

CARMELITE STUDIES



CARMEL AND CONTEMPLATION



TRANSFORMING HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS

EDITORS
KEVIN CULLIGAN, OCD
REGIS JORDAN, OCD

CARMELITE STUDIES

CARMEL AND CONTEMPLATION

Transforming Human Consciousness

**Kevin Culligan, O.C.D.
Regis Jordan, O.C.D.**

Editors

**ICS Publications
Institute of Carmelite Studies
Washington, DC
2000**

TRANSFORMATION IN WISDOM: THE SUBVERSIVE CHARACTER AND EDUCATIVE POWER OF SOPHIA IN CONTEMPLATION

Constance FitzGerald, O.C.D.

Carmelite Monastery

Baltimore, Maryland

Introduction

We need a spirituality for our time, an in-between time some have called it. Who is the God who will accompany us, if, as some suggest, there looms on the horizon for the inhabitants of this earth an era demanding a change of consciousness more radical than we can imagine?¹ Or what kind of spirituality will address our experience if, indeed, the tremendous emergence of the feminine in culture, visible in so many different ways, truly heralds the end of the fundamental masculine dominance of the "Western mind," as Richard Tarnas proposes.² Some suggest that it is at great transitions such as this, when there are such insoluble problems, such a radical breakdown of structures, and so many confusing questions, that a new religious tradition rises up.³

Must we begin again then or can we build a new conceptual house for faith by gathering up what Ray Hart calls "the debris" around us and using it to make something new?⁴ More precisely, are the traditions and language of mysticism, muted and suspect in the public life for centuries and yet coming to life again in our time, capable of giving radical direction to our search for a meaningful God and a new way of living in the universe?⁵ Can the mystical or contemplative tradition, specifically the teaching of a sixteenth-century *man*, John of the Cross, ground us in our passage from one age to another and deal with our questions about God, about the earth, and about the universe? The experience of the western mystics is, undoubtedly, confined in part by the language and culture of western civilization and particularly of their own specific time in history. But if we decode their contemplative teaching, will it point us into the future and push us to envision and even experience a new mysticism, truly new and appropriate to our time and yet in continuity with our past?⁶

If, as I continue to believe, mystics live on the frontiers of human consciousness and address us from the farthest edges of the human spirit, we should not be surprised to find in the mysticism of John of the Cross some extremely important and yet hitherto undecoded clues about a God image capable of supporting our crossing into a new era of life on our planet earth. This raises the specific question of whether the teaching of John of the Cross, which delineates with such clarity the critical, central function of "Divine Wisdom" in human transformation and communion with God, validates and even enlarges upon the extensive research and theological investigations of feminist thinkers and theologians regarding the feminine God gestalt, Sophia?

These questions and assumptions motivate this study of wisdom in John of the Cross, which will examine, first of all, the transformation of the person in Wisdom (Sophia), a transformation of human desire and consciousness that is in its unfolding a process of education for contemplation; second, the subversive and therefore emancipatory character of the experience of Sophia in contemplation; third, what

this experience and process of transformation suggests regarding the feminine God image Sophia; fourth, what implications this has regarding education for contemplation.⁷ Furthermore, because the members of the Carmelite Forum have been attempting to guide students in reading and interpreting the classic Carmelite texts, I will attempt to include in this interpretation of John of the Cross actual texts from his writings as an integral part of this essay in the hope that these texts will be educative rather than tedious and will not interrupt the flow of my thought. It is my desire that others will grasp and develop implications from this study of Divine Wisdom in John of the Cross, if indeed there are any implications of value to contemporary spirituality, which I am only able to hint at or may not even see.

I will frequently be using Sophia instead of Wisdom because feminists prefer the Greek *sophia*, which is *chokmah* in Hebrew and *sapientia* in Latin—all feminine grammatical gender. This in itself is not significant inasmuch as feminine grammatical gender cannot be equated with actual gender. Nevertheless, the biblical depiction of wisdom in pre-Christian Judaism is invariably female, suggesting to us a person rather than a concept or an attribute. Biblical wisdom is treated, not as an it, but as a summoning "I": sister, mother, spouse, female beloved, teacher, chef and hostess, preacher, judge, liberator, establisher of justice, and numerous other female roles.⁸

Influenced by feminist scholars, I have been working for a number of years with wisdom in John of the Cross. As I have searched and analyzed his many wisdom texts and tried to interface them with contemporary studies and the tradition of wisdom in Jewish theology and in the New Testament,⁹ I have discovered considerable potential for spirituality today.

I now find myself asking if possibly this is the **time**, the **age**, for Sophia: God experienced in feminine categories from the ground up. Until now, the masculinity of the Western intellectual and spiritual tradition has been pervasive and fundamental as has been the mas-

culinity of the Western man's [sic] God.¹⁰ Perhaps in a time when this long dominant masculinity has become so apparent to us and when the feminine principle is welling up with such powerful energy, Sophia is a God image capable of moving with humanity into the next evolutionary era when the universe will be experienced not as a collection of objects for human use and mastery but rather as an intimate, interconnected, and diverse communion of subjects.¹¹ If "the evolutionary imperative for the masculine is to see through and overcome its hubris and one-sidedness . . . [and] to choose [to transcend itself and] enter into a fundamentally new relationship of mutuality with the feminine in all its forms,"¹² then this embrace of the feminine may well reveal Sophia-God.¹³

This means the experience of Wisdom in transformation or contemplation according to John of the Cross is so subversive it could change the content of our theological discourse, as Elizabeth Johnson suggests in her groundbreaking, scholarly study, *She Who Is*. Initially, when I hinted at the subversive character of Sophia, it was because I thought transformation in Wisdom radically changed desire, consciousness, and, ultimately, behavior, personal and societal. Now, I realize the experience of Sophia may be subversive, above all, because it affects how we understand the very nature of God, and our understanding of God is what affects the character and quality of our human living.

For John of the Cross, the experience of contemplative union reveals and supports an experience of God as Sophia. He moved in the milieu of Sophia-Wisdom from the beginning of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* to the end of *The Living Flame of Love* and kept the tradition of Sophia alive, waiting there for our discovery. When the tradition of contemplation or mysticism was finally decisively muffled by the condemnation of quietism in 1699, ending two centuries of struggle and debate, so, perhaps, was the opportunity to develop this strong experience of Sophia.¹⁴ In fact, the marginalizing of the

language of mysticism has a symbolic affinity not only with the disparagement of Sophia but also with the marginalization of women and the neglect of the Spirit. Have no doubt that the muting of contemplation was/is directly related to the place of women in society, the role of conscience in religion and politics, the fear of direct inspiration by the Spirit, and the transformative and therefore seditious character of contemplative prayer.¹⁵

John of the Cross and Wisdom

To understand the contemporary significance of Sophia and attempt to interpret adequately the meaning of wisdom in John of the Cross, one has to have some knowledge of the complex background and extensive research related to wisdom. In the light of contemporary scholarship, particularly feminist studies, one has to examine not only possible influences on John from pre-Christian Judaism and the New Testament, but also from early Church writers and the mystical tradition as it developed through the centuries with particular emphasis on Christology and Trinitarian theology. One cannot make even a cursory study of these ancient and contemporary sources without coming up with questions that both challenge and confuse the religious imagination.

Mindful of this very complex backdrop and aware of the limitations of my own knowledge, I will attempt to contribute to contemporary studies of Wisdom or Sophia by concentrating on John of the Cross. When one begins to examine his major writings, one is awed by the extent and significance of the presence of Sophia who appears absolutely fundamental to John's understanding and description of contemplative experience. Although at times wisdom seems to be either an attribute or even a gift of God, Wisdom is basically a way of naming and symbolizing God's very self. Wisdom is primarily "Divine Wisdom," and Divine Wisdom is identified with Jesus Christ,

the Word, the Son of God. Moreover, the entire process of human transformation is seen in terms of Wisdom, as evidenced, for example, by John's description of "the subject of [the] stanzas" of the poem, "The Spiritual Canticle," as "mystical Wisdom which comes through love" (C.prologue. 2).¹⁶

Pre-Christian Judaism

Many contemporary scholars believe that the development and biblical depiction of the figure of Sophia in Jewish wisdom theology was influenced by an extrabiblical figure of a female deity. While some endorse the Mesopotamian goddess, Ishtar, or the Canaanite goddess of love, Astarte, others prefer the Egyptian goddess Ma'at who represented law, order, and justice. More attractive to many scholars, however, is the theory that the figure of Jewish Sophia has been greatly influenced by the Hellenized form of the Egyptian goddess Isis. Personified Wisdom was the response of orthodox Judaism to the threat of the Isis cult, which was experienced as a temptation to the Jews to doubt and even turn from their traditional faith. While defending monotheism, Jewish wisdom theology was not afraid of the goddess but rather transferred the characteristics of mighty Isis to the figure of personified Wisdom in a creative effort to counteract the influence of this popular deity. Using goddess language and imagery drawn from wider religious thought and worship, they presented Jewish worshippers with the most attractive possible alternative to the cult and philosophies prevalent in the ancient Near East at the time.¹⁷ Divine Sophia is therefore, according to Fiorenza, Israel's saving and gracious God "in the language and gestalt of the goddess." With the exception of Yahweh, Sophia was, Elizabeth Johnson concludes, the most carefully limned God image in pre-Christian Judaism, far more common and extensive than Word, Spirit, Torah, or Shekinah.¹⁸

It would be helpful to bear this development in mind if we are threatened with talk about a Sophia-God. The Jews did not sacrifice

their belief in a monotheistic God; they brought to the fore a feminine God/dess metaphor important for their age and used it to speak of the God of Israel!¹⁹

Later, the writers of the New Testament took this very God image, this figure of personified Wisdom, and applied it to Jesus to show his continuity with the God of Israel in a manner that influenced the whole development of the doctrine of the Incarnation. The way this figure of Wisdom appeared in the literature of pre-Christian Judaism affected Christology, tradition, and John of the Cross. The problem here is, of course, the intervening tradition and what sources regarding Sophia-Wisdom from this cumulative tradition influenced John's education and study and ultimately his contemplative experience and writings.²⁰

John of the Cross and Sophia in the Old Testament

While how much John or his contemporaries knew about the origins of personified Wisdom in Jewish thought and theology could be the subject of an historical study, an analysis of his major writings reveals the radical influence of the wisdom texts of the Old Testament in shaping not only his understanding of Sophia but also his expression of religious experience.²¹ Particularly important in John's writings for defining who Sophia is and what she does are the books of Proverbs (chap. 8) and Wisdom (chaps. 7-9), and to some extent Sirach, to which he repeatedly returns throughout his three major works.²² From these sources, the specific view of Wisdom we find in these texts arises. To summarize very briefly:

1. Sophia has a divine origin, that is, Sophia is the spotless mirror of the power of God, the image of God's goodness, the brightness of the eternal light.
2. Sophia has a unique role in creation. God creates through Sophia.

3. Sophia moves and recreates, more active than all active things. She touches, enlivens, penetrates, and energizes everywhere. The touch of Wisdom is important.

4. Sophia calls to all to come to her, to choose her.

5. Sophia dwells on the earth and delights to be with humankind in the world making them friends of God.

6. Sophia works gently, with order and harmony, taking account of created capacity and progressive development.

7. Sophia is secret; she dwells in secret and has an affinity for darkness.

8. Sophia eats at a common table with humankind in this world. She says, "Come eat my bread and drink the wine I have mixed for you."

9. Sophia is loving, nurturing, and compassionate. Sophia is, in fact, a Lover: "My Beloved to Me . . ."

10. Sophia is loving knowledge of God, both the teacher and what is learned. Sophia is on the side of continual learning.

Out of his own distinctive configuration of Jewish wisdom literature, which one would expect research in John of the Cross's writings to refine and make more precise over time, emerge some of the most basic principles of his teaching. It fashions an understanding of *who Jesus is*, who God is and how this God functions in the dynamic of human purification and transformation. It suggests the place of Sophia in human suffering and hints at how the beloved of Sophia sees the world and functions in it. I want to tease apart this configuration in what follows though not necessarily in the order I have enumerated them.

Sophia Dwells on Earth and Calls to All to Desire Her and Come to Her

John begins *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* by describing the journey to God as a dark night and the completion or goal of that journey through the darkness as *union with Divine Wisdom*:

When this third night (God's communication to the spirit . . .) has passed, a union with the bride, who is the Sophia of God, then follows. (A.1.2.4)²³

In actuality, Divine Sophia figures prominently throughout the first book of *The Ascent*. She takes her stand on the heights, along the highways of this world, at the very crossroads of the human enterprise, calling the children of this earth to the path of transformation and communion. She highlights human desire and pities those whose primary focus of desire and meaning is askew. She challenges those who are unfree, consumed by the possessive desire for what can never completely satisfy. She calls them "little ones" because they become as small as that which they crave, while the lasting affection and reassurance they unconsciously search for in their choices are present and available in Sophia. Therefore, Sophia says, "desire me":

O people, I cry to you, my voice is directed to all that live. Be attentive, little ones, to cunning and sagacity; and you ignorant, be careful. Listen, because I speak of great things. Riches and glory are mine, high riches and justice. The fruit you will find in me is better than gold and precious stones; and my generations . . . are better than choice silver. I walk along the ways of justice, in the midst of the paths of judgement, to enrich those who love me and fill their treasures completely. [Prv. 8.4–6; 18–21]. (A.1.4.8)

It is important to note at this point that at the beginning of *The Ascent*, when John begins to set in place his core teaching on the education of human desire, he uses specifically "Sophia" texts showing some of the same connections between the Sophia of the Old Testament and Sophia-Jesus in the New Testament that contemporary scholars are indicating.²⁴

The presence of Jewish Sophia with humankind (Prv 8:31; Wis 24:1–12) provides the context for one of John's most basic and yet most misunderstood and difficult principles, one that appears to be

at odds with his mystical experience of the harmonious presence of Sophia in all of creation. At first reading, the text seems to insist that only God is worthy of our desire and that this earth, people, human ability, and human love are worthless, nothing. Yet, it must be carefully noted that it is *only in comparison with Divine Wisdom* that they pale into insignificance; *only when preferred* to Sophia do they become idols, addictive, and obsessive in character.²⁵

Oh, if people but knew what a treasure of divine light this blindness caused by our affections and [desires] deprives them of. . . . They must not rely on their sharp intellects or upon their gifts received from God as to believe that their attachments or [desires] will not blind, darken, and cause them to grow gradually worse Solomon [wise man] . . . although in the beginning he was truly restrained, *this rush after his desires*, and the failure to deny them gradually blinded and darkened his intellect so that finally *the powerful light of God's Wisdom was extinguished*. (A.1.8.6)

For John of the Cross, desire has a central and defining role in our lives. He assumes, first of all, that we are inescapably driven and motivated by our desires; secondly, if our desires are addictive and unfree, they weaken, weary, torment, blind, and demean us; and thirdly, the desire for Divine Wisdom (who is Jesus Christ) has to become greater than the desire for everyone and everything else that gives us pleasure.

A love of pleasure, and attachment to it, usually fires the will toward the enjoyment of things that give pleasure. A more intense enkindling of another, better love (love of the soul's Bridegroom) is necessary for the vanquishing of the [desires] and the denial of this pleasure. (A.1.14.2)

What is indicated here is a decisive, preferential choice of the heart for God,²⁶ a conscious shift in one's focus of meaning, which ever

so slowly redirects and claims desire. The love of Divine Wisdom as it grows and develops in life experience actually *educates human desire*, that is, effects a gradual transference of desire to Jesus Christ, Beloved Sophia! John writes with profound insight about the agony and ecstasy of the journey of human desire and explains for us what kind of affective education is carried on by Divine Sophia over a lifetime. Contemplation, which is the concern of this volume, comes by the very gradual adherence of our desire to God, which truly illuminates human perception and understanding. *We educate people to contemplation, therefore, by consciously guiding the complex education of human desire as it is being influenced and effected by Beloved Sophia in each one's life situation.*

For it is Divine Sophia, herself, who sets the stage by her presence and invitation for the long and difficult life-passage, first of all, from a possessive, confining, unfree desire for pleasure, safety, and reassurance to a desire and passion for God transcending that consuming concern for oneself and one's own interests, where human desire is transformed and fulfilled in the deep communion of love; and secondly, from a myopic, self-centered, isolated, nonnurturing presence to others and to reality to a Wisdom surpassing the knowledge we learn and accumulate through education and culture.

