

**FRAY JUAN DE LA CRUZ (1542-1591) :
A PERSONALITY SKETCH.**

Every saint is a human being, though often they are presented to us as something less (or more) than human. The complex and lengthy process leading to official canonization lends time and interest to the building up of the legend surrounding a very real, human and holy individual. Even our secular heroes are obliged to undergo the fate of supernaturalization. The heroes of man must be gods. Or so we think. However, in this very human and natural hero making process, mankind destroys the very character which actually made these people great leaders of humanity. Holy people and human leaders are subjected to the experience of a personality change at the hands of their admirers.

It is to be expected that Juan de la Cruz received the same treatment. His works, which are indeed quite complex as well as beautiful, lead one to think that he must have been a most unique human being. And there is no doubt that he has been presented as such. Unfortunately, Fray Juan the saint seems to have found uniqueness in biographical eyes through a presentation which paints him with distant, cold and aloof colors. He is most often seen as being absolutely inhuman in his demands not only upon others, but upon himself as well. He does not turn out to be a very endearing man for our twentieth century tastes. Despite the toning down of some of the negative aspects found in early documentation, even our modern biographers have not succeeded in presenting a very human and consequently, a very loveable person. Why?

Much that is to be found in the early documents such as eye witness accounts or biographies concerning Fray Juan de la Cruz is dated. By that I mean that it is heavily influenced by a cultural view of sanctity common to the sixteenth and seventeenth century ideas prevalent in Spain. The saint is a hero who must be surrounded by the aura of the extraordinary, the unique, in short, of anything that is more than human¹. So as we look through the declarations

¹Cf. Jonathan Sumpton: *Pilgrimage. An Image of Mediaeval Religion*. Totawa,

and early lives we find a picture of a man who never laughs². While others might speak of secular things, Juan never speaks except about God³. Furthermore, severe penances (not to say inhuman ones) are his seeming delight⁴. Consequently, Fray Juan is an angel in disguise⁵. However, I believe we can and we must ask the question: « Is there not another interpretation of Juan de la Cruz' life which is more valid because more real? ». I think there is.

Even in the early documentation we find that Juan is one who possesses very human qualities. These very qualities belie the pessimistic presentation which seems to be the general tone handed down through the centuries to us. These qualities, when examined carefully, are much more in keeping with the tone of his own works. Moreover, they make him more endearing, more human while contributing to a more correct understanding of his mystical path. So, in this short sketch, I would like simply to outline some of these qualities, basing myself upon the same early documents which have been drawing for too long a time a terribly darksome portrait of the Spanish man who was indeed a man of God.

Fray Juan's Sense of Humor

The dour, strict, and strained Fray Juan de la Cruz who is presented as such by the general tenor of the early documentation is not a faithful reflection of him. When we pay more careful attention to the declarations of those who knew him best, we discover a rather affable person upon whom the humor of certain human situations is not lost. Only someone who is really human can see it and

N.J., Rowman and Littlefield, 1975. p. 41-53. I have recently completed a short study entitled: « Early Biographical Documentation on Juan de la Cruz ». In it I point out the generally gloomy and « supernatural » view of Fray Juan which is to be found in early documentation and the care which must be exercised in using these documents. It is to be published shortly in a theological journal.

² Declaración of Fray Alonso de la Madre de Dios in *Biblioteca Mística Carmelitana*, edited by P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, Burgos, El Monte Carmelo, 1931. vol. 14 (*Obras de San Juan de la Cruz* vol. 4). p. 795-796; cf. also Bernabé de Jesús, BMC vol. 14, p. 296.

³ Relación de Fray Juan Evangelista, BMC vol. 13, p. 386; Fray Martín de San José, BMC vol. 14, p. 14.

⁴ Relación de Fray Juan Evangelista, BMC vol. 13, p. 385; Fray Martín de San José BMC vol. 14, p. 18.

