

SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS AND THE MYSTICAL EVENT AS DESCRIBED IN
THE ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL AND THE DARK NIGHT

by

ROBERT NOAH POLLOCK

(Under the Direction of Carolyn Jones-Medine)

ABSTRACT

This thesis will focus on the teachings of St. John of the Cross as they pertain to the mystical path of union with the divine as expressed through his works the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and the *Dark Night of the Soul*. The thesis will discuss the stages St. John of the Cross describes in moving towards this union which can briefly be described as the soul's attainment to a spiritual state of a kind of receptive contemplation through which divine grace is infused and the human will and the will divine are harmonized. As the works we will examining focus more on the soul's approach to this state and the various movements by which this approach is characterized, it is to this approach that the focus of our attentions will be most dedicated, which is to say that we will not be examining the unitive event itself, but rather the movements that prepare the soul for this event.

INDEX WORDS: St. John of the Cross, Christian Mysticism, Ascent of Mt. Carmel,
Dark Night

SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS AND THE MYSTICAL EVENT AS DESCRIBED IN
THE ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL AND THE DARK NIGHT

by

ROBERT NOAH POLLOCK

B.A., The University of Akron, 1999

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Georgia in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2013

© 2013

Robert Noah Pollock

All Rights Reserved

SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS AND THE MYSTICAL EVENT AS DESCRIBED IN
THE ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL AND THE DARK NIGHT

by

ROBERT NOAH POLLOCK

Major Professor: Carolyn Jones-Medine

Committee: Wayne Coppins
Kenneth Honerkamp

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2013

DEDICATION

To Mom and Dad

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Medine, Dr. Coppins and Dr. Honerkamp for their immediate and willing assistance in completing this thesis, Dr. Power and Dr. Martin for their necessary insight, Zinetta McDonald and Kimbley Scott for their invaluable logistical capacities, and, finally, all the other graduate students enrolled in the program for their consistent and amicable support. Thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
PREFACE	1
CHAPTER 1 A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION TO SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS	2
CHAPTER 2 INTRODUCTION	15
CHAPTER 3 THE ASCENT	17
Night One: Mortification of the Appetites	21
Night Two: Faith, Hope and Charity and the Evacuation of the Intellectual, Mnemonic and Volitional Faculties	38
Conclusion	62
CHAPTER 4 THE DARK NIGHT	65
Passive Night of the Senses	66
Passive Night of the Spirit	81
Conclusion	94
APPENDIX: An Overview of Some of the Epistemological and Ontological Sources for the Christian Mystical Tradition and St. John of the Cross	97
BIBLIOGRAPHY	121

PREFACE

In the following, we will be examining the mystical event as it is discussed in two works of Saint John of the Cross: the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and the *Dark Night of the Soul*. Though he treats this event in two later works: the *Spiritual Canticle* and the *Living Flame of Love*, we have restricted our examination to the two former titles because it is in these works that we find the most thorough discussion and description of the path leading to this event. Aside from these writings mentioned above, the Saint has left many letters, poems and minor works including *Sayings of Light and Love*, in which are collected maxims and aphorisms pertaining to the mystical process.

It should also be pointed out here that the most immediate audience to whom Saint John of the Cross would have been writing were the brothers and sisters of his Carmelite community. In fact, the works we will be discussing were composed as commentary to his poem *Dark Night* as a response to expressed interest in the spiritual significance of the poem. Though we have consulted many sources, the scholars that have been most influential to us are Crisógono de Jesus, Bede Frost, Kieran Kavanaugh and Allison Peers.

CHAPTER 1

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION TO SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS

"It is time for Matins. Tonight, I shall sing them in Heaven. Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit."¹ These are the last words of St. John of the Cross, spoken from his bed in the Carmelite monastery in the Andalusian region of Spain, in the small village of Úbeda, one stroke after midnight, December 14, 1591. The events that would lead him to this point began in the village of Fontiveros in the northern province of Ávila where on an unknown day in the summer of 1542, St. John of the Cross was born Juan de Yepes. Though it is not our intention here to enter into a thorough account of the life of St. John of the Cross, we do feel a knowledge of some of its more remarkable events would benefit in coming to an understanding of the character that informed his work, and perhaps of the work itself. It is to this end that we offer the following brief biographical outline.

His father, Gonzalo de Yepes, was a man of status and nobility, the privilege of which he would sacrifice by marrying below his class to Juan's mother, Catalina Alvarez. Disinherited from the support of his family, Juan's father was forced to earn his living by his own resources and took up Catalina's vocation of silk weaving, with which the couple struggled to support themselves and their two sons, Francisco, the eldest, and Juan. Some

¹ The biographical information used to compose the following is taken from the work of P. Crisogono de Jesus *San Juan de la Cruz: El Hombre-El Doctor-El poeta*, Barcelona: Editorial Laboral, 1946, Kieran Kavanaugh *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, Washington D.C.:ICS Publications, 1973 and E. Allison Peers *Spirit of Flame*, London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1943. Rather than cite every source of each of the biographical events here described we have limited ourselves to citing only that material we have quoted or paraphrased to a degree closely approximating quotation and refer the reader to the bibliography for the sources used.

seven years after Juan's birth, his father died, leaving Catalina with only herself to continue supporting the family. In order to do so, Catalina took her two sons and began an itinerant pursuit of the opportunity that would allow her to escape the destitution in which she now found herself and her two children, settling eventually in the city of Medina del Campo some 50km to the north. There, Juan was apprenticed consecutively to a carpenter, a tailor, sculptor and finally, a painter, before his scholastic talent was discovered and he was enrolled in the College of the Children of Doctrine, a school administered by the recently formed Society of Jesus. His academic success led him into the patronage of Don Antonio Álvarez de Toledo, the acting warden of a hospital where in exchange for the payment of Juan's tuition he employed Juan in various capacities such as begging alms for the hospital's poor and tending to its patients.

It was his patron's hope that Juan would graduate, study for the priesthood and return to the hospital as chaplain. However, Juan decided upon a different course and in 1563, a year after leaving his work at the hospital he entered the Order of Carmel and took the name Juan de Santo Matía. The following year, Fray Juan entered the internationally recognized University of Salamanca where he enrolled in a three year Arts course. While there, he also studied Theology at St. Andrews, the college of his Order affiliated to the University.

Four years later, in the spring of 1567, Fray Juan was ordained to the priesthood and in September of that same year returned to Medina del Campo to sing his first Mass. It was there that he met St. Teresa of Ávila. Concerned with what she felt to be a too worldly inclination obtaining within her convent's spiritual posture, she sought and received permission to establish a convent through which she and other of the Order's

nuns might practice the more contemplatively, more ascetically oriented Primitive rule upon which the Order was originally founded. Given the success of her endeavor, she initiated a Reform movement with which she hoped to establish other such convents within the Order. It is for this reason that she had come to Medina del Campo. While there, she met with Fray Antonio de Heredia, then serving as Prior of Medina, with whom she discussed the nature of her Reform and her aspirations of extending it to the Order's friars. Fray Antonio responded enthusiastically, offering to be the first of the Order's brothers to profess the Reform.

It is not known how St. Teresa and Fray Juan first came to know of one another. As E. Allison Peers suggests, it may have been that Fray Juan had heard of St. Teresa and her Reform through his Prior, Fray Antonio, and resolved to meet with her himself. However it came about, in September, 1567, they met and began a friendship that would prove crucial to the Reform's development. In the course of their conversation, Fray Juan spoke to St. Teresa of his desire to move to the Carthusian Order with the hope of more thoroughly engaging a life of solitude and prayer. She assured him that through her program of Reform he would be able to pursue such a life without having to leave the Carmelites and asked him not to make any decision until an appropriate location could be found in which he and Fray Antonio could establish themselves. Fray Juan agreed and told her he would remain within the Order and assist her in her Reform on the condition that there not be too long a delay.

The following year, after graduating from his university studies, Fray Juan returned to Medina where he met again with St. Teresa who informed him that a small farmhouse had been given to them in the nearby village of Duruelo. While the final preparations

were being made for his and Fray Antonio's move, St. Teresa suggested that Fray Juan accompany her to a newly founded Reform community of nuns in the city of Valladolid where he would serve as confessor and chaplain and familiarize himself with the daily practice of the Reform he would soon profess. After some three months there, St. Teresa, confident that was now able to begin work on his own, sent Fray Juan back to Duruelo, where he and Fray Antonio set to transforming the small farmhouse St. Teresa had acquired for them--a farmhouse she describes as consisting of "a porch, a room divided into two, with a loft above it, and a little kitchen"²—into the first monastery of the Reform. It was there, on the first Sunday of Advent, November 28, 1568, that Fray Juan and four others renounced the Mitigated rule of the Order and professed the Primitive rule of the Reform, at which time Fray Juan de Santo Matía changed his name to Juan de la Cruz. Now, Fray Juan was able to engage in the contemplative life he had been seeking.

Kavanaugh recounts that for the friars the requirements of fulfilling the Primitive rule of the Reform consisted of "the recitation of the Divine office in common, with Matins recited at the hour of midnight; two hours of mental prayer daily; and conventual Mass." The rule also required "fasts, total abstinence from flesh meat; poverty in the type of dwelling, clothing and food; enclosure and withdrawal from the world. They were also to go barefoot, and thus were soon referred to as the Discalced (shoeless) Carmelites."³ The active aspect to the rule predominantly involved their preaching and hearing confession. A year later the small monastery was declared a Priory and began taking in novices. Fray Juan was selected as Subprior and Novicemaster. Soon, the

² Peers, 20.

³ Kavanaugh, 19.

limited capacity of the humble farmhouse became insufficient for the number of friars living there and a year later, in 1570, the community of friars and novices moved to Mancera de Abajo in the province of Salamanca. That same year, St. Teresa would oversee the formation of another novitiate in Pastrana, located in close proximity to the city of Alcalá, home to the University of Alcalá and a locus of Spanish culture. With an increase in the number of novices coming to the monastery from the university came the necessity to provide them with appropriate schooling. To this end a school was established for which Fray Juan served as Rector responsible for both the academic and spiritual guidance of the students.

The following year St. Teresa was recalled to the Convent of the Incarnation in Ávila--the convent where she had taken the habit some 35 years earlier--to initiate there her reform. Having been impressed with the character and devotion of Fray Juan, she applied for his assistance. It was granted and he was appointed Vicar and confessor to the convent.

The Reform at this time, with the support of both the Papal Nuncio, Nicolas Ormaneto, and King Philip II, began to gather a momentum of influence that the Calcedos found threatening to the stability of the Order. In May, 1575, the Calcedos convened in Chapter at Piacenza, Italy and prohibited, among other things, the establishment of any new Discalced communities and required that St. Teresa take up permanent residence at a convent of her choice, threatening to uphold these decisions even with the use of force. In response to this, the following year, the Discalceds met in Chapter in Almodóvar and declared themselves a separate congregation. To recount the details of the conflict that then ensued between the Mitigated and Primitive rules of the Order would take us too far

afield. What is important is that we understand the severity of the circumstances in which Fray Juan now found himself. As Peers tells us in his study of the Saint's life, aside from his presence at the Almodóvar Chapter, for the five years Fray Juan was at Ávila he lived in relative peace, despite what Peers has termed the civil war in which the Carmelite Order was now engaged. This relative peace however, would not last. With promises of higher office and the recognition such office would bring, the authorities of the Mitigated rule attempted to persuade Fray Juan to abandon his affiliation with the Reform. When he proved impervious to such persuasions these authorities turned to violence. On the night of December 3, 1577, Fray Juan and a fellow friar were abducted, beaten, and taken to separate holding cells in a local Calced Monastery. From there Fray Juan was brought to Toledo where, blindfolded, he was led to the monastery of the Mitigation where he is compelled to either totally renounce the Reform or be charged as a rebel.

Refusing to renounce the Reform, Fray Juan chose to maintain his position and was consequently declared rebellious and sentenced to prison. The cell in which he was incarcerated measured six by ten feet. According to his first historiographer, it had originally been constructed to serve as a lavatory for visiting prelates hosted in an adjoining room⁴. Ventilation came to the cell only through a small slit at the top of the wall connecting it to this room. There was no window or any other source of outside light. To assist us in understanding the darkness of the cell we have Peers' description: "Except on the rare occasions when he was allowed a small oil lamp, the prisoner had to

⁴ José de J. M., *Historia de la vida y virtudes del v. p. fr. Juan de la Cruz*. 481.

stand on a bench to read his breviary, and even this was possible only when the sun was shining into a gallery at one end of the outer apartment."⁵

It was in this cell that Fray Juan would remain incarcerated for nearly nine months. As part of his punishment his hood and scapular were taken from him. He was permitted no change of clothing. His bed consisted of an old blanket tossed upon the floor. He was fed bread and water and occasionally salt-fish. For a time he was forced to eat his meal on his knees in the center of the refectory floor, where, when the other friars had finished their meal, he would be compelled to bare his shoulders and receive what was called the "circular discipline" which consisted of the other friars circumambulating him, each lashing him with a whip as they passed, handing it on to the next one to follow.

Kavanaugh points out that because it was forbidden to show prisoners favor, he was denied even the slightest compassion. All of this Fray Juan suffered quietly, as one of his captors tells us, "immovable as a rock."⁶ It is difficult to accurately assay the effects this incarceration must have had on Fray Juan's constitution. Aside from the sufferings inflicted upon him physically and the psychic exhaustion affected by such sufferings, there were, as Peers relates, the frequent visits to his cell of Calced friars with unverifiable news of the Reform's defeat and continued provocations to therefore save himself finally and renounce it. And there were, perhaps more significantly, the long days, the long hours of solitude and darkness.

Mercy did come though, in the form of the young Calced friar Juan de Santa Maria, who, some six months into Fray Juan's incarceration, was assigned as his jailer, performing his duties as such with a compassion and sympathy so lacking in his

⁵ Peers, 39.

⁶ Ibid, 39-40.

predecessor. Not only did he provide him with the comfort of a change of clothes, but he also permitted him to leave his cell and enjoy the comparative expanse of the larger room onto which his cell opened. Furthermore, it was through this compassion of his new jailer that Fray Juan obtained the ink and paper he used to begin composing the poetry for which history would claim him as one of its finest poets.

At dawn on August 16, 1578, a rope knotted together from blanket shreds was noticed tied to and hanging from the sill of a window looking out from the monastery onto a view of the Tagus river and the surrounding countryside. The logistics of the escape remain unknown. According to one tradition he was assisted by the Blessed Virgin Mary; if so, it would not be the first time. As a child, Juan de Yepes had fallen into a small lake and is reported to have seen a vision of Our Lady before being rescued from the water by a passing laborer. Others believe that his escape was facilitated by the noted compassion of his jailer⁷. Whatever the case, Fray Juan managed to free himself from his captors and make his way to a nearby convent of Reformed nuns. Under their care he was able to recuperate enough from his trials and incarceration in Toledo to set out first for Almodóvar where the Reform was meeting in Chapter and then on to a monastery at Monte Calvario where he would serve as Vicar and where he began to compose the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*.

Fray Juan stayed at Monte Calvario for eight months before moving to the Andalusian town of Baeza where he was appointed as Rector of a recently founded Carmelite College. Aside from developing the school's curriculum of Scholastic Theology and performing the administrative duties required of his office, Peers tells us he also attended the students' exercises and was often approached by other of the college's

⁷ It seems to us that the jailer's name is of particular interest here.

Doctors for his interpretations of Scripture, devoting the remainder of his time to evangelical work and writing. While there, Fray Juan would hear of the Reform's receiving the support of Pope Gregory III who, on June 22, 1580, declared that the Discalceds be permitted to form their own province to be governed by a Discalced Provincial under the authority of the Calced General.

For the nearly ten years that followed, in the relative stability and security this decision provided to the Reform, Fray Juan would travel throughout the country serving the Reform in various administrative capacities. At times he felt the draw of all this activity leading him away from the contemplative life he had sought in joining the Reform—"I am well..." he writes in a letter dated 1589, "but my soul lags far behind..."⁸ Nevertheless, he continued to devote himself not only to his administrative duties, but also to the spiritual development of both those for whom he was responsible and those who sought him out for such guidance. In 1590, though, the Reform would experience an interior conflict that would threaten its recently won stability.

In 1585, some three years after the death of St. Teresa, Fray Nicolás Doria was elected Provincialate of the Discalceds. He had been supported in his bid for the position by his predecessor Fray Jerónimo Gracián, who had worked so closely with both Fray Juan and St. Teresa in establishing the Reform. Two years later, in response to the petitions of Fray Nicolás, Pope Sixtus V proclaimed the Reform an independent congregation falling under the jurisdiction of the General of the Order but governed practically by a Vicar-General. This was a position held first by Fray Nicolás himself who immediately began to use the authority of this position to concentrate his power by establishing a seven member tribunal he called the Consulta, which would assume the

⁸ Kavanaugh, 691.

power and authority of the Priors in Chapter. By 1588, Fray Nicolás had seen to it that Fray Jerónimo be prohibited from holding any office within the Order, further solidifying his power. That same year, the first Discalced Chapter-General was called at Madrid. There, Fray Juan was elected as Major Definitor and Third Counselor--offices which would place him in the position of receiving the authority of the Vicar-General, Fray Nicolás, in the event of the latter's absence. Two years later, Fray Nicolás called an extraordinary Chapter at Madrid where he would set two controversial proposals before the Discalceds. One was that St. Teresa's Constitutions of 1581 be discarded--a decision he proposed as a means to removing the nuns from the Order and consequently the threat he felt they posed both to his power and to the direction in which he hoped to turn the Reform. The other was the expulsion from the Order of Fray Jerónimo, again, as a means of ensuring that his power remain unchecked.

The reaction to these proposals throughout the Order was divided. Fray Juan would remain faithful to the Reform and objected to them openly. In doing so, he declared himself in direct opposition to Fray Nicolás, an opposition, given Fray Juan's position and authority, the Vicar-General could not ignore. At the Chapter called in 1591, Fray Juan was appointed to no office and after some deliberation it was decided that he, in effect, be exiled to the friary of La Peñuela, a small, isolated village in the Andalusian countryside. Fray Juan's response to all of these events is expressed in the following excerpt of a letter written to the Prioress of Segovia just before his removal to La Peñuela:

“...do not let what is happening to me, daughter, cause you any grief, for it does not cause me any. What greatly grieves me is that he who is not at fault is blamed. Men do not do these things, but God, who knows what is suitable for us and arranges things

for our good. Think nothing else but that God ordains all, and where there is no love, put love, and you will draw out love...”⁹

From the accounts we have of his time there, it seems that through such intimate and solitary exposure to the natural order his location now offered him, Fray Juan was able to find some degree of tranquility. Peers recounts that he would often rise before dawn to walk the countryside, or spend entire nights praying in the monastery garden. Turning to his correspondence again we find the following written to Doña Ana del Mercado y Peñalosa:

“I desire to remain in this desert of La Peñuela. I like it very much, glory be to God, and I am well. The vastness of the desert is of great help to the soul and body, although the soul fares very poorly. The Lord must be desiring that it have its spiritual desert. This morning we have already returned from gathering our chick-peas, and so the mornings go by. On another day we shall thresh them. It is nice to handle these mute creatures, better than being badly handled by living ones. God grant that I may stay here. Pray for this my daughter. But even though I am so happy here, I would not fail to come, should you desire...”¹⁰

In September of 1591, Fray Juan succumbed to a fever and decides to seek medical attention. There being no resources for such attention in La Peñuela, Fray Juan was offered the choice of the monastery at Baeza, where he was well known and highly esteemed, and that of the village of Úbeda, where he was virtually unknown. “I will go

⁹ Ibid, 703.

¹⁰ Ibid, 704.

to Úbeda...” he writes “...for at Baeza they know me very well, and in Úbeda, nobody knows me.”¹¹

After making the six hour journey, Fray Juan arrived at the monastery there, where he was received by the Prior, Fray Francisco Crisóstomo with expressed hostility. The cells of any Discalced monastery of the time would have been austere. Here, however, P. Crisógono de Jesús tells us that Fray Juan, in his condition, was given the narrowest, poorest cell of the Úbeda monastery and was prohibited any visitations that had not been previously approved by the Prior. Fray Juan’s condition worsened. The doctors treating him discovered he had been infected with erysipelas of the foot. Soon it began to spread throughout his body and beyond the capacity of the doctors treating him. He would not survive.

December 13, 1591, Fray Juan summoned the Prior of Úbeda, Fray Francisco, and asked his forgiveness for any trouble and inconvenience he may have caused him. Fray Francisco responded with pleas of his own for Fray Juan to forgive him his lack of compassion and the severity with which he received him, and, according to Kavanaugh, left the room in tears. That night, after receiving the Viaticum for the second time, Fray Juan asked to be left alone. Sometime later, he summoned his brothers to his cell, among them his old companion Fray Antonio with whom he had professed the Primitive Order some twenty-three years before. Reclining in his bed, a crucifix in his hands, he asked to be read some verses of the Song of Songs and Fray Francisco complied. The hour struck midnight: "It is time for Matins. Tonight, I shall sing them in Heaven. Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit." In 1726 Fray Juan was canonized by Benedict XIII, San Juan de la Cruz, Saint John of the Cross.

¹¹ Ibid. 25.

In conclusion, if we cannot say with any certainty to what degree the events of the Saint's life influenced the development and trajectory of his thought and his writing, it does seem that we can at least detect through these events and through the manner in which he chose to experience them a correspondence to the type of life he advocated through his work to those seeking spiritual guidance, a correspondence that infuses the work with a certain sincerity, validating the Saint as one qualified to offer such spiritual guidance and direction.

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

The *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and the *Dark Night*, though composed separately, are two parts of what can be considered a single treatise written by Saint¹² John of the Cross as a kind of guide describing the mystical process of the transformation of the soul from what he terms its old to its new self through an erotic, spiritual and participatory union in God, a union requiring the soul's passage through a night of detachment, purgation and purification. This metaphorical night the Saint tells divides into three parts; each corresponding to an aspect of the literal or what he terms the natural night.

