

**THE RELEVANCE OF JOHN OF THE CROSS (1542-1591)  
FOR CANADIAN PRAIRIE EVANGELICAL SPIRITUALITY**

by

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my Baba (Grandma),

**Helen Sanchuk Kotak (1899-1989)**

a woman of God, who exemplified all that represents goodness, truth and wisdom inherent in Canadian Prairie Christian Spirituality. She settled into western Canada as an infant with her Ukrainian Orthodox immigrant family near Gilbert Plains, Manitoba. Baba Kotak loved God with all her heart, mind, soul and body, and in her later years, had hidden large portions of the Holy Scriptures in her heart. This is truly commendable, since she was illiterate in both her mother tongue, Ukrainian, and in English. This work at a significant level represents who she was; an unpretentious prairie woman who was knowledgeable about the things of God and deeply mystical.

## **ABSTRACT**

Evangelicalism in western Canada was fuelled by fundamentalist theology and devotion which evolved in this region during the early twentieth century. Generally, Canadian evangelical theologians have focused on the historical and theological implications of evangelicalism within this area. Due to the nature of evangelical theology, which is governed by reason and the defense of truth and dogma, this Christian movement in the west ignored by default concepts connected to mystical theology. This thesis researches a question which has not had an adequate response within evangelical theological tradition, primarily as a result of its disregard for mystical theology. The issue of concern in this thesis is the nature of the process of sanctification of the soul, and particularly, the purpose of the silence of God during this time. Questions to be addressed are: ‘what is the nature of spiritual transformation?’, ‘what transpires in the soul of the person?’ and ‘what is the role of the ‘dark night’ and the ‘silence of God’ during this experience?’ This research responds with an explanation to the underlying cause for the inability of evangelical spirituality in the Canadian west to respond to this issue. It also provides a plausible resolution to the problem which is embedded in the literature of John of the Cross, a sixteenth century Spanish mystic.

Key words: Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality, dark night of the soul, apophatic mysticism, mystical theology, sanctification, John of the Cross, Canadian prairie history, Bible colleges, Sanjuanist spirituality, Evangelical spirituality, Spanish Mysticism.

## PREFACE

I was first introduced to Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross in the early 1980's, when I was on a spiritual quest to rediscover the spirituality of my heritage. In my early teens, my family had left the Ukrainian Catholic church in our small prairie town to become affiliated with a Baptist church which was grounded in evangelical theology perhaps which was quite closely akin to fundamentalist theology. By the time I met Teresa and John, I was middle aged, a Bible college graduate from a Canadian prairie evangelical institution, the wife of a foreign mission administrator, had three children, and was well into a personal crisis of faith. In addition to the guidance received from a wise spiritual director who was a Catholic sister, it would be the 'Christian mystics' of the past who grounded me at this strategic moment in my spiritual formation. They provided me with a mystical theology which I discovered was similar to the form of spirituality to which I had been exposed as a child.

During those years of rediscovery, several issues surfaced which instigated a quest and to some degree stimulated the journey which resulted in this thesis. I was attracted to the writings of John of the Cross, but did not fully comprehend the reason until the early 1990's. By this time, I was in graduate school at Regent College, where the phenomenon of the 'silence of God' caught my imagination for reflective speculation. Why would a loving God become silent or seemingly distant from the people who deeply longed to experience the presence and love of God? The 'pat answers' from evangelicalism included, 'there is sin in your life', 'if God is distant, guess who moved', and 'you need to pray more and read your Bible every day'. I recognized that not only were these responses unsatisfactory, but that my evangelical tradition did not have a paradigm for the 'silence of God'.

As I delved into the poetry and commentaries of John of the Cross, I encountered his interpretation of this phenomenon, and it would be an understatement to say, a great deal more. He exposed me to an area of spirituality which had virtually been untouched in my evangelical tradition, and particularly so, within Canadian evangelical prairie spirituality. I related immediately to the apophatic way of being

present to God, as well as, I recognized the depth to which the prairie soil had shaped my soul and who I am as a Christian believer.

This thesis reflects the journey of my soul in an ongoing quest with someone who is a spiritual guide to me and whom I dearly love, John of the Cross. Also, this thesis journey which began over twenty-five years ago encompasses much thought, sorting, praying, reflecting, and many good conversations with colleagues, friends, and students over cups of coffee.

I am deeply indebted to my partner in life, my husband Ed, for his constant encouragement, and assurance that when I had doubted I could complete this work, he kept me on track. Indeed, I am grateful to him for all that he has sacrificed in order to be my strongest supporter. Our children and grandchildren continue to be the joy of my life, and to them, I am grateful that they have continually encouraged me in the academic track, even when it meant that I had to sacrifice time with them.

My spiritual and professorial mentor, Eugene Peterson, and his wife Jan, have been of particular importance to me in my spiritual quest. When I was completing masters graduate study, Dr. Peterson was my professor at Regent College in Vancouver. He modeled for me the integration of spirituality and theology in the discipline of Christian spirituality. He stepped into the classroom and lectured as one who is a theologian, mystic, pastor, scholar, and professor, a combination rarely seen in our evangelical tradition. I have been blessed to have Dr. Peterson as role model for when I step into my classroom to teach Christian spirituality at an evangelical Bible college in Calgary.

Prof Celia Kourie, who has been my promoter and mentor for the research of this thesis, has been an invaluable source of encouragement and direction. Her assistance has enabled me to conquer the ominous task of research and of writing this thesis. She has provided correction and direction which has stretched my thinking and learning experience on this topic. Indeed, her patience with me with regard to the duration of time to complete this work is beyond commendable.

At this juncture, I thank all the people who have come along side me at strategic moments of my life, and provided me with the encouragement and the impetus to continue. There are far too many to list! Further, I wish to acknowledge my colleagues and the students who are part of my life at Rocky Mountain College in Calgary, Alberta. To the academic dean at Rocky Mountain College, who several years ago in his search for a ‘professor of spiritual theology’ decided to risk and hire me for the task of creating a new academic program in an evangelical theological institution, I am grateful. And to the students who challenge me continually about what it means to study Christian spirituality in a ‘postmodern evangelical world’, I am more than grateful. May their tribe increase!

Joyce M Peasgood

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Nature and Background of Research**

This study intends to show that Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality, namely that spirituality practiced in the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba is reflective of the prairie environment, and thus it has an aspect of spiritual experience that is unaccounted for in Protestant evangelical theology. The experience and writings of John of the Cross are introduced as a counterpoint to the conservative prairie religious practice. Thus, this phenomenological study is indigenous to the religious and spiritual experience of Canadian prairie populace. Prairie landscape has significantly shaped Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality with prairie narrative portraying the story of a people affected by their natural surroundings.

The sixteenth century Reformation brought into being a new theological movement called Protestantism. In its initial stages, this reactionary religious reform was by nature a militant movement. As it matured, however, a fundamental tenet remained. The Catholic institution centered in Rome was the 'enemy in the camp.' This mindset migrated with the new immigrants onto the western soil as churches were established to meet the spiritual needs of developing communities. Though European Protestant factions defended their own brand of dogma, the tendency within Canadian evangelical denominations was to participate in collaborative efforts, sharing common beliefs and concerns (Stackhouse 1993:179). Eventually, Canadian evangelicals banded together by means of doctrinal commonalities to share in common goals such as mission endeavours and the establishment of theological institutions of higher learning across the prairie west. Having established a foundational core of beliefs, Canadian Prairie evangelicals collaborated in the promotion of three concerns which became interwoven into the fabric of evangelical life: doctrinal orthodoxy, personal piety, and evangelistic zeal (Stackhouse 1993:181). The prairie evangelical church community adopted this common vision

with intense passion, resulting in a spirituality that supported legalism and sectarianism.<sup>1</sup>

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, waves of immigrant people settled in the Canadian West. The early pioneers came to the barren prairie for several reasons some arrived with the desire for adventure, others by a desire for a new life, while other ethnic and religious groups sought freedom from the difficult and seemingly hopeless situation in their motherland. All of the new inhabitants assumed that the prairie soil promised opportunities for a life of prosperity. However, the prairie would not always be kind to its newcomers. First Nations' peoples were not pleased by the influx of Europeans disrupting their ancient cultural way of life. Climatic conditions with hot summers, bitterly cold winters, the persistent prairie wind, drought, flash floods, prairie fires, failed crops, plagues of diseases, insufficient medical care and initial isolation tested the hardest pioneering spirit.<sup>2</sup> In the midst of struggle, survival and triumph on the prairie soil of the Canadian West, prairie spirituality was sculpted.

Prairie ethos, by its very nature, required a spirituality that provided hope in the inherent harshness and instability of prairie experience. Protestant Evangelical theology provided a doctrinal rationale which implemented a source of hope into the religious prairie experience. However, evangelical theology combined with a pietistic lifestyle shaped a legalistic and sectarian form of devotion.

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<sup>1</sup> Stackhouse (1993:179) itemizes a 'generic' statement of faith compiled by the World Evangelical Fellowship, that has been adopted by two leading evangelical institutions in Canada: Regent College and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. In citing this statement of faith, Stackhouse suggests that the statement is representative of the commonality of vision shared by the evangelical community.

The statement is as follows:

1. The Holy Scriptures as originally given by God, divinely inspired, infallible, entirely trustworthy; and the only supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.
2. One God, eternally existent in three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
3. Our Lord Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, His virgin birth, His sinless human life, His divine miracles, His bodily resurrection, His ascension, His mediatorial work, and His personal return in power and glory.
4. The salvation of lost and sinful man through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith apart from works, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit.
5. The Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the believer is enabled to live a holy life to witness and work for the Lord Jesus Christ.
6. The unity of the Spirit of all true believers, the Church, the Body of Christ.
7. The resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life, and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The problem investigated in this thesis centers upon profiling Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality as a legitimate and unique expression of Christian experience. Little research or literature exists at this time addressing this specific expression of spirituality, thus permitting ample opportunity for in-depth investigation.

However, rationalism and legalism in the evangelical tradition eclipses the recognition and study of the mystical element in Christian experience. The influence of rationality has overshadowed the inclusion of Christian spirituality in the lecture halls of Bible colleges, academic curricula in the seminaries, and preaching of the Scriptures in the pulpit. In addition, the Protestant evangelical interpretation of Christian mysticism and Christian spirituality is critiqued by the ‘principles’ located in the text of Holy Scripture (*sola scriptura*).

This study focuses upon a specific element of Christian spirituality unaccounted for in prairie evangelical spirituality. The combination of prairie landscape, an evangelical interpretation of Christian theology, and defined piety renders little allowance for mystery. In response to this incompleteness, this present thesis introduces a sixteenth century Spanish mystic, John of the Cross. By means of the wisdom and insights expressed in his writings, this research addresses a specific spiritual formation factor overlooked in evangelical theology, namely, the inner aridity of the soul, which is the phenomenon of the dark night of the soul, and experienced as the silence of God.

There is clearly a lacuna in current research which deals with the extent to which John of the Cross is capable of contributing to twenty-first century Christianity in the Canadian prairie setting. The proposed hypothesis of this thesis contends that John of the Cross draws our attention to an apophatic mystical component that is absent in Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality.

## **1.3 Significance of Investigation**

The current study derives its significance from its affirmation of a unique expression of Christian experience and lifestyle. At the outset, this study assumes the inherent uniqueness of prairie evangelical spirituality. Generally, a particular populace is not aware of the nature of their Christian experience, or how their

experience has been shaped by the local environment. This lack of awareness is common, as a regional spirituality exists in the essence of ordinary life. Thus, a significant resource in defining prairie ethos is discovered in the pages of prairie story, the prairie novel. For the most part, prairie evangelicalism has failed to recognize the significance of the prairie novelist. According to the evangelical critics, prairie stories are too raw, too ‘worldly’ for Christian readership, thus rendering the prairie novelists untrustworthy messengers of spiritual reality.

At present, the prairie evangelical church community is challenged by two major influences. The first is the onset of Postmodernity.<sup>2</sup> The rationalistic element of prairie evangelicalism promoting sectarianism does not bid well with the postmodern mind and soul.<sup>3</sup>

Intrinsic to the postmodern paradigm shift is the acceptance of the notion of mystery. In fact, the postmodern embraces mystery with comfort and ease. Typically, evangelicalism has difficulty embracing ‘mystery,’ since it is uncontrollable, associated with ‘New Age’, and allows for the unexplainable. Conversely, for the evangelical thinker, every religious phenomenon requires logical biblical justification, an exegetical inquiry to determine theological truth, and a reasonable response to the inexplicable. Under this cloud of scrutiny, Christian spirituality is judged with immense suspicion.

A second factor is the evolving pluralistic society within the three adjoining prairie provinces, promoting an interrelation of multicultural communities of faith. The intermingling of culture, thought, and spiritual insight creates an atmosphere of acceptance and tolerance and a paradigm shift which carries major implications for younger evangelicals.

In this thesis, a particular assumption inherent in Canadian prairie evangelical theology is examined. A theology that is rationalistic, legalistic, and controllable interprets human experience from within the scrutiny of the rational and that which can be explained. This study investigates the inadequacy inherent in prairie evangelicalism as it relates to the topic under investigation. It will be argued that

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<sup>2</sup> Alister McGrath (1999:188) defines postmoderism as “A general cultural development, especially in North America, which resulted from the general collapse in confidence of the universal rational principles of the Enlightenment”.

<sup>3</sup> Note Kourie’s (1995:172) comment with regard to the “reductionist theories of scientific empiricism” and the subsequent reintroduction of mythology and symbolism as a counterpoint to the general flattening of thought that was characteristic of the rationalistic era.

evangelical theology does not provide an adequate theology of suffering. Thus, as a consequence, evangelical spirituality does not account for seasons of impasse, confusion of soul and mind, and spiritual aridity. John of the Cross, a sixteenth century Spanish mystic, provides a plausible rationale for these aspects of the Christian faith. The unusual component in this thesis is the juxtaposition of Spanish counter-reformation mysticism with Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality. The blending of these two philosophical and theological worldviews is remarkably uncomplicated; numerous similarities transcend the centuries, as will be noted in chapter four. At present, as noted above, theological literature remains virtually silent on the connection between Spanish mysticism and Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality. Consequently, this research will enhance Canadian prairie theological learning by utilizing the academic expertise and knowledge apropos to the scholarship of Christian Spirituality. The academic discipline of Christian Spirituality remains a 'land yet to be settled and tilled' in prairie theological institutions. Furthermore, this study attempts to ascertain the role of suffering and the silence of God in the spiritual formation and transformation of the soul.

#### **1.4 Definition of Terms**

The following terms are relevant to the study of this thesis.

**Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality:** The specific manner in which Christian men and women live their Christian faith within the evangelical community located in the setting of the Canadian prairies.<sup>4</sup>

**Canadian Prairies:** The Canadian prairies comprise the three adjoining western prairie provinces: Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Though they share a similar history, each province is unique. However, CPES as an expression of a particular experience of Christian spirituality manifests certain similarities across the three provinces.

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<sup>4</sup> As this is a term that I have coined, 'Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality' cannot be cited from other sources.

**Evangelicalism:** A term with reference to reform movements that began in the sixteen century, in Germany and Switzerland. Currently, it refers to a movement which espouses the supreme authority of Scripture and the atoning death of Jesus Christ (McGrath 1999:183,1993a,1993b). Culturally, evangelicalism is rooted in a modernist paradigm that elevates reason and the attainment of propositional truth. This cultural model of religious faith sustains itself by means of thorough explanation, proclamation, and defence of the truth of Scripture (Webber 2002:14).

**Christian Spirituality:** Christian Spirituality is the ‘living out’ in particular ways the encounter with Jesus of Nazareth. Personal and communal spirituality are daily expressions of the devout life of faith, faith values and the means by which one’s experience of God is deepened (Healey 1999:xii).

**Mysticism:** Mysticism is the phenomenon which emphasizes the relational, spiritual, and experiential aspects of faith, as opposed to the cognitive and intellectual aspects dealt with in systematic theology (McGrath 1999:6). It is reflective of a deeper way of life in which the purifying, illuminating and transformational process of God’s Spirit is experienced in the life of a person (Kourie 1992:86).

**Dark Night of the Soul:** A term associated with John of the Cross that refers to the process of inner transformation of the soul. The pathway to union with God is a long road of formation and reformation until one beholds the promised land of union with God (Muto 1994:27).

### **1.5 Delimitations of Research**

The following are possible limitations that need to be considered. This study is not intended to represent the views of the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, or mainline Protestant traditions as they exist in the Canadian prairie environment. Similarities will surface as individuals interrelate in communities, families, and employment

situations. This thesis concentrates on the evangelical religious tradition as represented on the Canadian prairies.

While the potential for academic research into Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality is enormous and numerous topics present themselves for in-depth exploration, this study develops an argument that amalgamates prairie spiritual experience with the spiritual teachings of John of the Cross. His thesis states that dark times provide the setting for a deep, authentic, and healthy spirituality. Although other Christian mystics will be discussed, where relevant, John of the Cross will be the primary source for authenticating the phenomenon of the dark night of the soul.

### **1.6 Research Procedures and Methodology**

This study represents the convergence of two unrelated fields of study. One setting is the prairie soil of Western Canada, spanning the expanse of three prairie provinces. These western provinces (Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta) contain three distinguishable landscapes: the prairie that stretches from the Red River in Manitoba and westerly to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains; the parklands, teeming with birds and lakes form a crescent shaped area north of the prairies; and the boreal forest, rocky areas lined with spruce and pine along cold lakes (Friesen 1987:4). Settlers inhabited the three landscapes — the prairies, the parkland, and the forest — uniting these landscapes by means of economy, culture, common history, and religious institutions.

By the middle of the twentieth century, evangelical churches were a strong force on the Canadian prairies, yielding missionary candidates in great numbers from the large number of bible colleges established across the three provinces. With the advent of the twenty-first century, the bible college setting retains a high profile within the evangelical community as a religious academic institution.

The second setting is located on another continent, in another era, with an approximately four hundred years separation in time and culture: sixteenth century Spain. The primary setting of this thesis is Canada, while the secondary setting is Spain. The primary study is Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality; the secondary research focal point is the message of John of the Cross. These two worlds converge in this project as a specified transcendental experience.

This thesis will be broadly *phenomenological* in nature, retaining a similarity to a philosophical theory launched in the first half of the twentieth century by Edmund Husserl.<sup>5</sup> Phenomenology examines a variety of experiences including perception, thought, memory, imagination, and desire as they interface with bodily awareness, embodied action, social, and linguistic activity (Smith 2003:2). ‘Intentionality’ according to Husserl is defined in terms of experience interpreting acts of consciousness only through particular concepts and ideas. Meaning is located within the local environmental context (encompassing culture, language and history); in the case of this thesis, the Canadian prairie culture.

### **1.7 Demarcation of Research**

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter one is the introduction to the thesis, defining the problem, the significance and delimitations of the research and the methodology utilized. Chapter two reviews related literature pertinent to the research project. Chapter three characterizes the ancient tradition of the Carmelites and recognizes one of their outstanding mystics, John of the Cross. Chapter four defines Canadian Prairie Evangelical spiritual ethos incorporating literature, history, culture, and religious experience as significant factors that shape a unique form of spirituality. Chapter five provides the background to the works and teaching of John of the Cross. Chapter six describes the four movements of the dark night of the soul

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<sup>5</sup> The development of Husserl’s fundamental phenomenological analysis was motivated by the inadequacy of the objective sciences, which to Husserl were incomplete in and of themselves (Zahavi 2001:2). Husserl’s early works were marked by psychologism, the attempt to base logic and arithmetic on the discipline of psychology. Husserl distinguished between the intended objects of consciousness which are labelled as ‘phenomena’ and the psychical acts which are experienced (Honderich 1995:382). He introduces the term ‘intentionality’ to describe the basic feature of consciousness that cannot be understood in terms of features characterizing natural events. For Husserl, intentionality is the key to understanding human experience (Keller 1999:2). He stated that all experience is directed toward phenomena through particular concepts, thoughts, ideas and images. This makes up the meaning of a given experience, distinct from what the object means (Smith 2003:2). The process of gaining knowledge and meaning of the essential features of the world through perception and abstraction is eidetic reflection or eidetic reduction. One intuits the properties from ‘experience’ and ‘phenomena’ in order to intuit the essential features of the world – essences. The knowledge gained from eidetic reduction facilitates the ability to make connections among essences and the knowledge gained is non-empirical (Honderich 1995:659). Husserl writes “The eidetic theory of lived-processes must take the lived-processes with the whole content with which they present themselves in the eidetic intuition, and as eidetic it rests on psychological intuition, whether it be on psychological experience or in psychological fiction,” (Husserl 1980:35). Further, a lived-process “in view of reflective inner experience, to the extent that this view can grasp at all, or the whole content of that which is given the view of the reflection...changes into the essence of eidetic attitude,” (Husserl 1980:36). The phenomenologist is required to perform epoché, that is, focusing upon this particular item, and putting it in ‘brackets’ and suspend judgment upon other perceived objects that may be similar or have similar components (Welton 1999:325). Thus, phenomenology is an attitude in which objects of which one is conscious or experience count for meaning in the lived processes of life. This philosophy is to be distinguished from a defence of the existence of objects outside or independent from consciousness, but is an intentional relation between perception and object (Zahavi 2001:6).

and synthesizes the writings of John of the Cross with Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality. Chapter seven provides the summary and conclusion of the research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

Recent Canadian Prairie symposia exploring the unique elements of Canadian prairie experience have categorized numerous areas of interest pertaining to Canadian Prairie life. Poets, novelists, sociologists, historians and theologians engage in the ongoing dialogue, uncovering and discovering the essence of a complex, organic and earthy social structure.

Clearly, an analysis of a selected form of ‘spirituality’ which will be juxtaposed alongside a particular framework of theological reference employs a body of literature comprising a broad spectrum of references. The reference point of the experience of spirituality - for this particular thesis, the lived-experience of evangelical spirituality in a particular locale - at this juncture in academic research is virtually non-existent. Therefore, in order to facilitate an adequate argument required within academic rigor, Canadian prairie evangelical spirituality will be examined and defined by means of an in-depth examination of Canadian prairie history, literature, regional politics (essential for the nature of the topic) and evangelical theology.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, selected literary texts pertaining to the focus of this research will be examined and critiqued. Rather than following a strictly chronological arrangement, this chapter has been assembled with a thematic organization of texts which fall into the purview of the thesis. Thus, the literary library in this chapter includes texts that explore the range of the research area. Section two examines literature reflecting religious experience in Canada, most specifically, the Canadian evangelical experience; while section three examines publications representing evangelical theology in general. Section four looks at the aspect of doctrine which is at the core of this thesis, the doctrine of sanctification as developed in evangelical theology. Section five explores current literature which investigates the essence of ‘Christian Spirituality’ and its place in the halls of the academy. Section six

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<sup>1</sup> This topic will be developed in chapter three under the heading of ‘Canadian Prairie Evangelicalism.’

considers the character of the Carmelite religious tradition, and includes a selection from the body of literature pertaining to the spirituality of the Carmelite order and the general works of John of the Cross. In particular, literary works defining the ‘dark night’ as characterized by John of the Cross are also reviewed.

## **2.2 Western Canadian Evangelical Environment**

Rawlyk’s (1997) book is a collection of papers presented at the *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience Conference* held at Queen’s University, Kingston in May of 1995. Rawlyk passed away prior to the completion of the publication; however, the papers he collected were posthumously published and have contributed significantly to the resource of historical data pertaining to Canadian evangelical history. In his introduction, Rawlyk (1997:xiv) reports the history of evangelicalism which was a movement that developed in late eighteenth century Canada. Rawlyk (1997:xiv) suggests that “Canadian evangelicalism was shaped by its quadrilateral ideology of *conversionism, biblicism, activism, and crucicentrism*, as well as by what Ronald Knox once called its ‘peculiar enthusiasm’”.

Canadian evangelicals comprise two major groups and represent a wide spectrum of beliefs and practice. The first group, ‘radical evangelicals’ comprising primarily Baptists and Methodists, are defined by their promotion of the emotive element in the experience of God. The other, ‘formalists’, usually the Presbyterians and Anglicans, are noted for an emphasis upon a rational faith, concerned with the mind rather than the heart. This group stresses an ‘orderly faith’ based upon consistent doctrine, acceptable decorum in worship and biblical interpretation through a well educated ministry (Rawlyk 1997:xv). By 1812, nearly half of Canadian Protestants were self-confessed radical evangelicals or adherents of these forms of congregations. In addition, there were hundreds of congregations in Central and Eastern Canada; this remarkable level of evangelical strength would never be achieved again in the history of the church in Canada.

Rawlyk (1997) organized the conference papers under six headings. Part One consists of four papers pertaining to the perspectives of four theologians; one theologian lives and teaches in a Canadian environment and the other three theologians are from outside Canada. Part Two reflects on the evangelical impulse

in the Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican and United Churches in Canada. Part Three discusses the Baptists, Mennonites and Lutherans, while Part Four focuses upon the Holiness, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and Pentecostal churches. For Part Five, Rawlyk selected papers describing evangelical leaders, revivals, and movements which promoted the message of this movement in strategic areas of Canada. The articles in Part Six deal with topics concerning women, spirituality and the church's impulse in the 1990's. The diversity of religious affiliations within the Canadian evangelical landscape is evidenced by the spectrum of multi-denominational contributors to the symposium. For the purpose of this thesis, only three of the contributions will be reviewed, the articles written by Stackhouse (1997), Burkinshaw (1997), and Hindmarsh (1997).

Stackhouse (1997) critiques the evangelical quadrilateral in contemporary Canadian evangelicalism as listed by Rawlyk (1997:xii) – *conversionism, biblicism, activism, and crucicentrism*. Stackhouse (1997:56) expands these terms by posing a pertinent question: 'what are these distinctive evangelical commitments'? His answer: firstly, evangelicals affirm the good news of Jesus Christ, which is salvation in Christ, accomplished through the substitutionary work of Christ at the cross and resurrection; secondly, evangelicals trust the holy Scriptures as the pre-eminent source for and ultimate standard of God's revelation; thirdly, the good news of Christ involves a personal transformation and a disciplined holy life and lastly, evangelicals are evangelists who actively proclaim the 'good news' of the work of salvation accomplished through Jesus Christ.

Stackhouse paints a dismal picture of the influence of evangelicalism within Canadian society, for he argues that "... it appears that some evangelicals today, as in the past, are attempting to influence Canadian society in these various aspects without leaving the marks of the four distinctly evangelical convictions" (Stackhouse 1997:69). In fact, he suggests that Canadian society has been less and less influenced by evangelicalism, for Canadian society has had a greater influence upon evangelicals, even suggesting that evangelicals are becoming much more secularized in their worldview and function within society. He concedes, however, that in the Prairies, a reactionary element in evangelicalism influenced the development of the Bible Institute movement as an alternative to the secular education of the university (Stackhouse 1997:57). The prairie ethos provided

suitable fodder for a Bible college movement which has influenced the development of the Christian church in the Canadian west.

In his article, Burkinshaw (1997:370) demonstrates the impact of the Bible college movement upon evangelical religious training particularly in the Canadian West. Initially, the Bible college movement arose in response to the need of educating young people in the Scriptures, which was not happening in any other educational setting. This movement served the prairie church by retaining the foundational constructs of the evangelical tradition with an educational institution.

As Bible Institutes were established in rural and urban centres across the prairie provinces, their graduates saw in the vast, often isolated areas of the Canadian west, places to plant churches.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, these outlying churches were incorporated into evangelical denominations. Nondenominational Bible schools on the prairies influenced changes with regard to the usage of language in worship services, influencing Mennonite churches to switch to English-language services. Conversely, pastors and youth pastors graduating from evangelical Bible colleges on the prairies provided the catalyst to strengthen the English-language orientation in ethnic churches. Burkinshaw (1997:373) notes that the purpose for the Bible schools was two-fold: "... teaching the Bible as truth rather than as an academic subject and training for practical Christian living and ministry". The Bible college movement, having been birthed in the evangelical cradle, would become a thriving movement in the Canadian west, and resulted in a litany of Bible colleges and seminary institutions that remain to this day.

The Bible college movement on the Canadian prairies has produced an inordinate number of pastors, Christian workers and missionaries who serve worldwide, in which the 'evangelical quadrilateral' remains *and* reigns supreme. In addition, the evangelical educational movement which occurred on the Canadian prairies has produced numerous colleges and schools which have provided the leadership for churches, mission organizations and theological institutions world wide. In recent years, many of these colleges have amalgamated with other

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<sup>2</sup> Burkinshaw (1997:370) reports that prior to 1952, eighty-five Bible schools were located in western Canada; three quarters were founded during the Depression (the 1930s) while the remaining quarter were established between 1940 and 1952. In 1947, twenty-seven Bible schools on the prairies had enrolled 2,090 students; by 1960, 3,300 students were enrolled in forty-four institutions. By the early 90s, student enrolment across Canada in evangelical theological institutions numbered 7,000 students, of which 5,000 students were in schools in western Canada.

institutions to form new academic institutions. In Calgary, Alberta, two evangelical colleges – Rocky Mountain College and Ambrose University College – are examples of theological institutions which are the amalgamation of other smaller bible colleges to form their own individual academic schools.

Hindmarsh (1997:308) develops the argument that the initial stages of the evangelical movement in western Canada began in Winnipeg as a fundamentalist thrust. Initially, the establishment of Elim Chapel in 1910 as an urban mission during the interwar period influenced the beginning of Winnipeg Bible Institute in 1925, which was the educational wing. Two years later in 1927, the Canadian Sunday School Mission was established in rural Manitoba. As theological institutions developed over the prairies, personnel in the new institutions were educated and influenced by their ‘mother institute’, Winnipeg Bible Institute in Winnipeg.<sup>3</sup> Hindmarsh (1997:316) argues that the Winnipeg based fundamentalism, (specifically promoted at Elim Chapel) had a primary influence on emerging prairie evangelicalism. Though the fundamentalist religious movement had its historic roots outside the prairie environment, the religious expression of this movement in western Canada befits the nature and character of the Prairies. He contends that the fundamentalist mentality in this context had the appearance of frontier entrepreneurship rather than a dissent from a religious establishment. Further, this ‘frontier’ for the early leaders of the movement in Manitoba and the prairies had no borders: conference speakers were equally at home on both sides of the Canadian-American border.

Hindmarsh (1997:316) comments:

All of this defines fundamentalism on the Canadian Prairies as neither distinctively British nor distinctively American. It was distinctive chiefly of the Prairie West in Canada itself, since the fundamentalist constituency did not differ markedly from the patterns of immigration and ethnicity which predominated the West generally: this was a region open to European, central Canadian, and American settlers and to pioneers, economic and religious, of all sorts. This religious movement, more than the traditional denominations which had their historic roots elsewhere, uniquely expressed the character of

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<sup>3</sup> In 1963, Winnipeg Bible Institute became Winnipeg Bible College, then in 1992, it was renamed Providence College and moved to a Catholic monastery site south of Winnipeg, near Otterburne, Manitoba where it continues to flourish as a Bible and seminary training institution.

the Prairies. In missiology terms, the movement grew along indigenous rather than exogenous lines.

Hindmarsh is a historian who contends that the initial stage of Prairie evangelicalism was non-sectarian by nature. The founding leaders in the initial fundamentalist network were established members of Winnipeg and its business community, and regarded themselves as progressive leaders. What may have been a mission movement in its inception took on sectarian proportions as the 'graduates' spread the Christian message across the prairies. However, this religious movement evolved into a form of evangelicalism that eventually took on legalistic and sectarian elements. Hindmarsh (1997:317) commends the visionary leaders in the early days of evangelical development in Winnipeg, since their educational and missionary vision influenced the Christian movement on the Canadian prairies. Indeed, Hindmarsh himself is a by-product of evangelical theological institutions which resulted from this early thrust.

According to Stackhouse (1993:ix) who writes about Canadian Evangelicalism from an insider's perspective, his spiritual formation occurred in this tradition, and he remains involved in this tradition as an educator and practitioner. He acknowledges that currently, the term 'evangelicalism' is undergoing adjustments, thus requiring substantial re-examination particularly in its application in the Canadian setting. Though his work references the broad spectrum of Canadian evangelicalism, the area of research benefiting this thesis lies in the segments featuring Western Canada, which include the story of William Aberhart, former Premier of Alberta, the development and role of the Prairie Bible Institute in Alberta, and the unique role of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada within the Canadian (and western Canadian) context.

Canadian evangelicals,<sup>4</sup> writes Stackhouse (1993:181), adhere to three fundamentals: *doctrinal orthodoxy*, *personal piety*, and *evangelism*. Currently, within the Bible college movement in western Canada, these three fundamentals are emphasized in their academic curriculum. The purpose of this combined emphasis is to adequately prepare Christian young people for vocational ministry, pastoral and missionary service. The Bible college movement has taken on another significant role in its educational track, that of equipping the laity for leadership and teaching responsibilities within the local church or in a secular environment.

An argument could be made for a distinctly Canadian evangelicalism with its own shade of evangelical experience, for Stackhouse has ample reason to elaborate upon the accomplishments of evangelicals in Canada, organizationally and educationally. His insights into evangelicalism at the end of the twentieth century verify the notion that evangelicalism tips the scale toward *activism* and *orthodoxy*, in spite of recognizing the importance of *orthopraxis*. Consequently, Stackhouse's view as an evangelical is much more speculative and biased toward his own tradition. He offers little insight or information into the essence of evangelical spirituality. The argument could be made that it was not his intention to describe evangelical spirituality per se, since his intended purpose in writing his text was to introduce the reader to the character of Canadian evangelicalism. However, it does beg the question, does not the character of a defined spirituality locate its roots in a

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<sup>4</sup> Stackhouse (1993:6) designates 'evangelical' as aligned with Protestantism, standing in the tradition of Martin Luther's articulation of the gospel of "good news," supporting the beliefs of the Protestant tradition known as the "Reformed." Evangelicalism was a movement in eighteenth century England that arose to reinvigorate the church by emphasizing "... personal salvation, salvation by faith in the atonement of Christ, the unique authority of the Bible, the importance of preaching (with a relative minimizing of liturgical worship), and the imminence of Christ's second coming" (1993:6). Another definition of evangelicalism suggests a group of people who share similar convictions, joined together for common goals or in the establishment of bible colleges or seminaries. To the degree that institutions or churches do not adhere to the established evangelical convictions, they would be measured as 'non-evangelical'. Stackhouse (1993:13) distinguishes between a church and a sect. A church enjoys status in a culture, participates in a culture, and shows interest in the local and larger context of culture, while a sect separates itself from the culture, and the membership is exclusive to the 'believers' adhering to the tenets of the local church or denominational affiliation. Acknowledging that some sectors of Canadian evangelicalism fit this image, he comes to its defence when he writes (Stackhouse 1993:15), "While the history of these alternative (evangelical) institutions demonstrates a continuing estrangement from the direction and leadership of the mainline denominations and much of the larger society, however, it also shows that evangelicals since the 1960s increasingly sought to re-engage the culture at a number of levels. The seminaries offered courses for laypeople that helped them understand and practise their callings in a Christian way – rather than merely training them in Bible study and evangelism. Regent College, in fact, established this as their central task. Trinity Western University, despite its general isolation from the secular university world, sought to train leaders for the whole community, not just the church per se. And the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada not only helped evangelicals preach, study, pray, and witness better through its publications and seminars, but increasingly took on the role of representing (and shaping) evangelical opinions on a variety of social issues to local, provincial, and national governments. In all of this, evangelicalism belied the 'sectarian' label".

*form* of spirituality, that is, the values, the truth inherent in narrative and lived experience?

What Hindmarsh (1997) and Stackhouse (1997) have not accounted for is the intersection of the fundamentalist prairie birthing in Manitoba with the Canadian prairie landscape and experience. Both of these theologians critiquing the experience of Christianity in the prairie west allude to the unique form of evangelicalism which took shape in this environment, but in their works do not integrate the two. Evangelicalism in Canada, as yet, has not interpreted the intersection of a spirituality rooted in prairie ethos, evangelical theology and mysticism.

### **2.3 Evangelical Theology**

Although Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality is rooted in evangelical theology, the embodiment of evangelicalism is naturally shaped and influenced by the environment in which this ideology manifests itself. The ideology in question is evangelical theology, and the phenomenon relevant to this research concerns inner transformation, generally referred to as *sanctification*. It is critical to pay careful attention to the process of inner transformation as described by evangelical theologians and authors as a prerequisite for the later chapters. The list of theologians is not exhaustive; nonetheless, these texts and views of evangelical theologians are representative of a broad spectrum of evangelical theology. A separate section below describes the doctrinal perspective of sanctification from several evangelical circles. The following theologians are not necessarily discussed in chronological order, but with a view to their contribution to the body of theological literature with reference to sanctification.

Dr. Stanley Grenz (1993, 2000),<sup>5</sup> a systematic theologian, in these seminal works challenges evangelicals to move beyond the established theological thinking of the twentieth century as they enter the new millennium. Grenz does not endorse the loss of fundamental evangelical theological thought and action, but he endeavours to recognize the theological and spiritual values which must be retained to facilitate stability. The central theme germane to both of these books discusses specifics within evangelical systematic theology which he judges as the common set

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<sup>5</sup> The evangelical Christian community experienced a significant loss in the sudden death from a brain aneurysm of Dr. Stanley Grenz early in the spring of 2005.

of beliefs or common theology espoused by evangelical theologians. Grenz (1993:23) claims the Reformation heritage bequeathed to evangelicalism the great ‘*solas*:’ *sola scriptura, solus Christus, sola gratia, sola fide*.<sup>6</sup>

In his earlier text, Grenz (1993) considers the twenty-first century ‘revisioning’ of evangelical theology. Grenz concedes that the emphasis placed upon spirituality within Christian experience predates the rise of evangelicalism. However, evangelicalism can boast of a heritage that dates back to both the Puritan tradition in England and Pietist tradition in Germany. Puritanism focuses upon the Word of God and the preparation of the heart to receive the word while Pietism was concerned with the reform of one’s life, spiritual fruitfulness, and the dynamism of the presence of Christ in the life of the believer. It is here that Grenz demonstrates the pattern of thinking that prevails within evangelical theological scholarship. By definition, Grenz (1993:42) suggests that:

... spirituality is the quest under the direction of the Holy Spirit but with the cooperation of the believer for holiness. It is the *pursuit* (italics mine) of the life lived to the glory of God, in union with Christ and out of obedience to the Holy Spirit.

By means of this definition Grenz illustrates an aspect of activism – ‘doing’ as evidence of the ‘regenerative’ work of God – which is an integral component of evangelical theology. Evangelical regeneration is measured and experienced by the event of the ‘new birth’ and the ability to articulate the details of one’s conversion, since this personal experience is foundational to the Christian life. The question is often asked of a new convert, “Are you born again? And if so, when?” which is a form of spiritual, temperature-taking since evangelical piety is often judged by evidence of ‘obedience to the Holy Spirit’. In the chapter entitled *Revisioning Evangelical Spirituality* in Grenz (1993) notes the integration of theology and

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<sup>6</sup> Grenz delineates the term ‘evangelical’ as a “... means to participate in a community characterized by a shared narrative concerning a personal encounter with God told in terms of shared theological categories derived from the Bible” (Grenz 1993:17). What Grenz refers to in ‘shared theological categories’ transfers to the use of language, for example, a shared term for evangelicals is ‘born again’ – a phrase borrowed from Jesus in his conversation with Nicodemus in John 3:1-21. Grenz (1993:36) further notes that “... evangelicalism is characterized by a distinct theology ... that central to evangelicalism is a common vision of the faith that arises out of a common religious experience couched within a common interpretive framework consisting in theological beliefs we gain from the Scriptures. As evangelicals we are persons who sense that we have encountered the living God through the gospel message of Jesus Christ. We describe this encounter by means of a set of theological categories derived from the Bible. These categories which form the cradle for this experience, in turn, constitute the grid by which we now interpret all of life”.

spirituality. Theology that flows out of a disciplined spiritual life will take seriously the life of the spiritual community and will be cognizant of the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity, suggests Grenz (Grenz 1993:58).<sup>7</sup> Even though Grenz desires to revision ‘evangelical spiritually’, his fundamental definition of evangelical spirituality retains the supremacy of the cognitive rational components without any substantial reference to the inner process of spiritual maturation, the process of growth in holiness and the *nature* of life in the Trinity. The questions arises, do evangelicals not value the process of inner transformation and sanctification? There is no doubt that evangelical theologians *recognize* that the spiritual journey involves sanctification, namely, living a sanctified life. Though the process of sanctification is valued and recognized, literature dedicated to this aspect of the spiritual life has utilized very little ink.

Grenz (2000:337) proposes that for the church to recover its evangelical ‘center’, it must retain its ongoing mission, and serve as a renewal movement within one’s religious environment and toward the church as a whole. This means to return to a truly evangelical theology and “... to the center of the church for the sake of the church’s mission as a worshipping community of people sent into the world with the gospel” (2000:337). This ‘renewed center’ according to Grenz is gospels in focus, which refers to the Christian message as recorded in the New Testament, and doctrinal in orientation. Doctrine becomes the set of propositions that comprise the ‘belief-mosaic’ which Grenz (2000:345) states is always connected to the Bible and in particular to the biblical narrative.

For Grenz (2000:344), the renewal of the ‘center’ of evangelicalism must be oriented toward doctrine, since doctrine is intrinsically linked to the life transforming work of the Spirit. There is a clear link between the evangelical commitment to conversion piety and sound doctrine, given that the “... renewal of the center, therefore, calls the church (evangelical) to the ongoing task of doctrinal retrieval and reformation, under the normative guidance of Scripture and Spirit, for the sake of the furtherance of the gospel” (Grenz 2000:345).

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<sup>7</sup> Grenz writes “... theology must flow from discipleship. Theology is not merely the intellectual findings of professional thinkers, but requisite knowledge for doers — disciples of the Lord who need to know whom they are following and why they are following him. A theology that arises out of discipleship does not dismiss questions of cognition and intellectual knowing. It does not eliminate the need for a proper belief structure. But because discipleship is concerned with behaviour, action, and doing, the theology oriented toward discipleship constructs the Christian belief structure for the purpose of Christian living” (Grenz 1993:58).

Thus, a reformulation of the ‘center’ for Grenz must embody the evangelical posture of doctrine and theology as foundational for evangelical piety. Grenz is no doubt correct in his assessment of the ontological reality of evangelical theology. However, the author overlooks the dimension of Christian experience and spirituality that enable the ‘centre’ to maintain a vital life force.

Alister McGrath, one of the most prolific contemporary writers in Christian theology, continues to astound his readership with the immense amount of published material he produces. *Theology, the Basics* (2004) and *Studies in Doctrine* (1997) provide comprehensive studies in systematic theology, while *Christian Spirituality* (1999) engages the student of theology with the classical texts of spirituality in the Christian tradition.

McGrath identifies himself as an evangelical of the Reformed tradition; thus his theological orientation supports evangelical theology. McGrath concludes that the Scriptures are authoritative in matters of thought and life (McGrath 1997:xv): that the Creeds play a major role within Christian belief (McGrath 1999:29): and of the importance of applying reason to validate a ‘belief system,’ particularly in the context of Christian spirituality. McGrath’s orientation to Christian faith is centred upon the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on the cross and salvation (redemption) which is experienced when a believer appropriates the covenantal agreement between God and Christ<sup>8</sup> through faith (McGrath 2004:84: 52ff). The underlying assumption appears to be that the path to union with God is through appropriating propositional truth (Christian doctrine) which enables the ‘believer’ to encounter God via the path of knowledge and reason.

In his investigative and explanatory text, *Studies in Doctrine* (1997) McGrath notes that the “... New Testament is dominated by the proclamation of the transformation of sinful human beings through a redeeming encounter with the living God ... this transformation is partial rather than total — something is initiated and will be completed on the last day” (McGrath 1997:439). A new situation has been inaugurated, a desire to obey God because of an obligation on the part of the Christian due to the death and resurrection of Christ. A transformation of outlook upon life and a new understanding of a person’s being and purpose takes place

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<sup>8</sup> McGrath (2004) defines the ‘covenantal agreement’ as the substitutionary act which occurred at the death and resurrection of Christ.

(McGrath 1997:440). McGrath acknowledges that underlying justification by faith is an experience: a personal encounter with the 'risen Christ'. He notes "... this strongly experiential aspect of Christianity tends to be played down by academics, who understandably wish to concentrate on the intellectual framework of the faith" (McGrath 1997:447). Nonetheless, the essential purpose of Christian doctrine is to provide the framework within which the spirituality of the first Christians, as reflected in the Acts of the Apostles and in the writings of the New Testament, may become the experience of the modern Christian (1997:447). McGrath describes briefly the element of experience in the spiritual life, which is included in the doctrine of justification and salvation; however he offers little commentary on the *journey* of sanctification.

In the introductory chapter to *Theology, the Basics* (2004:xv) McGrath describes the foundation of Christian theology as: the Bible, tradition (creeds) and reason (theological debate). He proceeds to outline the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, describing God, Creation, Jesus, Salvation, Trinity, Church, Heaven, Faith; notably, he omits the doctrine of sanctification. Indeed, McGrath could argue that this text was designed merely as an introduction to the study of systematic theology, and not as an expanded version any particular topic. However, he emphasizes the substitutionary role of Christ on the Cross, and the consequent participatory role of the Christian through faith. McGrath (2004:85) writes "... they are 'in Christ', to use Paul's famous phrase. They are caught up in him, and share in his risen life. ...they share in all the benefits won by Christ, through his obedience upon the Cross". He proposes that Christ is the sinless substitute for humankind, since "... we ought to have been crucified, on account of our sins; Christ is crucified in our place ... in order that Christ's righteousness, won by obedience upon the cross might become ours" (2004:85). In the context of his theological treatise, he defines Christian spirituality as "... the way in which the Christian life is understood and the explicitly devotional practices which have been developed to foster and sustain that relationship with Jesus Christ" (McGrath 2004:3) Nonetheless, the relationship with Jesus Christ must be rooted in a set of beliefs, a set of values, and a way of life (holy life) which purportedly integrates reason and *praxis* (2004:3).

The reader of *Christian Spirituality* (1999), soon discovers that McGrath systematizes Christian spirituality in similar fashion as he systematizes Christian

dogma and tradition. The question arises: is it possible for Christian spirituality to be critiqued utilizing the academic skills and tools appropriate to the discipline of systematic and dogmatic theology? Are the criteria appropriate for the study of systematic theology applicable to the study of Christian spirituality? No doubt, McGrath abides by the rules of theology as established within the evangelical tradition, and he follows in a long line of evangelical theological giants. However, has the systematization of Christian doctrine crippled the evangelical tradition with regard to the mystery of the Christian faith and the ability to define the process of inner transformation?

McGrath (1997:27) tackles the issue of the relationship between theology and spirituality indicating that the gulf – between the two disciplines – having opened up in the last century has to be viewed as a cultural issue surfacing out of the western academy. He is of the opinion that “... theology has suffered a serious and detrimental shift in meaning in the last century” and he suggests that “... theology embraces, informs and sustains spirituality” (1999:27). He claims that western academy has forced theology to view itself as an ‘academically-neutral subject’ and “... this is not how theology was understood in earlier generations. It is perfectly proper to point out that Christian theology cannot remain faithful to its subject matter if it regards itself as purely propositional or cognitive in nature” (McGrath1999:28). Since western academia has lost spirituality, that is the experiential concept of theology;

... it is little wonder that so many seminaries report a burgeoning interest in spirituality on the part of their students, when they have been starved of the experiential and reflective dimensions of theology by the unwarranted intrusion of the academic attitude toward the subject (1999:28).

McGrath laments the role of western academia in the separation of theology and spirituality; although he does not indicate if he includes himself in the classification of a ‘western academic’ which by his work is to be assumed.<sup>9</sup> The

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<sup>9</sup> McGrath (1999:32) blames current ‘western academia’ for the divorce of theology and spirituality. Compare with Sheldrake who suggests a different time line. Sheldrake (1998) notes that up to the development of scholasticism around the twelfth century, theology and spirituality was a single enterprise (Sheldrake 1998:36). Intellectual reflection, prayer and living were a seamless whole in the study of theology. Indeed, western academia would be the catalyst for the divorce between spirituality and theology. However, modern academia has followed the speculative ‘scientific’ approach to theology established during the twelfth century (Sheldrake 1998:39). This new theology would give birth to distinctions between biblical theology, doctrinal theology and moral theology, suggesting that the discipline of the mind could be separated from the discipline of an “ordered

remedy for the tension between theology and spirituality is “... to foster a sense of commitment to the Christian faith on the part of the students, and thus create an ideal intellectual environment for the development of spirituality” (McGrath 1999:32). According to McGrath, theology is relational only if it is rightly understood (1999:32). An astute reader of this text, who is versed in the study of ‘Christian spirituality’, may have reservations about the ‘relational’ exposé of McGrath’s text on the subject. Even though McGrath emphasizes the theological foundations for Christian spirituality, along with biblical texts and models, and incorporates selections of classical writers from Christian tradition, the reading remains primarily an intellectual exercise targeted toward students in the academic world of theology.

With regard to the doctrine of sanctification, McGrath alludes to the process of inner transformation (sanctification) but does not identify the trademarks of spiritual formation *per se*. He relegates less than a half page to the journey of the ‘dark night of the soul’ as described by John of the Cross. His brief description of the topic appears in the section addressing the themes of darkness and light as deployed in Scripture. He demonstrates from the biblical text that darkness reflects an image of doubt and a relational separation from God. ‘Darkness’ also refers to divine unknowability which is the spiritual experience described in the apophatic tradition (McGrath 1999:105). If theology is ‘relational’ as McGrath suggests in this instance, the relational element of the inner darkness is lost in a rhetoric which analyzes and labels the phenomenon with little comment on the process.

Indeed, this is cause for reflection: has the rational evangelical approach to Christian faith circumvented the ability of evangelicals to pursue an understanding of the inner spiritual experience? This, seemingly, appears to be the case. For this reason, the focused study of this thesis could not be completed within the confines

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lifestyle or *ascesis*” (Sheldrake 1998:40). With the advent of the ‘university’ and academic institutions developing theological disciplines of study, dogmatic theology grew apart from what was termed as spirituality. Sheldrake (1998:40) explains that reason would triumph over imagination, and the ability to define truth — knowledge of truth — would triumph over the experience of the sacred. Finally, the body of knowledge associated with asceticism, contemplation and mystical theology was relegated to the formal study with religious orders, and led to the development of systematic meditative techniques (Sheldrake 1998:42). Protestant reformers did not adopt the systematic approach to spiritual life for two reasons: 1) the Reformers were not comfortable with a specified method of ‘self-sanctification’ and terminology such as ‘ascetical and mystical theology’, which suggested for them salvation through works and 2) for the Reformers, doctrine and ethics were closely linked, thus, ‘spirituality’ was in reality living the divine-human relationship in every day life (Sheldrake 1998:46).

of evangelical theological research alone; it is necessary to delve into traditions beyond the scope of evangelicalism.

Richard Lovelace's text, *Dynamic of the Spiritual Life* (1979:13) is a watershed work that addresses a deficiency which he identifies in evangelical theology, namely "... spiritual theology, a discipline combining the history and the theology of Christian experience". It was while Lovelace was studying philosophy at Yale (still an atheist, he claims) as a young student that he was introduced to Thomas Merton's *Seven Storey Mountain* (1948). Lovelace realized that beyond the beauty and order in nature and human art, there lies divine creative wisdom and infinite personality that blazes with new orders of existence (Lovelace 1979:229). His spiritual quest exposed Lovelace to a variety of Christian traditions, and with each new mystical exposure he came up with his own assessment of the nature of the community of faith. Eventually, he studied at a seminary and graduate school, and was exposed to the streams of evangelical revival springing from Puritanism and German Pietism to the Great Awakening in the Eastern United States (Lovelace 1979:231). He discerned at some point that "... there was not even a name among Protestants for the sort of thing I wanted to study. Catholics had one - spiritual theology - but Protestant scholars ... did not seem aware that there was something else to the faith besides catalogs (sic) of doctrine and institutions" (1979:231).

When Lovelace was a student at the seminary, 'spirituality' was not a comfortable concept for evangelicals. In fact, there was immense fear and suspicion associated with the term. Fully aware of the phobia connected to this concept, Lovelace, who exhibits enormous courage, steps into the discord with relative ease and offers a plausible response to the evangelical tension. He writes that spirituality has been a neglected stepchild within the Christian movement, often viewed as the emotional element in the more substantial and important areas of evangelical faith, such as the maintenance of sound doctrine, proper social behaviour, and correct institutional (ecclesial) policy. If 'spirituality' is neglected, the Christian's spiritual life is powerless and shallow; and Lovelace suggests this is the condition of the average evangelical from his assessment of spiritual development within the church. As a remedy for this spiritual condition, Lovelace (1979:12) points to "... other parts of the church (which) have developed an intricate machinery for spiritual perfection which intimidates the laity and most of the leaders (in evangelical churches)". He

observes how evangelicals have utilized far too many 'rules' as a means for cleansing the soul (legalism) which can mortify the physical body, yet remain negligent in fostering union with God via spiritual transformation. Lovelace (1979:102) strongly asserts that the "... New Testament makes clear that cheap grace, the attempt to be justified through faith in Christ without commitment to sanctification, is illegitimate and impossible".

Lovelace suggests that evangelical theology engendered what he categorized as the 'sanctification gap'. He credits the revival movements of the twentieth-century that promoted instantaneous commitment and instantaneous conversion with the creation of the sanctification gap. The early revival movements were influenced by the nineteenth century revival leaders who "... were like mechanics examining an engine in which the power train has somehow been attached to the carburetor; the whole of sanctification had been inserted into conversion" (Lovelace 1979:234). The problem was, according to Lovelace, that having unloaded conversion, they failed to "... reinsert sanctification in its proper place in the development of the Christian life and left the engine with no power train at all" (1979:234).

As new converts began to grow in their faith, (having been converted in the revival meetings), they identified a struggle with 'fruitless spiritual lives' and determined that there was a need for another 'experience'. If 'being born again' did not entirely equip the new convert, a 'second experience' would surely solve this problem. To remedy this situation, Lovelace (1979:235) suggests the 'sanctification gap' was filled with 'Holy Spirit empowering', 'two-stage theory of spiritual development', 'the second blessing' and the 'deeper life' phenomenon.

As time progressed, this remedy has not proven satisfactory, since these experiences provided an exterior resolution, while the inner life was not always being spiritually transformed. Lovelace (1979:236) admonishes his evangelical readers and states that part of the solution to this problem is to return to the heart of their Christian faith. This entails a willingness to reengage the Scriptures and not overlook the insights and spiritual wisdom located within the Catholic tradition with respect to biblical study and the spirituality of the Christian life. He also recommends that evangelicals revisit the pan-denominational consensus which was evident in the early Protestant revival movements led by the Pietists and the Methodists (1979:236).

Lovelace, in his own spiritual quest, delved into the writings of the spiritual classics. One such writer is John of the Cross, and Lovelace studied John's works with regard to the role of suffering in the formation of character, with the results that the believer becomes conformed to the image of Christ. Lovelace interprets John's instruction on the 'night of the senses' as "... a total suspension of enjoyment and awareness of God in the Christian life, so that we must walk entirely by the obedience of faith" (Lovelace 1979:118). Further, God may direct a believer through the 'dark night of the soul' which is "... a period in which we seem to be wholly abandoned by God and are conscious only of the wrath our sin deserves" (1979:118). Lovelace interprets John's perception of the phenomenon of the 'dark night' to be specifically targeted at Christian believers who may not experience suffering in their personal life and therefore require this specific spiritual experience in their progress to union with God. Though this interpretation of 'dark night' may not agree entirely with John's perception of the 'dark night of the soul', Lovelace's analysis recognizably places him ahead of his peers in understanding the progressive pattern in spiritual transformation.

Lovelace anchors his apologetic of evangelical theological renewal in the history and theology of evangelicalism, particularly in the history of North American evangelicalism. He reminds his readers that evangelical churches have been preaching the work of justification through Christ, but have not placed equal stress on sanctification, "... so that the grace of God can be both intelligible and credible for the individual believer" (Lovelace 1979:211).<sup>10</sup>

Though Lovelace intended to publish a history of spiritual renewal in the light of biblical models, he opened 'Pandora's box' with respect to the study of Christian spirituality. He explains from evangelical history the basis for the neglect and fear associated with the term 'spirituality' within the evangelical context. Indeed, Lovelace has directed the evangelical community toward an awareness of the undercurrent of suspicion prevalent in evangelical circles toward Christian

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<sup>10</sup> Lovelace (1979:98) writes "In the New Testament portrayal of the application of redemption, *justification* (the acceptance of believers as righteous in the sight of God through the righteousness of Jesus Christ accounted to them) and *sanctification* (progress in actual holiness expressed in their lives) are often closely intertwined, as if these two concepts were identical. In reality, however, they are quite distinct: justification is the perfect righteousness of Christ reckoned to us, covering the remaining imperfections in our lives like a robe of stainless holiness; sanctification is the process of removing those imperfections as we are enabled more and more to put off the bondages of sin and put on new life in Christ".

spirituality. He has accomplished this in a text which is historical in content, and spiritual in purpose. For the purpose of this thesis, Lovelace provides evidence for the lack of a satisfactory explanation with respect to the process of sanctification within evangelical theology. The means of spiritual development which are lacking within evangelical literature, according to Lovelace, have their roots within the evangelical revival movements that had a powerful influence upon evangelicalism in North America.

Evangelicalism has a broader meaning for Donald Bloesch (1988) a leading evangelical theologian, than merely a group of theologically 'conservative' churches being influenced by 'conservative' theologians. It represents less a branch of Protestantism and more a theological movement promoting biblical Christianity within the Christian church at large. He expresses some optimism concerning the potential for meaningful development of theological truth along with spiritual renewal within evangelical churches. He is quite clear what is negotiable and non-negotiable, at least, according to his perception of evangelical theology and praxis. He defines an evangelical as one who affirms the centrality of the work of Christ for personal reconciliation with God, and for the redemption of humankind as declared in Scripture. Further, an evangelical is one who appropriates Christ's redemptive work in one's life (lives a life of holiness) and senses an urgency to bring the message of this 'good news' to a lost and dying world (Bloesch 1988:17). In addition, evangelicals maintain a high view of Scripture, affirming its divine authority and full inspiration by the Holy Spirit (Bloesch 1988:18).

With regard to spiritual formation, Bloesch views the atoning work of Christ as the basis for a biblical evangelical spirituality. "True spirituality views the Christian life as primarily a sign and witness to the atoning work of Christ," and he adds, "The imitation of Christ is a token of our gratitude for his incomparable work of reconciliation and redemption at Calvary" (Bloesch 1988:133).

Bloesch indicates a level of discomfort with mysticism and spirituality; he issues warnings with regard to the placement of an inordinate amount of importance upon these areas as they relate to the spiritual life. He acknowledges that spirituality will involve mystical communion with God, "... but it must not be dissolved into mysticism" (1988:133). With regard to spiritual formation, he states that the "... development of the spiritual life is always based on the decisive act of God in Jesus

Christ in biblical history” (Bloesch 1988:134). For when spirituality is divorced from its objective historical foundation, it may become engulfed in the ‘peril of subjectivism’ (Bloesch 1988:135). For “... spirituality basically refers to the style or mode of life that emanates from faith in the living God. It concerns the practical appropriation of the truth of faith by the believer ... its goal is conformity to the image of God” (Bloesch 1988:130).

No doubt, Bloesch’s comments could be construed as fear based, for he writes as one who is Protestant, ‘protesting’ falsehood and potential evil, while defending biblical truth and Christian dogma. He identifies dangers which could potentially annihilate evangelicalism, such as Christian mysticism, secular peace movements, permissive morality, and feminist theology (Bloesch 1988:133ff). The question arises, is he representative of current evangelical thought, in which the rational element of evangelicalism holds sway in the study of Christian spirituality? Is the fear of intentional study of the Christian mystics based on concern for theological compromise, or is it a defence mechanism, a means of guarding the status quo of the Christian evangelical faith?

Bloesch’s (2007) latest book, *Spirituality, Old and New*, differentiates between authentic and inauthentic forms of ‘spirituality’. He notes, “... my intention ... is to differentiate between an authentically Christian spirituality and one that has been compromised by an amalgamation with purely cultural values and goals” (Bloesch 2007:13).<sup>11</sup> In addition, he notes that a critique of theology necessarily includes a critique of spirituality, for spirituality cannot be separated from theology, since spirituality is the living out of theology (2007:13). Further, a spirituality anchored in Scripture will endeavour to speak to the plight of humanity and the redemption of humanity by the work of the living Christ (2007:13). He laments that “... spirituality is in crisis today because the church is ignominiously accommodating itself to new winds of doctrine that contradict traditional Christian values and teachings” (Bloesch 2007:31). Thus, it behoves the evangelical to be cautious and not hastily celebrate the current spiritual renaissance, since for Bloesch, “... it contains more peril than promise” (Bloesch 2007:26).

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<sup>11</sup> Indeed, this is a common misunderstanding for evangelicals, since in reality spirituality precedes theology; experience precedes articulation of that experience. Spirituality and theology are partners, and it may well be more accurate to say that theology is the ‘living-out’ of spiritual experience (Discussion with Prof C Kourie).

Of concern to Bloesch is mysticism, which in Bloesch's mind is in contrast to biblical spirituality. He notes, "... mysticism in the classical sense has constituted a major alternative to biblical religion, though many scholars have tried to make a case that these two types of religion actually have much in common" (Bloesch 2007:18). Indeed, for Bloesch, mysticism signifies a departure from biblical norms and the confusion prevalent in spiritual theology is due to the cleavage that exists between biblical spirituality and mysticism. He adds, "I see mysticism in many respects as contrary to biblical faith" (2007:18). Whereas evangelical piety "... upholds a theology of Word and Spirit, mysticism elevates Spirit over Word and ends in the morass of subjectivism" (Bloesch 2007: 20).<sup>12</sup> Further, for the evangelical Biblicist, he provides a list of authors who "reflect the motifs of classical mysticism" (Bloesch 2007:38).<sup>13</sup>

By contrast, Bloesch suggests, 'biblical spirituality' or 'true spirituality' belongs to the ethos of the Old Testament prophets, New Testament prophets, and apostles. He (2007:39) concedes that Augustine practiced true spirituality, although

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<sup>12</sup> Bloesch perceives mystical religion as "... classical or traditional mysticism - that which constitutes the mystical heritage of the church. Like all mysticism it is typified by an immediate or direct experience of God that may well bypass the ordinary channels of redemption, such as the Word and the sacraments. Its focus is on a participatory knowledge of God rather than one that is purely intellectual or rational. It looks to Christ as providing the occasion for the mystical experience of God. It fosters a Spirit-Christology rather than a Logos-Christology. Salvation is not simply something that happened in past history: it is being confronted by the ground of all being here and now" (Bloesch 2007:35). Further, Bloesch is uncomfortable with speaking of God as enshrouded in mystery - engaging the unknowability of God as described in the apophatic tradition. He is suspicious when "... the pathway of our knowledge of God is the sense of the numinous rather than propositional truth" (Bloesch 2007:36). In addition, mysticism in its introspective tendency believes that God is discovered in the interior depths of the self (Bloesch 2007:37). Weborg & Colyer (1999:160) comment on Bloesch's warning against solipsism, which for Bloesch is a byproduct of introspection.