As in *The Ascent*, so at the very beginning of the commentary on *The Spiritual Canticle*, in the context of an Old Testament wisdom text, we see the underlining of the cost and significance of the self-transcendence required to pursue the desire for Divine Sophia:

Sophia is bright and never fades and is easily seen by them that love her, and found by them that seek her. She goes out before them that covet her that she might first show herself to them. Those who awake early in the morning to seek her shall not labor, but will find her seated at the door of their house [Wis. 6:13-5]. *This passage indicates that when the soul has departed from the house of her own will and the bed of her own satisfaction, she will find outside Divine Wisdom, the Son of God, her Spouse. (C.3.3)*

Those who decide to commit their lives to God frequently fail to realize that this very decision will activate an uncomfortable self-knowledge. Nevertheless, there is reason for encouragement when one realizes that *in the painful self-searching* that a choice for Divine Wisdom stimulates, content is being put into our relationship with Beloved Sophia and our desire for God is growing.²⁷ The deepening presence of Holy Wisdom pervading one's whole life and environment gradually educates desire and in that process eventually fulfills it. In other words, Wisdom is not only the teacher, but also what is learned, not only the educator of desire, but also the love perception and fulfillment itself!

Sophia Moves, Touches, Recreates, Energizes, Gently, Always with Order

A fundamental dynamic of this transformation of desire is inspired by the first verse of the eighth chapter of the Book of Wisdom. Understanding this dynamic allays some of our anxiety about purification. Even though Divine Wisdom is always active, re-creating, touching, energizing powerfully from one end of the earth to the other, and the all-pervading effectiveness of Wisdom in the world is reiterated again and again, still Sophia touches gently, with order, and with careful respect for the human maturation process.²⁸ Moreover, if we understand the human spirit as the crowning point of earth's evolution at the present time, or if, aware of the incalculable limitations of our knowledge of the mystery of the evolving universe, we yet dare, as some do, to consider the human spirit as the cosmos come to full consciousness, then in the gentle, energizing touch of Divine Sophia resides an equal, correlating respect for the gradual, evolutionary process of the earth.

This means that Wisdom moves from within the person and teaches through the human processes of knowing and loving, so that

step-by-step over a lifetime, in the experience of human relationships and human love, in the experience of the created universe, of one's task in this world, and even of one's deepest self, human desire gathers strength and passion and moves toward God. In other words, we gradually see the dedication of all our desire or affectivity by a hunger for God. Divine Sophia is so at home on the pathways of this world and so delights in dwelling with the children of earth that a person grows and is transformed, not by a leap over or denial of life, not by suppression of desire, but through the experience of the sensual and sexual, the physical and material, through life and life's loves, through what one cherishes and what gives one delight, security, and support.²⁹ Sophia is so subtle and so patient, *so indwelling human experience*, that only looking back can one say: Sophia, the fashioner of all, taught me everything I know (A.3.2.12; Wis 7:22).³⁰

Within this epistemological framework we are able to understand the progressive character of the schema of the nights: active night of sense, passive night of sense, active night of spirit, and passive night of spirit. The dark night is in actuality a *gradual* purification and transformation of desire and consciousness with a corresponding *developing* experience of Divine Sophia who is loving knowledge.

Sophia Creates with Harmony and Order

Contrary to what many readers initially believe about the mystic's feelings for the world, relationships, and human love, the true mystic is enthralled by the diversity and beauty, the unfailing harmony and interconnectedness of the entire creation. All this is the work of Sophia ("the Word") by whom they were created. Everyone and every living thing are clothed with the image of Sophia as we see in "The Spiritual Canticle" poem where the lovesick bride questions the created world:

O woods and thickets,
planted by the hand of my Beloved!

O green meadow,
coated, bright, with flowers,
tell me, has he passed by you?

Creatures then respond:

Pouring out a thousand graces,
he passed these groves in haste;
And having looked at them,
with his image alone,
clothed them in beauty. (C.4-5)

The commentary explains:

Only the hand of God, her Beloved, was able to create this diversity and grandeur. . . . This reflection on creatures, this observing that they are things made by the very hand of God, her Beloved, *strongly awakens the soul to love [God]*. (C.4.3)

Far from being an obstacle, delight and immersion in the wonder of the universe propels desire on its way toward God. The genuine mystic has frequently been prophetic in transcending the hierarchical dualism³¹ of his/her time in contemplative "knowing." In every living thing, therefore, the mystic sees a *trace* of God's passing through which one can track down God's *image* or presence in the world:³²

God created all things with remarkable ease and brevity, and in them left some trace of Who [God] is, not only in giving all things being from nothing, but even by endowing them with innumerable graces and qualities, making them beautiful in a wonderful order and unfailing dependence on one another. *All of this [God] did through [God's] own Sophia, the Word, [the] only begotten Son by Whom [God] created them.* (C. 5.1)

And she says "he passed" because creatures are like a trace of God's passing. Through them one can track down [God's] grandeur, might, wisdom, and other divine attributes. (C.5.3)³³

The *image* of Jesus-Sophia, developmental and transformative in character, is central to John's theology. Whenever we encounter "image" (i.e., trace, sketch, imprinting, mirror) in his writings, we can be certain we are in the sphere of wisdom Christology.³⁴ John of the Cross follows St. Paul in teaching that this image is Jesus-Sophia and that it is in Jesus-Sophia, the Son, the splendor of God's glory, that God "looked at" all creation, that is, created everything and made all complete and whole by the imprinting of Sophia:

and having looked at them,
with his image alone,
clothed them in beauty.

St. Paul says: *the Son of God is the splendor of [God's] glory and the image of [God's] substance* [Heb. 1:3]. It should be known that only with this figure, [the] Son, did God look at all things, that is, [God] communicated to them their natural being and many natural graces and gifts, and made them complete and perfect, as is said in Genesis: *God looked at all things that [God] made, and they were very good* [Gn. 1:31]. To look and behold that they were very good was to make them very good in the Word, [God's] Son. (C.5.4)³⁵

To look at and experience the beauty, gifts, and sacredness of the earth, therefore, is to behold and experience Divine Sophia who, looking back, marvelously energizes human desire:

The soul, wounded with love through a trace of the beauty of her Beloved, which she has known through creatures and anxious to see that invisible beauty which caused this visible beauty, declares . . . who has the power to heal me?

Since creatures gave the soul signs of her Beloved and showed within themselves traces of [her Beloved's] beauty and excellence, *love grew in her and, consequently, sorrow at [her Beloved's] absence. The more the soul knows of God the more the desire and anxiety to see [God] increase.* (C.6.1-2)

If this experience of the creative presence and image of Jesus-Sophia in the world strongly awakens the person to love and causes desire for God to grow, what can we say about the experience of Sophia in *human* relationships?

All who are free
tell me a thousand graceful things of you;
all wound me more
and leave me dying
of, ah, I-don't-know-what
beyond their stammering. (C.7)

The commentary continues:

In this stanza she asserts that she is wounded with love because of another higher knowledge she receives of the Beloved through rational creatures. . . . She also asserts she is not merely wounded, but is dying of love . . . due to an admirable immensity these creatures disclose to her, yet do not completely disclose. Because this immensity is indescribable she calls it an "I-don't-know-what." And because of it the soul is dying of love. (C.7.1)

Desire for Beloved Sophia is enkindled and gathers even more passion and momentum by nothing so much as human friendship and love, even when one is captivated by a powerful infatuation and thus largely unconscious that the power and attraction experienced come from the image or trace of Sophia within the loved one. John of the Cross's incarnational position, like Karl Rahner's, insists that created mediations do not destroy the immediate re-

lationship of the graced person to God. Rather, they make it possible and attest to its authenticity in everyday life.³⁶ This means that human desire is moved toward Divine Sophia and gathers strength through what/whom we cherish, and it is purified and transformed through not only the joys and ecstasies but also the sorrows, losses, and disappointments of human relationships. (C.7.1–9; 8.1)

While this stance found in *The Spiritual Canticle* (st. 3–7) is not always easy to reconcile with the teaching on desire in book 1 of *The Ascent*, where all desires are potential idols, still for the mystic the experience of this world is an experience of God! Although every desire has the latent possibility of focusing on an idol, love of God and human love are not in competition. The totality of creation—ourselves, our relationships, our world—is a milieu of prayer. Our very experience of creation puts content into our relationship with Beloved Sophia. This is how our desire or affectivity is educated. To express this another way, to experience Divine Sophia in this manner sketches color and depth into one's own slowly developing, inner image of Sophia-Christ.

I will return to this later and to what it means to be a friend and prophet of Sophia possessing the perspective and desire of Divine Sophia in and for the world. It is sufficient to indicate here that in the last part of both *The Spiritual Canticle* and *The Living Flame*, one of the astounding graces of transformation in wisdom, or union with the divine, is that one actually *experiences* the harmony, mutuality, and diversity of all creation *moving in God* in a unified, interdependent connectedness and enjoys this as a mirror or image of Sophia-God. This is so true that the universe itself and all it nurtures with life become for the person a harmonious symphony surpassing the most wonderful melodies one has ever heard (C.14/15.10 & 25; 36.6–7; 39.11; F.4.4–7).

Sophia Delights to Be with the Children of the Earth and Makes Them Friends of God

Sophia is not, therefore, distant or removed from human affairs nor from this world. She is involved in and concerned with the lessons and significance of human experience. By the gates, at the approaches to the city she waits, her delight and concern with the children of the earth. Again and again we are assured of her indiscriminating delight:

the Father of lights [Jas. 1:17] . . . is not closefisted but diffuses himself abundantly, as the sun does its rays, without being a respecter of persons [Acts 10:34], wherever there is room—always showing himself gladly along the highways and byways—does not hesitate or consider it of little import to find his delights with the children of the earth at a common table in the world [Prv.8:31]. (F.1.15)

This text is complex since it draws on the book of Proverbs for its strong wisdom content but does so in the context of the Letter of James and the Acts of the Apostles. Here Sophia's delight to be with humanity is associated with the doctrine of the indwelling of the Trinity and, in the process, Sophia's presence and delight are transferred to the Father, thereby masculinizing Sophia. The commentary continues:

And it should not be held as incredible in a soul now examined, purged, and tried in the fire of tribulations, trials and many kinds of temptations, and found faithful in love, that the promise of the Son of God be fulfilled, the promise that the Most Blessed Trinity will come and dwell within anyone who loves him [Jn.14:23]. The Blessed Trinity inhabits the soul by divinely illuminating its intellect with the Wisdom of the Son, delighting its will in the Holy Spirit, and by absorbing it powerfully and mightily in the delightful embrace of the Father's sweetness. (F.1.15)

And this is what happens, in an indescribable way, at the time this flame of love rises up within the soul. Since the soul is completely purged in its substance and faculties (memory, intellect, and will), the divine substance which, because of its purity, as the Wise Man says, *touches everywhere profoundly, subtly, and sublimely* [Wis. 7:24], absorbs the soul in itself with its divine flame. *And in that immersion of the soul in Wisdom*, the Holy Spirit sets in motion the glorious flickerings of his flame. (F.1.17)

Sophia delights precisely in dwelling with the human person and rejoicing in her delight and happiness. John's central emphasis on a relationship of mutual indwelling is rooted in this truth:

The Son of God finds delight in the soul in these her delights, and is sustained in her, that is, he dwells in her as in a place that pleases him. . . . This, I believe, is what he meant through what Solomon said in Proverbs: *My delights are with the children of this earth* [Prv. 8:31], that is, *when their delight is to be with me, Who am the Son of God.* (C.17.10)

Sophia desires human presence and companionship. From the very beginning of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* through the concluding stanzas of *The Spiritual Canticle* to the end of *The Living Flame of Love*, these writings never swerve from this framework in which union with Divine Wisdom through a mutual likeness effected by the companionship of love is the promise and the goal. Sophia is so desirous of this mutual transfiguration that she is actually called *the spouse* of the soul. This central role of Wisdom is explicit in the book 1 of *The Ascent* in a text already quoted:

When this third night . . . has passed, a union with the bride, Who is the Sophia of God, then follows. . . . Love is perfect when the transformation of the soul in God is achieved. (A.1.2.4)

And in one of the last stanzas of *The Spiritual Canticle* we hear the plea:

Transform me into the beauty of Divine Sophia and make me
resemble the one who is the Word, the Son of God. (C.36.7)

Jesus Christ Is Divine Wisdom: John of the Cross and the New Testament

It is clear that for John of the Cross, as for St. Paul and the writers of the Gospels of Matthew and John, Jesus Christ *is* Divine Wisdom (Sophia), the Word, the Son of God. In the unitive experience of Jesus-Sophia, the person is transformed, and in this Jesus, the entire creation is touched and gathered into the tender, unifying embrace of Sophia-God who pervades and connects the entire cosmos and every form of life in it.

John of the Cross appropriates not only some of the understandings of Sophia in the Old Testament, but he seems to be completely at home with the identification of Jesus with Divine Sophia that some of the writers of the New Testament make: *Jesus is Sophia incarnate*.³⁷ In Jesus, therefore, we find the incarnation of a feminine gestalt of God. To underpin his own cohesive Christology, John uses most of the significant wisdom texts of the New Testament currently being analyzed by contemporary scholars, and he does this in a context that frequently reveals his knowledge of their connection with the wisdom texts of the Old Testament. The tradition of personified Wisdom, which played a foundational role in the development of Christology in the early church, seems to have been singularly important to him since some of his most profound Christological assertions are couched in its terms. The recognition of the central, critical function of Wisdom is therefore basic to understanding John's Christology. Elizabeth Johnson clarifies precisely what this means when she writes:

Whoever espouses a wisdom Christology is asserting that Sophia in all her fullness was in Jesus so that in his historicity he embodies divine mystery in creative and saving involvement with the world. In Augustine's words, "But she was sent in one way that she might be with human beings; and she has been sent in another way that she herself might be a human being."³⁸

I have met numerous religious people in recent years who, because of their own spiritual experience, feel a great affinity for the writings of John of the Cross but do not want to deal with the dominant place of Christ in his teaching. One cannot begin to explore the transformative function of Sophia in John, however, without simultaneously probing *the role of Jesus Christ* in the process of Christian transformation, or vice versa.³⁹ John appropriates as his own the words of the Book of Wisdom together with those of Paul the Apostle to accent the centrality and complete sufficiency of Jesus, Sophia incarnate:

If you desire me to answer with a word of comfort, [God says] behold my Son, subject to me and to others out of love for me, and you will see how much he answers. If you desire me to declare some secret truths or events to you, fix your eyes on him, and you will discern hidden in him the most secret mysteries, and wisdom, and the wonders of God, as My Apostle proclaims: In the Son of God are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge of God [Col. 2:3]. These treasures of wisdom and knowledge will be far more sublime, delightful, and advantageous than what you want to know.⁴⁰ The Apostle, therefore, gloried, affirming that he had acted as though he knew no other than Jesus Christ and him crucified [1 Cor. 2:2]. And if you should seek other divine or corporeal visions and revelations, behold him, become human, and you will encounter more than you imagine, because the Apostle also says: In Christ all the fullness of divinity dwells bodily [Col. 2:9]. (A.2.22.6)⁴¹

In investigating Sophia-Wisdom, one discovers just how cohesive and all-pervasive John's wisdom Christology really is. Furthermore, it is

rooted in the whole Christological development beginning with the New Testament and early Church writers.⁴²

To see the significance of John's understanding of Jesus as Sophia and his use of a wisdom Christology, we must examine briefly how and why the writers of the New Testament, particularly Paul, Matthew, and John, understood Jesus in wisdom categories and what this meant for them and for the tradition.⁴³ Elizabeth Johnson tells us that when the communities of first-century Christians started to reflect on the identity and "saving significance of Jesus of Nazareth and to his ultimate origin in God's gracious goodness," they turned to Jewish theology and Hellenistic culture for elements of interpretation. One of the very first they put to use was the Jewish figure of personified Wisdom, that female figure of the late Old Testament and intertestamental literature whose words, characteristics, and functions they quickly shifted to Jesus. They therefore interpreted Jesus within the framework of the tradition of personified Wisdom.⁴⁴

Through the feminine Sophia-God image, New Testament writers linked the man Jesus to Yahweh of Israel, thereby showing the intrinsic continuity between their Yahwistic faith and Christianity and revealing how, in Jesus Christ, all that Yahweh is was present in their midst. Johnson writes:

What Judaism said of Sophia, Christian hymn-makers and epistle writers now came to say of Jesus: he is the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15), the radiant light of God's glory (Heb 1:3); he is the firstborn of all creation (Col 1:15), the one thru whom all things were made (1 Cor 8:6). Likewise, the way in which Judaism characterized Sophia in her dealings with human beings, Christian gospel writers now came to portray Jesus: he calls out to the heavy burdened to come to him and find rest (Mt 11:28-30); he makes people friends of God and gifts those who love him with life (Jn 15:15; 17:2). As the trajectory of wisdom Christology passages in the New Testament shows, the identification of Jesus with Sophia was so closely made that Jesus is presented not only as a wisdom

teacher, not only as as a child and envoy of Sophia, but more significantly as Sophia herself: Biblical scholarship in recent decades has been lifting this tradition from the footnotes of scripture studies into more central consideration. Regarding NT Christology James Dunn concludes, "Jesus is the exhaustive embodiment of divine wisdom"; M. Jack Suggs argues that for Matthew, "Jesus is Sophia incarnate"; according to Raymond Brown's analysis, "in John, Jesus is personified Wisdom"; This early use of Wisdom categories had profound theological consequences. It enabled the fledgling Christian communities to attribute cosmic significance to the Crucified Jesus, relating him to the creation and governance of the world, and was an essential step in the development of incarnation Christology.⁴⁵

The Role of Jesus in Our Lives

In John's anthropology, the human person is seen as an "infinite" capacity for God (F.3.19–22).⁴⁶ As long as the great "caverns" of the mind, heart, memory, and imagination are filled with human knowledge, loves, dreams, and memories that seem or promise to satisfy completely, the person is unable even to feel or imagine the depths of the capacity that is there. Only when one becomes aware of the emptiness of these caverns, in the face of the experience of the fragility and breakdown of what/whom we have staked our lives on, the limitation and failure of our life project and life love, and the shattering of our dreams and meanings, can the depths of thirst and hunger that exist in the human person, the infinite capacity, really be felt.

