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A STUDY IN COMPARATIVE MYSTICISM:
SPIRITUAL DARKNESS IN JOHN OF
THE CROSS AND SUFISM

by

CORA ANNE DESMOND

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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Abstract

In comparative studies of mystical phenomena, a pressing issue is the relationship between experience and interpretation. Does mystical experience happen first, followed by interpretation, or are the two simultaneous?

The Sufi phenomenon of ḍaḥī/ḥast (desolation/consolation) was symbolized by Ibn Abīd of the Shādhilī order with the terms "night" and "day." More than once it has been likened to John of the Cross's "Dark Night" experience. Both ḍaḥī and the Dark Night involve privation and tribulation (night) for the mystic on the road to union with God. Periods of relief (day) also occur in each mystic's description. If mystical experiences are essentially similar, with only the interpretation of them at issue, one would expect to find Ibn Abīd's ḍaḥī/ḥast and John of the Cross's Dark Night in phenomenological agreement, regardless of theological interpretation.

The Sufi experience of ḥanū/ḥaqā (die to self/live in God) has been compared to Christ's passion, death and resurrection. A prominent Sufi, Junayd of Baghdad, included with his description of ḥanū/ḥaqā the element of tribulation. Since John of the Cross equates his Dark Night (with its enormous tribulation) and subsequent union with God to Christ's passion, death and resurrection, one could wonder whether Junayd and St. John
shared essentially similar mystical experiences as well.

Investigation indicates, however, that in both Ibn Abbād's qābd/bast and Junayd's fana/bagā, significant phenomenological differences from St. John's Dark Night occur. Although John of the Cross, Junayd and Ibn Abbād all deal with spiritual darkness or aridity, the form of each man's experience meshes with his own theological premises and system, and not with the other men's. Junayd and Ibn Abbād seem to be the two Sufis whose encounters with spiritual darkness come closest to that of John of the Cross. Yet, comparison of the three men yields no across-the-board similarities, phenomenologically or theologically. Thus it would be difficult to maintain that a "core" experience of spiritual darkness can be found in Christianity and Islam. Rather, there exist, according to Wittgenstein's formula, merely complex patterns of phenomenological resemblances, different in different cases, i.e., family resemblances. None of the above mystical experiences is pure or unmediated. Each is linked to the learned doctrines of the individual's faith. Interpretation seems to be more coincident with, and determinative of, the mystical experience than subsequent to it.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Dark Night of the Soul, as described by John of the Cross, is one of the major works in Christian mysticism. It contains central themes of both the Bible and Hellenistic philosophy, an important source of inspiration for Christian mysticism. The biblical heritage is exemplified in this work by the stress on suffering, the feeling of desertion by God during trials, eventual victory over tribulation, and suffering and renewal on the model of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection. The influence of Greece is seen in such concepts as purification of the soul, the mystical flight of the soul to God, and asceticism.

Islamic mysticism (Sufism) is often compared to Christian mysticism. Even though there is no specifically Muslim model of redemptive suffering from which Sufis could develop a "Dark Night" as Christian mystics did, many scholars see parallels or prototypes of this event in Sufism.¹ In 1932, Miguel Asín Palacios claimed to have discovered a Spanish Muslim precursor of John of the Cross. Ibn Abbād of Ronda had similar virtues to the Spanish saint, a similar vocation, and similar theological conceptions about the mystic life. He counselled students to renounce charismatic gifts, to understand that God sends spiritual tribulation for the individual's benefit, and to view the onset of trials as a "dark night." All of these points are echoed by
John of the Cross. 2

More recent scholars have also drawn a favorable comparison between
the Sufi phenomenon described by Ibn Abbād (the state of qabā', deso-
lution) and the Christian mystical state of spiritual darkness charac-
teristic of the Dark Night.3 Thus a comparison of Ibn Abbād's concep-
tion of qabā' and St. John's Dark Night is worthwhile.

Besides qabā' there is at least one other phenomenon in Sufism
which can be legitimately compared to the Dark Night: the state of
fanā'/baqā' (annihilation of self/subsistence in God). The mere defi-
nition of fanā'—annihilation, obliteration, passing away—invites a
comparison with the Dark Night. St. John on many occasions employs
the concepts of annihilation of the soul and voiding of the faculties
to describe the process undergone in the Dark Night.4

In Sufi literature, fanā' is usually coupled with baqā' (subsistence
in God). One is made dead to self but alive in God. R. C. Zaechner
likens fanā'/baqā' to the Christian concept of death and resurrection.

... as in the mystical experience of those who believe
in God, there is no fanā' without baqā', no immolation
without survival, so was it necessary for Christ both
to die on the four-cornered Cross which symbolizes
wholeness and to rise again from the dead, immortal
as man and eternal in His Godhead.5

To St. John of the Cross, the Dark Night symbolizes, and enables the
mystic to relive, that fundamental Christian spiritual experience of
dying and being reborn. If fanā'/baqā' can be paralleled to the Christian
theme of death and resurrection, its similarity to the Dark Night
becomes apparent, and calls for exploration.6

Sufism has had hundreds of formulations of fanā'/baqā'. Most of the
later ones are monistic. Among the earlier, theistic ones, that of Junayd of Baghdad lends itself most readily to comparison with the Dark Night. Junayd incorporates tribulation and suffering (balā) into the framework of fanā/bagā. He also discusses the unitive life which follows fanā/bagā and balā. These correspondences between Junayd's fanā and St. John's Dark Night provide a point of departure for the discussion of possible Sufi correlations to the Dark Night of the Soul.

The comparison of mystical phenomena in different religions touches many problems, philosophical and methodological. A basic issue at stake is the use of the word "mysticism" as a catch-all category. Because the word originated in early Christianity and is historically tied to Christian theology, its application to other religions is ambiguous. Neither Buddhism nor Islam, for example, have concepts exactly equivalent. Nevertheless, within these and other religious traditions there exist individual experiences or ways of life which at least roughly assimilate those of Christian mysticism. Western scholars, rightly or wrongly, label such phenomena "mystical."

A second concern arises in the study of comparative mysticism: are these "mystical" traditions of different religions fundamentally different or identical? In exploring this question, one must consider reports by mystics of diverse religions, with their varying claims to have experienced Ultimate Reality, and to have truthfully, if incompletely, reported that event. Is each report a dogmatic interpretation of basically identical events, or is each experience unique, dissimilar to the others at a fundamental level? If all the reports can genuinely be labelled "mystical," can one report be accurate, the other distorted?
Can both be accurate, or both distorted? What standards should apply in making such evaluations?

Early in my research for this thesis, I came to the tentative conclusion that at least in fanā/baqā there was a positive and deep correlation to St. John’s Dark Night. This provocative idea might imply that the experience of redemptive suffering found in Christ’s passion and echoed in sanjuanist mystical theology was relived in Sufism. It would then give that aspect of Islam profound ties to Christianity.

This initial conclusion was based on the presupposition that the writings of John of the Cross on the Dark Night of the Soul represent a direct, relatively unmediated experience of Reality. Mystical phenomena found in Sufism which corroborated St. John’s testimony might then be evidence of "covert Christianity" in the midst of Islam, since Sunni Islam, out of which the vast majority of Sufis come, has little tolerance for redemptive suffering.7

In studying methodological and philosophical issues in comparative mysticism, a stumbling block appeared, however, which cast into doubt my original presupposition. When the encounter of human being and outside stimulus is analyzed (i.e., the mental processes evoked when one "experiences" anything), it becomes clear that no person directly "experiences" an event without his expectations, presuppositions or interpretations coloring it. Whether Kantian categories, Jungian archetypes or some other model is used to explain the mind’s responses to the world around it, experience is always interpreted. To understand and evaluate one’s encounters one must give them meaning. Meaning requires a "thought-world" of structures and values, adopted from one’s
cultural environment and past events in the individual's life. 8

The existence of culturally-biased interpretation in all mystical reports has been acknowledged during the past three decades in the major academic studies of mysticism. Yet, given the proposition that experience and interpretation are both present in all genuine mystical accounts, another problem must be faced: does interpretation of the experience begin after the actual event has occurred, or do interpretation and experience happen simultaneously? This issue is of prime importance.

A school of thought on the nature of mysticism has become vocal during this century. It insists that "... the monistic and theistic [mystical] experiences are essentially similar; ... it is [only] the correct interpretation of them which is at issue." 9 The thesis here is that all mystical encounters are identical. Only afterwards do different mental interpretations set it. Granting this assumption leads to the theoretical possibility that one can derive the "essence" of mystical experience from a wide-ranging comparison and evaluation of reports from various mystical traditions. W. T. Stace attempted to do so in Mysticism and Philosophy. His rationale was that if, for example, Hindu, Christian, "nature" and other mystics all reported encounters with certain common elements, those common features must describe the "core" experience. The disparate elements would then belong to the individual's subsequent, culturally-biased interpretation of the event. 10 Even given the assumption that commonly-shared traits can be distilled from various reports (and Stace's selection has been widely criticized), a basic flaw in the theory is the assumption that these traits are not mentally interpreted in the person's mind. Stace believes that they indicate direct
perceptions of the one abiding reality underlying everything, totally removed from and unaffected by the mystic’s internal history.

If Stace and the proponents of an "essence" of mysticism are incorrect, how else can the occurrence of mystical phenomena in so many religions be explained? An alternative theory concerning the use of the word "mysticism" to describe various cross-cultural religious experiences relates to Wittgenstein’s theory of family resemblances. Haig Khatcadorian observes that

Wittgenstein’s notion of "Family Resemblances" is that the traditional view, that in every case where things are called by the same name (when the name is used in the same "sense") there is a quality or a set of qualities which is common to them all, by virtue of which they are all called by that name is mistaken. Instead of such a common quality or a set of these, examination reveals complex patterns of resemblances different in different cases.11

In an article on Christian mysticism as exemplified by Walter Hilton, H. P. Owen applies this idea to the study of mysticism specifically.

Why do philosophers postulate an identical core in mystical experiences (either an undefined core or a defined one) ...? I suggest a possible reason. Perhaps they assume that because "mystical" is applied by linguistic convention to a conceptually varied set of data it must indicate an identity of essence—an experience or belief which is explicit or implicit in all those data and which constitutes a sufficient criterion for distinguishing them from all non-mystical data. But this assumption is not self-evident. "Mystical" could be used to refer to a set of characteristics which, though similar or even identical, do not constitute an essential difference.12

Buttressing Owen's contention that a common mystical core cannot successfully be identified are trenchant recent criticisms of the theory that there is a clear-cut distinction between experience and interpretation. Steven Katz quotes Coleridge's dictum, "the mind half-sees
and half-creates," in his argument that humans are not merely passive receptacles of experience but active participants in the creation of experience.\textsuperscript{13} Berger and Luckmann investigated the role that social processes play in shaping an individual's perception in The Social Construction of Reality. They insist that "the self cannot be adequately understood apart from the particular social context in which it was shaped."\textsuperscript{14} More importantly, "Language realizes a world, in the double sense of apprehending and producing it."\textsuperscript{15} So, the use of language in reflection and communication mediates one's world through the particular concepts used. This implies that a person brought up in a particular religious tradition will have his ability to receive, perceive and understand spiritual experiences mediated by the linguistically-determined philosophical and religious concepts of his tradition and culture.

Peter Moore is another scholar who assails the clear-cut distinction between experience and interpretation in mystical encounters. He reminds readers that "experience itself develops in accordance with changes in a mystic's beliefs, expectations and intentions."\textsuperscript{16} Further, "the possession of what could be called a 'doctrinal vocabulary' might indeed serve to precipitate features of experience which would otherwise remain at the margin of consciousness if not actually beneath it."\textsuperscript{17} Robert Gimello, in a study of the distinction between Buddhist mysticism and meditation, takes this line of thinking to its logical conclusion. He says that ultimately, "interpretation may not be only a rationalization contrived after the fact of mystical experience but may be actually coincident with and determinative of the experience."\textsuperscript{18}
Similarly, Ronald Hepburn, in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,
declares that

To insist that mysticism is possible without interpretation ... allows us to admit as mystical the experiences of people outside both the theistic and monistic traditions but whose testimony, at the phenomenological level, shows great affinities with the mysticism of both traditions. Nevertheless, the mystical experiences of an agnostic are surely bound to differ in important respects from those of a Christian, a Buddhist, or a Muslim. The concepts used in interpretation help to determine the mystic's expectations of future experiences and to determine his map of the mystical path and the plotting of his position upon it. They shape the actual quality of the experience itself in a most intimate way.¹⁹

Hepburn's reference to a mystic determining his map of the path and plotting his position brings up another factor in mystical traditions which militates against the likelihood of a "core" experience differently interpreted but identically encountered by all mystics. That element is the connection between the individual's preparatory practices and his later experiences.

Most mystical traditions in the world's religions include the participation of spiritual directors as a regular feature of the path. This is true of Christianity (e.g., John of the Cross was one of Teresa of Avila's most important directors), Islam (the Sufi sheikhs or pirs), Buddhism and Judaism, to name only a few. The function of these spiritual guides is to assess their pupils' progress along a path familiar to the directors—to evaluate the genuineness of their students' experiences and prepare them for coming stages of the journey. Mystical experiences are not normally isolated events, but are preceded by lengthy preparation, or are interspersed with several preparatory periods,
as in St. John's Dark Night. Scholars who attempt to isolate the mystic's experience from his interpretation of it neglect the importance of spiritual directors, among other factors, in shaping a mystic's consciousness and expectations of the coming events. The spiritual director helps to recondition the individual's awareness away from the everyday world and focus on the particular Reality which is the goal of the path. For example, the Zen master uses a *kōan* to teach his pupil about the nature of Reality (or lack of it) as conceived by Zen Buddhism. A Christian monk might use the Prayer of the Heart to teach a novice about Reality conceived in an entirely different way. Pupils then go on to experience religious encounters which substantiate the theological outlooks ingrained in them. This is not to say that socialization and indoctrination account for the entire experience. Rather, someone like John of the Cross, with his background of penance, mortification and a traditional Catholic upbringing and vocation, does not experience Reality in the same way as the God-intoxicated Persian Sufis Ḥallāj and Bīṭāmī, or a Buddhist monk who, in a moment of enlightenment, realizes the basic nothingness behind everything. In other words, mystics are limited in their ability to perceive "Reality," even if that ability is still much greater than the average person's.20

As a result of his process of intellectual acculturation in its broadest sense, the mystic brings to his experience a world of concepts, images, symbols, and values which shape as well as color the experience he eventually and actually has.21

If no one mystical account is verifiably superior to any other, each may be legitimate. By granting more integrity to the differences among mystical visions than has been done previously, one leaves open
the possibility that there is more than one "Ultimate Reality." Numerous irreducible, transcendent realities may exist, variously encountered by mystics of different religions or cultures. Alternately, there may be one overriding Reality which is experienced in diverse ways because of each mystic's ineradicable cultural conditioning.

