

**"LA FONTE" - JOHN OF THE CROSS'S POEM ABOUT THE
TRINITY, THE EUCHARIST, LONGING FOR GOD, AND FAITH**

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One of the poems that John of the Cross wrote while he was imprisoned infamously in Toledo, known as "*La Fonte*," reveals that, "although it is night," John found the eternal Trinitarian font "within this living bread," the Eucharist. John did not write very often about the Eucharist, but this remarkable composition represents his most sustained and explicit focus on this pivotal mystery of the Christian faith. In this article, I will systematically investigate the intertwining themes of Trinity, Eucharist, longing for God, and faith that make "*La Fonte*" a rich reflection on Christian life.

The existing articles and commentaries provide extensive linguistic and theological analyses of the poem, which will be summarized in the pages that follow. In addition, I hope to augment certain analyses and make new proposals about St. John's theological vision in *La Fonte*, which have been born out of my systematic research into the Eucharistic spirituality of St. John of the Cross, and the opportunity to periodically teach this topic to seminarians in an elective course.

Divo Barsotti, David Rubio, and Narciso Juberias each wrote full-length commentaries on "*La Fonte*."¹ Approximately fifteen scholars analyze "*La Fonte*" in articles of various lengths. Jesús Castellano Cervera, José Vicente Rodríguez, and Salvador Ros Garcia each wrote particularly interesting theological articles representative of common lines of thinking.² Three articles on *La Fonte* cite Helmut Hatzfeld's

¹ DIVO BARSOTTI, *Benché sia notte; Commento a un cantico di San Giovanni della Croce* (Brescia: Marcelliana, 1982). DAVID RUBIO, *San Juan de la Cruz; La Fonte; Comentario*, 2a Edición, (México: Editorial Minerva, 1949). FRANCISCO JUBERÍAS CASAS, *La fonte que mana y corre; Comentario al poema de San Juan de la Cruz* (Madrid: Claune, 1991).

² JESÚS CASTELLANO CERVERA, "Un símbolo de San Juan de la Cruz: la fuente, Biblia, liturgia, y espiritualidad," in *Phase* 31 (1991): 389-413. JOSÉ VICENTE RODRIGUEZ,

linguistic explications of the poem, published in 1967.³ More recently, Colin Thompson wrote an impressive volume on John's poetry called, *John of the Cross; Songs in the Night*.⁴ Nevertheless, most theological commentators conduct their own linguistic analyses.

Several scholarly sources claim that John of the Cross wrote this poem while he was imprisoned in Toledo.⁵ José Carvajal Gallego found in "*La Fonte*" the expression of John's frustrated desire to celebrate the Mass on the Feast of the Assumption during his incarceration.⁶ Federico Ruiz agrees that "*La Fonte*" was born out of the frustrated desire for the Eucharist, but that the occasion was the feast of *Corpus Christi*.⁷ Regardless of when exactly John composed the poem, theologians have focused their attention on its combination

"*Evangelio eucarístico de San Juan de la Cruz*," in *San Juan de la Cruz* 13 (1997): 9-57. SALVADOR ROS GARCÍA, "El Poema 'Que bien sé yo la fonte': la plegaria eucarística de un místico," in *Revista de Espiritualidad* 54 (1995): 75-113.

³ HELMUT HATZFELD, "Una explicación estilística del 'Cantar del alma que se helga de conocer a Dios por fe' de San Juan de la Cruz," in *Quaderno Iberia* (1967) no. 34: 71-80. For examples of scholars who rely on Hatzfeld's analysis, see ROS GARCÍA, "Le plegaria eucarística de un místico," in *Revista Espiritualidad* 54 (1995): 75-113, ROBERT RICARD, "Sobre el poema de San Juan de la Cruz 'Aunque es de noche,'" in *Clavileño* Madrid 6 no. 35 (1955): 26-9, and ROBERT RICARD, "La Fonte' de Saint Jean de la Croix et un chapitre de Laredo," in *Bulletin Hispanique* 58 (1956): 265-74, where Ricard cites Hatzfeld's earlier work on John of the Cross in the context of Spanish religious literature. Lucinio Ruano lists Hatzfeld among the primary literary critics of John's poetry, RUANO, ed., *Obras Completas de San Juan de la Cruz*, 14th Edición Crítica, , ed. by Lucinio Ruano de la Iglesia (Madrid: Biblioteca de Los Autores Cristianos, 1994), 94 (Hereafter, this critical edition of John's "complete" works will be cited as *Obras*.)

⁴ COLIN THOMPSON, *St. John of the Cross; Songs in the Night*, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003). In his analysis of "*La Fonte*," Thompson notices several parallels with images from the Johannine literature in the Scriptures, including light, faith, and water. John of the Cross invokes darkness frequently in his poem, but Thompson notes that this usage diverts from the Scriptural significations in the Johannine corpus.

⁵ RUANO, Introduction to "*La Fonte*," *Obras*, p. 93-4. FEDERICO RUIZ, ed., *God Speaks in the Night; The Life, Times, and Teaching of St. John of the Cross* (Washington: ICS Publications, 2000), 172. JOSÉ DAMINÁN GAITAN, "Teología poética de S. Juan de la Cruz," in *Revista Espiritualidad*. 49 (1990), 414-5. J. V. RODRIGUEZ, ed., "Introducción General" in San Juan de la Cruz, *Obras Completas*, 5^a Critical Edition, Textual Revision, Textual introductions and notes by José Vincente Rodríguez, Doctrinal introductions and notes by Federico Ruiz Salvador (Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 1993), 14. (Hereafter this Spanish critical edition will be cited as *OC* to distinguish it from Ruano's critical edition.) EULOGIO PACHO, "Poet in Prison," in *God Speaks*, 177.

⁶ JOSÉ CARVAJAL GALLEGO, "San Juan de la Cruz y la Eucaristía," in *Vita Sobrenatural*. 72 (1992), p. 281-2.

⁷ F. RUIZ, *God Speaks*, 172.

of Trinitarian and Eucharistic motifs. Further examination of these themes requires quotation of the text.

John's poem, which he titled, "Song of the soul that rejoices in knowing God through faith," but which is commonly known as "*La Fonte*," reads as follows:

*Qué bien sé yo la fonte que mana y corre,
aunque es de noche!*

*1. Aquella eternal fonte está escondida,
qué bien sé yo dó tiene su manida,
aunque es de noche.*

*2. En esta noche oscura de la vida,
qué bien sé yo por fe la fonte frida
aunque es de noche.*

*3. Su origen no lo sé, pues no lo tiene,
más sé que todo origin della viene,
aunque es de noche.*

*4. Sé que no puede ser cosa tan bella,
y que cielos y tierra beben della,
aunque es de noche.*

*5. Bien sé que suelo en ella no se halla,
y que ninguno puede vadealla,
aunque es de noche.*

*6. Su claridad nunca es escurecida,
y sé que toda luz de ella es venida,
aunque es de noche.*

*7. Sé ser tan caudalosos sus corrientes,
que infiernos, cielos riegan y las gentes,
aunque es de noche.*

*8. El corriente que nace de esta fuente
bien sé que es tan capaz y omnipotente,
aunque es de noche.*

*9. El corriente que de estas dos procede
sé que ninguna de ellas le precede,
aunque es de noche.*

*10. Bien sé que tres en sola una agua viva
residen, y una de otra se deriva,
aunque es de noche.*

*11. Aquesta eterna fonte está escondida
en este vivo pan por darnos vida,
aunque es de noche.*

12. *Aquí se está llamando a las criaturas,⁸
y de esta agua se hartan, aunque a oscuras,
porque es de noche.*

13. *Aquesta viva fuente que deseo
en este pan de vida yo la veo,
aunque es de noche.⁹*

a) THE TRINITY IN THE EUCHARIST

Many authors recognize John's claim to have found the Trinitarian God in the Eucharist as an answer to the soul's quest for transcendence and beatitude.¹⁰ Mother Maria de la Cruz recalled the

⁸ There is an indication that in 16th-century Spain, the term, "*las criaturas*," signified, "children," and not "creatures," as it commonly does in modern Spanish. Thus, John wrote that the "living bread" from Stanza 11 called out to "the children" (i.e., the children of God) in Stanza 12, offering to satisfy their thirst, "although in darkness, because it is night." This consideration strengthens the eucharistic signification of "this living bread," given by God "to give us [His children] life."