The mind is a deep cavern whose emptiness is a thirst for God. The mind thirsts, often unknowingly, for the waters of God's Wisdom to satisfy and complete human knowing. The will is a great cavern whose affective emptiness is a hunger for the ultimate, unconditional reassurance and fulfillment of love. The memory is a cavern, too, and its obsession with the past, its suffering over losses, and its

confusion with and need to organize images become a deep void of yearning for the possession of God.

Few people understand that John is actually addressing this infinite capacity when he urges them at the end of the first book of *The Ascent* to have an ongoing desire to pattern their lives on Christ's:

Have a habitual desire to imitate Christ in all your deeds by bringing your life into conformity with his. You must then study his life in order to know how to imitate him and behave in all things as he would behave. (A.1.13.3)⁴⁷

This means only one thing: *desire to know* Jesus Christ. Human desire is educated by an immersion in the Jesus of the Gospels. However, if you channel your desire toward knowing Jesus Christ, this person who has become in his life, death, and resurrection the Sophia of God, the one you will learn to know is loving Sophia who will slowly and secretly redirect and claim your desire and subvert your life. Desire is educated, therefore, by the companionship, the friendship, of Jesus-Sophia. This dynamic underlies John's whole philosophy of prayer and indicates how a conscious decision of the heart for Christ takes place, how a shift in the focus of desire and meaning *begins* in our lives.

But often the human person is not satisfied with the day-to-day fidelity to this companionship, nor to its slow, unpretentious, mysterious development. Too many people educated in our culture live with a consuming desire for novelty, excitement, change, new pleasures, visions, and extraordinary experiences. We have only to reflect on the way Americans flocked to Medjugorje before the war in Bosnia or the way people in our country search for unusual spiritual experience at the sites of reported apparitions. But John, appropriating both St. Paul and the Book of Wisdom in a Christological passage quoted previously, affirms that we do not need unusual new revelations, visions, or secret truths. We have everything we desire in the Gospel

and the unitive companionship of the human Jesus in whom dwells for us the nearness and fullness, the compassionate kindness, of Sophia-God embracing and energizing from within the totality of the human situation. Jesus-Sophia is the "sole Word" spoken by the "mouth of God."⁴⁸

Those who now desire to question God or receive some vision or revelation are guilty not only of foolish behavior but also of offending him by not fixing their eyes entirely on Christ and by living with the desire for some other novelty.

God would answer as follows: If I have already told you all things in my Word, my Son, and if I have no other word, what answer or revelation can I now make that would surpass this? Fasten your eyes on him alone, because in him I have spoken and revealed all, and in him you shall discover even more that you ask for and desire. You are making an appeal for locutions and revelations that are incomplete, but if you turn your eyes to him you will find them complete. For he is my entire locution and response, vision and revelation, which I have already spoken, answered, manifested, and revealed to you, by giving him to you as a brother, companion, master, ransom, and reward. Since that day when I descended upon him with my Spirit on Mount Tabor proclaiming: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear him" [Mt. 17:5], I have relinquished these methods of answering and teaching and presented them to him....Behold him well, for in him you will uncover all these revelations already made, and many more.

. . . Thus we must be guided humanly and visibly in all by the law [Gospel] of Christ, who is human, and that of his Church and his ministers. . . . One should not believe anything coming in a supernatural way, and believe only the teaching of Christ who is human. (A.2.22.5, 7)

This long text is particularly enlightening since John places it within the context of Sirach 24, where Sophia speaks of herself:

Wisdom praises herself and tells of her glory in the midst of the people. In the assembly of the Most High she opens her mouth,

and in the presence of his hosts she tells of her glory: *I came forth from the mouth of the Most High*, and covered the earth like a mist (Sir 24:1-3).

In accenting the complete sufficiency and unlimited potential of Christ as Divine Sophia, John of the Cross validates new possibilities for appropriating in our time the inexhaustible meaning of Jesus. If Jesus is Sophia incarnate, then new possibilities for studying his life do open before us. And what will we unlock if *in contemplative prayer* we experience again the life, death, and resurrection—the meaning—of Jesus in the light of Sophia, thereby transforming for our time the symbol of Christ and reclaiming Christ and Christological doctrine in a new way?⁴⁹

Image of Jesus Christ and Growth in Wisdom

This walking with the historical Jesus is how Sophia becomes a life-giving, indwelling image and one's primary focus of affective and cognitive meaning. This image is unique for each person, as a basis for relationship, direction, love, purification, and transformation. In fact, a gradual transference of desire occurs as the presence of loving Sophia takes shape within, influencing motivation and affecting imagination.⁵⁰ While it is the intimacy of prayer which, above all, shapes this image, nevertheless study, theological reflection, art, music, and a myriad of other life experiences contribute to this Christic patterning. We have already seen how in *The Spiritual Canticle* (st. 3-7) the experience of oneself, others, and the whole creation slowly roughs in and sketches color and depth into one's developing, inner image of Jesus-Sophia.

A principle fundamental to John's wisdom Christology is operative here: love will never reach the fullness of its possibilities, human desire will never stop yearning and aching, until the lovers are so alike that one is transfigured in the love and goodness of the other.

This means an imprint of Jesus-Sophia transformative of the human person is, in a mysterious way, totally harmonious with human development, gradually etched within the human personality. As I know Jesus-Sophia, this knowledge subverts my life, shows me to myself as in a mirror, and redirects and purifies my desire.

If I look long enough at one who truly loves me, I become what I see in the other's eyes. I am transfigured. The image of the loved one, the eyes of the beloved are burnt into my heart and seen with my inner eye. This image is not impersonal! Rather, it is relational. We see this with remarkable clarity in "The Spiritual Canticle" poem:

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*.

O spring like crystal!
If only, on your silvered-over faces,
you would suddenly form
the eyes I have desired,
which I bear sketched deep within my heart. (CB.11-12)

This is not difficult to understand when we reflect on how, when we love someone very much, we carry the image of that loved one within, where he/she is always present with us influencing motivation. John explains:

The soul experiences within herself a certain sketch of love . . . and she desires the completion of the sketch of this image, the image of her Bridegroom, the Word, the Son of God, who, as St. Paul says, *is the splendor of [God's] glory and the image of [God's] substance*, [Heb. 1:3]; for this is the image . . . into which the soul desires to be transformed through love. (C.11.12)⁵¹

In wonderfully graphic imagery along the same line of wisdom symbolism, the commentary continues:

[The person] feels that she is like wax in which an impression, though being made, is not yet complete. She knows, too, that she is like a sketch or the first draft of a drawing and calls out to the one who did this sketch to finish the painting and image. (C.12.1)

Because this is a fundamental experience, and not just a concept, it is important to understand the educative and transformative function of this wisdom image and its affective power over desire. Through this image the whole creative aspect of Old Testament Sophia is brought to human transformation. If it is not valued relative to spiritual growth, the tender, careful, nurturing creativity of Sophia will be thwarted and we will "damage or lose the sublime image that God [is] painting within [us]." ⁵²

At first, the developing image of Jesus-Sophia is a strength and consolation motivating one toward a generous, self-giving life influenced by the Jesus of the Gospels and sensitizing one to this Sophia presence in the world energizing and connecting all of reality—the likeness within recognizing and catching the reflection of the outer likeness. ⁵³ In fact, the presence of this tracing in human relationships, throughout the beauty and wonder of the created universe, in human culture and in all that human creativity is able to achieve, causes desire for God to grow by leaps and bounds.

Dark Night and the Continuing Role of Secret Sophia

As the intimacy with Christ matures, however, this presence, within and without, begins to make deeper claims and there is a shift in the way Sophia operates within the depths of human personality. ⁵⁴ Romance departs, and I see myself, my relationships, my community, and my world clearly in the mirror of loving Sophia. ⁵⁵ This is almost

more than one can endure. Now we experience Sophia as a teacher, that is, one who is always on the side of continual learning, even though everything we learn from Sophia is not comforting.⁵⁶

In time, the presence of Sophia becomes afflictive. The image becomes too threatening. Jesus-Sophia subverts my own self-image, and this marks the first level of subversion. I cannot accept the claims of Sophia upon me nor can I accept Wisdom as a life vision in an unconditional commitment; this vision is too revolutionary and seditious. Sophia turns life upside-down, challenges my most deeply held beliefs and values, undermines what I have learned, claims whom and what I possess, and highlights the limitations and oppressive character of what I depend on most for satisfaction and assurance.

This brings us to the relationship between the presence of loving Wisdom and the dark night.⁵⁷ John says explicitly that dark night, infused contemplation, *is* the loving Wisdom of God.⁵⁸ *Dark Night* = *inflow of God* = *infused contemplation* = *loving Wisdom*:

This dark night is an inflow of God into the soul, which purges it of its habitual ignorances and imperfections, natural and spiritual, and which contemplatives call infused contemplation or mystical theology. Through this contemplation, God teaches the soul secretly and instructs it in the perfection of love without its doing anything nor understanding how this happens.

Insofar as infused contemplation is loving Wisdom of God, it produces two principal effects in the soul: it prepares the soul for union with God through love by purging and illumining it. Hence the same loving Wisdom that purges and illumines the blessed spirits, purges and illumines the souls here on earth. (N.2.5.1)

Why, if it is a divine light. . . does the soul call it a dark night? In answer to this, there are two reasons why this Divine Wisdom is not only night and darkness for the soul but also affliction and torment. First, because of the height of the Divine

Wisdom that exceeds the abilities of the soul; and on this account the Wisdom is dark for the soul. Second, because of the soul's baseness and impurity; and on this account it is painful, afflictive, and also dark for the soul. (N.2.5.2)⁵⁹

Contemplation = mystical theology = secret Wisdom = ray of darkness:

Contemplation, consequently, by which the intellect has a higher knowledge of God, is called mystical theology, meaning the secret Wisdom of God. For this Wisdom is secret to the very intellect that receives it. St. Dionysius on this account refers to contemplation as a ray of darkness. The prophet Baruch declares of this wisdom: "There is no one who knows its way or can think of its paths" [Bar. 3:23]. To reach union with God the soul must obviously blind itself to all the paths along which it can travel. (A.2.8.6)⁶⁰

It follows that if Jesus Christ is Divine Wisdom (Sophia), then *dark contemplation is the presence of Jesus Christ as Wisdom* and dark night is the time when the image of Jesus-Sophia takes on all the marks of crucifixion: violence, suffering, isolation, failure, marginality, rejection, abandonment, hopelessness, meaninglessness, death. The image of the Crucified One,⁶¹ reflective of a seemingly silent, incomprehensible God, functions in the dark night as *incomprehensible, secret, hidden*, and yet *loving* Sophia. And this is the second level of subversion: not only has my self-image been subverted, but now too the image of Christ and of God. Therefore, when John says that the dark night is an inflow of God, *this inflow of God is very precisely in terms of secret Wisdom who is Jesus Crucified*, a secret, unitive, loving knowledge indicative of more intimate relationship (N.1.10.6; N.2.5.1-2; N.2.17). Dark night is not primarily *some thing*, an impersonal darkness like a difficult situation or distressful psychological condition, but *someone*, a presence leaving an indelible imprint on the human spirit and consequently on one's entire life.

This imprint is the touch of the hand of God marking, wounding, challenging, shaping, purifying, and transforming human personality.

You have wounded me in order to cure me, O divine Hand, and you have put to death in me what made me lifeless, deprived me of God's life in which I now see myself live. You granted me this with the liberality of your generous grace, which you used in contacting me with the touch of the splendor of your glory and the figure of your substance, which is your only begotten Son, through whom, being your substance [Heb. 1:3], you touch mightily from one end to the other [Wis. 8:1]. And your only begotten Son, O merciful hand of the Father, is the delicate touch by which you touched me with the force of your cautery and wounded me. (F.2.16)⁶²

In the mirror of *this* broken, ambiguous image of suffering Wisdom, we see the miseries and hypocrisies of our lives.⁶³ This Crucified image is living knowledge of human darkness, violence, limitation, oppression, and sinfulness that overpowers our shallow self-confidence and sense of direction, questions what we think we know about God, raises doubts about what we have accomplished, and undercuts our entire affective life.⁶⁴

In fact, this Crucified presence subverts and contradicts our whole individualistic perception of reality, that is, the way we experience not only other people, not only the loved one and loved community, but also the victims and scapegoats of our society, and even other species, the earth itself, and the cosmos (N.2.8.4). This image of crucifixion is the language of God (Word) opening and teaching the human mind and heart, calling us in our confusion and emptiness to pass over into the perspective of loving Sophia by an identification or profound unitive relationship with Jesus Crucified.

At this point in life and prayer development, the images of the poor, the victimized, the oppressed, the exploited, and the suffering take on a clarity and significance that is overpowering. They are clearly a suffering extension of the inner imprinting of Jesus-Sophia, and they

make a claim. They are the darkness of humanity; they are *our* darkness. In the image of Crucified Sophia, our violence is unveiled.⁶⁵ Just as personal darkness is exposed in the mirror of suffering Sophia, so is the collective darkness and violence of humanity. The "poor" are recognized and embraced to the degree that this identification with suffering Sophia has taken place in the inner darkness. This is a major internal connection Sophia effects with "the world." Having subverted our images of ourselves and of God, Sophia now subverts our relationship to the world and this is the third level of subversion. Here, *now*, in the dark night, the Crucifixion is recognized finally for what it is: the total, irrevocable unveiling of our cultural violence. Consciousness is the issue, but a love-consciousness born when this unitive relationship with Crucified Sophia takes hold in darkness and in deprivation of one's deepest affective resources, thereby redeeming or redirecting affectivity and transforming human desire. For so long, year after year, in meditation, in theological reflection, in liturgy, in suffering, during the dramatic liturgy of Good Friday, we have looked at the Crucified One, but only now do we realize *that Christ is looking back* with all the pain of the world in his eyes.

