

LETTERS

[Introduction to Letters](#)

[Letter 1](#): To Catalina de Jesús

[Letter 2](#): To María de Soto

[Letter 3](#): To Madre Ana de San Alberto

[Letter 4](#): To the same Ana de San Alberto

[Letter 5](#): To Madre Ana de San Alberto

[Letter 6](#): To a discalced Carmelite nun

[Letter 7](#): To the discalced Carmelite nuns of Beas

[Letter 8](#): To the discalced Carmelite nuns of Beas

[Letter 9](#): To Madre Leonor Bautista

[Letter 10](#): To Padre Ambrosio Mariano

[Letter 11](#): To Doña Juana de Pedraza

[Letter 12](#): To a young lady from Narros del Castillo (Avila)

[Letter 13](#): To a discalced Carmelite friar

[Letter 14](#): To Madre María de Jesús

[Letter 15](#): To Madre Leonor de San Gabriel

[Letter 16](#): To Madre María de Jesús

[Letter 17](#): To Magdalena del Espíritu Santo

[Letter 18](#): To Padre Nicolás de Jesús (Doria)

[Letter 19](#): To Doña Juana de Pedraza

[Letter 20](#): To a discalced Carmelite nun suffering from scruples

[Letter 21](#): To Madre María de Jesús

[Letter 22](#): To Madre Leonor de San Gabriel

[Letter 23](#): To a person under his direction

[Letter 24](#): To Padre Luis de San Angelo

[Letter 25](#): To Madre Ana de Jesús

[Letter 26](#): To Madre María de la Encarnación

[Letter 27](#): To Madre María de la Encarnación

[Letter 28](#): To Doña Ana del Mercado y Peñalosa

[Letter 29](#): To a woman under his direction

[Letter 30](#): To Madre Ana de San Alberto

[Letter 31](#): To Doña Ana del Mercado y Peñalosa

[Letter 32](#): To Padre Juan de Santa Ana

[Letter 33](#): To a discalced Carmelite nun in Segovia

Introduction to The Letters

The number of St. John of the Cross's Letters, or letter fragments, thus far discovered is unfortunately small. One would have hoped for many more than 33. The date on the earliest is as late as 1581. One reason for the scarcity is that during the investigation against John in the final year of his life many of his disciples burned his letters, as well as other little works, out of fear that calumnies would be spread against both him and themselves. But even at that, we have no letters to his mother, who died in 1580, or to his brother of whom he was so fond. None of his words to Teresa, who did not save letters once she had answered them, has remained; nor of hers to him. But even as his letters were being destroyed and he was on his death bed, John continued generously, with the help of his secretary, to carry on correspondence.

One recipient of his letters, a Carmelite nun in Toledo, testified that a letter from him had the same effect as hearing him speak. Revealing John as warm, compassionate, and deep, his correspondence served mostly for the purpose of spiritual direction. It provides examples of the application of his teaching to the particular needs of individuals. The general content of the letters is unmistakably his: live in the poverty of faith, hope, and love because

to receive the embraces of God you must be empty of desire for earthly and heavenly satisfaction.

The places where extant autographs are conserved will be mentioned in the footnotes. Manuscript copies of the other letters, with some exceptions that will also be pointed out, are conserved in the National Library of Madrid.

Letter 1

[To Catalina de Jesús, discalced Carmelite
Baeza, July 6, 1581]

Jesus be in your soul, my daughter Catalina.[\[1\]](#)

Although I don't know where you are, I want to write these lines trusting that our Madre[\[2\]](#) will send them on to you if you are not with her. And if it is so - that you are not with her - be consoled with the thought that you are not as abandoned and alone as I am down here. For after that whale swallowed me up and vomited me out on this alien port, I have never merited to see her again or the saints up there.[\[3\]](#) God has done well, for, after all, abandonment is a steel file and the endurance of darkness leads to great light. May it please God that we do not walk in darkness!

Oh, how many things I should like to say! But I am writing this very much in the dark as to whether you will receive it or not. So, I'll stop here without finishing.

Commend me to God. I do not want to say any more about matters down here, for I have no desire to do so.

From Baeza, July 6, 1581.

Your servant in Christ,
Fray John of the Cross

Address: for Sister Catalina de Jesús, discalced Carmelite,
wherever she may be.

=====

[1] Catalina de Jesús made her religious profession in Valladolid (1572). In 1580 she was transferred to the foundation in Palencia and in 1582, accompanied St. Teresa on the new foundation in Burgos. She later transferred to Soria, where she died in 1599. John helped her when she suffered from interior trials.

[2] He is alluding to St. Teresa to whom he also wrote, including this letter along with hers.

[3] The biblical allusion is to Jonah 2:1-2; through it John refers to his imprisonment in Toledo and his subsequent transfer to Andalusia.

Letter 2

[To María de Soto, in Baeza
Granada, March 1582][4]

Jesus be in your soul, my daughter in Christ.

I received your letter, which was an act of charity toward me, and I would very much like to comply with what you ask of me in it and thereby please you and your sisters.[5] But since God ordains things differently from what we may have in mind, we must conform ourselves to his will.

They have made me prior of this house in Granada; and it is a place very apt for the service of God. His Majesty does everything for the best. Would that you with your sisters lived here so that I could then in so me way make you happy. I trust in God that he will give you great happiness.

Be careful that you do not stop going to confession; and tell the same to your sisters. May you all recommend me to God, for I will never forget to do so for you.

Don't fail to have recourse to Father Fray Juan,[\[6\]](#) however tired he may be. Remain with God, and may His Majesty give you his Holy Spirit.

From Los Santos Mártires in Granada, March 1582

Your servant in Christ

Fray John of the Cross

=====

[\[4\]](#) The autograph is conserved by the discalced Carmelite nuns in Gmunden, Austria.

[\[5\]](#) María de Soto lived as a beata; one of her sisters was named Ana. They had belonged to a circle of people John directed in Baeza, but in January, 1582, he was elected prior of the community in Granada.

[\[6\]](#) Probably Fray Juan de Santa Ana, to whom John writes in [Letter 32](#).

Letter 3

[To Madre Ana de San Alberto, prioress of Caravaca[\[7\]](#)
Granada, 1582]

... since you say nothing to me, I tell you not to be foolish and not to walk with fears that intimidate your soul. Return to God what he has given you and gives you each day. It seems you want to measure God by the measure of your own capacity, but it will not be so. Prepare yourself, for God desires to grant you a great favor.

=====

[\[7\]](#) Ana de San Alberto was born in Malagón and entered the monastery founded there by St. Teresa. Teresa brought her on the foundations in Beas and Sevilla. From Sevilla she sent her to make the foundations in Caravaca. Madre Ana was prioress there for 15 consecutive years and died in 1624. About January, 1580, Teresa wrote to her: "I will arrange for Padre Fray John of the Cross to go

down there. Deal with him as though he were myself. Let the Sisters speak frankly with him about their souls. Let them find comfort in him, for he is a soul to whom God communicates his spirit." In her *Foundations*, 27. 8, Teresa writes of Ana de San Alberto: "I arranged for someone to be prioress who I trusted would fulfill the office very well, for she is better than I."

Letter 4

[To the same Ana de San Alberto
Granada, 1582]

... How long, daughter, do you think you will be carried in the arms of others? Now I desire to see you so greatly despoiled of and detached from creatures that all hell would not be enough to disturb you. What tears are these, so trifling, that you are shedding these days? How much good time do you think you have lost with these scruples? Should you desire to let me know of your trials, go to that Spotless Mirror of the Eternal Father [Wis. 7:26], that is, His Son, for there I see your soul every day, and doubtless you will be consoled and not find it necessary to beg at the doors of poor people.

