

Base Centrum

Spring Quarter

DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL  
Academy Lecture

Research Guild

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To talk about the spirit edge of this moment in history and in the midst of this body of people is to talk about a category we have not used for a long time—that of SANCTIFICATION. I have had difficulty getting ahold of that term because I have thought of it as something static. I think, however, that Sanctification really has to do with a dynamic of happenings in history. God happens something to his people. Perhaps that is the arena of spirit we would be focusing on in terms of the spirit edge.

As our brooding about the summer begins to come into focus we are becoming clearer that those colleagues in this summer's Research Assembly who will be creating the forms for humanness for the next hundreds of years are those who are already on that journey. Those already identifying themselves as people elected in history are those to whom the category of Sanctification might be relevant.

I guess in dealing with Sanctification we are speaking of a journey; and the first question we find ourselves asking is, "Who goes on this journey?" St. John of the Cross talked about that journey as the "journey of the dark night." Sanctification is the journey those people are on who have already decided to live out of the "Grace" happening. For the Grace happening is the foundation of their life, and there is a journey on the other side of that happening.

I do not know if you have begun to brood yet about what it is going to be like when you go home from Academy. I remember that over a year ago one of my favorite people, Mary, came to the Academy. The week before it was over she just went to bed and nobody could get her up. We strategized on what it would take to get Mary up. Her roommates, her prior, everybody was trying to get her up; but Mary said, "I can't get up, because when I go home, how am I going to be sustained?" She had already quit being sustained in sheer anticipation of going home and not being sustained. She just lay in bed. They put her in the hospital, took X-rays and nothing showed up. Finally, we strategized and sent from the faculty a giddy blond with long hair, who was kind of rattled, to go and sit on Mary's bed. We had decided we were desperate, so this member of the faculty said to Mary, "The Dean of the Academy says that if you don't get out of that bed, he's going to call the police!" She got up. Sanctification comes along, and your bondage goes away. Sanctification is that happening which allows you to be faithful in the midst of not feeling like being faithful.

On the journey of the dark night, the journey of Sanctification, I experienced abandonment. I do not know what images you have of the first time when you, as a child, were lost. That does not even come close to what I am talking about. I remember one time in a strange city being lost in the zoo, and spending hours waiting to be found. Whatever images you have of being lost do not even come close to what I am talking about with abandonment. The journey of the dark night, or of Sanctification, has to do with falling into terror over my own sin, terror over my own weakness, and clarity that surely God can never again look upon me, nor can any other creature. It is the kind of abandonment from the holiness of the call of God that is the experience of Sanctification. Yet, in the midst of that is the gift of the faithfulness, the gift of hoping when its hopeless; the gift of loving when one is forsaken.

Let me read a bit of poetry. From St. John of the Cross. He lived close

to the time Martin Luther lived. He was a colleague of St. Teresa, who was a nun very much separate from men. He was a monk, very separate from women. Yet, their journey of the spirit was so intensely the same that there was dialogue there. This is about the Dark Night.

"In poverty and without protection or support in all the apprehensions of my soul, that is in the darkness of my understanding and in the constraint of my will, in affliction and anguish with respect to memory, remaining in the dark in pure faith, which is the dark night, the will alone be touched by grief and afflictions, the yearnings for the love of God. I went forth from myself, that is, from my low manner of understanding, from my weak mode of loving, and from my poor and limited manner of experiencing God, without being hindered therein by sensuality or the devil. This was a great happiness and a good chance for me, for when the faculties have been perfectly annihilated and gone (that is, when I have been wiped out) together with the passions and desires and affectations of my soul, therewith I experienced a taste of God after a lowly manner. I went forth from my own human dealings and operations to the operations and dealings of God. On a dark night kindled with love and yearnings, O happy chance! I went forth without being observed, my house being now at rest."

He's a strange poet. Perhaps he follows in the tradition of a friend of yours, another strange poet:

"For I reckon that the sufferings we now endure bear no comparison to the splendor as yet unrevealed which is in store for us. For the created universe waits with eager expectation for God's sons to be revealed. It was made the victim of frustration, not by its own choice, but because of Him who made it so. Yet always there was hope, because the universe itself was to be free from the shackles of mortality and given to the liberty and splendor of the children of God. Up to the present we know the whole created universe groans in all its parts as if in the pangs of childbirth. (Is that not the case?) Not only so, but even we of whom the spirit has given as first proof of the harvest that is to come are groaning inwardly while we wait for God to make us His sons and set our whole body free, for we have been saved, though only in hope. Now the seeing is no longer the hope. Why should a man endure and wait for what he already sees? But if we hope for something that we do not yet see, then in waiting for it we show our endurance."