⁹ J.V. RODRIGUEZ (ed.), *OC*, p. 76-7. See Rodríguez's introduction, in *OC*, 43-7. Cf. RUANO (ed.), *Obras*, p. 93-6. In Kavanaugh's translation, "*La Fonte*" reads, "*For I know well the spring that flows and runs,/ although it is night*. 1. That eternal spring is hidden,/ for I know well where it has rise,/ *although it is night*. 2. In the dark night of this life,/ I know well by faith this cold spring,/ *although it is night*. 3. I do not know its origin, nor has it one,/ but I know that every origin has come from it,/ *although it is night*. 4. I know that nothing else is so beautiful,/ and that the heavens and the earth drink there,/ *although it is night*. 5. I know well that it is bottomless/ and no one is able to cross it,/ *although it is night*. 6. It's clarity is never darkened,/ and I know that every light has come from it,/ *although it is night*. 7. I know it's streams are so brimming/ they water the lands of hell, the heavens, and the earth,/ *although it is night*. 8. I know well the stream that flows from this spring/ is mighty in compass and power,/ *although it is night*. 9. I know the stream proceeding from these two,/ that neither of them in fact precedes it,/ *although it is night*. 10. I know well that three in only one living water/ reside, and one from the other arises,/ *although it is night*. 11. This eternal spring is hidden/ within this living bread for our life's sake,/ *although it is night*. 12. It is here calling out to creatures;/ and they satisfy their thirst, although in darkness,/ *because it is night*. 13. This living spring that I long for,/ I see in this bread of life,/ *although it is night*." (JOHN OF THE CROSS, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, Revised Edition, Trans. by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodríguez, revisions and introductions by Kieran Kavanaugh (Washington:ICS Publications, 1991), 58-60. Hereafter, this English edition of John's collected works will be cited as *CW*. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent references to the various works of John of the Cross will be cited from this English edition). Kavanaugh has only eleven stanzas, but Ruano and Rodríguez both have thirteen stanzas, because they include the manuscript of Granada among their sources, and Kavanaugh does not.

¹⁰ For example, J. CASTELLANO CERVERA, "*La fuente*," in *Phase*. 31 (1991), 389-413, J.V. RODRIGUEZ, "*Evangelio Eucharistico*," in *San Juan de la Cruz*. 19 (1992), 9-57, and C. THOMPSON, *Songs in the Night*, 70.

following conversation with John of the Cross during the processes for his beatification and canonization:

Among the mysteries that I have observed, he [John] had a great love for the Most Holy Trinity...[I know this] because I have seen him [John] say the Mass of the Most Holy Trinity many times, and I asked him, "Why do you say the Mass of the Most Holy Trinity so many times?" To which he responded in grace, "I hold [Mass] for [The Trinity] because [The Trinity] is the greatest holiness in heaven [*Téngole por el mayor santo del cielo*]." ¹¹

Francisca de la Madre de Dios offered an anecdote revealing a singular moment in John's spiritual life that connected the Trinity with the Eucharist. She explained that one sister desired that the community have a great reverence, love, and devotion to the Trinity, and she wished she could hear a Mass of the Holy Trinity.¹² She recalled:

Brother John of the Cross, it seems, had had a revelation from God Our Lord, in which He ordered him to say the Mass of the Most Holy Trinity, and that was so because of this nun. It seemed [so] at the time, as has been said, because at this time the holy father Brother John of the Cross was in the sacristy of this convent visiting in order to say Mass, [and] after he said Mass, he called to this nun and said to her, "O, Daughter, and how I am grateful to you and I will be grateful to you all my life for asking Our Lord that He command me to say the Mass of the Most Holy Trinity because today I said it and He gave me a truly great mercy, that at the time of Consecration He showed to me all three Persons in a very resplendent cloud. Oh Sister, and what good and such penetrating glory we enjoy when we possess [something] of the Most Holy Trinity and have a view of [The Trinity]!" ¹³

Given the details of the story, it would have happened after John's imprisonment because he did not visit the convent in question until after his escape. In that case, this experience would seemingly have confirmed and accentuated John's conviction that the Trinity is present "within the living bread" of the Eucharist, as he put it in "*La Fonte*."

In his book on "*La Fonte*," Barsotti emphasizes the tension between the divine life possessed in the "living bread," and the participation in

¹¹ MOTHER MARÍA DE LA CRUZ, testimony given in the *Proceso Ordinario de Ubeda (1617-1618)* in *BMC* Vol. 14, Tomo V, 121. This witness testified on 3 March 1628 about this conversation in almost exactly the same words in the Apostolic Process of Ubeda (*BMC* Vol. 25, Tomo IX, 483).

¹² FRANCISCA DE LA MADRE DE DIOS, testimony given in the *Proceso Ordinario de Beas (1616-1618)* in *Ibid*, 171.

¹³ *Ibid*.

Trinitarian life that awaits the blessed.¹⁴ In the Eucharist, the Christian enjoys a real, but veiled, sacramental partaking of Christ's life, which is a merciful provision for the frailty of earthly life, and an echo of the humility of the Incarnation.¹⁵ Colin Thompson observes this sacramental dynamic as a common feature of John's poetry in general, as he explains, "For John, the worlds of matter and spirit are bound together...because God has bound himself to the world to humanity in the Incarnation."¹⁶ The humble mercy of the Eucharistic Lord, by which he makes himself food for his creatures is bound up with St. John's understanding of faith as both dark and illuminating. We will return to this connection after uncovering John's vision of faith as expressed in "*La Fonte*."

Barsotti interprets John's vision of God in the Blessed Sacrament as consonant with the Saint's familiar doctrine of the apprehension of God in "dark" faith by grace.¹⁷ Iain Matthew interprets John's vision of the Eucharist from this poem in a similar fashion, although with an emphasis on Christ's action in the Eucharist:

It [the Eucharist] is an activity of Christ, powerfully 'summoning his creatures' to the water (stanza twelve). John sees Christ here active, torrential, receiving the full force of all that God is and unleashing its flow upon us – the 'everlasting fountain' released in the living bread 'to give us life' (stanza eleven).¹⁸

Looking at John's text, the Trinity is present in the Eucharist "for our life's sake," or more literally, "to give us life" (*por darnos vida*) (Stanza 11, line 2).¹⁹ God is hidden, but, as Matthew noted, not inactive; "*Aquí se esta llamando a las criaturas*" ("[The eternal spring] is here calling out to creatures").²⁰ The grammar of Stanza 12 indicates the appropriate human response to this divine gift. For their part, the "creatures...satisfy their thirst," (*de esta agua se hartan*). This construction implies a reflexive action on the part of the creatures rather than a mere passive reception of the eternal spring, infused without their cooperation.