Letter 5

[To Madre Ana de San Alberto, prioress of Caravaca
Sevilla, June 1586][\[8\]](#)

Jesus be in your soul.

At the time I left Granada for the foundation in Córdoba, I wrote to you in haste. And afterward, while in Córdoba, I received your letters and those of the gentlemen who were going to Madrid and who must have thought they would meet me while I was at the meeting of definitors. But you know this meeting never took place because we were waiting for the completion of these foundations and visitations. The Lord gives us so much to do these days that we

can hardly keep up with it all. The foundation for the friars in Córdoba was completed with greater applause and solemnity throughout the entire city than was ever given there to any other religious order. All the clergy and confraternities of Córdoba gathered, and the Most Blessed Sacrament was brought with great solemnity from the Cathedral. All the streets were beautifully decorated, and the people acted as though it were the feast of Corpus Christi. This took place on the Sunday after Ascension Thursday. The Bishop came and preached, praising us highly. The house is situated in the best district of the city, in the neighborhood of the Cathedral.

I am now in Sevilla for the transference of our nuns, who have bought some very fine houses. Although the houses cost around 14,000 ducats, they are worth more than 20,000. The nuns are now settled in them, and on the feast of St. Barnabas, the Cardinal will reserve the Most Blessed Sacrament with great solemnity. I intend to leave another monastery of friars here before departing, so there will then be two monasteries of friars here in Sevilla. Between now and the feast of St. John I shall depart for Ecija, where with God's help, we shall make another foundation, then to Málaga, and from there to the definitory meeting.

Would that I had the commission for this foundation as I have had for the others and could avoid these many delays. But I hope in God that it will be accomplished, and in the meeting I will do all I can. Tell this to these gentlemen to whom I am writing.

I am sorry you did not immediately sign the deed regarding the matter with the Fathers of the Society, for from what I observe they are not people who keep to their word. Thus I think they will not only deviate partly but, if the matter is deferred and if it is expedient for them, they will turn back completely. Hence take careful note of what I say: Without mentioning anything to them or to anyone, discuss with Señor Gonzalo Muñoz the purchase of the other house in that other locale, and sign the deed. For since they see that they

have you by the hook, they are in no hurry. It matters little if afterward it be known that we bought only with the intention of being freed from our annoyance. Thus they will agree without so much breaking of heads, and we will even oblige them to agree to whatever we desire. Tell this to only a few, and do it, for sometimes you cannot surmount one ruse without using another.[\[9\]](#)

I should like you to send me the small book of the Canticles of the Bride, for surely by now Sister Francisca de la Madre de Dios is finished copying them.[\[10\]](#)

This definitory meeting is being greatly delayed, and I am sorry on account of my desire that Doña Catalina enter, for I want to give ...[\[11\]](#)

From Seville, June, 1586.

Dear Daughter in Christ.

Your Servant

Fray John of the Cross

Be sure to give my heartiest greetings to Señor Gonzalo Muñoz. I am not writing to His Honor because I do not want to tire him and because Your Reverence can tell him what I have said here.

=====

[\[8\]](#) A photocopy of the lost autograph was published in *Biblioteca Mística Carmelitana*, vol. 13.

[\[9\]](#) "For reasons of charity" this paragraph was suppressed in past editions and manuscript copies.

[\[10\]](#) He is alluding to the *Spiritual Canticle*.

[\[11\]](#) Catalina de Otálora was one of the lady foundresses of the monastery in Caravaca. Teresa speaks of her in *Foundations*, chap. 27. Here the rest of the autograph (about 15 lines) is torn off. What follows comes from other sources.

Letter 6

[To a discalced Carmelite nun [\[12\]](#)
en route from Granada to Madrid, August 1586]

... Daughter, those who are strong soldiers God will try in dryness and emptiness concerning all things so they might be victorious in battle, for they know how to drink water from their hands while standing - not bending over to the ground. They are like the soldiers of Gideon who conquered through the dry clay jars that had lighted candles within [Jgs. 7:5-7, 16-23]. The jars signify the dryness of sense; and within, the good and enkindled spirit.

=====

[\[12\]](#) Probably María del Cancimiento, subprioress in Madrid.

Letter 7

[To the discalced Carmelite nuns of Beas
Málaga, November 18, 1586] [\[13\]](#)

Jesus be in your souls, my daughters.

Do you think that, since you see me so silent, I have lost sight of you and have ceased considering how with great ease you can become saints and walk in the joy of your beloved Bridegroom with great delight and sure protection? I am coming to Beas, and you will see how I have not forgotten. And we shall see the riches gained in pure love and in the paths of eternal life and the beautiful steps you are making in Christ, whose brides are his delight and crown. It is unworthy of the crown that it roll along the ground, for it should be taken in the hands of the angels and seraphim and placed with reverence and esteem on the head of its Lord.

When the heart walks along the ground among base things, the crown rolls and is kicked by every base thing. But when a person attains to a lofty heart, as David says, then God is exalted [Ps. 64:6-7] with the crown of his bride's lofty heart, with which they crowned

him on the day of the joy of his heart [Sg. 3:11], that day in which his delights were to be with the children of the earth [Prv. 8:31]. These waters of inward delights do not spring from the earth. One must open toward heaven the mouth of desire, empty of all other fullness, that thus it may not be reduced or restricted by some mouthful of another pleasure, but truly empty and open toward him who says: *Open your mouth wide and I will fill it* [Ps. 81:10].

Accordingly, those who seek satisfaction in something no longer keep themselves empty that God might fill them with his ineffable delight. And thus just as they go to God so do they return, for their hands are encumbered and cannot receive what God is giving. May God deliver us from these evil obstacles that hinder such sweet and delightful freedom.

Serve God, my beloved daughters in Christ, following in his footsteps of mortification, in utter patience, in total silence, and with every desire to suffer, becoming executioners of your own satisfactions, mortifying yourselves, if perhaps something remains that must die and something still impedes the inner resurrection of the Spirit who dwells within your souls. Amen.

From Málaga, November 18, 1586

Your servant,

Fray John of the Cross

=====

[\[13\]](#) A copy is conserved in the parish museum on Pastrana.

Letter 8

[To the discalced Carmelite nuns of Beas
Granada, November 22, 1587]

Jesus and Mary be in your souls, my daughters in Christ.

Your letter was a great comfort to me. May Our Lord repay you. My failure to write was not due to any unwillingness, for indeed I

desire your great good, but to my belief that enough has already been said and written for doing what is important; and that what is wanting, if anything is wanting, is not writing or speaking - rather these usually superabound - but silence and work. Furthermore, speaking distracts one, while silence and work recollects and strengthens the spirit. Once individuals know what has been told them for their benefit, they no longer need to hear or speak, but to put it into practice, silently and carefully and in humility and charity and contempt of self. They must not then go in search of new things that serve only to satisfy the appetite outwardly - although they are not able to satisfy it - and leave the spirit weak and empty without interior virtue. Hence it follows that neither the former nor the latter is of profit. We can compare this situation to one who eats before digesting what was previously eaten; for since the natural heart is divided between the two portions, it has not the strength to convert everything into substance, and one becomes sick.

