

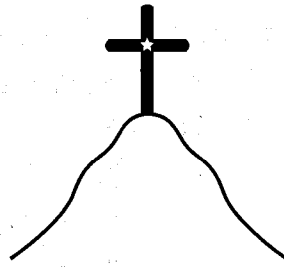


*A faithful and perduring attentiveness
to our depths and center is the best
cooperation we can give to God who is
reorienting our life.*

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The Summer issue is a continuation of the Spring issue, in which we present more chapters from John Welch's book.

"A faithful and perduring attentiveness to our depths and center is the best cooperation we can give to God who is reorienting our life."

Theologian Monika Hellwig

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Chapter Four
THE INSTITUTION OF THE
FIRST MONKS

Carmel's Foundational Story

The earliest Carmelites attacked the problem of egoism, disordered desires, and enslaved hearts through a disciplined life which combined elements of prayer, fasting, silence, solitude, and work. These were the time-honored weapons of desert dwellers. They put on the armor of faith. Each man was told to stay in or near his cell "pondering on the Lord's law day and night, and keeping watch at his prayers..." He was to abstain from meat, fasting every day from the Feast of The Exaltation of the Holy Cross until Easter (i.e., most of the year). These men owned everything in common, each living on what was given him by the prior, whom he was to reverence.

With these weapons the Carmelite entered the interior desert, willing to face whatever dangerous powers lived there. They opened themselves to the currents within their souls and the full force of their own untamed thoughts and desires. The structures of their life undermined their willfulness. Steeping themselves in scripture, they lived trustingly in the presence of God)

In the beginning these men lived quite solitary lives on Mount Carmel, but always with the assumption that they were a community of men in the Christian body. Consequently, eucharist together, daily if possible, was a value. And each week they met to correct and encourage one another.

As time went on, and especially in the new conditions in Europe, the community dimension was strengthened. They began to pray the psalms together at stipulated times each day, and they began to come together at mealtimes as well. The

hermits of Mount Carmel rather quickly became friars in Europe.

The Carmelite Order never disowned its original contemplative inspiration. No matter how neglectful of its calling, no matter how preoccupied with new forms of ministry, Carmelites clung to their foundation in contemplative prayer, which for the early Carmelites took the form of ruminating on scripture, listening for God's approach in their lives. Whenever they rose up to claim their identity or to renew their lives, they returned in spirit to the wadi on Mount Carmel and held up as a privileged activity for all Carmelites the silent encounter with God deep within the human soul.

The call to "watch in prayer" was a constant exhortation. Even though the order had become a mendicant community heavily involved in service of God's people, it was not evident in the order's documents. Carmelites wrote as though they were still living an eremitical life on Mount Carmel, and did not seem to notice any discrepancy with their actual lives. Apparently the contemplative activity, which was often associated with being in their cells, being quiet, being alone, was actually an activity which accompanied, but was different from, whatever else they were doing. Contemplation was another level of human activity, an attentiveness, which may or may not manifest itself in obvious "contemplative" lifestyles, structures, or activities. They would not have understood a dichotomy between contemplation and their pastoral activity.

The Carmelite Rule, which received its final formulation in 1247, and is still the Rule today, gives little hint that Carmelites are doing any more than praying in their cells, working in silence, and occasionally coming together for prayer and meals. Yet, Carmelites have served the church for eight

hundred years in innumerable pastoral activities, and have expressed no discomfort with the Rule. When reform was required, as it often was, it was not the ministries of the Carmelites which were criticized. It was their base in contemplative prayer that was questioned (along with the observance of the common life and poverty). What they actually were doing day to day in the church and for the church was never the point. All reforms called Carmelites back to the contemplative ideal which finds its expression in the Rule.

The earliest documents generally spoke about prayer, but very little about ministry. The disappointed general, Nicholas the Frenchman, in his 1270 letter to the order, *The Flaming Arrow*, argued for a more literal interpretation of the Rule. He urged the men to stop roaming the streets and to get back into their cells. He said they should abandon the cities and return to the rural settings. Only those conditions would allow the heavenly Bridegroom and his Bride to "converse the more secretly as they repose therein..." in contemplative prayer.²

But Nicholas' exhortations were met with silence. Almost all Carmelite houses founded in the first century of the order's existence, before and after Nicholas' letter, were located in urban settings. Being in the cities and spending time ministering to the people was never really the problem for most Carmelites. Perhaps they instinctively knew that a contemplative spirit, a "listening heart," was possible in any condition.

The *Rubrica Prima* from the Constitutions of 1281, which probably originated in the 1240s, told Carmelites to identify themselves as men who came from a long line of contemplatives on Mount Carmel going back to the prophets Elijah and

Elisha. It did not tell Carmelites to take their stand as mendicants, which they certainly were by then. The General Chapter of 1287 wrote that "we have left the world to be able to serve our Creator effectively in the castle of contemplation."³

The Carmelite story began to take on its distinctive contours over the first two centuries of the order's existence. The order's identity very quickly coalesced around contemplative prayer and the figures of Elijah and Mary.

The Institution of the First Monks

At the end of the fourteenth century a Carmelite provincial from Catalonia, Philip Ribot (d. 1391), told the story of Carmel in a new, more coherent way. Ribot pulled together various traditions in the order, particularly the Elijan and Marian traditions and provided a foundational myth which coalesced a variety of themes and values.

Ribot supposedly collected four separate works and arranged them in ten books.⁴ The first seven books constitute the most important work, *Liber de institutione primorum monachorum*, or *The Institution of the First Monks*.⁵ It probably circulated in the order in the 1390s. Today it is considered the second most important document in the order, after the Rule, for the development of Carmelite spirituality. The medieval imagination is evident as a "history" of Carmel is woven from diverse scriptural texts.

The Institution of the First Monks has two parts: the first part presents the ascetical and mystical ideal of Carmel; the second part constructs an imaginative history of the Carmelite Order from the time of Elijah down to New Testament times. The *Institution* purports to have been written in Greek in 412. It takes the form of a letter from the Bishop of Jerusalem, John XLIV, who supposedly had been

a hermit on Mount Carmel, to a young Carmelite, Caprasius. It begins, "With good reason, Caprasius, you inquire about the beginning of the Order.... we shall presently begin to speak of the supreme Founder of the Order....⁶ The "Founder" is none other than the prophet Elijah!

Noting that Elijah was the first of all monks, the origin of monastic life, the bishop refers to the key scriptural text which organizes this first part of the *Institution*: "And the word of the Lord came to him [Elijah] 'Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, that is east of the Jordan. You shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there' (1 Kgs 17:2-4)."⁷

This text is then interpreted to contain four steps which will lead the hermit to the contemplative experience of God.

1. *Depart from here* refers to a detachment from "the perishable things of the world, relinquishing in spirit and in reality for my sake, all earthly possessions and powers...."⁸

2. *Turn eastward* means a renunciation of sin, taking up the cross, a turn "against the original cupidity of your flesh."⁹

3. *Hide yourself by the brook Cherith* is a command to "live in the hidden solitude of silence."¹⁰

4. *East of the Jordan* is the situation of one who lives in charity (in Cherith); love of God and neighbor set the monk east of the Jordan, "that is, against the descent of sins...."¹¹

The goal of this graced ascetical effort is to be a contemplative, to experience the presence of God.

Therefore, when you come to the goal of the prophetic and eremitical, monastic life and thus are hidden "in Cherith," that is in charity, then there "you shall drink from the brook," because in this so perfect union of yourself with me, I shall give you and your companions to drink from that brook of which the prophet, speaking to me, says: "you give them drink from the river of your delights" (Ps 36:9).¹²

The hermit/Carmelite will not be able to live in a continuous contemplative state enjoying God's presence. Consequently, *I have commanded the ravens to feed you there*. The ravens are the prophets who are models for the monk, because they remember their sins and acknowledge their frailty.

I have commanded the prophets, your holy predecessors, that they should feed you by the doctrine of examples of humble contrition, by which they humbly recognized in themselves the blackness of sin and avoided the brightness of carnal life.¹³

A "History" of the Carmelites

Books Two to Five of *The Institution of the First Monks* tell an imaginative "history" of the Carmelites, beginning with Elijah as the founder and model of religious life. He is joined in the wadi Cherith by others who are fleeing the persecution of Jezebel.¹⁴ Elijah teaches them to be prophets, "that is, to sing canticles, hymns and psalms, accompanied with musical instruments, for the glory of God."¹⁵

Since they began their common life in the wadi Cherith, why were Carmelites not called "Cherithites"? Because the wadi lacked water and was not habitable.¹⁶ Elijah, hunted by Queen Jezebel, had to live as a wandering fugitive, "now in the desert at the torrent of Cherith, now in the widow's house at Sarepta, again in the desert of Bersabea or in a cave on Mount Horeb."¹⁷ His followers, too, had

to wander from place to place. "Therefore, since they could not live in peace at Cherith or anywhere else, they cannot be called Cherithites from Cherith."¹⁸

On Horeb, Elijah learns that the wind, the earthquake, and the fire are forms of destruction for those who were not faithful to God. But the "gentle air" promises a restoration:

The whistling of a gentle air symbolized Elijah, whom the Lord showed in the vision that he would traverse the kingdom of Israel like the whistling of a gentle air calling his disciples and the other servants of God to the refreshment of peace after the cessation of their persecutions.¹⁹

When he returned from Horeb, Elijah gathered his disciples on Mount Carmel. He chose that place because Carmel was the most suitable of all places for living the prophetic, monastic life.

The mountain does indeed afford silence and quiet to a hermit because of its solitude; shelter in its caves; peace in its woodlands; healthful air from its elevation; abundant food from its herbs and fruits; and delicious water from its springs.²⁰

They built a house for prayer, called the Semnion, and gathered in it three times a day, playing their musical instruments, singing hymns, psalms, and canticles, and listening to readings from scripture.

Elijah was the first monk, the perfect model of the religious. His first disciple was Jonah, the widow's son whom he raised from the dead. He is the one whom Elijah would send to look for the cloud on Mount Carmel. So many others joined him that they lived in places in the desert and in the cities, places such as Gilgal, Bethel and Jericho.

Elijah lived sixteen years on Mount Carmel, and so the mountain is holy. He worked miracles there, such as the defeat of the prophets of Baal; he called Israel back to faithfulness to God. Life on Mount Carmel was a life of justice and peace. "As the Prophet Isaias, in the person of the Lord, foretold about them and their dwelling place: 'Judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and justice shall sit in Carmel, and the work of justice shall be peace, and the service of justice, quietness, and security forever. And my people shall sit in the beauty of peace, and in the tabernacles of confidence, and in wealthy rest' (Is 32:16-18)."²¹

Although they stayed mainly on Mount Carmel and in other desert locations, the Carmelites would occasionally visit towns to work miracles, to call people back to God, and to draw new members to the order. After a period of probation in the cities, new members welcomed living in the solitude of the desert.

