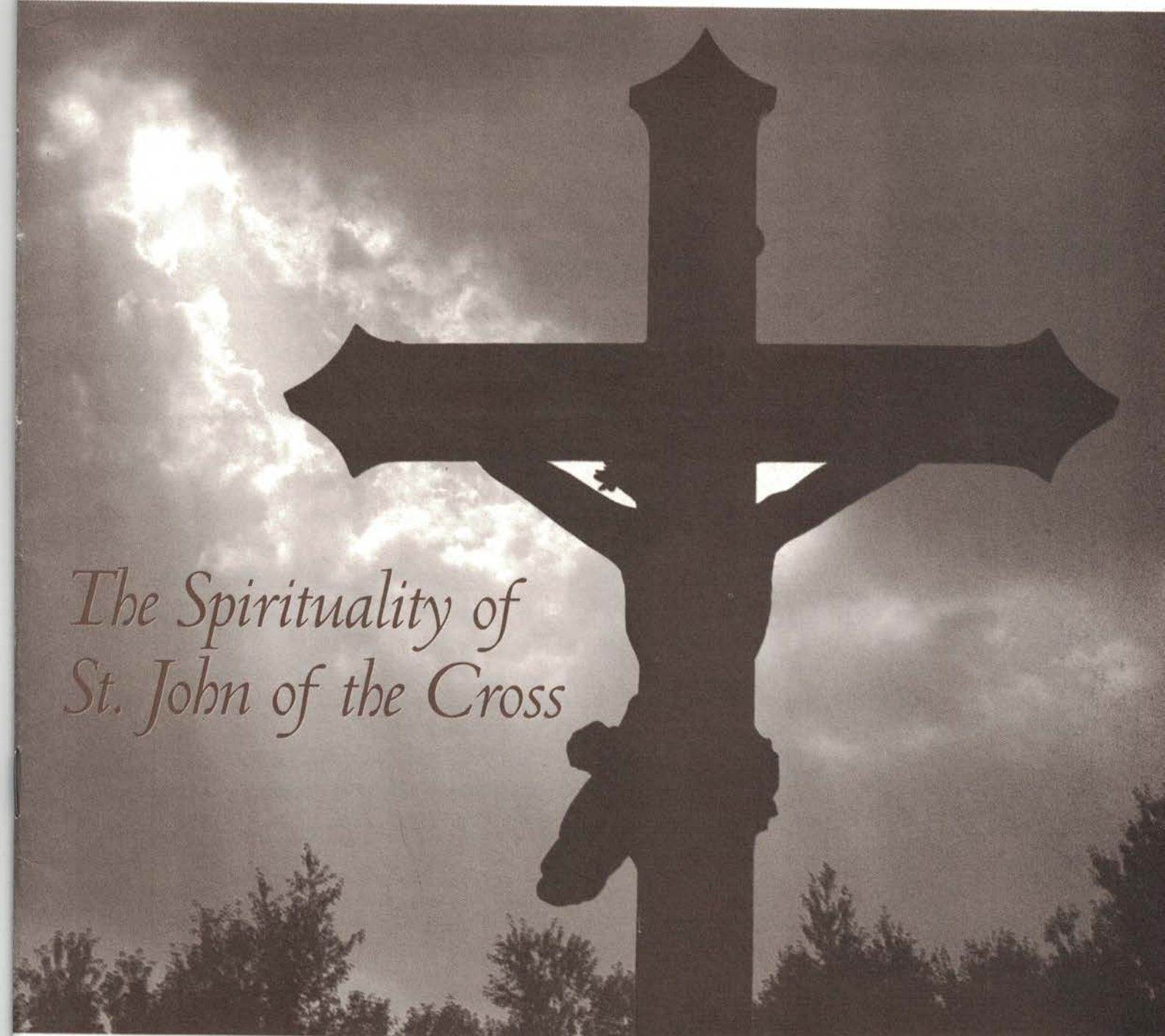


# CARMEL CLARION

November - December 2007    Volume XXIII    No. 6



*The Spirituality of  
St. John of the Cross*

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November – December 2007 Volume XXIII No. 6

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

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

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

Canadian subscription: \$20.00 US per year.

Foreign subscription: \$30.00 US per year.

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Official Website: OCDS Washington Province

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



# Editorial

With this issue of the *Clarion* we come to the end of our year-long concentration on St. John of the Cross. We hope you have found the material informative and helpful as you study our Holy Father's writings. During this past year, we received several notes from various members telling us how much they have benefited from the present format of the *Clarion*. We appreciate those who have taken the time to write to us. Your feedback is important. In the coming year we will focus on St. Therese of Lisieux: her life, times, and teaching.

Members have been asking about the new OCDS Province Statutes. According to Tom McCabe, President of the OCDS Provincial Council, the Council is now ready to begin writing the first draft of the Statutes. For a fuller explanation of the process ahead, see the OCDS website: [ocdswashprov.org](http://ocdswashprov.org). We will be updating you as progress on the Statutes moves forward.

I want to bring to the attention of the Presidents/Secretaries/Treasurers the subject of the "Reminders" section of this month's *Clarion*. The Rosters (the official OCDS membership list of your community) enable us to keep our database up-to-date. It is essential for us that you review the Roster we send you and return it to us with your corrections, additions and deletions. Please do not send us any other membership list created in another format.

It has been brought to my attention that there are some communities that have not paid their 2007 dues. I would ask each Council to remind its membership of its obligation to the Province, and to collect these dues and send them to us before the end of the year. For those who have been asking, the dues for the coming year 2008 will remain the same: \$25.00 for the dues, \$10.00 for the *Clarion*, or \$35.00 in total.

Beginning with the January-February 2008 issue of the *Clarion* we will be introducing a new section we are calling "The Question of the Month." If you have any questions you feel would be helpful to all, please e-mail us at [ocdswash@juno.com](mailto:ocdswash@juno.com) or write us at: 2131 Lincoln Road, Washington DC 20002-1101.

We are also working on revising the forms required for the various stages of formation, etc. We hope to simplify them and make them available on line. In this regard, I would ask those responsible for filling them out to be more zealous in sending them to the main office in a timely manner. This enables us to keep our database current. By the way, we will need these forms on file when your Community applies for Canonical Establishment. We thank you in advance for your efforts in this regard.

Since this is the final issue of the *Clarion* for this year. We want to wish you a very blessed Christmas and a very happy and prosperous New Year.

Fr. Regis, O.C.D.



