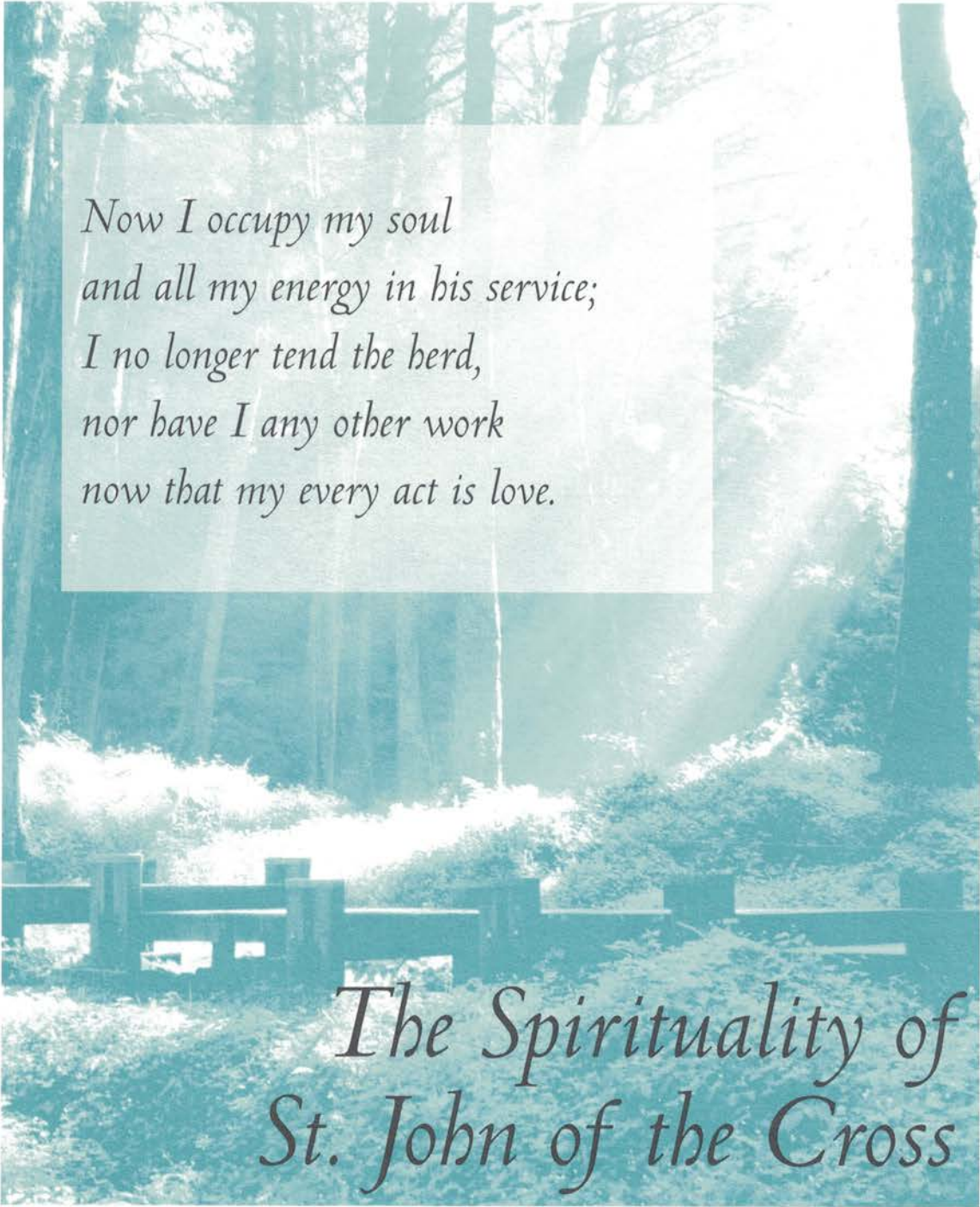


# CARMEL CLARION

March - April 2007 Volume XXIII No. 2



*Now I occupy my soul  
and all my energy in his service;  
I no longer tend the herd,  
nor have I any other work  
now that my every act is love.*

*The Spirituality of  
St. John of the Cross*

# CARMEL CLARION

March – April 2007 Volume XXIII No. 2

*Discalced Carmelite Secular Order, Washington, D.C.*

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# Editorial

In this issue of the Clarion we continue the study of the various works and themes in the works of our Holy Father St. John of the Cross.

In the article by Frederico Ruiz we encounter the work of one of the most notable sanjuanist scholars of the Carmelite Order. In his article Frederico gives us an overview of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night*, which he considers one work. He notes, "The work *Ascent-Dark Night* embodies an abyss of spiritual and mystical experience, of introspection and the observation of others. John worked with materials first-hand, not only with the received tradition and scholarship and brought to his work a strong unity and systematization." Frederico gives us a very good synopsis of both the *Ascent* and *The Dark Night*, which will help us to understand and enter into the mysterious process of the interior life.

Fr. Lain Matthew in his article on *The Spiritual Canticle* focuses on the wonder of God as seen in His creation and how it should lead us to sing a song of praise.

In our world today, overwhelmed as we are by technology, we may tend to overlook or forget the wonders of God's creation. The profound wonder of John for all of God's creation lies right below the surface in all of his writings. John's great love of nature would lead him into solitary places, not to forsake the world, but to experience in a tangible way the mystery of God in His creation.

As Fr. Matthews points out, all mystics are the spokespersons of God attempting to penetrate this mystery and in some small way to enable themselves and others to sing the praises of our loving God. It is not only the variety and differences of God's creation found in nature that lead to wonder, but also, and more importantly, the variety, differences and uniqueness of each person of the human family.

In entering into the season of Lent where we focus on our sinfulness, what enables us to bear our guilt are the insights we receive into the mystery of God as proclaimed by mystics such as John of the Cross. It is by standing in the presence of the mystery of God in wonder, experiencing, despite our sinfulness, the mercy, compassion and love of God in faith that we can grow and find comfort.

Kathleen Flynn's essay explores relationships as seen by John of the Cross. She points out that John's insistence that we seek God in faith does not hinder, but actually enhances one's relationship with God. The deeper one's faith, the more intimate one's relationship with God becomes. In turn one's relationships with others will deepen and grow as their relationship with God grows in deep faith. Kathleen highlights the relationships in John's life as the proof of this assertion.

Finally, the article on Elizabeth of the Trinity is by one of the foremost scholars on Elizabeth's life and teaching. Fr. Conrad DeMeister has been working on a definitive version of Elizabeth's writing for the past several years. I'm sure you will benefit by his insights, which will also appear in the next Clarion.



# The Ascent and The Dark Night

Federico Ruiz, O.C.D.



## *The Ascent of Mount Carmel and The Dark Night*

These two titles have been joined since the time of Fray John's stay in El Calvario and Beas. There he composed the poem and drew the sketch of Mount Carmel or the "Mount of Perfection." He explained it, made copies, and dedicated it countless times to friars and nuns. These two mustard seeds that seemed in the beginning to be simple means to promote piety within the community were in reality the rich seed of two great works, writings brimming with experience and thought, making John of the Cross the great theologian of mysticism and spirituality.

In reality, they constitute one work, the same project, organized in two parts. As a result, one speaks of the diptych *Ascent-Dark Night*, two segments of one composition. The two focus on the

same themes and experiences and use the same terms. They speak of union with God and likeness to Christ through faith, hope, and love, of poverty of spirit in the presence of God's gifts, and of detachment in the use of external things and the feelings of the heart.

## A Didactic and Theological Work

Time and again we have to return to the immediate practical purpose of St. John of the Cross's writings. Even the most elevated and systematic works bear the signs of having arisen and grown within the surroundings of the religious community.

One friar who knew him personally observed the spread and formative efficacy of the sanjuanist writings in the early monasteries of the reform. "They carried in their breviaries some small papers on which were sketched Mount Carmel and how to ascend; the doctrine was about reaching great perfection and was worked out by the said servant of God Fray John of the Cross. Moreover, almost all the friars knew by heart the poem *The Dark Night*, and they usually sang it during the relaxation period after eating and on other occasions for recreation" (Jose de la Madre de Dios).

In the last sentences of the prologue to *The Ascent*, which apply also to *The Night*, the author wrote that his main intention was to address “some of the persons of our holy order of the primitive observance of Mount Carmel, both friars and nuns, whom God favors by putting on the path leading up this mount, since they are the ones who asked me to write this work.” The simplicity of its origin and its didactic style do not hide the quality of John’s mystical experience or the depth of his theological thought. The work *Ascent-Dark Night* embodies an abyss of spiritual and mystical experience, of introspection and the observation of others. He works with materials first-hand and not only with the received tradition and scholarship. He also brought to his work a strong unity and systematization. He made use of his knowledge of systematic theology and spiritual tradition. On the basis of all this, he created an organic synthesis on Christian perfection, treating of union with God, the following of Christ, and the theological virtues.

