

THE INFLUENCE OF JOHN OF THE CROSS IN THE UNITED STATES: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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Introduction

First impression might suggest that the influence of John of the Cross on North American spirituality could be easily summed up in his own words: *nada, nada, nada*¹. After all, in the United States and Canada, John is the «unknown Carmelite»; his popularity has never approached that of St. Teresa of Avila or even of Br. Lawrence of the Resurrection, to say nothing of St. Thérèse of Lisieux (whose statue graces nearly every Catholic church on this side of the Atlantic)². Only a handful of American parishes are dedicated to John of the Cross, and even fewer Carmels³. The bulk of John's writings were not available in English translation until the 1860's, and took several more decades to be noticed in scholarly circles⁴. Even now, most of the serious

¹ Though this article specifically with the influence of John of the Cross in the United States, much of what is said applies also (with appropriate qualifications) to English-speaking Canada. At the same time, I recognize that Canada (especially the French-speaking region) has its own unique spiritual traditions.

² Many founders and foundresses of American religious congregations had a special devotion to St. Teresa, which still marks their communities. Br. Lawrence's *The Practice of the Presence of God* is widely read by American Protestants, and available in many editions. And, as elsewhere in the world, devotion to St. Thérèse of Lisieux dominated American Catholic spirituality earlier in this century, and remains strong.

³ As far as I can determine, the only currently existing American Carmel that has John of the Cross as its official patron is the friars' monastery in Oakville, California; the Carmels of nuns in the United States are generally dedicated to Mary, Joseph, St. Teresa or St. Thérèse. The Washington province's novitiate in Waverly, New York was dedicated to John of the Cross, but has since been closed; the Carmel of Wheeling, West Virginia was under the patronage of Saints Teresa and John, but has been joined to the community of Elysburg, Pennsylvania.

⁴ See Steven Payne, *John of the Cross and the Cognitive Value of*

sanjuanist studies available in English are either directly translated from European sources or heavily dependent on them⁵. Worst of all, Americans are typically portrayed throughout the world as slaves of «inordinate attachments» to wealth and power, the virtual embodiment of everything in modern society that John of the Cross would have opposed: pragmatic materialism, consumerism, sensualism, militarism, racism and so on. The United States would seem to be inhospitable soil for John's teaching.

But matters are not as simple as they might at first appear. Contrary to the usual stereotypes, recent research indicates that Americans remain among the most religious people in any developed nation, at least by such measurable standards as declared belief in God and frequency of church attendance. To be sure, the same studies show that this widespread religiosity is sometimes shallow, without a solid biblical basis or sufficient awareness of the necessary ethical implications of a life of faith⁶. Our constitutional separation of church and state has spared us the religious wars of our European ancestors, but also led to an overly individualized, privatized and «polite» approach to religion, as if it were merely a matter of a lifestyle choice and perso-

Mysticism: An Analysis of Sanjuanist Teaching and its Philosophical Implications for Contemporary Discussions of Mystical Experience (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990), pp; 1-3, 13 and below.

⁵ For older and more recent works on John originating in Britain, or translated from other European languages, see for example, Bruno de Jesús-Marie, *Saint John of the Cross*, ed. Benedict Zimmerman (New York, NY: Sheed & Ward, 1932; Crisógono de Jesús Sacramento, *The Life of Saint John of the Cross*, trans Kathleen Pond (Longmans, Green & Co., 1958); E.W. Trueman Dicken, *The Crucible of Love: A Study of the Mysticism of St. Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross* (New York, NY: Sheed & Ward, 1963); Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation according to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. John of the Cross*, trans. by M. Timothea Doyle (St. Louis, MO: B Herder Book Co., 1937); Jacques Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite, or the Degrees of Knowledge*, newly trans, from the 4th French edition under direction of Gerald B. Phelan (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959); Colin Thompson, *The Poet and the Mystic: A Study of the Cántico Espiritual of San Juan de la Cruz* (Oxford/ Oxford University Press, 1977); Karol Wojtyla, *Faith According to Saint John of the Cross*, trans. Jordan Aumann (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1981).

⁶ See George Gallup, Jr and Jim Castelli, *The People's Religion: American Faith in the 90's* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 20-21 and passim.

nal preference⁷. Yet beneath the differences, American commentators have also noted certain striking affinities between our own milieu and John's, living as he did at the zenith of the Spanish empire, while suffering the effects of the social and economic tensions that would cause its decline.

Whatever the reasons, contemporary Americans searching for a deeper faith are turning more and more to John of the Cross as a particularly apt guide for our times.

Actually, John has been a hidden presence in our country for a long time. In the same quiet and unassuming way he operated in life, John has left a subtle imprint on American culture and spirituality, most often indirectly. Discalced Carmelites, for example, were among the first religious to arrive in the United States, bringing with them a love of St. John of the Cross that they shared with many of the important figures in early American Catholic history. Again, the countless Americans who have read Thérèse's *Story of a Soul* could hardly have avoided exposure, however unknowingly, to the sanjuanist themes it incorporates. Thousands of college students in the United States and Canada have encountered John in the study of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, or in the Spanish literature courses taught at virtually every major university. The expression «dark night of the soul» has become almost a cliché in American speech and journalism.

This article is no more than a preliminary report on some of the sanjuanist traces in American culture and spirituality. Undoubtedly, with the heightened awareness created by the celebration of the fourth centenary of his death, new studies will soon begin to appear on hitherto unnoticed aspects of John's influence in the United States; thus, a more comprehensive survey will have to wait until all of these results are in. Here we must content ourselves with a few highlights.

⁷ See Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985).

Carmel in America

Certainly one of the earliest ways John came to be known in the United States is through the religious family he helped to found, and Discalced Carmelites have left signs of their presence here almost from the beginning. For example, it was three Spanish friars (Anthony of the Ascension, Thomas of Aquinas, and Andrew of the Assumption) from the same Mexican mission John was preparing to join at the time of his death who celebrated the first Mass in what is now California in 1602 at San Diego, and who gave the name «Carmelo» to the river and promontory near Monterey where Junipero Serra would later establish the Carmel Mission. Discalced Carmelite missionaries were also early arrivals in the Louisiana Territory (1720-1723)⁸.

But the most important and long-lasting Carmelite influence in the U.S. came from the nuns, who in 1790 established the first community of religious women in the thirteen original states, at Port Tobacco, Maryland (later moved to Baltimore). The four Discalced Carmelite sisters who made the foundation (three Americans, one Englishwoman) came from the Carmels in the Lowlands established through the efforts of Anne of St. Bartholomew and Anne of Jesus (for whom John of the Cross wrote his commentary on *The Spiritual Canticle*)⁹. Thus the new

⁸ See Peter-Thomas Rohrbach, *Journey to Carith: The Story of the Carmelite Order* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1966), pp. 327-329; Franz-Bernard Lickteig, «The Propaganda Fides Archives and Carmel in the United States», *Sword* 36 (February, 1976), pp. 21-43; John P. O'Brien, «California Missions, Part II: Spanish Voyages from Mexico North to California: The Carmelites», *Arms of the Cross* 4 (Fall, 1985), pp. 1-12; Stephen Watson, «The First Carmelite Friars in California», *Carmelite Digest* 1 (Winter, 1986), pp. 42-49; C. Douglas Kroll, «Unknown and Uncelebrated California's First Mass», *Carmelite Digest* 4 (Spring, 1989), pp. 3-9.