¹⁴ D. BARSOTTI, *Benché sia notte*, 90-7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 72, 86-7.

¹⁶ C. THOMPSON, *Songs in the Night*, 280.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 41ff.

¹⁸ IAIN MATTHEW, *The Impact of God*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), 74.

¹⁹ K. KAVANAUGH, (trans.), "*La Fonte*" in *CW*, p. 60. Note that both the Spanish "*por darnos vida*," and this English translation appear in the *Collected Works*, "for our life's sake."

²⁰ *Ibid.* As seen above, *criaturas* in Spanish specifically indicates rational creatures.

b) HUNGER FOR THE MASS

José Vicente Rodríguez called St. John of the Cross, "*El Cantor de la Eucaristía*" ("The Herald of the Eucharist") in an article he wrote for the journal, *Teresa de Jesús* in 1999.²¹ Rodríguez looked back to the dark days in Toledo as the moment when the Saint's profound desire to meet his Eucharistic and Trinitarian God in the Mass overflowed out of his poetic soul in the verses of "*La Fonte*."²² The text of the poem bears out John's confident faith in the Eucharist, especially in light of John's treatment during his imprisonment. His captors not only refused to allow St. John to say Mass, but they also forbade him from participating in the liturgy or receiving the Sacrament.²³ After long months of this deprivation, John steadfastly proclaims in "*La Fonte*," "[The eternal spring] is here [within this living bread] calling out to creatures, and they satisfy their thirst, although in darkness, *because it is night*."²⁴ Rodríguez argues that John's "*Fonte*" is a kind of mystical "Mass of desire" (akin to Baptism by desire), "without bread or wine or altar or misal or people or Communion," in which John sought to serve his "burning eucharistic hunger and thirst."²⁵ Rodríguez notes that at Ubeda in December 1591, suffering's crucible revealed once again John's intimacy with his Eucharistic Lord when at the end of his life, John asked to adore and bid farewell to the Blessed Sacrament.²⁶

In a similar vein, Salvador Ros García finds liturgical and eschatological themes woven together in "*La Fonte*" after the manner of a Eucharistic Prayer or anaphora.²⁷ Ros Garcia concedes that "*La Fonte*" is not a Eucharistic Prayer "in the strict sense," but it does articulate the mystery of transformative human participation in Trinitarian life through the Eucharist.²⁸ For this reason, the author considers the poem "a true Eucharistic Prayer."²⁹

Stéphane-Marie du Cœur de Jésus explored the complementarity of liturgy and contemplation in John's life in an article entitled, "*La*

²¹ J.V. RODRÍGUEZ, "*San Juan de la Cruz, Cantor de la Eucaristía*," *Teresa de Jesús*. (1999, no. 101): 190-3.

²² *Ibid.*, 191.

²³ F. RUIZ, ed., *God Speaks*, 171-2.

²⁴ JOHN OF THE CROSS, CW, Trans. by Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, 60.

²⁵ J.V. RODRÍGUEZ, "*Cantor de la Eucaristía*," 191-3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 193.

²⁷ S.R. GARCÍA, "*Plegaria eucarística*," *Revista de Espiritualidad*. 54 (1995): 75-113.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 113.

prière...eucharistique."³⁰ Relying on several figures in the Carmelite tradition, Stéphane-Marie argues that the same Spirit vivifies both contemplative purification in the "nights" and the Eucharist, and, by these means, the Lord prepares for and effects union between God and the soul in love.³¹ He explains, "The action of the Holy Spirit in the soul through silent prayer makes us remember Jesus Christ, develops in us a capacity to love, and to offer oneself, and disposes us for the union of love."³² Stéphane-Marie also explores John's expressions of longing for God, experienced excruciatingly during his incarceration.

c) "LA FONTE" AND LONGING FOR GOD

Stéphane-Marie finds in "*La Fonte*" an expression of St. John's mystical insight into longing for God gained through contemplative prayer and his human experience of darkness, separation, and desire for God in his Toledo incarceration.³³ He does not, however, offer a detailed explanation of this confluence of influences on John's theology. Jose Vincente Rodriguez raises a similar point in his article entitled, "*Evangelio Eucharístico de S. Juan de la Cruz*," "The Eucharistic Gospel of St. John of the Cross."

Reflecting on the last two stanzas of "*La Fonte*," Rodriguez traces the themes of "thirst," "desire," and "water" in three of John's four long treatises.³⁴ Rodriguez points to several places where John comments on "the deer longing for water" (Ps. 41 (42)), and claims that these references in the *Spiritual Canticle* 13.11, *Living Flame* 3.12, and *Dark Night* I 11.1 all, at least in part, reflect John's longing for the Eucharist during his incarceration.³⁵ Rodriguez connects longing for the Eucharist to a broader longing for Christ, and applies those interpretive threads through several passages of the *Canticle* where John expresses longing for God.³⁶ This interpretation seems to take

³⁰ STÉPHANE-MARIE DU CŒUR DE JÉSUS, "*La prière...eucharistique*," in *Carmel (Venasque)* no. 62 (1991): 41-8. The author quotes from St. John, St. Teresa of Avila, Bl. Elizabeth of the Trinity, and St. Thérèse to build his case.

³¹ Ibid., 41-7.

³² Ibid., 46.

³³ Ibid., 47.

³⁴ J.V. RODRÍGUEZ, "*Evangelio Eucharístico*," 44-8.

³⁵ Ibid., 46.

³⁶ Ibid., 46-8. Rodriguez looks at following passages in this order: *Canticle* 37.3-6; 1, line 1; 13; and 12. He completes this tour in about a page of his article.

the explicit references to the Eucharist in "*La Fonte*" as an interpretive touchstone for John's treatises, which contain very few Eucharistic passages, and even fewer explicit references to the Sacrament. I would like to draw attention to the contrast between John's unsuccessful quest for God in the Eucharist expressed in his earlier composition, "*Vivo sin vivir en mi*," and his successful quest recorded in "*La Fonte*."

While in Avila before his incarceration, John wrote in "*Vivo*," Stanza 5:

When I try to find relief
Seeing you in the Sacrament,
I find this greater sorrow:
I cannot enjoy you wholly.
All things are affliction
Since I do not see you as I desire
*And I die because I do not die.*³⁷

In *La Fonte*, we read these lines:

This eternal spring is hidden
In this living bread for our life's sake
Although it is night.
It is here calling out to creatures
And they satisfy their thirst, although in darkness,
Because it is night.
This living spring that I long for,
I see in this bread of life,
Although it is night.

There is an obvious contrast between these two encounters with the Eucharist, and John gives us the key to understand the development between them in his treatises on *The Spiritual Cantic* and *The Living Flame of Love*.

John explains in his commentary on Stanza 11 of the *Cantic* that at some stages of spiritual development, souls long for death specifically as a means to union with the Lord whom they love desperately.³⁸ He clarifies that a soul desires death "under the suppo-

³⁷ K. KAVANAUGH (trans.), *CW*, 55-6.

