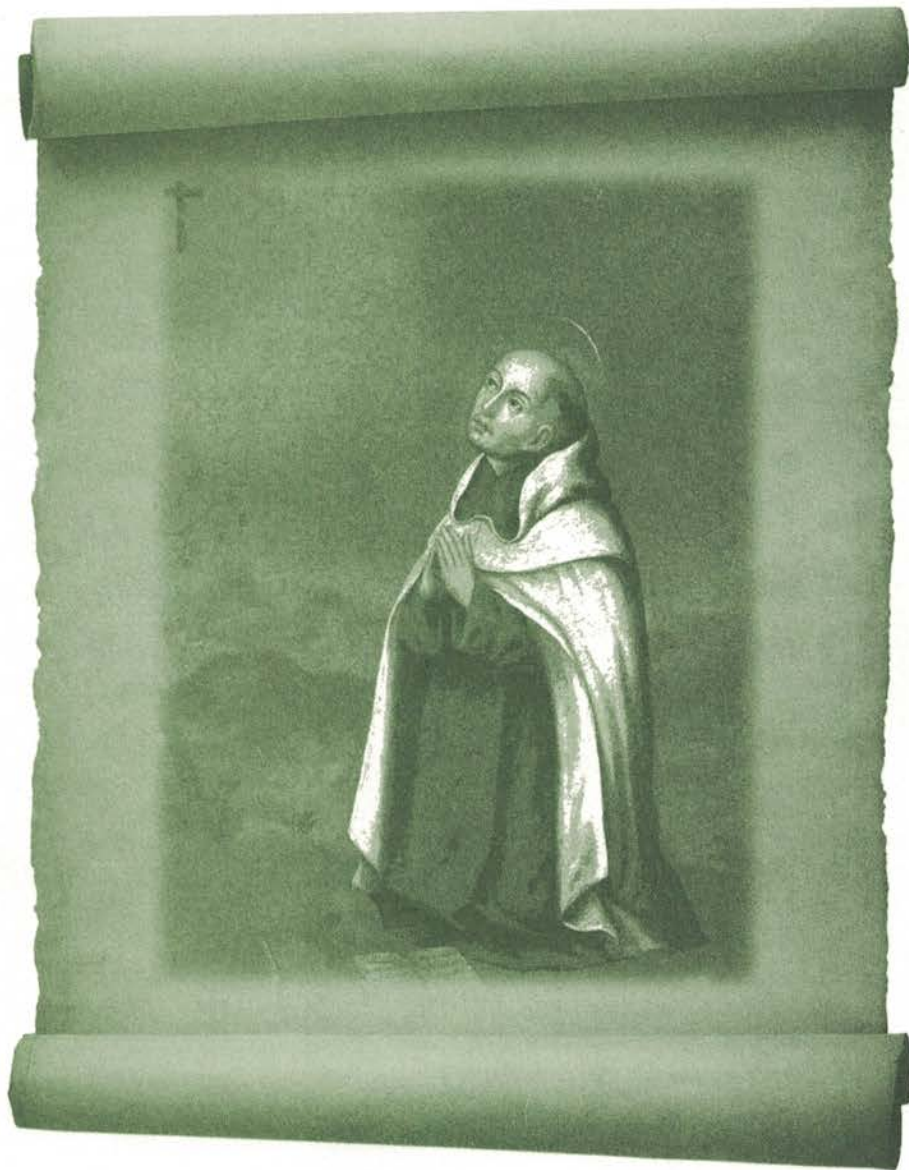


# CARMEL CLARION

September - October 2007 Volume XXIII No. 5



*The Spirituality of  
St. John of the Cross*

# CARMEL CLARION

September - October 2007 Volume XXIII No. 5

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

I

Editorial

Fr. Regis, O.C.D.

2

John of the Cross: A Personality Profile

Kevin Culligan, OCD

I4

News from the Northeast Region

I4

In Remembrance

I5

"I Lost Myself, and Was Found:"

John of the Cross for Today

Edward Ruscil

25

Reminders

---

**CARMEL CLARION** is a Catholic newsletter published bi-monthly by the Discalced Carmelite Secular Order, Washington Province, with central office in Washington, D.C.

**Discalced Carmelite Friars**

2131 Lincoln Road, NE, Washington, D.C. 20002-1101

Phone: 202-269-3792 Fax: 202-269-3792

E-mail: [ocdswash@juno.com](mailto:ocdswash@juno.com)

**Editor** Fr. Regis Jordan OCD

**Staff** Liane Melvin OCDS  
Rosemary Moak OCDS  
Suzanne Treis OCDS

**Provincial Delegates** Fr. Regis Jordan OCD  
Fr. Paul Fohlin OCD  
Fr. John Grennon OCD

**Change of address:**

Please notify us in advance.

E-mail: [ocdsclarion@hotmail.com](mailto:ocdsclarion@hotmail.com)

\$3.00 per issue, or \$10.00 US per year.

Canadian subscription: \$20.00 US per year.

Foreign subscription: \$30.00 US per year.

Contents may be duplicated if not sold for profit.

Request subscription at:

<http://www.carmelclarion.com>

Official Website: OCDS Washington Province

[www.ocdswashprov.org](http://www.ocdswashprov.org)

# Editorial

We see in the first article by Father Kevin Culligan that true transformation in God does not mean separation or isolation from others. Through the use of St. John of the Cross's letters Father Kevin shows us that John's love for God was the source of his great love and affection for others. In the letters that we have from John, written mostly to women, John shows great empathy for those he was counseling. He did not hesitate to express empathy and love in writing. He was very close to those who sought his counsel. His transformation in God allowed him to see others from God's perspective and to love them and treat them as God would treat them.

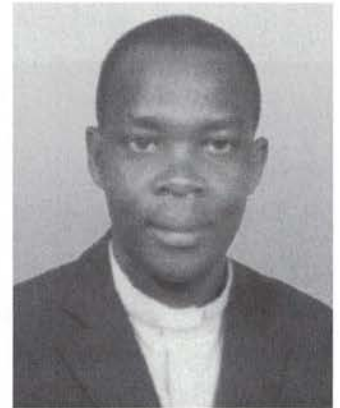
In our second article Edward Ruscil focuses on our humanity as a unity of flesh and spirit. Our salvation is no longer a liberation from the flesh but it is achieved through our flesh in our relationships with God, others, and all of creation. Ruscil shows us how John of the Cross had an incarnational approach to spirituality. The journey toward God does not mean we become less human but more human as God intended us to be. He points out that in our relationships it is a heart's disordered desires and appetites that are the obstacle to unity with God.

As you read this issue about the personality and teachings of St. John of the Cross, we hope you will enjoy the woodcuts by Zucchi and Zugni. They depict various events from his life and allegories of his works.

You'll notice on the back page of this issue of the *Clarion* we are beginning a new section we are going to call "Reminders." In this section we will be bringing to your attention various parts of the *Constitutions* primarily dealing with community administrative matters. The first subject is the responsibilities of the various Offices of the Community. I would like to suggest that each Community Council review this material to make sure that each officeholder understands his or her responsibilities as outlined in the *Constitutions*.

By the time you receive this *Clarion*, two new priests will have been ordained in our Province. Deacon Fred Hickey, O.C.D. was ordained in July and will serve on the shrine team at Holy Hill Wisconsin. Deacon Nicholas O. Adongo, O.C.D. was ordained on August 25th at our community in Nairobi, Kenya. We thank God for the gift of these two men who will now serve the Church and the Province.

Fr. Regis, O.C.D



Fr. Nicholas O. Adongo



Fr. Fred Hickey

# John of the Cross: A Personality Profile

Kevin Culligan, OCD



**O**n October 12, 1589, Fray Juan de la Cruz wrote from Segovia to a young woman in Granada, Doña Juana de Pedraza, a directee who apparently had written to him complaining that he had forgotten her: “Look,” John replied, “how could this be so in the case of one who is in my soul as you are?” (L 19).