The first part, corresponding to the gathering darkness of dusk, represents withdrawal from the sensory world and a turning toward the spiritual. The second, corresponding to the utter darkness of midnight, represents primarily faith and the blindness or avoidance it effects in the intellectual faculty and the third, corresponding to the dissipating darkness of dawn, or that breaking of night into day, represents the beginnings of this spiritual communion with the Divine¹³. For the Saint, the passage of the soul through these three stages of night requires of it and its faculties both an active and a passive disposition. It is to the former, or, to a description of the activity required of the soul in the passage of this night that he dedicates the *Ascent* and to the latter, or a description of the passivity required of the soul that he dedicates the *Dark Night*. We will

¹² As the repetition of the Saint's full name throughout the following would be cumbersome, from this point on we will in general be referring to him as the Saint. Not to elevate him above other Saints, but to avoid this cumbersome repetition of his full name.

¹³ It is important to point out here that these three stages describe a progression to union with the Divine and as such, that is, as a progression each stage can be regarded as distinct but not separate, as each holds a necessary relation to the others as either preparation or culmination.

begin our examination of these texts with a discussion of the *Ascent* from which we will then proceed to an examination of the *Dark Night*.

CHAPTER 3

THE ASCENT

At the outset it is important to recognize that for Saint John of the Cross, the soul holds an intermediary position between the sensorial and the spiritual orders of being and, therefore, is possessed of both sensorial and spiritual faculties and is susceptible to both sensorial and spiritual influence. For the soul to come to mystical union with the divine it must, at least in accordance with the limits of its capacities, actively both order and direct these faculties to the pursuit of this union and purify itself of any influences that might obstruct such union or the divine grace by which this union is ultimately received. The first of the *Ascent's* three books is devoted to a discussion of the first stage of this night which, as mentioned above, concentrates on the soul's active ordering of the faculties and appetites associated with its sensorial aspect, while the second and third books are devoted to a discussion of the same with regard to its spiritual aspect.

In accordance with the structure of the work, we will begin with a description of the first part of this night, or the night of sensorial detachment. Before beginning, however, it would be worthwhile to offer a brief examination of the sources of intellectual influence to which the Saint might have been exposed both as a student and through his own private study, as such an examination will serve in providing context and perspective throughout the following discussion of these texts. Also, and to the same end, we will follow this examination with a summary description of the Saint's conception of the soul and its ontological composition.

Given the lack of resources available, we cannot know in what particular courses the Saint was enrolled during his time at the University of Salamanca. What we do know about the university's curriculum however tells us much about to what theological thought the Saint would have been introduced and by what intellectual trends he may have been influenced as a student there. In the very thorough biography by P. Crisógono de Jesus, we are told that the theological curriculum prescribed at the time was substantially structured around Aristotle, and, following him, the work of Peter Lombard and St. Thomas Aquinas¹⁴. As we will see, the Scholastic and Thomist presence in the Saint's work is fundamental. However, though the curriculum was so structured around the work of these authors, professors were permitted and did not hesitate to openly refute them in their lectures. Through such refutations the Saint was introduced to other and various sources most notably from the Platonic or Neo-Platonic and Islamic traditions¹⁵. Also, as a member of the Carmelite Order he would have been familiar with the thought of John Baconthorp and Miguel de Bolonia, whose writings, as Crisógono de Jesus tells us, served as the doctrinal code of San Andrés, the Carmelite college associated with the university¹⁶. Furthermore, the university faculty included many eminent scholars of the time, some of whom, among them Luis de Leon, were willing to risk persecution and punishment in their pursuit of a deeper knowledge and understanding of their faith. All of this is to say that as a student of the university at this time, the Saint would not only have been exposed to a varying range of authors and theological positions, but he would also have been encouraged to investigate them as freely as his faith would allow.

¹⁴ P. Crisógono de Jesus *Vidas y Obras de San Juan de La Cruz*. Madris: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1973. 56.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid, 59.

With regard to the sources of influence the Saint encountered through his own reading, we know that his knowledge of and expositional insight into scripture were highly esteemed especially in relation to the *Song of Songs*, *Ecclesiasticus*, *Ecclesiastes*, *Proverbs*, and *Psalms*. Some testimonies even suggest that he knew the whole of the Bible by heart¹⁷. Whether or not this is the case, the facility and efficacy with which he utilizes scripture testify to a familiarity as thorough as it is insightful.

Outside of Scripture, the most intimate and fundamental influence on his writing and thought, as we mentioned above, was that of St. Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle¹⁸. The significance of this influence is evidenced by a correspondence between certain characteristic aspects of their philosophy, especially that of the former, and certain concepts central to the structure and trajectory of that of the Saint, such as that of the soul holding an intermediary position between the physical and metaphysical orders of being, or his division of the faculties of the soul into those that correspond to the former and those that correspond to the latter of these orders¹⁹. However, though this influence is perhaps the strongest or most pervasive, it is not the only source of influence to which the Saint turned. Cited in his work we find St. Bonaventure, St. Augustine, Hugh of St. Victor, and the Pseudo-Dionysius, among others. Also, as E. Allison Peers points out, based on the texts themselves and given the cultural sophistication of sixteenth century Spain and the university curriculum in which he was enrolled, it can be assumed that he was knowledgeable of the work of other mystical theologians as well, such as St. Gregory, St. Bernard and Ruysbroeck²⁰.

¹⁷ Peers.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., xxxv.

²⁰ Ibid, xlii.

In summary, we can conclude that St. John of the Cross was well versed in the sources of the mystical theological literature available to him at the time and was highly aware of the mystical tradition within which he was working. This being said, it is important to point out with Peers that his work and thought is not simply a synthesis or extension of these sources and traditions. He does not simply repeat, or reiterate, but rather he assimilates and employs these sources and traditions in creating the unique body of work for which he is so recognized and which earned him the honor of being declared the first Mystical Doctor of the Universal Church. We will have opportunity to comment on some of these influences throughout the course of what follows. First though, we will continue with a brief description of the Saint's conception of the soul and its ontological composition.

As mentioned above, for St. John of the Cross the human soul occupies what can be described as an intermediary position between the spiritual and the sensorial orders of being and is disposed to influences from both. As such, for the Saint, the soul can be described most basically as consisting of a spiritual and a sensorial aspect, each of which possesses certain faculties that correspond to its order of being. To the spiritual aspect of the soul correspond the faculties of intellect, memory and will,²¹ while to the sensorial aspect correspond the exterior or corporal, sensorial faculties of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch and the interior faculties of phantasy and imagination. These faculties are further organized into two categories: the cognitive, which include the sensorial faculties and the spiritual faculties of intellect and memory, and the appetitive which include the will, the appetites associated with it, and the emotions or affective states of joy, hope,

²¹ David Perrin *For Love of the World: The Old and New Self of John of the Cross*. San Francisco: Catholic Scholar Press, 1997, 114. Perrin points out that this triune of spiritual faculties is a combination of Aquinian and Augustinian conceptions of the soul's composition.

fear, and sorrow. Later, we will discuss the distinguishing characteristics of these faculties and the functions they serve, here what is important is that the soul is susceptible to both sensorial and spiritual influence and has recourse to both spiritual and sensorial faculties, faculties that, as we will see, for the soul desiring spiritual union in God, must all be ordered toward an erotic pursuit of this union. The first movement of this ordering occurs on the sensorial level and is that to which we will now turn.

Night One: Mortification of the Appetites

*Cuanto más te apartas de las cosas terrenas,
tanto más te acercas a las celestiales y más hallas en Dios*²².

*(The more you withdraw from terrestrial things
the more you draw near to things celestial and the more you find in God.)*²³

Interior detachment of the soul's sensorial faculties from any exterior influence is, for St. John of the Cross, is the initial stage in its nocturnal passage toward mystical union in God and is the theme of the first part of the *Ascent*. As the soul holds this intermediary position between the sensorial or spiritual orders of being, it is susceptible to influences from both. Insofar as the sensorial faculties are naturally bound to the world through the body, they receive knowledge of the world through the quintipartite senses.

As the Saint points out, these senses are the channels through which our knowledge of the sensible world is received and, therefore, are necessary to our being in that without them we would live in a kind of void as we would have no means by which to discern our position in or order our world.²⁴ This detachment, therefore, is not a

²² Kavanaugh, 681.

²³ This and all subsequent translations accompanying titles in the text are our own.

²⁴ Kavanaugh, 76-77.

detachment from the body itself, from the corporeal aspect of human being, but is rather a detachment from the bondage that obtains between the soul and the world through an inordinate submission of the soul to its appetites for the things of the world. It is a means of reorienting the relationship between body and soul such that the soul is not limited to a position of passivity and subjugation. It is a reorientation of intention, of volition, a movement not to simple reception, but to a kind of heightened indifference.

“We are dealing with the denudation of the soul’s appetites and gratifications; this is what leaves it free and empty of all things, even though it possesses them. Since the things of the world cannot enter the soul, they are not in themselves an encumbrance or harm to it; rather, it is the will and appetite dwelling within it that causes the damage.”²⁵

What is required here is neither to despise things--our contempt of things may serve as a point of attachment to them just as well as any pleasure we may have in them--nor is it simply to withdraw physically from them, as that will necessarily remain only a partial detachment, at least as long as the soul remains with the body. Rather, it is a “denudation”, a stripping away from the soul its “appetites and gratifications”, which do not reside in the things themselves, but in the soul.

With regard to the nature of this detachment, its end or objective, Bede Frost writes: “We are reminded of our Lord’s teaching that it is not that which comes from without that defiles, but that which comes from within...” and more: “There are no evil things, there are only evil thoughts and desires...”²⁶ To put it another way, it is the quality of our disposition toward things, to the world, that determines to what degree we will be influenced by them and in what way. For the Saint, this must be a disposition of quiet

²⁵ Ibid, 76-77.

²⁶ Bede Frost *Saint John of the Cross*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937, 186-187.

and a kind of active disinterest as, again, any response to them, either positive or negative, at least in this stage of the mystical process, remains a point of attachment. We use the term quiet here to signify a kind of disengagement. It is active because this denudation is volitional: the soul must choose to deny its “appetites and gratifications”, its pleasure and displeasure in things if it is to begin the process of spiritual reorientation.

Before continuing, it is important to define what these appetites are, or what the Saint intends to signify when employing the term “appetite”. For Urbano Barrientos the appetite or appetites can be described as “equivalent to an affective tendency [or tendencies] of the soul toward creatures...”²⁷ which is an adequate definition if we keep in mind that this tendency does not simply involve the emotions, as the term affective might suggest, but all of the soul’s faculties, including those associated with the intellect and memory. What we are talking about then, as we have already pointed out, is a total reorientation of the soul and its faculties such that any affection it may feel for the manifested world is subjugated to its faith in and love of God .

This change in disposition is necessary because without it the soul is disposed is incapable of receiving the divine grace necessary to any eventual communion in God. In chapter four of the *Ascent*, we find two reasons for this. The first is that “...two contraries cannot exist in the same subject at the same time...”: an attachment to our corporeal appetites is to be considered negatively as a kind of darkness and if our soul is subjugated to these appetites it, in a sense, is filled with darkness and therefore unable to receive the light of God’s grace. It is only through this purgative detachment that the soul can begin to open itself to such reception. The second reason is that “...an attachment to a creature

²⁷ Urbano Barrientos del Niño Jesus *Purificacion y Purgatorio: Doctrina de San Juan de la Cruz Sobre el Purgatorio, a la Luz de Su Sistema Místico* Madrid. Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 1960, 69.

makes a person equal to that creature; the firmer the attachment, the closer its likeness to the creature, and the greater the equality. For love effects a likeness between the lover and the object loved...”²⁸ It follows from this that the more closely the soul is attached to the corporeal, the further it is detached from the spiritual, and, inversely, the further it is detached from the corporeal, the more closely it is attached to the spiritual and the more open it is to the reception of God’s grace. Here we have given the Saint’s reasons for why the soul is obstructed by its corporeal appetites from making any progress toward spiritual union in God. What remains to be understood though is how it is that such appetites are so obstructive to this progress. In response to this question, the Saint divides the harm caused the soul by an adherence to these appetites into two categories: the privative and the positive. We will begin with a description of the first.

Privative harm is that which deprives the soul of any communion with God: the more a soul is bound to the corporeal world, the more it is attached to its appetites that correspond to this world, the less it is disposed toward the spiritual. But this is not all, the Saint goes on to describe how in looking at the natural world we find that two forms cannot occupy the same space, and that if one form is to take the place of another, the latter must be removed or there can be no replacement²⁹. Applied to the context of our discussion, if the soul is filled with worldly desire, there can be no room for spiritual grace and therefore the soul is deprived of God and of any possibility of the infused contemplation that might lead to union with God. The second kind of harm, positive harm, is that harm which effects the soul and individual directly. These effects the Saint divides into five categories: those that weary, those that torment, those that darken, those

²⁸ Kavanaugh, 78.

²⁹ Ibid, 79.

that defile, and those that weaken the soul³⁰. In examining these effects it will be important to remember the Saint's conception of God as the one true reality by which all things are created and upon which the existence of all things is contingent. It may seem that this goes without saying, but, as we will see in the following, these various forms of harm are all themselves sort of secondary effects of a soul having sought its center in the multiplicity of the created world; or, to say it another way, they are effects of a soul having ignored its center in God. This being said, we will proceed with a discussion of these harmful effects, beginning with those that weary the soul.

In explaining the wearisome harm caused the soul by its corporeal appetites, the Saint employs various metaphors: "...they resemble little children, restless and hard to please, always whining to their mother for this thing or that, and never satisfied..."; the appetites "...agitate and disturb..." the soul "...just as wind does water..."³¹ and uses exemplary references to scripture: "He is yet faint with thirst and his soul is empty" (Is. 29:8)³²; or "When he has satisfied his appetite, he will be more burdened and oppressed; the heat of appetite will be increased and every sorrow will fall upon him" (Jb. 20:22)³³. After looking at these metaphors and scriptural passages, we can say that the soul is wearied by its desires because any satiation of them is merely temporary and serves only to increase further our desire to satiate them.

But there is more. As creatures, the objects of our desires are necessarily temporal and are therefore also temporary. Given this temporality of the objects of our desires and the temporality of the body in which these desires are experienced, they can

³⁰ Ibid, 86.

³¹ Ibid, 86-88.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

be only temporarily satisfied. In other words, these desires are unable to be continuously or constantly satisfied precisely because they are desires that, like the objects to which they correspond, are contingent on the manifested order of things and as such are subject to an implicit discontinuity. God, as First Principle and as constant, is, as the Saint tells us, the only source of any continuous satisfaction, God being beyond time and the discontinuities of the manifested order upon which time is contingent and through which time is experienced. It is the incessant pursuit of an inconstant satisfaction that wearies the soul and obstructs its pursuit of things spiritual.

This discontinuity in satisfaction, this insatiability not only wearies the soul though, it also causes the soul “torment and affliction”³⁴ which brings us to the second type of harm caused the soul by its subservience to these appetites and desires. Here the Saint again offers various images and metaphors in description of how the soul is tormented by this subservience. We are told that the state of such a soul can be compared to that of Samson imprisoned, weakened and chained to the millstone “where he was grievously tortured and tormented...”³⁵ As with Samson, the soul “captured” by its appetites suffers “torture and affliction like an enemy held prisoner...”³⁶ in that it is chained and bound by these appetites to the “mill of concupiscence...”³⁷ And, further, we are told through a quotation taken from Revelation: “In the measure of her desire for self-exaltation and fulfillment of her appetites, give her torment and anguish...” that the greater the soul’s appetite or desire for a thing, the greater the torment in its

³⁴ Ibid, 89.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

dissatisfaction, and more, the greater the number of appetites, the greater then the number of torments.

We have here two tropes: one of imprisonment and enslavement, the other of torture and its implicit afflictions. Imprisonment and enslavement imply the torment not simply of an unrealized or restrained volition, a volition in bondage, but that of a bondage of a certain volitional potential, a potential to a kind of elaboration of the volition liberated. Imprisonment and enslavement imply torment not only because the volition is enslaved, but because it is, through this bondage, obstructed from exercising its potential, which, in this context, is the pursuit of spiritual union in God.

The trope of torture functions in a similar way. Torture is what it is because it suspends the victim between life and death, withholding the victim from both in the cul-de-sac of a repetitious pattern of alternating states of pain and relief, or, if applied to the soul and its relation to its desires, alternating states of dissatisfaction and satisfaction. Here too, there is an implicit relationship of subjugator and subjugated. Torture is not experienced willingly, or it is not torture. Relief, at least physical if not psychological, is experienced through the absence of pain, and as such is in a sense contingent upon pain. If we transfer this imagery to our discussion, relief is experienced with the satisfaction of the soul's appetites or desires, and torment in the absence of this satisfaction. Though there is a kind of inversion of terms: in the context of torture relief is contingent upon a certain absence, while in the context of our discussion it is contingent upon a certain presence, the contingency remains constant, and it is precisely this contingency that is important here. As long as the soul persists in a subservient relation to its appetites, its disposition remains contingent upon them, which is to say that it is ultimately disposed

toward the corporeal and not the spiritual order of being and as such is further prevented from any movement toward communion with God. This state is inordinate in that it seeks constancy in the contingent which torments the soul because the more it rejoices in the satisfaction of its desires, the deeper are its sorrows at the inevitable point of their dissatisfaction.

The third type of harm that afflicts the appetitive soul is spiritual blindness. In discussing this type of harm we will need to recall that for the Saint, the faculties of intellect, memory and will operate inter-dependently. With regard to this blindness, the Saint tells us: “The appetite blinds and darkens the soul because the appetite as such is blind. It is blind because of itself it has no intellect.”³⁸ In a properly functioning soul, the intellect, memory and will would guide the soul’s engagement with the world in accordance ultimately with the will of God. In this inverse state though, or from this contrary disposition, the soul is confused, it seeks up in down and down in up for having sought this guidance in the appetites, which, as the Saint has told us, is a function they cannot properly perform precisely because it is an intellectual function and the appetites in themselves have no intellect with which to perform it:

“The appetite causes this in the soul: it enkindles concupiscence and overwhelms the intellect so that it [the soul] cannot see its [the intellect’s] light...” and further “...since the appetite is so close to a man as to be actually within him, he is impeded by this interior light, feeds upon it, and is unable to see the clear light of the intellect; nor will he see it until he extinguishes this blinding light of his appetite...”³⁹ Simply, the soul is blind

³⁸ Ibid, 68.

³⁹ Ibid. 90.

to the more subtle spiritual influence because it has focused all of its attentions on the more immediate influence corporal.

In his discussion of the fourth type of harm caused the soul by its inordinate subservience to its appetites, namely, the defilement of the soul, it is difficult to discern exactly what it is that characterizes this defilement or what process or event this term defilement is used to describe as the Saint does not tell us explicitly. Throughout this section of the work he offers examples of images taken from scripture that, if interpreted analogically, serve as support for his argument that this defilement does occur but that do not assist us in understanding *how* it occurs. However, a close examination might assist us in coming to such an understanding.

At one point in the course of his discussion, the Saint describes the soul in its purest form as being a “...perfect and beautiful image of God...”⁴⁰ From the Saint’s perspective, the soul in its purest form is a soul that acts in accordance only with God’s will. In subjugating itself to its appetites, the soul has chosen a lower obedience and in this way defiles not only this purity but the perfection and beauty implicit in it as well. The appetites do not literally or physically defile the soul, but do so figuratively. When wholly in obedience to God’s will, the soul is pure to the degree that God’s will working in or through the soul is pure. If we read this purity as representationally or metaphorically equivalent to a kind of concordance obtaining between these wills, then in subjugating itself to the indulgence of its appetites the soul disrupts this concordance, or, to use the Saint’s terms, defiles this purity. Here we see not only how it is that this defilement occurs, but also how it is that this defilement further draws the soul away from any union with God.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 92.

Finally, this attachment to the appetites, this adherence to the creaturely order of being also weakens the soul, rendering it listless in its exercise of virtue.⁴¹ Central to this notion is the conception that the relationship between the practice of virtue and the indulgence of our corporeal appetites is at once so intimate and so inversely proportionate that to engage in the practice of one is to disengage from the practice of the other. In other words, the degree to which we are disengaged from the indulgence of our corporeal appetites is the same degree to which we are engaged in the practice of virtue and vice versa: "...if the desire of the will extends to something other than virtue, it grows weaker in the practice of virtue..."⁴² For Saint John of the Cross, the pursuit of spiritual union in God is characterized in part by focusing and applying the soul's faculties, including the volitional faculty and its capacity to desire, on receiving this union. In making this point he turns to Psalm 58: "I will keep my strength for you..." which he interprets as meaning "I will do this by concentrating the strength of my appetites on You alone."⁴³ If these faculties instead are diverted toward the indulgence of the soul's corporeal appetites, the intensity of this spiritual focus is weakened, listlessness ensues, and the soul is unable to procure the volitional fortitude that the practice of virtue provides and that is necessary to any progression on this path toward spiritual union in God.

