

Słowa kluczowe: miłość, przemiana, tożsamość, noc, Jan od Krzyża, Ratzinger, Akwinata

Keywords: love, transformation, identity, night, John of the Cross, Ratzinger, Aquinas

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BECOMING YOU WHILE BEING ME: EXPLORING THE LIMITS OF CHRISTIAN LOVE AND IDENTITY²

The purpose of this article is to ask Love a question; and to seek light from Juan de la Cruz and Josef Ratzinger, two far different authors linked in their conviction that “Only being loved is being saved” (Ratzinger, 1995a, p. 74).³ The question put to Love is about the limits of the self, or the extent to which we are limited to ourselves as subjects. Is there no alternative to, on the one hand, being a personal subject and forever knowing others only from that vantage point; and on the other hand, merging with, becoming the other and in so doing ceasing to be oneself? In terms of spiritual theology, can love so unite Christ and the believer that she becomes him while yet remaining herself?

Our response will call upon Aquinas, and observe a similarity between a phrase from Thomas’s *Commentary on the Sentences* and a verse from the poetry

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2 A version of the present article was published in Italian translation in Christof Betschart and Maria Manuela Romano (edd.) *Teologia dell’amore, prospettive teologico-filosofiche in dialogo con il Carmelo*, Città Nuova, Roma, 2023, 199-216. The English original is unpublished, as is the present version.

3 See Juan de la Cruz “la salud del alma es el amor de Dios” (CB 11:11). To refer to Juan’s writings, the following abbreviations are used: LA: Llama, first redaction; LB: Llama, second redaction; CA: Cántico, first redaction; CB: Cántico, second redaction; 1 S 1.1: *Subida del Monte Carmelo* Book 1, chapter 1, paragraph 1 (etc.); 2N: *Noche* book 2, etc. Our basic text is San Juan de la Cruz *Obras Completas* 6th edition, ed. José Vicente Rodríguez and Federico Ruiz, Editorial de Espiritualidad, Madrid, 2009. Translations from the Spanish are mine.

of San Juan de la Cruz. That leads us to consider how the English translations of the poetry of Juan de la Cruz unwittingly highlight the dilemma we are considering about love's limits. We then present four texts from San Juan's prose writings which push the limits of becoming in astonishing ways. Finally, Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict, will give theological corroboration to the understanding of love which the Carmelite poet and mystic has disclosed.

First, a word on love from Aquinas; specifically, Aquinas as mediated by Michael S. Sherwin O.P. *By Knowledge and By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the moral theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (CUA, Washington, 2005). Sherwin traces a development in Thomas's thinking about what love effects. Aquinas's earlier work, the *Commentary on the Sentences*,⁴ affirms: "amor transformat amantem in amatum" (*In Sent.* III 27.1.1 ad 4). Love transforms the lover into the beloved. This is a promising start: love not only brings lover and beloved close to each other, nor even unites them with each other, but indeed transforms the lover *into* the beloved. Let us follow Sherwin's discussion.

In the *Commentary on the Sentences*, the language of form is a central feature of Thomas' analysis of love. As the intellect is informed by an intelligible form which thus resolves doubt, so "when the affect or appetite is entirely imbued with the form of the good, which is its object, it takes pleasure in it and adheres to it as being affixed to it, and then it is said to love it. Hence, love is nothing other than a certain transformation of the affection into the loved object (*transformatio affectus in rem amatam*)." (*In Sent.* III 27.1.1, as quoted in Sherwin, 2005, 65). In this way, says Sherwin (2005, 66), love is "the terminus of the change (*informatio*) caused in the appetite by the loved object. Love is the form of the beloved existing in the appetite and in which the appetite rests." This is indeed indwelling, union; but it is so because of a being transformed into the other. So the *Sentences* read: "Love is itself the union or nexus or transformation by which the lover is transformed into the beloved and is in a certain way converted into him."⁵

4 The *Commentary on the Sentences* dates from St. Thomas's first teaching years in Paris, where he began teaching around the year 1252 (Aquinas Institute, n.d.).

5 "[Amor] est ipsa unio vel nexus vel transformatio qua amans in amatum transformatur, et quodammodo convertitur in ipsum" (*In Sent.* III 27.1.1 ad 2, as quoted in Sherwin, 2005, 68). Further on in the same article Aquinas affirms: "Because love transforms the lover into the beloved, it draws the lover into the interior of the beloved and vice versa, with the result that nothing remains in the beloved that is not united to the lover: just as the form enters deeply into the one informed by it and vice versa, so too the lover in a certain way enters into the beloved." "Ex hoc enim quod amor transformat amantem in amatum, facit amantem intrare ad interiora amanti, et e contra; ut nihil amanti amanti remaneat non unitum; sicut forma pervenit ad intima formati, et e converso; et ideo amans quodammodo penetrat in amatum." (*In Sent.* III 27.1.1 ad 4, as quoted in Sherwin, 2005, 66).

