

NIGHT AND LIGHT
THE POET JOHN OF THE CROSS AND
THE « EXSULTET » OF THE EASTER LITURGY

On the book jacket of Father Bruno's *Life of Saint John of the Cross* the reader finds El Greco's painting of Toledo — brooding, foreboding, but mystical Toledo. In line with his penchant for dramatizing the lives of the persons he wrote about, Father Bruno reminds us that the artist from Crete had been working in this city three years before the Saint of the Dark Night arrived there for nine months of house arrest¹. When one looks at the painting itself (which dates from around the year 1600) one notices the building which served as the monastic prison where in 1578 much brooding and forebodings were voiced over the inroads of the Discalced Carmelite reform movement. In that Calced Carmelite monastery, long since gone from Toledo's landscape, a great deal of mystical experience occurred in a key of darkness and light — like the *chiaroscuro* so dear to El Greco. The mystical light and darkness which was taking place there had as its focal point Saint John of the Cross.

During his forced stay in Spain's Imperial City from December 1577 to August 1578 the small cell he was kept in also provided darkness, and the poetic genius of its prisoner provided light. In spite of the unpleasant side to this forced stay, we all can be thankful that the saint's poetic growth managed to benefit from the pressure-cooker, or « crucible », setting of that Carmelite-monastery-become-prison². Still, we should remain less concerned in this article with

¹ Bruno of Jésus-Marie, *Saint John of the Cross* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1932), p. 164. See also the picture book he edited *Three Mystics: El Greco, Saint John of the Cross and Saint Teresa of Avila* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1952), pp. 4-5 and 15.

² See E.W. Trueman Dicken, *The Crucible of Love: A Study of the Mysticism of Saint Teresa of Jesus and Saint John of the Cross* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1963).

the reasons which brought John of the Cross to Toledo than with the fact that he was able to keep singing there his « Spiritual Canticle » regardless of the darkness that surrounded him at the moment. We would like to appreciate how he was able to remain « resilient », to borrow a term from the title of Avery Dulles' most recent book, in the way he drew on his powers of observation and assimilation all throughout the nine months' physical inactivity³.

To see how well he did so I would like to consider one special source of the light-darkness imagery so dear to John of the Cross, and one which must have offered him consolation in the Spring of 1578, namely, the liturgy of the Easter Vigil, and more precisely, the inspiring chant of the *Exsultet* of that liturgy. That is, I would contend that there are some very definite echoes of the Easter Vigil's *Exsultet* in the « Mystical Doctor's » *Noche Oscura* or *Dark Night of the Soul* poem. The reason for trying to demonstrate this is to bring the reader to the realization, to discover, that John of the Cross's poetic genius knew how to derive beauty of expression from the worship of the Church. To show this influence of a particular part of the Easter Vigil liturgy on Saint John's poetic production I would divide this article into three parts: the liturgy of the Carmelite Order at the time of Saint John of the Cross and its version of the *Exsultet*; a comparison of the *Dark Night* with the *Exsultet*; and some remarks on the significance of this comparison.

1. *The Liturgy of the Carmelite Order at the Time of Saint John of the Cross*

Saint John of the Cross spent all but five years of his religious life attending and celebrating the so-called « Rite of the Holy Sepulchre », as all Calced Carmelites used to until it was abandoned officially by their Order after Vatican II⁴. For a mere five years,

³ See Avery Dulles, *The Resilient Church: The Necessity and Limits of Adaptation* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977).

⁴ For what still remains the best all-around article on the Carmelite liturgy see Benedict Zimmerman, « Liturgie de l'Ordre des Carmes », *D.A.C.L.*, II (1910), cols. 2166-75. Later studies like Augustinus Forcadell, « Conspectus Historicus Liturgiae Carmelitanae », *Analecta Ordinis Carmelitarum*, X (1938-1940), 85-105; 165-79; 224-37; 294-300; 375-81; 437-45; and XI (1942), 139-67 plus Archdale King., Ch. 4 « Carmelite Rite », *Liturgies of the Religious Orders* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1955), pp. 235-324 acknowledge their debt to the Swiss Discalced Carmelite historian's careful scholarship.

See also the resource work of P. Kallenberg, *Fontes Liturgiae Carmelitanae: Investigatio in Decreta, Codices et Proprium Sanctorum* (Roma: Eds. Instituti Carmelitani, 1962). Coll. « Textus et Studia Historica Carmelitana », 5.

then, after the erection of the Discalced religious into an independent Province of the Order of Carmel in 1586, did he celebrate the liturgy according to the Roman Rite⁵.

To form an idea of just what John's life-long experience of the Easter Vigil would have been as a result, we need only go to the old Carmelite rite⁶. Assuringly enough, we find a liturgy for Holy Saturday very similar to the Roman Rite which John eventually embraced and whose adoption he discussed as a member of the Discalced Provincial Definitory⁷. Therefore, whether as a Calced Carmelite or as a Discalced friar, Saint John was familiar with the well-known text of the *Exsultet* in versions which were practically identical (except for a minor variation which we will point out in the next section)⁸.

