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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE "DARK NIGHT" OF SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS
IN THEOLOGY AMONG FRENCH AND ENGLISH AUTHORS SINCE 1960

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INTRODUCTION

There has been a growing interest in mysticism among the western cultures within the last few decades of the twentieth century. The interest has been wide in scope and varied, pertaining to the non-religious as well as the religious forms of mysticism in both the eastern and western civilizations.

Within recent years there has been particular interest shown in the phenomenon of the "dark night" of St. John of the Cross, a sixteenth century Spanish mystic of the western Catholic Church. Modern theological writers have begun to articulate the significance of this experience. Authors such as Amatus Van De H. Familie, O.C.D. and P. Blanchard have made a study of faith and freedom as found in the theology of the "dark night" of St. John of the Cross. Lucien-Marie of St. Joseph, O.C.D., A. M. Cocagnac, O. P., Ernest E. Larkin, O. Carm., and Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. have found the "dark night" to be an essential part of the spiritual growth in contemplation.

Such scholars as Trueman Dicken, William Johnston, and Russell Peter Holmes, O.C.D. made a psychological analysis of the soul in the process of the passive purification of the "night." Among others who have made a special study of the Saint's poetry are Willis Barnstone, Gerald Brennan and Colin P. Thompson.

This thesis attempts to investigate and to synthesize the meaning of the "dark night" as rediscovered by these modern writers. In order to understand "night" in John of the Cross it is necessary to realize its place and purpose in the Sanjuanistic spirituality. For John, the "nights"

are found in direct relation to contemplation, and thereby are a means of purification for the soul.¹ The intensity of the sufferings of the "night" are parallel to the degree of union that God has predestined for the soul. It is John's conviction that any soul which aspires to union with God must of necessity be purified of all deliberate faults and imperfections. "The aim of this night is to help the soul to attain the goal of the high state of perfection and sanctity which consists of the most intimate possible union with the divinity."²

Therefore the "night" of St. John of the Cross cannot be understood without some understanding of scholastic rational psychology, and an appreciation of the role which memory and grace play in the "ascent-descent" activity of the dark night of contemplation. Chapter One of this thesis will deal with the psychological structure of the soul in the "night" of John. It will point out the function and archetypal roots of forgetting and memory, and the factor of grace in the psychological study of the subconscious. The first chapter will also bring out the symbolic character of "night" where "The inspiration of the poet and the moment of insight with the mystic are interrelated."³ A brief historical background is essential to the understanding of the total picture.

Chapter II reviews the doctrine of the "dark night" as the Saint teaches in the Ascent-Night. It contains valuable insights of various scholars in their study of the Saint's work. Chapter III enlarges on the central themes of St. John's doctrine of "Night" -- "Faith" and "Freedom."

In referring to the major works of the Saint, the following signs will be used: A-The Ascent of Mount Carmel; N-The Dark Night; C-The Spritual Canticle; F-The Living Flame of Love. The upper case Roman

numeral, or capital, will be used for the number of the book. The lowercase will denote the chapter, and the Arabic numeral will designate the paragraph.

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PROPAEDEUTICA TO AN UNDERSTANDING OF 'NIGHT'

IN JOHN OF THE CROSS

I. Rational Psychology

(a) Psychological Structure of the Soul in the "Night" of John of the Cross

In order to grasp more fully the meaning of "night" in St. John of the Cross it is necessary to have an understanding of the nature of religion as an activity of the human soul. According to a fundamental principle of the Saint, "God moves each thing according to its mode."¹ John explains this manner in which God deals with the soul:

In order that God lift the soul from the extreme of its low state to the other extreme of the high state of divine union, He must obviously, in view of these fundamental principles, do so with order, gently, and according to the mode of the soul. Since the order followed in the process of knowing involves the forms and images of created things, and since knowledge is acquired through the senses, God, to achieve His work gently and to lift the soul to supreme knowledge, must begin by touching the low state and extreme of the senses. And from there He must gradually bring the soul after its own manner to the other end, spiritual wisdom, which is incomprehensible to the senses. Thus, naturally or supernaturally, He brings a person to the supreme spirit of God by first instructing him through discursive meditation and through forms, images, and sensible means,² according to the individual's own manner of acquiring knowledge.

To understand the "individual's own manner of acquiring knowledge" one must have a fair insight into John's psychological teaching. There is a divergence of opinion among scholars as to which school of thought the Saint follows. E. W. Trueman Dicken feels that while the philosophical and theological position of St. Thomas Aquinas is used by John, in minor areas he goes his independent way:

Broadly speaking, it is clear that the saint accepts the main structure and implications of the philosophical position of St. Thomas Aquinas, but in numerous points of detail as applied to spiritual doctrine and to psychology, St. John of the Cross follows an independent line.³

In analyzing the psychological structure of the "Ascent-Night," one finds that John of the Cross follows the faculty psychology of sixteenth century scholasticism. He regards the person as being schematically divided into a tripartite entity. The lowest level consists of flesh and blood which constitutes the bodily existence of the human person. This is also the part of the person which makes contact with the outside world. While John makes a division in the powers of the being, he does emphasize the ontological continuity between soul and body, "which derives from the fact that they are essentially one single entity, un solo supuesto,"⁴ According to the Aristotelian analysis which was incorporated into the works of the Scholastics, the soul is the 'form' and the body the 'matter.' This theory seems to be accepted by John, "but Neo-Platonist philosophy plays a larger part in his work than it does in that of the Schoolmen, and affects his psychological standpoint."⁵

In Neo-Platonism, "of which Plotinus is the outstanding representative . . . the experience of mystical union was the basic fact, and it was the central purpose of his teaching to lead men to it."⁶ For Plotinus, the life of the senses related to the physical world. If one wished to rise above the physical, to a higher life, one must undergo the purification of the soul. "He sums up his doctrine of mystical purification in the injunction: 'Cut away everything,'"⁷ John's admonition would be "a deprivation of the gratification of man's appetite in all things."⁸ Plotinus would arrive at inner freedom by detaching himself from external things. John exclaims: "If anyone is to reach perfect union with God

through his will and love, he must obviously first be freed from every appetite however slight."⁹

Continuing, then, with the psychological division of the person, the soul or higher part is subdivided into two strata. John holds that the "first part pertains to the sensory part of man's nature and is consequently more external."¹⁰ This part includes the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Besides these five exterior, corporal senses, the Saint mentions two interior corporal senses which he also terms the "imagination and the phantasy. They are of service to each other in due order, because the one is discursive and the other forms the images."¹¹ For John's further discussion on the senses, he saw no need to differentiate.

Kieran Kavanaugh sees the soul, according to St. John's notion, as simply divided "into two main parts: the sensory, and the spiritual. Each of these parts has its own powers or faculties." The sensory part John divides into inner and exterior sense faculties, while the spiritual part of the soul is concerned with the three faculties of intellect, memory, and will. "The sensory part, which has to do with sensible or corporal objects, possesses exterior sense faculties of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch; it also claims inner sense faculties which he reduces to the phantasy and the imagination."¹²

In explaining the nature of natural imaginative apprehensions, John wishes to prove that the soul does not attain union with God through their operations. Unless the senses are emptied "of every imaginative form and apprehension," it is impossible to arrive at union with God. "Such apprehensions are incapable of being the proper and proximate means of this union."¹³ Though "meditation is the work of these two faculties,

since it is a discursive act built upon forms, figures and images, . . . the soul will have to empty itself of these images and leave this sense in darkness if it is to reach divine union."¹⁴

In the higher part of the soul reside the rational faculties. This part, which St. John also calls the 'spirit,' includes the will, the understanding, and the memory. Hence, the whole man may be considered tripartite. He is made up of body and soul; while the soul is again divided into a lower sensitive part and the upper or higher part, called the spirit.¹⁵

St. John's division of the soul differs from that of St. Paul in that the latter considered the total person to be made up of body, soul, and spirit. Neither does it resemble the Stoic division of body, soul, and mind. For St. John, the spirit is the higher part of the soul. He does not give a specific name to the lower part.¹⁶

The faculties also have a different connotation from that usually accepted now and in Thomism. For instance, John attributes to the memory not only the power of retaining information but also of foreseeing the future. This deviates from our present tendency to place anticipation in the imagination rather than in the memory. It is with this reasoning that John causes the memory to exercise the theological virtue of hope. This is "the only major departure from Thomistic doctrine in St. John of the Cross, . . ."¹⁷

The faculty of understanding is distinguished from the memory and the will by its power of comprehension. But understanding depends upon the senses for the initiation of the process of knowing. "The soul is like a tabula rasa (a clean slate) when God infuses it into the body, so that it would be ignorant without the knowledge it receives through the

senses, because no knowledge is communicated to it from any other source,"¹⁸
 The higher part of the soul, the understanding, then becomes dependent upon the lower part, or senses.

The will is the faculty of the spirit which distinguishes man from all other animals and inanimate creatures. It governs all human acts and controls the whole personality. The disturbances which arise in the sensual or lower part of the soul are controlled by the will. Likewise, "the strength of the soul comprises the faculties, passions and appetites. All this strength is ruled by the will."¹⁹

The will is purified through charity of all inordinate feelings. These feelings or passions include joy, hope, sorrow, and fear. "The entire matter of reaching union with God consists in purging the will of its appetites and feelings, so that from a human and lowly will it may be changed into the divine will, made identical with the will of God,"²⁰
 In view of this, it is easy to understand why John can hold that sin is entirely in the will. The natural desires "are morally neutral and cannot of themselves harm the soul if they are properly controlled,"²¹ The resistance can actually strengthen the soul, for, "insofar as a person resists them, he wins strength, purity, light, comfort, and many blessings, as our Lord told St. Paul: Virtue is made perfect in weakness,"²² Since St. John demonstrates the interplay and interdependence of the higher and lower faculties of the soul, he refutes some of the criticism levelled against the Schoolmen in which they are said to differentiate too sharply between the diverse functions of the mind. Dicken says:

On the contrary, it is the complicated interplay between the parts of the soul as he sees them which gives the faculties themselves a significant existence. The saint is nothing if not an exponent of the doctrine that the human being, body and soul, is one single and indivisible entity.²³

Perhaps, according to more recent studies in physiology and psychiatry

showing the human being as one psychosomatic whole, John is more closely aligned with today's analysts than with the scholasticism of the nineteenth century.

St. John's analysis of the soul is solely for the purpose of having a better understanding of the spiritual and psychological process of the person on the difficult road to union with God. Through an understanding of the effects of the night on the soul in search of a greater knowledge and way of loving its creator, the director of souls more safely guides and helps his penitents. John is very much concerned about the manner and qualifications of the spiritual director, and especially about the penitent who may be experiencing authentic and supernatural apprehensions. The Saint warns:

Even if the visions are from God, this harm can come both to spiritual persons and to their directors if they are very credulous about them.

The reason motivating me to enlarge somewhat upon this subject is the want of discretion -- it seems to me -- in some spiritual directors. Trusting these supernatural apprehensions, counting them to be authentic and of divine origin, these directors together with their penitents have gone astray and become bewildered, realizing in themselves the word of our Savior: . . . (If a blind man leads a blind man, both fall into the pit.)

. . . The method of some directors is sufficient to encumber souls receiving these visions, or even to lead them astray. They do not guide them along the paths of humility, and they give them a free hand in this matter, which causes a want of a true spirit of faith. Neither do these directors ground their penitents in faith, for they frequently make these visions a topic of conversation. Consequently, the individuals get the idea that their directors are setting store by their visions, and as a result they do the same and stay attached to them, instead of deepening their faith and becoming detached, emptied and divested of apprehensions so as to soar to the heights of dark faith.²⁴

St. John of the Cross' consideration for original sin is the reason that his approach to human psychology differs from that of non-Christians. Dicken makes this observation:

There is, of course, one fundamental assumption made by St. John of the Cross, so self-evident to him that he barely mentions it, which

distinguishes his whole approach to human psychology from that of non-Christian exponents. It is that, because of the Fall, the entire make-up of every single human being is pervaded by the corruption which is our mortal heritage. Because of this, the natural activity of every component of the human soul tends to be directed toward its own self-centred purposes. Being a part of the created order, it looks to that created order for self-fulfillment. Hence the natural inclination of every part of the soul must be disciplined and so voided of attachment to the things of the created order that God may take possession of the whole soul for Himself.²⁵

Thus it is very important that the soul strive with all its energy to overcome all attachments, and that the purgation of the higher faculties of the soul is of greater importance than that of the lower exterior senses. The three theological virtues perfect the faculties of the soul and produce emptiness and darkness in them. "Faith causes darkness and a void of understanding in the intellect, hope begets an emptiness of possessions in the memory, and charity produces the nakedness and emptiness of affection and joy in all that is not God."²⁶

(b) Archetypal Roots of Forgetting and Memory in St. John of the Cross

As the soul advances in physical growth by discursive meditation through the use of the senses, God desires to draw the soul more intimately to himself through direct communication. This direct communication is known as "infused contemplation." The leading faculties of the soul, intellect, memory, and will must be purged in this spiritual night causing emptiness and darkness. One of the reasons for calling the path to the divine union a dark night is "God's communication to the soul. This communication is gauged by one's conformity to His will through love."²⁷

Communication is effected gradually as the soul ceases to work with the senses through discursive meditation. In contemplation, there is an "inflow of God . . . directly in the spiritual part of the soul."²⁸ This communication bypasses the senses thus making the inflow more abundant.²⁹ Therefore, as the soul advances in its progress toward union with God, its

three faculties, intellect, memory, and will, must be purged in the passive night.

Considering the faculty of memory in his theses, "Forgetting and Memory in the Writings of St. John of the Cross," Russell Peter Holmes, O.C.D, makes a comparison of St. John's technique in dealing with souls to that of C. G. Jung, the Swiss psychologist. Starting with the memory in human nature, Holmes demonstrates the memory's function and archetypal roots. As a result of the clinical interpretation, to the memory is attributed the three-fold activity of gathering the facts, retaining them, and recalling the deposits as needed by the "ego." This function has effects on the unconscious as well as the conscious.³¹

The psychologist has taken the goddess Mnemosyne as the symbol of memory. Mnemosyne was the mother of the **Muses** and "it was commonly believed by the Greeks that their poets produced their works not by intellectual acumen, but that the works of the poets were recollections of what they had been told by the Muses -- a memory."³²

Along with the goddess of memory, the Muses had to establish its "counter interdependence" with forgetting, namely, Lesmosyne. People needed to forget their cares and sufferings in contrast to remembering their joys and pleasures. The River Lethe provided water for the forgetting. Just exactly how much water was to be taken depended upon how much was to be forgotten in the memory.³³ Holmes explains:

In modern psychology this problem arises with the condition of the ego in deep mystical experiences or numinous descents in analysis. Too much water from the spring of Lesmosyne would leave the ego in an unconscious state; too much from the spring of Mnemosyne might allow the memory of unconscious contents to predominate the ego tasks of everyday life.³⁴

Holmes compares the spring of Lesmosyne -- the act of forgetting -- to John's descent into the dark night of **faith**. "This night purges not

only the intellect of its light and the will of its affections, but also the memory of its discursive knowledge."³⁵ During this time, "a person can neither pray vocally nor be attentive to spiritual matters, nor still less attend to temporal affairs and business."³⁶ John advises, "Indeed this is not the time to speak with God, . . . God it is who is working now in the soul, and for this reason the soul can do nothing."³⁷

This descent into the dark night of faith is similar to the numinous descent into the subconscious of psychological analysis. The "ascent-descent experiences," . . . directed by God in the night, or the Self in analysis, "carries with it a protection of the ego." St. John calls the direction of the soul by God a "secret wisdom" or "ladder:"

We can also call this secret wisdom a "ladder" because as the same steps of a ladder are used for both ascent and descent, so also the same communications this secret contemplation produces in the soul extol it in God and humiliate it within itself. Communications which are truly from God have this trait; they simultaneously exalt and humble the soul. For on this road, to ascend is to descend, since he who humbles himself is exalted and he who exalts himself is humbled.³⁸

There are dangers of no return in "climbing down the ladder."³⁹ Pride prevents the person under analysis from returning to normal associations and eventually causes a "schizophrenic" condition.⁴⁰ Pride in the divine communications of the night causes much more harm to the soul. Faith which unites the soul to God is gradually diminished through pride. "The soul begins to develop a possessive attitude toward these communications and fails to continue on its journey to genuine renunciation and nakedness of spirit."⁴¹ The soul thus "gradually loses God's favor, because he receives them as if they belong to himself, and does not profit well by them."⁴²

In his early studies of forgetting and memory, Jung came upon the discovery of the collective unconscious. Holmes finds that Jung, too, had

made a study of St. John of the Cross' ladder of descent:

In the Tavestock Lectures (1935), Jung stated that memory was an "endopsychic" function of consciousness, a constant function with its roots in the unconscious, the "ladder" of Giordano Bruno and John of the Cross, "descending to the production of things."⁴³

The "ladder descending" into the unconscious, according to Jung, dipped down into the "primitive psyche" which existed long before the conscious. This theory implies a "pre-existent wholeness" which is also found in Jewish mystical tradition.⁴⁴ William Johnston also speaks of "wholeness" in the lower level of the psyche:

At this deeper level, a unification of the personality is taking place: one is no longer "scattered" (to use the terminology of the author of The Cloud) but is gathered together in silent "oneness" -- hence the great difficulty of discursive thought which, of its very nature, breaks up unity and occupies itself with a variety of objects. Now it is quite possible that such a unification of the personality could be affected by various kinds of concentration (as on a philosophical or mathematical problem) causing an identical psychological state; but the characteristic of Christian mysticism is that the faculties are withdrawn from the various objects on which they were "scattered" in order to be fixed on God. In short, the faculties are drawn together and unified by the love of God.⁴⁵

Hence, Holmes comes to the conclusion that the path illumined by "Memory," which is the memory of the preconscious wholeness, the self, establishes a relationship with the ego and enters a "mystic" state wherein the opposites are combined. He explains:

The path of the inward flow of energy ending in self-transcendence, as exemplified in the lives and teachings of St. John of the Cross and C. G. Jung, can be seen as a path illumined by Memory, the memory of pre-conscious wholeness, the Self, . . .