⁹ See *The Carmelite Adventure: Clare Joseph Dickinson's Journal of a Trip to America and Other Documents*, ed. Constance FitzGerald (Baltimore, MD: Carmelite Sisters of Baltimore, 1990); Charles Warren Currier, *Carmel in America: A Centennial History of the Discalced Carmelites in the United States*, 200th anniversary edition (Darien, IL: Carmelite Press, 1989); *Journey to Carith*, pp. 331-334; *Who Remember Long: A History of Port Tobacco Carmel* (Port Tobacco, MD: Carmel of Port Tobacco, 1984).

American community could easily trace its spiritual lineage back directly to Teresa and John, and brought with them many tokens of that connection, including Father Cyprien's two-volume French edition of John's *Oeuvres Spirituelles* (Paris, 1641)¹⁰.

As the earliest community of religious women in the nation, situated in the diocese of Baltimore (the premier episcopal see of the United States), the Discalced Carmelite nuns had extensive contacts with most of the important figures in early American Catholic history, including the bishops of Baltimore and elsewhere, the Jesuits, the Visitation nuns of Georgetown, and the Sulpicians who eventually staffed most of the seminaries in the United States. Though it is hard to assess how successful they were in spreading Sanjuanist doctrine, we know, for example, that their first chaplain, Charles Neale, who had accompanied them from Europe, enjoyed translating John's poetry in to English¹¹, that sisters at various times received gifts of relics or pictures of the Mystical Doctor, and that several were remembered especially for their devotion to John of the Cross, a devotion they undoubtedly made efforts to share¹². In 1891 to mark the third centenary of John's death, the Carmel of Baltimore arranged an impressive three-day celebration, attended by Cardinal Gibbons, Charles W. Currier, and many important dignitaries¹³. From this original foundation have come over two-thirds of more than 65 currently existing American Carmels, one of the largest national groupings in the Order¹⁴. They continue to provide a living witness to the Teresian and Sanjuanist spirit throughout the United States today.

¹⁰ I am grateful to Sr. Constance FitzGerald, O.C.D., and the Baltimore Carmel for this and other information from their archives.

¹¹ The Baltimore Carmel has a copy of at least one of his translations in their archives.

¹² See, e.g., *Carmel in America*, pp. 233, 243, 257.

¹³ See the detailed descriptions of the event in *The Baltimore American* (25 November 1891), p. 8; and *The [Baltimore] Catholic Mirror* (18 November 1891). By that date, the Carmels of St. Louis (1863), New Orleans (1877) and Boston (1890) had also been founded, and presumably marked the occasion with celebrations of their own.

¹⁴ See *Carmel in the United States of America, 1790-1990* (Eugene, OR: Queen's Press, 1990), which contains brief histories of all the U.S. Carmels.

A Nineteenth Century Example: Isaac Hecker and the Paulists

The founder of the Society of Missionary Priests of St. Paul the Apostle (CSP), commonly known as the Paulists, provides an excellent illustration of John's indirect influence on the American church in the 1800's. One of the leading figures in 19th century American Catholicism, Father Isaac Hecker (1819-1888) strongly defended the compatibility of American ideals with Catholic principles, at a time when American Catholics were often suspected by their Protestant counterparts of disloyalty and allegiance to a foreign power; he was likewise an ardent proponent of a truly «American piety», combining a program of social reform with spiritual regeneration¹⁵. In terms of his own mystical life, however, he was deeply indebted to Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, turning to John especially when struggling to understand his own experiences of spiritual darkness. At the time of his profession as a Redemptorist in 1846, Hecker explained his own spiritual journey to his friend Orestes Brownson as follows:

It is well known to you my friend that there are recognized in the Church two ways in which the grace of God can lead the Soul to that perfection for which He created it. The one is called passive and the other active; these have given birth to the orders contemplative and the orders active, and from which have sprung the Theology mystic and the Theology scholastic as they are termed. Neither one of these ways are entirely separated from the other; still the predominancy of one is sometimes so great as to fully warrant this distinction... God does not put the soul in the way passive until he has gained at the bottom of the will its full consent, and is sure of its fidelity, morally sure. God when it is his design to unite the soul to himself in this way commences by infusing into it his infinite love, the object of which is to detach the soul from the irregular pleasure of the senses, the inordinate social attachments, and the desire of the riches, honors, and vanities of the world. Hence the chief occupation of the soul is to suffer, suffer the cruel operation of this divine love. This love of course must be stronger and greater than these

¹⁵ See Joseph P. Chinnici, *Living Stones: The History and Structure of Catholic Spiritual Life in the United States* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 100-112.

passions otherwise the soul could not nor would not detach itself from the one to unite itself to another. But this love is obscure, confuse[d], & almost unperceptible to the soul; hence it is not so much the pain of being separated from its former pleasures that causes its trouble as the fact of being lead & driven by whom? Where? & How? It knows not. If it could but see the hand of God which is laid upon it, if it knew what required of it, it would not complain... It is this that made St. John of the Cross call it the «night obscure of the Soul»,... The second night is to the first as the midnight is to the evening. God augments & throws a purer & more subtel [sic] love into the soul at this moment in order to despoil the soul of the willful use of its faculties. This love penetrates to the centre of the will, the Soul, and purges it of all that is destructible and improper... This second night is terrible, the Soul seems as it were held over the horrible abyss of hell by an invisible power, abandoned by God, a prey, and a subject of mockery to the demons. God seems to reject its prayers before it can utter them. All within the soul is thick darkness and without there is no reality, nothing firm, permanent, eternal. It is deprived of the use of its faculties, it can neither think, feel, or act. O great God how wonderful is the work of Thy infinite Love... But to be brief after the soul has been despoiled of all that is unpleasing in the sight of God, God takes up His habitation in the Soul. Already has commenced the dawn, the aurora has appeared, the full day of which is the clear vision & happiness of the blessed in the other world... But not to detain you any longer on this matter, I would refer you my dear friend to the works of St John of the Cross which are contained in three duodecimo vols. and are complete on this subject and most estimated¹⁶.

Except for the association of the «active» and «passive» ways with different categories of souls and religious orders, the almost verbal dependence on sanjuanist text is evident. Indeed, John's writings became Hecker's constant spiritual nourishment in his later years. Thus, in a letter of 13 July 1886, Hecker's companion and fellow Paulist Walter Elliot writes to the Discalced Carmelite nuns in Baltimore that:

¹⁶ *The Brownson-Hecker Correspondence*, ed. and introduced by Joseph F. Gower and Richard M. Leliaert (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), Letter #45 (1 November 1846), pp; 138-140.

Every night, nearly, and during the day sometimes I read St John of the Cross to Fr. Hecker, who is hardly able to do much reading himself. I must say he is greedy of him, but it shows his good taste; for what, but Scripture itself, is more ennobling than the writings of St. John of the Cross? We are now in the second volume, having read all the first, part of it twice over¹⁷.

Later, in the original 1891 edition of *The Life of Father Hecker*, Elliot again describes Hecker's special fondness for John's works:

Next to Scripture came St. Thomas and St. John of the Cross, the one for dogmatic and philosophical, the other for devotional uses... St. John of the Cross and [Louis] Lallemant, as already stated, were his handbooks of mysticism and ascetic principles. The former he caused to be read to him in regular course over and over again, enjoying every syllable with fresh relish¹⁸.