<sup>13</sup> Bloesch views classical mysticism as retaining the legacy of Neoplatonism, in which "... the problem of humanity is time more than sin. Salvation becomes identified with enlightenment or gnosis. The goal is reunion with the ground and source of being, the return of the soul to its divine origin" (Bloesch 2007:37). With this form of spirituality, prayer becomes meditation on the ground of self and the world, which from his observation leads ultimately to the dissolution of realistic or naïve prayer (Bloesch 2007:38). Classical mysticism attempts to blend two kingdoms, the material and spiritual, the temporal and eternal, along with being attuned to God within the soul. He views biblical history as reflecting the mighty deeds of God in the unfolding of history and have no relevance or pertinence to God being birthed in the soul (2007:39). He lists the proponents of classical mysticism who are "... among the great mystics of the Eastern and Western churches ... Evagrius Ponticus, John Climacus, Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor, John Cassian, Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventure, Gregory Palamas, Meister Eckhart, John Tauler, Henry Suso, Richard Rolle, the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Walter Hilton, Catherine of Siena, Catherine of Genoa, Hildegard of Bingen, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. More recently, persons who reflect the motifs of classical mysticism include Simone Weil, Evelyn Underhill, Carlo Carretto, Thomas Merton, George Maloney and Benedict Ashley. Mystics like Frederick Schleiermacher, Paul Tillich, Rufus Jones and Gerald Heard are transitional figures, since they follow basically a postmodern rather than a specifically Christian vision" (Bloesch 2007:38). Biblical spirituality for Bloesch is not centered on the travails of the soul but on the promises of God, and God is not the core or ground of the soul, but the Wholly Other who transcends human creation. He contends that evangelical spirituality celebrates the alien righteousness of God rather than an immanent, inherent righteousness (Bloesch 2007:39). Thus, evangelical spirituality inherently appeals to a norm outside of conscience and experience which is God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ (Bloesch 2007:40).

this was somewhat eclipsed by Augustine's openness to mysticism. Later, biblical understanding of 'life in the Spirit' resurfaced during the Protestant Reformation (sixteenth century) and was kept alive in Puritanism and Pietism. Bloesch (2007:39) writes that:

The biblical life- and world-view is oriented about the mighty deeds of God in a particular history — that mirrored in the Bible. It emphasizes hidden meanings in the unfolding of history rather than the birth of God in the soul (as in mysticism). The climax of the biblical revelation is the historical incarnation of God in Jesus Christ.... Biblical spirituality is also an evangelical spirituality because its focus is on the life-giving flow of the revelation of God in a particular person - Jesus of Nazareth.

Bloesch (2007:29) notes that 'true spirituality' is anchored ultimately in a vital faith in God, the Father of Jesus Christ, and leads the Christian into a caring concern for the welfare of one's neighbour which for Bloesch is far more important than the journey to perfection of one's own soul. The focus of true spirituality is on God's holy love, and not a Christian's spiritual fulfillment. 'True spirituality' entails self-sacrifice for the good of neighbour and for the glory of God, a person serving the forsaken for the sake of Jesus Christ who died and arose so that *all* might live. Truly spiritual people, according to Bloesch (2007:30) live not for themselves or for their own glory and happiness (as in mysticism), but for the glory of God alone. They do not pursue wholeness of personality in God (as in mysticism), but the fear of God.

Bloesch continues in his critique and comparison of 'biblical spirituality'/'evangelical spirituality' to mysticism. Evangelical spirituality upholds the complementarity of Word and Spirit. Scriptures are a personal address directed to one who believes. By contrast, "... mysticism has tended to elevate silence over the Word. The aim is to get beyond the logos to the ineffable One who defies rational articulation" (Bloesch 2007:85). Biblical faith has its roots in the knowledge of God within the paradoxical unity of the Word and Spirit - knowledge of God from the Scripture as illumined by the Spirit. With regard to mysticism, Bloesch (2007:85) insists that the Spirit does not speak directly to the human soul (apart from historical mediation), rather the Spirit acts through the outward means of Word and sacraments, the visible signs of invisible grace.

Another aspect of comparison between mysticism and evangelical piety is the prominence given to the Great Commission which constitutes the final directive of Jesus to his disciples; for they are to go into the world and preach the gospel to the whole world (cf. Mark 16:15). For Bloesch (2007:96), the objective of the Christian faith is to "... redeem lost sinners by bringing them into a right relationship with the living Christ. This task includes preaching, teaching, prayer and nurturing". The task does not end there, for "... we are not only to invite people to place their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ but also to train them to be disciples engaged in service to Christ and their neighbour" (2007:96). By contrast, in the mind of Bloesch, "... those who embrace a mystical spirituality are generally not interested in proclaiming the faith to the masses. Their concern is to share insights with fellow travelers on the infinite way" (2007:96). In biblical or evangelical spirituality, which is 'true spirituality' according to Bloesch, the Christian engages prayer as a calling to deliver lost sinners and a hurting world through the 'power of the Word and Spirit' (Bloesch 2007:134). Preaching assumes quite differing roles for the two spiritualities: in evangelical spirituality, 'preaching' takes the form of biblical exposition and proclamation, whereas for the Christian mystics, 'preaching' becomes sharing one's interior journey (2007:134). For Bloesch, the second approach to 'preaching' does not complete the commission of Jesus (Mark 16:15) to his followers.

Bloesch (2007:143) makes no apology for his prevailing view in his text, namely, that mysticism is a Christian aberration. The New Testament speaks of being united with Christ in his passion, death and resurrection. This event has occurred at the moment of conversion, "... we do not press forward into a deeper union with Christ but seek to demonstrate a union already actualized as we live out our faith in Christian service" (2007:143). With regard to the Song of Songs, mysticism interprets this text allegorically, while biblical spirituality interprets this text as a wedding song. Mysticism has assimilated into Christian spirituality insights drawn from Platonism and Neo-Platonism, which subvert the biblical understanding of life in the Spirit (2007:143). Bloesch is concerned with the practice of silence in meditative prayer: he speculates that sustained silence is detrimental to both the spiritual life and creative scholarship (Bloesch 2007:144). Yet, he does concede that

solitude and silence may indeed have a role in deepening one's fellowship with God and with the whole company of saints. In spite of Bloesch's concerns, he concedes:

Mysticism should not be denigrated, but it should be deciphered. It cannot be joined to a biblical spirituality without undergoing a considerable degree of revision. We as biblical Christians (evangelicals) can learn positively from the mystical tradition of the faith so long as we do not read into it ideas that are alien to its scope and outreach. Mysticism as a type of religion stands in contrast to biblical, evangelical faith, but a number of the great mystics of the church can be celebrated by evangelical Christians chiefly because they manifested in their piety a strong biblical thrust that exists in tension with a mystical orientation that belongs to another world of discourse and understanding (Bloesch 2007:146).

In spite of Bloesch's attempt to validate mysticism in a minimal fashion, he continues to 'denigrate' through comments such as 'mysticism stands outside of biblical, evangelical faith' and 'mysticism cannot be joined to a biblical spirituality without a considerable degree of revision' (Bloesch 2007:145). He affirms that there are a great number of Christian mystics who manifested a piety which reflected a strong biblical thrust. Yet, earlier, he offered a litany of recognized mystical writers from Christian tradition which is to be considered with suspicion. Not only is there incongruity with his perception of mysticism, the reader is left with some question as to his understanding of the mystical way in Christian experience.

Elmer Colyer (1999) edited *Evangelical Theology in Transition* as a tribute to his mentor, Donald Bloesch. In the chapter entitled *Bloesch's Doctrine of the Christian Life*, Weborg and Colyer discuss the centrality of the Word-Spirit polarity characteristic of his theology and how his doctrine of the Christian life is reflected in his theology. Relevant for the present thesis is Bloesch's definition of justification and sanctification. Justification is primarily a change of status for a believer before God, who, because of faith in Jesus Christ changes from accused to acquitted before God (Weborg and Colyer 1999:162). Justification is an act which is complete and provides a solid foundation for the believer in Christ. Sanctification, for Bloesch, is a change in being, the imparting of righteousness upon a believer, but remains an incomplete process until the time when believers consummate their life in eternity (1999:162). With regard to the role of faith and love in the Christian experience, faith is the subjective mode of justification, and love is the subjective mode of sanctification and the fruit of faith (Weborg and Colyer 1999:164).

In their summary, Weborg and Colyer (1999) note a missing element in Bloesch's theology.<sup>14</sup> Weborg writes "... one of my concerns about Bloesch's doctrine of the Christian life is what appears to be his lack of treatment of the resurrection as distinct locus of his theology", for justification by faith which is the perpetual link to the cross of Christ, "... is insufficient to give the believer the resources needed to maintain a healthy and hopeful evangelical devotionism (sic) when the service rendered seems to go for naught" (Weborg and Colyer 1999:167). Further, Weborg quotes Bloesch's perception of doubt as 'the intellectual form of sin' and 'attributed to a hardened heart' (1999:167). Weborg concludes, "... the experience of Christian life is more complex than these sentences (comments) seem to imply. Life tests the believer's faith and faithfulness both intensively as existential angst and extensively as unmitigated suffering over time" (1999:167).

Bloesch is to be commended for his loyalty and faithfulness to his own Christian tradition, and his desire to retain the spiritual integrity inherent in evangelical theology. However, Bloesch (2007) posits an apologetic for evangelical spirituality which denigrates the apophatic tradition situated in the history and praxis of Christian experience, which is a notion prominent within evangelical scholarship. Religious truth – Christian theology – is attainable primarily through the objective scrutiny of the biblical texts. Thus, the mystical experience of the Christian faith is not an acceptable tool in the procedure for abstract speculation. For this reason, his texts affirm the principal reason that evangelicalism has difficulty in comprehending the process of spiritual transformation within the inner person. Bloesch clearly validates the premise of this research which suggests that a 'spirituality' which is not able to embrace mysticism, will not have a listening ear for someone such as John of the Cross.

James Gordon (1992), utilizing both primary and secondary works of evangelical theologians, provides a broader definition for 'evangelical spirituality' than Bloesch. Gordon has summarized characteristics of 'evangelical spirituality' which are reflected in the life and works of twenty prominent leaders. Evangelical spirituality is, by definition, 'Christ-centred' and remains a witness to the power of the gospel and mission of the Church in the modern world (Gordon 1992:ix). Gordon offers the student of Christian spirituality an overview of a tradition that

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<sup>14</sup> Though their names appear as co-authors, Weborg wrote the article and consulted with Colyer.

crosses many boundaries and contains an extraordinary diversity in spiritual experience, doctrinal emphasis, and personal temperament. He defines 'Christian spirituality' in terms of lived doctrine, the response of the human heart to divine initiative, the glad obedience of worshipping love and the continuing consequences for the spiritual life of Christian belief and experience (Gordon 1992:3). Immediately, it is obvious that his definition is comprehensive and inclusive, since many spiritual traditions which come under the banner of 'Christian' tradition can discover a commonality of Christian belief in this statement. Whereas Bloesch views mysticism with suspicion, Gordon recognizes that the whole Christian tradition is the common inheritance of the people of God. Evangelicalism, he acknowledges, is indebted to earlier and different traditions "... and the spirituality of Evangelical Christians continues to be enriched, challenged, and broadened when mind and heart are open to others" (Gordon 1992:9). He quotes Thomas Goodwin, a Puritan, as follows: "I have found Gospel holiness where you would little think it to be, and so likewise truth", which according to Gordon provides a succinct description of "... spiritual priorities which lie close to the heart of Evangelical spirituality" (1992:9). Gordon elucidates a prophetic word to his own tradition, Evangelicalism, and to all Christian traditions desiring to benefit from 'Gospel holiness...and so likewise truth' (1992:9).

#### **2.4 Evangelical Doctrine of Sanctification**

The following two literary selections define the doctrine of sanctification as explained by evangelical theologians from differing theological persuasions within this tradition. The two works are Millard Erickson's (2001) text *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, and Melvin Dieter's (1987) edited work entitled *Five Views on Sanctification*.

Erickson (2001:325) defines sanctification as "... the continuing work of God in the life of the believer, making him or her actually holy, (bearing a likeness to God)". Thus, sanctification is a process requiring an entire lifetime to complete; it is not instantaneous. There are degrees of sanctification, where one can be more or less sanctified; however, Erickson does not explain the criteria for 'more or less'. "Sanctification is an actual transformation of the character and condition of a person ... a subjective work (of God) affecting our inner person" (Erickson 2001:326).

Erickson puts forward the notion that sanctification is a supernatural work: it is a progressive process, it is the work of the Holy Spirit, and it requires the Christian to work with God in striving for holiness (2001:326). Though Christians may not be perfectly sanctified during their lifetime on earth, the aim of the Christian is to pursue complete sanctification (perfection) as much as is humanly possible (Erickson 2001:328).

Erickson's interpretation of sanctification is broader than the other literary texts reviewed thus far. He explains complete and incomplete sanctification and the potential for a Christian to experience complete sanctification in his or her lifetime; however, he concedes that the problem of sin does not allow for total sinlessness to be experienced in this life. Nonetheless, the aim of the Christian is to pursue a sanctified life with faithful diligence. Erickson does not specifically define the actual experience of the soul in the process of sanctification. Essentially he provides a theological foundation for the biblical perspective of sanctification, differentiating the Calvinist and Armenian views. Though he provides more detail than the other theologians reviewed thus far, he does not explain the exact nature of sanctification and specifics regarding the relational elements between the soul and God in the process of sanctification.

*Five Views on Sanctification* (1987) is a collection of five papers defining sanctification from differing evangelical traditions: Melvin Dieter – *The Wesleyan Perspective*: Anthony Hoekema – *The Reformed Perspective*: Stanley Horton – *The Pentecostal Perspective*: Robertson McQuilkin – *The Keswick Perspective*: and John Walvoord – *The Augustinian-Dispensational Perspective*.

Each author describes the pathway to a holy, sanctified life and adheres to similar criteria of doctrine as is acceptable within the evangelical theological belief. They believe that Scripture is authoritative in the pursuit of the sanctified life. In spite of certain theological differences, they all adhere to the notion that Scripture commands a sanctification that is past, present, and future. It is past in that it is rooted in the completed work of Christ and accepted as truth at the point of conversion. In the present moment, sanctification involves seeking a holy life, and in the future, sanctification is culminated at the return of Jesus Christ, which refers to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. All authors agree that the Christian is to express God's love in their experience, devote themselves to the spiritual disciplines and

make daily choices to resist evil and strive for the way of righteousness. Finally, all agree that Scripture promises success in the battle of the Christian against sin through the power of Holy Spirit.<sup>15</sup>

The first of the five exponents is Dieter (1987) who explains the Wesleyan perspective. John Wesley (1703-1791) gave much thought to the theme of sanctification. He believed God desired to restore holiness to the Christian, which was lost in the Fall when Adam and Eve disobeyed God (Dieter 1987:15). The agent of sanctification, the Holy Spirit, is involved in the restoration of the divine moral image of love and purity which had been fully experienced by initial pair and lost when they succumbed to the temptation of the devil (Dieter 1987:16). Wesley concluded that humankind has the potential for freedom from ‘unhappy inner struggles’, from the sickness of systematic sinfulness, and complete sanctification was entirely possible (Dieter 1987:17). Thus, God’s definitive work of sanctifying grace is able to be victorious in the inner battle of the soul, which enables a person to be fully released from a spirit of rebellion into wholehearted love for others (1987:17).

Wesley came under intense scrutiny for supporting the notion of entire sanctification or perfection in the earthly life of a believer. Dieter, in his defence of Wesley, suggests that Wesley interpreted ‘perfection’ as the continuum of grace facilitating moment-by-moment obedience to God as the person conforms to the mind of Christ. The essence of sanctification is love in action, since true freedom is not specifically freedom *from* sin or guilt, but freedom *to* love God and neighbour. Dieter admits that there remain questions concerning the procedure for entrance into sanctification and how a person maintains ‘perfection’, or how it is expressed in the ordinary places of life (Dieter 1987:36). When Wesley was asked, ‘What is Christian perfection’ he simply responded “... loving God with our heart, mind, soul and strength...” (Dieter 1987:45).

Hoekema (1987), who explains the Reformed perspective, defines sanctification as the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit in tandem with our responsible participation, by which the Holy Spirit delivers the ‘justified sinner’ from the pollution of sin into the image of God. Thus, the Christian is able to live a

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<sup>15</sup> In each paper published in this book, Biblical references are provided as proof texts to justify the particular doctrine or view. In this literature review, these ‘proof texts’ are not included.

life of holiness pleasing to God (Hoekema 1987:61). In the Reformed tradition, sanctification is related to holiness: becoming separated from the sinful practices of the present and consecrated to the service of God (Hoekema 1987:63). The Christian is sanctified through an intentional union with Christ, a union which enables a person to imitate and promote a life-style resembling the exemplary life of Jesus Christ. Thus, the role of the Christian is to pursue the spiritual practices which nurture Christ-like attitudes (Hoekema 1987:67).

However, Hoekema believes that sanctification is fundamentally a divine gift and not a human activity: the role of the Christian is contingent upon the admonition in the epistle of Romans counselling the believers to present their bodies to Christ as a living sacrifice. Similar to Wesleyan sanctification, Reformed theology accepts the notion of *definitive* and *progressive* sanctification. Definitive sanctification occurs at the moment of justification, a work of the Holy Spirit when the Christian has 'died to sin' and has been 'made a new creature'. The progressive aspect is understood as the continuing work of the Holy Spirit where the Christian is being renewed and transformed into the likeness of Christ (Hoekema 1987:77).

Horton (1987) explains that Pentecostal theologians essentially agree with their evangelical counterparts, except that the Pentecostal perspective incorporates one additional element with respect to the notion of sanctification, namely, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In his paper, Horton describes the story of Pentecostalism, and provides a theological history lesson of the movement. With regard to sanctification, he concludes that its purpose is to bring the Christian to maturity, to absolute final perfection (Horton 1987:121). In the state of Christian maturity, the person is enabled to serve God from a position of uniqueness, and live an authentic experience of God in love, joy, and faith. Instantaneous sanctification occurs at the moment of conversion when a person invites God into her or his life. Progressive sanctification involves the whole person, since "... evidences of sanctification must be the result of an internal work" (Horton 1987:118). The agent of change or transformation is the Holy Spirit, and the Christian's duty is to cooperate with the work of God in the soul. An additional asset in the process of sanctification is submitting to the 'baptism of the Holy Spirit' which once received provides a channel for a deeper level of progressive sanctification (Horton 1987:131).

Horton accepts a view of sanctification which involves a process of maturation, along with the ‘second blessing’ concept. However, what has transpired within this movement is the notion that life will progressively become better and better as the person moves into deeper sanctification, and, in some Pentecostal circles this has fostered a ‘health and wealth’ following. God’s silence is evidence for ‘unconfessed sin’ and must be remedied before God will speak or interact with the believer.

Since 1875, Keswick, a resort town in England, has hosted an annual convention ‘for the promotion of practical holiness’. McQuilkin (1987) explains that the original intent of the Keswick Convention was to organize yearly gatherings which focused upon living the Christian life in the power of the Holy Spirit. Christians from various denominations gathered together and prayed for the ‘life in the Spirit’ and for deliverance from the ‘downward pull of sin’. The Holy Spirit does not eradicate the susceptibility to sin; rather, “... the Spirit exercises a counterforce, enabling the surrendered and trusting believer to resist successfully the spiritually downward pull of his or her natural disposition” (McQuilkin 1987:155). The Christian must surrender unconditionally to God, after which a believer is able to experience the filling of the Holy Spirit (1987:155).

Sanctification is of utmost importance in the life of a Christian, for if a person does not attend to the problem of sin, they are unqualified to associate with a holy God. Thus, the Keswick conference has established a detailed process for the removal of the barrier, namely *sin*, which hinders a Christian from having full, loving fellowship with God. This process of removing the ‘sin’ barrier is called sanctification; and occurs in three stages. McQuilkin lists these as *positional* sanctification, *experiential* sanctification and *complete* or *permanent* sanctification.<sup>16</sup> The ‘means of grace’ or conduits of divine energy that accomplish the process of sanctification within the believer require the active participation of the person for Christian maturity. The four ‘tools of the Spirit’ for Christian growth are prayer,

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<sup>16</sup> McQuilkin (1987:158) lists the three stages of sanctification as *positional*, *experiential* and *complete* (*permanent*) sanctification. By definition positional sanctification is the condition when the sinner is set apart for the purpose of becoming God’s possession. One is set apart when one is forgiven (sin is dealt with), justified (the guilt of the sin is removed) and regenerated (set free from the controlling sinful disposition) (McQuilkin 1987:158). ‘Experiential sanctification’ is the outworking of one’s salvation from sinful attitudes and action in daily life (1987:158). The third and final form of sanctification occurs when the believer is totally transformed into the likeness of Christ – ‘glorification’ – in this state of ‘complete or permanent sanctification’ the person is no longer susceptible to sin (McQuilkin 1987:160).

Scripture, the Church (community of faith), and suffering (McQuilkin 1987:181). Although the agent of ‘suffering’ is not defined, suffering plays a role in potentially transforming an evil or difficult circumstance into the way of shaping a Christian to resemble the Suffering Servant (1987:181).

The means and purpose of sanctification is clearly defined within this Christian tradition. However, can the process of inner transformation of soul and spirit be so clearly specified? Defining the means of eradicating sin so precisely, for example, a ‘one size fits all’ form of spirituality, precipitates a form of legalism. In this tradition, there is the prescribed outcome which in the final state resembles the ‘Suffering Servant’. McQuilkin’s definition of Keswick spirituality speaks more to the praxis of sanctification rather than to the inner dynamics of the transformative element.

Walvoord (1987:208), in his description of the Augustinian-Dispensational perspective, begins his paper with a lengthy description of the ‘two natures’ of humankind: the sinful nature and spiritual nature. He argues that sanctification must be understood in the context of the regenerate and unregenerate person. “Once a person is saved, the spiritual state of that person includes a new nature and an old nature” (1987:208). The believer retains the ‘old nature’ which is predisposed to sin, while being given a ‘new nature’ with attributes and inclinations that dispose the Christian to a new way of life, a holy life (Walvoord 1987:209). Regeneration occurs at the moment of salvation, which is the impartation of eternal life, which reflects the doctrine of eternal security.<sup>17</sup> At the moment of ‘salvation’ the believer receives the bestowal of eternal life and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (baptism of the Holy Spirit) (Walvoord 1987:213). This new union is the basis for sanctification, for from this union “... spring spiritual fellowship, the capacity to bear fruit, the supply of spiritual power and the direction of Christ”, (Walvoord 1987:213). At the moment of salvation, the Holy Spirit indwells the believer and this indwelling presence empowers the Christian to progressively grow in sanctification. Even though the old nature is still present, by the power of Holy Spirit, the new nature allows the person to live a holy and devout life (Walvoord 1987:221).

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<sup>17</sup> The view of eternal security, “... espoused in Reformed theology, that those who truly believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior will never lose their salvation, due to God’s ongoing power and faithfulness (John 10:28). Also called the perseverance of the saints” (McKim 1996:94).

Walvoord's view of sanctification has engendered an individualistic spirituality, since Christians who are secure of their 'place in heaven' are potentially free to select their own individual means of spiritual maturation. For this reason, this form of evangelicalism has been accused of the development of the 'Jesus and me' syndrome. A person is responsible for accepting the Christian faith which emphasizes the work of Christ at Calvary for their sins. Then, the Christian is responsible to incorporate the life of Christ into their lives, which is to imitate the life of Christ. Great emphasis is placed upon the 'moment of salvation' which within evangelical circles is the primary focus for ministry. The missionary thrust within evangelicalism has emphasized the ultimate goal as the 'salvation' of an individual, particularly within the environment in which 'eternal security' is a theological tenet. The significant moment is 'being saved' from hell, with the ultimate assurance of a place in heaven which is the afterlife. Consequently, an inordinate amount of energy has been directed into strategies and programs by evangelicals for 'winning people to Jesus Christ'. However, after a person has been converted to the Christian faith and is 'eternally secure', little energy is directed into the ongoing formational process of the soul.

## **2.5 Christian Spirituality**

Currently, 'Christian spirituality' is being instituted as an academic discipline in many universities world-wide. The prevailing worldview, namely 'postmodernity', continues to create the environment for academia to recognize transcendent experience as a fundamental dimension of human experience. Humanity is capable of an encounter with a transcendent 'object', thus, 'truth' may be engaged both in the transcendent dimension *and* in intellectual abstraction which provides definition to the Christian faith (Collins 2000:11). This section of the literature review includes a brief overview of current publications in the relatively new academic study of Christian spirituality.

Kenneth Collins (2000), in his work *Exploring Christian Spirituality*, has collected and published twenty-three essays of scholarly work on the subject of Christian spirituality. The essays depict the broader diversity of this topic inherent in Christendom. He recognizes that "... the discipline of spirituality is bringing together Christians of various traditions who might not otherwise talk to each other"

(2000:15). Collins believes that spirituality calls for personal and social transcendence, "... whereby the provincialism and ethnocentrism of group life can be thrown off, then the discipline of spirituality holds promise for ecumenism, for going beyond our limited group commitments to see the Christian 'other'" (2000:15).

As a working definition of spirituality, Collins describes 'spirituality' in terms of three main referents as described by Sandra Schneiders: "... a fundamental dimension of the human being, the lived experience which actualizes the dimension and the academic discipline which studies that experience" (Collins 2000:10). A brief review of two of the essays relevant to the research for this thesis is included in the following discussion.

Philip Sheldrake (2000:25) responds to his question, *What is Spirituality?*, by suggesting that spirituality "... in the Christian tradition ... seeks to express the conscious human response to God that is both personal and ecclesial. In short, 'life in the Spirit'". What indeed is the relationship between the intellectual (doctrine), affective (spirituality) and ethical dimensions of Christian experience? Sheldrake responds to these questions by drawing from three periods of history: the Patristic period, the High Middle Ages and contemporary spiritual traditions.

What is relevant to this thesis is Sheldrake's summary of Christian spirituality as it has emerged within the last twenty years. Sheldrake (2000:37) summarizes Christian spirituality to be: 1) inclusive - it does not emphasize one Christian tradition over another: 2) while still strongly associated with theology, it does not view spirituality as a prescriptive application of dogmatic principles to life: 3) not concerned with defining perfection but noting the mystery of human development in the context of a living relationship with the Absolute and 4) not limited to a concern with the interior life but seeking an integration of every aspect of human life and experience.

Christian spirituality as a study of personal spiritual experience is "... characterized more by an attempt to integrate human and religious values than by an exclusive interest in the component parts of 'spiritual' growth such as stages of prayer" (Sheldrake 2000:38). The study of spirituality will include the study of prayer, but more broadly, it will include the revelation of God in a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling Spirit and in the

context of a community of Christian believers (Sheldrake 2000:40). He concludes, "... spirituality is, therefore, concerned with the conjunction of theology, prayer and practical Christianity" (2000:40). Sheldrake's explanation of 'Christian spirituality' amalgamates the mystical with the theological which is lived out in the experiential. The common ground between differing faith traditions with respect to the meaning of spirituality is the development of the human capacity for self-transcendence to the Absolute (however this higher power is named). For Sheldrake, within the experience of being a Christian, the approach to spirituality is explicitly Trinitarian, Christological and ecclesial (2000:40). A point with which, evangelical spirituality concurs.

Sandra Schneiders, one of the most recognized scholars in the academic discipline of Christian spirituality, wrote an article discussing Christian spirituality as an academic discipline, which was published in Collin's text (2000). Schneiders (2000) strives to expand the meaning of *spirituality* in the context of faith, theology, and spirituality; and the place of spirituality in academia. She contends that Christian spirituality can be labelled as a theological discipline only if theology is understood as an umbrella term for all of the sacred sciences. Spirituality and theology are mutually related, "... in that theology is a moment in the study of spirituality and vice versa, theology does not contain or control spirituality" (Schneiders 2000:257). Although she develops a broad perspective of spirituality (ecumenical, interreligious, cross-cultural, holistic, and interdisciplinary), it is Schneiders' analysis of the methodological approach to spirituality in academia that is relevant to this thesis. The student of spirituality will engage with their material in a participative manner, that is, "... students in the field come to the discipline out of and because of their personal involvement with the subject matter" (Schneiders 2000:262). She observes from her experience as a professor of Christian spirituality that students not only engage in research but will eventually teach and 'practice' in the field in some pastoral sense.

Schneiders (2000:262) notes that in the manner similar to psychology, spirituality deals with material that often cannot be understood except through the lens of personal experience. She writes, "Spirituality deals with spiritual experience as such, not merely with ideas about or principles governing such experience (although these certainly have a role in the research)" (2000:262). She acknowledges

the problem of appropriate objectivity; and the resulting mistrust of ‘spirituality’ within academia. What is the appropriate means of defining subjective truth through the medium of objective research? In this article, Schneiders acknowledges the problem, and recognizes that the issue of the participatory nature of the discipline requires further investigation and clarification. Nonetheless, she describes the methodology of research appropriate for Christian spirituality: firstly, to identify the experience under investigation utilizing historical, textual and comparative studies; secondly, to analyze and critique the data providing an explanation and evaluation of the subject; and “... the third phase is synthetic and/or constructive, and leads to appropriation. Hermeneutical theory governs the final phase” (Schneiders 2000:263). With respect to the methodological approach to spirituality, Schneiders (2000:263) concludes:

Spirituality as a discipline seems to have an irreducibly triple finality. While research in the field is aimed first of all at the production of cumulative knowledge, there is no denying that it is also intended by most students to assist them in their own spiritual lives and to enable them to foster the spiritual lives of others. While this triple finality contrasts with the traditional understanding of academic discipline, it is actually not much different from the objective study of psychology or art. And increasingly even speculative theologians are realizing that good theology is not an exercise in abstract thought but reflection on the lived experience of the church community which affects that life.

Schneiders (2000:260) emphasises the interdisciplinary nature of Christian spirituality, and broadens the scope of study and research more than the narrower term of ‘spiritual theology’ is able to do. She also suggests that Christian spirituality allows for a ‘prescriptive-critical’ approach whereby the student is able to draw from various disciplines when appropriate (biblical studies, history, theology, social, political, psychology) in order to make discerning judgments with respect to religious experiences. The current challenge is to respond to an increasing number of students who are choosing Christian spirituality as an area of academic specialization. Most certainly, evangelical institutions, which include bible colleges on the Canadian prairies, are being challenged to respond to this developing interest.

Dreyer and Burrows (2005) comment that it is not often that the academy witnesses the birth of a new discipline. They compiled and edited a collection of essays which provide a historical and substantive overview of spirituality as an

academic discipline (Dreyer and Burrows 2005:xi). They note that just a century and a half ago, no one had heard of psychology or sociology, and yet today these academic disciplines are established fields of inquiry.

Their definition of ‘spirituality’ appears somewhat lengthy; nonetheless, it is comprehensive and worthy of note. It encompasses:

... the daily lived aspect of one’s faith commitment in terms of values and behaviours; how one appropriates beliefs about God and the world; the process of conscious integration and transformation of one’s life; the journey of self-transcendence; the depth dimension of all human existence; a dialectic that moves one from the inauthentic to the authentic and from the individual to the communal; the quest for ultimate value and meaning. This broader focus can include elements that are explicitly religious, such as prayer, spiritual disciplines, sacraments, retreats, worship, and Bible reading. A particularly Christian spirituality is one that involves Christian discipleship, opening oneself to grace in the generosity of the Creator, through the love of God, by the grace of Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Spirit (Dreyer and Burrows 2005:xv).

In their ‘Afterword’, Dreyer and Burrows acknowledge that the Spirit of God is elusive, as stated in the gospel of John 3:8: “... we might know something of her comings and goings in our own lives and perhaps even in the church and wider society, but the Spirit follows a logic we cannot manage or ever fully know” (2005:363). The challenge in the study of Christian spirituality is to honour the Spirit’s freedom, and remain faithful to the longstanding intellectual tradition of Christianity. In the context of academia, the emerging discipline of Christian spirituality depends upon the formal disciplines of the academy as well as the art of discernment. In addition, Christian spirituality calls upon the usage of a wide range of academic disciplines, while at the same time retaining “... a humble and clear eye on the elusiveness of the Spirit’s power and presence” (2005:363). Dreyer and Burrows (2005:364) contend that the future of Christian spirituality must be grounded in two sources, tradition and Scripture. For Christian spirituality, tradition is the context for the experience of memory, which is ‘inherited memory’. An authentic Christian spirituality will have its grounding in the church’s historical tradition and in the texts of the Scriptures which is the Christian message handed down through the centuries.

Along with tradition and Scripture, Dreyer and Burrows contend that Christian spirituality is shaped by present experience, “... memory transforming

itself into our future ... reading the past in light of our lives today reminds us that tradition (Christian) is a living reality” (Dreyer and Burrows 2005:365). The academic regimen of ‘inquiry’ and ‘discussion/debate’ foster insights into the understanding of spirituality as a human experience and continue to structure the study of Christian spirituality. Thus, insights from sociology, phenomenology, cultural anthropology, psychology, as well as systematic theology, biblical theology, pastoral theology and church history influence the methodological approach to the academic study of Christian spirituality (2005:365).

Schneiders (2005:49), in her essay, admits to reassessing her approach to the study of Christian spirituality and has been led to re-articulate her own approach as ‘hermeneutical’ rather than ‘anthropological’. She has long been convinced that the most adequate approach to the study of Christian spirituality is inter-disciplinary and that spirituality as a discipline must be distinguished from other fields of religious study even if both spirituality and religious studies sometimes investigate the same phenomena (2005:49). Schneiders underscores four aspects within the study of Christian spirituality. Firstly, spirituality studies the spiritual *life*. It is concerned with the spiritual life as an existential project, which is that of self-integration though self-transcendence within and toward God revealed in Jesus Christ who is present as Spirit in and through the community of faith called the Church (Schneiders 2005:51). Secondly, spirituality is concerned with the *spiritual* life, which is understood as the vital ongoing interaction between the human spirit and the Spirit of God. She notes that the human spirit is understood in terms of the ‘human subject’ and its capacity for self-transcendence. Thirdly, spirituality is concerned with the study of the spiritual life as *experience*. Schneiders (2005:52) recognizes that this is the most difficult dimension to identify because experience is difficult to define, and particularly so, with the addition of the adjective ‘spiritual’. Again, her argument is for the study of spirituality as inter-disciplinary, and in summary, Schneiders states that the study of spirituality “... as experience requires us to bring into play not only theology and historical studies, but psychology, sociology, the natural sciences, comparative religion, aesthetics, literature and the arts, and whatever other disciplines might be required by the character of the phenomenon to be studied” (Schneiders 2005:53). Finally, Schneiders states that the object of the discipline of spirituality is the experience of the *Christian* spiritual life.

Schneiders is both at the forefront of this new discipline of study and also must adequately respond to the sceptics (possibly her own colleagues) who teach within the halls of academia. What is amazingly refreshing in her writing, is the integrity of her academic knowledge and stature, coupled with her Christian faith and perspective of the Christian life; in addition her combination of knowledge, praxis and spirituality. Academic methodology is not relegated strictly to the rational. Personal experience is acknowledged and assimilated into the research data as an essential component for academic excellence within this new discipline. It could be argued (which is beyond the scope of this thesis) that in the history of evangelicalism, Schneiders is indeed defining the perspective of the early leaders who promoted the integration of theology and daily life. As an example, Gordon (1992:2) credits John Wesley with instructing his students on the theme of God's grace as follows: the mystery of God's relationship to humankind is a 'mystery of grace': the eternal purpose of God is fulfilled by 'sovereign grace': the coming of Christ as Redeemer is 'condescending grace': the death of Christ reveals 'reconciling grace': the remorseless patience of God is 'pursuing grace': the forgiving and cleansing power of God is 'saving grace': and the transformation of life by the Holy Spirit is 'sanctifying grace'. This suggests the integrative process of theology and praxis, the grace of God as theology and the grace of God as experience.

Frohlich's (2005) article continues the debate and discussion of Christian spirituality in the academy. She demonstrates from her own personal experience as a professor in this discipline the challenges which arise in pedagogical methodology. Frohlich concurs with Schneiders that, on a practical level, the study of spirituality focuses upon 'lived, experiential spirituality' (Frohlich 2005:65). However, within the academy, the challenge is how to navigate between lived experience and disciplined study since "... an academic discipline that names as its object simply 'experience' is in danger of becoming mired in a morass of practical and philosophical problems" (2005:65). What is required, according to Frohlich, is reclaiming the notion of 'interiority' as fundamental to both the object and the method of the discipline of spirituality (2005:66). The concrete data, which is the focus of study, consists of constructed expressions of human meaning. Frohlich

understands that there is difficulty in defining the appropriate academic boundaries which at the present seem to be ever-expanding (2005:71).

Frohlich is aware of the contemporary approaches to Christian spirituality which are developing as this discipline of study continues to evolve.<sup>18</sup> She concludes that beyond the current approaches there is another step even more crucial to the study of spirituality. She claims that "... to ground spirituality as a discipline in its own right, with a methodological principle specific to it, involves reclaiming both medieval and contemporary insights into 'interiority'" (Frohlich 2005:73). She draws from Bernard Lonergan's (1971) texts for her working definition of interiority: 'knowing what you are doing when you are doing it', that is, knowing the human spirit in act.<sup>19</sup> This does not presume that whenever a student is engaged in the study of spirituality, there will automatically be 'contemplative ecstasy'. Rather, suggests Frohlich, it means methodologically, "... we must begin by acknowledging that when we select, claim understanding of, or evaluate something as 'having to do

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<sup>18</sup> Christian spirituality as a discipline of study is concerned with the spiritual as experienced by the Christian. In his text, *Understanding Christian Spirituality*, Downey notes that Christian spirituality is concerned with the "... work of the Holy Spirit within the human spirit: 1) within a culture; 2) in relation to tradition; 3) in light of contemporary events, hopes, sufferings and promises; 4) in remembrance of Jesus Christ; 5) in efforts to combine elements of action and contemplation; 6) with respect to charism and community; 7) as expressed and authenticated in praxis" (Downey 1997:120). He describes four major methods in the study of spirituality, cautioning the reader that none of the approaches is fully satisfactory or complete in itself. By far, the theological method has the deepest roots in Christian tradition. Spirituality is understood as living out of what theology and moral theology have articulated in concepts, theories, and principles. In this method of study, Christian spirituality is subject to theology — this is really not the case in reality, and Downey states that "... spirituality is not a subdivision of either dogmatic theology or moral theology. Spirituality is being freed from its tutelage to both, and is emerging as a partner with them in the larger arena of all those disciplines which fit under the umbrella of theology" (Downey 1997:125). The second major method is the historical. The historical method enables the student to gain access to authentic spiritual experience by examining documents which recount the spiritual experiences of those who have gone before us. However, the inadequacy of this method is that a thorough examination of the spiritual experience of persons or groups from an earlier epoch will not necessarily give shape to the spiritual experience of the current researcher (Downey 1997:126). The anthropological method is concerned with the human person's experience in its own right. Human experience is a spiritual experience, and the category of Christian or religious is a non issue, the primary focus is the spiritual experience — whatever that experience might be. Thus Christian spirituality is only a human spirituality, which from this perspective concludes that spirituality — be it Christian or not — is an element of human life itself. The weakness of this method in the study of Christian spirituality is that the spiritual experience would not have to come under rigorous spiritual discernment and as yet, in academia does not have a normative criterion (Downey 1997:128). The fourth major method (also promoted by Frohlich (2005)), is the appropriative method. Here the governing concern is understanding the Christian life as experience, whereby the understanding occurs through interpretation and application which as an end result is transformational. He suggests that texts, art, music, persons, architecture, dance, popular devotions, liturgical rites, drives this method so that all genuine understanding of spiritual life in these experiences is transformational (Downey 1997:129).

<sup>19</sup> For her basic texts on the notion of 'interiority', Frohlich (2005) refers to the index in Bernard Lonergan's work, *Method in Theology*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1971). Frohlich is clear that "... within a Christian theological framework, then, human interiority is fundamentally a capacity for intimate, self-transcendent communion; ultimately, it is the capacity to dwell in the personal and transcendent God, and to be a place-in-the-world where this God dwells. Transposed into the more philosophical language used earlier in this essay, it is 'the human spirit fully in act'; or, in other words, 'human persons being, living, acting according to their fullest intrinsic potential'" (Frohlich 2005:74).

with spirituality’, we do so based on our own living of spirituality — that is, our own spirits ‘fully in act’” (2005:74)

‘Interiority’ influences the methodological approach to the discipline of spirituality, which is through “... standing inside, and coming to know, the lived reality of our own spirits” (Frohlich 2005:75.) This perspective enlarges the academic rigor in Christian spirituality to include the correlation between knowledge and life, for ‘lived spirituality’ is not merely a retrospective activity but rather an in-depth awareness with oneself, with others, with the world, and with God (2005:75). Consequently, a study of spirituality requires that a student exhibits a level of tolerance toward personal vulnerability. It presumes a willingness to probe, experiment, and accept challenges to every aspect of one’s lived spirituality. There is a call to dialogue with a ‘sometimes unnerving range of interpretations’ when a student deciphers spiritual phenomenon within his or her own or other’s spiritual experiences. Frohlich states that the discipline of spirituality demands the usual hard work of scholarly endeavour, including mastery of the necessary literature, terminology, and methods. Yet, at the heart of spirituality remains the focus of authenticity in the life of the spirit (Frohlich 2005:77).

Two observations are worthy of note at this juncture. Firstly, there is a similar desire and intentionality expressed by the proponents of the emerging discipline of Christian spirituality as there is by the proponents of evangelicalism. Though the semantics may differ slightly, nonetheless, the desire for relationship with the Triune God, and for a ‘lived spirituality’ reflected in daily spiritual experience is a shared philosophy for both groupings. What is particularly evident during this era of postmodernity is that the dialogue which has fostered the development of a new discipline of study is the same dialogue which is potentially fostering a reuniting of Christendom. Secondly, evangelicals who perceive spirituality/mysticism with suspicion fail to recognize that what is lacking within a particular Christian tradition may find a balance within another. Obviously, to discover another perspective on the silence of God and the role of the silence of God in sanctification, it is necessary to research other spiritual traditions since my evangelical tradition does not have a satisfactory response with respect to these questions.

As a systematic theologian, Matthew Ashley (2005) grapples with the shift of relationship in current academia between theology and spirituality. He laments the fact that theologians are somewhat confused by the nature of the critical shift of emphasis in the ‘turn’ to spirituality. Is this ‘critical shift’ purely a matter of linguistics, or interpretation (hermeneutics), or is it veering off to purely human experience? Postmodern theology is concerned with the return to the Scriptures, to tradition, and claims Ashley, to “... turn to turning itself” (2005:160). Nonetheless, after his initial preamble where he describes his own minor exasperation, he acknowledges the current ongoing process of restoration within academia between theology and spirituality. This development obliges theologians to cultivate within themselves and others a healthy respect for the diversity and particularity of ways people “... ‘walk according to the Spirit,’ and to be aware of the ways that we (theologians) can misjudge or distort a given spirituality by applying theological categories to it (spirituality) prematurely” (Ashley 2005:160). He defines spirituality as “... a classic constellation of practices which forms a mystagogy into a life of Christian discipleship. This aspect emphasizes the particularity of spiritual tradition within the history of Christianity” (2005:160). In the context of the present thesis, Ashley contributes a candid appraisal of the tension which exists between the discipline of systematic theology and Christian spirituality. He suggests a resolution which in essence responds to the current multicultural, polycentric global church and to particular spiritualities created by diversity. To resolve this tension, Ashley suggests that spirituality must draw heavily from historical-contextual methodology, and focus upon the fact that spirituality is something that *one does* (2005:161). He cites the example of the Dominicans, whose spirituality is built upon practices of teaching and preaching, renouncing the monastic practice of stability. In addition, Benedictine spirituality has at its core a rule of life that states a specific set of daily monastic practices. He proposes two theological tenets that should be at the heart of spirituality: firstly, spirituality is ultimately an encounter with God that becomes incarnate in a life of discipleship; and secondly, spirituality should incorporate a person more deeply into the body of Christ, which is the communal element (Ashley 2005:161). His definition of theology is:

... the discipline and self-critical attempt to construe all of reality — God, the human person, society, human history, and the natural cosmos, individually and in their inter-relations — in the light of the

symbols and narratives of the Christian tradition, and in dialogue with other disciplines in the academy that attempt to understand and interpret reality (Ashley 2005:162).

The question arises, what constitutes a successful relationship between spirituality and theology? What does one approach to the Christian faith contribute to the other? Or, is there a potential for mutual enrichment between differing Christian worldviews? Ashley recommends several proposals for the current reintegration of these two disciplines, and he acknowledges that his proposals are currently occurring in many sectors of the church. He observes that the usage of images, symbols and narratives from the classics of spirituality is illuminating specific areas in systematic theology. Creative, provocative (sometimes scandalous) and daring images in religious symbols are challenging logical and linear articulation inherent in theological systems. Ashley contends that spirituality has the potential to breathe new life into theological paradigms that have become too closed in on themselves; spirituality "... can serve as correctives to narrowly conceived theological constructs, when, for instance, they (theologians) emphasize only the distance and kingship of God, and not also God's nearness and tenderness" (2005:163). However, theology can enrich spirituality, since a particular spirituality may be enhanced by theological concepts which arise from a differing mystagogy. Ashley (2005:166) notes instances where theologies and spiritualities have interacted productively, and he refers to the example of Meister Eckhart who was both a scholar in theology and a speculative mystic. Ultimately, any theology of any breadth or depth has, explicitly or implicitly, a constitutive relationship to spirituality, and theology cannot be fully understood without taking spirituality into account (Ashley 2005:165). The reintegration of theology and spirituality will not be an easy process; however, there is no excuse to avoid the assimilation. Spirituality has a rich historical 'data base' which engages the discussion of 'experience' and 'spiritual language' in the Christian experience with relative ease in comparison to theology. It puts theologians in contact with a discipline that has been hard at work in providing a language for spiritual phenomena. Ashley concedes that difficulties will arise in the process of designating disciplinary boundaries, and ambiguities with respect to definition will continue to frustrate systematic theologians. He is convinced that the cross-disciplinary work between the two disciplines, occurring at

this time, will chart a course for the future and will connect spirituality and theology as partners to the 'Great Tradition' (Ashley 2005:168).

Ashley (2005) is representative of the current dialogue between the proponents of theology and spirituality. Obviously, this is not a dialogue across the entire spectrum of Christianity, since there are theological scholars who are suspicious of the proponents of mysticism and the discipline of Christian spirituality. However, in the pockets of academia in which the dialogue has been instituted and the discussion between theology and spirituality occurs, the ensuing relationship is nurturing the ability to engage in an openness of debate and appreciation of the other discipline. Within the context of evangelical academic institutions, the discipline of Christian spirituality has the potential to enlarge and enrich theology, as Ashley envisions. The ongoing question in the context of evangelicalism is, what will the dialogue look like, and as the dialogue between the two disciplines occurs, will the evangelical academic community recognize the significance and relevance of the dialogue? At present, the academic dialogue in evangelical institutions between theology and spirituality is sparse, even though students in these institutions welcome and celebrate the 'conversations'. In many evangelical colleges and seminaries across the Canadian prairies a level of dissonance exists between the recognition of 'spirituality' as foundational to Christianity, and the actual implementation of Christian spirituality as an academic discipline into their programs of study.

## **2.6 The Person and Works of John of the Cross (1542-1591)**

### **2.6.1 Carmelite Religious Tradition**

Late in the twelfth century, the Carmelite order (O.Carm) had its humble beginnings on a mountainous ridge jutting out into the Mediterranean Sea. The original Carmelites settled on Mount Carmel by a spring known as 'the fountain of Elijah' (Welch 1996:6). Unlike the Dominicans and the Franciscans, the Carmelites did not have a charismatic founder, which prompted them to look to Elijah (whose history linked him with Mount Carmel) for their direction and inspiration. They also associated themselves with Mary, to whom their oratory at Mount Carmel had been dedicated. Eventually, they referred to themselves as the 'Brothers of Our Lady of

Mount Carmel'. Thus, Carmelite spirituality was marked by the call to prophetic contemplation and to a Marian affiliation (Sheldrake 2005:172).

By the thirteenth century, living conditions on Mt. Carmel were unsafe for the monks, and the Carmelites decided to leave their desert monastery for new sites in Europe. They migrated to Cyprus, Sicily, France, England, and eventually to Spain. Initially, their intent was to remain an eremitical order; however, they soon recognized it would be wiser to join the group of mendicant orders 'taking their place with Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians' (Welch 1996:9).

Early in the fifteenth century, a reform within the Carmelite order began to emerge due to various members expressing dismay at the unhealthy state within the order. Certain members alleged the Rule of St. Albert was no longer being adhered to, and a general complaint ensued that seemingly few even *knew* the content of Rule. This situation precipitated renewal within the ranks of the order under the direction of John Soreth (d. 1471). In 1452, a papal bull, *Cum Nulla*, gave the Carmelites the authority to establish cloistered communities for women. Soreth never visited Spain, but following the *Cum Nulla*, Carmelite Discalced (the shoeless ones) houses were founded in Spain (Welch 1996:13).<sup>20</sup> In chapter four, the history of the Discalced is discussed, with special attention to Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, who were instrumental in the formation of the Discalced Carmelites – a renewal movement.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Spain entered the 'golden age of spirituality' largely as a result of vast religious reforms initiated prior to the Council of Trent. The reforms which took place during that era in Spain and Europe affected both laity and clergy (Dupré and Saliers 1991:69). The most distinctive trait of Spanish spirituality was the passage from objective spirituality (vocal prayer and works of charity) to vital and subjective prayer (based on personal experience). The 'way of recollection', a practice of prayer developed in the Franciscan houses during

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<sup>20</sup> Teresa of Avila, a leader in the Counter Reformation in Spain, initiated the Carmelite reform. She opened up many houses of the reform, and her nuns became known as the Discalced, the Shoeless ones. Teresa merits honourable mention in this thesis by virtue of her collegiality with John of the Cross as a Carmelite and collaborator within the Discalced Reform. Her kataphatic spirituality provides a refreshing balance for the apophatic spirituality of John; and the two inspired (and conspired) a reform that eventually morphed into an order in itself, the Discalced Carmelites. Teresa's inspiration for her reform movement came from the 'holy fathers' of the thirteenth century, who were called to 'prayer and contemplation'. She "... wanted her daughters to be detached from what kept them from God, to be humble and to practise the prayer of recollection. This prayer of recollection stressed attention to the presence of Christ" (Sheldrake 2005:173).

the 1500s comprised three parts: self-knowledge, the imitation of Christ, and union with God or transformation in God which does not take place through the intellect, but through love (Dupré and Saliers 1991:71).

The attractive and enduring element of Carmelite spirituality is the call to solitude, prayer, contemplation and union with God in love, which is a resource for all people who desire a meaningful depth in their spiritual and personal life. Carmelite spirituality offers a contemplative lifestyle for those who are in pastoral, cloistered, or lay ministries, and serves as a contemplative model within the monastic tradition. From sixteenth century Carmelite tradition, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross have left a literary legacy of classical writings in western mystical tradition which continues to astound and enlighten the postmodern Christian.

The following literature review examines texts that relate to the *writings* of John of the Cross, as well as certain *historical* texts dealing with the Carmelite order and more specifically John of the Cross. Due to the proliferation of available material the following literature survey is of necessity selective, concentrating more specifically on sources that have particular relevance for the present study.

### **2.6.2 John of the Cross**

With regard to the *life* of John of the Cross, Ruiz (2000) has compiled a collaborative work which took the contributors into monasteries, libraries, and to archives where the researchers were able to collect materials, photographs, and personal data. This collection, published, and distributed by the Carmelite press, conveys the life of John, providing immense detail into his culture, his country, his spiritual tradition (the Catholic Church), his Carmelite order, and his spirituality. This text contributes a wealth of information on the life, the writings and the times of John of the Cross.

There is a sense of delight in this literary treasure as one connects with the world in which John lived and ministered, even to the point where the landscape of his sojourn is also included in the text. Whether or not one has visited Spain or walked where John walked, the reader is engaged in the life, journey, ministry, and trials of this Carmelite friar through the pages of this book. Included in the text is the geography and history of sixteenth century Spain, as well as the tensions and turmoil of the Roman Catholic Church and the Spanish Inquisition. Maps of each of the

areas of ministry and travel, along with the sites of the monasteries, illuminate the history and bring life into the text, particularly for those who are not familiar with the Discalced Carmelite tradition (Seasoltz 2001:2). Interspersed within the textual materials are snippets of the writings of John, along with the stories and pictures of people who were significant in his life. If there is an impression this saint spent most of his time in solitude and contemplation, reading John's life in Ruiz's book certainly contradicts that concept. This text describes his ministry of preaching and spiritual direction, his care for the poor and sick, and his willingness to be engaged in manual work when necessary. The spirituality of a people is linked to their story, the landscape of their formation, their heritage, and their spiritual tradition; thus, this text is invaluable for its inclusion of all these aspects of John's life, enabling the reader to appreciate his work and ministry.

Susan Muto's (1991; 1994) scholarly work makes the poetry and commentaries of John of the Cross accessible to the postmodern reader. Muto writes two companion texts: *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (1991) and *The Dark Night* (1994), which provide a reliable and thoughtful guide through the mysticism and practical spiritual wisdom of John of the Cross. Though her writing is sometimes reflective in style, relating John's principles to contemporary experiences, her books direct the reader through the rigorous and arduous journey of soul transformation, and into the mystical wisdom of John.

Muto's (1991; 1994) two books guide the reader on an exploratory study concerning the mystical union with God. She chronicles the events which may occur as one proceeds in the pathway to the unitive experience with God. Muto strives to be loyal to the original text, from which she gleans the wisdom of John as he provides a road map for those who desire to advance in the life of the Spirit. Nonetheless, the reader is fully aware that her texts resemble a 'reader's digest' version of John's two works. Even so, Muto disentangles the difficult concepts inherent in the 'journey of the dark night' as a means of allowing the modern day sojourner to benefit from the acumen of John of the Cross.

In the *Ascent*, John starts at the point where God begins to wean the soul away from attachments to divine consolations toward an in-depth relationship with the One who consoles (Muto 1991:13). In her first text, Muto (1991) describes from John's commentary the entry into the active night of the senses and the active night

of the spirit. She notes the cautions, dangers, apprehensions, impediments, and the signs that occur along the way to union with God. As well, this journey inward will be accompanied with remarkable consolations, spiritual touches, delights, visions, and feelings (1991:13). Whereas John is often circuitous in his writing, repeating what he has just written in order to insure that his readers comprehend his line of reasoning, Muto summarizes in detail his analysis of the sensory journey in the dark night. In the experience of the active night of sense and spirit, faith guides the intellect, memory and will toward inner purification. Indeed, the benefits of detachment experienced in the ‘active’ night cause us “... to love God and pursue the good, (and) fosters the foundational dispositions of humility and charity, and reaps a bounty of blessings, including tranquility of soul, diminishment of distractions, recollection, and purity of mind and body” (Muto 1991:156). Throughout her book, Muto accentuates the insightful wisdom of John into the inner dynamics of the human soul. In this text, the *Ascent*, John demonstrates how sensory satisfaction can detour our dynamic for transcendence, how the senses are capable of connecting with supernatural goods that are not God. While Muto (1991) summarizes John’s description of this first aspect of the purging process, she contextualizes for the modern reader the daily circumstances where John’s teaching is relevant. As an example, Muto (1991:167) notes:

Were St. John alive today, he would see as many benefits associated with our saying “no” to the enjoyment of supernatural goods as he did in his time. As the saying goes, if we play with fire, we are likely to get burnt — and in the realm of spirituality there are many explosive charges. People perform healings that may be the result of purely natural forces. They hear voices from the “other side.” Witches and so-called “new age spiritualities” claim to be “channels” for ancient deities.... In such a climate of the fantastic it is more urgent than ever to heed St. John’s sagacious advice to negate, annihilate, deny, and dismiss any gratification we may feel for such “supernatural” feats.

The benefit of this practice — annihilating gratification from supernatural experiences — is the joy experienced when the soul is freed from all that is not God, and the ability of the whole mind and heart to praise and extol God alone. Through faith, the soul comes to know God as God, and the will concentrates on loving God alone rather than relying on disclosures or a dependency upon specific signs or sensory experiences (1991:167). From this focus of the initial part of the

transformational journey, John moves into the next stage which is the grace of passive purification.

In the *Ascent*, John focuses upon how those who are seeking God can actively purify themselves through their own efforts, whereas, in *Dark Night*, he provides insight on how those who are seeking union are passively purified by God (Muto 1994:14). As in her commentary on the *Ascent*, Muto contextualizes John's writing, and acknowledges that her desire is to reconstruct in contemporary language what John would say to the 'masses', that is, our current Christian culture, while remaining faithful to the "... parlance of this classic" (Muto 1994:17). She believes that the message of John has to appeal as much to the Carmelites in monasteries as to the laity in the marketplace (1994:17).<sup>21</sup>

John concentrates on the passive night of the sense and spirit in his second text, the *Dark Night*. Similar to the prior text, Muto (1994) outlines in orderly form the complexity of John's text, thus, providing for the modern reader a pathway through the commentary. She does not remove the 'sting' of sensory deprivation and the difficulty for the spiritual sojourner who is experiencing this night. However, there is a purpose for this state of being, for the purging of sensory delights reserves the heart solely for God (Muto 1994:92). No other delight can take the place of pure adoration, of learning to love God and give glory to God with our whole heart, mind, body, and soul (1994:92). Further, it is not appropriate to assess this inner dryness to be the result of some newly committed sins which is clearly not the case. Muto (1994:93) writes:

St. John does not accept this explanation. He says that if such a withdrawal of delight were due to human imperfections, the propensity would soon arise to seek satisfaction merely in material or mental ways. Again the outer and inner senses, our seeing and imagining, would draw us toward indulgence and instant solutions. This tendency would be in itself an imperfection, indicating how far

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<sup>21</sup> Muto (1994:18) extrapolates, "... the dark night afflicts the parent of an addicted teenager, as well as the victim of violence and disease. It touches every woman and man laid off from work. It affects single persons, both young and old, who are unable to pay their monthly bills.... The dark night is friendship betrayed, trust destroyed, abuse inflicted. ... It is out of this social and personal experience of the dark night that we can once again be enlightened by the writings of St. John of the Cross. The dark night is not distant from us; it is as near as our own backyard". From these statements, it could be deduced that Muto (1994) thinks that everyone who experiences personal difficulties is in 'dark night', and this is how lay people are able to encounter John's counsel. While this interpretation of John's 'dark night' phenomenon may have some merit, those who experience difficult situations may not categorically be experiencing the passive purgative process which John describes in his second commentary. Indeed, John does not indicate that problematic circumstances are a sign of inner 'dark night'. In the passive 'dark night', the soul is in affliction due to seeming absence of God's presence, rather than from external deprivations.

we are from a genuine sensory experience of the dark night. The inclination, indeed the urgency, to approach the mystery of the movement as if it were merely a problem to be solved would be an indicator that one is still bound, mildly or in great measure, to pretranscendent attachments.

John wants us to understand that the inner dryness is also not due to laxity or tepidity, nor to a secret indifference to God. Were this the case, Muto (1994:94) writes, a person would attempt by any means to change the situation since "... real love means that people struggle continually to improve the relationship, and this requires hard work as any couple committed to staying married can testify". The 'lukewarm' person does not cultivate a spirit of obedience and service to God, whereas, the one who is drawn by God into the 'crucible of purgative dryness' is "... acutely and continuously concerned. He or she is pained by the thought of falling out of favour with God. Their relationship of intimacy means everything" (1994:94).

There are several themes Muto (1994) notes from John's 'dark night' commentary, three of which are: the afflictions and benefits of this night, the spiritual exchange occurring in the soul with regard to the seven deadly sins, and the mystical ladder of love. These areas are pointed out and explained with greater detail in chapter five. Muto is to be commended for her 'commentaries' on John's commentaries, for by means of her insightful applications to everyday life, she opens up John's writings to the twenty-first century Christian.

Gerald May (2004) who was a psychiatrist and spiritual director, examines in his text entitled *The Dark Night of the Soul*, the role of inner darkness of soul in the spiritual formation of the Christian. May chose to write from a 'reflective' stance, reflecting upon lessons of faith emanating from the spiritual wisdom of John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila.<sup>22</sup> May's significant contribution to this thesis is that he is a Protestant Christian as opposed to Muto, who appreciates John of the Cross as a devout Catholic Christian. Both May and Muto share similar conclusions, yet, they discover in John's writings comfort, encouragement, and wisdom which speak to their background and experience in the Christian faith. Indeed, this strongly supports the notion that John's spiritual wisdom crosses theological and denominational lines.

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<sup>22</sup> Dr. Gerald May passed away in the spring of 2005, so this was his final publication. Written at a time when May was battling cancer, the poignancy of the book is apparent. He incorporates issues such as depression, addiction, personality and gender into the impasse of an experience of the 'dark night of the soul'.

May's text has a twofold significance for this thesis: firstly, May (2004) examines spiritual concepts in the writings of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, so that the reader is drawn into both May's journey and that of his two Carmelite companions by means of the dark night experience. Secondly, May's work is inspiring: he speaks to contemporary society with candid honesty and unabashedly carries the message of John and Teresa into the essence of every day experience. By comparison to his other published works, this text is not as much a scholarly thesis, as it is his musings of 'not knowing' and the gift of the dark night of the soul. He acknowledges that one of the biggest lessons from this time is the realization "... that I'm not as much in control of life as I'd like to be. This is not an easy learning, especially for take-charge people who ... should be in control of things" (May 2004:3). He writes that the darkness of the night implies nothing sinister, only that liberation takes place in hidden ways, beneath our knowledge and understanding. Thus, "... it happens mysteriously, in secret and beyond our conscious control. For that reason, it (dark night) can be disturbing or even scary, but in the end it always works to our benefit" (May 2004:5). He adds that more than anything, the "... dark night of the soul gives *meaning* to life. It is a meaning given in not knowing" (2004:5).

In this book, May (2004) relates the stories of both Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, and he reflects upon the interconnection between these two Carmelites in their theology and contemplative life. Of significance to this thesis are the final two chapters in which May develops the psychology of the dark night and the modern contexts for this experience. He reiterates that dark night of the soul is "... an ongoing transition from compulsively trying to control one's life toward a trusting freedom and openness to God and the real situations of life" (May 2004:135). It is a process often marked by a feeling of emptiness and inability to engage the old ways of living, and often a person experiences dryness in the former ways of prayer. The energy for meditation and the sources of consolation no longer exist (May 2004:136). May selects three 'signs' which he suggests John describes to enable us to differentiate an authentic dark night from other potential causes of inner dryness, such as lukewarmness, depression, physical illness, lack of desire or sin and imperfection (May 2004:137). Most often, we are not able to discern which of these signs may be in place, which indicates the importance of the role of a wise spiritual

director when a person is in an authentic 'dark night'. Though John lists the signs with regard to the experience of prayer, May chooses to include places where this phenomenon may occur in other aspects of life. May lists the signs as: firstly, a diminishment of consolation in prayer and of a sense of gratification in the rest of life, "... ways of meditation that used to be rewarding and rich now seem empty. Relationships and endeavors that used to be energetic and life-giving now seem to have lost their spark" (May 2004:139). In fact, in the dark night, not only are the old ways empty, they are inaccessible as well (2004:139). Secondly, there is a movement into a 'lack of desire' for the old ways of prayer and living, and if the Christian is honest, they come to acknowledge that they have no desire to return to the former ways of prayer and meditation (May 2004:140). Thirdly, the Christian is called to return to the simplicity of loving and desiring only God, to the deep-hearted desire expressed as "I don't know what it means or how to do it, but what I really want is just to be with God, just to be in love with God" (May 2004:141).

