

Discerning The Dark Night

Apophatic / Kataphatic Approach to Spiritual Direction

SUMMARY:

Within both the Judaic and Christian traditions, the nature, power and presence of God is revealed both obscurely and clearly. Within both traditions, God is not regarded as an object to be apprehended in the same way as we apprehend objects in the created world, but as a Subject who both knows us and draws us to our true home. The author of the Fourteenth Century The Cloud of Unknowing speaks of the knowledge of God as that which comes through love and not thought.

Those who undertake the Spiritual Journey are called to explore the head [rational knowledge], and the heart [intuitive knowledge]. For many of us, the journey may well be from the head to the heart. The heart is not merely a place of feelings and sensations, but the core of our personality. This is where we must learn to be still and trust God's work of love even when it is hidden from our intellect and senses. Within the heart, prayer is no longer our own work, but God's. The possibility of our approach to Union with God resides, not in our own faculties and capacities, but in our being enabled by grace to share in God's nature.

In this session we will examine two classical approaches to God: the apophatic and the kataphatic. We will also explore the nature of Divine Union, which is all God's work and not our own.

FOUNDATIONAL TEXTS: I Kings 19:1-18; Ephesians 3:14-19

CONTENT OUTLINE:

- I. A basic understanding of apophatic and kataphatic spirituality;
 - A. The core dilemma: How to know God;
 - B. The *Via Negativa*—"God is not this and not that."
 1. Stillness and silence;
 2. Contemplative Prayer'
 - C. The *Via Positiva*—"The presence of God can be communicated through creatures, images and symbols;
 1. God is present in the Eucharist;
 2. God is to be found through the hearing of the Word;
 3. God is found through conversion and transformation, and being "born again."
 - D. The *Via Moderna*—This mode of spiritual understanding emphasizes:

1. Involvement with others;
 2. Active service;
 3. Work to change and correct the problems of this world;
 4. God is perceived primarily through work in the midst of this world;
- II. Discovering our preference in approaching God;
- A. The negative way;
 1. Affirms God as Wholly Other;
 2. Helps avoid idolatry, and of confining God to the limits of our knowledge;
 3. Checks the tendency to an exclusive interiority which would neglect noticing expressions of God's love and justice;
 - B. The positive way;
 1. Affirms the Incarnation;
 2. Helps us celebrate points of contact. Intimacy, call, vocation and faithful response to the imperative to the summons to acts of service in the world;
 - C. The "Modern" way—leaves us with little to say to persons who, by force of circumstance, can never participate in this form of spirituality.
- III. We find balance through familiarity, comfort and practice.

This presentation is not intended to be a substitute for the medication or the psychological counseling or psychotherapy that persons with severe mental health issues may require. We believe that persons with an *active* mental illness, and whose ability to function is minimal ought to receive appropriate medical treatment. By following mental health protocols, they may reach the point where they can begin the journey through the dark night.

- I. One of the most trying times in the spiritual journey is that period of spiritual stripping and emptiness traditionally identified as "the dark night" of the soul;
 - A. This theme was developed by the 16th. Century Spanish Carmelite mystic, named St. John of the Cross, who described a situation that unfolds like this:
 1. Someone who has had a growing sense of relationship with God, suddenly finds him/herself bereft of an awareness of God's presence, consolation and comfort;
 2. Accompanying this is the experience of opaqueness in all of those areas where the light of God used to shine, giving one meaning and purpose;
 3. Just as moving to a new location or status in life tends to be full of confusion and misgivings, so the dark night is a bewildering occasion;
 - B. Illustration about bewilderment: My little nephew, who had come East with his mother and other relatives, missed his daddy on the farm;
 1. We all embarked on a sightseeing trip to Washington DC, parking the van in the suburbs, and taking the Metro into town;
 2. We would emerge on the mall at Smithsonian Station — perhaps the most dramatic introduction to the capital that could be imagined;
 3. As the escalator would transport us above ground, we would see:
 - a. The Capitol dome straight ahead;
 - b. The Smithsonian "castle" to the right;
 - c. The Washington Monument, Reflecting Pool and the Lincoln Memorial behind us;
 4. But this was 1979, during the farmers' strike, and dozens of tractors had been parked on the Mall, tearing up the sod in the process;
 5. Two-year old Tommy, oblivious to the panorama around him, ran about gleefully, exclaiming "Tractors! Tractors! Tractors!" and "I want my daddy!"
 6. His mother took him by the hand and said, "Look Tommy, There's the Capitol—you remember our picture book at home;"