To summarize, it is important to reiterate that it is not a denial of the world and the creatures of which it is composed that the Saint is advocating here, but is rather a reorientation of the soul's disposition to things such that it is guided in its actions not by its affection for these things, but by its higher intellectual faculties and ultimately, through a correct reorientation of these higher faculties as well, by the grace and the will

⁴¹ Ibid, 94.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

of God alone. To deny the sensible order of being, to deny the creaturely order of things would be to deny an aspect of human being so necessary to it that any such denial would ultimately prove fatal. Our vitality, the vitality of our being, insofar as it is human being, or, insofar as it is creature, is relatively bound to or contingent upon this created order of being and therefore finds the sustenance appropriate to it among this particular, relative order of being which is itself--and the soul then too--absolutely bound to and contingent upon the sustaining and creative power of God.⁴⁴ It is the objective of this reorientation to so order the soul that its corporeal and spiritual faculties are disposed to their corresponding orders of being, obtaining to what could be described as a kind of essential harmony or equilibrium: each faculty functioning in the realm of activity appropriate to its creation and therefore in accordance with the divine will. Regarding this point Crisógono de Jesus writes:

“The sensible order, as imperfect as it may be, is the first step on that mysterious ladder extending between heaven and earth, and the soul must support itself on it [the sensible order] in order to ascend to the higher orders. To deny it, would be to abolish it, and, this first order abolished, either the ladder will fall to the earth, lacking the inferior support on which it rested, or it will remain in the air, fastened only by its superior part, and in whichever case, the soul, on the earth, will not be able to ascend it to the heights of perfection.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ (We are reminded here of Matthew 4:4 in which Christ, in reference to Deuteronomy 8:3, tells us that we do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. Or further in the Lord's prayer: "Our Father who art in Heaven,/Hallowed be Thy name;/Thy kingdom come;/Thy will be done/on Earth as it is in Heaven./Give us this day our daily bread..." we find first an address to God, a willingness to accept God's will, followed immediately by a plea for daily sustenance.)

⁴⁵ Crisógono de Jesus, 71.

In other words, the higher faculties are supported by the lower not only on a biological or exterior level--as an aspect of the human being these higher faculties require the right functioning of the corporeal order to function correctly themselves--but on a more subtle or interior level as well. The intellectual, mnemonic, and volitional faculties all function, to a degree, in relation to a world, or in the context of the created order of being and though they too, as we will see, must undergo their own purgation and reorientation, at least initially it is through their correct functioning that the soul is prepared for entering into the contemplative state necessary to the reception of divine grace.

This brings us to another related point. For the Saint, the lower or corporeal appetites can be divided into two categories: the voluntary or the habitual and the natural. To the former can be attributed all of those appetites or affections for the material order of being to which the soul has a voluntary relationship, that is those appetites the soul chooses either to indulge or to ignore and to what degree. As we have seen, any attachment to these appetites must be wholly eradicated from the soul if it is to make any progress toward the mystical event of spiritual union in God. The latter, that is, the natural appetites, are those to which the soul does not have an entirely voluntary relationship. These appetites are associated with the biological and psychological functions of the corporeal aspect of our being that occur without our “consent” to use the Saint’s term. With regard to the former, these biological appetites are so intrinsic to the functioning of the body that to mortify them in this life is impossible for two reasons: one because they occur or operate on this biological level involuntarily and therefore it is beyond the soul’s capacities to control or mortify them, and because they are so necessary to the body’s right functioning that if the soul could mortify them, to do so

would be to mortify the body and its vitality as well. Regarding the appetites associated with the psychological functions of the body, these the soul cannot wholly deny because, like those associated with the biological functions of the body, these too occur involuntarily, at least to a degree--one may be for lack of a better term assaulted by a particular psychological image involuntarily and then must choose how to respond, involving the volition. The soul, to this degree, has no control over them and therefore cannot choose to mortify them.⁴⁶ This being said, it is important to remember that though these appetites are relatively innocuous in themselves, to the degree that the soul voluntarily indulges them or becomes inordinately attached to them, they can be sources of both the privative and positive types of harm we discussed above.

Inversely however, these appetites can also serve a positive function in assisting toward the cultivation of virtue. If we look at the temptations that occur on the psychological level, the degree to which the soul resists such temptations is the degree to which the soul develops a certain psychological fortitude and temperance that will be necessary in the later stages of spiritual detachment and purgation. In this way too the corporeal order, or the soul's disposition to it, serves as that first rung on the ladder of spiritual ascension to God that Crisógono de Jesus has described above. Also, the material world, the creaturely order of being, if approached correctly, can serve as a support for meditation through which one comes to that receptive contemplation necessary to any unitive communion with God. We will discuss this point later, what we want to demonstrate here is the central importance of volition and intention in the correct disposition of the soul, which, if it is to receive the grace of any transformative

⁴⁶ What we mean to signify here are those appetites associated with the images, thoughts, fantasies, impulses, temptations, et cetera, that seem to come to the mind without having been intentionally conjured or provoked.

communion in God, must be wholly focused upon this reception. Indulging voluntarily in these appetites, the soul shifts its attentions from the divine to the mundane and in this way fails to achieve total focus. It is for this reason that the appetites, our affections for them, no matter how slight, must be mortified entirely--that the soul's concentration, that is, the whole of its volition and intention, at least with regard to this active night of purgation, be turned solely upon this divine communion or its devotion to God. If bound to things, that is, if given over to the multiplicity characteristic of manifestation, the soul's faculties are confused, its attentions are divided, its energies dilute and this concentration, this focus, is lost.⁴⁷

As the Saint has already told us: "two contraries cannot co-exist in the same subject." We know, from what the Saint has said regarding the inability of objects as such to enter the soul, that he is not referring here to two contrary things in themselves holding a simultaneous presence in the same subject, but rather to the faculties of the soul itself being simultaneously committed or applied to contrary objectives or engaged in contrary endeavors. And further, it is not so much that the soul's faculties cannot be simultaneously engaged in contrary endeavors, but that, if there is such a contrariety, the soul, because of this contrary division of its faculties, will be unable to offer a total and unified engagement of them in its pursuit of union in God, which is precisely the engagement required of it here.

It is important to point out that the contrariety we are discussing is not that apparent contrariety, or those contrarieties we often find among the formal order of being, as such contrarieties, at least with regard to all that which has not been artificially created, can ultimately be resolved in their each being contingent upon the common

⁴⁷ Frost, 190.

center of the Absolute. The contrariety which concerns us here and with which the Saint is concerned is that absolute contrariety existing between all creatures and the uncreated God. By the term contrariety, we do not mean to suggest a kind of opposition or diametric antagonism, it is a contrariety of ontological quality regarding the distinction between the formal or created order of being and God. It may be argued that given the total immanence of the divine, this contrariety cannot be absolute. If looked at more closely however, it seems it is precisely this total immanence and its corresponding and total transcendence that characterizes this contrariety as absolute in that they both can be characterized themselves by a certain incomprehensibility attributable to God and denied of all creatures. Therefore, if a thing is conceivable⁴⁸, that is, if it is comprehensible by human consciousness, it cannot be God--here the contrariety is absolute: the application of the soul's faculties to any conception or affection whatever turns the soul from God to the degree that it holds the soul's attention upon that which, for being conceived, that is, created, is not God, further distancing the soul from its ontological source in God, which is precisely the distance the mystic soul seeks to close, at least to the degree that it is capable, through this emptying of the soul and its faculties of anything that is not an open desire for the reception of divine grace and union in God. As the Saint will tell us, this transformation, insofar as and because it pertains to the human order of being, can only be transitory, which is to say then that in this order of being it cannot be total or absolute, the ontological differential remaining: though it will participate in, the human soul cannot be God.

⁴⁸ We use this word in the sense of that which can be brought forth, or taken up, wholly, and that which we can imagine or think, and not to signify that which is possible.

As an aside, with regard to this total evacuation of the soul's faculties, we have said that the formal or sensorial order of being can serve as a source of meditative support, and this is true. To clarify and to avoid any contradiction: even these supports must eventually be abandoned if the soul is to receive any union in the divine. We will discuss this point later when we examine the more advanced stages of spiritual detachment. What we want to point out here is that at this stage, that is, prior to transformation, any inordinate, voluntary affection for anything other than God, however slight, stands as a direct impediment to the reception of any participatory union in God. In support of this point we turn to one of the Saint's more frequently cited analogies:

“It makes little difference whether a bird is tied by a thin thread or by a cord. For even if tied by thread, the bird will be prevented from taking off just as surely as if it were tied by cord--that is, it will be impeded from flight as long as it does not break the thread. Admittedly the thread is easier to rend, but no matter how easily this may be done, the bird will not fly away without first doing so. This is the lot of a man who is attached to something; no matter how much virtue he has he will not reach the freedom of the divine union.”⁴⁹

We have discerned the objective of the soul's activity in this initial stage of spiritual development: the soul's total mortification of the voluntary appetites associated with the corporeal or sensorial aspect of its being. What remains to be determined however is how the soul is to accomplish this mortification. In answer to this question, the Saint tells us that first one must establish a constant desire to imitate Christ in all realms of activity-- exterior as well as interior--and that this constant desire is achieved through a thorough study of His life and an engaged meditation upon it. Second, we are told that if this

⁴⁹ Saint. John of the Cross, Kavanaugh, 97.

desire is to be satisfied, that is, if one is to be successful in this imitation, one must purge oneself of any gratification (here with regard to the sensorial aspect of our being) that is not “...purely for the honor and glory of God...”⁵⁰ as this is the manner in which Christ behaved, desiring nothing other than the “...fulfillment of His Father’s will...”⁵¹

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Saint’s work is the care he takes in describing the various stages of this mystical process and how it is that the soul is to proceed through their passage. At this point, we have been told that one must begin one’s journey on the mystical path by fostering a desire to imitate Christ through a deep study of and meditation upon His life, and further, that one then must satisfy this desire by finding gratification in nothing other than the fulfillment of God’s will, which, at this initial stage requires the humbling annihilation of one’s lower or old self: “To arrive at being all/ desire to be nothing”

“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*⁵².

And when you come to the possession of the all
you must possess it without wanting anything...”⁵³

It should be pointed out here that this meditation on the life of Christ and this Christo-mimetic attitude advocated by the Saint as viable strategies to a successful undertaking of the mystical endeavor is thoroughly in keeping with the mystical tradition from and

⁵⁰ Ibid, 102

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Italics our own.

⁵³ Ibid, 103-104

within which the Saint was working. As Bernard McGinn has observed, and as even a superficial examination of the works associated with it will attest, this tradition was in large part developed through an exegetical approach to scripture: implicit to the process of obtaining to an intimate awareness of God is the examination and interpretation of God's word as revealed through the sacred texts, and, ultimately, as revealed through Jesus Christ⁵⁴.

We have to this point adequately examined the characteristics of the first night, or first stage of the night through which the soul must pass, that is, the night of the soul's mortification of its appetites or its appetitive attachment to the world. Now, we will continue with an examination of the second night.

Night Two: Faith, Hope, Charity and the Evacuation of the Intellectual, Mnemonic and

Volitional Faculties

*[E]n la noche dichosa,
en secreto, que nadie me veía
ni yo miraba cosa,
sin otra luz y guía
sino la que en el corazón ardía...*⁵⁵

*(On that fortunate night,
in secret, seen by no one
nor did I look upon a thing,
without any light or guide
but that which burned within...)*

Total submission to God's will, as the life of Christ testifies, and as the Saint would have the mystic initiate understand, requires a necessary and corresponding

⁵⁴ Bernard McGinn *The Foundations of Mysticism* New York: Crossroad, 1992, 64 As the examination of the presence of scripture in the work of Saint John of the Cross alone could be sufficient material for a paper, we will limit our discussion of this topic to this brief aside.

⁵⁵ Kavanaugh, 68.

measure of faith. This faith the Saint describes as characterizing the second and darkest stage of this night and dedicates the second part of the *Ascent* to its examination. In keeping with the procedural structure we have already established, it is to the Saint's treatment of faith that we will now turn, however, before doing so, it would perhaps be beneficial to pause as the Saint does at this point in the text, and examine what he means by spiritual union in God.

In his definition, or his preliminary definition of what characterizes this mystical "unión del alma con Dios"⁵⁶ (union of the soul with God), the Saint makes it very clear that any permanent union of the soul's faculties with the will of God is impossible as long as the soul is bound to the human order of being, which is to say, as pointed out above, that any union in this life can ultimately be only transitory⁵⁷. If we imagine the soul's journey on this path as an ascension, to come to this point of transitory union would bring the soul to the highest, *most* human level of being, as all of its faculties would be harmoniously calibrated to the divine will, with the soul coming into at least a relative perfection, which is perhaps all that can be asked of a creature bound to a relative order of being.

For Saint John of the Cross, there are two types of union in God. One, which he terms "essential or substantial union"⁵⁸ is experienced by all creatures and therefore all human souls in that it is through this union that we are sustained or preserved in our being. It is constant and natural and as such occurs independently from any activity of the soul. The other, and for our purposes the more significant form of union, is the mystical union in God which the Saint describes as supernatural and occurring only

⁵⁶ Crisógono de Jesus, *Vida y Obras*, 489

⁵⁷ Kavanaugh, 116

⁵⁸ Ibid.

where there is a “similitude of love” and which is appropriately termed “the union of similitude.”⁵⁹ As we have already seen, this latter union is characterized by a concordance of the soul’s will and the will divine. A related insight that might assist in clarifying what the Saint has in mind when using terms such as unión (union) conforme (conformed) or conformar (to conform) is presented in Trueman Dicken’s *The Crucible of Love*. Dicken tells us that in the Spanish of the time, according to the *Dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy*, the term unión signified “concord and right correspondence between two or more people.” Conformidad (conformity) meant “Likeness between two persons. Equality...” and that conformar meant “to be of one accord and of one will...” To contemporary readers such terms would readily be accepted as synonymous.⁶⁰ This is an invaluable point to make in that it at once precludes that any significance of ontological identification be attributed to the term union and further emphasizes the conformative aspect of the event this term describes insofar as it involves the soul’s disposition toward this event.

We have already discussed in some detail how this concordance is to be achieved, at least with regard to the soul’s active pursuit of a detached disposition toward the formal or sensorial aspect of its being, and we have seen that, ultimately, this concordance must be communicated to the soul by God and therefore requires that, in preparation for the reception of this communication, the soul be emptied of all that is not in accordance with the divine will and presence. What we have not seen before however is this erotic tone now necessary to any effective cultivation of this interior vacuity and finally the receptive disposition necessary for receiving any divine communication

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Trueman Dicken *The Crucible of Love* London: Dartman, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1963, 135.

toward the desired concordance of wills. It is not that the soul comes to love God only after it has emptied itself of all that is not God, or all that is not a desire for spiritual union in God, nor is it that the soul empties itself as a means of loving God, but that the loving and the emptying are an identical movement. “God communicates Himself more to the soul more advanced in love, that is, more conformed to His will.”⁶¹ The more a soul is advanced in love, the more God communicates with this soul, and the more one is conformed to God’s will, that is, emptied of all that is contrary to this will, the more the soul advances in love, as God’s will is love. Or, we could put it as follows: the more one advances in their love of God, the further one cultivates this interior vacuity necessary for the reception of divine grace, and, inversely, the more one cultivates this interior vacuity, the further one advances in their love of God. What we want to point to here is the significance the Saint now places on what we might term the erotic disposition of this receptive vacuity and the equation he establishes between divine love and the divine will. With this in mind, if we return to the Saint’s notion of the “substantial union” of the soul in God and that of the “union of similitude”, we find that it is through this self-evacuating eroticism that the soul comes to remove all that which would restrict it to receiving solely a natural or “substantial union” in God, thereby opening itself to the reception of a supernatural union, or the “union of similitude”, that is, the erotic-volitional union mentioned above.

This movement is most adequately described by the Saint himself in his use of a metaphor found elsewhere in the literature of the tradition involving the passage of the sun’s rays through a pane of glass.

⁶¹ Kavanaugh, 116.

If we allow the pane of glass to represent the soul, the smudges or dirt on this pane of glass the soul's attachment to the created order of being, and the sun's rays the divine will and presence, we recognize that the more a pane of glass is sullied, that is to say, the more the soul is attached to the created order of being, the less the sun's rays, though constantly present, are capable of passing into the glass and infusing it with its illuminative quality, or the less the soul is able to receive the spiritually illuminating grace of God. If the glass is clean however, the sun's rays are able to penetrate the glass to the degree that the glass and the light of the sun's rays become indistinguishable, which is to say that the degree to which the soul in all its faculties, both sensorial and spiritual, is cleansed of its attachment to the created order of being, is precisely the degree to which the soul is infused with the divine presence and thereby united to it.⁶²

It is important to emphasize here, as the Saint takes care to point out, that though the pane of glass and the ray of sunlight appear as one, though the glass shines with the sun's light, they are not one, the glass is not the light, and the light is not the glass. They remain distinct, though united in this illumination, just as the soul does not become God, but is rather united to God through participation in this presence, or, perhaps more accurately, through emptying itself to the point that the divine presence now participates in it: "Although obviously the nature of the window is distinct from that of the sun's ray (even if the two seem identical), we can assert that the window is the ray or light of the

⁶² Ibid, 117. "A ray of sunlight shining upon a smudgy window is unable to illumine that window completely and transform it into its own light. It could do this if the window were cleaned and polished. The less film and stain are wiped away, the less the window will be illumined; and the cleaner the window is, the brighter will be its illumination. The extent of illumination is not dependent upon the ray of sunlight but upon the window. If the window is totally clean and pure, the sunlight will so transform and illumine it that to all appearances the window will be identical with the ray of sunlight and shine just as the sun's ray. Although obviously the nature of the window is distinct from that of the sun's ray (even if the two seem identical), we can assert that the window is the ray or light of the sun by participation."

sun by participation.”⁶³ In cleansing itself of all that is not this love of God, the soul is prepared for the reception of divine grace by which it will be perfected, just as it is only when the pane of glass is cleansed and open to the reception of light that it serves its function of transparency.

We have said that the mystical union of the soul in God is characterized by a concordance of volition, which, if we are to equate the divine will with divine love, is as much to say it is an erotic concordance. To come to an understanding of this mystical union and transformation in God then we must come to an understanding of what the Saint means by love.

In the *Ascent*, as we have seen, the Saint describes how love effects a certain identification of the lover with the beloved and even subjugates the former to the latter. For this reason, any affection for the material order of being that is not divinely motivated is perilous to the soul’s attempt at approaching any union in God as it subjects the soul to this lower order of manifestation. It would lead us too far afield now to enter into any thorough examination of the psychosomatic effects characteristic to the experience and practice of love. It will be sufficient to recognize that for the Saint to love is for the soul to give itself over to the object of this love through the application or employment of all the soul’s faculties toward the pursuit and possession of the object desired, of the beloved. It is in this way that love is capable of effecting this identification between subject loving and object beloved. In the material order, if all of the faculties of the soul associated with this order are engaged in the possession of a particular object, the soul is then itself in a sense possessed by the desire for this object and in this way can be described as being identified with it, an identification which further solidifies the

⁶³ Ibid.

attachment to the physical or material order of being that as we have seen must necessarily be dissolved if there is to be any approach to spiritual union in God. A similar process of identification is present too in the soul's love of God. Here however the soul must employ all of its faculties toward the possession of that which cannot be possessed; God, as incomprehensible cannot be objectified: the intellect cannot comprehend, the memory cannot order, and the will cannot engage, therefore, the soul's love of God requires, at this stage, a certain co-operative evacuation of its faculties by which they are all actively disposed toward the reception of divine grace through which the soul participates in and is then identified with the divine presence. As we will see, this evacuation of the higher faculties of the soul is achieved through the practice of the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity corresponding respectively to the intellectual, mnemonic and volitional faculties of the soul.

Before continuing it is important to address a possible objection to this notion of identification of the divine love of creation as that of lover with the beloved. One might argue that following this line of thought, if, as the Saint has suggested, the created order of being is sustained by the constant presence of the love of God for this order of being then this love would identify the uncreated God with this created order of being, making God objective. In response, it is important to remember that this identification is not a strict identification, that is, an identification in which all of the ontological qualities of the object are assumed by the subject. Rather, as the Saint is careful to point out, it is an identification of participation. This being said, the presence of the divine is identified with the created order of being--that is, the divine participates in the created order of being precisely through the act of creation, which can be described as an act of love

because it is an act of the divine giving over of itself, of its divinity through the creative act. If we turn to scripture we find that we are made in God's image, which can be interpreted from one point of view as signifying that the creaturely order of being is a physical or material expression of certain metaphysical potentialities or possibilities that themselves are manifest through the grace of God or through the giving over of its divinity to the manifestation of this order of being and possibility.

This erotic identification, therefore, is not the transformation of the soul into God but is rather the realization of its participation in God. Inversely then, the love of God does not transform God into a thing beloved, thereby objectifying God, but in a way and by divine grace manifests an aspect of God's identity through whatever form this manifestation is expressed. It is in this way that Creator is identified with creature, lover with beloved. It should also be said here that this identification in no way precludes any qualification of the divine as incomprehensible. As we cannot comprehend the relative infinitude of the material order and its manifold forms, even less can we comprehend the transcending and illimitable presence of the divine, an illimitability of which this relative infinitude is an expression, an expression that itself, again, effects a certain identification. Now, we will continue with our examination of the text.

As we mentioned above, if the soul is to approach the reception of the divine grace necessary to any union with the divine presence, it must first dispose the whole of its faculties toward the pursuit of this reception. We have discussed this avoidance as it pertains to those faculties of the soul associated with the sensorial aspect of its being, what remains for us now is to examine how this avoidance is to be achieved with regard

to those faculties associated with its spiritual aspect which brings us first to the Saint's notion of faith.

Of the three nights or three stages of the spiritual night through which the soul must pass toward spiritual union in God, it is the second and darkest that corresponds to the virtue of faith. The first night, or first stage of this night the Saint tells us corresponds to that darkness experienced by the soul's mortification of its sensorial appetites. Because it involves the physical or material order of being, the darkness here is described as more outward, more exterior, crepuscular in that it resembles that diurnal point at which the visible begins to withdrawal into the invisible, as the soul withdraws inwardly from its exterior attachments to the world. As such it is still a partial darkness. The darkness of the third night too is partial in that it is permeated with the illumination of the approaching presence of God, just as the darkness of breaking dawn is permeated with the diffuse light of approaching day. The second night, the night of faith however holds between these two nights, or nocturnal stages, as midnight between dusk and dawn, and is described by the Saint as being--insofar as it pertains to the active disposition of the soul--the darkest of the three nights, or the darkest aspect of the mystical night through which the soul must pass into a unitive participation in the divine.