The nature and origins of the *Exsultet* itself are well documented for us by historians of the liturgy. Research has established that liturgical developments in the Church from the fourth century

⁵ See the series « Monumenta Historica Carmeli Teresiani », *Documenta Primigenia*, III (Rome: Institutum Historicum Teresianum, 1977), document no. 295, pp. 137-43 for the brief of separation, and more particularly, p. 142 for its passages concerning the adoption of the Roman Rite. The *Documenta Primigenia*, III, doc. no. 285 (March 18, 1586), pp. 114-16 gives the petition of the Discalced with their reasons for wanting to change rites. Not only was the recent confusion engendered by frequent modification of the Order's liturgical books adduced as a reason, but also the much more fundamental assertion that the Discalced were indeed a new entity unto themselves and thus obliged to adopt the new breviary (1568) and missal (1570) of the Roman Rite (in accord with the famous directive of Pius V that all rites which were not older than two hundred years would have to be suppressed and cede to the usages of Rome — see Pierre Journel, « The Tridentine Liturgical Books », *The Church at Prayer* ed. by A.G. Martimort (New York: Desclée Co., 1968), pp. 42-43). See too, Hipólito de la S. Familia, « Hacia la independencia jurídica del Carmelo Teresiano », *Ephemerides Carmeliticæ*, XVIII (1967), 314-47.

⁶ See *Ordinaire de l'Ordre de Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel par Sibert de Beka (vers 1312)* ed. by Benedict Zimmerman (Paris: Picard, 1910). Coll. « Bibliothèque Liturgique », 13. This ordinal was in use until 1580 when the General Chapter meeting in Rome called for a new one in the light of the Council of Trent's reform documents. Four years later, on August 4, 1584, the Holy See approved the Carmelites' new liturgical texts — see Zimmerman, *Liturgie des Carmes*, cols. 2174-75.

⁷ See *Ordinaire*, pp. 171-73 for the celebration of the Holy Saturday liturgy. Saint John's attitude toward the abandonment of the Carmelite Rite is not entirely clear. Some authors like E.A. Peers, *Handbook to the Life and Times of Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross* (Westminster, Md., 1954), p. 83 and Father Crisógono, *Vida y Obras de San Juan de la Cruz* (Madrid, 1973, 7th ed.), p. 272 assert that Saint John opposed the change of rites, but careful weighing of evidence in the source they both draw upon, namely, the *Reforma de los Descalzos* of 1655, shows that opposition as such is not really indicated. See Francisco de Santa María, *La Reforma de los Descalzos de Nuestra Señora del Carmen*, tom. II (Madrid: Diego Diaz de la Carrera, 1655, re-ed. 1747), p. 339. This topic awaits a study of its own.

⁸ See note 12, *infra*.

onward had produced several versions of the Easter *praeconium* or proclamation, but the one which took root in the Roman liturgy as well as the Carmelite Rite was actually a slightly retouched Gallican version⁹. Chanted in praise of the paschal candle as symbol of Christ's victory over the darkness of death (hence the alternate name of « *laus cerei* »), these highly poetic, sometimes rather long, songs were used to « bless » the waxen bearer of the Easter fire.

With its origins in either Southern France or Northern Italy, and inspired by the writings of Saint Ambrose, the Gallican version found in both the Carmelite Missal of the sixteenth century and in the Roman Missal of the same period would have exerted a definite influence on Saint John of the Cross. All Catholics are familiar with what he heard: a haunting chant that lyrically describes the beauty of light in darkness, of God's guiding hand upon his people, and of Christ's ultimate victory over death. These themes are modulated in a basic twofold structure of the *Exsultet*: « gospel and anaphora (canon) »¹⁰. As the *paschale praeconium* the text proclaims the resurrection of Christ, and « inasmuch as it is an important sacramental and a symbolic sacrificial rite, the *Exsultet* is composed, secondly, in the most solemn liturgical form of an anaphora, or 'canon' »¹¹. In order to maintain our attention on our intended comparison of it with the *Dark Night* poem and not lose ourselves in superfluous details, we give here the headings of the various parts of the *Exsultet* as set out by Herman Schmidt:

I. Introduction

1. Joy

- a. Angelic exultation
- b. Earth shares in the joy of heaven
- c. The Church as conveyer of universal joy

2. Recommendation

II. Eucharist

1. Theme

2. Easter Praise

- a. Fourfold « *Haec Nox* »
(Conclusion from Saint Ambrose)

⁹ Herman Schmidt, « *Laus Cerei* », *Hebdomada Sancta*, II (Rome: Herder and Herder, 1957), pp. 627-50; Adolf Franz, Ch. 7, § 4 « *Das Präkonium der Osterkerze am Karsamstag* », *Die Kirchlichen Benediktionen im Mittelalter*, I (Graz: Akademischer Druck u. Verlagsanstalt, 1960 - un - edited reprint of 1909 Herder edition), pp. 519-53; and Jordi Pinell, « *La benedició del ciri pasqual i els seus textos* », *Liturgica*, II (1958), 1-119. Coll. « *Scripta et Documenta* », 10.