In other words, in the secret, painful, unitive relationship with dark Sophia, a new kind of *participatory love-knowledge* begins to take over human desire and consciousness and to express itself, not only in the gradual repudiation of all kinds of personal and sociocultural violence and oppression, but also in an entry, *albeit still dark and unfinished*, into the experience of mutuality, communion, connectedness, and kinship with the earth that marks transformed or mystical consciousness.⁶⁶ Richard Tarnas suggests that a "subtler understanding of human knowledge," a participatory way of knowing that moves beyond the hierarchical dualism⁶⁷ characteristic of the Cartesian-Kantian paradigm, has been emerging in philosophy for over a century. Common to all its thinkers—Goethe, Schiller, Schelling, Coleridge, Hegel, and

Rudolf Steiner—is an essential conviction that the relation of the human mind to the universe is ultimately not dualistic but *participatory*.⁶⁸

In its own depths the imagination directly contacts the creative process of nature, realizes the process within itself, and brings nature's reality to conscious expression.

Then the world speaks its meaning through human consciousness. Then human language itself can be recognized as rooted in a deeper reality, as reflecting the universe's unfolding meaning. Through the human intellect, in all its personal individuality, contingency and struggle, the world's evolving thought-content achieves conscious articulation, . . . the world's truth achieves its existence when it comes to birth in the human mind. As the plant at a certain stage brings forth its blossom, so does the universe bring forth new stages of human knowledge. And as Hegel emphasized, the evolution of human knowledge is the evolution of the world's self-revelation.⁶⁹

I quote at length because this view of an emerging, different epistemological perspective, a "participatory epistemology," to which I will return later in dealing with transformation or the awakening of God, is strikingly similar, not only to the experience of contemplative consciousness in John of the Cross and other mystics, but also to the new paradigm of connectedness and communion emerging in various other disciplines and numerous other writers. Without necessarily realizing the relationship to contemplative consciousness and transformation in *Suffering Wisdom*, some of these trailblazers in religious thinking challenge humanity to accept the limitation and death (dark night) that will usher in the next great epoch or evolutionary era when the long-alienated modern mind will break through to discover its intimate relationship with nature and the larger cosmos. Then the universe will be experienced, as Thomas Berry suggests, as an intimate, interconnected, and diverse communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects or victims existing only for human use or domination.⁷⁰

Integral to and one with this rising participatory way of knowing and understanding life on earth is the tremendous emergence of the feminine in our culture rising out of the unitive energies at work in the universe and heralding the end of the fundamentally masculine dominance of the Western mind. It appears that we are truly at a highly critical stage of purification, closely associated with the emerging numinosity of Sophia, in which the masculine (in all of us) must voluntarily transcend itself in its own dark night of death, which will fit it to enter into a fundamentally new and reconciling relationship of mutuality with the feminine in all its forms.⁷¹

As we observe the twentieth-century's massive deterioration of so many structures, suggesting the necessary deconstruction or death prior to new birth, we see this participatory vision struggling to break through on so many levels and in so many disciplines. Experienced, first, in the bald exposure of so much violence and evil in our time and, second, in an increasing oneness with the suffering, this vision appears to be reflective of a deep and powerful process impelled by forces beyond the merely human. This is where the personal experience of dark Crucified Sophia intersects and resonates with the current state of the collective "soul" because the human spirit in the dark night does follow a numinous paradigmatic path unfolding from within on a trajectory that leads to transformation. This means the unitive relationship with Suffering Sophia can be so deep and, consequently, the solidarity with "the other" so profound that not only does the contemplative person in this dark night carry and bring to consciousness the collective longings and pain of humanity and the energies of the cosmos, but also brings *to them*, in her very being and desire, this participatory love-knowledge, which Jesus-Sophia gives and is.

This contribution of Sophia mysticism to a broader transformation must not be overlooked by those in other disciplines: namely, feminists, ecologists, creationists, geologists, scientists, philosophers, or theologians. Above all, it must not be overlooked by educators. Those

who teach the next generation need to understand and believe in the transformative character of the contemplative process inasmuch as this process is integral not only to fully developed humanity, but also to the new form of human existence struggling to be born, therefore, to the continued evolutionary thrust of the earth and the universe. Teachers need to know how to educate for contemplation and transformation if the earth is to be nurtured, if the people are to be delivered from the scapegoating oppression of all kinds of violence, and if humanity is to fill its role in ushering in the next era of life on earth. This may be the *most* basic challenge of religion today: not sexual mores nor bioethics, nor commitment to justice, not dogmatic orthodoxy, not even option for the poor and oppressed nor solidarity with women, but education for a transformative contemplation, which would radically affect human motivation, consciousness, desire, and, ultimately, every other area of human life and endeavor. As if to verify this at the end of his extremely significant book, *Violence Unveiled*, Gil Bailie moves from contemporary versions of crucifixion, wrenching accounts of the Buchenwald death camp, and the rape and murder of a young girl on La Cruz during the massacre at El Mozote, El Salvador, to the Gospel (Mt 22:37-9):

The Jesus of Matthew's Gospel did not say the greatest commandment was to *believe* in God and love humanity. He did not say that we should be nice to one another because that's the way God would like us to behave. He said the first and most essential thing is to *love God* with a paramount love. It is the most hackneyed notion in the world, but once or twice in a lifetime its dulling familiarity vanishes, and one feels for a moment the unfathomable significance and centrality of Jesus' suggestion for breaking the grip of sin and death: *to love God*. Partly due to humanists' romantic idea of basic benevolence and partly to the rationalistic "where-there's-a-will-there's-a-way" spirit of the Enlightenment, the modern world came to believe it could fulfill the requirements of the second commandment without having to bother with the first. We moderns came to believe

that, in effect, that, by itself, the second commandment was a civilizing force sufficient to the task at hand. The creaking and groaning, indeed, the shouting and shooting, that we now hear all around us is coming from the collapse of that assumption.⁷²

This makes it critical to realize that the dark night is the time in contemplative prayer development to seek, not the consolation and escape of other images, experiences, practices, relationships, or spiritual experiences, but "the living image of Christ Crucified within" (A.3.35.5) and stand open to this purifying, transforming image of suffering Sophia, *which is actually experienced as "no image" or "nothing"* but which nonetheless acknowledges, reflects, and even accepts our personal and societal darkness, violence, disgrace, failure, injustice, and selfishness. This soul experience is not easy to grasp because to all appearances Christ recedes from consciousness and loses significance, God is beyond reach, belief is threatened, and atheism is logical. This experience has nothing to do with imagining or "seeing" the Crucified Christ (A.2.12.3-6), but with staying in the hidden, dark mystery of Suffering Sophia with an incredibly simple faith-attentiveness that does not even perceive or feel the participatory love-knowledge secret Sophia-Jesus is (A.2.14.8).⁷³

It is only in the context of this dark experience that we are able to make any sense out of the difficult and complex directives, found in the second and third books of *The Ascent*, to cease clinging to images and to reject visions and revelations:

When individuals have finished purifying and voiding themselves of all forms and apprehensible images, they will abide in this pure and simple light, and be perfectly transformed into it. . . . If individuals would eliminate these impediments and veils and live in pure nakedness and poverty of spirit, . . . their *soul in its simplicity and purity would then be immediately transformed into simple and pure Sophia, the Son of God.* (A.2.15.4)

Since these imaginative apprehensions, visions, and other forms and species are presented through some image or particular idea, individuals should neither feed upon nor encumber themselves with them. . . . The reason is that in being apprehended these forms are always represented, as we said, in some limited mode or manner. But God's Wisdom, to which the intellect must be united, has neither mode nor manner, neither does it have limits nor does it pertain to distinct and particular knowledge, because it is totally pure and simple. That the two extremes, *the soul and the Divine Wisdom*, may be united, they will have to come to accord *by means of a certain likeness*. As a result the soul must also be pure and simple, unlimited and unattached to any particular knowledge, and unmodified by the boundaries of form, species, and image. *Since God cannot be encompassed by any image, form or particular knowledge*, in order to be united with [God] the soul should not be limited by any particular form or knowledge. (A.2.16.6-7)⁷⁴

By and large, most of us are ill-equipped to understand the contemplative process of identification with the Crucified Sophia whereby our desire and consciousness are being transformed. The image of secret Sophia teaching, nurturing, and purifying, unlike clearly defined images of the past, blocks out or makes ineffective other images life-giving until now. When, therefore, in book 2 of *The Dark Night* we read that a person is no longer able to pray or communicate as before, that, in fact, one feels abandoned and rejected, we learn that *in experience* darkness eclipses other images in one's life as sources of satisfaction and ultimate assurance: the loved one, the beloved community, images of oneself as successful and loved, but above all, lifelong images of God and Christ.

This teaching is important today for two very different reasons. First, we must not decide to do away with human images by sheer will power, most of all the image of Jesus Christ, until contemplative development undermines them. Second, lacking the tools of contemplative interpretation and hindered by the marginalization of Divine Sophia and ignorance of how her secret touch marks one's life,

contemplatives at this stage, instead of understanding this positive unveiling of darkness, begin to feel alienated from Jesus Christ.⁷⁵ In an effort to understand their experience and rescue their God from oblivion, it is not uncommon for them to speak of their God experience in terms of God present in others or of a kind of "cosmic" power or presence. This "vague presence" is actually understandable when one considers the secret Mystery that Crucified Sophia really is in the dark night. Not only the awareness of our own darkness and deficiency, therefore, but the dark beginning of a whole new consciousness of God without the clearly defined parameters of the past characterizes "the union of love" that is being activated. This is the blackest time of night when the last delicate shading of the image of Christ, crucified and abandoned, is being sketched within the human heart and flesh in total darkness and silence. As *The Spiritual Cantic* expresses it:

The soul cannot see herself in the beauty of God unless she is transformed into the Sophia of God . . . [and made to resemble the one who is the Word, the Son of God]. . . . [But] the gate entering into these riches of Sophia is the cross. (C.36.7-8 & 13)

Deeper Level of Night

When the invisible, silent God of an abandoned Jesus seems to draw us into lonely introspection where prayer and relationships as we have known them are painful or gone; when loss, failure, and hopelessness loom large; when all supports drop from one's consciousness and life's deepest meanings and symbol systems are empty and stale; when our inherited language and images no longer reveal the divine, then a dark Wisdom is operative, nurturing the human person with love and confirming values little prized in our society.⁷⁶

Book 2 of *The Dark Night* throws a stark light on the experience by showing *the whole person* deprived totally in her or his imaginative

powers, intellectual intuitions, and human sensibilities, that is, in all one's human powers:

God divests the faculties, affections, and senses, both spiritual and sensory, interior and exterior. God leaves the intellect in darkness, the will in aridity, the memory in emptiness, and the affections in supreme affliction, bitterness, and anguish by depriving the soul of the feeling and satisfaction it previously enjoyed from spiritual blessings. For this privation is one of the conditions required that *the spiritual form, [the image] which is the union of love*, may be introduced into the spirit and united with it. The Lord works all this in the soul by means of a pure and dark contemplation. (N.2.3.3)

As long as one cannot receive and hold the imprinting of the image, or "spiritual form," there is suffering. If one keeps a death grip on one's affective life and fulfillment as it has been experienced in the past and clings tenaciously to one's previous experience of life and perception of Christ/God, one is unable to *completely* "hold" the contradictory presence of Crucified Sophia (N.2.8.2 & 9.1). One's habitual way of understanding, long in use and characteristic of conventional wisdom,⁷⁷ has to go, wrenched from us either by the circumstances of life or finally in death. Likewise, one's habitual way of feeling and experiencing love has to go so that one can *experience the transforming touches* of divine love (N.2.9.3-4). Finally, one's habitual way of harboring memories has to be refined with the effect that the memory will feel alien to all familiar things, a stranger to one's own life, as it were (N.2.9.5-6).

Such a drastic subversion of the human powers can only be understood when we remember what was said earlier in the context of John's anthropology. As long as the great "caverns" of the mind, heart, will, memory, and imagination are filled with human knowledge, loves, dreams, and memories that seem to

satisfy completely, the person will never realize the depths of the capacity that is there. It is only when we actually *feel* their emptiness and darkness, that we thirst and hunger and yearn for these caverns to be filled with God.

When these caverns of the faculties are not emptied, purged, and cleansed of every affection for creatures, they do not feel the vast emptiness of their deep [infinite] capacity. (F.3.18)

The powers of the human person—John calls them intellect, memory, and will—are central to his anthropology. The purification process is centered on them in the darker experiences of night with an almost frightening specificity about this experience of the self.

But what, precisely, can it mean to say *the intellect* is emptied and left in darkness? Perhaps we are warned that the time does come when our philosophy of life, our theology, our carefully constructed meanings fall apart before our eyes. All we have accumulated intellectually that has given us "God," "faith," and security loses its significance. Nothing makes any sense. The mind, while *full* on one level of a lifetime of knowledge, is in total darkness on another, the level of meaning. We feel as if we have been duped and succumb to silence, afraid to shock others by the depth of our cynicism and unbelief (N.2.9.3; 5.3–5; A.2.4 & 8).

To understand this symbolic, intuitive language of dark contemplation is very difficult (N.2.17). Suffering Sophia, called by John "living knowledge," is so potent, so contradictory, so immanent and yet so transcendent that this presence really obscures what has been learned in life and consequently darkens and confuses our understanding.

When this divine light of contemplation strikes a soul not yet entirely illumined, it causes spiritual darkness, for it not only surpasses the act of natural understanding but it also deprives the soul of this act and darkens it. (N.2.5.3)

A dark Wisdom is operative here, confirming values little prized by the masculine mind of Western society. Divine Sophia defies the supremacy of linear logic and rational analysis; she rejects the pyramid of hierarchical dualism by resisting our dichotomies (e.g., between self and others, matter and spirit, body and soul, passion/desire and reason, feeling and thinking, masculine and feminine, humanity and the earth, success and failure, sacred and profane) and withstanding the compartmentalized, objective mind-set to which we have been educated and out of which much of our society lives and operates. In a word, Wisdom undermines the need to control life (F.3.38–9).

Our minds stumble, also, over the concept of emptiness in *the memory* because we know human memory is *full* of experience. But now the imagination can no longer connect life's memories to create meaning and hope. We can speak of emptiness in the memory, not because one remembers nothing, but because all the memory holds, which once provided motivation and security, which engendered trust and promise for the future, seems now an illusion and a mockery. Memories do not mean what one thought they did. The memory is indeed empty, possessing nothing but the scattered remains of cherished experiences and the crushing remembrance of personal failure and defeat.

Persons feel so unclean and wretched that it seems God is against them and they are against God. . . . [There is a] a deep immersion of the mind in the knowledge and feeling of one's miseries and evils; it brings all these miseries into relief so that the soul sees clearly that of itself it will never possess anything else. . . . The soul at the sight of its miseries feels that it is melting away and being undone by a cruel spiritual death. (N.2.5.5 & 6.1)⁷⁸

Doubts, imaginings, and fears tear the person to pieces and fill one's affections and energies with indescribable anguish and lethargy.

This kind of clarity about one's miseries generates the overwhelming feeling of being rejected and abandoned not only by one's friends but particularly by God. In fact, abandonment and the betrayal of trust are the hallmark of this dark experience. However it happens, what or whom one cherishes most in life is cut off, taken away. The worst thing about this "purification of *the will*" is that the loved one, the very focus of one's love and desire, becomes the cause of one's agony.⁷⁹ There is nothing so destructive of affirmation and worth as the feeling of being rejected by one who has loved you and on whom you have counted with complete assurance (N.2.10.2). It leaves one unable to grasp anything affectively. The seeming destruction of mutuality, with its deep frustration of desire, leaves one without any strength of purpose, bereft of motivation, and prone to bitterness. A transcendence in which one is not at home and against which one rebels is forced upon the person.

Alternative Vision: Faith, Hope, and Love

We face a challenge in this night to throw into gear the kind of radical faith, hope, and love that can endure the death-dealing "touch of God's hand," the imprint which is emptying out our isolated self-sufficiency, on the one hand, and our unfree dependence and fear of transformation and change, on the other. Activated by Sophia's dark presence, the *theological* virtues are our only option, presenting a very uncomfortable alternative vision. Because initially we do not *feel* faith, hope, and love, maintaining this basic *contemplative posture* in our prayer and life is extremely difficult. It must overcome an anger, fear, and rebellion that want to refuse these theological *gifts* rather than be left with "nothing." Yet the only way the deprivation of the dark night will open into a radical change of consciousness and affectivity is by the *acceptance* of this contemplative posture or vision whereby one actually passes over to the love perspective of Divine Wisdom (A.2.6.6; N.2.21.11-12).