7. But the lad could only exclaim, "Tractors!", "I miss my daddy!" and, "I want to go home!"
- C. Tommy was experiencing bewilderment, aridity, loss and pain as only a two-year old can experience them;
- D. This is also a description of the dark night;
1. We would expect to see the pathway more clearly the closer we come to God;
 2. But what God is doing in the dark night is a re-patterning of our whole being;
 3. This darkness is the time of God's most radical--although hidden--work in our lives;
- E. John of the Cross calls this time of re-patterning "the night of sense";
1. What God is accomplishing in us is a shift from ego-centeredness to other-centeredness, where:
 - a. The intellect is being transformed by faith *to* faith;
 - b. The memory is being transformed by hope *to* hope;
 - c. and the will by love *to* love;
 2. God is leading us away from our blind tendency to draw-down everything to the level of ego-satisfaction;
 3. We may be so accustomed to our preferred way of coming to God--or rather, permitting God to come to us--that we become bewildered when God calls us deeper;
 - a. But we have come to recognize that our customary consolations cannot begin to reveal all that is God;
 - b. Consider this: *"If God did not seem to disappear, how many of us would keep going? God is always one step ahead of us in this journey toward the center. Just as we think we have found him, he slips out of our grasp. The worst thing that can happen to us is to settle in an oasis under a palm tree. Growth is the challenge of the Gospel. The great sin in the New Testament is to refuse to grow and choose to stay as we are. The spiritual life is dynamic. The Spirit keeps inviting us to new levels of surrender, faith and love"*

--Thomas Keating, *Intimacy With God*, p.89

- F. John of the Cross believed that the “night of sense”—the Relinquishment of the senses insofar as they impede the soul’s harmony with its own spiritual nature—was fairly common, but that a second stage i.e., the “night of the spirit” was rare;
1. This second “night” is as purification of spirit so that the soul is in harmony with God;
 2. The main experience in both cases is one of appalling aridity, anguish and deprivation;
 - a. It is as if the enterprise of prayer itself were futile, unsupported by nature or God;
 - b. Such afflictions are symptoms of the fact that we must—at some point—cast off altogether our reliance on created things;
 3. Darkness, however, has another significance;
 - a. If it is true, as the Christian mystics claim, that there is knowledge beyond discourse and vision beyond images, then such knowledge is impossible to describe, and it is often compared to a kind of darkness;
 - b. Thus, we are to discover at the heart of abandonment in the spiritual night a wholly other kind of the darkness-- the heart of darkness itself becomes bright-- a darkness so bright that it dazzles;
 - c. Such knowledge, however, remains a privilege, and because it is God’s gift we ought not to desire it impatiently;
 - d. Furthermore, experiencing it in this life is not necessary for our salvation;
 - e. Indeed, recognizing that we must relinquish even the desire for the contemplative vision is part of the de- nudification of self-will of which the dark night consists;
 - f. At the last resort, we need not be lost in the dark;

4. The Dark Night, as anticipated by Plato's Allegory of the Cave in The Republic:
 - a. There is a cavern deep in a mountainside where human beings have been chained since early childhood and their heads restrained in such a way that they can only stare at the rear wall of the cave;
 - i. Never once have these prisoners looked to the side or turned around;
 - ii. Naturally, they assume that what they see on the wall in front of them is all there is of reality;
 - b. But in truth, the cave is brimming with interesting activities behind the prisoners' line of vision;
 - i. Near the mouth of the cave, a fire is kept continually burning;
 - ii. In front of the blaze, mysterious beings walk back and forth carrying various objects that cast their shadows on the wall;
 - iii. Since the chained captives see only the wall, they think these reflections are solid objects in the real world;
 - c. Although the prisoners are able to converse, they do so only with each other's two-dimensional shadows, thinking that these reflections are complete people;
 - d. Any suggestion that an entire world exists beyond the wall--that there is a fire that casts these shadows--invites ridicule and even hostility;
 - e. Now, what if by some miracle of effort or good fortune — perhaps a stroke of grace--several prisoners should break-free of their chains and turn around to look at the flame;
 - i. The glare from the fire would make them tremble with fear--their shadow universe now vanished from before their eyes;
 - ii. After a lifetime of shadows, the light is unbearable;
 - iii. Their anguish intensifies when they are led out of the cave into the sunlight--they think they are hallucinating or going mad;
 - iv. Time passes, and some of the escapees accustom themselves to the three-dimensional world and leave the shadowland behind;

- f. But for some, the light is too strong:
 - i. After struggling to accustom themselves to this strange world they finally abandon the struggle return to the cave, where they find their old seats waiting for them;
 - ii. Settling back to their habitual places, they refasten the chains and tell themselves that everything they had seen was just a dream;
- g. For these returning prisoners, the comfortable bondage of shadow is preferable to the blinding radiance of the real world;

5. St John of the Cross: *The self is in the dark because it is blinded by thy light greater than it can bear.*

G. Because the dark night may start fairly soon after an person begins direction, the Director needs to be able to recognize the dark night for what it is, and know how to give plenty of reassurance.