Interestingly, it was an adapted French translation of this same biography, published in 1897, that first raised the specter of «Americanism», later condemned in Leo XIII's apostolic letter *Testem Benevolentiae* in 1899; Elliott's book had caused a sensation among French commentators, who alternately hailed or reviled Hecker as the representative of a «new American ascetism», cut free of the old «passive» monastic virtues of obedience, humility, etc., and founded instead on personal responsibility and the individual inspiration of the Holy Spirit¹⁹. «Americanism» has sometimes been called a «phantom» heresy, since virtually none of those involved in the controversy recognized their own views as among those rejected in *Testem Benevolentiae*. Still, at various times throughout the remainder of his life, Elliott was forced again to defend Hecker and himself against the accusation of «Americanism» (at least in the sense condemned by the apostolic letter), and often did so, in part, by insisting on the reliable Teresian and Sanjuanist sources of

¹⁷ Archives of Baltimore Carmel.

¹⁸ Walter Elliot, *The Life of Father Hecker* (New York, NY: Arno Press, 1972 [reprint of 1891 ed.], p. 409.

¹⁹ See Chinnici, *Living Stones*, pp. 121ff.

their spirituality. Thus, in a letter of December 1919 to the French Carmelite Father Leon responding to a renewed attack on «Americanism» in the *Messenger de Ste. Thérèse, 1919-1920*, Elliott writes that:

From the day I entered [the Paulists] I have been continuously led to read and indeed to study contemplative literature. It is from Father Hecker that I learned to love St Teresa and to enroll myself in her discipleship. I have read her and St. John of the Cross every day for many years. She is a great official patron of ours. St. John of the Cross is the same. It was by special request of Father Hecker that our original fathers place him among our notable sponsors in heaven. Father Hecker fixed on his feast day as the date of entering our first house. He was always reading contemplative books and practicing contemplative prayer. St. John of the Cross he read every day. Other books he changed; St. John of the Cross, never... My dear Father, what you and your brother Carmelites detest and abhor — «Americanism» — that do I and all other Paulists detest and abhor. What you love we love, namely, the contemplative spirit as the inspiring force of all Catholic activity²⁰.

Clearly, then, St. John of the Cross exerted a powerful influence on the spirituality of Father Hecker and the early Paulists. It remains to be seen whether future research may also reveal a Sanjuanist thread in Hecker's more strictly theological views. For our purposes, what is interesting is that such a dynamic and quintessentially American figure and religious community should have had such strong initial ties to the Mystical Doctor. A similar pattern could be found in the history of many other American congregations, suggesting that John's doctrine, though from a foreign land and culture, has never been totally foreign to the American Spirit.

²⁰ This letter is included among the «Americanism» papers in the Archives of the Paulist Fathers, New York, NY. A copy can be found in the Archives of the Baltimore Carmel.

Sanjuanist Texts in English

Until fairly recently, the United States has been almost totally dependent on Britain for works by and about John of the Cross in English. As noted above, despite early editions in other languages, the «complete» writings of John of the Cross did not appear in English until 1864 (in David Lewis's two volume edition), a year after the publication of Canon Dalton's brief anthology, *The Spirit of St. John of the Cross*²¹. Lewis's translation also circulated in the United States, and was frequently reprinted, eventually with corrections and introductions by Benedict Zimmerman, O.C.D.²². Subsequent translations of individual works gradually appeared, including an edition of the «Precautions» by the Discalced Carmelite nuns of Wheeling, West Virginia in 1918²³. But all of these were superceded in 1934-1935 with the appearance of E. Allison Peers's famous translation of John's *Complete Works*, based on the so-called «critical edition» of Padre Silverio²⁴. The three volume Peers edition contained both the A and B redactions of the *Spiritual Cantic* and *Living Flame of Love*, as well as other valuable documents, including the 1622 defense of John's orthodoxy by Fray Basilio Ponce de León. This three volume translation was later published in an American edition by

²¹ See *The Complete Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans; from the original Spanish by David Lewis, ed. by the Oblate Fathers of S. Charles, with a preface by Cardinal Wiseman, 2 vols. (London: Thomas Baker, 1864); and *The Spirit of St. John of the Cross, consisting of his maxims, sayings and spiritual advice on various subjects*, trans. Canon Dalton (London, 1863).

²² See, for example, the four volumes edition of the Lewis translation published in London by Thomas Baker in 1906-1912, and again in 1918-1922.

²³ See *Instruction and Precautions of St. John of the Cross, preceded by a short sketch of his life, and followed by some spiritual letters to the nuns of his Order — a Novena and prayers in honor of the Saint* (Wheeling, WV: Monastery of the Discalced Carmelites, 1918).

²⁴ *The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross, Doctor of the Church*, trans. from the critical edition of P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, C.D. and edited by Allison Peers (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1934-1935). Peers includes an extensive bibliography of previous studies and translations of John of the Cross, in the «Select Bibliography» of vol. 3, as does Pier Paolo Ottonello in *Bibliografia di S. Juan de la Cruz*. (Rome: Teresianum, 1967).

the Newman Bookshop (Westminster, MD), in 1946, and subsequently revised and reprinted many times; individual volumes of the *Ascent*, *Dark Night*, *Spiritual Canticle* and *Living Flame* also circulated widely here in inexpensive paperback «Image Book» editions.

The Peers translation is fairly literal, and very British in tone and choice of vocabulary, but for many years has served American readers well. More recently, however, Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez have produced the first truly American translation of *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1964). ICS Publications re-released this single volume edition in 1973, and without aggressive promotion has already sold over 100,000 copies in the United States alone (without counting editions of the same translation available in India and the Philippines), a small sign of John's growing popularity²⁵. While both the Peers and Kavanaugh/Rodriguez translations are highly regarded, American researchers seem increasingly to be using the latter for everything except the A redactions of the *Canticle* and *Flame* (not included in Kavanaugh/Rodriguez) and John's poetry, a trend likely to accelerate with the release of a newly revised centenary edition of the Kavanaugh/Rodriguez translation later this year. John's poetry, meanwhile, is available in several English versions, though (perhaps not surprisingly) none are considered altogether satisfactory by literary experts²⁶.

²⁵ *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, with introductions by Kieran Kavanaugh (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1973). A second edition was published in 1979. A preview of the forthcoming revised edition can be found in *John of the Cross — Selected Writings*, ed. with an introduction by Kieran Kavanaugh, Classic of Western Spirituality Series (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987).

²⁶ Besides the Kavanaugh/Rodriguez translations in *Collected Works*, pp. 711-737, see, for example, *The Poems of St. John of the Cross*, Spanish text with a translation into English verse by E. Allison Peers (London: Burns Oates, 1947); *The Poems of St. John of the Cross*, Spanish text and new English versions by John Frederick Nims (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1959); *The Poems of St. John of the Cross*, English versions and introduction by Willis Barnstone (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1968); Gerald Brenan, *St. John of the Cross: His Life and Poetry*, with a translation of the poetry by Lynda Nicholson (Cambridge University Press, 1973); and Antonio T. de Nicolás, *St. John of the Cross: Alchemist of the Soul* (New York, NY: Paragon House, 1989), pp. 75-151.

Early Studies of John of the Cross in English

Serious study of Sanjuanist doctrine began slowly in North America. Some of the first English-speaking authors to make significant use of St. John of the Cross came from beyond the boundaries of the United States or the Roman Catholic tradition. In 1856, for example, Robert A. Vaughan's popular *Hours With the Mystics* introduced John to a wider range of the British reading public, though casting him in a negative light.