³⁸ JOHN OF THE CROSS, *Cantic* 11.5-14, 512-5. Cf. Br. Brian Dybowski's exposition of John's spirituality, wherein he mentions this stage of spiritual ardor that desires death out of longing in love to see God: BR. BRIAN DYBOWSKI, FSC, "St. John of the Cross' Spirituality: Love Transforms Suffering," (The Sante Fe Institute for Spirituality, 2009)

sition that she cannot see him without dying.”³⁹ This seems to be the state of the speaker in “*Vivo*,” who longs to see God, but cannot see him as they would like to, and so repeats the refrain, “I die because I do not die.”⁴⁰ In the *Canticle* treatise, John identifies this soul who is longing for death as “in need of love...crying out for more love,” and says that death “will be the cause of love’s completeness, which she desires, and the satisfaction of all her needs.”⁴¹ At the conclusion of his commentary on this stanza, he explains the developmental stage of those who experience the desire for death out of love for God that he has discussed:

Those who feel in themselves the sickness of love, a lack of love, show they have some love, because they are aware of what they lack through what they have. Those who do not feel this sickness show they either have no love or are perfect in love.⁴²

This suggestive comment leads to John’s commentary on “*The Living Flame of Love*,” where he gives voice to those in “a very intimate and elevated union and transformation of the soul in God.”⁴³

In John’s commentary on the first stanza of his poem, “*The Living Flame of Love*,” he returns to the question of longing for God and the desire for death. The attitude of the speaker in “*Living Flame*” corresponds with that found in “*La Fonte*,” and represents a more mature stage of spiritual growth than that expressed in “*Vivo*” and described in the commentary on *Canticle* 11. The first stanza of “*Living Flame*,” in the Kavanaugh-Rodriguez translation, reads:

O living flame of love
That tenderly wounds my soul
in its deepest center!
Since now you are not oppressive,
Now consummate! If it be your will:
Tear through the veil of this sweet encounter!

John explains that the “consummation” and “tearing the veil” signify entrance into heavenly life through death in order to bring

<http://www.sfis.org/st-john.php>, 18 July 2013. Br. Dybowski holds Ph.Ds in philosophy and psychology, and has taught for the past 49 years at Sante Fe College and then Lewis University in Albuquerque.

³⁹ JOHN OF THE CROSS, *Canticle* 11.8, 512.

⁴⁰ JOHN OF THE CROSS, “*Vivo sin vivir en mi*,” 55-6.

⁴¹ JOHN OF THE CROSS, *Canticle* 11.10, 514.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 11.14, 515.

⁴³ JOHN OF THE CROSS, *Flame*, 638.

about the longed for union of Divine bridegroom and human beloved.⁴⁴ The line "if it be your will" represents the significant difference between this spiritual state and the one seen in *Canticle* 11 and "*Vivo*."

John's "*Vivo*" is a lament for the pitiable state of living on earth while longing for everlasting life with God in heaven. John announces this in the title of the poem, "*Coplas del alma que pena por ver a Dios*" (Stanzas of the soul that suffers with longing to see God⁴⁵). Desiring heaven and turning away from creaturely things in order to be close to God is certainly a gift for which many committed Christians would be grateful. As Iain Matthew points out, however, this attitude belongs to a purgative stage of spiritual development, which John considers a provisional step towards fully-developed Christian spirituality, or spiritual marriage.⁴⁶ In "*Vivo*," John's focus remains on the state of the soul that suffers so, and concludes with a question like Job's, "O my God, when will it be that I can truly say: now I live because I do not die?"⁴⁷ *Canticle* 11 has a similar focus, and request:

Reveal your presence,
And may the vision of your beauty be my death;
For the sickness of love
Is not cured
Except by your very presence and image.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux characterizes self-focused love of God ("loving God for my sake") as the second degree of love, but one who has grown to the third degree of loving God "praises God for His essential goodness, and not merely because of the benefits He has bestowed, really does love God for God's sake, and not selfishly."⁴⁸

John comments on his poem, "Living Flame" line by line, and takes up the phrase, "Now consummate! If it be your will" starting in *Flame* 1, section 27. He says that the impassioned request to "consummate" is a request from the soul enflamed in love to "consummate the spiritual marriage with me [the soul] perfectly by means of the beatific vision."⁴⁹ Up to this point the "*Vivo*"/*Canticle* 11 desire for death and

⁴⁴ Ibid., *Flame* 1.1, 641.

⁴⁵ This translation comes from Kavanaugh and Rodriguez in *CW*, 55.

⁴⁶ I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 35-50.

⁴⁷ JOHN OF THE CROSS, "*Vivo sin vivir en mí*," 56.

⁴⁸ BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, *On Loving God* IX, 21, available at: http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bernard/loving_god.pdf, 18 July 2013.

⁴⁹ JOHN OF THE CROSS, *Flame* 1.27, 652.

the *Flame* 1 version seem indistinguishable. The next phrase of the poem, "if it be your will" reveals the soul's conformity to God's will, which constitutes the specific difference of this mature desire for death. John explains that under the umbrella of the soul's conformity to God's will, the hope-driven desire for perfect union with God in heaven does not cause "affliction," but is "gentle and delightful."⁵⁰ He writes, "[The soul] says in this verse, 'Now consummate! If it be your will,' for its will and appetite are so united with God that it considers the fulfillment of God's will to be its glory."⁵¹ According to John of the Cross, the soul's desire for death in this state of conformity with God's will is only a response to the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is the "living flame" burning within the transformed soul. John explains, "The sudden flashes of glory and love that appear vaguely in these touches...are so sublime that it would rather be a sign of little love not to try to enter into that perfection and completion of love."⁵² Finally, John compares his words, "Now consummate! If it be your will" with the petitions of the Lord's Prayer: "Your kingdom come, your will be done," wherein the desire for the coming of the kingdom falls under the aegis of conformity to the will of God.⁵³ The soul's focus on the Beloved's will distinguishes the *Flame* 1 desire for death from the less mature version in "*Vivo*" and *Canticle* 11.

In "*La Fonte*," John does not rail against earthly life as he did in "*Vivo*," but displays mature acceptance of the will of God and praises him for his merciful provision in the Eucharist especially. In "*La Fonte*," John professes his sure knowledge of God's eternal Trinitarian mystery, and an encounter with this hidden God "within this living bread" (stanza 11). Furthermore, "because it is night," creatures (i.e., God's children,) "satisfy their thirst" for the "Eternal Spring," [the Triune God] (stanza 12). As seen above, the soul in "*Vivo*," looks for God in "the Sacrament," but finds this "greater sorrow [because she] cannot enjoy [God] wholly. All things are affliction since she does not see [God] as she desires, and she dies because she does not die."⁵⁴ The conflict between the soul's will to go to heaven and God's determination that her time has not yet come causes conflict and pain within the soul who speaks in "*Vivo*." The tension between living on

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 653.

⁵⁴ JOHN OF THE CROSS, "*Vivo sin vivir en mí*," Stanza 5, 55-6.

earth and longing for heaven exists in "*La Fonte*," but, as the title ("Song of the soul that rejoices at knowing God through faith") declares, the soul who sings these lines "rejoices" at knowing God through faith, and we discover in stanza 12 that she is satisfied with his Eucharistic presence "because it is night."

The one who sings "*La Fonte*" does not confuse Christ's sacramental presence in the Eucharist, and the dim reflection of the Trinity she sees through the dark rays of faith for the clear daylight of heavenly glory, when we shall know as we are known, and see God as he is (1 Cor 13:12), but, nevertheless, she "knows well" that she has encountered the eternal Trinity within this living bread, and is content with this measure of providence. She accepts the "night," the light of faith, as a gift and a means to be in contact with the source of all reality, her creator, who showers living water on her, thus inviting her to share already, "although in darkness, because it is night" in the eternal life of the Trinity.