It is very necessary, my daughters, to hide the spirit from the devil and from our senses, for if we do not, without realizing it we shall find ourselves very backward and far from the virtues of Christ. Afterward we shall awaken only to find our labor and work done in the wrong way, and thinking that we were carrying a lighted lamp, we shall discover that it has gone out [Mt. 25:7-8]. Because by blowing, in our opinion to keep it lighted, we perhaps did more to extinguish it. I say, then, so this might not happen and the spirit be preserved, that there is no better remedy than to suffer, to do, and to be silent, and to close the senses through the inclination toward and practice of solitude and forgetfulness of all creatures and happenings, even though the whole world crumbles. Never, whether in adversity or in prosperity, cease to quiet your heart with deepest love, so as to suffer whatever comes along. For perfection is so singularly important and the delight of the spirit is so high-priced that all of this is hardly enough to obtain it. It is impossible to

advance without doing and suffering virtuously, all enveloped in silence.

Keep this in mind, daughters: the soul that is quick to turn to speaking and conversing is slow to turn to God. For when it is turned toward God, it is then strongly and inwardly drawn toward silence and flight from all conversation. For God desires a soul to rejoice with him more than with any other person, however advanced and helpful the person may be.

I commend myself to your prayers; and be assured that although my charity is little, it is so directed toward you that I do not forget those whom I owe so much in the Lord. May he be with us all. Amen.

From Granada, November 22, 1587.

Fray John of the Cross

Our greatest need is to be silent before this great God with the appetite and with the tongue, for the only language he hears is the silent language of love.

Address: To Ana de Jesús^[14] and the other discalced Carmelite Sisters of the Convent of Beas.

=====

^[14] This is not Ana de Jesús (Lobera) for whom he wrote the *Spiritual Cantic*; this Ana was born near Madrid and made her profession in Beas in 1585.

Letter 9

[To Madre Leonor Bautista,^[15] discalced Carmelite in Beas Granada, February 8, 1588]^[16]

Jesus be in Your Reverence.

Do not think, daughter in Christ, that I have ceased to grieve for you in your trials and for the others who share in them. Yet, in remembering that since God called you to live an apostolic life,

which is a life of con tempt, he is leading you along its road, I am consoled. After all, God wishes religious to be religious - in such a way that they be done with all and that all be done with them. For it is God himself who wishes to be their riches, comfort, and delightful glory. God has granted Your Reverence a great favor, because truly forgetful of all things you will be able to enjoy his good in solitude, and for love of him have no care that they do to you what they will, since you do not belong to yourself but to God.[\[17\]](#)

Let me know if your departure for Madrid is certain and if Mother Prioress is coming, and give my best regards to my daughters Magdalena and Ana and to all the others, for I have no time to write them.

From Granada, February 8, 1588

Fray John of the Cross

=====

[\[15\]](#) Leonor Bautista (Albacete) was born in Alcaraz and made profession in Beas in 1578. She later went on the foundation to Valencia, where she died in 1604.

[\[16\]](#) A photocopy of the autograph appears in *Autógrafos del Místico Doctor San Juan de la Cruz* by Gerardo de San Juan la Cruz.

[\[17\]](#) This is alluding to the end of her term as prioress.

Letter 10

[To Padre Ambrosio Mariano,[\[18\]](#) discalced Carmelite, prior in Madrid

Segovia, November 9, 1588][\[19\]](#)

Jesus be in Your Reverence.

Because of the many foundations, the need for religious, as Your Reverence knows, is very great. Thus Your Reverence must be patient, for Fray Miguel has to go to await Father Provincial in

Pastrana and then finish the foundation of that monastery in Molina.[\[20\]](#)

Also, the fathers thought it would be expedient to give Your Reverence a subprior at once. And so they have given you Father Fray Angel, thinking that he will get along well with his prior, something that is most desirable in a monastery.[\[21\]](#) Your Reverence may give his patent letter to each one. You should be careful that no priest or other religious interfere with the novices, for as Your Reverence knows there is nothing more harmful than that the novices pass through many hands and others be disturbing them. Since he has so many novices, it is right to help and assist Father Fray Angel and even give him the authority of subprior (which he has now been given) so he might receive more respect in the house.

It seems now there was not much need for Father Fray Miguel here and he can better serve the order elsewhere.

There is nothing new concerning Father Gracián, except that Father Fray Antonio is already here.[\[22\]](#)

From Segovia, November 9, 1588.

Fray John of the Cross[\[23\]](#)

=====

[\[18\]](#) Ambrosio Azzaro (Mariano de San Benito) (1510-1594) was born in Italy. A student of law and theology, he was a theologian at the Council of Trent, but also a versatile engineer enlisted by Philip II for a project on the Guadalquivir River in Spain. He later left all to become a hermit, and then through the influence of St. Teresa entered the discalced Carmelites, making a profession in 1570; see *Foundations* 17. 6-15.

[\[19\]](#) The autograph is conserved by the discalced Carmelite nuns at San José in Avila.

[20] Fray Miguel, who had recently finished his office of prior in Segovia, was at the time subprior in Madrid. The foundation in Molina never materialized.

[21] The fathers are the other members of the council. John is presiding in the absence of the Vicar General. This Fray Angel seems to be Angel de San Gabriel of whom St. Teresa complains in *Foundations* 23. 9.

[22] Father Jerónimo Gracián (1545-1614) was the son of one of Phillip II's secretaries and worked closely with St. Teresa in the establishment of the discolored friars and nuns; see her glowing account of him in *Foundations* 23. Antonio de Heredia (1510-1601) was the Carmelite, along with John of the Cross, to join Teresa in inaugurating her way of life for the friars; see *Foundations* 13-14. He was present at the deaths of both Teresa and John of the Cross.

[23] On the autograph, the secretary adds: P. fr. Gregorio de S. Angelo kisses the hands of your Reverence.

Letter 11

[To Doña Juana de Pedraza, [24] in Granada
Segovia, January 28, 1589] [25]

Jesus be in your soul.

A few days ago I wrote to you through Father Fray Juan [26] in answer to your last letter, which, as was your hope, I prized. I have answered you in that letter, since I believe I have received all your letters. And I have felt your grief, afflictions, and loneliness. These, in silence, ever tell me so much that the pen cannot declare it. They are all comparable to knocks and rappings at the door of your soul so it might love more, for they cause more prayer and spiritual sighs to God that he might fulfill the soul's petition. I have already told you there is no reason to become disturbed over those little things, but do what they have ordered you to do; and when they impede it, be obedient and let me know of it, for God will provide what is best.

God watches over the affairs of those who truly love him without their worrying about them.

In what concerns the soul, it is safest not to lean on anything or desire anything. A soul should find its support wholly and entirely in its director, for not to do so would amount to no longer wanting a director. And when one director is sufficient and suitable, all the others are useless or a hindrance. Let not the soul be attached to anything, for since prayer is not wanting, God will take care of its possessions; they belong to no other owner, nor should they. I see this with myself: The more that things are mine, the more I set my heart and soul and care on them. The loved object becomes one with the lover, and so does God with the one who loves him. Hence one cannot forget the loved object without forgetting one's own soul; and even one's own soul is forgotten for the loved object, because one lives in the loved object more than in oneself.

O great God of love, and Lord! How many riches do you place in the soul that neither loves nor is satisfied save in you alone, for you give yourself to it and become one with it through love. And consequently you give for its enjoyment and love what it most desires in you and what brings it most profit. But because it behooves us not to go without the cross, just as our Beloved did not go without it, even to the death of love, God ordains our sufferings that we may love what we most desire, make greater sacrifices, and be worth more. But everything is brief, for it lasts only until the knife is raised; and then Isaac remains alive with the promise of a multiplied offspring [Gn. 22:1-18].