Establishing a relationship with the Self, the ego enters a "mystic" state, that is a secret and unique condition at the center of the soul where the opposites are combined. To leave this state is to leave the "presence of God, Thrones and Dominations, the original energy of life." . . . The center is arrived at by the function of forgetting and memory and contact with it is maintained by remaining fluid in the sense of being able to recall the original energy of life and being able to forget the personal in favor of what transcends it.⁴⁶

It is within the proper balance of remembering and forgetting, between Mnemosyne and Lesmosyne, that John of the Cross manages his coniuncio,

or mystical marriage of opposites: light and darkness, knowing and not knowing, seeing and not seeing. As part of his instruction for advancing in union with God, he advises:

All these sensory means and exercises of the faculty must, consequently, be left behind and in silence so that God Himself may effect the divine union of the soul. As a result one has to follow this method of disencumbering, emptying, and depriving the faculties of their natural rights and operations to make room for the inflow and illumination of the supernatural.⁴⁷

(c) The Factor of Grace in the Psychological Study of the Subconscious

William Johnston in his comparison of Zen with Christian mysticism brings up the question of the place of grace in the psychological study of the subconscious. "Catholic theology . . . insists, of course, that not only mystical prayer but any kind of prayer at all cannot be performed without grace."⁴⁸ Even though persons think they are performing acts of their own choosing, there is always that "hidden force" at work in their psyche.⁴⁹ Dicken, referring to the role that grace plays in all human activity, says, "for the modern psychologist all otherwise inexplicable psychological phenomena are 'by definition' referred to the subconscious." St. John of the Cross takes into consideration the "direct intervention of God himself, and when divine activity is not reasonably postulated, whether the devil may not be the probable agent,"⁵⁰ The Human soul can, with the help of God, be held responsible for its actions. Therefore, "in studying mystical prayer, psychology and phenomenology can prescind from grace without, of course, denying its presence."⁵¹

In describing mystical prayer, Johnston here suggests that "theologians should presume that the greater part, perhaps all, can be explained by ordinary psychological laws (which he believes to be God's laws); . . ."⁵² Johnston finds that the terminology used by most mystics, including St.

John of the Cross, "is not entirely satisfactory. For one thing, it is too analytical to describe mysticism which is an experience of unity. Again, it is geared to a reasoning process which it explains admirably."⁵³ The argument for Johnston's criticism of the terminology is that "in the deepest prayer there is no reasoning, but only an ineffable stirring in the deepest center of one's being that can scarcely be called either knowledge or love, for it is a delicate blend of both."⁵⁴ Another reason that Johnston finds the terminology inadequate is that it "does not make allowances for 'depth' in the mind; . . . In the prayer of quiet, for example, there seems to be an inescapable consciousness of two levels of the mind working at the same time."⁵⁵ In the upper level the imagination is "working wildly" while on the lower level "at a deeper point one is silently and lovingly concentrated on God."⁵⁶

Many mystics seem to regard the soul as a sphere. All of the activities of the sensible faculties take place on the surface. Underneath this exterior, outer rim, the knowledge which is found has nothing to do with the sensible faculties or reason.⁵⁷ This is indicative of a "'vertical thinking' in which, void of concepts and images, the mind spirals down to the core of one's being."⁵⁸

What is the reason for the descent? St. John speaks of a descending ladder:

In darkness, and secure
By the secret ladder, disguised, . . .

He explains that in the darkness of this night, and going down the ladder, "the soul subtly escapes from its enemies, who were always opposed to its departure."⁵⁹ Its enemies, of course, are the appetites and faculties of the soul. The ladder, says John, "is the living faith by which it departs in so concealed a way in order to carry out its

plan successfully, and by which it cannot but escape very securely."⁶⁰
The soul feels safe once removed from its enemies. "The soul is particularly secure in this purgative night because its appetites, affections, and passions, etc., were put to sleep, mortified, and deadened."⁶¹

After the soul has been practicing discursive meditation for some time and is beginning to enter the mystical life, "the mystic experiences a kind of ligature, an inability to think, as though the energy which normally is active in the conscious mind were transferred to some deeper level of the psychic life."⁶² John reassures the soul when it finds itself in this condition:

Oh, then, spiritual soul, when you see your appetites darkened, your inclinations dry and constrained, your faculties incapacitated for any interior experience, do not be afflicted; think of this as a grace, since God is freeing you from yourself and taking from you your own activity.⁶³

II.

Preparation for understanding the symbolic character of "night"

(a) St. John of the Cross -- the Poet

St. John of the Cross was, first of all, a saint, a mystic, and a learned theologian. Colin P. Thompson acclaims him as a person who "stands at a high peak in the mystical tradition of the Christian West, the mystical Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church; . . ." ¹ Kavanaugh exclaims, "In doctrine, there is no longer any doubt concerning the mark he has left in the area of ascetical and mystical theology." ² Pope Pius XI, in proclaiming St. John of the Cross a doctor of the Church, declared that his works are "full of . . . sound spiritual doctrine. . ." ³

However, rarely does one find the poetic genius combined with the saintliness of the mystic, and the learning of the theologian. "In the field of Spanish literature, St. John of the Cross has won a prominent place, particularly for his poetry. As a poet he is ranked among the greatest in the history of Spain." ⁴ Thompson verifies the fact that "he is regarded as among the greatest lyrical poets Spain has ever produced." ⁵ Willis Barnstone compares St. John with the Greek poets, Archilochos, Sappho, and Bakchylides and declares that "San Juan's few poems bring him to the highest peaks of literature." ⁶ As Barnstone observes, "we have a poet unsurpassed in the Spanish language . . . He was widely eclectic and openly derivative; yet among the most original poets in any tongue." ⁷ Speaking of the quality of his poems, Gerald Brenan realizes that "No other poet in any country seemed to me to have reached such heights of lyrical expression." ⁸

In an extensive study of the poetry of St. John of the Cross, Brenan has found that the poems show two main influences of the times, Spanish

and biblical. Among the Spanish influences were the popular songs from which John drew his form and style. "It is, however, the three major poems -- the Cantico, Noche oscura, and Llama -- that . . . his reputation as a supreme lyric poet is founded."⁹ And of these three, En una noche oscura, is "the most perfect of San Juan's poems. . ."¹⁰

These three great poems follow the arte nuevo or Italian Renaissance style which was introduced into Spain by Garcilaso de la Vega, a "young Castilian nobleman and soldier at the court of Charles V. . ."¹¹ Garcilaso refined the "strong, rather crude" Castilian idiom and made it "musical." Taking "into consideration the length of time that syllables take to be pronounced and the separate quantities of each of them,"¹² he controlled the speed of the line. "His verse is slow, langourous, melancholy . . . and every word is made to give out as it passes the full effects that are required of it."¹³

Although St. John admits that no words could adequately describe his mystical experiences, his brilliant use and placement of nouns and verbs produce a great overall effect on the total picture. His "words are clear, clean, almost transparent, yet sufficiently full for their purpose."¹⁴ He is extremely frugal in the use of the verb and, "although the action is often rapid, verbs are reduced to a minimum and sometimes a whole stanza passes without one."¹⁵ The rare use of adjectives, also, gives "his poems their lightness and speed of movement: things pass by rapidly."¹⁶ As with his verbs, when he does use them he "masses them." He is meticulous about where he places his adjectives. They usually follow the noun. This position extends the meaning of it. When the adjective precedes the noun, it has an analytical and qualifying function.¹⁷

Both the Cántico and the Noche oscura "are written in a verse form

known in Spanish as the 'lira'"¹⁸ This form lends itself to great lyric effects. St. John of the Cross is also a "coiner of images." This results from his power of "condensing different elements of thought or feelings into a single phrase, which thus acquires an extra vitality of its own."¹⁹ Another feature of his style is his portrayal of images in pastoral poetry. He uses these in his Cántico to demonstrate the love between Christ and the soul.²⁰

The Bible was another important influence in John's poetry. Scenes, incidents, images and color, particularly taken from the Song of Songs provide imagery and symbolism for his Cántico.²¹ Among the most famous commentaries of the Song of Songs is the "eighty-six sermons in which St. Bernard gives an allegorical exposition of the poem, treating its subject, as all mystics must, as being the love of Christ for the soul."²² St. John uses the allegory of the Song of Songs as the subject matter for both his Cántico espiritual and Noche oscura,²³ treating it in a very similar way.

As Brennan says, "it is fairly obvious that most of San Juan de la Cruz's poetry is autobiographical."²⁴ He used poetry, which was the only way he could somehow express his mystical experiences. The saint appears to have found the poetic form much more flexible than prose for the "utterances of love arising from mystical understanding."²⁵ In the prologue to the "Spiritual Canticle" he explains, I do not plan to expound these stanzas in all the breadth and fullness that the fruitful spirit of love conveys to them. It would be foolish to think that expressions of love arising from mystical understanding, . . . are fully explainable."²⁶ Although any use of words is highly inadequate to express these divine communications, poetry is a much more adaptable tool than prose for express-

ing the ineffable. It may seem to the mystic that "the apparent absurdities of the poetic figures and similes are less inadequate than rational explanations. Such in fact is the manner of the Holy Spirit, who ' . . . unable to express the plenitude of his meaning in ordinary words, utters mysteries in strange figures and likenesses.'"27

In speaking of Noche oscura, Brennan says it is the "most comprehensive of San Juan's symbolic themes -- that of the Dark Night."28 Though the structure is simple, and the poem consists of only eight stanzas, it traverses the entire way of perfection from the purgation of the senses and spirit, to ultimate union with God.29 Though images and episodes may have been borrowed from other poetic texts, St. John of the Cross made them his very own in the light of his mystical themes. "No poet borrowed more from other poets, yet none was more original because before he began to write all the work of transmutation into his own categories had been accomplished."30

(b) Historical background of night as symbol

Keith J. Egan explains in his lectures on the "Dark Night" that "there is no way of understanding St. John of the Cross without understanding his time."31 Spain dominated the Golden Era of modern times, and because of its geographical location, was protected against the Reformation. It was a nation for which discovery meant a good deal, and there existed in the country an intense interest in humanism.32

A great movement of ecclesiastical reform was on the way, and an interest in personal spiritual improvement was spreading throughout the land. John was swept up in these movements and influenced by the changes of his time.33 He finished his many years of education at the famous University of Salamanca which "ranked with the great universities of Bologna, Paris and Oxford."34 He was well versed in Greek, Latin, and native Castilian.

He also studied philosophy, theology, Sacred Scripture, music, and art.³⁵

Since "John was essentially a poet and an heir to the medieval commentaries on Sacred Scripture"³⁶ it is easy to see that the "Dark Night" has its historical background in the Old and New Testaments. "John had read widely of tradition and much of the symbolism contained in it."³⁷ His doctrine comes out of his understanding of Scripture.³⁸

"Darkness," says Yvonne Pellé-Douel, "is the symbol which becomes the center of the teaching of St. John of the Cross. His many references to Sacred Scripture entail darkness and clouds."³⁹ As the psalmist says, "Clouds and darkness are round about him."⁴⁰ "Darkness of the sun was a premonition of disaster," continues Egan. At another time "God stores darkness in a chamber."⁴¹ John used the Book of Genesis to show how creation took place in "darkness and void," "the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light;' and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night."⁴²

In Isaiah, darkness depicts the condition into which the Babylonians had fallen. "Sit in silence, and go into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans; for you shall no more be called the mistress of kingdoms."⁴³ Again, when Jeremiah berates the Godlessness of the people of Jerusalem, he warns: "I looked to the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light."⁴⁴ Amos, in recalling the punishments of Israel, exclaims: "He who made the Pleiades and Orion, who turns darkness into dawn, and darkens the day into night, . . ."⁴⁵ Job, while regretting that he was born, cries out, "Let me alone, that I may recover

a little before I go whence I shall not return, to the land of darkness and gloom, the black disordered land where darkness is the only light."⁴⁶ In another place he moans, "If I look for the nether world as my dwelling, if I spread my couch in the darkness, . . ."⁴⁷

The Lord spoke to Abraham in the early part of the evening as the sun was sinking on the horizon. It was in darkness that he received the message foretelling of the troubles of his descendants. "As the sun was about to set, a trance fell over Abram, and a deep, terrifying darkness enveloped him. Then the Lord said to Abram: 'Know for certain that your descendants shall be aliens in a land not their own, where they shall be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years.'⁴⁸

Darkness in the New Testament is associated with eschatological darkness. Jesus said to his followers, "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but he shall possess the light of life."⁴⁹ He promised salvation in the world to come to anyone who follows his precepts and keeps his commandments.

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, darkness is symbolic of sin. Speaking of the cloud which led the Israelites out of the land of bondage, he writes:

Brothers, I want you to remember this: our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; by the cloud and the sea all of them were baptized into Moses. All ate the same spiritual food. All drank the same spiritual drink (they drank from the spiritual rock that was following them, and the rock was Christ), yet we know that God was not pleased with most of them, for they were struck down in the desert.⁵⁰

From these many references to "clouds" and "darkness" in Sacred Scripture, especially in the Old Testament, it is clearly evident that St. John of the Cross' "immediate dependence upon Holy Scripture is immense and of fundamental importance. There is hardly a chapter of his writing which is

not studded with quotations from or clear references to Holy Writ, . . .,"⁵¹

(c) Recovery of symbolic character of night

To give expression to the reality of the mystical experience, St. John of the Cross uses the symbolic images of night. "The poetic figure 'dark night' provided" him "with a mysterious-sounding metaphor to designate the entire way leading to union with God."⁵² John gives three reasons for calling the path to union with God a dark night. They are: the mortification of the appetites; the journey in faith; and God's communication to the soul."⁵³ Pertaining to the first line of the first stanza of his poem Una noche oscura John explains, "one should know that a soul must ordinarily pass through two principal kinds of night (which spiritual persons call purgations or purifications of the soul). . ."⁵⁴ Here the saint refers to the first night as a "purgation" of "the sensory part of the soul."⁵⁵ The second night he calls a "purification," and again, a "purgation," which "is more obscure, dark, and dreadful, as we shall subsequently point out."⁵⁶ The dark night is also a "privation" as it is a purging of "all sensible appetites for the external things of the world, the delights of the flesh, and the gratifications of the will."⁵⁷

Regarding his first reason for calling this journey to God a dark night, John remarks, "Just as night is nothing but the privation of light and, consequently, of all objects visible by means of the light -- darkness and emptiness, then, for the faculty of sight -- the mortification of the appetites can be called a night for the soul."⁵⁸ The term "night" symbolizes for John the condition of the soul when deprived of all sense perceptions. "We are using the expression 'night' to signify a deprivation of the gratification of man's appetite in all things."⁵⁹

John of the Cross uses the Apocalypse to explain the darkness brought

on by the night of the senses. Because the tyros are "weak and tender,"⁶⁰ God leads them into darkness but does not abandon them. He speaks to them as he did through the angel of the Church in Sardis, "'I know your works; that is why I have left an open door before you which no one can close. I know that your strength is limited; yet you have held fast to my word and have not denied my name.'"⁶¹

The feeling of helplessness causes the person to go in search of God through this maze of darkness. Though the soul does not experience the presence of God in a positive way, it knows that it is not totally abandoned to itself in utter despair. This feeling is a negative way of knowing God. Larkin explains the dark night in conjunction with apophatic theology:

The dark night is a negative way of experiencing God. It is the counterpart of negative or apophatic (dark) theology. Negative theology proceeds by denying to God all the limitations of created reality; in a true sense it is non-knowledge. The dark night is the experience of void, of emptiness, of no-thing and non-being; it is the condition of kenosis and poverty of spirit. The sense of absence and negation is painfully real. Yet the experience seizes the reality of God more truly, because it touches him as he is, beyond feelings, images and concepts. Living faith alone can achieve this, and the purer and less encumbered the faith, the more real the possession of God. By the same token, however, God, the object of faith, becomes less 'visible' or empirically experienced in any human terms.⁶²

Struggling along through this vagueness as though traveling within a dark tunnel, the soul slowly begins to discern a glimmer of light. Pellé-Douel points out that the contemplative life begins to unfold during this symbolic night and the soul advances sorrowfully and tragically toward the Light which will consume it in the eternal face to face.⁶³

The journey in faith is the second cause for this darkness or night. It is "that admirable means of advancing to God."⁶⁴ The darkness of faith "is comparable to midnight."⁶⁵ The first part of the night is "pertinent to the senses" and resembles twilight, the time sensible objects begin to fade from sight.⁶⁶ It is not as dark and painful as the night of faith.

