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This work, though only recently published in English, was written in 1946-1948 as a doctoral dissertation. It was directed by the renowned Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, and presented at the Angelicum University in Rome. Originally composed in Latin, the work was speedily translated into several modern languages upon Wojtyla’s election to the Papacy in 1978, and thus it is now available in English.

The subject is the thought of St. John of the Cross, the sixteenth-century Spanish Carmelite known as reformer of his order, as mystic, as poet, and honored also as Mystical Doctor of the Church. Wojtyla thus traces “the nature of the virtue of faith as described in the writings of St. John of the Cross” (p. 29) through the latter’s tetralogy: The Ascent of Mount Carmel, The Dark Night of the Soul, The Spiritual Canticle, and The Living Flame of Love.

The author points out that John of the Cross defines faith as “a certain and obscure habit of the soul” (Ascent II, 3, 1). In analyzing this phrase, Wojtyla indicates that in Scholastic thought “‘habit’ signifies a certain perfection of a faculty ordained to operation” (p. 70). To say, then, “that faith is a habit signifies that it is a certain perfection of the intellect, ordained to a particular mode of operation” (ibid.). And yet, in the ordinary experience of faith, this operation is never exercised, for it would entail full intellection of the propositions believed. And thus faith is, as the definition has it, obscure, for it is always characterized by lack of full intellectual comprehension of the matter believed. At the same time, faith makes the understanding certain, or gives it certitude, for it presents truths to which we may fully assent.

The obscurity of faith is a central motif in the thought of the Carmelite reformer. In the consideration of this concept, Wojtyla points out that in ordinary human cognition the intellect tends to unite its objects to itself according to its proper intentional modality. In order for this to
occur, though, the external senses first perceive the object, the internal ones then form a phantasm of it, and subsequently the agent intellect illuminates the intelligible species. It is the latter that is understood by the knowing power or passive intellect, which then assimilates the object to itself. In the case of theological faith, propositions concerning God's existence, his nature, his attributes, the Trinity of Persons, and the like, are received by the external senses, yet the internal sense faculties have no capacity to construct commensurate phantasms. The agent intellect is consequently unable to educe the corresponding intelligible species. The subject is moved to assent by the power of the theological virtue of faith, which is infused, while remaining in darkness.

Nonetheless, in the configuration of the virtue of faith, the element of light predominates over that of darkness. If faith is darkness subjectively, because of the limitations of the knowing powers, it is pure light and resplendence in the objective order, being supernatural and possessing "essential likeness" to God (pp. 38-45; reference is made to Ascent II, 8, 3 and ibid., 9, 1). And thus the mind, being granted true yet incomprehensible propositions, as well as the grace to adhere to them, is guided in the darkness as by a blinding light. This darkness of faith can be said to be experienced by all believing Christians.

There is a still greater darkness linked with faith, however, compared to which the former one is only an evening twilight: the "dark night" spoken of by John of the Cross, a most rigorous ascetico-mystical programme undertaken by the soul in its striving for union with God. As Wojtyla notes, "faith . . . because of its intimate proportion of likeness to divinity, penetrates the intellect intimately but obscurely with an unlimited form or species and is therefore in opposition to the natural tendency of the intellect. In order that this opposition be effective, the privation of the intellect is necessary" (p. 142). Throughout this ascent toward mystical communion, thus, the faculty of the intellect is placed in perfection as it produces emptiness in itself regarding its natural object. And "together with the negation of the clear, particular species received by the intellect, there is an affirmation of the divine form as known in its unlimited darkness" (p. 143). To put it another way, the soul must walk in faith, must confirm itself in faith, for it is this virtue that is "the proper and proportionate means" of union (Ascent II, 9, 1). But faith in its purity forbids that any creature be substituted for God. Things sensed, felt, known, or imagined must all be banished from man's cognitive and affective faculties. Even intellectual apprehensions of supernatural origin must be rejected, for these are received in a way that is connatural to man and therefore incommensurate with God. Consequently, in prayer, the greater the darkness of the intellect in its natural operations, the purer is the faith and the greater is the approximation to God.
The stage in which the subject purifies himself through the exercise of abnegation is called "the active night of the soul." It is followed by the "passive night," in which purification is effected, not by the natural powers of the subject, even elevated by grace, but by supernatural infusion of the act of contemplation itself into the rational powers. This act of contemplation is brought about in the order of efficient causality by faith, which "contains in its internal structure the very substance of all the degrees of contemplation possible in this life" (p. 169). It intervenes, further, "not precisely as a virtue but so far as through faith the intellect participates in the light of divine knowledge" (ibid.). When an exceedingly advanced degree of purification is achieved, the subject comes into mystical communion with "the Son of God, who is communicated to the soul in faith" (Ascent II, 29, 6). Sharing through vivified faith in the Divine Wisdom, the soul participates at once in the generation of the Word, "terminus of the knowledge in which God, knowing himself exhaustively and comprehensively, expresses his own infinite perfection in the person of the Son" (p. 172). We are told, though, that these intimate and transforming mystical communications are experienced by the subject without intellectual enlightenment, for the Mystical Doctor, in Wojtyla's assessment, is consistent in his doctrine regarding "the excessive light of faith" and "the subject that remains in darkness" (p. 200).