Patience is necessary in this poverty, my daughter; it is helpful in truly departing from our land and entering into life so as to enjoy everything completely, which is a privation of life.

Now I do not know when I shall leave. I am well, although my soul lags far behind. Commend me to God, and, when you can, give your letters to Fray Juan or to the nuns more often - and it would be better if they were not so short.

From Segovia, January 28, 1589.

Fray John of the Cross

=====

[24] Little is known of this devout penitent of John's in Granada.

[25] The autograph is conserved by the discalced Carmelite friars in Concesa, Italy.

[26] He seems to be referring to Juan Evangelista (1562-1638) who was his faithful disciple, friend, and confessor. From Juan Evangelista we have our best extant copy of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*.

Letter 12

[To a young lady from Narros del Castillo (Avila), [27]
aspirant to the discalced Carmelites.

Segovia, February 1589 (?)] [28]

Jesus be in your soul.

The messenger, arriving at a time when I was unable to answer, continued his journey, and now on his return is here awaiting my reply. May God ever give you, my daughter, his holy grace so that in all things you may employ yourself entirely in his holy love and service, as is your obligation, since this is why he created and redeemed you.

A great deal could be said about the three points you raised, more than my lack of time and paper now permits. But I will speak to you of another three that you will find a help.

In regard to sins, which God so abhors that they obliged him to die: You should, in order to weep truly over them and avoid falling into them, have as little to do with people as possible, flee from them and never speak more than is necessary in each case. For conversing with people more than entirely necessary was never good for

anyone, however holy. And together with this you should keep the law of God with great punctuality and love.

With regard to the Lord's passion: You should endeavor to treat your body with a discreet rigor, strive after self-contempt and mortification, and renounce the desire to do your own will or seek your own satisfaction, since that was the cause of his passion and death. And in all you do let it be with your mother's counsel.

In regard to the third point, which is glory: To have the right idea of glory and to love it, you should consider all the riches of the world and its delights as mud and vanity and weariness, as they truly are, and do not esteem anything, however signal and precious, except being in God's grace. All that is best here below is ugly and bitter when compared to those eternal goods for which we were created. And however brief the ugliness and bitterness, it will last forever in the soul that esteems it.

I have not forgotten your business matter, but nothing more can be done now, although I have a great desire to do so. Entrust this earnestly to God and take our Lady and St. Joseph as your advocates in it.

Give my best regards to your mother and let this letter be for her too. Will you both pray for me and ask your friends also to do so out of charity.

May God grant you his Spirit.

From Segovia, February.

Fray John of the Cross

=====

[\[27\]](#) This young lady, whom John had known when confessor at the monastery of the Incarnation in Avila, entered the community in Arenas, which later moved to Guadalajara. She took the name Ana de la Cruz.

[\[28\]](#) This autograph is conserved by the discalced Carmelite nuns in Alcalá de Henares.

Letter 13

[To a discalced Carmelite friar
Segovia, April 14, 1589 (?)]

May the peace of Jesus Christ, my son, be always in your soul.

I received Your Reverence's letter in which you told me of the great desires our Lord gives you to occupy your will in him alone by loving him above all things, and in which you asked for some counsels to help you do this.

I am happy God has given you such holy desires, and I shall be much happier if you carry them out. In order to do so, you should observe how all pleasures, joys, and attachments are ever caused in the soul by means of the desire and will for things that appear good, suitable, and delightful, being in that soul's opinion satisfying and precious. And accordingly the appetite of the will moves toward these things, hopes for them, rejoices in their possession, fears their loss, and grieves on losing them. And thus, according to its attachments and joy in things, the soul is disturbed and restless.

In order to annihilate and mortify these attachments to pleasures in all that is not God, Your Reverence ought to note that every particular thing in which the will can rejoice is sweet and delightful, since it is in one's opinion satisfying; and nothing delightful and sweet in which one can rejoice is God. For, since God is not apprehensible to the faculties, he cannot be the object of the appetites and satisfactions of the will. Since the soul cannot enjoy God essentially in this life, all the sweetness and delight it tastes, however sublime, cannot be God. Likewise, any particular satisfaction and desire of the will derives from its knowledge of such and such an object.

Since the will has never tasted God as he is or known him through some gratification of the appetite, and consequently does not know what God is like, it cannot know what the pleasure of God is; nor can

its being, appetite, and satisfaction know how to desire God, for he transcends all its capacity. Thus it is obvious that none of all those particular things in which it can rejoice is God. In order to be united with him, the will must consequently be emptied of and detached from all disordered appetite and satisfaction with respect to every particular thing in which it can rejoice, whether earthly or heavenly, temporal or spiritual, so that purged and cleansed of all inordinate satisfactions, joys, and appetites it might be wholly occupied in loving God with its affections.

For if in any way the will can comprehend God and be united with him, it is through love and not through any gratification of the appetite. And since the delight, sweetness, and satisfaction that can come to the will is not love, none of the delightful feelings can be an adequate means for union of the will with God; it is the operation of the will that is the proportionate means for this union. The will's operation is quite distinct from the will's feeling: By its operation, which is love, the will is united with God and terminates in him, and not by the feeling and gratification of its appetite that remains in the soul and goes no further. The feelings only serve as stimulants to love, if the will desires to pass beyond them; and they serve for no more. Thus the delightful feelings do not of themselves lead the soul to God, but rather cause it to become attached to delightful feelings. But the operation of the will, which is the love of God, concentrates the affection, joy, pleasure, satisfaction, and love of the soul only on God, leaving aside all things and loving him above them all.

Hence if persons are moved to the love of God without dependence on the sweetness they feel, they leave aside this sweetness and center their love on God whom they cannot feel. Were they to love the sweetness and satisfaction, pausing and being detained in it, making an end and goal of the means, the work of the will would consequently be faulty. Since God is incomprehensible and inaccessible, the will, if it is to center its activity of love on him, must not set itself on what it can touch and apprehend with the

appetite, but on what is incomprehensible and inaccessible to the appetite. Loving in this way, a soul loves truly and certainly according to the demands of faith; also in emptiness and darkness concerning its feelings, going beyond all the feelings it may experience in understanding its concepts. Thus it believes and loves above everything it can understand.

Hence they would be very foolish who would think that God is failing them because of their lack of spiritual sweetness and delight, or would rejoice, thinking they possess God because of the presence of this sweetness. And they would be more foolish if they were to go in search of this sweetness in God and rejoice and be detained in it. With such an attitude they would no longer be seeking God with their wills grounded in the emptiness of faith and charity, but they would be seeking spiritual satisfaction and sweetness, which are creatures, by following after their own pleasure and appetite. And thus they would no longer be loving God purely, above all things, which means centering all the strength of one's will on him. In being bound and attached to that creature by means of the appetite, the will does not rise above it to God, who is inaccessible. It is impossible for the will to reach the sweetness and delight of the divine union and receive and feel the sweet and loving embraces of God without the nakedness and void of its appetite with respect to every particular satisfaction, earthly and heavenly. This is what David meant when he said: *Dilata os tuum et implebo illud* [Ps. 81:10].[\[29\]](#)

It is worth knowing, then, that the appetite is the mouth of the will. It is opened wide when it is not encumbered or occupied with any mouthful of pleasure. When the appetite is centered on something, it becomes narrow by this very fact, since outside of God everything is narrow. That the soul have success in journeying to God and being joined to him, it must have the mouth of its will opened only to God himself, empty and dispossessed of every morsel of appetite, so God may fill it with his love and sweetness;

and it must remain with this hunger and thirst for God alone, without desiring to be satisfied by any other thing, since here be low it cannot enjoy God as he is in himself. And what is enjoyable - if there is a desire for it, as I say - impedes this union. Isaiah taught this when he said: All you who thirst, come to the waters [Is. 55:1]. He invites to the abundance of the divine waters of union with God only those who thirst for God alone and who have no money, that is, appetites.