We seldom think of John of the Cross, then 47, speaking so affectionately to a woman probably in her early thirties. We usually imagine him as having no one in his soul but God alone. This would seem an accurate image if we read only his poems and major spiritual treatises, for these reveal John as existing only for Jesus, the Divine Bridegroom of his soul.

Fortunately, we also have 33 of John’s personal letters, either in their entirety or in fragments.

Many are intimate letters addressed to persons and religious communities he loved and guided in the spiritual life. All were written after his imprisonment in Toledo, where we believe he was transformed in God through love. They cover the last ten years of his life; 25 were written during the three years before his death in 1591 at the age of 49. They span almost exactly the same period in which John composed his major mystical treatises (1579-1591). They are thus a product of his spiritual maturity.

Though a mere handful compared to the hundreds of letters his friend Teresa of Avila wrote, these 33 letters complete the picture of John’s personality. They allow us to see him as he was experienced by those who knew him. Moreover, they enable us to observe the soul of a person intimately united with the Risen Jesus as expressed concretely in his relationships—with God, self, others, the world and his work.

## Relationship With God

God meant everything to John. In his 33 letters, he speaks of God more than 100 times—as Creator (L 12), Provider (L 11, 17, 20), Redeemer (L 12) and Guide (L 11, 19, 26). God is transcendent, beyond our imagination and understanding (L 13), yet immanent, living within us to receive our love (L 7, 11). God is Holy Spirit (L 21), yet incarnate in Jesus Christ (L 25).

Above all, God is good and desires to give good things to people. "Rejoice in God," John wrote to a Carmelite nun, "both your good and your salvation. May he grant you this good and this salvation and conserve it all until the day of eternity" (L 20).

This divine goodness demands a human response, and John believed only one response is adequate. "The only language [God] hears," wrote John in a postscript to the Carmelite nuns at Beas, "is the silent language of love" (L 8). We speak this silent language by desiring God alone—"Solo Dios!" "God alone without any other concern" was John's constant advice (L 20; cf. 7, 11, 13, 16, 19).

In this vein, he wrote in 1589 to his good friend, Leonor de San Gabriel, to ease the loneliness and poverty she was suffering as a member of the new Carmelite convent in Cordoba:

I thank God for having desired to use you in this foundation, since His Majesty has done this to bring you greater profit. The more he wants to give, the more he makes us desire—even to the point of leaving us empty in order to fill us with goods. You will be repaid for the goods (the love of your sisters) that you leave behind in Sevilla. Since the immense blessings of God can only enter and fit in an empty and solitary heart, the Lord wants you to be alone. For he truly loves you with the desire of being himself all your company. And Your Reverence will have to strive carefully to be content only with his companionship, so you might discover in it every happiness. Even though the soul may be in heaven, it will not be happy if it does not conform its will to this. And we will be unhappy with God, even though he is always present with us, if our heart is not alone but attached to something else (L 15).

The second way we speak the language of love to God is by doing God's will. To "love God purely, above all things," John wrote to one of his fellow friars, "means centering all the strength of one's will on him" (L 13). This was John's own practice, as we read in his letter to Maria de Soto: "I received your letter, which was an act of charity toward me, and I would very much like to comply with what you ask of me in it and thereby please you and your sisters. But since God ordains things differently from what we may have in mind, we must conform ourselves to his will" (L 32).

But we speak the silent language of love best by imitating Jesus Christ. When Madre Ana de Jesus Jimena of the Segovia Carmel protested the 1591 Chapter of Madrid's decision to transfer John from that city to Andalusia, fearing she would be deprived of his spiritual direction, he responded:

Leaving or staying, wherever or however things may come to pass, I will neither forget nor neglect you, as you say, because truly I desire your good forever. Now until God gives us this good in heaven, pass the time in the virtues of mortification and patience, desiring to resemble somewhat in suf-

fering this great God of ours, humbled and crucified. This life is not good if it is not an imitation of his life (L 25).

Jesus crucified symbolized for John of the Cross a person completely surrendered to the Father's will. He therefore continually challenged others to imitate Jesus' self-emptying, as in his letter of November 18, 1586, from Malaga to the Carmelite community of nuns at Beas:

Those who seek their satisfaction in something no longer keep themselves empty that God might fill them with his ineffable delight. And thus just as they go to God, so do they return, for their hands are encumbered and they cannot receive what God is giving. May God deliver us from such evil obstacles that hinder such sweet and delightful freedom. Serve God, my beloved daughters in Christ, following in his footsteps of mortification, in utter patience, in total silence, and with every desire to suffer, becoming executioners of your own satisfactions, mortifying yourselves, if perhaps something remains that must die and something still impedes the inner resurrection of the Spirit who dwells in your souls (L 7).

John's spiritual guidance thus amounted to a therapy of the heart in which he counseled others to desire only God, trusting that God in turn would fill their lives with his love and provide for their every need. He gave this advice to Madre Maria de Jesus, the prioress of the newly established community in Cordoba, regarding new members:

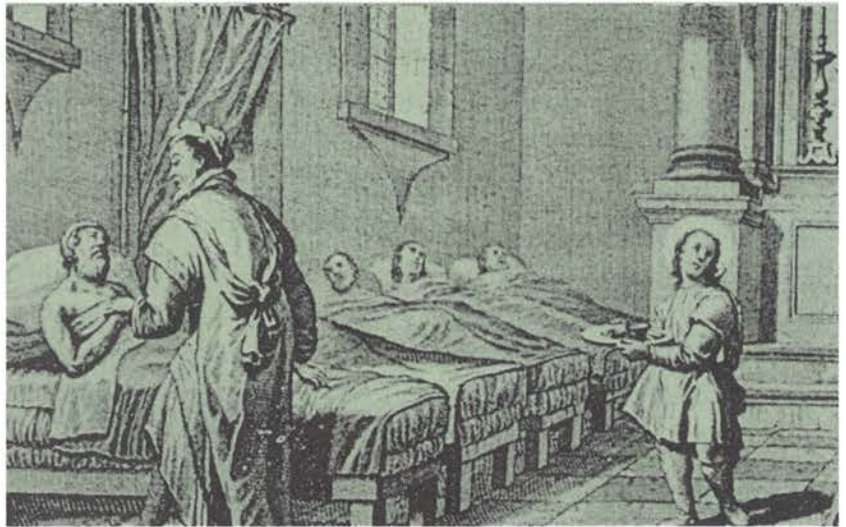
See to it that they preserve the spirit of poverty and contempt for all things, with the desire to be content with God alone. If they don't, be assured that they fall into a thousand spiritual and temporal necessities. And keep in mind that they will neither have nor feel any more needs than those to which they desire to submit their hearts. For the poor in spirit are happier and more constant in the midst of want because they have placed their all in nothingness, and in all this they find freedom of heart. O happy nothingness, and happy hiding place of the heart! For the heart has such power that it subjects all things to itself; this it does by desiring to be subject to nothing and losing all care so as to burn the more in love (L 16; see also L 7, 8, 11, 15, 17, 23).

John unified his entire life around his belief that the incomprehensibly good God desires to give himself completely to his people. Human persons, like Christ, respond best to this divine goodness by freeing themselves from disordered attachments to specific objects in order to be united with God's will and filled with God's love. This vision, demanding total detachment from the things of this world, might seem quite natural for John, who never possessed many things to begin with. In the poverty of his family home and later in the persecutions of his religious life, John suffered great physical deprivation throughout his entire life. Yet he considered living for God alone to be a universal goal and taught it to everyone—reli-

gious communities and individual persons, religious and laity, rich and poor, young and old. “May God ever give you, my daughter,” he wrote to a young woman desiring to become a Carmelite nun, “his holy grace so that in all things you may employ yourself entirely in his holy love and service, as is your obligation, since this is why he created and redeemed you” (L 12).