¹⁰ Jerome Gassner, « *The Exsultet* », *Orate Fratres*, XXI (1946-1947), 196.

¹¹ Gassner, *The Exsultet*, p. 197.

- b. Fivefold « Oh »
(Conclusion from Holy Scripture)
- 3. Sacrifice of Praise
 - a. Praise of the paschal night
 - b. Entreaty
 - c. The lighted candle
- 4. Encomium of the Bees
 - a. In general: excellence of the bees
 - b. In particular: their activity
 - c. Conclusion: their chasteness

III. Conclusion

- 1. Summing up the Easter praise
- 2. Entreaty
- 3. Universal petition ¹²

It would seem that the stage is now set for a comparison of the themes contained in the *Exsultet* known by John of the Cross with the themes we find in his sublime *Dark Night of the Soul*. And to begin this comparison we can move to the following three sections of part two: some preliminary points about John of the Cross's writings; a brief analysis of the main imagery of the *Exsultet*; then finally, a comparison — aided by graphs — of both the poem and the hymn of the Easter liturgy.

¹² Schmidt, *Hebdomada Sancta* II, pp. 640-44. We prefer to follow the textual reading of the critical edition (which Schmidt depends on) established by Bernard Capelle, « L'*Exsultet* pascal oeuvre de Saint Ambroise », *Miscellanea Giovanni Mercati*, I (Rome: 1946 — Studi e Testi, 121), p. 226 for section II, 2, a. and thus accept a fourfold « Haec Nox. ».

The fourth section of the eucharist part concerning the bees invites us to open an interesting parenthesis. The bees and their place in the *Exsultet* has been described by Georges Malherbe, « Les abeilles de l'*Exsultet* », *Questions liturgiques et paroissiales*, XIX (1930), 61-75. This whole section was omitted from the Roman version of the *Exsultet* in the medieval liturgical revisions of Innocent III. In using this text of the *Exsultet*, however, the Carmelites did not follow Rome's lead and so they did not delete all the lines. Instead, they opted to retain the following lines of the original text of the *Exsultet* (and thus allowed the liturgy to exercise its conservative power according to the famous adage « legem credendi statuat lex orandi »):

This is the truly happy and wonderful bee,
whom the male does not violate,
whose progeny is not harmed by the male,
whose integrity is not broken by its offspring,
just like Holy Mary who conceived as a virgin,
brought forth as a virgin and remained a virgin.

It was because of their attachment to the Queen Beauty of Carmel that the Carmelites did not remove these six lines from their celebration of the Easter Vigil, and thanks to such marian devotion John of the Cross heard them for most of his adult life.

2. Comparison of the « Dark Night » and the « Exsultet »

— The emphasis placed at the beginning of this article on the prison setting of Toledo might have given the impression Saint John did in fact compose the great poem of the *Dark Night* while still in his dark cell in the « Imperial City ». But — as unromantic as it may sound — he did not actually write it there.

Consultation of Father Eulogio Pacho's important study, *San Juan de la Cruz y sus Escritos*, shows that the poetic productivity of the prison on the bank above the Tagus did not include the *Dark Night*¹³. In what he terms the « poetic explosion of Toledo », Father Eulogio assigns to Saint John's creative pen, from May 1578 onward until his escape in August of the same year, the following poems:

the Spiritual Canticle;
the Song of the Soul that rejoices in knowing God through Faith;
the Romance on the Gospel « In Principio erat Verbum », regarding the Most Blessed Trinity; and
the Romance on the Psalm « By the Waters of Babylon »¹⁴.

He reserves for sometime later, between « the final weeks of 1578 and the first few months of 1579 », however, the composition of the *Dark Night*¹⁵. His painstaking analysis of the sometimes conflicting testimonies of eyewitnesses, of written sources, and of what he calls « acrobatic exegesis » on both is too extensive to be traced here. Suffice it to say that the prison experience was still fresh in the mind of Saint John when he composed the poem¹⁶.

— If we keep in mind that the *Exsultet* houses many allusions to the liberation of the People of Israel from slavery in the first Passover night, and of their going out of the country of the Nile for their exodus march, one might wonder in what way John of the Cross paid attention to the Book of Exodus, especially since this article claims there is a parallel between the *Exsultet* and one of his poems.

A brief examination of the presence of this second book of the

¹³ Eulogio Pacho; Chs. 2 and 3 « Exposición Poética de Toledo » and « Páginas ocasionales de Dirección Espiritual », *San Juan de la Cruz y sus Escritos* (Madrid: Eds. Cristianidad, 1969), pp. 99-150 and 151-62. Coll. « Teología y Siglo XX », 10.

¹⁴ Pacho, *San Juan y sus Escritos*, pp. 112-13.