It is very important and fitting for Your Reverence, if you desire to possess profound peace in your soul and attain perfection, that you surrender your whole will to God so that it may thus be united with him and that you do not let it be occupied with the vile and base things of earth.

May His Majesty make you as spiritual and holy as I desire you to be.

From Segovia, April 14,
Fray John of the Cross

=====

[\[29\]](#) "Open wide your mouth and I will fill it."

Letter 14

[To Madre María de Jesús, [\[30\]](#) discalced Carmelite, prioress of Córdoba
Segovia, June 7, 1589] [\[31\]](#)

Jesus be in Your Reverence and make you as holy and poor in spirit as you desire, and may His Majesty also grant this to me.

Enclosed is the permission for the four novices. See that they be good servants of God.

Now I want to answer all your questions briefly, for I have little time. I discussed them first with the fathers here because Our Father [\[32\]](#) is down there. May God bring him back to us safely.

1. The discipline of rods is no longer in use, even though the Office may be from the ferial day. This practice expired with the Carmelite rite, for with that rite this occurred only at certain times and there were few ferial days.[\[33\]](#)

2. Second, give neither to all - nor to anyone in particular - general permission to take the discipline three times a week as a recompense for this or anything else. In individual cases, as is the custom, you can make the decision. Keep to the common practice.

3. They should not ordinarily arise earlier in the morning than the Constitutions prescribe - that is, the community.

4. Permissions expire when the major superior goes out of office. And so now as a result I am again sending you permission to allow the confessor, doctor, barber-surgeon, and laborers to enter the cloister in case of necessity.

5. Since you now have many empty places, we can discuss your question concerning Sister Aldonza when what you say is necessary. Give her my regards and commend me to God. Abide with him. I cannot write at greater length.

From Segovia, June 7, 1589

Fray John of the Cross

=====

[\[30\]](#) María de Jesús (Sandoval y Godínez) (1594-1604) was one of the young women of whom Teresa speaks in her *Foundations*, 22. She made profession in Beas, where she first met John. In 1589 she went as prioress to Córdoba.

[\[31\]](#) The autograph is conserved by the discalced Carmelite nuns in Brussels.

[\[32\]](#) The fathers are the members of the council, and "Our Father" is the title used in referring to the Vicar General, Nicolás Doria, who was in Andalusia at the time.

[\[33\]](#) In the meeting of 1586, of which he speaks in [Letter 5](#), the discalced Carmelites changed from the Jerusalem rite (observed in

the Carmelite order) to the Roman rite. John was not in favor of the change, but adapted to it.

Letter 15

[To Madre Leonor de San Gabriel,[\[34\]](#) discalced Carmelite in
Córdoba
Segovia, July 8, 1589]

Jesus be in your soul, my daughter in Christ.

Thank you for your letter. And I thank God for having desired to use you in this foundation, since His Majesty has done this in order to bring you greater profit. The more he wants to give, the more he makes us de sire - even to the point of leaving us empty in order to fill us with goods. You will be repaid for the goods (the love of your sisters) that you leave behind in Sevilla. Since the immense blessings of God can only enter and fit into an empty and solitary heart, the Lord wants you to be alone. For he truly loves you with the desire of being himself all your company. And Your Reverence will have to strive carefully to be content only with his companionship, so you might discover in it every happiness. Even though the soul may be in heaven, it will not be happy if it does not conform its will to this. And we will be unhappy with God, even though he is always present with us, if our heart is not alone, but attached to something else.

I truly believe the nuns in Sevilla will feel lonely without Your Reverence. But perhaps you have done all you could there and God desires you to be of use in the new place, for the foundation will be an important one. Endeavor to be of genuine help to your Mother Prioress,[\[35\]](#) with great conformity and love in all things; although I clearly see that I do not have to make this recommendation, for since you are older and more experienced, you already know what usually happens in these foundations. This was why we chose Your Reverence. Were it simply a matter of nuns, there are so many in the region that there is hardly room for them all.

Best regards to Sister María de la Visitación, and thank Sister Juana de San Gabriel for her greetings. May God give Your Reverence his Spirit.

From Segovia, July 8, 1589

Fray John of the Cross

=====

[34] Leonor de San Gabriel made profession in Malagón. She accompanied St. Teresa on the foundations in Beas and Sevilla. She went on the foundation in Córdoba in 1589.

[35] Madre María de Jesús to whom the previous letter was addressed.

Letter 16

[To Madre María de Jesús, discalced Carmelite,
prioress in Córdoba
Segovia, July 18, 1589]

Jesus be in your soul.

You have the obligation of responding to the Lord in accordance with the acclaim with which you were received in Córdoba, for I was certainly consoled in reading the account. It was ordained by God that you enter such poor houses and in such heat so that you could give some edification and let them know what you profess, which is the naked Christ, so those who are inclined to join you may know with what spirit they ought to come.

Enclosed are all the permissions. Be very careful about whom you receive in the beginning, for those who come after will look to them. See to it that they preserve the spirit of poverty and contempt for all things, with the desire to be content with God alone. If they don't, be assured that they will fall into a thousand spiritual and temporal necessities. And keep in mind that they will neither have nor feel any more needs than those to which they desire to submit their

hearts. For the poor in spirit are happier and more constant in the midst of want because they have placed their all in nothingness, and in all things they thus find freedom of heart. O happy nothingness, and happy hiding place of the heart! For the heart has such power that it subjects all things to itself; this it does by desiring to be subject to nothing and losing all care so as to burn more in love.

My greetings in the Lord to all the sisters. Tell them that since our Lord has chosen them as foundation stones, they should consider what kind they ought to be, for the others must rest on the stronger ones. May they profit by this initial spirit that God gives in these beginnings so as to take up once again the way of perfection in all humility and detachment, interior and exterior, not with a childish spirit but with a robust will. Let them follow the path of mortification and penance, desiring that this Christ cost them something, and not be like those who seek their comfort and consolation either in God or outside him; but let them seek suffering, both in God and outside him, for love of him, in silence and hope and loving remembrance. Tell this to Gabriela and to her companions from Málaga, for I am writing to the others. May God give you his Spirit. Amen.

From Segovia, July 18, 1589

Fray John of the Cross

Father Fray Antonio and the other fathers send their regards. Give my greetings to Father Prior of Guadalcázar.

Address: For Madre María de Jesús, prioress of the monastery of Santa Ana de Córdoba, of the discalced Carmelites.

Letter 17

[To Magdalena del Espíritu Santo, [\[36\]](#) discalced Carmelite in
Córdoba
Segovia, July 28, 1589]

Jesus be in your soul, my daughter in Christ.