⁵ D. Luis Alonso Maldonado, BMC vol. 14, p. 270; Fray Alonso de la Madre de Dios, BMC vol. 14, p. 373 and 367; José de Jesús-María Quiroga: *Historia de la Vida y Virtudes del Venerable P. Fray Juan de la Cruz*. Brussels, Ivan de Meerbeeck. 1628. p. 216-220; José de Velasco: *Vida y Virtudes del Venerable Varón Francisco de Yepes...* Barcelona, Gerónimo Margarit. 1624. fol. 100.

Juan did. We have an example in the interesting story told us by Fray Juan Evangelista, who was Juan's confessor and constant companion for the last several years of the saint's life. It took place when Juan Evangelista was bursar of the monastery of which Fray Juan de la Cruz was superior. One day there was no food left in the house, nor did the bursar have any money with which to go out and buy some. So, Juan Evangelista went to his superior to ask permission to go and beg for some food in the city. Instead of granting the permission, Fray Juan told him to return to his cell and pray God to take care of this particular need. After praying, Fray Juan Evangelista returned still another time to seek the original request. However, Fray Juan de la Cruz merely repeats the same thing to him. Finally, Juan Evangelista was to be found yet another time imploring his superior to let him go. This time he told him that one should not tempt God in such things. With this and smiling while he told him, Fray Juan de la Cruz granted the permission telling Juan Evangelista to find a companion and go. As it happened, while he and his companion were leaving the monastery, they met someone who gave them money to buy the food they were lacking. It was then that Fray Juan Evangelista was faced with the embarrassing task of returning to tell the prior what had occurred. With a smile on his face, the prior responded: « See how much would have been yours had you waited »⁶.

This story is narrated in order to demonstrate Fray Juan de la Cruz' trust in divine providence, as understood at the period of time. However, if one looks at the overall effect produced on the one who hears the story and tries to visualise it, we find something of the personality of Fray Juan coming through. For the visualisation which is spontaneously obtained shows us a gentle man who loves others and who can be amused at the persistence of a friend and the coincidental results. There is no anger here. There are no harsh tones of rebuke from Juan. Nor is there really any demonstration of a gift of prophecy, as some might wish to read into the text. What is given is a small, but precious insight into the gentle man of Carmel. Moreover, this is not an isolated incident.

There is yet another story which is more explicit as regards his humor. It seems that one day he was on his way to hear the confessions of a convent of nuns. As he walked along the path, a woman with a tiny baby in her arms approached him. She then told him that this child was his and that he should pay for its upkeep. While this narration does not tell us of his exact response,

⁶ Relación de Fray Juan Evangelista, BMC vol. 13, p. 387.

it does say that he continued along his way. Once he arrived at the convent, he told the prioress about it « ...with much laughter »⁷. This is not the reaction of a scandalised cold person. Rather it is here that we see Juan as a man who can see all in its proper light and enjoy it⁸.

The true qualities of a man remain even in the face of death. Fray Juan's sense of human did not leave him at this time either. As he lay deathly ill in the tiny monastic cell in Ubeda, the monks saw him getting weak and tired. It was so bad that he could not even change positions himself. So, in order to help him, they installed a rope from the ceiling placing it just over his head. That way, by taking hold of it he could move himself a bit⁹. One day, shortly before his death, he lifted himself up on the bed saying « Thank God that I am light »¹⁰. It was not said in a complaining voice. For that would have been against his character. Moreover, it is significant that Fr. Alonso de la Madre de Dios would have spoken of this event. The event was serious. A holy man was dying. The one who had begun the reform of the male section of Carmel was going to enter eternal life. Every one, including his biographer, Fr. Alonso, was interested in the solemnity and holiness of the event. Yet, Fray Alonso does give us this little anecdote. Why? I believe it is because it not only actually happened, but because it also said very much the type of man Fray Juan was: gentle and light hearted. For this was certainly the man who comes through in his talks and conversations.

⁷ « ...con mucha risa ». Carta de Beatriz de Jesús from Ocaña, dated 12 November 1607, BMC vol. 13, p. 360.

