

LOVE, LIGHT, AND CATHOLIC MYSTICISM IN VINCENT VAN GOGH

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Love is a mystery within a mystery.

On the last day before . . . the face of death, there was in [Socrates] something . . . of a god, a ray of light from heaven.

I just entered for a minute the Catholic Church where evening service was being held. It was a beautiful sight . . . the church looked so cheerful in the evening light. – Vincent Van Gogh

Love and light in art as in mysticism

In *Love: A History*, Professor Simon May suggests that love is everywhere, writing: “Academic books, chat shows, pop lyrics, internet dating sites, self-help manuals—all buzz with curiosity about the conditions for successful love.” After exploring the many philosophers and writers who have written on love, May concludes that “The nature of love—what exactly it is; what we demand from it—is sacred territory.”¹ If Professor May had asked St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) whether love could be defined, he would have been mystified at the answer; because, unlike the figures he treats who seem to know what love is, St. Teresa believes that she is “not sure that [she] know[s] when love is spiritual and when there is sensuality mingled with it, or how to begin speaking about it.”²

It is not until the nineteenth century—with the advance of science in all its aspects, natural, physical, mathematical, psychological, and social—that love loses its “sacred territory,” and the tension between the “spiritual” and the “sensual” is broken. Today we speak of love or *erös* as though we “know” what it is: sexual desire, what Freud calls “libido,” and Darwin associates it with the “selfish gene.” But love involves real self-denuding that can propel us toward spiritual self-awakening, toward “sacred territory,” toward completeness, toward a Presence. Mystics have long spoken of Presence as God within us and in the world. Perhaps

St. Augustine (354-430) says it best: “You were with me, and I was not with you.”³ In *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*, William James (1842-1910) cites from the life of Dr. Burke—a Canadian psychiatrist—to demonstrate a larger and a more fulfilling love than ordinary love, a love that leads to seeing the universe a living Presence:

There came upon me a sense of exultation, of immense joyousness accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination impossible to describe... I saw that the universe is not composed of dead matter, but is, on the contrary, a living Presence; I became conscious in myself of eternal life ... that the cosmic order is such that without any peradventure all things work together for the good of each and all; that the foundation principle of the world, of all the worlds, is what we call love.⁴

This love is thus an integral, generative, illuminating, and sustaining feature in the web of Life itself; it is the door to “eternal life,” to a universe that is alive, Present, and that, according to St. John of the Cross (1542-1591), it is a gift of God’s love, in which, consequently, even mountains, valleys, flowers, winds, and birds could sing the spiritual canticle of the Song of Songs.⁵ The twentieth century Russian Orthodox theologian Nicolas Berdyaev (1879-1940) observes that this love is by its very nature creative. Hence it is “an ascent ... from the world to God. It moves ... towards eternity. The Products of creativeness remain in time, but the creative act itself, the creative flight, communes with eternity.”⁶ Hence the creative act, like the mystical experience, communes with eternity through love, real, sincere, true *erös*: sacred, mystical, mysterious, enlightening, not reduced to pure sensuality, as it is today. Today some men see in a woman nothing, but flesh used for the satisfaction of his physical desires; his encounters with a woman is self-fulfilling rather than harmonizing, than enriching, than completing.

In the following pages I will concern myself with the theme of love and light in Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890) as it exhibits a parallel vision to Catholic mysticism. Although scholarship on van Gogh has focused on the religious aspect of his writings and art,⁷ none relates his spiritual quest to Catholic mystical vision, none sees his sexual love as a paradigm for spiritual love, for a divine encounter, if only for a moment, with God’s light. This study, however, does not make van Gogh a Catholic

mystic—as Debora Silverman makes him a Buddhist monk, and in so doing she implies the dissolution of the self and of the world, which, in my opinion, is contrary to van Gogh’s thoughts⁸—nor does van Gogh reflect the central doctrines of the Catholic faith. Rather, van Gogh does center himself upon the theme of love and light that reflects the Catholic spiritual tradition whose roots stretch back to Plato and Plotinus. After all, it is in the form of light that love invades us. St. Augustine writes: “I do love . . . light. . . [God] is the light. . . Love knows . . . that light. . . He who knows that light knows eternity.”⁹

Van Gogh reflects this Catholic vision of love and light. His words and art contain the darkness of humankind estranged from God as a result of the original sin and the *longing* to break through this darkness to the light of knowledge of God. Hence from the day we are born, says van Gogh, following St. Augustine, we walk, yes, we walk “from darkness to light.”¹⁰ This is the “light” of God that St. John of the Cross describes with an exquisite metaphor of the *Living Flame of Love*. In addition to love, light, and longing, Van Gogh also shares with Catholic mysticism the emphasis on the individual’s inner self, and the vision of all creation as coming from and returning to God through the love of the beauty of creation. At the same time Catholic mystics place art in the service of ultimate theological mysteries in the Church as the *mystical body* of Christ; the hidden, the transcendent, the mystery, the spiritual, the sacramental, the incorporeal, and the self returning to God by love’s ascent through knowledge. St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) writes: “She [Soul] has for some time . . . become accustomed to dwelling in the cell of self-knowledge in order to know better God’s goodness toward her, since upon knowledge follows love. And loving, she seeks to pursue truth and cloth herself in it.”¹¹ By contrast, van Gogh stresses the personal, the visible, the imminent, the phenomenal, the natural, the secular, the corporeal, and the self returning to God by art as manifestation of the creative act. “A work [of art] that is good may not be eternal,” observes van Gogh, “but the thought [love] expressed in it is” (*L*, 120). Hence van Gogh is a mystic of the sensual life of art, while the Catholic mystic is an artist of the spiritual life, yet both ascend toward Light itself through the use of symbols and images.¹²

