

The Wound of Love: A Miscellany

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Preface

written by

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Books on the Carthusian life are already available. Why another? Because there is no book in which Carthusians themselves, and in particular, contemporary ones, speak to other Carthusians of the intimate details, the unexpected crises, the everyday challenges of their existence in the desert, thus lifting the veil beyond the pious spiritual theology that has so long been provided for the casual onlooker.

This book is therefore destined for those who thirst to have a look at 'things as they are' in the Charterhouse. Apart from 'The Poor Communities', written in 1993, all of the present selections were written in the decade from 1975 to 1985, and spring from the pen either of a Prior of the Order, normally speaking to his community in the chapter sermons prescribed for some dozen occasions throughout the year, or from that of a Novice Master, addressing his novitiate in the weekly conferences. In this account, therefore, although explanatory notes will be provided when necessary, a basic familiarity with the structure of Carthusian life is presumed (e.g. that there is a Midnight Office, which is one of only three daily gatherings for liturgical prayer in common; that the Fathers live their solitary life in modest and austere hermitages around a cloister, while the Brothers live their fulfilling daily chores around the monastery, etc.) Here, we gaze past the horizons of structure to the Mystery that both sustains and outstrips it.

One aspect of this Mystery of particular contemporary interest, we believe, can be envisaged as a paradox, although clearly conformed to traditional spirituality: to seek the Absolute, and him alone, we must relinquish it, since it so swiftly shows itself to be an abstraction or an idol (cf. chapter 3); humble, fraternal love is finally seen, not as an obstacle, but as the very condition, of authentic solitude (chapter 5). Yet, such a happy 'harmony of opposites', with its salutary effects on both the spiritual and the psychological levels, should hardly surprise us if the aim of our pursuit is to regain that harmony and wholeness in God which was the lot of our race on the first morning of creation, and which is also the challenge and promise of the New Creation in Christ. Hence, slowly, through the course of the years in the Charterhouse, the corporal and spiritual components of our being and our prayer are seamlessly integrated (chapter 11); the personal interior dimension is joined to the communitarian and liturgical (chapter 4). Indeed, purity of heart, the goal of monks throughout the ages, can be defined as the simplicity which receives all, even and only God himself, at every moment, through all the channels of our faculties, in daily events, in all of creation (chapters 8, 24, 25). *Hesychia* is but the breathing of the Holy Spirit, a stability in the Spirit of the risen Christ

(chapter 22) that is attained only at the price of our entirely letting go: of allowing our complications, our resistances, and our narrow, twisted *a priori* to be burned away under the desert sun (chapter 18); at the price of our willingness to slaughter 'Isaac', so that he who truly 'laughs' with the serenity of God's Joy may be born again from the ashes of holocaust (chapter 15). The Carthusian knows that this hidden gestation takes a lifetime, and that is why he is silent. The birth pangs are severe (more severe than he ever expected); but the cry of birth is a shout of victory that opens upon eternity.