Can mysticism as a universal phenomenon be defined, in view of its varying appearances and the difficulties involved in separating experience from interpretation? I concur in the statement of H. P. Owen, who feels that "we cannot do so in words that will both cover all the spiritual experiences to which the word conventionally refers, and be sufficiently precise to differentiate mystical from non-mystical states."\(^{22}\) Owen examines definitions of mysticism given by various scholars, such as David Knowles, F. C. Haddons and Evelyn Underhill, in their general works on the whole field of mysticism. None of their definitions fits both criteria mentioned above. He concludes that

the only definitive and etymologically valid usage of "mystic" is in fact a peculiarly Christian one ... Doubtless "mystical" will continue to be used in the wide and various senses stated in the definitions I have quoted. But if we continue to use it thus let us at any rate exorcise the ghost of an "essence" that we can define or to which we can, non-conceptually, point.\(^{23}\)

Against this background, how is Sufism related to St. John's Dark Night at all? Our answer must come from historical as well as phenomenological considerations. Among the mystical traditions of the world's religions, Sufism is probably closer to Christian mysticism in numerous ways than any other existing path. The reasons stem partly from the general historical relationship between Christianity and Islam, and
especially from the profound influence exerted by Christians on the earliest stages of Sufism's development. Although many of these influences cannot be concretely related through names, dates or places (such as the evolution of "love of God" as Sufism's primary objective), Christian influence is nearly indisputable, in view of orthodox Islam's general tendencies at the time. In addition, the same writings which were largely responsible for the character of Christian mysticism—those of Dionysius the Areopagite—were widely read throughout the Islamic world at the same time they came into vogue in Europe. Thus Christian and Islamic mysticism share many philosophical presuppositions which help account for similarities in their mystical treatises.

Putting these facts into perspective, certain things can be gained from the comparison of St. John's spiritual darkness with seeming parallels in Sufism. The initial assumption brought to the research—that the Dark Night was a direct, unmediated experience of Reality—has been dropped. Investigation indicates that no mystic's encounters are "pure" or unmediated. All are culturally influenced. It follows that St. John's Dark Night, with its accompanying theology, should not be used as the standard against which to judge similar mystical episodes in another religion. In the case of Sufism, in spite of the strong Christian input, phenomenological similarities to the Dark Night are more superficial than significant. Spiritual darkness in Sufism does not signify redemptive suffering as it does in Christianity. My research lends weight to the contention that mystical experiences are clearly linked to the learned doctrines of one's own faith. Sufi encounters take their cue primarily from Islam, which stresses God's transcendence and man's impotence above
all else.

Junayd's theory of annihilation and tribulation (fanā and balā) does not indicate a process of spiritual perfection which causes the believer to feel separated from the One Who is purifying him or her, as is the case in the Dark Night. Fanā/baqā is the destruction, rather than the perfection, of the individual will. Balā (suffering) is not caused by the Divine Presence, as in Christianity (felt by the Christian as God's desertion of the soul), but by the Divine Absence: for even in annihilation the mystic discovers that he is still an infinite distance from the God he longs to be with.

Ibn Abbād's idea of spiritual tribulation as divinely ordained, and a "dark night" for the mystic, is also fundamentally dissimilar to the Dark Night of St. John. Whereas the Christian mystic puts a high value on prolonged suffering, Ibn Abbād warns that prolonged suffering is a sure sign of damnation. Tribulation for this Sufi is merely a test of the individual's capacity to submit to God's Will and mortify his own. For St. John it is a sign that God is perfecting the individual's own will so that it works simultaneously and in harmony with the Divine Will. In both Junayd and Ibn Abbād, then, spiritual darkness is indicative of a basic pessimism about human nature, a dialectic in which God and humanity are in true opposition. In John of the Cross, spiritual darkness indicates human and divine opposition only on the surface. More deeply it symbolizes the perfectability of humanity, holding forth the ultimate possibility of human participation in the Divine Essence.

These differences in the theological interpretations of spiritual darkness parallel the differences found in each mystic's parent religion.
By themselves they indicate only that mystical experience can be interpreted in various ways, that spiritual darkness is seen differently in Islam from Christianity. In the final chapter of this thesis, the influence on each mystic’s formulations of the doctrines of his own religion will be examined more closely. If these men actually experienced the events they describe, and in the reported fashion, then it can be shown that their basic religious beliefs influenced not only the content of their experiences, but the form as well. This implies that no "essential" experience of spiritual darkness can be discovered through an examination of Sufism and Christian mysticism. Different occurrences may bear "family resemblances," but must be studied individually to be truly understood.
CHAPTER II

CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM AND JOHN OF THE CROSS

St. John of the Cross is the only Doctor of the Catholic Church ever raised to that status solely on the basis of works on mystical theology. He is probably best known for The Dark Night of the Soul, a uniquely Christian description of the mystic path to God. This chapter will explore the background of Christian mysticism, presuppositions of the mystic way, the personal history of John of the Cross, and his own theological explanation of mysticism. A description and analysis of his Dark Night will follow in the next chapter.

I. The Background of Christian Mysticism

Mysticism developed in Christianity only after Greek influences on the Church overtook the Jewish influences of the earliest years. Judaism and Christianity in the first century generally pictured God as sovereignly independent, though always linked to man in covenant. Loving and wrathful, yet transcendent and ineffable, He dealt with His creatures mainly in theophanies (angelic mediation, the Son of God, etc.).

Judaism in this era could simultaneously ascribe to God change of purpose and unchangeability, "for His immutability was seen as the trustworthiness of his covenanted relation ... rather than as a primarily ontological category." Christian mysticism developed a world-view foreign to this; it came to include elements of Greek philosophy (especially Neoplatonism)
and the mystery religions rampant in the Hellenistic world at that time, as well as fundamental themes from both the Old and New Testaments.\(^3\)

At the dawn of the Christian era, much of the Mediterranean population was absorbed in an attempt to protect itself from the impersonal forces of fate. Religious communities offered people deliverance from suffering and death. The cult of Osiris and Isis developed in Egypt, Adonis in Syria, Attis and Cybele in Phrygia, Mithra in Persia, Dionysus in Greece. These groups were called mystery religions because they maintained strict silence about their activities. One had to undergo an initiation into the cult to gain access to their spiritual knowledge.\(^4\)

The center of the cultic celebration was a drama about the venerated figure, mythically portrayed. The drama told of the process of becoming and passing away, death and life, as manifested in nature.\(^5\) Re-enactment of the mythical event transported it to the present, and those who participated in it received deliverance and a better fate in the world beyond.\(^6\) As these groups gradually spread throughout the Mediterranean area, their terminology became commonplace in the vocabulary of the ancient world.

Because of the many concepts the mysteries shared with the Christian revelation, such as the main theme of death and rebirth, Christian apologists often borrowed mystery terms to explain the Christian message to the Gentiles. As early as New Testament times the Apostle Paul borrowed from the mysteries the idea of "participation," and used the word to refer to the believer's relationship with the Saviour--participation in Christ.\(^7\) The influence of the mysteries and Greek philosophy in the definition of Christian thought continued to grow larger. A Father of the Church,
Clement of Alexandria, especially aided this process. In many respects he paved the way for the eventual development of Christian mysticism. He welded together most of the philosophical and religious ideas of his time, especially the language of the mysteries, to describe Christianity to the pagan world.8

Clement used the schema of the mystery initiations profusely in the development of his theology. He talked of a "gnosis" available to the believer, which would initiate him into the higher mysteries of the Creed. It was more valuable than the ordinary faith of the average Christian. On the wings of this knowledge the soul could rise above all earthly passions and desires, filled with a calm, disinterested love of God.9 Clement here followed the mysteries in making a distinction between a full member and a novice in the Church, as well as in the type of spiritual knowledge available to each. He took his theory that "gnosis" was more important than faith from both the mysteries and Middle Platonic philosophy, effectively reversing the original biblical emphasis on faith.10

Clement is only a more obvious example of the way Hellenistic presuppositions altered second and third century Christian theology from that of the New Testament and paved the way for mysticism to develop. Greek terminology, and the accompanying presuppositions, gradually became dominant in the Church and Christian thought. Another example of this was Christianity's hospitality to Neoplatonism. Because of numerous parallels to Christian doctrine, Neoplatonism became one of the chief philosophies adopted by early apologists and theologians. Plotinus, a third century hellenized Egyptian, had combined Platonism with aspects of
Aristotle's thought and elements of the mysteries to create his own system, elaborated later by Porphyry and Proclus.\textsuperscript{11}

For Plotinus, the ideal world, or ultimate reality, was made up of three principles, a hierarchical trinity. At the lowest level was the World Soul, principle of life and author of the visible world. All people participated in this principle through their individual souls, which together made up the World Soul. Above the World Soul was Intelligence, or the Mind of God, from which the World Soul emanated. The Intelligence both thought and contained the objects of thought. Man participated in this level of ultimate reality as well, through his ability to think. Intelligence emanated from the highest level, the One, or God. The One was unified, simple, nonthinking.\textsuperscript{12}

Plotinus's triad was related to Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, for both soul and intelligence constantly reflected back upon, or contemplated, the One. Since man contained both soul and intelligence, he had an inborn desire to contemplate the One. He was estranged from it, however, because his soul was trapped by his body. As matter, and therefore nonreality, the body was evil. While in the bodily condition, man was thus separated from the One and had to seek it out. The road of ecstasy was the most direct form of reunion with or contemplation of the One.\textsuperscript{13} It required abnegation and mortification, besides a strong desire to behold the One, as Plotinus indicated in this passage:

The soul when possessed by intense love of Him divests herself of all form which she has, even of that which is derived from Intelligence; for it is impossible, when in conscious possession of any other attribute, either to behold or to be harmonized with Him. Thus the soul must be neither good nor bad nor aught else, that she may receive Him only ...
Once the soul reached this state, the One suddenly appeared, "with nothing between," and they were "no more two but one ...." \(^{14}\)

Neoplatonism gave to the mysteries a philosophical base, so that "mysticism," which had originally meant "religious initiation," came to include more abstract and psychological dimensions such as mystical knowledge, union, ecstasy, and deification. \(^{15}\) Once the synthesis of Christian theology with Neoplatonism and the mysteries had taken place, Christian mysticism began to emerge. The term for mystery religion initiation, *mysterion*, and the initiate, *mystes*, are the source of the Christian terms mysticism and mystic. They come from the Greek verb *myein*, indicating the idea of secrecy and enclosure from the world. Around A.D. 500 the first distinctly Christian mystical treatises were written, by a man who claimed to be the Apostle Paul's Athenian convert Dionysius the Areopagite. Pseudo-Dionysius, as he is now called, took late Neoplatonic philosophy, imbued with many of the mystery religions' assumptions, and transferred it to the Christian sphere, purging it of its more obvious Christian aspects. The most influential of his writings bore the title, *On the Mystical Theology*. \(^{16}\)

In *Mystical Theology* Greek metaphysics completely swallowed up the New Testament's Jewish apocalyptic cosmology. Rather than everlasting, personal, concrete, jealous or wrathful, God was the Super-Essential Godhead, Supra-Personal and infinite. Instead of the creation of the world in seven days and stern prophecies of God's coming judgment, Dionysius proclaimed that "the Godhead eternally pours itself out onto the plane of Being." \(^{17}\) The final battle against the forces of evil disappeared in Dionysian mysticism because true evil had no being. "That
which we call evil in the world is merely a tendency towards nothing
ness. The resurrection of the body and integrity of the body/soul
unit in the New Testament and Pharisaic Judaism gave way to the pre
eminence of the soul, which was drawn from the body outwards and upwards
to God, in contemplation.

As the Super-Essence has an eternal tendency to pass
out of Itself by emanation, so the creatures have a
tendency to pass out of themselves by spiritual activ
ity. As the Super-Essence creates the world and our
human souls by a species of Divine "ecstasy," so the
human soul must return by an answering "ecstasy" to the
Super-Essence. Because of his claim to be a New Testament figure, Dionysius' writings
were accorded sub-apostolic authority. Thus, he set the stage for much
of Christian mysticism in the centuries to come. Echoing Plotinus, the
supposed Pauline convert exhorted his followers to:

leave the senses and the activities of the intellect
and all things that the senses or the intellect can
perceive, and all things in this world of nothingness
or in that world of being, and, thine understanding
being laid to rest, ... strain (so far as thou mayest)
towards an union with Him who neither being nor under
standing can contain. For by the unceasing and abso
lute renunciation of thyself and all things, thou shalt
in pureness cast all things aside, and be released from
all, and so shalt be led upwards to the Ray of that
divine Darkness which exceedeth all existence.

From Dionysius, John of the Cross developed "divine Darkness" into the
Dark Night; and from him, rather than chiefly from the New Testament,
John of the Cross took his framework for the soul's journey to God.

II. The Mystic Way in Christianity

As Christian mysticism evolved, it took on certain presuppositions
about the nature of the human being, reality and God. John of the Cross
shared fully in this common core of beliefs, the most important of which
follow.

God created man so that man could share in His glory, i.e., could
attain the Beatific Vision. He revealed this to man when He took on
human nature. Through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, He showed man
perfect life on earth. The quest of the perfect life (leading to the
Beatific Vision) is therefore the highest goal a person can have. While
one lives a bodily existence, however, he cannot see God as He truly is,
for God is spirit and incorporeal. Thus, the attainment of the Beatific
Vision can come only after physical death, when the soul lives on with-
out the limitations of corporality.

The soul attains Beatific Vision through "deification," the perfec-
tion of its human nature. This process can be started (although not
completed) in earthly life, but requires God's grace to succeed. God
enters the human spirit in the deep center, or divine spark, of the soul,
so one in quest of deification must focus on the interior life. The
ability to discover this divine spark within oneself can be blocked by
sin, which is caused by inordinate appetites and affections residing in
the will. These must therefore be destroyed as fully as possible, and
can be eliminated only through the renunciation of earthly desires and
the mortification of all bodily and spiritual appetites.

An individual must lead a humble, ascetic life to reach even the
initial stages of purification of the soul. The degree of purification
necessary to achieve deification, or union with God, is beyond human
power, however. Thus the success of the mystic's endeavors rests ulti-
mately with God alone. If He approves of the progress one has made in
the process of purification, He takes over at a certain point and infuses
divine wisdom into the soul. This completes the process and brings the
individual into union, or to whatever state God desires that person to
achieve. The entire journey, from start to finish, takes place in three
successive, but overlapping, stages: purgation, illumination, and,
finally, union.