⁸ I wonder as well if another story might not be interpreted in this more light hearted vein. When he was at El Calvario, he was walking near a town with a companion from his monastery. A woman of « little shame » approached him and said she would like to have him with her for a night. Among other things he is said to have answered that he would rather spend time with a demon from hell as a companion than with her. (Cf. Fr. Juan de san Angelo, BMC vol. 14, p. 69). It is difficult to determine if the story is even true or whether it belongs to one of those legends made to point out Juan's sense of purity. However, if it is, I cannot help but think that he must have enjoyed the repartee and its gives us to see too that he was able to speak with everyone. There is no doubt that he must have been quick witted as well.

⁹ Cf. Fr. Fernando de la Madre de Dios, BMC vol. 14, p. 147-148.

¹⁰ Fray Alonso de la Madre de Dios: « Echó la mano a una sogá que pendía sobre su cama para volverse; alivióse por sí solo y sentóse en la cama, diciendo ¡ bendito sea Dios, qué ligero estoy ! ». BMC vol. 14, p. 399.

The Person and His Words

When we think of someone whose conversations are almost constantly about God or the necessity of « detachment », the image which is conjured up in our minds is not a very flattering one. For usually, our minds perceive someone who is rather stuffy, as well as being a religious fanatic who bores people with talk of God rather than bringing them His life. Pious speeches are not the most endearing of the modes of speech. There is no doubt that God was central in Fray Juan's talks, yet Fray Martín de san José tells us that he was never dull or irksome¹¹. This statement in itself would be enough. However, we discover yet another most interesting facet in someone else's declaration. Here is what Fray Juan Evangelista says: « He (Fray Juan de la Cruz) spoke continuously about God, in recreation as in other places; and he was so good in doing this that in recreation, speaking about God, he would make us all laugh and we would leave quite pleased »¹². This is hardly the picture of Fray Juan that some biographies would have us see. For here, rather than a demanding, dour and overly serious and introspective individual, we find another type of personality. Fray Juan de la Cruz was not only able to laugh himself, but was able to make others laugh even in what would have been considered to be an especially serious context.

This shows us a man who is at home with God. Fear and damnation are not part of his image of the Father who loves his children. Fray Juan comes across to us as one who has come to know what it means to be a human son of God. God is his Father and His sons are his brothers. The man who can act and speak in the way he did is one who reflects the gentleness of his God. Therefore, it is not surprising that Fray Juan's words will have a very definite effect.

Oftentimes it is fairly easy to see who a person really is by listening to what he says, as well as the manner in which he says it. The overall presentation of ideas and their subsequent effect upon the hearers says a great deal. It might be a gentleness that comes to the surface or perhaps a certain harshness. Despite one's

¹¹ Fray Martín de San José: « ...sus pláticas habían de ser siempre de Dios... y con ser su trato común siempre de esto, era tan admirable en todo tiempo y lugar, que no era enfadoso ni pesado ». BMC vol. 14, p. 14.

¹² Fray Juan Evangelista: « Su continuo hablar era de Dios, así en recreación como en otros lugares; y tenía tanta gracia en tratar de esto, que en recreación, tratando cosas de Dios, nos hacía reír a todos y salíamos con sumo gusto ». BMC vol. 13, p. 386.

¹³ Fray Lucas de San José, BMC vol. 13, p. 357.

talents for speaking or even for acting, eventually, the true nature of an individual is discovered in the general tenor of his speech. This is what it is important and necessary for us to consider Fray Juan's effect through his words.