I am happy to see the good resolutions shown in your letter. I praise God who provides in all things, for you will truly have need of these resolutions at the beginning of the foundation because of the heat, crowded quarters, poverty, and work that is everywhere; there will be so much of all this that you will not notice whether you suffer or not. Reflect that in these beginnings God does not want sluggish or cowardly souls, nor still less those who love themselves. And to avoid this, His Majesty helps more at these times so with a little diligence they can advance in every virtue. And it has been fortunate for you and a sign from God in that he has passed by others and chosen you. However much it costs you to leave everything behind, it shouldn't matter, because soon you would have had to leave it anyhow. To possess God in all, you should possess nothing in all. For how can the heart that belongs to one belong completely to the other?

Tell the same to Sister Juana, and commend me to God. May he be in your soul. Amen.

From Segovia, July 28, 1589

Fray John of the Cross

=====

[36] Magdalena del Espiritu Santo (d. 1640) made profession in Beas and went on the foundation to Córdoba in 1589, where she died. John drew a sketch of Mount Carmel and the path leading to its summit for her; a copy of this is extant. See his [Sketch of the Mount](#) at the beginning of the *Ascent*.

Letter 18

[To Padre Nicolás de Jesús (Doria), [37] vicar general
of the discalced Carmelites
Segovia, September 21, 1589]

Jesus and Mary be with Your Reverence.

We were very glad to know that Your Reverence arrived in good health and that everything is so well there, and that the nuncio is well too. I hope that God will look after his family; the religious here are in good health and well united. I will try to carry out quickly what you ordered, although the floods have not yet arrived.

Regarding the reception of aspirants in Genoa without their having studied the humanities, the fathers[38] say that this does not matter if the aspirants understand enough Latin to comply with the decrees of the Council[39] (that they know how to construct sentences well) and that, if with this alone they may be ordained there, they can be admitted. But the fathers think that, if the Ordinaries there are not content with this, it would seem that these aspirants do not have the sufficient knowledge demanded by the Council and it would be burdensome to have to bring them here to ordain or teach them. And, to tell the truth, they would not want many Italians to come here.

The letters will be sent to Father Fray Nicolás[40] as Your Reverence says. May our Lord watch over you as he sees is necessary.

From Segovia, September 21, 1589

Fray John of the Cross

=====

[37] Nicolás de Jesús (Doria) (1539-1594). St. Teresa speaks of him in her *Foundations*, 30. Born in Genoa, he came to Spain as a banker and settled in Sevilla. Renouncing his career, he entered the discalced Carmelites. In 1585, he was elected provincial, and in 1588 became Vicar General for the Discalced. In 1593, he attended the general chapter in Cremona in which the separation of the two branches of Carmelites was approved. He then received the title of General for the Discalced, but died in the following year.

[\[38\]](#) Doria had made a foundation for the discalced Carmelites in Genoa in 1584; the fathers are the members of his council.

[\[39\]](#) The Council of Trent (1545-1563).

[\[40\]](#) Nicolás de San Juan (de Mena), who was at the time the order's procurator.

Letter 19

[To Doña Juana de Pedraza, in Granada
Segovia, October 12, 1589][\[41\]](#)

Jesus be in your soul and thanks to him that he has enabled me not to forget the poor, as you say, or be idle, as you say. For it greatly vexes me to think you believe what you say; this would be very bad after so many kindnesses on your part when I least deserved them. That's all I need now is to forget you! Look, how could this be so in the case of one who is in my soul as you are?

Since you walk in these darkneses and voids of spiritual poverty, you think that everyone and everything is failing you. It is no wonder that in this it also seems God is failing you. But nothing is failing you, neither do you have to discuss anything, nor is there anything to discuss, nor do you know this, nor will you find it, because all of these are doubts without basis. Those who desire nothing else than God walk not in darkness, however poor and dark they are in their own sight. And those who walk not presumptuously, or according to their own satisfactions, whether from God or from creatures, nor do their own will in anything, have nothing to stumble over or discuss with anyone. You are making good progress. Do not worry, but be glad! Who are you that you should guide yourself? Wouldn't that end up fine!

You were never better off than now because you were never so humble or so submissive, or considered yourself and all worldly things to be so small; nor did you know that you were so evil or God was so good, nor did you serve God so purely and so disinterestedly

as now, nor do you follow after the imperfections of your own will and interests as perhaps you were accustomed to do. What is it you desire? What kind of life or method of procedure do you paint for yourself in this life? What do you think serving God involves other than avoiding evil, keeping his commandments, and being occupied with the things of God as best we can? When this is had, what need is there of other apprehensions or other lights and satisfactions from this source or that? In these there is hardly ever a lack of stumbling blocks and dangers for the soul, which by its understanding and appetites is deceived and charmed; and its own faculties cause it to err. And thus God does one a great favor when he darkens the faculties and impoverishes the soul in such a way that one cannot err with these. And if one does not err in this, what need is there in order to be right other than to walk along the level road of the law of God and of the Church, and live only in dark and true faith and certain hope and complete charity, expecting all our blessings in heaven, living here below like pilgrims, the poor, the exiled, orphans, the thirsty, without a road and without anything, hoping for everything in heaven?

Rejoice and trust in God, for he has given you signs that you can very well do so, and in fact you must do so. If you do not, it will not be surprising if he becomes angry at seeing you walk so foolishly when he is leading you by a road most suitable for you and has brought you to so safe a place. Desire no other path than this and adjust your soul to it (for it is a good one) and receive Communion as usual. Go to confession when you have something definite; you don't have to discuss these things with anyone. Should you have some problem, write to me about it. Write soon, and more frequently, for you can do so in care of Doña Ana when you are unable to do so through the nuns.[\[42\]](#)

I have been somewhat ill. Now I am well, but Fray Juan Evangelista is sick. Commend him and me also to God, my daughter in the Lord.

From Segovia, October 12, 1589
Fray John of the Cross

Address: To Doña Juana de Pedraza, in the house of the
archdeacon of Granada, in front of the College of the Abbots.

=====

[\[41\]](#) The autograph is conserved by the discalced Carmelite nuns
in Valladolid.

[\[42\]](#) He is referring to Doña Ana de Peñalosa for whom he wrote
the *Living Flame of Love*.

Letter 20

[To a discalced Carmelite nun suffering from scruples
Shortly before Pentecost, 1590][\[43\]](#)

Jesus, Mary.

In these days try to keep interiorly occupied with a desire for the
coming of the Holy Spirit and on the feast and afterward with his
continual presence. Let your care and esteem for this be so great
that nothing else will matter to you or receive your attention,
whether it may concern some affliction or some other disturbing
memories. And if there be faults in the house during these days, pass
over them for love of the Holy Spirit and of what you owe to the
peace and quietude of the soul in which he is pleased to dwell.

If you could put an end to your scruples, I think it would be better
for your quietude of soul not to confess during these days. But when
you do confess, you should do so in this manner:

In regard to thoughts and imaginings (whether they concern
judgments, or other inordinate objects or representations, or any
other motions) that occur without being desired or accepted or
deliberately adverted to: Do not confess them or pay attention to
them or worry about them. It is better to forget them no matter how

much they afflict the soul. At most you can mention in general any omission or remissness as regards the purity and perfection you ought to have in the interior faculties: memory, intellect, and will.

In regard to words: Confess any want of caution in speaking with truthfulness and rectitude, out of necessity, and with purity of intention.

In regard to deeds: Confess any lack of the proper and only motive - God alone without any other concern.

By such a confession you can be content and need not tell any other particular thing, however much it may battle against you. Receive Communion on Pentecost in addition to those days on which you usually receive.