May notes that "... John says that three spirits may visit people during the night. He does not spend a lot of time on them, but his descriptions are psychologically very precise and insightful" (May 2004:142).<sup>23</sup> He indicates that John's selection and comments are particularly poignant for current western Christian experience. They are: firstly, the spirit of *fornication*, which for John implies a form of idolatry, a turning away from God and God's ways in order to seek personal gratification (May 2004:143). Secondly, the spirit of *blasphemy*, which for John is the impulse to rage against God. This occurs in the dark particularly during the night of the senses (May 2004:145). Thirdly, John utilizes a Latin term, *spiritus vertiginis*, literally meaning a 'dizzy spirit', which May notes,

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<sup>23</sup> With regard to the psychological aspect, May (2004:150) notes "To put it in more psychological terms, most of us become desensitized or *habituated* to the especially delicate experiences of life. Most of us live in a world of over stimulation and sensory overload. Without realizing it, we erect defenses against our own perceptions in order to avoid being overwhelmed. To some extent, this deadens our sensitivity and dulls our perceptiveness. We find ourselves no longer appreciative of the subtle sensations, delicate fragrances, soft sounds, and exquisite feelings we enjoyed as children. Like addicts experiencing *tolerance* — the need for more and more drugs to sustain their effect — many of us find ourselves seeking increasingly powerful stimulation to keep our enjoyment and satisfaction going. ... We are constantly trying to find ultimate satisfaction, but we unknowingly look in the wrong places. We are drawn to make idols of the good *things* of God, not knowing that it is only the *nada*, the no-thing of God's very self that can truly satisfy us. By the time life begins to break out idols, we normally find ourselves deadened and insensitive to the tender gifts we've been seeking all along. It is as if we have gorged ourselves on rich meals for so long that we cannot appreciate the delicate freshness of a sip of spring water. It is as if we have spent so long hammering in a noisy foundry that we can no longer hear the soft whisper of a breeze. Thus John and Teresa see the 'purgation' of the night as a healing process in every way. Many aspects of it may feel painful and distressing, but it is all designed for the recovery of innocence, the

“It seems specifically designed for people like me, people who refuse to relinquish the idea that *if only I could understand things, I could make them right*” (May 2004:148). The purpose of the ‘dizzy spirit’ according to May is that in each relinquishment, the person’s faculties are further emptied and reliance upon God is deepened (May 2004:149). The effects of these three ‘spirits’ is to invigorate and refine all of a person’s faculties: the intellect, memory, will, imagination, and senses (May 2004:150).

In Kieran Kavanaugh’s (1999) text, *John of the Cross, Doctor of Light and Love*, Kavanaugh begins with an extended version of the life story of John of the Cross. Following this historical section, Kavanaugh elucidates upon the concepts, terminology, and mystical teaching of John of the Cross which allow the ordinary reader to comprehend John’s writings. John’s usage of mystical terminology does not translate with ease into our contemporary context, thus, Kavanaugh (1999) proves to be a capable guide through the numinous language of John. Unlike Muto (1991, 1994) who published a commentary of ‘John’s commentary’, Kavanaugh’s work is thematic. He selects specific metaphors imbedded in John’s poetry and commentaries, positions the notion in John’s personal story, and then equates these with the spiritual and psychological formation of the Christian. The fundamental thesis of his book is John’s description of the journey of darkness within the soul, and that Christ is the way into light. However, along the way, the soul will be guided from meditative practices of prayer to contemplative practices, will be weaned as a child of inordinate attachments, will experience a humbleness of spirit (Kavanaugh 1999:126), and when the ascent is completed will encounter the depth of God’s beauty, uncreated Wisdom and union of divine Love (Kavanaugh 1999:206).

Another guide through the writings of the two Spanish Carmelite giants is John Welch (1996), in *The Carmelite Way, An Ancient Path for Today’s Pilgrim*. Carmelites are able to boast of a Christian tradition that may be likened to an ancient path, dating back to Mount Carmel in the early thirteenth century. Welch (1996:2) notes that the Carmelite story has been shaped over time in an attempt to respond to the challenge of the gospel of Christ. As such, over the years, the Carmelite tradition has developed its own soul language, the place where God’s spirit and the human

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reestablishment of perceptiveness and sensitivity, the rebirth of profound peace and exquisite joy, and, finally, the fullness of love for God, others, and the world”.

spirit meet. This meeting with God, suggests Welch (1996:2), takes place in our human experience, thus, it is opened up to its spiritual depths. The Carmelites, in their long history, have become known for their preferences of particular themes and images from Christian tradition and have drawn from their imagination to add to the wealth of Christian mystical literature.

Welch combines a history of the Carmelites and a portrayal of the themes and images that are at the heart of their spirituality. While he refers to other figures in his works, Welch provides a caveat that in his estimation, John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila remain the best exponents of this monastic tradition (Welch 1996:3). Welch captures many of the spiritual practices and values which he believes comprise the contribution of Carmelites to Christian mysticism. As an example, he suggests that Carmel for the contemporary church stands for prayer, which heeds back to original members who were preoccupied with attentiveness to Mystery (Welch 1996:75). Welch (1996:75) writes:

The Rule of Carmel, a quilt of scriptural references, focused the Carmelite on God's Word. Listening to scripture read in common, praying the psalms together, meditating on scripture in the silence of their cells, were fundamental prayer activities of the early Carmelites, ... There is no Carmelite method of prayer, only the encouragement to pray. Alone or with others, the presence of God is the foundational reality, the horizon against which our human activity takes place. Consciously attending to that foundation, that horizon, opens us to a full life. Carmelites pray with many forms, but essentially all forms are meant to open us to the Mystery which haunts our lives. In seeking God, Carmelites discovered that God had been pursuing them in love. Their seeking and desiring was a gentle response to a shepherd's whistle so gentle as to be almost imperceptible. In following the call they found themselves in a loving relationship: they were desired, affirmed and wanted by God.

Welch notes that this approach to prayer is the mystical underpinning for Carmelite prayer experience, and he includes Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), John of the Cross (1542-1591), Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897), and Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection (1611-1691), who are representative of this approach. Further, Welch (1996:83) demonstrates the psychological subtleties conveyed in John's and Teresa's writings, where they demonstrate nuanced understanding of human development. Both of these authors believed that self-knowledge was an essential component for spiritual development and for the ability to know God. To know

oneself fully included being able to fully know God, and the ‘self-knowledge’ proposed by John and Teresa was an inner awareness based on God’s grace and mercy (1996:83). For Teresa, “... this knowledge would include knowledge of inner fragmentation, compulsions, addictions which distort the heart. These realities float into awareness as prayer loosens layers of the psyche” (1996:83). Welch notes that John believed that when a personality is not centred on God, but on some aspect other than God, it becomes dysfunctional and incapable of knowing its true self. Only “... when the true center emerges, false centres die, and the personality heals” (Welch 1996:84).

Welch explains that the role of the ego in the development of human psyche as a normal progression of human development is a healthy process. It is only when the ego (which comprises a sense of one’s identity with oneself and others), becomes out of touch with itself or others around, that the personality will become distorted and affect both the inner life and exterior experience of the person. Welch (1996:86) concludes that fundamentally, ego is not necessarily the problem; the egocentric life is the issue. Thus, much of Carmelite literature assaults the ego, calling the Christian to simplify, to disengage from distraction and to leave the position of pre-eminence, and to embark on a journey not of its own making.<sup>24</sup> The desired goal for this purgative way is ‘being divinized’, resulting in one who is truly alive, who is able to use the gifts he or she has received from God, and whose whole personality is brought into harmony with its center in an integrated manner (Welch 1996:168). Here Welch (1996) and May (2004) converge; both interpret John and Teresa to suggest a form of self-transcendence: the person is “... grounded or rooted in a graciousness at the core of the personality. Her life naturally manifests acceptance, compassion, generosity, and humility. Others are esteemed, and community grows” (Welch 1996:168). John notes that this journey is a pilgrimage

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<sup>24</sup> Welch (1996:86) reminds the reader of the recurring theme of ‘humility’: “... the Carmelites testify that the outcome of prayer is humility. In the process the ego is often bruised but should emerge better for the experience. Some of the stronger language of John of the Cross could be understood as even advocating annihilation of the ego. He was sensitively aware of the ego’s fear and distrust, and its tendency to close in upon itself. The annihilation of the ego, however, is never the goal. It is this soul’s destiny to discover itself in relationship with God at its center. The ego necessarily plays a major role in this privileged encounter ... When John of the Cross describes the effects of contemplative prayer he is not describing an annihilation of the ego but a repositioning of the ego in reference to the self, to God and to others. Ego is now acutely aware of its selfish and sinful tendencies. Reverence has been restored to the personality which had grown presumptuous. The person, the ego, now takes its place in the circle of humanity, and no longer judges. Once-proud ego is now able to say ‘we poor’”. Indeed, Welch notes the place of humility in this transformational process.

and the soul will be in different stages along this way; however, as Welch (1996:168) notes there is a worthy goal:

Because the person is knowing this world with God's knowing, and loving it with God's loving, she can love this world, be committed to it, be passionate about it, without clutching, grabbing, with the heart being fragmented or enslaved, and without distorting the world. In other words, this person loves with a freedom of heart, a freedom of spirit. She is free to be the creation God meant her to be and free to love the world as it truly is and for its good.

Philip Sheldrake (1999) edited a series of texts entitled, *Traditions of Christian Spirituality*, in which contributors were invited to provide submissions. Wilfred McGreal (1999) wrote *At the Fountain of Elijah, The Carmelite Tradition* for this particular series. He suggests that "... imagination is a key word if we want to explore Carmelite spirituality" (McGreal 1999:11), because the essence of Carmelite spirituality is about 'story' and in the final analysis, story speaks of a living community with positive insights to share with Christendom and with whomever is willing to listen. Following his preamble, he relates the story of the Carmelites as a pilgrim community, in which the key themes of Carmelite spirituality develop: allegiance to Christ, openness to the Scriptures, the sense of silence and solitude and the undivided heart (McGreal 1999:39).

Though McGreal chooses not to focus upon the two Spanish Carmelites as Welch (1996) does, he refers to John and Teresa when he describes the mystical way, since these two leaders were influential in providing an impetus for sixteenth century spiritual renewal. Teresa was conscious of two things with regard to her work: firstly, the Inquisition would scrutinize her renewal efforts with suspicion, and secondly, she remained intentionally focused upon the ideals of Carmel established at its inception, whereby the holy father of Mount Carmel called his followers to prayer and contemplation (McGreal 1999:55). Teresa's motivation for reform was to restore the life of prayer in solitude, which had been the essence of life on Mount Carmel (1999:55). John of the Cross's works are referenced in McGreal's work with respect to the symbols of the mystical life. McGreal's discussion of other members of the order situates John of the Cross as one person in a long lineage of Carmelites.

When McGreal (1999) writes about the 'mystic way' in the Carmelite tradition, he draws from the legacy of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. Both of these counter-reformers were aware that the church (and their order) required

renewal, equally in the practice of prayer and contemplation, and in religious life. Thus, Teresa reminded her nuns that those who wear the holy habit of Carmel are called to prayer and contemplation, and that this precious pearl of contemplation must be sought in solitude and silence. She also discerned that many members of her order, who were extraordinarily busy in their religious duties, had relinquished the original essence of life on Mount Carmel (McGreal 1999:55). Thus, in spite of the Inquisition, that was suspicious of the forms of prayer encouraged by Teresa and John, both combined forces for the common objective of restoring the contemplative way of life. Further, in spite of the resistance the two reformers encountered from the Calced and the inquisitors, these two teachers, gifted with the imaginative and insightful power of the Spirit, have left a spiritual legacy of immense importance. For this thesis research, the journey of sanctification which both of these mystics describe in such detail, is affirmed and acknowledged in McGreal's assessment.<sup>25</sup>

With regard to John's works, Kavanaugh and Rodriguez (1979a) have translated and collected the major works of John of the Cross which are currently available and published in one volume.<sup>26</sup> Translated into English from sixteenth century Spanish, this volume makes these texts accessible to the twenty-first century reader. This text is the primary source for research regarding the 'dark night' phenomenon and includes a lengthy introduction to *Ascent* and *Dark Night* along with comments for each of the poems and commentaries. (This publication is the foundational text for chapter five of this thesis.)<sup>27</sup> All of John's works that are available at this time were written in the last fourteen years of his life, between the age of thirty-six to forty-nine, after he had attained an intellectual and spiritual maturity (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:33). Further, in the field of Spanish literature, the poetry of John of the Cross has received a prominent place, and as a

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<sup>25</sup> McGreal (1999:69) notes specifically of John's contribution, "John's life gave space and time to love and friendship. He felt a freedom in intimacy — he wanted neither to possess nor to be possessed. He could celebrate friendship and was honest in the joy such relations brought him. Because the mystics are open to the loving wisdom of God and allow the love of the Spirit freedom, they achieve a humanity that is creative, sensitive and spontaneous. Perhaps one of the great contributions that a teacher like John of the Cross could make for people today is that, in pointing to the way to grow in a loving trust of God, and in the experience of unconditional love, he enables men and women to gain confidence in the possibility of achieving full loving relationships. Mysticism could well be a school for marriage". McGreal provides a worthy connection for the postmodern Christian living in the context of marriage and family to John's teaching.

<sup>26</sup> Kavanaugh (1987) has also edited a compilation of selected texts, entitled *John of the Cross, Selected Writings*, for Paulist Press in the Classics of Western Spirituality Series.

<sup>27</sup> Spanish texts which have been downloaded from internet sources are referenced in chapter five to complement the English translations provided by Kavanaugh and others.

poet he is ranked among the greatest in the history of Spain (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:34). With regard to John's prose, he has not received much praise, since his didactic writing is unpolished; however, he shows clearly his literary skill in expressing his thoughts in phrases of "... beauty, originality, and power" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:35).<sup>28</sup>

In the introduction to their translated work, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez (1979a) provide the background for entering into the mystical works of John. The purpose of the *Ascent* and the *Dark Night* is to explain how the Christian is able to reach the 'high state of perfection' (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:44). However, these texts are not simply a set of rules and techniques, but include a systematic presentation of theory and practical norms which govern the development of the spiritual life (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:45). John states at the beginning of his work that he intends to draw his doctrine from the sciences, experience and Sacred Scripture (1979a:45).<sup>29</sup> The aim of the spiritual life, according to John, is the state of perfect

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<sup>28</sup> Kavanaugh & Rodriguez (1979a:35) note the difficulties in translating his prose into English, "St. John obviously made no particular effort to phrase his ideas in graceful, stylish, and impeccable prose. We find it quite unpolished (he himself complained of his style), cluttered with repetitions, redundancies, split constructions that are often complicated and obscure, Latinisms, and so on. His long, labyrinthine sentences have not infrequently proved a challenge to his editors seeking clear punctuation. We have the fantastic example in a recent Spanish edition of his works in which one sentence has been buttressed with fifty commas, four semicolons, two uses of parentheses, and a use of a dash". To complete their translation of John's works into English, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez (1979a) chose to use the codices which in the judgment of the experts are authoritative. They write: "Since we are still awaiting a definitive Spanish critical edition of the works of St. John of the Cross (and since those comparatively few scholars who would want to consult the usually insignificant readings of other manuscripts ordinarily have sufficient knowledge of Spanish), we have omitted all critical references to variant readings. ... For these reasons we have not translated any of the existing critical editions but have used as our source those codices which in the judgment of the experts are the most trustworthy. When — and these instances were rare — there were omissions in the codex selected or the expressions proved unintelligible or excessively obscure, we chose the complete or clearer rendering of another reliable codex" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:36). The codex for the translation of the *Ascent*, titled *The Codex of Alcaudete*, was made by Fray Jan Evangelista in Granada and is preserved in the Silvarian Archives in Burgos. It is a transcript of the original and is the most trustworthy copy of this text. For *Dark Night*, there are many copies, but none are valued as a transcript from the original text, and the translators chose to use *Hispalense*, which is the best codex from the critical viewpoint (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:44). The *Ascent* was probably begun in El Calvario and continued in Baeza and Granada during the years 1579-85. The *Dark Night* was composed in Granada during years 1582-84.

<sup>29</sup> Of the importance of the biblical text for John's theology and writing, Gaudreau (1976:56) in her doctoral thesis notes that "... this question cannot be slighted, for, indeed, from the time of his novitiate until his death, the Holy Scriptures remained his 'source par excellence'. But, an interesting fact to note that even though the Bible was for him both a literary and doctrinal source, it must be remembered that the old Carmelite breviary he was using to recite his divine office was actually the book he frequently held in hand while composing his works, and thus, many of his scriptural quotations were made through this intermediary. This has been made too little of in determining the sources which most influence him. While it is true that John of the Cross interpreted the Bible in the manner of a man of his own century, nevertheless, he understood the limited value of its use of symbolism and allegory". Gaudreau (1976:59) points out that John seeks from Scripture the principles of *modus operandi* on the part of God, as the texts reveal God in loving covenant with the creature that God has fashioned in 'His own image'. John uses the Bible as a means of confirming and illustrating what he is teaching, but he uses it in a unique way, and this is due to an 'interior exigency' which seeks the expression of the lived experience of the Christian faith (Gaudreau 1976:60). She writes, "... yes, John of the Cross is so intimately united to the Sacred Word of Scripture, received in faith, that it becomes, in a certain way, his own language"

union with God which is based in love: this is the summit of Mount Carmel (1979a:45). Thus, in the *Ascent*, John examines this concept and explains the pathway which leads to this goal (1979a:45). However, John's notion of the soul is significant in these two texts - the *Ascent* and *Dark Night* - since he divides the soul into two main parts: the sensory and the spiritual (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:47).<sup>30</sup> Kavanaugh & Rodriguez provide an overview of John's two texts in their description of the path to union with God as: the mortification of the appetites; the journey of faith; and God's communication to the soul. In the outline of John's works for this thesis, these titles have provided a guide line for this study, and are included in chapter five. What is the purpose and destination of these two works? Kavanaugh & Rodriguez (1979a) argue that John wrote for contemplatives; however, his work is not restrictive. In the Prologue, John remarks about the inclusiveness of his work, "Our goal will be, with God's help, to explain all these points, so that everyone who reads this book will in some way discover the road ... to reach the summit of this mount" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:59). Kavanaugh & Rodriguez (1979a:60) are of the opinion that John believed his teaching would be more or less beneficial for everyone at some point in their spiritual experience, which differs from the "... assertion that *all* doctrine applies at all times to everyone's particular situation and stage".<sup>31</sup>

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(Gaudreau 1976:61). On this point, Gaudreau's comment has merit, since there are times when the teachings of John and words from Scripture appear to flow seamlessly. Though, Aaron (2005) comes to a similar conclusion with regard to John's use of allegory, she holds a higher view of John's usage of symbolism than does Gaudreau. Aaron's central text for research is taken from Jean Baruzi's (1881-1953) work, *Saint Jean de la Croix de l'Experience Mystique* published in 1924. According to Baruzi, the dark night '*mérite d'être appelée, au sens technique du mot, une symbole*' — quoted by Aaron from Baruzi's text (page 330). Aaron (2005:181) says that "Baruzi begins by distinguishing between pseudo-symbolism (allegorism) and true mystical symbolism. We recall his contention that allegory fails to communicate the depth of the mystical experience, while true mystical symbolism is directly attached to the experience itself. Allegory finds images in the sense world that are already organized in the mind, whereas the symbol tends to avoid any thought developed in view of an already established world. In other words, symbol adheres directly to the mystical experience; it suggests a world of images whose inner logic we must try to capture. It figures a world in which we discover the object of our quest. True symbol has no adequate linguistic translation. Given all these criteria, Baruzi deems San Juan's Night to be a true symbol."

<sup>30</sup> Kavanaugh & Rodriguez (1979a) note that John describes the sensory and spiritual part of the soul with each part having its own powers or faculties. The sensory part "... has to do with the sensible or corporal objects, possesses exterior sense faculties of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch; it also claims inner sense faculties, which he reduces to the phantasy (sic) and the imagination" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:47). The spiritual part of the soul "... which is concerned with spiritual or incorporeal objects, numbers three faculties: intellect, memory, and will. The sensory faculties as well as the spiritual faculties of intellect and memory are cognitive; they involve the perception, or as the Saint terms it, apprehension and cognition of objects" (1979a:47).

<sup>31</sup> Here Kavanaugh & Rodriguez (1979a:60) comment that "... each reader should uncover in this treatise the instructions that is necessary for him in his particular situation and stage, the road he must follow in order to reach the summit of the mount. Sometimes the rules (provided by John) are exclusively suited to those who have begun to receive contemplation. At other times they apply to those who still commune with God by way of

Not everyone will find to their liking the demands which John places upon the Christian to follow Christ along the pathway to union with God. John is aware that only a few may fully benefit from his instruction, since he is not writing on ‘pleasing and delightful themes’ for those who “... like to approach God along sweet and satisfying paths” (1979a:60). Rather, John asserts that “... we are presenting a substantial and solid doctrine for all those who desire to reach this nakedness of spirit” (1979a:60). Thus, John’s main intention was to address the persons of his order, because he perceived that they were eager to know more about the journey to reach union with God. Further, his doctrine of ‘detachment’, which was fundamental to his writing, was a concept that the religious community already understood and seemingly practiced. They would easily grasp, so he thought, the ‘doctrine of the nakedness of spirit’, since they were to some extent detached from the things of the world. However, he encourages the reader at the outset not to be discouraged, since the latter parts of his instruction will provide greater clarity for the former, and when the text is read a second time, “... the matter will seem clearer and the doctrine sounder” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:61).

Allison Peers’ (1959) translation of the dark night is a much older work than the one of Kavanaugh and Rodriguez (1979a). However, these translators agree on the reliability of the manuscript in the Silvarian archives.<sup>32</sup> Peers (1959:14) acknowledges the difficulty in the obtaining the most precise rendering of the text since John is often repetitious in his wording and adds numerous parenthesis. However, Peers’ intent was to reproduce the atmosphere of the sixteenth-century text as far as is possible to retain consistency and clarity (Peers 1959:15). Peers (1959) provides a comprehensive overview of the available manuscripts with notations of omissions and abbreviations within each. His observations affirm the reason for Kavanaugh & Rodriguez (1979a) selecting the particular text for their translation of John’s text from Spanish into English. For the purpose of this thesis study, the copies of the Spanish text which were copied from manuscripts available from internet sources will be utilized.

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meditation”. John would add that the sojourner along the journey of faith should have a spiritual director to assist him or her in discerning exactly the manner in which John’s teaching is applicable to them at any given time.

<sup>32</sup> Peers (1959:12) writes that “So superior is it, even on the most casual examination, to all its predecessors that to eulogize it in detail is superfluous. It is founded upon a larger number of texts than has previously been known and it collects them with greater skill than that of any earlier editor. It can hardly fail to be the standard edition of

## 2.7 Conclusion

Evangelical theology affirms the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ accomplished at his death and resurrection. This is pivotal in the experience of conversion. Evangelicals adhere to the Holy Scriptures as their source for wisdom, knowledge, and inspiration to live a holy and devout life. A life of holiness is accomplished through the practice of spiritual disciplines and inner spiritual transformation. In addition, evangelicals are evangelists, who preach the ‘good news’ of God’s work of salvation accomplished through Jesus Christ to those who are outside the Christian faith.

One of the notable characteristics of evangelical theology is the plethora of literature published in the discipline of systematic theology in which evangelical theologians describe in copious detail the finer points of theology and dogma. Of particular interest for the research in this thesis is the doctrine of sanctification, since the phenomenon of the ‘dark night’ experience falls within the discussion of sanctification. However, from the literature reviewed, evangelicals, who seemingly are most comfortable with a systematized and predictable theology, and who affirm the importance of sanctification, fail to engage the process of inner transformation at the affective level. In the literature reviewed, not one author describes the inner dynamics of spiritual transformation for which a believer develops a daily practice of the spiritual disciplines and pursues the path of ‘being like Christ’ in order to ‘become like Christ’.

In addition, when a Christian tradition, such as Evangelicalism, evolves within a particular locale, a particular landscape, and a particular narrative, as has occurred in the Canadian prairie west, its spirituality is uniquely shaped by the environment. Such conditions foster a human spiritual experience indigenous to the environment. The wave of Evangelicalism on the Canadian prairie produced communities of churches, Christian organizations, and the Bible college movement. Within this expression of evangelicalism, the basic components of evangelical thought and theology would be maintained, notably a theology governed by reason and systematization. In addition, a deep level of mistrust and scepticism toward the mystical or mystical theology developed. Since spiritual transformation lies in the

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the works of St. John of the Cross for generations”. This is the same text used by Kavanaugh & Rodriguez (1979a).

domain of 'interiority' and 'mystical experience', little emphasis was placed in the development of a theology dealing with the dynamics of inner spiritual experience.

John of the Cross, mystic, theologian, and biblical expositor enters the dialogue, by means of his description of the spiritual, theological, and psychological framework for the mystical component of spiritual transformation. Thus, he is capable of comfortably and carefully describing the process of inner transformation from the aspect of the 'dark night'. Further, his texts – the *Ascent* and the *Dark Night* – provide the counter point to a rational, systematic theological thrust inherent in CPES. These works offer a particularly unique contribution to Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**LIFE AND TIMES OF JOHN OF THE CROSS**  
**(1542-1591)**

**3.1 Introduction**

The Evangelicalism which developed in the Canadian west had fundamentalist influences that had originated from the southern United States. As this religious ideology evolved, it adapted to the conditions which prevailed in the experience of life in a prairie setting. The pioneers who settled in this environment encountered conditions over which they had no control. They discovered in their new homeland a territory which had extreme seasonal patterns and unpredictable natural phenomenon. At the same time, the new immigrants integrated their religious beliefs (the interiority of their faith) with the external circumstances where they formed their new life. This unpredictable exterior created a natural desire for an internal spiritual faith which was predictable, secure, and absolute.

As a counterpoint to the conflicting exterior conditions, the evangelicalism which matured in the Canadian west provided a theology that was biblically based, rational, and had an unwavering response for every situation. As this Christian community expanded and increased in numbers, the movement took on sectarian and legalistic proportions. Thus, Christian theology in this faith-based group of people left little or no space for mystery, for the inexplicable, for the unknowability of God, and for the silence of God. The doctrine of salvation and the emphasis upon the Great Commission to win the world for Jesus Christ became foundational theological tenets. An enormous amount of energy was expended upon strategies for evangelism and for discipling new believers. Christian literature and Sunday morning pulpit preaching stressed the responsibility of every Christian to bring the 'lost' to Christ to guarantee a place in heaven in the afterlife. Although, new Christians were educated in their faith, the responsibility for inner sanctification was left to the recently initiated. Two theological characteristics developed in this context: firstly, sanctification occurs within a person as a believer is obedient to the teachings of the Christian faith. However, the rules which dictate 'obedience' often led to a form of legalism. Secondly, an adequate paradigm to explain the process of

sanctification — when the soul experiences inner transformation — has not been adequately developed. The reason for this particular absence in prairie evangelicalism is understandable. The inner journey of the soul is relegated to the sphere of mystery, and it is impossible to empirically systemize, analyze, and organize matters relating to these processes. At this level, the academic exercise draws from observation, attentiveness, reflection, appreciation, being attuned to loving wisdom, and a sense of comfort with an unpredictable and silent God.

John of the Cross, a leading authority in spiritual formation of the soul, offers a paradigm to interject into the aforementioned missing component of evangelical theology. He was prompted to write *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night* in response to the suffering of those who were experiencing inner turmoil and trials. His ministry as spiritual director placed him in contact with people whom he discerned were in the midst of inner purification and encountering immense suffering of soul. Through his poetry and commentaries he attempts to explain the process of spiritual transformation as it occurs in the journey of the dark night. John is an apophatic theologian (this will be developed in chapter five); thus, he is orientated toward the mystical quality of God. His apophatic approach enriches the expository message of hope he offers to evangelical theology. To appreciate the poetry and commentaries of the Carmelite friar, it is imperative to delve into the historical context of the Spanish era in which he lived. The concentration of research in this chapter includes both the historical and narrative and looks at the influences which shaped John's perception of theology, prayer, contemplation, the church, and the ascetic lifestyle.

### **3.2 Sixteenth Century Spain**

John of the Cross was born and grew up in the world of sixteenth century Spain, and this is where he began his vocational ministry. The following deals with significant events during his lifetime which gave shape to his spirituality.

#### **3.2.1 Cultural, Economic and Theological Conditions**

The late medieval church in Europe faced major theological challenges, which had been initiated by reformers such as Martin Luther (1483-1546) in Germany, and John Calvin (1509-1564) and Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), in

Switzerland. The Council of Trent (1545-63) convened to study the issues raised by the Protestant movement, and to address doctrinal concerns which arose from the Protestant-Catholic dissent. The council met to critique the performance of its own institution, and determine the reforms and changes from within, which were necessitated by the criticisms expressed by the reformers.<sup>1</sup> Spain, during this time, enjoyed a brilliant moment in her history due to her development in culture, politics and religion. While Europe was in the midst of the ‘clamour of reform’, a counter reform movement, no less clamorous, was underway in Spain. Sixteenth century Spain is commonly referred to as the ‘Golden Age of Spain’.

This era produced a substantial number of luminaries in the world of literature and the arts and included published works in theology, scholastic and classical studies. The Spanish conquest and exploitation of resources from various locations around the world contributed to the wealth and culture of the Spanish elite (Hardy 1982:6). For the lower middle class and lower class Spaniard, these successes affirmed the blessing of God upon Catholics. Providence was on the side of the Spaniards. This perception contributed to the acceptance of censorship of religious observance – as exhibited by the Inquisition – and intolerance toward any semblance of nonconformity to the spiritual practices of the Church. Since national pride included loyalty to the national church (the Catholic faith), the excesses of torture carried out by the Inquisition were perceived as a means of guarding orthodoxy – even though, the populace abhorred the torment inflicted upon the so-called deviants. It would be in the secular world of literature, fiction, drama, architecture, sculpture and art (painting) that narrow religious themes were challenged and remained somewhat unscathed by the Inquisition (Durant 1961:295). The academic world in Spain during this era experienced a significant increase in the establishment of universities and theological institutions. Faculties of arts

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<sup>1</sup> The Council of Trent (1545-63) (convened and reconvened throughout its duration) dealt with issues of doctrine posed by Protestantism. The permanent breach between Catholics and Protestants occurred during the reign of Pope Paul III prior to the formulation of the council. Not content to merely condemn the Protestant movement, the council discussed meticulously every item of theology, which the Protestant theologians were questioning. The deliberations of the council would be interrupted by change of venues, which were a direct result of strained relations between King Charles V and the popes in power. Nonetheless, the council would reconvene after a time in recess and continue the dialogue. Numerous decrees were established addressing measures of internal reformation, marking the birth of the modern Catholic Church. The teachings of Thomas Aquinas became the central theological treatise of study for the church. It took strong measures to combat the influence of the Protestant movement, part of which was the establishment of the Vulgate as the Scriptural authority in determining matters of dogma and decreeing the holy sacraments of the church to seven sacraments. See *The Story of Christianity*, volume 2, The Reformation to the Present Day, (Gonzalez, 1985:119).

offered courses in logic, rhetoric, and natural science, and expanded their programs to include specialized subjects such as theology, civil and canon law, and medicine (Defournaux 1970:166).<sup>2</sup>

For the agrarian populace, land was allocated and developed into grazing pastures to accommodate sheep, the basis for a lucrative trade in wool. By 1560, fifty thousand textile workers were employed in Toledo alone (Bilinkoff 1989:5). This agricultural enterprise required skilled labour which resulted in employment for weavers, dyers, carders, combers, and spinners along with artisans skilled in leather making, metal working, construction, and other trades. The thriving textile industry was the occupation of John's entire family (Bilinkoff 1989:5).

Sixteenth century Spain benefited from the discovery and colonization of the New World from outside of its borders, as well as, the conquest and expulsion of the Moors from within – southern Spain. This era reflected the flowering of the Spanish mind and heart, an expression that lingered into the next century. Most importantly, the Spanish Counter Reformation gave rise to mystical literature that had no counterpart in Europe at that particular time (Crow 1985:186).<sup>3</sup>

### 3.2.2 Counter Reformation in Spain

A precursor to the Counter Reformation movement in Spain was the influence of *devotio moderna*, a movement of religious piety with its beginnings in the Netherlands in the fourteenth century. Erasmus of Rotterdam (1469-1536), a Dutch thinker, promoted the ideals of *devotio moderna* and humanist philosophy rooted in the classics. Erasmus was a strong proponent of personal devotion which included the study of Scripture, the rejection of performed rituals, and daily practical service to God. His religious ideology inflamed scholars and clerics, religious and

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<sup>2</sup> Even though Spain developed a culture (art, music and affluence) which was envied by its European neighbors, poverty oppressed the vast majority of the people. Two classes, the rich and the poor, existed side by side, and were separated by the invisible barriers of their respective worlds. It was a rule that people did not cross this cultural barrier; however, some set this convention aside. A case in point would be the parents of John (Hardy 1982:6). Not everyone at this time enjoyed the glory of a country relishing in its splendour and accomplishments. The doctor of the Church, John of the Cross, was enriched by the culture and spirituality at his disposal and would reap some of the benefits of this richness in the midst of his poverty. For the poor, life was precarious at best. Though wealth and poverty coexisted, oftentimes in the same neighbourhood or the same country area, the line of demarcation was clearly marked between the rich and the poor, whether by economic class or social status.

<sup>3</sup> In his book, *Spain, The Root and the Flower*, Crow (1985:186) indicates that the writings of the mystics offered an escape from the suffering and poverty experienced by the populace either by the hand of the Inquisition or the

lay people, throughout Europe. Eventually, this movement produced an outpouring of literature and thought which affected the educational practices, works of charity, ways of prayer, and the role of the clergy within the broader Christian community of Europe (Bilinkoff 1989:80). Fray Luis de Leon (d. 1591), (a Spanish scholar) greatly influenced by the thinking of Erasmus, became a target for the Inquisition because of his humanist beliefs. His reverence for the great literary and religious tradition, (Greek, Latin, Christian, Hebrew), his love of music, his spiritual life, and his interaction with the people around him reflected his humanistic philosophy (Duran & Kluback 1984:ix). Humanism, which in its purest form celebrates beauty and truth in all aspects of cultural and human experience, was perceived as a fundamental threat to the dogmatism and rigidity of the Inquisition.

Clearly, *devotio moderna* influenced the development of Christian spirituality in Spain. Firstly, there was the focus upon the subjective side of the interior life, the psychological factor, where attention was paid to mental and emotional reactions to prayer; thus it promoted the possibility of experimenting with differing methods and techniques in prayer (Bouyer, Leclercq & Vandembroucke 1968:541). It precipitated:

the progressive development of meditation leading to conversion and interior prayer, and finally the stages of contemplation so called. Here Ignatius of Loyola and Teresa of Avila were to play a leading role, though the way had been prepared for him by Cisneros, for her by Laredo and Osuna (Bouyer, Leclercq & Vandembroucke 1968:542).

The *Alumbrados*, a group associated with this movement, were condemned as heterodox by the Inquisition due to their practice of contemplative prayer; allegedly they considered vocal prayer as a waste of time (Woods 2000:39). Another characteristic derived from *devotio moderna* was a general depreciation of the liturgy; instead it emphasized the practice of personal and private recollection in prayer,<sup>4</sup> similar to the practice of the *Alumbrados*. As an example, Ignatius of

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unfortunate result of impoverishment. Poets, novelists and mystics became shepherds via pastoral literature and art.

<sup>4</sup> The way of 'recollection' produced the first great mystics of the golden age of Spain, beginning around 1480 in the Franciscan houses of prayer. The way of recollection included three parts: self-knowledge, the imitation of Christ and union with God. Its essential characteristic was union with and transformation in God, not by way of intellect, but through love. This spirituality was grounded in Sacred Scripture and in the classical writings of the church such as Augustine, Gregory the Great, the Victorines near Paris, Bernard of Clairvaux and Bonaventure. This practice went beyond the normal forms of spirituality with long hours of vocal prayer and exercises which were characterized by external and sometimes superstitious manifestations of the practice of virtue and uprooting of vices. Inherent prevailing themes in this mystical movement of recollection includes: God calls all to

Loyola (1491-1556) developed the *Spiritual Exercises*, a set of meditations selected from narrative selections in the Life of Christ. Ignatius developed a discipline of meditative prayer which incorporated the senses. This was not merely for personal Christian experience alone, but the insights and wisdom gleaned through meditation directed the Christian to a decision for personal action (Dupré, Saliers & Meyendorff 1989:70). For Ignatius, praxis and prayer held equal value, and he challenged his followers with the Christian's apostolic responsibility (Bouyer, Leclercq & Vandembroucke 1968:542). The Catholic Church in Spain and the Inquisition viewed the practice of 'contemplative prayer' with immense suspicion, for the private practice of prayer could potentially create factions within the Catholic church and within the religious orders. In addition, there was the issue of control: if the Christian is guided by the combination of exterior senses and inner discernment then 'who is in control'? Is it not possible that the person engaging in such prayer could be misguided through inordinate mystical experiences, or worse, through the promptings of the devil? Of interest is the similarity between the hierarchy of the Spanish church and the current evangelical theological perspective with regard to the practice of 'contemplative prayer' and 'mystical prayer'. Both political bodies promote the importance of the community of faith and the role of the Christian church in the corporate life of its people. Concern arises, however, at the ecclesial administrative level when Christian ascetical practices encourage the practitioner to utilize 'contemplative prayer' to gain personal and spiritual insights from the inner core of the soul – that is, hearing from the inner 'flame of love'. Clearly, it is possible that a practitioner of prayer may discern a personal action in the world, and this action may not be in alignment with the teachings or practice of the ecclesial institution.

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Christian perfection, meaning that the call to perfection was taken out of the monasteries and included the laity, and the transformation of the soul — union with God — is comparable to the metaphor of two distinct candle fires coming together and becoming one, even though the two candles are distinct. Further, the encounter with God which takes place in the inmost part of the soul — in the center — is the primary goal and must be distinguished from the external acts and rites which accompany good works (Dupré, Saliers and Meyendorff 1989:71). Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross would be highly influenced by this movement and their teachings on prayer integrate these themes.

### 3.2.3 Spanish Inquisition

As early as 1184, at the Council of Verona, bishops were ordered to be on the alert for individuals or groups who were promoting heresies within the church (Painter 1961:314). It became obvious that given the busy schedule in the life of a bishop and the courage required to implement the order, many bishops were not able to comply. In time, groups of men were commissioned to root out the heretics and present them before ecclesiastical courts. These inquisitors, who received authority directly from the papal office, established an investigative organization and courts to combat heresy. This group of men became known as the Inquisition (Painter 1961:314).

The directive of the Inquisition was two pronged: firstly, to save the soul of the heretic, and secondly, to prevent the heretic from corrupting the faith of others. For the medieval Christian believer, heresy was one of the most frightful of all crimes since it was viewed as treason against the Church (Painter 1961:315). Two opposing beliefs could not coexist side by side: if one belief was truth, the other by default was false. Extreme measures were implemented to eradicate heresy for the sake of the church and nowhere were these practices more evident than in Spain. Even after four centuries, a mere mention of the institution continues to evoke images of gloomy prisons and gruesome tortures.

Baigent and Leigh (2000:148) explain that established and organized religions tend to be nervous concerning their own mystical traditions:

The mystic always remains a potential maverick, a potential renegade or apostate, a potential heretic — and therefore a potential candidate for persecution. Because of his insistence on direct experience, he does not require or even necessarily want a priest or interpreter. In effect, the mystic renders the priest and the entire ecclesiastical hierarchy superfluous. And the mystics of the world's various religious traditions will generally have more in common with each other than any of them will with their own official priesthoods.

By the fifteenth century, the Spanish Inquisition<sup>5</sup> was under the jurisdiction of the Spanish monarchy, even though it was instituted via a papal bull from Rome. King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella were especially concerned that the Inquisition root out the converts from Judaism, namely, the *Conversos*, who were suspected of retaining Jewish practices or ‘judaising’ (Durant 1957:207). They had hoped that these ‘New Christians’ would become sincere followers of the Church, however, it became clear that many of them secretly maintained their ancient faith and transmitted this faith to their children (Durant 1957:208).

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<sup>5</sup> Durant (1957:209) explains: “... at his (Ferdinand’s) request and Isabella’s, Pope Sixtus IV issued a bull (November 1, 1478) authorizing them to appoint six priests, holding degrees in the theology and canon law, as an inquisitorial board to investigate and punish heresy. The remarkable feature of this bull was its empowerment of the Spanish sovereigns to nominate the inquisitorial personnel, who in earlier forms of the Inquisition had been chosen by the provincial heads of the Dominican or Franciscan orders ... Technically, however, the inquisitors were only nominated by the sovereigns, and were then appointed by the pope; the authority of the inquisitors derived from this papal sanction; the institution remained ecclesiastical, an organ of the Church, which was an organ of the state. The government was to pay the expenses, and receive the net income, of the Inquisition. The sovereigns kept detailed watch over its operations, and an appeal could be made to them from its (the Inquisition) decisions. Of all Ferdinand’s instruments of rule, this became his favorite. His motives were not primarily financial; he profited from the confiscated property of the condemned, but he refused tempting bribes from rich victims to overrule the inquisitors. The aim was to unify Spain. ... The jurisdiction of the Inquisition extended to all Christians in Spain; it did not touch unconverted Jews or Moors; its terrors were directed at converts suspected of relapsing into Judaism or Mohammedanism and at Christians charged with heresy; till 1492 the unchristened Jew was safer than the baptized. Priests, monks, and friars claimed exemption from the Inquisition, but their claim was denied; the Jesuits resisted its jurisdiction for half a century, but they too were overcome”. Painter (1961:315) in *A History of the Middle Ages*, comments with regard to the practice and philosophy of the Inquisition, “... when a man was accused, he was arrested and questioned. If he could explain away the charges, he was, of course, released. It was rather difficult to do this, however, as he was not allowed to face his accuser, nor was he even told who his accuser was. This policy was considered necessary in order to protect informers. The chief object of the questioning was to obtain a voluntary confession of guilt. If this confession was obtained, the accused became subject to penance. This might consist of a pilgrimage; public flogging — often in the church; the wearing of a badge of some sort, such as a cross; or imprisonment. A confessed heretic was also deprived of his property. Usually it was divided between the king or other prince and the church, but in France the royal government was soon taking it all. This greatly increased the crown’s enthusiasm for the Inquisition”. Further, for those who refused to confess, torture was freely used to obtain a confession, or the alternative to such behaviour was to have the offender burned at the stake (Durant 1957:212).

Another movement targeted by the Inquisition was the *Alumbrados*,<sup>6</sup> an offshoot of the *Iluminismo*, a ‘sect’ influenced by humanism. The *Alumbrados* abandoned themselves to prayer and, at the same time, rejected the necessity of the Eucharist, reading the Scriptures or any form of external expression of the devotional life. By entrusting themselves to God alone, God would reveal to them wisdom and direction for daily life (Giles 1981:4). For this reason, the Inquisitors often detained members of the *Alumbrados*, who allegedly had rejected fundamental elements of Catholic dogma. Some of Teresa of Avila’s writings, which were deemed to border on *Alumbrados* heresy, were withheld from the readership of the time. Also, the Inquisition noted that contemplation was not for mere ‘carpenter’s wives’ and that the ordinary people were to be maintaining their household rather than dealing with personal prayer or contemplation (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1980:24).

There was a school of devotion referred to as *recogimiento* (the quieting of the senses in order to be attentive to God) which was explained in the *Third Alphabet* by Francisco de Osuna (1492-1542), a Franciscan priest. Osuna promoted a method of prayer in which he suggests the practitioner should learn three forms of prayer: firstly, vocal prayer, such as the Lord’s Prayer, secondly, meditating on the Life of Christ, and thirdly, mental prayer where the exchange of wills (between God and the soul) occurs and intellectual activity is suspended (Hamilton 1992:15). The writings of Francisco de Osuna influenced young Teresa at a strategic moment in her spiritual life when she was discerning the role of prayer in her own personal experience. When her prayer experience matured, Teresa of Avila, in submission to

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<sup>6</sup> Brenan (1973:96) explains that “... the *Alumbrados* or Illuminists, whose name crops up so frequently in the religious history of this century, were not, as is usually supposed, a sect. They consisted of small groups of both clerics and laymen who appeared in New Castile during the first two decades of the sixteenth century and practiced an interior Christianity. The movement arose spontaneously, but soon after came under the influence of Erasmus, because, like him, they stood for a spiritual Christianity as opposed to a ceremonial one.” However, the movement also shaped the experience of mental prayer, which had recently sprung up among the Franciscans, and the most eminent practitioner was, Fray Francisco de Osuna, whose *Tercer Abecedario Espiritual* came out in 1537, and was the first work on mysticism to be published in Spanish. Osuna taught what he called *recogimiento* or recollection, which he said could be practiced by anyone as it did not require any special aptitude. “The beginner would withdraw one or two hours every day and empty his mind of all thought or consideration of earthly things so that it would be free for God to occupy it. If persisted in, this would lead to that outpouring of grace which Santa Teresa called the Prayer of Quiet and then to the brief transport called the Prayer of Union” (1973:96). Teresa was influenced by Osuna’s work, and his book made a deep impression upon her in her early twenties, when she was experiencing a period of convalescence from an illness. Later in her life, she would distinguish the various stages of the mystical experience in her own text, *Interior Castle*. Another form of mental prayer current among some of the *Alumbrados* was *dejamiento*, as opposed to *recogimiento*, this ‘letting go’ instead of ‘collecting together’, in which the soul remained passive, without any effort or striving on the part of the soul, and simply surrendering to the love of God (Brenan 1973:97).

her bishop, described her visions, locutions, and images in her writings. Even though some of these texts were removed from circulation by the Inquisition (Dupré, Saliers & Meyendorff 1991:79), this did not deter her in her writing career<sup>7</sup> or from initiating a Discalced reform within her order (Bilinkoff 1989:121).

For the postmodern Christian in the Canadian west, the practice of the Inquisition is a difficult concept to comprehend. The imposition of the Inquisition upon the Church as a means of unilateral control appears cruel and unjust. The fundamental freedom valued in contemporary thought includes the privilege of practicing a faith or religion of one's own choice. However, the highly structured Christian institution as exemplified by the Catholic Church at the end of the Middle Ages in some respects does not differ from the institutional church in current Canadian evangelicalism. Dogma, church liturgical practices with slight variations in corporate worship, and organizational structures dominate the evangelical church culture. Although the institution of the 'Inquisition' no longer exists, the suspicion and nervousness towards spiritual deviancy, particularly in what may appear as a form of Christian mysticism, remains within evangelical institutions. Currently, postmodernity is challenging the evangelical church to broaden the scope of theological dialogue to include Christian spirituality. Not unlike the undercurrent mystical movement within the Spanish church in the sixteenth century, Evangelicalism in Canada is experiencing a spiritual mystical renewal at the grass-roots level, in its churches and Bible colleges.

### **3.2.4 Spanish Monarchy**

The Spanish monarchy claimed the Inquisition was not a political weapon; however, there is no question the monarchy benefited from its existence. Isabella (1451-1504) and Ferdinand (1452-1516) (who required a special dispensation to marry since they were first cousins) were married in 1469, and became joint rulers of a Catholic Spain as Queen of Castile and King of Aragon, respectively. One of

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<sup>7</sup> As a writer, St. Teresa had the rare gift of appealing to the most learned readers and to the least learned, even to the woman in the kitchen, if she was literate. When asked to write another book, Teresa responded by requesting to be allowed to work at her spinning wheel. She believed that it was not her lot to be a writer; that she did not have the health or the intelligence for it. Nonetheless, at one point in her life, complying with the request of her sisters and her bishop, she put aside her spinning wheel for a time — and the result was the *Interior Castle* (Bilinkoff 1989:121).

their primary assignments in the establishment of their kingdom was to integrate the Spanish Church and State. The conquest of and successful crusade against the Moors in southern Spain, the expulsion of the Jews, and the presence of the Inquisition as a purging force secured absolute authority for the sovereigns through uniformity of religious belief.

Isabella, queen of Castile, was known for her genuine interest in the welfare of her subjects and in Church reform. Due to her orthodox theological training, and scholarly achievements, she was able to dialogue comfortably with poets, philosophers, and priests. Thus, she gathered around her an impressive group of scholars and clergy as her advisors, both men and women (Gonzalez 1985:112). Queen Isabella supported the ministry of the churches and monasteries, gave abundantly to the work of hospitals, worked diligently in the business of government, took initiatives in reforms, and was resolved to facilitate peace within her kingdom. She confronted the hardships of war and conducted the affairs of state with wisdom, for which her contemporaries from surrounding nations ranked Queen Isabella as one of the ablest sovereigns of her era. In spite of her kindnesses and wonderful deeds, she supported and endorsed the zeal of the Inquisition, for in her mind, this was the tool required for the purification of the Church (Durant 1957:205).

John's pastoral and reform ministry occurred during the reign which followed Isabella, the rule of Philip II (1527-1598), who retained all the power acquired by the Inquisition, and indeed expanded the influence of the Inquisition in Spain. When John was imprisoned in December of 1577, Teresa of Avila appealed to Philip II by a letter and begged for the release of John who had been captured by the *Calced*. The appeal was ignored, since in matters which pertained to disobedience within a religious community, and particularly in this instance, Philip II relegated the punishment of its religious prisoners to the discretion of the 'Calced'<sup>8</sup> in the Carmelite order (Hardy 1982:65).

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<sup>8</sup> Though not normally an official term used to delineate the reform (*Discalced*) — meaning shoeless ones, indicating their simplicity of dress — from the establishment within the Spanish Carmelite order, the *Calced* had rejected the former ideals of the order. The *Calced* allowed for the ability to possess private property, a decline in the liturgical life, and an abuse of the vow of poverty (Ruiz 2000:121). Teresa of Avila reacts to what she perceives as a loss of focus of the original intent of the order in which she observes that there is very little resemblance to the early community of hermits of Mount Carmel. Having experienced a powerful transformation through prayer and contemplation, Teresa determines to bring about a reform within her order, and attracts others to join her, one of whom is John of the Cross. She establishes houses for women and men, in which the

### 3.2.5 Plight of the Poor

Castile, the land of John's birth, was a land of stark contrasts. The ideal life belonged to the nobility, a birthright that demanded and guaranteed respect and honour. One restriction imposed upon nobility was *limpieza de sangre*, namely, purity of blood. Any family with Jewish roots or Moorish heritage concealed their lineage to avoid legal restrictions, either through confession and penance determined by the Church, or through the 'purchase of their honour' – reference to the purchase of 'purity of blood' – by means of substantial payments to the local township office to erase any Jewish or Moorish ancestral connections (Payne 1992:10).

The median age of the sixteenth century Spaniard was twenty-seven, since for the poor, life presented insurmountable obstacles exacerbated by plagues, epidemics, and a nonexistent social system.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, it was possible to achieve greatness in Spanish society, in spite of one's poor beginnings, as was the case of Ximenez de Cisneros (1436-1517). A humble Franciscan friar, not desiring greatness, he reluctantly accepted the role of archbishop of Toledo, having being ordered to do so via a papal bull. Queen Isabella had requested this appointment from the pope. She respected the wisdom and leadership of Cisneros as both her confessor and high-principled advisor, and as co-champion of the counter reform movement (Gonzalez 1985:111). Cisneros implemented reforms within the Church which had positive repercussions for Spain for several decades (Green 1970:352). Isabella and Cisneros reinvigorated the Castilian church, and succeeded at a time when the church was weakest in the rest of Europe. Cisneros opened the way for the

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communities were small, and the focus was solitude, recollection, and prayer. She reestablishes the liturgical practices of the church. For her friars, she included the ministry of spiritual direction and preaching the word for apostolic action. Thus, the followers of Teresa were soon called the *Discalced* Carmelites (the shoeless ones) to distinguish them from the other Carmelites, and the official term for the Teresian reform became known as *Discalced*; however, the term *Calced* was never used officially (Kavanaugh 1999:42).

<sup>9</sup> Ruiz (2000:27) notes that "... the ranks of the poor swelled. And it increased much more in bad times, when the peasants, those in debt, or the weavers, without work, were forced into begging. The roads — this is no impressionistic exaggeration — swarmed with the wandering poor. The cities teemed with them. And added to the usual poor belonging to the cities were those that came from outside. Things got so bad during those years of scarcity caused by bad harvests that the authorities had to intervene with strict laws to prohibit this wandering about. The Castilian cities (Zamora, Salamanca, Valladolid, and Toledo) issued severe orders to defend themselves from the invasion of beggars. Theologians got entangled in heated disputes. Some defended socialist measures by which the poor would be gathered together in established centers. Others defended the traditional means of assistance, of the right of every poor person to seek alms and of every citizen to give alms indiscriminately. All of this took place precisely between 1540-45. Whatever the efforts and laws, the poor continued to overrun Castile in search of survival. The Yepes family (St. John's mother and brothers) of Fontiveros was typical of the behavior that was adopted on a universal scale ... for the cities had the obligation of attending as a priority to the poor. These poor included the 'ashamed poor' (the well-off who had fallen into financial ruin), the 'poor for Christ' (the friars and nuns), and above all the 'miserably poor.' More concern, still, was shown to widows and orphans".

Spanish mystics to develop, not only as agents of change toward acceptance of mysticism, but also as agents of reform (Livermore 1958:276).

### **3.3 Golden Age of Spanish Mysticism**

Sixteenth century Spain achieved its apex in the production of mystical literature with such notable contributors as: Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), John of the Cross (1542-1591), Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), Francisco de Osuna (1492-1542), John of Avila (1499-1569), and Luis de Leon (d. 1591). During this era, numerous educational institutions were installed<sup>10</sup> and schools of learning flourished in various parts of Spain. Although the universities were not church institutions during the sixteenth century, they housed Catholic scholars and prepared seminarians for the priestly ministry. This was common in Europe since religious instruction, which had formerly been offered in the monasteries, and then in cathedral schools eventually moved into the ‘university’ environment. Thus, for four years John studied at the University of Salamanca, housed in a city overflowing with culture and art (Ruiz 2000:61).

Spanish foreign missions programs developed in the Catholic Church with two distinct missions strategies. Monks and friars in northern Spain embarked on missionary journeys to southern Spain to preach to the Moslems. It was not a mission field engaged in lightly, since many Christian missionaries in the south were martyred. However, in northern Spain, a heretical group which came under scrutiny by the Inquisition was the ‘Moriscos’, Moors who had embraced Christianity. Often being forced to embrace Christianity under duress, they often retained an undercurrent of resentment directed toward the oppressive religious regime, namely the Church. Although many genuinely submitted to Christianity, prominent and administrative positions in the Church were withheld from them (Russell 1973:118). A second frontier involved a massive missionary endeavour directed toward the Americas. Missionaries were recruited and commissioned by the Spanish Church to Christianize the natives in the new world (Payne 1984:43).

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<sup>10</sup> In 1450, six universities existed in Spain, but during the next century and a half twenty-seven new ones were founded. By the late sixteenth century, some kind of Latin school existed in almost every Spanish town of 2,000 or more, and approximately 5 percent of all adult males graduated at a university, at least during the zenith of this expansion. For a brief period, Spain had proportionately the largest educated population of any country in the world (Payne 1984:39).

With regard to missionary zeal, the Jesuit order<sup>11</sup> exercised the greatest amount of effort to implement the Counter Reformation ideals. The Jesuits regained for the Catholic Church, through armed force and threat of persecution, much of the territory lost during the Reformation. Once the land, which formerly had been Catholic property, was reclaimed from the Protestants, the Jesuits re-established churches and introduced devotional practices (Green 1952:196). This band of “Spanish priests” spread throughout Europe, targeting Lutheran strongholds, and when victory was accomplished, the Jesuits established centers of learning. The Lutherans with their narrow competence in educational matters were not able to meet the challenge of the Jesuits (Fisher 1936:564).

As has been mentioned, a sector of Spanish mysticism leaned toward an individual expression of personal piety rather than a corporate or liturgical expression. They emphasized a sacramental spirituality that confirmed the presence of God in everyday life. The Spanish mystics had their roots in the Scriptures and John of the Cross often cited biblical texts in his writings. Their form of spirituality directed the practitioner to a specific method of meditating, contemplating, and praying. Their spirituality was practical: while Teresa and John promoted the inner life of prayer, clearly prayer had to be combined with a life of active charitable works (Evennett 1968:41)

Not to be overlooked during this era was the opulence of the Spanish church. One observer from the court of the King of France noted that the Spanish churches were not as well built as those in France. However, by contrast, the beauty of the churches in Spain far surpassed those in France with paintings, shrines, and ornaments of extraordinary quality that adorned the sanctuaries. Churches and monasteries amassed large tracts of land that comprised in some instances the land

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<sup>11</sup> Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), the founder of the Jesuit Order, otherwise known as the Society of Jesus, has left a singular literary legacy, the *Spiritual Exercises*, a text which emphasizes the integration of prayer and social commitment. The dynamism of the Exercises is ‘to find God in all things’ through understanding the rules of spiritual discernment, the recognition of the unity of all things in the love of God and discerning the purpose for which each person is created. Ignatius developed these themes in the context of meditation exercises focusing upon the life of Christ. Rakoczy (2005:61) writes that there are five foundational understandings that undergird the experience of finding God in all things, firstly, understanding creation from the perspective of faith, secondly, active love and service are imbued with the presence of Christ in others, thirdly, the search for the call of God, the leading of the Spirit is a matter of spiritual discernment, fourthly, we must clear away the underbrush of mixed motivations in our lives, and fifthly, when one is on fire with the love of God, the culmination of ‘contemplatio’, one is eager to serve with unselfish love. The lover seeks the Beloved and there is self-giving love in return for love. These themes resonate with the underpinnings of Spanish mysticism, particularly in the integration of prayer and praxis — the polar components of the spiritual experience.

mass of entire villages. Novices entering Novitiates of the religious orders were selected exclusively from families of nobility since bishops refused to admit young people of lower birth into the clergy. These would not have the finances to sustain themselves in the institutions (Peers 1951:xv).

This era of Spanish mysticism produced a torrent of devotional literature that remained unsurpassed in Christian spiritual literature for many centuries in Europe. It cradled and nurtured the formation of doctors of the church. These leaders founded no school to leave a legacy of an organized document reflecting ‘Spanish mysticism’; some of them were not even aware of each other. However, the movement earns its individuality by virtue of particular characteristics in nearly every Spanish mystic (Peers 1924:40). Allison Peers, a renowned scholar of Spanish mysticism, cites the foremost characteristic of this mysticism as ‘abhorrence of abstractions’. These mystics were skilled practical doctors of the soul, adept in the direction and care of souls. “They owe little to their predecessors, save the Bible and the Fathers, whom they quote continually. Yet their mysticism is not derived from the Fathers but from their own experience. Their writings and their lives are simple, their faith is spontaneous...” (Peers 1924:41).

At the heart of Spanish mysticism is the theme of *love*. The Spanish mystics were passionately in love with God, preached this message, and wrote volumes on this topic. The soul was to seek all of the spiritual gifts, but the most desired gift was that of love. John of the Cross understood through his own personal experience of the *inner living flame of love*. He defined mystical theology as infused contemplation which occurs when God instructs the soul secretly in the perfection of love (Peers 1924:47).

### **3.4 Carmelite Spirituality – An Ancient Path**

The Carmelite order had a unique beginning, for unlike their mendicant counterparts, the Franciscans and Dominicans, or even the Benedictines, they are not able to boast of a founder. Nonetheless, the Carmelite story commences with the ‘mystery of the desert’, when the first Carmelites settled in the desert of Palestine as an eremitic community of hermits. The name Carmelite is derived from the mountain range Mount Carmel in the Holy Land where the first group of lay men built their community in the early thirteenth century.

### 3.4.1 History of Carmelite Tradition

Between 1206 and 1214, a group of lay penitent hermits living at Mount Carmel, received a rule of life prepared by Albert, patriarch of Jerusalem. The desert dwellers had requested a written rule of life which would be suitable for their vocation; thus the document came to be known as the ‘formula for living’ ‘*vitae formulam*’. This rule provided the hermits with a basic orientation in the Church and the specifics of a lifestyle befitting an eremitic community. The themes of the ‘formula of life’ were solitude (individual cells located around a chapel), silence, continual prayer (chiefly the Psalms), penance, together with an emphasis upon an intentional relationship with Jesus (Egan 2000:97). Albert communicated to the hermits a form of conduct which inwardly, as well as outwardly, would transform their lives so that they could permanently receive the ‘form of God’ who is love (Waaijman & Vriend 1999:249).<sup>12</sup> Each of the ‘brothers’ was to remain in his cell or near it, meditate day and night on the law of the Lord, be diligent in prayer and attend the daily gathering for the Eucharist. These early hermits were known for their simple life style and did not attract undue attention to themselves (Egan 1988:51). Though little is known about these men who settled at the wadi of Mount Carmel, as a band they instituted an evangelical awakening. These were a people motivated by a desire to live their lives in conformity with the gospel and the model that Jesus left for the Church. Since Jerusalem was perceived as the centre of the world where the old and new covenants were amalgamated, Mount Carmel became the ideal location for the first hermits (McGreal 1999:18). In 1229, Pope Gregory IX granted corporate poverty on the hermits of Mount Carmel.

The hermits discovered that their serenity on the mountain was not to last, since for their own safety they had to emigrate from the Holy Land. They moved to different locations in Europe, to Cyprus, Sicily, England, and southern France. Within a short time, they discovered that their eremitical lifestyle was ill-suited to

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<sup>12</sup> The formula for the rule evolved out of the experience of the hermits themselves, thus, it was seamless. It had no boundaries, it crossed all the points of daily living, chastity, sanctification of one’s thoughts, faith, hope, love etc, for the hermits mystical space drew them out of their established habits to experience the contemplative life (Waaijman & Vriend 1999:250). 2007 is the 800<sup>th</sup> year celebration of Albert of Jerusalem’s *Formula Vitae*. Tony Lester, Provincial of the Ancient Observance England, in his homily on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2007, reminded his listeners that when the hermits moved from Mount Carmel to western Europe, the hermits brought with them a mysticism in which Mount Carmel had ceased to be a place in Palestine, but a place in the heart — whose ascent is precisely the journey inwards, from the edges of our lives to the centre. Available at: [www.carmelites.info/citoc/citoc/octdec%202006/citoc.oct\\_dec\\_2006.culture.htm](http://www.carmelites.info/citoc/citoc/octdec%202006/citoc.oct_dec_2006.culture.htm) [Accessed 17 July 2007]

the contemporary religious life in western Europe. As they settled into their own houses in Europe, the Carmelites noted that the Dominicans and Franciscans experienced success in pastoral ministries. They acted quickly and sought approval from the Pope to revise their formula of life so that they could follow in the footsteps of the mendicant friars. In 1247, Innocent IV approved the revised formula of life and with his approval the Carmelites had their own official rule of life (*regula*) (Egan 2000:98). They officially became friars, which meant they could settle in towns as well as in wilderness areas. Although, they lived in dormitories with individual cells, they came together for common meals and to participate in the choral Office. Their lifestyle became more cenobitic (2000:98).

In the second half of the thirteenth century, the Carmelite order expanded rapidly in Europe, and the younger Carmelites began to look back toward their origins. They desired to confirm a sense of their own identity. They could not declare a specific date of establishment, and they could not point to a founder such as Francis or Dominic. However, since the first monks gathered their small band at Mount Carmel, they decided that the initial band of eremitic monks were descendants of an earlier prophet, Elijah. Thus, he became their archetype and exemplar (McGreal 1999:38). McGreal writes, "... the notion of Elijah as one who stood before God in prayer and witnessed to God's truth before the powerful resonated with late thirteenth-century Carmelites as they tried to bridge the hermit and mendicant elements" (1999:38). These Carmelites also selected a second role model to emulate – Mary, the mother of Jesus. The chapel around which the hermits on Mount Carmel had built their hermitages was dedicated to Mary; thus, the Carmelite friars decided to inaugurate the title 'Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel' (Egan 2000:99). The friars identified with Mary, who as the mother of Jesus, in spite of struggling with her own fears, remained resolute in the face of difficult circumstances as she exercised obedience to her call.