¹⁵ Pacho, *San Juan y sus Escritos*, p. 162. On the advice of a colleague (K. Kavanaugh) I would offer the hypothesis that the chant of the *Exsultet* at Easter, early in 1579 or « primeros meses de 1579 », could have occasioned the composition of the *Dark Night* poem.

¹⁶ It could seem superfluous — in the context of such a specialized journal

Bible in the writings of Saint John proved worthwhile — not to create « scriptural proof » type conclusions about his treatment of the Book of Exodus — but because such an examination does suggest that there is an awareness of the escape motif (so prominent in the *Dark Night*) in Saint John's handling of some of its passages.

Out of the forty-five references I was able to track down with the help of the scriptural index provided by Father Lucinio, editor of the Crisógono Spanish edition of the saint's works, half contained events of the Exodus referring to it as a freedom-generating escape¹⁷. This is most pertinent to a comparison of the texts of the *Exsultet* and the *Dark Night*; and one ought to quote one of these passages from Saint John which is particularly meaningful¹⁸. The

as *Ephemerides Carmeliticæ* — to reproduce the poem of the *Noche Oscura*; still, the type of comparison we are conducting can only benefit from the inclusion of the poem's text somewhere in this article. Furthermore, this seems to be the most apropos place to give its eight strophes in the text found in the B.A.C. edition of Father Lucinio (Madrid, 1973, 7th ed.), pp. 407-08:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. En una noche oscura
con ansias, en amores inflamada,
¡ oh dichosa ventura !,
salí sin ser notada,
estando ya mi casa sosegada;</p> | <p>5. ¡ Oh noche que guiaste !;
¡ oh noche amable más que la al-
borada !;
¡ oh noche que juntaste
Amado con amada,
amada en el Amado transformada!</p> |
| <p>2. a oscuras y segura
por la secreta escala, disfrazada,
¡ oh dichosa ventura !,
a oscuras y en celada,
estando ya mi casa sosegada;</p> | <p>6. En mi pecho florido,
que entero para él solo se guardaba,
allí quedó dormido,
y yo le regalaba,
y el ventalle de cedros aire daba.</p> |
| <p>3. en la noche dichosa,
en secreto, que nadie me veía
ni yo miraba cosa,
sin otra luz y guía
sino la que en el corazón ardía.</p> | <p>7. El aire del almena,
cuando yo sus cabellos esparcía
con su mano serena
en mi cuello hería
y todos mis sentidos suspendía.</p> |
| <p>4. Aquesta me guiaba
más cierto que la luz del mediodía
adonde me esperaba
quien yo bien me sabía
en parte donde nadie parecía.</p> | <p>8. Quedéme y olvidéme,
el rostro recliné sobre el Amado;
cesó todo y dejéme,
dejando mi cuidado
entre las azucenas olvidado.</p> |

¹⁷ See. P. Lucinio ed., Father Crisógono, *Vida y Obras de San Juan de la Cruz*, p. 1012.

¹⁸ It seems worth pointing out in this connection that twenty-two of the forty-five passages from the Book of Exodus centered on the meeting of Moses with God on Mount Sinai. This high proportion of texts about the mountain encounter tempts one to wonder what Sanjuanist experts would say to the suggestion that the Sinai setting served a good deal as inspiration for John of the Cross's notion of *ascent* up another biblical mountain.

passage in question comes from the second book of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*:

Faith was foreshadowed in that cloud which separated the children of Israel, just before their entry into the Red Sea, from the Egyptians (Ex 14:19-20). Scripture says of the cloud: *Erat nubes tenebrosa et illuminans noctem* (the cloud was dark, and illuminative of the night — Ex 14:20).

5. How wonderful it was — a cloud, dark in itself, could illumine the night! This was related to illustrate how faith, a dark and obscure cloud to man (also a night in that it blinds and deprives him of his natural light), illumines and pours light into the darkness of his soul by means of its own darkness. This is fitting that the disciple be like the master¹⁹.

This text is a fitting introduction to the imagery of the *Exsultet* which offers many poetic similarities.

— Three main topics are important for our purposes of comparison of the *Exsultet* with the *Dark Night* and they are: the nocturnal terminology of the *Exsultet*; its exiting terminology; and the poetic cadence of several lines of it.

— The word « night » appears no fewer than twelve times in the *Exsultet*: on lines 34, 37, 42, 55, 58, 60, 61, 62, 111, 114 and 117 in Schmidt's transcription. « Light » appears four times in itself, and another three times in derived phrases²⁰. The « morning star » is mentioned twice (on lines 121 and 122), and « day » occurs only once (on line 60). In a chant which contained 130 lines at the time Saint John of the Cross might personally have sung it at the « Mother of All Vigils », this nocturnal imagery and terminology can easily be recognized as occupying a prevalent place.

— Nothing more natural than an allusion to the going out of the Hebrews from Egypt could be found in an Easter hymn since the Church has always considered Christ's paschal mystery as the *going out* to glory of Jesus (Heb 13:12-14) and the definitive passing over of time itself into the newness of the Kingdom which knows no waning, nor « the corruption of sin and death »²¹.