John wrote "*Vivo sin vivir en mí*" in the years preceding his incarceration while he was at the Encarnación monastery in Avila.⁵⁵ The development in attitude toward God and death from "*Vivo*" to "*La Fonte*" may shed some light on John's personal spiritual development and the spiritual impact that his incarceration had on him, or John may have written "*Vivo*" less as a disclosure of his current state, and more as an expression of those who find themselves at a trying moment in their spiritual growth. The investigation of John's spiritual development at various historical moments, however, is beyond the scope of this analysis of "*La Fonte*." On the other hand, John's treatment in "*La Fonte*" of faith in connection with the Eucharist constitutes a central, fascinating theme in this poem.

d) FAITH, THE EUCHARIST, AND THE MERCY OF GOD

In his article on St. John's "Eucharistic Gospel," José Vincente Rodríguez offers an extended reflection on John's teaching about the role of faith to make the infinite God knowable in some way to human beings. Citing frequently from the first few chapters of the second book of John's *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Vincente Rodríguez emphasizes the simultaneous darkness and obscurity of faith to the soul, and its gift of supernatural light by which the soul can glimpse

⁵⁵ RUANO, ed., *Obras*, 77.

the Triune, mysterious God, who remains inaccessible by the light of “natural reason.”⁵⁶ Soon to be St. John Paul systematically parsed each passage on faith in John’s writings in his famous dissertation, *Faith According to St. John of the Cross*, and he also finds in John tension between darkness and light in faith.⁵⁷ John’s title for the poem we know as “*La Fonte*” provides a determinative context of faith for the Trinitarian and Eucharistic themes in the poem. As seen above, he calls the work, “*Cantar del alma que se huelga de conocer a Dios por fe*” (“Song of the soul that rejoices in knowing God through faith”). Furthermore, one cannot come to certain knowledge of the eternal life of the Trinity or the reality of Christ’s real presence in the Eucharist without faith, and these are the specific and central truths John claims to know in “*La Fonte*.”

Focusing on *La Fonte*, Jesus Castellano Cervera draws attention to the tension in faith between sight and darkness. John expresses the darkness of faith by the consistent refrain at the close of each stanza, “*Aunque es de noche*” (Although it is night), and the one exception “*Porque es de noche*” (Because it is night) in the second to last stanza of “*La Fonte*.”⁵⁸ The knowledge gained through faith is certain, and John expresses this in the poem when he repeatedly writes “*Qué bien sé yo la fonte*” (I know well the font), referring to the Triune God. At the same time, faith proceeds not by sight, but by trust in God revealing truths about himself so that we might pursue the Lord and participate in his divine life.⁵⁹ Referencing “*La Fonte*” and the famous opening line from John’s poem “The Dark Night,” Cervera states, “In ‘this dark night of [earthly] life,’ in God and in the Eucharist the fountain is hidden.”⁶⁰ According to Cervera’s reading, faith includes both the obscurity of God’s presence in the Eucharist, and the simultaneous experience of communion with the Lord in the same mysterious reality.⁶¹ These two aspects of faith are signified by the Saint in his one departure from his otherwise constant refrain at the

⁵⁶ J.V. RODRÍGUEZ, “*Evangelio Eucarístico*,” 22-31.

⁵⁷ KAROL WOJTYLA, *Faith According to St. John of the Cross*, Trans. by Jordan Aumann, O.P. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981).

⁵⁸ J. CASTELLANO CERVERA, “*La Fuente*,” 397.

⁵⁹ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* II-II q2 a2.

⁶⁰ J. CASTELLANO CERVERA, “*La Fuente*,” 397. Aniano Alvarez-Suarez conducts a similar analysis of faith in *La Fonte* in an article also published in 1991 (ANIANO ALVAREZ-SUAZREZ, “*Que bien sé yo la fonte que mana y corre...’ Ejercicio de contemplación*,” in *Monte Carmelo* 99 (1991): 558-63).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 400.

end of each stanza, "*aunque es de noche*," to "*porque es de noche*," in the penultimate stanza.⁶² Cervera does not explain in detail how this shift in vocabulary expresses the tension in faith of seeing in darkness.

Following the arc of the poem, Cervera observes that God's *criaturas* not only experience God in the tension of "dark faith," but also satisfy their thirst for him "in darkness, because it is night," quoting "*La Fonte*."⁶³ Cervera explains that the Trinity and the Eucharist were for St. John, "Two vertices of contemplation and of experience," meaning that John both sought God and found him in these profound mysteries at the center of the Christian faith without exhausting the infinite riches of God's inner life or the Eucharist.⁶⁴ These are excellent points, and I hope to build upon them while incorporating insights from Barsotti, Thompson and Matthew.

As seen above, Barsotti and Thompson considered John's perspective on the Incarnation as a great mercy from God that transformed all of creation. Barsotti found in "*La Fonte*" an extension of this divine condescension in the Eucharist, where creatures see God, and "are satisfied." Iain Matthew emphasized the action of Christ calling us to himself, and working to fill us with his life and Spirit.⁶⁵ The interplay of faith and the Eucharist in our quest to find rest in God is another interesting dynamic at work in "*La Fonte*."

Faith is an answer to our longing for God, but it is not the perfect resolution that we hope to attain, and which will give us full and final peace. Faith and the Eucharist only satisfy those who remain on the earthly pilgrimage, but John affirms that they do in fact satisfy such persons, because they effect a real encounter with the eternal God, as he writes in the 13th and final stanza:

This living spring that I long for,
I see in this bread of life,
*although it is night.*⁶⁶

From the perspective of the Christian on earth, faith is great boon, which makes it possible to know God, and know him well, as John repeats throughout *La Fonte*, even without seeing him face to face as the blessed do. As Vincente Rodriguez indicates, if we

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 401.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 401-403. Cf. A. ALVAREZ-SUAREZ, "*Ejercicio de contemplación*," 565-567.

⁶⁵ I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 114-33.

⁶⁶ JOHN OF THE CROSS, "*La Fonte*" Stanza 13 (listed as Stanza 11), 60.

remember the circumstances under which John composed "*La Fonte*," alone in a dark hole in Toledo, persecuted by Carmelite brothers, and prevented from saying or even attending Mass, these gifts of knowing and communing with God appear all the more the incredible and poignant signs of the Lord's mercy to his faithful ones.⁶⁷ This context vivifies John's words in stanza 11 and the beginning of 12:

This eternal spring is hidden
In this living bread for our life's sake
Although it is night.

It is here calling out to creatures...

God did not abandon him in his suffering. John describes his experience as a *criatura* of this dark encounter in the succeeding lines of "*La Fonte*:"

they satisfy their thirst
although in darkness
because it is night.

This living spring that I long for
I see in this bread of life
although it is night" (stanza 12-13).

Christians who walk by faith can see and know Christ present "although in darkness, because it is night."⁶⁸

John, "The Doctor of the Dark Nights" teaches us that the darkness of faith is always a great mercy for us. In the *Ascent* and the *Dark Night*, the darkness of faith signals the incomprehensible God's approach to his poor, weak creature that does not have the strength to see his glory.⁶⁹ According to John, raptures and ecstasies, although they occur as a result of our incapacity to receive God's self-giving, mercifully prevent people from literally dying of a close encounter with radiant divinity.⁷⁰ Although this may seem like a small consolation at first, this delay allows the soul more time on earth to be purified and better prepared for entrance into heavenly life.⁷¹

⁶⁷ J.V. RODRÍGUEZ, "*Evangelio eucarístico*," 45-6.

⁶⁸ See H. HATZFELD, "*Explcación estilística*," 79.