In the purgative stage, one concentrates on mortification of the
appetites and renunciation of the world. After a time, however, he finds
himself unable to proceed. At this point the process is taken over by
God, which brings the individual into the illuminative way. This stage
is characterized by more complete dependence on God for purification
and the journey towards the Beatific Vision. If God desires that the
mystic complete the journey and come to union with Him (also known as
the spiritual marriage of Christ and the soul), the process continues
until sin has been completely eradicated from the soul. The end is the
unitive way. Yet even during the final transformation in God, the soul
retains its own human, although now sinless, nature. At the same time
it becomes completely absorbed in the divine essence. An appropriate
metaphor for this absorption is an iron in fire. The iron, when heated
to the extreme, seems to the onlooker to merge with the fire, becoming
indistinguishable from it. Yet the iron does remain iron, though trans-
formed in the heat, as the soul remains human though caught up in God.
Once union has come to a person, he can lead only a perfect life until
physical death. It is impossible for him to sin, for he has been com-
pletely purged of all evil inclinations.

A fundamental presupposition in Christian mysticism is that the
power or means by which this transformation in God is accomplished is love. The union of the soul and God is termed a "union of likeness" in Medieval theology, meaning a union of love, for love makes the lover become like the object loved. If one loves the world, he will become base like the world. If one loves God, he will become more like God. Love itself is the power which effects the union of the soul with God. Therefore, the knowledge God infuses into the soul during the journey is loving, and the evidence of an individual's progress on the path is his growing facility for loving God (and through God, all of creation).

Two terms commonly used in mystical literature, meditation and contemplation, illustrate well the stages of the mystic way. To Christian mystics, meditation generally means an intellectual activity—discursive concentration on certain religious concepts, images or symbols. It is a deliberate act of will, done to shut out the world and focus on God. Meditation is the mark of a beginner on the mystical path, and a hallmark of the purgative stage of the mystic's development.

Contemplation originally meant, in Plato, intellectual concentration upon the ideal world of forms. What it came to mean to Christians is defined by Aquinas as "the simple intuition of divine truth, proceeding from a supernatural principle." Unlike meditation, contemplation is not an intellectual, discursive exercise or an act of will. It is given by God and usually only to individuals who have mastered the purgative stage and are ready to move on. Contemplation is an awareness of God (the simple intuition of divine truth), given by God (proceeding from a supernatural principle), in which the intellect and will do nothing but rest, for God is in control and directs all spiritual activity. John of
the Cross equates contemplation with mystical theology, and with "knowing
by unknowing." This indicates that one receives divine knowledge with-
out using one's mind in any way.

Contemplation, then, is an infusion of loving knowledge from God,
the recipient of which is now no longer a beginner on the mystical path,
but a proficient. Technically, it is part of the illuminative stage of
the path, although "high contemplation" refers to the unitive stage.
Christian mystics historically have called their various practices
"contemplation" or mystical theology. Whereas speculative theology
treats of revelations understood or perceived by the human intellect,
mystical theology in its classic sense deals with secret revelations
which are neither understood nor perceived by the intellect, and are
beyond description.

III. Portrait of John of the Cross

A brief sketch of St. John's life will suggest possible influences,
both psychological and theological, in his creation of The Dark Night.
John was born of poor parents in 1542, at Fontiveros, Spain. His father
died early in his life, and John and his family were forced to eke out
a bare existence for many years. Throughout his life he remained ex-
tremely poor. He began higher studies, at age seventeen, at a Jesuit
College, and after four years there, donned the Carmelite cloak. The
following year he enrolled in the Carmelite College at the University of
Salamanca, during the finest days of its existence. The curriculum
included Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Avicenna, Averroes and Ockham.
The Carmelites in attendance also studied their own philosophers and
theologians, such as Baconsthorp, Michael of Bologna and others of the Augustinian tradition.

The many different schools of thought to which John was exposed gave him wide latitude in constructing a mystical system.

The independence he observed in the matter of schools and doctors was to give him flexibility and breadth of judgement, and the terse scholastic style was to give the logical and irresistible structure of his thought a coalescence and firmness which would enable him to raise mysticism to a scientific level hitherto unknown. 29

It was while he was at Salamanca that mysticism first began to interest him, especially the systems of Gregory the Great and Dionysius. During this time he lived at the Carmelite College, and his personal lifestyle was austere, including severe penance and extended fasting.

At the end of his university studies, while considering whether to join the Carthusians, he met Mother Teresa of Avila. She had founded the movement to reform the Carmelites and reinstitute the primitive rule, and persuaded John to join her in the discalced movement. 30 He was twenty-five years old at this point, and from then on devoted himself completely to the reform. Early in their relationship, Mother Teresa, herself a mystic, perceived the intense spirituality of her co-reformer, and came to value him deeply as a spiritual confessor and director. Under his tutelage she finally achieved the state of spiritual marriage (the unitive life). 31

In 1577 John was kidnapped by calced Carmelites, who tried to woo him out of the reform. Failing to convince him, they imprisoned him in a Toledo monastery for several months. 32 Although this was the low point of his life, it was also the source of inspiration for many of his literary works. During months of imprisonment, under the worst conditions,
he mentally composed the greater part of his poems, "The Spiritual Canticle" and "The Dark Night." He finally escaped his jailers late the following year, but took months to recuperate fully.

After the discalced Carmelites had obtained independence of jurisdiction from the calced, and throughout the rest of the 1570s and 1580s, John continued his duties and held many positions of authority in discalced communities. It was during the 1580s, a period of relative calm in his life, that he composed the commentaries to his prison poems and began his other major works.

In 1590 hostilities again broke out between calced and discalced Carmelites, with the result that John was not reappointed to any position of rank in the order. He now finished the series of writings started thirteen years earlier. In 1591, while in relative isolation from his order in a small monastery, he developed an inflammation in his leg. He received inadequate medical care, and died at Ubeda, Spain, at the age of forty-nine. He was eventually beatified, in 1675, canonized in 1726, and declared a Doctor of the Universal Church in 1926.

The circumstances of St. John's life help to account for many of the major characteristics of his mystical theology. The overwhelming emphasis on renunciation in search of God came from one who knew only poverty and harsh living conditions throughout his youth, and chose to live that way in adulthood. His most famous symbol for the mystic path, the Dark Night, took formation during months of gruelling imprisonment at the hands of ordained men of God. Extensive education at a Jesuit College and the University of Salamanca account for the precision of analysis and repeated explanations in his commentaries of images in his poetry. It also explains
the undertones of Aristotelian philosophy and Scholastic theology in his works. Finally, the development of his insights into psychological quirks, rationalizations, temptations, and other foibles of human nature was enhanced by many years as spiritual confessor and director to nuns and priests of the Carmelite Order.

IV. Sanjuanist Theology

St. John’s writings are limited in quantity, comprising four major poems (commentaries upon which have the character of theological treatises) and a few minor poems and prose works. The poem, "The Dark Night," is accompanied by two commentaries: The Ascent of Mount Carmel, an interpretation of the poem from the perspective of one in the early stages of contemplation; and the commentary bearing the name of the poem, which interprets it from the standpoint of more advanced contemplation. His two other major poems and accompanying commentaries, "The Spiritual Canticle" and "The Living Flame of Love," concern divine union, the spiritual marriage of the soul and Christ. "Canticle" covers the whole process from the closing moments of the Dark Night into union, whereas "Living Flame" deals only with highlights of the actual state of transformation.

Even a superficial glance at the commentaries on "The Dark Night" reveals the author’s reliance upon scholastic theology. His major biographer of this century has isolated seven main theological principles from John’s work, six of which are Thomistic. Like Aquinas, he sees the soul as having been created a tabula rasa, upon which ordinary knowledge (which comes from the senses) is written. The intellect
abstracts phantasma and figures, while the imagination conceptualizes objects or people from the information discovered through the five physical senses.36 All such abstractions are made by the agent (active) intellect, "which works upon the forms, phantasies and apprehensions of the corporal faculties [of the soul]."37 Supernatural knowledge, however, is produced in the possible or passive intellect ... [which] without the reception of these forms, etc., receives passively [from God] only substantial [i.e., spiritual] knowledge ... divested of images and given without any work or active function of the intellect.38

In the natural realm, the soul may gain limited knowledge of spiritual matters, primarily from the *analogia entis*, but not complete knowledge, and even this must be abjured before one can come into God's splendor. (The "union of likeness" between the soul and God requires that the soul forsake anything unlike God, and knowledge of Him obtained from the material realm is not supernatural but natural, regardless of its object.)39

All supernatural knowledge, coming through the passive intellect, is given through grace, and is experienced in all three spiritual faculties of the soul: the intellect, the memory and the will. This three-fold division of the soul was John's one major departure from Thomistic psychology. Like most previous mystics he followed the Augustinian division rather than the Thomistic two-fold division of the faculties into intellect and will.40 The probable cause for this is that in the three-fold scheme, each faculty can be purified and receive its supernatural infusion through the corresponding theological virtues of faith, charity and hope.41 Faith works in the intellect, hope in the memory and charity in the will. Each virtue perfects its corresponding faculty until union with God can be experienced in those faculties.
Since intellect controls the will, the memory and the sensory faculties, however, faith is the virtue most needed to guide one along the path towards union with God. Faith is the path to the end, although charity is the power which effects that end (with hope a much less significant factor in the whole picture). Faith continually purifies the intellect, guiding the individual past each new obstacle.

John gives three major reasons for his choice of the term "Dark Night" to symbolize the soul’s journey to God: 1) the mortification of the appetites; 2) the journey in faith; and 3) God’s communications to the soul during the process. Mortification of the appetites is a Dark Night when night is considered as a privation of day and light:

Just as night is nothing but the privation of light, and consequently, of all objects visible by means of the light ... the mortification of the appetites can be called a night for the soul. To deprive oneself of the gratification of the appetites in all things is like living in darkness and in a void.

This mortification is vital, since appetites cloud the intellect and impede the light of both natural reason and supernatural wisdom from completely illuminating it. Because of this darkening of the intellect, will and memory—which depend for their proper operation the intellect—become weak and disordered, incapable of turning wholly to God.

The path to God is also called a Dark Night because it is a journey in faith. Faith is a mystery to both the intellect and the senses. According to John, "it brings us to believe truths revealed by God which transcend every natural light and infinitely exceed all human understanding." God completely transcends everything we can know or understand; so to be united with Him we must shed all attachments to the world and
creatures. Consequently we must travel in faith, in unknowing and obscurity from the point of view of intellect.

God's communications to the soul are called a Dark Night because divine knowledge and love, given the soul along the way, are both general and obscure, rather than particular and clear like human reasoning or sensory knowledge. Not only are they "dark" or incomprehensible (like faith) to the intellect, but the communication of them constantly purifies the faculties of the soul. Through the demudation of all its usual human vestments, the soul experiences great torment and anguish. Although God truly communicates His virtues, the soul in this impure condition feels only that its habits, desires and inclinations are being pulled out by their roots—a tremendously painful experience. As long as the soul remains impure it cannot see that God is helping it, and thinks instead that its pain is from God's desertion of it. Thus it feels itself to be in a very dark night.

John's description of the soul and its functions follows closely the Catholic theology of his day. He divides the soul into two distinct parts, the sensory and the spiritual. The sensory part deals with the physical world, and includes the five exterior senses (touch, taste, etc.). Two interior senses, the phantasy and the imagination, develop the data from the exterior senses to formulate dreams, images, etc. The spiritual part deals with nonmaterial matters, and possesses three faculties—will, intellect and memory. Intellect and memory are cognitive, as are the sensory faculties, whereas the will is appetitive; it inclines towards good or evil, and rules all the emotions and desires. When unbridled (the normal human condition), the appetites of the will give
rise to vice and imperfection; when ordered and composed they give rise to virtue.49

Sin resides in the will, but affects the other faculties as well. Thus, while the intellect directs the activities of both memory and will, the appetites of the will damage the intellect's clear vision of things. If the will inclines towards the world, a person's life will be of the world, whereas if the will inclines towards God, that person will live in God.

The foregoing analysis reflects the basic situation of fallen human nature: the will is a captive of the body and its desires, but the intellect is not.50 Man's ultimate goal, to have a clear vision of God, is unattainable as long as the soul and body are joined together (the condition of earthly life).51 Nevertheless, if one has been purified of all sin in this life, he can pass directly into the presence of God at death, without detention in Purgatory. All necessary purgation will have been accomplished on earth, during the Dark Night. In fact, in the perfected individual, bodily death does not occur because of old age or physical ailment, though one may be old or sickly at the time of death. Such a person has already had two of the three veils between God and himself removed (the veil of the world, torn away by the renunciation of the world; and the natural veil, removed by the purification and deification of the soul's natural inclinations and faculties). Now the individual so ardently seeks the removal of the one remaining veil, that of natural life, that as the time of death approaches:

[his] soul is not wrested from [him]unless by some impetus and encounter of love, far more sublime than previous ones, of greater power, and more valiant, since it tears through
this veil and carries off the jewel, which is the soul. The death of such a person is very gentle and sweet, sweeter and more gentle than was his whole spiritual life on earth. 52

St. John's spiritual theology, although mainly scholastic in inspiration, is presented in practical everyday language, with abundant metaphors, symbols and analogies. His illustrations of the multiple ways in which the road to God is like a Dark Night have made that metaphor one of the premiere symbols for the Christian mystical path. Pope Pius XI recognized this, and in 1926 declared him a Doctor of the Universal Church. He stated that St. John's works were "full of such sound spiritual doctrine and are so well suited to the reader's understanding, that they are rightly looked upon as a code and guide for the faithful soul endeavoring to embrace a more perfect life." 53 Despite his scholarly training and his ability to elucidate points of moral and speculative theology, St. John wrote no works in this area. In the realm of mystical theology, however, it has been said that he

classified, systematized and subjected to rigorous theological analysis a whole range of mystical experiences which had often been described before, but never in so thoroughgoing a manner or with such keen intellectual penetration. 54

He is not just one of the outstanding Christian mystics of any time, but is considered the Mystical Doctor of the Catholic Church.
CHAPTER III

THE DARK NIGHT

St. John discusses the Dark Night in both The Ascent of Mount Carmel and The Dark Night, commentaries upon the poem. He counsels the individual on what one can do to progress along the path to union with God. The individual can begin to mortify both the sensory and spiritual faculties of his soul. This is insufficient to reach God, however, and St. John further discusses the divine purification of the soul's sensory and spiritual faculties in response to human efforts.