¹⁹ *Ascent of Mount Carmel*: 2, 3, 4-5, ed. Kieran Kavanaugh-Otilio Rodríguez eds., *The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross* (Washington: I.C.S. Publications, 1973), p. 111.

See also Father Crisógono, *San Juan de la Cruz: Su obra científica y su obra literaria*, II (Madrid-Ávila, 1929), p. 296.

²⁰ « Lux » is found on lines 9, 12, 15 and 79. The cognate words are: « *inluminabitur* » on line 60, « *illuminatio* » on line 61 and « *inluxit* » on line 124.

²¹ See the interesting allusions to a spiritual resurrection by John of the Cross in his *Dark Night*, 2, 6, 1 and his *Letter to the Discalced Carmelite Nuns of Beas*, November 18, 1586 in Kavanaugh-Rodríguez, *Collected Works*, pp. 337 and 688.

On line 32 of the *Exsultet* God « leads our fathers out of Egypt and makes them go across the Red Sea ». Then, a few lines further on we hear of the « brightness of the column (of fire) » which led the people on their journey through the desert. Still further on, Christ moves out of hades as its victor (line 42) and rises up — just like the « morning star » of lines 121-22 — from the underworld (line 57). Motion is surely evident, just as it is in the early strophes of the *Dark Night*. But before we consider the outline of the great poem of Saint John, we would like to show how the *Exsultet* contains another quite striking similarity to that poem in its lyric praise of the paschal candle.

— Those familiar with his writings will easily recall John of the Cross's use of ecstatic « Oh's » in them²². In a remarkable passage the *Exsultet* uses them too:

Oh wonderful condescension of your mercy toward us!
 Oh priceless love:
 to redeem a slave
 you have delivered up your son!
 Oh truly necessary sin of Adam
 which was blotted out by the death of Christ!
 Oh happy fault that gained
 so great a Redeemer!
 Oh blessed night which alone deserved to know the time and hour
 in which Christ rose again from the grave!²³

Both the poem and the liturgical chant modulate an enchanting flow of words which creates a spell. Both contain a pulsating rhythm characteristic of all great poetry, and, it would seem, both are rather closely united precisely because of the similar crescendo of so many « Oh's »²⁴. We can now examine the graphs which will illustrate the sometimes striking parallels between these two gems of religious

²² Aside from the presence of these « Oh's » in the *Dark Night* poem Saint John takes the trouble to expound explicitly the meaning of similar « Oh's » in his commentary on the *Living Flame of Love*, 1, 2 and 2, 5 in Kavanaugh-Rodríguez, *Collected Works*, pp. 580 and 597.

²³ See Schmidt, *Hebdomada Sancta* II, pp. 641-42.

²⁴ See the avowedly partisan remarks in favor of considering the *Exsultet* a « curious poetical piece of prose » in « sharp contrast to the sober, severe style of the Roman liturgy » by the accomplished Latinist Christine Mohrmann, Ch. 3 « General Characteristics of Liturgical Latin », *Liturgical Latin: Its Origins and Character* (Washington: Catholic U. Press, 1957), pp. 80 and 83. Much stronger-sounding are the following expressions she uses in the famous study Bernard Botte-Christine Mohrmann, *L'Ordinaire de la messe: Texte critique, traduction et études* (Paris/Louvain: Eds. du Cerf, 1953), pp. 43-44: « une couleur poétique », « une poésie d'un lyrisme très inspiré », and « l'*Exsultet*, pièce émouvante et profonde ».

literature. What the graphs highlight is a case of poetic inspiration from three points of view: in language, whereby the terms used are often similar and sometimes equivalent; in the imagery which bespeaks similar symbols; and in the poetic cadence.

— By way of introduction to the graphs we would say first of all, that each graph indicates a different level of elaboration of the *Dark Night* and so the reader ought not be surprised if we quote only those lines which contain passages pertinent *singillatim* to each of the three facets of the comparison represented by the graphs. Too meticulous a reproduction of the lines of each text would confuse the comparison and render examination overly tedious.

Secondly, while we are quite aware that John of the Cross heard a Latin text of the *Exsultet* in the Easter Vigil liturgy, we feel that our own translation into English adequately fills the task of reproducing the relevant wording of the same *Exsultet*.

Thirdly, the fact that we indicate structural or verbal similarities does not mean we believe they involve similarities in meaning in a univocal way. Saint John of the Cross assigns meanings to some words found in the *Exsultet* different from the sense intended by the latter's Latin author²⁵. For a full grasp of Saint John's acceptance of one term or another we must, of course, go to his commentaries; still, the immediate force of the words in his *Dark Night* poem depends on a process of poetic inspiration and composition with its own laws, and that is why a comparison of the elements of the poem as poem is justified²⁶.