This seems so contradictory, however, because *faith* causes darkness in our very power to understand. Now, in this dark period, it is at cross-purposes with our ability to make logical sense out of life, death, or eternity. In fact, as Denys Turner suggests in *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*, we are actually dispossessed intellectually by faith of any power to construct a meaningful world or a meaningful God.⁸⁰ When Jesus Christ recedes from consciousness, it is faith that moves us into the Mystery that is unimaginable, incomprehensible, and uncontrollable. While we do not set out to empty the mind, imagination, or memory, prayer development and life exacts this of us, and then faith becomes an opening into a realm of significance far beyond human understanding.⁸¹

Faith darkens and empties the intellect of all its natural understanding and thereby prepares it for union with Divine Wisdom, [who is the Word, the Son of God]. (N.2.21.11)

The hopelessness and emptiness of the dark night is precisely the condition that makes *hope* in the strictly theological sense possible. Hope comes into play when we are really radically at the end, unable to find any further resources to connect the memories, feelings, images, and experiences of life in a meaningful pattern, an independent identity of one's own, or a promising future. Then hope, transvaluing the past and forfeiting the struggle to press meaning out of loss, becomes a free, trustful commitment to the impossible, which cannot be built out of what one possesses.⁸²

Hope empties and withdraws the memory from all creature possessions, for as St. Paul says, hope is for what is not possessed [Rom. 8:24]. It withdraws the memory from what can be possessed and fixes it on that for which it hopes. Hence, only hope in God prepares the memory perfectly for union with God. (N.2.21.11)

Estrangement and abandonment administer the final test of love. Theological *love* prevents us from forcing the loved one into the constraints of our needs and so takes the beloved as he or she is. In the face of seeming rejection and affective loss, theological love will not in the end surrender to hate or violence nor forfeit belief in one's own worth and lovability. Overcoming the will to die, this love lives honestly with the pain of its own woundedness and longing. It continues to serve others, often with great effectiveness, in spite of intense affective deprivation and loss. This is a profound dispossession of the self, which frees the will from its own *possessive* desire and readies the person for transformation, as John explains:

Charity. . . empties and annihilates the affections and appetites of the will of whatever is not God and centers them on God alone. Thus charity prepares the will and unites it with God through love. (N.2.21.11)

The contemplative posture of faith, hope, and love slowly repatterns or transforms desire and consciousness and prepares the human person for the participatory love-knowledge Divine Wisdom is and gives (N.2.21.12). However, even though secret Wisdom is the beginning of a new, more symbolic and integrated way of knowing and valuing, a deeper mutuality and connectedness that subverts our usual understanding of life and reality and expected experiences of satisfaction, nevertheless, Sophia is imperceptible, hidden from our view as a focus of meaning and motivation. She functions, on the one hand, when the image of Christ who has accompanied us thus far recedes from consciousness and cannot be recaptured for motivation and meaning. On the other hand, the subversive dynamic of beloved Sophia is set in motion when human suffering, loss, and emptiness have reached such a pitch of consciousness, are such a reflection of Jesus silenced, rejected, abused, dismissed, and abandoned, that the capacity of the human person is hollowed out for deeper knowing, deeper mutuality, a Wisdom presence and vision in the world (N.2.17).

Then the image of Jesus-Sophia dying, the image of all that is dying within and without, reaches completion.

[This is] the real imitation [imprinting] of the perfect life of the Son of God . . . [through which God] will bring her to the high perfection of union with the Son of God, her spouse, and transformation in him through love. (C.1.10)⁸³

Ever so slowly, Divine Sophia actually shows herself in the soul and in the world transforming and completing human knowing and loving, fulfilling human desire.

When this . . . night (God's communication to the spirit, which usually occurs in extreme darkness of soul) has passed, a union with the bride, *who is the Sophia of God*, then follows and love is . . . perfect when the transformation of the soul in God is achieved. (A.1.2.4)

Loving knowledge [Divine Wisdom] is given in the beginning through interior purgation and suffering, after in the delight of love. (F.3.34)

First, we can understand that *the very loving light and Sophia into which the soul will be transformed* is that which in the beginning purges and prepares it, just as the fire which transforms the wood by incorporating it into itself is that which was first preparing it for this transformation. (N.2.10.3)

Transformation and Images of Fruition

What does it mean to be united with and transformed in Sophia? What does the person see and know as a result? And how will a person who becomes such a friend and companion, the Beloved of Sophia, live and function in the world? While the text does not speak specifically of the image of the risen Jesus to indicate the completion of the image of Christ, the symbols of fruition it uses to describe

the experience of transformation do indicate the reality of passing from death to life, from old to new, from present to future. Two of these, *the touch of God* and *the awakening of God*, help us to probe these questions about transformation in wisdom.

The Touch of Sophia-God

First of all, in an experience of loving communion and total mutuality,⁸⁴ the person is touched and marked with an "image of fruition" that now heals and affirms rather than wounds and oppresses (F.3.81). With this symbol of the touch of God, a distinctly wisdom image found in *The Living Flame*,⁸⁵ we see the mysterious evolution from the imprinting of dying Crucified Sophia to the image or all-pervading presence of a Sophia-God who gently touches the totality of a person's life with acceptance and gathers up the scattered fragments of alienation, loneliness, longing, loss, and failure into a meaningful whole. Life is no longer seen in painful, confusing, segmented parts.

You have wounded me [with your touch] in order to cure me, O divine Hand, and you have put to death in me what made me lifeless, deprived me of God's life in which I now see myself live. . . . [You] touch [with] the splendor of your glory and the figure of your substance [Heb. 1:3], which is your only begotten Son, through whom, being your substance, you touch mightily from one end to the other [Wis. 8:1]. And your only begotten Son, O merciful hand of the Father, is the delicate touch by which you touched me with the force of your cautery and wounded me. . . . [Now] then, [through] the delicate touch, the Word, the Son of God, . . . you subtly penetrate the substance of my soul and, lightly touching it all, absorb it entirely in yourself in divine ways of delights and sweetnesss. (F.2.16-17)⁸⁶

O sweet cautery,
O delightful wound!

O gentle hand! O delicate touch
 that tastes of eternal life
 and pays every debt!
 In killing you changed death to life. (F.2)

John indicates that now the *glorious* image of Sophia-Jesus has been sketched within: a touch of affirmation, a seal of divinity on a person's life and being (F.2.8). This touch is gentle, adjusting to human readiness, for although Wisdom reaches from one end of the universe to the other, pervading everything, she shows herself in order to exalt and affirm those she loves (Wis 8:1) and this is a continuing and deepening subversion of the self-image, this time on the side of exaltation. Ultimately, Sophia-Beloved is the presence of a God who not only delights to be with us but whose only desire is to exalt us, delight us, affirm us, and make us an equal.

Since God's purpose in granting these communications is *to exalt the soul*, God does not weary and restrict it, but enlarges and delights it; God does not blacken and convert it to ashes, . . . but brightens and enriches it. (F.2.3)

If anything pleases [God], it is the exaltation of the soul. Since there is no way by which [God] can exalt her more than by making her equal to [the Divine], God is pleased only with her love. . . . Since the soul in this state possesses perfect love, she is called the bride of the Son of God, which signifies equality with him. In this equality of friendship the possessions of both are held in common. (C.28.1)⁸⁷

While there is a time to see our miseries and hypocrisies in the mirror of secret, suffering Wisdom and to recognize our suffering lives as a reflection of Jesus rejected, abused, and dismissed, the time does come to see one's own beauty in the mirror of the glorified Jesus-Sophia and to experience oneself so loved, so cherished, so affirmed—"a union of love"—that one realizes God deals with one

now as with "a Queen," that is, an equal.⁸⁸ Over and over again, John accents the exaltation, affirmation, delight, sweetness, and equality of love:

Let us rejoice, Beloved,
and let us go forth to behold
ourselves in your beauty,
to the mountain and to the hill,
to where the pure water flows,
and further, deep into the thicket. (C.36)⁸⁹

The person is only able to see herself in the mirror of God's beauty because she has been transformed in Divine Sophia, has received the imprint of the *total* life of Jesus Christ in whom she experiences herself in possession of everything worthwhile on earth and in heaven (C.36.8). As in the dark night, Sophia is full of subversive, creative power, the source of newness and radical self-valuation.⁹⁰

When you looked at me
your eyes imprinted your grace in me;
for this you loved me ardently;
and thus my eyes deserved
to adore what they beheld in you.

Do not despise me;
for if, before, you found me dark,
now truly you can look at me
since you have looked
and left in me grace and beauty. (C.32-3)

By this look of love God made her gracious and pleasing to himself.
And . . . from this grace and value she received from him, she
merited his love and a *value within herself*. (C.32.2)

A value, an appreciation, within herself! If anything marks transformation in Sophia, it is self-acceptance and self-appreciation. In the

latter part of both *The Spiritual Canticle* and *The Living Flame of Love*, one can trace a thrilling affirmation of the gifts of the person that undercuts any temptation to false humility.⁹¹ When a person is transformed in Divine Sophia, therefore, her view of herself is radically altered. She moves from self-doubt, loneliness, powerlessness, inferiority, and subordination to see the completed inner image and to claim her own inner truth, her own inner voice, that is, to claim Wisdom: the creative power to bring into being new ways of thinking, new ideas and priorities, new visions, new ways of living and being together with others on the earth in cooperation and mutuality.⁹² In other words,

the experience is not only within her but overflows and becomes manifest outside of her, and those capable of recognizing it are aware of her experience. . . . This causes awe and respect in others. (C.17.7)

She moves, as well, from domination, control, anxiety, competition, and exploitation to receive Wisdom in mindless, playful joy, and delight. For the transformed person there is, therefore, not only validation of the inmost self but a fundamental revision of previously held beliefs and a radical questioning of deeply entrenched societal systems.

But the glorious presence or imprinting of Divine Sophia effects even more. When Sophia-Beloved transforms and exalts a person, every wound of the past, every hurt and bitterness, becomes a wound of love. In fact, the person becomes "completely healthy in love" (F.2.7).⁹³ Can we even imagine all our wounds, sufferings, obsessions, and sins being energized for love, becoming a power for love? The force and weight of our mistakes and failures flipped over to reveal sheer love? Can we imagine feeling a love commensurate with all our life sufferings and losses? The healing promised here is indescribable, and it is theological in character rather than simply psychological. This is the

other side of the dark night revealing the Resurrected One whose wounds shine brightly forever as wounds of love, and this is the image the transformed person bears sketched within. In the mirror of this Sophia-Jesus risen from the dead, every wound is seen to be and therefore given back a wound of love, given back, in fact, as a capacity to see and an empowerment to touch tenderly the mysterious imprinting of divinity present in every person. Furthermore, these wounds of love have been in the making for a very long time. Here the text sings of the person so healed:

The soul feels its ardor strengthen and increase and its love become so refined in this ardor that seemingly there are seas of loving fire within it, reaching to the heights and depths of the earthly and heavenly spheres, imbuing all with love. It seems to it that the entire universe is a sea of love in which it is engulfed, for conscious of the living point or center of love within itself, it is unable to catch sight of the boundaries of this love. . . . For the soul is converted into an immense fire of love which emanates from the enkindled point at the heart of the [human] spirit. (F.2.10-1)

What must be understood here is that the contemplative person "no longer goes about in search of her own gain" or self-fulfillment, nor does she occupy herself with matters foreign to God's concerns since now she has traded her former self-centered manner of dealing with life for a love and service of the Beloved One, which embraces the universe. All the powers of the person move in love (C.28.2-3 & 8).

Now I occupy my soul
and all my energy in his service;
I no longer tend the herd,
nor have I any other work
now that my every act is love. (C.28)

As Teilhard de Chardin has also insisted in *The Divine Milieu*, nothing in the universe is a more powerful energy than love. This is what Sophia-God makes use of to bring creation to completion (C.27.8). These acts of love are so precious that they are more valuable for the world than any acts that could be done without this love (F.1.3). Furthermore, this love overflows of necessity and is therefore effective in the service of the world (C.36.4). And few of us would dispute the need for this kind of effective love as a resource for humanity today.

The Awakening of Sophia-God

We have here such a radical change of desire and consciousness that John, in the final stanza of his last major poem, "The Living Flame of Love," writes about *the awakening of God*, a second image of fruition. It is the symbol of the dark night itself that gives the clue and direction for one of the most dynamic and all-embracing images of the transforming presence of the risen Christ, Divine Sophia. After the silence and suffering of a long dark night, secret Wisdom awakens:

How gently and lovingly
you wake in my heart,
where in secret you dwell alone;
and in your sweet breathing,
filled with good and glory,
how tenderly you swell my heart with love.
(F.4)

The awakening of God in the fourth stanza of *The Living Flame* is one of the most significant wisdom sections in John's writings. It is an ode to the fullness of the presence of Divine Sophia in a life and therefore in the world. It shows how profound was John's conscious dependence on the Book of Wisdom for an understanding

of *who* the glorified Jesus is for us, how progressively subversive Wisdom really is, and who the friend of Wisdom becomes in the world. We read again the description of Sophia influencing John here:

Wisdom is more mobile than any motion; because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things. For she is a breath of the power of God and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty. . . . For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of God's goodness. Although she is but one, she can do all things; and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God and prophets. . . . She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other and orders all things well. (Wis 7:24–8; 8:1; F.4.6)

The awakening of God within the human heart is, obviously, human awakening to what is. However, since such a fundamental transformation of knowledge, such a radical conversion of perspective and desire, such a drastic expansion of imagination are experienced, it is perceived as God's waking up (seeing) and gently breathing love from the very core of a person to every thought, emotion, desire, and action.

For since it is the soul that is renewed and moved by God so that it might [have] supernatural sight, and since that divine life and the being and harmony of every creature in that life, with its movements in God, is revealed to it with such newness, it seems to the soul that it is God who moves. . . . *For Wisdom is more moveable than all moveable things* [Wis. 7:24]. And this is not because she moves but because she is the principle and root of all movement. *Remaining in herself the same . . . she renews all things* [Wis. 7:27]. Thus . . . Wisdom is more active than all active things. We then ought to say that in this movement it is the soul that is moved and awakened from the sleep of natural vision to supernatural vision [i.e., God's vision]. . . . And [thus] the soul sees what God is in [God's very self] and what God is in . . . creatures in only one view. . . . God effects this awakening and view given to the soul

[by] remov[ing] some of the many veils and curtains hanging in front of it so that it might get a glimmer of [God] as [God] is. And then that countenance of God, full of graces, becomes partially and vaguely discernible, for not all the veils are removed. (F.4.6-7)

The person then "knows" with a deeper kind of participatory love-knowledge, for when Divine Sophia, the Beloved, the Word "awakens" and "moves" in this way, altering permanently and radically one's vision of reality, then absolutely everyone and everything in the universe is experienced as indissolubly and harmoniously interconnected and part of an energizing Mystery that binds everything together. In the lover of Divine Sophia we see a remarkable instance of the earth, the cosmos, becoming truly conscious of itself as it really is, every species connected to every other, seeing itself for the first time, as it were, in the eyes of the person transformed in Sophia. For such a person, the face of the awakening God is filled with the gifts and graces of all creatures, the entire creation. The grace, the beauty, of every form and species of life is seen in the inner mirror of Wisdom and is, therefore, known in a new way and valued for itself in God.