Sherwin perceives two difficulties in Aquinas's position here. First, this account of love as the receiving of a form makes it difficult to distinguish love from understanding, where the form of what is known shapes the knower. Second, and more seriously, the talk of transformation *into* the other seems to threaten personal identity. Here are Sherwin's words: "Aquinas faces an even more troubling difficulty from his tendency in the *Commentary on the Sentences* to describe love as causing 'the lover himself' (and not merely the lover's appetite) to become the form of the beloved: 'amor transformat amantem in amatum' (*In sent.* III 27.1.1 ad 4)". Further quotations follow, leading the author to exclaim, "If this is the case, how does the lover retain his or her personal identity?" (Sherwin, 2005, 69 note 27).⁶

In view of these difficulties, the change which Sherwin detects in Aquinas's thinking comes as something of a relief. In the *Summa Theologiae*, begun some dozen years later,⁷ Aquinas no longer talks of 'form' in his analysis of love. "While in the *Commentary on the Sentences* he defines love as 'transformation', in the *Summa* he describes it as a pleasant affective affinity (*complacentia*). This affinity is the aptitude, inclination, or proportion existing in the appetite for the loved object" (Sherwin, 2005, see ST I-II 26.1; 26.2; 23.4; 25.2; 36.2 note 27). In both the *Sentences* and the *Summa*, "Aquinas recognizes love's relationship to union. Love both presupposes union and likeness between lover and beloved, and causes deeper union. It causes mutual indwelling between lover and beloved, and even ecstasy..." (Sherwin, 2005, 80). *Complacentia* makes the lover and beloved to indwell each other (ST I-II 28.2 as quoted in Sherwin, 2005, 76–77). But love as *complacentia* does not transform the lover *into* the loved one. If it did, how would "the lover retain his or her personal identity?"

At the risk of frustrating expectations, we leave Sherwin's discussion of Aquinas there. What I want to take forward is his question about personal identity; and the early affirmation by St Thomas that "amor transformat amantem in amatum" (*In Sent.* III 27.1.1 ad 4). This phrase of Aquinas finds a remarkable parallel in Juan de la Cruz. Specifically, in verse five, stanza five of the poem *En una noche oscura*:

6 The author gives other quotations: "amor facit amatum esse formam amantis" (*In Sent.* III 27.1.1 ad 5); "amor magis intrat in rem quam cognitio: quia cognitio est de re secundum id quod recipitur in cognoscente: amor autem de re, in quantum ipse amans in rem ipsam transformatur, ut dictum est prius." (*In Sent.* III 27.1.4 ad 10).

7 Written c.1265–1273 (*Chronological List of Aquinas's Writings*, 2012).

¡oh noche que guiaste!	Oh guiding night!
¡oh noche amable más que la alborada!	Oh night more lovely than the dawn!
¡oh noche que juntaste	Oh night who joined together
Amado con amada	Beloved and loved bride
amada en el Amado transformada!	transforming her, the loved, into the Beloved!

In the phrase “en el Amado transformada”, the Spanish “en” is potentially ambivalent. In this context, English would distinguish *in* and *into*: (1) being transformed *in* - within - the ambience of another, such that the other is the influence or medium which hosts and perhaps effects a transformation; and (2) being transformed *into* the other, such that one becomes the other.

By way of example: (1) “This substance is transformed in salt water and becomes hard and durable”. “In that loving family, I was transformed, and became loving myself.” (2) is easier to exemplify: “The water is transformed into ice.” “Her Midas touch transforms boring recipes into something really special.” “I used to be a brute, but I was transformed into a loving person.”

In the standard English translations of stanza five of the *Noche* poem, the final line is translated “Transforming the beloved in her Lover” (Kavanagh, Rodriguez); “Lover transformed in the Beloved” (Allison Peers);⁸ transformed “in”. However, Marjorie Flower translates thus: “transforming the Beloved into him”. That is the sense - transformed into the other - that corresponds to Aquinas’s phrase in *Sentences*, “amor transformat amantem in amatum”. This is the sense of the preposition which I spontaneously read in Juan’s verse, *amada en el Amado transformada*. Here, in the ambience of night-time, the bride is not only changed by Christ, with Christ the ambience facilitating change (“transformed in”); rather, she becomes Christ (“transformed into”).⁹ The rhetoric of the poem itself suggests this interpretation. The poem transmits to us the bride’s exit, in the darkness of night, in search of the bridegroom.¹⁰ The movement is towards personal encounter with the beloved. Stanza five marks the climax of this movement, and the last line declares its fulfilment. The poem requires fullness of relationship here. It is not interested in the bride’s becoming a transformed person (albeit thanks to the spouse); it is interested in the bride-spouse relationship being as intense as it can possibly be. Not, “I became a better person”; but, “I found Him!” The poet is interested in the most

8 See Appendix for these and other translations into English, with references.

9 Augustine interprets the divine promise in a similar way: “cibus sum grandium: cresce et manducabis me. Nec tu me in te mutabis sicut cibum carnis tuae, sed tu mutaberis in me” (Confessions VII x 16).

10 The equivalence of *amado* and *esposo* is widespread in Juan. See for instance CB 40:7.

intense identification: being transformed into the beloved, such that the terminus of the movement, and the resolution of the stanza, is Christ.