### John’s Relation to Self

As we would expect, John’s desire for God alone influenced his thoughts about himself. We find many self-statements throughout his letters, most of them seemingly negative. He sees himself as deserving little (L 19), continually in need of prayer, and frequently asking to be commended to God (L 12, 14, 17). “I...never merited to see [Teresa of Avila] again,” he writes to Catalina de Jesus, lamenting his assignment in Andalusia



and his unworthiness to be near the woman who was the greatest single influence in his life (L 1). “I am well,” he wrote from Segovia to Juana de Pedraza in Granada, “although my soul lags far behind”—revealing his mean estimate of the state of his spiritual health (L 11). As proof of this, he confesses to the Beas nuns that “my charity is little” (L 8).

Perhaps most revealing is the sentiment he expressed to Ana de Jesus Jimena in July 1591 after being relieved of pastoral responsibility for the first time in 24 years: “being freed and relieved from the care of souls, I can, if I want and with God’s help, enjoy peace, solitude, and the delightful fruit of forgetfulness of self and of all things. It is also good for others that I be separated from them, for thus they will be freed of the faults they would have committed on account of my misery” (L 25).

To evaluate these negative self-statements, it helps to look at how John understood “self,” as in the phrase above—“the delightful fruit of self-forgetfulness (*olvido de si*).” Today, the word “self” is so widely used with such a variety of psychological connotations that it almost always needs to be defined whenever we use it in thoughtful discourse.

John understood “self” as the total human person with all one’s physical and psychological operations and capacities, but living without conscious relationship to God. Because John viewed the human person as intrinsically related to God, the true center of human life, he considered one to be fully alive only when one was consciously choosing to live in God, and directing the use of all one’s human activity to loving and serving God. To be concerned only with one’s own physical functioning, absorbed in one’s own desires, thoughts, fantasies, memories, emotions, and feelings without consciously relating this human activity to God was, for

John, to live as an isolated self, separated from one's true good, "natural" without any relation to the "supernatural."

One of the main themes of John's spiritual guidance was to demonstrate that a person's greatest good is to live, not centered in the "self," but in God. He counseled persons to consciously direct all their natural energies to loving and serving God, their Ultimate Good. He tried to help persons make the journey from living for self to living for God, from love of self to love of God. He taught them to forget self in order to remember God. "God deliver us from ourselves" is how he puts it to one of his directees (L 23).

John counseled this self-forgetfulness to the Carmelite nuns at Cordoba in the early days of their foundation. He directed at least six letters to them between June 7, 1589, and June 20, 1590, encouraging them in their struggle for survival. To Sister Magdalena del Espiritu Santo, he wrote:

I am happy to see the good resolutions shown in your letter. I praise God that he provides in all things, for you will truly have need of these resolutions at the beginning of the foundation because of the heat, crowded quarters, poverty, and work that is everywhere.... Reflect that in these beginnings God does not want sluggish or cowardly souls, nor still less those who love themselves. (L 17)

To his friend, Madre Leonor, whom he asked to come from Sevilla to help with the foundation and who missed her sisters back home, he wrote: "Be courageous, my daughter, giving yourself greatly to prayer, forgetting this thing and that, for after all we have no other good" (L 22). And to Madre Maria de Jesus, the prioress, John advised: "What you should do is endeavor to keep yourself and the nuns most perfectly and religiously united to God, in forgetfulness of all creatures and of any concern about them, wholly one with God, and happy with him alone; for I assure you all the rest" (L 21).



The self-denial he counseled for others, John also practiced himself, especially through religious obedience. In the summer of 1591 John was transferred from Segovia to Andalusia, where his old companion from the first days of the Reform, Antonio de Jesus, was vicar-provincial. John initially took up residence at La Penuela, a monastery in the Sierra Morena mountains where the friars devoted themselves to prayer, study, manual labor, and occasional pastoral ministry in the nearby town of Linares. After 24 years of nearly continuous pastoral ministry, John found that life at La Penuela suited him perfectly. Here indeed he found the "peace, solitude, and the delightful fruit of forgetfulness of self and of all things" that he longed for.

Despite his personal preferences, John was still a man of obedience. Thus, shortly after arriving at La Penuela, he wrote to Fr. Antonio in August 1591: "Father: I have become one of your subjects. Would Your Reverence consider what you



would like me to do and where I should go?" Antonio responded that he wanted to leave the choice of work and residence to John, perhaps as a reward for John's many years of faithful service in ministry and as an expression of their long friendship. But John replied from La Penuela, in the same month of August, "Father: I am not coming to do my will or to choose a house. Your Reverence could consider where you would like me to go, and I shall go."

A short while later, John learned that he was being falsely accused of indiscretions with the Carmelite nuns. In the same spirit of self-forgetfulness and obedience, he wrote to Juan de Santa Ana, a fellow friar who expressed concern about the grave danger John faced of being driven from the Order: "Son, do not let this grieve you, for they cannot take the habit from me save for being incorrigible or disobedient. I am very ready to amend all I may have done wrong and obey in whatever penance they may give me" (L 32).

However we may interpret his attitude toward himself, John hardly appears emotionally insecure. His spiritual guidance is always direct, firm, and sure. On January 28, 1589, he wrote from Segovia to Juana de Pedraza, his directee in Granada, who apparently was in spiritual desolation and wondering whether consulting other directors might ease her pain. John answered empathically: "I have felt your grief, afflictions, and loneliness." But then he continued:

In what concerns the soul, it is safest not to lean on anything or desire anything. A soul should find its support wholly and entirely in its director, for not to do so would amount to no longer wanting a director. And when one director is sufficient and suitable, all others are useless or a hindrance.... Patience is necessary in this poverty, my daughter (L 11).

Poor Juana must have written again to John some months later complaining that her desolation had not lifted and that, worse, he had forgotten her now that he lived in Segovia. John responded on October 12, 1589:

Jesus be in your soul and thanks to him that he has enabled me not to forget the poor, as you say, or to be idle, as you say. For it greatly vexes me to think you believe [that I would forget you] .... That's all I need now is to forget you!

Since you walk in these darkneses and voids of spiritual poverty, you think that everyone and everything is failing you. It is no wonder that in this it also seems that God is failing you. But nothing is failing you, neither do you have to discuss anything, nor is there anything to discuss, ...because all these doubts are without basis. Those who desire nothing else than God walk not in darkness, however poor and dark they are in their own sight. ...You are making good progress. Do not worry, but be glad! Who are you that you should guide yourself? Wouldn't that end up fine!

...Rejoice and trust in God, for he has given you signs that you can very well do so, and in fact you must do so. If you do not, it will not be surpris-

ing if he becomes angry at seeing you walk so foolishly when he is leading you by a road that is most suitable for you and has brought you to so safe a place. Desire no other path than this and adjust your soul to it (for it is a good one) and receive Communion as usual. Go to confession when you have something definite; you don't have to discuss these things with anyone. Should you have some problem, write me about it. Write soon and more frequently... (L 19).

John is equally firm with a nun suffering from scruples. In 1590, he wrote a Carmelite apparently troubled by obsessional thinking. He tells her how to go to confession, applying his therapy of the heart: to gain the peace of soul that befits the dwelling place of the Spirit, let go of concern for particular thoughts and trust in God's love for you. He concludes:

When something distasteful or unpleasant comes your way, remember Christ crucified and be silent. Live in faith and hope, even though you are in darkness, because it is in these darkneses that God protects the soul. Cast your care upon God, for he watches over you and will not forget you. Do not think that he leaves you alone; that would be an affront to him (L 20).

John writes with the same directness to one of his fellow friars, his disciple Luis de San Angelo: "If at any time someone, whether superior or anyone else, should try to persuade you of a lax teaching, even though it be confirmed by miracles, do not believe or embrace it; rather, greater penance and greater detachment from all things. And do not seek Christ without the cross" (L 24).