Prior to beginning our examination of the Saint's notion of faith, it is important to remember that the mystical union the Saint describes is an erotic union. We recollect this point only to avoid the error of attributing a certain singular significance to the virtue of faith. Such an attribution is to a degree warranted, as the practice of this virtue is essential to achieving the receptive disposition of the soul necessary to its experience of the mystical event, however, this necessity, this essentiality is in a sense dependent upon

or contingent upon the erotic disposition of the soul, just as this disposition is itself contingent upon the virtues of faith, hope and charity. To put it another way, we might say that it is through its love for God that the soul is brought to the point at which it is able to receive the divine grace it desires, and it is through the practice of these three virtues that this love is actuated. This being said, we will now proceed to our examination of the Saint's notion of faith.

As we have said, for the soul to approach any mystical union in God, it must first evacuate all of its faculties of all that is not its love of or devotion to God. This process was initiated in the soul's mortification of its sensorial appetites and attachments, which can be described as a kind of evacuation in that by mortifying these attachments the soul in a way empties itself of them. This evacuation must occur in the soul's intellectual, volitional and mnemonic faculties as well. Book II of the *Ascent* is for the most part dedicated to a discussion of the virtue of faith and its necessary function as means to achieving this evacuation as it pertains to the intellectual faculty of the soul.

At the beginning of this second book we are told that faith is darkness to the soul because through it the soul's intellectual faculty is evacuated of all its recourse to natural cognition and ratiocination. By natural cognition here we mean any understanding established upon or through the natural order of being. If God is incomprehensible, as we have argued, and if the soul's love of a thing requires that all of its faculties be engaged in, or occupied by the object of this love, then in loving God, the soul's faculties must be occupied by that which cannot be comprehended. For this reason faith is the only means by which the intellectual faculty of the soul might be occupied by or in its love of God: faith in God in essence is infinite in that it corresponds precisely to that which cannot be

objectified. “Faith, we know, affirms what cannot be understood by the intellect...”⁶⁴ the Saint tells us, adding that understanding itself precludes the presence or activity of faith. In other words, faith, by definition, is characterized by unknowing, by incomprehensibility and is therefore what the Saint terms a “proportionate means” to uniting the soul’s intellectual faculty with God⁶⁵.

According to the scholastic tradition within which the Saint was working, any means to an end can be such only to the degree that it realizes a certain concordance and similitude with the object to which it tends. The more thorough this realization, the more adequate and effective, the more proportionate the means. Because it is itself incomprehensible, that is, because it does not close upon its object, faith is the only such means to a unitive engagement of the intellectual faculty with the incomprehensibility of God. To put it another way, if the soul is to align its faculties with the incomprehensible, it can do so only by means which are themselves incomprehensible. Faith is such because it is necessarily dispossessive of its object.

All discursive ratiocination implies a certain degree of multiplicity by which it is informed. This multiplicity itself implies a degree of finitude and differentiation, of temporality and succession, of dimension and spatiality—all qualities as characteristic of the material order of being as they are necessary to any ratiocinative activity. This is to say that without the existence of a multiplicity upon which to draw, all ratiocinative activity becomes inoperative. Faith, by turning the intellectual faculty to that which transcends this multiplicity in effect if we may be permitted the expression “inoperates” any ratiocinative activity that would occupy this faculty and obstruct it from any

⁶⁴ Ibid, 125.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 126.

participation in the divine presence⁶⁶. In this way faith is blindness to the intellect: it requires the abandonment of all notion or image and demands the soul proceed not by knowing but by unknowing or contemplation which, in citing the Areopagite, the Saint describes as a ray of darkness.

To further understand this contemplative aspect of faith and its effect or influence on the intellectual faculty of the soul, it is necessary that we understand how it is that this faculty functions, that is, how it is that this faculty engages and is engaged by the multiplicity through which it is informed.

According to the Saint there are two forms or sources of information upon which this faculty may draw and by which this faculty may be engaged, two sources from which this faculty may derive or receive what he terms its “apprehensions.” These faculties, if not abandoned, ultimately, will serve as impediments to any mystical union.

One source the Saint categorizes as natural, the other supernatural. Natural apprehensions or conceptions can be obtained both through whatever information can be gathered by the senses, or the corporeal order of the soul’s being and through understanding, or ratiocination itself. Supernatural knowledge, as the category suggests, is obtained in a way that transcends the intellectual faculty’s natural scope of power. This supernatural knowledge the Saint further divides into two categories: the corporeal and the spiritual. To the former correspond both that supernatural knowledge obtained or received through what the Saint terms “the exterior bodily senses” (los sentidos corporales exteriores)⁶⁷ and that may be obtained or received through those interior including the imaginative faculty and all its fabricative capabilities. To the latter, that is,

⁶⁶ Geoffrey K. Mondello, *The Metaphysics of Mysticism: A Commentary on the Mystical Philosophy of St. John of the Cross*, published online: <http://www.johnofthecross.com/> 2011, 73-78.

⁶⁷ Kavanaugh 131

to the category of spiritual knowledge, correspond both what the Saint terms a “distinct and particular knowledge” which the spirit receives without the mediation of the corporeal senses through visions, revelations, locutions and spiritual sentiments and a knowledge the Saint describes as obscure, dark and general (*confusa, oscura y general*)⁶⁸ which is imparted to the spirit through contemplation, itself imparted through faith.⁶⁹ To say it another way, and as we will have more of an occasion to discuss in our examination of the *Dark Night*, through the practice of faith and its evacuative effect on the intellectual faculty, the soul is prepared for the reception of the dark ray of contemplation transmitted through divine grace. Ultimately, it is to this dark knowledge, to contemplation, that the soul must proceed, passing through all of these other forms of intellectual apprehension or conception and, proceeding from those exterior and sensorial to those interior or spiritual, denuding itself of them on its way.

In faith, the soul establishes that vacant, open disposition necessary to the reception of the divine grace that will ultimately purge and prepare it for spiritual transformation in God. First, as we have seen, the soul must proceed through prayer and meditation to disengage itself from any sensorial attachment to the world, so that then, through the practice of faith, it can proceed into both an intellectual detachment of all ratiocinative and epistemic form and the erotic contemplation that disposes the soul toward this reception. It is important to reiterate here that this movement is a process and that each of its procedural motions is preparatory to that which follows. For this reason,

⁶⁸ The Spanish *confuso*, here in the feminine *confusa* because it is modifying the feminine *manera* or way, can be translated as confused, as Peers has done, but it can also be translated as vague, as Kavanaugh has done, or as obscure, as we have chosen to render it. Though all of these translations are adequate, we have chosen the term obscure because its connotations of both darkness and incomprehensibility seem most appropriate.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

the material order of being is not to be ignored or denied but rather, as we will see, approached as meditative support assisting the soul in its advancement.

Throughout the course of our discussion we have continued to emphasize that to prepare itself for any unitive engagement with the divine the soul must evacuate the whole of its faculties from all that is not its devotion to God. In this night of faith, even meditation must be evacuated that, again, the intellectual faculty be poised a kind of passive aperture receptive to divine grace. Moreover, not only meditation, but all forms of spiritual communications both natural and supernatural are to be evacuated as well, including those charismatic. The Saint offers various reasons for this which we will discuss very briefly in what follows. For now, it will suffice to recall, as we have just pointed out, that for the soul to receive the divine grace of unitive participation this spiritual evacuation and the soul's corresponding devotion to God is to be total.

The question arises: why would God offer any such communications if they are ultimately to be disregarded? In response the Saint replies that it is through the lower that God leads the soul to the higher; from the exterior to the interior. With regard to the soul achieving a detachment from its sensorial appetites, the senses are employed: in the Saint's ecclesiastic milieu through liturgical practice, for example, or the observation of and meditation upon holy symbols, through the audition of sermons or sacred music, the corporeal, the sensorial assists the soul in achieving a more spiritual disposition. Here, with regard to the intellectual aspect of the soul, for the soul to move beyond the meditative, the discursive and arrive at the evacuative state of contemplation, it must proceed on meditative, on discursive grounds, as the Saint has already suggested in his advocacy of the practice of meditation on the life of Christ. With regard to the question

posed above involving the supernatural and charismatic communications we find a similar movement from outward to inward, or more accurately, to inward through outward. God, guiding the soul in its spiritual development knows that the soul must proceed according to its capacities. Given our predominantly extropic disposition it is, to put it one way, through the form that the content must be discovered. For the Saint these forms, or the images, or locutions offered by God are rinds through which the spiritual is communicated, outward forms that must necessarily be disregarded once this spiritual communication has been established or perhaps better received: "...a person must not fix the eyes of his soul upon that rind of the figure and object supernaturally accorded to him, whether the object pertains to the exterior senses...or whether it is an interior imaginative vision. He must instead renounce them all."⁷⁰

Contemplation, at least at this point, is a kind of apophatic apertion of the intellectual faculty affected by faith. A ray because it transmits the intellectual faculty toward the spiritual communication of divine grace and a darkness because it voids it of the objects upon and through which it operates and by which it had been naturally illumined--light is perceived through the objects that reflect it. It is in this way too that faith can be thought of as a kind of blindness. Faith deprives the intellectual faculty of this natural illumination with which it was accustomed to seeing, disposing it wholly toward that which cannot be seen, that is, comprehended. For this reason it is the path of unknowing, or the *via negative* the soul must take; not only because it is the path of that which transcends all comprehension, but also because the further the soul proceeds on this path, the more the intellectual faculty is evacuated of all it has known, the more it proceeds in un-knowing, the more thoroughly it is disposed toward its devotion to God.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 159.

Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II) very importantly points out that it is necessary to recognize that though through or in this contemplation the intellectual faculty is void of all that is not the soul's devotion to God, it is not itself a void, that is, there is and in fact must remain this devotion to God or the soul would find itself in a "vacuum mistaking indolence for the activity of God"⁷¹. Regarding this point we must reiterate that for the Saint this contemplative state is a state of obscure, dark and general knowledge which is perhaps most succinctly described in the Saint's treatment--found in chapter 13--of the third of three signs indicating when an individual ought to abandon or discontinue the practice of discursive meditation.

Though the first two signs are not of particular significance here, we will turn to them in passing for the sake of consistency. The first sign is the experience of what the Saint terms a certain "aridity". There is no longer the former sense of satisfaction had in focusing the soul's faculties on the objects of this meditation. The second and related sign is an awareness of a kind of disinclination to apply the imaginative or sensorial faculties of the soul to establishing a focus on any particular object or meditative support, either interior or exterior. This is not to say that the imagination ceases to function: "(for even in deep recollection it usually wanders freely)"⁷² but that the individual no longer feels a desire intentionally to either engage such supports, or to establish any attachment to them. The third, and most necessary sign the Saint describes as follows:

"The third and surest sign is that the soul takes pleasure in being alone in loving attentiveness upon God, without any particular consideration but with inward peace and quiet and rest, and without any acts and exercises of the faculties of memory, intellect

⁷¹ Karol Wojtyla *Faith According to St. John of the Cross*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981, 151-152.

⁷² Kavanaugh, 140.

and will--or at least without discursive acts, that is without passing from one thing to another. The soul is alone, *with an attentiveness and the general loving awareness and knowledge we mentioned, but without any particular knowledge or understanding of the object.*”⁷³

If there is not this erotic awareness or devotion, rather than being signs of a more spiritual movement toward God, the first two signs the Saint tells us could instead be evidence of a certain spiritual lassitude. We make this digression only because it is important to keep in mind that we are still in the active night of the spirit and that, again, though the soul in this night must evacuate its spiritual faculties of all that is not this erotic devotion to God, there is still and must be devotional awareness, this obscure, dark and general knowledge obtained through contemplation. Faith is not inactivity, it is a controlled attention that inactivates all other ratiocinative activity, abandoning all “particular knowledge or understanding” toward a total concentration of the intellectual faculty on the divine presence, a concentration that is not knowing and yet believing.

Above, in our discussion of the Saint’s notion of the soul and its ontological division we mentioned how the faculties of intellect, memory and will necessarily function with an inextricable cooperation. This is to say that one does not operate without in some way influencing the operation of the other two. While it is the function of the intellect to discern and comprehend, it is the function of the memory to retain already established knowledge or comprehension and to inform the intellect with what the Saint terms the “distinct images, forms and notions”⁷⁴ with and upon which the intellect operates, and it is the function of the will to activate these faculties, or, to say it

⁷³ Wojtyla, 141. Italics our own.

⁷⁴ Saint John of the Cross Tr. John J. McMahon, *The Divine Union in the Subida de Monte Carmelo and the Noche Oscura of Saint John of the Cross*, Diss. Washington, 1941,96.

another way, to manifest their operation. We should point out here that the will, to a degree, also activates the body and therefore is itself informed both spiritually and sensually, or we might say it has both a spiritual and sensorial field of activity⁷⁵. As we have seen, through the mortification of the sensorial appetites, the will is interiorly disposed toward the spiritual faculties of the memory and intellect and is, thereby, able to participate in the total disposition of the soul toward the divine. Each of these faculties is in a way then both responsible to and responsible for each of the others. This being said, the evacuation of the intellectual faculty through faith implies a corresponding evacuation of both the mnemonic and volitional faculties through the theological virtues of hope and charity respectively. It is to a discussion of this evacuation as it pertains to these latter faculties that we will now turn before concluding our examination of the text.

Given their interconnectivity with and their necessarily interoperable relationship to each other, the Saint informs us in the first chapter of the third and final book of the text that his discussion of the evacuation of these two faculties will not be so extensive as that of the evacuation of the intellectual faculty because, as we have just seen, the evacuation of the intellectual faculty through faith necessarily implies a similar movement in those mnemonic and volitional:

“Our exposition in this third book will be brief. For it is unnecessary to enlarge so much in our treatise on these faculties, since in the instructions given for the intellect...we have covered a great portion of the matter. If the spiritual person directs his intellect in faith according to the doctrine given him, it is impossible for him not to

⁷⁵ We borrow this phrase *field of activity* from Labourdette, M., O.P. who uses it to describe the memory’s relation to the theological virtue of hope. Here though it is also an appropriate term in describing the soul’s volitional jurisdiction.

instruct his other two faculties simultaneously in the other two virtues. For these faculties depend on one another in their operations.”⁷⁶

This being said, it is nonetheless necessary to examine the characteristics of the evacuation of these two faculties if we are to come to a thorough understanding of the Saint’s conception of the mystical process. In accordance then with the order in which the Saint discusses them, we will begin with an examination of the mnemonic faculty. At the risk of entering into digressive repetition we must again keep in mind that the objective of the soul’s activity in this stage of the mystical process is to make the faculties of the soul available to the reception of the presence and grace of God. Of this the Saint reminds us very succinctly in the following:

“...that God may...work divine union in the soul, it is necessary to proceed by this method of disencumbering and emptying the soul, and causing the natural jurisdiction and operations of the faculties to be denied them, so that they may become capable of infusion and illumination from supernatural sources...”⁷⁷

What remains for us to determine then is the “natural jurisdiction and operations” of these two faculties and how it is that their corresponding theological virtues effect the preparatory evacuation necessary to establishing the desired receptive disposition of the soul.

With regard to the mnemonic faculty we must recognize at the outset that for the Saint it is neither simply that faculty by or through which past events and experiences are recalled, nor is it simply that faculty through which we discern our chronologic position, it is, rather, that faculty through which we retain all of the knowledge that allows us to

⁷⁶ Ibid, 214

⁷⁷ McMahan, 68.

engage in and order our experience in and of the world. It is recollection, but that recollection that allows us to apply the knowledge we possess to our immediate experience of the present. This being said, it is of this knowledge, of the various natural components or items of this knowledge that the mnemonic faculty must be evacuated if it is to be adequately disposed toward the reception of divine grace.

According to the Saint the objects of the mnemonic faculty are of three kinds: natural, imaginative and spiritual. Similarly, the knowledge these objects collectively compose, the knowledge the mnemonic faculty serves to retain, he categorizes as that pertaining to the natural, the supernatural and the imaginary spiritual orders of being⁷⁸. We can say then that the “natural jurisdiction” of this faculty is these three orders of being, at least insofar as it is capable of engaging and interacting with them. Its natural “operations” then are those which pertain to its reception, retention and application of the objects it encounters through its engagement and interaction with these orders of being. The question arises then, how the mnemonic faculty is to be avoided of these objects or what we might call, in keeping with the Saint’s terminology, these mnemonic apprehensions.

We should recall that the objective here is the total subjugation and alignment of the soul, in all its faculties, to the will of God. To accomplish this, all that is not God

⁷⁸ Kavanaugh, 214. There is some difficulty in translating the passage referred to here. The Spanish reads : “...naturales y sobrenaturales y imaginarias espirituales...” Rendered literally we have: “...natural and supernatural and imaginary spiritual...” types of knowledge. The Saint writes that the objects of the mnemonic faculty can be divided into three categories: natural, imaginative and spiritual, and that the types of knowledge then too are of three kinds: natural, supernatural, and imaginary spiritual. Here, with regard to the latter three categories, he has included the category of supernatural which is not listed as one of the three categories of mnemonic objects. Also, in this second group of categories he has paired the imaginary and the spiritual to form one category, where in the categories of mnemonic objects they are each a separate category. This does not cause much of an interpretive problem as the natural, in this context, implies the supernatural and the imaginary, again, in this context, the spiritual. What will remain of great importance is that all of these objects, all of this knowledge be avoided from the mnemonic faculty.

must be avoided from the faculties of the soul so that the Holy Spirit might have room to work in them. With regard to the mnemonic faculty, this emptying, this avoidance is accomplished through the theological virtue of hope. Hope, the Saint tells us, is always disposed to the “unpossessed” object: “If something were possessed there could no longer be hope for it.”⁷⁹ Just as the intellectual faculty is avoided of all understanding through the practice of faith, so too the mnemonic faculty is avoided of all epistemic objects or apprehensions through hope. Again, this is not an abolition or an annihilation of these faculties themselves for they continue to function. Now though, through the practice of these virtues, they function in correspondence with an object that cannot be objectified, they are fixed upon that which cannot be comprehended, that which no image or concept is capable of thoroughly, adequately, and comprehensively representing and are in this way held open and available to divine influence. As we have seen, no distinct or particular apprehension is capable of signifying God, therefore any such apprehension is incapable of leading the soul to any unitive participation in the divine. The mnemonic faculty, therefore, must detach itself from all remembrance of such particular and distinct forms and open itself to God, an apertion, affected through hope.

It may be argued that such dispossession would render the mnemonic faculty inactive thereby incapacitating an individual’s ability to interact with the world. According to the Saint, to a degree this does occur: detaching the mnemonic faculty from any distinct, particular apprehensions will necessarily cause a degree of forgetfulness or absentmindedness with regard to one’s activity in the outward life. However, he is very clear in pointing out that such an incapacity for reminiscence is temporary and experienced only while the soul is in the process of preparing itself for transformation.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 119.

Once God has effected the unitive perfection of the soul, the individual acts in accordance with the divine will and therefore more perfectly, or, from another point of view, more effectively than before. What is being described here is not the annihilation of the soul's faculties, but rather an annihilation of their attachment to anything other than the soul's devotion to God.

“What must be done, then, that the soul may live in the perfect and pure hope of God is that, whensoever these distinct images, forms and notions come to it, it must not rest in them, but must turn immediately to God, voiding the memory of them entirely, with loving affection. It must neither think of these things nor consider them beyond the degree which is necessary for the understanding and performing of its obligations...And thus a man must not fail to think and recall that which he ought to know and do, for *provided he preserves no affection or attachments*, this will do him no harm.”⁸⁰

In summary, what is desired here is a supernatural application of the soul's faculties, that is, these faculties must be turned from the natural order of being to the supernatural that transcends it. To effect such a disposition these faculties must not only be avoided of any correspondence with or retention of the natural order of being, but they must also and, if guided by love, in the same movement, be directed receptively toward the divine. Faith disposing the intellect, hope the memory, and as we will now see, charity the will.

It is in the course of his discussion of the evacuation of the volitional faculty that the book abruptly comes to an end mid-sentence. Nevertheless, the Saint provides enough of a description of this evacuation for us to have more than an elementary understanding of the process through which this evacuation is achieved. Though this

⁸⁰ McMahan 96. Italics our own.

process is more thoroughly developed in the third book, in Chapter Six of the second we are given a preliminary description that is valuable in its precision: “Charity causes a void in the will regarding all things, since it obliges us to love God above everything. A man has to withdraw his affection from all in order to center it wholly upon God.”⁸¹ Now, it is for us to examine how such a withdrawal is to be characterized and enacted. We will proceed as we did above in our discussion of the evacuation of the mnemonic faculty by determining the “natural jurisdiction and operations” of the will.

In establishing his position the Saint turns to Deuteronomy 6:5 where through the figure of Moses we are admonished to love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our strength. For the Saint, the strength of the soul is composed of all of its faculties, passions and appetites, all of which in turn are governed by the will.⁸² It is for this reason that the volitional faculty must be emptied of all that is not an erotic devotion to God: that all of these faculties, passions, and appetites be rightly disposed toward God or the reception of divine grace. It is this strength, as it pertains both to the exterior and interior aspects of the soul’s being, that will be the natural jurisdiction of the volitional faculty, and its interaction with these faculties, passions, and appetites, and the natural and supernatural orders of being to which they correspond that will be its field of operation or activity. This is to say that to come to a love of God that exceeds love of all else, the soul must again rightly dispose these faculties, passions and appetites toward its devotion to God while detaching itself and turning its attentions or feelings from, any alternate devotion or inordinate attachment, thereby preserving its strength solely for this devotion.

⁸¹ Kavanaugh 120

⁸² Ibid, 237.