Unfortunately, Vaughan's evaluation of St. John, like that of so many commentators, was deeply colored by his distaste for «Romanism». He describes John's mysticism as «unnatural» and quietistic, and attributes to him the promotion of a «doctrine of blind obedience to ecclesiastical superiors» by means of which Rome was attempting to enslave the world. Yet Vaughan admits to a certain «melancholy admiration» for John, whom he considers a «consummate ascetic» and a «genuine», though «miserably mistaken», mystic²⁷.

Dean Inge repeated many of these same charges in the Bampton Lectures of 1899, published the same year under the title *Christian Mysticism*, accusing John of «nihilism and acosmism», as well as «a terrible view of life and duty»²⁸.

The following year, Canadian psychologist R.M. Bucke published an intriguing, idiosyncratic work entitled *Cosmic Consciousness*, in which he lists «Juan de Yepes» among those who had almost certainly attained this state; his extended discussion of John, though somewhat overly hagiographical, is far more positive in tone than Inge's or Vaughan's. Bucke had become interested in mysticism after an ecstatic experience of his own, and the thesis of his book, after analyzing a number of ostensible mystics (including John), is that «cosmic consciousness» has occurred with in-

²⁷ Payne, *John of the Cross and the Cognitive Value of Mysticism*, p. 2. With the original edition of *Hours With the Mystic* unavailable, the Vaughan quotations are taken from a later American edition, i.e., Robert A. Vaughan, *Hours With the Mystics: A Contribution to the History of Religious Opinion*, 6th ed., 2 vols. in one (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983), vol. 2, pp. 149-152, 183-197.

²⁸ See William Ralph Inge, *Christian Mysticism* (New York, NY: Meridian Books, Living Age Books, 1956), pp. 228-230.

creasing frequency down through history, and will gradually «become more and more universal and appear earlier in the individual life until the race at large will possess this faculty»²⁹. Not many have been convinced by Bucke's evidence, but the book is still widely read, and often regarded as a forerunner of various «transpersonal» and «consciousness» psychologies as well as certain «New Age» themes.

One enthusiastic early reader of *Cosmic Consciousness* was the American psychologist William James, whose own Gifford Lectures of 1901-1902, published under the title *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, quickly became a classic in the psychology and philosophy of religion. James also discusses John of the Cross, though not always favorably, describing him as «a Spanish mystic who flourished — or rather who existed, for there was little that suggested flourishing about him — in the sixteenth century»³⁰. James himself remained fascinated with mysticism, and though reluctant to draw any larger metaphysical conclusions, maintained nonetheless that «the existence of mystical states absolutely overthrows the pretension of non-mystical states to the sole and ultimate dictators of what we may believe»³¹.

Another important work in this period is Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, which was «immediately recognized as a remarkable book» upon its publication in 1911³².

Within the year of issue it was reprinted, then re-edited and reprinted again. Two years later it reached its fifth edition. Its popularity stemmed from the fact that it caved out a new

²⁹ R.M. Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind* (New York, NY: Causeway Books, 1974 [facsimile of original 1900 edition]), pp. 317-318.

³⁰ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature, Being the Gifford Lectures in Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburg in 1901-1902* (New York, NY: Modern Library, 1936), p; 299. See also Kevin G. Culligan, «William James and *The Varieties of Religious Experience*: The Birthday of a Classic», *Spiritual Life* 18 (1972), pp. 15-23.

³¹ James, *Varieties*, p. 418.

³² Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, 12 ed. (New York, NY: Meridian Book, Noonday Press, 1955); Dana Greene, *Evelyn Underhill: Artist of the Infinite Love* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1990), p. 53.

subject, made it intelligible, and interpreted it with convincing power. Although Underhill appealed to psychology, philosophy, and theology, her contribution does not rest principally on her analysis of her subject. Above all her book is a personal defense of the achievement of the mystics that she was able to understand because she lived intimately with the texts³³.

Underhill made particularly effective use of John's works in a chapter on «The Dark Night of the Soul», where many English-speaking readers discovered their first detailed introduction to this theme. It would be safe to say that authors such as R.M. Bucke, William James and Evelyn Underhill have played an important role in gaining for John, if not a place of honor, at least a serious hearing among American psychologists and philosophers of religion³⁴.

Twentieth Century Examples: Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton

John's name and doctrine were invoked again in a curious episode of the 1930's and 1940's involving a popular retreat movement developed by a Canadian Jesuit and avid reader of St. John of the Cross, Onesimus Lacouture, SJ. Evidently Lacouture's retreat form was «characterized by its rigor», and emphasized overcoming our natural «pagan» existence by acting always according to supernatural motives³⁵. Lacouture attracted many followers in Canada, and later in the United States, after he gave a retreat in Baltimore in 1938. Among the movement's early adherents were the Josephite priest Pacifique Roy, SSJ, and also Father John J.

³³ Greene, *Evelyn Underhill*, p. 54.

³⁴ See, for example, several of the articles in *The Highest State of Consciousness*, ed. John White (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1972); and *Understanding Mysticism*, ed. Richard Woods (Garden City, NY: Image Books, Doubleday & Co., 1980). This is not to deny that other authors, such as Ernest Hocking, Baron von Hügel and, later, R.C. Zaehner and W.T. Stace, also played an important role in introducing John to a larger American audience.

³⁵ See William D. Miller, *Dorothy Day: A Biography* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1982), pp. 335ff.

Hugo of the Pittsburgh diocese, who made two retreats under Lacouture and soon amplified and published his notes under the title *Applied Christianity*, being the imprimatur of Cardinal Spellman, and replete with quotations from the *Mystical Doctor*³⁶. Following Lacouture's model, Hugo himself became a highly successful retreat master in the United States, drawing many clergy, religious and laity to the movement. But the initial successes began to create conflict and opposition. «The controversial character of the [Lacouture] retreat» claims one author, «obviously arose from its emphasis on the spirituality of St. John of the Cross, his insistence on 'detachment' from those impulses for power and possessions to which the person was subject»³⁷. Lacouture and Hugo were both accused of propagating a «new Jansenism» and of misconstruing the proper relation between nature and grace in the spiritual life³⁸. Hugo defended himself at length against the charges in *A Sign of Contradiction*, once more by appealing to the doctrine of John of the Cross, among others³⁹. Ultimately, however, Lacouture was banished to an Indian reservation in upstate New York, while Hugo was told to discontinue his retreats. The «movement», as such, effectively died out, and has been all but forgotten⁴⁰.

But it left a lasting impact on at least one person. Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement,

³⁶ John J. Hugo, *Applied Christianity* (Bronx, NY: D.J. Fiorentino, 1944).

³⁷ William D. Miller, *All Is Grace: The Spirituality of Dorothy Day* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1987), p. 46.

³⁸ See Francis J. Connell, «Review of *Applied Christianity*», *American Ecclesiastical Review* 113 (July, 1945), pp. 69-72; and Joseph Clifford Fenton, «Nature and the Supernatural Life», *American Ecclesiastical Review* 114 (January, 1946), pp. 54-68.

³⁹ John J. Hugo, *A Sign of Contradiction: As the Master so the Disciple*, 2 vols. (n.p. [privately printed], 1947).