Just as he was firm with others, John could also be objective about himself. Desiring God alone and possessing nothing but God was his ideal, but he knew he did not always behave this way. Exhorting Juana de Pedraza to detachment, he writes: "Let not the soul be attached to anything, for since prayer is not wanting, God will take care of its possessions; they belong to no other owner, nor should they. I see this with myself: The more that things are mine, the more I set my heart and soul and care on them."

Yet this reflection on his own experience also led John to an attitude of humility and detachment regarding his own "self" so that he might be completely free to live in God. Thus, he continues in his letter to Juana: "The loved object becomes one with the lover, and so does God with the one who loves him. Hence one cannot forget the loved object without forgetting one's own soul; and even one's own soul is forgotten for the loved object, because one lives in the loved object more than in oneself" (L 11).

### **Attitude Toward the World**

John's desire to live in God more than in himself also influenced his attitudes toward the world around him. As a poet, he saw all created things reflecting God who "having looked at them / with his image alone / clothed them in beauty" (Canti-

cle 5). But as a spiritual guide, he also observed the damage that comes to souls from inordinately seeking the world for itself, apart from God. "To have the right idea of glory and to love it," he writes to the woman desiring to be a Carmelite nun, "you should consider all the riches of the world and its delights as mud and vanity and weariness, as they truly are, and do not esteem anything, however signal and precious, except being in God's grace. All that is best here below is ugly and bitter when compared to those eternal goods for which we were created" (L 12).



For these reasons, John counsels detachment from this world as much as from one's own self. To a Discalced Carmelite friar he wrote: "It is very important and fitting for Your Reverence, if you desire to possess profound peace in your soul and attain perfection, that you surrender your whole will to God so that it may thus be united with him and that you do not let it be occupied with the vile and base things of the earth" (L 13). Vile and base, not in their created beauty, but because of their potential to draw a person away from God to themselves, to become distorted from "icons" into "idols" by disordered human desire. Thus, the way to live in this world, as John recommended to Juana de Pedraza, is "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 exiled, orphans, the thirsty, without a road and without anything, hoping for everything in heaven" (L 19).

Nonetheless, John also understood that pilgrims still have to deal with the world, especially when you are, as he was from October 1585 to April 1587, a major religious superior, responsible for eight monasteries of friars and five convents of nuns scattered over 30,000 square miles in rugged Andalusia. Continual travel, frequent meetings, personnel problems, and business matters prompted him to complain in a letter written from Sevilla in June 1586 to one of his prioresses, Madre Ana de San Alberto at Caravaca, that "the Lord gives us so much to do these days that we can hardly keep up with it all" (L 5).

Although he exhorted his subjects to trust in divine providence, John also had to make ends meet financially. He delighted in a bargain as much as the next person. He reported to Madre Ana that the nuns in Seville had recently purchased "some very fine houses" for their new convent, proudly adding: "Although the houses cost around 14,000 ducats, they are worth more than 20,000" (L 5).

Usually innocent as a dove, John knew there were times he had to be as clever as a snake, especially in property deals with the Andalusian Jesuits. Thus he advises Madre Ana:

I am sorry you did not immediately sign the deed regarding the matter with the Fathers of the Society, for from what I observe they are not people who keep to their word. Thus I think they will not only deviate partly but, if the

matter is deferred and if it is expedient for them, they will turn back completely. Hence take careful note of what I say: Without mentioning anything to them or to anyone, discuss with Senor Gonzalo Munoz the purchase of the other house in that other locale, and sign the deed. For since they see that they have you by the hook, they are in no hurry. It matters little if afterward it be known that we bought only with the intention of being freed from our annoyance. Thus they will agree without so much breaking of heads, and we will even oblige them to agree to whatever we desire. Tell this to only a few, and do it, for sometimes you cannot surmount one ruse without using another (L 5).

Unfortunately, his advice did not resolve the matter. John had to write again nine months later giving Madre Ana and the nuns permission to go to court “concerning the houses which the fathers of the Company have taken from them, and which belong to the site of their convent.” The lawsuit went on for eight years before it was peacefully settled in March 1595.

### Interpersonal Relationships

Ordinarily, John was more interested in people than in purchasing property. His letters give us some idea of his relationships with both men and women.

Five of his existing letters went to men, all Carmelite friars—Ambrosio Mariano (L 10), Nicolas Doria (L 18), Luis de San Angelo (L 24), Juan de Santa Ana (L 32), and an unnamed Discalced friar who had requested spiritual advice (L 13). Some of these are purely business letters about such matters as distribution of personnel, formation and education of young religious, permissions, and news about the friars. In these, John is invariably cordial, brief, and to the point.

Not so with the friar who requested guidance for the spiritual journey:

May the peace of Jesus Christ, my son, be always in your soul. I received Your Reverence’s letter in which you told me of the great desires our Lord gives you to occupy your will in him alone by loving him above all things, and in which you asked for some counsels to help you do this. I am happy God has given you such holy desires, and I shall be much happier if you carry them out (L 13).

Following that wry opening, John provided his fellow friar with a long, detailed, almost scholastic exhortation to the effect that union with a transcendent God demands faith and love which, in turn, require that one be “emptied of and detached from all disordered appetites and satisfaction with respect to every particular thing in which it can rejoice, whether earthly or heavenly, temporal or spiritual, so that purged and cleansed of all inordinate satisfactions, joys, and appetites it might be wholly occupied in loving God with its affections.”

He encourages his brother to pay special attention to feelings:

Since the delight, sweetness and satisfaction that can come to the will are not love, none of the delightful feelings can be an adequate means for the union of the will with God; it is the operation of the will that is the proportionate means for this union. The will's operation is quite distinct from the will's feeling: By its operation, which is love, the will is united with God and terminates in him, and not by the feeling and gratification of its appetite that remains in the soul and goes no further. The feelings serve only as stimulants to love, if the will desires to pass beyond them; and they serve for no more. Thus the delightful feelings do not of themselves lead the soul to God, but rather cause it to become attached to delightful feelings. But the operation of the will, which is the love of God, concentrates the affection, joy, pleasure, satisfaction, and love of the soul only upon God, leaving aside all things and loving him above them all. Hence if persons are moved to the love of God without dependence upon the sweetness they feel, they leave aside this sweetness and center their love on God whom they cannot feel (L 13).

---

*God wishes religious to be religious—in such a way that they be done with all and that all be done with them. For it is God himself who wishes to be their riches, comfort, and delightful glory.*

---

John's remaining 28 letters are written to women, both Carmelites and laity. With them he is less formal and didactic, more warm and open, than with his fellow friars. Although we have none of his letters to Teresa of Jesus, he regrets his abandonment in Andalusia and the distance that separates him from her (L 1). He wants to please Maria de Soto and her sisters (L 2), finds comfort in the letter of Ana de Jesus and the community at Beas (L 8), carries Juana de Pedraza in his heart and feels her grief, affliction, and loneliness (L 11, 19), grieves over Leonor de San Gabriel's afflictions and the possible harm they can do her spirit and body (L 22), desires Ana de Jesus Jimena's good forever and promises not to forget her (L 25), always remembers Ana de Penalosa (L 31), and feels sorry for the sisters who are sick in Segovia (L 27). With Dona Ana de Penalosa, the "very noble and devout lady" for whom he wrote his masterpiece, *The Living Flame of Love* (see *Flame Prologue*, I), he speaks freely about himself, sharing with her his plans and activities, his desires, joys, and fears. He assures her that, even if he has to leave his beloved solitude, he will come to her if she needs him (L 28, 31). Nevertheless, he constantly challenges the women as much as the men, especially his sisters in Carmel, whom he desires to be Jesus' "delight and crown" (L 7). Thus, he writes on February 8, 1588, from Granada, to Madre Leonor Bautista in the Carmel of Beas, who had just stepped down from her office as prioress:

Do not think, daughter in Christ, that I have ceased to grieve for you in your trials and for the others who share in them. Yet, in recalling that, since God called you to live an apostolic life, which is a life of contempt, he is leading you along its road, I am consoled. After all, God wishes religious to be religious—in such a way that they be done with all and that all be done with them. For it is God himself who wishes to be their riches, comfort, and

delightful glory. God has granted Your Reverence a great favor, because truly forgetful of all things you will be able to enjoy his good in solitude, and for love of him have no care that they do to you what they will, since you do not belong to yourself but to God (L 9).