I. The Purgative Way

One enters the purgative stage of the journey by beginning to mortify the voluntary sensory appetites (attachments to particular foods, pieces of clothing, books, people and other worldly items.)¹ This requirement presupposes that any reliance upon human abilities or the outside world separates one from God. All normal activities and lifestyles are so alien to the divine essence that they must be nullified before one can achieve union with God. That is implied by the law of noncontradiction: human and divine operations cannot function simultaneously, since two contraries cannot exist in their fullness in the same soul.²

One must have an habitual desire to imitate Christ in everything. To be successful in this is to "renounce and remain empty of any sensory
satisfaction that is not purely for the honor and glory of God."3 To remain empty of such satisfactions is not to cease functioning altogether, however. The sensitive faculties continue to operate, but one detaches oneself from any interest in them.4 Total purgation of the appetites is accomplished only when the soul reaches the unitive stage, though it must be one of the chief goals of beginners, too weak, spiritually, to do much else.

As the individual learns to detach himself from the world, he habituates himself to constant prayer and meditation, from which he receives peace, joy and other spiritual delights. God purposely helps the beginner along the path by bestowing spiritual favors and enabling him to find satisfaction in abnegation. Meditation is only a first step, though, because it promotes reliance upon sensory objects. It involves the use of the interior faculties of the sensitive part of the soul, phantasy and imagination, to create images and forms upon which one can concentrate.5 Eventually the individual must transcend this dependence on information from the world in his quest for God.

Through prayer, supplication and the effort to be virtuous, as well as meditation, the beginner grows accustomed to a life of mortification. Once this has happened, God suddenly darkens the light of divine favor which had recently given spiritual delight.6 The mystic now finds he is losing the desire to meditate, as well as the satisfaction derived from it. A feeling of "dryness" invades his sensory faculties, for God has taken the "goods" formerly infused into the senses, and transferred them to the spiritual faculties.7 The sensory part of the soul is so impure that it has no way of understanding this transference
of goods to the spirit. It feels only the deprivation of its senses. The beginner’s inability to meditate as before makes him think he has rejected God, a fear which envelops him repeatedly in the course of the Dark Night. Each new divine purgation or bridling of the appetites and faculties will throw the individual into uncertainty about his sanctity, a problem which can be conquered by faith alone. Constant insecurity and the overwhelming need to rely solely on faith are two of the main reasons this route is called a Dark Night.

After the would-be contemplative has adjusted to "sensory deprivation," he begins to detach himself from reliance upon the spiritual faculties—intellect, memory and will. Again, this does not mean the cessation of their operation, but the individual’s attempt to think about, remember and will only what gives honor and glory to God.

Insofar as he is capable, a person must void himself of all, so that ... he will continually live as though demuded ... and in darkness. Like a blind man he must lean on dark faith, accept it for his guide and light, and rest on nothing of what he understands, tastes, feels or imagines. All these perceptions are a darkness that will lead him astray. Faith lies beyond all this understanding, taste, feeling, and imagining. 9

Until now, the individual has been living in the twilight of the Dark Night. The spiritual faculty of the intellect, with its natural light of reason, has remained untouched. As one moves towards greater reliance upon faith, however, the natural light grows dimmer. The arrival of the "night of faith" is midnight—the complete absence of natural light. "This spiritual night of faith removes everything, both in the intellect and in the senses." 10
II. The Illuminative Way

Not until God's infusion of the theological virtues into his spirit does the individual really begin to succeed in purging the spiritual faculties. The infusion of faith darkens or negates the intellect; that of love darkens the will; and that of hope darkens the memory.\textsuperscript{11} Faith affirms things the intellect has no way of understanding, while love darkens the will by obliging one to love God above all else. All affections and passions for anything else are voided, emptied, removed. Likewise, the memory (which contains "objects"--particular knowledge about past and future events) is voided by hope, that which pertains to what is not yet possessed.\textsuperscript{12} The theological virtues therefore "place a soul in darkness and emptiness in respect to all things."\textsuperscript{13} When this takes place the individual enters contemplation properly speaking. He has actively pursued this through meditation, prayer and mortification, but its onset comes only through God's agency.

Although one who enters the state of contemplation (the illuminative way) attempts to detach himself from all human wisdom, he is not without a guide as to how to act in the world. The journey in faith embraces supernatural prudence.\textsuperscript{14} Infusion of the theological virtues allows one to imitate and follow Christ in daily activities. This ability, or knowledge, does not come in the normal way, however, since divine knowledge is general and obscure. An indication of the difference between human and divine wisdom is that many people, upon losing the ability to meditate, initially feel idle and worthless, unaware that they are receiving an infusion of divine wisdom.
Since the individual lacks the feelings of the sensitive part of the soul, but not possessing these particular ideas and concepts which the senses and intellect are accustomed to act upon, he does not perceive this [divine] knowledge.

For this reason the purer, simpler and more perfect the general knowledge is, the darker it seems to be and the less the intellect perceives. On the other hand, the less pure and simple the knowledge is in itself, although it enlightens the intellect, the clearer and more important it appears to the individual, since it is clothed, wrapped or commingled with some intelligible forms apprehensible to the intellect or senses. 15

Because this is the nature of God's communications of knowledge to the soul, St. John explains that

In order to draw nearer the divine ray the intellect must advance by unknowing rather than by the desire to know . . . .

Contemplation, consequently, by which the intellect has a higher knowledge of God, is called mystical theology, meaning the secret wisdom of God. For this wisdom is secret to the very intellect that receives it. 16

The more habituated one becomes to this calm and quietude, the deeper his experience of the general loving knowledge of God grows. It is more enjoyable than anything imaginable. Without the soul doing anything, the divine infusion brings peace, rest, savor and delight. 17

It also provides strength and energy. As one remains in loving attentiveness to God, the theological virtues increase the purification of the faculties; for successful contemplation depends on the absence of discursive thought.

One benefit the soul receives through contemplation is knowledge of its true condition and misery: how wretched it really is, its virtual nothingness compared to God, and its inability to accomplish anything on its own. 18 When one stops relying on his faculties for
guidance, the divine light strikes the soul, at times so forcibly that
the person is stung by his own deep impurities. The contrast between
the divine ray and the still impure substance of the soul is glaringly
obvious, and the contemplative thus realizes his insignificance and
wretchedness. At the same time he becomes intensely aware of God’s
grandeur and majesty. The humility which develops from this realization
enables the individual to love his neighbors more than before, for he
judges them less harshly than when he enjoyed an intense spiritual
favor the others lacked. 19

For those who eventually go on to union with God, the bridling of
the appetites and elementary purgation of the senses lasts a long time,
Union is not the ultimate destination of all who enter the illuminative
way, but belongs to a chosen few. "In the measure of the degree of
love to which God wishes to raise a soul, He humbles it with greater
or less intensity, or for a longer or shorter period of time." 20 Even
the person who will eventually reach union is given "breathing spells,"
however. He passes out of the initial round of purgations, as a pro-
cficient rather than a beginner, and for many years afterwards enjoys
the good things of God, with "more abundant interior delight" than he
did as a beginner. 21 The purgation of the soul is not yet complete,
though, and certain aridities and darknesses occur from time to time;
these are far more intense than in the past, but of shorter duration.

During this interval, in which (except for the occasional aridities)
the soul is on the ascendancy, its sensory part, as well as its spiri-
tual part, is better able to receive God’s communications. It is
purer now and, locked together with the spiritual part of the soul, is
affected by the increased inflow of secret, loving, divine wisdom. However, because it is sensible, i.e., weak and incapable of vigorous spiritual communications, one often suffers physical infirmities, injuries and weaknesses of the stomach. These are a direct outcome of the contemplation the spiritual part of the soul is receiving. As they become progressively united and conformed, the two parts of the soul are prepared to suffer through the more profound and painful darkness ahead.

When the time of the new afflictive purgation arrives, God again takes away the spiritual satisfactions received earlier, and more fully voids the spiritual faculties. The individual still needs his "habitual" imperfections purified: their roots are deeply imbedded in the substance of the soul. These imperfections cause "the natural dullness everyone contracts through sin, and a distractive and inattentive spirit, which must be illumined, clarified and recollected [in God] through the hardships and conflicts of this night." As divine contemplation assails the soul forcibly, to strengthen and subdue it, one may suffer such weakness as to nearly die. "Both the sense and the spirit undergo such agony and pain that the soul would consider death a relief." The contemplative is certain that God has rejected him now, and cast him into darkness.

In the same way that fire consumes the tarnish and rust of metal, the divine rays of contemplation annihilate, empty and consume all affections and imperfect habits deeply rooted in the soul. Only at intervals is one aware of the intensity of this purification, since constant torment would kill a person. Because of the solitude and
desolation the night brings on, one finds no comfort or support in either doctrine or one's spiritual director. The contemplative feels like a prisoner, until his spirit has been so humbled, softened and perfected that it becomes as delicate, simple and refined as the spirit of God. To be truly effective, this stage of purification must last for years, although with periods in which the pain subsides and the soul understands the "goods" God bestows upon it. Yet in spite of the torment involved,

There is nothing in contemplation or the divine inflow which of itself can give pain; contemplation rather bestows sweetness and delight. The cause for not experiencing these agreeable effects is the soul's weakness and imperfection at the time, its inadequate preparation, and the qualities it possesses which are contrary to this light. Because of these the soul has to suffer when the divine light shines upon it.

After every recess in the torment, the new purgation is more severe than the last. The extent of the voiding process is such that a person may even experience long periods of forgetfulness in the memory.

III. The Wounding of Divine Love

As the trials and tribulations of the Dark Night progress, brought on by the infusion of divine contemplation, the soul slowly becomes aware of being enkindled by God's love. As the divine ray, or light, increases in the soul, love and longing for God also increase. Initially one is more aware of an aridity of sense, and an emptiness of faculty, than of a burning desire for God, since the "flame of love" increases slowly. The individual does not know where it has come from, or what it is, but once the flame has intensified,

the longings for God grow so great that it will seem to one that his bones are drying up in his thirst
[for God], and his nature withering away, his ... strength diminishing ...

In the midst of its conflicts, the soul feels wounded by the strong love. Its burning passion is a foretaste of the eventual union with God, and shares somewhat in the properties of union. The strength obtained from the soul’s trials, and the ardor it now feels, are signs that one is beginning to love God with his whole heart, mind and strength. The increase in divine light which inflames the soul marks the closing hours of the Dark Night. The supernatural illumination of the soul begins to be felt as light or heart rather than as darkness. This indicates the onset of dawn rather than the pitch black of midnight.

The renovation of the soul is completed when the intellect is so illumined with supernatural light that it becomes divine; the will is so informed with love of God that it no longer loves humanly, but divinely; and the memory recollects God constantly. “And thus this soul will be a soul of heaven, heavenly and more divine than human.”

A soul strays from God only because of appetites, discursive meditation, knowledge or affections (either through an excess or defect of these things). Thus, once the operations and movements of the soul in these matters are arrested, the individual can no longer err. Only the goods of union with God are imparted to the appetites and faculties. This secures one from vainglory, pride, presumption and false joy.

In the state of union, God alone dwells in the soul, which “has no other function than that of an altar, on which God is adored in praise and love.” The two wills (God’s and man’s) become one—the soul becomes God by participation. It might be added that once a person
acquires the habit (and not just touches or moments) of union, he no longer experiences lapses of memory or other defects associated with the Dark Night. Rather, he possesses greater perfection than before in all actions necessary and fitting.

IV. The Unitive Way

Although not the main concern of this paper, an explanation of the sanjuanist conception of union is necessary to complete the picture of the Dark Night. At the close of the Dark Night, where attachment to anything besides God has been destroyed, one is finally ready for union. Rather, the soul is ready for union, since the body, which is material rather than spiritual, is incapable of full participation in "spiritual marriage."

St. Paul states of his sublime vision in the third heaven... that he does not know whether he received it in the body or out of it. Nevertheless, no matter how it did take place, it occurred outside the body. For if the body had participated, St. Paul would have known of this and the vision would not have been as sublime as he implied by stating that he heard such secret words that it is unlawful for man to speak them. Knowing full well that such favors [are] preceivable in so fragile a vessel [as the body]... 36

St. John is not a dualist. In his eyes matter is not evil, but weak. For him, sin is spiritual, rooted in the will, and causes the will to deviate from its inclination to the Good. Therefore, spiritual purgation is much more intensive than physical mortification. Nevertheless, to the extent that he sees the body as a prison for the soul, John echoes Platonic rather than Aristotelian thinking: "The soul's] presence in the body makes her feel like a noble lord held in prison." 38
The union of the soul and God is one of "likeness," in which the
Holy Spirit enables the soul to love God the same way God loves the soul.
Love does not effect likeness of essence between the soul and God. The
soul retains its own created substance eternally. Instead, love "removes
the distance" between the soul and God.\(^{39}\) During the Dark Night, God's
immeasurable transcendence was repeatedly stressed, and the desire to
honor and glorify anything but Him was erased. The individual now can
turn wholly to God, however, and in this state he "participates" in God
through the Holy Spirit dwelling within his soul. The Holy Spirit allows
him to reciprocate God's love; thus God and soul are said to love each
other equally. Emptied of evil inclinations, the soul wills only what
God wills, and loves with God's love. This is the state of transformation,
or absorption, although the connotation of "loss of identity" sometimes
associated with absorption does not apply to the sanjuanist union.\(^{40}\)
Here the soul simply functions at its highest possible level, to fulfill
the purpose for which it was created. It loves God with all its strength
and all its might, though in earthly life even this union is incomplete.
Full transformation, which St. John does not describe, must wait until
the sensitive veil (of earthly life) has been torn, so that the soul can
see God clearly.

The state of union is called habitual union. At certain moments the
soul also experiences a "union of the faculties" (which involves only
the spiritual faculties, in keeping with John's low opinion of the phy-
sical world and the sensory faculties' participation in it). The union
of the faculties can last only a short time, since it takes the soul out
of all cognizance of itself or the world.\(^{41}\) Because the intellect, for
example, is completely flooded with general and obscure divine knowledge at this time, there is no room for particular knowledge, including that of self. Thus the soul is said to be "annihilated" to itself and all things, although this condition clearly is not ontological. The divine knowledge given the soul during "union of the faculties" does not make it omniscient. Instead,

... the soul in this state resembles Adam in the state of innocence, who did not know evil. For she is so innocent that she does not understand evil, nor does she judge anything in a bad light. And she will hear very evil things and see them with her own eyes and be unable to understand that they are so, since she does not have within herself the habit of evil by which to judge them ....42

Thus, even in highest transformation, the soul is limited in its ability to be divinized. Rather than become God, the individual becomes like Adam before the Fall, viz., the perfect human being.

