work, in joy and happiness; fleeing melancholy that leads to depression; his exquisite attention to the sick of the community, telling them jokes, playing music for them, and helping them in many other ways; the way in which he instructed people to read the Bible as a vehicle of love of God, finding in it "edification, exhortation, and consolation" (I Cor 14, 3); his way of giving correction in a "Gospel" manner; accompanying religious in the way of prayer, explaining for each one the problems he might encounter on the road; instructing people how to recognize the presence of God in nature. We should mention also his exhortations, particularly at the close of the day, always offering some good advice. This seemed to him so important that even when at times he had to spend the day in bed because of illness, he would always appear for the evening exhortation. Apart from the mistakes that St. John could make and of which he was very conscious, his style of guiding a community was exactly in accord with that of St. Teresa: "Strive to be loved rather than



obeyed.” In fact, on the testimony of Martin de San Jose, “He was so loved by his community that he was a father to each one.” Another religious said, “He was like a brother with his religious and manifested great ease and informality.” And, “He was the first to take in hand whatever he asked others to do.” We can extend this to all aspects of community life—the daily round, the manner in which the saint understood

and arranged it. We could apply it also to liturgical observance to which he devoted great care, to the daily obligation of work, to the time for daily recreation and the special days of recreation, the authentic Carmelite way of life to which he was introduced by St. Teresa when he accompanied her to the foundation of Vallidolid. It was then that she instructed him “in the style of both our community life and the recreation we have together” (FI3, 5). All that we learn of St. John’s teaching about the ordinary events of everyday life reminds us of St. Teresa. After she had written in the first three chapters of the *Seventh Mansions* concerning the spiritual marriage, in the fourth and last chapter, she came down to speak of the practical daily chores of the religious life: the community virtues—love, humility, prayer for one another, good example, care for one another. Thus also St. John of the Cross, as he counseled that we keep our feet solid on the earth, even as the heart soared heavenward. In that context of daily duties accomplished with love, we should envisage the entire spiritual legacy of St. John: vivifying that kind of fidelity and allowing oneself to be vivified by it. Here, as in matters liturgical, the external has to be an expression of the interior and at the same time a way of increasing and deepening those interior riches.

Model of Carmelite Identity

In order that St. John’s spirituality may be seen to influence practical personal life, we should see in him our model in many respects. Just to take a few instances:

His love for the Bible as the word of God. Apart from what has already been said, we note his practice on journeys of reciting the seventeenth chapter of St. John’s Gospel. The “priestly prayer” of Christ was his favorite prayer when on journeys. In the Carmelite Rule, we have many biblical texts—explicit and implicit—which he explained to his community in accord with the Constitutions: “The priors of the convents are obliged to admonish and correct community members and to have read every Friday the Rule and have it commented on by themselves or some others.” He did the same, as we have seen, during recreation and at other times. There were some who benefited more from such occasions than from formal meditation.

His love of work so highly recommended in the Carmelite Rule whether intellectual, apostolic, or manual. He took part in the regular community tasks, as well as occasional construction work. He labored from dawn to dusk preparing the house in Duruelo. Likewise in construction of the new house in Segovia, he acted as assistant to a mason. Pablo de Santa Maria, a religious who worked with him there, was in admiration of his dedication to work. "In the height of snow in winter, he went to the quarry to oversee the works. Many of those days, having had no breakfast, he took his meal only at one o'clock."

His love of nature, which always led him to God in a spirit of prayer to praise and glorify him. "There are souls who are greatly moved toward God by sensible objects" (A3 24,4). St. John, holy and artistic, was surely one of these. From the sensible, he was in touch with God, of whose transcendence, immanence, and condescension his books are full. He taught this to his religious and others.

His dedication to prayer and contemplation. I feel sure that he devoted himself to these much more than those zealots who began to boast of contemplative retirement, love of silence, and solitude. In order to evaluate St. John's approach to God, we might recall the wonderful idea of contemplation enunciated by Pope Paul VI when he evoked the image of the Lord so beloved by the Vatican Council: "That God exists, that he is real, that he is living, that he is personal, that he is provident, infinitely good, not only in himself, but for us: our creator, our truth, our happiness, so that the effort to fix on him our gaze and our prayer that we call contemplation is the highest and fullest activity of the spirit, which even today should be seen as the apex of human activity" (discourse at the closing of the Council, Dec. 7, 1965). The entire life of St. John was shot through with that contemplative spirit; this was his very life, and it determined his relationship with others and with the whole of creation.

His apostolic ministry. It was an apostolate that touched a wide spectrum of people: spiritual direction of religious, diocesan priests, lay folk in Alcala, and much more in Baeza, Segovia, and Granada. He taught catechism to simple peasants from Duruelo, as also to young people of the barrio of Ajates near the Monastery of the Incarnation in Avila. He exercised an extended apostolate to Carmelite men and women and to other religious also. His aim in all this apostolate was to help people redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and to nurture souls for heaven. Those who lived with him and observed his apostolic work noted "that he was all to everyone and not special to anyone."

His love for the brethren in community, especially for the sick, the old, and the most needy. There is a profound example of brotherly love from the days just before his death. Helped by another religious, he was burning all the letters he had received that had any reference to the persecution waged against him by Fr. Diego Evangelista. When the religious asked him why he was doing this, he said: "So that the good name and honor of all might be preserved."

A final word in the context of this [General] Chapter. In this matter, St. John

draws water from afar, from the formation that should be given to religious. His thoughts are conveyed to us by Eliseo de los Martires, first provincial of Mexico, in his Dictámenes. The saint affirmed that when religious are nurtured in irrational rigorism, they become fainthearted regarding real virtue, as if they were reared among beasts. And he held that it was the devil's plan to have religious formed in that manner, because superiors have no means of advising them or correcting them. If in that or any other way the Order should reach the stage that those who by the laws of justice and charity in chapters and meetings are afraid to speak out for reasons of cowardice or weakness, or for fear of annoying a superior or being left without an office, which is manifest ambition, we should consider the Order lost and totally relaxed. He said, "It would be better that they (such people) not be professed in the Order, because they would subsequently be ruled by vice and ambition, not by love and justice." And still more deliberately: "When it is clearly seen in chapters that nothing is questioned, but rather all is conceded and passed over, and each one looks to his own interests, the common good suffers, vice and ambition are nurtured, which should be denounced without compassion as a pernicious vice and destructive of the common good."