### Longing for Solitude

John's heart thus embraced many men and women, spiritual sons and daughters, during his 24 years of priestly ministry. But throughout these years his heart's deepest longing was to be alone with God in solitude. Over the years he came to understand that solitude is primarily a matter of desire, an interior experience rather than an external place. He placed himself in the desert every time he desired God alone and consciously chose to center his desires, thoughts, memories, feelings and emotions in God rather than in created things. Yet, despite the affection he felt for people and his will to serve them, he still longed for physical solitude. He could not contain his joy when he finally had it for a few short months before he died. On August 19, 1591, nine days after he arrived from Castile at the monastery of La Penuela in the Sierra Morena mountains of Andalusia, he wrote to Doña Ana de Peñalosa:

I like this desert of La Penuela very much, glory to God, and I am well. The vastness of the desert is a great help to soul and body, although the soul fares very poorly. The Lord must be desiring that it have its spiritual desert. Well and good, if it be for his service; His Majesty knows what we are of ourselves.... I am well off without knowing anything, and the life of the desert is admirable (L 28).

A month later he again told Doña Ana: "I am indeed very happy in this holy solitude" (L 31). At La Penuela, freed from the burdens of pastoral ministry, John satisfied his thirsty heart in God. "This morning," he wrote to Doña Ana, describing daily life in the desert, "we have already returned from gathering our chickpeas, and so the mornings go by. On another day we shall thresh them. It is nice to handle these mute creatures, better than being badly handled by living ones. God grant that I may stay here. Pray for this, my daughter" (L 28).

Sadly, even in the last months of his life, John was still being "badly handled." His response to this treatment, perhaps better than his lifting of his spirit to God in the mountain solitude of Andalusia, finally reveals the true man.

The previous June 2, Pentecost Sunday, the discalced friars convened their General Chapter at Madrid. John entered the chapter as general definitor of the Discalced Carmelite congregation and prior of the Segovia monastery; he left with no position at all, headed for the friars' mission in Mexico. His exclusion from office was due mainly to his outspoken opposition in the chapter to the policies of the general, Nicolas Doria, regarding the government of the Carmelite nuns and the punishment of another friar, Jerome Gracian.

After the chapter, writing from Madrid on July 6, 1591, to Maria de la Encarnación, prioress of the Carmelite nuns in Segovia, who complained of the treatment he received at the chapter, John responded:

Do not let what is happening to me, daughter, cause you any grief, for it does not cause me any. What greatly grieves me is that the one who is not at fault is blamed. Men do not do these things, but God, who knows what is suitable for us and arranges things for our good. Think nothing else but that God ordains all, and where there is no love, put love, and you will draw out love (L 26).

Several months later, the proposed mission to Mexico now abandoned, John found himself the object of a persecution intent on driving him out of the Order. One of the newly elected general definitors, Diego Evangelista, apparently in re-

tribution for a correction John had made of his activities years earlier as vicar-provincial, attempted to gather defamatory evidence about John's relationship with the Carmelite nuns, while Doria apparently looked the other way. Meanwhile, John had moved to the monastery in Ubeda for medical treatment of a serious infection spreading from his leg to his back, only to be treated inhospitably by the local superior,



Francisco Crisóstomo, who reminded John regularly of the disruption and expense his illness was causing the community.

In these circumstances John wrote from Ubeda one of his last letters to an unnamed Carmelite nun in Segovia, a few weeks before he died: "Have a great love for those who contradict and fail to love you, for in this way love is begotten in a heart that has no love. God so acts with us, for he loves us that we might love by means of the very love he bears toward us" (L 33).

### A Man for God and for Others

John's letters show that, for him, living for God alone includes loving God's people and working tirelessly for God's kingdom. It means, above all, allowing God to transform his body and soul so that he might see people and events from God's perspective and respond to them with the heart of Jesus Christ. It is a man fully transformed in Christ that the letters of John of the Cross reveal.



## News from the Northeast Region

As previously reported, the six Northeast Districts continue their planned regional programs for 2007. Below are the remaining programs for 2007. OCDS members from outside the Northeast can register later if there is room on these dates:

**September 28-30 2007, Friday to Sunday.** District 6 retreat: "Light and Warmth in the *Living Flame of Love* — St. John of the Cross," by Fr. Bonaventure Lussier, OCD 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; email: [josangels@comcast.net](mailto:josangels@comcast.net) or Norma Hurrell OCDS 26 Shaw Street, Lawrence, MA 01843-3521 [tereseofmary@comcast.net](mailto:tereseofmary@comcast.net)

**November 9-11, 2007 Friday to Sunday,** District 3 retreat, "Foundations for a Spiritual Life" by Fr. Paul Fohlin, OCD at Notre Dame Retreat Center, in Canandaigua, NY. Contact Pat Brazo, 1393 Mecklenburg Road, Ithaca, NY 14850-9389; 607-273-0821; [ebrazo@acmenet.net](mailto:ebrazo@acmenet.net)

### In Remembrance

**Frieda Russman, OCDS,** began eternal life on January 18, 2007. She was a member of the Community of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament in Hagerstown, MD.

**Joan Russell, OCDS,** Teresa of the Child Jesus, began eternal life on August 6, 2007. She was a member of the Community of the Immaculate Heart Carmel in Hilton Head Island, SC.

**Salvatrice (Sally) Rebman, OCDS,** Elizabeth of the Trinity, began eternal life on July 20, 2007. She was a member of the Community of Mary in Salisbury, MD.



# “I Lost Myself, and Was Found:” John of the Cross for Today

*Edward Ruscil*

A figure like John of the Cross can make us feel quite uncomfortable today. We live in a time when we are reaffirming the goodness of creation. Moving away from the Platonic dualism that influenced our Christian spirituality for so long, we are retrieving a healthier and more biblical notion of our own humanity as a unity of flesh and spirit. We no longer view salvation in terms of a liberation from the flesh. Instead, it is precisely through our flesh that we live out our faith and work out our relationships to God, ourselves, and other people, as well as to all of creation.

Happily, in an emerging creation-centered spirituality, we can accentuate the positive dimension of our corporeality and come to a deeper appreciation of our dependence on and responsibility toward the material world. One fine expression of this is the growing concern for environmental issues and the recognition of our responsibility for our Mother Earth.

Not only do we reaffirm the goodness of creation, but we also stress the dignity of the human person. We speak today of the importance of the self—its wholeness and its actualization. We seek to become authentically human, embracing all that this entails.



## The Timeliness of John of the Cross

With a deepening appreciation of the incarnational dimension of our faith we have justifiably become critical of anything that would cause us to be less than human. An outdated piety of self-contempt has little to offer us today.

Given this picture—and first impressions being what they are—it should not surprise us that some people would like to relegate John of the Cross to a closet of the past. His way of negation strikes a rather discordant note for contemporary ears. But we would be doing ourselves a great disservice were we to dismiss him so lightly. His writings are particularly relevant for our time—perhaps more so now than ever.

I say this because today we define ourselves more and more in terms of the network of relationships that we establish. Psychology and sociology emphasize how eminently relational we are, and how we are formed by these relationships, for better or for worse. Beginning with the symbiotic relationship in the womb, through infancy and our formative years, and right into adulthood, we become who we are by all the varied relationships in which we are engaged: with our own selves, with significant others, with God and all of creation. We are coming to see that the ultimate value of all creation is relational.

This is why John of the Cross is especially important today. One thing certain about John is that he was a passionate lover, and whenever we speak about love we are speaking about the relational dynamic of the human person. We are fortunate that John gave such effective expression to his passionate love affair with God through poetry (e.g., the “Dark Night” and “Living Flame of Love”) and commentaries on his poetry. We often say that “love is blind,” yet it seems that the passionate lovers are those who see right through to the center of reality.