During this time a document surfaced within the Carmelite order which was second only to the *Rule: Liber de Institutione Primorum Monachorum*, the *Institution of the First Monks* – known to be circulated in 1390s. This text was one of the primary books of spiritual reading for the order until the seventeenth century. It was a four part work written by Philip Ribot (d. 1391), the provincial of Catalonia, of which the *Institution* was the first part. Ribot, in this treatise, argues for the

position that the prophet Elijah is the founder the Carmelite order. For the most part, modern Carmelites no longer accept this position, since biblical scholarship and church history does not support this view (Raitt 1988:54). However, Egan (2000:100) suggests that Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross likely studied this text, since this work laid the groundwork for the mystical orientation of Carmelite spirituality and would be adopted by Spanish mystics. The *Institution* teaches that the spiritual life of the Carmelite is "... withdrawal from the usual preoccupations of the life, a purification of the heart, and the perceived union with God in love" (2000:100). McGreal (1999:42) outlines four steps in the ascension to perfection as written in the *Institution*: the renunciation of earthly things: the renunciation of sin and self-will: practicing silence, solitude and celibacy: and finally, growth in love.

Similar to the other mendicant orders, the Carmelites developed close ties with the laity, both men and women, who shared in the ministry and spiritual life of the friars. In 1452, a division of Carmelite sisterhoods developed with the official papal bull, *Cum Nulla*, which gave approval for women to join the Carmelite community as a second order (Raitt 1988:56). These women became the predecessors of Teresa of Avila.

In the sixteenth century, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross collaborated together as directors in the reform of the Carmelite order. Teresa noted the lack of observance of the common life which had been adhered to at the inception of the order. Teresa challenged her nuns to live the 'revolutionary way': the way of solitude as exemplified by the original hermits of Mount Carmel (Raitt 1988:58). It is important to note the role of 'reform' in the life of John and Teresa. Reform for 'reform's sake' has always engendered criticism since the underlying motivation for promoting change could be assessed by others as self-fulfilling or self-promoting. Nowhere is this perception more evident than when a shift occurs as a result of mystical experiences or the 'working of the Spirit' in an individual or in a Christian community. John and Teresa orchestrated reform in their order, and it was through the assistance of spiritual directors that they discerned this direction in their vocational life. Due to their obedience and service to God as reformers, they were often misunderstood, hindered, imprisoned (in the case of John), and sometimes even tolerated by the superiors of the order. In spite of the resistances they encountered from sectors of their order, they remained undaunted in their mission.

### 3.4.2 Characteristics of Carmelite Spirituality

Known as the ‘White friars’, the Carmelites spread throughout Europe; they became popular preachers, teachers and spiritual guides. They became known as people who lived and practiced a rigorous life of solitude and prayer. The contemplative orientation of their early beginnings remained pivotal and was a lasting and distinctive character of their spirituality (Raitt 1988:60). Carmelites have remained a major mendicant order within the Catholic Church and they have incorporated mobility in the context of monastic stability, corporate and personal poverty, modified monastic prayers and practices, and a commitment to pastoral ministry. Carmelite spirituality is not contemplative and then apostolic; on the contrary, it is apostolic *because* it is contemplative. Their eremitic origins and their adaptation to cenobitic mendicancy created a paradox in Carmelite spirituality: solitude and ministry (Egan 2000:98). Thus, Carmelite reforms have been required to maintain a balance with respect to incorporating the spirit of the order’s origins into contemporary cultural circumstances.

Carmelite spirituality has developed a particularly expressive language for the soul. The nature of the environment where the first hermits gathered, that of the atmosphere of the wadi, initiated a particular vocabulary. One of the first words in the spiritual tradition of Carmel is the ‘desert’.<sup>13</sup> These early hermits meditated on

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<sup>13</sup> Embedded in the history of the Carmelites is the motif of the desert, since the first Carmelites were desert dwellers and surrounded by the landscape at Mount Carmel. This is also a significant motif in Biblical literature. The most commonly used word for desert (or wilderness) in Biblical narrative is *midbar* (מִדְבָּר) in the Old Testament and in the New Testament the word is *érēmos* (ἐρήμος). From the OT, this word signifies arid places, and a wasteland with little or minimal amount of rainfall (Myers 1987:279). This was literally a place not inhabited by humans, or where marginal life was possible. In the New Testament, the Greek word implies an unenclosed and uncultivated area where wild beasts roam and the natural habitat of demons; however, it could be a place of pastorage (Freedman 2000:1378). In the majority of the Old Testament wilderness narratives, the prevailing theme consisted of episodes of movement from one place to another place with the common theme of points of transition — either in the experience of a community or a personal journey (Freedman 1992:912). Thus the motif of desert or wilderness connoted an arid environment hostile to life. Theologically, the desert functions for the human being as a place of testing; one’s endurance is tested for the purpose of one’s faith and obedience and in preparation for mission (Freedman 2000:338). When the early Carmelites settled in the desert, they lived in an eremitical community (partial solitude and partial community) in order to focus their lives exclusively on God. The early monks made a desert cell within the desert, where they released external footholds, and they entered into the inner realm of warring with the demons within. Desert literature (of which the Rule of Carmel is in part), identifies the inner battle of the soul, and at the same time, urges the monk to put on God’s armor: a breastplate of justice, a shield of faith, a helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit (Welch 1996:28). Later when the community had moved to Europe, and joined the ranks of the mendicants, Nicholas the Frenchman, warned the Carmelites that the ‘city’ could potentially destroy them. His letter, *The Flaming Arrow*, urged a retreat back to the desert, if not literally, then in lifestyle since Nicholas predicted that deeper societal involvement would erode the Carmelite monks of their solitude and contemplation (Welch 1996:29). Thus, what has evolved within the order is the call to the desert. Welch (2203:7) describes ‘Carmel’ as a land of paradox: a land of desert and garden, of heat and cold, of dark and light, of hunger and abundance. It’s a place where God’s absence reveals a compassionate presence. Carmel is a place of suffering, a starless and trackless space in which the pilgrim is led to healing and to home. Thus, the Carmelite tradition speaks to the souls who long to be

the Scriptures and they discovered in the texts ‘words’ for the Mystery who dwelt with them in their desert cells. Thus, the language of the soul in Carmelite spirituality includes such expressions as ‘nakedness’, ‘detachment’, ‘poverty’, ‘nothingness’, ‘purity’, ‘simplicity’, ‘unity’, ‘transformation’. It denotes the Carmelite essence, a longing for total transparency before God, where God has taken full possession of the inner person and nothing blocks the soul from God. With regard to the beauty of the Carmelite language, Welch (1996:85) adds, “The poetry of John of the Cross, the lively writing of Teresa of Avila, the tender expressiveness of Thérèse of Lisieux added to Carmel’s thesaurus. Contemporary pilgrims may find in the tradition of Carmel a primordial wording of their soul’s adventure”.

### **3.4.3 Carmelite Spirituality and the Postmodern**

In the epilogue of his book describing the Carmelite tradition, McGreal has entitled the chapter ‘Carmelite Spirituality and the Post-Modern’. He notes that our present culture is a world of sound bites, bombarding images from many sectors and a relentless search for something new and sensational. At the end of the day, what is genuinely human and life-enhancing is lost from view. McGreal (1999:124) writes:

We risk ignoring the capacity of the heart to wonder, to search, to listen and to experience that deepest of emotions, compassion. We need to give our imagination freedom so that we make connections and really see and hear what is going on around us. We all need to develop a poetic sense so that we can celebrate life and give our imaginations permission to flourish. This sense of freedom and openness helps us to know ourselves better and to realise (sic) that we are all called to be ‘artists’ who are engaged on the project of shaping the unique individual that each one of us is, to enable this individual to reach full potential.

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separate from a smothering urban existence and make a transition to the wilderness, to mountain retreats, and to the vast expanse of the desert. In the desert one hears one’s inner desires more clearly, while being nourished by the hidden springs by the One who speaks assurances and wisdom. Out of this ancient path of the ‘desert in the soul’, Carmelites live their vocation in community and mission. There is the counter-symbol of the desert: out of the battle of the inner demons emerges the flowering garden. When the battle is over, and the soul opens oneself to the loving activity of God, there is a blossoming into new and verdant life. If the desert represents the painful portion of the life’s journey, then the garden stands for the longed for goal on that journey. For some the goal is the ultimate repose in heaven, for others the garden is the inner place of repose and refreshment (Downey 1993:260). “Mount Carmel represented solitude and stark battle to the Carmelite, but it was also a place of physical beauty which offered fresh water, thick forest, striking vistas, and the company of wild animals” (Welch 1996:28).

Lester (2007:5) affirms this notion: “Our spirituality as Carmelites gives us a language and symbols to speak to a world and even to a church whose gods might be dying. We can interpret the dark night, hearing in the darkness the gentle whistle of the shepherd; and as we do so, we are sowing seeds”. Kavanaugh (1999:204) identifies symbols from the texts of John of the Cross which integrate the material of faith (content of faith) with the mystery of Christ. With symbols such as ‘Divine Wisdom’, ‘mountain’, ‘nada’, ‘dark night’, John directs his readers to a union, not a union with the attribute of God, but to union with the Son of God who is ‘resplendent Wisdom in whom the soul finds All’ (1999:204).

Carmelite spirituality speaks to a world that requires a reawakening toward a holistic spirituality. Attentive listening, reflective pondering, and being attune to the inner life are Carmelite values which are practiced in the context of solitude and silence. Carmelites are careful to point out that the contemplative stance “... is not tied to a method, but rather depends on the cultivation of time and a place for God and a willingness to allow the word of God in Scripture to be the main source of our nurture” (McGreal 1999:126). The gift from Carmelite spirituality to the postmodern world is the integration of contemplative prayer *and* action. The *Rule* requires that the Carmelites immerse themselves in the Scriptures, for it is in this written word that the mysteries of God are revealed. While the Carmelites provide a model of Christian devotion, they model “... the imperative of prayer that asks us to love and serve others as God loves us [and] finds its initial expression in community life.... A real community of friendship is a healing reality for others and also an antidote to the scramble for power, wealth and money” (McGreal 1999:125). Carmelites seek to build communities of friendship and simplicity so that their energy will be freed to work for justice (1999:125).

Love of learning is another attribute of Carmelite spirituality, although this attribute is not always recognized as a strong element. Embedded in the spiritual writings of the Carmelites is the combined integration of learning and spirituality, theology and mysticism, knowing and being. Their legacy harkens back to a religious community that values solitude, silence and ‘knowing’ God with the ‘intellect of the soul’.

The social justice element in Carmelite spirituality can be illustrated by the parable of the Good Samaritan in which the Samaritan went out of his way to care

for a wounded man. The reward will arrive later, when Christ returns to reward his servants, a reward for having unselfishly cared for the poor and the oppressed. Carmelite spirituality acknowledges that authentic spirituality is not a comfortable option, but is a call to respond with the gift of God's love to a world that is often dark and difficult. Real giving is going beyond oneself into a desert of love, and night of trust, as will be explained by John's teaching in chapter six.

This spirituality is an 'ancient path' fitting for the postmodern pilgrim.

### **3.5 The Life of John of the Cross**

#### **3.5.1 The Influence of John's Family**

In 1542, Juan de Yepes, third son of Gonzalo de Yepes and Catalina Alvarez, was born. What began as a love story, ended tragically for Gonzalo and Catalina. The marriage 'out of love' which had so many consequences for the young couple, demanded the sacrifice of wealth and status for a much nobler motivation in marriage, that of intimacy and friendship. Relatives of Gonzalo are listed as 'prebendaries' – an administrative post connected to the church – of the church in Toledo, an indication the forebears of Gonzalo lived in the general area of Toledo.<sup>14</sup>

Uppermost in the minds of the Yepes family (the extended family of Gonzalo) were the *converses*, Jewish converts to Christianity. To integrate Catalina into the Yepes family could initiate a potential investigation into the origins of both families. Better to release Gonzalo completely than to risk the possible loss of honour and wealth before the Inquisition should an exploratory procedure reveal an undesirable lineage (Payne 1992:10). Gonzalo took the risk of poverty and married Catalina against the counsel of his family and the counsel of the widow with whom Catalina lived. The marriage produced three sons: Francisco the first born in 1530, followed by Luis, and then 'Juan' in 1542. The exact month of John's birth is uncertain, although scholars ascertain either June or December. The marriage by all

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<sup>14</sup> Gonzalo, whose family consisted of upper class silk merchants, lived with his wealthy uncle after being orphaned as an infant. Though the family was wealthy, Gonzalo was not, and the necessity for employment involved working for an uncle in the prosperous silk business in Toledo. His work required extensive traveling, to and from Medina, with business appointments to the house of a widow in Fontiveros who had silk looms. There he met Catalina, also originally from Toledo and also orphaned; however, she ranked in the status of the poor. Gonzalo fell in love with this beautiful young woman and reported his intentions to marry Catalina to the Yepes family. His family was horrified and adamantly opposed the union on the grounds of class, and out of fear. There was a rumor that Catalina could possibly have Moorish connections — the daughter of a Moorish slave (Hardy 1982:7).

indications was happy, although the young family barely subsisted on a weaving income. Shortly after the birth of John, Gonzalo became ill, and died, which left Catalina in poverty as a result of medical expenses. After a few attempts to stabilize her family, in 1551, she moved to Medina del Campo as a family of four, (Luis had died earlier and Francisco had married) and the family continued in the weaving trade together. Biographers comment on the works of charity offered by this humble family to others in need. Catalina instilled in her children attentiveness to the poverty of others, even, in the midst of their own needs. Francisco begged for alms in support of the poor and for nobility who had fallen on hard times and were too embarrassed to beg for alms or to seek employment. Local parish records indicate that Francisco and his wife took in abandoned infants, acted as sponsors for the babies to receive the sacraments, and enrolled children in local programs to learn the trades. John commented later in his life that he considered his brother to be one of the greatest gifts that he had in the world (Payne 1992:12).

Significant formative factors, therefore, in the life of John were his parents and brother, and his experience of depravation in poverty. Catalina instilled in John a love of God and a love for people while Gonzalo modeled for John the ability to live authentically from a motivation of love. His brother, Francisco, in the midst of his own financial struggle, humbly sought financial support for the poor in their city. Since Medina del Campo was a bustling city, Catalina and her family found customers for their goods. Thus, his family became the genesis of a gentle, respectful, and caring spirit which was engendered in the soul of John during his formative years.

### **3.5.2 The Formative Years**

From the age of nine to twenty-two, 'Juan de Yepes' lived in Medina del Campo (1551-1564), the longest stay he had in any one place. He assumed that he would learn a trade for the purpose of contributing to the family finances, but Medina offered him far more. Here he was privy to the stories of the far away places, such as the Americas and the East. He would smell the fragrances of exotic spices from the Far East, he would listen to the woes and complaints of political strife, he was exposed to mysticism in the religious community, and he was aware of the social and municipal issues of his city. He was privy to the underprivileged, the

injustice of crime, and willingly worked with his family in works of charity. The city streets and its culture became John's school of formation (Hardy 1982:12). Later in life, when 'Juan de la Cruz' expounded aspects of 'disordered affections', he wrote from his experience of having observed the components of cultural excesses, namely greed, lust, and violence, to which he had been privy in his formative years.

John and his brother, though alike in many ways, were also very different. Illiterate, Francisco was highly adept at manual tasks; John, on the other hand, was not. Yet, he felt compelled to gain practical skills to contribute to the financial support of his family. Another area of differentiation between the two brothers surfaced in John's first taste of formal education. The Castilian court determined that boys who were from poor families would benefit from educational instruction, particularly in catechism, literacy and preparation for a trade. Thus John was placed in the School *de la doctrina*,<sup>15</sup> an institution established for boys in the social stratum where John lived: "... poor, urban, illiterate and largely untrained, source of danger to society at large" (Payne 1992:13). The beginning of John's formal educational experience was a turning point in his life. Teaching him a trade was a trying task, not for lack of desire to learn on the part of the young boy; but working with his hands did not come easily or naturally. He proved a much better student at verbal skills, where he learned to read and write quickly, and impressed the instructors at the school. A hospital administrator noticed his exceptional ability and invited John to work as an orderly at the hospital, which John stepped in with ease and proficiency to this task. His early childhood experiences served him well, as he gently and lovingly cared for patients who had contracted venereal diseases and the plague, a physical illness common in the area where he lived. During this time, John begged for alms on behalf of two groups of people: the boys at the school where he studied and the patients at the hospital who required money for their care.

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<sup>15</sup> Ruiz (2000:55) explains, "... precisely at the time that the Yepeses arrived in Medina the Jesuits had established a 'school of grammar'. In these schools the Jesuits educated their own members, those of the bourgeois able to pay for their education, and some youths accepted out of charity, as was the case with Juan de Yepes. The system of studies prescribed the regime of a boarding school, a complement to the educational method. Even times of recreation were included in the emphasis given to discipline, moral formation, and, naturally, Latin, the main subject, which was spoken even during times of relaxation. The program was much more thought out than that ordinarily found in the other schools. The subject of Latin was rounded out by other courses, such as rhetoric, theology, mathematics, history, geography, and so on".

### 3.5.3 Becoming a Carmelite Friar

Few families were able to enroll their children in guilds for apprenticeship training, since formal educational studies were reserved for children of upper class aristocrats able to afford costly tutors or university fees. In 1563, when John entered the Carmelite order at a monastery in Medina, and became a novice,<sup>16</sup> he was given the opportunity to pursue academic studies. At the University of Salamanca, John was exposed to the highest standard of academic brilliance that Spain (and the universities in Europe) had to offer, influencing his spiritual formation, philosophical thinking, and poetry.<sup>17</sup> His name is registered in school records<sup>18</sup> which indicate he was a student in the arts (which would have included philosophy) and in the sciences. In the final academic year, he registered for theology courses, which completed his four years of study at the university (Kavanaugh 1979:17). Due to his financial difficulties, as mentioned above, John worked outside of class at a hospital established for the poor; he was able to attend all of his classes, but did not participate in extracurricular events.

Three years later, in 1567, John met Teresa of Avila when he visited his home parish to celebrate his first Mass. A friend encouraged him to meet this nun who was instituting a reform within the Carmelite order. Thus, the paths of John and Teresa crossed when Teresa happened to be in Medina where she had just opened a

<sup>16</sup> Attracted to the Carmelites because of their contemplative tradition, John's response to his vocational call was motivated by love, in similar manner as his father Gonzalo in the marriage to his mother. At this point, he took the name of *Fray Juan de San Matia*, John of St. Matthias.

<sup>17</sup> Leclercq et al (1968:253) comment that the University of Salamanca, which had existed since 1242 had 8,000 students in the sixteenth century. The university was divided into twenty-five colleges and fifty religious communities. During that time, as new universities were being founded, religious orders vied with one another for places in the academic environment: Franciscans, Dominicans and Carmelites alike. John studied the arts, sciences and music, rounding out his academic study with theology.

<sup>18</sup> University records at Salamanca confirm *Fray Juan de Santo Matia* from Medina del Campo graduated from the university. John attended this prestigious university during the tenure of Luis de Leon, one the impressive figures and great professors in the history of Salamanca. In later years, Father Master Luis de Leon expressed amazement on reading the written work of John, commenting he did not know which of the saints he might be able to compare the 'delicacy' of John's wisdom (Ruiz 2000:74). Concerning John and his young Carmelite contemporaries, the little group in their brown habits and white mantles walked daily 'to and fro' from the university. Morning and evening, they seemingly passed unnoticed in the milieu of the university crowd. In this small and silent group was hidden the smallest and most silent: Juan de Santo Matia. It was noted that he observed and listened attentively, but spoke seldom and he applied himself intensely without leaving any trace of himself in historical documents. All that is conserved of his presence at the university is his signatures made at the beginning of each of the four school years and when he voted three times in the election of professors to university chairs (Ruiz 2000:75). One witness to John's university life asserts "... Fray Juan lived with such recollection in his confined and dark cell, in continuous silence, that he didn't leave it or seek diversion outside of it except for community acts" (Ruiz 2000:76). Further, John was assigned to a room that was cramped and uncomfortable, but with a privileged position. It had a little window looking onto the church and from which he was able to see the Blessed Sacrament altar. The 'privilege' was Fray Juan's joy. Study became meditation and contemplation; divine wisdom and human knowledge mixed together spontaneously (2000:76).

second foundation. During their conversation together, Teresa convinced the friar to join her in the Carmelite reform movement. Following his graduation from the University of Salamanca the following year, two Carmelite friars, John and another Carmelite friar, Joseph, were on their way to establish the first Discalced Carmelite monastery for friars. Teresa was delighted with their enthusiasm, and expressed to friends her pleasure with her recruits of a ‘monk and a half’, the latter which referred to John’s stature.<sup>19</sup>

On November 28, the first Sunday of Advent in 1568, John along with another friar, renounced the mitigated rule of the Carmelites. This decision set the course for the remainder of John’s life as a Discalced Carmelite. After they opened the monastery at Duruelo, John took on a new name, ‘*Fray Juan de la Cruz*’, John of the Cross. The Carmelite reform accepted this choice of title, and history has respected it. For the next 23 years, John was actively involved in his work as a Discalced Carmelite, which included a vocation of service to those within and outside of the order. It also included an imprisonment which facilitated the development in John’s mind of the nature of spiritual transformation.

### **3.5.4 John’s Incarceration at Toledo**

At the beginning of December in 1577, at age thirty-five, in the middle of the night, John of the Cross is spirited away from his quarters at the Convent of the Incarnation, blindfolded and taken via a circuitous route to the Carmelite monastery in Toledo by members of his order, the Carmelite Calced. He was secretly imprisoned as a rebel, humiliated before the other friars, flogged, and beaten. Barely recovered from his painful journey to Toledo and from his beatings, he was brought before a judge and tribunal and required to account for his activities inside and outside the monastery in Avila and for the role he played in bringing about the autonomy of the newly formed Discalced Carmelites.<sup>20</sup> John was repeatedly asked

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<sup>19</sup> Hardy (1982:32) writes that “... though he had not officially taken the vows of the Discalced, Fray Juan already looked like one in the habit of the Madre (St. Teresa) that her nuns had made him and requested that he wear. Though he was so short, he looked impressive in the coarse, dark gray-brown scapular and cassock over which he wore the modified version of the flowing white cape so familiar to those who knew the Carmelites. His dark skin, long narrow nose, and thin face topped with a receding hairline perfectly fit the austere clothes that he wore. The rosary hanging from his belt clicked quietly as he and the brother walked barefoot toward their new home”.

<sup>20</sup> For nine months, John is imprisoned by his own order in Toledo under excruciatingly difficult conditions. Kavanaugh (1999:51) describes his prison as “... a hole in the wall, like a closet, that had been made to serve as

to abandon the Teresian reform, namely the Discalced Reform, to which John repeatedly responded that he was acting in obedience to the orders from Ormaneto, the apostolic visitor<sup>21</sup> who had been appointed by the Pope to oversee the mission of the friars. Nonetheless, he was condemned as rebellious and contumacious. One of the most obedient and submissive men became a rebel by the decision of his ‘Calced’ order (Ruiz 2000:163). For the following nine months, John lived in obscurity and pain, physically and spiritually – this was indeed the ‘dark night’. During his incarceration, he composed poetry to express the spiritual angst that he was experiencing. *Spiritual Canticle* (songs of daring love) and *Romances on the Gospel* were written during his incarceration (Kavanaugh 1999:51). In spite of his enemies stripping him of health, friends, food, shelter, and reputation, John held on to his belief in God. In the darkness of the prison, John encountered his beloved, and that was enough to inspire the Carmelite friar to compose the poetry that became spiritual classics (Dodd1992:20).<sup>22</sup> A few days prior to his escape from prison, John called in his jailer, and asked him for pardon for any trouble that he may have caused him, and offered the jailer his crucifix, – this may have been a gift from Teresa of Avila. This gesture appeared to be an anticipated and a disguised farewell

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a lavatory in the back of a room reserved for special guests. The makeshift prison cell had no window, but only a loophole, three fingers wide, high up on the wall. Little light came through this chink. The cell measured about nine by five feet. The furniture consisted of a board on the floor with two blankets on top and a bench for the breviary, the only book allowed. No change of clothes was ever provided, and the scapular and cowl were taken away because Fray John of the Cross was a rebel. By our standards the punishment was cruel and unjust.... They (Calced) thought that by treating him harshly they could get him to repent of his rebelliousness and submit to the commands of Piacenza”. In spite of his mistreatment, he refused to renounce the Teresian reform.

<sup>21</sup> John argued in his defense that he was acting in obedience to the apostolic visitor, who had authority to give commands to the religious within their jurisdiction above that of the superiors of the order (Ruiz 2000:163). John justified his actions to his accusers from the perspective that his actions reflected obedience rather than rebelliousness.

<sup>22</sup> Concerning his imprisonment, Ruiz (2000:159) says: “It was a delicate and difficult moment in the life of Fray John. Unexpectedly, he found himself in the midst of a web of facts that, at first sight, were illogical, unjust, incomprehensible, and fruitless. As a result, he had to improvise a psychologically and theologically adequate response to this disconcerting situation. He was in need of much light and fortitude. If his attitude were not the right one, he would place his psychological and spiritual equilibrium in jeopardy for the rest of his life. This period in Toledo requires of us an appropriate reading on two levels. On the one hand, there is the chronicle of events, crude and bordering on the dramatic. With every kind of fact and detail, it tells the story of the inhumane treatment and severe punishment the young discalced friar suffered in the prison with incredible fortitude. The outline conforms to the usual two terms: victims and tormentors; tortures and patience. This perspective reflects a real and interesting aspect, but not the only or more important one. On the level of Fray John’s inner history, this painful reality was transfigured into a human and religious experience of the highest quality, radiating light in all the dimensions of his life: religious, psychological, mystical and aesthetic. ‘Toledo is Spain’s Tabor,’ someone wrote. This is an affirmation faithfully capturing John of the Cross’s experience: like a lightning flash, God revealed his presence in the midst of darkness. In the presence of this spiritual reality, the hardships in the chronicle become mere anecdotes or the framework”. In the crucible of the prison, John’s mystical and creative abilities surface which is one of the reasons his writings are amazingly powerful and realistic. With everything from his former life having been stripped away, he experienced a vulnerability enabling him to understand the human psyche at an inner level which was unhindered and unencumbered. It is this aspect of his innate ability and his intellectual prowess that has a depth of appeal to the postmodern mind.

to the jailer who had offered John kindness during his incarceration (Ruiz 2000:169).

It had become clear to John that his release from incarceration was not going to occur through normal channels, and that his suffering would potentially be to his demise and possibly death. By the time he was into the ninth month, for John, each passing day in the jail delivered a hard blow to his fragile and delicate survival (Ruiz 2000:174). Thus, he familiarized himself with section of the monastery he was in, plotted his route for departure and loosened the screws on his door when the jailer had allowed John time out of his cell for an hour each day. John had prepared his bed sheets and clothes for the middle of the night escape (Hardy 1987:75). Ruiz (2000:175) writes of the difficulties which John had to overcome, the appearance of guests in the monastery who stayed in the adjacent room (they were roused momentarily when John removed the jail door), and the jump out of a window in the passageway onto a wall. From John's own account of his escape as told to Blessed María de Jesús (de Rivas) (1560-1640), the fact that he navigated his way out of the monastery and on to the streets of Toledo can only be categorized as miraculous. He located the Discalced nuns monastery outside of the city, and through the clever intervention of the Mother Prioress, John was out of danger and received proper medical attention (Ruiz 2000:178).

### **3.5.5 John's Final Years**

For the next thirteen years, the Discalced assigned John to work in southern Spain, where he was relatively safe. For the most part, these were calm and productive years for John, in which he served as prior of several convents; also he established several Discalced convents. His final assignment took him to Granada, where he eventually was released of all his administrative offices, and John enjoyed life as a simple friar (Dodd 1992:23). During these years, (1578-1591), John became a popular figure to lay people and clergy alike, for he became spiritual director to nuns and friars, as well as, to professors, town and country people. During these years, he continued to write his poetry and commentaries, in the midst of overseeing several Carmelite houses. His travels took him to visit the foundations of friars and nuns which he had instituted. This is possibly why he failed to complete the commentaries on the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and the *Dark Night of the Soul*; he

likely placed them at the back of his desk and planned to get to them when no one came to his door (Dodd 1992:23).

In spite of the relative peace of his life in southern Spain, scandal continued to plague John for the remainder of his life. For his own protection, and as a means of maintaining control over John's activities, his superiors assigned him to a small community in La Peñuela into which, he settled as his final home. He gave himself to prayer, the study of the Holy Scriptures (which he dearly loved),<sup>23</sup> work in the fields, and ministry in his apostolate of spiritual direction. The friars, who had heard of his reputation for austerity, were not pleased that John was assigned to their community, but as they experienced his gentleness, his capacity to entertain, and his ability to encourage them to keep a single-minded devotion to God, the community of friars came to love him and considered themselves blessed to have him with them (Dodd 1992:25).

At La Peñuela, John developed a fever which he interpreted as being connected to a swelling in his right leg. He traveled to Ubeda, where the medical care which was administered, did not arrive in time for John to survive. His infection developed into gangrene, and spread through his body. Further, history records that John bore the coldness and indifference of the prior who ordered that John be placed in the coldest and smallest room in the monastery and be given minimal medical attention. However, the word of John's presence spread through the town, and the best medical care was provided for John, but it came too late to save his life (Ruiz 2000:361). By the time the seriousness of his condition was realized and medical attention administered, the infection was too far advanced. On December 14, 1591, upon reciting the words of Christ, "into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit", John of the Cross died. It was the commemorative day for the Virgin Mary, who is the patron saint for the Carmelites.

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<sup>23</sup> Kavanaugh (1987:28) affirms the role of Scripture for John, he writes "... thus, it is not surprising that when he came to write his works, John found the main support for his teaching in the Bible. He saw the Bible as a unique and inexhaustible source of our knowledge of God. In the Bible he uncovered the principles of God's activity and was able to apply them to the divine action in the spiritual life of individuals. To anyone claiming some new knowledge of God, new revelation in the sphere of the divine mystery or moral life, he replies that we can get sufficient guidance from reason and the message of the gospel. In fact, John insists that Christ is the fullness and culmination of God's revelation. We should no longer expect God to give us more truths. Everything is already revealed in Jesus Christ. ... Any spiritual synthesis that traces out the way to be followed toward the divine encounter must have Sacred Scripture for its foundation".

### 3.6 Conclusion

During the era of the Spanish Golden Age of Mysticism, a spiritual awakening occurred which was characterized by adherence to the Holy Scriptures, prayer and contemplation, detachment from inordinate affections, combined with works of charity. John of the Cross was highly influenced by the mystical climate which prevailed at this time, and he benefited from academic opportunities afforded him. His reflective apophatic orientation made him an ideal candidate to assimilate the process of inner spiritual transformation when the circumstances in his life warranted it. Christian spirituality is a contextual activity and is much more respectful of context and more versatile than the forms of Christianity dominated by dogmatism of tradition or systematic theology (Ruthenberg 2005:71). Though John describes in great detail the inner journey of spiritual transformation, his instructions arise out of personal experience in every day life, out of his own impoverishment, his own academic work, and his own reflections. His poetry and commentaries attest to someone who was committed to contemplative prayer, to meditating on the Scriptures, and to his apostolic vocation.

The question arises, is it possible to bridge the four hundred year gap which separates postmodern western Canada with the Spanish world in which John of the Cross lived his life? And the more urgent question arises, does the voice of mysticism and Christian spirituality expounded by John of the Cross translate into the current experience of Christians living on the Canadian prairies? Spain, in spite of its literary, educational and artistic glory, was undeniably a country in which wealth and poverty subsisted side by side. Yet, this cultural environment cradled the development of a unique form of Christian spirituality and mystical theology. Obviously, Canadian prairie history differs from the Spanish world; however, within the context of a religious people settling in the west, there has evolved an expression of evangelical spirituality shaped by its own cultural experience. The religious values inherent in evangelical spirituality which developed in the Canadian west do not differ fundamentally from the spiritual values of John of the Cross who adhered to the Word of God for guidance and strove to live his life fully to the glory of God.

With regard to the academic and spiritual credentials required to meet the criteria of evangelical theologians in the prairie setting, John's authority originates from an admirable portfolio. He comes as theologian, mystic, spiritual director,

Carmelite reformer (counter-reformer), bible expositor, poet, and monastery director. His colleagues would also describe such traits such as lucid and transparent thinker, philosopher, respectful of others, humourous, charitable, perceptive, and the list continues. The primary attribute which John contributes to the integrity of this thesis is his insight into the human soul and the role of the 'loving flame of love' which transforms the soul. John embraces the basic tenets of Carmelite spirituality, and encourages his readers to engage in whatever is required to facilitate spiritual transformation, such as the removal of inordinate attachments which block the soul from God. It is John's depth of understanding of the transformation of the soul which occurs in solitude and silence that is central to this thesis.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **CANADIAN PRAIRIE EVANGELICALISM**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The Canadian prairie west consists of a people's story which is unique to the North American continent and even within its own country. The history of this area is a recent history, thus, the areas of the Canadian west, namely Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta were settled between the middle and the end of the nineteenth century. This chapter explores the characteristics of this populace and a culture relevant to the research of this thesis. Although the task of researching the theological hypothesis for this project could be conducted from an analytical or pragmatic perspective or entirely from a systematic theological study, spirituality as an academic discipline requires a broader base of research. The study of Christian Spirituality demands the contextual; the locus of lived experience, hence, a brief overview of the historical, religious, and sociological background of prairie people is addressed.

The selection of material in this chapter provides significant information relevant to the research required for this thesis. This chapter is not an attempt to impart a comprehensive historical and sociological analysis of Canadian prairie culture; however, the selected topics convey information which enhances the understanding of Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality.

Although the three Prairie Provinces are situated side by side along the Canadian prairie west, the history of each one differs slightly from the other. Farming settlements on the prairies developed according to ethnic and religious groupings; still, as prairie towns were established, churches, predominantly mainline denominational affiliations, were built to serve the towns. Many of these churches were built alongside farm homesteads in the countryside. As the population across the provinces expanded with new churches being built, the need for pulpits to be filled increased. This religious thrust encouraged the development of bible colleges on the prairies where these institutions were a catalyst to prepare young men and women for ministry for the

emerging churches. As a result, evangelicalism, which developed a significant role in ministry preparation, took root on the Canadian prairie in its own unique manner. This chapter demonstrates the juxtaposition of evangelical theology and prairie experience in association with events and individuals who contributed to Canadian prairie politics and religion.

#### **4.2. Brief History of Canada's Three Prairie Provinces**

Known as the British North West, the Canadian West was opened up to the outside world in the mid-seventeenth century. The initial frontiersmen were the French fur traders who encountered the original inhabitants of the western hinterland. These were the First Nations peoples comprising differing bands with differing linguistic dialects and living in semi-nomadic conditions. These peoples were driven by seasonal conditions on the prairie and by the necessity of following the migratory patterns of the buffalo herds (*bison americanus*) (Stanley 1969:8). Generally, the fur traders remained in the northern boreal areas avoiding the arid southern prairie regions. In 1691, Henry Kelsey was the first Englishman to venture to the southern area, the first white man to view the prairie. With the assistance of Indian guides, he arrived at the edge of the treeless prairie in 1691 and journalled, "Today we pitcht to ye outermost Edge of ye woods the plain affords Nothing but short Round sticky grass and buffalo" (Stanley 1969:10).

Southern Manitoba was settled first by Scottish settlers arriving from Ontario who carved out a thriving agricultural center along the Red River. By the mid 1800s, in spite of the plagues of grasshoppers, drought, floods and early frosts, these hardy folk developed an autonomous colony which furnished the entire community with butter, eggs, some vegetables, beef, and cheese. Similar to the First Nations people, the settlers depended upon the buffalo herds for hides and meat (Thomas 1976:35). To the west of the Red River, the flat arid land belonged to semi-nomadic tribes, and the settlers preferred to remain in southern Manitoba since the open land of the prairie supplied little protection from warring aboriginals and harsh climatic conditions.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Canadian North West launched into a new era, the colonization of the west. Regions of the 'North West' developed a measure of governance and self-reliance which allowed for Catholic missions to be established near fur trading stations (Morton 1967:72). Also, the Hudson's Bay Company, the company dealing with the First Nations people and Métis in the fur trade, commenced negotiations to transfer its land to the Dominion of Canada. This decision of the Hudson's Bay Company changed the economic base from fur trading to agricultural and ranching, and effectively changed the First Nations peoples' way of life. Thus, for the First Nations peoples, their traditional way of life shifted, due in part, to the disappearance of the buffalo (Palmer & Palmer 1990:31). In addition, parcels of land were portioned out to tribal groups (referred to as reserves) through treaty agreements with provincial and federal governments. This provision for the aboriginal bands created protection for the settlers who homesteaded in the new territory. By means of the treaties, the nomadic cultural way of life was transformed to a settlement lifestyle.

From 1857 to 1860, the Palliser Expedition examined the plains area of the North West up to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains for the purpose of exploring the possibility of settlement (Thomas 1976:36). (The southern barren area of Saskatchewan and Alberta, which was named the Palliser Triangle, comprised a large parcel of land that would prove a challenge for farming settlers, and continues to do so today.) As the role of the fur trader and explorer faded, it was replaced with the farmer, rancher, businessman and politician. Emerging prairie settlements dotted the landscape from the Red River settlement to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. During the mid-nineteenth century, the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway contributed to the establishment of towns and villages at particular intervals on the prairie route to service the trains and the populace.

Law and order was officially instituted with the commissioning of the North West Mounted Police from the central government of Canada. Eventually, the regiment changed its name to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and established its central training post in Regina, Saskatchewan. In 1870, Manitoba entered the Dominion of Canada as a western province, and during the next thirty years immigrants from

numerous countries from Europe and Asia settled there (Morton 1967:176ff). After the Métis<sup>1</sup> uprising had been suppressed and Manitoba had entered confederation, the Canadian government proceeded to clarify its land and railway policies for the entire western area. To discourage any ambitions from the United States to take over prairie lands, the Canadian government undertook a rapid and uniform settlement of the prairie west (Wright 1955:60).

In 1905, Saskatchewan and Alberta joined the Dominion of Canada, which launched the greatest migration undertaken in the history of Canada. Between 1896 and 1920, over two million people migrated to Canada and almost all traveled west to the prairie provinces.<sup>2</sup> This area developed into a mosaic of cultures in which thirty ethnic groups entered within a short span of history, and built rural segregated settlements. Later, second and third generation children of the immigrants migrated to the urban centres for employment opportunities, and inter-married with children from other immigrant backgrounds (Driedger 1984:169). By the 1920s, the Canadian west had been settled and the ‘pioneer’ and ‘homesteader’ thrust had essentially ended. The positive momentum in the development of the Canadian frontier was halted by the drought and Dust Bowl conditions of the 1930s. Farm practices and policies experienced a significant change as a result of the Great Depression. A socialized Medicare system was established in Saskatchewan and eventually was adopted by the federal government for the benefit all Canadians (Gray 1966:213).

The effect of the Great Depression has remained in the collective consciousness of the people who live in this area. Gray (1966:210) suggests that “... there was probably never as sober a time in western Canada as in the depression years”. He does not romanticize that era, since for a segment of the population, primarily farming families, it was a devastating time. From his experience of the depression, he observes:

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<sup>1</sup> The Métis regarded themselves as a distinct group of people, differing from the First Nations peoples, and yet considered themselves part of the native group. They were the children of mixed marriages: French fathers with native mothers. However, some of the Métis had Scottish and English parentage. They viewed themselves as distinct, not French or First Nations, and they were proud of their successful buffalo hunting economy and their free way of life. They feared the prospect of agricultural expansion for this would threaten their way of life (Wright 1955: 52).

<sup>2</sup> Statistics taken from: *Settling the West*. Available at: <http://canadaonline.about.com/od/historyofimmigration/> [Accessed 24 July 2005]

Yet the most important development of the depression was not something that could be seen or measured, because it was taking place beneath the surface in the hearts of the people in western Canada. It was the universal conviction that what we had was not good enough. Our thirst for security, for some form of insurance against the climatic and economic storms that were destroying us, gradually found expression in all the political parties, and in the churches, professional societies, service clubs and universities as well. The term 'fringe benefit' crept into the language, and even non-union employers began to flirt with pension plans and welfare schemes (Gray 1966:212).

Gray notes that the Depression affected the hearts and souls of the people at a deep level. Theologically, this experience generated the need for a theological perspective to provide a biblical response to human suffering as experienced during the Great Depression.

### **4.3 Prairie Culture**

Prairie culture has been shaped and defined by its history. With regard to immigrant settlement, it is a young history as opposed to that of the First Nations peoples who were the original inhabitants for centuries prior to the immigrants. Evangelical prairie spirituality is a recent phenomenon; thus, it is appropriate to focus upon the cultural influences from recent history.

Clearly, the people of the Canadian west have had to deal with the psychological impact of climatic conditions, such as the wind, the harshness of the cold in winter and heat in summer, and the devastation of drought and floods in some areas. In spite of the climatic and landscape circumstances, Canadian western society generated a people who desired to create a 'mosaic' of peoples, yet retain cultural distinctives within a developing multi cultural region. In spite of the various groups of people discovering their place in western society, a regional identity developed which Driedger (1984:180) notes:

We conclude that the Canadian West has emerged as a regional identity, with social, political and economic distinctives which act as a counter-force or antithesis to the eastern power blocs which create much real and potential conflict. The West is a region, a society, a set of institutions, an attitudinal stance, a people, a symbol...The West has different needs,

interests, ambitions, even different theories and forms of government. At the same time, this multicultural region with its many ethnic, religious, and political groups and communities, contains a special social mix which makes it unique in Canada.

Nowhere is this message of western uniqueness voiced more than in the topic of western alienation. In a series of essays discussing the sociological, industrial, and cultural issues relevant to the Canadian West, Elton (1984:47) notes that western Canadian alienation as a grass roots protest movement has two principle concerns: firstly, the perception that federal politics has little if any interest in western concerns. Secondly, the eastern political system (situated in Ottawa) leans toward the exploitation of the Canadian west rather than offering any benefits. The Prairie West retains a high level of mistrust toward federal politics, exhibited in the continual 'resistance and revolt' stance that smolders within western politics. As a result, numerous political parties have arisen from prairie soil, and disenchantment with the majority of the Canadian prime ministers are born and bred in Eastern Canada continues.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4.3.1 Prairie Landscape

"Tell me the landscape in which you live and I will tell you who you are," quoted by Belden Lane (1988:16) in *Landscapes of the Sacred*. James (1998:80) reflecting upon geography and spirituality notes, "To experience nature as one of the locations of the sacred might mean embracing its negative and positive bipolar aspects as components of a comprehensive view of the world". To the untrained eye, prairie landscape affords little for the imagination: there is the enormous sky stretched out over flatland to the distant horizon. The human psyche has to overcome the emptiness, the vulnerability of exposure to wind and sun, and to land stripped bare. James wonders how much the early immigrant pioneers embraced their geographic environment, and what level of the prairie ethos they accepted. Could it be that the original inhabitants

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that in spring, 2006, the newly elected prime minister was considered to be a westerner. Prime Minister Stephen Harper was not born in the west, but has made his residence in Calgary, Alberta for many years and strongly identifies with the Canadian West. This provides a sense that there is western representation at the highest office in Canada.

(First Nations Peoples) could contribute to our understanding the sacredness of place?

James (1998:94) reflects:

In enabling us to encounter our geographical uniqueness, in making possible a completion of that circuit of separation, initiation, and return, and bequeathed to us by those peoples who were here before we were, the canoe may well be an effective vehicle, not only for the exploration of the wilderness of the Shield, but also for exploring that inner frontier, and perhaps for effecting an appropriate transformation of attitudes through a kind of indigenization.<sup>4</sup>

Sharon Butala (1994:xiii), a prairie writer, muses how this terrain became her 'teacher'. The seemingly empty prairie landscape taught her enormous lessons about life, in spite of the difficulty she was having in accepting and adapting to her new environment in southern Saskatchewan. She chooses to embrace the prairie landscape as a source of wisdom, however, without the added dimension of theology, in contrast to Kathleen Norris, who moved to the Great Plains in central United States. Norris (1993:128) moved from New York to the plains landscape of South Dakota, where she revisits her Christian heritage through the spectrum of landscape and weather patterns. Her book is a contemplative visage of a new territory and its people, as she ponders:

The severe climate of Dakota forces us to see that no one can control this land. The largeness of the land and sky is humbling, putting humankind in proper perspective. A friend, Jim Lein, has described what it is like to walk here: 'One night, I sensed not only the curvature of the earth but its size and gravitational pull.' This feeling is no doubt what holds people to the prairie, what leads prairie people to feel claustrophobic in more cluttered environs, with their trees and mountains and tall buildings obscuring our view, our sense of planet.

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<sup>4</sup> James (1998:100) further postulates; "The attempt of scholars of religion to turn their attention to the religious dimensions of leisure, as this essay has done, may appear to be a waste of time. After all, the usual business of religious studies is supposed to be the study of sacred texts, of religious communities, and of historical traditions. These are the important matters to be sure, but at the very least I am suggesting that certain aspects of what we normally think of as leisure activities have important religious implications too. The application of a well-known model from religious studies to canoeing can illuminate its gravity and significance, can enrich our appreciation by making us a little more aware of its hidden meanings, and can be outside the domain of religion traditionally conceived. Alternately, we find that traditional forms of religion, having undergone at best an incomplete process of translation or 'indigenization,' display a rigidity and inflexibility in their lack of a sufficient degree of correlativity with contemporary culture". This assessment would be true of evangelicalism/fundamentalism in the Canadian west, which resulted in religious institutions unable to appreciate the affect of the prairie landscape on the human soul; thus this would be deferred to the poets, songwriters and novelists who had been affected by their prairie experience.

Butala and Norris acknowledge the ability of the of the prairie landscape to influence the human psyche. Their works guide the postmodern reader into the realm of engagement with mystery and beauty, and with the One who is the Creator of the natural environment.

#### 4.3.2 Climatic Conditions

Prairie poets and novelists play with the extremes of nature that encompass the Canadian west. There is no shortage of metaphors and themes to select: floods, pestilence, extreme cold in winter, and extreme heat in summer, drought, thunderstorms lighting up the prairie sky, the Northern lights, and the wind, the incessant wind. Norris (1993:41) discovered there is no escape from the onslaught of the wind; it can usher in a thunderstorm, it can yank the moisture from a wheat field, it can blow precious grain away from the combine during harvest time. It drove homesteaders off the land; in fact, it drove some mad.

Connie Kaldor (1992) a Canadian prairie poet and songwriter reflects a similar sentiment in the line, “I come from a land that is harsh and unforgiving/Winter snows can kill you/And the summer burn you dry/When a change in the weather/Makes a difference to your living/You keep one eye on the banker/And another on the sky.”<sup>5</sup> Though prairie poets and novelists offer some level of psychological relief from the climatic extremes, the benefits derived from modern technology and creature comforts offer a welcome respite for the prairie dweller during hot and cold seasons alike. This was not the case during the Great Depression.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Taken from *Wood River, Home is where the heart is...*, recorded by Connie Kaldor by Coyote Entertainment Group Inc., sponsored by Saskatchewan Culture, 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Prairie novelists and poets have had a love/hate relationship with the Christian church, and with evangelicalism in particular. Evangelical theology did not offer an adequate response to the nature of the land or its inhabitants, leaving a void that the novelists would fill. Prairie novelists filled the need of the prairie soul to find meaning in the midst of hardship and suffering, and to recognize beauty and strength inherent in the prairie landscape. Of interest is that the Christian evangelical community in western Canada did not accept the works of mid-twentieth century prairie novelists, such as Sinclair Ross, Rudy Wiebe, W. O. Mitchell, and Margaret Laurence, until recently. Postmodernism is challenging the prairie evangelical to be comfortable in the realm of prairie story and poetry.

### 4.3.3 The Great Depression

‘The Great Depression’, or ‘The Dirty Thirties’ (as the people of Saskatchewan remember it), or simply ‘The Depression’, profoundly affected the people of western Canada. The farm-drought depression began in 1929, and it progressed to its apex of complete disaster in 1939. This drought was confined to south-central Saskatchewan and the adjoining corners of Manitoba and Alberta, the corner of the adjacent province connected to the Palliser Triangle. While the people in Saskatchewan and the adjoining areas choked in the Dust Bowl, some northern areas of Manitoba and Alberta were enjoying relatively good crops (Gray 1966:2). Prairie writers, who experienced the depression, chronicled the plight of the ‘Great Depression’ with the hope that future generations would not forget the trauma of those years.<sup>7</sup> Though James Gray and others report of the Depression from first hand experience, novelists built story characters that lived during the depression. They attempted to reconcile the human spirit with the prairie and its suppressive hold upon its people. Sinclair Ross’s novel, *As For Me and My House*, offers an example of one family’s plight, physically, emotionally, and psychologically during the Dust Bowl era.<sup>8</sup>

The effect of the Depression on the Prairie Provinces and its inhabitants continues to the present day. Farming practices have been radically changed, new political parties were formed to create a voice for western Canada in the federal government, health care benefits were established (a privilege all Canadians presently

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<sup>7</sup> One of the chroniclers is James Gray, who eventually became a newspaper reporter. In 1931, when Gray was not quite twenty-five, living in Winnipeg, he writes, “We were almost out of food, we were almost out of fuel, and our rent was two months in arrears. At home were my wife and daughter, and my mother, father, and two younger brothers. Applying for relief might prove the most humiliating experience of my life (it did); but it had to be done, and I had to do it” (Gray 1966:9). He relays the plight of those who experienced the ‘Great Depression’ in the city of Winnipeg, but he also reminds his readers why he believes that this could not happen again. For the lesson of the depression had been duly learned by governments, farmers, and prairie dwellers.

<sup>8</sup> Sinclair Ross is most notably known for his depiction of the ‘Great Depression’ and particularly with his novel, *As For Me and My House*. Ross’s (1941:96,97) character, Mrs. Bentley, journals at the height of the Depression: “Tuesday Evening, June 6, The wind keeps on. When you step outside its strong but hot push is like something solid pressed against the face. The sun through the dust looks big and red and close. Bigger, redder, closer every day. You begin to glance at it with a doomed feeling, that there’s no escape. The dust is so thick that sky and earth are just a blur. You can scarcely see the elevators at the end of town. One step beyond, you think, and you’d go plunging into space. The days are blurred too. It’s wind in the morning, wind at bedtime. Wind all through the night – we toss and lie listening. The sand and dust drifts are everywhere. It’s in the food, the bedclothes, a film on the book you’re reading before you can turn a page. In the morning it’s half an inch deep on the window sills. Half an inch again by noon....It begins to make an important place for itself in the routine of the day. I watch the little drifts form. If at dusting time they’re not quite high enough I’m disappointed, put off the dusting sometimes half an hour to let them grow.... The wind and sawing eaves and the rattle of windows have made the house a cell”.

enjoy), and a collective resolve that a catastrophic event of this magnitude would never occur again. Some argue that a collective consciousness remains on the prairie from the Depression, reminiscent of rural values of caring and assisting one another through difficult times.

#### **4.4 Evangelicalism on the Prairies**

##### **4.4.1 Development of Christianity on the Prairies**

Palmer & Palmer (1990:27) record that the fur traders and missionaries were the forerunners of western civilization in the new land. Wright's (1955:44) perspective on the arrival of the missionaries suggests that the presence of the priests and chaplains in the remote posts contributed to a relative orderliness of life in the territory. However, Breton (1955:xii) comments that the 'H.B.C.' (Hudson Bay Company), sometimes referred to as 'Here Before Christ', were followed by the missionaries into the west almost simultaneously with the fur traders themselves. In Manitoba, about 1818, the first missionaries, who were Roman Catholic priests, arrived along the Red River. Anglicans and Methodists soon joined them and by 1838, Roman Catholic priests had settled further west into clergy posts in Alberta. The first long term Methodist missionary, Robert Rundle, arrived in Alberta from England in 1840 (Palmer & Palmer 1990: 23).

The first Anglican missionary at the Red River, Reverend J. West, established a mission to train First Nations people for missionary work. By 1857 permanent Anglican mission stations had been built up in Saskatchewan and Alberta. Church denominations recognized that missionary work in the rough and forbidding West required men who were of good health. Thus, the Roman Catholic Church assigned the Oblate Fathers the onerous task of moving to the western frontier, with the first young novice, Alexander Tache, arriving in 1845. Prior to the arrival of Tache, the first Grey Nuns<sup>9</sup> had already

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<sup>9</sup> The Grey Nuns is an order of sisters founded by Madame Marie-Marguerite d'Youville, a young widow. She began her work in 1737, in the city of Montreal. Initially, Madame d'Youville formed a charitable lay organization to offer assistance to the poor, even opening up a house for the poor. Eventually, the women would take over the care of the hospital, and took on the name of Grey Nuns, since they were mocked by some of the men as being 'les grises' — translated into the vernacular of the time as 'tipsy women'. The official name of their order is the Sisters of Charity. In 1755, when their religious community was officially recognized, they took a grey habit in deliberate reference to the derisive title. It was not until the 1840s that the sisters entertained the notion of moving farther afield, and in

been welcomed to the Red River Colony (Wright 1955:45). Wesleyan missionaries arrived in 1840, led by Reverend James Evans. Evans was already fluent in the Ojibway language, a dialect of Cree spoken by a First Nations tribe in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. After taking up residence with the Cree people near a trading post, Evans created an alphabet for the Cree language, and then translated the Scriptures into their language. His ingenuity in utilizing indigenous materials to print the first Biblical texts resulted in the formation of the first printing press in the west (Gilbert 1971:32).

When the settlers arrived in the West, their first project was to build their house or shelter and their next project was to build a church and school. Most often, volunteers from the area constructed the churches, utilizing sod or timber when wood was available. If a neighbourhood was predominately Presbyterian, the church would be Presbyterian; or if a gathering included greater numbers of Baptists or Methodists, the church would be designated according to majority of the worshippers (Wright 1955:103). In the early 1900s, all the denominations were on an equal footing; settlers attended the church in the vicinity. The situation differed for the Roman Catholics, since their churches were erected specifically for the Catholic community (Bruce 1966:100). A Scottish settler in Alberta in 1890 comments, "In the early days denominations made no difference. When a minister came, everyone went to church regardless of the denomination" (Bruce 1966:102).

Itinerant missionaries automatically inherited a two-fold objective for their ministry. The first was to minister to the settlers, where they conducted worship services of an interdenominational nature; and the other was to convert the First Nations Peoples and Métis to the Christian faith (MacKintosh & Joerg 1940:203). As time progressed, it became evident that the ministry of itinerant missionaries sometimes included serving as liaison between the white settlers and the indigenous bands. Some of the missionaries assisted in bridging the gap between adjustment to life on the reserves (land allocated to the bands by the government of Canada) and the settlers who

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1844, they opened a hospital in St. Boniface along the Red River. They were foundresses of most of the first hospitals and schools in cities and towns in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

homesteaded on former hunting and fishing territories of the First Nations people (MacKintosh & Joerg 1940:211).

As parishes or congregations assumed responsibility for their own church governance and budgets, the affiliating denomination laid claim to the worshipping congregation. The first of the denominations to establish self-sufficient churches were the Methodists and Presbyterians. Roman Catholic church parishes, which began prior to the arrival of the English settlers, were independent and distinct from their Protestant counterparts. Evangelical churches tended to be smaller congregations as they developed and paralleled their expansion with the development of mainline denominations, such as the Methodist and Anglicans (MacKintosh & Joerg 1940:224). With the influx of immigrant people, the religious churches established on the prairies provided an anchor in the new land for many cultures. Worship services were conducted in the mother tongue, and religious traditions were preserved as much as possible with the old country beliefs (Mol 1985:64). The new immigrants hoped that their religious practice would insulate them from exposure to the other cultures surrounding them. For the First Nations people, Christianity most often came in a 'foreign tongue' and with foreign traditions, since very few missionaries or mission organizations learned the aboriginal languages. As a result, each incoming immigrant wave brought with them their own strain of Christianity. The Mennonites emigrated from the Ukrainian steppes to southern Manitoba in the late 1870s. They established self sufficient farming communities complete with their own schools and churches. German families immigrated primarily to Alberta and brought their heritage of Lutheranism, as did the Scandinavians. German immigrants of Baptist and Catholic backgrounds built churches for their families, many in the countryside on a corner of a farmer's field (Mol 1985:69). Ukrainian immigrants introduced Eastern Orthodoxy to the prairies. Their families were of two persuasions: Catholic and Eastern Orthodox. Many towns supported churches of both denominations, servicing families of Orthodox and Catholic background (Mol 1985:73). With the arrival of the Dutch immigrants in the mid-twentieth century, the Christian Reformed Movement established itself as a denominational influence in Western Canada. Almost immediately upon arrival, this

minority group integrated the use of the English language into their liturgy. Although many churches held services in Dutch for several years, the Dutch immigrants who arrived in the early 1950's focused upon integrating into their new country as quickly as possible, which included the use of the new language, English, into their worship. Lutheran churches varied in practice depending upon the source country of the immigrants, since families arrived from Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Scandinavia (Mol 1985:78). In the 1920s and 1930s smaller Protestant churches were waning in numbers and recognition in the Canadian west. Consequently, three denominations (Methodists, Congregational, and Presbyterians) merged to form the United Church of Canada in 1925 for the purpose of maintaining a viable religious presence nationally and in the west (Palmer & Palmer 1990:240).

#### **4.4.2 Religion and Politics**

Fundamentalist advances<sup>10</sup> in Alberta and Saskatchewan owed much to the invention and availability of the radio. In the remote areas where churches were

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<sup>10</sup> History records that for the major portion of the twentieth century, evangelicalism in western Canada had fundamentalist roots. Bloesch (1988:25) defines fundamentalism as the right wing of the evangelical movement, a phenomenon of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, originating in Philadelphia. This movement arose to combat modernism in the churches, evidenced by acceptance of the theory of evolution and the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation. It tended (and presently tends) to be a defensive movement, stressing biblical inerrancy, postulating a defined doctrine of eschatology, and emphasizing separatism and evangelical rationalism. It could be argued that fundamentalism is not as extreme as Bloesch describes or that it can be found in varying degrees; however, the structure of fundamentalism that took hold in the Canadian west is not dissimilar to Bloesch's description. In addition, women have been almost completely excluded in leadership and administration in the church, including pastoral and ordained ministries. This issue remains contentious, even though a few evangelical denominations are presently ordaining women. Consequently, conservative evangelical denominations located in the Canadian west are being challenged to reconsider their position on women in leadership roles within their churches. Saliers (Dupré, Saliers & Meyendorff 1989:533) describes the spirituality of fundamentalism as grounded in a set of beliefs and practices based on a literalist reading of the Bible, and desire for absolute certainty on how God rules the world and how the Christian is to live. It was initially a reactionary movement toward the perceived threat of liberalism in the early twentieth century. This form of spirituality was distinctive in its method of interpreting Scripture, that the biblical text was a divinely inspired deposit of inerrant propositions. It contained "... revealed data that could be organized into doctrines and applied to Christian piety and conduct. Early fundamentalism was not anti-rational; rather, it was ultra-rational in its defense against historical criticism of the Bible" (Dupré, Saliers & Meyendorff 1989:534). Secondly, fundamentalism developed a theology of dispensational eschatology, whereby history is divided into a rigid series of dispensations, with each as a result of the supernatural conflict between God and Satan, and experienced by a different mode of divine activity in the world. Protestant liberalism interpreted Scripture within the larger context of historical self-understanding, while the dispensationalist interpreted history within the context of Scripture. Thus, the Sermon on the Mount is not understood as an ethic for the present age, but of an age to come. This interpretation of Scripture has been translated into evangelical theology in the Canadian west, and has been the predominant interpretive view of Scripture in many theological institutions. Thirdly, Saliers (1989:534) notes that for the Christian fundamentalist, Scripture became the counter-point to ecumenicism, which according to the fundamentalist was too ready to sacrifice truth for Christian unity. Thus, the fundamentalists tended to be radical separatists, fighting error and apostasy in doctrine and morals. And finally, Saliers (1989:534) suggests

inaccessible for the rural farming family, radio evangelists filled in the need for Sunday services.

Two prominent political leaders, both successful politicians and both fundamentalist lay preachers, took advantage of the availability of the radio to preach the Christian faith. These two men dominated the political scene in Alberta from the mid 1930s to the mid 1960s. William Aberhart (1878-1943), a high school principal in Calgary, formed the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute in 1927. One of his first students was a young Saskatchewan farm boy named Ernest Manning. Aberhart used the radio station CFCN to preach his fundamentalist teachings, and young Manning was able to listen to Aberhart from his parents' home in Saskatchewan (Van Die 2001:237). When Aberhart met Manning, he was so impressed with him that he hired him to work at the Bible institute which Aberhart had helped to establish.<sup>11</sup> The Depression was responsible for drawing Aberhart into politics. Noticing that his colleagues were demoralized by the depression, he searched for answers to the dilemma; other than blaming the devil for the climatic disturbances. Aberhart was introduced to the political and economic philosophy of *Social Credit*, and was convinced that this political platform was the answer to Alberta's social and economic dilemma. Aberhart's Social Credit 'doctrine' was an alternative to socialism and capitalism, which did not entirely remove capitalism, but controlled the financial interests of those who had usurped financial power. He believed that the financiers, who retained monetary control, were suppressing the ability of the people to better themselves, particularly the farmers and urban middle class (Parker & Parker 1990:258). Aberhart was a charismatic leader, well organized and capable of forming a new political movement; and he had a populace lamenting the woes of the depression and financial oppression. He combined

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that fundamentalism was marked by a highly individualistic picture of the Christian life. This fostered a deepened concern for individual holiness and salvation, which coupled with the dispensationalist view of the second coming of Christ as imminent, placed paramount concern upon the salvation of individuals to be ready for the rapture. All of these aspects of fundamentalist spirituality would be incorporated in differing degrees within evangelicalism as it evolved in the Canadian west.

<sup>11</sup> David Marshall in his essay, *Premier E.C. Manning, Back to the Bible Hour, and Fundamentalism in Canada* writes concerning these two leaders, "Aberhart and Manning were different from other fundamentalist leaders in North America in one important respect: they were not on the margins of society. They held political power and enjoyed a large political following outside their immediate fundamentalist constituency. Nevertheless, what struck and also troubled many was that neither Aberhart nor Manning kept their religious faith private. For both, religion and politics were indivisible," (Marshall 2001:237).

dispensational theology and his hermeneutics of Biblical prophecy along with Social Credit politics into his Sunday afternoon radio broadcasts. He preached economic salvation along with religious salvation, and prepared a radio course curriculum as his vehicle for promoting his economic doctrines (Dempsey 1981:187). Parker & Parker (1990:259) note that Aberhart "... claimed Social Credit was compatible with Christian beliefs. He deliberately mixed Social Credit with prophecy, hoping to convert his audience on both. The response was positive...". He was elected premier of Alberta, and led the Alberta government for seven years, from 1935 to 1943. Following his death, his closest associate and a fundamentalist preacher, Ernest Manning (1908-1996), became premier of Alberta for the next twenty-five years.

Aberhart continues to attract the interest of scholars and poets alike. Stackhouse (1993:44) commends Aberhart for pioneering religious broadcasting, as many religious teachers and preachers followed Aberhart's example and utilized the airwaves to preach the Christian message. His Bible lectures exposed hundreds of listeners and students to Biblical teaching and to dispensational theology in particular. Thus, he intentionally provided an alternative to the social gospel and ecumenism promoted by the United Church, a religious affiliation which, according to Aberhart, had strayed from the centrality of Biblical principles and teachings. Stackhouse (1993:44) asserts that despite Aberhart's fundamentalist doctrinal point of view, his political career and religious influence deserve careful study by historians of Canadian religion.