With the order firmly established, Elijah, in a chariot of fiery horses, was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind of fire. Elijah, and Enoch, are to return to prepare the day of the Lord in the time of the Antichrist. Elisha, the greatest of his disciples, had received the spirit of Elijah; he was given Elijah's habit to symbolize that spirit. It was the duty of Elisha, now, to rule and teach the community. Elisha visited the various communities consoling them and showing them signs and wonders. "All the monks received him in Elijah's place as their chief father and master."²² He governed the communities wisely, teaching them to trust in God.

Because of their faithfulness and their peaceful life on Mount Carmel, God spared the Carmelites from being taken captive by the Babylonians. They lived in hope of the Messiah.

When John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah, Carmelites were living near the Jordan. They heard him preach and they were baptized. In the time of Christ, the Carmelites had a house in Jerusalem, near the upper room. Shortly after the ascension they were gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate Jewish feasts. On the day of Pentecost they heard Peter preach and they realized John had prepared them for this moment, and so they were baptized in Christ.

Some Carmelites hesitated and were praying in the temple the next day. They witnessed Peter healing a crippled man, and they heard him preach about the resurrection of Jesus. "They believed completely in Jesus—five thousand—who, after being baptized by the Apostles, received the Holy Ghost in the form of visible fire."²³

And so the Carmelites became Christians. They were faithful to the teaching of the apostles, and to the celebration of the breaking of the bread. They prayed daily in the temple. They studied scripture, and through allegorical interpretation, sought spiritual and invisible meanings.

Finally, many of them pouring out to others the doctrines they had drawn from the Apostles, preached the faith of Christ in Phoenicia and Palestine, explaining the dogmas of faith and, by the practices of the monastic life, demonstrating the marvelous way of life taught by the Church of Christ.²⁴

Mary in the Tradition

The Marian tradition is united with the Elijah tradition in Book Six of the *Institution*.²⁵ When Elijah sends his servant to look out to sea, the servant reports seeing a small cloud. To the prostrate Elijah, God revealed four mysteries in this vision of the little cloud: 1) the future birth of a girl born without

sin; 2) the time of her birth; 3) that she would be the first woman to take the vow of virginity (after Elijah who was the first man to vow virginity); 4) that the Son of God would be born of this virgin.

The Carmelites, now Christians, understood that these mysteries were fulfilled in Mary.²⁶ "...Before the Mother of God passed from this life, she was seen frequently by the members of our institute in Nazareth, Jerusalem, and elsewhere."²⁷ The Carmelites devoted themselves to Mary and chose her as their Patroness. In A.D. 83, they replaced the ancient Semnion with a chapel in Mary's honor, near the font of Elijah where the little cloud had been seen. Mary was their sister, and they were known as the Brothers of the Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel.

(The Marian tradition, found in the *Institution*, has early traces in the Order's history, but not in some of the places where one would expect to find it. Mary is not mentioned in the Carmelite Rule. Nor is she mentioned in the *Rubrica Prima* of the 1281 Constitutions. *The Flaming Arrow* has only a passing reference to her.

But the Rule does mandate that an oratory be established in the middle of the cells, and early pilgrim reports testify to a church in the wadi dedicated to Our Lady. As early as 1252 papal documents contain the title "Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel."²⁸ Peter of Millau, prior general in 1282 wrote to King Edward I of England asking for protection and promising prayer to "the most glorious Virgin...to whose praise and glory the Order itself was specially instituted in parts beyond the sea."²⁹ The Constitutions of 1294 required that the name of Mary be given in response to inquiries about the Order or its name.³⁰ These same Constitutions, for the first time, refer to Mary as patroness of the Order.

By the time of the 1324 Constitutions the *Rubrica Prima* spoke of both Elijan and Marian origins adding: "After the Incarnation their successors built a church there [on Mount Carmel] in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and chose her title; therefore from that time they were by apostolic privilege called the Brothers of Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel."³¹

Jean de Cheminot in 1337 related Elijah and Mary through their vows of virginity. He apparently was the first to identify Elijah and Elisha as founders of the Carmelites.

The English Carmelite, John Baconthorpe [d. 1348], also linked the Elijan and Marian traditions in his works. He perhaps was the first to understand the small cloud seen by Elijah as a symbol of Mary.

Baconthorpe's commentary on the Rule is a creative and quaint comparison of Mary's life with elements in the Rule, e.g. the Rule requires each one to have a separate cell; the angel Gabriel found Mary contemplating in her own room. An oratory is to be built in the middle of the cells; Mary was brought by her parents to the temple. The Carmelite is to remain in or near his cell meditating; Mary prayed many hours each day. The Rule requires silence; Mary speaks no more than four times in the Gospels. Carmelites may keep asses and mules; Mary rode an ass not a horse. The prior is to serve the others; Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months. And so forth.³²⁾

Ribot, in the *Institution*, is credited with the first true synthesis of the Elijan and Marian traditions in the Order. Later, the Carmelite humanist Arnold Bostius (d.1499) produced his own, mature synthesis of the order's traditions. Bostius presented Elijah and Mary as co-founders of Carmel, with Mary having priority.

Her example and future destiny inspired Elijah to found the order.

The Carmelite habit is the theme of the final Book Seven of the *Institution*. In this book the habit is a sign of poverty, humility, separation from the world, dedication to God, and of a common fraternity. The scapular is understood as the yoke of obedience.

(For approximately 150 years the scapular was identified not with Mary but with obedience, a Christological theme. The first reference to it is in the Constitutions of 1281: "the Brothers are to sleep in their tunic and scapular under pain of severe penalty."³³ No mention is made of a scapular vision to St. Simon Stock in thirteenth-century documents.

A late-fourteenth-century account tells of Mary appearing to Simon Stock, who, perhaps, was elected prior general in 1254 at the general chapter of London. She held the scapular in her hand and said that the one who dies in it will be saved.³⁴ It is not possible to verify the historicity of this event which only surfaces in accounts almost 150 years after the purported event. A contemporary approach to this devotion understands the scapular as an expression of devotion to Mary, a sign of her protection and care, and a willingness to imitate her prayerful submission to God's salvific plan.)

The Elijan-Marian synthesis in the *Institution* presents a richly textured spirituality for the order. The order has two models, both witnessing to a contemplative attentiveness and availability to God. In them we see the Carmelite ideal as expressed in the words of the *Institution*:

The goal of this life is twofold. One part we acquire, with the help of divine grace, through our efforts and virtuous works. This is to offer God

a holy heart, free from all stain of actual sin. We do this when we are perfect and in Cherith, that is hidden in that charity of which the Wise man says: "Charity covers all offences"(Prv 10:12). God desired Elijah to advance thus far, when He said to him: "Hide yourself by the brook Cherith."

The other part of the goal of this life is granted us as the free gift of God: namely, to taste somewhat in the heart and to experience in the soul, not only after death but even in this mortal life, the intensity of the divine presence and the sweetness of the glory of heaven. This is to drink of the torrent of the love of God. God promised it to Elijah in the words: "You shall drink from the brook."³⁵

Perhaps an image capturing the core theme of the Institution is that of Elijah sitting at the mouth of his cave at the wadi Cherith being fed by a raven. Elijah living in God's presence models the eremitical spirit for Carmelites.

The ascetical ideal, offering to God a pure and holy heart, opens to the mystical ideal, experiencing in mind and heart the presence of God which is pure gift.

NOTES

1. The Rule of Carmel has at least eight places where the hermit is encouraged to read, listen to, reflect on, or pray scripture. A traditional form of prayer was a faithful rumination on the scripture called *lectio divina*. The expression comes from Origen and refers to a prayerful reading of scripture with attentiveness and openness to God speaking through the Word.

In the twelfth century this approach was systematized into four steps by Guido, a Carthusian monk: "On a certain day, during manual work, when

I was thinking about the activity of the human spirit, suddenly in my mind I could see the ladder of the four spiritual steps, *lectio, meditatio, oratio, and contemplatio*."

The faith-filled reading of *scripture (lectio)* leads to thoughtful reflection on what has been read (*meditatio*), which results in ardent prayer to God (*oratio*), and this prayer ends in silent commune with and enjoyment of God whose presence has been revealed through scripture (*contemplatio*). Cf. Carlos Mesters, O. Carm., "The Carmelite Rule and the Reading of the Bible: Reflections on Lectio Divina," in *Carmelite Charism* (Melbourne: Carmelite Communications, 1991), 11-30.

2. Nicholas, Prior General of the Carmelite Order, *The Flaming Arrow*, trans. Bede Edwards, O.C.D., in *The Sword* (June, 1979), 31.

3. Joachim Smet, O. Carm., *The Carmelites*, 1 (Darien, IL: Carmelite Spiritual Center, 1988), 19.

4. His collection is titled *Decem libri de institutione et peculiaribus gestis religiosorum carmelitarum*. (*Ten Books concerning the Institution and Deeds of the Carmelites*). The suspicion of scholars is that Ribot is the author of a substantial amount of the material. But the traditions he used do have a long history within the order, some probably going back to Palestine.

5. The best available critical discussion of this work is by Paul Chandler, O. Carm., in "*Princeps et exemplar Carmelitarum: The Prophet Elijah in the Liber de Institutione primorum monachorum*," in *A Journey with Elijah*, ed. Paul Chandler, O. Carm. (Rome: Casa Editrice Institutum Carmelitanum, 1991), 111-134. Chandler has prepared a critical edition of the *Institution*.

6. *The Institution of the First Monks*, trans. Bryan Deschamp, O. Carm., in *Carmel in the World*, 13 (1974), 70. Deschamp's translation is used for chapters 1-9, or the first book of the *Institution*. For chapters 10-41, the remaining six books of the *Institution*, the

translation used is Norman Werling, O. Carm., in *The Sword*, 4 (1940), 20-24, 152-160, 309-320; 5 (1941), 20-27, 131-139, 241-248; 6 (1942), 33-39, 147-155, 278-286; 7 (1943), 347-355. There are fifty-six chapters in the *Institution*, but the source used by Werling had reduced them to forty-one by excluding certain sources.

7. Deschamp, 71, 72.

8. *Ibid.*, 75.

9. *Ibid.*, 154.

10. *Ibid.*, 156.

11. *Ibid.*, 161.

12. *Ibid.*, 248.

13. *Ibid.*, 254.

14. Elijah was actually alone in Cherith, but the Carmelite reading sees him in a fraternal setting.

15. Werling, 5, 21.

16. It is possible the first book of the *Institution* was a separate work from a non-Carmelite source and Ribot would have had to explain the change of setting from Cherith to Mount Carmel. Cf. Chandler, 120.