# St. John of the Cross in Context

Kathleen A. Flynn, OCDS



St. John of the Cross lived in Spain during the sixteenth century. He was born in Fontiveros in 1542, probably on June 24th, and died in the monastery in Ubeda on December 14, 1591. He was the third son of a family that was materially very poor, but judging from their fruitfulness and the testimonies of others, rich in the things that matter to God. John's father, Gonzalo de Yepes, came from a wealthy family of silk merchants. He was orphaned and was raised by an uncle and his family. He eventually worked for his uncle in the silk business, traveling quite a bit in the course of his work.

While traveling through Fontiveros on his way to Medina del Campo on one of these business trips, Gonzalo met Catalina Alvarez, a beautiful young woman who had also been orphaned and was living and working with a woman who was a weaver. The two young people fell in love and wished to marry, but this was not considered an acceptable union in the Spanish culture of the time.

Catalina was poor and quite possibly from a family of "undesirable" ancestry. Gonzalo's family also had bloodlines in their background that they considered it prudent to keep hidden. If Gonzalo were to marry "beneath his class," besides the union being considered inappropriate according to the cultural norms, people would talk and attention would be drawn to his family, possibly uncovering the presence of Jewish blood in their ancestry. They were not willing to take the chance of losing their status and wealth, and so told Gonzalo that he would be disowned if he married Catalina. Despite this threat, Gonzalo, choosing love over wealth, married Catalina, and was consequently cut off from the family.

This choice of John's parents for love, despite the high cost, was a formative influence in John's life. He would have heard, from his family, the circumstances surrounding his parents' marriage, and he experienced first hand the repercussions of that decision. John experienced poverty and hardship, but also, probably, the more subtle blessings that can arise from such circumstances if they are lived out in faith.

John's father, Gonzalo, died before John reached the age of three. This increased the family's poverty and added to their lives the suffering due to loss of a loved one. Later, the middle son in the family would also die, probably from malnutrition. With all the struggle and loss in John's childhood, he may have wondered at times if this was all there was to life. In an attempt to make sense of it all, did he seek meaning in, or was he more open to, the things of God?



I truly believe that “all things work for good for those who love God” (Rm. 8:28), and so believe that despite the extreme physical, emotional and material hardship suffered by John and his family, there were also abundant blessings and growth in the spiritual realm. The fact that the family was later involved in helping the poor, and providing care, baptism and homes for abandoned babies, I believe, is a visible sign of these blessings. Though they themselves were often in need, still they gave of what they had for the good of others. This seems to indicate that the family had developed a dependence on, and awareness of, God’s providential love and care for them. They trusted that God would take care of them, bringing good in some form from all that happened in their lives. This same trust and dependence on God can be seen in John’s later writings. In “Letter 26” in *The Collected Works*, John writes “... Do not let what is happening to me, daughter, cause you any grief, for it does not cause me any. ... 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 ...” (Kavanaugh, 760). John accepted what came to him and even advocated taking the more difficult path, knowing that if he annihilated his own desires and plans, seeking God’s will in all things, rather than his own, he would be free and, paradoxically, have everything he desired. He states in *The Sayings of Light and Love*, # 87, “Crucified inwardly and outwardly with Christ, you will live in this life with fullness and satisfaction of soul ... [Lk. 21:19]” (Kavanaugh, 92).

In addition to the struggles and probable hidden blessings, John’s early life also contained some more obvious blessings. When he was nine years old, moving for the second time in an effort to find a place where they could scrape out a living, John’s family arrived in Medina del Campo. John’s brother Francisco, after a brief “wild” period while still in Arévalo, their former place of residence, was now living a life of prayer and service to the poor, and was married. He was undoubtedly a positive influence in John’s own growth in faith.

Another blessing was that John was able to attend the “School of Doctrine” for poor children where, in addition to Christian doctrine, he learned to read and write. John did very well academically. He also served as an acolyte at the Church of *La Magdalena*, the nearby monastery of Augustinian nuns, and in addition, he was sent to beg alms for the school.

Shortly after this, Don Alonso Alvarez de Toledo, the administrator of a hospital primarily for victims of venereal disease in Medina del Campo, took an interest in John and gave him a job at the hospital as a type of orderly and to collect alms for its support. John proved to be gifted in caring for the sick. He showed great compassion and love for those in his care. The sick would continue to have a special place in his heart throughout his life, as was demonstrated by his care for fellow friars who were ill in the monasteries in which he lived. It was said of him that, “when one of his subjects was sick, he cared for him with a mother’s heart, remaining with him, pampering him, making his bed, keeping him clean, and often feeding him himself” (*God Speaks*, 41).

Don Alonso, both a good role model and a generous man, continued to help John. While continuing work at the hospital, John was given the opportunity to enroll at the newly established Jesuit School, which broadened and developed his knowledge and skills, providing a strong base on which further study and his later writings would grow.

When John finished his studies at the Jesuit School, Don Alonso made him an offer: proceed to ordination to the priesthood and a position as chaplain at the hospital. This would have provided John with some income so that he could help his family. John, however, chose a different path. At the age of twenty-one, he entered the Carmelite Order, which had a monastery in Medina del Campo.

Looking at the situation from the surface, or from the world's perspective, John's decision might seem selfish or imprudent. Why would a man of compassion and love, coming from a life of poverty, not choose the opportunity to improve both his and his family's life financially? That would seem the loving thing to do. But I believe John had the ability to see the situation from a deeper level. He knew that money would not obtain for him his heart's desires, and he also knew that financial security was not what his family sought from life. Francisco, his brother, knowing the spiritual blessings that it can bring, wished to remain poor (both Francisco and John, in their prayer, were in the habit of begging God for certain things. One of these things for which Francisco begged, was that he remain poor). I suspect both John's mother and brother wished him to follow the path to which God was calling him, the path to union with God in love as a member of the Carmelite Order. The culture of Spain during this time, too would have supported this desire for union with God.

This period of Spain's history is often called "the golden age," because there was an abundance of energy and creativity at work in the socio-political, cultural and religious spheres. Spain was politically powerful, and culture and the arts were blossoming. Many universities were established, theological study flourished, and literature was at its peak. Christian faith and spirituality were of prime importance in this culture. Efforts at renewal focused on prayer, recollection, asceticism, mysticism, evangelization and rites. A large number of Saints were produced in Spain during this period.