Following in his mentor's footsteps, Ernest Manning preached for several years on the radio while serving as premier of Alberta. However, rather than calling for Christian-inspired legislation, Manning sought to convert people to the Christian faith. It is one thing for clergy to make the appeals for listeners to be 'born again'; but another thing for the premier of the province to be speaking to the public concerning politics. Confusion arose when he appealed for funds to support his radio ministry, and critics questioned the appropriateness of mixing politics with religion. However, for Manning, there was no dichotomy: "... he could not separate religion from politics" (Van Die 2001:250). Generally, what mattered most to Manning's dedicated radio audience was

the guidance he provided to the Christian community.<sup>12</sup>

#### 4.5 Prairie Theological Institutions

One of the largest sectarian movements in the history of North America occurred in the Canadian west, and Oke suggests this movement was a major factor in the development of theological institutions on the prairies.<sup>13</sup> In his study of Bible colleges in this region, Oke (1972:24) sums up as follows:

The Free Methodist sect came to Canada, following the Methodist Union of 1876, and drew many disinherited by the Union. The Holiness Movement started as an interdenominational concern determined to lead a return to apostolic Christianity, but led instead to the creation of a number of sects which succeeded in the West. The Mennonite sects were split producing a series of groups, some of which retained the Mennonite name, while others, like the Missionary Church, adopted new titles. E. T. Clark suggests that a crucial factor in the emergence of the sect was the economic condition and status of the individuals involved. He suggests

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<sup>12</sup> In an article published in *Macleans*, July 1, 2005, the son of Ernest Manning, Preston Manning (2005:35) (who also formed a new political party in the West) writes of his view from the front row seat as he witnessed much of modern history in the west. He writes: "Though I grew up in a political home in Alberta, I nevertheless heard as many sermons as speeches. At a critical time in Alberta's history (his father was premier of Alberta from 1943 to 1968), religion and politics became closely entwined as folks leaned on both to see them through the hard times of depression and war. In the 1920s and '30s, two particularly spiritual streams cut across the Prairies as do the North and South Saskatchewan Rivers, leaving an indelible impression on the political landscape. One came to be known as the Social Gospel Movement; J.S. Woodsworth, a Methodist minister from Winnipeg, was one of its main proponents. He helped found and lead the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, a new federal party that later became the New Democratic Party under the leadership of another man of the cloth, Baptist minister Tommy Douglas, a former premier of Saskatchewan. From the social-gospel perspective, the most important dimension of Christian faith is social justice — the horizontal dimension of faith, as it's been called — meeting the needs of the young, the sick, the poor and the old. At around the same time, another spiritual stream, later labeled the Evangelical Movement, rolled across the Prairies. One of its key proponents was William Aberhart ... (Aberhart) a pioneering radio broadcaster of weekly religious appeals helped knit together isolated Prairie homes. For evangelicals, the primary dimension of faith is the relationship between individuals and God — the so-called vertical relationship of personal salvation — a prerequisite to being able to effectively do God's work on earth. People like my parents, who grew up on the Canadian Prairies during this period, could hardly avoid being influenced by these movements — the one stressing collective responsibility, the other individual responsibility — each with political, as well as religious ramifications".

<sup>13</sup> Oke (1972:21) refers to John Moir, in *The Churches and the Canadian Experience*, in which Moir suggests "... sect involves division, protest and separation, and popularly implies smallness of number. The North American sect is fundamentalist, evangelistic, Bible-centered and traditionally antitraditionalist in its emphasis. It stresses the necessity for conversion as a condition of membership, a fact which leads Richard Niebuhr to say that the true sect exists for only one generation. The sect is totalitarian in its demands for strict behavioural conformity, and like the totalitarian state, is aggressively militant in its symbolism and defensive in its outlook." (Moir 1963:120). Oke (1972:21) further suggests that sects tend to oppose creeds and confessions of faith, they reject infant baptism, they accept religion as a way of life and they follow a simple polity. Stackhouse (1993:13) in *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century*, writes "... a 'church' is a denomination that enjoys status in the culture, participates in the culture, and indeed manifests something of a proprietorial interest in the culture ... the 'sect' by contrast, enjoys no status in the culture but rather consciously separates itself from it. It is made up of 'believers,' only of those who consciously join it and who maintain its intellectual and behavioural discipline".

that much of the self-denial demanded of sect members is really legitimizing their economic lack. It might be suggested, however, that instead of asceticism of the sect being a justification of its economic condition, this economic impoverishment had spiritual benefits. A man who has little of the benefits of economic success finds it easier to realize his need to depend upon a God who, according to sectarian faith, provides all man has materially, and who must be served if He is to provide the quality of spiritual experience the individual wants and finds satisfying. A dependence upon God is easier to achieve, perhaps, by one who has little reason to depend on himself.

In 1946, the Protestant churches in Alberta were estimated numerically as high as thirty-five percent sectarian. The United Church Superintendent for Missions in Alberta calculated that up to eighty percent of the United Church membership at that time was inclined to fundamentalism. Although Ontario, in Eastern Canada, would lead the country in the numbers of religious sects, the influence of fundamentalism was far stronger in the west than in any other area of Canada (Oke 1972:25).

There were two issues which encouraged the escalation of the Bible College movement in Canada. Firstly, the trend toward secularization of church-related colleges threatened fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals, and they were fearful of the liberal onslaught in theological training. Secondly, many denominations were serving a defined constituency and this required specific religious training suited for pastoral and missionary service within the particular setting (McKinney 1997:153). Further, McKinney notes that seventy-five percent of the Bible schools started in Canada were and still are in western Canada.<sup>14</sup> Oke (1972:30) lists several reasons for the rise of the Bible college movement in the Canadian west. Firstly, this was the period when sectarianism reached its peak, and Oke (1972:30) cites the coming to power of the Social Credit Party in Alberta, which was sectarian in nature. Secondly, economic conditions prohibited students on the prairies from traveling to eastern Canada for

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<sup>14</sup> By 1952, ninety different Bible schools had been started in the prairie provinces and in British Columbia. The majority of these schools are located in the prairie provinces. Of these schools, twenty percent were started in the first two decades of the twentieth century, more than fifty percent were opened during the depression of the 30s, and the remainder opened their halls of learning between 1940 and 1952 (McKinney 1997:155). Oke (1972:30) comments that of the thirty-eight colleges presently operating in western Canada (three prairie provinces), twenty-nine are classified as denominational schools. Alberta has thirteen Bible colleges, Saskatchewan has eleven, and Manitoba has eleven. The majority of the colleges were started between 1930 and 1950, with the peak years being 1935 to 1939.

education or, in some situations, to the next province. Many parents who were from the lower-middle income bracket, particularly those from farming communities, required the assistance of their children on the family farm. Thirdly, Oke (1972:30) suggests that:

... during the depression, when material success decreased, an increased concern developed for a knowledge and experience of Christian faith. Bible colleges were begun to provide for an intensity and depth of training in Christian faith not available in the typical congregation.

Finally, he suggests that Bible colleges provided a sense of security for a person's Christian faith during a period of social and economic insecurity. He suggests that faith in God and study of the Bible offered the necessary strength and wisdom to endure the troubled times.

The fledgling Bible schools, often academically unsophisticated and functioning with limited funding, attracted scores of students, and eventually the necessary funds to maintain successful educational institutions. Indeed, right across Canada the developing theological institutions became influential in Canadian religious life. Their twin purposes, which was *teaching* the Bible as truth and *training* in practical Christian living and ministry, became the key to their growth (McKinney 1998:43). However, in western Canada, two practical realities contributed to the explosive growth of Bible schools across the prairies. One factor was geographical accessibility. Schools were built in small town communities and often in rural areas.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, the academic year was adjusted to fit within the work schedules of students in rural communities; the school commenced after fall harvest and ended before spring seeding. A third factor that may have contributed to the growth of Canadian Bible schools and colleges in the west was the informal alliances that were formed between the different evangelical institutions, most often between the presidents of the colleges. The impact of the Bible college movement on Canadian evangelicalism may be much greater than most people

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<sup>15</sup> The prairie rural setting became the setting for many of the fledgling Bible schools, such as Caronport at a military base, which Briercrest Bible College took over after WWII. Other schools were based in Pambrun, Saskatchewan, Three Hills in Alberta and Winkler in Manitoba, to name a few (McKinney 1998:43). Often these schools formed informal alliances which enhanced the image of the Bible college movement suggesting a cooperative spirit in the work of the kingdom. President L. E. Maxwell of Prairie Bible College and President H. Hildebrand of Briercrest Bible College exhibited such a cooperative mindset; they worked quite closely together (McKinney 1998:47).

realize, since this movement provided the only post-secondary educational option for thousands of men and women who desired religious training in an evangelical environment (McKinney 1998:47).

#### **4.6 Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality<sup>16</sup>**

This section explores numerous features that have given shape to Canadian Prairie Evangelicalism, recognizing that twenty-first century evangelicalism has been subversively influenced by postmodernity.<sup>17</sup> This thesis does not address the degree to which postmodernity has transformed prairie evangelicalism. The question for consideration is, what does it mean to be a Canadian evangelical, and more importantly, how is Canadian prairie evangelical spirituality defined, and what is its theological and spiritual expression? In chapter two, evangelical theological distinctives were listed by current leading theologians. In this section, the intent is not to repeat what has been noted, but to intentionally comment on the essentials of evangelical theology which have influenced the spirituality of the Canadian west.

Evangelicals accept and adhere to the four ‘distinctive commitments’ agreed upon and these tenets remain the foundational elements upon which they are able to

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<sup>16</sup> The challenge for the present thesis is the absence of published materials addressing evangelical spirituality in the Canadian west.

<sup>17</sup> Postmodernity is a term which describes a current intellectual mood and a cultural expression. Postmodern consciousness has abandoned the Enlightenment presupposition which prescribes to inevitable progress, in which the world is progressively becoming a better place to live. The postmodern generation assesses the present circumstances of the world as humankind is destroying the environment, and the world is becoming a less favourable place to live in. Thus, postmodern consciousness, with its dark pessimism, operates from a view of truth different from what previous generations espoused as truth (Grenz 1996:14). Consequently, postmodernity is the combination of an intellectual mood which has shifted from the Enlightenment assumption, namely that truth is certain and purely rational. (Postmoderns contend that truth includes emotions and the intuition). This perspective of truth combined with cultural expressions relevant to the present circumstances inherent within the drug culture and environmental concerns buffets the rationalism which ruled modernity. Postmoderns believe that truth includes the historical, relational, and personal (Grenz 1996:7). Kourie (1995:171) concurs with this definition. She suggests that the driving forces of modernity, namely science, technology, and industry, no longer dominate this present era. Modernity provided a rationale of reality by means of a scientific methodology, which was disconnected from spiritual and ecological values. Postmodernism, on the other hand, offer a model which is organic, delving into the interconnectedness of contemporary issues and concerns, and the means of remedying the well being of our world. In reality, postmodernity has provided access to mysticism and mystical experience, in which the experiential component of Christian spirituality is the ‘inheritance’ of many, if not all who identify themselves as Christian believers. Because theological constructs have failed, evident through systematic theology not having a happy track record in achieving experiential breakthroughs, postmodernity promises a potential for spirituality which is inclusive, non-authoritarian, while embracing prayer of the past and the use of discursive meditation (Ruthenberg 2005:76). Clearly, the way has been opened for new dimensions in academia within the postmodern world, which has provided the student in Christian spirituality access to the mystical path. Fortunately, this is true for the majority people whether they are clergy or laity.

respectfully assemble and serve each other. The basic doctrinal convictions are, firstly, an affirmation of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ accomplished through his death on the Cross and resurrection. Secondly, they believe the text of Scripture to be the pre-eminent source of God's revelation.<sup>18</sup> Thirdly, the message of Christ facilitates personal transformation which has spiritual and ethical consequences. And lastly, evangelicals are evangelists, people who proclaim the message of Christ to the world (Stackhouse 1997:56). With regard to their influence within Canadian society, Stackhouse suggests that evangelicals have contributed little to Canadian society, often avoiding the political arena. Two conspicuous exceptions occurred when the Christian community crusaded for prohibition and to keep Sabbath observances (for businesses to be closed on the Sabbath Day which is Sunday). Both resistance efforts were unsuccessful (Stackhouse 1997:57).

Currently, evangelical scholarship in western Canada is being reevaluated, with the result that many institutions have raised the standard of academic rigor for Bible college and seminary study. Greater numbers of evangelical theologians and academics contribute to scholarly works. Still, some of these theologians indicate a collective nervousness with regard to the retention of an evangelical identity in a postmodern pluralistic society. Is the church able to retain its theological distinctives within the contemporary setting of mutuality and cultural integration? Erickson (2003:20) recognizes the complexity of twenty-first century evangelicalism, and he harkens these Christians back to the commonality of their history, and to what he discerns as the foundational elements of North American evangelicalism. His list of the fundamental inherent components affirms the position of western Canadian theologians: a *doctrinal*

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<sup>18</sup> Two doctrinal principles which have influenced Canadian prairie theologians are biblical inerrancy and biblical infallibility. The inerrancy of Scripture is the belief that the Bible contains no 'errors' of any kind in the *original texts*, and is completely truthful on all matters, such as history, science and biology (McKim 1996:29). This has spawned a strong undercurrent movement of 'biblical creationism', which rejects the Darwinian evolutionary theory, and states that the world is much younger than suggested by Darwin, and that God created the world in six — twenty-four hour periods — days. At present, a new biblical creation museum has opened in southern Alberta, as a means of providing an alternative to the museum exhibiting dinosaurs in Drumheller, Alberta which promotes the evolutionary view of the creationism. Biblical infallibility argues that the Bible is completely trustworthy as a guide to salvation and the life of faith, and that following the teachings of Scripture will enable a person to accomplish a life of faith (1996:29). Further, some Reformed theologians view Scripture as verbally inspired, infallible, and divinely revealed truth statements which extend to the very words and not merely the ideas of the Bible (Olson 1999:558). Both of these views adopt the literal interpretation of Scripture and would reject an allegorical interpretation; also, the ardent proponents of these views would not be comfortable with a historical/contextual hermeneutic.

component consisting of convictions upon which the believer functions; a *spiritual* component beginning with regeneration and a continuing relationship with God; an *ethical* component comprising a life of purity in accordance with the will of God, and an *evangelistic* element in which the Great Commission of Christ is fulfilled — to bring the good news to the world (2003:20). He is convinced that “... evangelicalism, historically, has involved all four of these elements. If any of these elements is missing, a church may call itself evangelical, but it really is not, at least not in the sense that term has borne itself historically” (Erickson 2003:21). Bloesch (1988:5) strongly advocates a similar attitude of guarding the truth inherent in evangelicalism when he admonishes that the most authentic form of evangelicalism is a catholic evangelicalism and the purest form of catholicism is evangelical catholicism. The aforementioned summations are the essential declarations of dogma which have been incorporated into the church. What was added into evangelicalism in the Canadian west was the practice of protectionism, being guardians of the truth, which is located in the ‘absolute normativeness of Holy Scripture’. The Bible college movement is engaged in an integral role in this process through biblical and ethical education.<sup>19</sup>

A descriptive statement of a regional experience of spirituality is illusive and speculative at best, since a fluidity of praxis within Christian piety is evident within pockets of prairie experience. Still, Canadian prairie identity for the most part, originates with *story*; western history is relatively short, combining the collective story of First Nation’s peoples and immigrant communities. A high percentage of prairie people are second or third generation Canadians, who trace cultural heritage to western and eastern Europe and presently to Asia. Within the last thirty-five years, indicating one’s country of origin (or racial heritage) is no longer required for legal documentation. Ethnic cultural identity remains a high priority for many children and

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<sup>19</sup> In the Canadian prairie west, evangelical scholarship — systematic theology and ministry preparation — initially was cradled in the halls of Protestant evangelical Bible schools. What was offered in the Bible schools was intended to complement the seeming lack of orthodoxy prevalent in the universities. In addition, the evangelical Bible schools tended to ignore non-evangelical institutions, since the other academic schools were secular and liberal. By contrast with the secular university, the evangelical undergraduate institutions offered a preparatory education suited for pastoral and missionary ministry. However, should a student indicate interest in a university education, many parents selected the option to educate their children in these colleges prior to university study as a means of grounding their children in the Christian faith before entering secular education.

grandchildren of immigrant groups, which includes the spiritual heritage that accompanies each particular people.

Christian spirituality is lived in the context of ordinary life: the daily routines that require attention and response — ‘ordinary time’. Being attentive to story trains the mind and the soul to be attuned to grace and the hidden in the midst of the ordinary.<sup>20</sup> On a visit to a coffee shop in a prairie town, it becomes quite evident that prairie people utilize the medium of story as a significant means of communication. Prairie conversations tend to revert to storytelling, since seemingly story connects people, and

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<sup>20</sup> In recent years a small number of theologians have been addressing the role of ‘narrative theology’ as a ‘cure’ for Enlightenment illnesses such as: rationalism, monism, decisionism, objectivism and other ‘isms’ (Hauerwas & Jones 1997:1). As a definition of ‘narrative theology’, McKim (1996:182) writes that it is “... a 20<sup>th</sup>-century theological movement that stresses the power of language and the essential narrative quality of Scripture and of human experience. The Bible provides stories that shape human life and consciousness as they are read and told”. Thus, the role of story in scholarly circles has been increasing in prominence, to the delight of some, the consternation of others, and for some, there is bewilderment. However, Hauerwas & Jones (1997:5) write that “... narrative is neither just an account of genre criticism nor a faddish appeal to the importance of telling stories; rather it is a crucial conceptual category for such matters as understanding issues of epistemology and methods of argument, depicting personal identity, and displaying the content of personal convictions”. Though this thesis is not able to draw from narrative as its primary sources, ‘spirituality’ as an academic discipline draws from narrative theology as the context for Christian experience. Thus, theologians are challenged to stop looking at doctrine and maxims in the abstract, but to incorporate ‘the full story’ of a situation which is where the doctrines and maxims are applied with any degree of intelligence and significance (Goldberg 2001:25). Goldberg (2001:35) writes, “Similarly, as there are many ways of describing narrative, generally speaking, we might say that narrative is the telling of a story whose meaning unfolds through the interplay of characters and actions over time. Therefore, drawing each of these elements into a single statement, we can now declare that the primary claim of a ‘narrative theologian’ is that in order to justifiably elucidate, examine, and transform those deeply held religious beliefs that make a community what it is, one must necessarily show regard for and give heed to those linguistic structures which, through their portrayal of the contingent interaction between persons and events, constitute the source and ground of such beliefs. In short, the fundamental contention is that an adequate theology must attend to narrative. There are, however, a number of ways that contention can be understood. It is not, for instance, the assertion that the systematic theological task must itself be done in story form, as though discursive reasoning and expository writing were now to be abandoned. Rather, it is the claim that a theologian, regardless of the propositional statements he or she may have to make about a community’s convictions, must consciously and continuously strive to keep those statements in intimate contact with the narratives which gave rise to those convictions, within which they gain their sense and meaning, and *from which they have been abstracted* (italics are the authors)”. Eugene Peterson (2005:13), a Christian spirituality theologian concurs, “Story is the most natural way of enlarging and deepening our sense of reality, and then enlisting us as participants in it. Stories open doors to others aspects of life that we didn’t know were there, or had quit noticing out of over-familiarity, or supposed were out of bounds to us”. Elsewhere, Peterson (1997: 186) notes, “Existence has a story shape. The most adequate rendering of the world in words is by storytelling. It is the least specialized and most comprehensive form of language. Everything and anything can be put into the story. And the moment it is in the story it has meaning, participates in plot, is somehow or other significant. The biblical revelation comes to us in the form of story. Nothing less than story is adequate to the largeness and intricacy of the truth of God and creation, or of the human and redemption. One of the verbal effects of sin in either the destruction or obfuscation of story, the fragmentation of story into disconnected anecdotes, the reduction of story to gossip, the dismemberment of story into lists or formulae or rules. ... Every time someone tells a story and tells it well and truly, the gospel is served. Out of the chaos of incident and accident, storymaking words bring light, coherence and connection, meaning and value. It there is a story, then maybe, just maybe, there is (must be!) a Storyteller”. Indeed, if any aspect of prairie experience could find a source of redemption, it is in the telling of stories. Whereas evangelical theology is strongly propositional, prairie stories provide a means of connecting theology with mystery, if the listener is able to recognize the correlation. Unfortunately, for many evangelical Christians, the need for propositional truth overrides the ability to recognize the relationship between story (personal experience) and theology.

fosters the ability to provide a resolution for the inexplicable. The harshness of the land and climate tested the resiliency of the immigrant farmers, and though there were casualties, for the most part, the new inhabitants adapted and settled in for the duration of time. The hardship of the Depression years revealed that within the dust of adversity, beauty, humour and human dignity survives. Thus, prairie people can be defined as survivors, and exhibit a resilient nature. However, prairie evangelicalism had ‘an answer’ for the tribulation of the ‘depression’: this was the judgment of God upon the land. Since the human psyche searches for an explanation for human suffering, the rational element inherent in evangelicalism forged across the prairies providing a rationale for Christian belief within a desperate situation. The harshness and unpredictability of prairie climatic conditions demanded a predictable rational response from Christian dogma. What worked for the prairie evangelical populace was a theology — a concept of God — that was predictable, manageable and rational, since much of the existence on the bald prairie was unpredictable, unmanageable and battered the human psyche.

As has been stated, the four evangelical distinctives call attention to the role of Christ in redemption, the revelatory text of Scripture, personal transformation (mystical and ethical) and practicing evangelism. A study of systematic theology as compiled by evangelical theologians reveals clear demarcations of the basic beliefs adhered to by evangelicals. Indeed, this is commendable. As a student of Christian spirituality, one soon discovers the absence of process and the absence of mystery in evangelical theology, and particularly, the process of inner personal transformation. Conversion, sanctification, the phenomenon of being ‘born again’, are defined; but a missing component is the *process* of inner transformation. What does sanctification look like in the journey of a soul? What is the working of God in the process of soul formation? These questions remain untouched, and these issues have been largely ignored in theological instruction within Canadian prairie evangelicalism.

Where is God when people suffer? What is happening when the devout Christian no longer senses the presence of God, and is experiencing difficult circumstances? A theology that is ‘pat answer’ based, or requires a rationale for

suffering no longer has the capacity to respond to the silence of God or the seeming silence of God in the personal life of a Christian.

Devout prairie evangelicals agree that the existence and presence of God is not in question, and many evangelicals would argue that this principle alone should suffice as a response to the question of suffering. Further, they would argue that God expresses concern and love for the individual Christian, and it behooves the Christian to be attuned to the grace of God in his/her personal life. This view is extrapolated even further to include the practice of spiritual disciplines — prayer, fasting, bible reading — which empower the Christian to maintain a meaningful relationship with God and to sense God's presence in one's life as a sign of God's approval and blessing. Therefore, with this proviso, the silence of God is cause for concern, since this may indicate God's disapproval or God's punishment upon the soul. Thus, without an adequate theology of suffering, the Christian is left to assume failure when God is silent, or even worse, *sin* has separated the soul from the awareness of the presence of God, when in reality that may not be the case.

This response is inadequate for the discerning Christian who recognizes there are moments in the journey of faith that defy rationalism, and where the mystery of God engages the soul. For this phenomenon — the silence or illusory absence of God's presence — evangelical theology does not have an adequate paradigm.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

The context for Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality is Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta – Canada's three western prairie provinces. The religious development of the Canadian West transpired simultaneously with the development of the fur trade. Later, with the immigration of various ethnic people into the area, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches were built. Evangelicalism progressed across the prairies in the form of fundamentalism, although current evangelicals deny the extreme sectarian element in fundamentalism.

The harshness of the climate and the barrenness of the flat land proved to be more difficult for the new settlers than anticipated, which, resulted for a few, in

migration to other areas of the continent. For the hardy people who remained, the prairie climate and landscape would shape a unique form of evangelicalism that provided a response to the environment which they called home. Evangelicalism would establish a seedbed for theological training, and be the source for a plethora of foreign missionary and pastoral candidates. Many of the presidents of prominent Bible colleges in Canada and worldwide, received their theological training at a Bible college located in the Canadian prairies.

The argument has been stated that given the combination of a prairie environment and fundamentalism, the doctrinal position which evolved in this setting was rational, predictable and controllable. The external natural setting demanded this structure in a 'theology'. Such a position provides little room for mystery or the unexplainable, and in some instances, exhibits a reluctance to enter the realm of the silence of God. Therefore, the inner dynamics of spiritual transformation which engage the work of God in the soul have been largely ignored within evangelical spirituality. John of the Cross provides a response to the theological deficit by means of his plausible explanation of spiritual transformation.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**PROLEGOMENON TO**  
**THE ‘DARK NIGHT’ IN JOHN OF THE CROSS**

**5.1 Introduction**

Christian Spirituality recognizes the role of tradition, history and the lived experience in the formation of a Christian. It finds its starting point in experience rather than in abstract ideas or ‘pure rationality’ whose appeal is often exclusive to Scripture, Tradition or Reason (Sheldrake 1987:3). Current published studies in spirituality are indicative of important academic work in the integrative task of the experiential and theological. Historically, this is not a new concept, since “... it is difficult to avoid the evidence of history that concrete spiritual traditions arise from Christian experiences or from the concrete realities of human existence rather than being derived from ideas and doctrines” (Sheldrake 1998:86). Sheldrake does not suggest that experience has priority over theory, for knowledge is born out of assumptions, theories and reflections. Still, Christian spirituality began with events rather than a theory born out of intellectual speculation; thus, it cannot be subsumed into structures determined primarily by doctrinal theology (1998:86).

The underlying debate between Christian spirituality and dogmatic theology is fueled by a basic philosophical issue of epistemology — the ways of knowing. The question arises, which is the most trustworthy means of ‘knowing’ God, is it through experience or reason? With regard to reason, Ruthenberg (2005:141) lists two common presuppositions related to ‘pure rationality’: firstly, it assumes that it is the only epistemology; there is no philosophical or scientifically justifiable ground for any other, and secondly, that it is ‘pure’ and is untainted by the cloudiness of impure ‘*subjectivity*’. He suggests that an integral part of academic spirituality is its engagement with the claims of ‘reason’ and ‘pure rationality’ (2005:140). According to Ruthenberg (2005:141), Bernard Lonergan probed into the experiential dimension of the Christian faith, and questions the prevailing myth concerning reality, objectivity, and human knowledge. Lonergan (1971:238) wrote “... the myth is that knowing is like looking, that objectivity is seeing what is there to be seen and not seeing what is not there, and

that the real is what is out there now to be looked at”. Evangelical theology has been shaped through rational and objective discourse, which has resulted in the current systematization and delineation of dogma. Further, systematic theology has created a false distinction between Christian spirituality and ‘mystical theology’, and other forms of academic theology. This distinction has deterred the potential for dogmatic theology to embrace the experiential core of spirituality. The current rediscovery of ‘experiential epistemology’ in Christian spirituality challenges the tradition of rationality as it encounters the mystical in academic theory.

Evangelical theology, traditionally a theology influenced by rationalism, has neglected to take into account the mystical or experiential. Thus far, the focus of study has revealed an aspect of theology substantially affected by rationalism, which has given shape to the concept of sanctification, for which little is written. A form of Christian spirituality to appeal for an adequate resolution to this mystical theological dilemma is John of the Cross, a Spanish Carmelite.

Sixteenth century Spain witnessed a flowering of mysticism which produced a body of literature written by a large number of Spanish mystics and extended well into the eighteenth century. Two members of this group, John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila described an aesthetic way of spirituality and provided guidance to the friars and nuns in the Carmelite reform. What guided and precipitated the spirit of sixteenth century Carmelite mysticism was the nature of divine Love, a theme which echoed throughout the writings of the Spanish mystics during that era.<sup>1</sup> Their ‘school’ of spirituality proposed a balance between the affective element of the spiritual experience — prayer — and the intellectual. Though they respected the role of learning, they tempered the intellectual pursuit of the knowledge of God with the capacity to be impacted by the love of God. John of the Cross, through his poetry and commentaries, reveals the knowledge and skill of a mystic, theologian and scholar (Peers 1960c:4).

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<sup>1</sup> See Peers (1947:63), who concurs “Los mayores de entre los místicos son aquellos que mayor centaron al amor: Santa Teresa, tal come Crenshaw experimentó cuando excribió su noble *Hymn*, y San Juan de la Cruz, que conoció la llama de Amor Viva y definió la ‘teología mística’, como una contemplación infusa en la que Dios instruye secretamente al alma en la perfección de amor.”. Translated from Spanish into English by Dr. Edward Milton, “The major figures among the mystics are those who largely concentrated on love. Saint Teresa, just as Crenshaw found out when he wrote his noble *Hymn*, and Saint John of the Cross, who experienced the call of Living Love, and defined mystical theology as an infused contemplation in which God secretly instructs the soul in the perfection of love”.

Concerning the integrity of these two mystics, Peers (1960c:4) comments: “ ... those two Saints were great natural artists as well as great mystics and the peers of such one can hardly expect to find twice in a century”. John’s guidance for the way to Mount Carmel is by means of mortification. His poem, *La Noche Oscura – The Dark Night* - reflects a poetical-metaphorical representation of spiritual transformation and the achievement of divine union.

The rich ferment of mystical thought of John of the Cross, generated in the midst his own spiritual journey, was fraught with suffering and bewilderment. In spite of his personal impoverishment, John’s legacy to the body of mystical literature is his apophatic perspective of the unitive way, spiritual formation and inner transformation. It is John’s understanding of spiritual transformation which is the focus of this thesis. However, a balance of perspective is mandatory; John’s reflections of the way of suffering, the way of negation, are intended to explain inner spiritual transformation. Thus, it is important not to paint this saint as a morbid individual: ample evidence exists which suggests John demonstrated an ability to enter into celebration and joyful exuberance with intense passion and joy. On the other hand, John described with incredible insight the process of sanctification which he comprehended through the apophatic way – *via negativa*. His experience taught him that the partnership of mysticism and knowledge requires the usage of language appropriate to the spiritual experience. Nieto (1979:243) comments,

así pues, cuando Juan intenta comunicar la naturaleza y esencia de su conocimiento y experiencia místicos, encuentra que los símbolos y terminología religiosos y estéticos que frecuentemente emplea no las transmiten adecuadamente. Juan expresa los resultados de esta consciencia mística en el lenguaje del misticismo universal, que es negación y pardoja.<sup>2</sup>

Kavanaugh and Rodriguez (1979a:29) concur with Nieto; John’s deepest concern was for those who experienced suffering, and the ‘needs of souls undergoing interior trials’

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<sup>2</sup> Translated from Spanish into English by Dr. Edward Milton, “So thus, when John wishes to communicate the nature and essence of his mystical knowledge and experience, he discovers that the religious and aesthetic symbols and terminology which he frequently uses does not transmit them adequately. John expresses the results of this mystical awareness in the language of universal mysticism, which is negation and paradox”. Dr. Milton is professor emeritus from University of Brandon, having taught courses in religious studies and languages. He is now retired and resides in Calgary, Alberta.

motivated him to write *La Subida del Monte Carmelo* and *La Noche Oscura*. John desired to comfort the Carmelite friars and sisters, with the thought that the afflictions of the ‘dark night’, regardless of how severe the purification, was still the work of God’s gentle hand. God was clearing away the debris of ‘inordinate affection’ and making room in the soul for the ‘divine light’. The methodology to express this spiritual experience could only be manifested in the language of ‘negation’ and ‘paradox’ — the apophatic way.

This chapter examines the theological precepts and mystical phenomenon located in the poetry and commentaries entitled *The Ascent* and *Dark Night* written by John of the Cross. In order to appreciate John’s intellectual and spiritual understanding of the formation and transformational process, it is important to be aware of some of the influences which shaped his thought. The chapter will begin with a rendering (from several sources) of the *Dark Night* by John. Included in this chapter is the ‘apophatic way’ which provided the mystical background to the *Dark Night*.

## **5.2 The Poem: ‘Dark Night’**

### **5.2.1 Prefatory Remarks to ‘Dark Night’**

John observed the influence of ‘appetites’ which can find their way into the human soul: he considered these to be the inordinate attachments to anything other than God. The ‘night’<sup>3</sup> metaphor is a fitting symbol to understand how the inner thoughts, addictions and sins of the soul, ‘inordinate appetites’, may be annihilated or purified (Aaron 2005:12).

During his imprisonment, John composed lyrical poetry to capture the spiritual struggles that occur during the season of inner darkness and aridity. Both the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *Dark Night* treatises<sup>4</sup> were composed after his incarceration when he

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<sup>3</sup> Aaron (2005:14) comments, “Thus the symbol of the Night provides a triumphant resolution of the richest diversities of experience and verbal expression in superior unity. Logically and lyrically, it synthesizes the concepts of *tinieblas* (the existential poverty of the human condition) and *oscuridad* (natural and supernatural renunciation), two terms that are related, but irreducible to unity. It also connotes the response to an incomprehensible light. Additionally, it communicates the growing awareness of one’s own inner darkness and moral poverty. So, Night is both apt semantically, and faithful to an experiential knowledge that is essentially abstruse, but not essentially dark. This constitutes a singular achievement in the history of religion”.

<sup>4</sup> These two titles are often referred to as ‘diptych’, two segments of one composition. *The Ascent* was probably begun in El Calvario, and completed in Baeza and Granada, during the years 1579-85. *The Dark Night* was composed

was requested to provide an explanatory text for his poetry. In *The Ascent*, John focuses upon the fact that those who seek God are able to purify themselves through their own pursuit of God. The *Dark Night* commentary, which is an incomplete work, offers insights into how the soul is passively purified by God (Muto 1994:14). Both of these treatises make up one book, and scholars speculate that John may have intended to combine both of these works under the title of *Dark Night*. These works break off abruptly, and much research continues as to the reason for the incomplete documents. John may have assumed that the missing comments were written in other texts, or some of his later work may have been destroyed or lost following his untimely death (Brenan 1973:139). Or, as has been suggested, John was often interrupted while he worked at his desk and he simply set aside his work to another convenient time.

John's texts were the outcome of his ministry as a spiritual director and guide to the penitents and these two books provided a supplement to his personal instruction. He began to write *The Ascent* in the spring of 1579, and in the following two to three years, he continued his work on the *Dark Night* commentaries.

### 5.2.2 'Dark Night' As Written by John of the Cross

En una noche oscura,<sup>5</sup>  
 con ansias en amores inflamada,  
 ¡oh dichosa ventura!  
 salí sin ser notada,  
 estando ya mi casa sosegada.

A oscuras, y segura,  
 por la secreta escala disfrazada,

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in Granada during the years 1582-84 (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1979a:44). For this thesis, the codex followed in the translation of the *Ascent* is the one made by Fray Juan Evangelista in Granada, and this is preserved in the Silvarian Archives in Burgos. With regard to *Dark Night*, none of the copies in existence has value as a transcript from the original. The best codex from the critical perspective is *Hispalense*, which is located in the National Library of Madrid (1979a:44). The English translation referenced in this thesis was completed by Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, and is located in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*. Ruiz (2000:310) notes the "... work of Ascent-Dark Night embodies an abyss of spiritual and mystical experience, of introspection and the observation of others. He (John) works with materials first-hand and not only with the received tradition and scholarship. He also brought to his work a strong unity and systematization. He made use of his knowledge of systematic theology and spiritual tradition. On the basis of all this, he created an organic synthesis on Christian perfection, treating of union with God, the following of Christ, and the theological virtues".

<sup>5</sup> The Spanish rendition for this poem is taken from the Sanlúcar manuscript. The spellings *oscura*, *oscuro*, and *escuro* all occur in various manuscripts. Lynda Nicholson (Brenan 1973:145) whose translation has been included in the English rendering of this poem, has kept the *oscura* in her Spanish rendition.

¡oh dichosa ventura!  
a oscuras y en celada,  
estando ya mi casa sosegada.

En la noche dichosa,  
en secreto, que nadie me veía  
ni yo miraba cosa,  
sin otra luz y guía  
sino la que en el corazón ardía.

Aquesta me guiaba  
más cierto que la luz del mediodía,  
adonde me esperaba  
quien yo bien me sabía,  
en parte donde nadie parecía.

¡Oh noche, que guiaste,  
oh noche amable más que el alborada:  
oh noche, que juntaste  
amado con amada,  
amada en el Amado transformada!

En mi pecho florido,  
que entero para él solo se guardaba,  
allí quedó dormido  
y yo le regalaba,  
y el ventalle de cedros aire daba.

El aire de la almena,  
cuando yo sus cabellos esparcía,  
con su mano serena  
en mi cuello hería,  
y todos mis sentidos suspendía.

Quedéme y olvidéme,  
el rostro recline sobre el Amado;  
cesó todo, y dejéme,  
dejando mi cuidado  
entre las azucenas olvidado.

### 5.2.3 Contemporary English Translations

#### 5.2.3.1 Translation by Kavanaugh and Rodriguez

1. One dark night,  
 Fired with love's urgent longings  
 -Ah, the sheer grace!-  
 I went out unseen,  
 My house being now all stilled.
  
2. In darkness, and secure,  
 By the secret ladder, disguised,  
 -Ah, the sheer grace!-  
 In darkness and concealment,  
 My house being now all stilled;
  
3. On that glad night,  
 In secret, for no one saw me,  
 Nor did I look at anything,  
 With no other light or guide  
 Than the one that burned in my heart;
  
4. This guided me  
 More surely than the light of noon  
 To where He waited for me  
 -Him I knew so well-  
 In a place where no one else appeared.
  
5. O guiding night!  
 O night more lovely than the dawn!  
 O night that has united  
 The Love with His beloved,  
 Transforming the beloved in her Lover.
  
6. Upon my flowering breast  
 Which I kept wholly for Him alone,  
 There He lay sleeping,  
 And I caressing Him  
 There in a breeze from the fanning cedars.
  
7. When the breeze blew from the turret  
 Parting His hair,  
 He wounded my neck

With His gentle hand,  
Suspending all my senses.

8. I abandoned and forgot myself,  
Laying my face on my Beloved;  
All things ceased; I went out from myself,  
Leaving my cares  
Forgotten among the lilies (1979a:68).

### 5.2.3.2 Translation by Lynda Nicholson

On a night of darkness,  
In love's anxiety of longing kindled,  
O blessed chance!  
I left by none beheld,  
My house in sleep and silence stilled.

In darkness and secure,  
By the secret ladder and disguised,  
O blessed venture!  
In darkness and concealed,  
My house in sleep and silence stilled.

By dark of blessed night,  
In secrecy, for no one saw me  
And I regarded nothing,  
My only light and guide  
The one that in my heart was burning.

This guided, led me on  
More surely than the radiance of noon  
To where there waited one  
Who was to me well known,  
And in a place where no one came in view.

O night, you were the guide!  
O night more desirable than dawn!  
O dark of night you joined  
Belovèd with belov'd one,  
Belov'd one in Belovèd now transformed!

Upon my flowering breast,  
Entirely kept for him and him alone,  
There he stayed and slept  
And I caressed him

In breezes from the fan of cedars blown.

Breezes on the battlements –  
 As I was spreading out his hair,  
 With his unhurried hand  
 He wounded my neck  
 And all my senses left suspended there.

I stayed, myself forgotten,  
 My countenance against my love reclined;  
 All ceased, and self forsaken  
 I left my care behind  
 Among the lilies, unremembered (Brenan 1973:145).

### 5.2.3.3 Contemporary translation by Kathleen Jones

On a dark night  
 When Love burned bright  
 Consuming all my care,  
 While my house slept,  
 Unseen, I crept  
 Along the secret stair.

O blessed chance!  
 No human glance  
 My secret step detected.  
 While my house slept,  
 I silent crept  
 In shadow well protected.

That blessed night  
 Concealed from sight,  
 Unseeing did I go,  
 No light to guide  
 But that inside  
 My eager heart aglow,

A guide as bright  
 As noonday light,  
 Which brought me where he dwelt,  
 Where none but he  
 Could wait for me  
 And make his presence felt.

Sweeter that night  
 Than morning light,

For Love did loving meet,  
I knew him well,  
And we could dwell  
In ecstasy complete.

I gave him there  
My thought, my care,  
So did my spirit flower.  
Love lay at rest  
Upon my breast  
That cedar-scented hour.

When morning air  
Ruffled his hair  
From off the ramparts blowing,  
I felt his hand,  
A quiet command  
Tranquility bestowing.

Then face to face  
With Love's own grace,  
My fears no more parading,  
I left them there  
With all my care  
Among the lilies fading (1993:19).

### 5.3 Phenomenological Perspective of the Dark Night

#### 5.3.1 Prologue to the Phenomenon of Dark Night

The poetic motif ‘*dark night*’ afforded John of the Cross a metaphor<sup>6</sup> to designate the ‘unitive’ way which guides a soul to God. This path directs a person through the initial stages of the spiritual life to perfect union with God, where the soul must leave all things through denial of its appetites and all that is not God (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:47). In the Prologue to the *Ascent*, John writes that his purpose is “... to explain the dark night through which a soul journeys toward that divine light of perfect union with God which is achieved, insofar as possible in this life, through love” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:69).

John concentrates on two aspects of the soul’s journey: the *human search* for God (the active part of the dark night) and the *divine search* for humanity (the passive part of the dark night). Within each aspect of the journey, he presents the duality of activity and passivity. Thus, the commentary follows a fourfold structure: the active night of the senses (*Ascent to Mount Carmel*, Book I), the active night of the spirit, (*Ascent to Mount Carmel*, Book II and III), the passive night of the senses (*Dark Night*,

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<sup>6</sup> Continued academic debate is concerned with the poetic structure of John’s poetry. The argument is made along traditional forms of poetic style (metrical form as opposed to the older Castilian *cancionero* tradition) as well as the distinction between the allegory and symbolism debate. Woods (2000:108) references Baruzi’s work (1924:331-37), *Saint Jean de la Croix et le problème de l’expérience mystique*, in which Woods notes that an allegory is a narrative structure, and a symbol is independent of structural consideration. Woods writes, “... whatever might be added to the concept of the symbol by artistic movements in later centuries, San Juan’s commentaries on his own poems indicate that he saw what he called poetic ‘*figuras y semejanzas*’ (‘poetic images and similes’) as metaphorical, and that includes the symbol of night which Baruzi enthuses about as ‘adhering directly’ to San Juan’s contemplative experience” (2000:108). Aaron (2005:19) critiques the work of Baruzi and comments, “... the figurative world to which the mystic resorts only offers the outward appearance of an adventure and not the adventure itself, which defies all attempts at representation. Thus, true mystical symbolism represents an effort to transpose an experience that has nothing in common with the natural world. This notion of symbolism entails a subtler relationship in which image and inner experience are so intimately fused as to figure the latter without deliberate effort on the mystic’s part. Such symbolism would reveal a reality that no other faculty of knowledge would render accessible. It would not *translate* (authors’ italics) an experience; it would be *a symbolic experience itself* (authors’ italics). Baruzi proceeds to try to verify this thesis, which constitutes the very core of his notion of mystical symbolism”. Aaron then defines the distinction between pseudo-symbol (allegory) and true symbol as proposed by Baruzi: “... the former fails to communicate the depth of the mystical experience while the latter goes beyond merely figuring the experience. It is directly attached to the experience itself. Allegory and symbol alternately involve two distinct worlds. Allegory translates a conceptual construct by means of a world of images. Thus some perceptions are virtually allegorical because they find in the sense world an image of what is already spiritually organized in us. Conversely, symbol tends to avoid any thought in view of a world that is already established. Perceptions that are virtually symbolic suggest a world of images in which we try to capture an inner logic and where we discover the object of our inner quest. Baruzi suggests that San Juan’s symbolism is of the latter sort. His spiritual experience is symbolic; it does not fully correspond to any of the terms that we would discover in a world besides that of his *Noche*” (2005:19). For the purpose of this thesis, John’s ‘dark night’ will be reviewed and critiqued as a metaphor signifying a spiritual experience which represents the journey to union with God.

Book I), and the passive night of the spirit (*Dark Night*, Book II). Both of the two nights of the senses occupy relatively little space, since they address ascetic practices familiar to his audience, who are the nuns and friars in the Carmelite order. However, the active and passive nights of the spirit utilize a great deal more ink, even though in both cases, the commentaries are both incomplete (Healey 1999:78). Because John noticed the disparity between the guided instructions for beginners in prayer as opposed to proficient in the passive night of the spirit, he reasoned that there was little understanding of this passive mode. This lack of understanding prompted John to put more energy and time into the explanation of the passive mode of prayer and transformation, for the sake of those who desire to advance further on the journey to God and for the sake of spiritual directors who guide them. John writes, “For some spiritual directors are likely to be a hindrance and harm rather than a help to these souls that journey on the road. Such directors have neither enlightenment nor experience of these ways”, writes John (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:71).

There are three reasons for calling the path to union with God a ‘dark night’. John describes in the first book of *The Ascent* the ‘negative’ state of privation; and that the dark night of the senses is the mortification of the appetites. John comments, “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” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:76). The deprivation of the appetites in every aspect of life is comparable to the sensation of ‘darkness’ for the soul.

The second reason for naming the path to divine union as darkness involves the theological virtue of faith. Indeed the entire path of darkness is laced with the obscure doctrine of faith; John teaches that faith, being the obscure habit of the soul brings the soul to believe “... divinely revealed truths which transcend every natural light and infinitely exceed human understanding” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:110). “Similarly,” John writes, “... the light of faith in its abundance suppresses and overwhelms that of the intellect. For the intellect, by its own power, comprehends only

natural knowledge”<sup>7</sup> (1979a:110). Though John underscores how the light of faith nullifies the natural light of the intellect, he does not suggest that faith does away with knowledge, but that in the dark night, “... the intellect must be blind and dark, and abide in faith alone, because it is joined with God under the cloud” (cf. Psalm 17:10-12 Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:129). For the soul to be prepared for divine union, the “... intellect must be cleansed and emptied of everything relating to sense, divested and liberated of everything clearly apprehensible, inwardly pacified and silenced, and supported by faith alone, which is the only proximate and proportionate means to union with God” (1979a:129). Kavanaugh and Rodriguez (1979a:51) suggest that John’s wish is to “... turn our attention to the obscurity of faith and impress upon our minds the inability of the intellect to acquire by its own power the knowledge which faith affords of the strictly supernatural mysteries of God, or even to understand them fully once they have been fully revealed”.

Thirdly, not satisfied that he had given an adequate commentary on the poem, John expounds again from *The Dark Night*, with regard to the *passive purifications* of the soul, the passive night of the senses and the passive night of spirit. Thus, the third reason for the term ‘dark night’ is that the communication of God to the soul is as darkness to the soul. The mystic designates communication with the soul with terms such as ‘inflow’, ‘infusion’, ‘illumination’, which suggests that the communication with the soul is without the aid of the senses (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:56). The sensory dryness or emptiness is required for the soul to proceed to communication with God in the passive night of the spirit.

It is important to understand that the ‘passive nights’ are not aspects of darkness associated with evil, an evil influence or evil intent. Darkness in this context is strictly for the purpose of the purification of the soul, since John explains that the “... dark night with its aridities and voids is the means to knowledge of God and self” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:323). In spite of the intensity of the ‘dark night’, this experience contains an inherent luminosity within it. When the soul progresses beyond

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<sup>7</sup> Here John uses the phrase ‘la ciencia natural’ which suggests scientific knowledge, the intellect is capable to comprehend knowledge which is substantiated through a logical, methodological procedure. Faith, according to John, ‘oprime y vence la del entendimiento’ (La Subida 3), the intellect.

vision exercised through the mind or body, it is capable of penetrating divine Darkness. This symbol and experience of a presence (of God) "... is a night in which the Inaccessible presents himself and eludes us at the same time. It is the nocturnal communion of the hidden God with the person who is hidden in God" (Clément 2002:246). Clément suggests that this darkness is not the absence of light, rather it resembles the notion of luminosity, a light emitted in darkness. Darkness is the ultimate meeting, when the soul, "... in a state of ontological poverty, becomes pure movement towards God, who (God) comes down infinitely lower than his own transcendent state, retaining nothing of himself but the poverty of love" (Clément 2002:247).<sup>8</sup>

In an earlier publication, Kavanaugh (1987:33) describes the nature of 'union with God' in terms of John's doctrinal synthesis of spiritual transformation. John was not particularly interested in a theological debate concerning the nature of God, the person of Christ, grace and other teachings of church dogma. John was teaching how these foundational realities of the Christian faith facilitate the transformation of the soul. Rather than treating each point of dogma in its own merit, John prefers to demonstrate the interrelationships of points of doctrine instead of each item in isolation. At stake for John was the issue of the spiritual development of the human person, and the creation of a doctrinal synthesis in which all of the converging realities (doctrine, human soul and the nature of God) would be cohesive. John recognized that the experience of union with God involves two infinitely distant extremes: God and the human person. Kavanaugh (1987:33) notes that "... we have before us the absolute transcendence of God and the relative 'nothingness' of the creature. Divinization, then, must be brought about on another level, by means of realities that are not 'natural', but are built into nature". The realization of 'divinization' or 'deification' has both a negative and a positive aspect: firstly, the negative factor refers to the elimination of all that is not God, and secondly, the positive refers to a substitution or exchange for what is eliminated in the soul. The two 'prime agents' are God and the human person, which result in union with God, or transformation in God. Kavanaugh (1987:33) explains:

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<sup>8</sup> Not unlike the symbolism written by John, the apostle, in the gospel of John 1:5, where "... the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness never can extinguish it" (New Living Translation).

The final result is transformation, divinization, marriage, the human becoming divine insofar as possible in this life. This transformation in God is not merely a likeness of wills. What is divinely brought about by means of contemplation radically changes the human mode of functioning. That which is concrete and particular no longer plays the role of a determining stimulus on the cognitive and affective plane. What is substituted is general and unlimited, that which does not disfigure the absolute Good, whose communication we receive fully only in faith and contemplation.

Cugno (1982:80) concurs with Kavanaugh with respect to John's concept of divinization and its relationship to spiritual transformation. Cugno (1982:80) writes "... this transformation amounts to divinization, *The Spiritual Canticle* leaves no doubt. The soul is transformed in such a way that its life becomes God's life". In *The Spiritual Canticle*, John writes that at the moment of the spiritual marriage, "He (God) transforms her (the bride) in Himself, He makes her entirely His own and empties her of all she possesses other than Him" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:518). In the following paragraph, John adds:

... just as one who is espoused does not love, care or work for any other than her bridegroom, so the soul in this state has no affections of the will, nor knowledge in the intellect, nor care, nor work, nor appetite that is not entirely inclined toward God. She is as it were divine and deified (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:519).

For those who are Protestant and evangelical in theological persuasion, this doctrinal position does not pose any alarm. Erickson (2001:326) would concur with John of the Cross that sanctification (spiritual formation and transformation) is a supernatural work of God; it is a work in progress conducted by the Holy Spirit. Where John of the Cross and Erickson would differ is the extent of the role of the Christian in the soul's transformation. Erickson (2001:327) would not accept the place of passivity with respect to the behaviour of the believer in matters which pertain to salvation and sanctification. While he recognizes that sanctification is exclusively of God, the believer plays a central role in both the removal of sinfulness and development of holiness. In this discussion, the doctrine of 'glorification' oftentimes is referenced. With regard to glorification, (Erickson 2001:334) writes that it is "... multidimensional, it involves both individual and collective eschatology. It involves the perfecting of the

spiritual nature of the individual believer, which takes place at death, when the Christian passes into the presence of the Lord”. Glorification involves the perfecting of all believers, but only at the resurrection in connection with the second coming of Christ.

Do these two theologians in fact, disagree in the doctrine with regard to ‘glorification’ and ‘divinization’, or is there a commonality in their theological positions? Initial appearances could indicate a divergence of their doctrinal views. However, delving deeper into their perspectives reveals a surprising concurrence. Whereas Erickson, an evangelical theologian, posits his perspective as a systematic theologian, John of the Cross analyzes spiritual maturation from the perspective of a mystic *and* systematic theologian — namely, a mystical theologian. Whereas Erickson describes sanctification and glorification in terms of individual theological components, John of the Cross depicts sanctification and glorification in terms of interrelational, unitive and transformational terms. However, both of these men would concur with Erickson’s (2002:335) statement that “... when glorified, we will be everything that God has intended us to be”. Nonetheless, John’s theology allows for the experience of spiritual transformation and divinization to be entirely possible in the earthly sojourn of faith.

One other commonality of theological perception coexistent between John and evangelical theologians has already been documented in chapter four.<sup>9</sup> Anecdotal evidence abounds which reflect John’s high view of Scripture, and how deeply he cherished the sacred Biblical text. His favorite moments occurred when he withdrew to hidden parts of the monastery to retreat with his Bible; much is made of his traveling companions in his journeys: ‘a walking stick and his Bible’.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> In chapter four, John’s reverence for the Scriptures is noted, and in this chapter, his high view of Scripture is reviewed from the perspective of his interpretive model.

<sup>10</sup> On one occasion, when he was with a group of friars in Lisbon to visit a famed stigmatic who lived in the city, apparently, he declined to accompany the group and remained alone with his Bible — that exercise was sufficient for him (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1979a:32). In *God Speaks in the Night*, a short report entitled ‘John of the Cross, Man of the Bible’, José Rodriguez notes that a more natural representation of John would be to picture him with a Bible in his hand than with a cross. From the Scriptures, John drew experience, doctrine and language. He contemplated and analyzed it; he sang and memorized it and in his writings there are approximately one thousand five hundred quotes from the Scriptures. The Scriptures were for John food for the journey, a traveling companion, a formation handbook, an immense source for his writings, and indeed a faithful friend. At his deathbed, the prior

Consequently, in the Prologue to *The Ascent*, John unequivocally declares the source of his understanding of dark night. He writes:

In discussing the dark night, therefore, I shall not rely on experience or science, for these can fail and deceive us. Although I shall not neglect whatever possible use I can make of them, my help in all that, with God's favor, I shall say, will be Sacred Scripture, at least in the most important matters, or those which are difficult to understand. Taking Scripture as our guide we do not err, since the Holy Ghost speaks to us through it. If I should misunderstand or be mistaken on some point, whether I deduce it from Scripture or not, my intention will not be to deviate from the true meaning of Sacred Scripture (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:70).

Current evangelicalism assesses John's methodology of Scripture interpretation with suspicion, since John was influenced by the interpretive model developed by the Church Fathers. After careful examination of this interpretative paradigm, Louth (1983:41) concludes that the concept of 'mystery' referenced in Christian tradition by the Patristic Fathers is commendable. He argues for the posture of engaging Church tradition, not as means to dominate or critique the past, but to recognize that the past has something to say; it speaks into the present. With that posture, there is genuine listening, genuine openness to Christian narrative, which allows tradition and history to challenge and affirm knowledge which are acceptable and applicable for the present. He notes that the effect of the alliance between the Reformation and the Enlightenment with regard to the principle of *sola scriptura* is "... understood as meaning that Scripture is a quarry from which we can extract the truth of God's revelation: that allied to the more recent notion that the tool to use in extracting meaning from literary texts is the method of historical criticism" (Louth 1983:101). The underlying principle of *sola scriptura* directs one away from the traditional devotion to Scripture as the Word of God, which was the practice of the fathers in the Patristic era. Currently, Scripture is understood as an arsenal — not a treasury (1983:101). Louth's (1983:115) argument challenges evangelicalism to reconsider the use of allegory and imagination as a way of interpreting Scripture; for he argues that Scripture is not merely a text for solving problems, but a means to focus upon the mystery that lies at the heart of Scripture. He

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began to read the prayers for the dead, upon which John gestured him to stop and asked for the Scriptures to be read instead. The Scriptures had become for John an inseparable friend — 'precious gems' (Rodriguez 2000:292).

claims that the allegorical method of interpretation applied to the Scriptures by the Church Fathers centered their theology in the mystery of Christ. They viewed the entirety of Scripture through the grid of mystery, which enabled them to synthesize a theological construct out of the images and events within Biblical narrative (Louth 1983:121). Louth reminds the reader that early church doctrine was shaped and formulated by theologians and scholars, through ecumenical church councils, who utilized the allegorical method of Scripture interpretation. For the Patristic theologians, the movement from faith to understanding was not simply an intellectual process or for the development of doctrine. Louth (1983:120) explains,

It is a matter of realizing our participation in the mystery of Christ. This has a dogmatic dimension, certainly, and this is the first to be developed: by the allegoria of the traditional way of interpreting Scripture. But these dogmas are not lifeless propositions: they disclose to us the lineaments of the mystery of Christ; and that mystery draws us to itself, that mystery invites our response. The allegorical sense leads into the moral sense...But that mystery has to be fulfilled in us; we have to enter into that history. What was done in Christ is not past, but present in the One who is risen.

Louth (1983:146) notes that doctrinal theology, a means by which Christian scholars could discuss doctrine and issues of the church, indulged the craving of the human spirit for a clear and concise system of belief and truth.<sup>11</sup> This particular

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<sup>11</sup> Kourie (1995:173) comments on the serious limitation inherent in the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation; it is "... atomistic and disintegrative (in) nature; the lack of understanding of the documents as literary wholes; the concentration on the pre-literary phase which grinds the tradition up into small pieces and prohibits a more holistic meaning of the text in its wider context; the idea of scripture as an object to be dissected, rather than a life-giving revelation; the positivistic framework from within which the method operates; the reductionist and anti-historical view of myth, and the fact that the results of the method are not readily available for the non-specialist". Kourie does not suggest that the historical-critical method should be jettisoned; she is offering a warning that the historical-critical interpretive method's weakness is self-evident. Louth (1983) concurs, affirming one of the areas of weakness in this methodology concerns the preeminence of knowledge and reason in the study of theology which eclipses the recognition of the concept of mystery in theological debate. According to Louth, one of the reasons is that the historical-critical method has influenced the development of academia in the humanities and sciences, and in the area of Christian doctrine, the question arises concerning the validity of objective truth in relation to subjective truth. Louth (1983:27,28) writes: "Science is concerned with objective truth, that is, with truth inhering in the object of knowledge. Such truth is independent of whoever observes it, and it is precisely this that the use of the experimental method seeks to achieve. As we have seen, the experimental method seeks to elide the experimenter by the principle that experiments must be repeatable by other experimenters. Objective truth, in this sense, seeks to be detached from the subjectivity of the observer. In contrast to such objective truth, subjective truth is a truth which cannot be detached from the observer and his situation: it is a truth which is true for me, and which cannot be expressed in such a way that is true for everyone. Put like that, it seems at first sight obvious that objective truth is real truth, and subjective truth falls short of such ultimacy. But further reflection suggests that so to suppose is to over-simplify. When Kierkegaard claimed that all truth lay in subjectivity, he meant that truth which could be expressed objectively (so that it was the same for everyone) was mere information that concerned everyone and no

approach to Christian theology developed as a product of the marriage between Protestantism and the Enlightenment which was an applied ‘logical scientific’ methodology. As an antidote to the potential for intellectual spiritual elitism, Louth suggests that current Christian theology could benefit from keeping an open mind to the tradition which beheld the mystery of God revealed in Christ, which for the Church Fathers was contained in the Scriptures. What creates discomfort for the evangelical mind is the seeming lack of acceptable methodology associated with the allegorical approach, which is corrected by means of the critical historical and exegetical analysis when applied to hermeneutics. Louth (1983:112) notes:

... and what we need here is no method — there is none — but rather erudition, learning, *experience*: the experience of living close to the heart of tradition, of being able to hear His stillness ... a familiarity with the response that Scripture has inspired in the Church throughout its life.

Theologically, John lived in closer proximity to the Church Fathers, and as a mystical theologian, he was clearly rooted in the mystical tradition of this era: his academic educational and theological training attest to this reality. Thus, it follows that the role of Scripture in the formation of John’s theology, and his ability to address the mystery of faith in the human person is influenced by the interpretive methodology utilized by the early church tradition. This requires two responses from evangelical Christians: firstly, that evangelicals recognize the historical discomfort with mystery inherent in evangelical theology and tradition, to which John provides a biblical, logical and plausible alternative. Secondly, the doctrinal-literary work researched for this thesis was written during the last fourteen years of John’s life, after he had attained an intellectual and spiritual maturity. Thus, evangelical Christians will discover in John of the Cross a person with academic and spiritual integrity, both as a mystic and a theologian. At that level, John’s credibility as an academic and his experience in the spiritual life invite the

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one. Real truth, truth that a man would lay down his life for, was essentially subjective: a truth passionately apprehended by the subject. To say, then, that truth is subjective is to say that its significance lies in the subject’s engagement with it; it does not mean that it is not objective in any sense: indeed if it were objective in no sense, if it were simply a collection of subjective impressions, there would be no engagement, and consequently no question of truth at all...What is important is the engagement with reality, not simply the discerning of reality: and if it is reality, then it has a certain objectivity, it cannot be simply a reflection of my subjective apprehensions”. This recognition and comprehension of the credibility of ‘subjective truth’ is essential in the reading of John of the Cross.

evangelical Christian to consider the journey of spiritual transformation without reservation.

As a theologian, John's perspective differs only in his emphasis of focus. Whereas evangelical theology begins with the human capability of knowledge of God, John begins with the unknowability of God in relationship with the human person. One perspective guides its adherents toward a focused emphasis located in systematic theology and the other in mystical theology. Both perspectives accept the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of sin, the doctrine of atonement through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In addition, systematic and mystical theologians reference their deductions with the same text, the Scriptures. Thus, John's knowledge of Scripture and biblical theology classifies him both as an academic and theologian.

The argument could be made that John was connected to Christian tradition at a level which evangelicalism is uncomfortable with, since Catholicism ranks tradition and the Scripture with equal authority. While this may be the case, evangelical theologians and evangelical theological institutions are beginning to integrate Christian tradition into their teaching curriculums and worship practices, perhaps an indication of the reinstatement of spiritual practices and values relinquished at the Protestant Reformation.

Evangelicals tend to perceive Catholic religious clergy as isolated and out of touch with the 'real world', and John would be included in the 'out of touch' category. In reality, John would be highly suspicious of the individualism characteristic in Protestant evangelicalism. His ministry occurred in the context of community, in which he was required to live amicably with his friars. He entered into the daily life of the community, be it in the kitchen or as grounds keeper, or in the spiritual practice of the daily office. He was committed to social justice, to the care of his friars, to the spiritual welfare of sisters and friars, and to the Church – the Catholic Church. The pursuit of God was not merely for the sake of union with God, but to carry the pure love of God to the world outside one's 'cell'. John's spiritual 'laboratory' was not purely an analytical probe into his private experience of formation, rather, he observed the faith journey of

those who were members of a community of Christians, which consisted of clergy and laity.

### 5.3.2 Mysticism and Mystical Experience of the Soul

Mysticism by definition is the apprehension of the divine (or the numinous) in an unmediated experience of awareness, thus, a natural extrapolation is that Christian mysticism is the experience of union with God through love which is beyond the human capability to attain on one's own merit or skill. This experience brings a sense of direct knowledge or insight along with a relationship with God centered in Jesus Christ (McKim 1996:181). Kourie (1993:111) adds that "... mysticism can be defined as consciousness of union with the Divine, or Ground of Being, or Ultimate Reality, depending on the type of mysticism under investigation and whether its predilections are theistic or monistic".<sup>12</sup> She distinguishes between the mystical experience and the *numinous*, the latter, an experience of a dynamic external presence, whereby the mystical experience is characterized by an immediate and inner contact with the transcendent, and for the Christian believer, with the Spirit of God (Kourie 1993:110). Teresa of Avila describes this phenomenon from her own personal experience:

When picturing Christ in the way I have mentioned, and sometimes even when reading, I used unexpectedly to experience a consciousness of the presence of God, of such a kind that I could not possibly doubt that He was within me or that I was wholly engulfed in Him. This was in no sense a vision: I believe it is called mystical theology. The soul is suspended in such a way that it seems completely outside itself. The will loves; the memory, I think is almost lost, does not reason — I mean that it does not work, but is amazed at the extent of all it can understand (Peers 1960a:119).