When something distasteful or unpleasant comes your way, remember Christ crucified and be silent.

Live in faith and hope, even though you are in darkness, because it is in these darkneses that God protects the soul.

Cast your care on God, for he watches over you and will not forget you. Do not think that he leaves you alone; that would be an affront to him.

Read, pray, rejoice in God, both your good and your salvation. May he grant you this good and this salvation and conserve it all until the day of eternity. Amen. Amen.

Fray John of the Cross

=====

[\[43\]](#) The autograph is conserved by the disalced Carmelite nuns of Santa Ana y San José in Madrid.

Letter 21

[To Madre María de Jesús, disalced Carmelite,
prioress of Córdoba

Madrid, June 20, 1590][\[44\]](#)

Jesus be in your soul, my daughter in Christ.

The reason for my not having written during all this time is due more to my having been in such an out-of-the-way place, as is Segovia, than because of a lack of desire. My will to write remains ever the same, and I hope in God this will continue to be so. I have been sorry about your troubles.

I would desire that you not be so solicitous for the temporal things of the house because God will gradually forget you and you will come to a state of great spiritual and temporal need; for it is our anxiety that creates our needs. Cast your care on the Lord, daughter, and he will sustain you [Ps. 55:22], for he who gives, and wants to give, the highest cannot fail to give the least. Be careful that you do not lack the desire to be poor and in want; for if you do, at that very hour devotion will fail you and you will gradually weaken in the practice of virtue. If previously you desired poverty, now that you are superior you ought to desire and love it much more. You ought to govern and provide the house with virtues and ardent desires for heaven rather than with worries and plans about temporal and earthly things. The Lord tells us not to be thinking about food or clothing or tomorrow [Mt. 6:31-34].

What you should do is endeavor to keep yourself and the nuns most perfectly and religiously united with God, in forgetfulness of all creatures and of any concern about them, wholly one with God, and happy with him alone; for I assure you all the rest. I find it difficult to believe that the houses will help you out any longer, [\[45\]](#) since you are in so good a locality and receiving nuns from such well-to-do families. However, if I see some chance anywhere of helping you, I will not fail to do what I can.

I desire to send great comfort to Mother Subprioress. I hope in the Lord you will extend it to her, encouraging her to bear her pilgrimage and exile for love of him. Enclosed is a letter for her. To my daughters Magdalena, San Gabriel, and María de San Pablo,

María de la Visitación, San Francisco and all, many greetings in our Good.[\[46\]](#) May he be ever in your spirit, my daughter. Amen.

From Madrid, June 20, 1590

Fray John of the Cross

=====
[\[44\]](#) The autograph is conserved by the disalced Carmelite nuns in Córdoba.

[\[45\]](#) He is probably referring to financial help given by the communities from which the nuns in Córdoba came.

[\[46\]](#) They were all nuns of the community well known by John; some he refers to by their first name, and others by their religious title.

Letter 22

[To Madre Leonor de San Gabriel, disalced Carmelite, in Córdoba Madrid, June or July, 1590 (?)][\[47\]](#)

Jesus be in your soul, my daughter in Christ.

In reading your letter I felt sorry for you in your affliction, and I grieve over it because of the harm it can do your spirit and even your health. But you ought to know that I don't think you should be as afflicted as you are. For I do not see in Our Father any kind of dissatisfaction with you or even any recollection of such a thing. And even if he may have had some, now with your repentance it would be lessened. And if he should still show some displeasure, I will take care to speak well of the matter. Do not be troubled or pay any attention to this, for you have no reason to. I certainly believe it is a temptation the devil brings to your mind so that what should be employed in God is taken up with this.

Be courageous, my daughter, and give yourself greatly to prayer, forgetting this thing and that, for after all we have no other good or security or comfort than this, for after having left all for God, it is

right that we not long for support or comfort in anything but him, and it is still a great mercy ...[\[48\]](#)

Address: To Madre Leonor de San Gabriel, subprioress of the discalced Carmelite nuns in Córdoba.

=====

[\[47\]](#) This autograph, in bad condition, is in possession of the discalced Carmelite nuns on Sanlúcar la Mayor in Sevilla.

[\[48\]](#) The autograph of this letter has been so damaged that the contents cannot be completely deciphered.

Letter 23

[To a person under his direction
Of uncertain date][\[49\]](#)

You have seen, daughter, how good it is not to have money, which only troubles us and is stolen from us, and for the treasures of the soul to be hidden and at peace so we cannot even know of or see them ourselves, for there is no worse thief than the one inside the house.

God deliver us from ourselves. May he give us what pleases him and never show it to us until he wishes to do so. And, after all, the one who stores up treasures out of love, stores them up for another. It is good that God guards and enjoys them, since they are all for him; and that we neither see them nor enjoy them so as not to deprive God of the joy he finds in the humility and the nakedness of our heart and in our contempt of worldly things for love of him.

It is a very manifest treasure and it gives great joy to see that the soul continues to please God openly, paying no attention to the foolish ones of the world who know not how to keep anything for the next life.

The Masses will be said, and I shall go willingly unless they notify me to the contrary. May God keep you.

Fray John of the Cross

=====

[\[49\]](#) A copy is contained in the manuscript Tardonense-Granadino, Montserrat.

Letter 24

[To Padre Luis de San Angelo, [\[50\]](#) in Andalusia Segovia, 1589-1590 ?]

... If at any time someone, whether superior or anyone else, should try to persuade you of a lax teaching, even though it be confirmed by miracles, do not believe or embrace it; rather, greater penance and greater detachment from all things. And do not seek Christ without the cross.

Fray John of the Cross

=====

[\[50\]](#) Luis de San Angelo received the habit from John in Granada in 1583, having had him for a confessor in Baeza. He at times accompanied John on his journeys.

Letter 25

[To Madre Ana de Jesús, [\[51\]](#) in Segovia Madrid, July 6, 1591] [\[52\]](#)

Jesus be in your soul.

Thank you very much for your letter; this puts me under greater obligation than before. If things did not turn out as you desired, you ought rather to be consoled and thank God profusely. Since His Majesty has so arranged matters, it is what most suits everyone. All that remains for us is to accept it willingly so that, since we believe he has arranged this, we may show it by our actions. Things that do not please us seem to be evil and harmful, however good and fitting they may be. And it is obvious that this is not evil or harmful, neither

for me nor for anyone. It is in my favor since, being freed and relieved from the care of souls, I can, if I want and with God's help, enjoy peace, solitude, and the delightful fruit of forgetfulness of self and of all things. It is also good for others that I be separated from them, for thus they will be freed of the faults they would have committed on account of my misery.

What I ask of you, daughter, are your prayers to the Lord that whatever happens he may continue to grant me this favor. I still fear they will make me go to Segovia and not leave me so free from all things, although I will do what I can to free myself from this too. But if this cannot be, Madre Ana de Jesús will not be left without my direction, as she fears, and thus she will not die of this sorrow that the opportunity, in her opinion, of being very holy has come to an end. But whether leaving or staying, wherever or however things may come to pass, I will neither forget nor neglect you, as you say, because truly I desire your good forever.

Now, until God gives us this good in heaven, pass the time in the virtues of mortification and patience, desiring to resemble somewhat in suffering this great God of ours, humbled and crucified. This life is not good if it is not an imitation of his life. May His Majesty preserve you and augment his love in you as his holy beloved. Amen.