II. The Gift of the Dark Night:

- A. The “gift” is the realization that I’m not as much in control of my life as I’d like to think:
 - 1. Life is much more than learning cope or adjusting to a difficult situation;
 - 2. It is the discovery that here is something wonderful at the heart of our existence, and it is nothing other than love;
 - a. Love for God;
 - b. Love for our fellows;
 - c. Love for creation, i.e., love for life itself;

- B. The Dark Night is part of a deep transformation—a movement toward indescribable freedom and joy;

- C. Suffering arises in everyone’s life;
 - a. God’s role in human suffering is to stand with us;
 - b. To give us courage and strength;
 - c. To enable us to respond with compassion and forgiveness;

- D. The Dark Night reveals an even deeper divine activity—a continually gracious, loving and fundamentally protective guidance through every human experience—the good and the bad;

- E. Each encounter with the Dark Night gives its gifts:
 - a. leaving us freer than we were before;
 - b. leaving us more available to God than we were before;
 - c. More responsive than we were before;
 - d. More grateful than we were before;

F. St Teresa's poem:

*Let nothing disturb you;
Let nothing make you afraid;
All things pass;
But God is unchanging,
Patience
Is enough for everything.
You who have God
Lack nothing.
God alone is sufficient.*

G. In the end we surrender to God alone, who is at the center of our soul;

III. The Apophatic and Katapathic pathways of the Divine/Human encounter:

A. The Katapathic path i.e., "Light Spirituality" or the *Via Positiva*;

1. God employs the richness of the created world to touch our lives;
 - a. Loving relationships;
 - b. the fellowship of other Christians;
 - c. our vocations;
 - d. The Scriptures;
 - e. a devotional life focused and enriched by our use of images, ideas and concepts i.e., *discursive meditation*, and our heartfelt response to Christ in *affective prayer*;
2. God speaks to us all through these means, although it seems, to some persons more than others;
3. Any conclusion we make about God, or any image we cling to, is always incomplete;

B. The Apophatic path i.e., the way of "Darkness" or the *Via Negativa*:

1. When we find ourselves on this pathway, we discover that the harder we strive to cultivate our spiritual life, the less we gain -- "The harder I try, the behinder I get";
2. Because the old consolations no longer work, we redouble our efforts;
 - a. More study;
 - b. More prayer, meditation and reflection;
3. Although it may seem that God has abandoned us, actually, quite the opposite may be happening;
4. God may be seeking to cultivate a deeper relationship, saying, in effect, "*Look, you've manipulated this relationship long enough. Now it's my turn! From now on I'll meet you in my own way and on my own terms!*"

- C. Is one path superior to another? To answer that, one would have to know the mind of God!
1. Most of us would prefer the Cataphatic path;
 2. More popular devotional literature deals with the Cataphatic path than the Apophatic i.e, God's presence in our everyday lives of work, family, relationships, nature, etc.;
 3. A notable exception is the popular poem, "Footprints in the Sand";
 - a. Looking back over much of his life, a man noticed two sets of footprints in the sand;
 - b. But looking back over the most vexing times of his life, he noticed only one set;
 - c. It was in these most vexing times that God had carried him;
- D. Sooner or later, we all may experience the Apophatic pathway to one degree or another;
1. It is a time when old understandings begin to die and new understandings come to birth;
 2. And in the midst of our emptiness, we are ready to discover that God is greater than our previous ways of knowing and perceiving;
 3. The Apophatic path calls us from knowing to *unknowing*, where God is known by love but not by thought;
- E. The end of the Apophatic way is union with God;
1. It is a union that is neither acquired or perceived;
 2. It is realized, but only in the sense that it is something that can be yearned for, sought after, and—with God's grace—found;

F. The Apophatic pathway reveals three discoveries:

1. No matter what we *do*, we cannot force God to reveal himself--our perception of God's presence is always pure gift;
2. But even our "sense" of God's presence may not indicate that such a meeting has in fact occurred--we tend not to see God "face to face", but behind our back;
3. The proof that God has touched our lives resides, not in the felt experience as such, but in the love for God and his creatures that flows from it;

G. All parts of the spiritual journey--including the dark night, are grounded in a mystery that surpasses human understanding;

1. There is no way to *explain* the dark night--we can only recognize it;
2. If we are to proceed on our spiritual journey, we must consent to this movement of God in our lives;
3. When we feel most bewildered, there is comfort in knowing that others--St. John of the Cross, Theresa of Avila, and the author of The Cloud of Unknowing, have gone before us;

H. No matter how hard we try, we cannot savor God's sweetness directly;

1. We cannot see God face to face;
2. Our minds cannot comprehend God's wisdom;
3. We cannot will ourselves into God's perfect goodness;
4. Even our most inventive imagination can only invent symbols and representations that only point to the union we desire;
5. Every representation of God comes short of the essence of God;

I. John of the Cross' "Todo y Nada" [All and Nothing]:

*"To reach satisfaction in all,
Desire its possession in nothing.
To come to the knowledge of all,
Desire the knowledge of nothing.
To arrive at being at all,
Desire to be nothing.
To come to the pleasure you have not,
You must go by the way 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.*

J. Western culture teaches that we should be able to achieve perfect satisfaction in life through our own capacities and efforts;

1. Even if we are never satisfied, we can at least preoccupy ourselves with the effort;
2. We grasp and embrace what we can, but it is never enough;
3. We desire good feelings and to avoid unpleasantness;