The parallel between the Latin of Aquinas and the Castillian of Juan is not exact. In Juan's phrase, *amada en el Amado transformada*, the beloved (bride) is transformed into the beloved (Bridegroom). What brings about the transforming, the ambience "in" which transformation happens, is *noche*. Conversely, Thomas's *Sentences* read: "amor transformat amantem in amatum": love transforms lover into loved. In Juan's poem, "night" does what, in *Sentences*, love does. Rendered in Latin the *Noche* verse would read: "nox transformat amatam in amatum". There is a promise here that the person will not only be united with the beloved, but that she, in being united (*juntaste*), will be transformed *into* the beloved. And what will achieve this is night; the nighttime darkness which environs her and is not her own creation.¹¹

In this enquiry into the possibilities of loving, into whether one can remain oneself yet become the other, numerous sanjuanist texts corroborate our reading of the *Noche* verse as transformation "into" Christ, as the soul becoming Christ. There follow three such texts, all from the *Cántico*.

I propose these texts, not as explanations, but as affirmations; Juan's testimony to what he knows mystically to be the case. It could be objected that this gets us nowhere if it lacks a philosophical justification; that Thomas's tight analysis of becoming through knowing and loving demands a response of the same calibre; that his moving away from an explanation of the dynamics of love in terms of form, to an explanation in terms of affinity, needs to be answered if one is nonetheless to speak of love transforming the persons, one into the other.

Well, no, not necessarily. Juan de la Cruz is speaking of mystical transformation, that is, of gifted transformation; of love experienced in its purity, coming forth from God rather than built up by man. So although the structures of the human person, in being divinised, remain human, yet love at its purest, at its most original, may disclose new potentialities which no philosophy will be able to break down into controllable elements or arrive at by induction. Thomas, lover of God's wonders, would be the first to agree. Reginald of Piperno famously reported Thomas's declaration at the end of his life that his writings seemed like straw, in comparison with what he had now seen (see for instance Barron, 2008, p. 23–24). Commentators

11 Perhaps it is not necessary to choose one alternative - either 'in' or 'into' - to the exclusion of the other. The ambivalence of 'en' in Spanish may serve our purpose: Christ is both the atmosphere that makes transformation happen, and the one into whom we are transformed. The philologist and theologian Juan Antonio Marcos favours such polysemic reading: "Como ocurre tantas veces en su poesía, la polisemia y las lecturas plurales y con variaciones son las más acertadas." (Personal correspondence, 30th March 2021; see also Matthew, 2017, p. 104).

rightly emphasise that the writings were straw, not as such, but *in comparison* with what he had seen; and that this in no way undercuts the value of his writings. He wrote, and then saw; and having seen, he wrote no more. But there are mystics who have also seen what Thomas saw, and who *have* been graced to write of it; their voice need not be excluded because it does not adapt to a philosophical analysis.

In the case of Juan de la Cruz, that voice comes to us in his poetry, the first echo of his mystical experience; and it comes to us in those prose commentaries that stay closest to the initial poetic impulse. We have no commentary by Juan on the fifth stanza of the *Noche* poem, with its verse, *amada en el Amado transformada*. Of the two prose commentaries on the *Noche* poem, *Subida* only gets as far as stanza two; *Noche* ends as it is about to comment stanza three. However, the person-based idiom of the *Noche* poem, is the idiom also of *Cántico*.¹² The bridal, *Song of Songs* vocabulary is at home in both. So Juan's commentaries on *Cántico* are where we shall seek further light on what is contained intensively in the *Noche* poem but did not receive a commentary.

The first *Cántico* text we offer is from the first redaction (CA). As Juan's first completed prose work, this redaction is particularly close to the originating experience. CA stanza 11 tells of the bride, who has been anxiously searching for the missing Beloved, returning to faith as that which holds most promise of giving her what she seeks. In this life, faith will always be like a sketch, not a vivid picture. But, in that faith, we are told, love can take us further. Love effects an indwelling, such that the one lives in the other; an assimilation of the bride to Christ, a transformation, such that

... it may be said that **each is the other** and that both are one. The reason is that in the union and transformation of love each gives possession of the self to the other, and each surrenders and gives self and exchanges self for the other; **so each lives in the other, and the one is the other, and both are one through the transformation of love**. This is what St Paul wanted to communicate when he said, *Vivo autem, iam non ego; vivit vero in me Christus...* 'I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me'. For in saying, I live, now not I, he showed that, though he was living, it wasn't his life, because

12 While *Cántico* and *Llama* both convey the fulness of mystical union (*Llama* still more than *Cántico*), the spousal idiom which we find in the *Noche* poem is more characteristic of *Cántico* than of *Llama*.

he was transformed in/into Christ, so that his life was more divine than human; and so he says that it wasn't him living, but Christ in him. (CA 11.6)¹³

Each "is the other" (*cada uno es el otro*). There is a reason specified: the gift of self each makes to the other, *el uno da posesión de sí al otro*. We are told that this pertains to love, to a union in love which involves imparting a form (transformation), *en la unión y transformación de amor el uno da posesión de sí al otro*. There is a kind of kenosis at work, each leaving self, giving self, exchanging self for the other, *y cada uno se deja y da y trueca por el otro*. The result of this self-abandoning gift is that each lives in the other, and each is the other in oneness through love, *así, cada uno vive en el otro, y el uno es el otro, y entrambos son uno por transformación de amor*. Juan sees this as Christ living in the person, as Paul affirms in Galatians.¹⁴ And notwithstanding this transformation into the other, the self continues to live, *aunque vivía él*, and in that respect identity is not obliterated.

What we can take from this is that Juan knows of a kind of love that enables the one to be the other, without that one thereby ceasing to be; he knows a love whereby the other becomes the identity of oneself, without one's self-identity being lost. Juan does not explain this. Indeed, how could he?