He traced the way and process of the gradual transformation that God brings to completion in the believer, converting the old self into the new self, a truly spiritual self; step by step, from the first fervor through the desert of the arid night to the light of the full union of love.

In fact, the *Ascent-Night* with its experiences and doctrine has left a mark on all later mystical writing. And it continues to be today the authoritative criterion for judging authentic spirituality.

### The Ascent of Mount Carmel

The title alludes to the Sketch of the Mount, which the author so often copied and explained, and which was widely distributed among the first friars and nuns. The word “Carmel” evoked thoughts of the vocation of Carmelites, of their Elijan tradition, of the many who over the centuries had become saints in the order. The symbolism of the title is very rich, and furthermore lays bare the meaning and content of the work. In the first place we have a mountain, an elevated place where God approaches and manifests himself to human beings: Horeb, Sinai, Carmel, Tabor. It is the place of theophanies or revelations of God. What this title refers to first of all in the sanjuanist work is not human effort but divine condescension and intimacy with God.

This basic symbol is completed by the image of an ascent. Humans invited by God to communion with him must engage in an arduous climb, withdrawing from all the banalities of ordinary existence, getting rid of the weight of egoism and possessiveness that can hinder the ascent. “As this path on the high mount of perfection is narrow and steep, it demands travelers who are neither weighed down by the lower part of their nature nor burdened in the higher part. This is a venture in which God alone is sought and gained, thus only God ought to be sought and gained” (A.2.7.3).

In that same chapter 7, John wanted to give to his mount and the ascent a meaning strictly from the gospels. It is the narrow gate and the constricting path to

eternal life that our Lord mentions. And it points above all to the unconditional following of Christ along the way of love and the cross.

### Synthesis of the Theological Life

The work is divided into three books having respectively 15, 32, and 45 chapters. In *The Ascent*, a variety of perspectives are mixed together, which give shape to the content and development of the work. It is biblical in its basic sources and positions. Thus it affirms both the continuity and break between the revelation of the Old and of the New Testament; it affirms Christ as the unique and complete Word of God, the law of discipleship, and the precept of love. It is theological in its outline and development, considering the presence of God by nature and grace, the primordial function of the theological virtues in the union and transformation, the necessity of affective redemption, the infinite God who is blinding to the creature. It is experiential in its subject matter and ultimate intention, dealing with deeply rooted defects and disorders in spiritual persons, the mystical graces granted by God, the use and abuse of religious and profane objects in one's relationship with God. And it is pedagogical, pointing out the gradual stages of development and their practical demands, such as, first fervor, purification of the senses, and the additional exigencies of interior poverty.

For its author, as well as for the reader, this work is both mystical and ascetical. It is mystical because it describes God's generosity in even its most extravagant forms and the work of Christian grace in its most delicate shadings; it is profoundly ascetical because this communion with God demands an attitude of fidelity and surrender, consistency of life, and above all totality of love.

### Ideas and Stimuli

What can this classic work offer us today that is interesting and timely? Some reject it or push it aside en bloc because it doesn't correspond to today's religious tastes in subject matter and spiritual terminology. But these are not sufficient reasons for ignoring a work that continues to identify many fundamental points of experience and thought. At various times in its preparatory gatherings and in the council hall, the Second Vatican Council alluded to the pages of *The Ascent*. His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, focused on it in his doctoral dissertation in theology.

Here are some of its constant and timely themes: union with God through love as the total meaning of Christian and human existence; the divine gift, human purification; Jesus Christ, God's total revelation and gift, experience and model of total response; faith, hope, and charity, whether considered actively as surrender or passively as gift, the only and complete means of encounter with God; the purification of all affectivity and of the scattered imagination; the clarity of religious practice in its objects and expressions,- the prayer of a silent and simple gaze, loving awareness that stirs so much enthusiasm for this teaching at the present time; the mystical life and its manifestations; criteria for theological discernment, which

continue today to be the theological (and canonical) norm in teaching and making judgments about mystical experience.

### *The Dark Night*

Despite the biblical, mystical, and theological riches present in *The Ascent*, its author was left doubly dissatisfied: in the first place, because he had not given a true commentary on the poem *The Dark Night*, as he had proposed to do; and above all, because he had not described and explained the disconcerting and painful experience that many spiritual persons pass through on the way of perfection. This experience makes up the central theme of the poem and is the main motive for his writing the work, as he stated in the prologue of *The Ascent*. Thus he felt moved, almost obliged, to write a new work that would be a real commentary on the poem *The Dark Night*. The result was a work by this same title, concluded a year after the first was done, in 1586.

Faithful to his initial plan, the commentary on *The Night* keeps contact with the poem, explaining it stanza by stanza, verse by verse. Right away one becomes aware of the harmony existing between the poetry and the prose, a unity in the experience, vital sources, and lyric tone. With regard to its length and divisions, the author developed his commentary on the verses in an irregular manner. To help readers, the first editor of the works, in 1618, divided this writing into two books of 14 and 25 chapters.

### *Life and Theology*

From the viewpoint of language the symbol Dark Night is commonly considered the most effective one in the sanjuanist writings. In it we find sensible perception, human intuition, and spiritual experience intimately related. Thanks to this interconnection among them, each evokes and empowers the others. During his life, Fray John experienced the night in all its forms and tonalities: the joy of contemplating, being silent, and perceiving the nearness of God, the suffering from being alone and in poverty, and from the confinement in the dismal cell in Toledo; the interminable contemplation for so many hours in Baeza, Granada, and Segovia.

At once the difference between this symbol and the image "ascent" becomes apparent. *The Night* cannot be programmed; it demands passivity more than effort. It limits activity, hides objects, augments danger, and converts everything into strange, frightening silhouettes. Yet, at the same time it also protects and helps those hiding from their enemies. All these meanings and allusions served John well in his description of the spiritual experience of a person who feels lost and very far from God. *The Dark Night* has a twofold modality, negative and positive. Negative, because it hides everything; one feels incapable of working; God has hidden; prayer becomes tasteless; life has no meaning. Positive, because, thanks to this aridity and darkness, the soul can walk free of so many enemies

that habitually hindered it in its times of spiritual well-being: calculations, demands, attachments, pastimes, and curiosity.

### Description and Explanation

Helped by the symbol, Fray John presents a description and explanation of this desolate experience. He describes with beauty and precision the beginning of what we call the passive night. When these beginners have left worldly things and have procured some spiritual strength “they will be able to suffer a little oppression and dryness without turning back. Consequently, it is at the time they are going about their spiritual exercises with delight and satisfaction . . . that God leaves them in such darkness they do not know which way to turn in their discursive imaginings . . . and in such dryness that they not only fail to receive satisfaction and pleasure from their spiritual exercises and works, as they formerly did, but also find these exercises distasteful and bitter” (N. I. 8.3).

This experience gradually becomes more profound and all-embracing. And it ends by absorbing the whole person in all the faculties. It is a “living death,” as John says. In its most intense form one remains without plans, without impulses, and without desire to live.

What purpose could so radical a pruning have? The interesting point is that the spirit is incapacitated, has no appetite even for spiritual things, such as, prayer, love of neighbor, and apostolic creativity. Following John’s thought, we can respond to the question in phases.

First, the distinction between good and evil objects, licit and illicit ones, is of little use here. Inordinate attachments also feed on spiritual objects and seek satisfaction in them. John presents a good explanation of this in the first chapters of *The Night* (I.17). The seven capital vices come into play with pious objects in an apparently spiritual way.

Second, if affectivity and the discursive function are left dry and inactive, the bad habits contracted through their use are uprooted. A paralysis in our spontaneous tendencies is enough to purify or disinfect them of the egoism of the old self. One can then begin the new life with the form and strength of the theological virtues.

Third, what seems on the surface to be a paralysis is in reality the divine activity, which transforms and renews from within. Also, the individual can perceive signs of the improvement that is interiorly being accomplished: “Thus, while the spirit is tasting, the flesh tastes nothing at all and becomes weak in its work. But the spirit through this nourishment grows stronger and more alert, and becomes more solicitous than before about not failing God” (N.I.9.4).

### Experiences

Many find in their own lives a verification in broad strokes of the experience John calls the “dark night.” From the Old Testament up to our own day, God repeats



this same pedagogy, purifying and sanctifying by the way of the cross. John proposes great biblical models; for example, David, Jeremiah, and Job. "We could adduce numerous passages from Sacred Scripture, for since this sensory purgation is so customary, we find a great many references to it throughout, especially in the Psalms and the Prophets" (N.I.8.5).

John thus wrote in order to direct persons who receive this grace, but do not profit by it because of cowardice, ignorance, or bad advice from other spiritual teachers.