Regarding those penances enjoyed contrary to obedience, a last word from DNI, 6, 2 where he speaks about spiritual gluttony in doing penances. "Corporeal penance without obedience is no more than the penance of beasts. And like beasts, people are motivated in these penances by an appetite for the pleasure they find in them."

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The Prophetic Dimension of Our Carmelite Rule

The Carmelite Institute 2007 National Conference

KEVIN G. CULLIGAN, O.C.D.
Keynote Address



For centuries, the Old Testament prophets called the Jewish people to fidelity to God's covenant with them and to care for one another, especially the poor and most disadvantaged. By choosing to live on Mount Carmel, the sacred place in the Holy Land where the prophet Elijah's victory over the prophets of Baal reaffirmed that "Yahweh is God," the first Carmelite hermits presumably desired to continue this prophetic tradition when they began their life together in the beginning of the thirteenth century. Although not explicitly stated in the Rule of St. Albert, this prophetic challenge is implicitly contained in the rule's reminder to live "in allegiance to Jesus Christ," the greatest of all prophets. Subsequent reflection on the rule and the living testimony of Carmelite men and women through eight centuries have expanded the prophetic dimension of the Carmelite rule. Today, at the beginning of the third millennium, the prophetic character of the rule challenges the American Carmelite family to uphold once again the primacy of God and care for others in the face of such modern idols as national security, consumerism, and

militarism that result in the neglect of the neediest in our world. This keynote talk will review the development of the prophetic dimension of our Carmelite rule and suggest strategies for continuing Carmel's prophetic witness in today's American culture.

General Session Presenters:

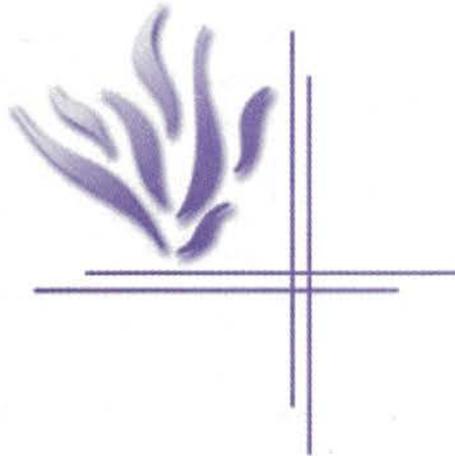
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Mary Margaret Yascolt, O.C.D.

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I am Most Zealous for The Lord, the God of Hosts
1 Kings 19:10

Warwick, Rhode Island, July 25-29, 2007

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St. John of the Cross and the Seasons of Prayer

Iain Matthew, O.C.D.



“...And I am feeling very well, glory be to God, and doing fine. The openness of the wilderness really does soul and body good— though my soul is in great poverty. The Lord must want it to have its own spiritual desert. Well and good, so long as that is what pleases him. His Majesty already knows what we are when left to ourselves.”

This is John of the Cross writing to his friend, Ana de Penalosa, August 1591, a month before his final sickness begins to overpower him. It is a bewildering time. John’s moral authority had once led him to positions of influence and respect in his Order. Now, abruptly, he has found himself on the sidelines, a focus of controversy, victim of a campaign to have his name disgraced. “Just being his friend was a crime.”¹

John is writing from La Penuela, an isolated monastery in the foothills of the Sierra Morena in the south of Spain, far away from the responsibilities and politics of Castile. The stillness is a mirror of his own spirit: a still point in a jostling, jealous world.

In the midst of all this, John is in desert surroundings, *el desierto*. He is pleased to be there. It “does soul and body good.” He relishes the solitude, openness, *anchura*, room to breathe. Apparently it was during this time that he reedited his most personal and intense writing, the *Living Flame*. The desert lets him connect with what is truest in him.

It is also a place where he knows his poverty: “my soul is in great poverty;” a desert of the spirit, where he is not simply in command, where things do not just work for him. That too can be a good place. It spells surrender to God’s plan, not the pushing of his own.

John encourages us to go there. The place of poverty within us is the threshold at which Christ stands. Our need is a way of prayer.

John of the Cross: the voice of fragility

“People do not know how rightly to rejoice, nor how rightly to mourn, for they do not know the distance between good and evil”² In the face of the world’s pain, John’s writing can seem rather private; too slow-moving to keep up with human need. In fact, the vaster the pain, the more vital John’s word. When the need is so far-reaching, superficial solutions will not do. John is one who *has* traveled the distance, from darkness to light; he has been led to the places within him which border on good and evil. Knowing that distance, his word goes to the root causes and can

lead us, not to superficial adjustment, but to a gospel mourning and a genuine joy.

Given the quality of John's testimony, it is all the more illuminating, then, to see where his word originates. The events in his story are worth recalling, to highlight this one fact: that John's word issues from a history of weakness.

One witness was later to speak of the striking conjunction in John of strength, commitment on the one hand, and gentleness, mildness, on the other.³ His life had fired him to just that temper. The death of his father and brother when John was an infant; his displacement as a child as the family looked for a living; John's work as a teenager with people dying of syphilis; a crisis in direction at the time of his ordination, through which Teresa helped to guide him: these were so many events emptying his spirit, carving out a nothingness, an expectancy, for the divine.

The honing of his spirit came to a head in circumstances where his weakness was extreme: months of imprisonment in Toledo for his part in the Teresian reform. Transferred to a tiny, dark dungeon, where hunger, squalor and isolation could set to work, John was pushed there beyond thresholds he had never had to cross before, into unfamiliar regions, where his emotional and physical weakness would have made him very vulnerable.

And it is precisely here that John began composing his most personal poetry, from which his writings derive.

That then is a first indication for us from John about prayer: the place within us where not everything is all right, where the wound that is in you aches. John says: go there.