Accordingly, **the second of our four texts**, CB 26.4 (see CA 17.3), emphasises that here we are in a domain where conceptual analysis is inadequate to the intimacy, giftedness, otherness of what is going on. In the itinerary traced by the second redaction of *Cántico*, the bride has reached (in stanza 22) the fulness of communion, the spiritual marriage. Our second text comments the beginning of stanza 26, *En la interior bodega*:

What God communicates to the soul in this close-knit togetherness is completely beyond words, and nothing can be said [of it], just as of God himself nothing can be said that would be like him; for God is the very one

13 "... se puede decir que cada uno es el otro y que entrambos son uno. La razón es porque en la unión y transformación de amor el uno da posesión de sí al otro, y cada uno se deja y da y trueca por el otro; y así, cada uno vive en el otro, y el uno es el otro, y entrambos son uno por transformación de amor. Esto es lo que quiso dar a entender san Pablo (Gal. 2, 22) cuando dijo: Vivo autem, iam non ego; vivit vero in me Christus, que quiere decir: Vivo yo, ya no yo, pero vive en mí Cristo. Porque en decir vivo yo, ya no yo, dio a entender que, aunque vivía él, no era vida suya, porque estaba transformado en Cristo, que su vida más era divina que humana; y por eso dice que no vivía él, sino Cristo en él" CA 11.6. The second redaction is almost identical, CB 12.7.

14 The author returns to Paul's text in CB 22, the stanza announcing the consumation of union in spiritual marriage. There, the beloved is a garden in which the soul is transformed - 'in' as ambience, here - and in which the divine and human natures, God and the soul, are so given to each other that, without erasing their natures, each seems to be God ('cada una parece Dios', CB 22.5). This is an embrace (*abrazo*), through which the soul lives God's life, and what Paul says is fulfilled: I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me. (CB 22.6)

who communicates himself to her with wondrous glory, transforming her in/into him, such that both are one; as we might say of the window and the ray of sunlight, or coal and the fire, or the light of the stars and the light of the sun - though not as essentially and completely as in the other life.¹⁵

The images of sunlight and fire suggest an entry of the lesser into the greater, such that lesser becomes greater without ceasing to be itself. The coal becomes fire without ceasing to be coal. Coming from God, this work of love is as beyond explanation as God is. And such ineffability is not a static inability to conceptualise; it is a bridal condition, a passing over from oneself to the other, in a love which discourse would cheapen or betray. Hence, a few paragraphs further on:

... that divinisation and uplifting of the mind in God - in which love steals her heart and she is as it were saturated with love, wholly refashioned in God - does not let her pay attention to anything worldly. For she is far distant, not only from all things, but even from herself: annihilated, as one taken up and held together in love; which consists in passing over from oneself to the Beloved.¹⁶

The transformation which love effects is a passover; a paschal mystery, passing from self to the Beloved. This dying and rising speaks of the deconstruction, the annihilation, worked by the inflow of divine love which is the dark night of spirit.¹⁷

15 "Y lo que Dios comunica al alma en esta estrecha junta totalmente es indecible, y no se puede decir nada, así como del mismo Dios no se puede decir algo que sea como él; porque el mismo Dios es el que se le comunica con admirable gloria de transformación de ella en él, estando ambos en uno, como si dijéramos ahora la vidriera con el rayo del sol, o el carbón con el fuego, o la luz de las estrellas con la del sol, no empero tan esencial y acabadamente como en la otra vida." CB 26.4.

16 "... aquel endiosamiento y levantamiento de mente en Dios, en que queda el alma como robada y embebida en amor, toda hecha en Dios, no la deja advertir a cosa alguna del mundo; porque no sólo de todas las cosas, mas aun de sí queda enajenada y aniquilada, como resumida y resuelta en amor, que consiste en pasar de sí al Amado." CB 26.14; see CA 17.11.

17 "[La] pasión y pena que el alma aquí padece es a causa de otros dos extremos, conviene a saber, divino y humano, que aquí se juntan. El divino es esta contemplación purgativa, y el humano el sujeto del alma. Que como el divino embiste a fin de [cocerla y] renovarla para hacerla divina, desnudándola de las afecciones habituales y propiedades del hombre viejo, en que ella está muy unida, conglutinada y conformada, de tal manera la destrica y decuece la sustancia espiritual, absorbiéndola en una profunda y honda tiniebla, que el alma se siente estar deshaciendo y derritiendo en la haz y vista de sus miserias con muerte de espíritu cruel; así como si, tragada de una bestia, en su vientre tenebroso se sintiese estar digiriéndose, padeciendo estas angustias como Jonás en el vientre de aquella marina bestia. Porque en este sepulcro de oscura muerte la conviene estar para la [espiritual] resurrección que espera." (2N 6.1) The elements in square brackets are taken (by the editors of the *Obras Completas* EDE Madrid 2009) from the Roma manuscript, ms.328a Archivo Gen. OCD; the primary manuscript used is ms.3446 BN-Madrid.