"The second, darker night of faith belongs to the rational, superior part; it is darker and more interior because it deprives this part of its rational light, or better, blinds it."⁶⁷

Night, then, in all of its shades and degrees of darkness is used to symbolize the various stages of spiritual growth and development. For obvious reasons, night best depicts the conditions a soul must pass through before it can enjoy the all-encompassing bliss of spiritual union with God. "Night" symbolizes darkness -- the time in the physical world from dusk to dawn. A time when travel becomes difficult and sometimes even impossible, for want of the sun to light the way. The night varies in degrees of darkness. When dusk is approaching, things may still be seen, but their colors soon become indistinguishable. Objects take on deceptive hues. As the evening progresses, images fade from view, and the awesomeness of the night descends upon the traveler. He sees nothing -- he loses his way -- he has nothing with which to guide himself. He becomes totally helpless. "The dark night," says Larkin, "is perhaps the most characteristic and original symbol in St. John of the Cross."⁶⁸

Night has a deeper meaning than darkness, or the divesting of self in all that hinders its ascent to God. Yvonne Pellé-Douel finds that the "night" of John is to him the great symbol of the mystical life. "La Nuit, pour saint Jean de la Croix, est le grand symbole de la vie mystique."⁶⁹ It means following Christ in his final hours of degradation and abandonment. A. M. Cocagnac in his article, "Jalons sur la montée du Carmel," describes this night as "more one of abasement, one veritable annihilation with Christ."⁷⁰

This annihilation not only deals with the senses, but touches the very depths of the soul. It is a night of the spirit when one feels oneself

abandoned not only by man but by God as well. It closely resembles the night of the suffering and death of Christ on the Cross, when he cried out in crucifying agony, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"⁷¹ This abandonment was so great that he suffered inwardly during his entire sojourn on earth. In this abandonment he accomplished the greatest work he might have performed during his lifetime, a work far greater than any miracle he could have wrought.⁷² There was no more perfect way to achieve this reconciliation between God and man. Insofar as a man abandons himself to God, both sensibly and spiritually, so much is he united to God and so much more effective is his work.⁷³

St. John of the Cross compares this annihilation to the chalice Christ offered his disciples who requested a place of glory in his kingdom. "This chalice symbolizes death to one's natural self through denudation and annihilation."⁷⁴ Referring to the first stanza of Noche oscura as contemplative purgation John exclaims:

Poor, abandoned, and unsupported by any of the apprehensions of my soul (in the darkness of my intellect, the distress of my will, and in the affliction and anguish of my memory), left to darkness in pure faith, which is a dark night for these natural faculties, and with only my will touched by the sorrows, afflictions, and longings of love of God, I went out from myself.⁷⁵

Darkness symbolizes the presence of God. When God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai it was in the midst of thunder and lightning and a dark cloud. "On the morning of the third day there were peals of thunder and lightning, and a heavy cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled."⁷⁶

The dark mountain is a symbol of Divine Majesty. And the traveler on his way toward union with God must not only walk in darkness, abasement, and complete annihilation, but must climb this steep, forbidding mountain in order to reach his goal. God holds himself on the summit of this mount,

surrounded by clouds which obscure him. This spiritual experience is the confrontation of the transcendence of God with the nothingness of the creature.

The mountain is a symbol of the mystical union of the soul with God. Larkin holds that this union "is the universal Christian vocation." God, the "All", resides on the summit of the mount. He is possessed when the soul arrives at the final destination of its journey. The "All" is achieved when the soul has experienced the "nothingness" of its total despoiling. "Todo and nada are correlatives: the two are possessed in the same degree."⁷⁷

But the journey to the summit is arduous. As John pointed out, many start out with good intentions, but never reach the desired goal, due to the lack of perseverance and the totality of renunciation. As Larkin tersely remarks: "No one reaches the heights of mystical union or even the lower reaches of contemplation without passing through the dark night of renunciation and faith. For St. John of the Cross 'contemplation or detachment or poverty of spirit . . . are almost one and the same thing.'"⁷⁸

For the contemplative, night is the symbol of silence. But one must go beyond the physical experience of silence in order to penetrate the silence of the heart. The silence of the heart implies the absence of all images.⁷⁹ If one avoids words in the absence of speech, one avoids images in the absence of the heart. One must experience absolutely nothing if one is to experience God. There is nothing in creation nor in our thoughts that would be able to give the understanding the proper means toward the union with God.

According to a rule of philosophy, all means must be in proportion to their ends. One must have the proper medium which would suffice to obtain the end one pursues. This rule holds true about union with God. If one

wishes to reach this lofty goal, one must use all the necessary means in order to accomplish the end -- mystical union with the Creator.⁸⁰

The "dark night" is not the end of the journey. It is only the means to the end. One has to travel the dark, agonizing way, if one wishes to experience the overwhelming delights and joys awaiting the soul which perseveres in its painful quest.

NIGHT -- ITS DIVISIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

In his prologue to The Ascent of Mount Carmel, St. John of the Cross gives his reason for calling this journey "toward that divins light of perfect union with God" a "dark night."

The darkneses and trials, spiritual and temporal, that fortunate souls ordinarily encounter on their way to the high state of perfection are so numerous and profound that human science cannot understand them adequately; nor does experience of them equip one to explain them.¹

According to Larkin, St. John speaks of three nights: namely, "the night of the senses," "the night of the spirit," and "the night of God." The first two nights, those of the senses and of the spirit are "two degrees of the one night of faith."² Both of these are preparations for the final night "which is not only contemplation but the beginning of the experience of union."³ The three nights are all part of the same night of faith, the third differing in terms of experience from the first two purgative periods.⁴

St. John encases his entire doctrine of the way to perfection in his eight-stanza poem "Noche oscura" -- "Dark Night." He stated at the beginning of his book The Ascent of Mount Carmel that the poem "Dark Night" contained all of the doctrine of which he would treat in this account. "The following stanzas include all the doctrine I intend to discuss in this book,"⁵ The Ascent, then, is the first part of the commentary on the poem and deals with the active nights of the senses and of the spirit. The passive nights of both the senses and spirit are treated in the second part of the commentary called Dark Night.

There is evidence that both the Ascent and Dark Night were originally

considered as one whole treatise on the poem. In The Living Flame of Love St. John refers to Dark Night as belonging to the Ascent.⁶ The prologue to the Ascent is lengthy and mentions the sufferings encountered in the passive nights, while in the short prologue to Night nothing is mentioned of this difficulty. "Clearly, he considers the prologue of the Ascent to be a prologue for the Night as well."⁷

Since the commentary of the Ascent ends abruptly with the beginning of the third stanza, "the night of God" is not mentioned in either the Ascent or the Dark Night. However, Larkin states that the third night is brought out further on in the poem. "Later stanzas of this poem refer to the third night, as do the poem 'Spiritual Canticle' and its prose commentary."⁸ This third night occurs in faith, but it is the last of the three, immediately preceding the dawn. This phase is not painful as are the other two night, but is the beginning of a delightful, mystical experience with God.

The poem "Dark Night" is a summary of St. John's doctrine on the state of perfection, or union of a soul with God. It is quoted in its entirety here, since St. John used it as a basis for his instruction on how to attain to this lofty divine union quickly.

1. One dark night
Fired with love's urgent longings
-- Ah, the sheer grace! --
I went out unseen,
My house being now all stilled;
2. In darkness, and secure,
By the secret ladder, disguised,
-- Ah, the sheer grace! --
In darkness and concealment,
My house being now all stilled;
3. On that glad night,
In secret, for no one saw me,
Nor did I look at anything,
With no other light or guide
Than the one that burned in my heart;

4. This guided me
More surely than the light of noon
To where he waited for me
-- He I knew so well --
In a place where no one else appeared.
5. O guiding night!
O night more lovely than the dawn!
O night that has united
The Lover with his beloved,
Transforming the beloved in her Lover.
6. Upon my flowering breast
Which I kept wholly for him alone,
There he lay sleeping,
And I caressing him
There in a breeze from the fanning cedars.
7. When the breeze blew from the turret
Parting his hair,
He wounded my neck
With his gentle hand,
Suspending all my senses.
8. I abandoned and forgot myself,
Laying my face on my Beloved;
All things ceased; I went out from myself,
Leaving my cares
Forgotten among the lillies.⁹

After presenting the entire poem, St. John proceeds with his commentary. But in announcing his theme, he declared his intention to comment on each stanza separately, and if need be, each verse individually.

While presenting an ordered and sequential pattern for proficients to follow on the road in search of perfection and union with God, he offers no further commentary on the verses of the poem until the last two chapters of the first book of the Ascent. Here he briefly gives an explanation of the first four lines of the first stanza. Later in Book One of Dark Night he reverts once more to the first stanza. Finally, in the passive night of the spirit, he gives us a commentary, line by line, on the first two stanzas of the poem. After starting to explain the first line of the third verse he rather abruptly comes to a close. Later

stanzas may be clarified in the commentary on the poem "Spiritual Canticle" as a description of the third night.¹⁰ It is not dealt with in the Ascent nor in Dark Night.

The Active Nights of the Senses and Spirit

The Active Night of the Senses

In the introductory statement to his commentary on the first stanza, St. John of the Cross speaks about "two different nights through which spiritual persons pass in both the lower and higher part of their nature,"¹¹ These nights are known as purgations or purifications of the soul.

To understand this departure one should know that a soul must ordinarily pass through two principal kinds of night (which spiritual persons call purgations or purifications of the soul) in order to reach the state of perfection. Here we shall term these purgations nights, because in both of them the soul journeys in darkness as though by night.¹²

In this first stanza St. John speaks of the night of the senses as the "lot of beginners, at the time God commences to introduce them into the state of contemplation."¹³ Even though he calls this stage "the lot of beginners," he assumes that the soul has already progressed to the stage where "the appetites of the sensory part were stilled and asleep in the soul, and the soul was stilled in them."¹⁴

He also asserts that this stage is a particular blessing in itself, since "it was sheer grace to be placed by God in this night that occasioned so much good. The soul would not have succeeded in entering it, because nobody is able alone to empty himself of all his appetites in order to reach God,"¹⁵

Three reasons he gives "for calling this journey toward union with God a night."¹⁶ The first deals with the necessity of depriving one's appetite of worldly things. This privation is like a night to the senses.

The second reason for naming this journey a night is the means by which the person travels. "Now this road is faith, and for the intellect faith is also like a dark night,"¹⁷

The third and final reason "pertains to the point of arrival, namely, God. And God is also a dark night to man in this life. These three nights pass through a soul, or better, the soul passes through them in order to reach divine union with God."¹⁸

St. John compares the dark night of the soul or spirit to the natural night. Just as it can be divided into three parts, namely: early evening, the time of twilight; midnight, the darkest time of the night; and early dawn, shortly before the break of day; so too, can the night of the soul be divided into various phases of night.

In actuality these three nights comprise only one night, a night divided into three parts, just as the natural night. The first part, the night of the senses, resembles early evening, that time of twilight when things begin to fade from sight. The second part, faith, is completely dark, like midnight. The third part, representing God, is like the very early dawn just before the break of day.¹⁹

The first cause of the night is attributed to the mortification of the senses. St. John uses the expression "night" to signify the privation of all gratification of the senses. Since the eye needs light in order to see, the removal of light would place the object in darkness. In a similar fashion, the other senses are placed in darkness when the objects of their gratification are removed. The soul then, is plunged into darkness because it possesses no other means of obtaining knowledge or of perceiving things.

However, St. John distinctly points out that the mere lack of things does not constitute this darkness nor "divest the soul, if it craves for all these objects."²⁰ Things of this world are not, in themselves, a hindrance on the way to perfection. It is only when they are allowed

to enter the soul that the divine operations of God cannot take place. "It is the will and the appetite dwelling within it that causes the damage."²¹

St. John then proceeds with the reason for traveling through this dark night. He asserts that, "There can be no concordance between light and darkness," and using Scripture as proof of his statement he quotes St. John, the evangelist, "The darkness could not receive the light."²² He also applies the philosophical approach "that two contraries cannot coexist in the same subject."²³ He considers attachment to creatures as the cause of darkness, and if the light of divine union is to be established, these affections must be eradicated.

Moreover, he maintains that "attachment to a creature makes a person equal to that creature."²⁴ And the greater the attachment, the more similar they become. Here he uses a psalm as verification of his statement: "Let all who set their hearts on them become like them."²⁵ He goes on to explain the sad state of affairs in which a person finally becomes entangled. "He who loves a creature then, is as low as that creature, and in some way even lower, because love not only equates, but even subjects the lover to the loved object."²⁶ By this fact, attachment to creatures makes it impossible for a soul to attain pure union with God since both cannot be contained in the soul at the same time. Again, he uses Jeremiah's perception of everything created in the heavens and on the earth as darkness compared with God. "Darkness is nothing, and less than nothing since it is a privation of light."²⁷

St. John goes on to cite particulars, "All beauty of creatures compared with the infinite beauty of God is supreme ugliness." Therefore, a person attached to the beauty of any creature is ugly in the sight of God, since "ugliness does not attain to beauty." "All grace and elegance

of creatures compared with God's grace is utter coarseness and crudity." Because of this, a person attached to these qualities in creatures becomes coarse and crude in God's sight. "He is incapable of the infinite grace and beauty of God."²⁸

In like manner, all goodness of creatures and all the world's wisdom and human ability in contrast to God's infinite goodness and wisdom become as evil and foolish in God's sight. There is no thought, then, of any person attaining this high degree of union with God, "without first emptying his appetite of all the natural and supernatural things which can be a hindrance to him."²⁹

If the soul does not rid itself of all inordinate appetites, "two main areas of harm" will eventually fall upon it. The first is the deprivation of God's spirit. The other harmful effect will "weary, torment, darken, defile and weaken him." Again, St. John philosophizes, "two contraries cannot coexist in the same subject."³⁰

The saint then goes on to explain how the appetites torment and weary the soul. The more they are fed, the more demanding they become, causing the frustrations and restlessness to increase. The affliction is described "like thorns, the appetites wound and hurt, stick to a person and cause him pain."³¹

The third kind of harm, darkness, weakens the will and dulls the memory. "Since these faculties depend upon the intellect in their operations, they are manifestly disordered and troubled when the intellect is hindered."³² The appetite is the cause of this blindness and darkness in the soul, because the appetite in itself has no intellect. Therefore, when a person allows his appetite to lead him, he becomes blinded by concupiscence and deprives himself of the light of God's wisdom.

The appetites also defile and stain the soul. They damage its beauty by their inordinate attachments. Lastly, the appetites weaken the soul and cause it to become lukewarm in the practice of virtue. They sap the soul of the necessary strength for perseverance in practicing the various exercises.