To see a "trace" of God's passing in the beauty of creatures and the wonder of the earth is one way of knowing and experiencing God. We learn to love God through this experience: finding God in all things! To see and possess the beauty of the created universe and everyone and everything in it *in God* is quite another vision.⁹⁴ Some of John's most frequently quoted lines of poetry express this vision:

My Beloved, the mountains,
and lonely wooded valleys,
strange islands,
and resounding rivers,
the whistling of love-stirring breezes,
the tranquil night
at the time of the rising dawn,
silent music,

sounding solitude,
 the supper that refreshes and deepens love.
 (C.14-5)

These mountains—my Beloved is this to me! These valleys—my Beloved is this to me! Strange islands and resounding rivers that drown our dark desires and fill everything with peace—God is this to me! The Beloved becomes everything, and yet everything becomes the “Beloved” one, the Sophia of God, and therefore integrally part of the beloved friend of Wisdom who now experiences herself connected to every other form of life on the earth (C.14/15.4-9; 24.6).⁹⁵ In this unearned, gratuitous awakening of consciousness, the participatory love-driven knowledge initially experienced secretly and painfully in the dark night now explodes into an undeniable, conscious insight and passionate love for “the world.” This identification with the entire cosmic order and the discovery of the earth as a living organism is the mystical basis for an intimate and compassionate human presence to other humans, to the earth, and to all living things.

First of all, then, the capacity for hearing the cry of the poor and suffering of the earth breaks open into a nearly incomprehensible desire to “enter all the afflictions and sorrows of the world” (C.36.11) in order to enter even more deeply into the Divine Wisdom in which all are rooted and connected. Because it brings together delight and suffering, happiness and death, *The Spiritual Canticle* 36.11-3 is a mysterious text, difficult to interpret, showing a distinctly different experience from the identification with “the poor” in *The Dark Night*. Since the experiences described in these texts are never disembodied, no matter how lofty they seem to be, one has to think that the person transformed in Divine Wisdom is to the rational mind a confusing and wonderful paradox, propelled to run with joy into the thicket of the poor and suffering, seeing there *already* the resurrected face of Beloved Sophia.⁹⁶

And, in exchange, it will be a singular comfort and happiness for her to enter all the afflictions and trials of the world, and everything that might be a means to this, however difficult and painful, even the anguish and agony of death, all in order to see herself further within her God. (C.36.11)

Suffering is the means of her penetrating further, deep into the thicket of this delectable Wisdom of God. The purest suffering brings with it the purest and most intimate knowing, and consequently the purest and highest joy, because it is a knowing from further within. (C.36.12)

Oh! If we could but now fully understand how a soul cannot reach the thicket and wisdom of the riches of God, which are of many kinds, without entering the thicket of many kinds of suffering, finding in this her delight and consolation; and how a soul with an authentic desire for *Divine Wisdom* wants suffering first in order to enter this Wisdom by the thicket of the cross. Accordingly, St. Paul admonished the Ephesians not to grow weak in their tribulations and be strong and rooted in charity in order to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and height and depth, and to know also the supereminent charity of the knowledge of Christ, in order to be filled with the fullness of God [Eph. 3:13, 17-19]. *The gate entering into these riches of [God's] Wisdom is the cross*, which is narrow, and few desire to enter by it, but many desire the delights obtained from entering there. (C.36.13)

One suspects the beloved of Sophia has a whole new slant on suffering and identification with the poor and marginalized. Sophia is so related to the world, to the people, that the friend of Sophia will experience herself immersed in and connected to the suffering with the compassion of Sophia. She will value life and health everywhere; value food for bodies as well as education and love for mind and soul; value justice and affirmation and equality. This means that in the transformed person, Sophia's compassionate presence will be productive and deeply subversive.

Second, and related to the first, the capacity for listening to what the earth is telling us opens up. The text speaks, in fact, of an immense, powerful voice that sounds in the soul: the voice of creation in all the magnitude of its struggles and wonders.

What a person knows and experiences of God in this awakening is entirely beyond words. Since this awakening is the communication of God's excellence to the substance of the soul, . . . an immense, powerful voice sounds in it, the voice of a multitude of excellences, . . . infinite in number. The soul is established in them . . . [and it sees God whose] countenance [is] filled with the graces of all creatures, awesome in power and glory, and with the voice of a multitude of excellences. (F.4.10-1)⁹⁷

In actuality, compassionate presence and subversive identification with the marginal experienced in the dark night take on broader and even more effective cosmic significance here. In other words, Sophia awakens not only in a person's individual self, not only in one's sisters and brothers, not only in the poor and marginalized, but Spirit-Sophia awakens simultaneously in all of matter to be enjoyed in the immensity of all that is. The person transformed in Sophia experiences the sacred community of the earth, the entire earth with all its energies and diversity and all its species, awakening and coming to life—all a part of each, and all a part of her—each possessing a value and a wisdom of its own, all moving in a wonderful harmony and each giving voice to what Creator-Sophia is in it.

In the nocturnal tranquillity and silence and in that knowledge of the divine light the soul becomes aware of Wisdom's wonderful harmony and sequence in the variety of her creatures and works. Each of them is endowed with a certain likeness of God and in its own way gives voice to what God is in it. So creatures will be for the soul a harmonious symphony of sublime music surpassing all concerts and melodies of the world. (C.14/15.25)

To know oneself, the human, one with the immensity of all that is, is an ecstatic experience in which to rest and rejoice, and even to suffer. Because historically until very recently we have been deprived of the language of contemplation or mysticism in ordinary life and religious education, American spirituality is not at home with words like resting, tasting, ecstasy, being, delight, joy, and Lover/Beloved, nor are Americans, therefore, at home with "the languages of the multitude of beings" inhabiting the earth in such a highly differentiated unity.⁹⁸ Our culture has had far too much to do with achieving mastery over the earth, other earth species and one another, to be mindful that there is a contemplative time for resting and delighting in the exquisite harmony of all that is and for understanding and communicating in the nonhuman languages of mountain, river, tree, wolf, stars. The person transformed in Beloved Sophia hears the new, more symbolic languages needed to enter into the subjective depths of things.

We need this experience, enhancing self-appreciation and yet relativizing self-importance, if we are to move toward an understanding of the connectedness of the cosmos that will save existing life on earth. Divine Sophia, the glorified Christ, shows us the unbreakable connection between creator and creatures, between "heaven" and earth, and between one another, for Sophia pervades, connects, and energizes the entire cosmos. It is not that Sophia-Jesus reconnects us to the earth and to one another. Rather, in the experience of awakening, one *sees and knows* it is a delusion to perceive ourselves as separate from the earth, from one another, and from all other species of life, superior and unaccountable to the earth and to other forms of life. The vision of Divine Sophia enables contemplative people to be keepers of the earth and of beauty because they experience the connectedness of it all in *the Beauty*.

John of the Cross could not have expressed this experience as twentieth-century writers like Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, Elizabeth Johnson, and Sallie McFague do:

Even as a species we are not separate and isolated, but in all our uniqueness . . . "[w]e belong, from the cells of our bodies to the finest creations of our minds, to the intricate, constantly changing cosmos."⁹⁹

Nevertheless, within the framework of a Sophia-God, this sixteenth-century mystic does describe this experience of the reality of the universe in a way we are only beginning to comprehend and express.

This is the third gift the Beloved will bestow on the soul. Since many plants and animals are nurtured in it, the "grove" refers to God, for God nurtures and gives being to all creatures rooted and living in God. Through this gift God shows himself to her and reveals himself as Creator.

By the "living beauty" of this grove, for which she asks the Bridegroom here, she intends to beg for the grace, wisdom, and beauty which every earthly and heavenly creature not only has from God but also manifests in its wise, well-ordered, gracious, and harmonious relationship to other creatures. Thus we find this accord among the lower creatures and among the higher, and we find it as well in the relationship between the higher and lower. The knowledge of this harmony fascinates and delights the soul. (C.39.11)

Implications

The Mystic Vision. In actuality, John had a vision of kinship with the earth whose evolutionary truth and meaning he could not have begun to fathom with his sixteenth-century cosmology and worldview.¹⁰⁰ Yet it welled up from the ageless roots of his being, from the Source of all life, from the Wisdom of the Universe itself and all the collective energies of the cosmos, all the reserves of life in the earth coalesced and reached for consciousness in this sixteenth-century mystic. His wisdom vision was far ahead of his time—in a sense, ahead of himself. Yet he looked over the edges of human consciousness and dwelt there. And his life, dedicated to the companionship of Sophia-Jesus, not only

endured the darkness of a dying time, but actually called forth the *unitive* energies of the cosmos and gave them sanctuary within himself. The universe spoke its meaning in him.¹⁰¹

If indeed matter, alive with energy stretching back through galactic ages to the big bang, does somehow evolve to spirit, as Teilhard de Chardin insisted some years ago and others are suggesting now, if the human spirit is the cosmos come to consciousness, then the mystic transformed in Divine Sophia is the human spirit itself at the fullest consciousness possible to the human species at any one time in history.¹⁰² This means that transformation in Divine Sophia is not something completely new and extraordinary added to the universe from outside by a God distant from the cosmos; rather, this transformation is the most advanced evolutionary possibility and expression, the cutting edge of evolution, the full flowering of the earth and of the cosmic energies within the human. As such, the mystic is a prophecy and a promise. And the wisdom language of the mystic is a code to be broken by us for our time and situation when the survival of life on the earth hangs on humanity's total, unwavering appropriation of a new vision of the cosmos and even a new vision of God.

In John's writings, we gain some idea of the frontiers to which Sophia brings us. Sophia is a key for understanding the place of the mystic at the forefront of the earth's evolutionary process, the cosmos coming to full consciousness. If, as Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme believe, the next stage in the development of the universe will require above everything else the insight of shamanic powers, then Sophia may be the God we need to make us mystics.¹⁰³

The Prophet of Sophia and Contemplative Transformation. Transformation in Loving Sophia actually changes the mind, the imagination, the memory, the heart, the desires, and the will through a painful process of death, thereby advancing human knowing and loving

with a vision of the universe that places Sophia in intimate, dynamic, energizing, life-giving relationship to the whole evolutionary process. Therefore, the mystic's human powers, the "deep caverns of feeling," united with and transfigured in Sophia, take on the Divine Energy at the heart of the universe (C.26.5-9; 28.3-5).

The person no longer knows and understands with the vigor of her own natural light but with the divine light. This is, in effect, the transformation of the mind through a new kind of loving knowledge: Sophia. The memory, too, is changed in this union by an experience of ultimate assurance. Obsession with the past gives way to a new possession and sense of belongingness, and this conversion of memory releases creativity. The human capacity to love is also changed by the experience of God's love, as has been said above. The mystic is transformed by love and therefore loves with the love God has for us. The imprinting ("I live now not I but Christ lives in me") is so complete that the mind is God's mind, the will is God's will, the memory is the eternal memory of God, and its delight and desire are God's delight and desire (F.2.34). The person becomes, therefore, "like the shadow of God" in the world: in other words, the prophet of Sophia (F.3.78).

These are realities almost impossible to comprehend or even believe in with our postmodern consciousness, but what is significant is that for the friend and prophet of Divine Sophia the conventional way of knowing and loving is gone (C.26.13-7). The process of contemplative transformation is, moreover, not only an irreversible maturation but also a very radical reeducation of human desire and consciousness. This is why Sophia-Wisdom is so subversive and, perhaps, why her presence and power have been so confined and muted in the history of Christianity.

Those who have become friends and intimates of Wisdom, the shadow of God in the world, whose consciousness, imaginations, hearts, and desires are radically expanded by the awakening of God,

by the drink of Loving Sophia, truly touch the interiority of everything living and understand the community of which we are all a part. These prophets embody the desire of Sophia-Christ for the world. They threaten the security of our way. They stand, as it were, on the side of the creative Wisdom of God actively calling us to recreation and continual learning, to sensitivity, to beauty and wonder, to responsibility for one another and for the earth, to participative living and teaching, to connectedness and community, to justice in coherence with the harmony and order of everything on earth, over against selfish detachment, isolated individualism, self-concerned competition, domination, and oppression of others.

Participatory Love-Knowledge. It should be clear now why the Wisdom of the mystic can be called a *participatory* way of knowing and loving that moves beyond the paradigm of hierarchichal dualism that has been, in the past, part of the philosophical underpinning for our lives. There is a thrilling intersection between the love-knowledge of the contemplative and the participatory epistemology Richard Tarnas believes has been slowly surfacing in philosophy. The experience of the person transformed in Sophia validates the emerging conviction that the relation of the human mind to the cosmos is ultimately not dualistic but participatory. This throws additional light on Tarnas's previously quoted words:

In its own depths the imagination directly contacts the creative process of nature [the universe], realizes the process within itself, and brings nature's reality [of the cosmos] to conscious expression.

Then the world speaks its meaning through human consciousness. Then human language itself can be recognized as rooted in a deeper reality, as reflecting the universe's unfolding meaning. Through the human intellect, in all its personal individuality, contingency and struggle, the world's evolving thought-content achieves conscious articulation, . . . the world's truth achieves its existence when it

comes to birth in the human mind. As the plant at a certain stage brings forth its blossom, so does the universe bring forth new stages of human knowledge. And as Hegel emphasized, the evolution of human knowledge is the evolution of the world's self-revelation.¹⁰⁴

This understanding is strikingly similar to the new paradigm proposed by Thomas Berry, Danah Zohar (*The Quantum Self*), feminist thinkers, and many others. While we do witness the breakdown of numerous structures—cultural, philosophical, scientific, religious, moral, artistic, social, political, atomic, ecological—we see, also, this new participatory world view breaking through on so many levels.¹⁰⁵

Sophia-God Image. In this worldview presently crying out for paradigmatic significance, Sophia may well be a God image that corresponds and resonates with the current state of the evolving collective psyche of the earth. It seems to me that Sophia is one, clear, significant God gestalt, retrieved from the tradition and emerging out of a long, dark night of broken God symbols.¹⁰⁶ Spiritual directors find that people, both women and men, are actually experiencing Sophia and her emancipatory and transformative potential in their prayer, theologically confusing as this may sometimes seem to them. We may see Jesus more and more taking on the marks of Sophia, and this is probably what will save Jesus for some people. This is where *the tradition of Wisdom* in mysticism, so long muted and marginalized but embodied with such prophetic power in John of the Cross's writings, will reassure us and enable theology to speak anew about Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁷ The mysticism of John of the Cross supports a Sophia-God image, and a Sophia-God image, before everything else, subverts the way we understand God. It has the potential, therefore, to transform not only our consciousness and desire but most of all to change radically our theological discourse.

Feminist Consciousness and New Relationship of Mutuality. Just as there was a correlation in the past between the muting of contemplation,

the suppression of Sophia, the exploitation of the earth, and the marginalization of women, so now is the emergence of feminist consciousness in so many cultures and disciplines directly connected to both the Sophia-God image and the participatory or contemplative way of knowing and understanding human life, as was already indicated in relation to the dark night. The emergence of women's voices and influence is part of an enormous epochal shift taking place in human consciousness and rising out of the unitive energies at work in the universe. As far back as the sixteenth century, a mystic like John, educated by lifelong companionship with Divine Sophia, experienced the movement of this marginalized feminine toward reconciliation and mutuality. Even the major symbolism of his poetry, lover/beloved, is testimony to this experienced mutuality and as such is prophetic for our time, for who is Lover, who beloved, who masculine, who feminine?¹⁰⁸

It is not by accident, therefore, that Sophia-God, bearing the marks of the feminine, comes to the forefront at a time when many believe the dominant and pervasive masculinity of the Western intellectual and spiritual tradition is dying. Actually, the mystical language of John was a promise of this and a validation for us now of its rightness and inevitability.

Feminists have long been conscious of the darkness of this dying time as they have struggled to find meaning in the experience of impasse in their God images, in their churches and theology, in their institutional lives, and in their social and political lives. Richard Tarnas, however, emphasizes that the crisis of modern man [sic] is essentially not a feminine but a masculine crisis whose transforming resolution is actually occurring within the tremendous emergence of the feminine in our culture and in the struggles surrounding it. The dominance of the masculine (in all of us) is not only dying (dark night) but, touched by the increasing numinosity of Holy Sophia, is truly at a highly critical stage of awakening and is slowly entering, as Tarnas writes,

into a fundamentally new relationship of mutuality with the feminine in all its forms. The feminine then becomes not that which must be controlled, denied and exploited, but rather fully acknowledged, respected, and responded to for itself. It is recognized not as the objectified "other," but rather source, goal, and immanent presence.¹⁰⁹

In the concluding paragraphs of *The Passion of the Western Mind*, Tarnas responds to the question often asked: "Is this not just a passing fad, the last gasp of the Enlightenment?" Why have we become so aware of the pervasive masculinity of our culture and spiritual tradition only now when for almost every previous generation it was nearly invisible?