Transformation, becoming the other while remaining oneself, is death and resurrection, the grain of wheat falling in the ground and dying, and so bearing fruit.¹⁸

The language of divinisation, *endiosamiento*, includes, for John, an ethical dimension; a godliness in the way a person feels and acts.¹⁹ Our focus now, however, is the possibility that divinisation might signify a becoming God, yet without either adulterating the divine or destroying the self; a becoming Christ, without ceasing to be oneself.²⁰ So too, the language of participation, set to work by Juan, serves this hope of becoming the other.²¹ Sharing in Christ's beauty, we become his beauty. Or rather, we become him, in his beauty. So the **third text**, CB 36.5, commenting on the line, *Y vámonos a ver en tu hermosura*.²²

... and so I shall be you in your beauty, and you shall be me in your beauty, because your very beauty will be my beauty; and so we shall see each other in your beauty. This is the adoption of the sons of God, who in all truth will say to God what the Son himself said, in St John, to the eternal

18 See John 12:24-25. Thanks to Dr Sabina Alkire for this insight.

19 3S 13.5: "y así, se asemeja el alma a él por las acciones y movimientos de amor hasta **transformarse en él**." CB 20/21.4: "En la cual, porque Dios **transforma vivamente al alma en sí**, todas las potencias, apetitos y movimientos del alma pierden su imperfección natural y se mudan en divinos." A sharing in divine strength: CB 22.8 God's strength becomes hers. "Los brazos de Dios ... **en que ... transformada** nuestra flaqueza, tiene ya fortaleza del mismo Dios."

20 Stephen Finlan concludes his excellent chapter, "Can we speak of *theosis* in Paul?", in Michael J. Christensen and Jeffrey A. Wittung, eds, *Partakers of the Divine Nature, The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, with the assertion that for Paul "the believer does not *become* Christ. This is where Paul's viewpoint is to be distinguished from a Gnostic one [...] where the mystic blends identities with a god. Becoming Christified does not mean becoming Christ, but rather Christlike in substance and character" (Finlan, 2007, p. 79). However, he does not take account of Galatians 2,22, nor of Pauline language of being the body of Christ. What we are probing in this paper is the possibility of a becoming Christ where identities are not blended. Also to be noted, as Finlan (2007, p. 76) points out, is that 2 Corinthians 3:18 speaks of a change of 'form' (*metamorphoumetha*).

21 2S 5.3 [end]: "quedará transformada en Dios por amor" in "unión de semejanza", where wills are conformed. 2S 5.5 [end] and 5.6: "transformación por participación". 2S 5.7: "... y aun es Dios por participación" although distinct. LB 3.8: "Todo lo que se puede en esta canción decir es menos de lo que hay, porque la transformación en Dios es indecible. Todo se dice en esta palabra: que el alma está hecha Dios de Dios, por participación de él y de sus atributos." LB 3.78: "Porque estando ella aquí hecha una misma cosa con él, en cierta manera es Dios por participación." CB 39.4: God so favours her as to "unirla en la Santísima Trinidad, en que el alma se hace deiforme y Dios por participación", so it is not incredible that she should work along with the Trinity; "porque esto es estar transformada en las tres personas en potencia y sabiduría y amor, y en esto es semejante el alma a Dios; y para que pudiese venir a esto la crió a su imagen y semejanza."

22 "... y así seré yo tú en tu hermosura, y serás tú yo en tu hermosura, porque tu misma hermosura será mi hermosura; y así nos veremos el uno al otro en tu hermosura. Ésta es la adopción de los hijos de Dios, que de veras dirán a Dios lo que el mismo Hijo dijo por San Juan al eterno Padre, diciendo, 'Todas mis cosas son tuyas, y tus cosas son mías' [Jn 17.10]. Él por esencia, por ser Hijo natural, nosotros por participación, por ser hijos adoptivos. Y así lo dijo él no sólo por sí, que es la cabeza, sino por todo su cuerpo místico que es la Iglesia" (CB 36.5). We are in the final section of the Cántico, referred in the first redaction to the mystic (in anticipation of heaven), and in the second redaction to heaven (as anticipated by the mystic).

Father: All that is mine is yours and all that is yours is mine. He, by essence, being Son by nature; we, through participation, being adopted children. So he said this not only for himself, who is the head, but for all his mystical body which is the Church.²³

“I shall be you... and you shall be me.” Here the subject is the Church, and the baptised person in the Church.²⁴ The Church is the body of Christ, Christ the head of the body. This is no abstraction: look at Jesus as he walks on earth, the Son of God personally bodily present; there he is, a living man, head, chest, arms, legs, his gait and his gaze and the way he moves his hands: the whole of him. Within that wholeness of his, he is the head, we are the body... that is as ‘one’ as it is possible to become: we are *him*, while being ourselves. And for Juan it is Christ’s beauty that, shining forth, claims and incorporates the person into Him, so that she is towards the Father in the way that the Son is towards the Father. The Father has only one begotten Son; that Son so shares himself that the believer becomes one in him, with him, in his oneness towards the Father.

Hence in CB 37 (our **fourth** text from *Cántico*) where the person in heaven comes home to Christ, what she shares, in mystery, is his gaze upon the Father. “And saying, *There we shall enter*, that is: there we shall be transformed, namely, I in you through love for these sweet, divine judgements of which we spoke.”²⁵ In the knowledge of God’s judgements, in his Son, the soul is transformed in love for God, “thanking and loving the Father afresh, in the light of this knowledge, with great sweetness and delight, through his Son Jesus Christ. And this she does united with Christ, together with Christ” (CB 37.6).²⁶

23 CB 36.5 adds to CA 35.3 at this point the hope that this will be fulfilled eschatologically, in eternity.

24 Baptised: see CB 23.6.

25 “Y decir: Allí nos entraremos, es decir: allí nos transformaremos, es a saber: yo en ti por amor de estos dichos juicios divinos y sabrosos.” CB 37.6.