K. Sometimes, our reaching turns into compulsion;

1. Then we act, not because we have chosen to, but because we "have to";
2. We cling to creatures, not because we love them, but because we are afraid of losing them;
3. Addiction, in one form or another, eventually brings us to our knees;
 - a. We discover how far we have strayed from our true desire;
 - b. We have fashioned idols, and give them time and attention they are unworthy of, even as we struggle to be rid of them;

- L. What if this hollowness—this emptiness within—is not our enemy, but our friend?
1. If this inner void has the capacity to swallow-up everything we put into it, then, perhaps only the Infinite will fill it!
 2. This inner hollowness is nothing more than our capacity for God;
 3. Augustine: “Our hearts are restless till they rest in thee..”
 4. God has made us for himself, and nothing less than God is going to satisfy us;
 5. It takes courage for us to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord;
 - a. The entrance to the Kingdom is shrouded in deepest shadow;
 - b. Therefore, we run away from the emptiness;
 - c. We run away from the silence that makes us aware of the emptiness;

IV. The Dark Night in Scripture:

- A. Accounts of the dark night experience are the center of the Exodus and Crucifixion;
- B. In both events:
 - 1. People who had made a deep faith-commitment to a spiritual journey were led to a confrontation with darkness and death;
 - 2. Although God appeared to have abandoned them instead of leading them to closer communion with him, both occasions enabled God to bring his people into a covenantal relationship of mercy and righteousness;
 - 3. W.H. Auden:

*The Pilgrim Way has led to the Abyss.
Was it to meet such grinning evidence
We left our richly odoured ignorance?
Was the triumphant answer to be this?
The Pilgrim Way has led to the Abyss. --For the Time Being*

V. In the Exodus, God led the Hebrew people out of Egyptian bondage into a new home in Canaan;

A. But they were not able to enter directly into the Promised Land, but wandered for forty years in the wilderness;

1. It was a time of frustration, failure and a constant stripping-away of all their humanly-based power and strength;

2. Although they had feared that God had abandoned them in the desert, it was in the desert that they learned not to abandon God;

B. Although these former slaves imagined their captivity at an end, end, they brought their slavery with them i.e., [Ex. 14:11-12]:

"And they said to Moses, 'Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt, 'Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians?' For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in this wilderness.'"

1. They could hardly bring themselves to cross the desert;

2. The servitude they had known in Egypt seemed better than the anxiety and possible death involved in moving toward freedom;

3. Their fear enslaved them, in the guise of the desire to control their own fate:

a. They made a golden calf from their own jewelry [lit.] "from themselves";

b. They desired a "god" they could control, and who would grant their wishes;

c. A 'golden calf' can appear very comforting when God seems far away--when we are stripped of all that is familiar, and when we doubt that a new home awaits;

d. So they "rose up to play"--throwing off all restraints, and sinking deeper into their servitude--the servitude to their own lusts;

C. In such a state of mind and heart, the Hebrews were not able to enter into the Promised Land;

1. They did not know how to be free;
2. They did not know how to be in a trusting relationship with the God who is the source of all life, and thus of human freedom;
3. They confused freedom with autonomy;
4. It took them forty years to learn the way out of autonomy/servitude to trust in God;

VI. The Crucifixion/Resurrection is at the heart of the Christian Faith:

- A. The Cross is a confrontation with darkness, failure and emptiness;
 - 1. Although the Crucifixion would seem to overturn all meaning, it enables the faithful to begin to understand themselves and their relationship with God;
 - 2. Through the Mystery of the Cross, Jesus enabled us to enter the Kingdom of God without any of our baggage from the past;
 - a. Now we can leave it all behind us;
 - b. Nothing can now prevent us from becoming the free human beings that God created us to be;
 - c. See Col. 2:14--"*He has wiped out the record of our debt to the law, which stood against us; he has destroyed it by nailing it to the cross.*" [*The Law was able to do nothing about a sinner except condemn him/her to death.*]
- B. But the Cross reveals more than our freedom from the guilt of our unfaithfulness;
- C. We see revealed a radical critique of the prevailing social order:
 - 1. The life of powerlessness, servanthood and nonviolence in the world is revealed as the life that God chooses;
 - 2. At the cross, Jesus did not use force to defend himself, his ministry, and his vision of God's new order;
 - 3. He revealed that God wills his servants to embrace the power of love rather than the love of power;
 - a. Jesus remained faithful to God's love through it all;
 - b. He lived and died in complete trust and dependence upon God;
 - c. And God raised him high, exalted above every name;
- D. Christians understand themselves as called to participate in and to manifest Christ's redemptive work;

- E. But the Cross is more than this--we cannot possess its meaning, but must wait until the Christ of faith reveals its meaning to us: *"He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: 'follow thou me!' and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience who He is."* --Albert Schweitzer
- F. At the center of the Christian faith is the place of darkness, waiting, emptiness and Unknowing where we are stripped of our "gods" and brought to God through Christ;
1. In this darkness, we are called to die to the old ego-centered life, and to be stripped and crucified of all that is *not* God;
 2. In the dark night, we participate in Christ's death;
 3. There, we discover that increasingly, it is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us;
 - a. In that transforming night, we become more like Christ — mirrors of God's love;
 - b. We begin to love the world more as God does;
 - c. We begin to realize that we love God as much as we love our worst enemy;