This part of Spain's history had its roots in the two or three centuries preceding. Christian Europe had suffered from the Black Plague, which had caused a mass exodus from the monasteries, and had experienced dissension arising from the Western Schism. In response to these events, there was the promotion of reform by various sectors of society, including the Church hierarchy, leaders within religious orders, monarchs, nobility and the people themselves. In the Church, the Council of Trent was held during this time, and in the political sphere, Phillip II used his power to influence the religious reform taking place. St. Teresa of Jesus herself sought his help in the carrying out of the Carmelite reform.



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Keith J. Egan, with a doctorate from Cambridge University, is the President of the Carmelite Institute, Washington, DC. He is Aquinas Chair in Catholic Theology Emeritus at St. Mary's College and Adjunct Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame. Dr. Egan has published extensively in Carmelite Spirituality and has lectured widely in North America and in Europe.

Many of the reform efforts among the religious orders had similar goals. They sought to:

return to their roots, to the genuine sources of their charism and/or to the primitive rule,  
live a life of austerity, and  
live a life of prayer.

The reform of the Carmelite Order was influenced by, and a part of, these wider efforts at reform.

During this time, “a new practice called ‘recollection,’ ... developed in many Franciscan houses. This spirituality made union with God through love its most important concern, seeking nourishment in Scripture and classic spiritual works” (Kavanaugh, 13). In *The Sayings of Light and Love*, # 93, John advises his readers to “... abide in recollection with your Bridegroom,” showing the influence John’s environment had on him (Kavanaugh, 92).

Upon completion of his novitiate, St. John of the Cross traveled to Salamanca to study philosophy and theology. The faculty there was one of the best in Spain. While there, John experienced interior conflict, desiring a life more devoted to contemplation, which he felt he could not obtain in Carmel. He was considering joining the Carthusians when he met St. Teresa, who convinced him to wait and join her reform, where he would find what he sought. Meanwhile, he completed his last year of studies at the University.

John must have spent many hours studying and reading Scripture at Salamanca and thereafter. It is very evident in his writings that the teachings of Scripture were a part of the very fabric of his being. He quoted Scripture frequently, using it to express his own spiritual experience, confirm his theological position, or illustrate or support his teaching. For example, in speaking in *The Living Flame of Love* of the flaring up of the Holy Spirit in a soul enflamed with love, John supports his teaching by quoting David, “My heart and my flesh rejoiced in the living God [Ps. 84:2].” He then comments, “David did not refer to God as living because of a necessity to do so, for God is always living, but in order to manifest that the spirit and the senses, transformed in God, enjoy him in a living way, which is to taste the living God—that is, God’s life, eternal life” (Kavanaugh, 643).

Scripture scholarship in sixteenth century Spain was not what it is today. Translations were sometimes corrupt, and at times John would adapt passages to fit his own purpose. Bibles at that time were not translated from the original Hebrew or Greek, and study of these languages and the context in which the texts were written was not a focus. Rather, there was an adherence to traditional ways of interpreting and using Scripture. Still, John must have been unusually insightful and wise in his understanding of Scripture. While he was rector in Baeza, professors from the University there sought him out in order to discuss the Bible with him.

John became the first friar of St. Teresa’s reform. He later would establish other monasteries for friars, and assist in new foundations for the nuns. John’s fruitfulness



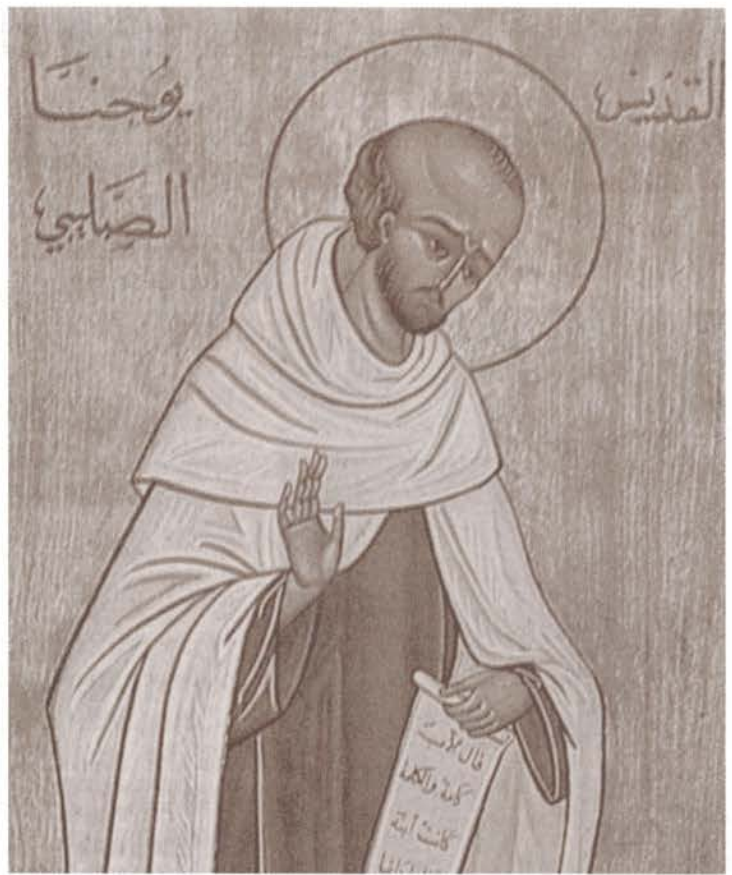
in the reform, however, was not without cost for him personally. John spent nine months in a monastery prison in Toledo, living under horrendous conditions. He suffered both physical and psychological abuse, which must have caused him not only great physical pain, but feelings of confusion, self-doubt, and possibly despair as well. In this prison, John was truly impoverished in every sense of the word, he had lost everything, yet it was here that he first began to write his poetry, words speaking of the great wonder and love of God.

In such total misery and nothingness, there was nothing left to cling to, nothing to give satisfaction. In such total poverty, John became very open to God, sensitive to the workings of the Spirit. There was no where else to go, nothing else to do. God alone could help him. Being emptied of everything that was not God, he was filled with God, and hence he had everything. And so he states, "Mine are the heavens and mine is the earth. . . . God himself is mine and for me, because Christ is mine and all for me" (Kavanaugh, *Sayings*, 87-88).

St. John of the Cross was obviously gifted in many ways. Influenced by the strong religious culture and renewal of his time, he sought God in all things. The poverty of his childhood helped him learn dependence on God, his days in Medina, love for the poor, sick, and suffering. He learned to beg, both from others and from God, for what was needed. He came to understand the primacy of God, and that by following the path of *nada*, giving up all things for him, he would gain everything, he would come to union with God. He learned that love was both the path and the goal, for God is love. And he wrote down what he learned so that others might benefit from it. May his teaching and his intercession help us to follow the same path to He who is All.