I think that they were both talking about the Dark Night. It is strange that it is called the Dark Night, because it comes really as an assault by light. It is as if great rays of light assault the being; the light just rushes in on you. Our poetry might be "consciousness"- new consciousness rushes in on you and it is almost more than you can bear. A fascinating thing about St. John is that he, as

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part of the sixteenth century used scientific metaphors to get ahold of the spiritual reality. He, therefore, says that being assaulted by the light is like a ray of sunlight coming in through the window. When a ray of sunlight comes in, if the whole room is light you do not see the light. But if the room is in darkness and there are dust specks all through the room, when the ray of sunlight comes in, what is exposed is the darkness and the specks. When the light assaults me what I see is not the light, but the darkness of my own self. The darkness is already there, I now see the specks, the imperfections, the sin of my own self.

God does not lead you into this journey until you are ready. Some never enter the dark night of the soul. First, comes the journey through the dark night of the senses where you fight over against some kind of discipline relative to what we used to call the seven deadly sins: avarice, gluttony, etc. It is after the journey of the senses and after an experience of the sheer joy of God that you enter this dark night where the light assaults you. What you see clearly is your own imperfections.

Perhaps a key event in my own journey was in the days of the civil rights movement, with those events around Selma, Alabama, and the struggle of black people to gain some kind of dignity and freedom. A white minister from the East, James Reid, had been shot. He had gone South to demonstrate his deep sense of care about the injustice there, came out of a restaurant, and was shot. It was on television, perhaps you remember. People tried to cross the bridge through firehoses and dogs. The whole nation responded to that. People rushed in from everywhere. John and I began to discuss what we needed to do, we finally decided that probably he ought to go. Well, I did not **realize**, until then, how much I was refusing to be finite, how much I hated death, or how much I had refused to have death in my grid of the way life was. Of **course**, I knew about death. But I had never really anticipated death for my self or anybody I knew very well, not in any very concrete way. I was **sort** of neurotic about it. The whole time John was in seminary we lived forty miles out in the country in a place called Rover, Tennessee. He drove back and forth every day, and I stayed glued to the television to see if he had died on the highway. If he was fifteen minutes late, I was in a panic. One time he went fishing and was an hour late, so I called the highway patrol to drag the lake. If he went to Selma I knew he would be killed immediately. The decision to go to Selma was a confrontation with the fact that I refused to be finite. The light broke in and disclosed to me that I hated God for making me finite. I hated my own life which was finite.

I do not know how you get ahold of what this light does to you. It is like a Christ event that radically transforms your life. But it is like Christ event after Christ event after Christ event just breaking into your life continuously. No relief, just pain, pain, pain. The light breaks in, and it is just pain, the pain of the disclosure of the fact that I hated my life and had refused to be the creature I had been created to be.

Last quarter I was teaching in Academy. There was a young black woman from Milwaukee there, a powerful woman, who did not mind telling me what she thought. Well, one weekend we were working on the Christ lecture. I had been working with a group all day long, and I thought it was pretty fantastic. After the day was over, Joanne came up and she said, "Do you all just sort of make up those illustrations you use? Or are they really about your life? I wondered, because it did not really sound like those things you shared ever happened to you or that you

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really meant it, especially the one about when you ran over a kid!" I just stood there assaulted, not by Joanne but by the question. So as my way out, I asked her what was addressing her life that she was refusing to come to terms with! But what I was clear about was that I had just been assaulted by the fact that the whole day I had not decided to risk my own suffering. I had not decided to let the Christ lecture address me. I had done the Christ lecture before, and was just telling about doing it before, was not willing to deal with the deeps of my own life. That was evident. It is that being assaulted in which over and over and over again the light breaks in and reveals your own darkness, casting you into despair over your own darkness.

In the fine film, The Immigrants, people from Sweden are journeying over on a boat. There is a lot of death, suffering, and tragedy. Finally, a little three year old girl becomes ill, all attempts to save her fail, and she dies on the journey. At the funeral when they are casting her body into the sea, her father kneels down and says, "I thank you God that you have taken my daughter away, for I see that I had allowed her to become an idol to keep me from worshiping only you." Well, it is that kind of pain of our real idols getting exposed and taken from us that is the experience of the light.