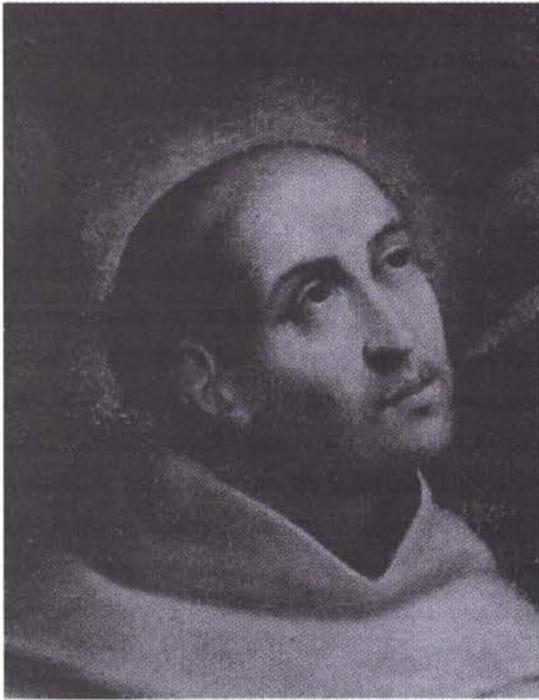
The wound is the place where God dwells

Go to that place of need, because that is a threshold at which Christ stands; our need is an evidence of God. This is a second lesson from John on prayer.

It is said that physical hunger passes through three phases.⁴ You stop eating and you need food and that is hard to cope with. But as time passes, the body settles into a rhythm, feeding on its fat reserves. The point comes, though, when these reserves run out and the body begins to feed on its own substance. Then hunger turns into a desperate craving, all the person's instinct to preserve their life invested now in this, the body's cry.

In our life of faith, too, there are levels and phases. Perhaps one is in that second phase: what once was powerful and compelling has settled down, a steady jog, feeding on reserves. But if one were taken further, to that third level of hunger, what would we find? That was the place John reached, and from which his prison poem, the *Spiritual Canticle*, begins: a word that issues from the substance of his spirit, the heart's cry, craving for life.

Where have you hidden
Beloved, and left me groaning?
You fled like a stag



having wounded me;
I went out in search of you,
and you were gone ...

This stanza, expertly crafted and couched in *Song of Songs* language, is the cry of John's spirit. He has experienced a wound within him. He calls out from there. Calls out for what?

At this point in his life, with dungeon walls and lice for company, John had many needs. He lacked light, warmth, food, clean clothing, medicine for his wounds; he might have been helped by reassurance that he had not made a mistake, that his life's endeavor would be fruitful, that his friends still believed in him. All these protective layers were being stripped off him. But when he is exposed in this way, what he calls out for is none of these. "God, give me light, clothing, safety, friendship, a welcome, a future." What he cries for is "You;" a person, Another; Christ. "Where have you hidden, Beloved." It is as if the removal of all those layers

laid bare a deeper wound, the need which John is: it reveals John as a need for God.

John confirms that for us, too, there is a third level of hunger, where our reality, the "substance" of the soul, is crying out for God. To be taken there is an immense blessing. Our need is the measure of our dignity, the reverse image of our greatness. When the person is empty and cleansed, "the thirst and hunger and the spirit's feeling of longing is more than can be borne ... The capacity of these caverns is deep, for that which can fill them is deep, infinite, and that is God. So in a sense their capacity will be infinite, and so their thirst infinite, their hunger too is deep and infinite, their sense of undoing and pain is an infinite death ... since the soul is in a sense ready to receive what will fill her."5

It is natural to flee from the place where that hunger throbs. Still, John encourages us to go there. It is what beckons the divine. It is the threshold at which Christ stands. We hunger for him because he has touched us; we want him because he wants us. The wound is the print of the pledge upon us, the pledge of the Spirit who holds us from the abyss. John comments on his poem: we "have our feeling of longing, the sense of God's absence" precisely there, "within our heart, where we have the pledge."6

Two pointers, then, about prayer from John of the Cross: go to the fragile place: it is Christ who is waiting there.

Open spaces and the terror of the night

Thirdly, much of John's system is really about this: trying to get us there, to the place of our need; to get us to go there, and stay there. The desert can be scary. The spirit suffers from a natural agoraphobia. The night is disconcerting: safer back in the house, with the glow of party lights and small talk.

In the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, John expends his energy encouraging us not to lose our nerve or settle for a cheap alternative. When the wound that is in you begins to ache, or the anesthetic in you starts wearing off, do not grasp for compensation. Stay there. Show yourself you can stand there. Do not be a slave to the fear of not being anaesthetized. Risk stepping into that open space where you need God. "Step free of your longings and you will find what your heart really longs for . . ."7

In the books of the *Dark Night*, John is talking to people who are being taken there. John's nada is mystical, a nothingness into which he himself was led, far beyond the regions of his expertise. In that aching, open, darkened place, the temptation is to read the openness as emptiness, and to panic. John says rather, stay there; let God work there; say yes to the God who is feeding you precisely there.

The person was wearing this white garment of faith as she went out in this dark night. She wore it as she journeyed . . . in inner darkness and oppression, when her mind was giving her no relief: no light from above, since heaven seemed closed and God seemed hidden; no light from below, since her teachers were failing to meet her need. On this journey, she persevered, bearing it with constancy, passing through these difficulties without giving up or giving up on her Beloved.⁸

In probing our neediness, the books of *Night* find signs of God's action. When prayer is no longer functioning the way it once did, but has become tasteless, and the person feels disorientated, reaching out for a God who is no longer showing up: John sees that reaching, that anxiety for God, as a sign of God's action (N.I,9).

Again, when a person experiences their weakness as never before, feels that they do not fit, that they are unacceptable, all the rubbish in them now floating like jetsam to the surface: John sees that as a fruit of God tenderly, hiddenly drawing near; a fruit of God's action (N.2,7).

To the question, Where is God? John is answering by pointing to where we felt most needy.

The wound at the heart of the world

When in *Night* John seeks words for the wound that is in him, it is the cries of Israel that surface: the psalms, Lamentations, Job—individuals, who voiced the pain of their people. The wound to which John descends, "Where have you hidden...?", connects with the pain of the world. It is as if, deep beneath the surface where we perform and survive, there lay a reservoir of weakness where we all are one. In his solitary confinement John was accessing a universal cry.