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# John of the Cross and the Laity

*Leonard Doohan*



When Juan De Yepes entered the Carmelite Order in 1563 at the age of 21, many of the qualities that would mark his later life were already formed, often in interaction with exceptional laity, primarily his family but others as well.<sup>1</sup>

John was born in 1542, the third child of Catalina Alvarez (a poor orphaned silk weaver) and Gonzalo de Yepes (a member of a wealthy Toledan silk merchant family that disowned him at the time of his marriage). Shortly after John's birth, Gonzalo contracted a serious and painful illness, and died when John was only two. Rejected by Gonzalo's relatives because she was not of the appropriate social standing, Catalina struggled through acute poverty, social ostracism, unemployment and homelessness, migrating from town to town in search of work, food, and education for her sons. Around the time of John's sixth birthday, his brother Luis died, probably of malnutrition. Francisco, John's oldest brother, was a typical teenager, offering Catalina many worries until a youthful conversion transformed him into a young man of prayer and concern for the needy. Francisco married Ana Izquierdo. The young couple began to share not only Catalina's home, but also its life of virtue, love, care for the needy, struggles, endurance, and hard work.

Within this extended family, John likewise experienced poverty, hunger, homelessness, rejection, the constant struggle to find work or deal with expensive and debilitating illnesses. But he had also shared a foundational experience of good family life that would not be crushed by oppression, would not allow rejection to turn to bitterness, injustice to anger, or seeming hopelessness to despair. Many of the values and virtues evidenced in John's later life are rooted in the initial formation he received in his own family, which was, in its own way, a model of beatitudinal living: blessed are the poor, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger, the merciful, the peacemakers, the single-hearted, and those who suffer persecution.

In Medina del Campo, John was first sent to a kind of boarding school for orphans and children of the poor; later he was trained in carpentry, tailoring, and painting (though his talents lay in other directions). As a teenager, John began working as an orderly in the local Plague Hospital, under the guidance of a generous lay administrator, Don Alonso Alvarez. John showed great ability in working with the sick, obtaining alms for their support and developing the patience and compassionate love for others that would always remain with him. In his free time he studied at the local Jesuit school nearby.



In short, John came to the Carmelites already familiar with sacrifice, both that which is actively pursued and that which is passively accepted. He was a person of profound love, nurtured in his family but extended to everyone, especially the poor. He could live without bitterness toward those who seemed responsible for injustice, for his mother had trained him to see all life as part of God's plan. He was a person with extraordinary single-mindedness in pursuing his goal. While he had not yet expressed them fully, John was already living the basic principles of his "system" of spiritual growth.

### **Significant Laity in the Life of John of the Cross**

Even after John's entry into the Carmelite Order, lay people continued to play a major role in his life, as friends, spiritual directees, and partners in ministry. John first met Teresa of Avila in late 1567 while she was in Medina del Campo, staying in the home of a lay benefactor, the wealthy merchant Blas de Medina. She and John agreed to collaborate in spreading Teresa's reform to the Carmelite friars. John set out to open the first house of the reform in a small dilapidated farmhouse in Duruelo, given to Teresa by the layman Don Rafael Mejia Velazquez. Teresa had instructed John not to go directly to Duruelo but to pass through Avila and visit Francisco de Salcedo, a layman who had already played a special role in Teresa's own spiritual maturation. While we do not know what Francisco said to John, Teresa obviously trusted this layman's advice at a crucial time in the founding of the friars' reform.<sup>2</sup>

The laywoman Dona Ana del Mercado y Penalosa likewise played a crucial role in John's life, and in the spread of the Carmelite reform to Andalusia.<sup>3</sup> A wealthy widow, she assisted John and Anne of Jesus in establishing a monastery of the disalced Carmelite nuns in Granada. She became one of John's closest friends, and the directee for whom he would write (and to whom he would dedicate) the *Living Flame of Love*, his most sublime work. She later returned to her original palace in Segovia, becoming the principal benefactress of the disalced Carmelite monastery in that city. When John was eventually transferred to Segovia himself, she left her palace to live in some small buildings directly across the road from the entrance to the monastery, so that she could be closer to her director. In fact, as a reward for her generosity, she obtained permission to be buried there in the Carmelite chapel next to her husband, and that no matter where John of the Cross would die he too would be buried in the same place.

In addition to the *Living Flame*, two of John's thirty-three surviving letters were written to Dona Ana (Letters 28 & 31). These writings indicate John's profound appreciation for this "noble and devout lady."<sup>4</sup>

"Jesus be in your soul.

...I mentioned in the other letter how I desire to remain in this desert of La Penuela....

...Pray for this, my daughter. But even though I am so happy here, I would not fail to come should you desire.

Take care of your soul and do not confess scruples or ...imaginings in which the soul does not desire to be detained. Look after your health, and do not fail to pray when you can" (Letter 28).

And again, shortly before his death, John writes:

"Jesus be in your soul, my daughter in Christ.

...I am very happy to know that [your brother] is now a priest of the Lord.... Even though I am forgetful, I will not be able to forget him, since he is so close to his sister whom I always remember.

Greetings in the Lord to my daughter Dona Ines. And may both of you pray God to prepare me that he may bring me to himself" (Letter 31).

These letters show John's concern for her friendship and health, while the Living Flame, the description of the later stages in the spiritual life, shows how deeply he knew and appreciated her spiritual and mystical maturity.

In fact, as John moved to various cities he always attracted the friendship and spiritual commitment of laity. In Baeza there were Teresa de Ibros (a farm laborer's wife and a mystic), Maria de Paz, Maria Vilches, Juana de Arjona, Juana de la Paz, Bernardina de Robles, Juan de Vera (a sculptor and painter).<sup>5</sup> In Segovia there were Dona Ana del Mercado y Penalosa, her niece Ines (mentioned in Letter 31 above) and her maid Leonor de Vitoria.<sup>6</sup>

In Granada lived Juana de Pedraza, to whom John wrote two of his surviving letters.<sup>7</sup> In the first, he expresses genuine friendship and his delight in receiving letters from her, and also speaks of love of God and obedience to the divine will in ways that presume Juana's spiritual maturity:

"Jesus be in your soul.

A few days ago I wrote to you ... in answer to your last letter, which, as was your hope, I prized....And I have felt your grief, afflictions, and loneliness. These, in silence, ever tell me so much more that the pen cannot declare it.