26 “... según estas noticias, agradeciendo y amando al Padre de nuevo con grande sabor y deleite por su Hijo Jesucristo. Y esto hace ella unida con Cristo, juntamente con Cristo”, CB 37.6. In this, there is a correspondence between the union of divine and human in Christ and the union of the soul with God. “The rock of which she speaks here is Christ - so says St Paul. The high caverns of this rock are the high, sublime, profound mysteries of divine wisdom which are in *Christ*, concerning the hypostatic union of the human nature with the divine Word, and the way that the union of humans with God responds to this, and that God’s justice and mercy fittingly come together for the salvation of humankind and so manifest God’s judgements.” “La piedra que aquí dice, según dice San Pablo, es Cristo. Las subidas cavernas de esta piedra son los subidos y altos y profundos misterios de sabiduría de Dios que hay en Cristo, sobre la unión hipostática de la naturaleza humana con el Verbo divino, y en la correspondencia que hay a ésta de la unión de los hombres en Dios, y en las conveniencias de justicia y misericordia de Dios sobre la salud del género humano en manifestación de sus juicios.” CB 37.3

So the home of the oneness I am hoping for, where I would be not simply me, but where love would make me the other, is the Blessed Trinity. It is in God that personal identity is not destroyed, but is at its greatest, where persons are so united that they are, simply, one. Juan's spousal language which we have seen in *Cántico* was first pronounced in his Toledo poetry: namely *Cántico* and *Romances*. In the latter, the Church is the bride created for the Son, and the Son intends to seek her, rescue her, embrace her, and lift her into his embrace with the Father.²⁷ There she finds the Trinity, happening: "Three Persons and one beloved / existed among all three; / and one love in them all / made of them one lover, / and the lover is the loved one / in whom each one lived."²⁸

We began this discussion with the hope that it might be possible to be so taken up in love that the old "I-based" vantage-point might be superseded. We took a cue from Aquinas's discourse on love in the *Sentences*, where love transforms lover into loved. The concern is that such an account of love would destroy personal identity. We looked to San Juan de la Cruz, not for a philosophical explanation of what in any case may in fact exceed established categories, but rather for his testimony to what he knows to be the case, the witness of his mystical experience. There we found him being transformed into Christ, and his knowing a transformation that makes each the other in shared beauty. Love like this finds its home in the Son's oneness with his Father, into which He, the Son, draws the believer. In the last part of this article, a contemporary theologian will add his voice, as we seek Love's answer to our question, Can Love make me you, while I yet remain me?

When in the Easter Vigil homily of 2008 Benedict XVI explores the mystery of Christ's resurrection, he looks to the communion in love between Jesus and the Father. He looks to what love can do, to the kind of transformation it can entail.

27 "... for he was the head / of her who was his bride, / to whom all the members / of the just he would join, / these, the bride's body, / whom he would take / in his arms, tenderly, / and there give her his love; / joined thus as one / to the Father he would lift her, / where that same delight / which God knows, she would know; / for as the Father and the Son / and the one from them proceeding / the one lives in the other, / so the bride would be, / for, taken into God. / God's life would she live." "...porque él era la cabeza / de la esposa que tenía, / a la cual todos los miembros / de los justos juntaría, / que son cuerpo de la esposa, / a la cual él tomaría / en sus brazos tiernamente, / y allí su amor la daría; / y que, así juntos en uno, / al Padre la llevaría, / donde del mismo deleite / que Dios goza, gozaría; / que, como el Padre y el Hijo, / y el que de ellos procedía / el uno vive en el otro, / así la esposa sería, / que, dentro de Dios absorta, / vida de Dios viviría." *Romances* 4, 149-166.

28 "Tres Personas y un amado / entre todos tres había, / y un amor en todas ellas / un amante las hacía, / y el amante es el amado / en que cada cual vivía." *Romances* 27-32.

By dying he [Jesus] enters into the love of the Father. His dying is an act of love. Love, however, is immortal. Therefore, his going away is transformed into a new coming, into a form of presence which reaches deeper and does not come to an end.

Earthly life is strictured by the limits of place and time, and “between the ‘I’ and the ‘you’ there is a wall of otherness.” Jesus’ rising breaks through that restriction:

Yet Jesus, who is now totally transformed through the act of love, is free from such barriers and limits. He is able not only to pass through closed doors in the outside world, as the Gospels recount (cf. Jn 20:19). He can pass through the interior door separating the “I” from the “you” (Benedict XVI, 2008).

At Easter 2006, an equally penetrating sermon interprets Jesus’ rising in terms of communion, of oneness; the oneness of the human nature assumed into unity with the divine person; the oneness of the Son incarnate and crucified embraced in love by the Father.

The crucial point is that this man Jesus was not alone, he was not an ‘I’ closed in upon itself. He was one single reality with the living God, so closely united with him as to form one person with him. He found himself, so to speak, in an embrace with him who is life itself, an embrace not just on the emotional level, but one which included and permeated his being. His own life was not just his own, it was an existential communion with God, a ‘being taken up’ into God, and hence it could not in reality be taken away from him (Benedict XVI, 2006).