I believe this is occurring now because, as Hegel suggested, a civilization cannot become conscious of itself, cannot recognize its own significance, until it is so mature that it is approaching its own death. Today we are experiencing something that looks very much like the death of modern man. . . . Perhaps, the end of "man" himself is at hand. But man is not a goal. Man is something that must be overcome—and fulfilled in the embrace of the feminine. . . . And their synthesis leads to something beyond itself: It brings an unexpected opening to a larger reality that cannot be grasped before it arrives, because this new reality is itself a creative act.¹¹⁰

Perhaps now, when the dominance and effects of the isolated masculine have become so apparent, and when the feminine is welling up with such powerful energy, Sophia is a God-presence capable of moving with humanity into the next epoch of life on earth. When we have passed through this night, says the mystic, we will be united with and transfigured in Divine Sophia, she who is the Word, the Christ. In this union, the evolutionary imperative of the earth, which is before us now, will come to full consciousness in the human spirit. We need a Sophia-God for this, a God who, while touching and embracing tenderly both man and woman, truly transcends patriarchy and is able,

therefore, to sustain this cultural death and new synthesis and give life and meaning to them.

Conclusion

It is no wonder that now, when the human species' manipulation of the earth and the long oppression and neglect of the feminine truly threaten the survival of life on earth, when we are conscious of so many insoluble problems coming to a head in our age, when so much is breaking apart in violence and hatred, we may finally be ready and open to the experience of Sophia-God, that is, to the mystical experience and to a kind of love-knowledge as yet uncommon in human consciousness today.

At a time when philosophy is shifting radically and theology is searching for a meaningful God, when the age of technology, with all its magnificent achievements, has yet exploited the earth as an object for domination, and when a new participative epistemology is beginning to operate, a mystic like John provides some of the most precious materials for the new conceptual house of faith we are trying to build for ourselves. He "knew" that "all thinking must begin with [belief in that] cosmic genetical relatedness" that the mystic transformed in the mirror of Sophia experiences.¹¹¹

I believe we have held up John of the Cross as if he were the end of the process of transformation. The wisdom of this mystic is more like a beginning in that his insight and experience point toward and even usher in an age yet unborn. He had the magnificent contemplative experience of mutuality and connectedness, of being part of and kin to all creation in Beloved Sophia who secretly deconstructed the pyramid of hierarchical dualism that philosophically supported his life.¹¹² Now, at the end of the twentieth century, there is a significance to his experience that only we can name and understand this way, as his insight, once so prophetic and almost unimaginable, actually takes shape in postmodern consciousness.

Most importantly, this means John's vision is not just a goal to be repeated, but rather one example of lifelong companionship with Sophia. His vision is only one segment of a sequence of irreversible transformations in space and time into which we need to enter on our own, thereby creating another segment, our own piece,¹¹³ in the evolution of cosmic consciousness. We must be ready to surrender to the process of transformation ahead of us; eager, or at least willing, to appropriate the patterns of Beloved Sophia and move with the earth toward greater variety, intensity, and depth of expression and to more intimate bonding with woman, with man, with every species of life that exists.

One thing is certain: in this movement of transformation, the mystical intuition does not allow the suppression of Divine Sophia's personal engagement in the developmental process of the earth. Furthermore, since Spirit-Sophia is the unceasing, dynamic flow of divine power that sustains and pervades and embraces the universe, bringing forth life and energy at every moment, the prophet of Sophia cannot transcend the human nor the cosmos, and contemplation is more starkly necessary than ever before.

We are faced with a question repeatedly raised through the centuries by the contemplative tradition and repeatedly muted, suppressed, or ignored by the churches and society: is it time for a public contemplation, public education for contemplative prayer, that is, the integration into public life and education of a societal understanding of the contemplative process of transformation,¹¹⁴ rather than a contemplative life largely hidden in the cloisters, hermitages, and ashrams of the world, muted by those who fear, however unconsciously, not only Divine Sophia but the evolutionary power of mystical transformation? And what would we have to do to achieve this if we believed it? What would educators in our schools and colleges do? What would business leaders meeting to discuss how to break the cycle of violence and bolster the economic vitality of our cities do? What agenda would

politicians pursue? What would women's groups do? Where would Church leaders put their energies? What would each one of us do if we believed in the enormous power of contemplative transformation, transformation in Beloved Sophia?

Notes

1. For example, Brian Swimme, a mathematical cosmologist, and Thomas Berry, a historian of cultures, suggest that we stand between two great eras: "the Cenozoic era," which began 67 million years ago and is now in its terminal phase due to a distorted aspect of the myth of progress, and "the Ecozoic era," whose central commitment believes "that the universe is a communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects," (*The Universe Story* [San Francisco: Harper, 1992], 241-3). Cultural theorist, René Girard, according to Gil Bailie, writes in terms of "the disintegration of conventional culture, a process that is irreversible and one that constitutes humanity's moment of truth Coming to grips with the depths of the crisis (the greatest anthropological challenge in history precipitating a major epochal shift) is a daunting task, but it is also one that is full of promise, and the price to be paid for shrinking from it is too horrendous to seriously contemplate" (*Violence Unveiled* [New York: Crossroad, 1995], 5,13).

2. Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind* (New York: Harmony Books, 1991), 441. Tarnas sees the masculine dominance as beginning "four millenia ago with the great patriarchal nomadic conquests in Greece and the Levant over ancient matriarchal cultures, and [being] visible in the West's patriarchal religion from Judaism, its rationalist philosophy from Greece, its objectivist science from modern Europe."

3. Swimme and Berry, 255.

4. Ray L. Hart, *Unfinished Man and the Imagination* (New York: Seabury Press, 1968), 26-36.

5. We need to understand the history that makes us the inheritors of a long period of what historian, Joseph Chinnici, calls "muted mysticism." When the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century debates over the role of mystical prayer in the context of the early modern church and state finally culminated in the condemnation of quietism in 1699, the language of mysticism and the whole tradition of contemplative prayer were muffled and privatized. In these debates carried on in Spain, England, France, and Italy, as political and social as they were religious, some questioned the advisability of mystical prayer for the common, unlearned people, particularly women. They feared the influence of interior inspiration on the obedience of the people and the effect of trust in experience and personal discernment on the order of the prevailing system, civil and ecclesiastical. "Feared

by authority in both church and state, confined by 'reason' to the cell of the 'irrational,' and removed from the marketplace by the forces of capitalism, mysticism after 1700 lost its place in the communal consciousness. Now cloistered, contemplative prayer ceased to be available to all, and the highest reaches of holiness eluded the aspirations of the baptized. Now privatized, contemplation lost its connection with political and social change; its practioners became irrelevant. It is this history, also, which we inherit, and the mutation of our true mystical tradition accounts in large measure for the contemporary groping for a stable spiritual center" (Joseph Chinnici, "The Politics of Mysticism: Church, State, and the Carmelite Tradition," delivered during the Bicentennial Symposium of Baltimore Carmel: *Contemplation and American Culture*, Baltimore, 1990).

6. I am conscious of how "the master narratives" of Western culture and theology are, as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza believes, "always implicated in and collude with the production and maintenance of systems of knowledge that either foster exploitation and oppression or contribute to a praxis and vision of liberation." Furthermore, I am specifically aware of how some interpretations of John of the Cross's works have contributed to oppression and isolation, and I have no wish to surrender to what Fiorenza calls "a hermeneutics of indiscriminating acceptance of . . . tradition" in this study (*Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet* [New York: Continuum, 1994], 5, 12). However, I do continue to ask if the tradition of mysticism as we find it in John of the Cross (and other mystics) can function for the liberation and transformation of people?

7. These areas may prove to be important in the emergence in spirituality of a new cosmic experiential gestalt.

8. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 133; and *Jesus: Miriam's Child*, 135-9. In the latter treatment, Schüssler Fiorenza has an interesting development of the gender question. See also Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 87, whose lucid theological writing on Sophia has inspired and influenced my own work with Sophia in John of the Cross. See also Johnson's "Redeeming the Name of Christ," in *Freeing Theology*, ed. Catherine LaCugna (San Francisco: Harper, 1993); and Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Wisdom Biblical Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 133-49, for a treatment of "Lady Wisdom." The endnotes and bibliographies in the works cited above provide evidence of the very extensive research available on Sophia.

9. I have decided, with some hesitation, to use "New Testament" in this essay even though some scholars today propose "Christian Testament" or "Second Testament" as possibilities. Because I realize New Testament is considered by some scholars to be offensive to Jews, I considered this change. However, my concern is that those who read this for spirituality and prayer may be unfamiliar with this discussion.

10. Tarnas, 441–5. When I am using or building on Tarnas's thought, I use his capitalization of "Western."

11. Swimme and Berry, 243.

12. Tarnas, 444.

13. I realize the danger of this language since God is for John of the Cross and for us incomprehensible, beyond all our images and forms. Nevertheless, even the mystics express their ineffable experiences in images and the human person and theology will always symbolize God in some specific anthropomorphic image or images, which in turn affect human self-understanding.

14. Augustine Baker, *Sancta Sophia or Directions for the Prayer of Contemplation* (Doway: John Patte & Thomas Fievet, 1657), introductory letters and preface give some feel for this debate. This volume is in the archives of the Carmelite Monastery, Baltimore.

15. Although I have realized for a long time the relationship between the cloistering of contemplation, the role of women, and the seditious character of contemplative prayer, nevertheless Joseph Chinnici has added new historical dimensions to this understanding.

16. Most references to John of the Cross are inserted in text. Although I have made some changes in the text for inclusivity, most quotations are from Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, trans., *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991). Italics in quotations are mine.

17. For further clarification and development, investigate Johnson, *She Who Is*, 92–3; and James Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 170f. I draw closely on these writings. See Johnson above and "Jesus, the Wisdom of God: A Biblical Basis for Non-Androcentric Christology," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovaniensis* (December 1985): 269–71, and Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child*, 135–6, for a comparison of texts regarding Isis and Sophia.

18. Johnson, *She Who Is*, 87; "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 264.

19. Sandra Schneiders, "Feminist Spirituality," *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 397–9, has a concise, lucid treatment of "The Rediscovery of the Goddess."

20. While I see it as a deficiency in this study, the limits of this essay prevent me from dealing with any adequacy with the presence of Sophia-Wisdom in the development of spirituality from the time of the early Church up to sixteenth-century Spain, but future study in this area is important for a more comprehensive understanding of John's use of Divine Wisdom.

21. I am using Old Testament for the first testament of the Christian Bible, especially since the Book of Wisdom is not part of the *Jewish Scriptures*, the Jewish Bible as it is used today among Jews. For a good explanation, see Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 6. Besides, "Old" need not mean superseded but rather revered, venerable, and valuable.

22. Not only Proverbs, chap. 8 and Wisdom, chaps. 7–9, but also Wisdom 6:13–5; 8:1 & 31; 18:14–5; Baruch 3:23 & 31; Ecclesiasticus 51:25 & 29; Song of Songs; Psalm 76:19–20; Job 37:16; Genesis 1:31 are used by John of the Cross in a wisdom context.

23. There is an notable gender change in this passage in the 1991 translation of *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross* where Kieran Kavanaugh equates *bride* rather than *bridegroom* with Divine Wisdom.

24. See, e.g., *Ascent* 1.7.3–4 in connection with *Ascent* 1.4.8, and 13.3–4.

25. "All creatures of heaven and earth are nothing when compared to God" or "all the being of creatures compared to the infinite being of God is nothing and . . . therefore, anyone attached to creatures is nothing in the sight of God" (A.1.4.3–4). *Ascent* 1.4 is a pivotal chapter on this subject, but *Ascent* 1.6–12 delineates the destructive effects of addictive desire which weaken, weary, torment, blind, and defile.

26. A key text for understanding and interpreting John is indicated here, one to which I will return later: "Have a habitual desire to imitate Christ in all your deeds by bringing your life into conformity with his. You must then study his life in order to know how to imitate him" (A.1.13.3).

27. In other words, the experience of one's self, painful as this can be, is an experience of God or stimulates the desire for God: "The soul has made known the manner of preparing oneself to begin this journey: to pursue delights and satisfactions no longer, and to overcome temptations and difficulties through fortitude. *This is the practice of self-knowledge, the first requirement for advancing to the knowledge of God,*" (C.4.1) that is, the initial step on the path to contemplation. See Karl Rahner, "Experience of Self and Experience of God," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 13 (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 122–32. Rahner's work, here and elsewhere, shows a striking familiarity with John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila. Elizabeth Johnson also deals with the self in relation to Rahner in *She Who Is*, 65–7.

28. See *Ascent* 2.17.1–5 for this important dynamic and its relationship to wisdom. This is a very important text in interpreting John of the Cross because he gives here his epistemology, or the way he understands the whole process of acquiring knowledge.

29. See my earlier work on the Dark Night: Constance FitzGerald, "Impasse and Dark Night," in *Living With Apocalypse*, ed. Tilden Edwards (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 97; and Michael Buckley, "Atheism and Contemplation" in *Theological Studies* 40 (1979): 696, which I cite there.

30. Wisdom 7:13–22.

31. Elizabeth Johnson, *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 10–1, explains "hierarchical dualism" as the dominant form of western rationality, a major taproot connecting the exploitation of the earth and the treatment of women. "This is a pattern of thought and action that (1) divides reality into

two separate spheres, and (2) assigns a higher value to one of them. In terms of the three basic relations that shape an ecological ethic, this results in a view in which humanity is detached from and more important than nature; man is separate from and more valuable than woman; God is disconnected from the world, utterly . . . transcendent over it. . . . Hierarchical dualism delivers a two tiered vision of reality that privileges the elite half of a pair and subordinates the other, which is thought to have no intrinsic value of its own but exists only to be of use to the higher." See pp. 10–22.

32. See *The Spiritual Canticle*, st. 4–6 with the corresponding commentary.

33. The influence of Sophia as she appears in Proverbs 8:22–30 is apparent in this section of *The Spiritual Canticle*: "The Lord begot me. . . . When [God] established the earth I was there." See also Wisdom 7:24–7.

34. For a contemporary treatment of image of God, see Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is*, 69–75.

35. Hebrews 1:2 is significant here: "In this the final age [God] has spoken to us thru [the] Son whom [God] has made heir of all things and thru whom [God] first created the universe."

36. Harvey Egan, *What Are They Saying about Mysticism?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 106.

37. See, e.g., Dunn, 177–209; Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God," 276–89.

38. "Redeeming the Name," 127.

39. To witness a feminist theologian underlining the importance of Jesus for personal spirituality, see Sandra M. Schneiders, "The Resurrection of Jesus and Christian Spirituality," in *Christian Resources of Hope*, ed. Maureen Junker-Kenny (Dublin: Columba Press, 1995), 81–114.

40. In Canticle 37.4 John comments again on this same text.

41. Compare with Wisdom 7:26 and Colossians 2:2–3, & 9; see also *Flame* 3.17.

42. Feminist writers suggest this is not necessarily positive for feminist emancipation. See, for example, Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child*, 131–62.

43. This study limps, as was said before, as long as we do not understand the precise theological trajectory of wisdom Christology to which John was heir.

44. "Jesus, The Wisdom of God," 261.

45. Ibid. See also James Dunn, *Christology*, 164–6 and all that of chaps. 6 and 7 for an excellent treatment that includes the scriptural texts.

46. While an *infinite* human capacity for God can be questioned, John explains in *Flame* 3.22 that "the capacity of these caverns [intellect, memory, will] is deep because the object of this capacity, namely God, is profound and infinite. Thus in a certain fashion their capacity is infinite, their thirst is infinite, their hunger is also deep and infinite, and their languishing and suffering are infinite death."

47. This is a fundamental text regarding affective purification. It interprets all that precedes it in book 1 of *The Ascent*.

48. See *Ascent* 2.22.3. Although in this part of the text Sophia is subsumed in the Word, the Logos, nevertheless by using "the mouth of God" symbolism, an allusion to Sirach 24, it distinctly shows the connection made between the two.

49. See Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child*, 162.

50. In *Canticle* 12, John develops at length this inner image as a faith experience, which has intellectual, volitional, and emotional components. There is a sketch of faith in the mind giving meaning to a person's life (C.12.6), a sketch of love in the will effecting commitment to the beloved, and a sketch of hope in the memory producing trust and a sense of belongingness (C.12.7).