The word John uses in the first stanza of his *Canticle* conveys this: *gemido*, "Where have you hidden, Beloved, and left me groaning." In the Prologue to his commentary John speaks of his verses as an echo of the Spirit who pleads for us with a cry too deep for words, *gemidos inefables*. From the wound within him rises the

cry of the Spirit. It is a cry which gives voice to the longing of the whole of creation to be set free:

the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole of creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption . . . (Romans 8:21-23).

In Remembrance

Rose Bonavita, OCDS, began eternal life September 19, 2006. She was a member of the Saint Joseph Community, Erie Pennsylvania.

Anna Vivacqua, OCDS – Sr. Mary Teresa, began eternal life on November 18, 2006. She was a member of the Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel Community of Elysburg, Pennsylvania.

Virgil Burns, OCDS – John Mary of the Cross, was a member of the Mary Mother of Divine Mercy Community in Waconia, Minnesota and began eternal life on November 18, 2006

Two members of the Our Lady of Mt Carmel and St. Teresa of Jesus Community in Roxbury, Massachusetts passed away last year.

Ellen Ahern, OCDS, age 98, was fully professed on August 20, 1951 and began eternal life on October 6, 2006.

Catherine Joyce, OCDS, age 84, was fully professed on December 18, 1968 and began eternal life on December 29, 2006.

The Community of St. Teresa of Jesus Fraternity in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania also lost two members.

Dorothy Churchville, OCDS - Mary Elizabeth of the Visitation, was fully professed on October 9, 1997 and began eternal life, November 25, 2006.

Marjorie Oliver, OCDS – Regina Maria of Passion and Cross, was fully professed in June 1982 and began eternal life on December 29, 2006.

The Community of the Holy Spirit in Richmond, Virginia lost three members. **Domina "Sunni" Cowling**, OCDS – Domina Maria Elizabeth of the Holy Spirit, began eternal life on August 12, 2006.

Dolores Whalen, OCDS – Mary of the Incarnate Word, entered eternal life on December 2, 2006.

Diana Maxwell, OCDS – Diana of St. Catherine Laboure, also entered eternal life last year.

In another prison poem, *Romances on the Incarnation*, John pictures humanity longing for the coming of the Bridegroom, begging “with tears and cries” (*lagrimas y gemidos*) for the “companionship” of the Son of God.⁹ Individuals are pictured voicing the Advent prayer of the Church. So it is that those who are taken by God to the place of hunger within them, stand there on behalf of their people. They give voice to the cry, the need, of the universe. Such purified prayer is a source of healing; “a little of this pure love is more precious to God and for the soul, and of more benefit to the Church”—and so, to the world—“than all those other works put together.”¹⁰

Christ is the guarantee of this; the wounded Christ, a brother in our need. So John puts at the head of his treatise *Ascent-Night* the picture of Jesus reconciling humanity, restoring the universe, by entering the black hole where God seems not to be. John knows an annihilated Christ who was “compelled to cry out My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me? This was the most extreme forsakenness he had felt in his life. And by it he did his greatest work, greater than any he had done in his life . . . That is, he reconciled and united the human race with God. . . .”¹¹

The journey to our poverty, then, is not a private affair; the healing of the world is at stake

Let your need be your prayer

This, then, is one of the seasons of prayer in St. John of the Cross. We have been led by him to Cana, the family wedding where the wine runs out. Mary sees the anxiety, and has a quiet word with her Son just pointing out what she has noticed.

This is a scene with cosmic scope: the wedding of the Lamb, espousing humanity, a humanity in peril. The mother of Jesus perceives what is lacking, and names it, without dictating a solution: “They have no wine.” Hers is a prayer of need; her perception of need is a prayer. She takes it, holds it, allows it to ache before him. And that precipitates glory. He “manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him.”

This, then, is a way of prayer: to feel our way to the wound that is in us, to the place of our need. Go there, take it, name it; hold it before Christ.

To feel our way to the wounds of the world, to those people or situations in dire need of healing. Go there, take them, name them, and hold them before him.

Go there, not to dictate to Christ what the answer should be or what he should do about it; but to hold the wound, before him.

“They have no wine.” John of the Cross sees wisdom here. A love which does not spell out “what it needs or wants, but holds out its need so that the Beloved might do what pleases him” is especially powerful.

And this for three reasons: firstly, because the Lord knows what is best for us, better than we do; second, because the Beloved’s compassion is more

deeply moved when he sees the need and the surrender of the one who loves him; third, because the soul is less vulnerable to her self-love and possessiveness when she holds out the need before him than when she spells out her own view of what it is she needs.

This, then, is a way of prayer in St. John of the Cross: to go to the place of our need, and hold that before God. "We have no wine:" a service to the world, a prayer that precipitates glory.

Notes

1. Jose de Jesus Maria Vida de San Juan de la Cruz III, Burgos (3) 1927, 451. In *San Juan de la Cruz: Obras Completas*, ed Maximiliano Herraiz, Salamanca 1991, p. 16
2. *Sayings of Light and Love* 62
3. Magdalena de Espiritu Santo, BMC 10.324 [see note 1]
4. See Monika Hellwig *Eucharist and the Hunger of the World*, Sheed and Ward, US 1992, p. 5.
5. LB e.18, 22
6. CA 1.6
7. *Sayings* 15
8. N. 2, 21.5
9. *Romances* 177
10. CB 29.2
11. 2A 7.11

Mount Carmel, Autumn, 1999



I must again reiterate how much I enjoy and treasure the Clarion. When it arrives in the mail, I put it with my spiritual reading, eagerly anticipating a time when I will be able to take in this wonderful nourishment, with ample time to absorb its richness. I am particularly appreciating the "theme" of St. Teresa on prayer. This is particularly helpful for the class that I am teaching on St. Teresa's, Way of Perfection. These articles are a wonderful supplement to Fr Kieran Kavanaugh's Study Guide. Thank You!!!