Another image St. John uses to describe the journey is that of the burning log. At first, the log is sort of wet and soggy. It has been sitting out and the wood is moist. When the fire gets to the log, at first it takes the moisture out of it and dries it out. Then, before long the log itself becomes black and unsightly and all the imperfections of the log begin to get burned away. The next step, then, is that the log itself becomes kindled. It finally, becomes fire itself or it is gone; only the fire is left. He speaks of the journey of the soul as being very much like that. When the fire attacks you it attacks your senses first; then it attacks your understanding, your will, and your memory.

When it attacks your understanding everything you had bet your life on gets stripped away from you. The foundations upon which your security is built are removed.

A colleague of mine who taught RS-1 in Syracuse last week said that the people there could not stop talking about the Watergate incident. It was as if they personally had been betrayed. There was anger, fear, terror, and hopelessness. Something they had really trusted that they did not even know they had trusted—the democratic way of life, the government, the symbol of the president suddenly showed it could not be trusted. One's understanding is rocked, and you are left, again, up against the abyss only, over against God alone.

Perhaps that happens to people when they take RS-1, or when you really encounter a death. It certainly happened to me in Summer '71. Some of you probably were there when we were working on the social process triangles. I remember being clear years ago that there were no absolutes, but it took Summer '71 to help me realise I still thought something was secure. I thought life somehow was structured, and yet there we were creating the structure, the overlay on life people would live out of for years. It was terrifying. We could have gestalted reality other ways and totally different images and possibilities would have been in history.

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Last year we began experimenting in a new way with music. I was in on some of the early brooding on that, and I suddenly felt like a misplaced person. People were singing, "When you are in love," This was the Spirit Movement? Suddenly I was just lost. I did not know what was happening. It did not make any sense to me, but there wasn't any other movement to go to. When your understanding gets attacked, it is as if you did not even know you trusted something until it is ripped away from you and you are left over against "the nothing"- the "nothing." You are cast into darkness.

Then the will gets attacked, or my motivity, my doing, my longing gets attacked. I wanted to do a life, I wanted to care for people, I wanted to be fulfilled, I wanted to change history. Suddenly, my wanting gets attacked and I do not care anymore. I do not want anything. Three billion people die and never live. So--I am sorry. I do not know if that has happened to you, but it is terrible. You cannot get up for you are so much in pain because you do not care. And yet, you care. It is terrible. Your will is just gone. You do not have the energy anymore to give your life. You do not have the energy anymore to care whether that seminar comes off. You do not really have the energy to care whether or not the children make good grades in school. You do not have the energy to care whether your husband makes it or collapses. You do not have the energy to care whether the economic model of the United States is just or unjust. Your will is gone. On a baser level, you do not want to eat, you do not want to sleep, you do not want to not sleep, you do not want anything. You are sort of dead. And that is the Dark Night. God has lead you into that Dark Night. Your will is being attacked and it is a fiercesome time. It is as if everything has become dry. It is a time of aridity. Here, it is very easy to fall out of the journey. I think of the sheer pain of two or three people I have known over the past few years. There are those who have committed a form of suicide in terms of what they have done with their lives. This is a time to beware of not falling out of the journey.

Not only is your will attacked, but your memory is attacked. Your memory is that which holds your understanding and your will. I remember that I understand about how life is. I remember that the future is open. I remember that I care. I remember what it is like for people in India. I remember the glory of St. Francis' life. I remember the power of seeing the people in Academy. I remember what happened to me when I took RS-1. I remember that witness somebody gave that stood there as a symbol of resurrection. But suddenly my memory is gone. I cannot even remember if I ever had faith. I cannot remember that I decided to be the Church. I am structured in, but I cannot remember why I am here. I cannot remember why I got married. I cannot remember why I decided to have children. I cannot remember why I go to work. I cannot remember why I keep on doing life. I cannot remember. The word John uses here is "void" or emptiness. I am empty. This, too, is a frightening time. On this God-given journey, I am stripped of my own understanding, my own will, and my own memory in order that I might depend only on God not on my own will. I had the will to change History. I do not anymore. I am over against only God. There is nothing left for me; and I experience myself as being abandoned by God. Surely, somebody as dark, dry, and empty as me could never again come into the presence of God. This is the experience of total abandonment. Paul said, "Hope that is seen is not hope." For God has given us this time of testing in order that real faith might come into being.

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It is at the bottom of that journey when there is nothing left that I experience myself being kindled with love for the Mystery. For that is like the log-the only thing left of me is my fire. I have been burnt up. The only thing left of me is the fact that I love the Mystery, or that I yearn for the Mystery. The one thing in life I could not do without is my relationship to the Mystery, even if that relationship is abandonment. You look at every face to see the Mystery; you smell every flower; you taste every food. Everywhere you are looking for the Mystery. You are journeying the Mystery, you are walking with the Mystery, you are seeking the Mystery. You want infinity, you want eternity, you want life. The one thing that drives you is your desire to have the Mystery.