According to the Saint, there are four passions through or according to which the volitional faculty operates: joy, hope, fear, and sorrow⁸³. All of them are inextricably related. If one actively experiences joy in a thing, for instance, one then virtually experiences hope that it will experience that joy, sorrow if it does not, and fear that it will not.⁸⁴ As we have suggested above, it is the volitional faculty that communicates to the intellectual and mnemonic faculties the objects upon which or with which they operate. The will decides in a way to what activities these faculties will be applied and therefore devoted. If the volitional faculty allows itself to be guided or occupied by its passions for creatures, these creatures then will necessarily come to occupy accordingly both the faculties of intellect and memory as well. We can imagine that if the volitional faculty experiences joy at the sight of a certain image for example, the mnemonic will retain this image and the intellectual will be encumbered by it. For this reason the volitional faculty must be avoided of all such passions, that the soul “...rejoices only in what is purely for God’s honor and glory, hopes for nothing else, feels sorrow only about matters pertaining to this, and fears only God...”⁸⁵

It is important to recognize, again, that the Saint is not advocating the denial or restraint of all outward erotic expression or activity. What he is advocating is the denial and restraint of all such activity motivated by a soul’s affections for the created order of being, or, for anything other than God. If we recall that it is a union of wills the soul is seeking here, and that God’s will is equated with love, then as God wills all things, God in turn loves all things universally. If the volitional faculty is fixed on anything individual it is no longer capable of approximating divine, universal love as it has

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ The terms *actively* and *virtually* here are the Saint’s, as is their relationship to the passions described.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 238.

occupied this faculty with the particular object upon which it is fixed. Through charity, through the soul's voluntary dispossession of all that is not its devotion to God, through the simultaneous employment of the volitional passions in the practice of devotion, an aperture is prepared in which this faculty might receive the grace of God, allowing the soul to participate more fully in the divine will and finally, in a universal love of all things, it now being rightly disposed or motivated. .

Conclusion

In concluding our examination of the *Ascent to Mount Carmel* there are a couple of points we would like to clarify. The first has to do with the procedural aspect of the text. Though the Saint has divided the process into three parts or nights that each pertain or correspond to a particular aspect of the soul's preparation for and pursuit of a participatory union in God, we must acknowledge that the experience of this process does not necessarily correspond directly to its description. It is certain that the soul must pass through each of these three nights or nocturnal stages, but it is not certain how such passage will effect each soul, nor how each soul will experience such passage, as each will proceed differently from each other in accordance not only with their capacity for such progress but also and ultimately in accordance with the grace of God.

We are, at this point, in the active night of the soul, that is, that aspect of the mystical process pertaining to the activity of the soul, to its faculties and powers and their influence on its procession along this path. Precisely because this movement is, to a degree, a human procession, it may not be experienced with the strict linearity, sequence and consequence the textual description of the process may imply. As we have seen, all of the soul's faculties operate inter-dependently; a movement in one manifesting a

simultaneous movement in the others. Though the soul must initiate its movement along this path in those faculties more exteriorly oriented, this movement is itself directed by the volitional faculty, and, therefore, has an influence upon the more interiorly oriented mnemonic and intellectual faculties. What we want to point out here, with the Saint, is that the process demands the soul's faculties engage in a unified concentration in its devotion to God and the reception of divine grace, a unity and concentration established through the passage of each of these nights. As we have said, each is preparatory to the next, but this is not a mechanical relationship—one does not end the first night, awake and begin the second; rather, one is prepared for the second by the first, which in a way is to say that the first leads the soul into the second, and the second then, in its turn, leads to the third so that ultimately we have one night composed of three distinct but not separate nights or aspects of this one, comprehensive night.

The other point we would like to address has to do with the Saint's notion of contemplation. We will discuss this in more detail in our examination of the *Dark Night* as it is there, in the passive night of the soul, that we encounter it in its fullest expression. Here, though, it is important to point out that this contemplation is not activated by the human soul, as we may have suggested above. Rather, it is through the activity of faith that this contemplation is in a way permitted—or, better, received—and it is in this way that contemplation can be effected by faith: the degree to which one's faith is perfected correlates directly to the degree one participates in contemplation.

We will have occasion to discuss this more fully in what follows. What is important to recognize here is that the spiritual state of contemplation is not one to which the soul can bring itself alone. Having addressed these two points we will proceed to our

discussion of the *Dark Night* where we find the passive night as it pertains to both the sensorial and spiritual aspects of the human soul.

CHAPTER 4

THE DARK NIGHT

Darkness, nocturnal darkness, the darkness of blindness, in the *Ascent* functions for the Saint as the metaphorical equivalent of a certain receptive vacuity in the faculties of the soul obtained through the soul's active engagement in its spiritual progress. For this reason the night or stages of night described in the *Ascent* the Saint qualifies as active. In the *Dark Night*, we have a description of the passive night, or that aspect of the night of faith which involves a necessarily inactive disposition of the soul and the work of divine grace within it. The text is composed of two books each corresponding to the two stages or aspects of this passive night: the passive night of the senses in Book I and the passive night of the spirit in Book II. In keeping with our approach to the *Ascent*, here too we will proceed in our examination of the *Dark Night* in accordance with the structure of the text.

One point to which we should call attention before continuing is that in the *Dark Night*, we are still in the night of faith first introduced in the second book of the *Ascent*. The difference is that now it is presented to us from a passive point of view, that is, here we are given a description of both how divine grace works to bring the soul into this passive state and the characteristic effects these workings have upon it. We point this out only to clarify and avoid any misunderstanding of this night as somehow being separate from the night of faith described in the *Ascent*.

Passive Night of the Senses

*En una noche oscura,
con ansias, en amores inflamada,
¡oh dichosa ventura!
salí sin ser notada,
estando ya mi casa sosegada.*⁸⁶

*(On a dark night,
longing, inflamed in love,
oh happy fortune!
unnoticed I went out,
my house now being all calmed.)*

At the outset the Saint informs us that this passive night is the state to which God brings the souls of initiates--those still practicing discursive meditation--into the state of proficients--the state of “contemplatives”--that they move finally through this latter state into that of the perfect, or that of the desired union in God.⁸⁷ As mentioned above, there are two stages to this night: that pertaining to the soul’s sensorial, and that pertaining to its spiritual aspects. It is to the former that the experience of the beginners corresponds, and to the latter that of the proficients. To say it another way, and as we will see throughout the course of our discussion, once a soul has been led through the sensorial stage, it is prepared for its passage into the spiritual.

Before initiating his description of the passive night of the senses, the Saint first describes and examines some of what he calls the “imperfections”⁸⁸ of beginners which, if they are to advance on their spiritual path, must be corrected occasioning the necessity for the souls of these beginners to be brought into the first or sensorial stage of this night.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 295.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 299.

In categorizing these various imperfections, the Saint turns to the seven capital vices⁸⁹ of pride, avarice, lust, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth. It will suffice for our purposes here to examine these imperfections only summarily as a detailed examination of their characteristic qualities will not be necessary to what follows.

For the Saint, these imperfections are a result of a certain interior attachment beginners may develop to the satisfaction they feel in the performance of their spiritual exercises or in the objects and movements associated with and utilized in facilitating this performance. It is this satisfaction, the Saint tells us, and an accompanying “consolation”⁹⁰ they experience in these activities or objects that serve as their motivation for performing them, a motivation proceeding then from a certain egoism, and an egoism which, as we have just suggested, is itself manifested through these various imperfections in accordance with the object of their attachment.

With regard to pride for example, this egoism is manifested through a kind of private hubris one develops out of what they perceive to be the extraordinary fervor and diligence with which they perform their spiritual exercises. Among other related effects, this can cause one to become unjustifiably self-satisfied in their estimation of themselves and judgmental in that of others, further drawing the soul away from the diametrically opposed humility requisite to any spiritual purification⁹¹. One too may become covetous of spiritual objects associated with the practice of their devotion, causing them to direct their attentions to the physical symbol rather than the metaphysical symbolized, and engendering an egocentric avarice by which they are prevented from attaining that

⁸⁹ Ibid..

⁹⁰ Ibid, 298.

⁹¹ Ibid, 299-302.

selfless dispossession of spirit their vocation demands⁹². The imperfections associated with the remaining vices could be described similarly; the little we have said here adequately demonstrates the nature of these imperfections and the impeding harm they can have on the soul's pursuit of spiritual perfection. To reiterate: as the capital vices are all essentially expressions of a fundamental egoism, so too then are the spiritual imperfections they create. And, given that it is through our individualities that we participate in multiplicity, at least in part, the more firmly we are bound to them, the less so are we bound to the simplicity of God.

Having said this, there is a notion expressed in the course of the Saint's treatment of these imperfections regarding the relationship between the sensorial and spiritual aspects of the soul that would be beneficial to point out before continuing. In his treatment of the vice of lust, in describing how the joy received through communion is felt simultaneously by both the spiritual and the sensorial aspects of the soul, ordinately in the former and inordinately in the latter.⁹³ The Saint accounts for this simultaneity of experience by pointing out that these two aspects of the soul compose together one suppositum or individual whole and that as such each aspect shares according to its order in what the other receives in accordance with its⁹⁴. We have approached this in our discussion of the spiritual faculties before, we want to point it out here because it will assist us in understanding the characteristic effects of the passive night on both of these aspects of the soul. It should be said here that, again, the Saint is not admonishing the religious to avoid or deny the emotive experiences of their being. What he is

⁹² Ibid, 302-303.

⁹³ Inordinately because at this point the sensorial aspect of the soul has not been wholly perfected and so participates in the joy of receiving the divine grace offered the spirit through the rite impurely.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 304.

admonishing, for reasons we have already discussed, is that the religious form no attachment to such sensations and evacuate themselves of their influence to the degree that their powers allow. We will see that great ineffable joys await the soul that endures this night. Now, however, it must be purged of all those imperfections that would obstruct such endurance.

It is in Chapter Eight of Book I that we are first given a description of the characteristic qualities of the influences this night has on the sensorial aspect of the soul and their consequent effects. Here, in reference to this night as a whole, that is, this passive night as it pertains to the suppositum of the sensorial and the spiritual aspects of the soul, the Saint gives us the following:

“This night, which we say is contemplation, causes two kinds of darkness or purgation in spiritual persons according to the two parts of the soul, the sensory and the spiritual. Hence the one night or purgation will be sensory, by which the senses are purged and accommodated to the spirit; and the other night or purgation will be spiritual, by which the spirit is purged and denuded as well as accommodated and prepared for union with God through love.”⁹⁵

Two points are significant here. One is that in the first sentence we find this night equated with contemplation which assists us in coming to an understanding of the nature of contemplation as conceived by the Saint: the effects of this night are the effects of contemplation. Further, as this is the passive night of the soul, this equation allows us to deduce that this contemplation is experienced passively and is therefore different from the contemplation treated in our discussion of the *Ascent*. This apparent difference might suggest that the Saint is describing two kinds of contemplation, one active, or acquired,

⁹⁵ Ibid, 311.

and the other passive, or infused. With Frost, who has treated the subject more than adequately, we would argue that the difference is one not of kind, but of degree. As Frost has pointed out, contemplation as it is described in the *Ascent* is acquired in the sense that the soul is capable of preparing itself—and in fact must prepare itself—for receiving it. As we have seen, this preparation is essentially the theological virtue of faith and the evacuative effect it has on the spiritual faculties, which can be equated with contemplation insofar as it is through faith that contemplation is received. Because faith is actuated in part through the volitional faculty of the soul, when contemplation is received, that is, when it is infused, we can say that this contemplation is acquired to the degree that the soul's faith is actuated, or, to the degree that the soul has prepared itself for this reception. The soul cannot enter into the passive night of its own accord because to do so would require activity. And, it cannot purge and prepare itself because it is not God. As this night is contemplation, the soul must be led into it, or, from another point of view, must receive it. In this sense contemplation is infused.⁹⁶ As we can see, we are dealing with a singular form of contemplation described from two corresponding points of view.

The second point of significance here is that this night serves a purgatorial and therefore preparatory function, even within the terrestrial realm of being. Also, it is important to recognize that union does not occur in this night. Though the Saint will describe moments when the soul is communed with the divine presence, here it has not yet experienced the unitive event. We will now continue with our examination of the passive night of the senses.

⁹⁶ Frost, 323-344.

We have said that this night is experienced by initiates to the path of spiritual perfection--those who still exercise their devotion interiorly through discursive meditation. As we saw in the preceding chapter, ultimately such meditation must be abandoned if the soul is to proceed upon this path because through it the spiritual faculties of the soul continue to employ in their operation individual objects of the creaturely order of being and are prevented from that utter avoidance necessary to the reception of divine grace. According to the Saint, one reason God leads these souls into this night is that through its passage, their lower, or sensorial aspect is accommodated to the higher, spiritual aspect of its being. This is to say that it is through the passage of this night, through its effects on the soul and its attachment to those operations associated with its sensorial aspect that this abandonment and total evacuation are achieved.

Another reason has to do with the erotic affections of these souls and, as we have just seen, their frequent disposition not toward God, but toward the individual initiates themselves and the contentment they find in the performance of their spiritual exercises and, further, the attachments they may develop to this performance and the objects and movements associated with it. Through the course of what follows, we will examine how in this passive night God works to correct this disposition and thoroughly dissolve these attachments so that the soul may proceed toward the spiritual aspect of this night⁹⁷. Here we have set out the reasons for why it is necessary that these initiates be led into the passive night of the senses. What remains for us to examine now is how these souls are so effected by this night and what qualities characterize these effects.

According to the Saint, God chooses to lead into this night those souls who have proven constant in their devotions and prayers, activities through which they have

⁹⁷ Kavanaugh, 312.

“exercised themselves for a time in the way of virtue”⁹⁸ and, therefore, have achieved a certain degree of sensorial detachment and interior fortitude that will assist them in enduring the passage and trials of this night. Having achieved this relative fortitude, both through their own powers and through those of divine grace, they feel, in the Saint’s words, as though “the sun of divine favor is shining most brightly upon them”⁹⁹ and yet it is precisely at this moment, when they are strongest, that they must be led into the mortifying darkness of this passive night for this strength, as we have already discussed, continues to correspond to the manifested order of being and to an often egoistic disposition; in this sensorial night the soul is purged of those imperfections pertaining to this aspect of its being. That a soul has entered this night, the Saint tells us, can be determined by the manifestation of three signs¹⁰⁰. As we will see, these signs correspond to the three signs we touched on briefly in our discussion of the *Ascent*. Here, because a close examination of them is necessary to an understanding of our subject, we will discuss them more thoroughly. Essentially, as we have just suggested, the three signs presented in the *Dark Night* are representative of the same experience or state of being, though here they are described, appropriately, from a passive point of view, or, with regard to the effects of this night on the soul passively disposed to the workings of divine grace within it, while in the *Ascent*, the point of view was more associated with the activity of the soul.

The first sign the Saint describes is a thorough lack of “satisfaction” or “consolation”¹⁰¹ either in things divine or of the creaturely order of being. Because the

⁹⁸ Ibid, 312.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 313

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 313.

objective of this passive night of the senses is to purge it of all associated imperfections, God prohibits any experience of pleasure in anything whatsoever. That this state is the effect of this purgative preparation and not some other more imperfect cause can be determined, the Saint tells us, by the fact that this general lack of desire includes even that desire for creaturely objects. To say it another way, if this dissatisfaction in things were only limited to the things of God and was not experienced with regard to the soul's disposition toward the creaturely order of being, then we could attribute its generation to another more imperfect source. This, the Saint points out, does not exclude the influence of psychological depression, or what he terms "melancholia,"¹⁰² which leads us to the second sign.

The second sign is a certain solicitude the soul experiences for its attitude toward God and a concern that it is digressing from its spiritual path and failing to serve God appropriately. These experiences preclude the presence or influence of any psychological depression because, according to the Saint, if the soul were in such a depressed state it would not have such concerns. Though this purgative "aridity", to use the Saint's term, may be intensified by a melancholic disposition, as the soul, or at least its sensorial aspect, no longer finds enjoyment in anything, it—that is, this aridity—will nonetheless continue to effect this requisite purgation and, further, a certain spiritual fortitude.

In his discussion of this second sign, the Saint tells us that the sensorial aspect of the soul experiences these aridities because "God transfers His goods and strength from sense to spirit. Since the sensory part of the soul is incapable of the goods of spirit, it remains deprived, dry and empty..."¹⁰³ We have said above that each of the sensorial and

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 314.

the spiritual orders, being one suppositum, shares, in accordance with the limits of its faculties, in what the other receives in accordance with the limits of its. What we have just quoted presents us with an apparent contradiction, but if we recognize that it was in a discussion of the sensorial aspect's inordinate and impure reception of graces given through the spiritual, a reception described as occurring prior to the soul's entrance into this night, the contradiction is resolved. There, the senses were still permitted the faculties of joy and desire, here, God withholds these faculties or the capabilities of such experiences to both purge the soul of any imperfections associated with them and, in the same movement, to initiate the correct disposition and arrangement of these aspects of its being. The sensorial here is enfeebled, in a sense, so that the spiritual be fortified¹⁰⁴.

We do not want to suggest, with this last statement, that the spirit is simultaneously being purged here as well, as we have already pointed out, there is a spiritual aspect to this passive night we will discuss later. This being said, we must remember the cooperative relationship of these aspects of the soul which allows them to influence one another. The sensorial pleasure experienced in the spiritual reception of divine grace, we saw, was an impediment to the appropriate reception of this grace and therefore the cause of a certain imperfection in the soul because neither its sensorial nor its spiritual faculties had been ordinately disposed to these graces, not yet having passed through the passive nights corresponding to their orders of being. Here, to reiterate and perhaps clarify, the sensorial being now deprived of any capacity for satisfaction or consolation, the spiritual is now able to experience any such reception of divine grace without hindrance. We point this out only to demonstrate the continued relation of influence between these two aspects of the soul's being. This spiritual fortification is a

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

result of this nocturnal purgation concomitant to that effected within the sensorial aspect of the soul, and, moreover, we should remember that it is through contemplation, the initial reception of contemplation, through what we might call its sustenance that such fortification is generated. The Saint writes:

“Ordinarily this contemplation, which is secret and hidden from the very one who receives it, imparts to the soul, together with the dryness and emptiness it produces in the senses, an inclination to remain alone and in quietude. And the soul will be unable to dwell upon any particular thought, nor will it have the desire to do so.”¹⁰⁵

Aside from demonstrating the corresponding effects this night produces in the sensorial and spiritual faculties, here we are also given a description of that type of vacuity required of the intellectual faculty we discussed in the first chapter and the attitude to which this vacuity disposes the soul. Now the senses are quieted, and the interior faculties “bound” from any movement save that which maintains this passive disposition, resulting in a certain pacification of the soul.

Finally, the soul’s passage into, or presence in this night can be discerned by its inability to engage in any ratiocinative or discursive activity. We will recall that it is to the objects of manifest multiplicity that the cognitive faculties functionally correspond. Now, however, these faculties have no such recourse for God has ceased communicating with the soul through such channels. Here, all communication occurs directly through the spirit “...by an act of simple contemplation, in which there is no discursive succession of thought.”¹⁰⁶ This is to say that through the obscurative effects of this contemplation the interior sensorial faculty of the imagination is deprived of any material with or upon

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 315.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 315.

which to work, of any footing upon which to stabilize itself. The soul now, at least in its interior sensorial aspect, is denied anything but the receipt of this contemplation, suspending it in a kind of contemplative apertion, grounding it solely in faith.

That this contemplative grace be permitted to produce the intended effect of rightly disposing the soul toward a purer faith, the soul must remain in what the Saint terms a “loving and peaceful attentiveness to God.”¹⁰⁷ As the above suggests, this is because any activity on the part of the soul at this point would only serve to obstruct the work of divine grace within it. Though individuals at this point will often begin to feel as though they have digressed from the spiritual path upon which they thought they had been so steadily advancing, they must not allow this discouragement to provoke them into returning to the ratiocinative or discursive activities to which they are accustomed for to do so would, again, effect only the very digression they are solicitous of avoiding. The more the soul is avoided of any distraction, the further or more deeply it receives “the burning of the love that this dark and secret contemplation bears and communicates...”¹⁰⁸ to the soul. Which is to say that it is through this contemplation, through this passive night of the sensorial aspect of the soul that a desire is ignited within the soul for a more intimate correspondence with God. It is this contemplative desire that will motivate the soul to endure the discouragement it feels in no longer experiencing the satisfaction it once had in performing its spiritual exercises and to dispose itself more attentively to its higher, spiritual aspect.

A few summary comments are necessary here before proceeding. It is important to keep in mind that this passive night of the senses is distinct from that of the spirit.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 317 “...una advertencia amorosa y sosegada en Dios...”

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 318. The Spanish reads: “...arde y se enciende en el espíritu el amor que esta oscura y secreta contemplación trae consigo y pega al alma...”

Many, the Saint tells us, come to this sensorial night, but not all are led on to the spiritual night, for reasons only God knows¹⁰⁹. This is significant because it reminds us that here, through the passage of this initial, sensorial stage of the night, the contemplation it imparts to the soul purges the soul and accommodates it to a more spiritual disposition, in this way preparing it for the deeper purification associated with the spiritual aspect of this night.

We point this out to reiterate both the function of this initial stage of the night and to clarify that there are, in fact, two stages or aspects to this night. This being said, we should also say again that this is not a process of strict succession. Some will experience these contemplative effects more readily and immediately than others. Given that the physicality imparted to all creatures implies a degree of individuality and distinction, each soul will experience these effects in accordance with their individual characteristics, and therefore differently from others.

Having examined the afflictive signs by which the soul's experience of this contemplative night are discerned, we will now turn to a brief examination of some of its beneficial effects.