51. There is such an interplay of wisdom symbolism here: crystal, face, sketch, mirror, eyes, seeing, knowing and being known, being carried away by the beauty one beholds, and, therefore, being changed and made beautiful like the beauty one sees.

52. In *Flame* 3.41-5, John castigates those spiritual directors who do not understand the secret, loving wisdom of contemplative prayer, that is, "the sublime anointings and shadings of the Holy Spirit," and therefore damage or destroy by poor direction the image God is painting within the human person. "Who will succeed," he says, "in repairing that delicate painting of the Holy Spirit once it is marred by a coarse hand?" Without an understanding of the essential role of the developing pattern of Jesus-Sophia in a person's spiritual growth, one can "lose the sublime image that God [is] painting within."

53. We can note an intersection here with John M. Staudemaier's interpretation of the dynamic of the Second Week of the Exercises of St. Ignatius, which "inculcates a form of personal intimacy with Jesus that opens out to intimacy with the larger world, an intimacy of affective engagement that leads to action in the world." See "To Fall in Love with the World" in *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* (May 1994): 1-28.

54. This section on the dark night was first published in part in "Ignatian Prayer," *The Way Supplement* 82 (Spring 1995), as "Desolation as Dark Night: The Transformative Influence of Wisdom in John of the Cross," 96-108. I intended the title to have been "The Transformative Influence of Wisdom in the Dark Night" since I do not deal with Ignatian desolation there, and never intended to do so.

55. Teresa of Avila writes about this kind of experience in *The Book of Her Life*. See, e.g., Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, trans. *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1976), chap. 40.10, 280-1.

56. See *Ascent* 2.17 and note 28, to understand John's teaching on knowledge and Sophia's role in this process.

57. When I wrote "Impasse and Dark Night" in *Living with Apocalypse*, later reprinted in *Women's Spirituality*, ed. Joanne Wolski Conn (New York: Paulist

Press, 1984 and 1996), I did not directly address the significance of Jesus-Sophia in the dark night. This Christological way of experiencing the dark night is a necessary complement to the impasse experience, just as the impasse experience I describe is a part of my development here.

58. See *Dark Night* 2.5.1–2; 2.17; *Ascent* 2.8.6 to study in context the equivalencies that John sets up.

59. Another relevant text is *Dark Night* 1.10.6 where infused contemplation is, according to Kieran Kavanaugh, mentioned for the first time and equated with “dark and secret contemplation” and “secret and peaceful and loving inflow of God.” “Such persons should not mind if the operations of their faculties are being lost to them; they should desire rather that this be done quickly so they may be no obstacle to the operation of the infused contemplation God is bestowing, so they may receive it with more peaceful plenitude and make room in the spirit for the enkindling and burning of the love that this dark and secret contemplation bears and communicates to the soul. For contemplation is nothing else than a secret and peaceful and loving inflow of God, which, if not hampered, fires the soul in the spirit of love.”

60. See also *Dark Night* 2.17 for an extensive and very beautiful treatment of secret mystical Wisdom and dark contemplation.

61. In *Ascent* 2.7.8–9, we note how Christ Crucified is seen as the pattern or mirror of the dark night. The whole context of this chapter is important because it shows Jesus dying as the unitive image.

62. See also *Flame* 2.17 and *Wisdom* 7:24 and 8.

63. *Dark Night* 2.5.5: “This divine and dark light causes deep immersion of the mind in the knowledge and feeling of one’s own miseries and evils; it brings all these miseries into relief so that the soul sees clearly that of itself it will never possess anything else.”

64. This is what I have called the purification of desire in “Impasse and Dark Night.” This purification takes place in one’s life situation and therefore is mediated through one’s central human relationships and life project.

65. This is the powerful title of Gil Bailie’s groundbreaking work mentioned at the beginning of this study.

66. As I have suggested in “Impasse and Dark Night,” 97, “transfiguration does not happen at the end of the road; it is in the making now. If we could see the underside of this death, we would realize it is already resurrection.” Furthermore, as Sandra Schneiders suggests in “Feminist Spirituality,” 400: For feminist spirituality groping to claim and understand Sophia, the personal is always political; personal transformation is the only possible basis for societal transformation. In this context, it is important to note that the presence of loving Wisdom in John of the Cross is not an esoteric, condescending, or world-transcending presence, but an affirmation of and solidarity with the human, with the body, with the earth, in all its fragility and poverty. Sophia is at home on the streets of the

world. Where Sophia is, we hear the call: "Come all who are burdened. . . . Come, eat and drink you who have no money. . . . Come all who are thirsty."

67. Description given in note 31 above.

68. Tarnas, 433–45. I draw on his thought in the following section.

69. *Ibid.*, 434–5.

70. Among these trailblazers in religious thinking is Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988); see also Swimme and Berry, 243: "Existence itself is derived from and sustained by this intimacy of each being with every other being."

71. Tarnas, 444.

72. Bailie, 272.

73. John says in *Ascent* 2.12.3: "The soul will have to empty itself of these images and leave this sense in darkness if it is to reach divine union. For these images, just as the corporeal objects of the exterior senses, cannot be an adequate, proximate means to God." In *The Collected Works of St. John*, 186, Kavanaugh adds a note: "Having in mind . . . a contemplative simplification of prayer, John stresses communion in living faith more than discursive reflection. These passages do not advise one to turn away from Jesus Christ but insist on the simple gaze of faith and personal communion rather than on imaginative representation. John's teaching is in harmony with St. Teresa of Avila's. Strongly asserting that one must never turn from the humanity of Christ, she nonetheless admits that it is common for contemplative souls to be unable to engage in discursive thought about the mysteries of Christ's life. Communing with the Person, however, 'dwelling on his mysteries with a simple gaze,' is another matter and 'will not impede the most sublime prayer' (*Interior Castle* 6.7.6–7, 11–2; *The Way of Perfection* 34.11)."

74. In this context, *Ascent* 2.8 (chapter heading) and 4–5 are instructive also: "No creature or knowledge comprehensible to the intellect can serve it as a proximate means for divine union with God. . . . Everything the intellect can understand, the will enjoy, the imagination picture is most unlike and disproportionate to God. . . . The intellect will be unable through its ideas to understand anything like God, the will unable to experience a delight and sweetness resembling God, and the memory unable to place in the imagination remembrances and images representing him." See also *Ascent* 2.9.4: "Union with God in this life, and direct communication with [God], demands that we be united with the darkness in which, as Solomon said [1 Kgs. 8:12], God promised to dwell."

75. This experience may be further complicated by contemporary developments and questions in Christology, particularly those regarding the divinity of Jesus.

76. I first began developing the interpretation of "the dark night of the spirit" set forth in this section in "A Discipleship of Equals: Voices from Tradition—Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross" in *A Discipleship of Equals: Toward a Christian Feminist Spirituality*, ed. Francis A. Eigo (Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1988), 63–97. I have included it in *The Way* article and here because the Villanova volume has been unavailable almost from the time of its publication.

77. That Jesus as the Sophia of God subverts conventional wisdom is persuasively suggested by Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus, a New Vision* (San Francisco: Harper, 1987), chap. 6: "Jesus as Sage: Challenge to Conventional Wisdom," and *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 84–8, 106, 134.

78. See also *Dark Night* 2.10.2 and *Flame* 1.22 & 23. No. 23 is on the will.

79. See *Dark Night* 2.7 on "straits of the will"; *Dark Night* 2.9.3 & 7; *Ascent* 3.16; 35.5; *Flame* 1.23.

80. Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 246.

81. For a description of faith see *Ascent* 2.3; 4.1–3; 8 & 9; *Dark Night* 2.16.8–12.

82. Karl Rahner has helped me interpret John's thought on hope and on the theological virtues. See "On the Theology of Hope," *Theological Investigations*, vol. 10 (New York: Herder & Herder, 1973), 242–53, and "Theology of Death," *Theological Investigations* vol. 13 (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 169–86.

83. Elizabeth Johnson reminds us of a long-standing tradition of interpretation concerning martyrs, a tradition which Vatican II continues: "Martyrdom 'transforms' a disciple into an intense image of Christ, *imago Christi*, for the martyr 'perfects that image even to the shedding of blood' " (*She Who Is*, 74; *Lumen Gentium*, 42).

84. See, e.g., *Flame* 3.79.

85. The "touch of divinity" is found also in *The Ascent* (e.g., A.2.26.5–10; 2.32) and *The Dark Night*.

86. See *Flame* 3.81. Touch is also an important symbol of desire in *The Spiritual Canticle*. Here in *Flame*, the Word, the Son of God, is a touch of the divine hand. Note the comparison at the end of *Flame* 2.17 between the touch or tracing within and the withdrawal from the touch or trace of creatures. This is to accent the touch of Sophia-Jesus "compared with" all other touches and is an allusion to *Ascent* 1.4.

87. See *Canticle* 39.6: ". . . equals and companions of God."

88. *Flame* 4.13 brings together the Wisdom image of Christ or Word with the experience of equality: "There *the face of the Word*, full of graces, . . . *shines on the queen*, which is the soul, and clothes it in such fashion that, transformed in these attributes of the heavenly king, it is aware of having become a queen." See also *Canticle* 30.6.

89. See commentary *Canticle* 36.5 on this stanza for equality emphasis and extravagant expression of mutuality. See also *Canticle* 32.6; 24.5; 38.3–6. This equality is taken to even greater lengths when God becomes the person's slave and prisoner, subject to her desires (*Canticle* 27.1; 32.1).

90. Susan Cady, Marian Ronan, Hal Taussig, *Sophia: The Future of Feminist Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 84, suggests that "by identifying

with the one who took a playful part in creation, women can imagine new and larger arenas in which their creativity can flourish" in the world.

91. There are many texts that could be cited. See, e.g., *Canticle* 30.2-3; 14/15.29; 33.6-9; 16.1 & 8-9; 32.2; 36.5; 24.2-4; 17.5-7.

92. See Cady, Ronan, and Taussig, 84.

93. Examine *Flame* 2.7-8 to see what "completely healthy" in love means.

94. This vision is familiar to the mystics. See, e.g., St. Teresa's experience in *The Book of Her Life*, 40.9-10, *Collected Works*, 1:280-1: "Once while in prayer I was shown quickly, without my seeing any form—but it was a totally clear representation—how all things are seen in God and how [God] holds them all in himself. . . . Let us say . . . that the Divinity is like a very clear diamond, much greater than all the world; or like a mirror, as I said referring to the soul in that other vision, except that it is a mirror in so sublime a way that I wouldn't know how to exaggerate this. And we could say that everything we do is visible in this diamond since it is of such a kind that it contains all things within itself; there is nothing that escapes its magnitude. It was a frightening experience for me to see in so short a time so many things joined together in this diamond."

95. Dichotomies are reconciled and cease to exist when the self is no longer defined by opposition and separation but by relationship and connectedness.

96. I am reminded of an impressive report made some years ago by representatives of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious after attending a conference with religious of Latin America. The LCWR representatives were deeply moved by the joy, the sense of resurrection, that emanated from the religious of Central America who lived and worked with the poor and oppressed and in many cases lived under death sentences because of their ministry.

97. See also *Canticle* 39.8-9 & 11; 14/15.4 & 9-11 for more on this voice.

98. Here John of the Cross's teaching intersects with Brian Swimme's and Thomas Berry's thinking in *The Universe Story*, 258. They suggest we need an earth-centered language, one enjoyed, until now, only by the mystics and poets: "Beyond any spoken or written language are the languages of the multitude of beings, each of which has its own language given to it generally, in the world of the living, by genetic coding. Yet each individual being has extensive creativity in the use of language. Humans are becoming more sensitive to the nonhuman languages of the surrounding world. We are learning mountain language. . . . This capacity for understanding and communicating in these languages, until now enjoyed only by our poets and mystics, is of immense significance since so much of life is lived in association with the other beings of the universe. . . . A more symbolic language is needed to enter into the subjective depth of things."

99. Elizabeth Johnson, *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 32, with note: Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 7-8. Johnson proposes a model of kinship "that traces an organic connection between human beings and the earth."

100. According to Kieran Kavanaugh, *Collected Works of St. John*, 709, John seemed to have accepted the Copernican theory. The University of Salamanca, where John studied, was the first to accept and teach the Copernican system, but by the time the first edition of John's works appeared, Copernicus's work was on the Index of Forbidden Books.

101. Tarnas, 435.

102. For one careful analysis of the evolution of human consciousness, see Johnson, *Women, Earth*, 37–8. I have drawn on her development, aware that recent discoveries in outer space raise questions about the beginning of the universe as well as the evolution of human life and consciousness. Another theory may in time replace the one Johnson describes. Furthermore, other species may evolve with a greater consciousness than our own. Then the cosmos may come to even fuller consciousness in them.

103. See Swimme and Berry, 238.

104. Tarnas, 434–5.

105. Tarnas clarifies that this participatory epistemology is not a "regression to naive participation mystique but . . . the dialectical synthesis of the long evolution from the primordial undifferentiated consciousness through the dualistic alienation. It incorporates the postmodern understanding of knowledge but goes beyond it" (434–5).

106. Tarnas writes with incisive clarity about the progression in history from one paradigm to another, about the birth and death of paradigms and why one paradigm is perceived at one time as a liberation and then at another as a constriction and prison: "For the birth of every new paradigm is also a conception in a new conceptual matrix, which begins the process of gestation, growth, crisis, and revolution all over again. Each paradigm is a stage in an unfolding evolutionary sequence, and when the paradigm has fulfilled its purpose, when it has been developed and exploited to its fullest extent, then it loses its numinosity, it ceases to be libidinally charged, it becomes felt as oppressive, limiting, opaque, something to be overcome—while the new paradigm that is emerging is felt as a liberating birth into a new, luminously intelligible universe. . . . As the inner gestalt changes in the cultural mind, new empirical evidence just happens to appear, pertinent writings from the past suddenly are unearthed, appropriate epistemological justifications are formulated, supportive sociological changes coincidentally take place . . . new psychological predispositions and metaphysical assumptions emerge from the collective mind, from within many individual minds simultaneously" (438–9).

107. See Tarnas, 438, and Johnson, "Redeeming the Name," 116: "Is the Christological tradition hopelessly patriarchal or are there marginalized impulses that can be released to shape a Christology of healing and liberation? With critical analysis and alternative possibilities in view, theology then speaks anew about Jesus the Christ." Moreover, John of the Cross is not the only one in the tradition who was prophetic for a future time concerning wisdom. He stands in a long line of

church writers and mystics. See, for example, Sophia Barbara Moore's treatment of wisdom and Louis de Montfort in "Wisdom, A Hidden Treasure," *Christian Spirituality Bulletin* 3 (Spring 1995): 18-23.

108. Sandra Schneiders writing in *Women and the Word: The Gender of God in the New Testament and the Spirituality of Women* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986) on the Song of Songs, which influenced John so profoundly, says: "As Phyllis Tribble has explained, this celebration of human sexual love is completely devoid of patriarchal overtones. In fact scholars continue to be unable to distinguish precisely between the discourse of the woman and the man. . . . Although the androcentric imagination of commentators has always assumed that the male lover is God and the female Israel, the Church, or the soul, there is nothing in the Canticle itself to suggest this. God might just as plausibly be represented by the woman as by the man" (34f). Schneiders's essay provides a powerful underpinning for this entire study.

109. Tarnas, 444 with 435, 442.

110. Ibid., 445.

111. Brian Swimme cited by Sallie McFague, "Imaging a Theology of Nature: The World as God's Body," in *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology*, ed. Charles Birch, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 225.

112. See Johnson, *Women, Earth*, 28, 60, 63. John could only write with the philosophical assumptions and language of sixteenth-century Spain. Nevertheless, his experience, I believe, surpassed in significant ways the philosophical paradigms of his time. So we struggle with his language, even while we resonate with the experience described.

113. While I am conscious of having done a new critical reading of John of the Cross in retrieving wisdom, I believe that there is another creative step in interpretation that must be taken in contemporary spirituality.

114. The desire for this pervades our society. See, e.g., Michael Crichton, *Travel* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988) for the account of an unusual lifelong search for contemplative experience. Crichton concludes his book: "We need the insights of the mystic every bit as much as we need the insight of the scientist" (375).