⁶⁹ *Ascent* II 3.4-6, 158-9; 4.1-7, 159-62; 9.1, 177; 14.8, 194; 24.8-9, 243-4. *Night* I 9.3-4, 413-4. Pseudo-Dionysius, whom John occasionally cites by name, is certainly an important, influential source for him in his explanation of faith as "dark," or a "ray of darkness" (*Canticle* 14&15.16, 532). Cf. I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 46-58, 72-85.

⁷⁰ See, for example, *Canticle* 13, 519-24.

⁷¹ John is discussing this point, for example, in *Night* II 14, 428-9.

Furthermore, John explains that in moments when a person has been removed from their senses (i.e., experiences rapture or ecstasy), God is able to work with great affects in secret, in "darkness," because the soul, having given herself over by allowing herself to be rapt, is not obstructing God's work. In "*La Fonte*," the darkness of faith is a mercy because through it, wayfarers can "be satisfied," and "know God well" even though they do not yet look on "the Eternal Spring" face to face, but only "within this living bread."⁷² The satisfaction and knowledge the soul gains by these means, however, cannot replace "what God has ready for those who love him" (1Cor 2:9).

Only the permanence and unveiled fullness of heaven can bring us complete satisfaction, as Augustine announced at the beginning of his *Confessions*, "My heart is restless until it rests in you [God]."⁷³ In his famous prayer from Book X, "O Beauty ever ancient, ever new...", he says that he has found God, but he concludes with these provocative words, "Now I pant for you...I hunger and thirst for more...I am enflamed with love of your peace."⁷⁴ While on earth, Augustine was left with the fire of love's holy desire for perfect union with God. We can read a similar sentiment in John's in *La Fonte* Stanza 12, where he explains that the Living Bread satisfies creatures "although in darkness, because it is night" (stanza 12). When commenting on these lines from "*La Fonte*," Jose Vincente Rodriguez argues that the living water and satisfaction we receive on earth "only imperfectly fulfills our desire for God because... we are always longing for "eternal life...and the plenitude of the vision of God."⁷⁵ If it were the glorious "day" of heavenly bliss, then the sacramental, veiled presence of God in the Eucharistic and the light of faith that Paul describes as "a dim reflection in a mirror" (1 Cor 13:12) would not satisfy, or even attract us. When the Beloved is personally, immediately present, intermediaries are not desirable. Taken as "the response of Christians to God," "faith" signifies human cooperation in the delicate and beautiful exchange between God and the Christian, and John articulates that dynamic in the last three stanzas of "*La Fonte*" as well.

As seen above, Stéphane-Marie du Cœur de Jésus claims that John and several figures in the Carmelite tradition write about the

⁷² See, D. BARSOTTI, *Benché sia notte*, 72, 86-7.

⁷³ AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *Confessions* I.1.1.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, X.27.38.

⁷⁵ Jose Vincente Rodriguez makes this point in his article, "*Evangelio eucharistico*," on page 44. Interestingly, Rodriguez also quotes Augustine, but draws on his commentary on the Gospel of John, Tract 32.

Holy Spirit helping people “remember Jesus Christ, develops in us a capacity to love, and to offer oneself, and disposes us for the union of love.”⁷⁶ In “*La Fonte*,” Stanza 12, the “Eternal Spring” of which John has sung, “calls out to creatures,” taking initiative and leading people to drink the life-giving water in “the living bread.” John describes the creatures’ response with a reflexive verb, “[*las criaturas*] *se hartan*” (“[creatures] satisfy themselves”) on the living water flowing from the fountain. The motif of “divine call and human response,” revealed poignantly in the Bridegroom and Bride of the Song of Songs, is a dominating theme throughout John’s writing, as Iain Matthew wonderfully explains in his introduction to John of the Cross.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that our response to God cannot occur without his empowering us to embrace him and aiding us along the way. Matthew summarizes John’s thought on this point by quoting a prayer from John’s commentary on “The Living Flame:”

Do you awaken us, my Lord, and shed your light upon us that we might recognize and come to love the blessings that you always hold out to us, and shall realize that you stepped forward to show us your favor and that you have not forgotten us.⁷⁸

This should temper our reading of the reflexive, [*las criaturas*] *se hartan* in “*La Fonte*,” Stanza 12, but John’s account of our encounter with God and being satisfied with him “in the living bread” involves our response to God’s initiative, just as receiving communion at Mass generally requires some positive action from the person in the pew.

Vincente Rodriguez concludes that for John, faith and the Eucharist are inextricably intertwined in the mystery of the “fountain that runs and flows,” and the soul’s quest for Christ rests in the Eucharist, which is the crowning gift received through faith.⁷⁹ In order to reach this tight connection between the Eucharist and the search for Christ in St. John’s writing, however, Rodriguez relies on a quotation from the Vatican II decree on priests about the Eucharist “containing every spiritual blessing”⁸⁰ because no such passage appears in John’s corpus. It seems to me that in order to reach the conclusion about the centrality of the Eucharist in John’s spirituality,

⁷⁶ STÉPHANE-MARIE DU CŒUR DE JÉSUS, “*La prière...eucharistique*,” 46.

⁷⁷ I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 28-50, 134-41.

⁷⁸ JOHN OF THE CROSS, *Flame* 4.9, 711, as quoted in I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 34.

⁷⁹ J.V. RODRÍGUEZ, “*Evangelio eucharistico*,” 47-8.

⁸⁰ *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 5, as quoted in *Ibid.*, 48.

it is necessary to make a broad appeal to the biographical data we have about his concrete spiritual practices, which I have done at length elsewhere. Nevertheless, the consideration of faith, the Eucharist, and the mercy of God in John's "*La Fonte*" can be suggestive for contemporary piety in various ways, which I will pursue further in my conclusions section, after considering a possible parallelism between the Eucharist and contemplative prayer as ways of seeing God for John of the Cross.

e) THE EUCHARIST AND CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER AS WAYS OF SEEING GOD FOR JOHN OF THE CROSS

While commenting on the line in *La Fonte*, "This eternal spring is hidden within this living bread for our life's sake," Vincente Rodriguez turns to the opening pages of John's treatise on his poem, "The Living Flame of Love." In *The Living Flame*, completed near the end of John's life, he describes the experience of those in spiritual marriage who receive from God, "A love deeper in quality and more perfect within this very state of transformation [i.e., spiritual marriage]...where the flames of God's love flare up and shoot out from [the purified soul]." ⁸¹ John draws a parallel between the text of John 6 where many register a negative response to Jesus' "Bread of Life Discourse" and the response of "the impure" to God's gift of "the living flame of love." ⁸² After a tantalizing reference to the "sovereign and loving doctrine of the Eucharist" ⁸³ St. John describes the great benefits received by those who experience this exalted contemplative prayer, for example, "[The soul] is transformed into a flame of living love in which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are communicated to it...it enjoy[s] a foretaste of eternal life." ⁸⁴

Vincente Rodriguez remarks that St. John found the life-giving God of *The Living Flame* in the "Living bread" praised in "*La Fonte*" Stanza 11, "*Este vivo pan por darnos viva.*" ⁸⁵ Undoubtedly, St. John met the Triune God in contemplative prayer and in the Eucharist, as Vincente Rodriguez affirms. ⁸⁶ The similarity in themes and language

⁸¹ *Flame* Prologue.3, 639.

⁸² *Flame* 1.5-6, 642-3.

⁸³ *Flame* 1.5, 642.

⁸⁴ *Flame* 1.6, 643.