VII. The dark night is not:

- A. Applicable to those who have not yet become aware of God's call in their lives, or who are unsure of whether there is a God and may just be beginning to search-out the answer to that question;
- B. Descriptive of the condition of those who are struggling with low self-esteem, because God will not ask us to surrender what we don't already have;
- C. Or those who have lost sight of God through negligence:
 - 1. Who do not reflect upon God or God's work all week long, and then wonder why God doesn't reveal Himself in church;
 - 2. Who have persistently refused to answer when Jesus persistently stood at the door and knocked, and then wonder why the knocking has ceased;

VIII. What the dark night is:

- A. Descriptive of the situation of those who once had a sense of a growing relationship with God and who now feel bereft of God's presence, direction and consolation;
- B. But unlike other occasions in life where more initiative and effort yields to new openings, here the darkness only becomes deeper:
 - 1. They search for something to fill the emptiness they feel, but to no avail;
 - 2. They try harder and harder to engage in their customary types of devotion and prayer, but the struggle only seems to sink them deeper and deeper into the "spiritual quicksand" into which they believe they have inadvertently stumbled;

IX. The Dark Night and clinical depression:

A. Although depression may be one element in the dark night journey, depression is neither The dark night, nor the dark night depression;

1. We have to learn to discern the difference between clinical depression and depressed feelings--these latter are the natural consequence of the sense of loss that comes of the disappearance of the signs of sensible consolation, and the perceived lack of love toward Christ;
2. Some marks of Clinical Depression:
 - a. The depressed person cannot experience inner joy and peace;
 - b. the depressed person cannot relate to others in community;
 - c. the depressed person cannot summon the energy to work at a profession or trade;
3. The depressed Christian the situation is in a double bind —because Jesus said that we should not be anxious [Mt. 6:7], he is not only paralyzed by anxiety but feels guilty about it;
4. The difficulty for the Spiritual Director's discernment is that in Clinical Depression the victim also has depressed feelings;

B. But in clinical depression:

1. The experiences of darkness and sadness may be cyclical;
2. They may be related to identifiable hormonal imbalances, or manic-depressive mood swings--both of which can often be alleviated through medication;
3. Anger and resentment tend to be much deeper and less openly acknowledged, and thus might be more adequately diagnosed and treated by competent psychological counseling than by Spiritual Direction alone, however competent and well-meaning;
4. A note of caution:
 - a. When psychotic and/or suicidal thoughts and/or behavior present themselves, the Spiritual Director must *always* Refer! Refer! Refer!
 - b. But referral does not mean abandonment;
 - c. The spiritual journey has not come to an end for this person;

- d. Emotional scars have begun to emerge from the unconscious, and they must be allowed to reveal themselves;
 - e. If consultation is possible between yourself as Spiritual Director, and the person to which you have referred your directee, you must do it—even initiate it;
 - f. Rejection from one's spiritual director at this point could be devastating;
- C. Spiritual Direction and counseling are not the same—whether psychological, personal or emotional:
- 1. In many instances, they may be complementary and Necessary;
 - 2. But Spiritual Direction is *not* client-centered, nor does it deal primarily with the behavioral aspects of the individual;
 - 3. Spiritual Direction is first and foremost, God-centered as the director and directee alike listen to God and to God's ineffable and mysterious ways;
- D. In Spiritual Direction, the person affected is able to carry-on normal job requirements, interaction with family and friends; even through
- 1. Even though s/he may feel inwardly that the world has collapsed, s/he has the intuition that his/her trials are going someplace;
 - 2. One may perceive the fruits of the dark night in his/her changing perspectives, such as the growth of a nonjudgmental attitude toward everyone, greater detachment from things and persons, humility and trust in God;
 - 3. In clinical depression, one goes around in circles, getting nowhere and perceives no benefit at any level;
 - 4. There is a general disposition of acceptance of God's will contrasts with the self-preoccupation of clinical depression;
 - 5. There is emerging a simple desire to serve God, whereas in depression, there may be no such desire;
 - 6. In the midst of the dark night, one is in the midst of exploring available solutions to an "impasse situation", whereas clinical depression often brings functioning in the world to a standstill;