17. Werling, 5, 135.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*, 137. The *Institution* does not mention Elijah's flight into the desert after defeating the prophets of Baal. Chandler hypothesizes that the author did not want to acknowledge Elijah's frailty, a sensitive point in medieval literature. Cf. Chandler, 117, 118.

Notice that the author, surprisingly, does not identify the "gentle air" with a contemplative experience, which would seem to have been a natural interpretation for a Carmelite. Chandler theorizes that perhaps each locale in the Holy Land had its own traditions and those of Mount Carmel were different from the ones associated with Horeb. The Carmelites from the locale of Mount Carmel developed their own interpretations. If this is so, it is an argument for an early structuring, in Palestine, of the Carmelite tradition, which will then mature in

Europe. Cf. Chandler, 119, 120.

20. Werling, 5, 138, 139.

21. *Ibid.*, 243. "Elijah's eschatological role, his peace-bringing role assigned by God on Horeb, and the emphasis on the peaceful nature of the Mount Carmel community, make the theme of Elijah as a man of peace a prominent one in this work." Cf. Chandler, 122, 123.

22. Werling, 6, 34.

23. *Ibid.*, 155.

24. *Ibid.*

25. Before the *Institution*, the Elijan and Marian traditions were two separate strands in the order, never satisfactorily integrated. Cf. Chandler, 117.

26. Ribot unites traditions about Mount Carmel, Elijah, and Mary under the rubric of virginity. Mount Carmel is understood to mean, under a false etymology, "knowledge of circumcision." Elijah and Mary are the first man and woman to practice voluntary virginity. Mary is the virgin who gives birth to the Messiah. Consequently, all three sources call the Carmelite to a purity of heart essential for a contemplative. Cf. Chandler, 117.

27. Werling, 6, 281.

28. Smet, 8.

29. *Ibid.*, 21.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Medieval Carmelite Heritage*, ed. Adrianus Staring, O. Carm. (Roma: Institutum Carmelitanum, 1989), 42. Trans. Christopher O'Donnell, O. Carm.

32. "Mary Mirrored in Our Rule: Baconthorpe's Commentary on the Rule," ed. Joachim Smet, O. Carm., in *The Sword*, 7 (February, 1943), 6-11.

33. *Analecta Ordinis Carmelitanum*, 15 (1950), 218.

34. Smet, 23.

35. Deschamp, 72.

Chapter Five CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross

The Institution of the First Monks had an important place in all the major reforms of the order. Its imagery and teaching deeply influenced the reform efforts of John Soreth, and the reform of Touraine as well. It is assumed John of the Cross studied the document since by his time it was mandated for all Carmelite novitiates. A Spanish copy of the *Institution* was available to Teresa in the convent of the Incarnation. Her challenge to her sisters conveys the spirit of this foundational myth:

So I say now that all of us who wear this holy habit of Carmel are called to prayer and contemplation. This call explains our origin; we are descendants of men who felt this call, of those holy fathers on Mount Carmel who in such great solitude and contempt for the world sought this treasure, this precious pearl of contemplation that we are speaking about. Yet few of us dispose ourselves that the Lord may communicate it to us.¹

Teresa's Castle Journey

Teresa of Avila's solution to fragmentation and dissipation was a healthy community life of moderate asceticism, with an emphasis on prayer. She wrote that the door to the inner castle, and therefore to true self-knowledge, was "prayer and reflection."²

Teresa defined prayer at one time as "nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends."³ But notice her assumption: in this prayer, our friend is the one who first speaks. The mystery at the center of the castle first "spoke" us into life, and continues to address us, calling us more deeply into our lives, into wider freedom, and more intimate union. We

are, essentially, listeners for this voice, hearers of the Word. Prayer in the first instance, therefore, requires attentiveness. Initial efforts to pray may require great effort. Those people and things to which we have given our heart may be so preoccupying, so absorbing, that it is difficult to hear the "good shepherd with a whistle so gentle...."⁴

When she describes the process of a soul in prayer in her classic synthesis, *The Interior Castle*, Teresa begins by describing a person who may pray just a few times a month. She does not discount the value of this apparently minimal activity; she appreciates the difficulty involved in listening into one's life for more. She writes about the condition of this soul:

Even though it may not be in a bad state it is so involved in worldly things and so absorbed with its possessions, honor, or business affairs, as I have said, that even though as a matter of fact it would want to see and enjoy its beauty these things do not allow it to; nor does it seem that it can slip free from so many impediments.⁵

The enemies of the soul at this point, Teresa observes, are fear, faint-heartedness, and cowardice. It is harder to hear a call than not to hear it. Or, where no one asks, no one need answer.

Where is the call coming from? From the center of one's life. Teresa's image for the journey to and with God is the movement from the periphery of a circle to its center. We begin the pilgrimage living on the periphery of our lives, locked into many dissipating centers, and gradually, through prayer, we are de-centered and drawn to another Center. The advantage of Teresa's image is that God is not in the distance to be reached by crossing rivers, passing through deserts, or climbing mountains. God is "always already there" in the center of our existence.

If anyone is absent from the relationship it is the human being who is unaware of the friendship being continually offered.

Where does one look to find God? Teresa points to many places of mediation: books, friends, times of illness, trials, moments in prayer. With regular attempts at prayer a person may progress to a point where the relationship with God becomes less generic and more personal. The one praying begins to realize that he or she is being personally addressed by God. This awareness is not necessarily more consoling; "... hearing His voice is a greater trial than not hearing it."⁶

Not only does it call for a response in one's life, but it throws light on various, up to now, dimly perceived corners of that life. The journey within the castle of one's life initially sounds like a peaceful setting aside of life's conflicts and entering the quiet sanctuary of an inner world. Teresa's experience shattered that hope. I went within, she reported, and I was at war with myself! The self-knowledge gained in prayer includes an awareness of our distance from God as well as the distance from our true self. The prayerful person may find herself ill at ease in her own house.

Teresa's Prayer

Teresa complained that she could not think much, nor could she imagine much. Sustained reflection with concluding resolutions was not the way her mind worked. Nor was she capable of spinning imaginative scenarios as a prayer form. She called her prayer a prayer of recollection.

This is the method of prayer I then used: since I could not reflect discursively with the intellect, I strove to picture Christ within me, and it did me greater good—in my opinion—to picture Him in those scenes where I saw Him more alone. It seemed to me that being

alone and afflicted, as a person in need, He had to accept me. I had many simple thoughts like these.⁷

She especially liked the scene in the garden of Gethsemane where, in her thoughts, she could remain alone with Christ. For many years, before going to bed, she briefly reflected upon this scene.

For many years, as well, she began her prayers by opening a book and using it to help her be aware of God's presence. Or, she said, she used flowers of the field, water, or other parts of creation. She said she looked at water more than anything else in her life. The important thing, she wrote, was not to think much but to love much. The book and the images helped her become aware of the presence of Christ. With that awareness she could enter into conversation or simply remain quiet with her Friend.

When writing for her sisters in the *Way of Perfection* Teresa encouraged them to represent the Lord close to them, at their side as their companion. "... Get used to this practice! Get used to it!"⁸

I'm not asking you now that you think about Him or that you draw out a lot of concepts or make long and subtle reflections with your intellect. I'm not asking you to do anything more than look at Him... In the measure you desire Him, you will find Him.⁹

Teresa encouraged her women to honor their deeply felt responses to life. They need not hide their emotional state from the Lord. He is not like some husbands who expect their wives to be sad when they are sad and joyful when they are joyful. She assured her nuns that the Lord wants to accommodate himself to them:

He submits to your will. If you are joyful, look at Him as risen. Just imagining how He rose from the tomb will

bring you joy. The brilliance! The beauty! The majesty!
How victorious!

...If you are experiencing trials or are sad, behold Him on the way to the garden: what great affliction He bore in His soul;...Or behold Him bound to the column, filled with pain....Or behold Him burdened with the cross, for they didn't even let Him take a breath.¹⁰

In this meeting of moods, each rejoices with the other, each consoles the other in their sorrow. The one praying is not reducing the Lord to the dimensions of her life, but she is placing her own responses to life in a broader context. She is reading her life *through* the life of Christ. In the relationship she finds Christ available to her, for affirmation as well as for challenge.

Teresa's own prayer experiences taught her to trust the realization that Christ desired her. In her life within the convent and in her dealings with society outside the convent she had been looking for affirmation, for a sense of being wanted. Her prayer relationship with Christ eventually impressed her with the fact that she had been desired all along. She realized that the challenge was not to earn God's affirmation; acceptance and affirmation had always been offered her. The challenge was to meet Christ's acceptance of her, to accept the acceptance.

But the relationship with Christ all rests on a sense of his presence, and communication with this companion on our life's journey. The ever practical Teresa advises her nuns to become aware of this presence by using "a good book written in the vernacular." And, "try to carry about an image or painting of this Lord that is to your liking, not so as to carry it about on your heart and never look at it but so as to speak often with Him; for He will inspire you with what to say."¹¹

The Problem of the Good, Adult Christian

Even a well-ordered prayer life can eventually be its own enemy. When Teresa describes the situation of someone who is in the third dwelling place of the castle, she describes a Christian who prays regularly, practices asceticism, is generous in sharing goods with the needy. This person's life is well-balanced and moderated. Other people ask this person for guidance in their spiritual journey.

By the time Teresa finishes describing this prayerful person one would think the goal, the center of the castle, had been reached. Why is this only the third of seven dwelling places? Teresa hints at the problem. These people are so balanced, she observed, that you do not have to worry about them going to extremes in anything. She describes their life as "well-ordered," "well-structured."

It becomes obvious that the very security of this situation and the sense of well-being which accompanies it have now become blocks to further penetration of other inner rooms. Having responded well to God by establishing a disciplined, prayerful, generous life, the very control itself has become the latest attachment. Further growth will call for the return of insecurity and the lessening of control. Having become quite free in their availability to God, these people can still move into wider realms of freedom. Their prayer needs to become more contemplative, more sensitive and attuned, their grasp of their lives more relaxed and open-handed.

Teresa uses an image to describe the difference between prayer that is largely the graced outcome of our own efforts, and prayer which seems unrelated to our efforts and appears to have its source elsewhere. The image is a description of two ways of filling a fountain. One way is the laborious process of pulling up water from a distant well and

transporting it by aqueduct to the fountain. The other way is to have the fountain over the source of the water, filling up effortlessly from within. The first way is similar to our efforts to meditate; the second way pictures a prayer which has become more contemplative.