In writing about his love affair with God, John left us not only a paradigm, a pattern for all such love affairs, but also some important insights into the relational dimension of the human person.

Our Western spirituality has always tended to emphasize the “eros” of the human heart, maintaining that God is the true answer to our hearts’ deepest longings. This is most eloquently expressed by Augustine’s “our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” The desire of our hearts is meant to impel us to seek out others, and ultimately “The Other.” This relational dimension of the heart is a reflection of our creation in the image and likeness of God; one of the basic tenets of our Christian faith is that God is Trinity, a community of love in which this relational dynamic is perfectly expressed.

### **The Disordered Heart**

John of the Cross would certainly agree that we are eminently relational beings, and that our deepest longings can only be fulfilled in the union of love with God. But through his writings he also shows that there is much more to be said on this matter—and unfortunately this is the part we would prefer to ignore.

John of the Cross believes that our human condition is such that we experience serious obstacles in the search for our hearts’ true fulfillment. For John, the heart’s desires and appetites are “disordered” and often misdirected (see especially the first book of the *Ascent*). In short, John indicates that there is a real problem within the relational dimension of the human person. Some people have misinterpreted John as saying that the problem resides in what we relate to, and thus have accused him of being anti-incarnational. In other words, they believe John teaches that to love God fully we must be disengaged from all other relationships. Actually, for John the problem is not so much what we relate to, but rather how we relate to it—the relational problem is not “out there” in the object of our desire, but within the

human heart. If the relational dynamic is dysfunctional because of the way we are relating, then this bespeaks a serious problem in our Christian existence, if we are to define ourselves by the network of relationships we establish.

For John of the Cross, authentic human and Christian existence demands a radical transformation of the human heart, for what is at stake here is the redirecting and reordering of the heart's desires toward true fulfillment in God, which in turn brings about a right relationship to everything else. The remedy for the heart's malady (and the means of its transformation) is the "Dark Night."

We should be clear, however, on this point: the dark night is not about an inhuman destruction of the heart's desire. Quite the contrary, it is precisely the "eros" of the human heart that will be the vehicle of its transformation—for we are always most deeply affected and purified by what we desire and love.

Our love brings us into "darkness," since it makes us most vulnerable. But it is the development of love that brings about our transformation. Cutting off all our affectivity and desire can hardly be considered an effective formula for authentic human living. Thus John knew there could be no annihilation of human love and desire. Rather, these have to be transformed through "another, better love"—the love of the Bridegroom (*Ascent 1*, 14, 2).

### **In Search of Authentic Selfhood**

This grasping and desire of our hearts raises the question of the "true self." The real issue here is not human love and desire per se, but the center from which our love and desire originates. Who we are at our center determines what we strive and yearn for.<sup>1</sup> "If we operate out of an exclusive ego-consciousness, our hearts" desires will be very limited indeed. In effect, we will be setting ourselves up as the center of the universe, operating under an obvious illusion. What we need is a transformation of ourselves, and of the understanding of ourselves in relation to God. According to John of the Cross, the dark night is the process that God initiates to bring about this transformation. It is, to be sure, a painful process that entails a stripping of the ego, and requires a cooperative spirit of self-emptying on our part.

But this is where our contemporary distaste for John's doctrine enters. There is no getting around the fact that John's dark night does involve suffering and self-abnegation. At a time when we are trying to emphasize a positive understanding of the self, we can become disheartened by John's seemingly negative approach. We may well wonder whether John's dark night is another example of an outdated piety of self-contempt. Why would a passionate, loving relationship—especially with a good and loving God—entail such a negative and painful process? Why is there a need at all for a dark night?

When John of the Cross had to answer such questions he fell back on the scholastic dictum, "Whatever is received is received according to the mode of the one receiving it" (*Night 2*, 16, 4). Today we might transpose this to

---

*We should be clear, however, on this point: the dark night is not about an inhuman destruction of the heart's desire. Quite the contrary, it is precisely the "eros" of the human heart that will be the vehicle of its transformation—for we are always most deeply affected and purified by what we desire and love.*

---



## Carmel Clarion Communications

2131 Lincoln Road NE

Washington, DC 20002-1101

TOLL FREE: 1-877-845-4560

[ocdsclarion@hotmail.com](mailto:ocdsclarion@hotmail.com)

<http://www.carmelclarion.com>

### NEWLY AVAILABLE CD's on CARMELITE SPIRITUALITY

from the following albums previously offered by ICS Publications

- ❖ Carmel Faces the New Millennium
- ❖ St. Therese of Lisieux: Her Mission Today 1897-1997
- ❖ Carmelite Prayer and Meditation in the Carmelite Tradition
- ❖ Spiritual Guidance: The Carmelite Tradition
- ❖ Contemplative Prayer in a Time of Crisis

**PLEASE check your albums before ordering**



#### SAINT TERESA OF AVILA

**From the Wadi to San Jose: Teresa's  
Renewal of Contemplative Prayer**  
By Keith Egan **CD-147**

**The Dark Night as Liberation of  
the True Self** By Keith Egan **CD-146**

**John of the Cross Through the Eyes  
of Edith Stein** By Keith Egan **CD-148**

#### SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS

**The Dark Night of the Spirit:  
the Healing of the Soul**  
By Kevin Culligan, O.C.D. **CD-105**

**Spiritual Direction in the Letters  
of St. John of the Cross**  
By Kevin Culligan, O.C.D. **CD-106**

**The Holy Spirit: The Bond of  
Friendship in St. John of the Cross**  
By Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. **CD-132**

#### SAINT THERESE OF LISIEUX

**Empathy: Key to Therese's Little Way**  
By John Sullivan, O.C.D. **CD-115**

**The Revolution of Therese**  
By Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. **CD-130**

**The Little Way**  
By Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. **CD-133**

**St. Therese: Doctor of the Church**  
By Keith Egan **CD-137**

**Each CD is \$8.95**

**10% Discount on purchase of 4 or more**

**Each CD is \$8.95**

**10% Discount on purchase of 4 or more**

**SAINT THERESE (continued)**

**The Discovery of Merciful Love**  
By John Welch, O.Carm. **CD-140**

**Therese and Priesthood**  
By Mary Frohich, RSCJ **CD-144**

**Reflections on the Doctorate of St. Therese: 'Something Surprising'**  
By Steven Payne, O.C.D. **CD-154**

**BL. ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY**

**The Apocalyptic Dimension in Elizabeth of the Trinity: Eternity**  
By Margaret Dorgan, DCM **CD-171**

**The Prayer of Elizabeth of the Trinity**  
By Daniel Chowning, O.C.D. **CD-181**

**SAINT EDITH STEIN  
(St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross)**

**Edith Stein: Contemplative Scholar**  
By Constance Fitzgerald, O.C.D. **CD-145**

**OTHER CARMELITE SAINTS**

**Elijah: A Prophet in Crisis**  
By Kevin Culligan, O.C.D. **CD-125**



**ON PRAYER**

**Meditation and Contemplation in the Carmelite Tradition**  
By Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. **CD-118**

**From Solitude to Contemplation**  
By Keith Egan **CD-141**

**The Stream of Consciousness and Carmelite Prayer**  
By Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. **CD-142**

**The Moral Dimension of Carmelite Prayer**  
By Steven Payne, O.C.D. **CD-149**

**Learning How to Meditate: An Unfinished Journey**  
By Kevin Culligan, O.C.D. **CD-150**

**Eucharist and Contemplation**  
By Keith Egan **CD-151**

**OTHER CARMELITE THEMES**

**New Age in Christ**  
By Kevin Culligan, O.C.D. **CD-128**

**Mystical Phenomena and Carmel's Women**  
By Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. **CD-129**

**Images Are Forever**  
By John Welch, O. Carm. **CD-143**

**Self-Emptying: Phillipians 2 and the Carmelite Tradition**  
By Vilma Seelaus, O.C.D. **CD-155**



**Carmel Clarion Communications**

2131 Lincoln Road NE

Washington, DC 20002-1101

TOLL FREE: 1-877-845-4560

[ocdsclarion@hotmail.com](mailto:ocdsclarion@hotmail.com)

<http://www.carmelclarion.com>

“Whatever/whomever is related to, is related to according to the mode of the one relating.” What is the “mode” of our relating, and how is it flawed?