This same dark night, uncovered and analyzed by John of the Cross serves many today as a frame of reference for understanding the personal and collective situation in which we must live. Above all, it encourages them to carry the cross of Christ faithfully in the midst of confusion, weakness, and obscurity.

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# ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS AND THE SEASONS OF PRAYER

## II: A Song Of Praise

Fr. Lain, Matthew, O.C.D.

*In this second article of a new series, Lain Matthew, novice master and assistant editor of Mount Carmel, invites us to enter through the Spiritual Canticle of St. John of the Cross into the prayer of wonder and praise at the workings of God in creation and in souls.*

'Brother Francisco, tell me what God is?'

'God is whatever he wishes to be.'

So ran a conversation between John of the Cross and a brother in his community in Granada (1582-1588).<sup>1</sup> John loved Francisco's answer. It told of a God who is greater than we are, whose love is unearned, and whose coming causes wonder. We want to catch some of that wonder in these pages.

### A vocation to praise

In speaking of amazement at the mystery of God, we are coming close to John's center. We have seen a first movement in John's prayer: going to the place where we are poor, needy.<sup>2</sup> But there is a movement more characteristic of John himself: a movement of wonder and praise.

We shall focus on *The Spiritual Canticle*. Here the author is, precisely, 'saying and singing the greatness of his Beloved'; released by Christ to 'love and desire and praise and thank and revere and cherish and call on God, all with the fragrance of love.'<sup>3</sup>

You cannot just decide to write brilliant poetry. John's verses are gifted language - masterfully crafted, but fundamentally received. His stanzas are 'the sayings of love in mystical understanding' (CB Prol I). They are born of his experience of God. A response, then, to a gift.

John's great poems - *Canticle, Flame, Night, Fountain* - are Eucharistic. They tell the story of God's deeds in his life. John has come to know God as this: one who has loved him, transformed him like fire, beckoned him into the night, and filled him with living water. In different ways, these poems declare that. 'You, my God, are this. You have been this to me. You are this for us. Thank you.'

In bearing witness in this way, John is fulfilling the vocation of all creation. Commenting on the lines from his *Spiritual Canticle*, *la musica callada, la soledad sonora*, 'hushed music, resounding solitude'; John declares that meek creation is in fact exploding with praise, loudly 'testifying to the reality of God'. Each work of God is proclaiming God's greatness in accord with what it has received, 'giving voice to that which in her is God' (CB 14.27, 25).



That might sum up the mystic's mission in the Church. Creation's mouthpiece, she gives voice to that which in her is God. John too does that: declares the God he has come to know.

To hear this witness is itself an education in prayer. Children can survive with scanty rations and hand-me-down clothing. But for a child to know joy, something more is needed. They must be treasured, nurtured in love. So with our prayer journey. Advice on what to do when we sit or kneel is important. But over and above any how, there is the horizon that makes the how worthwhile and true.

We know that John gives helpful advice for prayer. Prayer is a journey - a hill climb, or a flight by night - and he expertly offers provisions, direction. But prior to the how and the what, John's gift is a light cast throughout. 'You, Father, are this. You have been this to me. You are this for them.' That light, of praise to God, is John's fundamental gift.

### **That there is a word**

Revelation is a motive for wonder: not only what the word declares, but the fact that there is a word at all; that God has broken the skin of silence sealing off our world, and dialogue has begun.<sup>4</sup> John can help us retrieve this primordial amazement. He does so, because he takes the silence seriously. His praise has been tested by the barrenness of life.

Nowadays, we rightly expect information. 'The 7.44 from Bournemouth is running approximately 42 minutes late.' Delay is fair enough, but we do want to be told.

However, where persons are concerned, we cannot demand disclosure. You cannot force a child to like you. You cannot require another to love you, to let you into the inner regions of their heart.

Where God is concerned, all the more is this the case: the living God, who cannot be reduced to just one more, even the mightiest, element in my universe; who is not simply at my disposal; who cannot be constrained. That this God should open his heart to us is not automatic.

John of the Cross treasured this divine otherness.

You do very well to seek him always as hidden. You honor God greatly and indeed come close to him when you hold him to be nobler and deeper than anything you can attain. So ... do not be like many heartless people who have a low opinion of God: they think that when they cannot understand him or sense or feel him, he is further away - when the truth is more the opposite: it is when they understand him less clearly, that they are coming closer to him. (CB I.12)

John's praise was smelted in this furnace of God's otherness. Teresa read John's Toledo imprisonment in that way: it confronted her with a God whose ways seemed strange. How can he? she asks (with a typical feel for hygiene and for the friar's diminutive stature):

'I keep thinking about what they have done to Fray Juan de la Cruz. I can't understand how God can allow such things. Even you [Father Gracian] ... I don't

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know the whole story. He was in that prison for a whole nine months - he could scarcely fit, tiny as he is. No change of clothes for all that time, though he was on the point of death.<sup>5</sup>

'How can God allow such things?' John's experience there - as with any contradictory suffering - was a confrontation with a different kind of God, one who outstrips the boundaries of my mind.

Another letter of Teresa's takes things further: 'Awesome is the way God treats his friends - that is no insult, since he treated his Son the same way.'<sup>6</sup> What looked godless was in fact a gift of love, 'God treating his friends'. John describes a night-like obscurity that can submerge the spirit, where one's relationship with God feels cruelly in the balance. Yet he is convinced that this felt dissonance - the difference between narrow 'us' and a God who is infinitely spacious - is caused by the divine approach, not by divine anger or absence.<sup>7</sup> Night for John was an experience of God's love; but the love of the living God, awesome, mysterious, the holy God who cannot be constrained.

John's writing was born there. His prison song begins, 'Where are you? ... you have gone.' As *The Canticle* progresses, there is no permission to settle for something cheaper. John stays there, tasting his poverty, the experience of a God who cannot be mastered or bought:

Who is there to heal me?  
Give yourself now, fully and forever!  
I beg you now to send me  
No more of these your messengers;  
they cannot speak the word I long to hear.  
(C6)

'O God, your way is holy. What God is great as our God?' Night, the taste of God's silence, schools the soul in 'respect and courtesy'. Of God himself, John says, 'nothing could be said that would be like him.'<sup>8</sup>

John's God is not in the phone book, and there is no earthly reason why he should disclose himself.

### A world addressed

So here, wonder begins. Though nothing in us could lay claim to this, and no earthly reason could demand it, yet God, the living, awesome God, chooses, in his love, to communicate himself, to us. We live in an addressed world.

To love is to reveal; to risk disclosing the self.<sup>9</sup> God, loving us, is taking that risk. John of the Cross helps us to be amazed at this.

So in the course of the *The Spiritual Canticle*, after twelve stanzas of longing, asking, and anguish, at last, for a brief moment, ever so slightly, the Beloved draws

---

*Awesome is the way God treats his friends - that is no insult, since he treated his Son the same way.*

---

back the veil on who he, God, is. John's eyes meet other eyes (those he bore sketched deep within his heart, stanza twelve), and the sight, like lightning splitting the night, overwhelms him: 'take them away', the poet cries (stanza thirteen). But from that moment's encounter, a litany of praise - 'saying and singing the greatness of her Beloved'<sup>10</sup> - is released:

My Beloved: the mountains,  
Lonely wooded valleys,  
rare islands,  
thundering rivers,  
the whisper of love, carried by the breeze,  
The tranquil night,  
At one with the rising dawn,  
silent music,  
the roar of solitude,  
the supper that renews the heart in love.  
(CI4-15)

The prologue to the *The Canticle* emphasizes that any attempt to comment is going to look pale. Nevertheless, two things are worth noting.

Firstly, we have here John's testimony to the way God is. These stanzas I4-I5 of *The Canticle* are like the first news home, the first fruits, freshly cut, from the orchard of John's experience, before our fears and assumptions could turn them stale.

Here we have the real horizon of our prayer: all the promise of creation, the intimations of joy that we scarcely dare to hope in, all this, John says, the Beloved is for us.

Mountains are high, vast, immense, beautiful, fair, decked with flowers and circled with fragrance: my Beloved is these mountains for me ... Valleys ... are silent, lovely in their shade and morning freshness, flowing with sweet water ... my Beloved is these valleys for me ... (CB I4.6-7).

Here is access to the center of John's relationship with the God he has come to know: a God who comes, surprising, unconstrained, and gives all, filling all our potential for loving. 'You have been this to me. You are this for them.'

Secondly, one cannot miss the sense of wonder in John's language: wonder at the sheer presence of the Beloved; that he is, and here, and for me.