²⁵ Compare the verse of the *Exsultet* which seems to consider the darkness of the night in a negative way, « May this candle, consecrated in your name, O Lord, continue unflinchingly to scatter the darkness of this night », (lines 116-17) with the passage from the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* which we quoted earlier and whose reference is found in note 19, *supra*. Elsewhere the *Exsultet* speaks twice of the « darkness of sin » on lines 35 and 39 (Schmidt transcription).

²⁶ See the pertinent distinction of Prof. Leo Spitzer applied to the *Dark Night* in « Three Poems on Ecstasy: John Donne, St. John of the Cross, Richard Wagner », *A Method of Interpreting Literature* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1949 — reissue 1967), pp. 32-33 between « the symbol of the night as it is used in our poem, and the allegory of the night as we find this elaborated in the prose commentaries of our author » (Underlining mine).

Some of Spitzer's remarks tend to confirm the present article's insight into the poetic cadence of the *Dark Night* (pp. 24, 35 and 42), but his study betrays a weak knowledge of Saint John of the Cross's corpus of writings and of the usages of the Catholic liturgy. His sometimes erroneous understanding of the liturgy leads him to assert on page 34 that « Nor, obviously, is our apostrophe: *¡ oh noche amable más que la alborada!* to be compared to the *o vere beata nox!* of the Holy Saturday liturgy, which prepares the believer for the more important, the all-important resurrection of the Lord, which will take place on Easter Sunday ». Two times in the course of the *Exsultet*, however, we are told that the *night* (which is the very reason why the Church keeps

GRAPH 1 - *Language**Dark Night**Exsultet*

I. INTRODUCTION

II. EUCHARIST

1. (Theme)

1. En una *noche* oscura2. A *escuras* y segura¡ *Oh* dichosa ventura!
a *escuras* y en celada3. En la *noche* dichosa
sin otra *luz* y guía4. Aquesta me guiaba
más cierto que la *luz* del me-
diodía2. This is the *night*... you led
outThis, therefore, is the *night*...
the *darkness* of sinThis is the *night*... the *dark-*
ness of sin

Oh wonderful condescension

Oh priceless love

Oh truly necessary

Oh happy fault

Oh *blessed night*the *night* brings *light* to my
joy3. the glowing fire enkindles
no loss from its *light*

an Easter *vigil*) is the privileged time of Christ's resurrection. In Schmidt's transcription we read on lines 42-44 and 55-57 respectively: « This is the *night in which*, having broken death's bonds, Christ the victor rose from hades » and « Oh blessed *night which alone deserved to know* the time and the hour in which Christ rose from hades » (underlining mine). In all fairness to Spitzer we should also recall that he wrote his study at a time when the Easter Vigil was not celebrated at night as a real vigil, since the restoration of the Holy Saturday services to their proper chronological and symbolical setting came only in 1951.

Furthermore, the recent work of Colin Thompson, *The Poet & The Mystic: A Study of the Cántico Espiritual of San Juan de la Cruz* (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 1977), p. 69 underscores the same tendency toward poetic licence in Saint John of the Cross where it describes his use of the Bible's Song of Songs for the *Spiritual Canticle* poem:

« From this evidence it is clear that San Juan took considerable liberties with the Biblical text in the creation of his poem. He used the Song not as a whole, but as a *quarry* from which he could draw his poetic material. He was not interested in preserving the sequence of images he found in the Song, but in the evocative quality of each, and where he thought it right he reshuffled them and altered them. Certainly his is a borrowed language, but he has made it his own, because he controls the images and redirects their tremendous power *into the channels he has prepared* for them ». (Underlining mine).

4. (Encomium of the bees)

III. CONCLUSION

5. ¡ *Oh noche* que *guiaste* !

¡ *Oh noche* que *juntaste*

6.

7. con su mano *serena*

8.

1. Oh truly blessed *night*... enriched the Hebrews
night which *united*

2. he, the *serene* one,

3. (Universal petition)

GRAPH 2 - Imagery

Dark Night

1. En una *noche oscura*
sali sin ser notada

2. A *escuras* y segura
¡ *Oh dichosa* ventura !
a *escuras* y en celada

3. En la *noche dichosa*
sin otra *luz* y guía

4. mas cierto que la *luz* del me-
diodía

Exsultet

I. INTRODUCTION

II. EUCHARIST

1. (Theme)

2. This is the *night*... you led
out
This, therefore, is the *night*...
the *darkness* of sin

This is the *night*... the *dark-*
ness of sin

Oh wonderful condescension
Oh priceless love
Oh truly necessary
Oh happy fault

Oh *blessed night*
the *night* brings *light* to my
joy

3. no loss from its *light*

4. (Encomium of the bees)

III. CONCLUSION

- | | |
|--|---|
| 5. ¡ Oh <i>noche</i> que guiaste !