To begin with, as already indicated, we naturally tend to set up our own little worlds with ourselves at the center. We then proceed to set up a network of



relationships solely from the perspective of our own needs and purposes. The relational value of everything is judged only according to whether it stimulates and supports us, or obstructs our present and future needs. As one writer put it:

Most of us do operate on the assumption that the value of reality is relational, but the reference point of that relation is changed. It is not how things are grounded in God but how they serve me and my needs that gives them their value.... In our

living, then, we endorse the conviction that the key is the relation; but we change the center of the universe from God to ourselves.<sup>2</sup>

John of the Cross describes this situation in terms of disordered appetites and the traditional sin of pride. Today we might speak of it more as a type of “ego-living.” This ego-living causes a blindness in the human heart whereby we lose sight of the fact that God is our ultimate fulfillment. The central relationship to God is obscured, while the ego and its insatiable desires become the focal point of our existence. Our motivation is then dependent on achieving pleasure—we are only inclined to enter relationships that gratify us in some way. We become addicted to the satisfaction of our own needs. This ego-consciousness causes us to live, in effect, out of a false self that creates many illusions for its own survival, idols of people and things, projecting onto them an ultimate significance that they are unable to bear. Even our relationship to God is approached according to how our apparent needs can be best served—prayer becomes a matter of seeking an experience that will gratify and console us. God and the doctrines of our faith become merely means for our own self-assurance and security. The price we end up paying is enslavement to this false self, and the efforts to satiate it only serve to “weary, torment, darken, defile and weaken” us, as John says (*Ascent I*, 6, 5).

For John, this is one reason the dark night is so important. He states that one of the chief benefits of the night is coming to know ourselves as we truly are in relation to God (*Night I*, 12, 2). The dark night brings about a critique of our own consciousness of self. To break out of our illusions we need to see ourselves as we really are in relationship to God, the true center of reality.

### **“Have a Habitual Desire to Imitate Christ” (Ascent I, 13, 3)**

To many of us in our culture, self-actualization seems to entail “adding on” to ourselves through status, prestige, power, wealth, popularity, or even holiness. However, John of the Cross suggests that true self-actualization entails a subtraction, a stripping or self-emptying that aims at ridding us of this false self and its illusions. Thus the negative aspect of self-emptying is for the positive goal of finding our true selves, and thereby becoming more authentically human. John’s dark night does strip the ego naked, but it does so ultimately to lead to the rebirth of the self in God. Although talk of self-emptying might make us uncomfortable in our anthropocentric times, we need only turn to our Christology to check the soundness of John’s doctrine.

As Christians, we hold Jesus of Nazareth to be the paradigm of authentic human existence. He is first and foremost defined by his relationship to God, which in turn defined all his other relationships. His personhood was singularly marked by his consciousness of the centrality of that God-relationship in his life, which resulted not in an ego-consciousness but in an awareness that identified him as being “for others.” Because of this central relationship to God, his loves and desires stretched him out to the point of death on a cross.

In our Christian tradition, this characteristic dynamism of Jesus’ life has been expressed in the term “kenosis.” In terms of our discussion, it is interesting to note the interpretation of some commentators regarding the kenosis of Christ presented in the hymn in Paul’s letter to the Philippians (2:5-11).

This familiar text speaks of Christ not deeming “equality with God” as “something to be grasped at” (Phil 2:6). Some commentators believe this should be taken to mean not simply that Christ enjoyed equality with God and surrendered it by becoming human, but that Christ could have grasped at this equality by self-assertion and self-aggrandizement yet declined to do so, treating it as an occasion for renouncing every privilege or advantage that it might have brought him.<sup>3</sup>

Other commentators have seen in this hymn a contrast with the story of Genesis, in which Adam is tempted to “be like God.”<sup>4</sup> Adam grasped at a false and illusory equality with God for his own glory, and thus lost the image of his Creator; but Christ—enjoying true equality—refused to derive any advantage from it and chose rather the path of self-emptying and was therefore glorified as Lord.

It is uncertain whether this is the correct interpretation of the hymn, but it does capture in biblical imagery the human situation that John of the Cross addresses in his writings. The ego-centered living exemplified in the first Adam is contrasted with the self-emptying existence of the second Adam. For John of the Cross, the way out of the ego-centered existence we are born into under the first Adam is to enter into the process of “kenosis” in imitation of the second Adam; “the one who seeks not the cross of Christ seeks not the glory of Christ” (*Maxims on Love* 23; see also *Ascent* I, 13, 3-4; *Canticle* 23, 1-5).

## “I Lost Myself, and Was Found” (Canticle 29)

The way of negation and self-emptying that John of the Cross encourages is not an antihuman activity. It is a development toward finding our true selves in relation to God. It is in this context that we discover the final answer to our hearts deepest longings. Otherwise we are left to the illusions of the false self that cause us to enter frantically into possessive relationships, in which we consume not only things but other people in an attempt to satiate our false selves. In the end, however, our illusions make a mockery of our humanity and ultimately betray us, laying bare the shallowness of our false selves.

### Contemporary Witnesses

Thomas Merton and Johannes Metz are two modern writers who can contribute to our appreciation today of John's doctrine. For both, the concept of self-emptiness is central to an understanding of authentic humanity.

In the book *Contemplation in a World of Action*, Merton expresses well the basis for a contemporary understanding of John's dark night. Merton writes:

Do we really choose between the world and Christ as between two conflicting realities absolutely opposed?... Do we really renounce ourselves and the world in order to find Christ, or do we renounce our alienated and false selves in order to choose our own deepest truth in choosing both the world and Christ at the same time? If the deepest ground of my being is love, then in that very love itself and nowhere else will I find myself, and the world, and my brother, and Christ. It is not a question of either/or but of all-in-one. It is.. [a matter] of wholeness, wholeheartedness, and unity....<sup>5</sup>

In an article surveying the development of the themes of darkness and self-emptiness in Merton's works, John Teahan explains Merton's understanding that the path to human wholeness is the path of self-emptying.<sup>6</sup> Emptiness is something Merton believed to be intrinsic to the human condition. He states that the kenotic process “accurately defines the transformation of the Christian consciousness in Christ” and also that “only when the ego or false self has been reduced to nothing can the full manifestation of God appear.”

Teahan goes on to show how Merton, during the 1960s, came to emphasize more and more the connection between emptiness and the emergence of the true self. It is within this emptiness that one is able to transcend the limited, egocentric, false self. For Merton, inner emptiness is the manifestation of one's deepest reality, the fertile soil within which the central relationship to God can blossom. Like John of the Cross, Merton understood the experience of self-emptiness to involve both obscurity and illumination: the movement from our ego-consciousness to the painful awareness of our emptiness is experienced as darkness, yet it enlightens us regarding our true selves in relationship to God.



In his book *Poverty of Spirit*, Johannes Metz speaks eloquently, describing what it means to be human on the basis of the Incarnation of the Word.<sup>7</sup> Metz understands humanity as something we must attain, not something given at birth. He defines “becoming human” in terms of becoming poor and embracing our innate poverty, a process already revealed to us by God’s involvement in the Word becoming flesh. Metz maintains that, in



giving us his Son, God showed us that the spirit of authentic humanity is the spirit of poverty. This has always been difficult for us to accept, and there is always the possibility that we will betray our humanity.