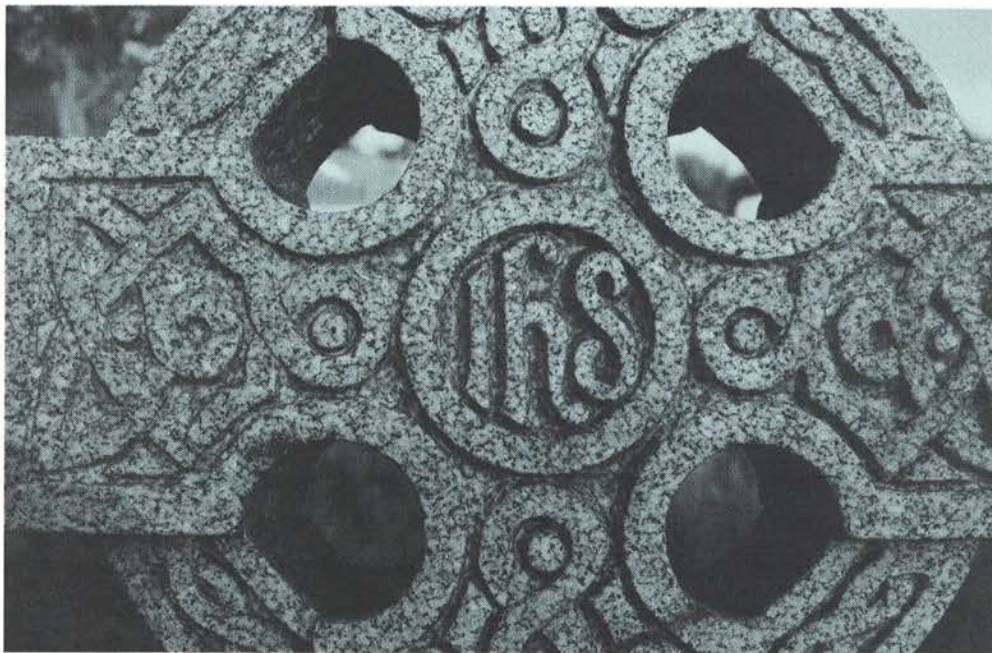
In particular, these stanzas convey a sense of breathlessness: there is no verb, no time for a verb, rather a series of word-splashes, a breathless response to a light that is eye-close. This is akin to the *loh!* of the *Living Flame* poem - an exclamation that for the poet spells wonder and praise.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand the lines are rich in color. Up to this point, the bride's anxious search for her beloved has been all movement and Endeavor. Rarely have adjectives been allowed to embellish the story.<sup>12</sup> Now, born of God's disclosure, there is a torrent of description (wooded valleys; rare islands; *thundering* rivers ... ), spraying colors

across the canvas. John's wonder is confident, radiant, like a bride whose smile blesses the guests because she knows herself accepted in the other's heart.

When John speaks of contemplative prayer, it is a case of a journey (albeit costly) into this: into freedom, into wonder. Growth in prayer means growth in presence. So prayer is likely to become simpler, because fuller; darker, because all-encompassing.

This is God's total presence making the person whole; light and love met by loving attentiveness.



In this state God is the agent...; he is giving her blessings at the level of spirit, that is, loving knowledge, his own knowledge and love together... Then the soul too should go on just in loving attentiveness to God,... Like someone opening their eyes in the attentiveness of love...<sup>13</sup>

'Simple and open loving attentiveness.' Childlike wonder at unearned disclosure. Contemplative prayer means living in a world addressed.

### Getting in touch with the real world

In this horizon, the universe looks different. People and events have a different weight.

There is a telling account of John's tact as superior in Segovia, during the last three years of his life (1588-1591):

In his house were some friars who - well, they were not the most perfect nor the most submissive in the Order, and other superiors had difficulty coping with them, and they all used to try to get rid of them so that community life would not deteriorate ... The venerable father took in all of these and gave them welcome, with a charity that came from the heart.<sup>14</sup>

'Oh - send him to John of the Cross. He won't mind ...' There is evidence here of someone who sees beneath the gauche exterior; who reads creation in a different way. The awkward, unsightly and smelly in fact came to him from the hand of

'the merciful and all powerful Father' (LF 2.16). Known in God, creation reveals its splendor.<sup>15</sup>

John's severe-sounding language about the nothingness of creation fits here. It rests on his sense of the delicacy of the universe; 'the sheer dependence, almost the precariousness' of existence.<sup>16</sup> For John, the created universe, from the slightest inflection of a thought to the course of a comet, is being given being by Another. It exists, because Another is looking at it. The world is *that* childlike: total dependence on the sustaining breath of God. Constantly we are being held out of disintegration by the loving gaze of our Father.

Hence John's language: to love creation apart from God, outside of God, in opposition to God, - with 'disordered longing' - is really to commit it to nothingness, to make it supremely ugly.<sup>17</sup> To love creation in God is to be part of something supremely tender.

Creation - the mountains round Granada; the night sky at Segovia; philosophy at Salamanca; gaolers, lice and nightmares in Toledo - is in fact bathed, held, in the gaze of his Beloved, and cannot but be a motive for praise:

Pouring out a thousand graces  
he passed this way in haste;  
he cast his gaze across the woodland  
bathed it with his face,  
and left it draped in beauty.  
(C5)

John's vision of things connects us with the real world.

### Grace from the inside

In the fullness of union, which the second half of *The Canticle* conveys (stanzas 22-35), the Beloved's first gift to the bride is insight into the love of the Crucified. She understands a drama in which she has long been involved. The betrothal she now enjoys in fact was hers in baptism, and baptism communicated the content of the Cross. The Bridegroom says to her:

Beneath the apple tree  
there it was that you became my bride.  
I gave you there my hand,  
and in that place, restored you;  
your mother's violation is redeemed.  
(C23)

Commenting, John declares that Jesus' mystery and the Church's sacraments are the place of betrothal. What *The Canticle* does is show this betrothal working itself



out, in a particularly gifted way, across a person's lifetime. 'It is all one; but this [the betrothal in *Canticle*] happens at the soul's pace, and so, little by little; that [on the Cross and in the font], at God's pace, and so all at once' (CB 23.3,6).

We have seen so far that John's central gift is his testimony to the way God is: pressing in to fill him. From there, he could read creation in its proper light, held on the hand of the Beloved. Now we want to emphasize that this horizon is our horizon. 'Mysticism is the interiority of faith.'<sup>18</sup> Mysticism is grace unfolded.

Traditionally, grace comprises two dimensions: God's gift of his Spirit, and his empowering us to enter the Spirit's domain. When God gives, he does not bulldoze, or patronize. He so loves us as to make us capable of being part of his love. Faith, charity, is sharing God's life, not just receiving handouts and staying a stranger.

If that is the 'interiority of faith', John of the Cross puts us inside that 'interior', and enables us, through his testimony, to in some way taste the reality of what we say we believe.

*En la interior bodega ...* In stanza 26 John takes us into 'the inner wine cellar'. Here, wine has no additives. God is being permitted to be, at last, 'what God wishes to be'.

God communicates himself to the soul in this inner union with such a real love, that no mother has ever cherished or caressed her child so tenderly; with this love of God no brother's love or friend's friendship could compare.

So tender and so real is the love of the all-encompassing Father that - how awesome this is, how amazing, what a wonder! - he truly submits himself to this humble, loving soul, so as to make her great, making her great in the kindness he shows her. It is as if he were her servant and she his Lord ... So profound is God's humility and gentleness! ... 'he will gird himself and have them sit at table, and he will come and serve them' (Lk 12:37). (CB 27.1).

This is grace from the inside. For God to love is to give, to give himself and so to share, and empower. And what this evokes in John is, precisely, wonder.

'Oh souls created for this greatness and summoned to it! What are you doing?' (CB 39.7). Knowing God like this, John cannot remain impassive. Wonder, gratitude, initiates a different way. His testimony invites us to shift from career to partnership, to marriage. His is not a lonely trudge through sludge, but an ice-skating duet, where each moment of the movement comes from the other's pulse.

Praise, gratitude, promote such a shift. They bathe life in a different perspective. John invites us to choose the love of the Son who betroths on the cross; choose the love of the Father who risks such disclosure. This is a season of prayer

to which John invites us: even when feelings are numb or confused, to 'say and sing', in faith, 'the greatness of the Beloved'.

'I believe you are this. You have been this to me. You are this to us. Thank you.'