The mystery of love intimately lived in life as in art

Van Gogh's biographical story of his love for Eugénie Loyer, Kee Vos, and Christine Clasina Maria Hoornik, known as Sien, is well known; as is his life of sexual dependency, of enjoying "the hour of the flesh."¹³ What is less known is that what van Gogh seeks in his life is a real or an existential spirituality of love, a love intimately felt or experienced, which nevertheless remains a mystery: "What a mystery life is," van Gogh writes, "and love is a mystery within a mystery" (*L*, 265). Mysticism is about the mystery of life and of love. Van Gogh goes on to tell his brother Theo that true love "is like the discovery of a new hemisphere . . . like a clear light in the night . . . and it influences my work" (*L*, 154). Moreover, mysticism is creative; it is a journey of "discovery," of "light in the night." Of it St. John of the Cross observes: "For I know well the spring that / flows and runs, / Although it is night. . . / Its clarity is never darkened, / And I know that every light has / come from it / Although it is night."¹⁴

In a similar vein, van Gogh confesses that, although it is "night" for him—the night of suffering, of inner conflicts, of failures, of anguish, of despair, of not knowing where he is and where he is going with his life—love, "the flame of God" within him, is not extinguished, but burns in him (*L*, 111). He writes: "I will seek . . . Love, and go on beseeching the Spirit of God under all circumstances" (*L*, 82a). This is the Love that transforms van Gogh's sorrow into joy; and although he will fall many times, there will always remain in him a "longing for the heights away from the misery here below . . . the longing of our hearts" (*L*, 82a) for the more we cannot see: "And if we feel . . . that there is an eye looking down upon us, it would be well for us to lift up our eyes at times, as if to see the Invisible" (*L*, 112) or the Light or God himself who is Mystery. St. Catherine of Siena echoes what van Gogh says about longing; in fact, she sees "holy longing"¹⁵ as a way to transcend one's self-knowledge and be passionately embraced by the invisible God.

Yet God makes himself visible in Christ, his only begotten Son "born of woman" (*Gal* 4:4) so that we may come to know the ineffable, unspeakable, and unknowable God. God becomes incarnate or human in Christ, the light that dispels all darkness, the love that redeems humankind after the original sin, and the beauty that renders God present in the world. Of the latter, Simone Weil (1929-1941) observes: "There is as it were an

incarnation of God in the world and it is indicated by beauty. The beautiful is the experimental proof that the incarnation is possible. Hence all art of the highest order is religious in essence.”¹⁶ We should add that “all art of the highest order” flowers from the love the artist puts into the creation of beautiful images, stirring a yearning for the infinite, the eternal, the transcendent, the mystery, the holy, which van Gogh as a seeker of beauty express thus: “If one really loves nature, one can find beauty everywhere” (*L*, 16). This is the way St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) is transported to love God in all things, especially Brother Sun who “is beautiful and radiant with great splendor, / And bears the signification of you, Most High One.”¹⁷

Unlike St. Francis, who is primarily inspired by Scripture as he contemplates the beauty of creation, van Gogh is inspired not only by the Scripture but by literary works as well, writing: “I have a more or less irresistible passion for books, and I continually want to instruct myself, to study if you like, just as much as I want to eat my bread” (*L*, 133). In fact, in a letter to his sister, Wilhelmina, van Gogh goes so far as to suggest that Scripture should be supplemented with literature, the “work of the French naturalists, Zola, Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant, de Goncourt,” and asks, “Is the Bible enough for us?”¹⁸ He continues: “In these days, I believe, Jesus himself would say to those who sit down in a state of melancholy . . . get up and go forth. Why do you seek the living among the dead?” Yet van Gogh concludes the letter from a truly Franciscan perspective, writing:

If the spoken or written word is to remain the light of the world, then it is our right and our duty to acknowledge that we are living in a period when it should be spoken and written in *such* a way that—in order to find something equally great, and equally good, and equally original, and equally powerful to revolutionize the whole of society—we may compare it with a clear conscience to the old revolution of the Christians (*L*, W1).

St. Francis too believed that if the written or spoken word of God “is to remain the light of the world,” it should be preached or written in such a way that it is “good,” “original,” and “powerful.” Hence one day, as he prayed in the deteriorating church of St. Damian outside Assisi, he heard

a voice saying, "Francis, go and repair My house, which you see is falling down" and, by implication, to repair society as well.

Among the literary sources that instruct van Gogh are Dante (1265-1321), who "made an impression on me" (L, 539); Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471), whose *The Imitation of Christ* "can be compared to nothing else" (L, 267), and which "is sublime, and he who wrote it must have been a man after God's heart" (L, 108); John Bunyan (1628-1688), whose *Pilgrim's Progress* became the theme of his first sermon, "I am a stranger on the earth" (L, 31, 80, 82); Charles Dickens (1812-1870, whom van Gogh describes as "What an artist! There is no one like him" (L, 205); George Eliot (1819-1880), who moved van Gogh with her description of the life of the working class as the "'kingdom of God on earth,'" for these workers celebrate the Divine service "in a chapel in Lantern Yard" (L, 66); Jules Michelet (1798-1874), whose *L'Amour* was to van Gogh "both a revelation and a Gospel at the same time" (L, 20); Émile Zola (1840-1902), whose *La Joie de vivre* and *Une Page d'amour* he recommended to his sister, but which, together with the works of Michelet, he later told his brother to destroy (L, 39, 43).