It should be pointed out that the treatises of the Carmelite reformer are not principally speculative but practical, concerned with guiding souls to perfection and union with God. Although he relies on Scholastic terminology, John of the Cross does not develop speculatively many concepts to the fullest. On the other hand, Wojtyla, in his thoroughly speculative commentary, disengages the texts pertinent to the particular issue of faith, and answers potential questions. One point which he establishes resolutely is the unity of the one absolutely supernatural and infused virtue of faith, which is irreducible to any purely human construct or psychological state. It is believed that Wojtyla's mentor, Garrigou-Lagrange, encouraged a development along these lines in order to refute a thesis which had been put forth earlier by Jean Baruzi in Saint Jean de la Croix et le problème de l'expérience mystique (Paris, 1924; 2nd ed. 1931). This author endeavored to establish a polarity between "dogmatic faith," expressed in propositions proposed to the faithful for belief, and "mystical faith," understood by Baruzi as a "universalization of the intellect" in which the mind transcends by its own natural powers certain limited modes of conceptualization. Wojtyla establishes that such a thesis has no foundation in the thought of John of the Cross, who taught, to the contrary, that "faith, which is the basis of mystical knowledge, consists objectively in the truths revealed by God and proposed for belief by the Church," and that "adherence to the revealed truths in-
volves the same supernatural impulse that produces the loftiest mystical experience” (p. 181).

Nonetheless, some of Wojtyla's interpretations of the thought of John of the Cross could be given further precision. He asserts with insistence that faith is the means by which the intellect is joined to God, and further, that this virtue moves the subject to adhere to the propositions which express the content of faith. And finally he asserts that it is by this adherence that the intellect is united with God, who is made present to the knowing power intentionally though obscurely (see, among other, pp. 66, 67, 104, 207-9, 259). If we read the Sanjuanist texts with care, however, we will find that the majority of them do not state that faith joins the intellect to God, but that together with the other two theological virtues, it joins the soul to God. Faith is “... the proximate and proportionate means for the soul to be united with God” (Ascent II, 9, 1). “The soul ... is united with God ... by faith.” And a few lines above in the same text, reference is made to “the three theological virtues, faith, hope and charity ... through which the soul becomes united with God” (Ascent II, 6, 1).

This is not to say that there is no particular link between the faculty of understanding and the virtue of faith. There is, indeed, and it is complemented by corresponding relationships between the will and charity, and between memory and hope. What the Carmelite mystic tells us is that the soul cannot be joined to God except through its rational powers, for it is through them that it operates. Union with God must thus be by means of acts of knowing, loving, and remembering. As the human rational faculties are incapable of attaining their proper supernatural ends on their own power, they are each purified and endowed with a higher modality by the corresponding infused theological virtue. It is stated that “the three theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity—which are related to the three powers as proper supernatural objects, and through which the soul is joined with God according to its powers—cause the same emptiness and darkness in each respective faculty: faith in the intellect, hope in the memory, and charity in the will.” Consequently, “the soul is joined ... by faith according to the intellect, by hope according to the memory and by love according to the will” (Ascent II, 6, 1). The exercise of the theological virtues, therefore, does perfect and uplift the faculties. But the union with God is of the soul, according to the operation of its faculties, and by means of the theological virtues.

Focusing upon the union between the soul as such and God leads to an expanded understanding of the nature of this communion. By conceiving of it as being between the knowing power and God, Wojtyla is led logically to stress intentionality. For indeed, the only assimilation which the faculty of intellect can effect is an intentional one. Thus arises Wojtyla’s emphasis upon the communication of “substance understood,” and upon
intentional-presence-though-in-darkness. But this does not quite do justice to the thinking of the Mystical Doctor. His doctrine takes its point of departure from the belief that the theological virtues are derived from sanctifying grace, which also endows the subject with a certain participation in the Divine Being. The principles are articulated by Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica*, I-II, 110, 3, where he states that by the gift of grace it is given to the soul to participate in the Divine Nature; and in I-II, 110, 4, where he says that by the possession of the theological virtues the subject is made to participate in the vital actions of God. The Carmelite Doctor, on his part, corroborates Thomas’s statements with texts to the same effect. In *Ascent II*, 5, 4, and *Spiritual Canticle*, 11, 3, he speaks of a communication of the Divine Being to the soul in and through grace; and in *Spiritual Canticle*, 1, 6, of an essential and pre-sentential indwelling of the Trinity in the intimate being of the soul.