1. See *Dios Habla en la Noche*, Madrid 1990, p.234.
2. See the first article in this series.
3. CB [Spiritual Canticle, second redaction] 14.2; 25.5.
4. Von Balthasar develops this beautifully, *Prayer* San Francisco 1986, pp .38-39.
5. Letter 243 (21/8/78 to Gracian); Teresa goes on to express envy at John's 'martyrdom'.
6. Letter 217 (11/3/78 to Gracian).
7. 2N 13.5 (see 2N 7); and 2N 5.1, 2N 10.
8. Ps 76.14 in 2A 8.3; IN 12.3; CB 26.4.
9. So Jean Vanier in an address in Sligo 1996.
10. CB 14.2.
11. *LB 2.5: estimacion, encarecimiento; see 2.15.*
12. Only in stanza 12 (*crystalina fuente*) do adjectives appear; so Damaso Alonso, in Colin Thompson *The Poet and the Mystic: A Study of the C6ntico Espiritual of San Juan de la Cruz*, Oxford 1977, p.82.
13. LF 3.32-33; see 2A 12.7-8; IN 9.8; SC 16.11; 39.12.
14. Jeronimo de san Jose, DHN 329 in *Dios Habla en la Noche*, p.329
15. See *Living Flame* 4.4-9.
16. Ross Collings *John of the Cross* Collegeville 1990, p.31. See all chapter 2, 'Creation "By the hand of the Beloved"'
17. See IA 4.4, 'compared with . . .'; IA 5.4, put 'in a balance with God'. '... acto desordenado de apetito' IA 6.1.
18. Henri de Lubac 'Mysticism and Mystery' in *Theological Fragments* San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1989, p.56.

## In Remembrance

**Alan Foster, OCDS** - a past President of the St. John of the Cross Fraternity in Ann Arbor, MI, began eternal life on October 18, 2006.

**Carmelo J. Ruta, OCDS** – Barnabas of the Blessed Sacrament, a member of the Our Lady of Mt. Carmel and St. Teresa of Jesus Community in New York City, began eternal life on December 20, 2006

**Rev. Joe Bitar**, Spiritual Assistant for the Our Lady of the Paraclete Community of Detroit, MI, began eternal life on January 14, 2007.

**Gloria Dietrich, OCDS**, age 72, began eternal life on January 7, 2007. She was a dedicated member of the Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Community in Ellsworth, Maine for 25 years and was a former community President.

**Elizabeth (Bette) Schmidt, OCDS** – Bl. Elizabeth of the Trinity, was professed in May 2002 and entered eternal life on February 24, 2007. She was a member of the St. Therese of the Child Jesus, Little Flower Community in Cherry Hill, NJ.

# Relationship with God and with others in John of the Cross

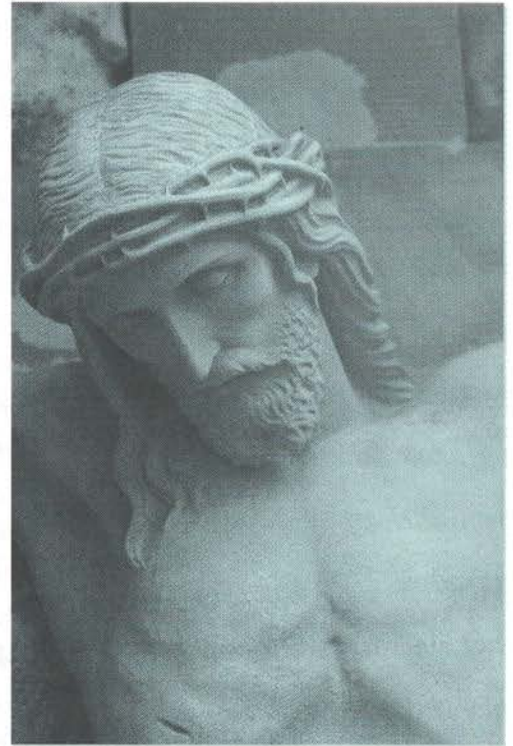
*Kathleen A. Flynn, OCDS*

Although John writes about the passionate pursuit of God, the God he pursues appears to many readers as so totally Other as to be unknowable. How would John answer this challenge? Also, John's passion for God would seem at times to exclude human love as a distraction at best, or even as disordered and in conflict with a single-hearted love. What do John's writings and his personal life reveal about the role of friendship and human love and its relationship to love of God?

God, in John's understanding as in the Church's understanding, is essentially incomprehensible to the human mind. The things we do know about him are only tiny pieces of an infinite reality. He is without beginning or end; the Creator of all that is; he is Father, Son and Spirit, a community of persons, yet one God; in Jesus he is fully human and fully divine; he is just yet merciful; he is Love; ...

God is so far beyond our understanding that we cannot grasp him in any real way. St. John of the Cross teaches that any image or concept of God we might have is grossly inadequate because it leaves out so much more than it depicts. That is why, as we progress in the spiritual life, John says we must let go of our images and go by a way of unknowing. Our minds are too limited to understand much about God. We must abandon our natural ways of knowing so that God can give us knowledge of himself through other means. God is totally beyond us, but he also has a great desire to be known and loved by us. He wants us to participate, to share in his very life, a life of love. (This life, perhaps, could be conceptualized as a continual flow of self-giving love, an exchange of love, within a community. Love continually poured out by all and therefore received by all. An example of an image infinitely inferior to the reality it is meant to describe.)

John seeks a God who wishes to be known, who wants to reveal himself and share his life with his people. This makes possible what would otherwise be impossible, an intimate relationship, union with the unknowable God through love. In this scenario, God does most of the work, we can do no more than desire this love relationship above all else, and try to cooperate and remove the obstacles that stand in its way. We cannot ever know God completely in this life, but we can come to a real though obscure knowledge of him through this gift of his grace. What we



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*God is unknowable  
and yet knowable,  
just one more  
paradox in a faith  
grounded in  
paradox. Seek and  
you will find, but  
not in the way you  
expected.*

---

cannot obtain on our own, he freely chooses to give to anyone who “goes and sells all that he has” in order to gain the “pearl of great price” (see Mt. 13:46).

Humankind was created by God and for God, and as St. Augustine says, our hearts are restless until they rest in him. Our ultimate human fulfillment lies in spending eternity with the God who created us, nothing else will satisfy. John’s writings can help guide us to this fulfillment, but in order to come to know God, we must let go of our human ways of knowing and perceiving, and allow God to reveal himself to our spirit, a way of knowing with which we are not familiar and in which there are no clear perceptions. So “to come to the knowledge you have not, you must go by a way in which you know not” (Kavanaugh, III). God is unknowable and yet knowable, just one more paradox in a faith grounded in paradox. Seek and you will find, but not in the way you expected.

In his dealings with God and with others, St. John of the Cross, as the saying goes, had his heart in the right place. He knew what was most important, where he should seek fulfillment in life. Having grown up very poor materially, he must have learned at an early age to look beyond the things of the world for meaning in life.

Human relationships were important to John. He cared deeply for his mother and his brother Francisco, both of whom lived with him on occasions throughout his life. He was well loved and respected by other religious, friars and nuns alike, as well as by lay people, and he returned this love and affection.

The friendship and collaboration between St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Jesus is well known. Although they did not always see eye to eye, there was deep respect, love and a spiritual bond between them. St. Teresa of Jesus said of Fray John in the *Memorias Historiales*, that “she loved him tenderly because he had a candid and pure soul and was a man without malice or cunning.” John of the Cross, for his part, stated when in Andalusia after his imprisonment, “after that whale swallowed me up and vomited me out on this alien port, I have never merited to see her again or the saints up there,” and he “carried about with him a portrait of Teresa” (*God Speaks*, 153-154).

St. John of the Cross also became a collaborator and close friend of Ana de Jesús (Lobera), a nun. “The two Carmelites got to know each other and began collaborating in Beas where Anne of Jesus and the whole community found in Fray John a true spiritual father and director. One nun recalled that at times, when the Saint was present, Anne of Jesus delegated her powers as prioress to him and arranged that each one ask for their permissions from him. In this way he had the opportunity to learn more about the real life of the Sisters, the needs and desires of each one” (*God Speaks*, 224). Later in Granada, at the request of Ana de Jesús, John wrote the commentary on the *Spiritual Canticle*. He reveals his intimate knowledge of her deepest self in the Prologue to this commentary, in which he states, “I hope that, although some scholastic theology is used here in reference to the soul’s interior converse with God, it will not prove vain to speak in such a manner to the pure of spirit. Even though your Reverence lacks training in scholastic theology,

through which the divine truths are understood, you are not wanting in mystical theology, which is known through love and by which these truths are not only known but at the same time enjoyed" (Kavanaugh, 470). Later, when Ana de Jesús was questioned during the process for the beatification of John of the Cross, she would give no information. When asked why by her then confessor, Hilario de San Agustín, she said "that she didn't dare speak of such matters for fear that by doing so she would be exalting herself and manifesting something of the graces she had received. She gave him to understand that when she went to confession to the Venerable Father John of the Cross, God often revealed secrets that he had communicated to them" (*God Speaks*, 225).

The love and concern of St. John of the Cross encompassed men and women, children and adults, religious and lay, wealthy and poor. While confessor for the nuns at the Incarnation in Ávila, he taught children in the barrio Christian prayers and doctrine and how to read and write. He took special care of fellow friars who were ill. And through his ministry as confessor and spiritual guide, he helped people from all walks of life.