From what we can gather from the early documentation, Juan de la Cruz' words and mannerisms affected people greatly. In his declaration from Baeza in the early seventeenth century, Fray Martín de san José provides us with the basic effect produced by Fray Juan. His hearers, we are told, were most often filled with peace and serenity upon hearing him. Many of them furthermore noted that they were relieved of some very troublesome difficulties as they listened to him. Most were filled with an enthusiasm to go on¹⁴. In reading what Fray Martín and others had to say of the effect of Juan's words and manner, it is easy to see, at the very least, some important characteristics of the man. To produce peace and serenity in others, one must have these same qualities in a proportionate degree within oneself. Furthermore, there must have been great hope and trust being communicated in order to allow people to put aside their doubts and hesitations and push forward in spite of these same difficulties. This is especially true of people who are seriously involved in a search for God. Certain doubts produce darkness, dread and lack of resolve which can cripple an individual's whole life style. Only contact with one who radiates a secure and peaceful trust can dispel these shadows of doubt in others. (These people are the prophets of any era). However, there is more to be noted. Such a stable and peaceful person can obtain such an effect in others only to the extent that he is seen to be gentle, kind: in a word, human. One who is « secure » but frightening and demanding in an aggressive fashion reveals himself as he really is: one who is in fact insecure and compensating for his own lack of surety. Fray Juan de la Cruz was not such a person as the latter.

His words carried conviction, but gentleness as well. His early biographer, Quiroga, tells us that Fray Juan would talk to religious in their recreation and these people would immediately understand and receive his message. Much of it was due to his own remarkable conviction and his ability to project that power¹⁵. The God Fray Juan knew and spoke of was a gentle, loving God — even when the person underwent those times of darkness and doubt. It is for this

¹⁴ Cf. Fray Martín de San José, BMC vol. 14, p. 13 and 17; Also, M. María de la Madre de Dios, BMC vol. 14, p. 26; M. Agustina de San José, BMC vol. 14, p. 41; Fray Juan de Sta. Eufemia, BMC vol. 14, p. 26; Fray Inocencio de San Andrés de la Asunción BMC vol. 14, p. 85 and 88.

¹⁵ Fray José de Jesús-María Quiroga: *Historia* p. 226-227.

reason that Fray Martín de San José was able to say that « ...neither before nor after in a religious community or outside it, have I heard anyone who speaks of God with such a gentleness »¹⁶. Juan de la Cruz understood the God to whom he was committed. It was because of this relationship that he himself reflected the gentleness and love of the Father. One speaks of the God one knows and the manner reflects as much the human personality of the one speaking as God himself. What Juan knew of God came not from « cold study », as Fray Alonso de la Madre de Dios notes, but from an experience of his own relationship with God¹⁷. A person can indeed be living separately from what he knows. However, for Juan this was not the case. The love and search for God expressed in his words came from a whole style in which Fray Juan involved himself daily. Furthermore, the way he spoke of God and his constant desire to speak of him¹⁸ were qualities of his life which stemmed from his love and concern for other human beings.

Fray Juan de la Cruz and others

Though there are several ways in which Fray Juan made his concern and love for others visible, there seems to be one which stands out in the memories of the early witnesses. That highlight is Juan's relationship with the sick. His care for those who were ill stems from his job when he was an adolescent in Medina del Campo. For several years during his adolescence Fray Juan worked at « Las Bubas », a hospital for the poor. Both Fray Josef de Velasco and Fray Gabriel de san Josef speak of how he showed great love and diligence as he cared for the sick of this hospital¹⁹. And what Fray Juan was as a youth is what he was as an adult, only more developed and conscious. Those roots of gentleness and concern for others which were his in Medina del Campo were carried over in more thorough forms in his life as a mature Carmelite. The early documentation on Juan's life does not fail to underscore this fact. Fray Juan, we are told, would go to the infirmary of his monastery and make the beds, change the dressings of the ill and even clean bed pans. And all of this when he was superior and could

¹⁶ Fray Martín de San José: « ...ni antes ni después en la Religión, ni fuera de ella, he oido persona que con tanta suavidad trate de Dios... » BMC vol. 13, p. 378.

¹⁷ Fray Alonso de la Madre de Dios, BMC vol. 14, p. 371.

¹⁸ Fray Martín de San José, BMC vol. 13, p. 378.