⁴⁰ From time to time, however, vestiges of the old controversy resurfaced, as in arguments in the later 1940's over an anonymous pamphlet entitled «Brother Nathaniel's Brainstorm», in which an unnamed Carmelite prior is portrayed as opposed to smoking, on the basis of Sanjuanist principles regarding «attachments». See Joseph P. Donovan, «A Bit of Puritanical Catholicity», *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 48 (August 1948) pp. 807-814; Louis A Farina, «Is Detachment Puritanical?» *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 49 (February, 1949), pp. 356-367. Farina was associated with Father Hugo and the Lacouture retreats.

a major figure in twentieth century American Catholicism and perhaps the symbol the Church's social conscience in the United States, came into contact with »the retreat« at a particularly important moment in her life. She was not much impressed by a first reading of Lacouture's retreat notes, but an initial visit to the Catholic Worker community by Father Roy, subsequent days of recollection under his guidance, and his retreat for the Catholic Worker group at Easton farm in 1940 won her over. Diffident about his own skills as a retreat master, Roy referred her to Father Hugo, who gave the Catholic Worker retreat the following year, and became Day's confessor during the last 40 years of her life. For Dorothy Day, these retreats marked a turning point in her spiritual journey, as she later acknowledges. She did not involve herself in the ongoing theological disputes over nature and grace, and could appreciate both sides of the argument. What interested her was the challenge from the Lacouture-style retreat to a life of heroic sanctity, embracing «the folly of the Cross».

To us the retreat was the good news. We made it as often as we could, and refreshed ourselves with days of recollection.

... If people did not go away from the retreat examining their consciences as to the work they did in the world, then it was a failure. Such a retreat should be like a shock treatment, we thought, putting the «old man» to death, bringing us to new life⁴¹.

In other words, Dorothy Day was brought to a more intense level of Christian dedication through a retreat program and spiritual formation drawn largely from the principles of St. John of the Cross. And while her favorite Carmelite saint seems to have been Thérèse of Lisieux, she continued to read John of the Cross throughout her life, frequently echoing Father Hugo's favorite Sanjuanist maxim: «In the evening [of life], you will be judged on love».

⁴¹ Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness: An Autobiography* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, Doubleday & Co., 1959), p. 254. For Day's description of the retreat movement itself and the persons involved, see pp. 240ff. Compare Chinnici, *Living Stones*, pp. 191-193; also Miller, *Dorothy Day*, pp. 335-341 and *passim* for her relationship to Father Hugo.

Despite his atypical career, and whatever his personal limitations, perhaps no one better represents and speaks to the restless spiritual search of contemporary Americans than Thomas Merton, who has been called «symbol of a century»⁴². Merton, too, was deeply influenced by John of the Cross, whom he called «the most accessible of the saints»⁴³. Merton first began a serious reading of John of the Cross in 1939 and 1940 while he was still living in Greenwhich Village. As he writes in *The Seven Storey Mountain*:

So at great cost I bought the first volume of the Works of St. John of the Cross and sat in the room on Perry Street and turned over the first pages, underlining places here and there with a pencil. But it turned out that it would take more than that to make me a saint: because these words I underlined, although they amazed and dazzled me with their import, were all too simple for me to understand. They were too naked, too stripped of all duplicity and compromise for my complexity, perverted by my appetites. However, I am glad that I was at least able to recognize them, obscurely, as worthy of the greatest respect⁴⁴.

Later, in 1950, after becoming a monk of Gethsemani, he explained to Abbot Fox in his retreat notes:

I had been hoping to meditate a little on the Cautions of St. John of the Crow. I have at least glanced through them. I took them as the standard of my religious life at solemn profession and have never really lived up to them. I know they contain the secret of success. Using them I know that I can make good use of the opportunities God has given me here. I *can* lead a contemplative life here. It takes some doing, but if I do not insist on having everything exactly my own way, Our Lord will do most of the work⁴⁵.

⁴² See Anthony Padovano, *The Human Journey: Thomas Merton, Symbol of a Century* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1982).

⁴³ Thomas Merton, «St. John of the Cross», in *Saints for Now*, ed. Clare Boothe Luce (New York, NY: Sheed & Ward, 1952), p. 258. In the same place, Merton also lists John of the Cross as his «favorite saint», along with Benedict, Bernard and Francis of Assisi.

⁴⁴ Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, Doubleday & Co., 1970), p. 290.

⁴⁵ Letter to Abbot James Fox (Retreat Notes 1950), in Thomas Merton, *The School of Charity: The Letters of Thomas Merton on Religious Renewal*

And elsewhere he writes, to Dom Jean-Baptist Porion, O. Cart.:

For me to be a Cistercian is to be a man who loves God in a Cistercian monastery — in sympathy with St. John of the Cross and Ruysbroeck and a few other people who are *not* Cistercians, and also with a few others who are. It does not seem to be a reserved or even a mortal sin to live in a Cistercian monastery with more actual sympathy for St. John of the Cross than St. Bernard of Clairvaux... I am happy with St. John of the Cross among the rocks⁴⁶.

During his early years as a Trappist, then, Merton avidly studied the Mystical Doctor, and produced a number of writings on John of the Cross, most notably *The Ascent to Truth*: the article on John in *Saints for Now*; and the essay on John's ascetical doctrine which first appeared as an introduction to John's *Counsels of Light and Love* (Wheeling, WV: Discalced Carmelite Nuns, 1953), and was later included in *Disputed Questions*⁴⁷. His works of this period show a remarkable enthusiasm for the Spanish Carmelite, and introduced many American readers to the study of John of the Cross. After 1953, however, his explicit work on John seems to have stopped. Perhaps Merton felt frustrated with the overly scholastic approach to Sanjuanist themes that had marred *Ascents to Truth*⁴⁸. In any case, during his early years as a Trappist, Merton did as much as anyone in this century to arouse American interest in John of the Cross. It is only

and Spiritual Direction, selected and edited by Patrick Hart (New York, NY: 1990), p. 19.

⁴⁶ Letter to Dom Jean-Baptist Porion, in Merton, *The School of Charity*, p. 33.

⁴⁷ Thomas Merton, *The Ascent to Truth* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1951); Thomas Merton, «St. John of the Cross», in *Saints for Now*, ed. Luce, pp. 250-260; and «Light in Darkness: The Ascetical Doctrine of St. John of the Cross», in Thomas Merton, *Disputed Questions* (New York, NY: 1960). For other writings on John of the Cross from this period, see «Thomas Merton's Practical Norms of Sanctity in St. John of the Cross», ed. and introduced by Robert E. Daggy, *Spiritual Life* 36 (Winter, 1990), pp. 195-197.

⁴⁸ Mott notes Merton's uneasiness in 1964 upon learning that *The Ascent to Truth* was «popular among Zen scholars and monks»; see Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984), p. 399.

unfortunate that he never seemed to have appreciated the full power of Sanjuanist mysticism to incorporate the very social justice and inter-religious concerns which Merton himself later helped raise, and which have been more deeply explored by those who have followed in his footsteps (e.g., Daniel Berrigan, William Johnston and others).

American Use (and Misuse) of «Dark Night» Language and Imagery

We have already noted that the expression «dark night of the soul» has now entered popular American discourse, often without any awareness of its Sanjuanist origins. One obvious example of this phenomenon is F. Scott Fitzgerald's famous reference in «The Crack Up» to «the real dark night of the soul», where «it is always three o'clock in the morning, day after day»⁴⁹. More recently, *People* magazine has referred to the Stuart murder scandal in Massachusetts as «A Dark Night of the Soul in Boston», while Tom Wolfe describes the astronauts' «post-orbital remorse» as a «dark night of the ego»⁵⁰. Such examples abound in American journalism and everyday speech, and have been discussed elsewhere⁵¹.