English Protestants have been much more appreciative of the value of Christian mysticism than continental Protestants; two of whom are William Ralph Inge (1860-1954), Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, and Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941), whose works on mysticism in English have been the most widely read (McGinn 1991:273).

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<sup>12</sup> Kourie (1993:111) comments further that "... any examination of mysticism has to take into account the fact that the mystic's total spiritual, social, historical, linguistic and traditional matrix helps both to shape and to constitute at least partially the mystical experience".

Inge (1956:5) defines religious mysticism as "... the attempt to realise the presence of the living God in the soul and in nature, or, more generally, as the attempt to realise, in thought and feeling, the immanence of the temporal in the eternal, and of the eternal in the temporal" (Inge 1956:5). McGinn (1991:273) assesses Inge's book, *Christian Mysticism*, to be guided by triple classification: firstly, speculative mysticism (largely Platonic and based on the principle of supernaturalism); secondly, practical and devotional mysticism, which seeks to find God in the world; and thirdly, nature mysticism, which sees God in all things. Evelyn Underhill published her first book entitled *Mysticism* in 1911 and her text continues to be reprinted. Underhill ([1915]/1942:23) defines mysticism as "... the art of union with reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union in greater or less degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment". In her much longer text on the study of mysticism, she summed up mysticism as a highly specialized form of search for reality, a search for the heightened and completed life which is sparked by the transcendental faculty. The encounter a person has with One who is Love allows God to become:

... the dominant factor in his (sic) life; subduing to its (Love) service, and enhancing by its (the soul) saving contact with reality, those vital powers of love which we attribute to the heart, rather than those of mere reason and perception, which we attribute to the head (Underhill [1911]/1955:94).

Mysticism is not an opinion, it is not a philosophy, it has nothing in common with the pursuit of occult knowledge and it is not to be identified with any kind of religious oddity (Underhill [1911]/1955:81).<sup>13</sup> Clearly, these two Anglican authors insist that true mysticism affirmed the spiritual element of God in the life of the soul, and furthermore, the mystical life discovers its true expression in love of neighbor (McGinn 1991:275).

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<sup>13</sup> Both Inge and Underhill were fully aware of the apprehension and animosity toward Christian mysticism from their Protestant counterparts. Inge (1956:6) notes that mysticism rests on the following proposition or articles of faith: firstly, the human person has a faculty of the soul that can perceive and exercise spiritual discernment of truth; secondly, the potential exists for a relationship to occur within the soul, since it is God who initiates the affiliation and has created the human soul with the ability to engage such a friendship; thirdly, the potential exists to become the 'likeness' of God, though the extent of the similarity differs from each tradition and dogma; and fourthly, the path to union with God requires the relinquishing of the attachments that are not of God. Underhill (1911/1955:82-92) lists the characteristics of true mysticism; firstly, mysticism is practical, not theoretical; secondly, mysticism is an entirely spiritual activity initiated by God; thirdly, the business and method of mysticism is love; fourthly, mysticism entails a definite psychological experience, involving the whole inner self; and lastly, true mysticism is never self-seeking.

Evangelical reticence toward mysticism deserves recognition,<sup>14</sup> particularly Protestant suspicion of John's *via negativa*. With regard to the apophatic or negative theological leaning of John of the Cross, this topic is addressed later in this chapter, along with an explanation of apophatic spirituality. The tradition of apophaticism is reviewed with the recognition that the apophatic experience is neither impersonal nor abstract but a *personal encounter* with God. Much has been written which has described the spirituality and theology of John of the Cross. However, since this section addresses Christian mysticism from the perspective of an evangelical critique of Sanjuanist mysticism, it is beneficial to examine the points of reference which may both align John with evangelical experience and a few which may be cause for concern in evangelical theology.

With regard to the theme of negation in the mystical writing of John of the Cross, Daniel Chowning, a Carmelite friar, provides an apologetic in defense of *via negativa*. Chowning (1992:32) writes that the Sanjuanist terms of negation have nothing to do with neoplatonic dualism which denies creation. John of the Cross was incarnational, and his writing exalts the beauty and dignity of creation. Numerous accounts of John's story include the 'escapes' into the hillside, where he took only his Bible as his companion, and spent hours in communion with the Creator of the natural world. Secondly, Chowning (1992:33) notes that the spirituality of *via negativa* promoted by John did not denigrate the beauty and dignity of the human person. All humanity is created in the image and likeness of God, and possesses the capacity to be the spouse of Christ in union with God through love. The issue is not the renunciation of material possessions or extreme ascetical practices. The obstructions to intimacy with God are contained within the human heart when it craves, desires and attempts to selfishly possess objects, people and situations. At the heart of John's apophatic

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<sup>14</sup> It is here that Kourie (1993:110) aptly defines the basis of animosity toward mysticism, which is certainly the case for evangelical theologians, "... a presupposition of the present inquiry is a correct understanding of mysticism — a term fraught with difficulties, given the equivocal meanings attributed to the word both in ordinary speech and scholarly analysis. The recondite nature of mysticism has unfortunately been obfuscated by the contemporary tendency to equate it with abnormal phenomena, pathological states, magic, psychical experiences of bizarre nature and religious sentimentality. Such confusion and lack of understanding causes untold harm and leads to prejudice which precludes proper investigation and scientific inquiry. In English there is only one word for mysticism, which accounts for its equivocal character, whereas German, for example, is able to distinguish true from false mysticism by its use of *die Mystik* for the former, and *der Mystizismus* for the latter".

spirituality is *love*; the soul can only begin the journey of love toward union with God when it has first experienced God's love within the soul. This initiative of God sparks the transformation process that frees the soul to love God, creation, oneself, and all of life as God intended for the soul (Chowning 1992:34). In the Prologue, John writes that the dark night sparks the journey to which "... el alma para llegar a la divina luz de la union perfecta del amor de Dios" (La Subida 1).<sup>15</sup> The soul arrives and strives toward divine light which is located in the perfect love of God.

Hibbert (1991:144) lists several theological themes in John's *Noche Oscura*. He suggests that John views the process of spiritual transformation as one who leaves the comforts of a private residence and walks outside into the courtyard to where the Beloved awaits, only to return to the house after the encounter with the Beloved. Speaking metaphorically, John implies that when the soul has returned home, it will have been transformed. This is a poetic representation of the journey of the soul and does not indicate an actual leave-taking with the result that it never returns. In contrast to Augustine's classic statement of the soul's ascent to God which has been accepted within Christian tradition, there is no hint here of an ascent with a permanent departing from the initial beginning place to end at a different finishing point. John depicts himself as outside of his house, and "... the start and the finish (of the journey) are bound together in the unity of the complex symbolism" (Hibbert 1991:145). The inference for Hibbert is that the reader is drawn into a participatory mode through the interplay of symbolism, which bypasses any attempt to translate this experience in cerebral terms. He argues that the image of 'ascent' — ladder of ascent — often depicted in the spiritual journey precludes the need for an analysis of the 'steps to perfection', which is not appropriate in the interpretation of *Noche Oscura* (1991:145). The mystical nature of John's poetry may be a stumbling block for the analytical nature of evangelicalism, because poets utilize the medium of imagination and metaphor to relay their message. Most certainly, there is no theological 'file folder' for poetic systematic theology, and the rigorous academic pedagogical format for teaching

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<sup>15</sup> "... a soul journeys toward that divine light of perfect union with God which is achieved, insofar as possible in this life, through love" (translated from Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:69).

theology in evangelical institutions leaves very little room for imagination or mystical speculation.

With regard to *ascesis*, Aaron (2005:131) compares the relationship between mysticism and asceticism in current Carmelite mystical thought. Asceticism and mysticism are not mutually independent: asceticism can exist without mysticism, but true mysticism cannot exist without asceticism. Aaron says that firstly, it (mysticism) is based on asceticism, which is the life of grace known experientially in the soul, and secondly, mysticism can never abandon ascetic exercises. For "... mystical phenomena are not habitual; they are manifest exclusively in the context of prayer" (2005:131). She notes that everyone is called to the ascetic way, but the mystical way, "... is not available to all because it implies an element outside the ordinary development of grace" (2005:131). Within the Carmelite tradition, the mystical way requires a special call from God; one cannot embark on the mystical way with any self-induced effort (Aaron 2005:132). This is one area where the Carmelites oppose the view of their fellow mendicants, the Dominicans. She sums up, "... for the Dominicans, asceticism and mysticism are two successive stages of the way to perfection, with mysticism complementing asceticism. Mysticism is the effect of the gifts of the Holy Spirit" (2005:132). The Dominicans posit that mysticism is the normative for all believers and every Christian is able to receive mystical experiences as they respond faithfully to the grace of God in their daily life (2005:132). On this doctrinal position, evangelicals would concur with the Dominicans, for the gift of God's grace revealed in the Word of God through the person of Christ, is available to everyone who allows the fullness of God to penetrate their souls. A careful study of John's work will uncover implied exclusivity for attainment of union with God. Two things must be noted at this juncture: firstly, John is writing for a select group of devout followers of God, the nuns and friars (and perhaps a few lay people) who were committed to the Carmelite way. Secondly, he described the spiritual journey to a sector of the Christian community for the purpose of a clearer comprehension of the purgative process in the 'dark night'. There is no indication that John wrote for a larger audience; this was strictly for his Carmelite order. The seeming exclusivity would be unacceptable to the evangelical mind. However,

upon careful scrutiny, evangelicalism has not been conspicuous as a movement known for its theological and religious tolerance.

The classical demarcations of the mystical life into three stages of spiritual development are clearly indicated in John's poetry and thought. Kourie (1993:120-125) notes the three cyclical stages as *via negativa*, in which purification and purging of inner detachments occurs, *via illuminativa*, in which infused contemplation and spiritual sensations occur (the dark night allows for inner cleansing and releasing), and *via unitiva*, the place of the spiritual marriage or state of transforming union. Kourie (1993:122) posits the notion that a comparative analysis of these stages with those reflected in other religious and spiritual traditions might be beneficial. Currently, within evangelicalism, the process of sanctification as defined by classical spirituality has not received a great deal of attention: since 'salvation' – coming to know Christ personally – is paramount. For evangelicals, the primary reference to the inner journey of 'transformation' is located in Galatians 2:20, "My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (New Living Translation). However, the *process* through which the 'old self' is 'crucified' and reshaped remains for the most part undefined within evangelical theology.

The mystical experience, by its very nature is incapable of a purely rational or empirical verification. Nieto (1979:251) adds that "solo éste conoce y entiende la naturaleza de tal experiencia...pero son los únicos cualificados para acerca de la validez de sus experiencias".<sup>16</sup> Thus, to become a judge of mystical experience is to be the recipient of one. Nieto (1979:252) believes that when a person has received a mystical experience, their interpretation will transcend 'mental forms' that is, 'desafía todo conocimiento'. John's poem *Concerning an Ecstasy Experienced in High Contemplation*, (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1979a:718) describes this sensation:

Entréme donde no supe,	I entered into unknowing,
Y quedéme no sabiendo,	And there I remained unknowing,
Toda ciencia trascendiendo.	Transcending all knowledge.
1. Yo no supe dónde entraba,	1. I entered into unknowing

<sup>16</sup> "Only the mystics who experience the mystical phenomenon are capable to validate their own spiritual experiences" – a loose translation from Spanish into English.

<p>Pero, cuando allí me vi,  Sin saber dónde me estaba,  Grandes cosas entendí;  No diré lo que sentí,  Que me quedé no sabiendo,  Toda ciencia trascendiendo.  De paz y de piedad  Era la ciencia perfecta,  En profunda soledad,  Entendida (vía recta);  Era cosa tan secreta,  Que me quedé balbuciendo,  Toda ciencia trascendiendo.</p>	<p>Yet when I saw myself there  Without knowing where I was  I understood great things;  I shall not say what I felt  For I remained in unknowing  Transcending all knowledge.  That perfect knowledge  Was of peace and holiness  Held at no remove  In profound solitude;  It was something so secret  That I was left stammering,  Transcending all knowledge.</p>
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John's poetry and doctrinal propositions as recorded in both his poems and commentaries present an opportunity for the reconciliation of a long-standing schism between theology and spirituality in the midst of which evangelicalism stands. His doctrinal synthesis offers a healing for the divorce between mysticism and theology because he models for Christendom the marriage of intellectualism and mystical knowledge.

Whereas the 'great divorce' of the twelfth century terminated the era of the complete theologian, with systematic theology and mystical theology parting ways, the postmodern era is ushering in a theological 'remarriage'. There are signs of reintegration surfacing within the Christian community, of reengaging reciprocal dialogue, and celebrating the commonalities within Christendom rather than emphasizing the differences. At present, there exists significant communication within Christian denominations, namely the Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant (and Celtic) sectors. This is creating an authentic appreciation for the beauty and validity of Christian faith practiced and experienced within the Church. For the evangelical community, the challenge will be to engage the dialogue and move beyond the theological prejudices and biases inherent in evangelicalism. It is highly possible in the context of theological collegiality and interchange that the return of the 'complete theologian' could be on the horizon in the discipline of academic theology. Perhaps this is the reason postmodern students are attracted to the theologians from the past who exhibited a broad perspective in theological understanding and knowledge, where

biblical, dogmatic, mystical and historical perspectives in theology held equal status. Clearly, this challenges the postmodern evangelical to review the constructive and affirmative characteristics of Pre-Protestant spirituality, which have enormous potential to speak to CPES.

### 5.3.3 The Way of Recollection

Two distinct practices of mystical prayer were prominent during the Spanish Golden Era. A common form of prayer within many of the Franciscan houses was the ‘way of recollection’, in which specific emphasis was placed upon self knowledge, the imitation of Christ, union with God, and the transformation of the soul through God’s love (Healey 1999:257). With the assistance of particular spiritual disciplines, the individual reassembles within oneself the scattered aspects of their personal world into a more conscious awareness at the core that anchors the person at the deepest level (Downey 1993:806). This way of recollection (*recogimiento*), according to Francisco de Osuna, required both mental concentration and active direction of the mind.<sup>17</sup> De Osuna writes that one entry point into the way of recollection is through the heart (complete recollection) and the second is to rise above the heart to God alone (Giles & Kavanaugh 1981:9). In this latter form of recollection, the soul comes to know God not by understanding, but by means of love: it is a process of emptying and ‘thinking about nothing’, ‘*no pensar nada*’ (Healey 1999:257). It is in this situation that love enters where the intellect cannot; in this quest for God, the soul is to travel the way of negation.

Along with the ‘way of recollection’ a more radical practice developed, namely the ‘way of abandonment’ (*dejamiento*). The proponents of the ‘way of abandonment’ built their spirituality on the concept of total abandonment to the love of God which emphasized interior illumination. This movement, which accentuated quietude and

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<sup>17</sup> One of the forerunners to the Golden Age of Mysticism in Spain was a Franciscan by the name of Francisco de Osuna (1492-1542). He influenced many of the writers serving with the Catholic orders in Spain, particularly Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. De Osuna is noted for promoting the way of recollection, being careful not to place himself in harm’s way of the Inquisition. Though he does not openly discourage the way of abandonment, he does encourage the importance of discerning the difference between false illumination and true mysticism (Giles & Kavanaugh 1981:9). The proponents of the way of abandonment became known eventually as false mystics, or *Illuminists*, and were later grouped with the *Alumbrados*.

passivity, directed its followers to reject the sacramental life and observances of the Church. Their experience of ‘total abandonment’ to God exempted them from the necessity of ecclesial commitment. The proponents of the movement came under the scrutiny of the Inquisition, and eventually were condemned for their practice. The backlash toward this religious group resulted in an anti-mystical climate which kept the practice of mystical prayer in check (1999:257). For their role in the teaching and promotion of mystical prayer, John of the Cross and his cohort, Teresa of Avila came under suspicion and scrutiny.

Keating (1992:17), a Cistercian monk, has renamed ‘contemplative prayer’ (although he still uses the term) to a phrase commonly used within twenty-first century spirituality: ‘centering prayer’. In his definition, this form of prayer occurs when a person reflects upon Scripture and allows the Spirit to speak to the inner sanctum of the soul. Thus, the soul is able to dismantle the inner programs which have been installed from past experiences.<sup>18</sup> As the psyche is able to listen at more refined levels of attentiveness, the Spirit begins to address the conscience at its deepest source, the true self (Keating 1992:17). In contemplative prayer, the Spirit places the soul where it is at rest and disinclined to resist the process of healing within the soul. “By his secret anointings the Spirit heals the wounds of our fragile human nature at a level beyond our psychological perception ... interior silence is the perfect seed bed for divine love to take root” (Keating 1992:45). Keating (1992:51) continues:

Contemplative prayer is an incredibly simple kind of attention. It is more intention than attention. As the Spirit gradually takes more and more charge of your prayer, you may move into pure consciousness, which is an intuition into your true Self. There is no way of knowing God directly in this life except by means of pure faith, which is darkness to all the faculties. This darkness is to be understood not as a blanking out of the faculties, but as a transcendence of their activity. Pure faith, according to John of the Cross, is the proximate means of union with God.

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<sup>18</sup> Contemplative prayer or ‘centering prayer’, or the ‘infused, obscure, loving knowledge of God beyond words and concepts prayer’ is generally accepted as an apophatic experience which is ‘dark and negative’. Larkin (1984) suggests that “... contemplation can also be experienced as kataphatic, that is, as light, positive and concrete. In this case God might be experienced in as well as beyond the image” (Larkin 1984:192). He is, of course, referring to Teresa of Avila and her experience of centering prayer.

It is well documented that John of the Cross encouraged the practice of ‘contemplative prayer’ as the key to free the heart from enslavement to inordinate attachments. Welch (1996:70) notes that for this reason, John has a reputation in the history of spirituality for the promotion of a rigorous asceticism in order to accomplish inner freedom. In reality, the central core of his teaching is the acknowledgement that only God’s love can break through to the heart which is entrapped. Contemplation is simply opening up to the purifying and transformative work of divine love. Only when a much stronger and deeper love is enkindled in the heart is it able to release its lesser loves.

### 5.3.4 Nature of the Soul

Clearly, John’s perception of the soul is significant, since the journey proposed is the union of the soul with God.<sup>19</sup> John concurred with Plato and later Descartes, who viewed the soul as an immaterial entity which has a being in its own right (Kavanaugh 1999:84). When John spoke of the soul, he leaned toward the tradition of Aquinas, who rejected the idea of the body being independent of the soul, so that the human is not two beings but one, and not a soul using a body (1999:84).<sup>20</sup> The soul gleans knowledge by means of the senses, experiences, passions, and thoughts that influence the imaginative process. Even though John did not entirely follow the way of the ancient philosophers, in his explanation of interrelation of body and soul, he revealed the influence of these classical writers in his work:

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<sup>19</sup> With regard to the extent of John’s perception of the soul, Thompson (1999:80) notes “St John’s prime concern is the inner life of an individual. When he uses the word *alma*, ‘soul’, he means the whole inner life of a person, not that part which according to many religions survives physical death. It therefore includes both the conscious and unconscious modes of operation of the self and a range of feelings and desires, many of them construed in negative terms, which would not generally now be associated with the concept of the ‘soul’”.

<sup>20</sup> Kavanaugh (1999:84) explains, “When John speaks of the soul, he is speaking generally in broad fashion of a human subject capable of God, the subject who suffers the dark night and reaches divine union. In speaking of the soul in relation to the body, John does not always take pains to wear the philosopher’s hat. When he does, it is clear that for him the soul is not a distinct entity related to the body as a part to the whole. Although a theory of the soul that views it as having a being independent of the body would seem to harmonize more readily with his belief in the human soul’s special creation, John follows the tradition of St. Thomas Aquinas, who rejects such a theory. The human being is not two beings but one; nor a soul using a body but a single entity of composite nature. The doctrine of body and soul that hold them to be related as matter and form preserves the unity of the human being and, in the opinion of Aquinas, fits the way in which we learn through our senses, experiences, passions, and, in thinking, depend on imagination. Thus, for the present it should be enough to say that for John the soul and body form a ‘unity of one *suppositum*’. A *suppositum* is a being that has existence in itself and underlies a rational and irrational nature. As understood in John’s time, a person is a *suppositum* of a rational nature, a distinct identity. In this sense a person is nobody else”.

The cause of this darkness is attributable to the fact that — as the scholastic philosophers say — the soul is like a *tabula rasa* (a clean slate) when God infuses it into the body, so that it would be ignorant without the knowledge it receives through its sense, because no knowledge is communicated to it from any other source. Accordingly, the presence in the body resembles the presence of a prisoner in a dark dungeon, who knows no more than what he manages to behold through the windows of his prison and has nowhere else to turn if he sees nothing through them. For the soul, naturally speaking, possesses no means other than the senses (the windows of the prison) of perceiving what is communicated to it (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:76).

John believed that the activities of the soul are fueled by two sources: the sensory and the spiritual. The exterior sensory faculties of sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste are concerned with sensory and corporal objects. With regard to channels of knowledge, John's Aristotelian-Thomist training revealed itself in his view that all knowledge from the outside is mediated through the five senses (1979a:76). Once the sensory knowledge is filtered and appropriated in the soul, it becomes part of the inner sense faculties, which John says engage 'phantasy' and the imagination. The spiritual part of the soul is concerned with the spiritual or incorporeal objects, and within this realm John identified three faculties: the intellect, the memory and the will (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:119). John accepted the role of the senses and the ability of the human person to perceive through their sensory experiences. However, humans possess the ability to comprehend and discern immaterial and spiritual realities. The distinctions between sense and spirit should not be interpreted negatively such as to signify the denial of the body as expressed in the exaltation of excessive ascetic practices. Rather, human sensory disorders are a result of a disorder of the will, which surface from wrong choices and actions. For that reason, both the senses and the spirit require purification: "The first night of purgation ... concerns the sensory part of the soul. The second night ... concerns the spiritual part" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:73). Seemingly, John "... does not regard these as entities or locations, but rather modalities of the inner life which are easy to distinguish at their extremes and use for the sake of analysis" (Thompson 1999: 80).

With regard to the *intellect*, John recognized this faculty to contain the power of human thinking and knowing: knowledge gleaned by means of the senses and life experiences. In the context of the soul, mystical knowledge is received without the senses or usage of particular ideas, transcending all knowledge, and can only be received by the passive intellect (Kavanaugh 1999:132). Thus, mystical knowledge requires a relationship between the knower and the known, similar to the relationship between the Beloved and the lover. With regard to the *memory*, John wrote of this as a spiritual faculty, although his distinction between the faculty of memory and intellect is not always clear. John was influenced by the theology of Aquinas and the problem is that Aquinas accounts for only two spiritual faculties: the intellect and will (Kavanaugh 1987:35), whereas John attached a third: the memory. Kavanaugh (1999:137) writes:

For him (John) it (memory) is first and foremost a faculty of recalling and remembering, voluntary or involuntary. If memory is the activity of recalling, evoking, and welcoming apprehensions, it is also the actual capacity to keep or retain these images, forms, and experiences. The interior senses are the storehouses for all material coming through the senses.

Thus, in the passive night of the spirit, memory will also be required to experience the process of purification.

John viewed the role of the *will* as the inclination toward the good apprehended by the intellect. It has a responsibility to connect thought and action. Action may follow upon thinking, but not without a desire to translate the thought into deed (Kavanaugh 1999:136). Thus, for John the will is the power of the spirit by which one wishes and chooses; on this point, Kavanaugh (1999:137) quotes John:

The strength of the soul comprises the faculties, passions, and appetites. All this strength is ruled by the will. When the will directs these faculties, passions and appetites toward God, turning away from all that is not God, the soul preserves its strength for God, and comes to him with all its might.

It is generally accepted when John speaks of the soul, he addresses in broad fashion the human capability of an encounter with the Creator God, during which the Christian believer will suffer the phenomenon of the dark night and eventually reach divine union (Kavanaugh 1999:84). The soul differs from the body, and from the sensory part of the

human person, for when the soul has been "... wounded by a strong divine love, and it has a certain feeling and foretaste of God", it is capable of experiencing transformation (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:352). As with his counterpart, Teresa of Avila, John valued the usage of metaphor in describing the soul; he compared the soul to a log transformed through a consuming fire, or he likened the soul to a window which is being cleansed in the process of the night (May 2004:188). In the unitive moment, the soul reaches the consummation of the love of God where there is only pure and perfect love of God. According to John of the Cross, the soul has been predestined by God for this unitive encounter from the day of eternity (Kavanaugh 1987:278).

### **5.3.5 Meditation and Contemplation**

When the soul journeys through the active night into the passive dark night and to union with God, the pattern of communication in prayer shifts from meditation to contemplation. This transition of prayer generally occurs early in the *Ascent* as the soul experiences the active night of the senses. Meditation is communication with God through images, the senses, and the use of imagination, which John explained as the "imaginative way or sensory meditation" and "discursive meditation" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:142). John writes:

Meditation is the work of these two faculties, (the imagination and phantasy) since it is a discursive act built upon forms, figures, and images, imagined and fashioned by these senses. For example: the imagining of Christ crucified, or at the column, or in some other scene; or of God seated upon a throne with resplendent majesty; or the imagining and considering of glory as a beautiful light, etc.; or the picturing of any other human or divine object imaginable. The soul will have to empty itself of these images and leave this sense in darkness if it is to reach divine union. For these images just like the corporal objects of the exterior senses, cannot be an adequate, proximate mean to God (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:137).

Thus, the criterion for advancement to union with God includes the necessity to relinquish the practice of meditation and move into contemplation. John explained the rationale for this adjustment (1979a:137):

... because the person has been granted all the spiritual good obtainable through discursive meditation on the things of God and that he (the

Christian) has now acquired the substantial and habitual spirit of meditation. It should be known that the purpose of discursive meditation on divine subjects is the acquisition of *some* knowledge and love of God (italics mine).

The problem with the practices of meditation is that as the Christian becomes very comfortable with the predictability of the spiritual exercise through the intellect and the senses, a form of attachment occurs. When the gratifications of approaching God through images, forms, and use of imagery are withdrawn, the soul finds little satisfaction, or may become restless and weary (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:138). However, the relinquishing of these ‘inordinate attachments’ to prayer is necessary. John explained (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:623):

A person should not bear attachment to anything, neither to the practice of meditation, nor to any savor, whether sensory or spiritual, now to any other apprehensions. He should be very free and annihilated regarding all things, because any thought or discursive reflection or satisfaction upon which he may want to lean would impede and disquiet him, and make noise in the profound silence of his senses and his spirit, which he possesses for the sake of this deep and delicate listening. God speaks to the heart in this solitude.

In contemplation, the communication of God is not received through the senses, but indirectly into the spiritual part of the soul, where the inflow may be more abundant. On this topic, John had an immense amount of wise insight. In the sensory night, God makes an exchange in the soul; whereby the soul transfers from utilization of the senses for communication with God to the realm of the spirit. At this moment, God carries the soul to a contemplative state in prayer (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:316). A person should not mind if the operations of the faculties of intellect, memory and will are lost to them; for God is preparing the soul for intimate communication. “For contemplation is nothing else than a secret and peaceful and loving inflow of God, which, if not hampered, fires the soul in the spirit of love” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:317).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> From John’s commentary on *The Spiritual Canticle*, he relays a similar theme; “The sweet and living knowledge she says He taught her is mystical theology, that secret knowledge of God which spiritual persons call contemplation. This knowledge is very delightful because it is a knowledge through love. Love is the master of this knowledge and that which makes it wholly agreeable. Since God communicates this knowledge and understanding in the love with which He communicates Himself to the soul, it is very delightful to the intellect, since it is a knowledge belonging to the intellect, and it is delightful to the will since it is communicated in love, which pertains to the will” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:518). Further in the same commentary, he writes “In contemplation God teaches the soul very

Currently, the term ‘meditation’ has a broader meaning for the postmodern Christian than for John of the Cross. Today, meditation includes a wide variety of spiritual exercises, from dwelling on a prayer word, to focusing on one’s breathing to passively listening to one’s thoughts. Often the words ‘meditate’ and ‘contemplate’ are used interchangeably, and generally the terms are differentiated with ‘meditate’ suggesting a kataphatic reflection on a Biblical text or devotional reading, while ‘contemplate’ connotes focused attentiveness upon God (Kavanaugh 1999:104). John of the Cross, however, reserved contemplation to passive or ‘infused’ prayer experienced in solitude and inner silence. John’s counterparts, the Dominicans, had divided prayer into various stages and steps: preparation, reading, meditation, thanksgiving, offering, and petition. While John introduced these prayer practices to his Carmelite nuns and friars, he added the prayer dimension of contemplation to the aforementioned steps of prayer. He noted that meditation did not necessarily have to precede contemplation, since one who habitually experienced the loving knowledge of the Beloved through truths arrived by means of meditation easily entered into contemplation (Kavanaugh 1999:105). Later, the Carmelites divided the practice of contemplation to include *acquired contemplation* (a term John never used), which is contemplation arrived at through meditation, and *infused contemplation*, ‘la contemplación ‘infusa’ o ‘pasiva’’, which is experienced in silence, passivity, simplicity and with receptivity (1999:105).

For those who are drawn into the graced place of contemplation, and particularly when this occurs in the experience of the dark night, John has listed practical imperatives to assist in the journey to contemplative prayer. Muto (1991:67) lists the counsels of John as she has discovered them in his teaching: 1) learn to abide in quiet with loving attentiveness to God; this will temper one’s ego-control; 2) pay no heed to the imagination and its work; this will diminish the distractions; 3) Allow your faculties, intellect, memory, will, to remain in a place of rest; 4) allow yourself to receive divine direction (a passive action) rather than trying to make something happen; this will allow the person to be receptive to the work of the Spirit within; 5) if you must utilize the

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quietly and secretly, without its knowing how, without the sound of words, and without the help of any bodily or spiritual faculty, in silence and quietude, in darkness to all sensory and natural things. Some spiritual persons call this contemplation knowing by unknowing” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:561).

faculties, don't make use of excessive efforts or of academic rationale; and 6) whatever you do, do so with the gentleness of love, moved more by God, than by your own strengths and abilities.

At the core of John's teaching is the acknowledgement that only God's love can break through the attachments of the heart, and contemplation is opening of the soul to divine love. However, contemplation is not merely for the human person alone, but must be expressed through daily actions and deeds. Among his list of instructions regarding contemplative prayer, von Balthasar (1986:137) writes "... unavoidably, the life of contemplation is an everyday life, a life of fidelity in small matters, small services rendered in the spirit and warmth of love which lighten every burden". On occasion, the brightness of the sun might be hidden in mist and cloud, but that is no reason for laying aside the daily work of love which is contemplative prayer in action (1986:137).

## 5.4 Apophatic Spirituality

### 5.4.1 The Apophatic Way—'via negativa'

Current Christian spirituality literature is devoting greater attention to identifying and analyzing the *affirmative* and *negative* elements of classical theology. The traditional names for these two prayer and theological foci are 'kataphatic' and 'apophatic', with the extended titles of kataphatic and apophatic spirituality. "The terms are ancient, used by Plato, Aristotle, and other Greek authors, for whom *kataphasis* generally meant 'affirmation' and referred logically and grammatically to positive statements, while *apophasis* meant 'denial' or 'negation' and referred to negative statements" (Woods 1998:44).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Taken from the notes for the chapter titled, The Darkness of God and the Negative Way located in *Mysticism and Prophecy* by Richard Woods. Woods (1998:142) notes, "Unlike *apophasis*, *kataphasis* has no grammatical, rhetorical, or other equivalent in English usage. But both *kataphasis* and *apophasis* were part of the ordinary legal and philosophical vocabulary of ancient Greece, and seem not to have acquired a more technical sense, especially in theology, until the beginning of the Common Era. Both terms have multiple and parallel lexical connections and therefore manifest semantic ambiguity. Just as *kataphasis* can be formed from three Greek verbs, *kataphainō* (declare, make public), *kataphaskō* (answer, affirm), and *kataphēmi* (assent), so also *apophasis* arises from either *apophainō* (show or declare), *apophaskō* (deny), or *apophēmi* (speak out, declare). Thus, even *apophasis* can mean 'decree', 'judgement', or 'declaration', as well as 'negation' and 'denial'. Insisting on a narrow, rigid, and exclusive understanding of these terms is characteristic of modern rather than classical approaches to language and reality".

The words ‘apophatic’ and ‘kataphatic’ describe different spiritual paths: apophatic, emphasizing silence, inner darkness, passivity and the absence of imagery; and kataphatic, emphasizing the way of images, thoughts, words and the positive elements in creation (Sheldrake 1991:199). A significant treatise associated with apophatic spirituality is *Mystical Theology* written by Pseudo-Dionysius, a sixth century Syrian monk. Though Dionysius, (also referred to as Denys the Areopagite or as Denis in the *Cloud of Unknowing*), is associated primarily with apophatic spirituality, he writes about both apophatic and kataphatic ways of experiencing God. Sheldrake (1991:200) comments:

Cataphatic theology is what we affirm about God and apophatic theology reflects the fact that when in the presence of God we are reduced to silence. It is thus a process of negation whereby what we affirm must also ultimately be denied. It is also important to realize that Pseudo-Dionysius’ theology is not concerned with subjective religious experience but with how we praise God, our response to the love of God made manifest. The fundamental link is liturgy and Scripture, as it was for all the patristic writers, a fact often forgotten when his *Mystical Theology* is taken out of context and too much emphasis is placed on his use of neo-Platonic language.<sup>23</sup>

Dionysius is one of the first theologians to describe the apophatic way, the way of *via negativa*, the process of stripping one’s concepts of God which are located in the realm of images and words. In *The Mystical Theology*, he focuses on the theme of divine darkness, the importance of clearing the intellect of the ‘knowledge’ of God. Holt (1993:49) ascribes to Dionysius, “... one of the striking features of the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius is the combination of a highly intellectual discussion of God with an absolute denial of the power of the intellect to know God”. Dionysius viewed the apophatic way not as an alternative to kataphatic spirituality; for kataphatic theology precedes the apophatic way, and is vital for spiritual development – they are essentially two sides of the same coin. An example is his perception of the doctrine of the Trinity: it is kataphatic in terms of affirming a fundamental concept inherent within Trinitarian

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<sup>23</sup> Sheldrake (1991) suggests an article which expands this statement written by Louis Bouyer entitled, ‘*Mysticism: An Essay on the History of the Word*’ in Woods (1981:52-3).

spirituality. However, the doctrine is also apophatic since the dogma reveals a depth of mystery unknowable to human intellect (Sheldrake 1991:200).

Denys Turner in his seminal work, *The Darkness of God* (focusing upon negativity in Christian Mysticism) differentiates between apophaticism and kataphaticism, as strategies for the same purpose but from differing perspectives. Turner (1995:19) notes that apophaticism is the experience of theology against a background of human ignorance of the nature of God. He writes:

It is the doing of theology in the light of the statement of Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, that ‘we do not know what kind of being God is’ (taken from *Summa Theologiae*). It is the conception of theology not as a naïve *pre-critical* ignorance of God, but as a kind of acquired ignorance, a *docta ignorantia* as Nicholas of Cusa called it in the fifteenth century (1995:19).

In addition, he writes that apophaticism is a concept of *unknowing*, a transitive verb-form invented by the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Thus, “... apophatic theology is the element of speech about God which is the failure of speech” (Turner 1995:20). Conversely, kataphatic theology according to Turner is the verbose element in theology, deployment of language and speech to express something about God to God. Turner(1995:20) defines kataphaticism:

It is the cataphatic in theology which causes its metaphor-ridden character, causes it to borrow vocabularies by analogy from many another discourse, whether of science, literature, art, sex, politics, the law, the economy, family life, warfare, play, teaching, physiology, or whatever. It is its cataphatic tendencies which account for the sheer *heaviness* of theological language, its character of being linguistically *overburdened*; it is the cataphatic which account the fine *nimietas* of image which we may observe in the best theologies.... For in its cataphatic mode, theology is, we might say, a kind of verbal riot, an anarchy of discourse in which anything goes.

Another contemporary author, Lanzetta concurs with the aforementioned description of apophaticism, where she asserts that ‘negative theology’ subverts the tendency of the mind to seek authority in final truths. She writes, “Negative theology affirms that God is beyond knowledge and knowing; relinquishing its *ability* (italics from author) to know, the soul is humbled in order to glimpse into the groundlessness of

mystery (Lanzetta 2001:20). She defines two types of apophasis: one, an *epistemological* negation which transcends finite modes of thought as a higher form of affirmation. She explains, "... in epistemological apophasis, the dialectical strategies of negative theology are for the sake of a higher and more sublime affirmation: God's nature and essence are understood in superessentially positive terms and remain outside negation" (Lanzetta 2001:21). In classical spiritual formation, Lanzetta's epistemological negation corresponds with the illuminative stage, whereby the Spirit of God illumines and teaches the soul directly. The second type of apophasis is one in which the person passes beyond the negation of knowing to enter the emptiness and silence of divinity to a more radical *ontological* negation. In ontological apophatism, the soul does not locate God in property or name; "... the soul is drawn to bearing the dialectical tension of opposites — knowing-unknowing, being-unbeing — until it breaks through to the nothingness of self and deity" (2001:21).<sup>24</sup>

McIntosh (1998:123) refers to Karl Rahner's view that the absence of God from the consciousness of our present era has its positive aspects. For the loss of the concept of God opens up the collective mind of society to recover what Rahner calls the "... transcendental dynamic of reality — the irreducible mystery of everything". McIntosh (1998:124) comments:

Yet apophatic mysticism ought not to be thought of as something undertaken by people who are absorbed by the unutterable *remoteness* of God. On the contrary, apophasis happens because, like Moses and the burning bush, persons have been drawn so *close* to the mystery that they have begun to realize how beautifully, appallingly, heart-breakingly mysterious God really is. In other words, the absence to which apophasis conducts one is an absence of any particular thing or item that could satisfy one any longer; apophasis is the intensifying of desire to such a point that one is left hungering only for the living God—who is of course, as Aquinas so clearly reminds us, never available as one of the *things* that we are capable of grasping, sensing or knowing in any normal sense. Hence absence; for what is so powerfully attractive about the true God is that one only journey into deeper encounter with God by entering

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<sup>24</sup> Lanzetta(2001:22) further writes "... classical *via negativa* finds God not in property or persons, or in conceptual imagery or names, but in nothingness and darkness. God's darkness cannot be broached. Yet here God and the self remain part of classical notions of being. If the soul is purged of identity, it occurs against the background of a personal, theistic God; if the soul touches nothingness, it is the nothingness of God's hidden presence".

into the desert of liberation. This is the fertile wilderness where one is freed from ideas and ways of life that are unmasked at last as traps and snares, subtle slaveries of spirit.

Apophatic theology does not promote a state of being as entirely 'dark' or void of 'light' since this phenomenon is both a 'luminous darkness' and 'dark brilliance'. When John drew from Christian tradition and theology a particular form of spirituality to ascribe to inner aridity, he recognized the connection between his experience of 'soul' suffering and the 'dark night'. John was cognizant of religious works which he had studied that depicted apophaticism.

Evangelical theology has not developed the concept of the apophatic way to the extent that other Christian traditions, which exercise a relative ease with mystery and the silence of God. Apophaticism does not find a safe place within a rational, systematized form of theological prejudice. It is not surprising that those who have been spiritually formed within the evangelical tradition would not have an evangelical 'file folder' for the unknowability of God and for mystery. Further, evangelical scholarship has tended to focus upon its 'own' place in church history, and the development of the church within the current era. Only recently has there been a resurgence of interest in the people of God who have provided shape to theology and the church from the middle ages or from the Patristic Era. John of the Cross presents a corrective to current evangelical thinking on two fronts: firstly, he read the classical Christian mystical writings and could direct his readers to his forerunners, and secondly, he was familiar with the forms of theology which were prevalent up to his era, that is, kataphatic and apophatic theology. He models for our contemporary Christian church the value of being attuned to the spirituality of the sages of the past, and the inference that wisdom from the past provides a foundation for current issues.

With regard to the 'apophatic way' and the corresponding 'silence of God' in the soul, John of the Cross proposes a paradigm that is foreign in evangelical theology. For the evangelical, the 'silence of God' or 'God is distant' syndrome is a consequence of the doctrine of the depravity of the human soul in which the Christian has caused the distance, normally through sin or rejection of God. It has already been noted that the passive night of the soul is experienced in silence, that is, silence to the soul and the

intellect, whereby God is illuminating and teaching the human soul. Thus, the Christian may encounter a spiritual state in a 'dark night' which is unlike other moments when God's present is immanent. John explains the phenomenon of spiritual transformation must be interpreted from the perspective of a God who is in the business of inner transformation, rather than from the perspective of the fallen condition of the human race.

The silence of God as proposed by John of the Cross is formational, whereby the 'silence' becomes a teacher of the soul. It is the luminous way of love and the path to the deepest connection with God as is humanly possible. Jesus initiated the way for this journey through the steps he walked during his Passion, the way of suffering, death and resurrection. The soul will experience the three fold path of Jesus when it allows the 'inner flame of Love' to cleanse it; however, it will be the way of suffering, death and resurrection. Does John's perspective provide any consolation for the soul in the midst of purging, when spiritual transformation occurs by means of the seeming distance of God? For the soul who is in the midst of the cleansing, his words offer immense consolation, particularly when discouragement sets in. Does his treatise educate the postmodern Christian evangelical with regard to the process of spiritual transformation? Indeed, it does. Then, how does this message speak to the believer in our present era who may be in a 'dark night'? In his works, John provides a rationale for the silence of God, and he states that this occurrence will be the cause for immense suffering to the human soul. Nonetheless, he encourages the 'beginners' and 'proficients', be they his own friars or sisters, or twenty-first century evangelicals, to submit to the transformational work of God in the soul, since this is an acceptable journey to union with God.

The next section examines briefly a selected collection of mystics who significantly contributed to apophatic theology and influenced the doctrinal synthesis of John of the Cross.

#### 5.4.2 Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-c. 395)

Gregory of Nyssa, a speculative theologian, was one of the three Cappadocian Fathers of the Athanasian heritage. The grouping of three comprised his brother, Basil the Great and his friend, Gregory of Nazianzen. Gregory, and his brother Basil, sons of devout parents, received the finest of education in Athens; however, he forsook his privileged world to settle for an ascetic life near the river Iris in Pontus. Gregory was influenced by Eastern theology which insisted that the apophatic experience is not an impersonal or abstract encounter with God, but a personal encounter with the triune God in darkness – an encounter with the hiddenness of God in Christ (Cunningham & Egan 1996:130).

Theologically, Gregory did not follow the mystical views of Origen, who taught that the soul is in movement toward increasing illumination from darkness to light and then to greater light (Jones, Wainright, & Yarnold 1986:166). Gregory discerned the stages of the soul's movement to be from light to darkness. Even though Gregory was aware of Origen's three fold stages of progression, he argued for the three fold passage into the 'dark cloud'. From the life of Moses during the wilderness journey, Gregory saw three stages; the revelation at the Burning Bush, and the two ascents at Mt. Sinai, the first into the cloud and the two ascents refer to the darkness of the cloud where God dwelt (1986:166). When Moses approached God on the mountain, Gregory (1978:43) writes, "... he entered the inner sanctuary of the divine mystical doctrine, there, while not being seen, he was in company with the Invisible. He (Moses) teaches ... that the one who is going to associate intimately with God must go beyond what is visible ... to the invisible where understanding does not reach."

From the aforementioned narrative of Moses, Gregory of Nyssa concluded that the doctrine of God's unknowability is based upon the soul's ascent to God, which implied the soul's ascent into divine darkness. Andrew Louth (1981:81) comments:

His (Gregory of Nyssa) understanding of the doctrine of creation out of nothing means that there is no point of contact between the soul and God, and so God is totally unknowable to the soul, and the soul can have no experience of God except in so far as God makes such experience possible. It is the unknowability of God which leads to Gregory's insistence that it is only in the virtue of the Incarnation, only because

God has manifested Himself — and His love — among us, that we can know Him at all. As the soul responds to God's love, as it comes closer to the unknowable God, it enters into deeper and deeper darkness, and knows Him in a way that surpasses knowledge.

The translation of Gregory's work *From Glory to Glory* (Daniélou and Musurillo 1961) confirms Louth's interpretation of Gregory's reflections. Commenting on Exodus 23:15, Gregory (Daniélou and Musurillo 1961:118) wrote,

The true vision and the true knowledge of what we seek consists precisely in not seeing, in an awareness that our goal transcends all knowledge and is everywhere cut off from us by the darkness of incomprehensibility. Thus that profound evangelist, John, who penetrated into this luminous darkness, tells us that no man hath seen God at any time (John 1:18), teaching us by this negation that no man — indeed, no created intellect — can attain a knowledge of God.

The process of negation, or elimination of what is not God, is a necessary stage in the journey to inner knowledge of God. Meyendorff (1979:12) suggests that this process is spiritual purification (*katharsis*), whereby all forms of identifying God with what is not God, is discarded. Clearly, there is a paradox, suggests Meyendorff, for *katharsis* is an intellectual process whereby mental forms of understanding God are being eradicated, since the concepts may be idolatrous. Consequently, this refining allows the Christian to *know* God as the Unknowable and Incomprehensible, even if the experience in prayer is indeed a positive one (1979:12).

### **5.4.3 Pseudo-Dionysius**

It is in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius that mystical theology is defined in clearer terms than previously explored. For many centuries, the works of Dionysius were assumed to have been written by Dionysius, the person associated with St. Paul and a convert at Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:34). This authorship was accepted without question until scholars in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries challenged the author's identity. Scholars date the Areopagitical Corpus around the end of the fifth and early sixth century, since the writings bear the mark of late Neoplatonism influence, particularly the work of Proclus (Wakefield 1983:108). Recent scholarship has

concluded that the writer of these works could have been a sixth century Syrian monk.<sup>25</sup> Dionysius' works consisted of *Divine Names*, *Mystical Theology*, *Celestial Hierarchy*, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and ten letters, which all have one ultimate aim: the union of all creation with the One who has created all things. This unitive process occurs by means of purification, illumination and perfection or union; Dionysius is the first to describe the *process* of spiritual formation in this manner (Healy 1999:53). The goal is for union with love: being united with the God of love, and knowing God in all things. Dionysius describes three forms of 'theology' which assist the soul toward union with God, two of which are kataphatic and symbolic theology. Though these are somewhat related, for Dionysius, they had slightly different nuances.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, due to the limitation of the senses and the intellect, a third way, the *apophatic way*, the *theology of negation*, directs the soul to abandon all created things and seek God in the darkness. Dionysius, in the poetic prologue to *Mystical Theology*, proposes the format for 'radical apophatic thought' (Healy 1999:53). He uses poetic phrases such as "... the mysteries of God's Word lie simple, absolute and unchangeable in the brilliant darkness of a hidden silence" (Rorem 1987:135). Addressing Timothy, he admonished him to leave behind all things, perceived and unperceived "... to strive upward as much as you can toward union with him who is beyond all being and knowledge" (1987:135).

In all likelihood, the writings of Dionysius piqued the interest of John. Unlike his contemporary, Teresa, John chose not to leave us an autobiography, thus we know virtually nothing of his own spiritual formation process. One can only speculate that the

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<sup>25</sup> Von Balthasar (1984:144) comments that with "... Denys we have a unique case in theology, indeed in all intellectual history. A man of the foremost rank and of prodigious power hid his identity not only from centuries of credulity but also from the critical acumen of the modern period, and precisely through that concealment exercised his influence. That for our modern, and above all German, scholarly world is unforgiveable". Further, Von Balthasar (1984:147) notes, "But if anyone should set aside all bias ... and allow this astonishing work to exert its influence upon him, he will in the same glance recognize two things. First, that this writer, like no other, is 'indivisible' and that his person is wholly identified with his work; in other words, that there is nothing 'made-up' about him, that he is no 'pseudonym' for another. And then, that such power, such radiance of holiness streams forth from this unity of person and work — as the Middle Ages sensed immediately — that he can in no case be regarded as a 'forger', not even as a clever 'apologist' pulling off a trick". The case is made that Denys, alia Pseudo-Dionysius had completed a body of writing which was innovative, on the forefront of mystical theology.

<sup>26</sup> A lost or fictitious document entitled *Symbolical Theology* explored the usage of biblical symbols and symbols in liturgy pointing beyond themselves to the nature of God. However, Dionysius reminds the reader the most important aspect of understanding the symbols is in seeing past them into the reality they disclose. There is no natural similarity between the symbol and what the symbol represents (Wakefield 1983:109).

clarity with which John describes union with God had to have personal overtones. The writings of Dionysius must have impacted John's reflections, such as:

But see to it that none of this comes to the hearing of the uninformed, that is to say, to those caught up with the things of the world, who imagine that there is nothing beyond instances of individual being and who think that by their own intellectual resources they can have a direct knowledge of him who has made the shadows his hiding place.... The fact is that the more we take flight upward, the more our words are confined to the ideas we are capable of forming; so that now as we plunge into that darkness which is beyond intellect, we shall find ourselves not simply running short of words but actually speechless and unknowing (Rorem 1987:136,138).

Seemingly, John does not incorporate the apophaticism of Dionysius into his doctrine of transformation. Louth suggests that the reason for this is that in the *Dionysian Mystical Theology*, the words for 'darkness' do not denote any particular experience. The way of negation is the recognition that God is "... unknowable in Himself, and He is not an object of knowledge" (Louth 1981:172). The path to union involves a continual longing for God with an increase in desire to love God: "... if she seeks to trace back God's manifestations and moving through a state where less and less can be expressed until ultimately she 'becomes completely speechless and is entirely united to the Inexpressible'" (Louth 1981:173). By contrast is John's dramatic, affective language points to a transformation which occurs in the 'dark night' where sin is removed and exchanges take place in the soul, so that the soul is capable of a pure response to God.

#### **5.4.4 Cloud of Unknowing**

Out of fourteenth century England, an anonymous mystical document entitled the *Cloud of Unknowing* surfaced. This humble author produced a most notable single treatise of mystical theology, and yet no one knows for certain who *he* or *she* was. Recent scholarship has made a plausible case that the author may have been a Carthusian monk or priest within a community of men living in a combined eremitic and cenobitic religious life style. It was customary for the Carthusian monks to write anonymously, thus giving further weight to the defense of this position. Whoever the

writer was, this person was a skilled theologian, mystic and wise spiritual director. The same author wrote other treatises and translated the writings of Dionysius, Richard of St. Victor, and other works into English (Nuth 2001:57, 58, 59).

The author is indebted to others for his theological insights, mainly theologians such as Dionysius, Richard of St. Victor, Augustine and possibly Thomas Gallus of St. Victor (Holmes 1981:79). Turner notes the author's declared fidelity to particular texts from which he sources his insights, however, he suggests the *Cloud of Unknowing* must be tested on its own merits (Turner 1995:195).

Essentially, the author's spirituality reflects an emphasis in which *desire* prevails above all else. Between the person's desire and God's desire exists a cloud of unknowing, and between a personal desire to love God and a person's intellect and imagination there must be placed a cloud of forgetting. The author of the *Cloud* states that one's innermost thoughts, be they worldly or spiritual, pose as obstacles in piercing this cloud of unknowing (Turner 1995:196). The author of the *Cloud* explains:

Do not think that because I call it a 'darkness' or a 'cloud' it is the sort of cloud you see in the sky, or the kind of darkness you know at home when the light is out ...By 'darkness' I mean 'a lack of knowing' — just as anything that you do not know or may have forgotten may be said to be 'dark' to you, for you cannot see it with your inward eye. For this reason it is called a 'cloud', not of the sky, of course, but 'of unknowing', a cloud of unknowing between you and your God (Wolters 1961:66).

With regard to the cloud of forgetting, the author suggests that similar to the cloud which exists between the soul and God that is 'unknowing'; there must be a cloud between the soul and creation. The author writes:

I suggest then just as this cloud of unknowing is as it were above you, between you and God, so you must also put a cloud of forgetting beneath you and all creation. We are apt to think that we are very far from God because of this cloud of unknowing between us and him, but surely it would be more correct to say that we are much farther from him if there is no cloud of forgetting between us and the whole created world (1961:66).

How then, does one pierce this cloud of unknowing? Through the grace of contemplation, the author suggests, one steps beyond the cloud of forgetting,

relinquishes the trappings of the created world, "... and you are to step over it resolutely and eagerly, with a devout and kindling love, and try to penetrate that darkness above you. Strike that thick cloud of unknowing with the sharp dart of longing love, and on no account whatever think of giving up" (Wolters 1961:68).

The apophatic experience for the author of the *Cloud* is the breakthrough into the unknowable place of God, an intervention of grace that erupts into daily life in which cognitive activity is reduced to a minimum. It is at the point of breakthrough:

... that love requires the total abandonment of all cognitivity (sic), a cutting of all ties with the safe anchorage of the mind in its familiar images, meditations and narratives of God, leaving all intellectual activity behind, so that the disciple can launch out on to the intellectually uncharted and uncharitable seas of the knowing of love (Turner 1995:199).

Was John of the Cross familiar with the treatise entitled *The Cloud of Unknowing*? The answer is not quite as clear with regard to his exposure to the *Cloud* as to other theological texts. Nonetheless, this text is rated alongside the apophatic theological works of Dionysius, Gregory of Nyssa and John himself. The *Cloud* affirms the validity of apophaticism, which denotes that the desire to love God requires that the soul pierce the 'cloud of the unknowability of God'.

#### **5.4.5 Eastern Orthodox Tradition**

Orthodox Church history is marked by a long-standing connection with the past which is rooted in the theology and spirituality of the Christian East and to the Patristic Fathers. It is a living tradition that in its most genuine expression retains a delicate balance between beauty and simplicity, spirituality and dogma, mystery and reason.

During the Enlightenment era, the church in the West (Catholic and Protestant) enthroned logic and reason as the arbiters in matters of truth, particularly where applicable to the development of doctrine. The *modus operandi* for determining doctrinal 'truth' became *credo quia intelligo* — 'I believe because I understand'. The usage of reason as a measuring tool for truth in issues of doctrine heightened the theological chasm already in existence between the Orthodox (Christian East) and the Christian churches of the West. The point of contrast: reason and logic had a distrust of,

even disdain for myth and mystery. Educational training in the western world promoted the elimination and mistrust of mystery which generated an attitude of intolerance towards the inexplicable (Clendenin 2003a:49). Theology conformed to the canons of Enlightenment rationality; truth of revelation had to be proven as reasonable (Clendenin 2003a:50)<sup>27</sup>

Though Orthodoxy fosters a positive appreciation for mystery, it does not entirely reject reason as a necessary component of human knowledge and experience. A reading of the *Philokalia*, Greek words *philos* and *kalos* meaning for ‘the love and attraction toward the spiritually beautiful and virtuous’, illustrates the central role of the intellect in Eastern spirituality.<sup>28</sup> However, Eastern theologians reject the tendency that allows or encourages reason to expunge theological mystery and appoint reason as the only criterion of truth. Clendenin (2003a) contrasts the difference of theological perspective between Western theologians and their Eastern counterparts. In the West, theology is typically a rational deduction from revealed premises or propositions; while in the East, theology and revelation are viewed experientially, as experienced in contemplative prayer. In the East, a theology produced from reason is an inferior theology, since eastern theology joins reason and experience, theology and spirituality, cognition and mystery (Clendenin 2003a:54).

The Orthodox approach to the Mystery of God is through unknowing and love, and through the definition of God by who God is not. The unknowable God is only able to be known through communion and relationship, primarily through a language of silence reflected in poetry, liturgy, doxology, and as quotidian experience. This theological heritage is at its root apophatic; the way of negation, of unknowing, God is glimpsed

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<sup>27</sup> Clendenin (2003a) cites western theologians who enshrine human rationality as the decisive criterion of theological truth. He illustrates from John Locke (1632-1704) who “... insisted that all truths of biblical revelation must be proven by the ultimate criterion of reason before they can be accepted by faith. Theological statements that are contrary to reason and logic must be rejected (Clendenin 2003a:51). Clendenin (2003a:51) further cites Bishop Joseph Butler (1692-1752) who wrote “... let reason be kept to; and if any part of the Scripture account of the redemption of the world by Christ can be shown to be really contrary to it (reason), let the Scripture, in the name of God, be given up” (2003a:51). Wolfhart Pannenberg promoting a similar commitment to Enlightenment rationality, insists that every theological statement must prove itself in the field of reason, otherwise, it has no place in the base of presupposition of faith (2003a:51).

<sup>28</sup> In the introduction to *Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain*, the title *Philokalia* is further defined as dedicated to ultimate Truth, the source of life and all sustenance, the love of God himself, the only Way who can provide purification, illumination, salvation and deification. The *Philokalia*, a work of profound spiritual magnitude, is a collection of patristic texts concerning the spiritual life and formation of the Christian.

through the lens of what is not true to understand what is true. Zaleski (2003:46) suggests that "... the apophatic way demands that we leave behind the safety of rational thinking and step into what seems to be darkness beyond: a darkness through which our senses or our minds cannot guide us, but which we are called to explore".

Bishop Ware (1993), a leading Orthodox theologian, wrote that to understand the otherness of God, it is necessary to use negative *and* affirmative statements, saying what God is *not* rather than what God is. Without the use of the apophatic way (the way of negation), any understanding of God becomes gravely misleading. The very word 'mystery' implies a hiddenness, and disclosure; and the apophatic approach is affirmative in its final effects. Ware (1993:18) argues that the way of 'unknowing' brings the person to fullness and not emptiness, beyond all language and thought toward an immediate existential experience of the living God. He references the 'thick darkness' into which Moses entered, which turned out to be a luminous or dazzling darkness; God revealing both the hiddenness of God and the immensity of love inherent in the energy of God.<sup>29</sup> It is through apophasis (or negation) that a person opens themselves up to the silence of *theosis* (or deification),<sup>30</sup> which is a distinctive mark of Orthodox theology.

At this level, theology becomes transformational. A seventh century mystic, John Climacus, underlined the importance of direct, personal experience of God as a prerequisite for a leader within the Christian community. A genuine teacher is someone who has received from God a tablet of learning, that is, spiritual knowledge written on the soul and mind by means of the inner working of illumination. Climacus chastises anyone who would give instruction from notes taken from other people's writing; one should teach what God alone has taught them (Chryssavgis 2004:58). God is not a

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<sup>29</sup> Ware (1995:15) explains, "The apophatic way of 'unknowing' brings us not to emptiness but to fullness. Our negations are in reality super-affirmations. Destructive in outward form, the apophatic approach is affirmative in its final affects: it helps us reach out, beyond all statements positive and negative, beyond all language and all thought, towards an immediate experience of the living God".

<sup>30</sup> Not unlike when John writes in *The Ascent*: "The supernatural union exists when God's will and the soul's are in conformity, so that nothing in the one is repugnant to the other. When the soul completely rids itself of what is repugnant and unconfirmed to the divine will, it rests transformed in God through love" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:116). He continues, "... when God grants this supernatural favor to the soul, so great a union is caused that all things of both God and the soul become one in participant transformation, and the soul appears to be God more than a soul. Yet truly, its being (even though transformed) is naturally as distinct from God's as it was before, just as the window, although illumined by the ray, has an existence distinct from the ray" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:117).

rational problem who requires a level of resolution; rather God is a lover of humanity and the world. Thus, Orthodox theology transcends formulation and definition; rather, it is identified in a mystical union that is engaged in apophatic silence. For the Orthodox believer, this is a positive and creative phenomenon (Chryssavgis 2004:62).

Gregory Palamas, a fourteenth century exponent of the apophatic way, explains that the human mind is capable of seeing God only through revelation that is appropriate and analogous to God. “One sees”, writes Palamas, “... not in a negative way — for one does see something — but in a manner superior to negation. For God is not only beyond knowledge, but also beyond unknowing” (Palamas 1983:32). Nicodemos the Hagiorite (1749-1809), who published the *Philokalia*, speaks of apophaticism as the ability of the mind to envision the spiritual reality of God as unlike anything comparable within creation. The mind utilizes apophatic and transcendent theology to name God “... apophatically and transcendentally as more-than-wise, more-than-good. Thus God is not sun, nor light, nor fire, nor air, nor anything else from created beings” (Nicodemos the Hagiorite 1989:197). Both Palamas and Nicodemos strongly assert the positive experience of apophaticism, which involves a prostration before the living God, who is ungraspable, unknowable, and who is incomprehensibly personal and loving.

Vladimir Lossky (1976) summarizes that Orthodox apophaticism by its innate orientation transforms theology. He writes that ‘negative theology’ transforms theology into an exercise of contemplating the mysteries of God’s revelation. An individual may exercise reason and logic in the study of theology, and remain relatively unscathed and unruffled by the doctrinal exposition of human reason and philosophy. Apophaticism teaches the believer to see beyond the meanings inherent in the dogmas of the Church; plus, it forbids a person to follow the normal process of human reason to understand spiritual realities. “Christianity is not a philosophical school for speculating about abstract concepts” writes Lossky (1976:42), “... but is essentially communion with the living God”. For that reason, the fathers of the Eastern tradition remained faithful to the apophatic principle of theology, “... never allowed their thought to cross the threshold of mystery, or to substitute idols of God for God Himself” (1976:42). Seemingly, God’s

hiddenness is not an exercise of human versus the divine, but it is intentional, a means of drawing humanity forward on the quest for immediacy with God.

Orthodox theologians insist that negative theology does not undermine positive theology; rather negative theology *builds upon* positive theology. Kataphatic theology, shaped by the directives of Scripture and tradition, is necessary for propositional truth. Apophatic theology allows the Christian to be rid "... of concepts proper to human thought, transforming them into steps by which we may ascend to the contemplation of a reality which the created intelligence cannot contain" (Payton 2007:78). Payton (2007:82) suggests that apophatic theology calls the Christian to negate their intellectual conceptions and rise above them, and in so doing, open themselves up to God "... who is unutterably beyond us and all our thoughts and words, and to experience him intimately". Payton (2007:86) concludes,

Apophatic theology undercuts the presumption that we limited human beings — via reading Scripture, studying doctrine and using our minds — have become experts in talking about God because we have mastered the data of revelation. We do not have, and must not act as if we have, "God in a box," whether that box be denominational or doctrinal. Beyond what we claim to know and understand, beyond all our limitations, is our God — who invites us to leave behind our considerable intellection and to encounter him beyond our capacities.

In a personal quest for Orthodox spirituality, Markides (2001) encounters a broader experience of Orthodoxy than he had originally intended. His search took him to the Panagia monastery in Cyprus and to Mount Athos in Greece. Of importance to the research for this thesis is the spiritual guidance and the wisdom tradition of Eastern Orthodoxy that Father Maximos conveys to Markides. He learned that Orthodox monks "... try in reality to move from an intellectual faith in God to the actual vision of God. Faith becomes Love itself. The Creed means 'I live in a union of love with God'" (Markides 2001:45). Father Maximos teaches his novice that true Christians are those who have a direct experience with God; thus, they are not bound to this world (ambition, money, fame, power, safety) and are unafraid of death, war, illness or anything else in this world. Father Maximos adds, "... such persons transcend the ideas of God and enter into the experience of God" (2001:45). This comment reflects the

notion of apophaticism which is foundational to Orthodox spirituality, since the mentor concludes that until we reach the point of becoming conscious of the reality of God within ourselves, "... we simply remain stranded within the domain of ideas and not within the essence of Christian spirituality which is the direct communion with God" (2001:45).