I remember in the fall quarter it seemed like the impingements of life were so incredibly savage I could hardly bear it. The train wreck in Chicago in which 59 people were killed; a friend of mine left his family and just walked off; the Hancock building caught on fire; the symbol of Chicago, the lake, which used to be calm, was rushing up, ready to eat up our city. It is savage. I experience the Mystery. It is as if I could not bear it; yet the one thing I could not really bear is to not know that was the Mystery. At the end of the quarter I had to do a montage of the activity of the Mystery. Somehow, that enabled me to be at peace again or to articulate my yearning, my trusting the savage Mystery. This "catching on fire" has to do with the nothing left of me but my yearning for the Mystery. Everything else is burned out.

It is in the midst of this that one becomes clear there is only one way through the Dark Night. God provides a disguise for you to wear in that Dark Night. I am exposed to the Dark Night; and available to me are three garments. The first is white; it is the garment of faith. The second is green; it is the garment of hope. The third one is purple; it is the garment of charity, or that of loving the Mystery. These garments are a disguise. I do not know if you remember the greatest disguise you ever wore, how much fun it was, or how you scared people, or how they laughed. What you knew was, that you and the disguise were not the same thing. A disguise is not you, but you put it on. In the midst of the Dark Night you put on a disguise of faith, hope, and charity.

God offers you that disguise for a two-fold purpose. One is that the way you disguise, or freight, yourself determines who you turn out to be, where your affection is. Also, the disguise conceals you from the "enemy." John Wesley, before his heart-warming experience, went around asking people over and over, "How do you get faith?" Somebody finally got tired of this and said, "Shut up Wesley! What you need to do is to preach faith until you have faith!" That is something like a "disguise." I had a pastor once who said to watch what habits you get because your habits will get you. There is something in that. Remember The Wizard of Oz with the Tin Man, The Straw Man, and all the others who went on the journey? The disguises they wore were that they were brave, had a warm heart, and were intelligent; before long they and their disguise were the same thing. In the Dark Night, God allows us to put on a disguise which conceals us from the enemy. St. John is pretty clear about the enemy. The enemy faith protects you from is the devil. The enemy hope protects you from is the world. The enemy charity protects you from is the flesh. He is fairly comprehensive. That is, when you are in disguise, there is no entry for the devil, the world, and the flesh.

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Your faith constantly wards off the devil. This is faith at the moment of abandonment. This is faith in no aid. Yet you choose it. Martin Luther is my favorite colleague in the category of faith. One line of his is just fantastic. He said, "The Lord provideth all things well." That is, whatever situation comes, it was provided--given. He also said, "If I were assigned to hell for three hundred years, I would shovel coal to praise God!" The devil does not have too much defense with that kind of garment.

Then there is the garment of hope. Hope has to do with hoping only in God. It protects you from the world, because you do not hope anymore for little hopes. You do not hope for the things of the world; you only hope in God. That movie, The Poseiden Adventure was about hope. It was a movie about a journey. It was hoping only in that which gave you the journey.

Then there is charity, or loving only God. Teresa comes to mind, here, for me. She was a nun and was very sick in bed suffering; her body was just wiped out with cancer or something. The Lord came to her and said, "Teresa get up and go start some new convents." Teresa said, "Lord, I'm sick." And the Lord said, "Teresa get up and start some new convents." And she said, "But it's the rainy season." (In Spain in the rainy season, the only way to travel was in a cart with mud and ruts.) But He said, "Teresa get up and start some new convents." So she got up, and she started some new convents. Teresa said to the Lord, "Lord, why do you treat your servants so hard?" And the Lord said, "Well, because I love them so much." And Teresa said, "That's probably why you've got so few of them." Well, charity has to do with loving only God. Those are the garments and without the disguise, one will not make it through the Dark Night.

John talks about the journey in another way and that is with the image of climbing the Ladder. The ladder has ten steps. Before you know it, God has placed you on the first step of the ladder, which you find leads to God. Sometimes you experience a step as exultation- victory. Victory? Victory! Sometimes you experience it as humiliation. The ladder is a slow, saintly climb. The same step is both exultation and humiliation.

He talks about the first step on the ladder as languishing. Languishing is that you show up just on the other side of the grace happening. You show up just languishing, sick. You do not know if you have hepatitis, Asian flu, or you just know something awful is wrong. Nothing tastes good. You do not want anything. It is not because you are forty. You do not have any drives left. You are on the first step of the ladder and you are languishing. The soul swoons, John says, and loses all its taste for other things so it can be filled with the yearning for God.