John's relationships with others were guided and enlightened by his relationship with God. The love he strove to share with others was God's love. He cared most deeply for the ultimate good of the persons with whom he was involved, the good of their souls in relationship with God. God was the center, goal and purpose of his life, and everything else he did flowed from that center.

St. John of the Cross, in his writings, spoke a great deal about the need for detachment from everything we might cling to that is not God. In *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, he stated that "By not becoming attached to anyone, ... a person remains unencumbered and free to love all rationally and spiritually, which is the way God wants them to be loved" (Kavanaugh, 308). Without this detachment, a person is like a dog tied with a chain. John writes, "Those who are attached spend all their time going to and fro about the snare to which their heart is tied, and even with effort they can hardly free themselves for a short while from this snare of thinking about and finding joy in the object to which their heart is attached" (Kavanaugh, 303). St. John of the Cross knew the importance of establishing or maintaining a "right relationship" with all created things. God, as the Creator of all, must be put first, above all else. In this detachment or "right relationship" with things, we "acquire a clearer knowledge of them and a better understanding of both natural and supernatural truths concerning them" (Kavanaugh, 302). When we are attached, we cannot love either God or others freely, because our judgment, our vision, is clouded by our own desires and "perceived" needs. In order to love all with a true, pure love, we must let go of all, so that we are free. Then, united with God, the source of all love, we can love all with His love, and truly give to each what they most need from us. John's passionate love for God did not exclude others, but rather freed him to love others with God's love, a pure selfless love, wanting what is best for each individual person.

John of the Cross passionately sought a God who is essentially unknowable, totally Other, but who passionately wants to be known and share his life of love with us.

He proved this through the incarnation and the passion, death and resurrection of his Son. The unknowable God made himself knowable through his Son and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Everything was created and is sustained by God, and nothing can truly be known outside of Him. So the fullness of life and love, of relationship, can only be found in God. And what is unknowable on a purely human, natural level, is knowable through the gift of God. John of the Cross sought first a relationship of love with God, which in turn enlightened and grounded in God's love all his human relationships, making them more than a purely human relationship. Individuals, who live in and for God, "bring" the Holy Spirit, God's wisdom and love, to their relationships with others. God is then the principle force and guide in the relationship, doing His work through his servant.

All good comes from God, so all we do must be grounded in God if it is to bear fruit for the Kingdom. All things are good and bear fruit when in "right relationship." "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find" (Mt. 7:7) the unknowable God. First, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Mt. 22:37) and then you will be able to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt. 22:39) in the fullest sense. St. John of the Cross did not see human love that was grounded in God as a distraction or obstacle to love of God, rather he saw it as a way to manifest love for God and reflect God's love to the world.

Love rooted in God is always good. Love that is selfish or sinful is not really love, and is contrary to love of God. To truly love God or man, God must be active in the relationship, we cannot do it on our own. If God is present, and we cooperate, he will purify us of all that is not of him and bring us to union with him through love. Then God's love will be the force that animates all that we do, the love we give to others, and we will become a part of that community of continually flowing agape love that is the Kingdom of God.

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# Elizabeth of the Trinity: A Life of Love

Conrad De Meester

## “A New Light is Shining”

**O**n November 9, 2006, it will be exactly a century since the death of Elizabeth Catez, Sr. Elizabeth of the Trinity, in the Carmel of Dijon in France. She was aged only twenty-six years and four months. Three years later, there appeared a first biographical sketch, called the *Souvenirs*, written by her prioress Mother Germaine of Jesus. Since then, the name of Elizabeth of the Trinity has gone all round the world, thanks especially to her prayer *O my God, Trinity whom I adore*. Gradually, a number of her writings, already widely quoted in the *Souvenirs*, became known. For the centenary of her birth in 1980, I was able to produce the critical edition of her complete works. On November 25, 1984, Elizabeth was beatified by John Paul II. The Pope said on this occasion: “With blessed Elizabeth a new light is shining for us, a new certain and sure guide is presented to us.”

It would be impossible to evoke, in one talk or article, all the riches of Elizabeth’s brilliant life and teaching. For that, I am taking the liberty of referring readers to my objective and critical biography of Elizabeth which is due to appear for the centenary of November 9, 2006 and also to a volume of documents containing eyewitness reminiscences of Elizabeth. The role of this article, which is inevitably incomplete, is to present in general the personality of Elizabeth and her spiritual development, with special emphasis on her life as a young laywoman—a young saint in the world—partly because this part of her journey is less well-known. This account will focus on Elizabeth’s experience and spiritual thought—fruits of a particular charism and of an attentive listening to the revealed Word.

## Patroness of Inner Music and Tourism!

Let us look first at her identity card! Elizabeth Catez, the eldest daughter of Captain Joseph Catez and Marie Rolland, was born on the Sunday morning of July 18, 1880 in the military camp of Avor near Bourges, right in the heart of France. Military families are often moved around, and after a stay at Auxonne in the Burgoyne region, the Catez family took up residence in Dijon. There, two and a half years





after Elizabeth, a little sister, Marguerite, was born; she was given the nickname “Guite” while Elizabeth would often be called “Sabeth”. In Dijon, the family lived in three successive houses. When Elizabeth was twenty-one, the Carmel would be her sixth home in total—the final one.

Elizabeth’s father died in her arms when she was seven years old. From then on, each summer Madame Catez took her two children the length and breadth of France for holidays lasting two to three months: one year they would go to the south, the next year to the east, even as far as Switzerland. Elizabeth traveled a great deal and met a number of families with whom they were friends; everywhere she got to know more people. She saw the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean, visited France’s big cities, admired the Pyrenees and the Alps, the lakes and the forests, and became acquainted with the peaceful atmosphere of the little villages in the south of France or in the Vosges and the Jura. When Elizabeth is canonized, she will be a good candidate for patron saint of tourists—especially of inner tourism, as we shall see.

She could also become patron saint of artists, for from the age of eight she had been enrolled at the Conservatory of Dijon; she also received extra tuition at home, of a rather modest kind, in literature and general education. At the age of thirteen, she won her final First Prize diploma at the piano. The local papers often sang the praises of her great musical talent. But Elizabeth could be a patroness especially of interior musicians, who sing “the praise of glory” of God, as St. Paul tells us (Eph 1:12); this phrase would become very dear to Elizabeth and she would take it for her “new name” in heaven (cf. Rv 2:17).

## “Love and Truth Walk in Your Presence”

Elizabeth possessed two other precious talents, more important than her musical gift: a heart that was immensely rich and an extraordinary sense of truth. The words “love” and “heart” recur constantly in her writings, hundreds of times. “God has given me a very tender, very faithful heart, and when I love it is not just a little!” she wrote (L 65); “He has given [my heart] such a great power to love” (L 178); “He has placed in my heart a thirst for the infinite and such a great need for love that He alone can satisfy it” (L 169).

Besides, this powerful heart was lodged in “an ardent nature and anger”, as her mother said, when evoking Elizabeth as a child over-flowing with energy that was neither controlled nor directed. How the sweet little thing could get into a rage! “My Elizabeth is a pure devil,” wrote her mother about the child whom she loved to distraction. What an explosive character! “Hot-headed,” her sister would say, “rages, absolutely real rages, very much a devil!” So twice we have the word “devil” on the lips of those who were closest to her. Even Fr. Sauvageot, who prepared her for her first communion, assures us: “Elizabeth Catez will be an angel or a demon.” There would be no middle path.

Her life story reveals numerous anecdotes in connection with her legendary rages. Her mother would have recourse more than once to this serious punishment: the refusal of a mother’s goodnight kiss. And to the supreme threat: If you carry on like this, you won’t make your first communion—this first communion which she would make at the age of ten years and nine months.

## An Inner Secret

Now, the prospect of first communion was essential for Elizabeth; it was, so to speak, a matter of life or death. For Elizabeth, as for Therese of Lisieux or Catherine of Siena, the intense interior life began very early on. Ever since her childhood, little Sabeth was living an inner secret: her relationship to God. From time to time, God visited her with the grace of his presence. From her own testimonies, as well as the mystical breath which would flow throughout her entire life, we can guess that Elizabeth must have experienced, in her earliest years, interior visits from the Lord—this coming of God into her heart in a way that was so sudden and surprising, so sweet and heavenly, that the child intuitively understood: it is Jesus here who is visiting me within, who is filling my heart with his loving presence.

And this interior visit from the Lord was welcomed with a limitless assent. Already, there opened before her the prospect of a future of belonging totally to Jesus. A belonging that was as direct as possible. As intense as could possibly be. In this light, we can understand the words she confided about the period before her first communion (that is, before her ten years and nine months): “I loved prayer very much and loved God so much that, even before my first communion, I could not understand how anyone could give their heart to another, and from that time I was resolved to love him alone and to live for him alone.” She had heard a call,

and her positive response would make her, from this moment on, intensely happy. From now on, she carried a royal secret in her expanded heart. It was Love who did this, and to Love she wished to give only love.