What van Gogh draws from these and other literary sources¹⁹ is a concept of love as a sublime, genuine, humble, simple, sincere, honest, intimate, gentle, pure, pious, compassionate, and deep *feeling* for things and for life itself in its personal and social aspects. In words that literally seem imported from *The Canticle of Brother Sun* of St. Francis of Assisi, Van Gogh tells his brother Theo that he should love everything that surrounds him; love a blade of grass, a dandelion, a hawthorn, a peach or an olive tree, a meadow, the sea, the sunset or the moon rising, the sky, the birds, the clouds, the whole of nature, where everything breathes serenity, calm and peace, and where the soul, in the presence of God's glorious and immaculate creation, is free from the chains of conventions, "forgets society and loosens its bonds with the strength of renewed youth; where every thought forms a prayer, where everything that is not in harmony with fresh, free nature disappears from the heart [and] . . . the tired souls find rest, there the exhausted man regains his youthful strength" (L, 76). St. Francis too loosened his bond with society and journeyed to the wooded Mount La Verna, where "every thought [was] a prayer," and where "everything" was in "harmony [with] the heart." Van Gogh goes on to say to his brother that he should love a friend, a stranger, a wife,

something—whatever it is—but that he should love “with a lofty and serious intimate sympathy, with strength, with intelligence; and . . . must always try to know deeper, better and more. That leads to God” (*L*, 133). Thomas à Kempis, following in the footsteps of St. Francis and St. Augustine, writes that “love descends from God, and may not finally rest in anything lower than God.”²⁰

With à Kempis, St. Francis, and St. Augustine, van Gogh says the fruit of love is service, and applies it in writing to his brother, telling him that he should love the poor, the weavers, the farmers, the miners, the laborers, the people that walk the streets, the lowest of the low, for these are the people van Gogh wants to give voice, if only he could paint them (*L*, 136); these people know the very depths of misery; they have experienced suffering, pain, sorrow, sadness, hunger, destitution, homelessness; they live their lives in total darkness. Yet these people too, concludes van Gogh, “can have moments of emotion and inspiration which give him a feeling of an eternal home, and of being close to it” (*L*, 248), recalling a holy city referred to by St. Augustine as the city of God, and by Bunyan as a celestial city, illumined by the unchangeable light of God, the light that shines in the darkness which led St. John of the Cross on his journey to climb Mount Carmel where God was waiting for him, “In a place where no one else appeared”;²¹ that is, in the darkness of his soul, as in the miners, the workers, the homelessness, and van Gogh himself.

These are the people that St. Mother Teresa (1910-1997) also gives voice to in the slums of India; she too, like van Gogh, desires to give them “a feeling of an eternal home” which she also believes can be experienced through love, “the fire that will make them live the life to its full.”²² Similarly, St. Catherine of Siena also devoted her life to the poor, the sick, the victims of the black death; she too wanted to give these people “a feeling of an eternal home” based on love and, like St. Mother Teresa, St. Catherine also speaks of love as “the fire in [my] soul [which] grew so great that [my] body could not have contained it.”²³ Before St. Catherine and St. Mother Teresa, St. Francis likewise had cared for the poor, for those afflicted with leprosy, for the beggars and, like van Gogh, he too experienced the bitterness of being rejected by his family, and of being called eccentric. In words comparable to those of these three mystics of the Church, van Gogh also defines love as “a great fire in our soul” whose flame lights up all that is hidden in our inner darkness, that burns

so deeply within us, yet “no one ever comes to warm himself at it, and the passers-by see only a wisp of smoke coming through the chimney, and go along their way” (L, 133). Moreover, van Gogh, like these three Saints, considers love as that “*germinating force . . . in us*” (L, W1), “that higher feeling which [one] cannot do without” (L, 159), for love perfects, transforms us, makes us reach to others, and, he concludes, “what is done in love is well done” (L, 121). As St. Augustine puts it, “No fruit is good which does not grow from the root of love,”²⁴ which, “like an ember or a spark of fire, flames always upward, by the fervor of its love, toward God,” observes à Kempis.²⁵

In contrast to the Catholic mystic who weds Christ and, therefore, the Church as bride, van Gogh yearns for a concrete realization of love; that is, for an intimate relationship with a woman. This brings van Gogh into a great conflict with the love preached by the clergymen of the Dutch Reformed Church, including his father who was a minister of that Church. To van Gogh, these clergymen preach a love that he finds impersonal, abstract, dogmatic, systematic, rational, and that triggers in him a crisis of faith: “‘O God, there is no God!’ For me that God of the clergymen is as dead as a doornail.” He then asks his brother: “But am I an atheist for all that? The clergymen consider me so—so be it—but I love, and how could I feel love if I did not live and others did not live; and then if we live, there is something mysterious in that. Now call it God or human nature or whatever you like, but there is something which I cannot define systematically, though it is very much alive and very real” (L, 164). Hence what God is to the clergymen, to van Gogh is not real, not alive, not felt; it is “an empty sound” (L, 158); it is nonsense. One must “feel that there is a God, not dead or stuffed but alive” (L, 161) urging us toward loving, with pity, humility, sincerity, benevolence, patience, charity, and compassion—virtues that embody the very life of the Catholic mystic—but which van Gogh believes is not in the language of the clergymen. For this reason, he “reckon[s] the whole lot of them among the most ungodly men in our society” (L, 288). Van Gogh is of the opinion that the clergymen are too narrow-minded, too driven by bigotry, hypocrisy, and prejudices to understand the “modern soul” (L, 339a) in search of love, without which “I shall freeze or turn to stone” or live in “a sinful and immoral condition” (L, 164).

At their core, these words echo St. Francis; for, van Gogh, like St. Francis, calls on the Dutch Church to reform itself, to base its teachings on love which he, like St. Francis, believes is attained through “simplicity and truth” (L, 339a). Thomas à Kempis considers them the “two wings” that lift us from earthly things “toward God, and . . . love samples and tastes”²⁶ the goodness of God’s charity. We are pilgrims on this earth and strangers, says van Gogh to his brother, recalling *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, *The Imitation of Christ*,²⁷ and St. Augustine’s *The Confessions*. Our life might be compared to sailing on a river, van Gogh continues; “but very soon the waves become higher, the wind more violent, we are at sea almost before we are aware of it. . . . The heart of man is very much like the sea, it has its storms, its tides and its depths; it has its pearls too.”²⁸ Like a sailor, van Gogh is being tossed to and from on a stormy sea, and asks, as does the sailor, whether he will ever reach port with “pearls” in his hands. Moreover, similar to the sailor who finds herself caught at sea in the midst of violent wind and high waves, as though incapable of freeing herself, van Gogh likewise sees himself “a prisoner,” “a caged bird . . . maddened by anguish” for being unable to free himself from “certain barriers, certain gates, certain walls,” asking: “My God! is it for long, is it forever, is it for all eternity?” (L, 133) As with the sailor, who knows that the sea is dangerous and the storm terrible, yet lets his love for the sea compel him not to remain ashore in spite of these dangers, so with van Gogh, whose love of and for art compel him to seek, to strive, to hopefully reach port, notwithstanding the risk of losing his life. Van Gogh tells his brother that this love is also the love that called Socrates who, “by devotion, work and renouncing frivolous things,” imbued his life with “a ray of light from heaven” (L, 306). The life of the Catholic mystic is similarly a life of “devotion, work and renouncing frivolous things,” as well as a life with “its storms, its tides and its depths; it has its pearls too”—as, for example, *The Imitation of Christ*, *The Confessions* of St. Augustine, the *Dialogue* of St. Catherine of Siena, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* of St. John of the Cross, and *Come be My Light* of St. Mother Teresa.