J.M. OCDS - Director of Formation
Flint, MI

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St. John of the Cross and Private Revelations

David J. Centner, OCD

Pious Christians are sometimes mystified by the way Carmelites attribute little importance to reported supernatural occurrences in different parts of the world. Their attitude has its origin in the experience and doctrine of the saints of Carmel.

There is an incident in the life of St. John of the Cross that can be very instructive for us. The friars had gathered together in Lisbon for a chapter, and many of them wanted to flock to visit a renowned visionary. John instead chose to go pray by the sea, which he had never seen, and to glorify God in the majesty of the ocean. As he predicted, the visionary was later found to be a fraud.

St. John of the Cross directed many people who had very elevated experiences of God. One would think that, as a consequence, he would esteem very much these special graces. In fact, his attitude was quite the opposite; and in chapter 22 of the second book of *The Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, he cites Scripture to show “God was unwilling that souls desire the supernatural communications of visions and locutions” [II Ascent 22, 2]. In a lengthy passage, which the Church uses in the office of readings on Monday of the second week in Advent, he tells us, “Now that the faith is established through Christ, and the Gospel

law made manifest in this era of grace, there is no reason for inquiring of him in this way or expecting him to answer as before. In giving us his Son, his only word (for he possesses no other), he spoke everything to us at once in this sole word—and he has no more to say . . . Any person questioning God or desiring some vision or revelation would not only be guilty of foolish behavior but also of offending him, by not fixing his eyes entirely upon Christ and by living with the desire for some other novelty” [II Ascent 22, 3&5]. He goes on to say, “We must be guided humanly and visibly in all by the law of Christ the man and that of his Church and his ministers. This is the method of remedying our spiritual ignorance and weaknesses; here we shall find abundant medicine for them all. Any departure from this



road is not only curiosity but extraordinary boldness. One should disbelieve anything coming in a supernatural way and believe only the teaching of Christ, the man, as I say, and of his ministers who are me”[II Ascent 22,7].

These are very strong words, but the Church in making him a Doctor of the Church and then quoting from this chapter in its own liturgy is telling us that it recognizes this doctrine as its own.

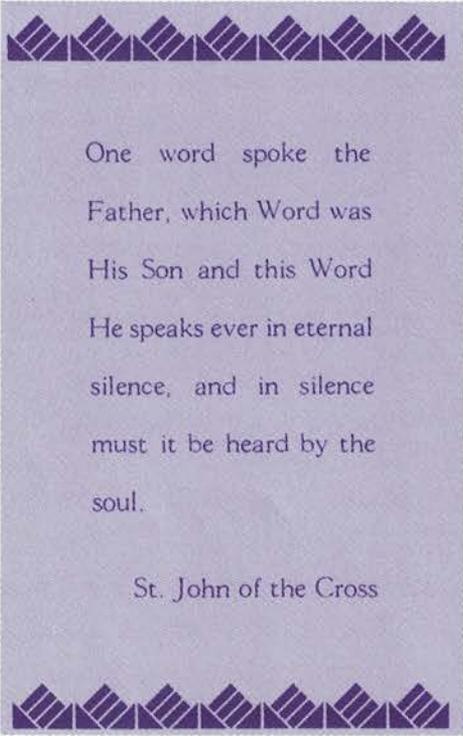
Today there are many people who disseminate mistrust in the hierarchy and in the ministers of the Church. Instead, they turn to visionaries and locutionists and seek to be guided by them, even preferring their statements to the clear teaching of the Church.

In some cases, these visionaries are clearly frauds; because their messages contain things that are contrary to the faith. We recall how one visionary’s following dissolved overnight after she announced that Joseph was the incarnation of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes there are subtle errors mixed in with a lot of good. Like viruses, they are hardly noticed; but gradually they bear bad fruit. Most often, these visionaries simply repeat what we know from catechism and the study of our faith. The doctrine may be totally unobjectionable, but St. John of the Cross would still oppose turning to it. For to put it bluntly, if it is not from God, it is idolatry to take it as coming from God. It is here that we can begin to understand St. John’s seemingly severe attitude.

Let us go back to what we know as the basic truth of the way God communicates himself to us. He does this through faith, through the theological virtue of faith. We assent to faith when we assent to the doctrinal propositions of the Church, but the content of faith cannot be reduced to any creature. Only because of the grace of the hypostatic union is Christ, the man, able to communicate to us the Divine Presence that is God. But when God speaks to us in faith in a “substantial” way, as St. John of the Cross would say, no creaturely concept can intervene. Our minds remain as “empty” as the Holy of Holies that was filled with the Divine Presence of God. To use a favorite phrase of the saint, no “clear and distinct knowledge” of God is God.

Well, then, what is it?

When God communicates himself to us, his presence *may* overflow into consciousness so that we experience words, touches, visions, feelings, or other sensible communications. The overflow, however, is not God, but a kind of “translation” of God’s presence. But we have no guarantee that what our minds perceive is an adequate “translation” of the truth of God’s presence or that it contains only the truth that God wishes to communicate to us. It invariably contains a lot of our own unconscious stuff, and the typical shape these visions and intuitions take follow very closely the pattern of dreams and can be likened to waking dream states. God may be involved in them, but there is a lot more of us in them. Souls



One word spoke the
Father, which Word was
His Son and this Word
He speaks ever in eternal
silence, and in silence
must it be heard by the
soul.

St. John of the Cross

experience a kind of spiritual “stimulus generalization” (to borrow a psychological term).

When we have a powerful interior experience, the senses want to make sense of it; and we may experience sense stimulation as a consequence. As St. John points out in book one of *The Dark Night of the Soul*, these sensible overflows ordinarily contain a lot of the capital vices.

As the philosopher says, whatever is received is received in the mode of the receiver. If I am an angry person, I may come away from prayer convinced that God is mad at the world. We are like children who may say, “Mommy is mad at me,” when mommy really simply cares. Furthermore, the more transparent we are (or free from traces of sin and inordinate attachments), the less we experience these visions. For they are like motes of dust or smoke that make a ray of light in a room visible (and, by the way, also impede its passing). So experiences such as visions and locutions actually are due to the imperfections of the soul and are not a sign of virtue. It is therefore most important for the person who experiences them to report them to a confessor or spiritual director and not be guided by the experiences. If this is true of the visionary, how much more of followers and visionary wannabes.