¹⁹ Fray Josef de Velasco, Vatican Secret Archives (USA), Ms. 2840, fol. 51; Fray Gabriel de San Josef, USA, Ms. 2840, fol. 54.

have easily appointed someone of his monks to do this work²⁰. It is noted too that when he would receive a gift for himself, he would bring it to the infirmary to share with those who were ill. Thus, was Juan constantly concerned about brightening the time of convalescence for those who were ill²¹. Nonetheless, one might interpret all of this within the context of a purely apostolic obligation. However, I believe that his whole attitude towards the weak and the sick flowed from a sincere love and natural concern for others. His being was other directed. He grew constantly more conscious of the needs of others and helped fill those needs whatever they might have been. His love for solitude was notorious. There, the statement of Don Diego del Moral becomes all the more fascinating and supportive of what I have been trying to say. Speaking of how he found Fray Juan to be a very holy and recollected man, he adds «...one hardly ever saw him in the plaza or in the city; and if sometimes he went out, it was to the hospital»²². His desire to alleviate suffering and his concrete actions of visits, care and the like show us a man who was other oriented. All the testimonies of early witnesses present us with a man who was deeply sensitive and who felt the pain of others. His concern for the sick demonstrates to us that he was not the unconcerned hermit some would have us believe. His fellow human person was not separable from his love for all life.

His characteristic of effective love was not limited to the sick only. He was interested in everyone. His personality as a whole was not introspective so much as it was contently opening to others. For examen, Fray Martín de la Asunción tells us that when Juan was superior he would often finish his own meal quickly and then go up to the person who was reading in the refectory and take over so that he could sit down to eat himself²³. Then there is the statement of M. María de la Encarnación who tells us that she often saw Juan undergo discomfort and eat late so that he could help someone who had come to see him²⁴. Still, one of the most revealing statements in this light comes from Fray Martín de san José who says in his declaration that though Juan liked solitude and recollection, he also loved people and was much interested in them. He was involved with lawyers and doctors, professors, the learned and the

²⁰ José de Jesús-María Quiroga: *Historia...* p. 303; Fray Alonso de la Madre de Dios, BMC vol. 14, p. 375; Fray Martín de la Asunción, BMC vol. 14, p. 92.

²¹ Fray Juan de Sta Eufemia BMC vol. 14, p. 27.

²² Don Diego del Moral: «...apenas le vió en la plaza ni en la ciudad; y si algunas veces, era al hospital», BMC, vol. 14, p. 55.

²³ Fray Martín de la Asunción, BMC vol. 14, p. 92.

²⁴ M. María de la Encarnación, BMC vol. 14, p. 219.

uneducated, lay people and religious²⁵. These statements merit our special attention for they dissipate the idea that Juan was aloof and introspective. The solitude which he desired and lived, forced him constantly into the tension of going out to others in their need, to say nothing of just being with those others. True solitude brings people to see each other, to love each other, to be concerned about each other. Juan discovered and incorporated this feature into his life. So, any picture of Fray Juan which would make him into a solitary, living his own life with God alone is absolutely false. Even a picture of him which would have him associate with others purely out of apostolic obligation is a parody of what was real.

Fray Juan de la Cruz' love for others flowed not from obligation but from love itself. He had been raised in a family atmosphere of love and devotion. Thus was it natural for him to extend that interest and concern to his family and outside it. An interesting example of his sincere and deep human love as well as attachment is seen in his relationship with his older brother Francisco de Yepes. His love for Francisco was very well known. However, such real attachment presented an obstacle to the early biographers who believed that such an emotion as was evidently Juan's should not exist in a saint. Consequently, they tried to understand this feature by subjugating it to virtue and hopefully leave but an appearance of love. In this approach they tell us that Juan seemed to delight in Francisco's arrival for visits. However, this delight, though very real, was due to his desire to humiliate himself. This could be done by admitting that such a poor, uneducated person as was Francisco was in fact his blood relation²⁶. Quiroga, furthermore, adds that when Francisco would come to visit, Juan would introduce him to others saying: « Sir, here is my brother who is the jewel of the world and whom I love most »²⁷. The biographer tries then to show that this introduction, as well as the fact that he never asked Francisco to change clothes or wash, was due to Fray Juan's desire to be humiliated even further. Such an interpretation of Juan's sincere love does not at all fit into this Carmelite friar's loving personality. There can be no doubt as to the real and deep love Juan had for Francisco — as Francisco was with all his defects and qualities. Fray Juan did not need to be a player of social games. He was honest and simple, with a heart that naturally opened to his brother and family as well as to all human beings.