In her Prologue to *The Long Dark Night of the Soul*, a study of opposition to the Vietnam War among American intellectuals in the late 1960's and early 1970's, author Sandy Vogelgesang argues that her title is especially apt for capturing:

... the mood of the U.S. Intellectual Left during the [President] Johnson period. More than coincidence made such contrasting figures as Daniel Berrigan and Norman Mailer choose that image to characterize their opposition to

⁴⁹ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Crack-Up, with Other Uncollected Pieces, Notebooks and Unpublished Letters*, ed. Edmund Wilson (New York, NY: New Directions, 1956).

⁵⁰ «A Dark Night of the Soul in Boston», *People* 32 (November 13, 1989), pp. 52-55; Tom Wolfe, «Post-Orbital Remorse, Part III: The Dark Night of the Ego», *Rolling Stone* (15 february 1973).

⁵¹ See Steven Payne, «The Dark Night of St. John of the Cross: Four Centuries Later», *Review for Religious* 49 (November/December, 1990), pp. 891-900.

the Vietnam War. Father Berrigan compared his antiwar experience to the original line from St. John of the Cross in *The Dark Night of Resistance*. Mailer borrowed the phrase for his coverage of the March on the Pentagon in 1967⁵².

Indeed, as Vogelgesang notes, Daniel Berrigan found John's life and «dark night» imagery well suited for reflecting on his own situation in 1970, while hunted by the FBI for his anti-war activities.

I should like to use, as a general guide, master text, source of imagery, the book of John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*.

The choice is deliberate. It implies in the first place that my present situation is primarily an experience in and of the spirit, that its only coherence and meaning are to be sought on those terms. Otherwise, one is playing cat-and-mouse with the hunters, and the chase becomes frivolous, thoughtless or pathetic... I claim for myself the dignity of a Christian and a man, present to his tradition...

... [John] was neglected, cast down from the places his talents would justly claim, maligned, broken. Yet in the dark socket of existence into which he had been flung to be ground to powder, a most stunning event occurred... In a dungeon, the light broke upon him. John was granted something due no mortal man: access to the mystery of love...

... He suffered greatly, as a condition of life and a condition of faith. He suffered because his convictions were unacceptable to power, ran counter to the grain. He never submitted obediently to Byzantine men, even though their power was announced in awesome rhetoric, and wielded the keys of the divine will. John was seeking a simple human good (we should say today). He wanted a community in which men would choose how they would live and where, within the freedom granted them by the truth of a tradition.

He was willing to negotiate with opponents; he traveled unwearyingly in service to rational solutions. But when power breathed close and threatened hard, his adversaries came up against something harder than Spanish bone. The struck flint; and flint, in the nature of things, awakened fire. John burned with a fire which human conflict ignited, sustained elsewhere, burning on behalf of men.

⁵² Sandy Vogelgesang, *The Long Dark Night of the Soul: The American Intellectual Left and the Vietnam War* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 9-10.

... I want to be faithful to his method, which is rational and coherent, but whose content is also, and from another point of view, surreal, nightmarish. A classicist, an ecstatic, a good fighter, a faithful man, a hound nervous as lightning in the traces, a merciless surgeon of the soul, a Jesus prayer⁵³.

Berrigan goes on to ponder the significance, in his own situation, of the imagery of night, of leaving the house, of going out unseen.

The symbol: a going forth, from a house at rest, at night.

The House: in many senses; the *alma domus*, the structured universe, womb, rest, tomb; premature age, reward after effort, retirement plan...

Leaving the house. it has to do with the beginnings, the first stirrings of conscience, the first serious step as a consequence, the first march, the first legal jeopardy, the first trial attended⁵⁴.

He likewise challenges mystics and contemplatives to «cut loose from their good order and country discipline» and begin to share with the political activists «all those good thing [they] purportedly hold in escrow», guiding them «into their unexplored inner spaces»⁵⁵. Successive chapters are a kind of free-form meditation on the political spirituality he finds suggested by Sanjuanist texts.

To be sure, the immediate crisis of the Vietnam War has long since passed; ironically, in his 1968 convention acceptance speech, Richard Nixon had already declared that «a long, dark night for America is about to end» (well before the national «dark night» of the Watergate scandal!)⁵⁶. *The Dark Night of Resistance* is a product of its time; written on the run, it conveys an enormous sense of urgency but lacks the polish of some of the author's other works. Yet, whether one agrees with Berrigan's political stance or not, this book forcefully raises important issues about the social implications of mysticism in general, and Sanjuanist spirituality in par-

⁵³ Daniel Berrigan, *The Dark Night of Resistance* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1971), pp. 7-14.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-27.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

⁵⁶ See Jay Matthews, «The Nixon Time Capsule: In California, the Public Browses Through History», *Washington Post* (21 July 1990), section C, p. 2.

ticular, and the potential danger of interpreting John in an overly privatized and individualistic way which divorces spiritual from social transformation. These same concerns, obviously, reappear later in the more recent works of liberation spirituality. In short, *The Dark Night of Resistance* is a prophetic book, in more than one sense.

The expression «dark night of the soul», then, continues to be used widely and often carelessly in American discourse (and not just in our spiritual and devotional literature), but there is at least a growing recognition that the experience it evokes can have, as the recent Apostolic Letter suggests, «a kind of collective character»⁵⁷. Americans as a whole, and not just as individuals, have been undergoing successive periods of national «soul-searching» in recent decades, chastened by the failure of many of our plans and aspirations. John's teaching on the educative role of «passive purification» has proved extremely helpful in understanding the positive value of such experiences.

American Carmels in the 20th Century

Lest there be any doubt, it should be noted that throughout this century Carmel in the United States has continued to promote Saint John of the Cross, though usually in quiet and less dramatic ways. We already noted the many communities of Discalced Carmelite nuns scattered throughout the country, which together with over 20 communities of friars and hundreds of Secular Carmelites continue to impart Sanjuanist doctrine through newsletters, public liturgies and celebrations, classes, preaching, retreat work, and simple fidelity to the Carmelite way of life. For example, though the monastery of the Discalced Carmelite friars in Washington, DC was only founded in 1916, by 1919-1920 they had already published a full-length biography of John of the Cross and a translation of *Holiness in the Cloister* by Father Lucas of St. Joseph⁵⁸. Some U.S.

⁵⁷ John Paul II, «Master in the Faith: Apostolic Letter of His Holiness John Paul II for the Fourth Centenary of the Death of Saint John of the Cross», *L'Osservatore Romano* 52 (24 December 1990), # 14.

⁵⁸ See Paschasius Heriz, *Saint John of the Cross* (Washington, DC: n.p., 1919); and *Holiness in the Cloister*, adapted from the Spanish of Lucas of St. John by Paschasius Heriz (Chicago, IL: M. A. Donohue & Co., 1920).