I find there to be some ambivalence in the formulation, “He was one single reality with the living God, so closely united with him as to form one person with him.” The translation from the Italian is accurate (“Egli era una cosa sola con il Dio vivente, unito a Lui talmente da formare con Lui un’unica persona”). The term “person” has such a distinct profile in theology of the Trinity and Incarnation, that “to form one person” cannot but bring to mind the hypostatic union of the human and divine nature in Christ. Yet the context, where that which enters into union with “God” appears personally distinct - a “he”, not a nature - suggests the union of Jesus (God the Son, made man) with his Father (“God”). “Oneness” obtains in both perspectives: the Son of God so assumes humanity to himself that his human nature is

united with his divine in one person, the hypostasis of the Son; this Son of God, in his flesh, in his human soul, is so surrendered to his Father as to be one in the Spirit with his Father. Jesus' resurrection points to both, to his divine identity, thanks to which he rises; to his union with his Father, thanks to which he is raised (on this duality, see Ratzinger, 2004, p. 305).

Out of love, he could allow himself to be killed, but precisely by doing so he broke the definitiveness of death, because in him the definitiveness of life was present. He was one single reality with indestructible life, in such a way that it burst forth anew through death (Benedict XVI, 2006).

Benedict sees Christ sharing this resurrection oneness with the disciple. This communion, in which the 'I' is not enclosed but is able to be taken up into the other, is extended to the disciple through baptism, which is "truly death and resurrection, rebirth, transformation to a new life" (Benedict XVI, 2006).

To understand such transformation, the homily invokes Paul's declaration in Galatians 2:20, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me". We have already seen Juan de la Cruz having recourse to this Pauline 'autobiography': "so each lives in the other, and the one is the other, and both are one through the transformation of love. This is what St Paul wanted to communicate when he said, *Vivo autem, iam non ego; vivit vero in me Christus...*" (CA 11.6). So, for Benedict, the disciple's share in Christ's resurrection brings about a new kind of identity, a new form of subjectivity. "I live, but I am no longer I. The 'I', the essential identity of man - of this man, Paul - has been changed. He still exists, and he no longer exists. [...] My 'I' is taken away from me and is incorporated into a new and greater subject. This means that my 'I' is back again, but now transformed, released, opened through incorporation into the other" (Benedict XVI, 2006).²⁹

In baptism the Risen One reaches us, seizes us, takes our hand (says Benedict), and so we find ourselves connected with all whose hand He holds, "and we become one single subject, not just one thing. I, but no longer I: this is the formula of Christian life rooted in Baptism, the formula of the Resurrection within time." This expansion of identity through love is heaven seeping into our present. "Simple indestructibility of the soul could not by itself give meaning to eternal life, it could

29 The 2008 Vigil homily (Benedict XVI, 2008) also quotes Galatians 2:20. The English translation reads "broken up" for "dissodato", which refers to loosening the soil, breaking up hard ground. "Released" aims at the positive sense of the Italian original.

not make it a true life. Life comes to us from being loved by him who is Life; it comes to us from living-with and loving-with him. I, but no longer I: this is the way of the Cross, the way that ‘crosses over’ a life simply closed in on the I, thereby opening up the road towards true and lasting joy” (Benedict XVI, 2006).³⁰

A new, unheard of metaphysics is in operation here, which cannot be simply derived from established categories. “It is a qualitative leap in the history of ‘evolution’ and of life in general towards a new future life, towards a new world which, starting from Christ, already continuously permeates this world of ours, transforms it and draws it to itself.”³¹

This homily re-presents insights with a long history in Ratzinger’s theology. By way of example, his essay, “The Spiritual Basis and Ecclesial Identity of Theology” (Ratzinger, 1995b)³², focusses on the conversion which doing theology demands, and sees its paradigm in Paul’s declaration, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). Conversion here means more than moral improvement or a change in beliefs. “It is a death-event. In other words, it is an exchange of the old subject for another. The ‘I’ ceases to be an autonomous subject standing in itself. It is snatched away from itself and fitted into a new subject. The ‘I’ is not simply submerged, but it must really release its grip on itself in order then to receive itself anew in and together with a greater ‘I’” (Ratzinger, 1995b, 51). Ratzinger (as in the later Vigil homilies) complements this with Paul’s discussion in Galatians 3 of how the Christian becomes the offspring of Abraham. No longer Jew, Gentile, male, female, slave, free; disciples have become one in Christ Jesus. Not one thing, but one personal being: “You have become a new, singular subject together with Christ” (Ratzinger, 1995b, 52). Such an “exchange of subjects” could never be our own achievement; it must come from another person. “Because Christian conversion throws open the frontier between the ‘I’ and the ‘not-I’, it can be bestowed upon one only by the ‘not-I’” (Ratzinger, 1995b, 52). This is the meaning of becoming the body of Christ.

30 Word order adapted for grammatical clarity.

31 “But the point is that Christ’s Resurrection is something more, something different. If we may borrow the language of the theory of evolution, it is the greatest “mutation”, absolutely the most crucial leap into a totally new dimension that there has ever been in the long history of life and its development: a leap into a completely new order which does concern us, and concerns the whole of history” (Benedict XVI, 2006).