⁸⁵ J.V. RODRÍGUEZ, "*Evangelio Eucharístico*," 43-4.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

between the poem composed in prison, and the treatise composed some years later in Andalucía makes the descriptive text cited above from *The Living Flame* highly suggestive of John's rich experience of grace when receiving the Eucharist. The words he wrote about contemplation could have been written about the Eucharist! Furthermore, the passage follows a comparison to one of the most famous Eucharistic texts in the Gospels. Nevertheless, John of the Cross does not explicitly write in *Living Flame* that the experience of God's presence and self-gift that he found in contemplation was found in the Eucharist. The comparison between the two remains suggestive but not definitive.

If John had connected contemplation and Eucharist as means to a foretaste of eternal life, if the lines from *La Fonte*, "This eternal spring is hidden, within this living bread for our life's sake [*por darnos vida*], although it is night"⁸⁷ appeared in *Living Flame* 1.6, then there would be far less need for scholars to argue that the Eucharist was central to John of the Cross. In fact, John wrote hundreds and hundreds of marvelous pages about contemplation, and comparatively few Eucharistic passages and allusions sprinkled throughout his corpus. As Vincente Rodriguez continues his article, however, he suggests that some texts John wrote about contemplation should be understood as (also) Eucharistic.⁸⁸

The eyewitness, biographical testimonies about John reveal that his conferences, talks, liturgical celebrations, example of extended Eucharistic adoration, and other actions and signs demonstrate his consistent effort to bequeath Eucharistic devotion to the germinating order of the Discalced Carmelites.⁸⁹ We know that John expressed his personal experiences and spirituality in his writings. This indicates that if indeed the Eucharist was central to John's spirituality, then he would have passed this on through his writings. This inference leaves us with a conundrum, however, because John did not write much about the Eucharist, at least in his extant corpus.⁹⁰ In light of this

⁸⁷ "La Fonte," Stanza 9, 60.

⁸⁸ J.V. RODRÍGUEZ, "Evangelio Eucharístico," 43-8.

⁸⁹ JOHN D. LOVE, "Within This Living Bread," *The Eucharistic Spirituality of St. John of the Cross*, (Rome: Angelicum Press, 2005), pp. 13-104.

⁹⁰ Various sources attest that both Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross burned the letters they received from the other, perhaps out of a desire to remain detached for communion with God, or to avoid harm to the discalced reform should the letters fall into malicious hands. Many of John's other correspondents burned his letters in the last year of his life, when Diego Evangelista was attempting to destroy John's reputation

peculiar combination of factors, Vincente Rodriguez's comments are more provocative than they might first appear to be, and his interpretive suggestion deserves further and more detailed investigation.

f) CONCLUSIONS

In "*La Fonte*," John of the Cross explores some of his most characteristic themes and one theme about which he writes only seldom: the Eucharist. As many scholars have concluded, John of the Cross reveals in "*La Fonte*" a fundamental connection in his spirituality between the Trinity and the Eucharist, and he touches delicately, yet with penetrating insight, on our longing for God, and faith that sees in the "night."⁹¹ The quest for God and the persistent dynamic of faith and "night" may be found on practically every page of John's collected works, and every stanza of "*La Fonte*" contains one or both of these motifs. At the climax of the poem, John gives center stage to the Eucharist, connecting it with all the other primary themes.⁹²

For John of the Cross, faith is both dark and illuminating, as it says in a famous Pauline text, "We see a dim reflection in a mirror" (1 Cor 13:12). In "*La Fonte*," John explores the tension within faith of true vision of divine mysteries seen "in darkness" (stanza 12). The vision we have through faith is dim, reflected, but nevertheless, we do see and know God.

The Eucharist, seen through the eyes of faith, satisfies our longing for God, in John's words, "because it is night" (stanza 12). We are able to have communion with the eternal Trinity while on earth "because it is night," that is, because of faith's dark vision. On the other hand, the communion we have with God through the Eucharist only satisfies our longing for God because we live now in the darkness of faith and have not yet entered into the clear sight of heaven. In a poem written before "*La Fonte*" and before he was incarcerated, John

with accusations of misconduct with his former subjects and directees (K. KAVANAUGH, *Introduction to the Letters* in *CW*, 735. RUANO, *Nota* to the *Cartas* in *Obras*, 8-9. F. RUIZ, *Introducción* to the text of the *Epistolario* in *OC*, 1065-6. Perhaps these lost letters contain evidence that would shed light on the paucity of references to the Eucharist in John's treatises, but we will never know.

⁹¹ See, for example, J. CASTELLANO CERVERA "*La fuente*," 389-413. J.V. RODRÍGUEZ, "*Evangelio eucarístico*," 9-57. S.R. GARCÍA, "*La plegaria eucarística de un místico*," 75-113. D. BARSOTTI, *Benché sia notte*, 1982.

⁹² "*La Fonte*," Stanza 9-10 (11-12), in Kavanaugh (ed., trans.), *CW*, 60.

gives voice to a less satisfying encounter with the Eucharistic Lord, wherein the soul finds Christ's sacramental presence in the Eucharist a greater sorrow because she cannot enjoy him in the complete way she will in heaven ("*Vivo sin vivir en mí*," stanza 5). John explains in his treatises that this soul's desperate longing for God is imperfectly self-focused on her own enjoyment, and that this stage gives way to the grateful reception of the gifts and divine encounters God gives according to his will and plan to purify and save the soul. John's word in "*La Fonte*" to souls thirsty for the Lord may be summarized, "Even though the darkness of faith and sacramental mystery can make it difficult to see clearly, the Triune God sought by souls may be found and known well in the Eucharist."⁹³

It is interesting to note that John writes in "*La Fonte*" about seeing God through faith and in the Eucharist, but does not write about eating or receiving the Sacrament. The historical context of John's being barred from Eucharistic communion (or attending Mass at all) by his jailors gives a partial answer: reception of the Eucharist was not his spiritual experience at the time when he composed this work. It is also possible that John meant to extol his experience of encounter with God in Eucharistic adoration. It is recorded by several witnesses that John displayed zeal for serving at Mass as a boy,⁹⁴ and spent many hours in adoration as a Carmelite student, through a small window in his cell that overlooked the tabernacle in the chapel.⁹⁵ John

⁹³ Ibid, Stanzas 9-11 (11-13), in Kavanaugh (ed., trans.), *CW*, 60.

⁹⁴ JOSÉ DE VELASCO, testimony given in the *Proceso Ordinario de Medina del Campo (1614-1615)* in *BMC* Vol. 22, Tomo VI, 46.

⁹⁵ FR. ALONSO DE LA MADRE DE DIOS (ASTURICENSE), testimony given in the *Proceso Apostolico de Segovia (1627-1628)* in Ibid, 366. Fr. Alonso Asturicense was 60 years old when he testified on 22 December 1627, having lived more than 40 years as a Discalced Carmelite. This witness gave the longest testimony from all the Processes for John of the Cross (more than 50 pages-worth in *BMC* Vol. 14). Alonso first met John of the Cross at the Discalced Carmelite priory in Segovia in 1587, and he was with the Saint at his death in Ubeda (Peers, *Handbook*, 111). One of the first two biographers of St. John along with Fr. José de Velasco, Fr. Alonso provides extensive information from almost every period of St. John's life from his "vast familiarity with the biographical information of John of the Cross" (*BMC* Vol. 14, Tomo V, 361). Fr. Alonso was also the Postulator of John's Cause in the Ordinary Processes conducted in the diocese of Jaén and in the diocese of Segovia from 1614 to 1618 (*BMC* Vol. 24, Tomo VIII, 265). Fr. Alonso de la Madre de Dios, states that Fr. Alonso de Villalba certified these facts to him, and Fr. José de Velasco included them in his book as well (*BMC* Vol. 25, Tomo IX, 103).