In summing up, St. John explains that not all the appetites are equally harmful. The natural ones, which are experienced in the sensitive nature, cannot be fully eradicated in this life because they do not reside in the rational part of one's being. The "natural ones are little or no hindrance at all to the attainment of union, provided they do not receive one's consent nor pass beyond the first movements in which the rational will plays no role."³³ However, all the voluntary appetites, whether grave, or only involving imperfections, must be mortified in order to attain this complete union with God.

The reason for the need of this complete eradication of imperfection is the fact that man's will becomes completely transformed in God's will, leaving no room for anything contrary to this perfect union with God. He symbolically uses the example of the ensnared bird. It matters little whether the winged creature is caught by a thin thread or held by a thick cord. Both prevent its spirited flight into space.

St. John concludes his description of the active night of the senses by offering some counsels on how to enter into it. He points out "that a man ordinarily enters this night of the senses in two ways: active and passive."³⁴ Through the active night a person is able to help himself in this entry. He advises, first, "to have an habitual desire to imitate Christ in all your deeds by bringing your life into conformity with His."³⁵ Secondly, he admonishes, "in order to be successful in this imitation, renounce and remain empty of any sensory satisfaction that is

not purely for the honor and the glory of God . . ."36

St. John, in presenting his commentary on the poem "Dark Night", made a sketch of Mount Carmel in order to illustrate more clearly his counsels and rules regarding the way of the ascent. Since the sketch of the Mount is considered an integral part of the Ascent-Night, the maxims which he wrote on the drawing and with which he prefaced the first book are quoted here.

To reach satisfaction in all
 desire its possession in nothing.
 To come to possess all
 desire the possession of nothing.
 To arrive at being all
 desire to be nothing,
 To come to the knowledge of all
 desire the knowledge of nothing.
 To come to the pleasure you have not
 you must go by a way in which you enjoy not.
 To come to the knowledge you have not
 you must go by a way in which you know not.
 To come to the possession you have not
 you must go by a way in which you possess not.
 To come to be what you are not
 you must go by a way in which you are not.
 When you turn toward something
 you cease to cast yourself upon the all.
 For to go from all to the all
 you must deny yourself of all in all.
 And when you come to the possession of the all
 you must possess it without wanting anything.
 Because if you desire to have something in all
 your treasure in God is not purely your all.
 In this nakedness the spirit finds
 its quietude and rest.
 For in coveting nothing;
 nothing raises it up
 and nothing weighs it down,
 because it is in the center of its humility.
 When it covets something
 in this very desire it is wearied.³⁷

The Active Night of the Spirit

The active night of the spirit is a treatise on faith. St. John calls it "the proximate means of ascent to union with God."³⁸ He quotes

the second stanza completely, explaining that the "secret ladder" represents faith because all of the rungs of the ladder, or articles of faith, are secret to and hidden from both the senses and the intellect."³⁹ Fr. Amatus Van de H. Familie, in his article "Faith and Contemplation in St. John of the Cross," observes that "from the first reading of the works of St. John of the Cross, the work 'faith' pursues us with insistence."⁴⁰

In this treatise on faith, St. John speaks of divesting the spirit of its imperfections and appetites for spiritual things. This grace is greater "because of the greater hardship involved in quieting the house of man's spiritual nature and entering this interior darkness . . ."⁴¹

The soul is disguised -- its apparel changed from natural to divine. The soul eludes the devil or any other temporal or rational thing, since none of them can harm the person who walks through this darkness in faith. The house is now stilled because the spiritual and rational part of the soul is at rest. The "urgent longings" of the senses are absent. All that is required of the spiritual faculties "is the negation through pure faith."⁴²

In pointing out the differences between the night of the senses and the night of faith, St. John writes, "In the night of the sense there is yet some light, because the intellect and reason remain and suffer no blindness. But this spiritual night of faith removes everything, both in the intellect and in the senses."⁴³ However, this darkness is more secure "for the less a soul works with its own abilities, the more securely it proceeds, because its progress in faith is greater."⁴⁴

Faith is the essence of this night. It is compared with midnight, which is darker than either twilight or the period before dawn. Twilight pertains to the senses, and dawn to the approach to God. This second night or night of faith belongs to the rational part of the soul, and it

deprives this part of its rational light, "or better, blinds it."⁴⁵

Faith is considered a "night" because its light overshadows the light of the intellect. Since the intellect can understand only natural knowledge, faith can inform one of matters which the intellect has never seen nor known. St. John defines faith by saying, "it is not a knowledge derived from the senses, but an assent of the soul to what enters through hearing."⁴⁶ He further explains that "Faith nullifies the light of the intellect and if this light is not darkened, the knowledge of faith is lost."⁴⁷ Not only must the sensory part of the soul be darkened through mortification and penance, but the higher part of the soul or intellect must be purged of its inordinate attachments for "faith lies beyond all this understanding, taste, feeling, and imagining . . ." and "God's being cannot be grasped by the intellect, appetite, imagination, or any other sense, nor can it be known in this life."⁴⁸

In a little digression on the union of a soul with God, St. John makes it clear that "a permanent actual union of the faculties in this life is impossible" even though "God sustains every soul and dwells in it substantially."⁴⁹ Here he distinguished this substantial union, which exists continually in creatures, from the transforming union of the soul in God. He calls this latter union "the union of likeness" since it is found only where there is likeness of love. While the substantial union is natural, the union of likeness is supernatural. This exists only when the will is in complete conformity to God's will.

God sustains all creatures by his presence in the soul, but he only communicates supernatural being through love and grace. God communicates himself in a greater degree to those who are more advanced in love, or in other words, to those who are more perfectly conformed to his divine will. "A person who has reached complete conformity and likeness of will

has attained total supernatural union and transformation in God."⁵⁰ This does not mean that every soul that reaches this union will attain to the same degree of it. St. John says, "Although a person may have truly reached union, this union will be proportioned to his greater or lesser capacity, for not all souls attain an identical degree of union."⁵¹ Souls may reach a state of perfection and enjoy equal peace and tranquility, though the degree of union will vary.

The theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity perfect the faculties of the soul and are the supernatural objects of its intellect, memory, and will. These supernatural objects are the cause of emptiness and darkness in the soul: darkness in the intellect by faith, emptiness in the memory due to hope, and nakedness and absence of the affections through charity.

This Journey then, not only implies the exclusion of objects, but embodies "a disposition and annihilation in the spiritual part of his nature."⁵² This includes a willingness to endure dryness, distaste, and trials in one's attentiveness toward God, rather than a searching for sweetness and consolations from him. "Seeking oneself in God is the same as looking for the caresses and consolations of God. Seeking God in oneself entails not only the desire of doing without these consolations for God's sake, but also the inclination to choose for love of Christ all that is most distasteful whether in God or in the world -- and such is the love of God."⁵³ St. John uses Christ as the example of perfect annihilation. His greatest work was accomplished at the moment of his greatest suffering and abandonment -- his death on the cross.

No creature, real or imagined, can serve the intellect as a proximate means of this union with God. Neither can the intellect acquire a supernatural means of knowing God. St. John affirms, "As for the supernatural

way of knowing, the intellect according to the possibilities of its ordinary power is neither capable nor prepared, while in the prison of the body, for the reception of the clear knowledge of God. Such knowledge does not belong to this state, since death is a necessary condition for possessing it."⁵⁴

The intellect must advance toward God by unknowing rather than knowing, for nothing in the intellect would be able to understand, nor the will experience, nor the imagination conjure up, by way of providing a description of God. Faith, then, is the only and proximate means to the intellect for attaining to this union of divine love, and the degree of union depends on the degree of faith. For St. John testifies, "The more intense a man's faith, the closer is his union with God."⁵⁵

Before this union can be achieved, the intellect, memory, and will must be purified through mortification. St. John sets up a division of all apprehensions and ideas, natural and supernatural, of the intellect. He separates natural knowledge which is obtained through the bodily senses from supernatural knowledge which transcends its natural ability. Supernatural knowledge is, in turn, subdivided into corporeal and spiritual.

Corporeal knowledge can originate both from the exterior bodily senses and also from the interior bodily senses. The spiritual is also divided into two kinds, the distinct and the particular. The latter, which he describes as "vague, dark, and general knowledge" includes "visions, revelations, locutions, and spiritual feelings."⁵⁶

It is to this dark and general knowledge, which St. John calls contemplation, that the soul must be guided through all the other apprehensions. Great harm can be brought to the soul through objects supernaturally represented to the exterior senses. Even though these appre-

hensions come to a soul from God, St. John advises one to flee from them. A soul is more easily deceived through the senses than through the spirit, since the devil has easier access to the corporeal than to the spiritual. By seeking sweet communications, the soul is abandoning faith, the only safe way to union with God. A soul becomes vain, and the devil deludes him by presenting to him pleasant visions or feelings to the senses. If, when God wills, he presents these consolations to the soul, one does not offend God by rejecting them, since the soul has no power to acquire or refuse them when God so wishes to bestow these graces upon it. Just as St. John spoke of divesting the senses of their supernatural exterior apprehensions in the night of the senses, he also speaks of emptying the interior corporeal sense, the imaginative power and phantasy, in the night of the spirit. These powers are of two kinds - - supernatural and natural. Meditation makes use of them, but since meditation is not the means to union, the soul will have to eliminate the use of images in order to arrive. No picture that can be conjured up by the imagination can begin to give an adequate concept of God.

At this stage of progress, St. John advises that meditation be left behind, and that one engage in a general, pure act of love.⁵⁷ Many individuals do not understand this new experience and "they imagine themselves to be idle and doing nothing."⁵⁸ This state of affairs causes painful aridity since one is no longer able to gain satisfaction from efforts to meditate. These individuals must learn to "abide in that quietude with a loving attentiveness to God and pay no heed to the imagination and its work."⁵⁹

St. John gives three signs for recognizing the time to discontinue discursive meditation. The first is the inability to make discursive meditation and receive satisfaction from it as before. The second is

the awareness of a disinclination to fix one's imagination on any particular object. But the surest and third sign is the desire of the person to remain alone in loving awareness of God, without the discursive acts of the intellect and will. Anyone of these signs alone may not be an indication of entering into the state of contemplation. The third sign along with the first and second is essential -- the loving knowledge and awareness of the divine presence in peace. This last condition may be so delicate and imperceptible that it may even go unnoticed.

While these signs for discontinuing discursive meditation in order to enter the state of contemplation are given in Book Two under the consideration of the active night of the spirit, St. John repeats them again under the consideration of the passive night of the senses. This presents a problem to the reader, causing one to wonder if what is meant by the "night of the spirit" is synonymous with the "passive night of the senses." E. W. Trueman Dicken in his thorough study of the works of the saint, gives a possible explanation of this situation in his work The Crucible of Love,⁶⁰ St. John's doctrine appears to be at variance with itself at times, and Dicken observes:

Frequently the saint's doctrine seems to be self-contradictory, and just as one seems to be in possession of a master clue one lights upon a statement which apparently conflicts with all one seems to have discovered thus far. Modern scholars are virtually unanimous in the view that the reason for this is to be sought in a failure to comprehend the literary and logical structure of the saint's two basic works, the "Ascent" and the "Night," and to assess correctly the relationship between them . . .⁶¹

Elsewhere Dicken comments, "There is in Book I (of the Night) recapitulation of much that has nothing to do with the passive night of the senses at all, notably the material concerning the state of beginners,"⁶² and it seems that most of the material is an introduction to the main theme of the "Night." However, six of the fourteen chapters in the Night

do deal specifically with the passive night of the senses. Since the passive night of the senses has been placed, through editing, in the Night, these three signs for discontinuing discursive meditation will be dealt with again when treating of the passive night of the spirit.

St. John is quick to explain that the passage from discursive meditation into contemplation is not abrupt and definite, but at the onset of contemplation the soul must return to discursive meditation from time to time, until the habit of contemplation has been acquired. Here, also, he warns that a soul must neither seek nor feed upon imaginative apprehensions or visions. These are represented to the soul supernaturally without the intervention of the exterior senses, either falsely through the devil or authentically by God. This rejection is necessary, for God is not known through any image, form, or particular knowledge, and if the soul leans upon any imaginative form of the divine, it obstructs the way for pure communication with God.

In chapter seventeen of Book II, St. John gives the reason why God bestows these visions, forms, or images at all, if it is better to reject them. He explains that God always works in orderly fashion, gently and "according to the mode of the soul."⁶³ He brings the soul to the high state of union first by discursive meditation, then through forms and images, thereby gradually bringing it to higher and more interior knowledge of himself through union. God works with man according to his human nature, progressing from the corporeal, exterior senses to the imaginative vision, until the soul is finally purified of all sensory apprehension and totally free and open to the Spirit for communication.

The saint gives many reasons why persons should not look for, nor attempt to interpret, visions. Since God's ways are not our ways, and

God's understanding of a prophecy is far different from man's, it follows that man can never take visions or prophecies literally. To do so would cause the spiritual director as well as the person directed to fall into grave error. Sometimes prophecies do not come to pass, not because they are not true in themselves, but because creatures are subject to change. Changes in behaviour and attitude in people will effect changes in the way God will regard them. This is another reason why St. John warns against taking visions and locutions literally.

One more important note regarding the rejection of supernatural communications. St. John points out that God generally achieves his purpose through other human persons and natural means. "He usually does not effect or reveal to a person that which through human effort or counsel can be done, even though he may frequently and affably commune with him."⁶⁴

As a final admonition, St. John does stress the importance of revealing these supernatural communications to the person's spiritual director. If the person feels reluctant to do so, he will find in disclosing these matters a means of practicing humility. Neither should the director show any signs of severity or displeasure, since his attitude may cause the person to recoil from further disclosure and great harm could result from not receiving the proper guidance regarding the vision or locution.

Lastly, the saint discusses the other four intellectual apprehensions, namely; visions, revelations, locutions, and spiritual feelings. These are purely spiritual because they are not communicated to the intellect through the corporeal senses. The spiritual director should be knowledgeable about these graces in order to be able to lead the soul safely and securely through these difficult passages.

In the third book of the Ascent St. John speaks of the active night of the memory and will. Just as the intellect, the first faculty of the soul, needs purgation if it is to arrive at union with God, so do the memory and will. As the intellect is perfected through faith, so the memory and the will are perfected through hope and charity.

As in the case of the intellect, arriving at union with God means "knowing God through what he is not, rather than through what he is . . ."65 Therefore, the memory must also empty itself of all forms and shapes and allow itself to be elevated supernaturally.

Andre Bord has made an interesting study of the faculty memory, with its corresponding theological virtue, hope, in the work of the Ascent-Night. In his plan he neatly placed the elements of the "conceptual architecture articulate according to the horizontal and vertical plan."66 His unusual arrangement is worthy of note:

| | | | |
|---------------|---------|----------|------------------------|
| wisdom | glory | love | (fruits of the union) |
| faith | hope | charity | (theological virtues) |
| understanding | memory | will | (powers of the spirit) |
| obedience | poverty | chastity | (vows of religion) |
| demon | world | flesh | (enemies of the soul) |

From this arrangement he selected the central group: glory, hope, memory, poverty, and the world for his particular analysis. He questions St. John of the Cross on each of the functions of the memory and compares the saint's treatment of the memory with those of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine. In this vertical arrangement he shows how "the theological virtue of hope is grafted onto the memory; with the vow of poverty it detaches itself from the world and obtains its possession of glory."67

In the beginning of union then, and before it reaches its glory the memory will show signs of deficiency, and the person may suffer lapses of memory because of its absorption in God. When this habit of union has been acquired, this imperfection no longer happens because the per-

son's memory is transformed in God. This union is effected by God in the passive night, but the person can do much to prepare himself for it in the active state.

Three kinds of harm will result if the memory of knowledge and discursive reflection is not darkened. The first arises from retaining in the memory any of the objects of the external senses. The second harm is due to the devil. He can add to a person's knowledge, ideas, and reasoning which might easily move one to pride, envy, anger, and many other things. The third kind of harm is privative. Merely retaining apprehensions in the memory deprives one of the spiritual good that can come to one when the memory is void of every kind of thought.

The benefits derived from closing the memory to all kinds of knowledge are many. The spiritual person will enjoy tranquility and peace of soul, which in turn engenders purity of conscience which disposes him for divine wisdom and virtues. He is also freed from temptations and suggestions from the devil. The Holy Spirit likewise can enter the soul in order to teach and instruct.