A common theme to both the Orthodox and Protestant Evangelical spiritual reality is the element of spiritual formation, namely sanctification. It has been established that evangelical theology recognizes the significance of sanctification in the life of the Christian, evidence of the actual inner processes of spiritual formation is almost non-existent in current literature. By contrast, within the Orthodox tradition, sanctification is defined by the three classical stages which a soul experiences union with God: purgation, illumination and union. Father Maximos spoke of the threefold way as *catharsis*-the purification of heart and mind, *fortis*-the enlightenment of the soul after being purified, and *theosis*-union with God (Markides 2001:250-252). Markides, in one of his chats with his spiritual mentor, speaks with Father Maximos concerning the 'illnesses of the heart'.<sup>31</sup> What has been attributed to the Fall, namely, the entrance of original sin, obstructs the Christian from fully experiencing the vision of God. Father Maximos lists the 'illnesses' and the spiritual antidotes for restoration and intimate relationship with God. Is it possible that the Orthodox tradition in accepting the mystery of God, and the inner experience of mystery in the sphere of silence and apophaticism, is able to discern the ways of God in the soul? Is it possible that a theology structured in a rationalistic orientation sabotages itself from the capability of understanding the intricacies of spiritual formation? Has the systematized structure of theological constructs eclipsed evangelicals from an appreciation of mysticism and beauty inherent in God? Is it also possible that the North American evangelical church has relinquished a particular function of 'soul care' into the offices of psychologists and

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<sup>31</sup> In his essay, Rogers (2004) looks at the practice of spiritual direction within the Orthodox Tradition, and examines the history and theology of this ministry within the tradition. Rogers (2004:31) notes, "The spirituality of the Orthodox Church centers on the healing of the soul, the restoration and fulfillment of the image and likeness God in the human person. In the process the person grows into a relationship with God which is ultimately so intimate that it can only be described as *union*. Spiritual direction in the Orthodox tradition, then, involves leading a person through the process of healing the heart and into an ever-deepening relationship with God. This process occurs in a sacramental and corporate context as well as in a personal one-on-one relationship with a spiritual guide".

psychiatrists, since evangelical theology has virtually little concept of soul formation? Markides discovered on his pilgrimage that his Eastern spiritual heritage emphasized mystical union and divine transformation, which provided a paradigm for sanctification. Within western theology, the stress tends to be placed upon the believer's juridical standing before a holy God, and the critical issue of reconciliation by means of a personal commitment to Christ. Evangelicalism has exerted an enormous amount of energy in the development of evangelistic strategies to ensure that all may 'come to Christ'; but has relinquished its responsibility to ensure the spiritual formation of the soul in the process of sanctification.

### **5.5 Conclusion**

The 'dark night' metaphor provided for John of the Cross a means of explaining the journey of the soul as it experiences spiritual transformation en route to union with God. Initially, his thoughts took shape in poetic form, and when this literary mode was inadequate for many to comprehend his message, he resorted to explanatory commentaries. This chapter focused upon the *Dark Night* poem, from which he wrote his commentaries entitled *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night*. In these works, he explained the state of 'divine darkness' which is entered both in an active manner and a passive manner. Though his commentaries are incomplete, for reasons not entirely known, many documents have been preserved which confirm the bountiful treasury of spiritual wisdom and insight contained therein. Though evangelicalism acknowledges the process of sanctification as a doctrinal tenet of faith, there is little evidence in its literature to indicate the inner dynamics which occur in the maturing of one's faith. By contrast, John of Cross describes this progression of the soul from both the spiritual and psychological dimension.

It must be understood that the 'divine darkness' referenced by John does not have the component of evil, but is connected to the luminous presence of God. John's orientation to mystical theology clearly is slanted toward apophaticism, which is rooted in a long, reputable tradition in the Christian Church. Further, John was influenced by the prevailing teachings with regard to ways of prayer; his theological and religious

training would have exposed him to many of his Spanish mystical contemporaries. Thus, in the study of John's life, it is apparent that his intellectual grasp of the spiritual life was influenced by Christian tradition, church dogma, Scripture, apophatic mysticism and his own experience as a child of God. In addition, he was an observer of human nature and the inner dynamics of the soul.

The foundation for John's teaching in his 'dark night' commentaries is his prayerful attention to the Scriptures and the appropriation of the apophatic way in his spiritual orientation. He was exposed to the works of the Church Fathers, to the Eastern perspective of 'knowledge of God', and to the writers who promoted a way of experiencing God by means of *via negativa*. To comprehend the insights from John's commentaries with regard to the 'dark night', it is paramount to be attuned to his spiritual orientation. Evangelicals have not endorsed the apophatic way in their theological works, for this form of experiencing God is 'uncontrollable', thus, not readily definable. For many evangelicals, to wait upon God in silence, and to remain in a contemplative mode of quiet and listening, creates an atmosphere whereby the Christian is able to open up their souls to any form of spiritual involvement, which could potentially be an evil force. Prayer must be controllable, predictable and methodological, to avoid any circumstance which would possibly allow any other influence upon the Christian other than the Spirit of God.

The contribution which John of the Cross provides for evangelicals is his recognition of another way of *being* with the Creator God. Also, he guides the Christian who has been spiritually formed by means of the rational approach to their faith, to a knowledge of God which is promoted in the *ascesis* of mystical theology.

**CHAPTER SIX**

**SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE ‘DARK NIGHT’  
IN JOHN OF THE CROSS: ITS RELEVANCE FOR  
CANADIAN PRAIRIE EVANGELICAL SPIRITUALITY**

**6.1 Introduction**

Spanish mysticism during the time of John of the Cross was moving from objective spirituality, based on vocal prayer and ascetical works, to a deeper vital subjective spirituality which was built on personal experience. The catalyst for this form of the Spanish mystical way was the Franciscan spirituality of recollection (Kavanaugh 1999:58).<sup>1</sup> Chapter five examined many of the conditions which influenced the mystical theology of John, and set the foundation to enter into engaging spiritual transformation as described in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night*.

This chapter will explore the essence of the ‘dark night’ and the role of this phenomenon in the soul, as it is being transformed in the crucible of Love. This is not a morbid state, or a spiritual experience to be anxious about; rather, it is in reality the beginning of the movement towards being freed from unrecognized vestiges of complacent spirituality existing in the soul. Starr (2002:11) suggests that the ‘dark night’ descends upon the soul when all other efforts to live the spiritual life have failed.<sup>2</sup> “This, says John, is the beginning of blessedness. This is the choiceless choice when the soul can do nothing but surrender” (2002:11). Spiritual transformation, as encountered in this spiritual state and defined by John of the Cross, will be considered as it relates to the journey of the soul, and as it speaks to Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality.

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<sup>1</sup> Kavanaugh (1999:58) notes that the movement of interiorization appealed to the Jews (*conversos*) and Moslems (*moriscos*) who had converted to Christianity but chose to remain in Spain. They were not at home with many of the external Christian practices, yet they were drawn to the religious orders that emphasized interiority, the life of recollection.

<sup>2</sup> Starr (2002:11) suggests that ‘dark night’ comes upon the soul “... when you are no longer the best meditator in the class because your meditation produces absolutely nothing. When prayer evaporates on your tongue and you have nothing left to say to God. When you are not even tempted to return to a life of worldly pleasure because the world has proven empty and yet taking another step through the void of the spiritual life feels futile because you are no longer good at it and it seems God has given up on you, anyway”. John of the Cross writes, “It was a sheer grace to be placed by God in this night that occasioned so much good. The soul would not have succeeded in entering it, because nobody is able alone to empty himself of all his appetites in order to reach God” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:74).

## **6.2 Four-fold Stages of the ‘Dark Night’**

The following four sections investigate the commentaries of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night* in their order of writing. The organization of the topic is taken from Kavanaugh & Rodriguez (1979a), since their delineation of these works correspond appropriately with the intent of this section of the thesis. The four segments provide an exposition of spiritual transformation, with corresponding comparisons to evangelical theological positions when applicable to the question posed in this thesis.

### **6.2.1 Active Night of the Senses – *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book I**

In *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, John explained the journey towards reaching divine union and in this commentary of the poem ‘dark night’, he provides instruction and doctrine in prayer for beginners and proficients alike. Those who follow his instruction will learn how to unburden themselves of earthly things, how to avoid spiritual obstacles and how to live in complete nakedness and freedom of spirit required for divine union. The following section of this thesis sums up the mystical journey of the soul in the process of sanctification. Nothing exists in evangelical literature or theological discourse that reflects the spiritual and psychological depth of which John writes in these two works. The overview provided in this section discloses an element of religious teaching which is missing within the dogma of evangelicalism, namely, the process of sanctification. John is working within the context of the soul, within the dimensions of the mystery of God; and he addresses specifically the dis-eases of the soul. Many of his explanations are circuitous, he repeated himself fairly often; nonetheless, recent scholarship on the works of John provide valuable direction and assistance.

In his Prologue to the treatise, John outlined the purpose of the dark night “... through which a soul journeys toward that divine light of perfect union with God which is achieved, insofar as possible in this life, through love” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:69). He informs his readership right at the outset as to the source of his wisdom and information. His reliance on science and experience is minimal, for these can

deceive the soul, although “... I shall not neglect whatever possible use I can make of them” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:70). The required text for wisdom in John’s mind was *Divina Escritura*; “... taking Scripture as our guide we do not err, since the Holy Ghost speaks to us through it ... my intention will not be to deviate from the true meaning of Sacred Scripture” (1979a:70). Further, John assured whoever may inadvertently read his treatise that his teaching would not deviate from the doctrine of the Catholic Church (1979a:70). He targeted also the lack of discernment and wisdom amongst the spiritual directors, who due to inadequate direction and knowledge had discouraged people from advancing to divine union. These spiritual directors are a hindrance and cause harm rather than assist people in the journey to union with God (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:71).<sup>3</sup>

#### **6.2.1.1 The Mortification of the Appetites**

The first book of the *Ascent* assumes that a person has reached a place in their spiritual life where they are ready to be led by God beyond the beginnings of prayer into deeper intimacy. One enters the night of transformation at twilight, which heralds the beginning of the silence of God, seemingly a deprivation of the presence of God (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:75). On this night, the ‘night of the senses’, the sense

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed, John made a strong statement concerning the necessity to have wise spiritual directors who understand this spiritual state, otherwise, the sojourner will not be assisted at all. Spiritual direction is a new charism within the evangelical tradition. Though spiritual direction has been traditionally cradled within the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, current Protestant writers are contributing to the body of literature on this topic. David Benner (2002) defines spiritual direction as “... the jewel in the crown of soul-care relationships, (it) has been an important part of formal relationships of Christian nurture since the earliest days of the church. Rather than being for a specialized few, it is highly relevant to every Christian who takes the spiritual journey seriously. Rather than being a relationship of authority, it is a form of spiritual friendship. And though it shares some features with counseling and other relationships of care, it is distinct from all of them — serving more as an alternative to Christian counseling than a component of it”. Margaret Guenther concurs “Domination and submission are not what spiritual direction is about, but ‘holy listening,’ presence and attentiveness” (Guenther 1992:1). She adds, “Spiritual direction is not psychotherapy nor is it an inexpensive substitute, although the disciplines are compatible and frequently share raw material. Spiritual direction is not pastoral counseling, nor is it confused with the mutuality of deep friendships, for it is unashamedly hierarchical. Not because the director is somehow ‘better’ or ‘holier’ than the directee, but because, in this covenanted relationship the director has agreed to put himself aside so that his total attention can be focused on the person sitting in the other chair. What a gift to bring to another, the gift of disinterested, loving attention!” (Guenther 1992:3). Moon and Benner (2004:11) note that “... the species of which spiritual direction is one important representation is soul care. The English phrase “care of souls” has its origins in the Latin *cura animarum*. While *cura* is most commonly translated “care,” it actually contains the idea of both care and cure. *Care* refers to actions designed to support the well-being of something or someone. *Cure* refers to actions designed to restore well-being that has been lost. The Christian church has historically embraced both meanings of *cura* and has understood soul care to involve nurture and support as well as healing and restoration”.

'faculties' (hearing, seeing things, smell, delicious food and touch) no longer support spiritual pleasure and insight. Indeed, the journey into the night stills and quiets the faculties, which is reflected in the line from the *Dark Night* poem, 'estando ya mi casa sosegada', 'my house being now all stilled'. John (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:76) explains:

Just as night is nothing but the privation of light and, consequently, of all objects visible by means of the light — darkness and emptiness, then, for the faculty of sight — the mortification of the appetites can be called a night for the soul. To deprive oneself of the gratification of the appetites in all things is like living in darkness and a void. The eye feeds upon its object by means of light in such a way that when the light is extinguished the eye no longer sees them. Similarly does a man by means of his appetite feed and pasture on worldly things that gratify his faculties. When the appetites are extinguished — or mortified — he no longer feeds upon the pleasure of these things, but lives in a void and in darkness with respect to his appetites.

With regard to the necessity for the mortification of the appetites, John (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:77) writes:

The necessity of passing through this dark night (the mortification of the appetites and the denial of pleasure in all things) for the attainment of the divine union with God arises from the fact that all of man's attachments to creatures are pure darkness in God's sight. Clothed in these affections, a person will be incapable of the enlightenment and dominating fullness of God's pure and simple light, unless he rejects them.

John incorporated the classic three-fold path to union with God, formerly accepted within the doctrine of the Church: purgation, illumination, and union. These are not accomplished once and for all in a linear fashion, but as an ongoing cycle of "... deprivation, restoration, and graced transformation" (Muto 1991:19). In addition, John referred to an Aristotelian principle of philosophy in his statement, "For two contraries cannot coexist in the same subject, as the philosophers say ... since the love of God and attachment to creatures are contraries, they cannot coexist in the same will" (Kavanaugh

& Rodriguez 1979a:84).<sup>4</sup> With regard to the dualism prevalent in classical philosophy, John indicated that he viewed all creation as good, since nothing is inherently evil in and of itself. The problem arises when ‘creatures’, ‘possessions’, and ‘ambition’ function as the source of one’s gratification; these become idols in themselves. The issue is:

We are dealing with the denudation of the soul’s appetites and gratifications; this is what leaves it free and empty of all things, even though it possesses them. Since the things of the world cannot enter the soul, they are not in themselves an encumbrance or harm to it; rather, it is the will and appetite dwelling within it that causes the damage (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:77).<sup>5</sup>

Unless the appetites — inordinate attachments — are eradicated, they will have detrimental effects upon the soul: these effects John categorizes as having privative and positive harm. Privative harm involves the removal of the grace of God from the soul and positive harm involves the soul turning toward attachments which weary, torment, darken, defile and weaken the soul (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:84). Since inordinate appetites for the things of the world damage the beauty of the soul, these must be purged in order for a soul to possess God and to experience pure transformation of love (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:78).

Not all appetites are equally detrimental or equally a hindrance in the journey to union. John instructed his readers that the first type of appetite, ‘natural appetites’ are almost impossible to eradicate. “A man”, suggested John, “... can easily experience them (natural appetites) in his sensitive nature and yet be free of them in the rational part of his being” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:96). Natural appetites, such as music, good food, and stimulating conversations, are sensory experiences. Yet, if the will pays little or no attention to them, they may still be appreciated and not deter one’s absorption in God at the center of one’s soul (1979a:96).

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<sup>4</sup> John studied the philosophers during his academic training at the University of Salamanca, and from time to time he references philosophical thought. This particular principle of Aristotle is formulated and explained in *De sensu et sensato*, 8 (Kavanaugh 1987:65).

<sup>5</sup> Kavanaugh and Rodriguez note that John substitutes other words for ‘appetite’ such as, attachment, affection, the love of creatures, the will for something, inclination and desire. These appetites belong to the ‘affective’ or ‘appetitive’ function of the soul. Thus, they can be applied as affective tendencies toward an object (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1979a:48).

‘Voluntary appetites’ are the major blocks toward inner transformation, for these are habitual imperfections. At this juncture John lists the ‘habitual imperfections’ as:

... the common habit of loquacity (talking too much); a small attachment one never really desires to conquer, for example, to a person, to clothing, to a book or cell, or to the way food is prepared, and to other trifling conversations and little satisfactions in tasting, knowing, and hearing things, etc.... As long as he continues this attachment, it is impossible for him to make progress in perfection (sanctification) even though the imperfection may be very small (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:97).

John was quite adamant and uncompromising in the importance of relinquishing every attachment and not to allow for even the smallest imperfection. His point is that if a bird is tied by a thin thread or a thick cord, it is still prevented from flying unless, of course, the bird breaks the thread. For “... this is the lot of a man who is attached to something; no matter how much virtue he has he will not reach the freedom of the divine union” (1979a:97). Whatever sensory satisfactions (large or small) there are, which do not offer honor and glory to God, they must be renounced for the sake of the journey.

Near the end of Book I in the *Ascent*, John provides direction which for the postmodern Christian could be interpreted as somewhat harsh and masochistic. Ordinarily, one enters the night of sense in two ways: actively and passively. In the passive way, the person does nothing, for God accomplishes the work in the individual; John discusses the passive experience in the *Dark Night* text. The active aspect of the night of the sense is the participatory role of the person entering into nothingness, where nothing but God will satisfy the soul. In this state, the person renounces any sensory satisfaction in prayer and seeks solitude and silence. As one pursues a ‘habitual desire to imitate Christ’ and practices living ‘out of love for Jesus Christ’, John assures the reader that they will “... gain a great deal in short time” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:102).

In order to desire nothing but God and to pacify the passions, John guided his readers to *endeavor*, and it must be stressed the operative word is **endeavor**:

Endeavor to be inclined always:  
 not to the easiest, but to the most difficult;  
 not to the most delightful, but to the harshest;  
 not to the most gratifying, but to the less pleasant;  
 not to what means rest for you, but to hard work;  
 not to the consoling, but to the unconsoling;

not to the most, but to the least;  
 not to the highest and most precious, but to the lowest and most despised;  
 not to wanting something, but to wanting nothing;  
 do not go about looking for the best of temporal things, but for the worst,  
 and desire to enter for Christ into complete nudity (nakedness of spirit),  
 emptiness, and poverty in everything in the world (1979a:102).

As one navigates the dark night into the active night of the spirit from the night of the senses, the soul must be prepared to enter the night of the spirit where the only guide is faith. John's guiding dictum for the journey through the remaining 'nights' is expressed in one of his most famous poetic instructions:

To reach satisfaction in all  
 desire its possession in nothing.  
 To come to possess all  
 desire the possession of nothing.  
 To come to the knowledge of all  
 desire the knowledge of nothing.  
 To come to the pleasure you have not  
 you must go by a way in which you enjoy not.  
 To come to the knowledge you have not  
 you must go by a way in which you know not.  
 To come to the possession you have not  
 you must go by a way in which you possess not.  
 To come to be what you are not  
 you must go by a way in which you are not.  
 When you turn toward something  
 you cease to cast yourself upon the all.  
 For to go from all to the all  
 you must deny yourself of all in all.  
 And when you come to the possession of the all  
 you must possess it without wanting anything.  
 Because if you desire to have something in all  
 your treasure in God is not purely your all.  
 In this nakedness the spirit finds  
 its quietude and rest.  
 For in coveting nothing,  
 nothing raises it up  
 and nothing weighs it down,  
 because it is in the center of its humility.  
 When it covets something  
 in this very desire it is wearied (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:103).

The journey to union with God at this juncture crosses from the active night of the senses to the active night of the spirit, where the ‘esta noche spiritual, que es la fe, todo lo priva, así en entendimiento como en sentido. Y, pore so, dice el alma en esta’, (the “... spiritual night of faith removes everything, both in the intellect and in the senses”) (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:108).

Muto (1991:33) suggests that what bothers John is the tendency for Christians to stop at the sensual level of prayer instead of going through and beyond it to the sacred mystery to which it points. She writes, “Being human, we cannot help but experience satisfaction in these sensory goods. The key to spiritual progress is not to desire this gratification as such but to desire mainly the God who gratifies” (1991:33). A faction of North American evangelicalism which has infiltrated into sectors of Canadian prairie spirituality is the ‘health and wealth’ religious conviction. This is the notion that God’s blessing in the life of the Christian is linked to financial success and career fulfillment, as well as enjoying all that a capitalist society has to offer. John did not discourage the accumulation of wealth, since he would seek out the merchants and privileged members of his society to beg for alms. What he did discourage was the “... passion for or the inordinate attachment to satisfactions that are self-centered; expectations that are willful; anxieties rooted in our search for security; and depressions due to lack of control when things do not go our way” (Muto 1991:34). It is here that he challenges the postmodern Christian, who is often ‘attached’ to the palm pilot, the current model of vehicle, the cell phone, or latest computer gadgetry. The Canadian culture does not assist the Christian in relinquishing these ‘gratifications’ for the postmodern Christian is constantly bombarded through the media with the message that to live a fulfilling life, one must possess these items. Indeed, consumerism reigns. The question arises, to what degree has the consumerist god of North American society infiltrated into the very core of our spirituality? The second line of the poem ‘dark night’ reminds the Christian that the sensory appetites are to crave spiritual desires that ‘con ansias en amores inflamada’ – are ‘fired with love’s urgent longings’, which is directed solely to the Beloved.

## 6.2.2 Active Night of the Spirit – *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book II & III

The journey of faith in the second part of the active dark night is darker for the soul since it affects the rational interior part. Faith is an obscure habit “... because it brings us to believe divinely revealed truths which transcend every natural light and infinitely exceed all human understanding” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:110).<sup>6</sup> The excessive light of faith conferred to a soul is as darkness to the soul because naturally a brighter light suppresses a dimmer one. The abundance of the light of faith suppresses and overwhelms the intellect, which on its own has the property of natural knowledge (1979a:110). John’s desire is to direct the readers to the obscurity of faith and impress upon them the inability of the intellect to acquire by its own power the knowledge which faith affords concerning the supernatural mysteries of God, or even to understand the mysteries of God fully once they have been revealed to the soul (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1979a:51).

John’s instruction becomes repetitive, in which he repeats maxims and instructions from differing perspectives in defense of his perspective of the journey to union. The reader of John’s commentary quickly recognizes his intensity and deep desire for each person to grasp the magnitude of inner transformation as expressed poetically in *Dark Night*. Due to the repetitive and cyclical pattern of John’s instruction, the following section is selective with regard to issues and perspectives appropriate to the nature of this thesis.

### 6.2.2.1 The Journey of Faith

John’s commentary in Book II of *The Ascent* centers on stanza two of the poem, *Dark Night*, in which line two, ‘by the secret ladder, disguised’, symbolizes faith as represented by the ‘secret ladder’, ‘la secreta escala’, “... because all the rungs or articles of faith are secret to and hidden from both the senses and the intellect” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:107). Indeed, faith is the ladder that leads to the

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<sup>6</sup> Muto (1991:40) writes, “Faith, according to St. John of the Cross – not works, not ecstatic experience, only faith – is the proximate means of ascent to union with God. Not only must we let go of sensory gratifications for the sake of going through them to God; we must also relinquish spiritual possessions, like thoughts, dreams, and expectations, and learn to lean on pure faith alone”.

vantage point where one can behold, through a glass darkly, the deep things of God (Muto 1991:40).

Faith underscores the process of the soul during the darkest part of the dark night experience; it is one of the reasons why the experience is dark to the soul. John explains, "... such is faith to the soul — it informs us of matters we have never seen or known" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:110) as opposed to the light of natural knowledge which "... does not show us the object of faith, since this object is unproportioned to any of the senses" (1979a:110). Natural knowledge is acquired by the ability of the intellect, but it is not a form of knowledge that originates from faith. Therefore:

Faith nullifies the light of the intellect, and if this light is not darkened, the knowledge of faith is lost ... Faith, manifestly, is a dark night for man, but in this very way it gives him light. The more darkness it brings upon him, the more light it sheds. For by blinding, it illumines him (the soul) .... Our deduction is that since faith is a dark night, it illumines the soul that is in darkness. We verify, then, David's assertion on this matter: *Et nox illuminatio in deliciis meis* (Night will be my illumination in the midst of my delights) [Ps. 138:11]. This amounts to saying: The night of faith will be my guide in the delights of my pure contemplation and union with God. By this passage David clearly informs us of the darkness demanded on this road if a soul is to receive light (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:111,112).

John continually reminds the reader of the goal of this dark journey, which is the attainment of supernatural transformation, and this demands a darkening of the soul to the sensory and rational parts of nature. He writes, "Since this transformation and union is something that falls beyond the reach of the senses and human capacity, the soul must empty itself ... of all the earthly and heavenly things it can grasp" (1979a:112). What does this transformation look like; how is the union with God experienced in the soul? John suggests in his discussion of the nature of union with God that there are two components: substantial union and 'union of likeness'. On this point, John revealed a doctrinal precept with regard to the presence of God within the soul, for he writes that "... God sustains every soul and dwells in it substantially, even though it may be that of the greatest sinner in the world. This union between God and creatures always exists" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:115). On this particular point of doctrine, evangelical

theologians would disagree with John, since evangelical doctrine of salvation presupposes a spiritual separation from God, that is, God is not present in the soul prior to a personal decision to accept the substitutionary work of Christ. The relationship between God and the creature (humankind) had been broken at the Fall and requires restoration through Jesus Christ, which is accepted and mediated by faith. Salvation is personal, a personal choice, and a specific act of faith at a particular moment, a faith rooted in the death of Christ on the cross (Erickson 2001:291). Though evangelical theology would not be comfortable with John's perception of 'substantial union', most certainly, there would be agreement in the existence of a 'substantial union' with God at the moment of salvation, when God, by the Holy Spirit enters the soul of the human person (Erickson 2001:274).<sup>7</sup>

With regard to the 'likeness of love' or 'union of likeness':

The union of likeness is supernatural, the other natural. The supernatural union exists when God's will and the soul's are in conformity, so that nothing in the one is repugnant to the other. When the soul completely rids itself of what is repugnant and unconformed to the divine will, it rests transformed in God through love (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:116).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Erickson (2001:296) explains that in evangelical theology, the Scriptures play an indispensable part in the matter of salvation. He references I Peter 1:23,25, "For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God. ... But the word of the Lord remains forever. And that word is the Good News that was preached to you" (New Living Translation). "Thus the Word of God, whether read or preached, is God's means of presenting to us the salvation found in Christ; faith is our means of accepting that salvation" (2001:296). Further, Erickson quotes Paul in Ephesians 2:8-9 which reads; "God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it" (New Living Translation). Thus, "... the view espoused by most evangelicals, is that while some or even many will be saved, some will not" (Erickson 2001:296). Erickson (2001:307) explains, "Conversion is a single entity which has two distinguishable but inseparable aspects: repentance and faith. Repentance is the unbeliever's turning away from sin, and faith is his or her turning toward Christ.... In a sense, each is incomplete without the other, and each is motivated by the other. As we become aware of sin and turn from it, we see the necessity of turning to Christ for the provision of righteousness. Conversely, believing in Christ makes us aware of our sin and thus leads to repentance.... It is important also to draw distinctions between conversion and conversions. There is just *one major point in life* (italics mine) when the individual turns toward Christ in response to the offer of salvation. There may be other points when believers must abandon a particular practice or belief lest they revert to a life of sin. These events, however, are secondary, reaffirmations of the one major step that has been taken. We might say that there may be many conversions in the Christian's life, but only one Conversion". This fundamental perspective of 'salvation' is advocated by most evangelicals to state that only the 'saved' or the 'converted' will experience God and consequently inherit eternal life.

<sup>8</sup> Muto (1991:43) notes that John in making his distinctions between 'substantial union' and 'union of likeness' is careful to avoid any hint of *pantheism*, in which everything is God. John suggests that the soul becomes one with God by participant transformation, which is *panentheism*, everything in God but not identical to God. What Muto is referring to is John's comment, "... when God grants this supernatural favor to the soul, so great a union is caused that all the things of both God and the soul become one in participant transformation, and the soul appears to be God more than a soul. Indeed, it is God by participation. Yet truly, its being (even though transformed) is naturally as distinct from God's as it was before, just as the window, although illumined by the ray, has an existence distinct from

John explained at length the role of theological virtues in the process of transformation of the three faculties, each respectively experiencing emptiness and darkness caused by the night of the senses. The remainder of Book II examines "... how in order to journey to God the intellect must be perfected in the darkness of faith, the memory in the emptiness of hope, and the will in the nakedness and absence of every affection" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:119). Two points of importance: John's instruction appears harsh and unattainable, and particularly so, should the reader not be a member of a religious order in which the spiritual disciplines lend themselves to the austerity that John suggests. Throughout his writings, he will remind his readers that a person makes progress to union with God as much as is humanly possible, "... to reach union with God in this life, insofar as is possible" within the circumstances of their spiritual life (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:126).<sup>9</sup> However, he warns the traveler that seemingly few (at least this is his assessment of the spiritual climate of the Christian world in Spain) choose to enter the path of 'emptiness of spirit'. His assessment of the spiritual maturity of his contemporaries comes through quite profoundly:

Oh, who can make this counsel of our Saviour understandable, and practicable, and attractive that spiritual persons might become aware of the difference between the method many of them think is good and that which ought to be used in traveling this road! They are of the opinion that any kind of withdrawal from the world or reformation of life suffices. Some are content with a certain degree of virtue, perseverance in prayer, and mortification, but never achieve the nakedness, poverty, selflessness, or spiritual purity (which are all the same) which the Lord counsels us here (to take up his cross and follow me). For they still feed and clothe their natural selves with spiritual feelings and consolations instead of divesting and denying themselves of these for God's sake. They think of denial of self in worldly matters is sufficient without an annihilation and purification of spiritual possessions. It happens that, when some of this solid, perfect food (the annihilation of all sweetness in

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the ray" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:117). This statement further suggests that John viewed the human personality as unique and maintained its uniqueness in the process of participative transformation.

<sup>9</sup> John tempered his teaching of the purification and union journey as "... describing a soul's conduct along the spiritual road which leads to perfect union with God through love, insofar as is attainable in this life", located in his explanation of the *Dark Night*, Book I. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez (1979a:572) interpret John to believe that perfect union will be in heaven where it will be more intense, continuous and permanent, whereas here on earth, the act of intense, loving union is not possible to be sustained, but comes and goes according to God's desire for the soul. They refer to John's statement, "Yet it is not secret to the soul itself that has attained this perfection, for within itself it has the experience of this intimate embrace. It does not, however, always experience these awakenings..." (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:648).

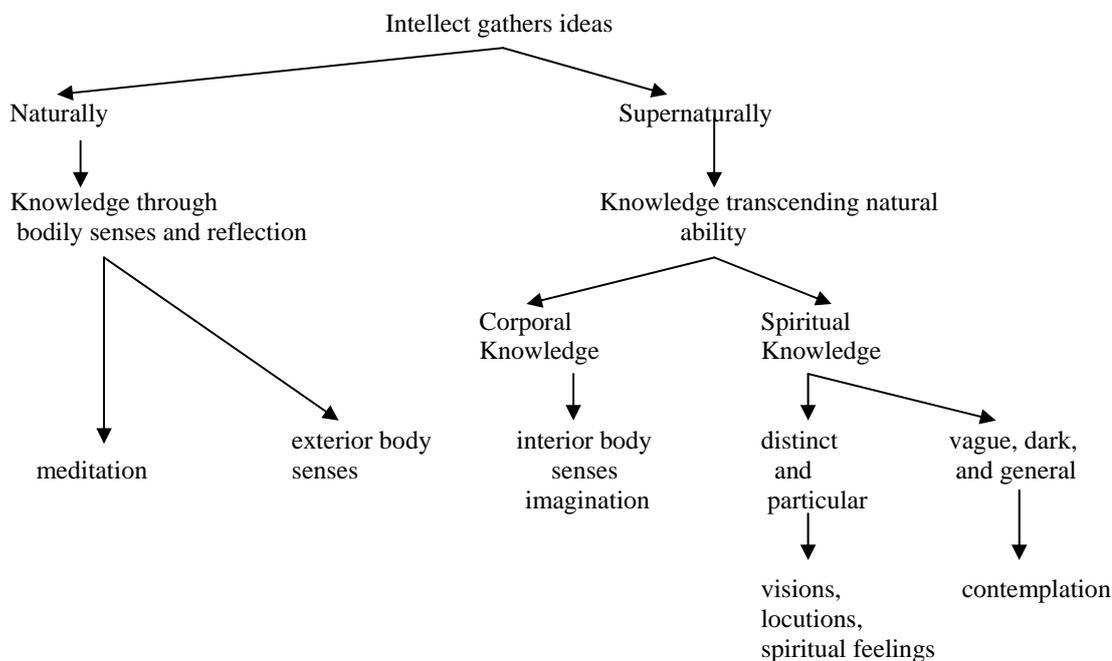
God — the pure spiritual cross and nakedness of Christ's poverty of spirit) is offered them in dryness, distaste, and trial, they run from it as from death and wander about in search only of sweetness and delightful communications from God. Such an attitude is not the hallmark of self-denial and nakedness of spirit, but the indication of a 'spiritual sweet tooth.' Through this kind of conduct they become, spiritually speaking, enemies of the cross of Christ [Phil. 3:18] (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:122).

John was dogmatically clear that to be a faithful follower of Christ comes with a price if one desires spiritual transformation; there is no shortcut to the 'resurrection experience of Easter morning'. He observed that for some Christians, Christ is to a great extent unknown, even though they consider themselves to be Christ's friends; and because of their own extreme self-love, they seek out Christ for their own satisfactions and consolations, and refuse to seek Christ out of love for him, his bitter trials and death (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:125). John's writing, as instruction to the Carmelite friars and nuns, was a strong admonition for those already on the spiritual path.

John expended a great deal of ink (and energy) in Book II explaining the process of the three faculties, the intellect, memory, and will which are being purged through the theological virtues: faith, hope, and love.

Faith is the only proximate means to union with God for the intellect; and for this to occur it (the intellect) must be divested and emptied of everything related to sense and those things apprehensible, which is knowledge gathered by natural means (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:129). John explained, "For the likeness between faith and God is so close that no other difference exists than that between believing in God and seeing Him" (1979a:129).

A diagram reflecting John's view of the manner in which the intellect gathers ideas and concepts is included here based on (AMC II 10, 12 [3], (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1979a:130,131,137).



The intellect must travel through all of the means of gaining knowledge until it arrives at contemplation. Is John saying that the person who travels the path to union is becoming an anti-intellectual? Not at all, for if that were the case, a brilliant mystical theologian would not have qualified to be on the journey. The intellect is not the problem; pride, arrogance and intellectual snobbery are. With all of the ways and means to knowledge that John identifies, none can direct the soul to the place of Mystery, the place of deepest intimacy, except for the supernatural knowledge of contemplation. He meticulously classifies each form of knowledge and the detrimental effects of each type on the soul in the journey to union with God. John was precise, detailed and issued warnings with regard to the necessity of faith to purge the intellect.

When a person is no longer able to practice meditation, the imaginative and sensory experience of prayer, they enter the way of the spirit, the contemplative way. John has previously defined contemplation as the manner in which the intellect

experiences a higher knowledge of God which is called mystical theology; or another phrase he suggested is the 'secret wisdom of God'. He wrote, "For this wisdom is secret to the very intellect that receives it. St. Dionysius on this account refers to contemplation as a ray of darkness" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:128). Just as the sun is total darkness to the eyes of a bat, so the brightest light in God is complete darkness to the intellect (1979a:128).

John addressed the natural imaginative apprehension and he warned of the harm caused to the soul when a person becomes attached to meditation. His rationale: images, forms, figures, fashioned by the senses are an inadequate, proximate means to God (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:136). One of the experiences that become apparent in the practice of contemplative silence is a particular inner quiet which occurs when the soul's intentional focus rests in God, while not having to do or feel or see anything. John explains, "In this loving awareness the soul receives God's communication passively, just as a man without doing anything else but keep his eyes open receives light passively" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:148). He adds, "For little by little and very soon the divine calm and peace with a wondrous, sublime knowledge of God, enveloped in divine love, will be infused into his soul" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:149).

Loving knowledge infused into the soul during contemplation is a repeated theme John interjected at strategic places in the text. Though the purpose of the journey of spiritual transformation is union with God; clearly, a byproduct in the mind of John is 'loving knowledge' which is infused into the soul during contemplation. What happens, he writes is the following:

Accordingly the moment prayer begins, the soul, as one with a store of water, drinks peaceably, without the labor and the need of fetching the water through channels of past considerations, forms, and figures. At the moment it recollects itself in the presence of God, it enters upon an act of general, loving, peaceful, and tranquil knowledge, drinking wisdom and love and delight (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:142).

During contemplation, the soul which has been united with God – who is pure knowledge – becomes united with heavenly knowledge, and John suggests that the person may even lose track of time. When they return to the present moment, there are

effects produced of which the person is not aware of. These are: "... an elevation of mind to heavenly knowledge, and a withdrawal and abstraction from all objects, forms and figures as well as from the remembrance of them" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:146); and contemplation produces these effects without the use of the senses and the faculties. John classified this form of communication as a 'general, loving knowledge' since it is imparted to the intellect obscurely; for the higher and more sublime the divine light, the darker it is to the intellect (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:147).

Having explained the transformation required for the intellect, John continues on to the next two faculties: memory and will. In the first fifteen chapters of Book III in *The Ascent*, John points the way for advancement in contemplation and describes the second faculty which requires transformation. In order for union with God to occur, the faculties must be silenced so that God may effect the divine union. It is as though this method of disencumbering, emptying, and depriving the faculties of their natural rights and operations, that space is created for the inflow and illumination of the supernatural (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:214). In the same manner as the intellect is prepared for union with God by faith, memory and will are purged by hope and love respectively. John's instructions for the latter two faculties are shorter, since when one faculty is being purged, seemingly the other two interconnect. In addition, the maxims applied to the purification of the intellect parallel the principles of purification for the other two faculties when drawn into the dark night.

In dark night, the soul loses its knowledge of God and its memory, and must journey to know God through what God is not, rather than through what God is. Memory purged in the dark night is emptied of all knowledge and at times struggles to remember something, since in this state, memory is united with God. Hope sustains the soul during this time of transformation because hope is all that is retained within the memory bank. John reminded the reader that a transformed memory experiences freedom from attachments to 'things':

These souls, consequently, perform only fitting and reasonable works, and none that are not so. For God's Spirit makes them know what must be known and ignore what must be ignored, remember what ought to be

remembered — with or without forms — and forget what ought to be forgotten, and makes them love what they ought to love, and keeps them from loving what is not in God (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:217).

Muto (1991:126) concurs, for being “... possessed by God, we can profess God in all we say and do. There is no split between inner aspiration and outer incarnation, between recollection and action, because we are in spirit with God”. Thus, when the operations of the memory are increasingly ‘divinized’ and ‘transformed’, “... we know what must be known and ignore what must be ignored; we remember what ought to be remembered and forget what is best forgotten” (1991:126).

Divine operations of the faculties performed in daily life take on practical expression and John illustrated this principle with concrete examples. Someone will make a request of the Christian, whose memory is hidden in God, to pray for them, and God will remind this person at strategic moments to pray for the individual; or the believer may be directed to pray for someone or a situation unknown to him or her. Another example, suggested John, of the outworking of a memory united with God is that God will remind this person of a ‘necessary business matter’. “He will not remember through any form, but, without his knowing how, the time and suitable way of attending to it will be impressed on his soul without fail” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:217). Is it possible that palm pilots, the Blackberry and day timers have replaced the necessity of transformation at this level in the soul? Indeed, the question arises, do these ‘attachments’ deter the postmodern in their quest for union with God?

Three obstacles restrain a person from yielding to the purification of memory by means of hope. The first is the memory’s capability to retain knowledge and reflections that are harmful and hinder the process. John understood the human memory and the ability for memory to trick the intellect through clinging to “... falsehoods, imperfections, appetites, judgments, loss of time, and numerous other evils engendering many impurities in the soul” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:219). In addition, a memory which harbors falsehoods and replays these messages incessantly deprives the soul of “... numerous holy thoughts and considerations about God, which are conducive to the reception of favors from God” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:220). Memory,

silenced by hope, silences the soul so that one can hear the voice of Mystery which speaks deep into the depths of the soul.

The second obstacle naturally coexists with the first: the work of the devil. The greatest harm that the devil performs in the soul is through the memory, whereby "... he (the devil) can add to its (the memory) knowledge other forms, ideas, reasonings, and by means of them move it to pride, avarice, anger, envy, etc., and insert unjust hatred, vain love, and many kinds of delusions" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:221). With this instruction, John reveals to the postmodern reader his doctrine of evil. The devil has influence on the soul only through the operations of the faculties, intellect, memory and will and principally by means of knowledge procured through the faculties. Thus, to darken the memory of its knowledge is to render the devil powerless (1979a:221). Negative memories rehearsed and retained create an opening for the devil to implant thoughts which distort reality and consequently cause immense harm to the soul. The silence of God in the context of memory guards the soul against the influence or invasion of destructive thought patterns in the soul.<sup>10</sup>

Thirdly, an 'untransformed memory' which retains its power in daily life has the potential to be an enormous impediment for the spiritual life, namely, 'the deprivation of moral and spiritual good' (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:222). Moral good "... consists in the control of the passions and the restriction of inordinate appetites. The result for the soul is tranquility, peace, repose, and moral virtue, which is the moral good" (1979a:222). Disturbances never arise in the soul except through the knowledge

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<sup>10</sup> John's perception of evil may be simplistic to the modern day theologian, particularly since this question has never really had an adequate answer within philosophical and theological debate. Although, theologians expend a great deal of ink in speculation. Erickson (2001:158) suggests that the devil is engaged in opposing God and this work is accomplished by means of deception. He blinds the unbelievers' minds from seeing the gospel of Christ, (2 Corinthians 4:4), and he opposes and hinders Christians in their service for God. Bloesch (1995:129) writes though "... biblical religion is unequivocal that ... evil is not directly willed by God it is under his controlling power. Behind the afflictions and sufferings of the human race lies the malevolent work of Satan, and behind this abysmal power lies the inscrutable hand of the living God". Another theologian, Carl F Henry (1983:270) suggests that "Since what God does and discloses is the sole standard of goodness, no problem of evil can originate at the ultimate level; the problem of evil arises only if God can be charged with doing what he commands other rational beings not to do". However, if theology cannot offer a fully satisfying explanation for evil, it can point to the spiritual solution, the incarnation and atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Bloesch 1995:136). Thus, this is where John and evangelical theology would intersect, since for John the only place where the devil cannot penetrate is the soul of the believer. Christians may be deceived, hence, the importance of the silence of God in the soul for spiritual transformation. However, it is to be noted that not all negative thoughts as John suggests are from the evil one, and can be relegated to the work of the devil. Modern psychology would not concur with his interpretation of the source of negative thoughts.

of the memory and when memory is silenced, sadness and hatred are exchanged for tranquility and love (1979a:222).

The benefits of forgetting and relinquishing thoughts causing inner disturbance to the soul counterbalance the three obstacles which John has identified. With regard to the first type of harm, the spiritual person experiences tranquility and peace of soul due to the absence of disturbing knowledge in the memory. Consequently, the person is predisposed to inner awareness of wisdom and virtues (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:223). The second harm to be silenced is the infliction upon the soul through the demonic, and the benefit in memory entering the dark night is the soul "... is freed from many suggestions, temptations, and movements which the devil inserts in souls through their thoughts and ideas, thereby occasioning many impurities and sins" (1979a:223). Along with these benefits, the third harm is overcome: the soul is freed from addictive responses to distortion and is affected and taught by the presence of Mystery within (1979a:223).

What is the role of the human person in this journey? Indeed, John clearly indicates throughout his writings the absolute necessity of pursuing silence and solitude in daily life. In the circumstance of the transformation of memory, John reiterates, "we close the memory to all ideas from which distractions and evils arise by rendering it silent and mute, and applying the hearing of the spirit to God in silence" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:220). In this particular experience of silence, a person is able to turn to God, for "... as often as distinct ideas, forms, and images occur to him, he should immediately without resting in them, turn to God with loving affection, in emptiness of everything rememberable (sic)" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:222). However, a paradox occurs as John writes:

In the measure that the memory becomes dispossessed of things, in that measure it will have hope, and the more hope it has the greater will be its union with God; for in relation to God, the more a soul hopes the more it retains. And when, precisely, it is more dispossessed of things, it hopes more .... The following must be kept in mind: Our aim is union with God in this memory: the object of hope is something unpossessed; the less other objects are possessed, the more capacity and ability there is to hope for this one object, and consequently the more hope; the greater the

possessions, the less capacity and ability for hope (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:225,236).

Knowledge of God attained through the dark night will be remembered by the 'notable effect' produced in the soul, which awakens in the soul the ability to glean loving knowledge. The communications of the knowledge "... are touches and spiritual feelings of union with God" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:235), which the memory does not recall through any forms, images or figures impressed upon the soul, since the touches and spiritual feelings of union with God do not possess sensory attributes. The soul remembers these through the effect of light, love, delight and spiritual renewal produced within it, a renewal experienced as often as the soul recalls the memory of these effects (1979a:235). This form of spiritual reminiscence, according to John, is sound intellectually and theologically.

Even though John exhibits his knowledge and wisdom as both a systematic and mystical theologian, in this instance, he comprehends the depth of psychological healing which transpires within the soul in the realm of healing of memories. What John espouses is currently a practice of a healing ministry which occurs in many places within the Christian church. His understanding of the role of memory upon the well-being of a person, and the addictive control of destructive memories retained within the soul are principles in the healing of memories ministry practiced at this time. Obviously, John understood the role of memories in the psychological well-being of a person, as well as the role of the Spirit in freeing the human soul from the destructive messages related to past memories.

This is the final section of the *Ascent*, and John begins his examination of the purification process of the will. This section is incomplete, since the text stops mid-sentence in chapter forty-five. However, his insights provide sufficient evidence to recognize a connection between the three faculties and the theological virtues required for purification.

The will is grounded by charity, for through charity, works carried out in faith are living works and highly valued (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:237). The ontological essence of the soul comprises the faculties, passions, and appetites, and all

of these are ruled by the will. John writes, “When the will directs these faculties, passions, and appetites toward God, turning away from all that is not God, the soul preserves its strength for God, and comes to love Him with all its might” (1979a:237). Similar to the other faculties, the purification of the will of all inordinate feelings which feed unruly appetites, affections, and operations provide the basis for a person to preserve one’s strength for God (1979a:237). The four feelings or passions capable of weakening one’s strength and resolve to union with God are joy, hope, sorrow and fear. Joy (finding gratification in one’s own needs and accomplishments), hope (personal self-fulfilling expectations), sorrow (an attitude fostering depression and despair), and fear (worry and anxiety cultivating insecurity) deter the will in the journey to union with God. The idea of reaching union with God consists of purging the will so that the human will is aligned with the divine will and made identical with the will of God.

When the four feelings are unbridled, they are the sources of many vices and imperfections; however, conversely, when they are in order and composed, they provide strength to all the virtues. In fact:

These four passions are so brother-like that where one goes actually the others go virtually; if one is recollected actually, the other three in the same measure are recollected virtually. If the will rejoices over something, it must consequently in the same degree hope for it, with the virtual inclusion of sorrow and fear. And with the removal of satisfaction in this object, fear, sorrow, and hope will also be removed (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:238).

This final text examines the role of joy in the faculty of the will and the harm caused by pursuing joy by means of inordinate attachments. John demonstrates his intuitive skill by naming the objects of joy that cause harm to the soul, followed by the benefits when we allow the dark night to purify this emotion. The detailed analysis within these chapters provides a template to continue the process through the other three ‘brothers’ of joy, since John for whatever reason, unknown to modern day scholars, was not able to complete this text. For the serious pilgrim en route to union with God, the principles defined as guidance through the passion of joy is sufficient since seemingly, the same principles apply to the other three passions.

This is the journey to midnight, the active night of the senses and the active night of the spirit. In the following sections, John describes the passive night of the senses and passive night of the spirit which constitutes the darkest part of the night.

At this juncture, the disparity between the mysticism of John of the Cross and evangelical spirituality takes on greater clarity. John's mystical and theological experience had revealed to him that contemplation is the final place of embracing knowledge of God. This knowledge is transformational, intimate and authentic; indeed, this is the knowing by Unknowing. Whereas within evangelicalism, knowledge of God attained through mystical union is pure subjective speculation and to some extent, unreliable. Knowledge of God attained through diligent study of the Scriptures – biblical theology or systematic theology – is the primary means of understanding the concepts of God. For the evangelical theologian, the Scriptures are the final text of revelation of God to humankind. What John is seemingly suggesting, with regard to the knowledge of God attained by means of contemplation, represents to the evangelical mind the notion of the 'incomplete revelation' of God. There is not a suggestion in the writings of John that this is the case, however John would reiterate the absolute necessity for the Christian is this state of the 'dark night' to locate a wise and discerning spiritual director to offer assistance for the journey. For the interior knowledge of God which is being infused into the soul is not for the purpose of self-promotion, but as John will elaborate later, for the purpose of spiritual humility. Starr (2002:79) writes:

What the soul draws also from the aridity and emptiness of the night of desire is spiritual humility. Through humility, acquired along with self-knowledge, the soul is purified of the imperfections of spiritual pride into which she stumbled during her time of prosperity. Aware only of her own aridity and misery, it never occurs to her that she is now making better progress than others, which is what she used to erroneously believe. Now she is sure that others are doing much better than she is. From this humility arises love of neighbor. The soul honors others and does not judge them as she did before, when she assumed that she burned with special fervor and that they did not. Her own wretchedness is so present in her sight that there is no room to scrutinize others.

Near the end of this text, John notes that many are entrapped in their addictive needs for self-gratification, and they busily search out new ways of recollecting their minds and

discovering other ways of disciplining their wills. They are not content to stay the course, always searching for the new way of prayer or the latest method of studying the Scriptures.<sup>11</sup> Even Christian spirituality is not immune to becoming a victim of faddishness, since currently, a large number of books and journal publications are tapping into the addictive tendency for ‘more’ – even if the ‘more’ is the intellectual knowledge of the Christian mystics or signing up for another course in contemplative prayer. Unfortunately, the pursuit of the ‘good’ can be a sign of an addictive and undisciplined form of spirituality. John suggests that it is through the ‘dark night’ that God directs the soul toward intimacy – and at this point, which is the active night of the ‘sense’ and ‘spirit’, the soul has merely made a serious start.

### 6.2.3 Passive Night of the Senses – *The Dark Night*, Book I

The *Dark Night* exists as a separate treatise from the *Ascent*, although reading this text requires a prerequisite reading of the *Ascent*. Scholars question John’s intent in writing the two texts. Were they actually to be amalgamated into one treatise, since the active purification of the night is insufficient for union with God (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:218)? In the *Living Flame of Love*, John references back to the “*Dark Night of The Ascent of Mount Carmel*” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:589) as the text which deals with aspects of the intense purification in the intellect, will and memory. John’s reference begs the question, had he indeed completed this treatise and incorporated both texts, and the document has been lost, or have portions been destroyed? Did he write *Living Flame* with the intent to resume his teaching from where he had terminated the text at the end of chapter twenty-five in Book II of *Dark Night*? In Book II of *Dark Night*, John’s commentary accounts for merely the first two stanzas of

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<sup>11</sup> John described these Christians as, “... the appetites of these individuals will be the occasion of considerable inconsistency. Some will never persevere in one place – nor even at times in one state – but now you see them in one spot, and now in another; now choosing one hermitage, now another; at one moment they will be decorating one oratory, and at the next, another. Some also pass their time here below changing states and modes of life. The fervor and joy they find in their spiritual practices is merely sensible, and they have never made any effort to reach spiritual recollection through denial of their wills and submission to the suffering of discomforts. Consequently, as often as they see a seemingly devotional place, or way, or state of life adapted to their disposition and inclination, they immediately leave what they have and follow after it. And since they are motivated by sensible gratification, they soon look for something else; for sensible satisfaction is inconsistent and very quick to fail” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:284). This notion has immense implication for the North America/Canadian Christian, where culture suggests that we strive for self-fulfillment at all costs.

the poem; nonetheless, in his incomplete work he meticulously explains the purification of the soul as it passes from a state of the proficient to perfection.

The night of passive contemplation engenders two types of darkness: sensory and spiritual. The first part, in Book I of *Dark Night*, is the purification of the sensory which facilitates the purification of the spiritual that is described in Book II. John comments that the sensory night (passive) is common and happens to many Christians; the spiritual night (passive) is experienced by very few, apparently only by the proficient (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:311).

### **6.2.3.1 The Communication of God**

The first stanza of the poem *Dark Night* represents ‘purgative contemplation’, which is the passive journey in the soul toward negation of self and all things. This is the passive night of the soul, and what transpires in this section of the dark night is unknown to the soul, for God is orchestrating the entire process.

In Book I of the *Dark Night* commentary, John began once more to address the beginners in prayer. He discerned that some of the sisters and friars, for whom he wrote, were still novices in the mystical journey. Comparing the formation of the soul to a mother breastfeeding her child, he reminds his readers that many people prefer the nutrition from the ‘good milk and tender food’, rather than put aside the childhood habits and become accustomed to greater and more important things (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:298). John challenges the beginners in prayer to put away their ‘security blankets’, since the time has come to relinquish attachment to spiritual ‘goods’ and embrace the dark night.

The first step is the acknowledgement of sin and John describes the ‘imperfections’ of the beginners by means of the seven capital sins.<sup>12</sup> He demonstrates that each one of the ‘seven deadly sins’ exposes inordinate ‘loves’, and by means of the entry into the dark night, the soul is able to place all of these loves in reasonable order

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<sup>12</sup> The seven deadly sins, or capital sins, originally listed by the early Church Fathers and adopted by medieval theologians are pride, envy, anger, sloth, avarice, gluttony and lust. These classifications were originally set due to their tendency toward evil and habits of vice. They were recognized as impulses which blocked the ability to love God, ourselves and others; though, they were not viewed as ‘mortal’ sins. Recently, Catholic theologians have proposed alternate ‘deadly sins’: cruelty, hypocrisy, snobbery, treachery, self-negation and aimlessness (Downey 1993:248,251). John teaches that the seven sins prevent beginners in prayer from progress in the night.

(Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:306). The soul is strengthened and purified by the love of God, by whom the person is weaned from the gratifications and delights of breast milk and acquires virtues by a different means (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:311). A reform of the appetites is required for entry into the 'happy night of the senses' (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:312), since God desires to remove the base manner of charity as people presently practice. God desires to guide the person to a higher degree of divine love and to liberate them from the lowly exercise of senses and discursive meditation (1979a:312).<sup>13</sup>

Three signs accompany the spiritual person into the sensory night of purification: firstly, the person no longer finds consolation in meditation or from 'creatures', since God "... puts a soul in this dark night in order to dry up and purge its sensory appetite" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:313). Secondly, the person considers that he or she is at fault, since the former delights and spiritual practices have become distasteful, and nothing satisfactory has replaced them. Take heart, writes John, for "... it is obvious that this aversion and dryness is not the fruit of laxity and tepidity, for a lukewarm person does not care much for the things of God" (1979a:313). John explains the difference between dryness and lukewarmness: "... a lukewarm person is very lax and remiss in his will and spirit, and has no solicitude about serving God; a person suffering the purgative dryness is ordinarily solicitous, concerned, and pained about not serving God" (1979a:313).<sup>14</sup> In fact, this person's spirit is ready and strong, since in this

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<sup>13</sup> Quite a lengthy explanation follows which develops the rationale and timing for the sensory deprivation, "He desires to liberate them from the lowly exercise of the senses and discursive meditation, by which they go in search of Him so inadequately and with so many difficulties, and lead them into the exercise of the spirit, in which they become capable of a communion with God that is more abundant and freer of imperfections (sins). God does this after beginners have exercised themselves for a time in the way of virtue and have persevered in meditation and prayer. For it is through the delight and satisfaction they experience in prayer that they have become detached from worldly things and have some spiritual strength in God... Consequently, it is at the time they are going about their spiritual exercises with delight and satisfaction, when in their opinion the sun of divine favor is shining most brightly on them, that God darkens all this light and closes the door and spring of the sweet spiritual water they were tasting as often and as long as they desired.... God now leaves them in such darkness that they do not know which way to turn in their discursive imaginings; they cannot advance a step in meditation, as they used to, now that the interior sensory faculties are engulfed in this night. He leaves them in such dryness that they not only fail to receive satisfaction and pleasure from their spiritual exercises and works, as they formerly did, but also find these exercises distasteful and bitter" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:312).

<sup>14</sup> John briefly explains the connection between depression, melancholia or some other humor, and the experience of dark night of senses. The inner dryness may be accompanied by depression, as it often is, he claims. It still will have the purification effect, since the soul is still deprived of the satisfactions connected with God. On the other hand, if the dryness is caused entirely by the 'humor' or depression, then, there is harm since the depression does harm to one's nature, and none of the effects of purification or spiritual transformation occur. In the state of depression, the

dryness, God is transferring spiritual 'goods' and strength from sense to spirit for the sensory part of the soul is incapable of the 'goods of the spirit' (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:314). The aridity of the inner desert becomes the stage for purging the sensory appetite that was fed and nourished through meditation:

This (new) food is the beginning of a contemplation that is dark and dry to the senses ... if those in whom this occurs know how to remain quiet, without care or solicitude about any interior or exterior work, they will soon in that unconcern and idleness delicately experience the interior nourishment. This reflection is so delicate that usually if the soul desires to experience it, it cannot...the reason is that now in this state of contemplation, when the soul has left discursive meditation and entered the state of proficients, it is God who works in it. He therefore binds the interior faculties and leaves no support in the intellect, nor satisfaction in the will, nor remembrance in the memory. At this time a person's own efforts are of no avail, but an obstacle to the interior peace and work God is producing in the spirit through that dryness of sense. Since this peace is something spiritual and delicate, its fruit is quiet, delicate, solitary, satisfying, and peaceful, and far removed from all these other gratifications of beginners, which are very palpable and sensory (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:315).

The third sign essentially is the byproduct of the first two: the spiritual person is unable to meditate, use the imagination or draw from interior senses as was the practice prior to entrance into the night of the senses. What is the conduct of a person who is in the sensory night when they are being directed from meditation to contemplation? The advice given by the Mystical Doctor is to persevere patiently and not be afflicted; they should trust in God who does not fail those who seek with a righteous and simple heart. For God does not fail to impart what is needful for the spiritual person, which is direction to the clear and pure light of love (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:317). John advises his reader that when they experience freedom of soul in the night of the senses, they should liberate themselves from the impediment and fatigue of ideas and thoughts in prayer, and care not about thinking and meditating. They should content themselves with a loving and peaceful attentiveness to God, and live without the effort or desire to taste or feel God in their spiritual life (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:317). When a

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soul experiences none of the desires to serve God which accompany purgative dryness (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:314).

person has entered the place of contemplation in idleness and quiet, writes John, they should not seek any satisfaction from other spiritual practices, but walk upright, with their spirit detached from everything and allow God to speak to them. This practice opens the way for the faculties to receive the message of God in a state of listening and loving attentiveness (contemplation), since God desires to communicate directly with the soul (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:623).

A litany of benefits for the spiritual person is recorded. For the purposes of the present research, only one is discussed since John tends to be repetitive in certain of his observations. John writes that God illumines the soul during the passive night of the senses, a maxim derived from Isaiah 58:10. In fact, God bestows upon the soul two things: knowledge of the soul's own condition (misery and lowliness), and knowledge of the grandeur and majesty of God. The intellect is left quiet and limpid, free to understand the concepts of God, which opens the means for the soul, now unhindered and empty, to receive divine wisdom (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:322).

Evangelicals believe that God speaks to the spiritual person, and accept the notion that the communication is generally recognizable to the intellect. A dimension of John's perception of God's interaction with the soul which casts doubt for the evangelical theologian is John's view of a God who 'directly' illuminates or teaches the soul, and bypasses the intellect. The argument would be made that the Christian can be easily deluded by the evil one. Since the communication with the soul is entirely subjective, claims can be made for strange and unrealistic 'messages'. What John proposes in the previous paragraph is highly suspicious, since there is the appearance of loss of control. The question arises, who is in control? Is the Spirit of God or is the evil one, since at this level, the devil can create immense havoc?

John is keenly aware of this concern, and while many of his directees experienced visions, locutions, revelations and spiritual feelings (Teresa of Avila being one of them), he was highly suspicious of these practices. He acknowledges that God grants natural or supernatural spiritual gifts, as listed by St. Paul, such as "... wisdom, knowledge, faith, prophecy, discernment or understanding of spirits, knowledge of tongues and interpretation of words" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:197). Yet, John is

so concerned that his readers comprehend the ‘meddlesomeness’ of the devil, that he devotes twelve chapters to this topic in Book II of the *Ascent*. From his own observations, John has discerned the ability of the devil to conjecture and deceptiveness, which direct the soul away from focus on God toward focus on one’s ability, which is the beginning of spiritual pride.<sup>15</sup> People are deluded and deceived because the devil is a meddler in the delivery of messages to the soul, “... since the truths are imparted through words, figures, and likenesses, etc., he can make counterfeits more easily than when the revelations are purely spiritual” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:201). For this reason, every spiritual person requires a wise spiritual director, who is able to discern along with the person the nature, source, and meaning of any form of spiritual revelation. In John’s mind, to communicate with a spiritual director the received visions and revelations is not an option; it is an absolute requirement.

To relinquish control of the soul as suggested by John is uncomfortable for evangelicals who fear the influence of evil in the passive night of senses and spirit. John clearly alludes to the necessity of passivity of the intellect, emotion and will, for the passive night of the spirit:

... puts the sensory and spiritual appetites to sleep, deadens them and deprives them of the ability to find pleasure in anything. It binds the imagination and impedes it from doing any good discursive work. It makes the memory cease, the intellect become dark and unable to understand anything, and hence it causes the will also to become arid and constrained, and all the faculties empty and useless. And over all this hangs a dense and burdensome cloud which afflicts the soul and keeps it withdrawn from God (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:363).

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<sup>15</sup> In *The Ascent*, John describes the intent of the devil, “Through spiritual suggestion and by means of a certain natural light, the devil can also cause these visions in the soul, whether the objects be present or absent. ...A great difference lies between diabolical and divine visions, for the effects of diabolical visions are unlike those produced by the divine. The devil’s visions produce spiritual dryness in one’s communion with God and an inclination to self-esteem, to admitting them and to considering them important. In no way do they cause the mildness of humility and the love of God. Neither are the forms of these diabolical visions impressed with a delicate clarity upon the soul, as are the others. ...But the memory of them is considerably arid, and unproductive of the love and humility caused by the remembrance of the good visions” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:191). By contrast, “The effect these visions (from God) produce in the soul are: quietude, illumination, gladness resembling that of glory, delight, purity, love, humility, and an elevation and inclination toward God” (1979a:191). Evangelical theology would concur with John on this issue, since for most theologians, the theology of evil – in the form the devil and his angels – is clearly a force to be reckoned with. Currently, the alternate forms of spirituality prevalent in Canadian society, such as New Age, the occult, ‘white witches’ and ‘mother earth’ movements are perceived by evangelicals as initiated by the devil.

John's doctrine of evil speaks to the 'meddlesomeness' of the devil, as mentioned above. He teaches that in the state of dark contemplation the soul is closer to God; also, in this state, God safeguards and cares for the soul. The soul is well hidden, and protected from itself and the influence of 'creatures' (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:367). John elaborates:

The reason the darkness of this contemplation frees and hides the soul from the wiles of the devil is that the contemplation experienced here is infused passively and secretly without the use of the exterior and interior faculties of the sensory part of the soul. The soul's journey, consequently, is hidden and free not only from the obstacle these faculties in their natural weakness can occasion, but also from the devil, who without these faculties of the sensory part cannot reach the soul or know what is happening within it. Accordingly, the more spiritual and interior the communication and the more remote it is from the senses, the less the devil understands it (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:382).