### Containing the Volcano

So, what about her legendary rages? Here, we see revealed a second fundamental feature of Elizabeth's character: her thirst for truth, her innate uprightness. Elizabeth was basically a being of truth. Once she had seen a light—for example, that the supreme nobility is to love, and that it is therefore vitally important to avoid anything

that can hurt our neighbor—she threw herself firmly into organizing her life around this law. Her first governess speaks of her “iron will”. It was a will enlightened by an intelligence whose primary goal was to love; this intelligence would not be slow to tame the wild growth of an apparently inexhaustible force.

But it was a hard struggle. Elizabeth was a volcano! (In passing: at the age of twelve she wrote that she would love to visit Italy in order to see the Vatican and . . . Vesuvius!) Only, she learnt to control

herself perfectly, to contain the burning lava within herself. We might look ahead for a moment to a passage from her *Diary*, written at the age of eighteen and a half. We see in it just how much Elizabeth remained a volcano and the extent to which she knew how to control herself: “Today I had the joy of offering to my Jesus several sacrifices concerning my dominant fault, but what they cost me! . . . It seems to me, whenever I receive an unjust remark, that I can feel my blood boiling in my veins, my whole being rebels! . . . But Jesus was with me, I heard his voice in the depths of my heart, and then I was ready to endure everything out of love for Him!” (D I). Simultaneously, then, both anger and the thought of Jesus rose up in her; the request of Jesus and the response of Sabeth. The least failing was immediately put right. Truth and love were the two wings carrying her upwards.

We return now to Sabeth at the age of nine, ten, eleven. Once she had understood that her tantrums were ruining the atmosphere at home, she did the impossible, in order to better contain the lava of her volcano. Witnesses speak of a kind of “conversion” around this age. They tell of how, often, with tears in her eyes, she would bite her lips so as to hold back all angry words and violent reactions.

### “God Took Possession of My Heart”

April 19th, 1891. Her first communion at the parish church of St Michael in Dijon! But what was happening? The mischievous little girl burst into tears.

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*“Today I had the joy of offering to my Jesus several sacrifices concerning my dominant fault, but what they cost me! . . . It seems to me, whenever I receive an unjust remark, that I can feel my blood boiling in my veins, my whole being rebels! . . . But Jesus was with me, I heard his voice in the depths of my heart, and then I was ready to endure everything out of love for Him!”*

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## REDISCOVER CARMEL'S RULE WHERE IT WAS BORN



You are invited to join a small pilgrimage to the Holy Land from October 16 -28, 2007 under the direction of Fr. John Sullivan, OCD.

This trip is styled to celebrate the 8th Centenary of our Rule and to experience the biblical setting of that blessed place.

Contact Illume Travel, Boston,  
for registering or more information:  
Telephone 1-800-368-6757  
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Throughout the whole Mass she was completely overwhelmed.

At last! Jesus had come into her heart for the very first time . . . It was an unforgettable moment for Elizabeth, this first visit from Jesus, “the living bread that comes down from heaven” (cf. Jn 6:51). Seven years later, she would again write about this great moment: “God took possession of my heart, / So much and so well that since that hour, / Since that mysterious exchange... / I aspired only to give my life. / Only to give back a little of his great love / To the Beloved of the Eucharist / Who was resting in my feeble heart, / Flooding it with all his favors” (P 47). In response to receiving the Body of Christ for the very first time, this intelligent, ardent child, to whom so much had been given, consecrated her life to Jesus. Later, she would confide that on “that great day” of “the first encounter”, “we gave ourselves to each other completely!” (L I78). When the little girls left St. Michael’s church—they had not yet eaten and were ravenous for the festive table awaiting them— Elizabeth whispered to her best friend, Marie-Louise Hallo: “I am not hungry . . . Jesus has fed me.” Hungry? Of course! More than ever! But hungry for love. Hungry for the highest love. For Love par excellence, the source of all true love.

### **A Limitless Gift**

And so life went on. Music studies, first concerts, numerous meetings with her young friends from the town, among whom she was the natural leader of the



group, traveling, holidays. But above all, her already intense friendship with Jesus. One young friend, Louise Recoing, testifies: "At that age, she was thirteen or fourteen, what always struck me about her was her so ardent hunger for holy communion. She thought only about the days when she would be allowed to receive Our Lord, she counted them, spoke to me about them every time we met and made my own hunger grow while telling me about hers. The time she spent in church always seemed to her to be too short, she was absorbed in prayer and to see her there did one good."

Canon Angles, Elizabeth's great confidant during her vacations in the parish of Saint-Hilaire in the south of France, described her as "always at the head of the group" during excursions, and also called her "a saint, in the broadest meaning of the word. Elizabeth was holy from her earliest years. I affirm that she never went back on her word . . . All that I can certify is that after (her first communion), not once did I see her at prayer, not once did I hear her confession, not once did I give her communion without being edified and murmuring: 'This child is an angel.'"

Elizabeth was about to turn fourteen when, one morning after communion, the presence of the Lord became so pressing that she made a limitless gift of herself,

## The Prophetic Dimension of Our Carmelite Rule

In the year 2007, Carmelites will celebrate the eight-hundredth anniversary of their origins in the Holy Land and their Rule of St. Albert. The order began in the thirteenth century when a small group of inhabitants of the Latin Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem began living as hermits on Mount Carmel near present day Haifa. Although we have no detailed documentation as to the precise motives that drew these men to a life of prayer and community on Mount Carmel, we believe it was principally due to their longing to follow Jesus Christ in the spirit of the Old Testament prophet Elijah, and a desire to take up an inner, spiritual warfare in order to promote God's kingdom. Our conference will celebrate this early history of the Carmelite order, endeavoring to show its relevance for life today in the United States.



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

Fr. Culligan will insist that the prophetic call of the Carmelite Rule today includes, in addition to prayer and interior combat with evil, following Jesus Christ's way of peacemaking. This includes confronting America's disordered attachment to military power that diminishes available resources for humanitarian development, promoting the Catholic Church's teaching on peace and justice, and calling people to moral and spiritual renewal.

#### General Session Presenters:

Andrew J. Bacevich, Ph.D.  
Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, O.Carm.  
John F. Haught, Ph.D.  
Craig Morrison, O.Carm.  
Vilma Seelaus, O.C.D.  
John Sullivan, O.C.D.

#### Workshop Presenters:

Michael H. Crosby, OFMCap.  
Peter Hinde, O.Carm.  
Edward McCormack, Ph.D.

#### An Evening of Musical Reflection:

Claire Sokol, O.C.D.  
Clorinda Stockalper, O.C.D.  
Mary Margaret Yascolt, O.C.D.

### Conference Registration:

A form to register for this conference is available on our website: [www.carmeliteinstitute.org](http://www.carmeliteinstitute.org). Click on *Conferences* and then click on *Upcoming Conferences* to download the registration form.

### Flight Information:

American Airlines is offering a 5% discount on the lowest published fare, if you indicate that you are attending the Carmelite Institute Conference. Call AA meeting service desk at 1-800-433-1790 to arrange for the discount.

### Hotel Reservations:

The conference will be held at the Crowne Plaza at the Crossings in Warwick, Rhode Island. Conference rate for rooms is \$119.00 plus a 13% tax per night. Rooms are double occupancy. To receive this discounted rate, indicate that you are attending the Carmelite Institute Conference.

Crowne Plaza at the Crossings  
801 Greenwich Avenue  
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1-800-227-6963  
The hotel is 4 miles from the T.H. Green Airport and there is a complimentary shuttle to the hotel.



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

promising to Jesus virginity for life, so as to belong to him directly and forever. Very soon afterwards, again after communion, the word "Carmel" rose up in her heart, thus giving a definite form to the manner in which her future would take shape. Elizabeth loved children and would admire the happiness of her friends when they were about to get married. But as for herself? She was married. To Jesus. In an indisputable and definitive way. She never went back on this, even though she would meet handsome boys full of admiration for her, even though she would later receive several offers of marriage. Several . . . .