The consolations of the first way of praying begin in our efforts and end in God. We have genuine enjoyment, contentment, happiness, but it may be constricting; we cling to it, not wanting to lose it. The spiritual delight accompanying a more contemplative prayer begins in God, as it were, and ends in us. It amplifies our spirits rather than constricts them. God at the center of one's life is overflowing into the heart.

The purpose of prayer, Teresa regularly reminds us, is conformity with God's will, not experiences of consolation or delight. Teresa realizes that not everyone will be able to report such experiences, especially some of the more ecstatic experiences she had. It does not mean they are not growing in their relationship with Christ. If their lives are more and more in conformity with God's will, if they gradually learn to want what God wants, and this desire is expressed in the way they live, then the journey through the castle is leading to a fruitful union.

Contemplative Prayer

Just how one transitions from meditation to contemplation, or incorporates contemplative prayer within more meditative prayer is a subject with which Teresa struggles. On the one hand, she holds that contemplation is pure gift; one cannot prepare for or summon it. This gift from God is totally gratuitous, coming and going according to patterns unrelated to our activity.

On the other hand, she does acknowledge that we can make ourselves more open to such prayer. She is critical of any unilateral effort on our part to stop using our natural abilities to reflect and imagine in order to be more "contemplative." She does, however, recommend slowing down our normal processes, keeping the mind from wandering by reciting a few simple words. "And without any effort or noise," she advises, "the soul should strive to cut down the rambling of the intellect—but not suspend either it or the mind; it is good to be aware that one is in God's presence and of who God is."¹² In time the words may fall away in the pure receptivity of contemplation. The person in the third dwelling places, then, is encouraged to quiet the busyness of their religious activity, to slow down the tight wording of their life, to loosen control and give God's spirit room to breathe new life.

The stillness of contemplation will never be such that we no longer have use of ordinary means of praying, much less that we no longer need the gospels. Teresa was revolted by teaching which held that contemplative prayer eventually superseded meditation on the gospels and participation in the ritual life of the church. Her emphatic teaching was that we never get beyond our need for the humanity of Christ and the celebrations of the church. Life is long, she said, don't just sit there in an attempt to force or simulate contemplation.

...Someone must necessarily blow on the fire so that heat will be given off. Would it be good for a soul with this dryness to wait for fire to come down from heaven to burn this sacrifice that it is making of itself to God, as did our Father Elijah? No, certainly not, nor is it right to expect miracles...But His Majesty...desires that we help ourselves in every way possible."¹³

Different ways of praying have their seasons and the seasons have their natural rhythms. She was convinced that even simple vocal prayers are sufficient to open one to the gift of contemplation.

This prayerful listening to a deeper center within her life slowly freed Teresa from the many fragmenting centers around which her life revolved. Listening to the call, and responding to it, eroded the attachments which had confined her heart. That which she could not remove through sheer willpower slowly melted away in the new relationship nurtured in prayer. The only truly terminal problem was to stop praying.

Theologian Monica Hellwig aptly summarized Teresa's message: a faithful and perduring attentiveness to our depths and center is the best cooperation we can give to God who is reorienting our life.¹⁴ In other words, if we give God our attention, God will draw our whole being into proper focus.

John of the Cross

John of the Cross taught that contemplation was the key to freeing a heart enslaved by idols. John has a reputation in the history of spirituality for rugged asceticism, but actually at the core of his teaching is an acknowledgment that only God's love can break through the heart wrapped in attachments. Contemplation is simply opening one's life to this love.

John certainly counseled disciplined efforts. For example, in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (Book 1, chapter 13) he offered a series of counsels which would help free a heart.¹⁵ He begins by urging the imitation of Christ by bringing one's life into conformity with his. Then he says this imitation of Christ would be accomplished by the renunciation of any sensory satisfaction that was not "purely for the honor and glory of God." He follows this challenging

counsel with a series of maxims, such as: "Endeavor to be inclined always not to the easiest but to the most difficult..." In addition he encourages the reader to "act with contempt for yourself and desire that all others do likewise." John concludes with a string of verses which are variations on the theme, "To come to possess all, desire the possession of nothing." This one chapter in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* is enough to substantiate John's ascetical reputation in the church.

However, to be preoccupied with the intensity and challenges of his counsels is to miss a central point in John's teaching. In the very next chapter (chapter 14) he admits that his counsels, by themselves, are bound to fail. No amount of ascetical effort can free a heart from its attachments if the heart has nowhere to go. The heart cannot break away from whatever is providing some life, some meaning and happiness, and go into an affective vacuum, and there await a better offer. It is an impossible task, John concludes. No ascetical regimen, no controlled, disciplined effort by itself can wrestle a person's life into submission. The solution is contemplation.

Only when a stronger, deeper love is kindled in the heart can it let go of its lesser loves. Only when a flame is kindled which lures the person past the attachments will the soul release its grasp on whatever has been so transfixing. When that trust grows, then those things which had captured the heart begin to fall away. What could not be thawed ascetically, begins to melt away in the warmth of God's love. It is mysticism, the experience of being grasped by God's love, which allows asceticism, a disciplined response to this love. Attending to that flame and following its allure is contemplative activity. John writes:

Accordingly, the moment prayer begins, the soul, as one with a store of water, drinks peaceably without the labor and the need to fetch the water through the channels of past considerations, forms, and figures. The moment it recollects itself in the presence of God it enters into an act of general, loving, peaceful, and tranquil knowledge, drinking wisdom and love and delight.¹⁶

In *The Living Flame of Love*, John further comments on this experience:

Since God, then, as the giver communes with individuals through a simple, loving knowledge, they also, as the receivers, commune with God through a simple and loving knowledge of attention, so knowledge is thus joined with knowledge and love with love.¹⁷

John remembers a scene from scripture, and his Carmelite heritage: "... some theologians think our Father Elijah saw God in the whistling of the gentle breeze heard on the mount at the mouth of his cave [I Kgs 19:11-13]."¹⁸

Dark Nights

It is from this Carmelite tradition that the haunting image of the dark night of the soul emerges in the church. The image is taken from a poem of John of the Cross which captures his experience of God while in prison: "One dark night..." it begins.

John went on to comment on this poem, and this image. He said it spoke of times when God's love was so opaque that it could not be seen or felt. As a matter of fact, there are times when God's love seems to be over against us, negating us. John gave signs for judging whether our experience is truly from God: when one is finding no satisfaction or meaning whether in religion or in any other area of life; when one has a sense of guilt, feels responsible

for these doldrums, wishes the former sense of satisfaction could be restored, but can do nothing about it; when a person's normal problem-solving approach of thinking, analyzing, and deciding no longer works, and prayer goes quiet.

When these signs are present, wrote John, one is in a loving condition. God's love is healing the soul and freeing it. There is nothing in the love which is painful or dark. But, because of the healings we need, the love is dark and, at times, painful to us. In time the confusion and pain lift, and consolation is restored.

When life and prayer dry up this way, John recommends entering into this dark experience. He warns against forcing more understanding and control into this situation. It is not a time for making secure, but for taking a chance and letting go. John recommends entering into this dark time with patience, perseverance, and trust. For a while one may have no words, no thoughts, no solutions. John urges that we go quiet, and prepare to endure as long as need be. In the quiet, dark time John counsels having an attitude of "loving attentiveness." At this time we are a watch in the night, alert to the approach of God. In time, a sense of presence replaces our loneliness, meaning replaces our confusion, and once again we are able to word our lives.

John wrote about even more difficult times in life when life's journey itself is called into question. John speaks of a midnight time in life, a dark night of the spirit. One's sins and weaknesses press in and undermine any sense of worth. Life's limitations are painfully experienced. Anxiety and bitterness spread through the soul. The fundamental trust in life's promises and one's own worth has evaporated and now no one and nothing is trustworthy. The

soul experiences an intense loneliness, feeling abandoned by all; even God seems to be walking away, perhaps in anger and rejection. Prayer is all but impossible.

Thérèse of Lisieux, the popular saint of our time, experienced an intense night of the spirit in her final illness; the darkness mocked even her belief in an afterlife.¹⁹ The potential unbeliever lurking in the heart of every believer is given free rein to question the very purpose of life. Does anyone or anything promise the fulfillment of the deepest desires of our hearts? Or are we meant to have those desires frustrated, mocked, by a life which simply blazes for a brief period of time between two vast darknesses?

At the heart of the experience, one way or another the fear is that I have lost God, and all that God means to human existence. The dark night of the spirit is John's expression for the deeply unsettling experience of one's sinfulness, the finiteness of the human condition, and God's transcendence.

John counsels against prematurely solving this condition. A deep purifying and healing is going on under the impact of God's love. No words, explanations, counsels, or plans can help. Indeed, John says, it is time to "put one's mouth in the dust," and proceed with a naked faith. The only answer is the answer of Jesus on the cross: to trust in the sometimes dark love of God.

This powerful image, and John's reflection and recommendations regarding this experience, have been a great, consoling, contribution to the Christian journey. Just when one might be tempted to turn back, either for fear of having taken the wrong path or because the cost is too high, this tradition testifies to the benefits of continuing on in deep faith.

It is a tradition that tells us not to be afraid of the dark, of apparent failure. It encourages us to have trust even in the face of our own sinfulness, our own inauthenticity. Let nothing have the last word, except the God whose word to us is forgiveness, peace, welcome. The log, initially scarred by fire, slowly becomes one with the flames.

Pope John Paul II, an ardent student of John of the Cross, observed that the image of the dark night fittingly captures the suffering of our world:

Our age has known times of anguish which have made us understand this expression better and which have furthermore given it a kind of collective character. Our age speaks of the silence or absence of God. It has known so many calamities, so much suffering inflicted by wars and by the destruction of so many innocent beings. The term *dark night* is now used of all of life and not just of a phase of the spiritual journey. The Saint's doctrine is now invoked in response to this unfathomable mystery of human suffering.

I refer to this *specific world of suffering*....Physical, moral and spiritual suffering, like sickness—like the plagues of hunger, like war, injustice, solitude, the lack of meaning in life, the very fragility of human existence, the sorrowful knowledge of sin, the seeming absence of God—are for the believer all purifying experiences which might be called *night of faith*.

To this experience St. John of the Cross has given the symbolic and evocative name dark night, and he makes it refer explicitly to the light and obscurity of the mystery of faith. He does not try to give to the appalling problem of suffering an answer in the speculative order; but in the light of the Scripture and of experience he discovers and sifts out something of the marvelous transformation which God effects in the darkness, since "He knows how to draw good from evil so wisely and beautifully" (*Cant.* B 23:5). In the final analysis, we are faced with living the mystery of death and resurrection in Christ in all truth.²⁰

The Carmelite Contribution

Carmel in the contemporary church stands for prayer. The original Carmelites and the saints of Carmel, known and unknown, were preoccupied with attentiveness to Mystery. From this attentiveness flowed identity, community, and service of the world. If the tradition of Carmel has anything to say to the modern world it is a word about prayer.