María de Jesús could not testify in the official Processes because of her untimely death in 1618, but, based on what she learned from Venerable Ana of Jesús, María declared in Salamanca in 1616, "While he [John] was among the Calced Friars, he was

continued this practice throughout his life, spending "all his time when he was not occupied, ordinarily, before the Blessed Sacrament on his knees in the church...[including] the major part of the night, sleeping only two or three hours each day."⁹⁶ One witness conversed with John about his experience in adoration, and made this report:

When I was living at the convent of my order in the city of Granada, I was waiting at the grille of the choir for Fr. John of the Cross in order to go to confession with him. He was kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel of the church. His mouth was pressed to the ground for a long time. When he got up, he was very happy. I asked him, "Why are you so happy?" He responded, "Shouldn't I be? I have been worshipping and seeing my Lord." With his hands together, he said, "O what a good God we have!" I say this because I saw it happen the way that I have stated it.⁹⁷

This kind of encounter with the Lord in adoration explains in part why John spent so much time praying this way, and consequently why he extols in "*La Fonte*" seeing God in the "living bread" and being "satisfied" in his thirst for the "Eternal Spring." John's practice of and experience in adoration taken together with his theology of "dark faith" offers a suggestive reflection for Eucharistic piety in general.

Although the relationship between John's extended adoration and his sanctity in general has not been studied in detail, undoubtedly the two are connected. A person would not spend so many hours in front of the Eucharist without certain faith and intimate experience of the Lord's presence there. On the other hand, his consistent

a man of much prayer. In order to have more time in prayer, he passed a very great part of the nights [*pasaba muy gran parte de las noches*] with His Majesty at a small window in his cell [from which he could adore] the Blessed Sacrament" (MARÍA DE JESÚS, testimony given in the *Proceso "in genere" de Salamanca (1616)*, in *BMC* Vol. 26, Tomo X, 498). María made similar assertion in one of her letters, dated 11 April 1614 (MARÍA DE JESÚS, *Letter to An Unnamed Recipient (11 April 1614)* in *BMC* Vol. 13, Tomo IV, 410).

⁹⁶ MARTIN DE LA ASUNCIÓN, testimony given in the *Proceso Ordinario de Ubeda (1617-1618)* in *BMC* Vol. 14, Tomo V, 85, 88. Other witnesses attested to the same facts: FR. MARTIN DE SAN JOSÉ, testimony given in the *Proceso Ordinario de Baeza (1617-1618)* in *BMC* Vol. 14, Tomo V, 15. FR. ALONSO DE LA MADRE DE DIOS, testimony given in the *Proceso Apostolico de Segovia (1627-1628)* in *BMC* Vol. 14, Tomo V, 370, 396. FR. JERONIMO DE SAN JOSÉ, testimony given in the *Proceso Apostolico de Segovia (1627-1628)* in *Ibid.*, 422. ANTONIO DEL ESPÍRITU SANTO, testimony given in the *Proceso Ordinario de Alcaudete (1618)* in *BMC* Vol. 23, Tomo VII, 500.

⁹⁷ FRANCISCA DE LA MADRE DE DIOS, testimony given in the *Proceso Ordinario de Beas (1618)* in *BMC* Vol. 14, Tomo V, 168. Trans. by Gary and Anilu Seromik.

practice of adoration throughout his adult life surely caused increased devotion to God and sanctity in John as well. Although John did have some extraordinary experiences of the Trinity during the Mass, as seen above, his regular counsel to look past such favors with the eyes of faith to God, who inspires and perfects our faith and gives every good and perfect gift, is reason for hope and perseverance for those who do not have extraordinary, palpable experiences of God during adoration.

As Iain Matthew beautifully explains, according to John of the Cross, our first task in relating to God is to “make space” for the Lord who is pressing and dying (figuratively and literally) to fill us with his life-giving love and presence.⁹⁸ Spending time in adoration, in the darkness of faith, is a concrete, bodily way to “make space” (and time) in one’s life for God. Unless I am horribly misinformed, in Eucharistic adoration, most people encounter God without definitive, sensible signs that they are in the presence of the Almighty. The “darkness” of this prayer seems to match John’s call for faith’s purifying *nada*, which removes all distractions and prepares the soul for union with God.⁹⁹ The connection for John of the Cross between adoration and the *nada* of dark faith deserves more study in the future.

Another underdeveloped area for research is the significance of Marian devotion for John of the Cross, and the intersection of this devotion with his Eucharistic piety. Scholars such as Steven Tyler have begun investigating this question in general,¹⁰⁰ and others, like Jose Vincente Rodriguez and Jose Carvajal Gallego have studied the Marian dimension of John’s experience in Toledo, his desire for the Mass and the Eucharist during that period, and an extraordinary Marian encounter he had at that time.¹⁰¹ This religious experience was made known through the testimony of John’s long-time associate and friend Martin de la Asunción.

⁹⁸ I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 35-38.

⁹⁹ See, for example, John’s “Sketch of Mount Carmel,” in *CW*, pp. 110-111. In a small but fascinating point, the cover art for Steven Tyler’s book represents an icon of St. John written by the Carmelite sisters of Harissa, Lebanon, in which John is surrounded “with symbols of his major works: ‘The Ascent of Mount Carmel,’ ‘The Dark Night of the Soul,’ and ‘The Fountain.’” (“Explanation of Front Cover,” in STEVEN TYLER, *St. John of the Cross* (London: Continuum, 2010), iv).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

¹⁰¹ J.V. RODRÍGUEZ, “‘San Juan de la Cruz, Cantor de la Eucaristía,’ Teresa de Jesús. (1999, no. 101): 190-3,” 191. J.C. GALLEGO, “San Juan de la Cruz y la Eucaristía,” 281-282. F. RUIZ, ed., *God Speaks*, 60.

John asked the prior at Toledo if he could say Mass for the Feast of the Assumption, but the prior flatly refused.¹⁰² According to Martin's account, Mary appeared to John that night, and said, "Son, have patience because soon these works will be finished, and you will leave the prison and you will say Mass, and you will be consoled."¹⁰³ This episode raises questions about the relationship between John's hunger for the Mass and his Eucharistic faith, expressed in "*La Fonte*," and his Marian devotion. Although much attention is still given to John's remarkable experience while imprisoned in Toledo, there is not much written on the intersection of these elements of John's spiritual life. In general, John does not write very much or very often about Mary, but this alone may not explain well her place in his spirituality. Perhaps a systematic study of the biographical evidence regarding the Marian dimension of John's spirituality would shed more light on this question.

"*La Fonte*" has proved to be a fascinating treasure trove of themes and insights from John of the Cross. He touches on several points that frequently appear in his writings, such as the nature and benefits of faith and human longing for God, bringing them into contact with the mysteries of the Trinity and the Eucharist. Although John only addresses the Eucharist in the last three stanzas of "*La Fonte*," this is the longest, most concrete reflection on the Eucharist in John's extant body of writing. As scholars continue to explore this composition and its context, we hope to learn more about John's spirituality, and understand better his wisdom about the spiritual life.

¹⁰² MARTIN DE LA ASUNCIÓN, testimony given in the *Proceso Ordinario de Ubeda (1617-1618)* in *BMC* Vol. 14, Tomo V, 96.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*