Van Gogh confesses to his brother that life is not as simple or cut and dried for the “modern soul” as clergymen make it appear; for, if it were so it wouldn’t be very difficult to make one’s way. But it isn’t, and things are infinitely more complicated, and right and wrong do not exist separately, any more than black and white do in nature; there are things

that remain incomprehensible and dark before “the cold light of reason and calculation” (L, 259). Besides, van Gogh insists, the clergymen do not know that religious life other than their own exist; they do not know that God’s love extends towards evil and the unrighteous as well. As to those who sincerely, honestly, patiently, and humbly seek their own path with sympathy and deep love, van Gogh reminds his brother that, as Victor Hugo writes, “*Il y a le rayon noir et il y a le rayon blanc* [There is a black ray and there is a white ray]” (L, 326). The clergymen, concludes van Gogh, have “a black ray,” which he associates with hypocrisy; whereas he seeks the “White Light” (L, 339a), which is simplicity and truth. He says that, where simplicity does not exist, truth turns into lies, into hypocrisy, which affects a false piety, vanity (L, 345a). The soul of a Thomas à Kempis serves van Gogh as a mirror of the simplicity and truth of Christ reflecting the simplicity and truth of God (L, 116).

Van Gogh’s search for the “White Light” or for “a ray from on high” (L, 242) leads him on the path to his love of art as analogous to his love for a woman; and van Gogh’s love for Christine Clasina Maria Hoornik, known as Sien—a prostitute of thirty years of age, sick and alcoholic, and who became his companion, his mistress, and his model—teaches van Gogh the cold and false love that the clergymen preach; for Christ, unlike what the clergymen preach, allowed a prostitute to kiss his feet (*Luke* 7: 37-39), and spoke words of hope to outcast women (*John* 4: 7-27; 8:11). It is this loving attitude of Christ that van Gogh sees in the books he read, and in the works of art he saw as he wandered from place to place arousing in him a “violent passion for them, reaching the highest pitch of enthusiasm” (L, 133). Now, if Christ is “a greater artist than all other artists” (L, B8[11]), and if Christ is God’s love made flesh, then, the end of love and of art is an end itself. Hence van Gogh writes to his traveling companion and artist Anton van Rappard: “Let us give our souls to our cause, let us work with our heart, and truly love what we love... One loves because one loves. To love . . . that is all!” (L, R5, 156)

These words circle us to St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) who, borrowing from Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana* I.1, writes: “I love because I love [*Amo quia amo*]; I love that I may love. Love is a great thing; as long as it returns to its beginning, goes back to its origin, turns again to its source, it will always draw afresh from it and flow freely... Love needs no cause, no fruit besides itself; its enjoyment is its use.”²⁹ Like St.

Bernard, van Gogh says that love is something infinite, deep, eternal (*L*, 276), and that it demands self-sacrifice or the loss of the self; and, like St. Bernard, van Gogh believes that in physical love there is truly the presence of God, that fountain of fire that “wells up from a deeper source in our souls” (*L*, R43) so as to inflame our thirsty soul so as to yearn for its Eternal Spring whose clarity, says St. John of the Cross, “is never darkened, / And I know that every light has / come from it / Although it is night.” Therefore, love, like art, demands that the self “be dead to everything” (*L*, 313); and art, like love, is something greater and higher than technical skill; it is a “mystery,” a “blessing” (*L* 266), “a ray of light from heaven.” It is, in sum, “the fire in our soul” which is the Creator Spirit: “*Veni, Creator Spiritus* . . . and in our souls take up Thy rest . . . to Thee we cry, o heavenly gift of God Most High . . . o fount of life and fire of love.”³⁰

As “heavenly gift” or as “fount of life” or as “fire of love,” the Creator Spirit is love as spiritual seeing;³¹ it is the enlightened eye, the eye of “inner silence” (*L*, 333) that penetrates to the invisible, to depths of things, to the light that renders everything beautiful; for, says van Gogh, there is nothing more truly creative than to remain silent—which Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) calls “internal fruition”³²—as one looks with awe at the wonders of creation. As often as van Gogh finds himself among the company of artists, he always finds it difficult to speak about “simple [things] in themselves, but which are unfortunately connected with much deeper things” (*L*, 313)—which, in my opinion, will undo him, since he has no one with whom to share the silence of these “deeper things.”³³ Hence “How can I express myself? I want to be silent” (*L*, R4) about the love for “deeper things,” a love that demands nothing more than total self-surrender.

“Surrender is also true love,” observes Mother Teresa. “The more we surrender, the more we love God and souls. . . . Total surrender—for us, contemplative life means also a joyous and ardent response to his call to the most intimate union with him.”³⁴ As in the contemplative, so in van Gogh, without this total self-surrender, the heart *loves* nature, but this love is rational, and abstract. Even if one loves nature, van Gogh goes on to say, she remains distant and absent. Though nature’s intentions are “beauty and sublimity,” yet she leaves one “cold and without emotion.” In art, van Gogh writes to Rappard, “beauty and sublimity” are sought in

an intimate contact with nature otherwise the result is “false”; it is an art that freezes, petrifies, and prevents “a warmer, a more fruitful love from awakening in you.” Hence van Gogh urges Rappard to let go of his academic “mistress, and fall desperately in love with Dame Nature or Reality” (L, R4), as van Gogh himself does. Van Gogh’s love for Lady Nature or Reality mirrors his love for Sien, “a pregnant woman who had to walk the streets” (L, 192), and whom the clergymen view as a sinner. But van Gogh believes that in his love for Sien, he lives out the vey mystery of God’s love (L, W1), as he does in his love for Lady Nature.