The Rule of Carmel, a quilt of scriptural references, focused the Carmelite on God's Word. Listening to scripture read in common, praying the psalms together, meditating on scripture in the silence of their cells, were fundamental prayer activities of the early Carmelites, and remain privileged forms of communication with God in prayer.²¹

There is no Carmelite method of prayer, only the encouragement to pray. Alone or with others, the presence of God is the foundational reality, the horizon against which our human activity takes place. Consciously attending to that foundation, that horizon, opens us to a full life. Carmelites pray with many forms, but essentially all forms are meant to open us to the Mystery which haunts our lives.

In seeking God, Carmelites discovered that God had been pursuing them in love. Their very seeking and desiring was a response to a shepherd's whistle so gentle as to be almost imperceptible. In following the call they found themselves in a loving relationship; they were desired, affirmed, wanted by God.

Teresa of Avila concluded that God does not wait until we get our life in order. God meets us where we are and asks us to trust that acceptance. After all, Teresa wrote, Jesus did not wait until the Samaritan woman straightened out her life before he spoke with her at the well. Teresa said she probably should

not have called her autobiography "the story of my life," but instead, "the story of God's mercies."

John of the Cross learned that God's Jove had to lead the way before a heart truly became free. On its own, the heart is not going to let go of whatever is providing some meaning, some happiness, some fulfillment of desire, even if it has become enslaved; only when God kindles in a soul a deeper love which lures us past our other loves will we be able to open our hands and relax our grasp on our lives. Teresa taught that the important thing was not to think much but to love much; John taught that desiring God is the beginning of possessing God.

John gives no methods or approaches to prayer; any and all are suitable to open us to God's presence, but none of them should take God's place. "One rosary is no more influential with God than is another."²² Where there is faith, any image suffices; where there is no faith, no image suffices.

He encouraged a silent attentiveness to where our heart is struggling and experiencing exhaustion. In the night no method or solution is at hand other than patience, perseverance, and trust. Carmelites learned in contemplation that we all are poor in spirit and have to wait in hope for God's mercy.

Thérèse of Lisieux, too, learned in prayer that "It's all grace." She entered Carmel with heroic ideals and realized they were unattainable. She often slept during prayer time. Her only hope was to trust in God's mercy and grace, and to live with the utter abandonment and confidence of a child playing in the company of a parent. It is a "little way" not simply because she did ordinary things in place of heroic efforts, but because nothing big or small was needed to please God.

Thérèse had the best of models, but she found her own way. Even though Teresa of Avila was her patron and the writings of John of the Cross nourished her, they pointed her to Jesus:

Ah! how many lights have I not drawn from the Works of our holy Father, St. John of the Cross! At the ages of seventeen and eighteen I had no other spiritual nourishment; later on, however, all books left me in aridity and I'm still in that state....It is especially the Gospels which sustain me during my hours of prayer. ...

Jesus has no need of books or teachers to instruct souls; He teaches without the noise of words. Never have I heard Him speak, but I feel that He is within me at each moment; He is guiding and inspiring me with what I must say and do.²³

Thérèse learned that the secret of her life and vocation was not that she was worthy but that God freely chose her. She quoted St. Paul: "So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy" (Rom 9: 16).

Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, a Carmelite whose simple encouragements to remember the presence of God are well known, described his own prayer:

My commonest attitude is this simple attentiveness, an habitual, loving turning of my eyes to God, to whom I often find myself bound with more happiness and gratification than that which a babe enjoys clinging to its nurse's breast. So, if I dare use this expression, I should be glad to describe this condition as "the breasts of God," for the inexpressible happiness I savour and experience there.²⁴

Once one is in the presence of this friend, is attentive to this friend, then prayer takes its course. I may simply listen as this friend speaks through the urgings of my heart, the thoughts of my mind, the

objects and people in the world around me. Teresa of Avila counseled, " ... He wants us to ask creatures who it is who made them.... "²⁵ I can be quiet and mull what I have heard. I can take inventory of my life in the presence of this one who loves me. I can speak about my needs and concerns. I can make present in this meeting my loved ones, parents, enemies. I can speak from a heart overflowing with gratitude. I can simply be still. In prayer there is nothing I have to accomplish, but simply stay open to the love of a graciousness at the core of life. John of the Cross was able to write, "How gently and lovingly you wake in my heart...."²⁶

Perhaps the most difficult thing for a Christian is to truly accept the fact that he or she is loved by God. As a statement, God's love for us is easy to acknowledge. As a basis on which to proceed in trust, the fact that God loves us is problematic. This gratuitous love is the basis for our Christian living. And it is at the heart of the Carmelite experience. Contemplation, or an openness to God's transforming love, no matter how it is approaching, is the only solid basis for proceeding in life. And contemplation is the only sure antidote, the "solution" to a life given to fragmentation and idolatry.

NOTES

1. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, 2, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1980), *The Fifth Dwelling Places*, chap. 1, no. 2.
2. *Ibid.*, *The First Dwelling Places*, chap. 1, no. 7.
3. *The Book of Her Life in The Collected Works*, 1, chap. 8, no. 5.
4. *The Interior Castle*, *The Fourth Dwelling Places*, chap. 3, no. 2.
5. *Ibid.*, *The First Dwelling Places*, chap. 2, no. 14.
6. *Ibid.*, *The Second Dwelling Places*, chap. 1, no. 2.

7. *The Book of Her Life*, chap. 9, no. 4.
8. *The Way of Perfection in The Collected Works*, 2, chap. 26, no. 2.
9. *Ibid.*, no. 3.
10. *Ibid.*, nos. 4, 5.
11. *Ibid.*, no. 9.
12. *The Interior Castle, The Fourth Dwelling Places*, chap. 3, no. 7.
13. *Ibid.*, *The Sixth Dwelling Places*, chap. 7, no. 8.
14. Monica Hellwig, "St. Teresa's Inspiration for Our Times," in *Carmelite Studies*, vol. 3, 214, 215.
15. John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel, in The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*. trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1991), Book 1, chap. 13.
16. *Ibid.*, Book 2, chap. 14, no. 2.
17. John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love in The Collected Works*, stanza 3, no. 34.
18. John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle in The Collected Works*, stanzas 14 and 15, no. 14.
19. Popularly known as the Little Flower, Thérèse (1873-1897) entered the Discalced Carmel of Lisieux, France, at the age of fifteen and died of tuberculosis at age twenty-four. Her autobiography is a warm, faith-filled account which sees God's presence and love in her life even in times of darkness and suffering.
20. *Master in the Faith*. Apostolic Letter of John Paul II in *Walking Side by Side with All Men and Women* (Rome: Institutum Carmelitanum, 1991), 22, 23.
21. Carlos Mesters, O. Carm., has identified steps in a process of *lectio divina*, a prayerful reading of scripture:
 1. Opening prayer, an invocation of the Holy Spirit.
 2. Slow and attentive reading of the text.
 3. A moment of interior silence to recall what I have read.
 4. Look at the meaning of each phrase.
 5. Bring that Word into the present, ponder it, in

relation to my life.

6. Broaden my vision by relating this text to other biblical texts.
7. Read the text again, prayerfully, giving a response to God.
8. Formulate my commitment in life.
9. Pray with a suitable psalm.
10. Choose a phrase which captures the meaning and memorize it.

This process may be adapted for group reading of, and reflection on, scripture as well. Mesters observes that the communities of the poor in Latin America have been using a form of *lectio divina* as they read their lives through the Word of God, and the Word of God through their lives. Cf. Mesters, "The Carmelite Rule and the Reading of the Bible," in *Carmelite Charism* (Melbourne: Carmelite Communications, 1991), 38, 39.

22. John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 3, in *The Collected Works*, chap. 35, no. 7.
23. Thérèse of Lisieux, *The Story of A Soul*, trans. John Clarke, O.C.D. (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1976), 179.
24. Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, trans. E.M. Blaiklock (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1981), 45. Lawrence (1614-1691) left the military to become a cook with the Discalced Carmelites. Abbé de Beaufort posthumously published a collection of Lawrence's sayings and letters.
25. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle, The Sixth Dwelling Places*, chap. 7, no. 9.
26. John of the Cross, "The Living Flame of Love," in *The Collected Works*, stanza 4.

Chapter Six
PRAYER AND THE SELF

Issues in Human Development

The contemplative emphasis in the Carmelite tradition implies living with greater awareness, a wider consciousness. The goal of prayer is not to become isolated in a corner but engaged in life, one's own and the life of the world. A life lived without the attentive listening of prayer is often a life lived quite unconsciously. As Carl Jung wrote, "Where no one asks, no one need answer."

We may assume that some of the first Carmelites arrived on Mount Carmel only after having undergone serious personality changes, the result of what we today would call transitions or passages. In their homelands where they grew up they would have formed their basic identity. They would have entered into responsible relationships, perhaps deeply loving relationships. Some of them may have been quite well known in their communities; they may have been leaders.

What events and decisions brought them to a remote place on a mountain ridge far from their homes can only be imagined. Dark nights and thoroughgoing conversions may have been the prelude for some of the men. On the mountain they sought conditions which would support their growing commitments and further their spiritual development. They probably would have simply said that life on the mountain was their way of following Christ.

Today we understand that prayer also activates powers of the psyche, and personality is opened to its hidden depths. If we assume that our lives, our depths, are first met outside us in some symbolic form, then even the living conditions of the early Carmelites may have been expressive of their

interiority, and, ideally, fostered greater interiority. The cluster of huts and caves on Mount Carmel provided the first Carmelites with an environment conducive to attentiveness to God and, most probably, had profound impact on their psychological well-being.

The first articles of their Rule addressed the physical and structural conditions which would allow them live out their allegiance to Jesus Christ.¹ Each was to have a separate dwelling letting the lie of the land dictate its location. The individual Carmelite was urged to stay in or near his cell, ruminating on scripture, unless occupied elsewhere. They were to elect and obey a leader, a prior, whose dwelling was to be at the entrance of the wadi. There, the prior would be the first to meet those who approached the site. The individuality of each person, and that person's unique relationship with God, was honored and protected in the physical arrangements of the first community of Carmelites.

The architecture of the wadi expressed the fundamental conviction of the Carmelites that God was the center of their existence, the guarantee of their personhood. Albert, the Rule-giver, prescribed that they should build an oratory, a small chapel, somewhere in the middle of their huts and caves. In this space they gathered daily to celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus and to renew their commitment to their common project. On Sundays they discussed their life together, correcting and encouraging one another, giving voice to the values which drew them to the mountain. The oratory in the center of the wadi expressed the sacred center of human life. In contact with that center the Carmelites found their identity and were formed into a community.