...O great God of love, and Lord! How many riches do you place in the soul that neither loves nor is satisfied save in you alone, for you give yourself to it and become one with it through love....But because it behooves us not to go without the cross, just as our Beloved did not go without it, even to the death of love, God ordains our sufferings that we may love what we most desire, make greater sacrifices, and be worth more" (Letter 11).

Ten months later John writes again to Juana, who is feeling abandoned both by God and by her friends, including John. He reaffirms his friendship, and challenges and supports Juana in the desolation she is experiencing. *(continued on page 15)*



(continued from page 10)

“Jesus be in your soul and thanks to him that he has enabled me not to forget the poor, as you say, or be idle, as you say. For it greatly vexes me to think that you believe what you say; this would be very bad after so many kindnesses on your part when I least deserved them. That’s all I need now is to forget you! Look, how could this be so in the case of one who is in my soul as you are?

Since you walk in these darkneses and voids of spiritual poverty, you think that everyone and everything is failing you. But nothing is failing you, neither do you have to discuss anything..., because all of these are doubts without basis. You are making good progress. Do not worry, but be glad!

...You were never better off than now because you were never so humble..., nor did you serve God so purely and disinterestedly as now. What is it you desire? What kind of life or method of procedure do you paint for yourself in this life? What do you think serving God involves other than avoiding evil, keeping his commandments, and being occupied with the things of God as best we can? When this is had, what need is there of other apprehensions or other lights and satisfactions from this source or that? ...[What] need is there in order to be right other than to walk along the level road of the law of God and of the Church, and to 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?

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” (Letter 19).

In Ubeda John’s friends and benefactors included Dona Maria de Molina and her two daughters Catalina and Ines, Doctor Villarreal, Don Bartolome Ortega Cabrio, Cristobal de la Higuera, Juan de Cuellar, and many others.<sup>8</sup>

John also attracted many young people to his spiritual guidance, and while some of them may have later become priests or religious, it was as laity that the initial commitment was made; Juan de San Pablo, Luis de San Angelo, Jose de la Madre de Dios, Sebastian de San Hilario. Clearly, in his own day, John was close to lay people, who valued his friendship and guidance.

### **Interpreting John of the Cross for the Contemporary Church**

Some great spiritual leaders seem to have a message mainly for their own times, and do not speak as effectively to later generations. Others, like Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, are canonized (i.e., considered canonical) by the faithful, who are convinced that their lives and teachings have enduring value. This does not necessarily mean that such individuals are better in any absolute sense than the many hidden saints known only to God, but rather that

their teaching and example capture universal values and respond to common human concerns.

John of the Cross notes in opening pages of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, for example, that his “main intention is not to address everyone, but only some of the persons of our holy order of the primitive observance of Mount Carmel, both friars and nuns, since they are the ones who asked me to write” (*Ascent*, Prologue, 9). We should not be surprised, therefore, that he develops no explicit “lay spirituality” in the contemporary sense. John of the Cross did not write specifically for us, nor did he have our church and world in mind. This means that we cannot take a fundamentalistic approach to his experience or his writings, but must constantly reinterpret John’s teachings in the light of our own knowledge and experience, so that what was spirit and life when he proclaimed it can again become spirit and life for us today. Reading John of the Cross, then, requires many interpretational skills. Here I mention a few points to keep in mind when interpreting John for contemporary lay Christians.

First, John’s special ministry to the consecrated religious of sixteenth century Spain does not mean that he undervalued the lay vocation. Quite the opposite! But the social context was different. For many, religious life represented the only outlet for a special commitment to follow Christ; others were forced by their families to join because of social and financial concerns. John’s teachings are directed to all who wished to dedicate themselves to God. His doctrine is all the more valid today in light of Vatican II’s emphasis on the “universal call to holiness.”

Second, the role of the church in sixteenth century Spain was also very different from our present experience, much more rigidly hierarchical, a “perfect society;” official power was invested almost exclusively in the nobility and clergy, with the majority of the laity often illiterate. John, however, seemed to focus on religion as a movement of the Spirit within the whole ecclesial community. Though always respectful of church authorities and appreciative of the sacramental economy of the church as the normal channel of grace, John’s ecclesiology was more expansive; he seemed unhampered by exaggerated concerns with institutional issues, even though involved in them.

Third, many spiritual movements in John’s time considered temporal realities an encumbrance to spiritual growth, something the religiously devout should normally despise as of no value. By contrast, the Second Vatican Council spoke of the intrinsic goodness of creation and the legitimate autonomy of earthly realities. Despite occasional appearances to the contrary, John was ahead of his time in valuing the created order as God’s gift, “through the Incarnation of his Son and through the glory of his resurrection ... clothed ... entirely in beauty and dignity” (*Canticle* 5,4). What must be eliminated, for John, is not the outer world but our inner possessiveness. The harsh-sounding statements in the first book of the *Ascent* and elsewhere should be understood not as a rejection of the created order, but as a call for a fundamental rectification in our human values. Unlike some du-



alistic, world-negating spiritualities that cannot be adapted to our present needs, John teaches that values and desires not conducive to a God-directed life must be transformed and redirected. Our “disordered appetites” must be integrated and purified, rather than absolutized or destroyed—a message as valid for married couples as for celibate religious.

Finally, contemporary spirituality seems to be in some sense less “individualistic” than much of the piety in John’s day.

This is not to deny that Christians of the Spanish Golden Age were interested in social issues, or concerned about the poor and oppressed, but spiritual texts of the time tended to focus more exclusively on the relationship between the individual soul and God, without the same attention we see today on developing a collective spirituality of social justice, world transformation, or political service. Indeed, John himself ordinarily speaks of the individual soul and God. Yet the principles John presents are just as valid in a communal perspective. Peoples and nations, as well as individuals, need to undergo the purification of the Nights in their journey together to God.

As the church gains new insights about itself, human development, and the social or psychological aspects of life, it reflects and then confronts these with the gospel and if necessary adapts its spirituality or creates new spiritualities. John’s teachings offer major challenges for contemporary laity provided we interpret them in changed contexts. Sometimes the language may put us off, but the doctrine is as valid as ever. He articulates the universal call to holiness, challenges all of us to emphasize the life of the Spirit in times of exaggerated institutional concerns, sees life dynamically (everything, whether earthly or heavenly, can be directed either toward God or toward self), and calls us to synthesize all aspects of life in one great self-commitment, both integrated and wholistic.