Carmelite periodicals of the past, such as *Mount Carmel* (Washington, DC), *Little Flower Magazine* (Oklahoma Province) and *Revista Carmelitana* (Tucson, AZ), helped foster interest in Carmel and St. John of the Cross in their time; others, such as *Spiritual Life* (Washington Province), *Carmelite Digest* (California-Arizona Province), *Living Prayer* (Carmel of Barre, VT) and *Apostolate of the Little Flower* (Oklahoma Province) continue to thrive. The Spiritual Life Institute, founded by Father William McNamara, OCD, has offered for many years a distinctive and powerful American presentation of Sanjuanist themes, through the publication of *Desert Call* and the teaching of its members. Individual American Carmelite friars, nuns and seculars have written numerous books and articles on John. Various Carmels continue to produce material by and about the Mystical Doctor, and ICS Publications hopes soon to expand its Sanjuanist offerings. Carmelites of the Ancient Observance have shown increasing interest in the Mystical Doctor, and many are leading American experts on his teaching. The Carmelite Forum, composed of American Carmelites of both the Ancient and Primitive Observances, has offered popular twoweek programs in Carmelite and Sanjuanist spirituality for the past several summers.

These are but a few expressions of Carmelite devotion to John of the Cross in the United States. Though the Order remains small in this country, it has played an important role in spreading his message.

John of the Cross in American Arts and Literature

John's influence on American arts and literature is modest but growing. For example, though Anglo-American poet and Nobel laureate T.S. Eliot was already a British citizen by the time he published *Four Quartets*, his masterpiece made an enormous impact on both sides of the Atlantic. One cannot read selections like the following without noting the almost literal borrowing from John of the Cross:

To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,

The later was later revised and republished as Lucas of St. Joseph, *The Secret of Sanctity of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Mary Alberto (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce, 1962).

You must go by a way in which there is no ecstasy.
 In order to arrive at what you do not know
 You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.
 In order to possess what you do not possess
 You must go by the way of dispossession.
 In order to arrive at what you are not
 You must go through the way in which you are not⁵⁹.

Yet Eliot's debt to John goes beyond such paraphrases.

Since Eliot first discovered John's works while at Harvard, was still interested enough to cite them as a «devotional monument» in «Lancelot Andrewes» (1926) and to quote them ironically in an epigraph to *Sweeney Agonistes* (1926-27), as well as to review an abridged version of John's works in 1934, it is more than probable that he continued reading John in depth and with understanding. Dame Helen Gardner tells us that when Eliot was writing «East Coker» (1940) he used E. Allison Peer's translation of John's works. Eliot's preoccupation with Christian mysticism is evident throughout the corpus of his religious works. *Murder in the Cathedral*, for example, presents the inward journey of the protagonist, as he picks his way among ever more subtle and dangerous temptations towards his goal in «the night of God»⁶⁰.

In fact, as the author of this comment shows, throughout *Four Quartets* Eliot «uses John of the Cross, not as a theologian, but as an eclectic poet familiar with mysticism», borrowing «the scheme, concepts, images, and symbols derived from John»⁶¹.

Nor was Eliot the last to borrow from John of the Cross, who reappears at odd moments in the work of such contemporary American poets as Paul Mariani and Charles Simic.

... In abject submission, I offer
 The simplicity of this instant,
 The Divine Office of the empty plate,

⁵⁹ T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, «East Coker», III (London: Faber & Faber, 1944), p. 20.

⁶⁰ Corona Sharp, «“The Unheard Music”: T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* and John of the Cross, *University of Toronto Quarterly* 51 (Spring, 1982), pp. 264.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

Mating season
 Of the hand and the glass,
 Respectful homage
 Of the wine to the light,
 Clarity
 That I talk, that I quarrel with...

They say of St. John of the Cross
 That he would sit,
 Just the way I'm sitting now
 In a small dark place,
 And through a window
 Gaze at a distant landscape⁶².

It goes without saying, of course, that Jessica Powers, herself a Carmelite nun (Sr. Miriam of the Holy Spirit, OCD), was deeply influenced by John of the Cross, and many of her best poems are directly inspired by Sanjuanist texts⁶³.

Among visual artists, interest in John of the Cross has not been confined merely to the analysis of his famous drawing of Christ on the Cross. In 1985, for example, Bill Viola's multimedia «Room for St. John of the Cross» received the first Polaroid International Video Art Award from Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art, out of 200 entries.

On entering an unlit gallery, viewers confronted with a large video image of mountains projected on a screen and a roaring soundtrack of wind and earthquake-like rumbling. The mountain image was shot with a hand-held camera in a moving car, making it jagged and disorienting. In the center of the gallery is a cell the size of the one in which the saint was confined. Unlike the prototype, however, this cell has a window, which reveals an earthen floor, spartan furniture and, on a table, a small color television with a fixed image of the same mountainscape as that on the large screen. As a visitor

⁶² From «The Cure», in Charles Simic, *Charon's Cosmology* (New York, NY: George Brazillier, 1977), p. 38.

⁶³ See, for example, «The Mystical Sparrow of St. John of the Cross», «The House at Rest» and «The Books of St. John of the Cross», in *Selected Poetry of Jessica Powers*, ed. Regina Siegfried and Robert Morneau (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1989); Kieran Kavanaugh, «Jessica Powers in the Tradition of St. John of the Cross: Carmelite and Poet», *Spiritual Life* 36 (FALL, 1990), pp. 161-176.

leans through the window to examine the interior of the cell, the booming sound recedes. In its place is a second soundtrack: the muted cadence of the poems being read quietly in the original Spanish⁶⁴.

Recently, John Michael Talbot, one of the more successful practitioners of Christian popular music, released an album entitled *The Lover and the Beloved*, devoted almost entirely to songs based on the poems of John of the Cross⁶⁵. Meanwhile, Gian Carlo Menotti will premiere a new John of the Cross Cantata in April, 1991 at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. In short, Americans are coming to appreciate John not only as a mystic and spiritual theologian, but as an artist as well.

Recent Trends

In this final section we will briefly review a few contemporary currents in American spirituality where John's doctrine seems to have special relevance or hold special promise.

In the first place, and surprisingly, despite his past reputation as a writer only for the mystical elite, in this country John has proved a remarkably effective resource for popular works on prayer and spirituality. One of the most successful introductions to the spiritual life, for example, is a series by Thomas H. Green, an American Jesuit working in the Philippines. His teaching, though put into practical terms, is drawn almost entirely from Teresa, John of the Cross, and Ignatius Loyola⁶⁶. Again, Susan Muto uses texts from John of the Cross to introduce Americans to the «art and discipline of spiritual reading»⁶⁷. Evidently, John is not as inac-

⁶⁴ Charles Giuliano, «Visionary Video», *Art News* (May, 1985), p. 11; see also Thomas Frick, «Boston», *Art in America* (June, 1985), pp. 145-146.

⁶⁵ John Michael Talbot, «The Lover and the Beloved» (Chatsworth, CA: Sparrow Music, 1989). This album includes songs adapted from «The Dark Night», «The Spiritual Canticle», «The Living Flame of Love», «For I know well the spring that flows and runs», and «I went out seeking love». Elsewhere Talbot has recorded a version of the «Pastorcico».

⁶⁶ See Thomas H. Green, *Opening to God: A Guide to Prayer* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1977); Idem *When the Well Runs Dry: Prayer Beyond the Beginnings* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1979).

⁶⁷ See Susan Muto, *Approaching the Sacred: The Art of Spiritual Reading* (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1973).

cessible to the average Christian as has often been assumed in the past!

Second, one of the most significant developments in North America today has been the explosion of «recovery» literature, programs and support groups, most based on the famous «Twelve Steps» of Alcoholics Anonymous. The United States has been called an «addictive society», with men and women now joining together to overcome their dependence on everything from drugs and alcohol to food, gambling, and sex. In such a context, some authors are beginning to uncover a fresh meaning in the Sanjuanist analysis of «inordinate attachments»⁶⁸.