32 Originally published as “Theologie und Kirche” in *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio* 15 (1986) 515-533. Also relevant is the chapter “The Holy Spirit and the Church” in Joseph Ratzinger *Images of Hope* (Ratzinger, 2006), originally published in 1989 (in German, A. Coreth and I. Fux *Servitum pietatis: Festschrift für Kardinal Goer zum 70. Geburtstag* Salterrae Maria Roggendorf 1989, 91-97).

It denotes, not simply a model of the Church where all play their part, but entry into a new subjectivity: “The new subject is [...] ‘Christ’ himself, and the Church is nothing but the space of this new unitary subject” (Ratzinger, 1995b, 54).³³

“Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back” (Herbert, 1963, 48). The conclusion I draw from this exploration of Juan de la Cruz and Benedict XVI is that God’s love is better than one might think; that divine love brings forth a fuller metaphysics; that it is possible for Christ to transform me not only *in* him but *into* him, so that, yes, I become him without my ceasing to be myself.

What should we do with this conclusion? Not seize it possessively nor prosaically solidify it. Here San Juan’s advocacy for holding gifts on open palms is above all relevant. Rather, allow this, Love’s answer to our question, to be a horizon of possibility, a gracious environment in which growth can kindly happen. This comes from Christ, and is not to be extrapolated from those workings of love and knowledge with which we are humanly familiar. As St Augustine exclaims: “Let us rejoice and give thanks: we have not only become Christians, but Christ himself... Stand in awe and rejoice: We have become Christ.”³⁴

APPENDIX: STANZA 5 OF THE NOCHE POEM AND SOME ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS.

¡oh noche que guiaste!
¡oh noche amable más que la alborada!
¡oh noche que juntaste
Amado con amada
amada en el Amado transformada!

33 Ratzinger highlights the Eucharistic nature of this identity, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body” says Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:17. “One body”: in accordance with the biblical significance of *soma*, this may be translated as ‘one subject’, provided we are sensitive to the connotations of bodiliness and historicity belonging to this word.” (Ratzinger, 1995b, 54).

34 “Gratulemur et agamus gratias, non solum nos christianos factos esse, sed Christum . . . Admiramini, gaudete, Christus facti sumus!” St. Augustine, *In Ioann. Evang. Tract.*, 21, 8: CCL 36, 216 (as quoted in John Paul II, 1988, 17).

1) Kieran **Kavanaugh** and Otilio **Rodriguez** (translators) *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross* Washington 1991, page 114:

O guiding night!
O night more lovely than the dawn!
O night that has united
the Lover with his beloved,
transforming the beloved in her Lover.

2) E. Allison Peers, tr. and ed., *The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross, doctor of the Church* volume one, London 1943, page 10:

Oh, night that guided me,
Oh, night more lovely than the dawn,
Oh, night that joined Beloved with lover,
Lover transformed in the Beloved!

3) John Frederick **Nims** *The Poems of St. John of the Cross*
Grove Press, New York, 1968, page 21

O dark of night, my guide!
night dearer than anything all your dawns discover!
O night drawing side to side
the loved and the lover -
she that the lover loves, lost in the lover!

4) **Roy Campbell**, *St John of the Cross, Poems*
Penguin, Baltimore 1960 (first published by Harvill 1951), pages 28-29.

Oh night that was my guide!
Oh darkness dearer than the morning's pride,
Oh night that joined the lover
To the beloved bride
Transfiguring them each into the other.

5) **David Lewis** *The Living Flame of Love by St. John of the Cross, with his Letters, Poems and Minor Writings*, Thomas Baker, London, 1934, page 253

Night that led to my Beloved, -
Guide and light upon the way -
And made us one; night more lovely
Than the dawn of coming day.

6) Antonio T. **de Nicolás** *St. John of the Cross, Alchemist of the Soul* Paragon House, New York 1989 (translation by de Nicolás)

O night! O guide!
O night more loving than the dawn!
O night that joined
Lover with beloved,
Beloved in the lover transformed!

7) **Lynda Nicholson** in Gerald Brenan *St John of the Cross, His Life and Poetry* CUP, Cambridge, 1973, page 145

O night, you were the guide!
O night more desirable than dawn!
O dark of night you joined
Belovèd with belov'd one,
Belov'd one in Belovèd now transformed!

8) **Marjorie Flower OCD**, tr., *Centred on Love, the Poems of St John of the Cross* Varroville, NSW, 1983, 2002, page 13:

Dark of the night, my guide,
fairer by far than dawn when stars grow dim!
Night that has unified
the Lover and the Bride,
transforming the Beloved into him.

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BECOMING YOU WHILE BEING ME: EXPLORING THE LIMITS OF CHRISTIAN LOVE AND IDENTITY

SUMMARY

Does love - can love - transform one person into the other without loss of personal identity? Taking a cue from a phrase in Aquinas's *Commentary on the Sentences*, we seek in the writings of St John of the Cross an understanding of how love works in relation to the identity of lover and beloved. The article considers a specific verse in his *Noche* poem, and four texts from the commentary on the *Spiritual Canticle*. The Carmelite poet's intuition about love's efficacy then finds confirmation in texts from Ratzinger / Benedict XVI, with his hallmark attention to personal relationship.

Article submitted: 21.04.2023; accepted: 23.06.2023.