He visited friends outside the monastery and received visitors

²⁵ Fray Martín de San José, BMC vol. 14, p. 17.

²⁶ Fray José de Jesús-María Quiroga: *Historia...* p. 369.

²⁷ *idem.* p. 370.

as well. The benefactor of the Segovian monastery, Doña Ana de Peñalosa often received Juan into her home for visits with her and with her niece, Doña Inés Mercado y Peñalosa. There they conversed and enjoyed the visits. The servant who tells us this also notes how Juan would talk with the servants being present²⁸. And even when he was in seclusion in his monastery, people visited him. Among them were D. Juan de Orozco y Covarrubias (later to become a bishop), Diego Muñoz de Godoy and Dr. Villegas. These three were known to have spent hours at a time with Juan. Once Fray Juan had been ordered to leave Segovia, they missed the long and delightful conversations they had been used to having with him²⁹. These visits outside and the receiving of others within the monastery present us with a Fray Juan de la Cruz who is more than just polite. He so loves these people that he is able to be a real host, making them regret his absence and cherish the memories of his delightful conversation. This is hardly the image of a man who scorns and dislikes the company of fellow human beings. Juan was indeed gentle, loving, kind, open and interested in everyone and everything.

This love for his fellow human beings was part of the overall love which Fray Juan had for all that was created. He loved to go out into nature and on his trips he would sing hymns and songs³⁰. His senses were open to REAL delight of being alive and seeing the relationship of life and all things to God. His use of plays for pedagogical purposes³¹ and his own expression of joy in dance and song³² are further confirmations of Fray Juan de la Cruz' personality of light and love. Such observations or stories are in complete accord with the sheer delight of senses which we find consistently expressed in Juan's poetry and commentaries, especially those of the *Llama de Amor Viva* and the *Cántico Espiritual*³³.

Yet, all of this should not lead us to commit the sin of making Juan into the « perfect angel ». He remained throughout his entire life a human being subject to our weaknesses. If he was a gentle, kind, open and pleasant person, he was also subject to loneliness

²⁸ Leonor de Vitoria, BMC vol. 14, p. 279.

²⁹ M. Isabel de Cristo, BMC vol. 14, p. 233-34 and p. 445.

³⁰ Fray José de Jesús-María Quiroga: *Historia...* p. 314.

³¹ idem, p. 320-321.

³² idem, p. 321-322.

³³ G. Morel says in his very fine study that a positive world view in Fray Juan de la Cruz was present even in the *Noche* and the *Subida* (p. 90). However, he finds a certain reserve as regards senses in Juan's work (p. 93-94). I wonder if his judgment here is not based upon a rather dark view of Juan's own personality as it had been presented in the biographies even to our own day? Cf. G. MOREL: *Les sens de l'existence selon saint Jean de la Croix*. Paris, Aubier. 1960-61. vol. I.