It should also be pointed out that in the texts dealing specifically with communication of God in faith it is made clear that He does not communicate himself in and through the darkness, but that He is hidden underneath the darkness (Ascent II, 9, 1). In the couplet of adjectives light/darkness, Wojtyla associates light with the propositions of faith, and calls this aspect the objective dimension of faith; and darkness with the human experience thereof, rightly called the subjective dimension. Yet both the propositions of faith and the human inability to comprehend them pertain to the human mode of operation of the virtue of faith. But the soul is placed in communion with God by the operation of the virtue of faith according to its supernatural mode, in a way that is totally imperceptible by the subject and independent of his psychological experience (see Ascent II, 9, 1 and 3). What we have here is a true communion of persons, beside which a notion of mere intentional presence becomes pallid. In the Sanjuanist texts the communion is vital, moral, psychological, and metaphysically actual, without being, however, a union of essence. It is effected supernaturally by grace. And from the perspective of this presence of God in the soul of every baptized, believing Christian, it is seen that the entire mystical life is a development of this imperceptible yet real communion. Development, however, only takes place in the subject receiving and not in the object received. Through relentless purification and confirmation in virtue, the soul comes to have a certain experience of God, but only because He was already there. We find the terms somewhat inverted in the presentation of Wojtyla, in which God is said to be made present to the soul in and through his being known in darkness.

In Wojtyla’s assessment, it is “‘naked faith’ that perhaps best exemplifies the fundamental concept of the virtue of faith according to St. John of the Cross. It is a faith that lacks all consolation and is without
any light from above or below. It is a faith that is manifested as the
unwavering constancy of the intellect in its adherence to God" (p. 201).
The author likewise is insistent that "the entire journey to union with
God is enveloped in the darkness of faith; darkness covers all the steps
of the soul to God . . ." (p. 144). The texts of the Carmelite doctor, how­
ever, seem to indicate that at the summit of the mystical ascent the soul
experiences a relative enlightenment which allows a certain intellectual
perception, a certain intuition, of the object of faith. Such experience
is an effect of what is called the "actual union according to the faculties,"
which is temporary, and which stands in contrast to the more permanent
habitual union in which intellective darkness prevails (Spiritual Can­ticll',
26, 11). As Wojtyla himself indicates, in the passive night of the soul,
"an infused, supernatural modality replaces the human, natural modality
. . ." (p. 186). Thus it is that the jubilant soul who has surmounted all
the rigorous nights of purification can claim: " . . . I sallied forth from
my human operation and mode of acting to God's operation and mode
of acting . . . My intellect departed from itself, changing from human
and natural to divine. For, united with God through this purgation, it
no longer understands by means of its natural vigor and light, but by
means of the Divine Wisdom to which it was united" (Dark Night II,
4, 2). At this stage the soul must still abide in faith. It is, however, "a
most enlightened faith" (Living Flame, 3, 80), making manifest in some
measure the presence of God. A faith like night, yes, but night "at
the onset of the rising dawn . . ." (Spiritual Canticle, 15). The experience
is a prelude of the full vision of glory, which the saint compares to the
bright light of mid-day.

Our contemporary commentator of John of the Cross emphasizes the
unity and continuity in the latter's doctrine of faith. He observes that
it is the same formal cause that is present in contemplation at any level:
a sharing in the knowledge of God himself, which participation is one
with faith (pp. 169 and 190). This unity, nonetheless, can be stressed
even further and seen in the still broader context of a unity of the
communication of God to the soul. If what He communicates through
the theological virtues is his very Being, as the Carmelite Doctor indeed
teaches, then the participation in the divine knowledge which is granted
through faith, and the sharing in God's love which is given through
charity, are none other than touches of that very same substance of God.
In one of his most rapturous passages, John of the Cross tells us that
the Divine Being present in the soul is like a flame which enlightens and
kindles jointly (Living Flame, 3, 49). It is a simple substance, in other
words, which refracts upon contact with the complexity of the human
subject. The cognitive power is touched by the Divine Substance under
the modality of the virtue of faith, and the will is touched by the same
Divine Being as communicated charity. Faith under its numerous modalities is always constituted objectively by the same reality, the participated life of God. This is the case whether it be the faith infused at baptism, the faith which gives the necessary impetus to assent to the formulation of revealed truth, faith experienced in its obscurity in the active night of the soul, faith as the ray of contemplation which purifies in the passive night, or the faith which illuminates at the summit of mystical union. And this virtue of faith is only one of three modalities under which the transcendent Deity penetrates the soul, the other two being hope and charity. All three jointly permeate the soul, each purifying its corresponding faculty, bringing the subject into intimate embrace with the already possessed Triune Divinity.

Although Wojtyla does not emphasize these last-mentioned points, this in no way detracts from the merits of his study. The monograph is indeed filled with numerous keen insights into the thought of the Mystical Doctor, which can be enriching both to the beginner and to the expert in mystical literature. By his ascension to the Papacy, John Paul II has enabled this work to reach a wider audience with its light upon the figure and thought of Saint John of the Cross.

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