Unlike Rappard’s cold and barren “mistress,” van Gogh’s Lady Nature warms, refreshes, gives life, and is “a woman born of a woman.” She knows “how to love and craves for love,” for she possesses sincerity of feelings; she dwells not in Heaven but on earth. She is “goodness, kindness, tenderness”; she is true “beauty and sublimity” (L, R4). In simplicity, poverty, solitude, silence and quiet (L, 133, 253, 543)—ideas that take us back not only to Francis of Assisi but also to the Catholic mystical tradition in general—one learns to love her, and that a joyful encounter with her also embraces sorrow and pain, for “the more one has intercourse with [her]” (L, R43), the more painful it is to unveil the secret of her heart; for, “I cannot say that I have won her by a long shot, but what I *can* say is that . . . I am trying to find the key to her heart,” notwithstanding at times the pain, the “exhaustion and impatience” (L, R4). True art is achieved only through an “intercourse” with Nature—as love is through an intimate communion or “intercourse” with a woman, concludes van Gogh: “I cannot live without love, without a woman. I would not value life at all, if there were not something infinite, something deep, something real” (L, 164).

These words take us back to Genesis 2, when God created Adam, saying: “It is not good for man to be alone” (*Gen* 2: 18). After creating the animals, God created Eve from Adam’s ribs. “This at last,” he exclaims, “this one is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (*Gen* 2: 23). Thus in awakening, Adam not only discovers that he is missing part of himself but he also discovers Eve as complementing him. So only in union with Eve will Adam recover his complete self, or what he has lost. Thus in sexual love or “intercourse,” Adam and Eve complete each other, and that without the other each is missing “something infinite, something deep, something real.” St. John of the Cross gives the mystical treatment of this

union of love: “Love produces such likeness in this transformation of lovers that one can say each is the other and both are one. The reason is, that in the union and transformation of love each gives possession of self to the other, and each leaves and exchanges self for the other. Thus each one lives in the other and is the other, and both are one in the transformation of love.”³⁵

That van Gogh cannot “live without love, without a woman,” is not only an analogue for his spiritual truth but also for his art as an “intercourse” with Lady Nature; and Lady Nature who personifies Sien—“a woman born of a woman”—as model for art and for love itself, a love that inspires van Gogh to create (*L* R34). Hence in an art created with love (*L* 309), van Gogh glimpses the “White Light,” or the “ray from on high,” not on the basis of the “cold academic view” (*L*, 164, 133), but on the *fire of love* as the “modern soul” journeys into God’s ineffable graciousness in Christ who, says van Gogh, uses images from art to convey his meaning: “[His] spoken words . . . are one of the highest summits—the very highest summit—reached by art, which becomes a creative force. . . . They make us see the art of creating life, the art of being immortal and alive at the same time. They are connected with painting” (*L*, B8 [11]) as mirror of the mystery of Love, of Light, of Eternity, “which the halo used to symbolize, and which we seek to convey by the actual radiance and vibration of our coloring” (*L*, 531).

By emphasizing “the halo,” Van Gogh takes us back to a world far different from ours, to a world, he says, painted by “Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Giotto and Botticelli” with the “fullness of goodness and ardor”—though he prefers the artist rather than the poet, because “the artist . . . is silent” (*L*, 539). So too the mystic is “silent.” And for the mystic God is Silence, is a friend of silence. “Nature: trees, flowers, and grass grow in silence,” writes St. Mother Teresa, and “The stars, the moon and the sun move in silence. . . . We need silence to be able to touch souls . . . to find God”³⁶ in Christ’s fleshly love or *erōs* on the Cross. As Hans Urs von Balthasar observes:

In the face of the Cross, love is sobered to its very marrow before God’s *agape*, which clothes itself in the language of the body; and, in the face of this intoxicating language of flesh and blood that gives itself by being poured out, love is lifted above itself and

elevated into the eternal, in order there, as creaturely *eros*, to be the tent and dwelling-place of the divine love! Love is dispossessed in order to become the expression of something higher.³⁷

Sensuous images of divine radiance and love

Van Gogh sees nature filled with the *fire* of God's divine love as light, and through the vibrations of colors he imparts on things an inner luminosity and a radiance that renders them a "living Presence"—real, true, vivid, animated, yet partaking of the infinite, of the eternal, of the mystery, as do the things or figures that Michelangelo and Millet depict (*L*, 418). Paradoxically, Michelangelo and Millet paint like Evangelical Protestants,³⁸ yet they are Catholics; conversely, van Gogh, whose upbringing was Protestant, but who later embraced Evangelism, paints like a Catholic. Above and beyond this, Michelangelo and Millet are seen by van Gogh as mirroring similar religious struggles that he experiences in their art; their art, van Gogh observes, does not depict "things as they are, traced in a dry analytical way, but as *they* . . . feel them"; that is, with "those very incorrectnesses, those deviations, remodelings, changes in reality, so that they become, yes, lies if you like—but truer than the literal truth" (*L*, 418). What van Gogh wants us to experience as we contemplate his works are feelings of sincerity, of warmth, of intimacy, of serenity, of calm, and of purity. It is true that we often encounter van Gogh in a state of anger, anxiety, passion, and changing moods; yet deep within his heart there always remains "a calm pure harmony and music inside me" (*L*, 218). Equally true is that van Gogh's life is filled with suffering, sorrow, failures, and disappointments—as are the lives of Michelangelo and Millet—yet his art reflects the radiance of love: the "White light," the "ray of light from heaven," "grace" (*L*, 238), which is Love and Life in their inexhaustible mystery, in their the inaccessible Light, in their deep Silence.