Union of the faculties occurs occasionally in the state of habitual union, but after each occurrence the individual returns to an awareness of the world and self. He continues, until death, to love perfectly and to will nothing contrary to God's will.43
CHAPTER IV

SUFISM AND SPIRITUAL DARKNESS

Islamic mysticism began to develop soon after the religion itself sprang up. In its earliest stages, Sufism was not so much mysticism as a search for a rule of life, based on the revealed faith of the Qur’an and the Prophet. The earliest Muslim mystics sought to interiorize the laws and doctrine of the Qur’an to a greater extent than did their fellow Muslims. Their search for an appropriate lifestyle led to asceticism, on the theory that worshipping "no god but God" meant living without physical comfort, material happiness and sensual pleasure. Thus they carried their profession of God’s unity to the extreme, but did not conflict with the practices of the mainstream Muslim community.

The powerful eschatological overtones of the quranic message—the nearness of the impending Day of Judgment, when God will chastise the unbelievers—led many pious ascetics to forego all comforts of everyday life and seek the solitude of the desert. There they could worship God wholeheartedly and without distraction. The trend towards isolation grew stronger; and in imitation of the highly regarded Christian monks living in the desert, these ascetics began to wear woolen robes. The probable derivation of the term "Sufi" is the Arabic word for wool, suf.

God is stated to be supremely transcendent and unknowable in the Qur’an. In spite of His being nearer than one’s jugular vein, He is utterly different from His creation. A certain parallel can be drawn
between the roles of the Qur'an in Islam and the person of Christ in
Christianity as the central vehicles of God's self-revelation. However,
in Christianity God is claimed to be, in principle, ultimately and
completely revealed through one man. The Qur'an reveals merely that
God is utterly mysterious and cannot be understood or penetrated.²

The most sincere early ascetics had a heartfelt desire to scale the
unattainable heights of the divine mystery. Although this was not pos-
sible according to Islamic doctrine, the early Sufis found that they
could close the gap experientially, through love. No definite time or
place can be pinpointed for the formation of this idea. Considering
the hostility it engendered from official Islam, however, and the influ-
ence of Christian monks on Sufis generally, Christianity is the most
probable source of the notion that God can be reached through love. The
adoption of this idea brought on Sufism's first real conflict with reli-
gious authorities, towards the end of the first Islamic century.

During the second century, the formulation of doctrine and juris-
prudence began to be institutionalized in different schools of thought.
The strictest jurists and theologians in these schools distrusted the
unorthodox and interiorized religious life which stressed love of God
even above awe of Him. Their great concern was that the Muslim community
be constituted and informed through total submission to the inaccessible
God, following the precepts handed down in the Qur'an and the traditions
about the Prophet. These guardians of the faith did not especially dis-
like the Sufis' sincerity and deep love of God. Their objections centered
on the fact that interior experience was the Sufis' primary guide in the
worship of God. If this were allowed as a criterion of the behavior a
Muslim should display towards God, it could lead to the degeneration of the faith, through the eventual acceptance of impure and deceptive inner experiences.⁴ Thus Sufism began to be denounced at the same time it crystallized its emphasis on love of God and took on a character of its own.

Even in their early attempts to reach out to God in love, and to communicate with Him through love, the goal of Muslim mystics was to achieve a sort of union with God. His presence would envelop the believer so that she was aware of nothing else. As Rābia of Basra, a mystic of the early second century, wrote in a poem to God:

Oh Beloved of hearts, I have none like to Thee, therefore have pity this day on the sinner who comes to Thee. Oh my Hope and my Rest and my Delight, the heart can love none other but Thee.

Once this love was perfected, the believer “ceased to exist and passed out of self.”⁵ Passing out of self came to be known as ḥaṭṭāḥ. With various ontological interpretations it has been a cornerstone of Islamic mysticism ever since its original formulation.

Sufism continued to evolve along its own route, independently of mainstream authorities, yet retaining its Islamic spirit. Although the spread of Islam had put it in contact with several older cultures and religious traditions, foreign influences did not initially change the central focus of Sufism’s energies, which remained on the Qur’ān and the profession of God’s unity. The emphasis on love and union with the Beloved (God) turned Sufism from asceticism into a full-fledged theological mysticism. As doctors of Ḥaṭṭāḥ (apologetic theology) discussed issues of doctrinal or legal significance among themselves, mystics developed
circles of practice and theory which roughly corresponded to issues debated by the theologians. This was only natural, since Sufism at this time was still simply the "interior experimentation of a religion dutifully practiced." The French Islamic scholar, Louis Massignon, asserts that one can chart a table of concordance in which the technical terms of the mystics correspond one-to-one with the central theories of the prevailing dogmatics.

A watershed for Sufism occurred at the end of the third century, the early tenth century of the Christian era, when a Sufi named Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj was publicly executed in Baghdad, on the charge of heresy. Ḥallāj was an ecstatic, a passionate lover of God, whose experience of union with the divine had compelled him to openly declare, "I am the Truth." This was tantamount to proclaiming himself God, many Muslims thought—the cardinal sin in a religion which prohibits association of anything with God. It was only the most vocal of Ḥallāj's many extremist utterances and beliefs, all of which came from his intensely love-oriented experience of union with God. Refusing to retract his statements, Ḥallāj was executed in A.D. 922. He died asking God to forgive his persecutors for their ignorance in killing him, and became known as "the martyr of divine love."

Ḥallāj's execution by the authorities was the highpoint of official Islam's animosity towards the Sufis. In the following decades, Sufi masters set themselves to the task of proving their own circle's orthodoxy and denouncing Ḥallāj's heterodoxy. This era produced many manuals which outlined Sufi beliefs and showed their strict adherence to basic Islamic principles. The production of these manuals helped
to clarify the direction Sufism was taking and give it a more delimited nature.

Public pressure on Sufis eased once the majority of them had denounced Hallāj's outcries. Yet within a century of his death, Sufism became entangled with foreign elements which threatened to divorce it completely from Islam. The new veering away from tradition was due in large measure to the writings of the falsafā, Islamic philosophers greatly influenced by Greek thought, especially Neoplatonism. Because of a profound reliance on Greek dialectic and ontology, the writings of these men, in particular Avicenna, were condemned by the doctors of law and jurisprudence. The Ash'arite school of kālām, which had become the standard for orthodoxy by this time (the eleventh century of the Christian era) rejected any notions involving Greek ontology for the explication of theological concepts. But since Hallāj's execution, various social and political factors had been catalysts in the adoption by fringe groups in Islam of a new influx of Persian, gnostic and Greek philosophies.

Sufis no longer publicized their growing divergencies from mainstream Islam, as had Hallāj. Instead they started to form orders, or schools, where only after initiation would they discuss among themselves ideas which developed a gnostic, theosophical character. Avicenna's writings, with their flavour of "natural" mysticism—speculative cosmogony—were particularly popular. As they began to group themselves together somewhat monastically, Sufis lost touch with the simplicity of mainstream Islam. Their divorce from daily Islamic life and traditional authorities, and their free-thinking openness to foreign
influences, resulted in the substitution of "an intellection contemplation of God for an active reliance on Him." 9

Amid such divergent currents as the falsafā, Kalam and Sufi esotericism came a man of great service to the religion and to Sufism. His contribution was to make earlier modes of Sufism once and for all accepted practices in mainstream Islam. Revered as the Proof of Islam, Abu Ḥamid al-Ghazzālī first achieved recognition as a jurist and scholar. Intellectually dissatisfied with the constraints of this field, he moved on to theology, and thoroughly investigated Greek thought, the falsafā, and Ash'arite Kalam. He excelled here as well, yet remained dissatisfied. This led him finally to Sufism. Realizing that it required practice and not just intellectual study, Ghazzālī isolated himself from society, and lived the Sufi life for ten years. Here he found his home, and remained a Sufi the rest of his life. He eventually returned to society, however, and wrote several treatises on the validity of Sufism as a true expression of Islam.

Ghazzālī's theology was eclectic. It harbored traces of Greek, Jewish and Christian elements. However, these did not alter his unshakeable confidence in the truth and main tenets of Islam.10 His great contribution to the faith was the integration of Sufism, and the elements of affection towards God that it promoted, into Islamic theology in an organic manner. This he did in such a way that Sufism could be accepted by official Islam, and henceforth a Muslim could love God openly and without guilt.11

Ironically, Ghazzālī based his claim for the truth of Islam more on subjective religious experience than anything else. He recognized
Kalām as having only medicinal value, for doubters. This attitude, coming from one universally acclaimed for his work, may have contributed to the eventual stagnation of Kalām, for as its prestige shrank, the impetus to continually reformulate it also shrank. Above all, once the degree and manner of interiorization of faith were made the criterion of certainty, faith was reduced to a subjective norm. That factor, as well as Ghazzālī's later writings (which incorporated a Neoplatonic, gnosticized vision of the world into an Islamic framework) presaged the takeover of Sufism in the following century by a "monism of Being." 12

With the exception of a very few orders (such as the Shādhilī school of Northern Africa) Sufism after Ghazzālī, held in check for a short time, finally broke loose and steered completely away from orthodoxy. It retained its Muslim character only in respect to some of its major emphases. Later Sufis, led by the Spaniard Ibn al-Arabi, transfigured Sufism's formerly dominant emphasis on the Unity of Witness into a Unity of Being. In the Unity of Witness, God was attested to, in His mystery, in the Sufi's heart. He retained his divine transcendence, and only through love could the believer be linked with the Creator in union. However, the Unity of Being, which joined Flo- tinian monism with the Ash'arite affirmation of God as sole agent and sole being, posited a created world which was merely a manifest reflection of the unique divine existence. In this situation the human spirit emanated directly from the divine. 13 Created existence had no real or separate identity, and union with God became a philosophical exercise, completely divorced from asceticism. Sufism by now had
renounced its social radiance as an exemplar for the community as well. "For the duty of fraternal correction ... [it substituted] an esoteric science which did not have to be divulged, and closed initiatory circles ... [signs of an] intellectually fossilized corporation of ecstasy," a sort of "supernatural opium."\textsuperscript{14}

Although Sufism did evolve gradually further away from its Islamic roots, there have always been those whose doctrines remained within the pale of orthodoxy. One of the two authors to be discussed in this chapter, Ibn Abbād of Ronda, lived nearly two centuries after Ibn al-Arabī, yet was quite orthodox in his treatment of mysticism. But he was a striking contrast to the more popular esotericism of his day.

Sufism's relationship to Islam is such that in a comparative study with Christian mysticism, exact parallels and comparisons cannot be made. Islamic mysticism was more directly inspired by its sacred book than was Christian, and it adapted itself to numerous philosophical thought systems, which varied greatly with time and place. Christian mysticism developed under the aegis of the Church, usually within monastery walls. It shared the philosophical and theological bent of the Fathers of the Church and the leading theologians of the day, at least until the Reformation. This inclusion in the general flow of Christian thought gave it consistency, and a solid philosophical base from which its adherents could minutely analyze their experiences.

Islamic mysticism did not have one sure philosophical base, shared by the official religion, from which it could explicate its principles. Ibn al-Arabī marked an era of complex philosophical and theological analysis of mystical phenomena, but his chosen system of thought was
alien to the spirit of orthodox Islam. The two Sufis who have been chosen for a comparison with John of the Cross share with him not only "spiritual aridity," but mystical systems strongly stamped by the character of their religion. These men, al-Junayd of Baghdad and Ibn Abbād of Ronda, present theological doctrines and psychological insights less philosophically sophisticated than those of John of the Cross.

For that reason, the analyses of their "dark nights" will be different from that done in the preceding chapter. Nevertheless, they present the closest approximations to St. John's Dark Night of any major Sufi author in the classical period (or at least of Sufis whose works have been translated into European languages).

In order to put into perspective the phenomena of spiritual darkness which both Junayd and Ibn Abbād describe, a short description must be given of the general path Sufis followed towards union with God. The rough outline of this path, once established, was much more consistently agreed upon than any particular school of thought over the centuries of Sufism's development.

I. The Classical Sufi Path

Like Christian mysticism, Sufism prescribes a particular way to reach union with God. The basic relationship between the individual and God, between Creator and creature, starts before life on earth, at a time when all people are just ideas, or spiritual existences, in the mind of God. A verse in the Qur'ān inspired this idea:

And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify touching themselves, "Am I not your Lord?"
They said, "Yes, we testify ...." 15
The "seed" are interpreted as persons living an existence different from that on earth—a spiritual existence, within God yet separate from Him. The goal of the Muslim mystic is to return to this existence, to live with God in spiritual intimacy. This is a union in which God and His subjects are still differentiated.

The spiritual existential identity, or higher soul, which precedes earthly life, combines on earth with a lower animal soul, one's carnal self. The animal soul is the seat of all evil, while the higher soul is the source of all good. The higher soul has three layers: the (symbolic) heart, the spirit, and the conscience or secret (ṣīrṣa), in which God can be found. The secret of the soul houses a divine spark. "That part in which the evil suggestions of the self are not felt, it is the secret shrine of God Himself, wherein He knows man and man can know Him."16

Although the carnal self acts as a veil to keep one from knowing God, it is not an inextinguishable hindrance. In Islam, "human nature is potentially good and it is on account of this potential goodness that it rises high towards its ideal, in spite of so many temptations and hindrances in the way of progress."17 The lower soul calls one to Hell, but the higher soul calls one to Paradise.18 The solution of this tension is the purgation of all evil inclinations. Complete purgation results in 

\[ \text{fanā} \], "the passing away of the attributes of the lower soul and the passing away of repugnance to, and reliance on, anything that may happen."19

Purification encompasses approximately three stages, according to one well-known Sufi treatise: 1) that of the stations, which indicate
the degree of progress one can achieve in seeking God; 2) that of the states—gifts of grace bestowed upon one by God to encourage her on the journey; and finally 3) the end of the path, the unitive life. The first two stages are not successive, but occur together. Each new human effort is met by a divine favor. The human effort begins with submission—to the tenets of Islam, to the profession of God’s unity, and to the command to worship God alone. As previously mentioned, this involves the realization that attachment to anything other than God is idolatrous. Thus the journey begins with mortification and purgation. As the Sufi attains each new station, and receives each new state from God, a passionate love to be with God grows and grows. Finally, completely purified, the Sufi can be united with the Beloved, passing away from any awareness of self and subsisting in God alone.

To delineate the process more clearly, a standard list is given below, composed of ten stations and states. The composition and order of these stages vary from author to author, but the general progression is always similar. The ten stations are: repentance, abstinence, renunciation and patience, poverty, gratitude, fear and hope, trust (in God), and contentment. The ten states which parallel these stations are: love, longing, intimacy, proximity to (or familiarity with) God, reverence, union, contraction and expansion, annihilation and subsistence, and collectedness and separation.