### "Jesus, of You My Soul is Jealous . . ."

Elizabeth was fourteen years old. Fifty-four percent of her life was already over. At fourteen, her life began to move in an accelerated, breathtaking way. By chance, she began to write, a first *Diary*, which she destroyed. Then *Poems from her Youth*,

## 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**

**September 28-30 2007, Friday to Sunday. District 6 retreat: "Foundations for Spiritual Life" by Fr. Paul Fohlin, OCD (covers the Scriptural, Eremitical and Monastic traditions which both ground and explain Carmelite asceticism and spiritual experiences) at the Franciscan Guest House, St. Anthony's Monastery, in Kennebunk, ME. COST: Double: \$130; Single (very limited): \$185; Deposit: \$50 (non-refundable) Final payment due on or before July 16, 2007 For map & views of retreat house only: <http://www.franciscanguesthouse.com> Contact: Doug Treadwell OCDS, 451 Lowell Street Methuen, MA 01844-2249; e-mail:josangels@comcast.net Or Norma Hurrell OCDS 26 Shaw Street, Lawrence, MA 01843-3521 tereseofmary@comcast.net**



which, from a technical and strictly poetic point of view, have more or less no value. But their great worth is that she expressed in them, for herself alone, what was animating her within. Just like a rose, a new interior life was blossoming, more intense than ever. "Jesus, of you my soul is jealous . . ." (P 4). "Jealous", in the sense of an ardent desire, ready to walk through flames. From now on, Elizabeth Catez suffered from a lasting, inextinguishable love of Jesus, that of a consuming fire propelling her to give herself without reserve.

Carmel, then, the object of her dreams for the future . . . Elizabeth had only to walk two hundred yards to reach her neighbors, the Carmelites of the Boulevard Carnot. She could see this monastery all the time from her bedroom window. She had only to leap over the wall. And even if she was only fifteen, sixteen, she dreamt of entering there soon. Why make him wait, the One who was the Sun of her heart?

On this point, she had been very much mistaken. Madame Catez, her mother, was a practicing Christian, a pious woman. She liked very much the writings of Teresa of Avila, and it was she who had often spoken to Elizabeth about the reformer of Carmel. But for her elder daughter, the apple of her eye, to disappear forever behind the monastery grille, that would not happen! Never! And so began for Elizabeth Catez—who in the meantime was a brilliant First Prize winner of the Conservatory of Dijon—a long wait of seven years, not without suffering. This lengthy period would be very important for the maturing of the prophetic charism of the young saint.

### **"There" and "Tomorrow"**

And so, Elizabeth no longer spoke openly of her desire with this mother whom she loved tenderly, very deeply. She could only wait, hope, pray. But when she reached the age of sixteen, her long wait began to weigh heavily. We see from her poems how, unconsciously, Elizabeth was taking refuge in a nostalgic longing for the house of her dreams, that Carmel where she could finally realize fully her contemplative love of Jesus. There, tomorrow, she would give her full measure: there, in the monastery, where nothing would distract her from the Beloved.

For the moment, she could only resign herself to exercising patience in the midst of her apparently so enjoyable existence. Her mother was an unshakable rock. What was worse, Madame Catez's health began to go downhill. It seemed that Elizabeth, as the elder daughter, would have to give up her own future in order to care for her. In those days, people did not live so long, and there were few structures in place for elderly people. So it was goodbye forever to the contemplative dream!

### **"Here" and "Now"**

In the meantime, a maturing process was taking place in the young Elizabeth Catez: she was gaining a true understanding of her position. She grasped—and so

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*At the age of seventeen, the young Elizabeth had made a fundamental decision, to which she would always remain unconditionally faithful: the absolute and consistent choice of the will of God, whatever it was.*

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young!—that true love consists in committing oneself radically, completely, to whatever the Lord asks in a concrete situation. True love is not about loving “there” and “tomorrow”,—elsewhere and at another time — but “*here*” and “*now*”. If God wanted Elizabeth to say goodbye to her contemplative convent, well then, that is how it would be.

Elizabeth accepted! She understood the new light with which God was inspiring her and followed it without hesitation. “What you want, I want too” (P 44), she now wrote. The exact “will” of God and “*abandonment*” to all his concrete desires now triumphed in her writings. At the age of seventeen, the young Elizabeth had made a fundamental decision, to which she would always remain unconditionally faithful: the absolute and consistent choice of the will of God, whatever it was. A profound transformation had taken place in her. Here, Elizabeth became the young saint, the holy young laywoman before being a holy young Carmelite—even if the growth in sanctity would be completed only at the very moment of entering heaven.

### “In the Midst of the World”

December 8, 1897, the feast of Mary Immaculate. On that day, there is a very important and symbolic coincidence in Elizabeth’s writings. It is striking that for the first time she formulated both her unconditional belonging to the concrete will of God and also her desire to offer her heart to Jesus as his “dwelling place”; it would be a “solitary garden” which Jesus would “visit often”, indeed “remain in constantly”, so as to make it “at every hour” “his pure dwelling place” (P 43). There, Elizabeth would live an unfailing friendship with Jesus, in his presence which she sought continually. “For my heart is always with Him, / And night and day it thinks unceasingly / Of this heavenly and divine Friend / To whom it would like to prove its love” (P 43). This unconditional entering into the concrete will of God—here and now, and whatever it would be in the future— would therefore have incisive consequences for her prophetic message destined for others.

We note first that Elizabeth *interiorized* her contemplation more and more. Her attention was directed less and less to prayer in the monastery “there” and “tomorrow”: rather, it shifted towards what she would call “the cell of my heart”: “may it be your little Bethany; come and rest in it, I love you so much” (IN 5). She would write at the age of eighteen: “you who have taken my whole heart, you who live in it continually and have made it your dwelling place, you whom I feel, whom I can see with the eyes of my soul in the depths of this poor heart” (D 60). “O you so humble of heart, fashion it at last so that it may be your beloved dwelling place, so that you may come and take your rest in it” (D II9).

Secondly, she in one sense *secularized* her contemplation, in that she lived her relationship with the Lord in the midst of the world. She prayed in an ordinary house and on street corners. She encountered the Lord when she was traveling, at

the piano, dancing, playing tennis, helping at home, visiting the sick, going to rehearsals of the St. Michael's choir, giving catechism lessons, taking on the role of leader of a club for the children of workers in the tobacco factory—a group for which she invented a name that was totally original in the history of Christian piety: “Our Lady of Tobacco”! She would write: “It seems to me that nothing can distract one from Him, when one acts for Him alone, always in his holy presence, under this divine gaze which penetrates into the innermost place of the soul; even in the midst of the world one can listen to Him in the silence of a heart which wants to belong only to Him!” (L 38).



Thirdly, she *reduced* her contemplation to the *essential*. Her spirituality was extremely contemplative, its character not very “monastic” as such. Without the setting of a monastery or the religious habit, Elizabeth developed a spirituality on a basis common to all Christians: faith in the presence of God just as Jesus revealed it to us, a listening to his word in scripture. Later, Paul and John would become her great masters. That is why, later on as a Carmelite, she would be able to repeat forcefully to her friends that they as lay people could also, thanks to the grace of their baptism, live in intimacy with the Trinity in “the Heaven of their soul”.

### Elizabeth's Longings

And never did the inner song come to an end. In her Diary, she repeated seven times that she loved her Lord “to death” and prayed: “my heart is burning with such a love for you, that I cannot live calm and happy, when you, my Beloved Bridegroom, are suffering” (D 95); “for a long time, ah, how I have longed to bring souls back to you . . . My heart burns and is consumed for this work of redemption” (D 43). She prayed for the conversion of Monsieur Chapuis with as much ardor as Therese of Lisieux for the conversion of Pranzini.

These are texts written at the age of eighteen. They reveal her passion for life and show what she did with her own suffering: she threw it into the fire of love. She threw herself, too, into this fire of love: that was her prayer of Pentecost 1898, when she was not yet eighteen. She asked the Holy Spirit, “brilliant light”

and "supreme Beauty", that he might "Consume with (his) divine flames / this body, and this heart, and this soul! / This bride (of) the Trinity / Whpires only to his will!" (P 54).

Finally, when Elizabeth had already said her great "yes" to God who keeping her as a laywoman in an ordinary, everyday life, there came the great prise . . . In March 1899, a full-scale "mission" was preached in all the par of Dijon. After speaking to the preacher, Madame Catez eventually came to that she must no longer stand in the way of her daughter's desire and the pl their God. In tears she gave her consent: Elizabeth could enter Carmel. W little reservation: she would have to wait just a bit longer . . . until the ag twenty-one. That was not much more: twenty-eight months, eight hundred nineteen days, some nineteen thousand hours . . . Deeply moved, the happy l abeth could not believe her ears. And there were many things more before great day arrived of her entrance into the monastery.

On the morning of August 2, 1901, Elizabeth knelt down one last time fore the portrait of her father who was in heaven, then left home. For the time in her life she walked along the Boulevard Carnot. After Mass and c munion, she crossed the threshold of Carmel, the house of prayer of her dre of the dream of God for her. She did not know that eighty percent of her had already passed . . .

1. The talk was delivered at the Teresianum in Rome on March 6, 2006 and has been slightly revised for publication in Mount Cannel. It is translated here by Joanne Mosley
2. For more on Bl. Elizabeth go to the website of the Carmel of Dijon: <http://www.elizabeth-dijon.org>

*Part II will be in the next issue of the Clarion.*

## OCDS NEWSLETTER

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