The one aim is union with God in the memory. Since the object of hope is something unpossessed, the soul will not acquire this virtue if the memory is in possession of many things. If ideas and forms are used for the purpose of fulfilling one's obligation, they should not be dwelt upon any longer than necessary. It is interesting to note that St. John does not recommend discarding the use of images of Christ and the saints. Speaking in defense of their use for spiritual growth he strongly objects to those who would remove this cult from the faithful:

Yet it must be noted here that by our doctrine we are not in agreement, nor do we desire to be, with that of those pestiferous men who, persuaded by the pride and envy of Satan, have sought to remove from the eyes of the faithful the holy and necessary use and

the renowned cult of the images of God and of his saints. Our doctrine is far different from theirs. We are not asserting as they do, that there be no images or veneration of them; we are explaining the difference between these images and God, and how souls should use the painted image in such a way that they do not suffer an impediment in their movement toward the living image, and how they should pay no more attention to images than is required for advancing to what is spiritual.

The means is good and necessary for the attainment of the end, as are images for reminding us of God and the saints. But when a person uses and dwells upon the means more than he ought, his excessive use of them becomes as much an impediment as anything else. This is even truer in the case of supernatural visions and images, with which I am especially dealing here and which are the cause of many delusions and dangers. . . Images will always help a person toward union with God, provided that he does not pay more attention to them than is necessary, and that he allows himself to soar -- when God bestows the favor -- from the painted image to the living and true God, in forgetfulness of all creatures and things pertaining to creatures.⁶⁸

Along with the purification of the intellect and memory, the will must be purged. The object of the will is charity. According to Dicken's analysis of St. John of the Cross' doctrine of grace, "union with God is essentially a personal relationship, and a personal relationship of which love is the decisive and all-pervasive characteristic. Since love in the human soul is a function of the will, it must therefore be primarily by conformity of the human will to God that the soul can be said . . . to be united to him."⁶⁹

The strength of the soul resides in its faculties, passions, and appetites which are ruled by the will. St. John divides the passions into four feelings: Joy, hope, sorrow, and fear. He then gives a definition of joy to fit his needs: "Joy -- to give a definition suited to our purpose -- is nothing else than a satisfaction of the will with esteem for an object it considers fitting."⁷⁰ He makes a distinction between active and passive joy, dwelling at this point on the active and voluntary derived from clear and distinct objects. Then he divides the source of joy into six kinds of objects or goods, namely: temporal, natural, sensory, moral, supernatural, and spiritual.

Joy in temporal goods such as riches, status, relatives, and positions can become harmful unless they are employed in the service of God. This harm is greater or less according to the intensity or degree of withdrawal from God. At first a dullness of mind sets in, then the person's intellect becomes clouded and the judgment darkened. The afflicted soul loses its love for spiritual things and seeks satisfaction in worldly things. Lukewarmness sets in and then God is finally abandoned.

The benefits derived from withdrawal of joy in temporal goods are liberty of spirit, clarity of reason, peace and tranquility. And to the extent that the soul has nothing in his heart, he possesses all with great liberty.

Joy in natural goods pertains to beauty, grace, bodily endowments along with gifts of the soul such as intelligence, discretion and other rational qualities. The only justifiable reason for rejoicing in bodily grace is whether the person is serving God through them. Among the harm resulting from indulging in natural joy are the various faults of presumption, pride, lack of esteem for neighbor, flattery, vain praises, distraction of the mind with creatures, incitement of the senses to complacency, sexual desire and lust. All of these give rise to the other faults such as a dulling of the reason and judgment, distraction of the mind with creatures accompanied with an outgrowth in spiritual lukewarmness and weakness.

By withdrawing the heart from these evils, the soul grows in humility. And by remaining unattached to persons, the soul is free to love everyone spiritually. Tranquillity of soul and liberty of spirit is the reward for those who do not indulge in natural goods.

Another kind of object for joy is sensory goods such as sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. The senses in no way are capable of understanding, seeing, feeling, or knowing God. However, St. John affirms that if a person experiences joy at perceiving or sensing an object and immediately raises his heart and mind to God, he is performing a virtuous act, which is not harmful but beneficial in helping a person come closer to God.

For when the will, in becoming aware of the satisfaction afforded by the object of sight, hearing, or touch, does not stop with this joy but immediately elevates itself to God, rejoicing in Him who motivates and gives strength to its joy, it is doing something very good. The will, then, does not have to avoid such experiences when they produce this devotion and prayer, but it can profit by them, and even ought to for the sake of so holy an exercise. For there are souls who are greatly moved toward God by sensible objects.⁷¹

The saint points out the harm that can result from indulging in sensory goods. One's reason becomes obscure, lukewarmness sets in, and one becomes distracted. Through hearing one tends to gossip, and uncertain judgements are made. An inordinate joy in food engenders gluttony and drunkenness. St. John abhors the "vice of effeminacy" in regard to the touch of soft objects and suggests that it "foments lust" and makes the "spirit unmanly and timid."⁷²

The spiritual and temporal benefits resulting from the denial of joy in sensory goods are many. The mortified person can more easily become recollected in God and grows in purity and spirituality. Finally, "this person, now pure of heart, finds in all things a joyful, pleasant, chaste, pure, spiritual, glad, and loving knowledge of God."⁷³

Moral goods are another kind of joy in which the will can indulge. These are the virtues and their habits, such as the practice of works of mercy and of observing God's laws. St. John warns that the Christian ought only to rejoice in these moral goods and the works he performs,

"insofar as he performs these works for the love of God," and "they procure eternal life for him."⁷⁴

To perform these good works for any other motive than the honor and glory of God engenders vanity, pride, vainglory, and presumption. These evils lead to contempt for others. Persons who look for praise and thanks for good works performed usually end in discouragement when they are not recognized. They grow cold in charity toward God and their neighbor. Denying oneself joy in performing good deeds will keep one meek, humble, and prudent at one's work. One will be free from spiritual avarice, gluttony, envy, and sloth.

Another class in which the will can rejoice is supernatural goods. These are goods which exceed the natural faculties and powers such as faith, gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophesying, discernment of spirits and the gift of tongues. God bestows these gifts upon souls, not for the recipient, but for the benefit of others. Becoming vain over these supernatural gifts darkens the intellect and causes misunderstanding over the proper use of them. If the person concentrates solely upon God, and relegates the honor only to Him, the soul is exalted in pure faith. The other two theological virtues of hope and charity are also increased.

Among other spiritual goods, St. John mentions statues and paintings. While they are good and helpful in moving the will to devotion, they themselves can become the object of devotion rather than the persons they represent. Some persons, he cautions, become attached to the workmanship of the object, or its ornamentation, rather than to the person represented by them. Others see or hear supernatural or extraordinary phenomena through the images. St. John warns of the craftiness of the

devil in disguising himself by the use of these objects, and thereby misleading unwary souls and impeding them on their way to the truth.

Regarding oratories, churches, and other places in which to pray, St. John advises that the place which is chosen should be most conducive to prayer and offer the fewest distractions. "That place should be chosen which least occupies and attracts the senses."⁷⁵

In speaking of ceremonies and devotions the Saint suggests, "One should be distrustful of ceremonies unapproved by the Catholic Church."⁷⁶

The Passive Nights of the Senses and Spirit

The Passive Night of the Senses

In his conclusion to Book I on the active night of the senses, St. John demonstrated various ways in which a soul could help itself with this entry into the night. In speaking of the passive night by way of comparison, he stated that "In the passive way an individual does nothing, for God accomplishes the work in him, while he acts as the recipient."⁷⁷ In the active night of the senses St. John dealt with the sensory part of the soul. In the passive night, he deals with the spiritual side.

The first two stanzas of his poem "Dark Night" which he quoted in its entirety at the beginning of The Ascent of Mount Carmel are used again for the prologue to the first book of the Dark Night. Here he announces that "The first two stanzas proclaim the effects of the two kinds of spiritual purgation: one, a purification of the sensory part; the other, a purification of the spiritual part."⁷⁸

This passive night of the senses signifies purgative contemplation "which passively causes in the soul this negation of self and of all things."⁷⁹ He calls this stage of the soul "obscure contemplation" and those who arrive at this stage "proficients" although he says they "are

already contemplatives,"⁸⁰

Up to this stage the soul has been enjoying sweet consolations in its prayers and meditations. God had been favoring it with "caresses" as "a loving mother" would bestow upon her little child. Now, however, he is weaning it of the habits of childhood, and "letting it walk on its own feet" so that it may "grow accustomed to greater and more important things."⁸¹

In chapters one through seven St. John discusses the major imperfections occurring among beginners who are entering this state of purification. Using "the seven capital vices as our basis,"⁸² he takes each one separately explaining how the souls starting out on this journey fail through these imperfections. Dicken in studying the structure of the Ascent-Night points out that there is a repetition of material here that is quite irrelevant to the passive night of the senses:

There is in Book I recapitulation of much that has nothing to do with the passive night of the senses at all, notably the material concerning the state of beginners, and only six of the fourteen chapters of this Book deal specifically with the passive night of the senses. Even here, much of what is said is no more than a restatement of the teaching given in Book II of the "Ascent."⁸³

The saint continues then with the plight of the so-called beginners. Because of early feelings of fervor in their spiritual exercises, they develop a certain "secret pride" which "begets a complacency with themselves and their accomplishments . . ."⁸⁴ They enjoy speaking quite vainly of spiritual things with a desire to instruct others along the way to perfection. At the same time they try to camouflage their own shortcomings by minimizing their faults.

Spiritual avarice is another fault found among beginners. Due to a lack of spiritual consolation, they seek a substitution by searching for counsels and maxims instead of striving for perfection through mortifi-

cation and interior poverty. Attachment to material objects of devotion is preferred to true devotion and genuine piety.

St. John speaks of the imperfections of "spiritual lust, not because the lust is spiritual, but because it proceeds from spiritual things."⁸⁵ Since one cannot eliminate the sensory part of the soul while one is at prayer or spiritual exercises, one may be vulnerable to impure sensations even while the higher or superior part of the soul experiences pleasure and gratification in God. This is caused, says St. John, from the sensory and spiritual parts of the soul receiving stimuli from the same object, each "according to its own nature and properties."⁸⁶ However, the Saint adds, "Once the sensory part is reformed through the purgation of the dark night, it no longer has these infirmities. For then the spiritual part of the soul rather than the sensory part receives God's spirit, and the soul thus receives everything according to the mode of the spirit."⁸⁷

Anger is also an imperfection found among beginners. After once experiencing delight and satisfaction in their spiritual exercises, they become "peevish" and irritable when the satisfaction is no longer there. They also become angry over the sins of others and take it upon themselves to correct and reprove them. Others become impatient with themselves for their slow progress in virtue, and show a lack of humility in their conduct by not waiting meekly for God's help.

Spiritual gluttony is found among almost all persons setting out on the road to perfection. This vice is caused from the delights beginners find in their spiritual exercises. Some will go to extremes in performing penances of their own choice, while disregarding the advice of their directors or confessors. By doing this, they substitute their own will

for the act of humble submission to others, thus forfeiting an opportunity of performing a greater sacrifice more pleasing to God. This submission of one's will in obedience St. John terms "a penance of reason and discretion" and consequently "more pleasing and acceptable to God."⁸⁸

Many beginners are beset with the imperfection of spiritual envy. They become saddened at the spiritual goods of others and are disturbed at hearing others praised.

Spiritual sloth is one more fault which befalls them. When God removes spiritual consolations from them they are loath to continue their spiritual exercises. They want "God to desire what they want" and "they measure God by themselves and not themselves by God."⁸⁹

The saint continues then with an "exposition of the dark night." The night is one of purgation and pertains to the senses. In speaking of this night he explains that many pass through this first one, but few arrive at the night of the spirit. "The sensory night is common and happens to many . . . The spiritual night is the lot of very few . . . The first purgation or night is bitter and terrible to the senses. But nothing can be compared to the second, for it is horrible and frightful to the spirit."⁹⁰

St. John gives three signs for determining when a soul is entering the passive night of the senses. The first is that the person is no longer able to meditate discursively. While one does "not get satisfaction or consolation from the things of God, they do not get any out of creatures either."⁹¹

Since this dryness "could be the product of some indisposition or melancholic humor"⁹² he makes a second sign necessary for the discernment of this purgation. The memory still turns to God "solicitously and

with painful care, and the soul thinks it is not serving God but turning back, because it is aware of this distaste for the things of God." This condition is different than lukewarmness. A person who is lukewarm readily turns away from the things of God and finds its enjoyment in other sensible objects.

This dryness occurs because God is transferring his gifts from the sensory delights to the spiritual, and since the senses cannot enjoy the things of the spirit, a dryness sets in which disturbs the soul. Through this ordeal the spirit becomes strengthened although it does not perceive this, because it is unable to taste the sweetness of this new grace.

The purgation of the senses and the substitution of interior food for the spirit is the beginning of contemplation. It results in darkness and dryness. While the soul desires to "remain alone and in quietude" it cannot "dwell upon any particular thought, nor will it have the desire to do so."⁹³ This stage of prayer is perhaps the most critical of all phases, for if the soul, bewildered as to what to do next, is not encouraged and directed wisely, it may become discouraged and fall back into a stage of mediocrity. Or worse yet, it may abandon prayer altogether.

St. John explains that, "This reflection is so delicate that usually if the soul desires or tries to experience it, it cannot. For, as I say, this contemplation is active while the soul is in idleness and unconcern."⁹⁴ It is God who now takes over in the activity of prayer. Kavanaugh, in his article on aridity and contemplation, advises that "The individual does not decide that the time is ripe for transition to a simpler, more deeply spiritual form of prayer; it is God who determines the seasonableness of this transition." After using quotes from the Ascent and Night Kavanaugh immediately follows with the question ". . . how do 'we'

discern that God is bringing the soul to this more spiritual intimacy?"⁹⁵

The saint gives the third and final sign to determine whether this dryness is actually the beginning of contemplation. The soul loses its power to meditate as it previously did, and no amount of effort on its own part can keep it in discursive analysis of thought. The soul suffers keenly during this period of aridity, because it feels as if it were abandoned by God. It fears that it has gone astray, and of its own accord cannot concentrate its faculties upon God. It tries to meditate, and when it cannot, it believes it is doing nothing. Its efforts only obstruct God's work in the soul, for "In searching for spirit, they lose the spirit which was the source of their tranquillity and peace."⁹⁶

St. John offers this advice to those who find themselves in this state:

The attitude necessary in the night of the sense is to pay no attention to discursive meditation, since this is not the time for it. They should allow the soul to remain in rest and quietude, even though it may seem very obvious to them that they are doing nothing and wasting time, and even though they think this disinclination to think about anything is due to their laxity. Through patience and perseverance in prayer, they will be doing a great deal without activity on their part. All that is required of them here is freedom of soul, that they liberate and care not about thinking and meditating. They must be content simply with a loving and peaceful attentiveness to God, and live without concern, without the effort, and without the desire to taste or feel him. All these desires disquiet the soul and distract it from the peaceful quiet and sweet idleness of the contemplation which is being communicated to it.⁹⁷

Because of the restrictions on the use of the imagination at this stage in prayer, several authors have used the term 'ligature' in place of the expression "passive night of the senses." Dicken tells us that "John Chapman designated this beginning of contemplative prayer 'the ligature'" in his Spiritual Letters. This, in turn, was borrowed from Poulain "who used it to mean something rather different."⁹⁸ Dicken believes that it is a good word to use in place of the cumbersome expression

'night of the senses':

It nevertheless merits retention in the technical vocabulary of English spirituality as a synonym of 'passive night of the senses,' both because it is already familiar to many English readers and also because it is associated with the doctrine of one of the greatest modern teachers on this delicate theme. It denotes the most critical point of all in spiritual development, and certainly the most clearly defined stage in spiritual growth.⁹⁹

The saint continues, then, with further analysis of this stage in spiritual growth. A soul will lose the gifts God in his goodness is trying to bestow upon it, if it disturbs the tranquility through which God acts. John explains this contemplation in simple terminology, "For contemplation is nothing else than a secret and peaceful and loving inflow of God, which, if not hampered, fires the soul in the spirit of love. . . ."¹⁰⁰

The soul entering this state does not feel at first the fire of divine love, either because the soul does not understand its position, or because it still retains some impurities in its sensory part. Gradually, the enkindling of love increases to the extent that the soul feels "his bones drying up in this thirst, his nature withering away, and his ardor and strength diminishing through the liveliness of the thirst of love. A person will feel that this is a living thirst."¹⁰¹

The soul gains many benefits and graces while passing through this period of purgation. Hence, the meaning of the line -- "Ah, the sheer grace!" First, it is freed from the "seven capital vices" by which the soul is held captive through its earthly attachments. In this night the soul "is despoiled and denuded -- in order to pass through it -- and grounded in faith, which is foreign to all senses . . ."¹⁰²

Speaking of the main benefit of this night, St. John says, "The first and chief benefit that this dry and dark night of contemplation causes

is the knowledge of self and of one's own misery."¹⁰³ The soul now realizes its wretchedness and helplessness, since it formerly served God with a great deal of self-satisfaction. This was the occasion of many imperfections. Now a person "communes with God more respectfully and courteously, the way one should always converse with the Most High." At first the beginner did not act in this manner, since "that satisfying delight made him somewhat more daring with God than was proper, and more discourteous and inconsiderate."¹⁰⁴

Another benefit resulting from this purification of the senses is the freedom granted to the intellect: "The intellect is left limpid and free to understand the truth, for even though these concern spiritual things they blind and impede the spirit. Similarly the anguish and dryness of the senses illumines and quickens the intellect . . ."¹⁰⁵ From this knowledge of self flows the knowledge of God. As St. John concludes: ". . . self-knowledge flows first from this dry night, and . . . from this knowledge as from its source proceeds the other knowledge of God."¹⁰⁶

Spiritual humility is acquired in this night of the senses, and as one continues in this journey, spiritual pride is left behind. The imperfection of avarice, an inordinate attachment to spiritual objects, is overcome. Likewise, a person is freed from spiritual lust and gluttony. Concupiscence and the appetites are subdued. The soul now bears an habitual remembrance of God and exercises all the virtues simultaneously: Corporally and spiritually, the theological virtues as well as the cardinal and moral ones.