Van Gogh's paintings of the simple lives of the farmers—the farmers that till the earth, that load a boat, that plant potatoes, that dig potatoes, that eat potatoes, that rest at noon and watch a little girl take her first steps at the end of the day, as well as his paintings of the solitary farmer sowing, cultivating, and harvesting—all reveal the forms under which this mystery of love, this inaccessible light, and this deep silence is experienced, paralleling the daily solitary work of the contemplative who, in

the words of Dom R. Sorg, “gravitates towards art. For in God’s service [the monk] must never be less than an artist. . . . All work . . . is art when its mind is Godward.”³⁹ Van Gogh’s works are mindful of God, and as such they *participate* in divine love as ordinary as eating potatoes, as sowing, as digging, as resting, as sunrise and sunset, as streaming water, and as fields of grain and of olives. Like van Gogh’s farmer, the contemplative also lives in close contact “with the earth, sky, and sea . . . the bright running stream, the easy gifts which mother earth . . . yields on very little persuasion.”⁴⁰ For the contemplative, as for van Gogh’s farmer, all created things manifest God’s glorious work of creation and refer to him by way of prayerful reading and physical labor (*ora et labora*). St. Benedict (c. 480-547) writes: “Let us open our eyes to the light that comes from God, and our ears to the voice from heaven that every day calls us” to do our daily work with love as/and obedience.⁴¹

Van Gogh’s life and works somewhat echo St. Benedict’s call. In fact, the artist writes to his brother Theo, saying: “*Ora et labora*, let us do our daily work . . . with all our strength and let us believe that God will give good gifts” (*L*, 39). His work, the *Potatoes Eaters at a Table* (1885), for example, emphasizes “that those people, eating their potatoes in the lamp-light, have dug the earth with those very hands they put in the dish, and so it speaks of *manual labor*” (*L*, 404). Consequently, it alludes to St. Benedict who in *Rule* 35 says that the monks should serve one another and God in the meal, and that the utensils and the goods they use should be washed. Hence St. Benedict regards them as sacred, for they reveal God’s love for us in Christ on the Cross—“the Great Man of Sorrows” (*L*, 127).

Hence the *Potatoes Eaters at a Table* is analogous to the sacrament of the Holy Communion or Eucharist. The figures are shown in the acts of giving, of sharing, of thoughtfulness, of thankfulness, of attentiveness, of kindness, of tenderness, of serenity, of empathy, of reverence, of peace and of muted joy, as though the oil lamp suspended from the ceiling spreads light inside the dark house as the Eucharist does in the hearts or souls of the figures transporting them on the wings of “simplicity and truth” beyond the confines of their earthly and dark existence. “You [Theo] know how one of the roots or foundations, not only of the Gospel, but of the whole Bible is ‘Light that rises in the darkness’” (*L*, 126); that essential paradox that constitutes the very mystic way. Not only does light shine in the darkness of these farmers eating at a table, but it also

lights their poses, gestures, and expressions thus speaking the unspeakable. Everything in this work is quiet, motionless, waiting, yet everything speaks, is in motion, is present or sacramental: "The table is their altar and the food a sacrament for which each has labored," observes Meyer Shapiro.⁴²

Just as van Gogh associates "the food" with the dark existence of the poor and with "the Great Man of Sorrows," the contemplative too regards the Eucharist as inseparable from Christ on the Cross and from the darkness of the poor. Mother Teresa writes: "In the Eucharist, I see Christ [on the Cross] in the appearance of bread. In the slums, I see Christ in the distressing disguise of the poor."⁴³ Moreover, the contemplative, like van Gogh, glimpses God's light in the darkness, a darkness so dark that Mother Teresa, like van Gogh, cries out: "I am alone.—Unwanted, forsaken.—The loneliness of the heart that wants love is unbearable."⁴⁴ She calls on the Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity, as van Gogh calls on the ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church, to go forth into the world and work with great patience, love and care so as to keep the light of God burning. She tells the Sisters that the way of becoming God's light is by being sincere, kind, loving, thoughtful, truthful, and humble towards others; for, it is in their being humble that love becomes real, devoted, and a living flame consuming the selfishness that prevents spiritual and creative growth. "[To] keep your lamp burning," says Mother Teresa to the Sisters, you have to keep putting "drops of oil in [it]. What are these drops of oil in our lamps? They are the small things of daily life."⁴⁵ This metaphor of the oil lamp takes us back to van Gogh's *Potatoes Eaters at a Table* where to do God's simple work is love, which keeps the "lamp burning." Van Gogh writes: "One must keep something of the original character of a Robinson Crusoe or an anchorite, for otherwise one has no root in oneself, and one must never let the fire in one's soul die, but keep it burning" (*L*, 121).

"Flood my soul with your spirit and life / Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly / that all my life may only be a radiance of yours, / Shine through me... / So to shine as to be a light to others."⁴⁶ These words come from Mother Teresa's favorite prayer which she borrows from Cardinal John Henry Newman; but they could easily have come from van Gogh as well who in *The Reaper* (1889) and *Noon: Rest from Work* (1890) depicts the life of the "spirit," not in the light of the sun, but

through the simultaneity and contrasts of colors, such as yellow, blue, gray, purple, and green; the silent melody of love's *work and rest* swells forth as to suggest the rhythmic day of the contemplative life in harmony with nature's cycles. In these works, the "spirit" does shine brightly on the lives of these ordinary, humble, and working farmers as they do "small things of daily life"; but it also shines through van Gogh whose eyes of silence perceive God's everlasting or eternal Light (*L* 82a, 112), which the color rhythms or vibrations intend to express. "Revelation of spirit by means of colour: that was Van Gogh's dream," writes Lionello Venturi.⁴⁷