The Rule of Carmel situates the Carmelite in a place of solitude and of silence. This solitude and silence allow the Mystery at the center of all lives to emerge. The chaos of life gives way to a cosmos ordered by God's self-communication. Far from isolation and non-communication, the prescriptions to spend time alone and to work in silence created in the wadi conditions of alert listening. The sight of the sea at the mouth of the canyon, the feel of the breezes blowing in from the Mediterranean, the shapes created by the contours of the wadi, are among the impressions even today which fill the senses. In these conditions, while he prayed and worked, the Carmelite listened for a gentle whistle, a silent sound, an awakening in the heart. More than a physical silence, the silence urged by the Rule was meant to permeate the hermit's interiority so that his whole being became an expectancy, an awaiting. God is met and disoriented psychic structures find a healing.

Attentiveness to Presence at the center has become an enduring Carmelite activity. The door to the castle of our souls and its center is prayer and reflection, wrote Teresa. John of the Cross urged that we become a watch in the night, listening for God's approach. When our words fail, meaning evaporates, and a remorseful guilt overtakes us, John counseled quiet, and, in the quiet, a "loving attentiveness." Love is at work.

Self knowledge

The writings of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross demonstrate psychological subtlety. Without having our contemporary categories, they nonetheless were able to convey a nuanced understanding of human development. Teresa used rich imagery to express the realities of the psyche.² John wrote poetry, amplified it with scriptural imagery, and developed his thought in scholastic categories. He

used the psychological framework available to him, a faculty psychology, to express the impact of God's love on his personality structure.³

Teresa believed that self-knowledge was essential for spiritual development. Through self-knowledge we come to know God. On the other hand, the self is only truly known in relationship to God. When she could most fully say "God," she could most fully say "Teresa." The self-knowledge she gained was a knowledge of her essential poverty yet her immense worth based on God's grace and mercy.

This knowledge would include knowledge of inner fragmentation, compulsions, addictions which distort the heart. These realities float into awareness as prayer loosens layers of the psyche. Deeper union with God was not always pleasant for Teresa because of the greater awareness accompanying her prayer. When she writes her autobiography, she describes an adolescence which seems seriously irresponsible; but it is an adolescence viewed through the self-awareness of a fifty-year-old.

John of the Cross believed that when a personality is not centered on God, but is centered on some part of God's creation, the personality is dysfunctional. When the true center emerges, false centers die, and the personality heals. From this center a person hears his or her name more clearly than ever before; and other people are valued as brothers and sisters. John learned that true community is formed when each one is related, not only to the others, but most especially to the Mystery at the center of all lives.

Prayer offers an opportunity to hear parts of the self which have not been allowed room at the banquet table of our life. Without a deep listening to one's life and to God in prayer, our un-lived life is met outside us in projection. Our life and our gods are

all outside. We then live with false selves and false gods. A greater openness to God results in greater self-appropriation, a necessity before one can truly lose oneself.

If the world around us holds for us the secrets within us, then a contemplative attentiveness to this world may reveal our inner life. Teresa encouraged her readers to let creatures speak of their maker. And she observed that there is more to every little thing, even the tiniest ant. Her symbolic attitude allows access to the mystery of God and to the equally mysterious self. Teresa often knew that activity was taking place deep within her psyche in prayer, even though on the surface her mind could not focus on prayer.

Carmelites have developed a particularly expressive language for the soul. The place of the order's founding, and the architecture and atmosphere of the wadi became the first words of the spiritual tradition of Carmel. The hermits found in scripture a language which gave words to the Mystery that dwelt with them in their cells. *The Institution of the First Monks* wove a narrative based on Carmel's relationship to the prophet Elijah and to Mary, and through story expressed the ascetical-mystical ideal of the Carmelites. The "land of Carmel" became symbolic of an inner terrain where the human spirit enacted a love story with God. The poetry of John of the Cross, the lively writing of Teresa of Avila, the tender expressiveness of Thérèse of Lisieux added to Carmel's thesaurus. Contemporary pilgrims may find in the tradition of Carmel a primordial wording of their soul's adventure.

Ego

To have an ego, in our contemporary society, is often understood in a pejorative sense. In human development, the emergence of an ego is an

important and necessary occurrence. It is only the ego out of touch with the rest of the self which begins to distort the personality and life around it.

Initially, the ego is a tentative and fragile development in the unfolding of personality. The infant is born with a vast psychic inheritance, an inner cosmos, out of which the ego is shaped. The development of the ego is a graced freeing of ego from the grip of the unconscious, from anonymity, from collectivity, from merely instinctual living. The spirituality of ego development supports a movement into consciousness where an identity is slowly forged, relationships are developed, values are interiorized, and a world view is formed. This day of development is a prelude to any talk of "dark nights."

The ego arrives at the noontime of life in full stride. However, it is just at that point when deep reversals are beginning to take place within the psyche. Inevitably the development of the first part of life reaches a dead end, because, as Jung observed, it is necessarily one-sided. Too much of personality has remained untapped.⁴ This unlived life lives on in the unconscious like glowing coals, waiting to burst into flames. Neglected sources of life begin to seek an expression in the conscious personality, demanding that ego-consciousness widen to make room for the new life. But ego has often reached a petrified state and the new life must force its way into awareness. Ego is often the last to recognize what is happening. And yet, it is the ego's destiny to house these conflicts, to be the theater in which the story of personality is played out.

Much of the literature of the Carmelites assaults the ego. The Rule forces it to simplify, to disengage from distraction, and to focus. Owning nothing and told to merge with the land, ego loses footholds

where security might have been found. It is to live in an undefended manner, obeying a leader, open to criticism and correction from others. The Rule and the lifestyle it urges invites ego to let go of its firm grasp on the personality and on life, and to embark on a sometimes painful journey. Ego is asked to stand ready to hear if there are other voices in the house of personality.⁵

Ego is asked to identify with Elijah in the *Institution of the First Monks*. The key scriptural text in the first part of that document is 1 Kings 17:3-4 where the word of the Lord tells Elijah to depart and go eastward to the brook Cherith, and there he is to drink of the brook, and the ravens will feed him. The medieval Carmelite heard in this command the ascetical and mystical ideal of Carmel. From a developmental point of view, ego must leave its position of preeminence and with docility embark on a journey not of its own making. It is told to let go of its anchors and follow, not lead. The journey is difficult as it works against its selfish, sinful habits, and takes up residence in a life supportive of others' well-being, a life of charity. Ego is asked to trust in the promise that through it all there will be nourishment and even greater life.

The Carmelites testify that the outcome of prayer is humility. In the process the ego is often bruised but should emerge the better for the experience. Some of the stronger language of John of the Cross could be understood as even advocating annihilation of the ego. He was sensitively aware of the ego's fear and distrust, and its tendency to close in upon itself. The annihilation of the ego, however, is never the goal. It is this soul's destiny to discover itself in relationship with God at its center. The ego necessarily plays a major role in this privileged encounter.

The problem is not ego, but an egocentric life. It is the ego which lives in isolation from the deeper, nourishing sources of the psyche that becomes a problem to itself, to others, and which distorts God. The ego that rests in its own knowledge and control is not aware of the psychic forces which can undermine its position. The beginner John of the Cross describes in the *Dark Night* (Book One, Chapters 2 to 8) is a good person, but one basically unaware of the selfishness hidden within the apparent virtues. When John of the Cross describes the effects of contemplative prayer he is not describing an annihilation of the ego but a repositioning of the ego in reference to the self, to God and to others.⁶ Ego is now acutely aware of its selfish and sinful tendencies. Reverence has been restored to the personality which had grown presumptuous. The person, the ego, now takes its place in the circle of humanity, and no longer judges. Once-proud ego is now able to say "we poor."

Paradoxically, the surrender results in an awareness of a deeper foundation for one's life. The ego is not annihilated but is put in touch with enlivening sources of life, sources received as gracious gift. The humility arising from this process results in an even surer, more confident ego. The person is able to proceed not on the basis of assumed strengths, but with a realization of a giftedness offered it from beyond its own feeble powers. A life is seen now not as the story of an individual's strengths and weaknesses, but as a story of God's mercy.

In Teresa's own life this deeper humility coincided with energetic, effective efforts to reform the Carmelite Order by establishing new communities. Humility, for her, obviously did not mean shrinking from life. As a matter of fact she warned that a humility which led to a poor self-image was one of the greatest temptations of the devil.

In much of the literature of the Carmelites there is a confident tone as they report their experiences and insights. The experience of God has softened any arrogance, but also allows them to write with a conviction, even while protesting their faithlessness. Teresa complains about her feminine nature and its limitations, yet she is also convinced that her writing will be beneficial to readers, and she is willing to fight for her convictions even in the face of opposition from more learned figures of her day.⁷

True humility resulting from prayer is an acknowledgment that our ego is not the center of the personality, much less the center of the world. It is an acceptance of the truth of things. We are not our own cause nor do we have the strength to guarantee our lives in any way. The ego is forced to acknowledge its poverty of spirit. In this acceptance there is a self-transcendence, a true losing of oneself. The ego learns to surrender the personality to another center, a psychological center and also a transcendent Mystery at the core of its existence.

Persona

One of the important tasks in the first part of life is to develop a healthy persona, a way of presenting oneself to the world. A healthy persona balances one's own self-expectations, the expectations of others, and the very real possibilities of one's personality. The persona is a mediator between the ego and the outer world. That outer world, or collective consciousness, is a powerful shaping force for a persona. We learn to see ourselves through others' eyes and speak with others' voices. A challenge for the ego is to step out from behind the masks or personae it is wearing and to find its own voice; a persona eventually becomes inadequate and will have to become more flexible, perhaps only after an initial disintegration.

The Carmelite inclination to go apart, into real deserts or simply into one's interior desert, manifests an uneasiness with personae, or being part of a collective. Often the very geography and living conditions chosen by early Carmelites was an effort to free themselves from society's expectations. The phrase they used, *vacare deo* (to be free for God), captures something of the intent.

In the renewal of their lives, the first Carmelites often had to set aside family and societal expectations in order to enter on a pilgrimage to the land of the gospel. They went to the edges of society and the church. As part of their new identity they took on the role of penitent, pilgrim, hermit. As a sign of their radical change they rejected existing rules, and requested a new formula for living. Their Rule encouraged them to put on the armor of God, a new persona, letting faith be their shield and holy thoughts their constant reminder.