- E. One who is *simply* in the dark night should be aware that taking pills or tranquilizers indiscriminately may interfere with process of grace;
1. One's capacity to face the dark side of his/her personality increases in direct proportion as his/her trust in God develops;
 - a. This occurs even more when one discovers that he/she is loved by God;
 - b. *Keating., p. 108--All the defenses disintegrate in the presence of knowing one is loved by God."*
 2. Aridity and bewilderment aside, even the desire to be able to pray is itself a prayer;
 3. Thomas Keating--"*Trust in God has to be proposed vigorously and without end those who are struggling on the spiritual journey with prolonged periods of powerlessness, dryness, and even the sense of being abandoned by God.."* *[p. 106, Intimacy With God]*
 4. If these occur in the dark night, they are signs of spiritual progress, not regression;
 5. At the heart of the spiritual journey lies the struggle with unconscious emotions, and the *effective* director is sensitive to the emergence of previously unconscious material;
 - a. The effective Spiritual Director will not be "spooked" when the directee reveals intensely personal material;
 - i. The director must not lay any trips--emotional, intellectual, or disciplinary—on the directee;
 - ii. However, the encouragement of personal responsibility is essential;
 - b. But s/he also is also able to discern when to "back-off", when tempted to coax the directee to reveal more than s/he is psychologically ready to face;
 - c. S/he will also discern when outside help is needed;
 6. *Ineffective* spiritual direction leaves the directee in the same situation as before: just as insensitive to the needs of others, and preoccupied by self-centered goal;

F. Summary:

1. The Dark Night is the ongoing transition from compulsively trying to control one's life toward a trusting freedom and openness to God in the *real* situations of life;
2. The process is often marked by a feeling of emptiness and a lack of energy for the old ways of living;
3. The process is always obscure;
 - a. We don't really recognize what is going on;
 - b. It usually feels as though there is something wrong i.e., laziness, listlessness, depression, or some psychological problem;
 - c. But these feelings are actually the birth pangs of a freer life and a deeper prayer;
 - d. It is the beginning of contemplation, which John of the Cross describes as something “..secret and hidden from the very person who experiences..it is like air, which escapes as one tries to grasp it in one's hands.”;

X. The Dark Night and Addiction;

- A. No one understands the Dark Night better than recovering addicts;
- B. It is only *because* of the addiction that they have discovered the true depths and longings of the soul;
- C. They have discovered that *recovery* is a matter of life and death, and that dependence upon a Higher Power is the only way to new life;
- D. Their desperate need for God is being transformed into a loving desire *for* God;
- E. Recovery is no longer the “end,” but service in love;
- F. The Twelve Steps of Recovery:
 - 1. We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable;
 - 2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity;
 - 3. We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understood him;
 - 4. We made a searching and moral inventory of ourselves;
 - 5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs;
 - 6. We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character;
 - 7. We humbly asked him to remove our shortcomings;
 - 8. made a list of all the persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all;
 - 9. We endeavored to make direct amends to such People whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others;

10. We continued to take a personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it;
11. We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood him, praying only for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry it out;
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

XI. Being Re-patterned by God:

- A. The best advice one can give to someone in the midst of the dark night:
“*Stay in the darkness and emptiness. Do not flee from the nothingness or try to fill up that hollow space with your own attempts to create new finite pillars on which to build your life*”:
 1. This advice seems to fly in the face of sense and reason, because helpers “help”:
 2. But rescuing is not in order here, for God is to be found *in* the darkness and not apart from it;
 - a. Rescue is not possible in any case;
 - b. There are no straws to clutch;
 - c. There are not solutions that can be prescribed;
 - d. The advice to stay in the emptiness is the only possible advice that is possible anyway;
- B. When we face the darkness of another, or our own darkness through another, we confront the limit of all finite things, and the end of a quest which has tried to “grasp” God;
 1. In the past we confused the consolations of God with the God who consoles;
 2. We wanted the fruits of a close relationship with God, but we did not necessarily want God;

C. But as the old self begins to melt away, we discover, not annihilation, but a deeper "I";

1. This deeper "I" is not the fruit of our attempts at self-improvement;
2. It is, instead, a precious gift from God;
3. Our "loves" for others now spring from the awareness that they too are gifts from God;
4. This transformation marks our being "crucified with Christ" i.e., *'It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me [Gal. 2:20a]*

XIII. The Dark Night and Preparation For Ministry;

- A. The Dark Night journey often comes to whom God is bringing to a greater maturity in Christian life and preparing for a deeper ministry;
1. Throughout our lives, God is at work in the outward circumstances of our living and through the interior movement of the Spirit;
 2. Our initial commitment to God is usually an intellectual and emotional breakthrough;
 3. Oftentimes, this is the beginning of our involvement in the work of the Church;
 - a. However, it is far too easy to do our “religious work” in the same way that we performed all previous work;
 - b. We expect our efforts to bring change;
 - c. We may measure our “success” primarily by our receiving the approval of others;
 4. In all of this, there may be little change in the “self” orientation of our work;
 - a. The work is still ours;
 - b. Our life has not shifted so that God is at the center of it all;
 - c. Our direction and fulfillment are still rooted in our sense of our own accomplishment and our own power;
- B. It is at this point that our Dark Night journey may begin in earnest;
1. We may have lost our initial enthusiasm for the “work” through others lack of response, their opposition or some other cause;
 2. As a result, our experiential sense of God’s presence begins to recede;
 - a. Our hope for a life committed to God’s service begins to disappear;
 - b. However, it often happens that as we are left in spiritual poverty and emptiness, the true meaning of our initial hope may be being realized;