II. Abu’l Qāsim al-Junayd

Al-Junayd’s claim to fame in the history of Sufism rests on his setting down in writing fundamental principles of Islamic mysticism,
and on his synthesis of Sufi thought. Although future mystics were able to elaborate his principles, they were incapable of either adding to or altering them. To this extent Junayd can be called the father of Sufism.

Junayd lived in Baghdad during the third Islamic century (the ninth century of the Christian era), and belonged to a particular Sufi tradition which stressed ethical ideas as well as mysticism. His principles were based largely on the Qur'ān and the customs of the community, so his teachings were usually accepted by mystic and theologian alike. The main concern of the Baghdad school, and one which Junayd correlated to all his other mystical doctrines, was tawhīd (unification). This is the central tenet of Muslim faith, viz., the profession of God's unity. One prominent Sufi, a contemporary of Junayd's, defines tawhīd this way:

Tawhīd is that you know that God's omnipotence in the calling into being of anything does not result necessarily from a natural power, and that His creation goes on without instrument; that the cause of all things is His creation, which has no cause and that everything of which you, yourself, may form a conception is a thing, so that God is different from it.

Junayd took tawhīd further, probing the philosophical and spiritual implications of unification. His famous encapsulated definition runs:

Unification is the separation of that which has from that which was originated in Time, and departure from familiar haunts and separation from brethren and forgetfulness of what is known and unknown and God only in place of all.

He recognized that not all believers would see with equal clarity the diverse ethical, mystical and psychological implications of tawhīd. Thus he classified awareness of it into four stages. The first stage
of tawhīd is what Islam demands as a basis of faith from every believer—the profession of God's unity through the discarding of all "conceptions of gods, companions, opposites, equals, [and] likenesses to God, but with the retention of hopes and fears in forces other than God." The second stage includes the positive characteristics of the first, "combined with the performance of the positive commands and the avoidance of that which is forbidden so far as external action is concerned, all that being a result of their hopes, fears and desires." The third stage, which includes some esoteric knowledge, combines the first two stages' positive characteristics with "the cessation of hopes and fears in forces other than God, all this resulting from the ideas which tally with the awareness of God's presence with [the believer], with God's call to him, and his answer to God."

Although the third stage is acquired through a mystical vocation, it is not the final one. The believer is still aware of something other than God, namely herself, and so complete unification has yet to be achieved. In the final stage of tawhīd, the individual exists

... without individuality before God ... a figure over which His decrees pass as He in His Omnipotence determined, and that he should be sunk in the flooding seas of His Unity, completely obliterated both from himself and from God. It is a state where the devotee has achieved the true realization of the Oneness of God in true proximity to Him. He is lost to sense and action because God fulfills in him what He has willed of him.

At this point, the believer's own will has been extinguished and she becomes the very will of God. A prominent Sufi of a later generation interpreted the fourth stage of tawhīd this way:

the [believer] has no regard to himself so that he
becomes like an atom, as he was in the eternal past, where the Covenant of Unification was made. It means ... the annihilation of the individual when he is overpowered by the revelation of His majesty, so that he becomes a passive instrument and a subtle substance that feels nothing, and his body is a repository for the mysteries of God to Whom his speech and actions are to be attributed. 31

The Covenant of Unification is one of the central themes of Junayd's writings, called the theory of mithaq.

Briefly stated, Junayd believes there are two kinds of existence in God. One is of "divine" existence, which is timeless and occurs while people are simply "higher souls," living in God's mind. The other kind is that in the created world. The first kind is unquestionably the more perfect and penetrating one, "conquering, victorious and truly overwhelming," because in God's mind, the individual's awareness of self is obliterated and God alone is felt and understood. 32

Junayd seems to interpret the quranic verse on the Covenant through the Neoplatonic doctrine of the soul's pre-existence. Real existence is with God, before we come here. Our lives as created beings on earth are only a secondary, derived existence, similar to what Plotinus describes in the Enneads. Echoing the Neoplatonic symbolism of the "flight of the alone to the Alone," Junayd claims that in the highest stage of taqwad, the believer returns to the primordial sphere of existence where she had been before she was created. For the moment, her normal human existence is discontinued. 33 Her physical body continues on, and to outsiders she seems as before, but in reality her characteristics of individuality have been obliterated. Her will is annihilated, for she lives according to God's will alone. One in this condition wills nothing but what God wills. She is dead to herself but alive
The process by which one reacquires this primary existence, \textit{fanā́} (obliteration or annihilation), is another theory central to Junayd's system, one which bears a resemblance to several aspects of St. John's Dark Night.

III. The Theory of \textit{Fanā́}

Al-Junayd classifies three stages of \textit{fanā́}:

1) the obliteration of attributes, characteristics, and natural qualities in your motives when you carry out your religious duties, making great efforts and doing the opposite of what you may desire, and compelling yourself to do the things which you do not wish to do.

2) the obliteration of your pursuit after pleasures and even the sensation of pleasure in obedience to God's behests—so that you are exclusively His, without any intermediary means of contact.

3) the obliteration of the consciousness of having attained the vision of God at the final stage of ecstasy when God's victory over you is complete. At this stage you are obliterated and have eternal life with God, and you exist only in the existence of God because you have been obliterated. Your physical being continues but your individuality has departed.

Stage One concerns the active life, and requires perseverance in moral training, through a deliberately ascetic lifestyle. This often goes against one's natural inclinations and desires, which normally disrupt the attempt to reach God. Stage Two involves cutting oneself off from all pleasures, including the enjoyment of fulfilling God's religious injunctions. It is done so that there remain between God and the worshipper no intermediary objects. This aspect of \textit{fanā́} concerns one's mental and spiritual life. Stage Three is the state of losing con-
sciousness of everything, even awareness of union with God. The worshipper is so overwhelmed and engulfed by God that she is unaware of anything in the earthly plane of existence.\textsuperscript{36} Her physical body continues on, but her faculty of rational perception has passed away, and she loses her individual awareness.\textsuperscript{37}

In spite of this proximity to God, the worshipper does not lose her ontological essence or become part of God.

Even ... in this divine state, he cannot find a way to reach the ultimate reality which now possesses him.
It is [however] only in this state that God can be seen in His exalted nature, His beatific names be appreciated.\textsuperscript{38}

(The condition of being absent to the world—spiritually obliterated from it—is always accompanied by the corresponding condition of subsisting in God, \textit{baga}, so \textit{fan\textsuperscript{a}} is not the equivalent of \textit{nirvana}.)

The worshipper's inability to become God, or identical to God, is demonstrated by the onset, following the attainment of \textit{fan\textsuperscript{a}/baga}, of trial and tribulation—\textit{bal\textsuperscript{a}}. \textit{Bal\textsuperscript{a}} is a "testing time," when the believer "struggles and prevails and is faithful to God and then he is conquered by that which obliterates him, that same strength, that elevated spiritual stage, that noble relationship with God."\textsuperscript{39}

During \textit{bal\textsuperscript{a}}, one's inner spirit is metamorphosed and loses its way, figuratively speaking, in eternity. The once familiar places are no longer a refuge; nor is the former home of the body any more the abode of the spirit. The believer is consumed with longing for God and moans constantly at her loss of orientation. She is sorrowful, suffers deeply and seeks passionately after God, Whose pursuit becomes her constant preoccupation. Though it has \textit{bal\textsuperscript{a}}, the soul has not been rejected. Although it sees that it is still human (since it still enjoys physical
pleasures),

it no longer arrogates a degree of importance to its individuality, but is amply satisfied with God's love and propinquity. Such, then, is the infinite duration of this newly found spiritual life and the intensity of the stage of balā that the quest of the suppression of its individuality is completely swamped by the lightning flash of God's regard. 

Thus, in the highest stage of fanā, the believer is still separated from God by a veil, causing anguish and suspense. God helps and sustains the believer in this renunciation of her remaining individuality. Because she yet retains consciousness, and thus is separate from God, the Sufi simultaneously experiences pain and pleasure.

The importance of balā in Junayd's theology cannot be overstressed. Later interpreters often misunderstood Junayd, and interpreted fanā as a passing away of human qualities and transformation into the qualities of God, so that one became identical to God. Such a misinterpretation leads to the Christian doctrine of incarnation (Ḥallāj, one of Junayd's pupils, was accused of this). But the doctrine of balā proves Junayd's theory true to the spirit of Islam. The prominent Sufi Sarrāj explains that in Junayd's doctrine,

when a man goes forth from his own qualities and enters into the qualities of God, he goes forth from his own will, which is a gift to him from God, and enters into the Will of God, knowing that his will was given to him by God, and that by virtue of this gift he can stop seeing himself and become entirely devoted to God .... Those who have erred in this doctrine have failed to observe that the qualities of God are not God. To make God identical with His qualities is to be guilty of infidelity, because God does not descend into the heart, but that which descends into the heart is faith in God and belief in His Unity and reverence for the thought of Him.

Sarrāj also warns that in fanā,
Humanity does not depart from man ... but the inborn qualities of humanity are changed and transmuted by the all-powerful radiance that is shed upon them from the Divine Realities. The attributes of humanity are not the essence of humanity. Those who speak of the doctrine of fanā mean the passing away of regarding one's own actions and works of devotion through continuously regarding God as the doer of these actions on behalf of His servant.\textsuperscript{43}

Once an individual has become absent to self and world, and present only to God, "the laws and standards which normally apply are without significance or meaning since for him everything is God's will."\textsuperscript{44} The distinction between good and evil becomes meaningless. The last stage of fanā is not the final goal of the mystic quest, however, nor the highest state. It cannot and must not be the exclusive aim of the Sufi who feels responsibility toward fellow Muslims. God does not wish to keep the believer in isolation forever. Rather,

God desires to return His worshipper to the community and does so, making clear the evidence of His grace to him, so that the lights of His gifts in the return of his individual characteristics scintillate and attract the community to him who appreciate him.\textsuperscript{45}

At this point Junayd adopts the ethical theory of sobriety, sahm, which, with unification, forms the basis of his whole mystical system. A later commentator says of the doctrine of sobriety that "it is the best-known and most celebrated of all doctrines and all sheiks have adopted it, notwithstanding that there is considerable difference in their statements of the ethics of Sufism."\textsuperscript{46}

The believer leaves the intoxication of God's overwhelming victory over her, and enters sobriety. She once more assumes her individual attributes, but her actions in the world henceforth become a pattern for her fellow Muslims to follow. She is in a state of spiritual per-
fection, able to help others with what she has received from God. Sobriety does not entirely eradicate the state of fanā, however. The believer "keeps the experience [of fanā] like a secret treasure concealed within himself." It radiates through the Sufi, so that she lives at the same time in God and in the community.

Only those who constantly receive God's grace can maintain the states of sobriety and fanā simultaneously. It is a strain on the individual and is accompanied by a variety of emotions. She seeks sights of beauty and aesthetic accomplishment around her, to remind her of God; yet these sights are also a source of pain. They remind her of the lost Beloved for Whom she is always homesick. Yet she also often feels release from all care and worry, independence from all things in the world, and can enjoy an otherwise unimaginable sense of liberty.

The state of sobriety is often referred to as the "union of union," while fanā/baqā is called simply "union." Junayd's first two stages of fanā are the equivalent of states preceding fanā/baqā on the standard list given previously. Sobriety is considered the final goal, the unitive life in God. The difficulty of obtaining it is indicated by Hujwīrī:

My shaykh, who followed the doctrine of Junayd, used to say that intoxication [fanā] is the playground of children, but sobriety is the deathfield of men. I say ... that the perfection of the state of the intoxicated man is sobriety ...

Intoxication, then, is to fancy one's self annihilated while the attributes really subsist; and this is a veil. Sobriety, on the other hand, is the vision of subsistence while the attributes are annihilated; and this is actual revelation. It is absurd for anyone to suppose that intoxication is nearer to annihilation than sobriety is, for intoxication is a quality that exceeds sobriety, and so long as a man's attributes tend to increase he is without knowledge; but
when he begins to diminish them, seekers have some hope of Him.31

This statement indicates a lack of agreement among Sufis as to the character of the ultimate earthly state of life with God. The intoxicated, ecstatic, oblivious condition of fanā/baqā was preferred by many.

Because of his doctrine of sobriety and his emphasis on suffering after fanā, Junayd’s vision is similar to St. John’s Dark Night. Of all the descriptions of fanā given by mystics in Sufism’s "Golden Age," Junayd’s comes the closest to St. John’s spiritual aridity. The implications, similarities and dissimilarities of Junayd’s doctrines of fanā/baqā and sobriety to the sanjuanist Dark Night will be elaborated in the final chapter of this thesis. The following section deals with the one other striking similarity to the Dark Night in Sufi literature—a phenomenon which occurs at an earlier stage of the mystic journey than fanā. This is one which the standard list places immediately preceding fanā, the state of contraction and expansion (qādā and bāst).

IV. Ibn Abbād of Ronda

In 1932, a Spanish Islamicist, Miguel Asín Palacios, wrote an article entitled, "Un précurseur hispano-musulman de Saint Jean de la Croix." He hypothesized than an Andalusian Sufi was a principal inspiration for St. John’s use of the symbol “Dark Night.” The Muslim in question, Ibn Abbād of Ronda, was a spiritual director in his faith and an orator in a Moroccan mosque in the century preceding John of the Cross. He wrote of the spiritual states of qādā (desolation or contraction) and bāst (consolation or expansion), and likened them to the appearance of night and day in a person’s life. Ibn Abbād also
put great emphasis on the believer's need to endure tribulations during
the journey to God, tribulations sent by God to purify the soul. Finally,
Ibn Abbād warned Sufi novices against attachment to spiritual favors
that God might grant from time to time. He advised them to renounce
all such charismatic gifts, for their own good and their further pro-
gress towards God.

The publication of Asín Palacios' article stirred the interest of
both Islamicists and Hispanists in the academic world of religion. Al-
most all of them, in the intervening years, however, have rejected his
theory of a literary transmission of Ibn Abbād's symbolism to John of
the Cross. Louis Massignon summed up the general feeling of scholars
on the subject when he declared, in 1938, that, "Entre Ibn 'Abbād et
Saint Jean de la Croix il y a plutôt convergence indépendante qu'en
emprunt." The improbability of literary transmission between the two
men does not rule out the possibility of independently conceived and
experienced theological similarities, however. We will conclude this
chapter with an examination of the states of gabā and bast which Ibn
Abbād expounds, and their connection to the renunciation of spiritual
favors and tribulations he believes one must experience on the path
to God.