Other benefits received from this dry contemplation are numerous. "God frequently communicates to the soul, when it least expects, spiritual sweetness, a very pure love, and a spiritual knowledge which is sometimes most delicate."¹⁰⁷ The soul obtains liberty of spirit, acquires the

fruits of the Holy Spirit and is liberated from the world, the flesh, and the devil.

All these trials of the night of the senses God sends in order to prepare the soul for the more difficult and terrifying night of the spirit. "For those who must afterwards enter into the other more oppressive night of the spirit in order to reach the divine union of love -- because not everyone but only a few usually reach this union -- this night is ordinarily accompanied by burdensome trials and sensory temptations which last a long time, and in some longer than in others."¹⁰⁸

St. John mentions quite frequently that not all souls who pass through the night of the senses will enter the night of the spirit. Neither is it certain how long the soul will remain in the night of the senses before it is purged sufficiently enough to enter the stage that will lead it into the union of divine love. But, he concludes, that souls who will pass on to this lofty state of union "must usually remain in these arduities and temptations for a long while no matter how quickly God leads them."¹⁰⁹

The Passive Night of the Spirit

There is evidence to show that the Night was written before the Ascent was finished. The saint labored meticulously with the material in the first three books over a period of approximately five or six years, and the work seems to have very little relation to the poem which was quoted at the beginning of the commentary. Dicken observes that:

The lines of the poem could, in fact, be altogether excised from the book without materially affecting its argument, for structurally the "Ascent" has the form of a systematic theological treatise, proceeding according to a series of logical divisions and subdivisions totally unrelated to the poem.¹¹⁰

However, Egan is of a different opinion regarding the close association between the poem and its commentary:

Dicken said that he has found that there is little relationship of John of the Cross' commentary with his poetry. It is my conviction that a careful study of medieval spiritual exegesis will show that John of the Cross is very much in that tradition. Moreover, I believe that the relationship between John's poetry and commentaries is closer than we can appreciate from our literal minded viewpoint.¹¹¹

The Night, on the other hand, is truly a commentary and not an independent treatise as is the Ascent. As Dicken again remarks:

The "Night" stands in a very different relationship to the poem upon which it is a commentary. The text does not perhaps adhere very rigidly to the poem, but it is unmistakably a commentary, not an independent, intricate treatise such as the "Ascent," full of meticulous and minute distinctions. Where the "Ascent" argues elaborately, safeguarding each point with scholarly care, the "Night" is written currente calamo with the minimum of structural complication. The saint undoubtedly had the material at his finger-tips, and wrote almost without pause.¹¹²

The difference in the time element of the two texts may account for the obvious disparities in style and ease of composition. It flows smoothly and without any hesitancy into the many-faceted night.

St. John continues, then, with the journey of the soul toward its predestined union with God. Before being plunged into the depth of the dark night of the spirit, the soul spends many years after the night of the senses, in a period of comparative peace and freedom. It has been purged somewhat of its grossest faults and failings and has been freed to some extent from its attachment to things of the senses. However, this purgation was sensory, and therefore did not reach the spirit. As St. John pointed out, the purgation of the senses is only the "beginning of the contemplation which leads to the purgation of the spirit."¹¹³

Hence, in order to reach divine union, the soul must pass through another, and more intense purification, that of the spirit. In this night both the sensory and the spiritual parts are purged of any remaining pleasures, and the soul has no other way of advancing excepting by pure and dark faith. This difficult way St. John aptly describes as "rough

and arduous." Since, as he explains, all evil habits reside in the spirit, the senses cannot be completely purified until accompanied by the purification of the spirit. Thus, God begins to work on the soul at both the spiritual parts:

God divests the faculties, affections, and senses, both spiritual and sensory, interior and exterior. He leaves the intellect in darkness, the will in aridity, the memory in emptiness, and the affections in supreme affliction, bitterness, and anguish, by depriving the soul of the feeling and satisfaction it previously obtained from spiritual blessings.¹¹⁴

The saint goes on to tell how all this purification is necessary for this "union of love" and he calls this way or means "a pure and dark contemplation, as is indicated in the first stanza."¹¹⁵ Here he interrupts with the explanation that while he used the first stanza of the poem to pertain to the senses in Book I, it associates itself more accurately with the night of the spirit. "Although we explained this stanza in reference to the first night of the senses, the soul understand it mainly in relation to this second night of the spirit, since this night is the principal purification of the soul."¹¹⁶

This dark night of the spirit St. John calls infused contemplation or mystical theology. And this purgation prepares the soul for union with God. The soul suffers keenly at this time because the light of this contemplation is so bright, and the soul is so dark and impure. This combination of extremes produces a terrible affliction in the soul. The soul feels as if God has rejected or abandoned it, and that it will never be worthy of Him. Added to this feeling of desolation, the person seems to be forsaken and despised by friends. An utter feeling of helplessness is produced in the soul by the knowledge of its ultimate poverty and misery.

The soul also experiences poverty in temporal, natural, and spiritual goods. Aridity purifies the sensory part, the faculties are voided of

their apprehensions, and the spirit is thrust into utter darkness.

St. John calls this darkness "dark contemplation." He describes this state as a "terrible anguish (like hanging in midair, unable to breathe)."117 Dicken, in analyzing the passive night of the spirit, exclaims:

If the light which was given to it at the ligature (passive night of the senses) was darkness, how inconceivably blacker is the night into which it has now come! There seems to be nothing but endless, desperate, utterly abyssal emptiness wherever it turns. Despite all the strength which it has acquired during its previous phases of spiritual growth, it has no adequate resources to enable it to accept stoically this appalling dereliction, or to believe that this is in truth the mark of God's most loving favour.¹¹⁸

The soul is also compared to gold which is purified in the fire. "Because the soul is purified in this forge like gold in the crucible, as the Wise Man says (Wis. 3:6), it feels terrible annihilation in its very substance and extreme poverty as though it were approaching its end."¹¹⁹ The saint adds that this suffering is so intense, that if God did not permit it only at intervals, a person would die within a short time.

The sufferings of the will are also immense. The soul remembers past consolations received from God, and now feels far removed from them. St. John cites scriptural passages from Job and Jeremiah in their afflictions and finally concludes that despite the number and extent of their sufferings, these descriptions would still be inadequate in fully describing all of the anguish of this night. "So numerous and burdensome are the pains of this night, and so many are the scriptural passages we could cite that we would have neither the time nor the energy to put it all in writing; and, doubtless, all that we can possibly say would fall short of expressing what this night really is."¹²⁰

St. John cautions that any person enduring these terrible afflictions

ought to be treated with great compassion. The soul feels that these sufferings and tribulations will never come to an end. Neither can the soul find consolation in any doctrine or spiritual director, since Our Lord wills that the person obtain no relief from this desolation until the purging has been completed. This purgation lasts according to the degree of union of love that God has decreed for the soul. This period may extend over years, despite its intensity.

During this time of purgation there are periods of illumination, when the purgative mode ceases and the soul experiences "great sweetness of peace and loving friendship with God."¹²¹ It is God who is working now in the soul, and because of this the soul can do nothing.¹²² This condition not only affects the spiritual state of the person, but also his temporal affairs and business. He is unable to concentrate on anything despite his desire to do so.

The purgation of this night is threefold: The intellect is purged of its light, the will of its affections, and the memory of its discursive knowledge. Also, the brighter this divine light, the more it darkens and empties the soul. The natural affections, sentiments, and apprehensions are so different from the divine "that their actual and habitual possession demands the annihilation and expulsion of the natural affections and apprehensions; for two contraries cannot coexist in one subject."¹²³ Hence the need for this painful purgation of the soul or dark contemplation.

This painful purifying also involves many "fears, imaginings and struggles" within the soul. Sometimes the person fears that he is lost. Thus inward agony becomes so piercing that it finds expression in audible groans. St. John compares the night of purification to the effect that fire has on a log of wood:

Fire, when applied to wood, first dehumidifies it, dispelling all moisture and making it give off any water it contains. Then it gradually turns the wood black, makes it dark and ugly, and even causes it to emit a bad odor. By drying out the wood, the fire brings to light and expels all those ugly and dark accidents which are contrary to fire. Finally, by heating and enkindling it from without, the fire transforms the wood into itself and makes it as beautiful as it is itself. Once transformed, the wood no longer has any activity or passivity of its own, except for its weight and its quantity which is denser than the fire. For it possesses the properties and performs the actions of fire: it is dry and it dries; it is hot and it gives off heat; it is brilliant and it illumines; and it is also light, much lighter than before. It is the fire that produces all these properties in the wood.¹²⁴

When the divine fire is applied to the soul, it purifies the soul of all its imperfections. And when the impurities are disposed of, so is the intense suffering caused by the knowledge of these imperfections. In like manner, as the fire increases in power, so also is love enkindled in the soul. This divine fire is also compared to purgatory. "Souls are cleansed in the other life by fire, but here on earth they are cleansed and illumined by love."¹²⁵

Sometimes this loving light when communicated to the soul, "acts more upon the will through the fire of love and leaves the intellect in darkness," or at other times, "illumines the intellect with understanding and leaves the will in dryness."¹²⁶ As the faculties of the intellect and will are purified, they are sometimes united. And as this union becomes more perfect, love becomes more free. "Thus this soul will be a soul of heaven, heavenly and more divine than human."¹²⁷

St. John explains in the second stanza that the soul, when it walks in darkness, is secure. Darkness here pertains "to the sensory, the interior, and the spiritual appetites and faculties."¹²⁸ A soul usually fails through its appetites, knowledge or affections. In proportion to its mastery over these faculties, it walks securely.

Suffering is another reason why the soul walks securely in darkness.

"Suffering is a surer and even more advantageous road than that of joy and action."¹²⁹ When a person has to endure suffering, he becomes strong. Virtues are acquired through patient endurance and the soul is "made wiser and more cautious."

The saint continues the commentary on the second stanza by explaining the secrecy of this dark journey. He compares this dark contemplation to a "secret ladder." The ladder is secret wisdom infused into the soul through love. It is secret because it is indescribable. "Yet pure contemplation is indescribable, as we said, and on this account called 'secret.'"¹³⁰

This secret wisdom is compared to a ladder by which one ascends and descends. Souls called to this great stage of communication by God are exalted and humbled. There are alternately "ups and downs." The knowledge of God causes the soul to ascend, the knowledge of self to descend. This succession of ascending and descending continues until perfect habits are acquired and the soul finally reaches God and is united with Him.

The ladder contains ten successive steps. The first pertains to lovesickness caused by the soul's imperfections and attachments to things not of God. As the person ascends to the second step he begins a search for God. While looking for God in all things, the soul is "convalescing and gaining strength in the love found on this second step . . ."¹³¹

From this state it immediately ascends to the third step by which the soul undergoes "a certain degree of new purgation in the night."¹³² The new purgation incites the soul to the performance of many works. The person feels that the things it does for God are too few and of little consequence. It also feels worthless and worse than all others. Graces are bestowed upon the soul enabling it to endure sufferings, and providing it with courage to proceed to the fourth step of the ladder.

On the fourth step much energy is acquired and the flesh is brought under control. By this time the soul no longer seeks consolation in God or creatures, but desires only to give pleasure and render service to its creator. God rewards a soul for this generosity by "paying it visits of spiritual delight."¹³³

The intense desire to please God enables the soul to ascend to the fifth step. Here the soul hungers intensely for its beloved with an impatience that is frustrating. It feeds alone on love and quickly ascends to the sixth step.

On the sixth step the soul runs "swiftly toward God" and experiences Divine touches. It grows rapidly in charity and is now "almost completely purified." Thus it moves rapidly to the seventh step. Here it acquires great boldness. God readily hears the person's prayers and petitions. "These souls obtain from God what they ask of him with pleasure."¹³⁴

This freedom and boldness brings the soul to the eighth step where "love impels the soul to lay hold of the Beloved without letting Him go . . ."¹³⁵ However, the soul does not rest on this step continuously or it would possess a "certain glory" even in this life. The soul rests at this stage for only short periods at a time.

The following step, the ninth, is that of the perfect. The soul "burns gently in God." It leads to the tenth and final step which is no longer a part of this life. The soul becomes completely assimilated to God. It no longer remains in the body; neither is it detained in purgatory since its purgation was made perfect through love. "The soul departs from itself and all things and ascends to God."¹³⁶ The soul goes forth "disguised" in order to escape its adversaries in the world, the flesh, and the devil. The colors of its disguises are white, green, and red -- symbolical of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity.

The whiteness of faith blinds the intellect. It is the surest safeguard against the devil. The soul walks in darkness, preventing the evil spirit from an advantage of attack. The green garment signifies the virtue of hope. The soul's taste for eternal life causes it to consider all worldly matter as worthless and dead. Therefore, he is protected against the second enemy, the world. Hope lifts the eyes of the soul to God.

Charity is symbolized by the red outer garment. It makes the soul beautiful, pleasing, and elevates it to God. Since the soul has no love for itself, it is protected against the third enemy, the flesh.

The three colors of white, green, and red symbolize the union of the intellect, memory, and will with God. Faith empties the intellect of its natural understanding. Hope empties the memory of all created things. Charity empties the will of its affections and appetites thus preparing the soul for union with God.

This is the reason for the soul's necessity to remain in darkness throughout this journey. The devil has no access to this citadel, because now God works in the most interior and spiritual part of the soul. It is only through the senses that the devil understands what is happening, and the more spiritual and interior the communication the less is his power to hinder the work of God in the soul. However, the devil perceives that something is happening here because of the peace and quiet produced in the senses, and he will do everything to excite and disturb it with fears and sufferings.

Sometimes, God permits the devil to detect some of the favors he is bestowing upon the soul. This is done in order that, in the struggle between good and evil goodness may prove its strength, and the "devil cannot protest his rights, claiming that he is not given the opportunity to conquer the soul . . ."137 Just as the good angel communicates spir-

itual favors to the soul, so does the devil try to imitate with disturbances and spiritual horror. God permits this intense spiritual suffering in order to purify the soul and prepare it for still greater favors.