John’s general rule is to ignore them and to adhere to Christ and to the teachings of the Church as mediated through its human ministers. Yet there are times when a private revelation may clearly contain something that God wishes communicated to the Church. In this case, the revelation falls into the category that the Scriptures call prophecy.

In the New Testament, the gift of prophecy, according to best theological opinion, has two purposes. First of all, it reminds us of aspects of the faith we may tend to ignore or reproves us for falling away from God’s will. In both cases, essentially, prophecy calls us back to the Word of God. Examples of this are the apparitions to St. Margaret Mary or St. Catherine of Siena’s mission to bring the Holy Father back to Rome. There is a second purpose, which is to help the Church understand God’s manifest will in a concrete moment. There may be a prophetic message to preach the Gospel to a people. But this second function can never add anything to the basic message of the Gospel, and its authority has to be confirmed by the Church as humanly credible. It is *never* the object of theological faith.

When Church authority approves an apparition or a devotion, it simply permits it. It never imposes it. It does not even guarantee its authenticity. We may use these apparitions and devotions to help us to follow Christ more closely, but even they become an impediment if we substitute our attachment to them for the Gospel of Christ. Scripture is the Word of God. Christ speaks to us through it in a manner that is analogous to his mysterious presence in the Eucharist.

There is a famous incident in which a priest tried to test St. Catherine of Siena’s holiness by bringing to her an unconsecrated host as if it were the Eu-

charist. She was horrified and reproved him for occasioning the sin of idolatry, because people would adore mere bread as if it were the Real Presence. Similarly, we can never ascribe to words that are not part of Scripture the same reverence and devotion we ascribe to God's own Word in Scripture. It would be like venerating an unconsecrated host.

In the Old Testament, God forbade any kind of direct representation of himself. When the kingdom of Israel was divided after the death of Solomon, the great sin of the king of Israel was to set up two royal sanctuaries to compete with the temple in Jerusalem. In these, he placed golden calves. Nobody imagined that they represented false gods or that they were adequate representations of Yahweh. But the commandments forbade any representation of God. The Holy of Holies, in fact, was empty. And the "deepest center" of anyone who truly loves God must also be empty of every representation that derives from human ingenuity. In fact, we can venerate the Sacred Humanity of Christ, which is a creature, only because by the grace of the incarnation it is the humanity of the Divine Person. Jesus alone is the visible manifestation of the Father.

Then how are we to respond to a prophetic message?

St. John of the Cross teaches that God gave Moses Aaron, and that we should not act on anything communicated in a supernatural way unless it is confirmed by the voice of reason. "God is so content that the rule and direction of man be through other men and that a person be governed by natural reason, that he definitely does not want us to bestow entire credence upon his supernatural communications, nor be confirmed in their strength and security until they pass through this human channel of the mouth of man. As often as he reveals something to a person, he confers upon his soul a kind of inclination to manifest this to the appropriate person. Until a man does this, he usually goes without complete satisfaction, for he has not received it from another man like himself' [II Ascent 22, 9].

St. Teresa's practice, if in prayer it seemed the Lord was asking of her a particular work, for example the foundation of a monastery, was to propose the idea to authorities as a good thing to do and let them decide on the basis of its intrinsic merit. And if authority decided differently, as in the case of the Burgos foundation, she knew it was better to obey; and that this was more pleasing to God. In this, she exactly confirmed the rule set by St. John of the Cross.

When John speaks of natural reason, he is not referring to rationalism or to individual opinion. He is actually talking about theological reflection by the Church as local community in the person of its ministers. "This is the trait of a humble person: he does not dare deal with God independently, nor can he be completely satisfied without human counsel and direction. God is desirous of this, for to declare and strengthen truth on the basis of natural reason, he draws near those who come together to know it . . . This is why he also affirmed in the Gospel . . . Where two or three are gathered to consider what is for the greater honor and glory of my

name, there I am in the midst of them-that is, clarifying and confirming divine truths in the hearts . . . Thus God announces that he does not want the soul to believe only by itself the communications it thinks are of divine origin, nor that anyone be assured or confirmed in them without the Church or her ministers. For God will not bring clarification and confirmation of the truth to the heart of one who is alone" [II Ascent 22, 11].

The truth is, Carmelite spirituality is a spirituality of the desert, the very desert that God used to purify his people of attachment to their idols. We Carmelites ought to follow the example of Elijah and take care that faith not be sullied by any pious attachments to anything less than God.

If you read book 3 of *The Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, you will clearly see that there are a great many dangers to be had from attachment to anything less than God.

To my mind, the most pernicious of them in the Church today is to make us think that some one way is the only way or the best way and that anyone who does not agree with our opinion is in error. In subtle ways, they divide the church community, create cliques, draw attention to themselves, and undermine respect for the Church's ordinary teachings. They are, what one writer has called so well, "The devil's plan for the pious."

St. Paul told people long ago that there was a better way than seeking extraordinary gifts. The better way was to seek charity. St. John of the Cross tells us that there is a better way than seeking extraordinary knowledge; it is to know Christ and him crucified. There is no other way.

This article first appeared in *Mount Carmel*, Summer, 2000



*I went
without discerning
and with
no other Light
except for that
which in my heart
was Burning.*

ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

News from the Northeast Region

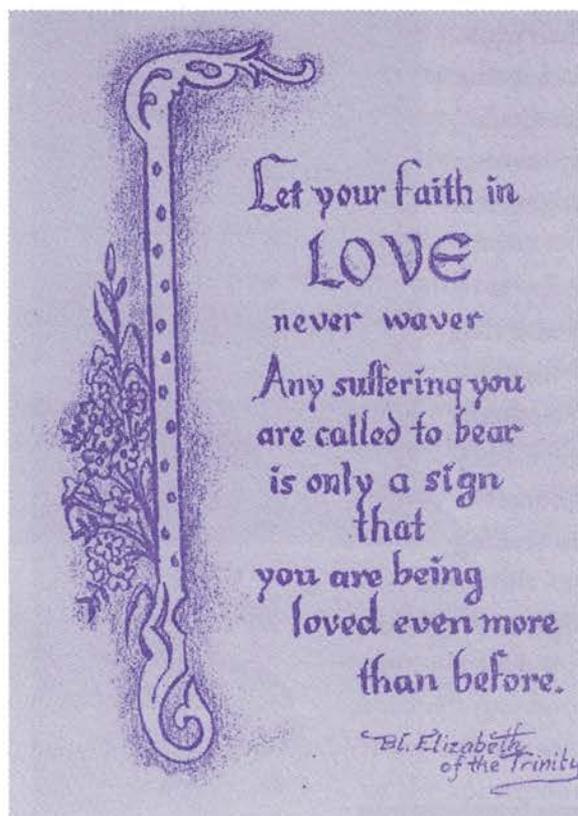
The six Northeast Districts are planning regional programs. OCDS members from outside the Northeast can register later if there is room on these dates:

April 21, 2007, Saturday 9:30 AM -3:15 PM, District 2, Day of Recollection, "The Rule of St. Albert and Spiritual Warfare," by Fr. Dennis Mancuso, OCDS at Our Lady of Angels Church, Carmody Hall, in Cuba, New York. Read the Rule of Albert before attending. Contact: Kitty Pasquale, 5771 Feathers Creek Road, Belmont, NY 14813-9756.

June 9-11, 2007, Friday to Sunday, District I Retreat *The "Secret" of Elizabeth of the Trinity: "Being at Home" with the God of Love Within us*, by Fr. Michael Berry, OCD at Manhattan College, in Riverdale, NY, The cost is \$110.00; Contact: JoAnn Lee OCDS, 115 Kendall Drive, Parlin, NJ 08859; 732-727-5858; e-mail: joannleel@verizon.net

Elizabeth of the Trinity: the Witness of Her Letters from Carmel

Christina Nunn



Even as a novice, Elizabeth had an enormous correspondence, and it did not diminish throughout her time in Carmel. She had fifty-nine correspondents of whom forty were lay. She wrote to young teenagers and elderly people, family and friends, religious and priests; and yet Elizabeth was able to interact with each at his or her own level. Her long years of waiting to enter Carmel had sharpened her understanding of what the Christian life was all about, and she had come to interiorise her monastery in the cell of her heart. This experience helped make Elizabeth so effective in sharing her insights when she was in Carmel, able to reach out to others and touch their hearts. But most of all, she could do this because she so identified herself with Christ that she loved with his heart, with his love. She shared her understanding of God; she was not trying to prove anything. As Conrad De Meester expresses it: “she has inherited more of the prophet who proclaims, than of the theologian who explains or the exegete who analyses.”¹

Moments of Contact

Elizabeth’s letters are filled with advice on prayer. Her writing is not the dry academic thesis, but straightforward practical counsel. She recommends that we deepen our friendship with God by frequently introducing into our life a brief moment of contact with him, and sometimes a longer pause for prayer. She advised her mother, for example, to make three five-minute prayers daily (L 273). For Elizabeth, prayer is a ‘wonderful communion’ (L 249), ‘an exchange of love’ (L 161), ‘that intimate heart-to-heart in which the soul flows into God and God flows into it to transform it into Himself’ (L 278). She stresses to Germaine de Gemeaux, a young friend, that she does not take ‘prayer’ to mean vocal prayers but, rather, ‘that elevation of the soul toward God through all things that establishes us in a kind of continual communion with the Holy Trinity by quite simply doing everything in Their presence’ (L 252).

Elizabeth’s letters give a straightforward and simple way of praying. We need first to place ourselves in God’s presence – or rather, to recognize that the Holy Trinity already dwells within us (cf. L 273) and that God loves us (cf. L 85). The second movement of this prayer is to converse directly with God: to ‘bring

[your] soul to Him' (L 179), with or without words. Elizabeth describes giving God her 'loving attention' (cf. L 231) and looking at him with 'a gaze full of love' (L 138). To sum up again with the words of Conrad De Meester: 'To pray is to receive and to give, to give and know that one is accepted, to know one is accepted and to love.'²

Heaven Within

The indwelling of God within us is a recurrent theme in Elizabeth's writings. This is not a new teaching: she is echoing Teresa of Avila. As a young girl, Elizabeth had copied into her notebook a statement by the Spanish saint, 'You must seek me in yourself.'³ When she read *The Way of Perfection*, she found in Teresa's teaching on prayer frequent references to the indwelling of God, such as the following: 'the soul collects its faculties together and enters within itself to be with its God' (WP 28.4). Elizabeth writes to her friend Marie-Louise Ambry: 'Remember that you are in Him, that He makes Himself your dwelling here below: and then, that He is in you, that you possess Him in the most intimate part of yourself, that at any hour of the day or night, in every joy or trial, you can find Him there, quite near, entirely within you. It is the secret of happiness; it is the secret of the saints' (L 175).

Writing to Canon Angles in April 1902, just eight months after entering Carmel, Elizabeth tells him: 'We find Him in our sleep just as we do in prayer, since He is in everything, everywhere, and always!' (L 111). Then, a few lines later, she uses a phrase that will become a familiar theme in her writings: 'I already live in that Heaven, since I carry it within me'. For Elizabeth, baptism is when we are clothed with God and become his children, 'and at the same time His living temple' (L 240). First holy communion, too, was for her a very important occasion. Writing to Berthe Guemard, a young friend about to make her own first communion, Elizabeth says: 'it is not for only a few moments that He comes to [you, but in order to remain in [you] always...a union has begun between Jesus and His little communicant that is to be a foretaste of Heaven (L 112).

Never Alone

Prayer is not something that we have to attempt on our own. As Elizabeth says so well: 'I'm never alone: my Christ is always there praying in me, and I pray with Him' (L 123); 'my prayer is quite powerless, but I possess within me the Holy One of God, the Great Suppliant, and that is the prayer I am offering' (L 241). Because we are not alone, Elizabeth can offer encouragement to those who are going through difficult times: 'He is always with you, be always with Him, through all your actions, in your sufferings, when your body is exhausted, remain in His sight, see Him present, living in your soul' (L 138).