Gābā and bast were listed by many Sufis as part of the path to God
centuries before Ibn Abbād. Both terms derive from the Qur'ān, where
it is stated that "God contracts and expands." Their definitions
and implications were complicated and widened over time, however. Well
before Ghazzālī, eminent Sufis expounded upon the spiritual states of
expansion and contraction. According to Ḥujwīrī,
Qabd denotes the contraction of the heart in the state of being veiled, and bast denotes the expansion of the heart in the state of revelation. My Shaykh used to say that both qabd and bast are the result of one spiritual influence which descends from God on man, and either fills the heart with joy and subdues the lower soul or subdues the heart and fills the lower soul with joy; in the latter case contraction (qabd) of the heart is expansion (bast) of the lower soul, and in the former case expansion of the heart is contraction of the lower soul. He who interprets this matter otherwise is wasting his breath.

Hujwīrī, then, favors expansion over contraction on the journey to God.

A contemporary of Hujwīrī's, Qushayrī, writes that qabd and bast are "the pure objectivity of the [gnostic] untinged with any individual subjective reaction such as fear and hope." Sarrāj, another leading Sufi of the same period, defines them as:

two noble spiritual states belonging to gnostics. When God contracts them, He causes them to shrink from partaking of subsistence and permitted things, of eating, drinking and talking; when He expands them, He restores them to these things, undertaking to protect them therein. Qabd is the state of a gnostic who has no room left for anything but the gnosis of God.

Thus Sarrāj comes down in favor of the spiritual superiority of qabd over bast.

The first Sufi to use the image of night and day to explain qabd and bast was Abu-l-Ḥasan as-Shādhili, after whom is named the mystical order to which Ibn Abbad belonged. Ibn Abbad quotes Shādhili's description of qabd and bast in one of his own works:

Qabd and bast are two states from which the servant of God is rarely exempt. They alternately succeed each other, as the night and day. If qabd takes hold of you suddenly, and you do not know why, remember that the "time" is also double; night and day. Qabd is that which more closely resembles the night, as bast is that which more closely resembles the day. If you are served with qabd without knowing why, your duty is to be calm and reposed in words and movements—
exterior and interior. If you operate this way, the night will very quickly leave you with the sighting of the sun of day, or the stars which will guide you or the moon which will illuminate you, or finally the sun of the light to which you are going. The stars are the stars of knowledge, the moon is the moon of unity, the sun is the sun of gnosis. But if you keep yourself in the obscurity of the night, you will rarely escape perdition.  

Here qabd is like an overcast night in which the believer must guard all initiative for fear of stumbling. She must wait patiently until the sun, or moon and stars, come out. As "luminous night" symbolizes divine illumination for Dionysius the Areopagite, the moon and stars symbolize for Shâdhili "a sort of aurora of illumination," through which the mystic is elevated by the knowledge of God's unit. So the night, when illuminated, becomes the "time" of waiting for the sun of gnosis. Shâdhili states that "frequently [God] grants in the night of qabd more than you acquire in the resplendid day of bast."  

According to Asín Palacios, this interpretation of qabd and bast, along with the doctrine of the renunciation of spiritual favors and the privileged role assigned to tribulation, are ideas unique to the Shâdhili Order in Islam. Yet they are exceedingly similar to those of the Carmelite Order in Christianity, and especially to John of the Cross. They are treated most comprehensively by two of the Shâdhili Order's greatest theologians, Ibn Atâ Allâh of Alexandria and Ibn Abbâd of Ronda. As Ibn Abbâd was closer both in time and location to John of the Cross, Asín Palacios chose to call him a "hispano-muslim precursor" to the Spanish mystic.  

Ibn Abbâd's major work is a commentary upon sentences written by Ibn Atâ Allâh. In it, Ibn Abbâd indicates that qabd and bast are the
premiere signs of entrance into the mystical life. They correspond, in proficients, to the fear and hope which novices experience. What qabd and bast really indicate is that the believer still has consciousness of her own existence. Only when she has lost herself in God (fanâ) will qabd and bast cease to occur in her.62

Examples of Ibn Abbâd’s vision of God’s purpose in giving the soul desolation and consolation are taken from his Commentary on the Sentences of Ibn Atâ Allâh.

(Sentence 91) In the expansion of the spirit, the sensitive soul finds its enjoyment, testing the joy; whereas in contraction, sensuality brings not a single joy.

Comment: ... In expansion the sensitive soul discovers enjoyment, and as joy takes possession of it, the soul is not able either to dominate or content itself, until finally, because of this, it goes, through its defects, against reverential conduct towards God. By contrast, in contraction, there exists for the sensuality no joy at all, and that is why this state is more pure ...63

...[The conduct one must follow] in contraction is to abandon oneself in God’s hands, until this momentary state passes; ... if one surrenders oneself and abandons oneself to the divine decrees of the moment, this oppression will cease very quickly.64

Here Ibn Abbâd indicates that qabd, the superior state, is not long-lasting, and can be endured without excessive hardship through patient trust in God.

(Sentence 115) He is short-sighted who believes that the divine decrees are not accompanied by divine favors.

Comment: ... We will say first that tribulations, by which God tests his servants, go against their will and put up an obstacle against their natural inclinations of desire and appetite. Being so, all the trouble and cause of this discomfort, since it goes against self-love of the sensitive soul, is in consequence very commendable. In effect, this tribulation makes one return to God and enter by the door with a sincere desire to search for him ... and this is the greatest advantage of tribulation ....
It is in tribulations that man practices the interior virtues, of which the smallest are more meritorious than mountains of exterior works of virtue. These are, for example, patience, conformity, renunciation of things of the world, confidant abandon to Providence, and the desire to enter in front of God.\textsuperscript{65}

Tribulations force one to be humble, lead a more ascetic life, and develop inner virtues. This gradually transforms one's character so that one becomes God-centered rather than self-centered. One theme of Ibn Abbād's reappears throughout his Commentary: the reason God puts obstacles in the way of one's natural desires is to accustom the individual to look only at God, to realize that God alone matters, and that God alone is to be desired. Therefore, the superiority of ḡabd amounts to this: "a tribulation which obliges you to search for refuge in the presence of God is better for you than a favor which makes you forget God and digress from Him."\textsuperscript{66}

Another theme around which ḡabd and ḍast revolve relates to God's transcendence. The purification of the soul is only one stage in the discovery of God, and not the most important one. Were the believer's passions and faults the only veil separating her from union with God, the task of the mystic would be relatively simple. In any event, God would be within one's reach. But the Sufi discovers, once her soul is purified, that the veil of impurity is only the first of many which intervene between God and the soul. The truth of the matter is this:

That which veils God from you is the excess of His proximity. He veils Himself by a too great Transparency, and becomes invisible through the intensity of His light.\textsuperscript{67}

(Here one detects the influence of Neoplatonism on the Shādhilīs, echoing Dionysius' dazzling darkness theme.)
Because God is ultimately the cause of His own veil, and one is kept far from Him by more than her sins, viz., by His holiness, the asceticism of the believer must not be voluntary mortification. It must consist merely of humble and attentive prayer, so that God can remove all necessary veils. For Ibn Atā Allāh, who sees God and world in terms of light and shadow, there is no being after Creation (or before it) other than God. It is only the creature’s illusion that something besides God exists which can veil her from God. God alone is capable of making an obstacle of Himself, Who is pure light. Thus, God alone can introduce the believer into His presence. Yet, even in close proximity to God, the believer is still an infinite distance away. No substantial union can ever take place.

In spite of the distance, however, nothing can intrude between God and the soul once it enters His presence, not even language. This fact finds confirmation in the secret (sīra) of the Sufi’s soul:

The true gnostic is not one who, in the outline of an allusion, finds God more intimate to self than his allusion. But the one who does not outline any of it, being annihilated in the Being of God and centered on His vision.68

Ibn Abbād, while agreeing with Ibn Atā Allāh’s theology, does not make use of speculative ontology. Against centuries of non-Islamic borrowings by Sufis, Ibn Abbād looks for instruction to the central theme of his faith, the profession of God’s transcendent. Its correlate, in his eyes, is the absolute nothingness of all other than God.69 These two great visions, of God’s All and the creature’s nothingness, are the sum and core of Ibn Abbād’s spirituality. He is pessimistic enough to see all being as condemned at its root. Since one’s mere existence
puts a certain limit on God's being, a Sufi must, to attain perfect faith and holiness, renounce all attributions of the reality of her acts to herself. The glory must go to God alone. Whether she does good or bad—simply because she acts—a person limits God's being. Here Ibn Abbād and the Shādhili school reaffirm what Massignon characterizes as "the general tendency of Islamic theology to affirm God more by the destruction than by the construction of being." As has been said of Junayd's mysticism, "God is affirmed more by non-being than by being." 70

The only valuable religious response in such a situation is complete and utter resignation, implied in such fundamental Sufi categories as tawakkul (passive confidence), istislaâma (abandon) and riḍâ' (acceptance). The omnipresence of dialectic in all Sufi thinking is evident. Total insignificance and the helplessness of the creature in the face of its Creator is underscored by the constant paring of opposite motifs. God is infinitely distant, yet nearer than one's jugular vein. The Sufi is annihilated to herself (fanâ) but subsists in God (baqa). And because the Qur'ān tells us that God is deceptive and can lead one down the wrong path, the believer must live constantly in both fear and hope. Because of the possibility of divine machinations (makr), a believer should never interpret spiritual favors extended by God as a sign of salvation. 71 A single attachment to anything other than God Himself may cause her to be judged guilty of "associationism" (polytheism). This cardinal sin merits the chastisement of the unbelievers—eternal punishment. The bestowal of charismatic or spiritual gifts is no guarantee of divine pleasure, for only when the believer reaches the highest stage possible
in life will she be assured of salvation. At that point God grants her a certain spiritual joy confirming her sanctity and the certainty of salvation.\textsuperscript{72} It is the hope in which the believer constantly subsists at the same time as the fear of damnation.

Asín Palacios errs greatly in interpreting the Shādhilī Order’s main emphases as the themes of \textit{qabd/bast} and the renunciation of spiritual gifts. These are merely the outcome of the central, primordial theme of the school’s thinkers, which, according to a later Shādhilī, is the disesteem of the individual’s own force, and the recognition that God is the only actor in the drama of one’s destiny.\textsuperscript{73}
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The phenomenological and theological characteristics of spiritual darkness in John of the Cross, Junayd of Baghdad and Ibn Abbād of Ronda have now been set forth. It is evident that there are similarities between St. John and each of the two Sufi authors.

Asín Palacios has pointed out theological and linguistic parallels between St. John and Ibn Abbād. Each man is revered as a spiritual director in his own religious circle, and evolved many of his insights over years of counselling novices. Both speak of the mystic path in terms of day and night. Night signifies a period of trial and tribulation, and day is the cessation of it. The onset of periods of darkness indicates that the believer has truly entered the mystic way, and no longer uses self-inflicted asceticism to attain spiritual union. God is the ultimate cause of the darkness, which kills the self-love of the individual, forcing him or her more earnestly to seek Him. Tribulation thus allows the believer to develop important spiritual virtues. One gains no joy from sensuality or the things of the world during dark periods. Material and sensory objects are to be abjured, including charismatic gifts such as visions, strange utterances, etc. Though possibly of divine origin, these gifts deflect mind and spirit away from God, so their value is limited; they must not be sought.

Both St. John and Ibn Abbād believe that spiritual darkness reveals
to the soul its utter wretchedness and misery in comparison to God. It also reveals how utterly alien the divine Presence is to the things of the world. The end of the journey, as each man sees it, comes when self-love and self-will have been completely obliterated within the individual. Even in a completely purified state, however, the mystic still remains human, never passing over into a divine nature or substance.

Junayd of Baghdad also provides parallels to St. John in his account of spiritual darkness, though the structure of his experience is significantly different from that of Ibn Abbād. Two Neoplatonic themes invade the theologies of both Junayd and St. John. The "flight of the alone to the Alone" theme (i.e., the soul escaping from bodily hindrances and fleeing to God) is prominent, as is the idea that the body is a prison for the soul.

Testing, trial and tribulation occur in Junayd's system primarily because the individual feels at home neither in self nor in God. This lack of orientation similarly characterizes one who endures the sanjuanist Dark Night. During that time he or she feels close to no one, including the spiritual director. The sense of darkness makes one feel estranged from and rejected by God as well, adding to one's anguish.

Junayd's spiritual system has a strong ethical cast. The purpose of fanā/taqā, and of the subsequent return to sobriety, is that the mystic may aid fellow Muslims in their search for and worship of God. Thus, spiritual perfection--the state of union--is characterized more by awareness of the world than by obliviousness towards it. The mystic also retains his or her human nature throughout the experience. Such concepts find agreement in John of the Cross. The Dark Night's progress
is indicated by the amount of love for fellow creatures and God which one displays or feels. The implicit purpose of the journey is for the mystic to become an example and guide for other souls in their search for God. Once a believer has reached the state of union, he or she is unconscious of the surrounding world only during brief intervals. His or her life is exemplary, yet he remains completely human, despite the unitive state, until death.

Perhaps the most obvious similarity between John of the Cross and Junayd deals with Junayd’s use of the three stages of fanā to indicate the steps of the way to God. Fanā is usually translated as annihilation, obliteration or passing away. The three stages indicate a progressive obliteration of selfish traits within a person. One’s lower, carnal self, which is responsible for sin, is gradually destroyed. This eventually leaves only the higher soul to unite with God. Even at the final stage of fanā, however, the individual’s soul remains in bagā—subsistence in God—rather than entirely passing away.

Junayd’s theology strongly resembles St. John’s Dark Night in these ways. For St. John, the purpose of the Dark Night is to annihilate the soul’s imperfections, i.e., its ability to sin. The process is long and arduous, but the final product is a perfected individual who lives the unitive life in God. Annihilation of selfish traits does not destroy a person, but purifies him or her. Thus St. John likens the Dark Night, with its exceeding tribulation, to the passion and death of Christ. The outcome, the unitive stage, he likens to the resurrection. If fanā/bagā is translated as “die to self/live in God” it can be said to reiterate the theme of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ.
The final similarity to be noted, bearing indirectly on the theme of spiritual darkness, is the theological "return to origins" which Junayd and St. John describe as the essence of union with God. The result of the last stage of fana is that the believer returns to primordial existence as an idea in the mind of God. This concept Junayd conveys using the Adamic symbology of the qur'anic verse on the Covenant of Unification(Qur'ân 7:127).² Adamic symbology is also used by John of the Cross to explain times during the unitive life when one's spiritual faculties are completely inundated by God. One becomes oblivious to the surrounding world, unable to understand evil, and resembling Adam before the Fall.³ For both Junayd and John of the Cross, the mystic's primordial existence in oblivion does not last. It is followed by a return to awareness of and participation in the world, to a life in which one functions as an example of God's favor and an advertisement for the desirability of the holy life.