However, when God so desires to communicate directly with the soul, He does so in "complete darkness and concealment," so that neither the angel nor the devil can gain access and thereby see what is happening . . ."138 From these, the soul benefits the greatest "Since this is the highest degree of prayer," and "the soul receives greater good than in all else."139

No one reaches this sublime stage of intimate union with God except through purgation and intense suffering. "No one," says St. John, "attains to this blessing except through an intimate nakedness, purgation, and spiritual hiding from all that is of creature."140 When commenting on the last verse of the second stanza, "My house now being stilled," he emphatically states once more, "One cannot reach this union without remarkable purity, and this purity is unattainable without vigorous mortification and nakedness regarding all creatures."141

NIGHT AS FAITH AND FREEDOM

Central Themes of John's Doctrine of Night

St. John introduces his second book of the Ascent of Mount Carmel as "a treatise on faith, the proximate means of ascent to union with God."¹ Here we are working with a paradox. In a broad sense, faith means to trust -- to have confidence in something or someone. Theologically, it can connote an increase in light as the understanding acquires an insight into or a greater knowledge of an article of truth. Faith is often considered an act of the intellect. However, for St. John, "The 'secret ladder' represents faith, because all the rungs or articles of faith are secret to and hidden from both the senses and the intellect."² This 'secrecy' and hiddenness causes a darkness because the senses and intellect are deprived of light. "Accordingly the soul lived in darkness, without the light of the senses and intellect, and went out beyond every natural and rational boundary to climb the divine ladder of faith that leads up to and penetrates the deep things of God."³

In his introduction to the Ascent-Night, Kavanaugh explains, "It is the theological virtue of faith taken in its strict sense which undoubtedly prompted St. John of the Cross to term the entire path, or life, of faith a dark night."⁴ Here, faith may be a pure act of the will, accepting God's revelation without any help from the knowledge acquired through the senses or the intellect. Lucien-Marie of St. Joseph describes the role of faith in Book II beautifully when he states, "Tout ce livre II est un hymne à la foi."⁵

Amatus Van De H. Familie finds the concept of faith the underlying theme in "Faith and Contemplation in Saint John of the Cross."⁶ He observes

that even when the Saint treats of the memory and will, faith is not absent. Faith in the works of St. John is compared by Amatus to a theme in a great symphony. When it is not dominating the harmonies, it rests as a leitmotif in the background, but its presence is always perceived. The theme acts as a supporting bass when the purification is taking place in the memory and in the will.⁷ It is especially in the night of the spirit that faith plays such a significant role, though it comes to the fore again in the Spiritual Canticle where the spiritual espousal takes place. Faith is highly illumined at the most sublime moments of the spiritual marriage in The Living Flame.⁸

Faith according to St. John of the Cross

St. John defines faith as a "certain obscure habit of the soul. It is an obscure habit because it brings us to believe divinely revealed truths which transcend every natural light and infinitely exceed all human understanding."⁹ Faith is compared by John with the light of the sun. Because of its overwhelming brightness, instead of affording vision to the eyes, it overwhelms, blinds and deprives them of vision, since its lights is excessive and unproportioned to the visual faculty.¹⁰ In like manner, "the light of faith in its abundance suppresses and overwhelms that of the intellect."¹¹

Faith is a virtue of the intellect. "Faith nullifies the light of the intellect, and if this light is not darkened, the knowledge of faith is lost."¹² It is not through the senses or any other of its own resources that the intellect arrives at divine knowledge, "for the intellect by its own power, comprehends only natural knowledge, though it has the potency to be raised to a supernatural act whenever the Lord wishes."¹³

Alain Delaye in his study of faith in St. John finds a second sense

to the meaning of the term. The meaning is used less frequently, but is derived from the understanding of faith by extension. Faith, according to the second sense, is an integral attitude which engages the whole man.¹⁴ The soul believes, not because it understands, but because these truths were revealed to the Church through hearing. Regarding new revelations about faith, "a person should not believe already revealed truths about faith because they are again revealed, but because they were already sufficiently revealed to the Church."¹⁵ John is referring to a specific kind of revelation: the disclosure of secrets and hidden mysteries. He demonstrates how a person receiving these "truths of faith revealed again, can easily be deceived by the devil who "first lures a person with truths and verisimilitudes that give assurance; and then he proceeds with his beguilement."¹⁶ The saint safeguards the soul by advising that "a person should be undesirous of knowing the truths of faith clearly, that he may thereby conserve pure and entire the merit of faith and also pass through this night of intellect to the divine light of union."¹⁷

(a) Faith -- An Obscure Light

Faith is an obscure light. When the soul is purged of evil tendencies, it sees itself more clearly, through the illumination of this dark light of contemplation."¹⁸ It may appear to the soul that its condition is worse than before, but this dark light merely brings out the imperfections in a way which had not been noticed previously. The condition of the soul is not worse, but it is brought to a greater exposure by the illumination of the obscure light of contemplation.

The Saint stresses that one cannot advance in faith without shutting off all avenues of approach through the senses. "There is no advancing in faith without closing one's eyes to everything pertaining to the senses

and to clear, particular knowledge."¹⁹ But the rational or higher part of the soul must be darkened as well as the sensory or lower part. This state of the soul is arrived at, not by striving to attain knowledge through the intellect, but by taking faith as a guide. "A person ought to desire with all his might to attain what in this life is unknowable and unimaginable."²⁰ By this means he receives knowledge by faith. "In this way, in obscurity, a man swiftly approaches union by means of faith, which is also dark. And in this way faith gives him wondrous light."²¹

Here we seem to have an apparent contradiction. At one time John is saying that a person should not desire to know the truths of faith clearly, and at another time he seems to be saying the directly opposite. It is easy to take his meaning of faith out of context and to come up with several contradictory statements. Kavanaugh has this explanation:

Laying stress on the doctrine of theologians that the virtue of faith is an obscure habit, he teaches that "it brings us to believe truths revealed by God which transcend every natural light and infinitely exceed all human understanding." [A2, 3, 1] But in his ponderous underscoring of how the light of faith "suppresses" and "overwhelms" and "nullifies" the natural light of the intellect, he sometimes leaves one with the cold impression that faith simply does away with all knowledge. Reflecting upon some of his strong statements on the obscurity of faith, we must not, however, overlook other texts in which he definitely declares that faith gives us knowledge of God. [A2, 9, 1; C12, 3-6] The Saint's wish, obviously, is to turn our attention to the obscurity of faith and impress upon our minds the inability of the intellect to acquire by its own power the knowledge which faith affords of the strictly supernatural mysteries of God, or even to understand them fully once they have been revealed.²²

The intellect, then, must be deprived of knowledge in order that the Spirit of God can illuminate it through faith. The soul seeks God in recollection, and this is achieved by faith. "the purer and more refined a soul is in faith, the more infused charity it possesses, and the more charity it has, the more the Holy Spirit illumines it and communicates his gifts, because charity is the means by which they are communicated."²³

When the Holy Spirit communicates truths there is some light to the soul, but John makes a clear distinction between that kind of light and the light given in faith:

In that illumination of truths the Holy Spirit indeed communicates some light to the soul, yet the light given in faith -- in which there is no clear understanding -- is qualitatively as different from the other as is the purest gold from the basest metal, and quantitatively as is the sea from a drop of water. In the first kind of illumination, wisdom concerning one, two, or three truths, etc., is communicated; and in the second, all God's wisdom is communicated in general, that is, the Son of God, Who is imparted to the soul in faith.²⁴

The intellect is united with God through faith. Therefore, John warns against the use of images and ideas with which to reach him. There is absolutely no comparison to be made between any of God's creatures and himself. "Creatures, earthly or heavenly, and all distinct ideas and images, natural and supernatural, that can be the objects of a person's faculties, are incomprehensible and unproportional to God's being."²⁵ He adds that those who pay heed to these imaginative apprehensions will gradually lose the light of faith in their intellects.²⁶ Amatus believes that St. John develops a "new personal nuance" when he claims that one must go to God by faith in believing, and not through the understanding.²⁷ "For though faith brings certitude to the intellect, it does not produce clarity, but only darkness."²⁸

R. J. Zwi Werblowsky in his study of the Night says that "faith is synonymous with darkness." Faith is darkness. Considering the total context of St. John's mystical theology, Werblowsky states that "the term 'faith' means annihilation of the light of reason. 'Faith' does not, therefore, signify the irrational acceptance of some absurdum, but the abeyance of the intellectual faculty."²⁹

Faith, then, actually blinds a person before it enlightens, "for by blinding it illumines him."³⁰ John makes the comparison of the cloud,

which led the Israelites out of Egypt by night, with light. "The cloud was dark, and illuminative in the night."³¹ Therefore, the knowledge that faith gives effaces the knowledge of the intellect, "and if the light is not darkened, the knowledge of faith is lost."³²

(b) Faith and Contemplation

St. John, in explaining his second reason for calling this journey toward God a "dark night," calls faith the means or "road" to this end, union with God.³³ The soul is leaving behind the ideas and images that it used with the senses in the work of meditation, and is advancing into the "dark night" of contemplation.

At the start of contemplation, the soul experiences dryness and emptiness due to the passive purification of the senses. It no longer enjoys the sweetness it experienced in prayer through the use of its senses. Faith moves in to replace the senses, "hence the dark night with its aridities and voids is the means to the knowledge of God and self."³⁴ In these passive nights God communicates with the soul directly, and "prepares the soul for the union with God through love by both purging and illumining it."³⁵ But this preparation is painful "because of the height of the divine wisdom which exceeds the capacity of the soul."³⁶ Also, because the soul is not purified of all its imperfections. "On this account it is painful, afflictive and also dark for the soul,"³⁷ Therefore, "this dark night signifies purgative contemplation."³⁸ St. John equates faith with contemplation, and contemplation with darkness. It is purgative because the soul is purged of all its sensuous appetites. It must then live in "void and darkness" by pure faith alone.

The reason for this "dryness" and "darkness" is that "God transfers His goods and strength from sense to spirit."³⁹ The sensory part is

incapable of receiving the goods of the spirit, so it remains "deprived, dry, and empty, and thus, while the spirit is tasting, the flesh tastes nothing at all and becomes weak in its work. But the spirit through this nourishment grows stronger and more alert . . ."40 When the soul experiences this "dryness" and "emptiness" and can no longer meditate, it is "now in the state of contemplation," and "it is God who works in it."41 The interior faculties are "bound" and there is "no support in the intellect, nor satisfaction in the will, nor remembrance in the memory."42

There are no definite lines between the night of the senses and the night of the spirit. The soul may spend years amidst the "aridities" and "dryness" of the senses, however, enjoying the "new state, as one liberated from a cramped cell . . ."43 At this stage "the soul goes about the things of God with much more freedom and satisfaction of spirit and with much more delight than it did in the beginning before entering the night of sense."44 However, the purgation of the soul is not complete, and a deeper, more intense purification is in store for the soul in its progress toward union with God. "The Lord works all of this in the soul by means of a pure and dark contemplation . . ."45 God, in his concern for the spiritual advancement of the soul, "divests the faculties, affections, and senses, both spiritual and sensory, interior and exterior. He leaves the intellect in darkness, the will in aridity, the memory in emptiness . . ."46 Nothing is spared in this total purgation. He puts the affections "in supreme affliction, bitterness, and anguish, by depriving the soul of the feeling and satisfaction it previously obtained from spiritual blessings."47

The second night, or night of the spirit, is darker than the first night of the senses because it occurs in the higher faculties of the soul. "The second, darker night of faith belongs to the rational, superior part;

it is darker and more interior because it deprives this part of its rational light, or better, blinds it. Accordingly, it is indeed comparable to midnight, the innermost and darkest period of night."⁴⁸

It is in this darkness or faith, then, that the intellect is emptied and prepared for the divine union: "Faith darkens and empties the intellect of all its natural understanding and thereby prepares it for union with the divine wisdom."⁴⁹ The soul benefits greatly from this dark night of contemplation because it sees itself and its faults in an entirely new light. St. John explains:

The first chief benefit that this dry and dark night of contemplation causes is the knowledge of self and of one's own misery. Besides the fact that all the favors God imparts to the soul are ordinarily enwrapped in this knowledge, the aridities and voids of the faculties in relation to the abundance previously experienced, and the difficulty encountered in the practice of virtue make the soul recognize its own lowliness and misery, which was not apparent in the time of its prosperity.⁵⁰

Previously the soul was oblivious to all its failings and miseries because it derived some satisfaction from performing its spiritual exercises. "As a result the soul recognizes the truth about its misery, of which it was formerly ignorant."⁵¹ The light that the soul receives now regarding its spiritual condition is much more beneficial than heretofore experienced. "Now that the soul is clothed in these other garments of labor, dryness, and desolation, and that its former lights have been darkened, it possesses more authentic lights in this most excellent and necessary virtue of self-knowledge."⁵² It sees itself as nothing, and realizes that of itself it is incapable of performing the least act. This acknowledgement of the soul is pleasing to God because it is a great advancement in humility. "God esteems this lack of self-satisfaction and the dejection a person has about not serving Him more than all former deeds and gratifications, however notable they may have been, since they were the oc-

casation of many imperfections and a great deal of ignorance."⁵³

Dicken has this to say about the relation of faith to night:

This is the whole import of the expressions 'night' and 'darkness,' noche and oscuridad, so typical of the writings of St. John of the Cross . . . the whole journey towards union with God must be undertaken by faith and not by sight; we are traveling to a place we do not know, and must travel by a road we do not know and cannot intellectually comprehend. This, too, is a privation and as it were darkness so far as our intellect is concerned.⁵⁴

So, one advances in security through this spiritual darkness in which all the faculties of the higher part of the soul are left in obscurity. "In neither looking nor being able to look at anything, the soul is not detained in its journey to God by anything outside of Him, for in its advance it is free of hindrance from the forms and figures of the natural apprehensions, which are those that usually prevent it from union with the eternal being of God."⁵⁵ And the soul, being deprived of any interior light of the intellect, soars to God by pure acts of love alone.

It is this advanced stage of prayer where meditation gives way to contemplation that a most profound experience of God becomes evident. "Contemplation develops on this new level in dark faith, with a deepening of the original experience. Eventually a deep, peaceful, yet very simple communion with God becomes normal, and this may last for years."⁵⁶ Absence and void make way for the presence of God.

Kavanaugh explains that though the spiritual faculties of the intellect, memory and will may not be exercised according to the reasoning power, they will, nevertheless, be active in some other form. "The spiritual faculties (intellect, memory, and will) through the theological powers of faith, hope, and love will be engaged in more profound activity, not of reasoning, but of loving gaze upon or attentiveness toward God."⁵⁷

It is through this darkness and detachment that growth in prayer progresses. One moves painfully but securely through this "nothingness," this difficult path which becomes "a progressive purification and voidance, through the growth of the theological virtues. . ."58 As John so often emphasized, this union cannot be attained without "remarkable purity" and this purity can only be acquired through "vigorous mortification."

(c) Faith and Life in the Trinity

St. John gives the reason for placing total reliance on faith when the soul is in search of God. In the Old Law God commanded the prophets to seek direction from him for answers to their problems. They were reprimanded at times when the Hebrews were in trouble for not going to Yahweh for help and advice. In explaining why it was proper and even necessary to make inquiries to God in the days of Moses and the kings of Israel, John shows that "faith was not yet perfectly established, nor was the Gospel law inaugurated."59

He explains why it is wrong for souls to make inquiries of God or to seek visions and revelations. In these times "faith is established through Christ, and Gospel law made manifest in this era of grace."60 Since the coming of Christ the deposit of faith has been made complete. In him all things have been revealed. There is no more to be added to the revelation of God to man. Anyone seeking more would be lacking in faith, because "Christ has already been given."61 And what is more, a person would be "accusing God of not having given us in His Son all that is required."62

Faith, then, is the principle of life in the Trinity. Christ is the Word of God. A person seeking divine communications causes himself great harm. Sensible experiences cause faith to diminish since faith "tran-

scends all sense."⁶³ And, if a person does not close his eyes to all sensory apprehensions, he loses the means to union with God, for sensory apprehensions detain the soul from "soaring to the invisible."⁶⁴

John demonstrates how God would speak to a soul who would desire knowledge of him through divine communications. The only avenue of approach to God is through Christ crucified.