¡ Oh <i>noche</i> que <i>juntaste</i>
<i>Amado</i> con <i>amada</i> | 1. Oh truly blessed <i>night</i> ... enriched the Hebrews
<i>night</i> which <i>united</i>
<i>heavenly</i> things to <i>earth's</i> |
| 6. | |
| 7. con su mano <i>serena</i> | 2. he, the <i>serene</i> one, |
| 8. | 3. (Universal petition) |

GRAPH 3 - *Poetic Cadence*²⁷*Dark Night**Exsultet*

- | | |
|---|---|
| | I. INTRODUCTION |
| | II. EUCHARIST |
| | 1. (Theme) |
| 1. En una noche oscura | 2. { This is the night
This, therefore, is the night
This is the night
This is the night |
| ¡ Oh dichosa ventura ! }
2. ¡ Oh dichosa ventura ! } | { Oh wonderful condescension
Oh priceless love
Oh truly necessary
Oh happy fault
Oh blessed night |
| 3. | 3. (Sacrifice of praise) |
| PAUSE | PAUSE |
| 4. | 4. (Encomium of the bees) |

²⁷ In the third graph we indicate the flow of the emotion within the poetic cadence by the following conventional signs:

- | | | |
|---------|------------|---|
| | (Dotted) | = Declarative statement with low intensity |
| ----- | (Dashes) | = Ecstatic statement with growing intensity |
| ————— | (Straight) | = Sheer ecstatic sentiment with peaking intensity |
| PAUSE | | = indicates a break in the crescendo before reaching climax |
| DECLINE | | = release from and progressive lessening of intensity |

III. CONCLUSION

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 5. ¡ Oh noche que guiaste !
¡ Oh noche más amable !
¡ Oh noche que juntaste ! | } | 1. (Oh truly blessed night... enriched the Hebrews
night which united
heavenly things to earth's |
| 6. | | 2. (Entreaty) |
| DECLINE | | DECLINE |
| 7. | | 3. (Universal petition) |
| 8. | | |

3. *Significance of the Comparison*

In studies of comparative literature like the present one clear-cut and apodictic demonstrations are often hard to attain without the direct testimony of the author under consideration. Interviews with contemporary authors or autobiographical accounts left to us by writers of the past are extremely precious aids to interpretation of literary inspiration, dependence, borrowing or outright citation. Sometimes, though, the authors do not, or are not able to, reveal the full meaning they themselves intended for a particular passage or work when invited by critics or scholars to comment upon their own texts. What are we left with then? Mere conjecture, perhaps? Obviously not.

The art of interpretation must go on relying on all the tools and talents available to it, but always with a certain amount of modesty in the absence of first-hand testimonies. When this is the case, and we do not have the author himself to assist us in our search, it seems altogether valid for the interpreter to express his own insights about the matter under study. With this in mind, and confident that the comparison we have just completed between the *Exsultet* and the *Dark Night* poem will gain the reader's assent by its satisfactory degree of plausibility, it seems worthwhile to describe briefly what for me are the reasons which render this close relationship of the *Exsultet* to the *Dark Night* significant.

My discovery of the definite inspiration which the *Exsultet* offered Saint John for the composition of the *Dark Night* did not demand a great deal of ingenious effort: personal reflection on the beauty of the stirring Easter chant led me progressively to the conviction that real traces of it existed in the poem of the « Mystical Doctor ». Even if my demonstration of this inspiration should need any corrections of detail, I remain very happy as I notice the poet

John of the Cross deriving inspiration for some of his best verses from that rich source of poetic imagery which is the liturgy²⁸. Whether it was through the missal or the breviary, Saint John surely welcomed the liturgy's sacramental contact with the living God and was also attracted by it because it opened him out onto the world of another great source of poetic expression, the Bible²⁹.

Quite coincidentally, but still interestingly so because I was not actively looking for them, I came across two direct quotations from the Divine Office in John of the Cross's works as I was verifying his references to the Book of Exodus. The first was an allusion to the hymn from First Vespers of the Dedication of a Church, *Coelestis Urbs Jerusalem, Beata Pacis Visio*³⁰. The second gives the text of a response from Matins of Thursday within the Octave of Pentecost: « Fire came from heaven, not burning but emitting light; not consuming but giving illumination »³¹. These references to the liturgy of the hours show two things worth mentioning: first, the obvious joy Saint John took in putting to good use and sharing the liturgy's beautiful passages with his readers; but secondly, the fact that both are of a poetic nature themselves, namely, a hymn and a responsory. Our current liturgical practice assigns a poetic function to them in the new *Liturgy of the Hours*: for the former we are told that

²⁸ See Jean-Pierre Manigne, « The Poetics of Faith in the Liturgy », *Concilium* 82 (1973), 40-50. We would exceed the purpose of this article if we were to try to bring into play the theories and opinions contained in the rather vast literature on the sources of all John of the Cross's poetry. To provide the reader with an idea of some treatments of this wider question it should suffice to note works like the following: Dámaso Alonso, *La poesía de San Juan de la Cruz* (Madrid: Ed. Gredos, 1962 — 4th ed.); Emeterio Setién, *Las raíces de la poesía sanjuanista y Dámaso Alonso* (Burgos: Ed. El Monte Carmelo, 1950); Max Milner, *Poésie et vie mystique chez saint Jean de la Croix* (Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 1951); and Gerardo Diego, « La naturaleza y la inspiración poética en San Juan de la Cruz », *Revista de Espiritualidad*, XXVII (1968), 311-19. The more recent work in English of Gerald Brennan, *St John of the Cross: His Life & Poetry*. With a translation of the poetry by Lynda Nicholson. (New York: Cambridge U. Press, 1973) ought to be read with extreme caution — see the rather severe review of it by Kieran Kavanaugh in *The Catholic Historical Review*, LXIII (1977, 2), 311-12.