The ego has to thread its way between the collective consciousness of society and the collective depths of the psyche. Too much societal identification and one sees oneself only through the eyes of others. One begins to live solely in the persona, losing touch with the rest of the personality. Too much unconscious identification and one can become inflated, claiming for oneself powers which rightfully belong to the "gods." An inauthentic prophet blindly takes on an archetypal role and in her hubris brings about societal and personal destruction.

The Carmelite heritage of prophecy, beginning with the major figure of Elijah, demands a certain distancing from societal values in order to present a critique. It also is the result of a contemplative prayer which opens the personality to God's invitation. In the experience of John of the Cross, the contemplative is led into a "vast wilderness" where

one's former identity and value system is left behind. Here a new knowing, now by "unknowing," takes place. From this stance the contemplative is able to offer a critique of society as well as the church. In its own history, Carmel has known the sharp critique of its contemplatives. The prophetic cannot be a persona seized, but a role taken on reluctantly. Elijah understands himself as the only one left to defend the true God. Contemplative prayer is not seen as inimical to justice and peace concerns. On the contrary, the contemplative is expected to be one who sees the reality of a situation.

In Teresa's day the concept of "honor" greatly shaped the persona. Honor was the mask through which one related to society. It shaped one's self-understanding and affected one's relationships. Teresa was particularly sensitive to the confines of such a persona and its deleterious effect on a gospel-oriented life. Her communities were to function in such a way that only God's honor was served. But even that noble intention may lead to rigidity.

The soul traveling through Teresa's inner castle slowly takes on the persona of a good religious person, one who has established a life structure which would be in accord with their own self-understanding and the expectations of others. As good as it is, the very security of the lifestyle becomes the latest attachment which hinders the soul from moving through the castle.

Continued attentive prayer with an openness to being led, may result in transformations of the persona. How one understands oneself and how one presents oneself to the world around may undergo change. Carl Jung believed that ego often will not be willing to explore other rooms in the psyche until the persona begins to disintegrate.⁸

This disintegration may happen when the persona is no longer adequate to express new life emerging from within the personality or expected by others.

The temptation is to wrap one's persona even more tightly around oneself. Taking even greater control of one's life, and refusing to hear any questioning of that life, ego identifies even more tightly with persona and cuts off potentially nourishing sources from within the unconscious. Just as the early Carmelites had to let go the security of the wadi on Mount Carmel for the unknown challenges of Europe, so the dweller of the third dwelling place in the castle needs to move on into as yet uninhabited rooms.

Shadow

The early Carmelites established a lifestyle which would practically guarantee a confrontation with one's shadow. They encouraged quiet introspection through the prism of scripture; they gathered to point out the faults of the community members. Teresa of Avila's communities of friends were meant to undermine any claims to privilege based on bloodlines or virtue or anything else. Individuals were meant to be brought face-to-face with their essential poverty and learn to live in hope based on trust in God.

The shadow may be understood as the underside of the persona. When John of the Cross describes the beginner, the good religious person, in terms of the seven capital sins, he is identifying the shadow dimension of the religious persona. For example, the person is no longer obviously proud, but now has a secret pride in her growing humility and so forth.

What I am portraying to the world around, and what I believe about myself, has a dark side to it, an

unacknowledged, unconscious aspect. The shadow is the inferior, undeveloped, negative aspect of the personality. It is a part of me I would not want others to know, nor do I want to know it myself. But prayer opens me to an inner journey into the truth of myself. That truth includes the shadow, and it is this reality that makes the inner journey initially painful. It is not simply a matter of acknowledging the fact that we have a shadow. Prayer may open us to the experience of the shadow. The challenge is to accept that this, too, is a part of who we are.

Teresa of Avila wrote about entering within herself and finding that she was at war with herself. John of the Cross talked about entering the misery of one's existence where all seemed to be operating in reverse, the opposite of what was assumed. The first Carmelites were warned that the devil, like a roaring lion, would stalk them in their inner desert. From a psychological point of view one could say that the authentic prayer of the mystics led them into an experience of the shadow side of their lives, the inferior, undeveloped, negative aspects of their personality. It certainly led them into an awareness of their sinfulness as well.

Prayer also led them into their giftedness and called them to accountability. This unknown dimension of the personality has been called the "positive" shadow. It, too needs, acceptance, and is often as painful to acknowledge and engage as are the more negative aspects of the shadow.

The mystics are particularly apt religious educators for adults. Generally, they are reporting experiences and convictions occurring in their mature years. Their stress on learning to listen attentively, to let go of tight control, to surrender to the Mystery addressing them from deep within their lives is advice given to adults who often have been struggling for years to find a path to greater meaning and life.

The sometimes strong ascetical language of entering into a dying process must be heard within the context of an adult life which is already gasping for air. The background to the message of the Carmelites is a day of normal human development before any talk of night. The Carmelites are addressing people who have some ego-strength with a persona in place, and who are in possession of a hard-won identity, world-view, and value system. These are the normal results of the first part of life. But it is a one-sided journey often leading to petrification. The person becomes restless, yearning for a saner, deeper, more fulfilling life, but nothing and no one is able to provide it.

It is into this situation of stagnation and dying that the message of letting go, surrendering in trust, is uttered. The message is not really bad news about jettisoning one's life, but good news about finding a way out of a situation of death. The accumulated wisdom of the Carmelites, which is simply a learning of gospel truths, is that the paschal mystery, the dying and rising of Christ, is built into human development. One need not go looking for crosses. To simply grow into the potential of one's life brings on death and its promise of resurrection.

Masculine and Feminine

The Carmelite tradition is a striking treasury of masculine and feminine imagery. These images speak to our yearning for both human community and also psychological wholeness. Masculine and feminine may be understood to refer not only to men and women, but also to modes of consciousness within each man and woman. Unless one is willing to separate sexuality from gender, it makes sense to say that the differences between males and females carry through into their personality structures. We have different, but related, inheritances. A healthy tradition will have to, in some way, assist an

individual pilgrim to integrate the great polarity of human development signified by the symbols of masculine and feminine.

The far regions of the psyche are so different from the conscious personality that only a symbol of "otherness" can begin to express them. For men and women someone of the opposite sex is often the best expression of "otherness." Relating to that person, or to equivalent symbolic expressions, puts one in touch with nourishing sources of inner life. A healthy tradition makes available symbols of otherness, encouraging encounters which allow for a deeper, fuller life.

Very early in the history of Carmel, devotion to Mary found its way into the wadi. A medieval notion of the "lady of the place" may have made it natural for these rough hermits to dedicate the early chapel to Mary. The order continued throughout its history to place special emphasis on this woman, identifying itself as her brothers and calling her the "beauty of Carmel." The scapular worn by the men became special protective clothing given by Mary. The order's relationship with Mary was such that it quickly became known as a Marian order and an advocate of Marian feasts and devotion.

The pair of Elijah and Mary are brought together most powerfully in *The Institution of the First Monks*. Each becomes the first of their gender to vow virginity, modeling for the Carmelite an expectancy of fulfillment. Not complete in themselves they await God's invitation to a relationship. For Carmelites they take on different gender roles, including "father" Elijah and "mother" Mary. This pair grows in stature in order legend and eventually they are understood by Arnold Bostius as co-founders.

Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross are names forever linked in the history of spirituality. The popular view of their relationship may assume a warmer friendship than was actually present. But as icons for the Carmelites they, together, form a masculine/feminine door through which the transcendent is approached. Carmelites are attracted to one or the other, not necessarily based on gender, but finding in John or Teresa a soul-mate. As Teresa advised, if you want to know God, know God's friends.

The whole ethos of the Teresian reform is formed by a web of relationships. It is impossible to think about the beginnings of the reform and not have in mind Teresa's numerous relationships with spiritual directors, theologians, missionaries, and assorted Carmelite friars. Her deep affection for Jerome Gratian, a leader of the reform among the male Carmelites, was quite absorbing for a period of time in her life.⁹ Her relationship with John of the Cross was mutually enriching. She gave guidance and encouragement to the Carmelite men who pioneered the reform.

John often visited and stayed with many of Teresa's communities of women, saying mass, hearing confessions, counseling, teaching. They learned from him, as they testified, but he responded to them as well, attempting to put into writing his understanding of the spiritual life. He wrote important works at the request of women in his life: *The Spiritual Canticle* commentary for Ana de Jesús, the "captain" of Teresa's prioresses; and *The Living Flame of Love*, both poem and commentary, for the laywoman Ana de Peñalosa.

If relationship is a primary route for coming in contact with unmet psychological life within us, then the Carmel shaped by Teresa, John, and the

early pioneers would have been conducive to such developments. Teresa pointed to the relationships among the sisters, and with outsiders, as a vernacular text for them to read. In that text they would come to know whether or not they were serving God. She wanted her sisters to be capable of affective, non-possessive relationships guided by adult discernment. She believed that in their relationships God was loving God.

Masculine and feminine symbols intertwine in the writings of Teresa and John as they attempt to describe their relationship with the Mystery at the center of their lives. Both mystics tell the story of the human/divine relationship as a love story, using images of man and woman, and their deepening union into marriage. Teresa describes a king at the center of the castle beckoning the feminine soul. John tells of a masculine beloved luring the feminine soul into high mountain trysts. John finds the initial plot of his story in the *Canticle* in the Old Testament, a love story portraying the relationship between God and God's people.

It should be no surprise that we cannot always find our contemporary sensitivity to gender issues in the writings of these saints. Teresa's complaints about her feminine nature seem to be part conditioning and part strategy. But a reader is forced to find some way of reconciling her sometimes apologetic language with her frequent bold assertions and action. She was not unaware of the prejudice against women: "Since the world's judges are sons of Adam and all of them men, there is no virtue in women that they do not hold suspect."¹⁰

John's writing conveys a spirituality in which many readers, both men and women, identify strong feminine elements. His use of the powerful image of a night in which one waits expectantly speaks

of a receptivity which is often associated with the feminine. For some people the association is unfortunate and a stereotype. But for many others, it is appropriate and evocative, although limited.

Today's follower of the path of Carmel may or may not find the personalities of Teresa and John inviting. These mystics' use of particular images and symbols may sometimes be a barrier as well. But the mystery of the self we seek to know is revealed most aptly in the clothing of masculine and feminine imagery as well as in real women and men. The God whom we seek to follow is personal and more than personal and comes more fully into focus when seen through the prism of masculinity, femininity, and their relationship.

A Carmelite Contribution

If only the men in the wadi on Mount Carmel had kept journals, telling us about their motivations for being on the mountain, their reactions to its primitive conditions, their hopes for their new community! Only the Rule, formulated by an outside observer, and possibly the *Rubrica Prima*, the first article of the extant 1281 constitutions which testifies to their descent from Elijah and Elisha, give us windows into their early self-understanding as a community. Otherwise, we observe them from a distance, through pilgrims' diaries which comment on the presence of hermits in the wadi. It is tempting to believe that Nicholas the Frenchman, the future general and author of *The Flaming Arrow*, at one time had been with them in the wadi. Nicholas gives a human face and personality to the otherwise anonymous first generation of Carmelites.