If you desire me to answer with a word of comfort, behold My son, subject to me and to others out of love for me, and you will see how much He answers. If you desire me to declare some secret truths or events to you, fix your eyes on Him, and you will discern hidden in Him the most secret mysteries, and wisdom, and the wonders of God, as my Apostle proclaims: In quo sunt omnes thesauri sapientiae et scientiae Dei absconditi (In the Son of God are hidden all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God). [Col. 2:3] These treasures of wisdom and knowledge will be far more sublime, delightful, and advantageous than what you want to know. The Apostle, therefore, gloried, affirming that he had acted as though he knew no other than Jesus Christ and Him crucified. [1 Cor, 2:2] And if you should seek other divine or corporal visions and revelations, behold Him, become human, and you will encounter more than you imagine, because the Apostle also says: In ipso habitat omnis plenitudo Divinitatis corporaliter (In Christ all the fullness of the divinity dwells bodily). [Col. 2:9]⁶⁵

Knowledge of God, then, is found in contemplation, where faith plays a very important role. One seeks God by loving and trusting rather than by any exercise of the memory or will. "This knowledge is very delightful because it is knowledge through love."⁶⁶ It is a transformation in Christ. The soul becomes one in Him. God is Master of this work of transformation. The soul has only to surrender itself to its Divine Craftsman in passive submission and to allow Him to complete the union of love. He leads the soul to perfection in a way "toward which one must advance humanly by not knowing and divinely by ignorance, since they are not humanly knowable."⁶⁷

However, one must not think that in order to arrive at the summit of union with God, one must live in a constant "dark night," always in obscurity, always groping, and always searching for the one Desire of one's

life. The "dark night" is peculiar to the phases of the passive purifications of the senses and the spirit. As Kavanaugh points out, "It does not fall within the scope of 'The Dark Night' to treat of God's communication to the soul as it exists in all the periods of the spiritual life, but only insofar as this communication is received in the passive purifications."⁶⁸

Elsewhere, John does speak of "the vague and indistinct delightful goods, . . . since they are pertinent to the general, vague, loving knowledge in which the union with God is effected."⁶⁹ There are also "delightful goods that are clear, and distinct,"⁷⁰ which the soul must be cautious about receiving. The saint divides the goods giving joy to the will into four categories: "motivating, provocative, directive, and perfective."⁷¹ Among these goods are statues, paintings, oratories, places dedicated to prayer, devotional objects, ceremonies, and preachers.

All of these ways of directing the spirit to God are only means to arrive at union with the divine Creator. As the soul progresses along the way it should divest itself of all of these "satisfactions and appetites" in order to arrive at "interior recollection and communion with God."⁷²

But, when the soul has been purged of all natural appetites, it will be infused with the supernatural desire for God. "A reciprocal love is thus actually formed between God and the soul, like the marriage union and surrender, in which the goods of both (the divine essence which each possesses freely by reason of the voluntary surrender between them) are possessed by both together."⁷³ And the saint exclaims, "Oh, how happy is the soul which ever experiences God resting and reposing within it."⁷⁴ For the lower part of the soul has now been "highly purged and in conformity with the spirit," so it "does not feel the pain and detriment commonly

experienced by souls unpurged in their spirit and senses and undisposed to receive spiritual communications."⁷⁵

Night as Freedom

(a) Spiritual Freedom

P. Blanchard in his article "La Doctrine et la Méthode de Libération Spirituelle chez Jean de la Croix" believes that spiritual liberation is one of the aspects of the saint's writings that has not been sufficiently brought to light. He sets out to show that "l'expérience sanjuaniste" is centered around the Trinitarian life of the soul.

To Ann of St. Albert, the saint had confided that he always carried his soul in the interior of the Holy Trinity. The point that St. John demonstrates in this union of the soul with the Blessed Trinity is that the soul tastes perfect liberty. Necessarily, in preparation for this union and perfect liberty, the soul must first divest itself of all possessions and desires for all creatures. While this purification takes place in the active and passive nights of the senses and spirit, the soul at the same time, appeased to a very high degree, aspires to the definitive liberation that only death can procure.¹

L. Guillet states in his study of the saint's works that liberation from sin is the essential element in the progress of a soul toward union with God. He points out that the first task of the disciple consists in liberating himself from the servitude of sin, that is to say, from the force of evil which prevents his liberty.² If one wishes to approach God, one must free oneself from the slightest attachment to any type of sin or creature. John warns, "a person is indeed ignorant if he thinks it is possible to reach this high state of union with God without first emptying his appetite of all the natural and supernatural things which

can be a hindrance to him,"³ He explains further, that "it makes little difference whether a bird is tied by a thin thread or by a cord. For even if tied by a thread, the bird will be prevented from taking off just as surely as if it were tied by a cord -- that is, it will be impeded from flight as long as it does not break the thread,"⁴

(b) Night and Freedom

In his first book Saint John explains why "night" is used to describe the deprivation of the "gratification of man's appetite in all things." Since night is the privation of light, the "mortification of the appetites can be called a night for the soul." Depriving the appetite of all sensible gratification is similar to "living in darkness and void."⁵ It is by escaping in the night that the soul breaks its chains which hold it captive to creatures. "This function of the night is liberating."⁶

Ernest Larkin shows that liberation will come by way of self-denial and mortification. "The asceticism proposed by John of the Cross is absolute."⁷ It has to be total. It cannot tolerate any exception. Kavanaugh brings out the liberating element in John's counsels for detachment. By detaching oneself not only from creatures but also from self-interest and human respect one acquires a stronger adherence to God. This proves "beneficial in liberating a person in his works, through greater attachment to God, from the omnipresent snares of self-interest and human respect."⁸

In the first night the sensitive powers are emptied. In the second night, the night of the spirit, the intellect, the memory, and the will must be liberated by the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. The understanding will be perfected in the night of faith, the memory in the way of hope, and the will exercised in privation.

By liberating the intellect, one enters the night of the spirit. Union with God is consummated in the night, in the not-knowing. One cannot go to God through the intellectual way. The less one knows, the more knowledgeable one becomes in the night of the spirit.⁹

By liberating the memory one frees oneself from much pain and trouble. One must lose oneself in forgetfulness. Regarding the liberation of the heart and its affections, Blanchard remarks that the climate of liberation is love. It is in the purification of the affections of the heart that the most dignified love of God comes into play. John does not condemn the affections of the family as long as they do not become obstacles to the spiritual life. "John of the Cross is not inhuman, he is superhuman. He has a sense of the hierarchy of values and of love. He sees the doctrine of the order of charity and he knows that the grandeur of it rises infinitely over the grandeur of the flesh."¹⁰

In speaking of the liberation of the will, it is noted that all of the passions reside there. Taking each one separately, if only one is left uncontrolled, the whole soul is held captive because of this affliction or attachment to sin.¹¹ The attachments may be one or many. There can be attachments to supernatural goods, such as beauty and grace, as well as attachments to temporal goods. There can be attachments to sensible goods -- objects of the corporeal senses both exterior and interior. Even though the soul may have passed through this series of purifications, imperfections still remain which call for a deeper and more intense cleansing of the spirit.

In this new purification God takes the initiative. The soul is not able of its own accord to cleanse itself from all imperfections, so God meets the soul in the darkness of the night and heals it of all its im-

purities." "The first purgation or night is bitter and terrible to the senses. But nothing can be compared to the second, for it is horrible and frightful to the spirit."¹² This suffering is necessary for total liberation. Leaving the night, the soul will discover a new earth and heaven. The reward will be in proportion to the amount of suffering it had endured. The spirit has need to be liberated by God, since all imperfections have their source and reason in the spirit.¹³

Though its sufferings are great, the soul feels strong and lively in the shadow of death. Despised and abandoned by all, it leaves its hiding place and prison and takes new liberty. Freed from all its impediments through divine intervention, the wings of the soul unfold, and it flies uninhibited to its God. There is nothing to stop its gravitation to Divine Love. Earth becomes heaven; the human takes on the divine.¹⁴

(c) Freedom and Union

In order to arrive at perfect purity and union with God it is necessary to divest the soul of all attachments to all things not pertaining to God. The three faculties of the soul must be completely "denuded" before they can enjoy the bliss of intimacy with God. St. John shows the "narrowness of the way" and the "emptiness and nakedness in which we must leave the faculties of the soul in the night."¹⁵

In speaking of "union" he makes a distinction between the permanent actual union in the substance of the soul and the substantial union by which God continually dwells on the transformation of the soul in God. This union is found only in souls "where there is likeness of love."¹⁶ It is a supernatural union and is found "when God's will and the soul's are in conformity, so that nothing in the one is repugnant to the other."¹⁷

God is present in every soul, but he communicates supernatural being

only through love and grace which are not possessed by all persons. Each soul possesses grace to a different degree, according to the conformity and likeness of his will to that of God. When a person has "reached complete conformity and likeness of will" he has "attained total supernatural union and transformation in God."¹⁸

The soul, in this total supernatural union, now experiences great liberty of spirit. It is freed from all that is evil and disturbing to the passions. Now the soul experiences a rebirth through grace and rises above itself to the supernatural. John of the Cross quotes the apostle John, "Nisi quis renatus fuerit ex aqua et spiritu Sancto non potest videre regnum Dei (He who is not reborn in the Holy Spirit will be unable to see the kingdom of God, which is the state of perfection)." [Jn. 3:5]¹⁹ He goes on to add, "to be reborn in the Holy Spirit during this life is to become most like God in purity, without any mixture of imperfection."²⁰ Rebirth produces a new freedom. In this freedom the soul experiences new life, which is a taste of true liberty.

(d) Definitive Liberation

Blanchard speaks of the "definitive liberation," a stage in which the soul, through God's special grace, has reached sovereign mastery over its passions. It is now in a state where neither the demon, the flesh, the world, nor the appetites can affect it. It is a royal liberty that the soul finds in this new and good life.²¹ The mystical state can only be achieved through much pain and suffering. It is incompatible with the corporeal life. Death alone is its true liberator.

A certain dualism exists in the union of body and soul. The sensible part is always disturbing the superior part. The flesh is unable to receive and hold the flow of spiritual graces. The sensible is not able

to taste the spiritual goodness.²² The soul, impatient with its union with the body, implores God to deal separately with it. "Since the soul desires the highest and most excellent communications from God, and is unable to receive them in the company of the sensory part, she desires God to bestow them apart from it."²³

One may say, then, that the character of the "Sanjuanist liberation" is supernatural. Man is not able to liberate himself. To a certain degree, with the help of grace, the human assists in the liberation during the active nights. But in the passive nights the divine action is substituted for the human in order to complete the work of purification.²⁴

It is a mystical liberation. The soul is liberated in order to be bound to union with God in love, and the interior liberty is an effect of this union. It is a progressive liberation; the liberation expands as the purifying detachment grows.²⁵

This liberty is total in that the imagination, the intelligence, the heart and the will are all involved in the process. The liberty penetrates the whole personality.²⁶ It is this total liberation which carries the soul to "the 'beatific state' which is the ultimate peak of human spiritual perfection in this life, and which can be surpassed only in the world to come."²⁷

Dicken asks, "How can there be a state still more sublime than the total transformation of the soul into God which is the essence of the spiritual marriage?" And then, he immediately gives the answer: "The last five stanzas of the 'Canticle' are the bride's answer to this question."²⁸ The soul has finally come to rest, free from "all the repugnances and contradictions of sensuality;" she can now "surrender to the delights and joys of intimate love of her Bridegroom."²⁹ The soul

desires to be dissolved and to be with Christ," in order to "see Him face to face and thoroughly understand the profound and eternal mysteries of His Incarnation."³⁰ In the soul's desire for perfect enjoyment of God she exclaims:

36. Let us rejoice, Beloved,
And let us go forth to behold ourselves in Your beauty,
To the mountain and to the hill,
To where the pure water flows,
And further, deep into the thicket.

37. And then we will go
To the high caverns in the rock
Which are so well concealed;
There we shall enter
And taste the fresh juice of the pomegranite.

In the following stanza the soul discusses the manner in which she will taste this divine sweetness, and "the glory she will give to her Bridegroom through her predestination:"³¹

38. There You will show me
What my soul has been seeking,
And then You will give me,
You, my Life, will give me there
What You gave me on that other day:

In stanza 39, the Saint describes the action of the Holy Spirit within the soul, transforming her into Himself, like a "breath of fresh air." The song of the nightingale is the "voice of her Beloved calling to her."³² The grove refers to God who nurtures and gives life to all creation. Again, the night signifies contemplation, or the "hidden knowledge of God." The flame is the all-consuming love of the Holy Spirit.

39. The breathing of the air,
The song of the sweet nightingale,
The grove and its living beauty
In the serene night,
With a flame that is consuming and painless.

The last stanza shows how the sensory part of the soul is now in intimate harmony with God. Aminadab symbolizes the devil who no longer has any control over her. The passions and the appetites are now stilled.³³

"The waters' here refer to the spiritual goods and delights which the soul enjoys inwardly with God," while "'The cavalry' signifies the bodily senses, interior as well as exterior, because they bear the phantasms and figures of their objects."³⁵

40. No one looked at her,
Nor did Aminadab appear;
The siege was still;
And the cavalry,
At the sight of the waters, descended.

And so, the bride, not being content with anything else but the Beatific Vision, presents her final petition to her Beloved:

The bride sets all this perfection and preparedness before her Beloved, the Son of God, with the desire that He transfer her from the spiritual marriage, to which He desired to bring her in this Church Militant, to the glorious marriage of the Triumphant.³⁶

Conclusion

In writing this thesis I have sought out the works of scholars of recent years, both of the French and the English schools, who have shown great interest in the phenomenon of the "dark night" of St. John of the Cross. I have investigated the works of these authors, many of them learned theologians of the Order of Carmel, who have made a special study of this "night." In conclusion, I shall briefly summarize the high points of interest found in these works of various scholars, bent upon probing the depths and meaning of "night" in the Sanjuanistic spirituality.

The "night" is a condition of the soul, brought about by systematically suppressing all desires of the flesh and spirit, clearing one's mind and imagination of all sensory images and thoughts, so that a non-conceptual or non-sensuous condition prevails. This condition is spoken of as a "vacuum" or "void" by some sources, but is truly a "pure" state of consciousness, uncluttered by images or objects of any kinds. The suppression of the memory and spiritual appetites "darkens their natural

light so that through the purgation of this light they may be illumined supernaturally."³⁷ St. John explains the results of this darkness:

It puts the sensory and spiritual appetites to sleep, deadens them, and deprives them of the ability to find pleasure in anything. It binds the imagination and impedes it from doing any good discursive work. It makes the memory cease, the intellect become dark and unable to understand anything, and hence it causes the will also to become arid and constrained, and all the faculties empty and useless. And over all this hangs a dense and burdensome cloud which afflicts the soul and keeps it withdrawn from God. As a result it asserts that in darkness it walked securely.³⁸

It is during this "pure" state of consciousness, or the deeper level of the psychic life that a unification of the personality occurs. The soul's faculties become unified by love of God. The unification is made possible by the cooperation of the soul with grace freely bestowed upon it by its Beloved. But this unification does not take place without great pain and anguish of soul. The mystics often undertook intense mortifications in order to bring their unruly passions into subjection. The agonies that followed were symbolical of the darkness of night.

St. John uses the symbol of "night" for several reasons to describe the path to union with God. "Night" is used to explain the mortification of the appetites, the journey in faith and God's communication to the soul. "Just as night is nothing but the privation of light and, consequently, of all objects visible by means of the light . . . the mortification of the appetites can be called a night for the soul. To deprive oneself of the gratification of the appetites in all things is like living in a void."³⁹

The Journey in faith is another reason for naming this path to divine union a dark night. Since the virtue of faith is often described as an obscure habit, St. John uses the metaphor to show how the path to union with God is a night. Lastly, God's communication to the soul may be

called a "night" insofar as it occurs during the passive purifications. Because this communication "exceeds the capacity of the soul," it is "painful, afflictive, and also dark for the soul."⁴⁰

Lastly, St. John of the Cross' Dark Night is a treatise of faith. His sole objective in writing the commentary to the poem was to instruct anyone who was interested in climbing the steep and rugged mountain to union with God in love. The way would not be easy and the path would be difficult. One must travel lightly and leave all unnecessary baggage behind. John calls for total abnegation of all desires, even the legitimate, and an unconditional surrender of the will.

But the route is well defined. Anyone who is brave enough to make the commitment and start the journey will have ample guideposts along the way. Pitfalls, or crevices of pride, sloth, lust, or envy, are warned against in advance, and alternate paths of self-denial and mortification are numerous.

"Faith" will be the faithful guide along the difficult and frightening path. One need not worry if one continually holds "faith" by the hand, no matter what the problem or how arduous the task. "Faith" will be there to help clear the intellect of all ideas and images, for by the very darkness it causes it will produce light to guide the soul along the way.

Faith will be the proximate means of aiding the soul in annihilating the memory of all forms, figures, and fantasies. The memory must be emptied of all sensory objects so that the divine Wisdom can fill the void in their stead. Faith will be there to help unite the will to God through charity. When the will directs the passions, appetites, and faculties toward God, the soul preserves its strength and is able to continue onward and upward toward the mountain of God.

Having at last succeeded in its departure in the "night" the soul,
with the help of grace, is liberated:

from the devil, the world, and its own sensuality. In having reached
the happy freedom of spirit desired by all, the soul went from the
lowly to the sublime; being earthly, it became heavenly; and being
human, it became divine, and arrived at having its conversation in
heaven [Phil. 3:20], as is proper to this state of perfection . . .41

NOTES

Notes to Introduction

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Notes to Chapter One

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