²⁹ Father Crisógono, in his *Vida y Obras* (1973, 7th ed.), p. 254, note 31, gives a testimony of Baltasar of Jesús regarding John of the Cross's frequent use of bible and breviary in his room. We would hesitate to draw the somewhat extreme conclusion that Saint John depended exclusively on both these books to cultivate his phenomenal ability to quote passages from Sacred Scripture, the liturgy and the Fathers of the Church. Still a good case can be made for the strong influence of these close-at-hand volumes on him. For further thoughts on this phenomenon see Colin Thompson, *The Poet & the Mystic*, pp. 6-9.

It is significant to note that in the next edition of Father Crisógono's *Vida y Obras* the current editor, Father Lucinio, will include a listing of the references John of the Cross makes to the breviary.

³⁰ *Living Flame*, 1, 16 in Kavanaugh-Rodríguez, *Collected Works*, p. 585.

From earliest times hymns have had an important part in the Divine Office. Because of their lyrical nature, hymns are specifically suited to the praise of God and form a popular part of the Liturgy of the Hours. (...) In the Office the hymns are the *foremost poetic elements* composed by the Church;

and that with the latter

The biblical reading in the Office of Readings is followed by its own responsory. (...) It may situate the reading within the context of salvation history, show the relationship between the Old Testament and the New, lead to contemplation of the reading, or complement the reading with *poetic variety and beauty*³².

Saint John the poet culled and retained such poetically beautiful material from the Church's liturgy. We can and ought to benefit as much from the liturgy if we look for the beauty it houses and — inspired by a contemplative approach like Saint John's — seek to make our celebration of communal prayer overflow with beauty.

In addition, this parallel is significant for our understanding of the spirituality of Saint John of the Cross. For those who are aware of the liturgical « atmosphere » of the Church through the centuries and of what degrees of fervor are usually assigned by experts to different epochs, it is clear that the times of Saint John of the Cross and Saint Teresa of Avila rank very low on the scale. Of course, they were a faithful daughter and son of the Church (and both doctors of it), but they were also a daughter and son of their times — and liturgically the times were bleak³³. So, people sometimes stress the lacunae and shortcomings of the Discalced founders in this domain, and without taking time to offer any apologies either. This they do, not just through anachronistic oversight (that is, they do not judge the two mystics of Old Castille according to twentieth century liturgical renewal standards), but simply because liturgical practice of the sixteenth century had come upon some very hard times³⁴.

³¹ *Living Flame*, 2, 3 in Kavanaugh-Rodríguez, *Collected Works*, p. 596.

³² See General Instruction of the *Liturgy of the Hours* (1971), par. 173 for the hymns and par. 169 for the responsories. (Underlining mine).

³³ See Gabriel Braso, Ch. 3 « History of the Church's Spirituality, 3. Decadence of Liturgical Spirituality », *Liturgy and Spirituality* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1960 — 2nd rev. ed. 1971), pp. 39-48.

³⁴ Significant is the attribution of the qualification « limitation » to John of the Cross's « liturgical sensitivity » by the Discalced Carmelite Federico Ruiz Salvador, *Introducción a San Juan de la Cruz: El hombre, los escritos, el sistema* (Madrid: Editorial Católica, 1968), pp. 150-53. Coll. « B.A.C. », 279.

Now, ought one to cry *nostra culpa* on behalf of the first Discalced Carmelite friar and nun, and willingly admit things could have been better but actually weren't? That would be as quaint as it is futile — if for no other reason than the fact that so many other great saints of their times were enveloped in the same liturgical languor that characterized the late sixteenth century. In our own times some have indeed written defensive-sounding articles like « Saint Teresa Anti-liturgical? »³⁵, but I do not feel we have to set about doing some similar apologetical exercise for Saint John. A better approach would seem to lie along the lines of more detailed studies like the present comparison; and I believe that in the long run we could very well come to discover a deeper attachment for sound liturgical piety in Saint John of the Cross than we might have imagined was possible.

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³⁵ Frederick Gast, « Saint Teresa: Anti-liturgical? », *Spiritual Life*, XI (1965), 52-58. For a more comprehensive treatment see Juan Antonio Pascual de Aguilar, « La liturgia y la espiritualidad teresiana », *Arbor*, LV (1963), 178-206 and Adolfo de la Madre de Dios, « Contemplación y liturgia », *Revista de Espiritualidad*, XXIV (1965), 5-36.