From Madrid, July 6, 1591

Fray John of the Cross

Address: To Madre Ana de Jesús, discalced Carmelite in Segovia

=====

[\[51\]](#) Ana de Jesús (Jimena), a widow, made her profession in Segovia in 1575. St. Teresa speaks of her in her *Foundations*, 21.

[\[52\]](#) A photocopy of the autograph may be found in the *Biblioteca Mística Carmelitana*, vol 13.

Letter 26

[To Madre María de la Encarnación,[\[53\]](#)
discalced Carmelite in Segovia
July 6, 1591][\[54\]](#)

... Do not let what is happening to me, daughter, cause you any grief, for it does not cause me any. What greatly grieves me is that the one who is not at fault is blamed. Men do not do these things, but God, who knows what is suitable for us and arranges things for our good. Think nothing else but that God ordains all, and where there is no love, put love, and you will draw out love ...

=====

[\[53\]](#) María de la Encarnación (Jimena) was the daughter of Madre Ana de Jesús (Jimena). Both mother and daughter made their profession on the same day, July 2, 1575. María was prioress at the time this letter was written.

[\[54\]](#) A fragment preserved by Jerónimo de San José in his *Historia*.

Letter 27

[To Madre María de la Encarnación,
discalced Carmelite in Segovia
Segovia, July (?) 1591][\[55\]](#)

Jesus be in your soul, my daughter in Christ.

I thank you for sending for me so openly and with such determination because as a result my perplexity will not give me cause for delay. So, I will certainly come tomorrow even though the weather may not be nice and I may not be feeling so well. Thus, I shall say no more than that I feel sorry for the sisters who are sick and that I am pleased with Your Reverence's good courage. May our Lord bring you to dwell in him so that the foolish things, which are ever arising, will make no impression on you.

Fray John of the Cross

Address: To the Mother Prioress

=====

[\[55\]](#) The autograph is conserved by the discalced Carmelite nuns of Antignano-Livorno, Italy.

Letter 28

[To Doña Ana del Mercado y Peñalosa[\[56\]](#), in Granada
La Peñuela, August 19, 1591]

Jesus be in your soul.

Although I have sent a letter by way of Baeza concerning the outcome of my journey, I am happy that these two servants of Señor Don Francisco are passing because of the opportunity it affords of sending these lines, which I am more certain will reach you.

I mentioned in the other letter how I desire to remain in this desert of La Peñuela, where I arrived about nine days ago and which is about six leagues north of Baeza. I like it very much, glory to God, and I am well. The vastness of the desert is a great help to the soul and body, although the soul fares very poorly. The Lord must be desiring that it have its spiritual desert. Well and good if it be for his service; His Majesty already knows what we are of ourselves. I don't know how long this will last, for Father Fray Antonio de Jesús threatens from Baeza that he will not leave me here for long. Be that as it may, for in the meanwhile I am well off without knowing anything, and the life of the desert is admirable.

This morning we have already returned from gathering our chickpeas, and so the mornings go by. On another day we shall thresh them. It is nice to handle these mute creatures, better than being badly handled by living ones. God grant that I may stay here.

Pray for this, my daughter. But even though I am so happy here, I would not fail to come should you desire.

Take care of your soul and do not confess scruples or first movements or imaginings in which the soul does not desire to be detained. Look after your health, and do not fail to pray when you can.

I already mentioned in the other letter, though this one will reach you first, that you can write to me by way of Baeza since they have mail service there. You can address the letters to the Discalced Fathers in Baeza; I have notified them to send the letters on to me.

Regards to Señor Don Luis and to my daughter, Doña Inés.

May God give you his Spirit as I desire. Amen.

From La Peñuela, August 19, 1591

Fray John of the Cross

[\[56\]](#) Ana de Peñalosa is the one for whom John wrote *The Living Flame of Love*.

=====

Letter 29

[To a woman under his direction [\[57\]](#)
La Peñuela, August 22, 1591]

May God grant us the right intention in all these things and that we might not consent knowingly to sin; for in this way, even though the battery of temptation be great and of many kinds, one will walk safely and everything will be converted into a crown.

Give my greetings to your sister; and to Isabel de Soria my best regards in the Lord, and tell her that I marveled that she is not in Jaén, since there is a monastery there.

The Lord be in your soul, my daughter in Christ.

From La Peñuela, August 22, 1591

Fray John of the Cross

=====
[57] This was probably one of the Soto sisters, Ana or María, who were friends of Isabel de Soria (mentioned later in the letter) and belonged to a group of persons directed by John in Baeza.

Letter 30

[To Madre Ana de San Alberto, discalced Carmelite in Caravaca La Peñuela, August-September 1591]

... You already know, daughter, the trials they are now suffering. God permits it to try his elect. In silence and in hope shall our strength be [Is. 30:15]. May God keep you and make you holy. Commend me to God.

Letter 31

[To Doña Ana del Mercado y Peñalosa La Peñuela, September 21, 1591][58]

Jesus be in your soul, my daughter in Christ.

I received here in La Peñuela the packet of letters the servant brought me. I greatly appreciate your concern. Tomorrow I am going to Ubeda for the cure of a slight bout of fever. Since it has been returning each day now for more than a week and does not leave me, it seems I shall need the help of medicine. Yet I plan to return here immediately, for I am indeed very happy in this holy solitude. And thus in regard to what you said about being careful not to accompany Padre Fray Antonio, be sure that in this matter and in all else that may require it, I shall be as cautious as possible.

I am very happy to know that Señor Don Luis[59] is now a priest of the Lord. May he be so for many years and may His Majesty fulfill the desires of his soul. Oh, how blessed a state this is for leaving aside cares and speedily enriching the soul! Congratulate him for me. I dare not ask him that he might some day remember me at the

sacrifice of the Mass, and I as a debtor will ever remember him. Even though I am forgetful, I will not be able to forget him, since he is so close to his sister whom I always remember.

Greetings in the Lord to my daughter Doña Inés.[\[60\]](#) And may both of you pray God to prepare me that he may bring me to himself. I cannot think of any more to write now and I am also closing on account of the fever, for I would like to write at greater length.

From La Peñuela, September 21, 1591

Fray John of the Cross

You say nothing about the lawsuit, whether it is being tried or still to come up.

=====

[\[58\]](#) The autograph is conserved by the discalced Carmelite nuns in Salamanca.

[\[59\]](#) Doña Ana's brother.

[\[60\]](#) Doña Ana's niece. Later, in 1597, both Doña Ana and her niece received permission from Rome to live in a monastery of discalced Carmelite nuns and wear a religious habit.

Letter 32

[To Padre Juan de Santa Ana,[\[61\]](#) discalced Carmelite in Málaga Ubeda, October-November, 1591][\[62\]](#)

... Son, do not let this grieve you, for they cannot take the habit from me save for being incorrigible or disobedient. I am very ready to amend all I may have done wrong and obey in whatever penance they may give me.

=====

[\[61\]](#) Juan de Santa Ana was at El Calvario when John went there after escaping from prison, and was his companion on a number of journeys.

[\[62\]](#) This fragment is conserved by José de Jesús María (Quiroga) in his *Historia*.

Letter 33

[To a discalced Carmelite nun in Segovia[\[63\]](#)
Ubeda, October-November 1591]

... Have a great love for those who contradict and fail to love you, for in this way love is begotten in a heart that has no love. God so acts with us, for he loves us that we might love by means of the very love he bears toward us.

=====

[\[63\]](#) This person's identify is unknown.