### **John, a Model for Key Aspects of Lay Life**

We have already seen John’s very positive view of family life. This was not just a youthful phase left behind upon entering the Carmelites. He kept in contact with his family throughout his life. John’s mother Catalina developed a close relationship with the nuns of the Teresian reform, as did his brother Francisco with the



friars. Francisco visited John several times in Segovia, and John visited Francisco in Medina del Campo. They were not only brothers but friends, and “soul friends” too, as they both strove to lead God-directed lives in their different vocations. Catalina’s house in Medina was on the same street as the monastery of the discalced Carmelite nuns. Teresa insisted that they make sure Catalina suffered no want, and their account books show they followed Teresa’s directions. In her home, the domestic church over which Catalina presided, John’s initial and lasting formation took place. As he grew and gained new insights into life with God, his family teachers became disciples and coworkers, sharing a common vision and commitment. John of the Cross’s appreciation of maternal love was so profound that he chose it as an ideal symbol of God’s love for us (see *Night I,1,2*; *Canticle 27, 1*).

John’s early life provided the strong foundation for a spirituality of work (see *Ascent 3,28,6*). Later in the reform he was a tireless worker for others in both his ministry and his writing. But he also showed good leadership and organizational skills in managing the business of the reformed houses. He worked hard to generate financial support for new foundations, and Father Doria relied on those skills in the expansion of the monastery in Segovia. John contributed practical building and painting talents in remodeling the first house of the reform in Duruelo, and his artwork was used in decorating new foundations. He also helped design two of the monasteries, which were built under his direction. He planned the cloister in Segovia and the aqueduct in Granada—both still admired.

John also balanced his intense working life with leisure. He could enjoy recreation with his community, singing, dancing, giving religious interpretations to poetry (see *Ascent 3,24,5*). He appreciated the beauty of the countryside, and many sections of his writings offer a sound basis today for an ecological spirituality.

One of John’s most delightful qualities was his capacity for friendship, which he compared to union with God (see *Night I,7,4*). Not only did he interact well with his brothers in community, who loved him very much, but he made new friends easily, in Baeza, Granada, Segovia and elsewhere. He was comfortable with the wealthy and those of high social status, with church people, with the poor, and also with women, whether lay or religious.

Christians today are more conscious than ever of the Church’s strengths and weaknesses. John’s spiritual journey took place in the midst of a troubled church. His seemed to be a balance of faith and realism; he believed in the church in spite of its human failings and continued to live his own life with honesty and a healthy distance from what was detrimental to true ecclesial life. His deep sense of obedience did not prevent him from disagreeing with his superiors when he felt they were wrong, planning his escape from the monastery prison of Toledo, or attending “illegal” chapters of the reform.

John is well known for his call to purify our religious concepts and images, since even good but finite images can become idols; we end up worshipping ideas of our own creation (see *Flame 3,73*). Among the most destructive idols today is



the image of laity as an isolated and passive part of the church. One of the first things laity need to renounce is this false notion of themselves. Ninety-eight percent of the church are laity! Jesus' call was to all, equally and without distinction—there were no “clergy” or “laity” in the modern sense among Jesus' first disciples. One of the great lessons John of the Cross teaches us is to be open to new movements



of the Holy Spirit, willing to reject and not be enslaved by harmful images from the past. John is rooted in the uncluttered core of the Christian spiritual life; he interprets its essential call for changing circumstances, and he identifies for all of us the universal call to holiness. This is why his teaching and example remains so important for laity today.

## Notes

1. For further biographical information on John of the Cross, see especially Federico Ruiz et al., *God Speaks in the Night: The Life, Times and Teaching of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991); Richard P. Hardy, *Search for Nothing: The Life John of the Cross* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1982). John's family background and youth are discussed in exhaustive detail in the first two chapters of the former work.
2. See *God Speaks in the Night*, pp. 95-96.
3. See *God Speaks in the Night*, pp. 222-223, 323-325.
4. All quotations from John are from *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, 2d ed. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991). The letters are quoted according to their numbering in this edition. The three arabic numerals following references to the *Ascent and Night* indicate the book, chapter, and section, respectively, from which selections from the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and the *Dark Night* are taken; similarly, the two numbers following references to the *Canticle and Flame* indicate the stanza and section from which quotations from the *Spiritual Canticle* and the *Living Flame of Love* are taken.
5. See *God Speaks in the Night*, pp. 207-211.
6. See *God Speaks in the Night*, pp. 323-325.
7. See *God Speaks in the Night*, pp. 243, 343-345.
8. See *God Speaks in the Night*, pp. 365-366.

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## In Remembrance

**Janette Nedzynski, OCDS**, of Mary of Mt. Carmel, began eternal life on August 3, 2007. She was a member of the Community of the Blessed Trinity in Rome, NY and made her vows in February, 2001.

**Patricia Hayes, OCDS**, Therese of the Visitation, began eternal life on August 26, 2007. She was a member of the Community of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel and St. Teresa of Avila in Des Plaines, IL.

**Dorothy Fitzgerald, OCDS**, Dorothy Dominica of the Eucharist, began eternal life on September 7, 2007. She was a member of the Community of St. Joseph in New Hartford, NY.

**Rocco C. Ganino, OCDS**, age 90, began eternal life on September 8, 2007. He was a member of the Community of Our Mother of Sorrows in Stamford, CT and made his Definitive Promise in January 1973.

**Gertrude Messner, OCDS**, Maria Trinita, age 92, began eternal life on September 21, 2007. She was a member of the Community of St. Teresa of Jesus in Philadelphia, PA and made her Definitive Promise in June 1986.



# Flower of Carmel Community

A Community of Secular Discalced Carmelites,  
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# Temptation and Spiritual Discernment in Ignatius of Loyola and John of the Cross

*Segundo Galilea*

The practice of discernment is as old as Christian spirituality. To discern is to distinguish between good and evil in order to choose the good. It is to identify the will of God in order to follow it. In this sense discernment is applicable to any believer, whether or not this person has a spirituality, and whether it be profound or in its beginning stages. In this general form, discernment is often practiced instinctively according to the light of one's own conscience.

There is, nevertheless, a more specific form of discernment particularly applicable to our concern: the subtle, deceitful temptations that lead to mediocrity. The tradition calls this form "discernment of spirits." Here one is dealing not so much with explicitly distinguishing good from evil, but rather with distinguishing the good spirit from the bad spirit, that is to say, distinguishing what is a call from God and what is temptation. This differs from the discernment of good and evil in that, even with good will, the two spirits are easy to confuse, since on this level (when we are dealing with spiritual persons) the temptations are subtle; at first sight they do not seem bad and could even be taken as inspirations from God.