The first benefit the Saint discusses has to do with the soul's knowledge of self and its misery (*el conocimiento de sí y de su miseria*)¹¹⁰. Having been denuded of all its superficial attachments and denied its former capacities for activity, the soul is exposed to a more accurate view of itself than it had prior to being led into this night. No longer distracted by the more exterior aspects of its devotion, the soul begins to see that it is nothing and can do nothing without the grace of God. It is through this more sincere and

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Crisógono de Jesus, 637.

accurate knowledge of itself, or, perhaps more correctly, through the humility this knowledge imparts, that the egocentric attitude it once had is corrected and the foundation of a more appropriate disposition to God is established.

Another benefit the soul experiences in the passage of this night is a deeper more accurate understanding of God, which we have touched upon above. Because the soul is now avoided of all impeding distraction, it is capable of receiving the knowledge of God that God wishes to impart to it. In expressing this notion, the Saint turns to Saint Augustine: “Let me know myself Lord, and I will know You.”¹¹¹ Its former illusionary perception of itself now corrected through the effects of this dark night or this contemplation, the soul not only has a more accurate understanding of itself, but of its relation to God as well, an understanding that is only possible when its faculties, in this case those sensorial, are, as we have said, evacuated of all that is not its devotion to God. In other words, through the evacuation of the sensorial faculties, the spiritual faculties are in a sense liberated or disencumbered and, thereby, are able to dispose themselves to the reception of divine grace accordingly.

As we have stated above, there is a certain and necessary humility imparted to the soul through this contemplation. This is important because it is through this humility that the imperfection of pride is corrected. Though the Saint offers in some detail an account of how it is that this dark night works to a similar end with regard to the other capital vices, it will suffice for our purposes to recognize the corrective influence humility has on the vice of pride and infer a similar influence this now corrected disposition will have on any imperfections associated with or occasioned by the other capital vices. In fact it is through enduring the darkness of this night that the soul begins to establish a more

¹¹¹ Kavanaugh, 323. Saint Augustine, Soliloq., lib. 2, c. 1-PL 32, 885.

habitual and sincere practice of virtue. The soul that perseveres through this night, maintaining the practice of its spiritual exercises without any gratification or satisfaction, realizes a sincerer love of God in that its motivation now is no longer the former pleasure it found in such practice and the objects associated with it, but in submitting to the will of God alone. Furthermore, in enduring the trials of this night, the soul also demonstrates a degree of fortitude and courage it could not have been capable of possessing through its former disposition so dependent on the creaturely or manifested order of being.¹¹²

Essentially, what is accomplished here in this passive night of the senses is the pacification of the four passions of joy, hope, fear and sorrow that we discussed in the previous chapter. Liberated now from their influence and from any imperfections to which this influence may lead, at least with regard to its sensorial aspect, the soul experiences a certain equilibrium that, with the virtues acquired through its passage of this night, demonstrates that it is to a degree purged and preparedly accommodated to the higher influence of the spiritual.

In concluding his treatment of the passive night of the senses, the Saint reminds us, as we mentioned above, that not all who are brought into this passive night of the senses will be led into the night of the spirit or the night of proficients. Those who are eventually led into this latter night however are often first tried further by what the Saint describes as diabolical spirits that agonize the soul with various forms of torment and temptation. Some are visited by the “spirit of fornication” through which the soul is exposed to “abominable temptations...and foul thoughts.”¹¹³ Others are subject to a spirit of blasphemy that invades the ratiocinative and imaginative faculties with blasphemous

¹¹² Ibid, 323.

¹¹³ Ibid, 328.

notions at times so powerfully delivered that the soul is very nearly brought to uttering them. And, still others are tormented by what the Saint calls, quoting Isaiah [Is. 19:14], a *spiritus vertiginis*¹¹⁴, or a spirit of vertigo, which assaults the sensorial faculties of the soul with “a thousand scruples and perplexities (escrúpulos y perplejidades) to their [these individuals] judgment so intricate that they can find satisfaction in nothing nor apply their judgment to any counsel or concept.”¹¹⁵ In accordance with what we have already seen, these torments and temptations serve both to further purge the soul of its imperfections and prepare it for advancement on its spiritual path.

One may ask why such torments and trials are necessary. We will have opportunity to treat this subject more thoroughly in what follows, for now, it will suffice to recognize that our participation in the manifested order of being implies a certain degree of contrariety since contrariety is characteristic of manifestation. If the soul is to receive any spiritual perfection, that is, if it is to be correctly disposed and rightly ordered, all aspects of its being must be brought into a kind of equilibrium, including those negative. For this equilibrium to be established, these negative potentialities, first, must be acknowledged so that they then either be corrected and integrated into this equilibration or mortified entirely. Again, we will have occasion to examine this in more detail as we proceed.

We have chosen to mention these more advanced trials for two reasons. First, if we can attempt even a slight approximation to a sympathetic reading of these passages we can see how enduring such trials would effect the humble and God-fearing disposition

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ This quotation is our own translation of the text provided in *Vida y Obras* by Crisógono de Jesus, 643. The Kavanaugh translation we have been using throughout is adequate but not as accurate regarding this passage as it tends generally to be.

mentioned above. Second, we want to demonstrate how difficult this night can be for the soul and the severity of the trials it endures in its passage, including even what could justifiably be described as a kind of madness. From our imperfect point of view, it may perhaps be somewhat beyond the limits of our capabilities to fully and accurately appreciate the torment and anguish the soul is subjected to here, nevertheless, it is worthy at least of mention before continuing on to our discussion of the passive night of the spirit, which, as the Saint tells us, is even more difficult and afflictive.

Passive Night of the Spirit

*Quien supiere morir a todo,
tendrá vida en todo.*¹¹⁶

*(They that know to die to all,
in all will have life.)*

As we saw in the previous argument, it was to accommodate the interior faculties of the sensorial aspect of the soul to the influence of the spiritual through the rectification of various imperfections that the soul was led into the passive night of the senses. This is to say that it is through the passive night of the senses that these faculties are purged and prepared for advancement into the passive night of the spirit. Similarly, the spiritual faculties of the soul, through the passage of this passive night of the spirit, are correspondingly purged and purified of any associated imperfections. As it will assist us in understanding the characteristics of this night, we will examine these imperfections briefly before continuing.

Those that have endured the passage of the night of the senses have entered the stage of proficients; however, it is important to point out that though these souls may be

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 681.

so categorized such categorization is not meant to suggest that they have been led into the passive night of the spirit. We will recall that it is through the passive night of the senses that initiates are made proficient and through the passive night of the spirit that proficient are made perfect. We point this out only to avoid any confusion. According to the Saint, these proficient are subject to two kinds of imperfection: those habitual (*habituales*) and those actual (*actuales*)¹¹⁷. To the former correspond those imperfections relating to certain attachments and habits that remain untouched by the purgative influence of the passive night of the senses. These imperfections are deeply embedded in the spirit and are not as apparent as those related to the sensorial faculties. Another type of imperfection these proficient have is what the Saint terms *hebetudo mentis*, or bluntness of mind which is characterized by “...the extraction and exteriority of the spirit...”¹¹⁸. Both of these types of habitual imperfection are possessed by all proficient and can only be corrected through the purgative influence of the passive night of the spirit.

With regard to actual imperfections, we are told that each proficient will possess them in differing quality and degree because they involve varying capacities for spiritual influence. Because these proficient have passed through the passive night of the senses they are subject to higher, more spiritual influences and communications, including those diabolical. It is at this point that the renunciation of all visions and spiritual locutions becomes necessary. Not yet having received spiritual union in God, these souls do not

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 331.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 331. This translation is a literal translation of the Spanish “...extracción y exterioridad del espíritu...” found in the texts included in *Vida y Obras de San Juan de La Cruz* of Crisógono de Jesus, 646. We cite Kavanaugh here because it is his translation with which we are working but that seems a bit too interpretive here. Kavanaugh renders the phrase “...distracted and inattentive spirit...” which, though adequate does not translate the emphasis on the exterior disposition of the soul we feel the Saint is applying here and which we feel our rendering does to a degree get across.

possess the ability to discern the true source of these communications and can easily be misled and misdirected, either, by diabolical forces working to oppose this union, or by their own imaginative faculties. Thinking themselves exceptional for receiving what they presume to be holy but what are truly unholy communications, they may fall again to the imperfections of pride and egoism. As we will see, it is only after passing through this purgative night of the spirit that the soul is prepared for receiving such communications correctly. Perhaps the most significant reason for this is that it is not until the spiritual aspect of the soul is purified that the sensorial can be, and, because the imaginative or interior sensorial faculties participate in the reception of these communications while the spirit has not yet been so purified, they do so inordinately and imperfectly.

In fact, the Saint tells us that rather than describing the sensorial faculties as being purged in the first passive night of the senses, it would be more accurate to say that there they are simply prepared and accommodated to the spiritual influences they will receive through the passage of this spiritual night and through which they will truly be purged and perfected¹¹⁹. It is this total purgation and perfection that are the objects of this passive night of the spirit, to which we will now turn.

In the first paragraph of Chapter Four of Book II of the *Dark Night*, in which the Saint begins to interpret a stanza of the poem on which the treatise is a commentary we find the following: “Understanding this stanza now to refer to contemplative purgation or nakedness and poverty of spirit (which are all about the same)...”¹²⁰ Here we find contemplation, purgation, nakedness and poverty of spirit more or less equated. We point this out because it will be necessary to keep in mind as we proceed and because, if we

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 333.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 334. The Spanish reads: “...la purgación contemplativa o desnudez y pobreza del espíritu (que todo aquí casi es una misma cosa)...”

recall that the Saint has equated this contemplation with both faith and love, we begin to distinguish a more certain and consistent significance of contemplation than we have seen previously. In the following we will examine these characteristics more closely. For now it will suffice to keep this in mind as a correct understanding of contemplation will be necessary for a similar understanding of the effects and characteristics of this night. According to the Saint, this passive night of the spirit not only involves spiritual purgation, but also a certain illumination whereby the soul receives a degree of divine wisdom. He writes: “Insofar as infused contemplation is loving wisdom of God, it produces two principal effects in the soul: it prepares the soul for the union with God through love by both purging and illumining it.”¹²¹ This leads to the question of why, if this experience includes such illumination, do we refer to it as a dark night of the soul. The Saint answers with two reasons. The first is that this supernatural, this divine wisdom transcends the faculties or abilities of the soul and the second is that through this event the soul is exposed to what the Saint terms its “baseness and impurity”¹²² (*bajeza y impureza*) which intensify the darkness of this night with pain and affliction. In elaborating on the first reason, the Saint turns to Aristotle telling us that the “clearer and more obvious divine things are in themselves, the darker and more hidden they are to the soul naturally.”¹²³ He illustrates this point by comparing this divine wisdom to the sun and the soul’s capacity for receiving it to the eye’s capacity for receiving light: the more one gazes into the light of the sun, the more one’s sight is obscured and overwhelmed. Similarly, the more an imperfect soul receives this infusion of contemplative illumination, the deeper it is led into spiritual darkness because it not only exceeds the

¹²¹ Ibid, 333.

¹²² Ibid. 335

¹²³ Ibid.

soul's natural capacity for understanding, but also because it prohibits any such understanding entirely, thereby effecting what we have previously described as a kind of blindness, this time though in the highest faculties of the soul.

With regard to the sufferings and afflictions the soul endures in this night, the Saint describes many and various kinds of which we will limit ourselves to a summary discussion of a few. In doing so we will arrive at an understanding of both the causes and characteristics of these afflictions that will be sufficient for our purposes here.

One source of these torments is the soul's imperfections themselves. Because this contemplative infusion imparts the perfection of divine wisdom to the soul, and the soul, at this stage, is still imperfect, and further, because, as we have seen, two contraries cannot co-exist simultaneously within the same subject, the soul becomes itself the crisis point between these two contraries of perfection and imperfection. Moreover, in receiving this dark ray of contemplation, the soul is exposed both to the severity of its imperfection, or, perhaps, we may say that through the illumination of the divine wisdom this contemplation imparts. It would be beneficial to turn to the Saint himself here:

“This divine and dark light causes deep immersion of the mind in the knowledge and feeling of one's own miseries and evils; it brings all these miseries into relief so that the soul sees clearly that of itself it will never possess anything else.”¹²⁴

Another source of affliction and suffering has to do with the dissolution of the soul necessary to any perfect, unitive participation in God. As this contemplative infusion works on dissolving any attachments, spiritual or sensorial, that the soul has established in its old life the soul will, and in fact must, experience a corresponding sense of being utterly dissolved prior to its entrance into its new life, a feeling which is

¹²⁴ Ibid, 336.

accompanied and intensified by a sense of having been abandoned not only by the familiar world of creatures but by even God. It feels abandoned from the world because it is no longer bound to the world and has no desire for such bondage and abandoned by God because to God it is not yet bound—a state the Saint describes as one of “terrible anguish (like hanging in midair, unable to breathe).”¹²⁵ In discussing the necessity of these afflictions and the accompanying sense of abandonment the Saint quotes Ezekiel 24:11: “Place it also thus empty on the embers that its metal may become hot and melt and its uncleanness be taken away from it and its rust consumed”¹²⁶ This the Saint interprets as referring to the imperfections of the soul being purified by the heat of contemplation: “[I]n order to burn away the rust of the affections, the soul must, as it were, be annihilated and undone in the measure that these passions and imperfections are connatural to it.”¹²⁷ Here we see that these imperfections are inherent to the soul, at least to what we might term its natural or human aspect. In effect, therefore, this purgation is very much a kind of death as each of the higher faculties of the soul is in a sense temporarily annihilated—that is, reduced to nothing, or, relatively nothing, as the divine contemplation infused into the soul remains along with its corresponding influences or effects.

Furthermore, as we mentioned briefly above, the soul, insofar as it is created, participates in the manifested world and is therefore subject to its characteristic contrariety. This is to say that the soul possesses in very simple terms both negative and positive characteristics and potentialities. It is those positive that pertain ultimately to the spiritual order of the soul’s being as it is through this order and the faculties associated

¹²⁵ Ibid, 339.

¹²⁶ Ibid. This is Kavanaugh’s translation of the Saint’s Spanish rendering of the verse.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 339.

with it that the soul is capable of any communion with the divine. Seen from this point of view, if the soul is to participate in the divine will, if its will is to be unified with the will divine, it must first be purged of its negative potential that its positive potential be fully realized. For this to occur, these negative potentialities must be acknowledged so that they then be either transformed and integrated harmoniously into the perfected soul, that is, subjugated to the divine will, or mortified entirely.

In an essay on the so-called seven deadly sins, Martin Lings discusses how these higher or spiritual faculties of the soul, those through which communion with God occur, or through which this communion is facilitated, are precisely those attacked by diabolical forces, for obvious reasons. Through the influence of these forces, the soul, as we have seen, either ignores these faculties or inordinately applies them to fields of activity that correspond strictly to the natural order, distracting them from their intended function. The higher faculties so applied Lings describes as “perverted”—that is,¹²⁸ turned away from their appropriate disposition. With regard to integrating these perverted potentialities of the soul into its higher aspect, Lings writes:

“But initiation, followed up by the devotional and ascetic practices implicit in it, opens the door to contact with the perfecting and unifying power of the Spirit whose presence demands the psychic substance shall become once again a single whole. The more or less scattered elements of this substance are thus compelled to come together; and some of them come in anger, from dark and remote hiding-places, with the infernal powers still attached to them.

¹²⁸ Martin Lings “The Seven Deadly Sins” *Studies in Comparative Religion* Vol. 5. No. 1, 1971.

From this point of view it is truer to say that Hell rises than that the mystic descends; and the result of this rising is a battle, with the soul as battlefield...”¹²⁹

These afflictions are necessarily characteristic of this purgative movement because they cleanse the soul of the illusory comforts it has established in the perverse application of its faculties, and, further, because there are forces that very much resist this cleansing, all of which occurs within the soul itself, which we can imagine as causing the soul much affliction.

There is a correlative point that is worth mentioning before we continue. In the above, it is also made apparent why this purgative activity must be enacted by God, or, better, why it is that the soul must be restrained to a strictly passive disposition with regard to such activity. Because the soul is not yet purged of its negative potentialities, it is incapable of effecting this purgation. The Saint suggests that this is another source of affliction: in such a state, the soul--apparently abandoned even by God--endures the struggle implicit in this purgation in darkness: total uncertainty regarding the outcome and with no understanding of its cause.

We bring all of this up for two reasons: one is to attempt a more thorough and adequate understanding of the characteristics of this passive night of the spirit; the other is to attempt to portray more accurately the severity of the afflictions the soul suffers in enduring this night. Having said this, it is indispensable to an accurate assessment of the texts that we recognize that this purgative process does not only bring affliction, but also, as the Saint tells us, it delivers a certain degree of illumination.

As we have discussed, the divine will is equatable to divine love which is universal. Because it is the objective of this contemplative infusion to align the soul with

¹²⁹ Ibid.

the divine will, we can also say then that through this dark night, the soul participates in the universality of divine love and the harmony or tranquility associated with it. Now, the soul is not yet perfected in the unitive event; nevertheless, it will sporadically experience intimations of this universal love and tranquility. These experiences, accompanied by the state of wretchedness in which the soul perceives itself and its utter incapacity for any activity serve to further intensify the soul's longing for and love of God:

“The touch of this divine love and fire so dries up the spirit and so enkindles the soul's longings to slake its thirst for this love that a person will go over these longings in his mind a thousand times and pine for God in a thousand ways.”¹³⁰

It is important to point out that this love is not an act of volition—that is, it does not involve an intentional application of the soul's volitional faculty—but is, rather, an effect of the contemplative infusion brought about by the movement of the Holy Spirit within the soul. This distinction is significant if we are to avoid any contradiction arising from misconceiving this night as involving any activity on the part of the soul.¹³¹ As the Saint points out: “An act of the will is such only insofar as it is free.”¹³² Overwhelmed with these afflictions and desires, the soul's intentional freedom is, in a way, lost. It can be said though that what the Saint terms the “fire” of this love operates within the volitional faculty—that is, through the volitional faculty passively disposed. It is a total occupation of the faculties that is being accomplished here: the volitional by this desire, the mnemonic by the hope and afflictions associated with it, and the intellectual with faith and the dark ray of mystical understanding this contemplation imparts.

¹³⁰ Kavanaugh, 354.

¹³¹ McMahon, 151.

¹³² Kavanaugh, 358.

What is significant in all of this is that there is a simultaneous purgation and preparation at work in the soul brought to the stage of this night. Through the afflictions associated with the former is established the erotic disposition associated with the latter. Because the following communicates all we have been discussing with a degree of efficiency and accuracy that lies beyond our capacity for paraphrase, we include it despite its length:

“...the darkness and evils the soul experiences when this light strikes are not darknesses and evils of the light but of the soul itself. And it is this light which illumines it so it may see these evils. From the beginning the divine light illumines the soul; yet at the outset it can only see through this light what is nearest--or rather within--itself, namely its own darknesses and miseries. It sees these by the mercy of God, and it did not see them before because this supernatural light did not shine in it. Accordingly, it only feels darknesses and evils at the outset. After being purged through the knowledge and feeling of these darknesses and evils, it will have eyes capable of the vision of the goods of the divine light. Once all these darknesses and imperfections are expelled, it seems that the immense benefits and goods the soul is acquiring in this happy night of contemplation begin to appear.”¹³³

Another characteristic of this contemplation worthy of attention here is its mystical quality. By “mystical” we mean that which is mysterious, or unknowable to the faculties of the soul. One reason the Saint gives for this contemplation being so is that, as pointed out above, it is infused by the Holy Spirit into the soul, and the soul cannot know or understand how this comes to be because the Holy Spirit has its motivational origins in God alone. Another reason is that it is only God as Creator that “dwells within it [the

¹³³ Ibid, 360.

soul] substantially”¹³⁴ beyond any diabolical, sensorial, or intellectual jurisdiction.

Furthermore, any accurate verbal account of receiving this contemplation is inhibited by the incapacity of the restricted terms of language to communicate that which cannot be comprehended by the intellectual faculties to which the order and application of language correspond. In other words, the discontinuity implicit in the multiplicity characteristic of language is incapable of communicating the continuity implicit in divine simplicity.

In support of this point, the Saint gives the example of an individual encountering an object the likes of which had never before been encountered and points to the difficulty this individual would have in attempting to accurately describe it. It could further be imagined that though the individual would be incapable of offering any verbal description of this object, they nonetheless could be capable of responding to this encounter, which assists us in understanding how it is one might be aware of the experience of a thing such as this contemplative infusion and yet still be incapable of describing it.

A final aspect of this passive night of the spirit that we would like to discuss before concluding is the Saint’s description of mystical contemplation as a ladder. He tells us that this description is appropriate because just as it is upon a ladder that one is able to ascend and descend, so too, through contemplation similar movements are made as what the Saint terms “the communications” this contemplation imparts “extol” (*la levantan*) the soul “in God and humiliate (*la humillan*) it within itself.”¹³⁵ We have seen the bidirectional movement the soul experiences through this contemplative infusion. The soul that humbly descends from the illusory heights of its egocentric attachments to

¹³⁴ Ibid. 368.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 371.

the world simultaneously and to the degree that it actuates such descent ascends toward a unitive participation in the divine.

According to the Saint, Helwich Teutonicus, O.P.¹³⁶ argues, this ladder of contemplation, or ladder of love, is composed of ten steps. Each of these steps pertains to a stage or degree in the mystical process leading ultimately to the unitive event. The Saint divides his discussion of these steps into two chapters, one dealing with the first five steps, the other with the last.

We will look at each of them briefly.