Very possibly the triumphs and travails of Elijah the prophet became, for them, the archetypal stories of their own lives. They identified with his zealous defense of God, gloried in his defeat of the prophets

of Baal, sympathized with his flight from persecutors, perhaps even recognized in his lassitude and discouragement their own emotional troughs. In Elijah, on whose mountain they lived and around whose well they gathered, they found patterns common to their own humanity.

The refounding of the order in the sixteenth century presents a very different picture. Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross left a literary heritage both intensely personal yet universal in its potential appeal. The writings of John and Teresa are striking in their perceptive analyses of both spiritual and psychological realities. It should not be surprising to find psychology and spirituality addressed in their works. These two processes most pointedly intersect in questions of human interiority and the nature of the self. The saints' primary concern was the presence of God in life, and the soul's response to God's will. But they were also well aware that this relationship between the soul and God affected mental and emotional states.

In our language today, Teresa and John encouraged a self-appropriation while at the same time they testified that the true self comes into reality only in self-transcendence. Teresa's language for self-appropriation is self-knowledge, which she bemoaned was in short supply. John observed the effect of disordered desires on the psyche and described it in the terms of the faculty psychology of his day. This psyche is never ignored or bypassed in relationship with God; hopefully, it is healed and brought to healthier functioning.

It is a Carmelite conviction that when the personality is not centered on this transcendent source of life and identity, but is centered on some part of God's creation, the personality is dysfunctional. Human development becomes a death scene. A part of

God's creation is asked to be ultimate; it cannot bear the responsibility and so it begins to die under the burden. The personality which has created this idol in following its unhealed desires, also begins to die. A lesser god means a lesser human. True healing only comes with the death of alien gods in the psyche and the emergence of the Nameless One. That transformation is beyond the powers of the psyche and requires graced assistance, God's love healing, freeing, and uniting lover and beloved. De-absolutizing idols and waiting in hope for God's further self-revelation remains the constant Carmelite vocation.

But we only know ourselves and grow into healthy psychological functioning when we are following a call met within these very psyches, yet coming from beyond. A flame lures us deeper into the night; a shepherd whistles gently to come; a stag appears to lead the way. The Carmelite mystics became convinced that they were being invited, even *pursued* into greater life. We understand today that God's spirit enables our human spirit not to turn in on itself but to follow a call to go out to the other and to the ultimate Other. God is met and the self is born on the same journey.

When false gods die, the world which formerly competed with God no longer preoccupies the heart. The soul is free to relate to and love this creation because it is now, in John's description, an harmonious symphony expressing the attributes of God. God is graceful as a mountain, pleasant as a valley, wonderful as a strange island, forceful and peaceful as a river; God is delightful as a breeze, restful and quiet as the night at the time of rising dawn. And God is the music, the solitude, the supper. God is all of these things, and they all speak of God to the soul. The outcome of a spiritual discipline which frees the heart from its attachments and

compulsions is an enjoyment of the world in a non-possessive manner.

Teresa and John's description of the journey to and with God anticipates contemporary understandings of human development. Their accounts of transformation provide a developmental spiritual topography which parallels developmental theories. Developmental psychologists chart human development through crises, passages, and seasons as the personality undergoes transformation. Spirituality understands that freedom and authentic personhood result from a process of conversion underlying these personality changes. From a Christian perspective developmental theories are exploring not simply personality transformation, but manifestations of what is, at root, a graced invitation to surrender a life in trust to God's empowering love and mercy. Psychological constructs may be understood as a charting of the paschal mystery, the dying and rising of Christ, inbuilt in human development.

It is probable that both Teresa and John would have been very comfortable with today's attention to human interiority. Ego-development, shadow material, gender issues, active imagination, dream work, would all probably be of great interest to them. After all, in large measure their writings traced the impact of God's love on our fragile humanity. But, they would have insisted that beneath the world of ego, below any personal or collective unconscious, different from the realm of the archetypes, or whatever psychological categories one would choose to use, we eventually have to come to a transcendent source of identity. We are not our own cause, nor do we fully know our own identity. We ultimately find ourselves named.

It is interesting to watch Teresa become more psychologically sophisticated as she finds more communities. One can only imagine the enthusiasm present in a fast-growing reform supported by cities and monarchy alike. Very intense and zealous personalities would have been drawn to such a movement. Its contemplative demands would have furthered the development of those who came with healthy religious sensibilities. On the other hand, the atmosphere of such communities could exacerbate conditions of personality imbalance. In *The Foundations* Teresa shows a growing concern for unhealthy psychological responses and inauthentic spirituality.¹¹

Psychological wholeness and spiritual holiness are not linked inseparably, nor are they totally unrelated. Psychological readiness for a full and faithful response to God is always a relative matter. All psyches are limited and a lite of faith is a gift unmerited by anyone. Thérèse of Lisieux's "little way" is based on that fundamental Christian premise. On the other hand, the Carmelite mystics testified that their experience of God transformed and healed their psychic structures. Desires warring within them were reoriented and put at the service of God's will in their life.

We go to God who is beyond name and image through a world filled with words and images. It is a natural process and one should follow nature. A spiritual journey which begins to ignore the normal forms of prayer, religious imagery, and sacramental ritual risks becoming too ephemeral, too removed from the stuff of life. Both Teresa and John encourage traditional forms of religion, but remind us that none of it should take God's place. John observed that where there is faith, any image suffices; where there is no faith, no image suffices.

These Spanish mystics draw our attention beyond our own practices, even communal ones, and place emphasis on God's activity in our life. They encourage the concomitant attitude of listening, an attentiveness to God's approach. They have a preference for simple and silent atmospheres, both in outer environments, but especially in inner environments.

In this love for quiet and solitude, one can hear the prescriptions of the Rule permeating the attitudes of Teresa and John. Teresa acknowledges that obedience or charity will often demand engagement with others, but " ...I always repeat that solitude is better, and even that we must desire it."¹² And John writes to nuns at Beas, "Speaking distracts one, while silence and work recollects and strengthens the spirit."¹³ It is also the preferred atmosphere of their sons and daughters, such as Lawrence of the Resurrection and Thérèse of Lisieux.

The first Carmelites must have wrestled with their personalities as they attempted to live in allegiance to Jesus Christ. Their lives were structured in such a way that they could not escape themselves, nor their devils, nor the God who was pursuing them. They knew that their salvation lay in such unremitting engagement.

Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, paradigms of humanity, teach that authentic human development is ultimately a process of divinization, a participation in the knowing and loving of God. These mystics report a graciousness at the core of life, a transcendent source of identity and empowerment within the psyche, which nurtured and guaranteed their personhood.

John Welch, O.Carm.

1. Cf. Appendix for Carmelite Rule.
2. For a psychological discussion of Teresa's imagery cf. John Welch, *Spiritual Pilgrims: Carl Jung and Teresa of Avila* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).
3. The person has a psychological structure composed of sensory and spiritual components. Each component has faculties, or powers, which have an appetite to be fulfilled. It was John's conviction that these faculties are expressive of a fundamental human hunger for which only God is sufficient food. Cf. John Welch, *When Gods Die: An Introduction to John of the Cross* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990).
4. "Everyone can call to mind friends or schoolmates who were promising and idealistic youngsters, but who, when we meet them again years later, seem to have grown dry and cramped in a narrow mould....

The nearer we approach to the middle of life, and the better we have succeeded in entrenching ourselves in our personal attitudes and social positions, the more it appears as if we had discovered the right course and the right ideals and principles of behaviour. For this reason we suppose them to be eternally valid, and make a virtue of unchangeably clinging to them. We overlook the essential fact that the social goal is attained only at the cost of a diminution of personality." C.G. Jung, *Collected Works* (Princeton University Press, 1969), VIII, pars. 770, 772.

5. "Among all my patients in the second half of life—that is to say, over thirty-five—there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. It is safe to say that every one of them fell ill because he had lost what the living religions of every age have given to their followers, and none of them has been really healed who did not regain his religious outlook." C.G. Jung, *Collected Works*, XI, par. 509.

Jung believed that alcoholic addiction expressed a spiritual hunger and could be counteracted through a spiritual renewal and the support of human community. Members of twelve-step programs often comment on the compatibility between their program and Carmelite spirituality.

6. Jung observed that there is a great difference between the person whose sun circles their earth and the person whose earth has learned to circle the sun.

7. For example, Teresa taught that prayer is never so lofty that meditation on the humanity of Christ becomes unnecessary: "They have contradicted me about it and said that I don't understand, because these are paths along which our Lord leads, and that when souls have already passed beyond the beginning stages it is better for them to deal with things concerning the divinity and flee from corporeal things. Nonetheless, they will not make me admit that such a road is a good one." Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle in The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, 2, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1980), *The Sixth Dwelling Places*, chap. 7, no. 5.

8. "Worst of it all is that intelligent and cultivated people live their lives without even knowing of the possibility of such transformations. Wholly unprepared, they embark upon the second half of life. Or are there perhaps colleges for forty-year-olds which prepare them for their coming life and its demands as the ordinary colleges introduce our young people to a knowledge of the world? No, thoroughly unprepared we take the step into the afternoon of life; worse still, we take this step with the false assumption that our truths and ideals will serve us as hitherto. But we cannot live the afternoon of life according to the programme of life's morning; for what was great in the morning will be little at evening, and what in the morning

was true will at evening have become a lie." C.G. Jung, *The Collected Works*, VIII, par. 784.

9. Jeronimo Gratian was already ordained when he entered the Carmelite novitiate in 1572. He became a dedicated religious and gifted administrator. Teresa considered him a blessing from God for the reform, as well as for her personally. After Teresa's death, disagreements within the reform led to Gratian's expulsion.

10. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, in *The Collected Works*, 2, chap. 3, no. 7.

11. "I know some souls of great virtue who remained for seven or eight hours in absorption.... I find no benefit in this bodily weakness—for it is nothing else—except that it arises from a good source, It would be a greater help to use this time well than to remain in this absorption so long. Much more can be merited by making an act of love and by often awakening the will to greater love of God than by leaving it listless. So I counsel the prioresses to make every possible effort to prevent the nuns from spending long periods in this daze." Teresa of Avila, *The Foundations in The Collected Works*, 3, chap. 6, nos. 2 and 5.

12. Teresa of Avila, *The Foundations*, in *The Collected Works*, 3, chap 5, no. 15.

13. John of the Cross, *The Letters*; in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1991), 741.

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