The discernment of spirits is much more complex than any other type of discernment. It requires experience, sound doctrine, and counsel. This discernment has a long tradition in Christian spirituality; it is present, to varying degrees, in the teaching of all the great mystics and spiritual masters, beginning with the desert fathers and mothers. But not all of them have attempted to analyze the theme in a systematic way, nor have they always excelled as masters in the discernment of spirits.

Among the masters, the most well-known and influential—after them little new has been said about spiritual discernment—are Saint Ignatius of Loyola and Saint John of the Cross. Their teaching is the inspiration for these reflections.

Ignatius and John of the Cross complement one another, but the character of their mysticism differs. Ignatian mysticism is oriented to apostolic service; his discernment seeks to arrive at a form of commitment, of "making a choice (election) to serve Christ" in his church. Making a choice is essential in Ignatian discernment and the key to his Exercises. Sanjuanist mysticism, on the other hand, is oriented to communion with God and neighbor through faith, hope and love. Fray John is a contemplative mystic. His discernment is not directed as much toward orienting and confirming a way of making a choice for Christ as it is toward purifying and developing a choice already made. Thus the differences and the complementarity. Ignatius is more universal. His doctrine of discernment is as appropriate for those who want to begin to follow Christ as for those advanced in spirituality (in principle his Spiritual Exercises are appropriate for all who want to reform their lives). John of the



Cross directs himself to those who are already on the way of Christian perfection; he assumes the first conversion and choice of a way of life. In fact, most of his writings are directed to members of the reformed Carmel. To be sure, his doctrine has universal application; in principle, though, his writings are not as well suited to those who are just beginning, even less to those who require a first conversion.

Still, both mystics have the same objective: a discernment of spirits that permits the soul to adopt attitudes and decisions leading toward a greater surrender to God through love. And both mystics present discernment as a process of illumination, in which availability for loving and serving God is purified and confirmed. Because of the different styles of their writings (the *Exercises* of Ignatius are schematic, in the form of aids for the director; the major prose writings of Fray John are treatises), their methods of explaining the process and the doctrine of discernment differ. Ignatius presents a system of “Rules” in pedagogical order (14 in the first week of the *Exercises* and 8 in the second), in addition to the “times and ways of making a choice of a way of life” that characterize the second week and add valuable criteria for discerning the will of God. On the other hand, John of the Cross’s doctrine of discernment is not synthesized as such, but scattered throughout his writings, as he analyzes the subtle defects and temptations of “spiritual people,” above all in his treatise *The Dark Night*. For the Carmelite saint, the “nights” correspond to the illumination and painful purification of inordinate attachments, thus implying a process of discernment. (Fray Juan’s “night,” however, corresponds to the Ignatian “desolation” only in some aspects, as we will later see.)

Both mystics, in the end, also concur in the fact that their doctrine about discernment of spirits proceeds basically from their own personal experience. In this, Ignatius is particularly transparent: his rules for discernment and moments of making a choice correspond to his personal life experiences, historically identifiable during the first stages of his conversion of life.

### Criteria for Discerning Temptation

The criteria of both mystics for discerning what comes from God and what is temptation agree to a great extent, although their modes of presentation differ in details. Furthermore, they both add original contributions that enrich and mutually complement one another. In Ignatius these criteria of discernment are explicitly identified in the book of the *Exercises*; in John of the Cross they are present throughout all his writings in a more implicit way (he almost never uses the term “discernment,” for example).

*The Need for Inner Freedom.* Provisionally, both agree in a fundamental criterion: Discerning the good spirit from the bad (temptation) requires the disposition of interior freedom, a progressive interior liberation from sins and deliberate faults, from inordinate affections and attachments, from passions and tendencies that customarily obscure and condition discernment in each person. (This interior freedom corresponds to the “indifference” of Ignatius and the “nothings” of John of the Cross.)





The grace of interior freedom in order to be able to respond with love and perseverance to the choice that God asks is one of the foundations of the Ignatian *Exercises*. In the "Introductory Observations," no. I, for example, he writes: "we call Spiritual Exercises every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments, and, after their removal, of seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of our soul. "The same theme appears in no. 23, "First Principle and Foundation." Again, in his counsels for making "a good and correct choice of a way of life" (Second Week), Ignatius wants to ensure interior freedom in the moments of making a choice, and a holy objectivity and indifference.

John of the Cross follows another method on the road to this interior freedom: He analyzes in spiritual persons the subtle and often unconscious temptations and enslavements of the soul that hinder a greater freedom to love. At the same time he proposes the manner of behavior for the soul to receive illumination from God, and thus to discern and purify this subtle servitude. Whereas Ignatius places the accent on making a choice for the service of God, Fray John places it on communion with God. These are the two complementary dimensions of Christian mysticism. We read in the first book of the *Dark Night* (Chapters 2 to 7) that the characteristic quality of these imperfections and temptations is that the spiritual person does not perceive them as such; but rather it seems that he or she is doing well. The Carmelite saint sees in this a typical form of the deceitful influence of the devil. This can lead to a secret spiritual pride and complacency in the spiritual person's Christian practices; a desire to have more and more pleasures and sensory experiences; or to delight in them, searching for one's own gratification; or wanting to appear spiritual before others; or becoming discouraged and irritable when one does not "feel" fervor; or the tendency as well to compare oneself with others. For John of the Cross, discernment and the overcoming of these temptations that threaten interior freedom require the purifying and illuminating action of God in the soul (the nights of sense and of spirit).

*Evil Under the Guise of Good.* The two mystics agree perfectly in another fundamental criterion: The most subtle and dangerous temptation in spiritual persons is that which happens under the appearance of good. By this means the devil deceives and obscures discernment. Thus in the fourth Ignatian rule, no. 332 (Second Week of the Exercises), Ignatius writes: "It is a mark of the evil spirit to assume the appearance of an angel of light. . . . Afterward, he will endeavor little by little to end by drawing the soul into his hidden snares and evil designs." And John of the Cross in his *Precautions* (no. 10) says: "It should be noted that among the many wiles of the devil to deceive spiritual persons, the most common is deceiving them under the appearance of good rather than of evil, for he already knows that they will scarcely choose a recognized evil."