It is color, then, that opens the world of the reapers and of the farmers at rest to illumination, as if seen from an unseen light that, in my opinion, recalls the works of Simone Martini (1284-1344) and Fra Angelico (1400-1455), where the rhythmic use of color, especially yellow, sets everything aflame with the fire of divine love as light "unknown to the eye and yet . . . pleasing to the sight",⁴⁸ and, as in van Gogh, so in Simone Martini and Fra Angelico, the figures are imbued with life, yet they are contemplative, empathic, reverential, at rest, as it were. However, in contrast to van Gogh, where light is real, in Fra Angelico and Simone Martini, light is ideal, and the space is only partially depicted, not through shadow or *chiaroscuro*, as in van Gogh, but by soft and delicate lines. Nonetheless, *The Reaper, Noon: Rest from Work*, and the works of Simone Martini and Fra Angelico, speak of painting as divine light, and of divine light as painting aesthetically or poetically beautiful to suggest another world, not of earth but of heaven, not of the finite but of the infinite, not of saying but of the unsaying, not of the temporal but of the eternal, "which the halo used to symbolize." In van Gogh's works, as in the works of Simone Martini and Fra Angelico, we have a "symphony of yellow" (*L*, 429),⁴⁹ or a poetry of light that is heavenly beautiful painted by hands with the *fire of love* within "the dark night of the soul," which for St. John of the Cross is the light of faith, as it is also for van Gogh who, like St. John, journeys alone and in darkness along the mystical way of the "holy longing" of love.

Just as St. John of the Cross sees everything in nature as alluding to God's light, which his poetry praises, so does van Gogh. Van Gogh, like St. John, sees nature not as the whole of reality, nor as God; rather, as manifesting God who remains hidden from us. Nature is in God, and God

is in nature: they are distinct, yet connected or united, as are religion and art, writes van Gogh to Theo (*L*, 49). Like St. John, van Gogh looks on nature as a field of symbols or metaphors that lead him to God, but only if our relation with nature is a love union based on simplicity, truth, sincerity, gratitude, reverence, and humility, a union where nature and the self are distinct, and not where the self merges with nature, as in romanticism or pantheism.⁵⁰ When van Gogh confesses to his brother Theo that he has "a terrible need of—shall I say the word?—religion. Then I go out . . . to paint the stars" (*L*, 543)—the sun, the moon, the clouds, the rain, the wind, the birds or crows, butterflies, trees, cypresses, poplars, blooming chestnut branches, olive trees, sunflowers, field with poppies, irises, blades of grass, running water, mountains and valleys, wood and stones, churches and houses—he is saying that through his artistic creativity he appears more and more in the image of God in Christ as "great artist" (*L*, B8[11]), and is led by everything in nature to contemplate the supreme Craftsman, the *Creator Spiritus*, and to offer him hymns of praises in the forms of sensuous images or symbols.

Hence these works may be seen as psalms or poems or songs without words; indeed, they may be seen as images for contemplation, for meditation, for prayer; they may serve as our silent dialogue before the hidden God leading us from darkness to light, as for example *Saying Grace* (1883), and *Woman Praying* (1883). At a time when we no longer believe in God or when God's light is no longer perceived by us, and when we no longer consider love as "sacred territory," art can provide an image of our divine existence. Such art is visible in Vincent van Gogh; it is visible because, in the words of Etienne Gilson (1884-1978),

to be creative is to imitate, in a finite and analogical way, the divine prerogative, exclusively reserved for He Who Is, of making things to be. Now . . . to make things to be and to make them beautiful are one and the same things. Each artist, then, while exerting his often anguished effort to add new types of beings to those which make up the world of nature, should be conscious of the resemblance between his finite art and the infinitely perfect efficacy of the divine power. All truly creative art is religious in its own right.⁵¹

The art of van Gogh “is religious in its own right,” yet it may be seen as an analogue of Catholic mysticism; not in every aspect, to be sure. Like the Catholic mystics, van Gogh resorts to the beautiful metaphor of the *spark* or *fire* or *flame* to express his *holy yearning* for love and light that he seeks. Moreover, as with St. Teresa of Avila, who likens the mystical life of contemplation or prayer to a “silkworm” transforming into a “white butterfly,”⁵² so too van Gogh compares the artist’s existence to “the caterpillar” transforming “into a butterfly” (*L*, B8 [11]). Both lives reflecting one another are veiled in darkness, are bathed in tears of the *fire* of love, yet both testify to the unchangeable or inaccessible light of God, and to joy; both lives are rooted in humility, poverty, self-denial, simplicity, honesty, truth, sincerity, reverence, solitude, and silence; and both lives bear witness to the “modern soul” traveling toward the Heavenly City where God will turn their lives completely into *fire* by the light of his love: the song of joy, “the very music of the heart,” tells us St. Bernard. “It is not a sound from the lips but a stirring of joy, not a harmony of voices but of wills,” St. Bernard continues. “It is not heard outwardly, nor does it sound in public. . . . Only he who sings it hears it, and he to whom it is sung—the Bride and the Bridegroom. It is a wedding song indeed, expressing . . . the concord of their lives and the mutual exchange of their love.”⁵³

Notes

1. May, Simon, *Love: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), p. xi.
2. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, trans., ed. E. Allison Peers (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1964), chap. 6, p. 27.
3. Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: New American Library, 1963), bk. X, p. 27.
4. James, William, *The Varieties of Religious Experiences* (New York: The Modern Library, 1994), p. 435.
5. John of the Cross, “The Spiritual Canticle,” in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Garden City, NY: Double Day & Company, Inc., 1964).
6. Berdyaev, Nicolas, *The Destiny of Man*, trans. Natalie Duddington, M. A. (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1954), pp. 147-48.
7. See Edwards, Cliff, *Van Gogh and God: A Creative Spiritual Quest* (Chicago, IL: Loyola University Press, 1989); and Erickson, Kathleen P., *At Eternity’s Gate: The Spiritual Vision of Vincent Van Gogh* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).
8. Silverman, Debora, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Search for Sacred Art* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2000).
9. Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. Rex Warner., bk. VII, 10.