In spite of the numerous correspondences noted above between John of the Cross and the two Sufi authors, however, phenomenological and theological differences between them are deep and profound. In the comparison of St. John and Ibn Abbâd, the similarities as noted are deceptive. In John of the Cross, the darkness which descends upon the believer is really the divine Presence. It is perceived as darkness only because the mystic cannot yet understand God's true nature. What appears to be dark eventually becomes known as light. God does not directly cause trial and tribulation to occur. Rather, sin within the individual is the cause of suffering. God remains constant throughout in his bestowal of divine light. What changes is the degree of imper-
fection within the individual, which affects one’s perception of God.

For Ibn Abbād, conversely, God does indeed withdraw His favor when darkness occurs. Although this is done to destroy a Sufi’s carnal traits, impurity is not the immediate cause of the darkness. It is God Who is chief actor. In addition, periods of darkness are of short duration in Ibn Abbād’s experience. The lesson to be learned from a dark night is to submit wholly to God—to cease resistance. Once a trial has been accepted as sent from above, it ends and day returns. Prolonged darkness is to Ibn Abbād a sure sign of God’s disfavor. It indicates that the Sufi is headed for eternal damnation, for he or she obviously has not learned to submit to God’s wishes. In sanjuanist theology, on the other hand, the truly efficacious Dark Night lasts for years. This time is required to destroy completely the deep roots of sin within one’s soul. A brief Dark Night indicates that the believer is not far advanced on the path to perfection.

To Ibn Abbād, consolation, or the return to day, is a sensual experience. That is, senses again function normally and one experiences a special joie de vivre. Return to daylight is an inferior state, however. It gives the Sufi an opportunity to focus on the material realm once again, rather than remain fixed on God. For St. John, consolation is spiritual rather than sensual. It is a revelation that the darkness enveloping the individual is actually divine light—illumination. Desolation, or the dark night, is not superior to consolation. It is merely necessary, in that it gradually erases sin and allows one to see God as light rather than as darkness.

Implicit in the above summaries of the workings of day and night
are two different conceptions of God's nature. To John of the Cross, God is consistently loving. His essence is immutable, and the light sent out is His divine Presence, the Holy Spirit. Through the work of the Holy Spirit within the individual, one is brought to perfection. Because God Himself, as Holy Spirit, eradicates sin within one, a person begins to participate in God as soon as he or she has been perfected. The absence of sin allows the Holy Spirit to flow freely through the individual, so that one loves God with His own love. God is immanent throughout the entire process of perfection, as well as transcendent.

Ibn Abbād's God has a strikingly different nature. To Ibn Abbād, God is the chief actor—the only actor—in the mystic path. Unlike St. John, Ibn Abbād denies the individual the ability to achieve even the elementary stages of purification by oneself. All is done by God. It is not accomplished by infused divine rays, however, but merely by fiat or decree. Simply because God wills something, it is automatically done. No Holy Spirit operates within the Sufi.

God is also capable of arbitrary and inconsistent behavior in Ibn Abbād's theology. He is under no requirement to be immutable. If a Sufi is not careful, he or she may end up in perdition, even though he initially found favor in God's sight. The best he or she can do is submit to His will at every turn, and acknowledge His omnipotence. Completion of the purification process does not produce participation in the divine Presence either, for one discovers, once perfected, that God still remains infinitely distant. Purification is not the primary purpose of the mystic journey for Ibn Abbād. Rather, the goal is complete realization of human inconsequence and impotence in the face of
the divine will. Not the perfection of human nature, but the annihilation of the human will is the objective. Where John of the Cross sees human nature as flawed but redeemable, Ibn Abbād sees it as a threat to God's sovereignty, and in need of destruction.

The Islamic conception of God which underlies Ibn Abbād's theology and accounts for the divergences between his and St. John's views also underlies the theology of Junayd. Whereas the main objective of the sanjuanist Dark Night is the purification of the human soul, this is not so for Junayd's three stages of ḥaṣā. Each stage of obliteration seeks to remove intermediary objects between God and the believer: first material, then mental, finally spiritual ones. Unification—the realization that God is behind and above all else—is the focus and main concern here, resulting in the obliteration of the human will.

Consonant with this objective is the role tribulation plays in Junayd's system. In St. John, tribulation serves to stress the intensity of the purification process, the deep roots of sin which must be pulled out. In Junayd, tribulation occurs not primarily during purification, but afterwards. It is a response to the great distance the believer still feels between oneself and God, despite the annihilation of one's carnal instincts. The emphasis is on transcendence rather than sin. The believer remains helpless to come closer to God under any circumstances.

In Junayd, earthly existence is itself problematic, even when "sinless." The ideal is to live as a thought in the mind of God. In this state individual attributes are nonexistent. One is not conscious of being an independent entity, but only of God. Life in the physical
realm is merely derived, of a secondary stature. Its inferiority is indicated by the fact that even in the unitive state of sobriety (to which one returns after the final obliteration of individual traits), the Sufi cannot be content with his or her life, but feels dissatisfied, homeless and alienated.

Earthly existence is not derived but sanctified for John of the Cross. Life in the physical realm can be perfected. Once union with God is reached, past feelings of alienation, homelessness and dissatisfaction vanish. The ideal life, a return to Adam's innocence, requires a physical realm in which to be fulfilled. God conquers human sinfulness by entering into the individual as Holy Spirit. He perfects one from within, so that victory over sin is achieved by both God and believer together.

In Junayd's theology, God never participates immanently in the process of unification. As Sarrāj explains, it is not God who enters one's heart, but faith, belief and reverence. These are attributes of God, but not His essence. God Himself remains strictly inaccessible and transcendent. In bringing a believer along the mystic path, He alone can be victorious. In fact, the ultimate goal of the Sufi is the utter and complete victory of God over (not with) the believer.

The above examination reveals that mystical accounts are infiltrated by doctrinal elements. Not only do the theological explanations given by the three men tally with their doctrinal beliefs, but phenomenology also seems to correlate. Ibn Abbād tells of only short durations of spiritual darkness, followed always by a return to sensuality. No matter how rigorous the mortification or spiritual tribulation, God
is never felt to be near. Junayd finds that obliteration of all carnal traits, i.e., purification, does not give one a sense of nearness to God either. Rather, it causes suffering and disorientation (balā). In John of the Cross, suffering begins gradually, increases in intensity and duration, and comprises the full extent of the purification process, rather than following it as in Junayd. Unlike Ibn Abbād, St. John's reprieves from torment are not returns to sensuality, but enlightened spiritual perceptions of the meaning of those trials. Such intervals of consolation are relatively brief compared to the periods of desolation or spiritual darkness. The final outcome for St. John is neither the obliteration of all awareness of day and night, as for Ibn Abbād, nor existence in a state of disorientation and homelessness. Instead, it is a peaceful, loving existence during which one participates in God. Simultaneously one coexists in perfect harmony with and in full awareness of the surrounding world.

Islamic or Christian motifs are so fully integrated into the accounts described above that an "essential" experience of spiritual darkness cannot legitimately be derived. In analyzing the particular experience of any of these mystics, phenomenological details such as duration, preceding and subsequent events, quality and nature of darkness, frequency of occurrence, and effect on the individual must be taken into account. None of these factors remains identical in all three experiences. Both the form and the content of the experiences are influenced by the mystics' underlying religious philosophies.

To assume that there is a core experience shared by St. John and one or both Sufis would be to read into the available data something
not there. It is evident that each mystic interpreted his experience along particular theological lines. Yet it would be incorrect to assume that the same experience could be adequately understood with a foreign frame of reference. Junayd and Ibn Abbād were trained to appreciate the overpowering majesty of God and His inscrutable will in all situations. They carried appropriate expectations of God's actions into their mystic encounters. For example, they could not have found, as did St. John, that purification from sin would effect participation in the divine nature, complete harmony with the world, and spiritual faculties which functioned in tandem with God. As moderate Sufis, these men shared the universal Islamic abhorrence of "associationism." A mystical experience which allowed one to "participate" in God (or believe that one was doing so) was inconceivable to them. Their pre-mystical expectations and socialization helped shape subsequent encounters. It prevented them from undergoing a "spiritual marriage of Christ and the soul." The same principle applies to their encounters with spiritual darkness. These cannot be truly understood apart from the religious context in which they occurred.

To reiterate the position taken in the introductory chapter of this thesis, examination of spiritual darkness, as encountered by a Christian mystic and two Sufis, indicates that there is no common core encounter. Rather, there exist only "complex patterns of resemblances different in different cases," i.e., family resemblances. None of the experiences is pure or unmediated; each is clearly linked to the learned doctrines of the mystic's faith. Interpretation seems to be both "coincident with and determinative of the experience."
Notes

Chapter One

1 Shi'a Islam knows of redemptive suffering through the martyrdom of Muhammad's grandson, Husayn, whom the Shi'a revere. However, the vast majority of Sufis have come from Sunni Islam, which does not accord theological significance to Husayn's death.

2 Miguel Asín Palacios, "Un précurseur hispano-musulman de saint Jean de la Croix," Etudes Carmélitaines, 1(April 1932), 113.


4 John of the Cross The Dark Night of the Soul (trans. R. Allison Peers) 1.11.1; 1.12.7; 2.6.5; 2.13.11.


6 The possibility of a direct link between fanā' and Christian mysticism is broached in the Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam, s.v. "fanā'," where it is stated that "the origin of the Muslim conception of fanā' has ... to be sought in Christianity from which it seems borrowed. This conception simply means the annihilation of the individual human will before the will of God, an idea which forms the centre of all Christian mysticism."

7 All references to Islamic theology in this thesis will be to Sunni Islam.


9 Minian Smart, "Interpretation and Mystical Experience," Religious Studies 1 (1966), 85.


14 Berger and Luckmann, p. 40.

15 Ibid., p. 153.

16 Peter Moore, "Mystical Experience, Mystical Doctrine, Mystical Technique," in Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis, p. 111.

17 Ibid., p. 112.


20 Katz, pp. 42-45.

21 Ibid., p. 46.

22 Owen, p. 39.

23 Ibid., pp. 41f.


Chapter Two


5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., p. 236.

7 Heiler, p. 190.


9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., p. 87.


13 Inge, p. 92.

14 Plotinus Enneads 4.7.34. Quoted by Inge, p. 97.

15 Parente, p. 19.

16 Ibid., pp. 21-22.


18 Ibid., p. 20.

19 Ibid., p. 29.

20 Dionysius the Areopagite, The Mystical Theology, pp. 191-192.


22 Heiler, p. 190.

23 Ibid., p. 187.

24 See p. 6 above, quote by Dionysius, for description of contemplation. See also Heiler, pp. 225-228.


26 Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, s.v. "Mysticism, Christian, Roman Catholic."

28 Ibid., p. 33.

29 Ibid., p. 37.

30 Ibid., p. 44.

31 Ibid., p. 78.

32 Ibid., p. 96.


36 Ibid., pp. 13-14.


38 Ibid.


42 Ibid. 2.10.1.

43 Kavanaugh, p. 47.

44 John of the Cross *Ascent* 1.3.1.


46 Ibid. 2.3.1.

47 Kavanaugh, p. 47.

48 Ibid.

49 John of the Cross *Ascent* 3.16.2.

50 Ibid. 1.15.1.
51 John of the Cross The Dark Night (trans. Kavanagh) 1.4.2.
53 Kavanagh, p. 35.
54 Thompson, p. 169.

Chapter Three

1 John of the Cross Ascent 1.11.3.
2 John of the Cross Dark Night 2.5.4.
3 Ascent 1.13.4.
4 Ibid. 3.39.1.
5 Ibid. 2.12.3.
6 Dark Night 1.8.3.
7 Ibid. 1.9.6.
8 Ibid. 1.10.1.
9 Ascent 2.4.2.
10 Ibid. 2.1.3.
11 Ibid. 2.6.1.
12 Rom. 8:24.
13 Ascent 2.6.4.
14 Kavanagh, p. 52.
16 Ibid. 2.8.5-6.
17 Ibid. 2.13.7.
18 Dark Night 1.12.2.
19 Ibid. 1.12.8.
20 Ibid. 1.14.5.
Chapter Four

2 Ibid., p. 78.
3 Ibid., p. 79.
4 Quoted by Schimmel, p. 39.
5 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Anawati and Gardet, p. 41.
10 Anawati and Gardet, p. 49.
11 Ibid., p. 50.
12 Ibid., p. 51.
13 Ibid., p. 83.
14 Massignon, p. 80.
15 Qur'an 7:127.
16 Smith, p. 201.
17 Ahmad, p. 89.
20 Smith, pp. 202-203.
21 Massignon, p. 41.
23 Ibid., p. xviii.
24 Ibid., pp. 3-4.
25 Ibid., pp. 69-70.
26 Ibid., p. 71.
27 Ibid., p. 73.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., p. 74.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., p. 75.
32 Ibid., p. 77.
33 Ibid., p. 79.
34 Ibid., p. 80.
37 Abdel-Kader, Life of Junayd, p. 160.
38 Ibid., p. 156.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., p. 159.
42 Ibid., p. 221.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., p. 222.
45 Abdel-Kader, Life of Junayd, p. 89.
46 Abdel-Kader, "Fanā," p. 223.
47 Abdel-Kader, Junayd, pp. 90-91.
48 Ibid., p. 90.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid., p. 92.
51 Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali al-Jullābi Hujwīrī, Kashf al-Mahjūb, the Oldest


53 Qur'ān 2:245.

54 Hujwīrī, p. 374.


58 Ibid., p. 35.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid., p. 109.

61 Asín Palacios, p. 115. My translation.

62 Nwiya, p. 111.

63 Asín Palacios, p. 141.

64 Ibid., p. 142.

65 Ibid., p. 145.

66 Ibid., p. 155.

67 Nwiya, p. 97.

68 Quoted by Nwiya, p. 100.

69 Nwiya, p. 112.

70 Ibid., pp. 113-114.

71 Qur'ān 8:30.

72 Nwiya, pp. 117-119.

73 Ibid., p. 20.
Chapter Five

1 R. C. Zaehner has done just this. See above, p. 2.
2 See quote on p. 52 above.
3 See quote on p. 43 above.
4 See Sarraj quote on p. 60 above.
5 See Gimello quote on p. 7 above.
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_____. S.v. "fanā'."

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