The first step corresponds to that general dissatisfaction in things we have seen the soul experience at its initial passage into this night. Following this the soul moves to the second step which corresponds to a certain heightened attention turned to maintaining the sincerity of its devotion. Here, the soul establishes a kind of loving and unwavering commitment to its pursuit of God, which leads it directly to the third step. On this step the soul is motivated to the performance of “good works” and at the same time is inspired with an edified hope that it will succeed in performing them. Because of its love of God, it feels however that all its works remain insufficient, and incomparable to what God deserves, further humbling the soul and correcting it from any inclination to pride. On the fourth step we find that the “spirit possesses so much energy...that it brings the flesh under control and takes as little account of it as would a tree one of its leaves.”¹³⁷ Now, rather than seeking gifts or graces from God, the soul desires to give of itself to God, even unto the point of suffering whatever afflictions to do so. At this point too, through demonstrating so sincere a devotion, the soul is often rewarded with spiritual

¹³⁶ Ibid, 373. Kavanaugh tells us that the work is titled *De Decem Gradibus Amoris Secundum Bernardum*.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 375.

communications which serve to intensify the soul's longings for God. With regard to the fifth step, we find these longings manifested as a deep and inexorable "hunger"¹³⁸ for God's proximity. The way the Saint describes this state suggests a certain ravenous quality: "On this step, *they suffer hunger like dogs and encircle the city of God.*"¹³⁹

On the sixth step the soul, motivated by the unrelenting hunger encountered on the fifth, is given to a comparable vehemence in its pursuit of God. Here, hope and the soul's now nearly perfected capacity for charity allow it to maintain this pursuit tirelessly and without restraint, leading it to the seventh step. On this step a kind of audacity is imparted to the soul. It is now permitted to exercise a degree of intimacy with God that had previously been denied it. If it retains the humility it has been given through ascending the preceding steps, it is in a sense permitted to go forth toward or to receive the divine presence. In coming to the eighth step, the soul's desire for communion in God is satisfied, at least to a degree: "If one were to remain on this step, a certain glory would be possessed in this life; and so the soul rests on it for only short periods of time."¹⁴⁰ It seems that this step corresponds in part to the good experienced and received in the passive night of the spirit. Following this step is the step of the perfect. Here, we are told simply that this ninth step is the step of those who through the "gentle and delightful ardor"¹⁴¹ (*ardor suave y deleitoso*) imparted to it by the Holy Spirit, "burn gently in God."¹⁴² This is the final step ascended in this lifetime. On ascending to the tenth step the soul is totally assumed into the divine presence. Souls that have come to

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid. 376. Italics are the Saint's and refer to lines taken from Ps. 58:7. The translation is Kavanaugh's translation of the Spanish.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 377.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

the ninth step--the Saint points out that they are few-- have been so purged through the effects of their ascent that upon separation from the body they do not pass through purgatory but rather are immediately assimilated to God.

Assisting us in understanding the nature of this assimilation and the Saint's conception of the union effected through the mystical event we have the following: "As we mentioned, this vision [here the Saint is referring to Mt. 5:8 which he has just quoted: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God."]¹⁴³ is the cause of the soul's complete likeness to God...[N]ot because the soul will have as much capacity as God-- this is impossible--but because all that it is will become like God. Thus it will be called, and shall be, God through participation."¹⁴⁴

Here we have, in short, the nature of the mystical event as we have been examining it throughout. The soul, first through actively detaching or disengaging its faculties from the created world prepares itself for then turning them toward passively receiving the necessary contemplative infusion communicated through faith and through which the soul is united in God. In summary, this contemplative infusion rightly orders the sensorial and spiritual faculties of the soul, subjugating the former to the latter, through the preparatory purgation of these faculties and rectifying their disposition to God by infusing the higher faculties with God's will so that the soul is ultimately now perfected in the love of God.

Conclusion

In concluding our examination of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and the *Dark Night*, it is important to point out that the contemplative infusion described in the latter

¹⁴³ Ibid. In the text, the Saint cites the verse in Latin, the translation here is Kavanaugh's.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 377.

corresponds to the second stage or night of the mystical process as conceived by the Saint, that is, the night of faith. Though there are communications of the unitive state to come, or the third stage of this night, it is in the books that follow, namely the *Spiritual Canticle* and the *Living Flame of Love*, that we find its fullest treatment. Also, as we pointed out with regard to the *Ascent*, what is being described by this process is not a mechanical progression from stage to stage but a spiritual transformation of the soul. Given the sequential restrictions or limitations of language, it is difficult to convey the simultaneity and cooperation of many of the movements involved in this transformation. For this reason, it is important to emphasize here that the processes described in these texts are, at least until the very point of transformation, characterized by the same contraries characteristic of all manifestation and, further, the subtleties with which they often correspond. The soul, the Saint tells, us, will likely spend years in this struggle for perfection, in alternating states of affliction and tranquility, of darkness and illumination.

Finally, we must continue to remember that the means of appropriately preparing the soul for spiritual advancement, of correctly disposing the soul's faculties toward this event is achieved first through a study of and meditation upon the life of Christ and later, or, coincidentally, an imitation of this life and the faith, hope, and charity with which it was lived, as well as the severity of the suffering it endured and overcame. What the Saint is ultimately describing then is a veritable death and resurrection of the soul. It is to the world, or the old self that the soul dies, and to the new self, or this unitive participation in God that it is resurrected. This is to say that this transformation is, and can only be, total, as the relative absolutes of life and death themselves. We point this out because if we are to understand his thought adequately, it is necessary to understand

that for the Saint, Jesus Christ is The Way to God, and it is this Way that these texts describe: the soul's disengagement from the world, through faith, to the spirit's reception and participation in divine grace.

Appendix

A Summary Overview of Some of the Epistemological and Ontological Sources for the Christian Mystical Tradition and the Work of St. John of the Cross.

In locating the ontological and epistemological origins of the development of the Western Christian mystical tradition, that is, that aspect of Western Christianity devoted to the spiritual pursuit of an immediate communion with the Absolute, we must turn not only to the Church Fathers whose formative work in attempting to express the human relation to the Divine would come to serve as a foundation for this tradition, but also to the Hellenistic and Judeo-Hellenistic intellectual context within which they were working and from which they acquired, both directly and indirectly, certain categories and cognitive strategies that would inform their thought and its expression in their attempts at conceiving of the relationship between the human and the divine. With the hope of discerning some of the ontological and epistemological sources by which the Christian mystical tradition of the West has been informed, it is to an elementary discussion of these concepts and strategies that we will devote the following. With regard to the above, Pere A.-J. Festugiere writes: “When the Fathers ‘think’ their mysticism, they platonize. There is nothing original in the edifice.”¹⁴⁵ It is appropriate then for us to turn first to Plato, in particular to his well-known allegory of the Cave.

Plato

As described there by Plato, the soul is essentially divine and is separated from its participation in Divinity by the corporeal form in which it is manifest and, through the

¹⁴⁵ Luoth, Andrew *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Deny*, Oxford : Clarendon Press ; New York : Oxford University Press, 1981, xiii.

influence of its lower, appetitive aspect, is to a degree bound to the world or the material order of being. To say it another way, the soul is of the Real, of the Good, but is separated from its participation in the Real, from its divinity, by the degree to which it is manifest, or the degree to which it adheres corporeally, that is, through the influence of the body, to the manifested world. For Plato, it is the object of philosophy, through contemplation of the Good, or of the Absolute, to lift the soul from this adherence, through reason toward contemplation, beyond the world of multiplicity and mutability, toward an ascending return to the One. As Andrew Louth points out, for Plato contemplation functions as a means to obtaining knowledge of, of knowing, as the soul once did, the supra-mundane unity of this Absolute Reality. This knowledge is not simply that of subject knowing object, a knowing which connotes a certain separation between the two terms, but is, rather, of subject becoming object, or, perhaps better said, in this Platonic context, it is knowing as subject unifying with object, as soul re-unifying with the One. Knowledge then, by way of contemplation, is, for Plato, re-union with the Absolute¹⁴⁶.

The question arises though: how is one to come to this point of contemplation? In Plato's discussion of the Cave is to represent that which corresponds to the sensible world, or that aspect of our being that participates in and is contingent upon the material world. And, further, that only in turning from this world does the soul begin the ascent toward "...the region of the intelligible..." and ultimately a perception of the "...essential Form of Goodness..."¹⁴⁷ or the Absolute from which all things proceed. That is, the soul must be re-directed, must detach itself from the sort of unreal quality of the material

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 2-5.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 6-7.

world if it is to initiate any ascent toward the immutable reality of the One. This detachment is described more fully in the *Phaedo* where we are told one must deny or refuse any recourse to the body and rely solely upon reason for delivering the soul into the absolute reality of the One.

This is not all. Further in the text we find that, given our corporeality, “pure knowledge [that is, pure union with the Absolute] is impossible”¹⁴⁸ and therefore can either not be had at all, or only at that posthumous point when the union between body and soul is dissolved. In other words, the farther we are from any adherence to our corporeal aspect and its various appetites, the further we proceed in coming to knowledge of or union with the Absolute.

This process of purification, this “practice of dying”¹⁴⁹ (Louth’s translation of the phrase *melete thanatou*) whereby the soul begins to detach itself from any corporeal dependence, is composed of two dimensions. One is the moral; through the practice of the virtues of justice, prudence, temperance, and courage, the soul, by way of its higher, rational aspect, begins to gain ground on and dominance over its lower appetitive aspect, allowing it to advance undistracted toward contemplation. It is the passage through this dimension of corporeal purification, the practice of these virtues, that prepares the soul for continuing to the second and higher dimension of intellectual purification by means of dialectic.

Mathematics and dialectic function for Plato as the most adequate and efficient courses of study for preparing the soul for contemplation, as it is through the practice of these two disciplines that the soul comes to learn how to approach and engage the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 7.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 8.

immaterial in its pursuit of pure essence and the Absolute or the Idea of the Good. As Louth writes: “...both mathematics and dialectic abstract from what the senses present to us; they accustom the mind to deal with objects apart from the senses, pure reality...”¹⁵⁰ But it is not solely a process of abstraction. This practice of dialectics is accompanied by the presence and practice of love, the function of which is to lead the soul to a recognition of true or ideal Beauty. In his description of this process of recognition of and encounter with ideal Beauty as it is presented in the Symposium, Bernard McGinn equates this Beauty with the Good, or the Absolute¹⁵¹.

It is through the practice of love, or what might be described as an erotic contemplation, that the soul prepares for its encounter with the Good. First, there is the love¹⁵² of a beautiful form, described by Diotima as that of a beautiful body, then, the lover begins to recognize and love all forms beautiful. Such recognition leads to a love of souls, and finally to a love of knowledge which, through this erotic contemplation, will lead the soul to a sudden revelation of and encounter with Ideal Beauty, a beauty which for Diotima is immutable, eternal, beyond the comprehension of imagination, of location and contingency, “...uniform and consistent, and mono-eidic with itself...”¹⁵³ and as such remains the “consummation” of the soul’s endeavors: a return to the Good, the One from which it came.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 9.

¹⁵¹ McGinn, 26.

¹⁵² With McGinn we feel it is important to recognize that this love is not, in fact must not be, an egoistic love whose ultimate objective is self-satisfaction as such a love would indicate a continued adherence of the soul to the body through and with which the ego, that is, the individual is identified, but is rather a love of giving over of one’s self to the contemplation of the Good in an act of creation, it is an “...engendering and begetting upon the beautiful...” from which the virtues are born.

¹⁵³ Louth, 11. Another example of Plato’s apophatic perception of the Good occurs in the Republic, 508 C- 509 B, where it is qualified as “...something beyond truth and knowledge...” and “...beyond being...”.

We are far from fully examining the extension of Plato's thought regarding the soul and its re-unification with the Good; however, in what we have already discussed, we are already able to discern a certain movement, certain procedural characteristics – purgative detachment from the sensible world through the development and practice of moderating virtues; the purgative function of reason through dialectic which leads the soul to contemplation; the necessary and erotic function of this contemplation; the absolute transcendence of the One and the at times apophatic perspective from which the One is described--characteristics that will both directly and indirectly prove of great significance and utility both to the Church Fathers and to those associated with the historical trajectory of Christian mysticism in general, in their attempts at investigating and comprehending their faith.

This being said, we must also recognize that it would be an oversimplification to suggest that the perspective of Plato and the varying perspectives of the Church Fathers are equivalent for there are significant differences. One example can be found in the notion of the soul and the quality of this process of re-unification with the Good, or the Absolute. For Plato, the soul possesses a divine quality that is inherent to it, is separated from the divine by its corporeal manifestation in the world and seeks a return to the divinity of the Absolute. It is the objective of philosophy and the responsibility of the philosopher, therefore, to realize this return. Though there are passages in Plato that suggest a kind of divine grace or assistance in accomplishing this objective¹⁵⁴, nowhere in Plato's work is such grace or assistance presented as explicitly necessary as it would become in the Western Christian mystical tradition in which we find that the process of

¹⁵⁴ McGinn, 30. cites the "sudden" quality of the philosopher's encounter with the Beautiful in the Symposium, and also the presence of the "beautiful beloved" in assisting the philosopher in coming to contemplation as examples.

obtaining to any union with God, and this union itself, must ultimately occur through God's grace alone. We will come to this point later on.

Another related point of difference is of course the presence and mediating function of Christ and the importance to some of the figures associated with the Western Christian mystical tradition of the imitation of Christ as necessary to approaching any experience of the mystical event. These differences are noteworthy because in attempting to trace the development of Christian mysticism they compel us to examine how this differential gap has been traversed, or how it was that the strategies described by Plato in obtaining to this union with the Absolute came to be applied to the Christian context in which the Church Fathers were working. In attempting to answer these questions two figures stand out as indispensable: Philo of Alexandria and Plotinus. Though it would be beyond the scope of our endeavors to offer a thorough description of their influence on the development of Christian mysticism, it seems to us essential to at least offer an elementary outline of this influence.

Philo

Philo has served the development of Christian mysticism in various ways, one of which, and perhaps most significantly, is in his being the first to apply Greek philosophical strategies to an allegorical exegesis of the Bible¹⁵⁵. Scriptural events for Philo were to be read not only on a literal level, they were to be interpreted as symbolizing certain truths that for Philo are capable, if contemplated correctly, of leading the soul toward communion with God¹⁵⁶. Among the Church Fathers, and even among

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 36.

¹⁵⁶ Louth, 29-30.

later mystics of the Western Christian tradition, this allegorical-anagogical approach to exegesis would be widely utilized and applied in their investigations of scripture.

Another way in which Philo's thought would come to accommodate a Christian context is through his notion or conception of the Logos as being the son of God, a revelation of God's power, and the necessary mediator between the supremely transcendent divinity of God and the world--all conceptions that would be associated with Christ in Christian attempts at understanding Christ's significance, the significance of our relationship to Christ, and, by extension our relationship to God, or the Father. Furthermore, related to Philo's conception of the Logos is his epistemological strategy for obtaining to any knowledge of God. Regarding Philo's thought on this point, Louth writes: "For Philo God is unknowable in Himself and is only made known in His works...His essence cannot be encompassed by human conceptions...God can only be known as he relates Himself to us"¹⁵⁷ which is done through the Logos. There is God as God is, which is beyond any human capacity to know, and God as God reveals God's self to us, which we are able to know only to the degree that our limited human capacity allows. Here we have two points that would resonate throughout Western Christian mysticism: one, this apophatic approach to God as God is, or God's essence, and two, the divine grace implicit in the idea that the only knowledge we can have of God is that which has been revealed to us by God through the Logos, or Christ.

To summarize, it is through the Logos and only through the Logos, or God's activity, that God is revealed to us, a revelation upon which any experience of God necessarily depends. This is to say that ultimately, the soul can only prepare itself to receive God's grace, that it has no power to initiate such reception, and, therefore, that it

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 19.

is capable of only a strictly passive participation in this preparation –an idea that foreshadows the conception many Christian mystics would have of the soul’s participation in this union: passive reception by way of active preparation.

Philo’s conception of this preparatory process Louth appropriately divides into three movements¹⁵⁸. The soul must pass through each of them if it is to come to any experience of God or divine revelation. The first is conversion from a sort of pantheistic attitude that regards the universe itself as divine to an attitude that recognizes God as the single, wholly transcendent creator of the universe. We should point out that the emphasis here is not so much on what is renounced, as Philo was understandably addressing the attitudes of his time, but on what is accepted. The second movement is the pursuit and attainment of self-knowledge. Unlike Plato, Philo does not regard the soul as essentially divine. It is created, and as such is entirely contingent upon God’s creative grace. This is to say that the process of knowing the self is not the process of coming to know one’s essential divinity, as it was for Plato, but, rather, is the process of coming to know that without God, the self is essentially nothing. “And this is nature’s law: he who has thoroughly comprehended himself, thoroughly despairs of himself, having as a step to this ascertained the nothingness in all respects of created being. And the man who has despaired of himself is beginning to know Him that is.”¹⁵⁹

We will come to self-abnegation as an aspect of this process shortly. The third and final movement of this passage is the contemplation of Scripture--God’s Word as it has been revealed-- as a means of preparing the soul for developing a more hopeful disposition toward the reception of the Word, or toward receiving the gift of divine

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 24-26.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 25.

illumination. For Philo, this point of contemplation may be the ultimate point in the soul's pursuit of communion with God, for, again, any such communion is beyond the powers of the human soul and entirely dependent upon God's grace. Philo's emphasis here, in contrast to Plato, is not so much on the preparation and activity of the soul, though necessary, but rather the graceful intervention of God.

In examining these preparatory stages to contemplation we do discern certain correspondences to Plato's work: the recognition of a power greater than that of the material universe, the necessary function of contemplation in coming to any communion with this power, and the presence and function of the Logos to name a few, but it is perhaps rather to the points of divergence here that we ought to turn in tracing the origins and development of mysticism in the Church Fathers.

One such point of difference is in Philo's conception of self-knowledge and how such knowledge is to serve in approaching any experience of God. For Philo, to know ourselves we, first, must focus our attentions inward, away from the material order of being. Then, when we begin to recognize that we too are created, we might come to the simultaneous recognition that we are creature, and as such are beings entirely contingent upon the creative grace of God and are therefore, essentially nothing unto ourselves alone. The process of knowing oneself then, in essence, must ultimately and necessarily be a process of self-abnegation, a process of making oneself nothing. As we previously discussed, for Plato our energies must be turned away from the created world if we are to initiate any movement toward a return to the Absolute; however, for Plato, the objective of this detachment is to release the soul from any bondage to the corporeal order of things so that the soul's inherent divinity might be liberated to a dialectico-intellectual pursuit of

a contemplative re-union with the Good. In other words, for Plato, the soul is, in its purest form, divine, while for Philo far from being essentially divine, the soul is essentially *nothing* without the grace of God and must realize itself as such if there is to be any reception of this grace. Though we risk repetition, it is important to point this out because this equivalence, at least initially, between self-knowledge and self-abnegation and their necessary and preparatory function in approaching any union with the Absolute would come to characterize much of how the mystical process is conceived in the Western Christian mystical tradition.

Another noteworthy point at which Philo differs in his thinking from Plato is in his conception of the Absolute and the nature of any experience of It. As we suggested, in contrast to Plato, for whom the ultimate objective of contemplation is an encounter with the impersonal and abstract divinity of the Good, or of the Realm of Ideas, for Philo, the objective of contemplation is to prepare the soul for reception of divine revelation given through the Logos by the grace of a personal though wholly transcendent God. As Louth writes: “God is for him [Philo] not only a philosophical principle, he is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a God who reveals Himself.”¹⁶⁰ To reiterate, God, for Philo, is unknowable except by the powers through which God reveals God’s self to us. We cannot know God as God is, as wholly transcendent, God will not be limited to any position of objectivity and therefore, because of this utter transcendence, it is not within the limits of human potential to know God’s essence. To say it another way, it is because we are human, because we are creature, that any essential knowledge of God is beyond our capacity and is possible only through God’s providence. In our discussion of Plato, we noted evidence of a kind of grace in his conception of an encounter with the

¹⁶⁰ Louth, 19.

Beautiful, with the Absolute, but here, in Philo, the necessity of God's grace in the experience of any such encounter is made explicit. Any access to God is given by God alone and through the power and grace of God alone. It is for the human, for the creature only to prepare for such reception. We bring this point up because here, once again, we find in Philo further examples of an ontological and epistemological disposition that the Church Fathers would assume in their investigations of the relationship between the human and the divine: one cannot act upon God, one must rather yield, wholly, to God's action.

Though we have offered only a superficial examination of Philo's thought here, it is sufficient for meeting our objective of demonstrating an existing correspondence between Philo's work and thought and that of the Church Fathers responsible for initiating and developing the mystical tradition of the West. This being said, we will turn now to Plotinus.

Plotinus

Central to Plotinus' thought is his conception of the material or visible order of reality as being contingent upon a hierarchy composed of three transcendent hypostases or principles which we list here in descending order: the One, the Intellect, and the Soul. Beginning with the lowest order we have the Soul, which corresponds to the human order of being. It is the order of sensible reality and ratiocination, the order of the daily life.¹⁶¹ Beyond the Soul, we find the Intellect of which Louth writes: "Here knower and known are one, here knowledge is intuitive: it is not the result of seeking and finding, with the possibility of error, but a possession, marked by infallibility."¹⁶² As such, the Intellect

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 38.

¹⁶² Ibid.

can be compared to Plato's realm of Forms; however, for Plotinus, this Intellectual order is not the highest order for it too is subject to and characterized by a multiplicity that, though it be of a more subtle quality than the multiplicity of the material order, necessarily denies it any such position¹⁶³. Even if there is an epistemic union between subject knowing and object known, there is still subject and object, there is still a plurality of Forms to be known. And, further, though subject and object are unified here, they are not Unity. This is to say, unification implies at the very least the multiplicity of a duality, of the terms unified, and so though they may be unified, they themselves are not, nor is their unification, the Unity to which their unification refers and by which it is qualified.

This Unity, for Plotinus, belongs to the highest term of the hierarchy, the One, which is the first principle from which all things proceed and upon which all things, even being itself, are contingent. The One is beyond being, beyond knowledge, beyond any predicate whatever and as such is utterly transcendent. At the same time however, as the source of all things, that through and by which all things have or participate in being, it is utterly immanent. In the words of Plotinus: "Generative of all the Unity [the One] is none of all; neither thing nor quality nor quantity nor intellect nor soul; not in motion, not at rest, not in place, not in time; it is self-defined, unique in form, or, better, formless"¹⁶⁴ and, he continues, "The One is absent from nothing and from everything."¹⁶⁵ The One, through its total immanence, "is absent from nothing", in its transcendence, "from everything."