10. van Gogh, Vincent, *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Boston, MA: A Bulfinch Press Book, 1978), Letter 126. Hereafter abbreviated in the text as *L*.
11. Catherine of Siena, *Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue*, trans. Suzanne Noffke, O. P. (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), chap. 1, 25.
12. Nicholas of Cusa, "On the Vision of God," in *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. H. Lawrence Bond (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1997), preface, 235.
13. Sweetman, David, *Van Gogh: His Life and His Art* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1990), p. 149.
14. John of the Cross, "Song of the Soul that Rejoices in Knowing God through Faith," in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D., prologue, and stanza 5.
15. Catherine of Siena, *Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue*, trans. Suzanne Noffke, O. P., chap. 92, 170.
16. Weil, Simone, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Craufurd (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952), p. 137.
17. Francis of Assisi, "The Canticle of Brother Sun," in *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God; The Tree of Life; The Life of St. Francis*, trans. Ewert Cousins (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), p.
28. See also von Balthasar, Hans Urs, *Seeing the Form*, 33, where he claims that splendor and form produce in us a transport of love which belongs to the very origin of Christianity: "The Apostles were transported by what they saw, heard, and touched—by everything manifested in the form."
18. See Sund, Judy, *True Temperament: Van Gogh and French Naturalist Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
19. See van Uiter, Evert, "Vincent van Gogh: A Literary Life," <http://www.vggallery.com/index.html>.
20. Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. S. J., ed. Harold C. Gardiner Richard Whitford (New York: Image Books, 1955), bk. III, 5.
21. John of the Cross, "The Dark Night," in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D., prologue, and pp. 295-96.
22. Mother Teresa, *Mother Teresa: Come be My Light: The Private Writings of the "Saint of Calcutta,"* ed. Brian Kolodiejchuk, M. C. (New York: Doubleday, 2007), p. 50.
23. Catherine of Siena, *Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue*, trans. Suzanne Noffke, O. P., 13, 48.
 Catherine of Siena, *Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue*, trans. Suzanne Noffke, O. P., 13, 48.
24. Augustine, "On the Spirit and the Letter," in *Basic Writings of St. Augustine*, trans. P. Holmes (New York: Random House, 1948), bk. XXVI, 482.
25. Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. S. J., ed. Harold C. Gardiner Richard Whitford, bk. III, 5.
26. *Ibid.*, bk. II, 4.
27. *Ibid.*, bk. I, 23.
28. Van Gogh, "Vincent's Sermon," in *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, vol. 1, 88.
29. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, trans. G. R. Evans (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), Sermon 83.4.
30. *Hymn of Vespers on Pentecost*, <http://chantblog.blogspot.com/2008/05/hymns-for-pentecost.html>.

31. See Kessler, Herbert L., *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).
32. This accords with Maritain's concept of "connaturality" as a mysticism of self-expression, as an "internal fruition" born in the pre-conscious life of the intellect, and it is essentially an obscure revelation, a flash of reality out of sleep in one single awakening. See Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, pp. 11-134; Maritain, *The Range of Reason* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952). See also John G. Jr. Trapani, *Poetry, Beauty and Contemplation: The Complete Aesthetics of Jacques Maritain* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011).
33. See Venturi, Lionello, *Impressionists and Symbolists*, trans. Francis Steegmuller (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1973), vol. 2, p. 188.
34. Mother Teresa, *Mother Teresa Essential Writings*, ed. Jean Maalouf (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), p. 40.
35. John of the Cross, "The Spiritual Canticle," in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D., stanza 12, 7.
36. Mother Teresa, *No Greater Love*, ed. Becky Benenate & Joseph Durepos (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1997), pp. 8-10.
37. von Balthasar, Hans Urs, *Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), vol. 1, p. 673.
38. Michelangelo belonged to a group of Italian Evangelicals known as the *spirituali* who stressed the concept of *sola fide* and, therefore, of personal relationship to God in Christ. See in particular Jung, Eva Maria, 1953, "On the Nature of Evangelismo in Sixteenth-Century Italy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 14, pp. 511-27; Nagel, Alexander, 1997, "Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna," *Art Bulletin* 79, pp. 647-55; and Caponetto, Salvatore, *The Protestant Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, trans. Anne C. Tedeschi and John Tedeschi (Kirksville, MO: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1999).
39. Dom, R. Sorg, *Towards a Benedictine Theology of Manual Labor* (Lisle, IL: St. Procopius Abbey, 1951), p. 118.
40. Cardinal Newman, John Henry, "Benedictine Schools," in *Essays and Sketches*, 3 vols. (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1948), vol. 3, p. 245.
41. Benedict, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, ed. T. Fry (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981), prologue.
42. Schapiro, Meyer, *Vincent van Gogh* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1950), p. 50.
43. Mother Teresa, "A Joyful Life," in *Mother Teresa: Essential Writings*, ed. Jean Maalouf, pp. 100-1.
44. Mother Teresa, *Mother Teresa: Come be My Light: The Private Writings of the "Saint of Calcutta,"* ed. Brian Kolodiejchuk, M. C., p. 187.
45. Mother Teresa, *No Greater Love*, ed. Becky Benenate & Joseph Durepos, p. 22.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
47. Venturi, Lionello, *Impressionists and Symbolists*, trans. Francis Steegmuller (New York, NY: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1973), p. 186.
48. Nicholas of Cusa, "On Seeking God," in *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. H. Lawrence Bond, II, p. 35.

49. The theme of music in van Gogh is explored by Veldhorst, Natascha, *Van Gogh and Music: A Symphony in Blue and Yellow*, trans. Diane Webb (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).
50. See Murray, Ann H., 1978, "The Religious Background of Vincent van Gogh and Its Relation to His Views on Nature and Art," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 46, Supplement, pp. 67-96.
51. Gilson, Étienne, *Painting and Reality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957), p. 294.
52. Teresa of Avila, "Fifth Mansions," in *Interior Castle*, trans., ed. E. Allison Peers (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1961), chap. 2.
53. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, trans. G. R. Evans, Sermon 1.