at times. One of the earliest expressions of this sadness and loneliness is to be found in his letter to Madre Catalina de Jesús, written from Baeza on 6 July 1581. It reveals to us the pain he experienced at this time. In it, Fray Juan tells the Madre to be consoled since she is « ...not as abandoned and alone as I am down here... For after that whale swallowed me up and vomited me out upon this alien port, I have never merited to see her (St. Teresa) again... »³⁴. This confirms what we find in St. Teresa's own letter to Fr. Jerónimo Gracián, dated 23-24 March 1581, in which she asks that Juan be transferred from Baeza because he is having a difficult time adjusting. She notes that he does not like the people of Andalucía³⁵. There is no doubt that he must have been suffering a great deal for him to have expressed it in such a poignant way to Madre Catalina. The reference to the whale is an expression of his imprisonment and escape. Having been imprisoned and having suffered so there, he now has to endure separation from his Castilian friends — and he does not like it. He no doubt had already told Teresa. Yet, in all this we still do not find real bitterness, only disappointed resignation with a constant hope he can be relieved of it soon. Fray Juan was tired and alone and did not hesitate to say it. His letter tells us of a real pain and confusion (to say nothing of anguish) that he was experiencing. All the human emotions were in him because Fray Juan was totally human.

Like everyone else, Fray Juan felt the pain of being treated poorly by his fellow man. In his letter to Ana de Peñalosa, written from La Peñuela, 19 August 1591, Juan says how all is well though in the desert his soul fare poorly. He apparently was undergoing more spiritual anguish and desolation at seeing what was happening to him even in these last months of his life, after years of devotion to his community and his fellow man. In this letter, he expresses it by saying that he had been gathering some chick peas in the fields and he notes that it is better to handle them than to be badly treated by living creatures³⁶. A seemingly strange reference is this, but more comprehensible when we remember what was happening.

³⁴ « ...consuélese conmigo, que más desterrado estoy yo y solo por acá; qué después que me trago aquella ballena y me vomitó en este extraño puerto, nunca más merecí verla... ». Carta I to Madre Catalina de Jesús, in *Vida y Obras de San Juan de la Cruz* (by Crisogono de Jesús, revised by Matías del Niño Jesús and edited by Lucinio del SS. Sacramento). Madrid, Biblioteca de autores cristianos. 1964, p. 971. English translation by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez: *Complete Works of John of the Cross*. Washington, Institute of Carmelite Studies. 1973. p. 685.

³⁵ Carta 361: *Santa Teresa de Jesús, Obras Completas*. (Efrén de la Madre de Dios and Otger Steggink). Madrid, Biblioteca de autores cristianos. 1967. p. 1044.

³⁶ Carta 26, BAC p. 992-993; KAV. p. 704.

For as he writes, he himself is aware of the fact that one of his confreres (from the Definitory itself) of the Order is attempting to have him expelled. Thus, Fray Juan felt the pain quite naturally of this event. In making humans into saints, God does not destroy man's humanity. Rather he uses it, forms it and perfects it. Perfection does not eliminate pain for that is of the essence of humanity. Sanctity enables man not to escape life and humanity, but to see it and live it more fully. Such was Juan's life and personality.

Conclusion

The early documentation, whether they be early biographies or declarations from witnesses for beatification or canonization, is a valuable source for our knowledge and interpretation of Fray Juan's personality. Yet we have seen enough to realise that these documents must be used carefully. There are other aspects of possible interpretations than the ones which have prevailed.

When seen within the context of the times and his own writings, these sources can present us with a more human, personable and loving Fray Juan de la Cruz. Where earlier witnesses or biographers until now were able to see mainly a gloomy or overly serious Fray Juan (or at most, they presented conflicting traits), I believe we can now look and see a fuller personality which coincides with human developmental patterns, being worked out in grace³⁷.

Juan loved people, the world and God. He grew into a more open, gentle, kind and loving individual through and in the very events which made his life so exciting, even if painful. These qualities which were doubtlessly his are the ones the modern reader of his works must retain in his mind as he attempts to decipher the mystical depths of this great Spaniard. Detachment, dark night, desert experiences, solitude, silence are meant to be seen in his life perspective. It is only then that they can be properly understood in the human and Christian way Fray Juan de la Cruz meant them to be received.

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³⁷ Baltasar de Jesús, BMC vol. 14, p. 139-140; Fernando de la Madre de Dios, BMC vol. 14 p. 147; Fray Martín de la Asunción BMC vol. 14, p. 96.