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Plotinus as quoted by Louth, 38

¹⁶⁵ Plotinus as quoted by McGinn, 52.

These three hypostases communicate or correspond through a two-part movement of emanation and return or conversion.¹⁶⁶ From the One proceeds the Intellect, and from the Intellect proceeds the Soul, itself composed of a higher and lower, or a Spiritual and Natural aspect, from the latter of which emanates the material order.¹⁶⁷ In describing this correspondence, Plotinus gives us the image of a circle whose center is the One. From this point of Unity all being projects in what we might describe as spherico-concentric undulations which, as described above, proceed through increasing degrees of multiplicity toward the level of material being, the furthest point from the center. Or, to say it another way, it is from the simple unity of the One that the complex multiplicity of the many proceeds. Here, it is not that the center is everywhere and the circumference nowhere, for, being the One, it denies all location, even that of *everywhere*, but is rather that the center is nowhere and the circumference everywhere¹⁶⁸. The One is immaterial, and, as we said above, is as transcendent as it is immanent, therefore, it will not be located or restricted to any location within the spatio-temporal realm upon which material being is necessarily contingent. We risk digression here. What is important to recognize in this is that the One is the center from which all being proceeds and to which all being tends: emanation and return.

How is the soul to achieve this return? The way is again through the hypostases: from incorporate soul to Soul incorporeal, from Soul incorporeal to the Intellect, and from the Intellect to the One.¹⁶⁹ For the individual soul, this movement is through, or, we

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. pg. 46.

¹⁶⁷ Louth, 39.

¹⁶⁸ This idea of the center as Absolute or First Principle being nowhere and the circumference of this center as being, or all created being is an inversion of the variously cited idea of the center as Absolute being everywhere and the circumference as being nowhere that has been proposed by Rene Guenon's; however, we have been unable to locate the source.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 39.

might even say is, loving contemplation. It is for us to turn inward, away from the multiplicity of the material order of things, toward our center, or, better, towards that central aspect of our being which is not ours individually but which participates in and in a sense grounds our being to the One. This act of introspection Plotinus compares to the act of a sculptor revealing the sculpture's form. It is a kind of cutting away of that which defiles the soul; it is a purifying of the soul with the objective of simplifying it toward a total participation in the simple Unity of the One.

Louth points out too that this inward movement is also an ascent.¹⁷⁰ In other words, the movement of ascent unto the One is the same as this centripetal, erotic, contemplative introspection. The farther the soul moves inward toward its center, the higher it ascends toward the Intellect through which it might approach the One.

Ultimately, the soul's endeavor is to pursue its true self, or, its essential identity through the purificatory process of knowing itself whereby it re-discovers or re-centers itself to the center of the One, a pursuit McGinn describes as the attempted realization of "...the supranoetic loving union that is the soul's deepest reality."¹⁷¹ Eugene A. Maio puts it more clearly:

"The individual human soul's fundamental task is to make the Divine its center, to realize the presence of the Divine within it. By a peculiar mental effort the soul, by stripping away all obstacles, can achieve this act of inward unity. When it does, it is momentarily at least identified with the supreme Unity of the One. 'This is the good,' says Plotinus in the sixth Ennead, 'and there is no better.'" ¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 40.

¹⁷¹ McGinn, 54.

¹⁷² Maio, Eugene A. *St. John of the Cross: The Imagery of Eros*, Madrid: Colección Plaza Mayor Scolar, 1973, 33.

All of what we have seen of Plotinus so far--the mystical event the soul pursues as a kind of unitive re-centering into the One, the utter transcendence of the One, the necessity of erotic contemplation--can be traced to Plato, his intellectual master. Yet Philo's thought is not Plato's thought and it would be a mistake to reduce Plotinus' work to a kind of Platonic reiteration. One point of difference that is particularly remarkable and that will find application in the Western Christian mystical tradition is his conception of self-consciousness as impediment to any return to the Unity of the One.

For Plotinus, in keeping with Plato, the purification of the soul is to be achieved through the practice of the virtues as such practice assists in effecting an interior harmony. As we have seen, however, this is not all, initial purification, initial harmony or equilibration serve a preparatory function themselves, which is to advance the soul toward a purification of the soul from any engagement in its higher intellectual aspect. As we mentioned above, it is the Intellectual principle that precedes the One, they are not identical, and so the soul must purify itself even of the Intellectual if it is to advance from the Intellectual unto any engagement with the One. For Plotinus, the simplicity of the One is such that it denies even intellection, for, as we have already pointed out, even on the level of the Intellect there is multiplicity.

For the soul to be unified with the One it must achieve this degree of simplicity. To do so the soul must not only be purified of its cognitive and intellectual faculties, but also of its self-consciousness, as an awareness of the self is also the product or effect of these faculties and as such is indicative of at least the multiplicity of the duality present in the self-conscious soul, a duality of which the two terms are both soul: the soul as it is perceiving itself, and the soul as it is perceived by itself. It is as if Plotinus has brought

us, here, to the final point of multiplicity, the simplest duality, and yet it is a duality, and as such, is not the total simplicity the soul desires in the One. To engage this simplicity the soul must perform a movement of volitional ecstasy, a movement of the volition ecstatic. There must be a passage from the soul's self as it corresponds to the order of multiplicity, to the soul's Self as it is within the Unity of the One. Our language begins to fail us here. Prepositions do not hold where there is no epistemic differential, where there is no distance. In Plotinus, we find that the mystical event is such, is mysterious, because in engaging in this simplicity, in the ecstatic dissolution of itself whereby the soul yields to be taken up into this union, into its true Self, the soul cannot know this union precisely because it has become it and, therefore, there is no longer any distinction through which to know: "to see the divine as something external is to be outside of it; to become it is to be most truly in beauty...This is why in that other sphere, where we are deepest in the knowledge by intellection, we are aware of none" and further "Soul must see in its own way; this is by coalescence, unification; but in seeking thus to know the Unity it is prevented by that very unification from recognizing that it has found; it cannot distinguish itself from the object of this intuition"¹⁷³ Here, Plotinus explains why an apophatic disposition to such union is necessary, why it is, as we will be told by certain mystics of the Christian tradition, that such communion must be pursued not through knowing, but this identical unknowing.

We have offered a summary of some of the epistemological and ontological positions and conceptions that would come to influence the thought of the Church Fathers and by extension attempts by later figures within the Christian tradition at approaching an

¹⁷³ Plotinus as quoted by Louth, 50. It may be of some use in understanding this point if we consider how we might describe who we are if we were prohibited in this description from referring at all to the material or physical order of being, to that of us which corresponds to this order of being.

understanding of the human relationship to the divine. This being said, there is much that we have left untreated that would be necessary to include in a more thorough discussion of the topic, such as Plato's emphasizing the pain existing in the process of the soul's acclimation to the Good, or, similarly, Plotinus' conception of the terror and dread implicit in the soul's volitional diffusion into the One--both conceptions related to or characteristics of the mystical process that have come to have a significant presence in the epistemological and ontological dispositions of the Western Christian mystical tradition. Furthermore, we have avoided offering any particular examples of authors associated with this tradition whose work directly corresponds to the work of those examined above--St. Augustine's adaptation and application of Plotinus' inward ascent, for example, or the apophatism central to the work of Pseudo-Dionysius--simply because to have treated of these correspondences with any adequacy and depth would have led us too far afield. In the above, our objective was not to demonstrate the ontological and epistemological presence of Platonic and Neo-platonic sources in the work of the Church Fathers and the development of Western Christian mysticism: such a presence is so apparent that it requires no demonstration. What we hoped to do, at least to a very basic degree, was to examine certain aspects or characteristics of these ontological and epistemological positions that for us correspond most significantly to this Christian mystical context.

Saint John of the Cross

One figure of the Western Christian mystical tradition whose work demonstrates how the Platonic and Neo-platonic epistemological and ontological positions discussed above came to be transformed and adapted to this Christian context is Saint John of the

Cross. Though we do not know if the Saint was directly familiar with the work of the authors whom we have treated, we do know that he was at least indirectly exposed to their work during the course of his Arts and Theological studies at the University of Salamanca, as we had occasion to point out in chapter one.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, as E. Allison Peers points out, the works of St. John of the Cross themselves testify to a high degree of familiarity with the Christian mystical tradition from and within which he was working¹⁷⁵, a tradition, as we have seen, that was deeply informed by Platonic and Neo-Platonic conceptions.

Though it would be a valuable undertaking to examine the whole of the Saint's work for evidence of any Platonic or Neo-Platonic presence in his thought and approach, here, we will restrict ourselves to discussing this presence in three particular aspects of the Saint's conception of the mystical path toward spiritual union in God: First, we will look at his conception of the human soul, its composition. Second, we will examine the importance, in the initial stage of taking up this path, of the soul's purgation from any adherence to the corporeal or material order of being, and finally, we will look briefly at the Saint's conception of the mystical event, that is, how he defines what this spiritual union in God is. We have chosen to restrict ourselves to these three topics because they are all both central to the Saint's work and indicative of at least an indirect correspondence to Platonic and Neo-platonic sources. This being said, we will now begin with a discussion of the Saint's conception of the human soul.

For the Saint, as we have seen, the human soul holds an intermediary position between the spiritual and corporeal orders of being, possesses both spiritual and sensorial

¹⁷⁴ Crisógono de Jesus, 56.

¹⁷⁵ Tr. E. Allison Peers, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*. New York: Triumph Books, 1991.

faculties and is susceptible to both spiritual and sensorial influence. Though we risk repetition, it may serve here to review the nature of these faculties as it will facilitate an understanding of our topic at hand. Intellect, will and memory function inter-dependently as the spiritual faculties of the soul and correspond respectively to the three cardinal virtues of faith, hope, and love. The sensorial faculties of the soul are divided into two categories: interior and exterior. The former include fantasy and imagination, and the latter the quintipartite senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch¹⁷⁶.

As we have seen, it is the objective of the mystical process to order these faculties of the soul, or the soul's application or employment of and disposition toward them in such a way that they are capable of receiving the influence of and acting in accordance to the will of God, which is ultimately what characterizes the mystical event of the soul's utter and total conformation to God's will. We will discuss the nature of this union later on. Here, what we want to point out is the similarity we find between the Saint's conception of the composition of the human soul and that of the authors discussed above. In all of them we see the soul holding an intermediary position between the corporeal and the spiritual orders of being, a position from which it is open to both corporeal and spiritual influence and a position that must ultimately be oriented toward the spiritual order if it is to proceed toward any union with the Absolute. This is not to say that we can identify the Saint's conception of the composition of the soul with that of the authors discussed above as these conceptions all differ significantly one from another. It is to say though that the structural similarity we see here demonstrates a Platonic or Neo-platonic presence in the Saint's work, a presence that is further elucidated if we look to how the Saint conceived of the soul's relationship to God. In *The Living Flame of Love* we are

¹⁷⁶ Perrin, 21.

told that “...the soul’s center is God.”¹⁷⁷ God is the soul’s center not as a kind of composite part of the soul, for from the Saint’s perspective, God is incomprehensible or illimitable and, therefore, is beyond the limitation implied in any division, such as that implicit in the notion of any part, nor is this center to be considered in a locative sense, God being beyond any spatio-temporal contingency, rather, God is the center metaphorically, or, we can say that the idea or conception of a spatially oriented center serves to symbolize the Saint’s conception of God as center: all manifestation, even being itself, proceeds from God and as such is contingent upon God’s creative grace, much the same way that all the points of the circumference of a circle are contingent upon its center. To say it another way, all forms of manifestation are equally dependent upon God for their being much the same way that all points of a circumference are equidistant from the center they imply. One way, then, of describing the mystical process as it is for Saint John of the Cross is as a kind of centering of the soul, or, as that process by which the soul finds concentricity in and through the grace of God: “When it [the soul] has reached God with all the capacity of its being and the strength of its operation and inclination, it will have attained to its final and deepest center in God...”¹⁷⁸ In considering this aspect of the Saint’s thought, we cannot help but recall Plotinus and his conception of the One as center and of the soul’s unitive ecstasy within the One as such. Again, these conceptions are not the same, but their resemblance is consistent enough to justify a claim of a Plotinian influence on or presence in the Saint’s work.

Another point that is relevant here is the Saint’s notion of the initial stage of the mystical passage from the old to the new self, that is, the self as it is without union in

¹⁷⁷ Kavanaugh 583.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

God, and that as it is within this union. As we have seen, Plato, Philo, and Plotinus all have in common the notion that for the soul to proceed to any engagement with the Absolute, it must first purge itself of all subservient attachment to the corporeal or material order of being, as discussed in our examination of the first book of the *Ascent*. Because we have treated this topic already, we will avoid the needless repetition of offering a similar treatment here. What is important to recognize is that this notion of the soul's preliminary or preparatory purgation of its attachment to the material order, though expressed in differing forms, is as fundamental to the work of Plato, Philo, and Plotinus, as it is to the work of Saint John of the Cross.

One final aspect of the Saint's work we would like to address is that of his conception of the mystical event, or that point at which the soul receives spiritual union in God. Though we have previously discussed this in full, we will offer a brief summary to bring the relationship between the work of the Saint and that of those authors we have been treating of here into a more immediate relief.

As we have seen, for the Saint, all creatures, in being creatures, participate in a "substantial union" with God—that is, that union which is implicit in that grace of God by which all things, even being itself, are sustained in their being; it is that union by which being is "conserved" and is both a natural and a constant union. All things have God as their center. Apart from this substantial union is a spiritual or supernatural union, which is not constant and which obtains only where there is a "likeness of love." This union is appropriately termed the "union of likeness" and is achieved through the soul's total submission to the will of God through love: "When the soul completely rids itself of what is repugnant and unconformed to the divine will, it rests transformed in God

through love.” And further: “a man must strip himself of all creatures and of his actions and abilities (of his understanding, taste and feeling) so that when everything unlike and unconformed to God is cast out, his soul may receive the likeness of God, since nothing contrary to the will of God will be left in him, and thus he will be transformed in God.”¹⁷⁹

What is required for this union then is a total effacement of the self, not only of those aspects of the self that pertain to the corporeal order, but a total self-abnegation or emptying of the self as a means of creating a kind of void or vacuity by and into which God’s likeness may be received and the self, through love, transformed. Here, we see a division between that aspect of our being through which we participate in God naturally, and that through which we participate in God supernaturally, or, mystically.

In Plato, and in Plotinus, though differently, we saw, if we use the terms of Saint John of the Cross, what we could describe as a kind of substantial divinity of the soul. That is, the soul for them is substantially, or essentially, divine and is obstructed from experiencing this divinity by its adherence to the corporeal order and the bodily appetites that secure this adherence. But there is more. In Plotinus especially, it is not only the soul’s participation in the corporeal order of being that obstructs any union with the One, but also its participation in the Intellect. As for Saint John of the Cross, for Plotinus, all discursive thought, all intellection, even that by which the self recognizes itself, must be annulled if the soul is to be unified with the One.

This total self-effacement or self-abnegation, though of a different kind, is also a central aspect of Philo’s work, as we have pointed out: it is through a self-abnegative recognition that, ultimately, the soul sees that it is nothing. We also see traces of Philo’s thought in the Saint’s insistence that God as God is cannot be known through human

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 116.

activity—that is, through human action: “No creature, none of its actions and abilities can reach or express God’s nature.”¹⁸⁰ Rather, any communion with God must in the end come from the will and grace of God alone.

A final aspect of the Saint’s thought regarding this union that is relevant here is his conception of love as necessary to the contemplative disposition the soul must have if it is to receive any intimate communion with God. If we recall our discussion of the Saint’s notion of love, we will remember that the more the soul loves God, the more open it is to the reception of God’s grace and the more it is in conformity with God’s will. This is to say that the higher the degree of the soul’s love for God, the closer the soul comes to “total supernatural union and transformation in God.”¹⁸¹ This is to say, again, that for Saint John of the Cross, this union must essentially and ultimately be an erotic union, as we have seen that it is for both Plato and Plotinus above.

Before closing, we want to emphasize again that it was not our intention to identify or even equate the onto-epistemological conceptions of Saint John of the Cross with those associated with Platonic and Neo-Platonic modes of thought. There are differences that are as apparent as they are fundamental: the mystical approach of St. John of the Cross is wholly oriented by a Christian concept of the Absolute, of God as revealed through Jesus Christ. Without denying these differences, we do feel, however, that we can say that what we have offered above does testify to at least a correspondence of form, if not content. This is to say that though the conceptions of the mystical event for these authors all differ in significant ways, there are certain characteristics of their thought that, on a deeper level, correspond. These include structural characteristics upon

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 116

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 116

which their notions of the mystical event find support: the significance of the disposition of the soul, the importance of self-abnegation, erotic contemplation, all of these concepts hold throughout, distinct, but not separate.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A Benedictine of Stanbrook Abbey. *Medieval Mystical Tradition and Saint John of the Cross*. Westminster: The Newman Press, 1954.
- Ángel Valente, José; Lara Garrido, José., eds. *Hermenéutica y Mística: San Juan de La Cruz*. Madrid: Editorial Tecnos, 1995.
- Barrientos del Niño Jesus, Urbano. *Purificacion y Purgatorio: Doctrina de San Juan de la Cruz Sobre el Purgatorio, a la Luz de Su Sistema Místico*. Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 1960.
- Bishop, Donald H., ed. *Mysticism and the Mystical Experience*. Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1995.
- Burrows, Ruth. *Ascent to Love: The Spiritual Teaching of St. John of the Cross*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1987.
- C. Nieto, José. *Mystic, Rebel, Saint: A Study of St. John of the Cross*. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1979.
- Crisógono de Jesus, P. *Vida y Obras de San Juan de La Cruz*. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1973.
- . *San Juan de La Cruz: El Hombre-El Doctor-El Poeta*. Barcelona: Editorial Labor, 1946.
- Colby, Frederick, S. *Subtleties of the Ascension: Early Mystical Sayings on the Prophet Muhammad's Heavenly Journey*. Compiled by Abu 'Abd al-Rahman Sulami. Louisville: Fons Vitae. 2006.

- Dicken, Trueman. *The Crucible of Love: A Study of the Mysticism of St Teresa of Jesus and St John of the Cross*. London: Dartman, Longman and Todd Ltd. 1963.
- Dombrowski, Daniel A. *St. John of the Cross: An Appreciation*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1992.
- Fernández Leborans, María Jesús. *Luz y Oscuridad en la Mística Española*. Málaga: Cupsa Editorial, 1978.
- Frost, Bede. *Saint John of the Cross*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937.
- Grant, Patrick. *Literature of Mysticism in Western Tradition*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983.
- Green, Deirdre. "St. John of the Cross and MYstical Unknowing." *Religious Studies*. Vol. 22. No. 1, 1986: pgs. 29-40.
- Jotisky, Andrew. *The Carmelites and Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Georgia, Harkness. *Mysticism: Its Meaning and Message*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973.
- Katz, Steven T., ed. *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Kavanaugh, Kieran. *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*. Washington D.C.: ICS Publications, 1973.
- Lings, Martin. "The Seven Deadly Sins." *Studies in Comparative Religion*. Vol. 5. No.1, 1971.
- Louth, Andrew. *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition from Plato to Denys*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.

- McMahon, John, J. *The Divine Union in the Subida del Monte Carmelo and the Noche Oscura of Saint John of the Cross*. Diss. Wahingto, 1941.
- Maio, Eugene A. *St. John of the Cross: The Imagery of Eros*. Madrid: Colección Plaza Mayor Scholar, 1973.
- María Briñas, Ángel. “La Vida de San Juan de la Cruz.” *El Ciervo*. Year 40. No. 485/486, 1991: pgs. 5-10
- May, Gerald G. *The Dark Night of the Soul*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2004.
- McGinn, Bernard. *The Foundations of Mysticism*. New York: Crossroad, 1992.
- Mondello, Geoffrey K. *The Metaphysics of Mysticism: A Commentary on the Mystical Philosophy of St. John of the Cross*. Geoffrey K. Mondello, 2011.
- McGreal, O. Carm. *At the Fountain of Elijah: The Carmelite Tradition*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999.
- Murphy, John J. “St John of the Cross and the Philosophy of Religion: Love of God and the Conceptual Parameters of a Mystical Experience.” *Mystics Quarterly*. Vol. 22. No 4, 1996: pgs. 163-186.
- O’Rourke, Fran. *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Panakal, Justin. ed. *St. John of the Cross: Studies on His Life, Doctrine and Times*. Kerala, India: Jyothir Dhara Publication, 1991.
- Palacios, Miguel Asín. *Saint John of the Cross and Islam*. New York: Vantage Press, 1981.
- Peers, E. Allison. *Ascent of Mount Carmel*. New York: Triumph Books, 1991.
- . *Spirit of Flame*. London: Student Christian Movement Press. 1943.

---. *Studies of the Spanish Mystics*. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1951.

Perrin, David B. *For Love of the World: The Old and New Self of John of the Cross*.

San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1997.

Ruiz Salvador. *Introducción a San Juan de La Cruz*. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores

Cristianos, 1968.

Stein, Edith. *The Science of the Cross: A Study of St. John of the Cross*. Chicago:

Henry Regnery Company, 1960.

Turner, Denys. *Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*. Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Vilnet, Jean. *La Biblia en la Obra de San Juan de La Cruz*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones

Desclée, 1953.

Werblowsky, R. J. Zwi. "On the Mystical Rejections of Mystical Illuminations."

Religious Studies. Vol. 1. 1965.

Wojtyla, Karol. *Faith According to St. John of the Cross*. Trans. Jordan Aumann.

San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981.