Using the gospel account of Jesus’ temptation in the desert, Metz shows us how Jesus remained true to his humanity by renouncing the allurements of power, security, and the human desire to use God for one’s own advantage. This is why the cross is “the sacrament of poverty of spirit in a sinful world” as well as the sign of one person who “remained true to his humanity.”

According to Metz we face a choice of either accepting our innate poverty or alienating ourselves from it in a form of protest and self-hatred. We are often scandalized at our inner emptiness and seek to flee from it, taking refuge in the comfort of illusions. But there is no escape. We can try to repress the truth, but we can never destroy it.

These cursory comments show that both authors regard self-emptiness as an authentic human experience, to be embraced rather than shunned. For Merton, we are estranged from God because of a “perverse attachment” to a self that is often false and illusory. In the “dark night” process we become aware of “infidelity to the truth of our life,” and in this awareness our true self emerges. For Metz, this “truth of our life” is our innate emptiness or poverty. To become human we must embrace this truth and remain faithful to it. Our emptiness is, as Metz puts it, our only treasure, since it is the place of our encounter with God. The modern echoes of John’s teaching are evident.

## Conclusions

The lesson of the dark night is especially poignant today since we are increasingly focusing on our network of relationships to define who we are. John of the Cross in his doctrine of the dark night warns us that our ego-centered con-

sciousness affects our relationships adversely. Such a consciousness makes us the focal point of our own illusory world. In this framework our relationships become the exploitation of others—even “The Other”—as well as the exploitation of the gifts of creation, spawning such abuses as voracious consumerism and opening the door to violence.

John of the Cross with his “theology of emptiness” challenges us to divest ourselves of our ego-consciousness for the sake of authentic human existence. In doing so we are able to enter into a right relationship to God, through which all other relationships are set right. Our inner emptiness is the pregnant womb within which the birth of God can take place.

As Christians we should never lose sight of the fact that for us the path to authentic human existence was marked out by Jesus of Nazareth himself, whose central relationship to God was expressed through a kenotic existence. This kenosis was manifested most clearly in the event of the cross. If we try to become fully human by seeking out our true selves, and are willing to allow all our illusions to break down as we are led into the dark night, we will be brought to the emptiness revealed at the foot of the cross. But we go into this process with the anticipation of the transformation that comes about on Easter.

Given John’s mystical depth and single-mindedness, it is not difficult to understand why he embraced this dark night with such passion. The night that John of the Cross passed through brought to birth in his heart the love that transformed him. It was a night joining Lover and Beloved—the “eros” of his human heart was truly fulfilled. No more appropriate judgment could be made about this transforming night than what John says of it in language reminiscent of the Easter Vigil’s Exultet:

O guiding night!  
O night more lovely than the dawn!  
O night that has united  
The Lover with his Beloved  
Transforming the Beloved in her Lover.  
(*Night 5*)

---

Notes

1. Cf. Michael Buckley, “Atheism and Contemplation,” *Theological Studies* 40(1979): 680-699.
2. Thomas Kane, “The Lord of Disillusionment,” *Spiritual Life* 23 (1977): 212-218.
3. Cf. Ralph P. Martin, *The Epistle of Paul: to the Philippians*, Tyndale New Testament 1964), pp. 97ff; see also F. F. Bruce, *Philippians: A Good News Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row 1983), pp. 45ff.
4. Cf. Bruce, *Philippians*, p. 45 and Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, p. 97.
5. Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a Our World of Action* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1971), pp. 155-156.
6. John F. Teahan, “A Dark and Empty Way: Thomas Merton and the Apophatic Tradition,” *Journal of Religion* 58 Commentaries, (London: Tyndale Press, (1978 ):263-287.
7. Johannes Baptist Metz, *Poverty of Spirit* (New York: Newman Press, 1968).



## Carmel Clarion Communications

2131 Lincoln Road NE

Washington, DC 20002-1101

TOLL FREE: 1-877-845-4560

[ocdsclarion@hotmail.com](mailto:ocdsclarion@hotmail.com)

<http://www.carmelclarion.com>

### LATEST CD's on CARMELITE SPIRITUALITY

#### 2006 CONFERENCES

A Living Charism:

Carmelite Spirituality for a 2<sup>nd</sup> Century

**Elizabeth of the Trinity and  
Baptismal Spirituality**  
By Daniel Chowning, O.C.D. **CD-194**

**Carmel and Mary**  
By Emmanuel Sullivan, O.C.D. **CD-184**

**Saving Private Herman  
(Brother Lawrence)**  
By Marc Foley, O.C.D. **CD-187**

**Liturgy and Personal  
Spirituality**  
By George Mangiaracina, O.C.D. **CD-188**

**True Peace: Teresa's  
Meditation on the  
Song of Songs**  
By Kevin Culligan, O.C.D. **CD-189**

**Edith Stein and Renewal**  
By John Sullivan, O.C.D. **CD-190**

**Pere Jacques' Retreat**  
By Salvatore Sciorba, O.C.D. **CD-192**

**Elizabeth of the Trinity  
and Silence**  
By Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. **CD-193**

**ENTIRE SET OF 2006  
CONFERENCES (8 CD'S) \$59.95**

#### 2007 FORUM

Carmel:

School of Prayer

**Martha and Mary Working  
Together: Teresa's Meditation  
on the Song of Songs**  
By Kevin Culligan, O.C.D. **CD-160**

**Praying with Br. Lawrence:  
the Practice of the  
Presence of God**  
By Gregory Klein, O. Carm. **CD-161**

**Eros and the Song of Songs  
in John of the Cross**  
By Keith Egan, T.O.Carm. **CD-162**

**Dark Passage to Prophecy**  
By Constance Fitzgerald, O.C.D. **CD-163**

**Story of the Soul: A New  
Arrangement of the Texts**  
By Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. **CD-164**

**Dark Fire: The Prayer  
of Saint Therese**  
By Daniel Chowning, O.C.D. **CD-165**

**Barbe Acarie and the  
Beginnings of Carmel  
In France**  
By Mary Frohlich, RSCJ **CD-166**

**ENTIRE SET OF 2007 FORUM  
CONFERENCES (7 CD'S) \$49.95**

**Each CD is \$8.95**

**10% Discount on purchase of 4 or more**

# Reminders

## Duties of Community Officers

These are the job descriptions for Community Officers as outlined in the Constitutions: **The Council** (¶ 46) is composed of the President, three Councilors and the Director of Formation, and constitutes the immediate authority of the community.

**It is primarily responsible for:**

- a. formation;
- b. Christian and Carmelite maturing of community members.

**The President** (¶ 51) is responsible for:

- a. convoking and presiding over the meetings of the community;
- b. coordinating contacts with those members unable to attend meetings;
- c. aiding the Director of Formation and Spiritual Assistant.

**The Councilors** (¶ 52) are responsible for:

- a. governing the community with the President;
- b. supporting the Director of Formation.

**The Director of Formation** (¶ 53) is responsible for:

- a. preparing candidates for Temporary and Definitive Promises or Vows;
- b. completing proper formation forms and sending them to the Main Office;
- c. presiding at community meetings in the absence of the President.

**The Secretary of the Council** (¶ 54) is responsible for:

- a. keeping up-to-date the register (Roster/membership list) of the community;
- b. taking and reporting minutes of monthly community meetings;
- c. attending Council meetings and recording Council minutes;
- d. recording (and in collaboration with the Formation Director) submitting forms:
  1. community elections;
  2. admissions to Formation (Receiving the Scapular);
  3. Temporary (First) and Definitive (Final) Promises or Vows;
- e. notifying the Main Office when candidates leave the community.

**The Treasurer** (¶ 55) is responsible for:

- a. receiving and accounting for the funds of the community;
- b. presenting a financial report to the Council every six months;
- c. giving an annual financial report to the community, Provincial/Provincial Delegate & Main Office

## OCDS NEWSLETTER

Disalced Carmelite Friars  
2131 Lincoln Road NE  
Washington, DC 20002-1151

Change service requested

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Waldorf, MD  
Permit No. 30