He reiterates this message later in the same chapter, stating that the soul is in total darkness and concealment as far as the enemy (the devil) is concerned. Thus, the enemy is incapable of learning the intimate and secret communication which occurs between the soul and God (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:385). This brief explanation of John's doctrine of evil coincides with evangelical theological precepts. Erickson (2001) writes that "... we receive confidence from the realization that powerful though Satan and his accomplices are, there are definite limits upon what they can do. We can, therefore, by the grace of God, resist him successfully" (Erickson 2001:160).

Another observation surfacing from the wisdom and writings of this Mystical Doctor indicates that to the degree Christian spirituality examines, discerns, defines, and defends the mystical spiritual experience associated with the Creator through Jesus Christ, to the same degree, the awareness of the tactics and 'meddlesomeness' of evil will be recognized and exposed. This process is generally referred to as spiritual discernment. Though not the focus of research for this thesis, John's warnings regarding the resistance associated with the enemy of the soul are comprehensive, wise, orthodox and encompassing.

Undoubtedly, the twenty-first century evangelical church will not be conspicuous for its integrity and maturity. The tentacles of 'evil' have stretched its arms

inside the walls of the Christian church and evangelicals are not without blemish. John responds to this dilemma with the assurance to the follower of Christ, that God is working an exchange of the human imperfections with the ‘fruit’<sup>16</sup> of the Spirit, personified in the life of Christ. Thus, an aspect of John’s message relevant to the evangelical church is the issue of personal integrity. When reason and logic reign supreme to define Christian theology and devotion, the human mind is capable of rationalizing a belief or behavior which supports an individual’s own desire or personal bias. The path of spiritual transformation, teaches John of the Cross, is the release of whatever ‘impediment’ restrains the person from living a life of integrity or exhibiting the characteristics of maturity and wisdom.

#### **6.2.4 Passive Night of the Spirit – *The Dark Night*, Book II**

At this point, the spiritual person enters the darkest part of the journey, the passive night of the spirit, where according to John, few enter. For proficients in prayer, this night involves a transition from sweet communications with God through the senses to contemplation which leads to the purgation of the spirit (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:331). There is a tendency for proficients in prayer to succumb to the sin of pride, for John had observed that these people have received an abundance of spiritual communications and live exemplary, holy lives. However, this is the stage where the “... devil induces many into believing vain visions and false prophecies. He strives to make them presume that God and the saints speak with them; and frequently they believe their phantasy” (1979a:331). It is possible for these proficients to become lax in their spiritual rigor and fervor, disrespectful of a holy God and may lose a connectedness with authentic spirituality (1979a:331). Thus, to reach union with God,

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<sup>16</sup> Characteristically, the ‘fruit’ of the Spirit is the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul listed the attributes in Galatians 5:22,23: “But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (New Living Translation). Theologians have agreed that this list is not intended to be exhaustive since St. Paul in I Corinthians 13:4-6 offers a similar list: patience, kindness, humility, gentleness, unselfishness, forgiveness, compassion, tolerance, trust, hope and endurance. Other references to the effects of the Holy Spirit in the human person are located in Colossians 3:12-15 and Ephesians 4:2-5 (Downey 1993:429). Evangelical teaching on sanctification has charged its followers that the committed Christian must live out the fruit of the Spirit. These virtues reveal the presence of God’s Spirit in the life of the Christian, which has promoted an activist form of spirituality. Rather than allowing the life of the Spirit to emanate from a transformed life within, often the Christian is attempting to live the virtuous in their own natural ability and strength. Obviously, this often results in a sense of failure and frustration.

they must enter the night of the spirit, in which both the "... sensory and spiritual parts are despoiled of all these apprehensions and delights, and the soul is made to walk in dark and pure faith, which is the proper and adequate means to divine union" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:332).

#### **6.2.4.1 The Continued Communication of God**

John states:

It should be known that God dwells secretly in all souls and is hidden in their substance, for otherwise they would not last. Yet there is a difference, a great difference, in His dwelling in them. In some souls He dwells alone, and in others He does not dwell alone. Abiding in some, He is pleased; and in others, He is displeased. He lives in some as though in His own house, commanding and ruling everything, and in others as though a stranger in a strange house, where they do not permit Him to give orders, nor do anything. It is in the soul in which less of its appetites and pleasures dwell where He dwells more alone, more pleased, and more as though in His own house, ruling and governing it (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:648).

The journey in the dark night before the dawn draws the person to where God alone dwells in the soul, the soul having been purified of its attachments, appetites and pleasures. What causes this process of purification to be viewed as darker than any part of the night? Why is this part of the night more difficult than the earlier experiences of the night? In the passive night of the spirit, there is an inflow of God into the soul, which purges the soul of "... habitual ignorances and imperfections, natural and spiritual" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:335). By means of infused contemplation (loving wisdom) "... God teaches the soul secretly and instructs it in the perfection of love without its doing anything nor understanding how this happens" (1979a:335). Hence, loving wisdom, according to John, during this moment in the night, purifies and illumines the soul.

If divine light is illuminating the soul, then, why is this experience called 'dark night'? John responds again to his own question: firstly, the greatness of divine wisdom exceeds the capacity and the ability of the soul to receive it, and secondly, due to the inherent sinful nature of the human person, infused wisdom is painful and afflictive to

the soul (1979a:335). John reminds his readers of the maxim that two contraries cannot coexist in one subject, and so the soul undergoes affliction and suffering when it experiences the 'dark contemplation'. For one thing, the soul becomes acutely aware of its own unworthiness of God by contrast to the immensity of the love of God. One suffers immensely because of one's sin, one's wretchedness, since the soul has been exposed to the brightness and purity of infused contemplation (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:336). Another affliction is the effect of the intensity of the inner flame of love, which renders the soul subdued and weak, almost to the point of desiring death. John assured his readers that the weakness will not destroy the soul, but is the result of having encountered the greatness of God. He muses "... how amazing and pitiful it is that the soul be so utterly weak and impure that the hand of God, though light and gentle, should feel so heavy and contrary" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:337). Did John think of the words of Jesus spoken in Matthew 11:29,30 when he penned those words? Jesus instructed his followers, "Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke fits perfectly, and the burden I give you is light" (New Living Translation).

The third affliction is the normal by-product of joining two extremes, the divine and the human. The 'divine extreme' attends to the renewal of the soul, stripping it of the affections and properties of its former self, and the soul feels undone due to former attachments that melt away. This may compare to a form of death, or as John suggests, the soul "... feels as if it were swallowed by a beast and being digested in the dark belly, and it suffers anguish comparable to Jonas's when in the belly of the whale" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:337). However, "... it is fitting that the soul be in this sepulcher of dark death in order that it attain the spiritual resurrection for which it hopes" (1979a:337).

Before proceeding to the other afflictions of the passive night of the spirit, an observation can be made from John's comment in the last paragraph. An image, (if it is appropriate to refer to images in this part of the night), which evangelicals would understand is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This night reflects the journey of Jesus during the Passion: intense suffering, a sense of being abandoned by

God, an awareness of being led into this journey, dying to the former, buried to the past, and then in the resurrection to walk into the glory and sunshine of the morning. Consequently, this becomes a meaningful metaphor representing the dark night which is the death and resurrection of Christ; for the soul experiences a form of death, the prerequisite to the coming of dawn in the morning.

The places of rejection surprise the soul in the dark night; at least, this part of the journey is not what the spiritual person anticipates. The soul is convinced that God has abandoned and rejected her, that God may be angry and this is a disciplinary action. As if the sense of God's absence and abandonment are not enough, a person may feel forsaken and despised by friends, most often, due to one's inability to comprehend or understand this aspect of the soul's journey (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:338).

There is one other affliction associated with the dark journey: the soul is purified like gold in a crucible, for "... as fire consumes the tarnish and rust of metal, this contemplation annihilates, empties, and consumes all the affections and imperfect habits the soul contracted throughout its life" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:339). Since these imperfections are deeply rooted in the soul, the removal of these attachments is the cause of immense suffering. John writes that "... in order to burn away the rust of the affections the soul must, as it were, be annihilated and undone in the measure that these passions and imperfections are connatural to it" (1979a:339).

During this time, the soul does not find solace in the practices that formerly fostered consolation and strength. The energy and time given to ministry for God, the solace located in spiritual consolations and Christian doctrine, the comfort and support from spiritual directors no longer expedite joy (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:340). John encouraged his readers to "... suffer this purgation patiently. God is working now in the soul, and for this reason the soul can do nothing" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:344). The intensity of the darkness fluctuates in proportion to the cleansing required of the soul, since "... it seems incredible that the brighter and purer the supernatural, divine light is, the darker it is for the soul; and that the less bright it is, the less dark it is to the soul" (1979a:344). With regard to the duration of this dark night, John suggested that if it is to be fruitful, it may last for a couple of years, although there

will be intervals when the purgation will lift, and God's illumination, which is a sign of the purification process at work, will shine through (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:342).

What benefits does the spiritual person receive from submission to the journey of the dark night other than ultimate union with God? Perhaps, the question alone is self-centered; one hopes that there are significant benefits which will exhibit themselves for the present moment in everyday life. It is not the aim of this thesis to justify the suffering of a soul during this dark night; however, John has graciously itemized the benefits which accrue to the spiritual person for his or her endurance and patience. As has been mentioned, there is the removal of the burden of attachments and the lightness of freedom of soul, putting on the 'new man' (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:347). The soul discovers that it has been wounded by a 'strong, divine love' which causes it to have a certain intuition about God; yet, it understands nothing in particular, since the intellect is in darkness (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:352). Moreover, John instructs:

... the spirit herein experiences an impassioned and intense love, because this spiritual inflaming engenders the passion of love. Since this love is infused, it is more passive than active and thus generates in the soul a strong passion of love (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:353).

As God is transforming the soul to all that is not God, there is an energy and boldness to remain loyal to the journey of faith. The soul transformed by love, loves authentically, "... since it is the nature of love to seek to be united, joined, equaled, and assimilated to the loved object in order to be perfected in the good of love, the soul hungers and thirsts for this union or perfection of love still unattained" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:360). The strength love possesses within the soul increases this passion to impassion the will which is now 'inflamed by love' (1979a:360).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> John compares the purifying process of a soul to the effect of fire on a log of wood. Just as the soul is prepared for divine union through transformation, in similar manner, wood is prepared for transformation into fire. First, it must be stripped of the impurities, such as moisture, and other impurities that will not contribute to the fire. "Finally, by heating and enkindling it from without, the fire transforms the wood into itself and makes it as beautiful as it is itself" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:350). It follows that before transformation of the soul, it must be purged of all contrary qualities. John builds upon this theme in the *Living Flame*. The flame of love (God) which is sweet and savory is bitter and unpleasant to the will (the senses). Nonetheless, the flame of love contains immense riches and delights which the impoverished soul is incapable of receiving. When this flame purifies a person, then they are able to comprehend the riches and glory of God. John writes, "This flame previously oppressed the soul in an indescribable way, since contraries were battling contraries: God, Who is all perfect, against all the imperfections of

In the remainder of Book II of the *Dark Night*, John has expanded the aforementioned themes with further instructions and usage of metaphors. For the purpose of this thesis, sufficient data has been gleaned and recorded. Nonetheless, one more item of the dark night puzzle need to be discussed in an attempt to encapsulate the meaning of this part of the night.

At some point, the darkness lifts, and "... once all these darkneses and imperfections are expelled, it seems the immense benefits and good the soul is acquiring on this happy night of contemplation begin to appear" (1979a:360). *Happy night* indeed; and what might be those immense benefits and goods received in this happy night? God makes the soul die to all that is not God; the soul is clothed anew:

This renovation is: an illumination of the human intellect with supernatural light so that it becomes divine, united with the divine; an informing of the will with love of God so that it is no longer less than divine and loves in no other way than divinely, united and made one with the divine will and love; and a divine conversion and change of the memory, the affections, and the appetites according to God (1979a:360). Further, this happy night...imparts light concerning all things (to the spirit)...impoverishes and empties him of all possessions and natural affection, it does so only that he may reach out divinely to the enjoyment of all earthly and heavenly things, with a general freedom of spirit in them all (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:346).

Thus, the journey terminates as a 'glad night' and as dawn breaks over the horizon, the soul dances out into the bright sunlight 'leaving my cares forgotten among the lilies', 'entre las azucenas olvidado' — the final line of the *Dark Night* poem.

The goal of the dark night is spiritual transformation — union with God — that results in the soul's ability to freely understand and value the true self. John defines the nature of transformation of the soul in God as:

... the union and transformation of the soul in God ... This union of likeness is a supernatural union ...(this) supernatural union exists when God's will and the soul's are in conformity, so that nothing in the one is repugnant to the other. When the soul completely rids itself of what is

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the soul. God does this that, by transforming the soul into Himself, He might soften, pacify, and clarify it, as does fire when it penetrates the wood" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:588).

repugnant and unconformed to the divine will, it rests transformed in God through love (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:116).<sup>18</sup>

A modern scholarly definition of spiritual transformation as ascribed to John of the Cross concurs:

Transformation — Only with grace is a divine change possible, that is a transformation in Christ of our deepest self. Only with the help of grace can our spiritual journey approach its final destiny. Graced-transformation is the ultimate answer to our aspiration to wholeness, completeness, and spiritual maturity in Christ through the Holy Spirit. It is our entrance into an intimate relationship with the Trinity. However blocked our power of listening may be by the confusing voice of the autarkic pride form, God offers us the opportunity to be transformed. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ shows us the way to let go of what is dissonant and to listen to what gives us new life in him and his church (Muto 1994:318).

### 6.3 The ‘Dark Night’: Psycho-Spiritual Implications

The practice of contemplation is being recognized by medical and psychiatric professions as having physical, spiritual, and psychological benefits. Though not the focus of research for this thesis, the benefits of contemplation as experienced in the ‘dark night’ are worth noting. Certainly, the separation of the psychological and spiritual in the context of suffering has fostered an inadequate form of spirituality. If a Christian appears to be developing as a healthy mental and spiritual person, then, this seemingly would exclude them from the experience of the ‘dark night’. However, the question arises, what is normal psychological and spiritual health? Who establishes the criteria for these categories? Rupnik (2004:54) asks the question and ponders the plight

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<sup>18</sup> In *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes*, Lane (1998) concurs with John with regard to the purpose and function of inner aridity. Lane provides a historical overview of the apophatic way, whereby he suggests apophatic prayer begins with contemplation and the embrace of silence. It is “... the recognition that language is inescapably an agent of control. In revealing the mystery of God, words also inevitably limit” (Lane 1998:67). Secondly, apophatic prayer involves the releasing of the restless activity of the mind, “... putting less stock in concepts by which we label everything we know ... it rejects every mental image taken from the natural world that might be used to speak of divine things, even while it insists — on account of the incarnation — that every aspect of the created world be taken seriously” (Lane 1998:69). However, the result of apophatic prayer is that intellectually, it serves as a theological corrective, summoning theologians to a posture of humility (Lane 1998:77). However, when a person has experienced divine love in the midst of emptiness, it is not able to remain entirely alone with God. Lane (1998:75) writes, “It has to reenter the world of others with its newly won freedom. In Christian mysticism, apophatic experience is never completed until it returns to kataphatic awareness and the exercise of compassion whose shape is justice .... The contemplative returns to the ordinary, not in spite of her detachment from it, but because of that detachment. No longer driven by fear of rejection and loss, she (the soul) is able now to love others without anxiously needing anything in return”.

of the ‘fragile, suffering, or unbalanced psyche’ that embarrasses those around them because they do not fit into our idealistic psychological categories. However, “... it is not at all certain that a psyche is healthy when it corresponds to the norms we have established. It is healthy and whole when it lives in the sphere of relationship and ... when it lives in the Love of God” (2004:54). Lanzetta (2001) suggests that in the emptiness which strips one’s self-identity, an intimacy develops in the inner life of the divine. This radical closeness, a hermeneutics of intimacy, requires a willingness to shoulder difficulty, distancing and the pain of life (Lanzetta 2001:118). Openness which implies in principle the intent to face the untidiness of life and bears this encounter without imposing judgments and dogmatic truths is inner freedom (2001:118). According to John of the Cross, divine encounter with the Creator is the beginning of self-knowledge. This is the journey when the soul becomes acutely aware of its own insignificance. Starr (2002:75) adds,

The countless mercies God bestows upon the soul now come wrapped in this self-knowledge, informed by the aridity and emptiness of the faculties. In light of the abundance previously enjoyed and the difficulty now encountered in spiritual labor, the soul cannot help but notice her own wretchedness, which was invisible in her time of prosperity.

Indeed, this implies both a maturity and humility which have been shaped in the crucible of the ‘dark night’.

Gerald May, a psychiatrist, spiritual director, and writer has conducted research on the affect of meditation on the human brain. In his final published work, entitled *The Dark Night of the Soul*, May (2004:135) defines the dark night as an “... ongoing transition from compulsively trying to control one’s life toward a trusting freedom and openness to God and the real situations of life”. May contends that society has become desensitized or habituated to the delicate experiences of life, due to living daily in a world of overstimulation and sensory overload. He argues that in our present culture, sensitivity and perceptiveness such as the ability to appreciate the subtleties of daily life, delicate fragrances, soft sounds and exquisite feelings once enjoyed as children have become deadened. Currently, many Christians are frantically searching for increasing stimulation in their spiritual experience to keep their enjoyment and

satisfaction going. May challenges current culture's frenzied pursuit of material and spiritual goods; even good things which take on the form of idolatry. He writes, "It is as if we have gorged ourselves on rich meals for so long that we cannot appreciate the delicate freshness of a sip of water" (May 2004:151).<sup>19</sup>

May observes that the classical description of contemplative prayer includes two psychological qualities. Firstly, in the inner awareness to open up to God in all things; nothing is excluded. In contemplation, when the Christian is simply aware to what is; awareness takes on an open, all-embracing, panoramic quality (May 2004:109). The second psychological quality is its centeredness in the present moment, being attuned to the timeless now which creates the space for soul rest and recuperation.<sup>20</sup> May ascribes 'psychological' to the two benefits because they are governed by how the nervous system mediates attention (May 2004:111). However, beyond these two psychological qualities is the one essential quality that all the Christian mystics affirm; that *contemplation is loving*. May (2004:111) explains:

And this love can neither be practiced nor achieved. We can, and certainly should, try to act in loving ways. All religions advocate this. But the way we act lovingly is often determined by our attachments. It is self-originated and unfree. We encounter true, unattached love only by falling into it or waking up to discover it, often being surprised by it. Much as we might long for it, we cannot make it happen. The freely loving quality of contemplation must be kindled, prompted, drawn forth, or, if you will, infused within us by God.

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<sup>19</sup> May (2004:154) writes of John and Teresa of Avila, "Teresa and John demonstrate an understanding of human psychology that seems uncanny for their era. With amazing accuracy they described the psychological phenomenon that would later be called defense mechanisms, behavioral conditioning, addictive and affective disorders, and psychosis". He is of the opinion that John and Teresa had clearer insights into the dynamics of consciousness than most modern neuro-scientists. The explanation for this amazing ability to understand the human spirit and psyche, May attributes to two factors. Firstly, like other contemplatives, they learned their psychology first hand, through acute, intentional attentiveness to their own interior lives. John and Teresa reflected upon their own experience, attempting to understand it and integrate its meaning into their own lives and find a suitable means to articulate their insights to others. Secondly, they were deeply immersed in community. Both of these mystics were spiritual directors attending to the inner lives of numerous members of their order and to members of the faith community at large. They were familiar with conflicts, group dynamics, power struggles, team work; thus, their ability to reflect deeply within extended to the knowledge gleaned from contact with others in the journey to union with God. It was also to their benefit that they were skilled in communication and recorded their insights through poetry, story, metaphor and concept (May 2004:154).

<sup>20</sup> May (2004:109) explains, "The second psychological quality commonly associated with contemplation is its centeredness in the present moment. This is the 'timeless moment' of the mystics, the "eternal now" – what the twentieth-century Quaker educator Thomas Kelly called 'continuously renewed immediacy'".

Keating (1992:84) concurs with May, for in contemplative prayer "... there is an immediacy of awareness". Further, contemplation hastens the pace of self-knowledge,<sup>21</sup> gleaned insights into experiences from the past that one has not previously faced or handled. He writes "... this dynamism is a kind of divine psychotherapy, organically designed for each of us, to empty out our unconscious and free us from the obstacles to the free flow of grace in our minds, emotions, and bodies" (Keating 1992:93). The psyche, similar to the body, has its own way of eliminating material that is harmful to its own health. By means of the daily practice of contemplation, the emotional 'junk' collected during childhood and life experiences emerges during prayer, providing insights into the dark side of one's personality and the opportunity for the Spirit to remove the encumbrances. Keating (1992:96) writes "... he (God) wishes to fill us completely and to transform our entire body-spirit organism into a flexible instrument of divine love". This enables the Christian to freely engage with its 'true self', since the 'false self' – the self which has been portrayed to oneself and to the world – has been transformed.

Welch (1996), a member of the Carmelite order, confirms the literary heritage of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, noting that their writings are both universal and personal. Their writings are striking in the perceptive analysis of both spiritual and psychological realities; both realities are addressed. Both of these mystics understood the relationship between the soul and God and that this relationship affected mental and

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<sup>21</sup> Keating (2004) defines 'self-knowledge' in terms of mystical theology; "Self knowledge in the Christian ascetical tradition is insight into our hidden motivation, into emotional needs and demands that are percolating inside of us and influencing our thinking, feeling, and activity without our being fully aware of them ... When you withdraw from ordinary flow of superficial thoughts on a regular daily basis (contemplation), you get a sharper perspective on your motivation, and you begin to see that the value systems by which you have always lived have their roots in prerational attitudes that have never been honestly and fully confronted. We have neurotic tendencies. When you practice contemplative prayer on a regular basis, your natural resources for psychic health begin to revive and you see the false systems that are damaging your life. The emotional programs of early childhood that are buried in your unconscious begin to emerge into clear and stark awareness. If in your psyche there are obstacles to opening yourself to God, divine love begins to show what these are" (Keating 2004:94). Teresa of Avila believed that 'self-knowledge' was essential for spiritual development. The human person can only come to know God through self-knowledge, and the self can only be truly known in relationship to God. "When she could most fully say "God," she could most fully say "Teresa." The self-knowledge she gained was a knowledge of her essential poverty yet her immense worth was based on God's grace and mercy. This knowledge would include knowledge of inner fragmentation, compulsions, addictions which distort the heart. These realities float into awareness as prayer loosens layers of the psyche" (Welch 1996:82).

emotional states (Welch 1996:96). Seemingly Teresa and John influenced the reshaping of Carmelite spirituality, for Welch (1996:96) writes:

It is a Carmelite conviction that when the personality is not centered on this transcendent source of life and identity, but is centered on some part of God's creation, the personality is dysfunctional. Human development becomes a death scene. A part of God's creation is asked to be ultimate; it cannot bear the responsibility and so it begins to die under the burden. The personality which has created this idol in following its unhealed desires, also begins to die. A lesser god means a lesser human. True healing only comes with the death of alien gods in the psyche and the emergence of the Nameless One. That transformation is beyond the powers of the psyche and requires graced assistance, God's love healing, freeing, and uniting lover and beloved.

A student of Carmelite spirituality quickly recognizes a similar train of thought between Welch's 'Carmelite conviction' and the writings of Teresa and John.

May (2004) and Keating (1992) are of a similar mind with regard to the fundamental essential of contemplation: Love, which is offered as sheer 'gift' to the soul. Contemplation grounded in Love, establishes the foundation toward freedom from attachments, whether these are addictions, compulsions or encumbrances. John speaks of contemplation having an element of being 'dark', for the context where spiritual transformation, union with God, occurs in the silence and quiet of the soul. God's silence and the silence of the soul converge into oneness, a union, in the prayer of contemplation.

Muto (1994:104) suggests that the main reason the soul is being led into the 'dark night' is captured in the phrase 'divine exchange'. During this time, the soul is being directed to exchange the sins and addictive behaviours for something more substantial. John addresses this 'divine exchange' with regard to capital sins. To comment briefly on this notion, he notes that in the 'dark night', spiritual humility is replacing spiritual pride (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:323).<sup>22</sup> From the imperfections of avarice – coveting various spiritual exercises and practices – a 'divine

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<sup>22</sup> John writes, "In the dryness and emptiness of this night of the appetite, a person also procures spiritual humility, that virtue opposed to the first capital vice, spiritual pride. Through this humility acquired by means of self-knowledge, a person is purged of all those imperfections of the vice of pride into which he fell in the time of prosperity. Aware of his own dryness and wretchedness, the thought of his being more advanced than others does not even occur in its first movements, as it did before; on the contrary, he realizes that others are better" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:323).

exchange' occurs whereby the soul "... does not obtain the delight it formerly did in its spiritual practices, but rather finds them distasteful and laborious, it uses them so moderately..." (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:324). Clearly, inner freedom at this level has major ramifications for the benefit of the soul and spirit.

There is one little glitch, or perhaps a major glitch, namely, the issue of the will – the Christian is required to choose to accept the route to spiritual transformation. John is aware that the soul is capable of not recognizing pockets of sin hidden in the inner recesses, but God is aware they are there. The soul may even be experiencing new heights of spiritual fervor, yet God knows that there are still "... tentacles of imperfection, the root system of impurity, and the ulterior motives buried deep in our hearts (Muto 1994:188). It is entirely possible to achieve a "... certain degree of virtue, perseverance in prayer, and mortification, but never achieve nakedness, poverty, selflessness, or spiritual purity (which are all the same)" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:122). Earlier, John's comment with regard to the Christian rejecting the 'nakedness of Christ's poverty of spirit' and choosing to seek only the sweet communications from God, is a statement befitting the era he lived as well as our own, particularly in the North American context. John writes that this attitude is not the hallmark of self-denial, but an indication of a 'spiritual sweet tooth' (1979a:122). Clearly, this is a poignant statement of how John perceived the spiritual state of his contemporaries, not unlike, the condition of the 'drivenness' prevalent within North American evangelicalism. In order to advance along the journey of spiritual transformation, the soul must be inclined to choose "... for the love of Christ all that is most distasteful whether in God or in the world – and such is the love of God" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:123).

#### **6.4 Confluence of Sanjuanist and Evangelical Spirituality with regard to Sanctification**

Clearly, a synchronicity of doctrinal perspective between Sanjuanist and Evangelical spirituality with regard to sanctification is somewhat of a challenge. At the outset, both represent differing historical eras; John is a counter-reformer, apophatic

theologian, and influenced by a medievalist worldview. Evangelicalism developed in modernity and has been shaped by the historical and cultural influences of the past two centuries. Further, John's spirituality matured in sixteenth-century Catholicism with centuries of tradition; evangelicalism has established itself within Protestantism which can look back only into two or three centuries of church history.

The common ground between these two perspectives commences with the fundamental aspect of the Christian faith: to love God with all of one's being as instructed by Jesus in Matthew 22:37, 38, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself". Both John and evangelicals adhere to the text of Scripture as the source of wisdom and the wonders of God. John cites Colossians 2:3 to teach that in the Son of God are hidden the treasures and wisdom of the divine, "... these treasures of wisdom and knowledge will be far more sublime, delightful, and advantageous than what you want to know" (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:181). In addition, the end result of sanctification, whereby the believer is conformed to the likeness of Christ while in the process of spiritual transformation, illustrates the concurrence between Sanjuanist and Evangelical spirituality.<sup>23</sup>

The dissonance that arises between the two points of view is essentially rooted in the concept of mystery, and the differing approach to the obscurity and the unknowability of God. Evangelicals pride themselves for being quite comfortable with mystery, as long as they are able to analyze and rationally conceptualize it. The notion of apophaticism as a theological construct, which promotes the hiddenness of God as a

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<sup>23</sup> Elwell (2001:1052) in the second edition to *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, writes that the goal for sanctification is holiness, which includes three aspects: purity before God, a righteousness which is purity before the law, and blamelessness which is purity before the world. Further, the ongoing debate for evangelicals is whether "... to regard sanctification as either an addendum to justification or merely evidence of justifying faith" (2001:1052). He answers the dilemma with the response, "In justification, God at the beginning of Christian life declares us acquitted. In sanctification, God accomplishes his will in us as the Christian life proceeds" (2001:1052). He notes that the common understanding of sanctification is growth in holiness that should follow conversion. In the article describing this experience, Elwell quotes numerous sources from the New Testament which depict the nature of sanctification. He concludes that if the modern Christian fully comprehended the depth of meaning located in this doctrine from the biblical text, there would not be such a thin substitute in the daily experience of the normal Christian as compared to the glorious experience afforded this phenomenon in the New Testament (Elwell 2001:1053). That may be case; however, he does not explain the depth of the experience or the process of the person who is being sanctified.

means of experiencing the divine is foreign within evangelical theology. With such a divergence at a fundamental level, is it possible to argue for a confluence between these two spiritualities? In addition, is there a possibility for current evangelicalism to be exposed to a corrective and a wider perspective of spiritual experience and understanding? Clearly, from the research indicated in this thesis, there is a theological deficiency in the evangelical doctrine of sanctification.

Contemporary evangelicalism can benefit from Sanjuanist spirituality at many levels: firstly, to glean knowledge from the writings of Christian mystics and spiritual writers who have delved deeply into the hiddenness of God, and in their own way became comfortable with the concept of Mystery. Secondly, John guides the modern day Christian into the intricacies of soul formation and transformation, whereby he describes from his perspective benchmarks of the transformative way. Admittedly, John's works are difficult to comprehend at times, but the perseverance in studying his teachings is worth the effort. Thirdly, as a theologian who was educated and trained within Catholicism, John is able to advocate the spirituality of apophaticism to the western theological mind. Admittedly, this concept — the apophatic way — has some difficulty in its attempt to cross the evangelical barrier. However, John's academic and theological integrity as well as his discernment and intellectual and combine to make him a suitable mentor to follow. Finally, the apophatic directs John's thoughts and reflections to an ancient heritage — Eastern Orthodoxy. John models for the contemporary Christian a comprehensive form of spirituality that combines the *kataphatic* teaching of western theology with the *apophatic* mysticism of eastern theology. It is unclear if this was intentional at this level in his synthesis. However, current evangelicals are discovering in writers such as John of the Cross a connection with the Church from the past and with the 'spiritualities' that governed and shaped Christian mysticism.

#### **6.4.1 Sanjuanist Spirituality Intersects with CPES**

The Canadian prairie is home to numerous evangelical denominations and is the environment in which a large number of evangelicals worship and live their daily lives. Even though these evangelical churches are located in the cities, large numbers of the worshippers are ‘country folk’. Nonetheless, whether in the city or country, these members adhere to the basic tenets of the evangelical faith, and are instructed to live an exemplary life as a follower of Jesus Christ. Further, evangelicals are highly encouraged to be students of the Scriptures, and ‘small group’ Bible studies are a common practice. What is not always encouraged is to embrace imagination and awareness as part of the spiritual journey, and as integral to spiritual formation.

The case has been made for the missing element of ‘mystery’ in Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality, due primarily to the history of the tradition both from the inception of evangelicalism, and the means by which this tradition established itself on the prairies. Herein lies the paradox, the prairie dweller who has embraced the prairie landscape soon develops a sense of connection to the land and its beauty, which in reality, fosters a mystical connection to the Creator by means of creation. Numerous accounts from prairie people speak of an unexplainable affiliation with nature which occurs when they sit in silence looking at the red sky of a prairie sunset, or listen to howl of wind as they walk through prairie grass or watch the northern lights dance across the sky at night. Seemingly, prairie people experience the mysterious communication which occurs in the vastness of prairie landscape. The disconnection occurs when evangelicals step into their theological culture and religious subculture, and leave behind their ability to be at ease with Mystery, due to the rational, predictable constructs of their Christian faith.

In reality, the landscape in Spain where John grew up is similar to the landscape of the Canadian west. Did John, as a child walk along coulees, sit and admire an evening sunset, note the subtleties of nature where few trees grew and wonder at the beauty of the large sky? This is indeed unknown. What is known is that John loved the outdoors, and he walked, meditated, prayed, and preached in the countryside. Did John discover the balance between the rational knowledge of God and the mystery of God as

he prayed in the flat landscape of Spain? It may well be that his 'inner knowledge' of God is far more closely related to the Canadian prairie dweller than is normally recognized, since his formation occurred in the context of a church that was hierarchical and suspicious of private mystical prayer experience. In the case of those who make their livelihood and home on the prairie, the prairie landscape becomes the 'ground' for spiritual awareness. This requires listening for the mysterious in the context of stillness and solitude.

How does Sanjuanist spirituality intersect with Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality? Certainly, as has been indicated, the mutual recognition of faith in a Trinitarian God, whose revelatory message is provided in the Biblical text, is foundational. Both expressions of Christian spirituality promote loving God with all of who we are as the children of God, and both concur as to the importance of community in the development of faith. John would encourage the study of the Scriptures, the writings of past spiritual giants and the pursuit of intimacy with God who is Ultimate Love. Fundamentally, CPES would concur. John, however, brings to CPES a depth of understanding which can broaden evangelical understanding of spiritual transformation. In order for evangelicals to appreciate this teaching, they will have to move beyond the exclusivity and theological snobbery so common amongst this group, and recognize the immense wisdom which is available to them through John of the Cross.

John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila wisely discerned that their monastic way of life was in dire need of a spiritual transformation *and* reformation. History records for us the courageous stance that both of them willingly took to confront the laxity and negligence evident in the lives of their friars and nuns. Similarly, evangelicalism in the twenty-first century will have to consider seriously the ongoing question, what path of 'counter-reform' will be required for the evangelical tradition to incorporate a balanced perspective of the rational and experiential within its parameters? Will this process require a 'dark night' phenomenon at some level, both personally and corporately?

## 6.5 Conclusion

That which joins together the two traditions which are featured in this study is the fundamental awareness that "... his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children" (Romans 8:16, New Living Translation). Canadian Evangelical Prairie Spirituality and Sanjuanist Spirituality intersect at this deep level of spiritual connection and contemplative vision of God. It is also at this intersection where the conceptual understanding of God's transformational work is perceived from different positions. CPES is a tradition which reveres the usage of the rational and cognitive approach to truth and ultimately to God. Conversely, Sanjuanist spirituality extracts wisdom and truth from a tradition founded upon mystical theology. Both adhere to the teachings located in the Holy Scriptures, and both encourage a spirituality of 'experience' whereby the Christian is able to encounter intimacy with the Creator God within the soul. It has been argued that in the confluence of these two traditions, a missing component within evangelical theological theory concerning the 'process' of sanctification has clearly been revealed. John of the Cross accounts for the missing element, with his affirmation and explanation of the 'dark night' which is for the soul a place of silence and suffering.

In his works, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night*, John of the Cross meticulously described the journey of spiritual transformation through both the active and passive nights of the senses and the spirit. Clearly, in the 'active' component of the 'dark night', the Christian has some level of participation in the process. By the time that the soul enters the passive part of the night, God is communicating and illuminating the soul without the intellect having any awareness of the transference. John advised his readers that for reasons he indicated, this darkest hour of the night is suffering for the soul. He wisely provided encouragement to his readership, for there are benefits for the soul and spirit, both spiritually and psychologically. It has been demonstrated throughout this chapter that John provides a plausible explanation for spiritual transformation. It has also been established that CPES does not have an adequate explanation for this phenomenon in its theological foundation. Thus, John's

works intersect with CPES as a means of responding positively to a deficiency within evangelical theology.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION

#### 7.1 Preamble

The research for this thesis necessitated two streams of investigation: firstly, to define and authenticate Canadian prairie evangelical spirituality, and secondly, to argue that a theological component is missing in CPES, which is formulated and developed in the mystical theology of John of the Cross. In addition, the outcome of this research has offered a synthesis of CPES with Sanjuanist spirituality, and at this juxtaposition of the two expressions of spirituality, suggests the means by which the mysticism of John of the Cross can enhance evangelical theology.

From the literature reviewed in chapter two, there is clearly a vacuum in evangelical theology with regard to the dynamics of soul sanctification. Ample verification was provided which confirmed a lacuna within this dogma, both in demonstrating the process of sanctification – spiritual transformation – and, the resistance to mystical theology within sectors of evangelicalism. Conversely, the growing academic discipline of Christian Spirituality, is providing a conduit for the mysticism of John of the Cross to respond to the deficiency identified in this thesis. The second feature for identification is Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality, which is an extrapolation of evangelical theology – with fundamentalist roots from Southern United States – that evolved in the culture of the Canadian west. Due in part, to the brevity of Canadian prairie history, this aspect of Canadian prairie ethos – CPES – has not been fully defined. Thus, it was essential to include a secondary element in the research, since the inquiry concerns the topic of spiritual sanctification within evangelical spirituality as it relates to a particular setting.

The following two chapters identified in greater detail the two ‘players’ involved in the context of this research. Chapter three recounted the life of John of the Cross, and the cultural, social and religious milieu influencing the education, teaching, ministry and spirituality of this sixteenth century mystical theologian. The argument was made for the academic, theological, spiritual and experiential capability of this Carmelite friar

to speak into the topic of spiritual transformation – sanctification. Clearly, he presents a commendable profile, both in his credentials and character, which offers a credible and reliable voice for current evangelicalism. Chapter four substantiated the notion of a style of spirituality unique to the Canadian prairies cradled in evangelicalism. A major influence upon the experience of CPES is the prairie landscape itself. A case is made and argued for the uniqueness of CPES, and the characteristics of this expression of spiritual experience are noted.

Chapter five provided the foundation of John’s mystical theology with respect to the journey of a soul to union with God — spiritual transformation — the goal of sanctification. The ‘sanctification’ phenomenon proposed by evangelical theology correlates with the phenomenon of the transformation of the soul as proposed by apophatic mystical theology of John of the Cross. Chapter six examined the ‘dark night’ phenomenon and the resulting spiritual and psychological affects upon the soul and spirit of a Christian. The ‘silence of God’ experience as defined within the context of inner transformation of the soul is distinct and exclusive to a particular ‘season’ of the soul.

In this, the final chapter of the thesis, I indicate the major conclusions arising from the exploration of spiritual transformation and its significance for Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality.

### **7.1.1 *Quaestio* – ‘the question’**

At the beginning of this thesis, the ‘statement of the problem’ was described as follows:

The problem investigated in this thesis centers upon profiling Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality as a legitimate and unique expression of Christian experience. Little research or literature exists at this time addressing this specific expression of spirituality, thus permitting ample opportunity for in-depth investigation.

However, rationalism and legalism in the evangelical tradition eclipses the recognition and study of the mystical element in Christian experience. The influence of rationality has overshadowed the inclusion of Christian spirituality in the lecture halls of Bible colleges, academic curricula in the seminaries, and preaching of the Scriptures in the pulpit. In addition, the Protestant evangelical interpretation of Christian

mysticism and Christian spirituality is critiqued by the 'principles' located in the text of Holy Scripture (*sola scriptura*).

This study focuses upon a specific element of Christian spirituality unaccounted for in prairie evangelical spirituality. The combination of prairie landscape, an evangelical interpretation of Christian theology, and defined piety renders little allowance for mystery. In response to this incompleteness, this present thesis introduces a sixteenth century Spanish mystic, John of the Cross. By means of the wisdom and insights expressed in his writings, this research addresses a specific spiritual formation factor overlooked in evangelical theology, namely, the inner aridity of the soul, which is the phenomenon of the dark night of the soul, and experienced as the silence of God.

Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality boasts of a very short history in comparison to the Christian tradition of the church. Evangelicalism which developed in the Canadian west came as a result of fundamentalist influences from the southern United States. As new families settled into the Canadian west with Protestant roots, the shape of evangelicalism would have sectarian and legalistic overtones. Seemingly, the combination of prairie landscape and climatic conditions nurtured a form of spirituality which required an internal faith which was predictable, secure, and absolute. The form of 'evangelical faith' which matured in this environment affirmed a theology that was biblically based, rational, and provided logical responses for every situation. Christian theology in this context, allowed little room for mystery, for the unknowability of God, and for the silence of God. There was an 'answer' for every situation, and should a Christian experience God's silence, it was an indication of God's displeasure, or at the very least, the Christian had been disobedient in some aspect of their spiritual life.

The Bible College movement was a significant theological educational thrust which spread across the Canadian west. These small schools allowed students from rural areas the opportunity to study the Bible and Christian theology, while still being able to offer assistance to parents at home running the family farm. In addition, these Bible schools promoted the evangelical perspective of theology and biblical interpretation, which was being shaped within a prairie agrarian environment. These schools opened up the west to evangelicalism, as well as, were the impetus for mission's ministry thrust throughout the world. Indeed, the Bible college movement in

the Canadian west is a unique phenomenon within the religious community of Canada, and it retains its reputation as a significant religious establishment in the North American evangelical scene.

Evangelical theology is committed to Christian orthodoxy, and as such, has aspired to doctrinal astuteness, which is a heritage from its Reformed beginnings and from early fundamentalism. As a result, there were numerous theologians from the past century and current twenty-first century, who systematize and examine ‘theology’ diligently, and at same time, publish books and articles which reflect their research. Thus, evangelical theology has been noted as a ‘well-oiled machine’ in the sense that every fundamental idea of Christianity has been meticulously studied. For the most part, this is a rational, intellectual approach to the content and implications of the Christian faith.

In the research for this thesis, evidence was presented which indicated that evangelical theology accounts for the notion of the saving grace of Christ, and for appropriating the work of Christ – the work of justification – in the personal experience of the Christian. A person becomes a ‘Christian’ by means of a personal recognition of their need ‘for salvation’, followed by the acceptance of Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. In many sectors of evangelicalism, emphasis is placed upon salvation for assurance of a place in heaven – in the afterlife. Thus, for many evangelicals, eschatology is considered amongst the doctrinal tenets of utmost importance in the understanding of the Christian faith. Furthermore, the focused concern upon the ‘salvation’ of souls for assurance of eternal life has been the impetus for the development of global evangelization. North American para-church and mission organizations of evangelical persuasion reach out to a plethora of cultural and subcultural groups both in the homeland and in other countries.

In matters which pertain to the soul, this research has proven that to enter the sphere of the mystery of God; the academic exercise requires reflection and appreciation rather than analysis and systematization alone. This is particularly fitting in the theological approach to sanctification, in which evangelical theology aptly describes the essence of the doctrine, but not the process in which the soul engages. Clearly, there

is an inadequacy inherent in evangelical theology with regard to the nature of spiritual transformation, namely, sanctification. The question arises, what are the characteristics inherent in the process of spiritual transformation, and where does one look to find a mentor capable of responding to this question? To answer this question, the research in this thesis focused upon a sixteenth century Spanish mystic, John of the Cross.

## **7.2 Observations and Dicta**

CPES has grown out of an agrarian and developing cultural base in the western three prairie provinces of Canada. As a religious force, its heritage is Christian and fundamentalist, with influences from the right wing movement located in the southern United States, as noted above. However, more importantly, the immediacy of the prairie of the west with its climatic conditions, rolling terrain and arid southern plains created a form of spirituality which is legalistic and sectarian. The influence of postmodernity is clearly challenging these values, particularly in the area of Christian apologetics, where ‘spirituality’ is much more comfortable in the context of numerous worldviews and religions. It is not clear at the moment how CPES will evolve, since the challenge of postmodernity will elicit a response, whatever the consequence of the symbiotic process will be. No doubt, the four distinctives ascribed to evangelicalism will be retained, since these values are cherished as core beliefs and practices within this tradition. However, the nomenclature for this spiritual experience, Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality, suggests that there must be something much more substantial to this phenomenon than traditional Christian apologetics. This is noted further in this chapter.

Sanjuanist spirituality refers simply to the theological and spiritual teachings of John of the Cross with regard to mystical experience and its relevance in the daily life of a Christian believer. Clearly, John was much more than an apophatic mystic: his credentials give witness to theologian, spiritual director, counter-reformer, Carmelite house director, poet, artist, which confirm the diversity and the multiplicity of giftedness he contributed to his community. What is his most enduring legacy is his contribution to the doctrinal tenet of ‘dark night of the soul’ – the process of sanctification in the soul. Chapters five and six described the foundation for John’s

mystical theology, and an overview of the formational progression in the believer of Christ, as the person moves from a beginner in prayer to proficient.

In spite of the obvious distance of cultural eras, CPES and Sanjuanist spirituality intersect at significant junctures which are noteworthy for this conclusion. Clearly, both of these spiritual communities have been influenced by the prevailing worldview, and the cultural and historical environment of their era. Whether this could be argued as a point of connection is an area for continuing research: however, the terrain and landscape in Spain which was John's environment during his childhood and a portion of his adult life is virtually identical to that of the Canadian west. Is it possible that the landscape of one's spiritual formation has greater spiritual influence that has been recognized by the traditional theological school of thought? However, in spite of the four hundred year span between these two Christian spiritualities, an underlying current of experience and thought connects them at a fundamental level. Undoubtedly, the role of the Scriptures in the life of the believer is a common thread of connection between the two. John viewed the Holy Scriptures as a source of truth and wisdom, which held a higher authority than science or experience when it related to matters of the soul. (However, it is obvious that his own experience of the 'dark night of the soul' contributed to his ability to decipher the various levels of the phenomenon). Proponents of CPES discover in John an appreciation for the Word of God which would coincide with evangelical theological adherence to the revelatory nature of the biblical texts. John's approach to the bible differs from his CPES counterpart, that is, the latter is exegetical versus John's more allegorical approach; and his inclusion of tradition (mystical devotional literature) along with Scripture, rather than adherence to the evangelical tenet of *sola Scriptura*. Nonetheless, both spiritualities have a high esteem for the written Word of God and its contribution to the transformation of the soul.

The primary place of intersection between the two spiritualities is in the desired outcome in the journey of faith as a Christian believer. John declares unequivocally that the intention of his exercise in penning his thoughts, was to achieve perfect union with God – as much as is humanly possible on earth. He believed that this aspiration could be attained through the pursuit of the love of God, which was the injunction given by

Jesus to his followers.<sup>1</sup> There is absolutely no doubt that the place of connection for these two pathways of spirituality converge at the point of a relational and experiential association with the Triune God. The God of the universe desires an intimate reciprocal channel of communication with the creation, and both of these Christian perspectives endorse this notion and strongly advocate the pursuit of the love of God for this purpose. This fundamental point of reference must be recognized and maintained in light of the following observations and suggested proposals concerning this research.

### 7.2.1 Outcome of Research

What insights does John of the Cross put forward from his two works which have been examined here which would benefit the twenty-first century devotee to Canadian Prairie Evangelical Spirituality? Firstly, he submits *an explanation of sanctification which occurs in the state of 'dark night of the soul'*. John draws from the classical demarcations of the spiritual life; namely, purgation, illumination and union in which the process of the 'dark night' addresses all three stages of spiritual development. The journey into the night affects both the senses and the spiritual component of the Christian, whereby the soul encounters an active and passive experience for both segments. In chapter six, a lengthy overview of the four stages of the 'dark night' was given. By way of summary, the benefits which appear when the night turns into dawn are listed briefly here.

John utilizes the phrase 'dark night' to indicate the darkness which the soul experiences when God is seemingly absent or has become silent. The soul interprets the perceived absence of God as a place of rejection, abandonment, confusion and oftentimes inner sorrow. Another reason for the 'dark night' phenomenon is due to the fact that God is directly *illuminating* the soul during this time, and at the same time, bypassing the intellect. Due to the intensity of light inherent in God's direct communication, the soul is able only to receive it as darkness. In addition, oftentimes, the more the impediments in the soul, the darker the night will appear. John is clear that

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<sup>1</sup> "Jesus replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" - Matthew 22:37-39 in the New Living Translation. The quotes which Jesus is using here are referenced in the Shema, Deuteronomy 6:5.

the inner aridity is not associated with evil, for this is a journey which has been orchestrated from the heart of God. This ‘dark night’ has its benefits and purposes, which John reiterates at several intervals in his texts. Clearly, the process involves being released from the impediments and inordinate attachments which hinder the soul from freedom to experience union with God through love. The soul is illumined with knowledge of its own condition, the ways and means that the intellect, will and memory require transformation. This is a time of graced transformation – a state of divine exchange of willfulness (sins) to willing submission – much of which the intellect and the soul are totally unaware. The paradox is that in order to experience union with God, the soul must be free of all things, even if a person is in possession of personal belongings in daily life. What does one do during this time of spiritual deprivation? John suggests that the Christian suffer patiently – for indeed, the soul will encounter suffering – and pursue silence and solitude in daily life. Can the process of inner transformation occur without suffering? Apparently not, suggests John, who offers the analogy a log when exposed to the heat of a fire. It is darkened, transformed, and only when the fire has destroyed the impurities, is the log capable of providing heat to its surroundings.<sup>2</sup> Is a ‘dark night’ necessary for all Christians, or is this phenomenon only for the selected few that need such a journey? Again, John indicates that all are called or directed into the process of spiritual transformation – sanctification – but seemingly, not all choose to follow. He says that it is possible to attempt to abort the process, or even to turn away by incorporating former ways of prayer, or as some had done, to leave their first Love – and walk away from their Christian faith. He did suggest that though all Christians may encounter the active night of the senses and spirit, not all will encounter the passive night of the senses and spirit.

A second contribution to CPES from Sanjuanist spirituality is the *legitimization of religious experience in the context of Christian dogma and theological education*. For evangelicals, the primary ‘religious experience’ is the significant moment of personal salvation – whether that is a particular event in time which the person is able to

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<sup>2</sup> That is John’s interpretation of the chemical transformation which occurs when a log is exposed to fire (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez 1979a:350).

recall, or a process of coming to personal Christian faith over a period of time. However, the current research has studied the experiential component beyond the moment of salvation, namely the transformation of the soul. This phenomenon has the potential to be a source of dogma, truth, and knowledge. This is clearly one of the major paradigm shifts for evangelicalism, since evangelical theology has failed to take into account the educational potential in the experiential or mystical. Nonetheless, theologians are discovering that the inner person cannot be nourished entirely by means of intellectual propositional truth. Clearly, Bible college academics are being challenged to approach theology differently, and to integrate intellectual pursuits and experiential knowledge. Perhaps, there will arise an experiential epistemology, and a new pedagogical paradigm for educating students in theology. In the context of academic institutions which are based in CPES, and which are truly blessed to have a structured and distinct faith and theology, the challenge is to foster a balance of the intellectual and experiential. Academic program managers will be required to recognize the wisdom to be gained from contemplative prayer and practice, the richness of spiritual knowledge from contemplative Christian orders, and the validity of searching deeply into the writings of the medieval and Patristic mystics. For many evangelical Bible colleges located in the Canadian west, this issue is two-fold: firstly, to recognize the deficiency within Christian training programs which do not incorporate courses reflecting Christian spirituality: and secondly, to have the courage to create a new focus, namely, a program of study which focuses upon spirituality and mysticism, within the curriculum. Many evangelical leaders and adherents still are highly suspicious of this field of study, and have sufficient influence within academic institutions to create concern and anxiety. With regard to the 'experiential' in academic study, an 'experiential epistemology' will comprise narrative theology, Christian spirituality, Biblical theology, systematic theology, pastoral theology, and historical theology (with the inclusion of Christian tradition) as equal partners in the curriculum.

Thirdly, John encourages CPES *to become more comfortable with the mystical side of Christian tradition, particularly apophatic spirituality*. Evangelical theology was shaped by a rational and objective discourse, which has created a systematization of

theology and a delineation of dogma. Is it particularly incorrect for a Christian tradition to establish its own belief system and mission statement based upon its values and concerns? Not exactly, in fact, a denomination or church based community is required to identify its own intention as a group of people for the purpose of direction and the maintenance of order. In addition, this includes the establishment of theological distinctives and the ‘texts of belief’ which influence Christian thinking and behaviour within a particular denomination or para-church organization. However, the experience of evangelicalism on the Canadian prairies has not been comfortable with the mystical forms of spirituality – the immediacy of God - inherent in Christendom. As a result, the teachings of John of the Cross, along with many of the pre-Reformation devotional writers, have been conspicuously absent in the pulpits and theological institutions. Oftentimes, the expressed concern with the introduction of spiritual writers from the past is that their works lean toward ‘New Age’, or are of an occult nature. Clearly, there remains a sector of evangelicalism that expresses alarm when references are made to meditative practices or suggestions of the mystical within Christian experience. The unfortunate result of these views is that they create an air of anxiety and fear. Even if their judgments are unfounded with regard to Christian spirituality, they exert undue influence and damage.

It is clear that proponents of CPES could also benefit from developing the ability to draw from the mystical roots and ethos of their own prairie landscape. Prairie poets, songwriters, novelists and artists abound who have long delved deeply into the mysticism of the prairie, and for the most part, evangelicals have not always treated them kindly. Recently, there has been a growing interest in these works, since these writers guide the prairie dweller to attentiveness of the natural world and to its inherent beauty. Many evangelicals are following in this trend: however, in spite of this development, there remains hesitancy towards viewing the prairie landscape and ethos as a means of gleaning ‘truth’. Does the Creator speak to creation – humankind – through the creation? Does the Creator provide a revelation of who the Creator is through the means of creation? The acceptable response from CPES is the affirmative, with the following caveat, that God has revealed all that humankind requires to know

within the text of Scripture, particularly through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is no further necessity to search elsewhere for further knowledge of the attributes and characteristics of God. It has been this basic belief that has hindered the prairie evangelical from appreciating the majesty and beauty of God located within this environment as a means of gaining further knowledge of God. Or, if they did, it was either denied, or retained as a personal interpretation from their own reflection rather than an opportunity to glean insights into the Creator. Prairie landscape by its very nature beckons the native dweller to reflection and response; nurturing a form of spirituality that is unique to its setting. In order for the proponents of CPES to adjust to the pluralism of their evolving culture, they would benefit immensely from the exercise of exposing their souls to the spirituality of the prairie and its Creator.

Another challenge for CPES is the global spiritual diversity which has infiltrated into the Canadian west due to the rise of a pluralistic society. The Canadian west was built upon the arrival of newcomers; however, the majority of the cultures which settled in the early west had a Christian based heritage. That is not the case today, and has not been for many years. CPES has not been conspicuous for its tolerance or acceptance of other Christian worldviews, never mind the non-Christian worldviews. Thus, this has only enhanced the anxiety of many evangelicals that other religious spiritualities will sway Christians toward rejecting their faith and accept a 'spirituality' that is endorsed and promoted by the devil. This is clearly not a minor accusation or allegation. One of the primary challenges for CPES at this time is to engage contemporary Christian spirituality with an open mind, and understand this discipline for what it represents. Much of the fear which is expressed is based on misunderstanding and ignorance of Christianity as a spiritual tradition; a tradition which is calling the evangelical church to revisit its Christian heritage and the richness inherent within it. Fortunately, there are pockets of evangelicals in Canada, including the western provinces who are courageously stepping into the foray of Christian spirituality and expressing a voice for this academic discipline. Further, the bible colleges which are offering courses in this area will have a significant influence upon the pulpits and the evangelical churches in the future.

The fourth influence that John of the Cross has upon CPES is *to recognize the psychospiritual effect of inner spiritual transformation*. Normally, for most evangelicals who come to the Christian faith through personal salvation, the procedure within the churches is to integrate them into a discipleship program. Recently, within some sectors, the nomenclature has shifted to mentorship programs, but the intention remains the same, provide the new converts with theological and biblical instruction, and direction for Christian piety and behaviour. For a long time within the evangelical churches, emphasis was placed upon Christian ethics, along with the rules and regulations that accompany a legalistic expression of spiritual life. In addition, many churches specified a particular way of life, in which members of the group often dressed alike or had specified rules of conduct along with expectations for their involvement within the church. This often resulted in evangelicals being accused of sectarianism.

It is not within the scope of this thesis to elaborate upon the development of psychology and psychiatry within the spectrum of global society, however, these movements largely arose due to the Christian church having relinquished its responsibility in ministry of 'soul care'. Traditionally, this ministry had been known as 'spiritual direction', or as 'soul friendship' or as 'cure of souls'. Recently, as early as the 1980s, an interest in spiritual direction has arisen, which was nurtured predominantly within Ignatian houses, and promoted throughout the world in Catholic retreat centers. The Orthodox tradition has retained a form of spiritual direction within its spiritual life, which is rooted in its mystical tradition. What is of interest in the history of spiritual direction is that as a particular form spiritual community evolves, and if it embraces the mystical and experiential component from Christendom within its ranks, the necessity for spiritual direction arises. Whenever the mystical element is relegated to the periphery in a faith based community, the requirement for soul care is unwarranted and deemed unnecessary. It is quite understandable, for when a code of belief and a code of conduct hold sway within a particular church or denomination, spiritual direction is superfluous. All that is required in a community of Christian believers is the pastoral role of overseeing the flock, assuring that the members adhere to a particular form of theological dogma and retain the acceptable form of Christian

behavior. There is a secondary element that requires comment, and that is the practice of *spiritual discernment*. Discernment in an environment where all the rules and regulations for Christian piety are understood through the instruction from the pulpit or discipleship education is obviously unnecessary. The type of discernment required of the Christian would involve personal decisions concerning such matters as vocation, marriage, and education, which would in all likelihood, include the community of faith. Christian spirituality assumes that there is a level of personal involvement with the transcendent God, which guides the soul to encounter God who is relational and intimate. This relationship requires a totally different set of discernment skills that are not bound by regulations, rules or formulas, but by the ability to decipher the inner voice of God who speaks quietly and gently into the soul. Thus, recently within evangelical churches, the necessity for wise spiritual directors has arisen, who are equipped with listening skills and the ability to spiritually discern the movements of God in their own souls and in the souls of others. This ministry is a time-honored tradition within Christendom, which is currently being rediscovered due to the increasing interest in contemplative prayer.

There is another aspect to the psychospiritual dynamic which relates to the end result of spiritual transformation. John wrote that the soul must be divested of the inordinate attachments which restrict the Christian from experiencing union with God. What occurs along the way are the exchanges which take place within the soul, namely being released from the sins and addictions which were in control of the Christian. Evangelicalism has encouraged living the sanctified life, oftentimes, providing the ideal for Christian living based upon biblical principles and precepts. Seemingly, the evangelical Christian was responsible for his or her own behavior, suggesting that the believer had to take matters into their own control and exhibit an acceptable Christian lifestyle. John challenged this perspective, though he certainly would have agreed that we are to live a godly lifestyle; however, his understanding is that God works from *within the soul* and provides the impetus and strength to live an exemplary Godly life. His spirituality is not congruent with a spirituality driven by legalism and sectarianism,

for it is not humanly possible within our own ability to achieve transformation of the soul and union with God unless the soul submits to this work of the Spirit.

Throughout the centuries, within the Christian church, we have witnessed the injustice of those who have been sinned against by the church. This is well documented, and examples of abuse need not be listed. Evangelicals have often referred to the old adage, 'teach a Christian to think right, and they will know how to live right'. Indeed, that has been one of the covert motivating factors in bible college education. Theological instruction in evangelical schools has maintained that the transformation of the mind is essential in the growth to spiritual maturity. The implication is that by disciplining the mind to search and study the Scriptures, memorize portions of the Word of God and learn the theological tenets of the faith, the student is experiencing the 'transformation of the mind'. What would be John's response to this perspective of spiritual maturation? Clearly, adequate data exists to indicate that highly gifted and intelligent people do not always have the depth of spiritual understanding with regard to spirituality or spiritual formation. Within evangelical church congregations, there have been allegations of sexual, physical and emotional abuse, and corruption which oftentimes is hidden or even more sinister, is justified under the guise of a biblical principle. A new phrase which is surfacing within many religious communities is the term 'spiritual abuse' or another term 'Scriptural abuse'. John's response to these circumstances correspond with his teaching on the necessity of soul transformation, whereby the spiritual component – memory and intellect – require a spiritual makeover. Consequently, the will is then provided with the impetus to live out of the transformation which is occurring within the inner person. Authentic spirituality cannot be imposed upon the individual believer; authentic Christian spirituality is a phenomenon which is the interplay of the Spirit of God within the inner person. In that place of intimacy, Love burns deeply into the soul its own quality of Love and Peace and Joy, which John continually reminds the reader occurs in secret and silence.

Fifthly, John speaks to CPES *the importance of creatively implementing spiritual disciplines of silence and reflection into corporate worship and prayer*. The North American evangelical church has bought into the business model that 'bigger has

to be much better', and that current fads in techniques and technology will assist the worshipper to a deeper knowledge of God. Therefore, Sunday morning sermons are delivered by the preaching of the Word and the usage of power point; no longer is the spoken word sufficient. Sunday morning worship has taken on the aura of a concert production, fueled by the philosophy that modern music with all of the instrumentals will attract the postmodern audience. It is outside the intent of this thesis to speculate on the success of current evangelicalism in this endeavor. However, the question arises, as the evangelical church incorporates cultural elements into worship, does this enhance spiritual formation and transformation? In the desire to be relevant to the culture in which the church finds itself, have we lost the potential for contemplative and reflective prayer in worship? Indeed, there are those who are already asking the question and intentionally reshaping the experience of corporate worship. John encouraged his readers to seek God in the silence and in the solitude of one's place of worship and prayer. He was known to take his brothers out to the countryside with only their Bibles in hand to spend time alone with God in prayer. Perhaps corporate worship should provide an antithesis from the driven and noisy world which accompanies the Christian on a daily basis. Thus, corporate worship could become the catalyst for a variety of avenues in approaching God through worship and prayer. In addition, this offers the opportunity to incorporate elements of prayer from other Christian traditions, and to creatively allow for the recovery of praying with the imagination. *Lectio Divina* – holy reading – an ancient practice from Christian tradition is being reinstated into Sunday morning worship as a means of utilizing Scripture in corporate prayer. There is the opportunity for worshipping people to become a contemplative community seeking God, beyond the self-serving form of spirituality fostered in much of what is experienced in corporate worship today.

### **7.3 Inspiration for the Future of CPES**

For the past twenty to thirty years, many evangelical theologians, educators and academics have delved into the writings of Christian mystics, particularly the writers from the medieval church. Eugene Peterson, James Houston, Richard Foster, Joyce

Huggett, David Benner, to name a few, are prominent evangelicals who have plumbed the riches of wisdom located in devotional materials from the Christian past.

Many of the manuscripts available to the postmodern reader have been discovered during the past century and translated into English. Of interest to note is the equal ratio of female and male Christian mystics (oftentimes, more women than men) who penned their insights as the revelation of God came upon them. Many evangelicals are recognizing the imbalance created by a purely rational faith, and the balance of spiritual understanding and perspective the Christian mystics of the past bring to the evangelical tradition. No doubt, it is imperative to encourage critical thinking which is clearly appropriate within the evangelical tradition of academic learning. However, oftentimes the students appear to lean toward becoming critical thinkers, rather than developing the ability to think reflectively. When a form of spirituality shuts out the mystical component, it closes the door to intuitive reflection and imagination in prayer.

What is clearly evident from the present research is that CPES is indeed a viable, organic expression of spirituality in western Canada. The missing component of spiritual transformation – sanctification – within the theological base of CPES has been identified. John of the Cross, a Carmelite friar, provides a significant response to the theological inadequacy which not only includes a plausible resolution, but indeed guides the postmodern CPES to vistas beyond the scope of this Christian tradition. Thus, this thesis is an attempt to recognize a component within the broader Christian world which is not always valued, recognized, or appreciated by the evangelical community worshipping on the Canadian prairie — the role of God’s silence in the formation and transformation of the soul.

As CPES continues in its course to recognize the necessity for enhancement within its expression of Christian spirituality, it will have to draw deeply from the tradition of mystical theology, its own unique narrative, the story of God located in the text of Scripture, the Christian tradition reflected in devotional literature and its own evangelical distinctives. Indeed, CPES can boast of a richness which has been shaped by a biblical, theological and missionary belief system. Currently, with the subversive injection of Christian spirituality into CPES and the ensuing reinstatement of devotional

literature from church tradition, the balance is in the process of being struck. That is indeed immensely hopeful.

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