*Consolation and Desolation.* This fact underscores the importance of taking into account other more particular criteria pertaining to the discernment of spirits. Among these, the criterion of "consolation-desolation" occupies an eminent place in Ig-

natus's doctrine. In one way or another, this criterion is present in almost all the "rules for the discernment of spirits," whether in the First Week or the Second. The criterion is essentially this: What comes from God causes consolation in the soul; what comes from the evil spirit, from temptation, causes desolation. Consolation is peace, inspiration toward the good, intensity of faith, confidence and love toward God. These signs of consolation are not always accompanied by relief felt in the senses. What gives consolation is not necessarily what pleases the person more; peace and inspiration toward the good can at times be accompanied by aridity and interior sacrifice. Desolation, on the other hand, is the state contrary to consolation (confusion, anxiety, sadness, lukewarmness, etc.). Equally, the signs of desolation can at times be accompanied by sensory pleasures; desolation and consolation are experiences rooted in the depth of the soul, not in pure sensibility.

John of the Cross, on this topic, takes a different path, although convergent and complementary. His point of departure is not that of consolation-desolation in the process of spiritual discernment, but rather that of the "nights," of "the aridities and trials of the dark night of the soul." For Fray John, the night is essentially the presence of the action of God, a process in which the soul must keep itself faithful and at peace, in spite of all. (In this sense the night has affinities with Ignatian consolation and not with desolation.) The night is an experience of profound purification of spirit by aridities and trials, and what the Carmelite saint seeks in his doctrine is to help souls discern if this experience of the night is fulfilling the sanctifying objective that God wants for it, or if the devil is taking advantage of the aridity to make these persons believe that they are evil because they do not "feel" the things of God, and thereby to carry the soul off on the road to discouragement and mediocrity. That is to say, John's goal is to discern if the night is rooted in consolation or moving toward desolation, to use Ignatian language. The criterion of John of the Cross for discerning if one is in the night that comes from God or in the desolation of the evil spirit is that, in the former, one maintains the fundamental choice and faithfulness to God in all aspects of the practice of Christian life; and in the second, conversely, faithfulness progressively declines. In the night there is no sensible consolation, but certainly fidelity; what is important is not what is felt, but what is coming into being (see especially *Ascent Prologue*, 6).

But it can happen as well that at the beginning the evil spirit disguises himself with consolation and by that means carries the soul off to desolation. Ignatius and Fray John both approach these cases with a similar criterion of discernment: The way of discerning true or false consolation is by the fruits that ultimately prevail in the soul, and whether or not they belong to the spirit of God.

Thus Ignatius in the third and fifth rules of the Second Week (nos. 331 and 333) insists: "The good angel and the evil spirit can give consolation to a soul, but for a quite different purpose. The good angel consoles for the progress of the soul that it may advance and rise to what is more perfect. The evil spirit consoles for purposes that are contrary, and that afterward he might draw the soul to his own perverse in-



tentions and wickedness. ...[And so] it may end in what weakens the soul, or disquiets it; or by destroying the peace, tranquility, and quiet that it had before, it may cause disturbance to the soul." And John of the Cross (II *Ascent* II, 6) notes that the communications that appear devout but come from the evil spirit "cause in the spirit either agitation, dryness, and vanity or presumption. Yet diabolical communications are not as efficacious in doing harm as God's communications are in doing good. For the diabolical communications can only arouse the first movements without being able to move the will any further if it is unwilling to be moved.... The divine communications, however, penetrate the soul, move the will to love, and leave their effect within." Thus the complementarity of the two saints is evident once more in the doctrine of discernment of consolations, desolations, and the nights.

*Consulting Others.* One last basic criterion in which both saints agree: personal discernment often runs the risk of error even in using the traditional criteria because of the deceitful nature of temptation and our lack of interior freedom. Therefore, in the process of discerning matters of evident importance one must consult with competent people and ask their advice. At the same time this helps individuals confirm for themselves the course taken and the decisions made (for Ignatius, confirmation of the choice discerned and made is very important). John of the Cross says: "It should be noted that among the many wiles of the devil to deceive spiritual persons, the most common is deceiving them under the appearance of good. To do the right thing, and be safe in such a matter, you ought to take the proper counsel" (Precautions, <sup>10</sup>). Ignatius agrees: "When the enemy of our human nature tempts a just soul with his wiles and seductions, he earnestly desires that they be received secretly and kept secret. But if one manifests them to a confessor, or to some other spiritual person who understands his deceits and malicious designs, the evil one is very much vexed. For he knows that he cannot succeed in his evil undertaking once his evident deceits have been revealed" (Exercises, First Week, Rules for Discernment, no. 326).

This last criterion is ecclesial: it means having recourse in the discernment process to people who represent the church for us. This same perspective will come to Ignatius later in writing his "Rules for Thinking with the Church."

## Conclusion

In summary, for Ignatius and John of the Cross the discernment of temptations characteristic of spiritual people is equivalent to discerning the good from the evil spirit. As a fundamental condition, both insist on interior freedom from disordered attachments of the will ("indifference" for the Jesuit, the "nothing" for the Carmelite). This presupposed, both adopt the basic criterion of consolation-desolation (understood as profound and lasting states of the soul and not merely transitory and purely sensible) as signs of the good and evil spirit respectively. And in order to confirm the discernment and avoid the dangers of subjectivism, both stress the importance of verifying what is discerned with competent spiritual people. Their message remains as important for us today as it was for the church of their own time.

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*John of the Cross says: "It should be noted that among the many wiles of the devil to deceive spiritual persons, the most common is deceiving them under the appearance of good. To do the right thing, and be safe in such a matter, you ought to take the proper counsel"*

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# Reminders

## Community Rosters

Community rosters are the basis of the official information contained in the OCDS database for the Washington Province. They are used to confirm membership in the Order and to generate the mailing list for the *Clarion*. Ongoing maintenance of the Rosters should be a team effort between the President, Formation Director, Secretary, Treasurer, and OCDS Main Office.

Presidents should record Community Officers and year of election in the STATUS column. Notations of those members who have made their Definitive/Final Promise or Vows, and are "infirm" or "inactive" and unable to attend meetings due to age, illness, distance, or other approved reasons, should be noted.

Formation Directors should review people listed and cross off all those who are no longer in formation. Members transferring will remain on the Community Roster until released and accepted by the receiving Community, and paperwork is received at the Main Office.

Secretaries should insure accuracy of members' name, address, and phone.

Treasurers should indicate amount received for annual OCDS dues and subscriptions to the *Clarion*. Council may waive need to pay for health or financial reasons by entering \$0.00 in the DUES column.

Rosters will be sent to all communities by the end of November. **PLEASE USE THE ROSTER AS A TURN-AROUND DOCUMENT.** Make corrections, and then **SEND IT BACK TO US!**

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