- C. Our life is finally in God’s hands, not our own, and God leaves us in that condition long enough for a deep interior restructuring of our being to take place;
- D. Two fundamental things happen:
 - 1. We come to know God in a more profound way than before;
 - 2. The *“boulders in our pathway, produced by ego-centeredness, are crumbled to dust so that in our future ministry we will not stumble over ourselves.”* [Cronk, p. 90]
- E. Cronk: *“It is unfortunate that much formal training in ministry does not even recognize that this inward preparation exists. In our world of degrees, exams, and training programs, it is easy to forget that ministry is not primarily a task; it is a way of being in the world. It is living in relationship with God and being a witness to God. Ministry is being able to listen to the Word of God and thereby have a word of life to share with others. Fundamentally, we do not “do” ministry. We “are” ministry. The experience of this inward preparation for ministry is a confirmation of this reality.”* p. 91
 - 1. We must be able to work with people in the midst of their failures and brokenness and not be paralyzed by a sense of anger at their not living up to our visions;
 - 2. Only then does our real participation in the church-community become possible;
 - 3. Only then are we liberated to enter God’s ministry.

XIV. Ministry Growing Out of the Dark Night:

- A. Those who travel in the Dark Night die to their old lives and are given new lives in Christ;
- B. As the result of God’s intensive work, journeyers live in a new relationship with God, self and others;
 - 1. A significant number of these journeyers understand this time as an inward preparation for ministry;
 - 2. This may bring a new way of being and living in the world—a way that can point others to God;

APPENDIX I:

XV. God Consciousness:

- A. The most prominent characteristic of the person who has been led through the dark night is a deep awareness of God;
 1. But although this consciousness pervades all of living, it does not necessarily mean that such people have much to say about God nor even that they will use typical religious language;
 2. They have made a shift in orientation which is deeper than talking about God;
 3. Because this reality is present in the midst of all other concerns and activities, these persons become witnesses to God through their very presence;

- B. Oneness with Christ;
 1. This is a mystical awareness that reaches to the root of everyday living;
 2. The experience of the death of the old self becomes one with Christ's crucifixion;
 - a. Through the self-emptying experience of the dark night, the journeyer comes to understand the meaning of Christ's self-emptying at the incarnation;
 - b. *"Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself taking the form of a servant."* [Phil. 2:5-7];
 3. Christ gave himself fully to be with us in our pain and brokenness;
 - a. His suffering was the result of full identification with the world's brokenness and pain;
 - b. In the dark night, with Christ, the journeyer enters the experience of the world's brokenness and experiences the redemptive love of Christ;

4. This symbolic and mystical language of the Christian tradition, which before may have seemed only abstract doctrine, is now alive with meaning, and it conveys an important quality of ministry as well;
 - a. One does not simply come to the “end” of the dark night, and then begin to minister;
 - b. Rather, ministry [servanthood] flows from our experience of ongoing oneness with Christ’s self-emptying love;
 - c. In this darkness we enter the suffering places in our world and in ourselves and know that God’s love is there;
 - d. The dark night, which on the one hand strips us of our idolatrous attachment to the things of this world, also brings us to a deeper unity with all of God’s creation;

C. Interior Freedom, Availability & Compassion;

1. When discussing the ministry that arises out of the dark night time of self-emptying, many people speak not about what they do, but about the inner attitudes of heart and mind that allow them to do it;
2. They describe being inwardly freed to be in relationship with God, with themselves and other people;
 - a. For some it is the freedom from dread, because they have touched the depths of the world’s pain and know that God’s love is there;
 - b. For others it is the ability to let go of compulsive or protective behavior;
 - c. Because they have touched a deeper grounding in their lives, they no longer need to “prove” to themselves and others their own worth;
 - d. Paradoxically, now that they are freed from having to prove how caring, loving, or competent they are, they are able to respond more fully to the needs at hand;

3. For some, a deeper compassion comes of a growing acknowledgment of their own needs, pain and yearnings;
 - a. In the darkness, they are able to move away from whatever has been blocking them from a deeper awareness of themselves as children of God;
 - b. They are—at last—able to love themselves, care for their real needs, and respect what God is drawing forth from their deepest self;
 - c. This is no longer a selfish preoccupation, but a grateful response to God for the gift of new life;
 4. In this darkness we may find a grounding deeper than the senseless or worthless we may have picked-up from an abused childhood;
- D. Forms of Ministry—the very nature of the dark night may give the journeyer particular experience in two dimensions of the spiritual life which may become part of his/her service to others: spiritual nurture and prophetic ministry;
1. Spiritual nurture ministry:
 - a. Dark night journeyers plumb the depths of the human condition—they learn how God works even in the midst of deep despair and suffering;
 - b. In their struggles to let God re-pattern their lives and to learn a new way of knowing God, they often become very sensitive to the movement of the Spirit of God in their own lives and the lives of others;
 - c. They become good discerners and may become excellent spiritual guides, especially for those who have had to face difficult situations of loss;