Third, while the charismatic movement is perhaps not as influential in the United States as it once was, it has continued to mature. Many groups are now turning to John of the Cross for guidance toward a more contemplative style of praying⁶⁹. John's discussion in Book III of *The Ascents* would also appear to have much to contribute to the modern interest in the «healing of memories»⁷⁰.

Fourth, Catholic Americans, many of them from the charismatic movements, seem to be particularly active in Medjugorje pilgrimages and in the activities surrounding other contemporary visionaries and apparitions. Those concerned about possible excesses in these developments often cite John's sober assessment of private visions and revelations as a useful corrective.

In the fifth place, and perhaps paradoxically, the same Sanjuanist lessons are also useful in responding to certain aspects of popular «occultist» and «New Age» phenomena. Without more thorough study it is difficult to say whether John is generally respected as a spiritual teacher in such

⁶⁸ See Gerald May, *Addiction and Grace* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Rom, 1988) and May's forthcoming article in *Spiritual Life*.

⁶⁹ Unfortunately, little has been written so far on John and the charismatic movement. One useful anthology, though not directly on Sanjuanist themes, is Paul Hinnebush, ed., *Contemplative and the Charismatic Renewal* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1986).

⁷⁰ See, for example, Dennis Linn and Matthew Linn, *Healing Life's Hurts: Healing Memories Through the Five Stages of Forgiveness* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978); Idem, *Healing of Memories: Prayers and Confession-Steps to Inner Healing* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1974); Matthew Linn, Sheila Fabricant and Dennis Linn, *Healing the Eight Stages of Life* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988).

circles (though it is intriguing, for example, that a «pre-New-Age» author such as Carlos Casteneda cites John in his phenomenally successful series of books, and that Werner Erhard, founder of EST, gives lectures of «Juan de la Cruz»)⁷¹. Still, John offers those involved in such movements a useful reminder that one comes to realize an authentic identification with God, not through channeling, workshops with Shirley MacLaine or reading *A Course in Miracles*, but only through a loving *surrender* to God «in the living, sensory and spiritual, exterior and interior death of the cross» (*Ascent* 2, 7, 11).

Sixth, John of the Cross has been hailed as a proponent of «creation-centered spirituality» by Matthew Fox and others⁷². While this may well represent an anachronistic and simplistic judgment, it has at least opened up for many American readers the positive side of John's teaching on creation, so often neglected in the past⁷³.

Seventh, John provides guidance and encouragement today for many American Catholic feminists experiencing frustration and impasse in the face of apparent institutional intransigence⁷⁴, while at the same time reminding those on

⁷¹ See, for example, the adaption of John's metaphor of the solitary bird on the opening page of Carlos Casteneda, *Tales of Power* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1974); and chapter 9 of Richard de Mille, *Casteneda's Journey* (Santa Barbara, CA: Capra Press, 1977), where he notes intriguing parallels and differences between John and Casteneda (including the role of female figures named «Catalina» in both their lives). Basil Pennington reports that «A few years ago Werner Erhard sponsored a day at Madison Square Garden. The immense center was completely full for the eight-hour program. Erhard spent most of the day reading and commenting on Juan de la Cruz, better known as St. John of the Cross. These thousands of people had paid \$ 65 for the day»; see M. Basil Pennington, «Master in Ministry: Centuries Prayer», *Priest* (June, 1988): 7.

⁷² See, for example, Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality* (Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Co., 1983), p. 312; and Camille Campbell, *Meditations With John of the Cross: A Centering Book* (Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Co., 1989).

⁷³ See Ross Collings, *St. John of the Cross* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), pp. 26-60, for a fine discussion of this point. Collings is a Discalced Carmelite of Australia, but his book has recently been published in the United States, where it is now widely available.

⁷⁴ See Constance FitzGerald, «Impasse and Dark night», in *Living With Apocalypse: Spiritual Resources for Social Compassion*, ed. Tilden Edwards (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1984), pp. 93-116 (reprinted in Joann Wolski Conn, ed., *Women's Spirituality: Resources for Christian*

the other end of the spectrum, disturbed by *rapidity* of changes in the Church, to lean only on the secure insecurity of «dark faith». To those on both sides of current ecclesiastical controversies in the American Church he continually points out that we can never afford to become fixated on anything less than God, since the infinite divine reality always ultimately surpasses even our most revered images, preconceptions and programs.

Finally, John of the Cross is a major contributor to the dialogue now occurring at various levels between Catholicism and other traditions. Protestants who might otherwise be suspicious of a Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation mystic have found hope in John's stress on the primacy of faith and his discussion of the «dark night» experience⁷⁵. John's *nada* doctrine and emphasis on detachment has offered a point of departure in Buddhist-Christian conversations, and in dialogues with other faiths⁷⁶. He has even proved an important figure in the modern encounter with Marxism and atheism⁷⁷.

Development [Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1986]; Idem «A Discipleship of Equals: Voices from the Tradition — Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross», in *A Discipleship of Equals: Towards a Christian Feminist Spirituality*, ed. Francis A. Eigo (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1988), pp. 63-97.

⁷⁵ See Georgia Harkness, *The Dark Night of the Soul: From Spiritual Depression to Inner Renewal* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1945). Compare Catherine Marshall, *Light in My Darkest Night* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H; Revell, 1989), pp. 168ff.

⁷⁶ See especially the important series of works by William Johnston, including *The Still Point: Reflections on Zen and Christian Mysticism* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1970); Idem, *Silent Music: The Science of Meditation* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1974); Idem, *The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1978); Idem, *The Mirror Mind: Spirituality and Transformation* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1981); Idem, *Christian Mysticism Today* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1984). Johnston is an Irish Jesuit working in Tokyo, but he has lived and taught in the United States and his writings are widely read here. See also Mary Jo Meadow and Kevin Culligan, «Congruent Spiritual Paths: Christian Carmelite and Theravadan Buddhist Vipassana», *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 19 (1987), pp. 181-196.

⁷⁷ See Michael Buckley, «Atheism and Contemplation», *Theological Studies* 40 (1979), pp. 680-699.

Conclusion

In this article we have touched upon some of the ways in which John of the Cross has influenced important spiritual writers and movements in the United States. Obviously, much more remains to be said. Just within the last few years, many new American publications on John have appeared, and the numbers will continue to grow⁷⁸. Certainly, not all of the points mentioned here are uniquely American. Much of the Sanjuanist scholarship now being conducted in the United States deals with universally recognizable themes, and would be equally at home in almost any nation, easily entering into the emerging global dialogue on spiritual issues. But I have tried in some way to show how the United States, with its «First World» concerns, has nonetheless learned to welcome John of the Cross as a teacher and friend. And the process continues. It will only accelerate, I suspect, with the growing «Hispanicization» of the United States, which is rapidly changing the face of religion and culture in this country. As we enter the 21st century, this development could turn out to be one of the most decisive factors for our future appreciation of John in North America.

⁷⁸ See, for example, Leonard Doohan, *The Contemporary Challenge of John of the Cross: An Introduction to His Life and Teaching* (Chicago, IL: Loyola University Press, 1991); Thomas Dubay, *Fire Within: St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross and the Gospel — On Prayer* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1989); Susan Muto, *St. John of the Cross for Today: The Ascent* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1991); George Tavard, *Poetry and Contemplation in St. John of the Cross* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1988); and John Welch, *When Gods Die: An Introduction to John of the Cross* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990).