On several occasions, Elizabeth reminds her correspondents of Christ's commandment in John's gospel: 'Remain in me, and I in you' (Jn 15:4). This is a com-

mand but also an encouragement: it says that no matter what may be happening, we are never alone. Elizabeth's relationship with God is similar to that of Therese of Lisieux—a child with its parent: 'I go to Him like a little child to its mother,' writes the Carmelite of Dijon, 'so He may fill, invade, everything, and then take me and carry me away in His arms' (L 169).

A Little Mother

Francoise de Sourdon was fourteen years old when Elizabeth entered Carmel, and she was greatly saddened by what felt like the loss of her close friend. We have fifteen letters written to her by Elizabeth from Carmel, and they give us a particular understanding into how Elizabeth shared her insights about God. They also show how she saw herself as a mother to Francoise — or 'Framboise' ('Raspberry'), as she affectionately called her! 'You've often said I was like a little mother to you, and I do in fact feel that my heart holds a maternal affection for you' (L 270).

Elizabeth frequently refers to the fact that, in God, she finds all those she has left behind, so that in some sense she has never really left them (cf. L 88). Her spiritual advice is immensely practical: 'You must build a little cell within your soul as I do. Remember that God is there and enter it from time to time: when you feel nervous or you're unhappy, quickly seek refuge there and tell the Master all about it' (L 123). And her counsel is also filled with her own insights: 'it seems to me that my prayer is all-powerful, for it is not I who am praying but my Christ *who is within me*' (L 105).

Hard-hitting Help

There was a real depth to the relationship between Elizabeth and Francoise, and on more than one occasion the Carmelite wrote her protegee a hard-hitting letter. She saw in Francoise something of herself—the same tempestuous nature!—and cautioned her to amend her ways. Because Elizabeth had been there herself, she was able to give advice with an authentic feel to it: 'In the past I overlooked these fits of temper, but now you're no longer a baby and these scenes are ridiculous . . . You see, my darling, you have my nature' (L 98). About seven months later, she is still advising Francoise: 'I can well see that you're unhappy and I assure you it's your own fault . . . In the beginning it's necessary to make an effort when we're just boiling inside, but quite gently, with patience and God's help, we get there in the end' (L 123).

Given her great love for Francoise, Elizabeth returned again and again to what it is to live in God and to know that he lives in us: 'what happiness it is to live in intimacy with God, to make our life a heart-to-heart, an exchange of love, when we know how to find the Master in the depths of our soul' (L 161). Elizabeth set up what she called a 'rendezvous' with Francoise, just as she had with her sister Guite: after compline each day, when the great silence had begun, they would be united in prayer (L 98.105).

A Vocation Shared

In April 1906, after a crisis when Elizabeth nearly died, she reassures Françoise: 'if I had gone to lose myself in (the Divine Beauty), how I would have watched over my Framboise' (L 270). Elizabeth's last letter to her, about five months later and only two before her death, is now considered one of her major works. Known as *The Greatness of our Vocation* (GV), it took Elizabeth many days to write, and her handwriting, particularly at the end, betrays her physical exhaustion. The point she stresses in this letter is that humility leads us to forget ourselves, to deny ourselves, in order that we may become Christlike; 'movements of pride,' she says, '... only become faults when the will takes part in them!' (GV 5). Again, there is the blend of the practical and the mystical.

Turning to her beloved Paul, Elizabeth gives Françoise what she calls 'a program of life' (GV 9): 'Walk in Jesus Christ, rooted in Him, built up in Him, strengthened in faith and growing in Him in thanksgiving' (GV 10; cf. Col 2:6-7). She then develops each of these phrases, encouraging Françoise to know God ever more intimately, to believe that God loves her, and to seek to enclose her will in his. As Elizabeth reaches the end of this letter, she acknowledges that this will probably be her last one to Françoise: she now takes her leave and pronounces a blessing for her young friend: 'In the shadow of His wings may He guard you from all evil' (GV 13).

Wherever We May Be

Although these letters were written a hundred years ago, they have a freshness and relevance for us today. The insights of Elizabeth, with her practical advice on awareness of the Trinity who dwells within us, are just as applicable now. Maybe they are needed more than ever. As her letters show, it is not necessary to be in a monastery to encounter the living God or for him to dwell in us: 'may the God who is all love be your unchanging dwelling place, your cell, and your cloister in the midst of the world' (L 261). He is to be found in the busyness of daily life, wherever we may be.

There are always moments for prayer, as Elizabeth reminds her mother: 'Friday on the train, don't forget to pray, it's the perfect time for it, as I remember' (L 287). Writing to her again, she points out, though, that we do need to have patience: 'How, I wish I could tell all souls what sources of strength, of peace, and of happiness they would find if they would only consent to live in this intimacy. Only they don't know how to wait: if God does not give Himself in some



perceptible way, they leave His holy presence, and when He comes to them laden with all His gifts, He finds no one there, the soul is outside in external things, it is not living in its depths!' (L 302).

A Mission – for Us

Elizabeth's entire life was a continual praise and adoration of the triune God dwelling in the holy temple of her soul. In the centenary year of her death. Elizabeth's writings encourage us to seek, as she did, the reality of the Trinity who is in the depths of our being. She urges us to know ourselves loved, and to return that love with all of ourselves. And she herself will help us in this.

Less than two weeks before she died, Elizabeth wrote to Sr. Marie-Odile. This was a sister who had belonged to the community of Dijon with Elizabeth, before leaving for the new foundation at Parayle-Monial. Elizabeth refers to 'mission', which surely owes much to the influence of Therese. Elizabeth writes: 'I think that in Heaven my mission will be to draw souls by helping them go out of themselves to cling to God by a wholly simple and loving movement, and to keep them in this great silence within that will allow God to communicate Himself to them and transform them into Himself' (L 335).

1. Conrad De Meester, OCD. *Your Presence is My Joy: Life and Message of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity*, Darlington Carmel, (no date). p.53
2. Ibid., p.62.
3. Luigi Borriello, O.C.D., *Spiritual Doctrine of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity: Apostolic Contemplative*. New York: Alba House, 1986, p.83.

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