2. Prophetic Ministry;
 - a. Because these journeyers have come face to face with many of the idols we use to prop-up our lives, they are in a good position to call us back to God after we have strayed to those “gods” made with our own hands and hearts;
 - b. They may perceive our social, economic and psychological idols before we do, and can form the function of the Biblical prophet, calling individuals and whole communities to accountability and to complete trust in God’s power rather than our own;
 - c. From their dark night encounter with God, they often bring a vision of a more faithful way of living;
 - d. Having been the iconoclasts who have broken the old set of structures of the religious life, they are able to return from that place beyond all images and forms to help their communities give new form and substance to God’s call to faithful living;
3. The gift of clear-sightedness;
 - a. This involves being able to see the patterns of life which have brought hurt and pain;
 - b. This clear-seeing comes of the re-evaluation of all inherited patterns and structures that occurred in times of darkness;
 - c. During these times a person may take a stark look at reality, causing all facades to fall away;
 - d. These experiences are shattering, but may ultimately be freeing;
 - e. This is the clear-sighted vision which these people now bring to bear in their ministries;
4. Clear-sightedness is also an essential prerequisite for acknowledging the spiritual dangers that confront anyone engaged in this ministry;
 - a. it is easy to fall victim to self-righteousness and arrogance while pointing-out the failures of our socio-political, ecclesiastical, and economic orders;
 - b. It is still more likely to find oneself accused of these faults unjustly by those who resent having their idolatry revealed;

- c. Those who have been in the dark night know their own frailty only too well;
 - d. They must speak truth with compassion, not pride;
 - e. They must remember their own anger when they encountered God's stripping-away of their own idols;
5. Courage is essential for prophetic ministers;
- a. Many indicate that fear is a stumbling block prior to their following God's call to prophetic witness;
 - b. They are aware of the inward dangers of pride and a judgmental attitude;
 - c. They know the kind of response any critique of the established order is likely to receive;
 - d. To persevere in this ministry they know that they will have to let go of much that they hold dear—reputation, cultural measurements of success, job, and in some cases, their lives;
 - e. They also know that they must let go of less tangible, but very real desires such as wanting to be liked, wanting always to be perfect, never making a mistake, and thus, never having to acknowledge their own human fallibility;
 - f. For these people, the dark night was a time for confronting their fears full in the face;
 - g. But out of the darkness also comes a remarkable courage to speak Truth and not be paralyzed by fear;
- E. Ministry As A Pattern of Living—two patterns may characterize those whom God has taken into the dark night; i.e., the way of silence and a life apart;
1. The Way of Silence:
- a. Although we are probably aware of the spiritual discipline of silence as practiced in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, there are many not in special communities who practice this discipline;

- b. These persons are aware of that empty place where eternity touches time, and that silence is the most eloquent response;
 - c. They know that silence is a very practical discipline for doing the deep work of God's movement in our midst;
 - d. However, those involved in this ministry must undertake the task of helping church-communities understand the ministry of silence in the world;
 - e. Paradoxically, the silent ones may need to become teachers and speakers about the way of silence in those groups where they live and work;
2. A life apart;
- a. Many who have passed through the dark night choose a life apart as their special vocation;
 - b. This may happen by force of external circumstance such as the death of a spouse, loss of a job, contracting a debilitating disease, or the effects of political persecution or social prejudice;
 - c. Many societies have recognized and honored this role;
 - i. The Russian Orthodox pilgrim;
 - ii. The Medieval anchoress [e.g., Julian of Norwich];
 - iii. The hermit on Mt. Athos;
 - d. They have experienced something of that new order which is to come and not just the reality of our present human order i.e., the other world which is constantly trying to emerge into our world;
 - e. That mode of living which leads to separation from immediate fulfillment on the human level allows journeyers to be open to the One who encounters us in the midst of our emptiness and weakness;

- f. Unfortunately, many of those drawn to a life apart are themselves unaware of the fullness of their vocations;
 - i. Often, their churches have done nothing to help them understand what it means to be a person apart;
 - ii. Very often, spiritual nurturers lack the training and experience to help dark night journeyers to live-out the implications of their path in ministry and pattern of living;
 - iii. Consequently, many of these journeyers have had to come to their ministry and their way of life entirely in the dark.

APPENDIX II:

St. John of the Cross on The Dark Night:

[See Attachment]

Contemplative Experience in The Dark Night:

“Contemplative Experience often results in creative restructuring of our patterns of thought and behavior. In the death of the old, the new can appear. Through being stripped of the usual inward ideas and illusions about ourselves, our world, and even about God, we are able to let go of narrow or false understandings of the nature of human existence which were manufactured out of our fears, hurts, angers and desires or were passed along by the social order in which we live. As a result, we are able to see more clearly. We are released from enslavement to false expectations and wrong desires. Our lives are now centered in that empty place with God. Out of that new centering comes a freedom to make new decisions, to see new truth, and to enter into as new pattern of life.”

~Sandra Cronk, p. 60