The second step is that of the soul seeks in God, or the self seeks God in all things, without ceasing. The only thing you do is seek God. Every time somebody says anything you are listening for God. Every time you hear a piece of music, every time anything happens: a wall falls down, and you are looking for God. The only thing you are doing is looking for God. It is sort of like the Siamese twin who suddenly realises she's a twin, and all of her nerve endings are out to find out who the other one is. You are out to sense who the other one is. John uses the imagery of the virgin who is longing for the lover. At first she just went to bed and she swooned for love, languished for love, but he was not there. So she got up and went to look for him. It is like running after the beloved,

seeking the beloved, hungering for the beloved.

The third step on the journey is fervour for work. It is as if all your drive to do and work and accomplish is just gone, and you are languishing. And now suddenly God has delivered you to a new step on the journey, or he has delivered you to intense energy. You just blow the limits out of every assignment. You get an assignment to chart a paper and you do fifteen charts on it. You cannot do enough. None of your works are adequate. Nothing satisfies you as being enough. I think of St. Francis always hearing God: "Not enough! Not enough!" It is an incredible place to be on the journey where you have never had so much energy, and yet it is not enough. I think of the Old Testament story of Jacob where he worked seven years to get Rebecca for a wife. After working seven years for his beloved, the sneaky old father tricked him, and gave him Rebecca's sister, because she was the older. He did not even know until after the wedding and the unveiling when he discovered it was not Rebecca. So he worked seven more years to get Rebecca, too. It is that kind of fervent energy to do anything for the beloved.

The next step on the journey has to do with suffering. It is suffering habitually, without ceasing. You suffer partly because none of your works are adequate. At this point you do not want anything. You do not want any favors from God. You do not want any consolation from anybody else. This is the cruciform man. His life is given. His life is just sheer suffering "on behalf of." The only thing he wants is to please God. The only thing he wants is to give his life into history. The only thing he wants is for his life to be given for all his neighbours. The only thing he wants is to participate in the eternal. He is a cruciform man. This man from time to time experiences great joy. He has worked and slaved and suffered not even sure he has accomplished anything, yet he feels good.

The next step is impatience and hunger. You are impatient all the time and you are angry and you do not even know what you are angry at or why you are angry, but you are hungry for something more. You are hungry for the eternal. You wake up and it is like a wall is just there and you bump into it. Or your shoes are gone! You are just angry. You have been on the journey a long time and you are beyond some kind of petty self-discipline, but you are angry and there is no reason. There is nothing that you are angry at. You are angry at "no-thing" because that is what you want so much is the No-thing. You want to have the Mystery. You want union with God. You want significant participation in life and not all this petty stuff like "my shoe is gone again."

The next step on the journey is running to God again and again. I think here Kazantzakis is the one who holds that for me. The awe is so intense you can practically touch it, and you back off because it is burning you up, but in five minutes you run out and touch it again. I have a colleague who talks about the man of faith as the one who would run fifty miles to get his life addressed. It is over and over and over and over and over and over again running to God. I do not care if he kills me! Running to God. Touching God over and over again. Touching the awe. Living in the deeps. That is a great step to be on.

It delivers you to the next step which is the step of boldness. St. John says that maybe this is the most dangerous step, when you might fall clear off the ladder into hell. Yet, this is the step on the journey God gives you. It is boldness. It is courage. It is the decision to be creative. It is the kind of boldness of



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Abraham, who argued with God and demanded that he not destroy a city. It is boldness. It is grabbing out for the Mystery demanding, "MYSTERY YOU LISTEN TO ME! BY GOD THIS HAS GOT TO HAPPEN!" It is the boldness of fearing only God. You do not fear anything else. You do not fear your life being taken away; you do not fear what history will say about you. I dare to offer up my bones as ransom for the YES decision of God to my brother. I defy him to refuse. I am his Son. My fear of God is so total and hopeless that it looks like courage. This is the seventh step. For the first time in a long, long while there are moments when I can breathe again. I beg for satisfaction. I seize God and will not let him go -- as a bride seizes the lover by the legs. Meaning is everywhere -- I wrench forth the promise of sonship -- it is well with my soul. Yet not at all times. This is the eighth step. I understand my obligation to history -- willingly I give my life -- but not always.

With the ninth step I am burning again; but oh, the burning is sweet! It is my home -- this restlessness. It is my joy, it is my relationship to the Father. When you bump into persons on this step of the ladder there is a glow about them, though they may not know it. They are healers. To encounter them is to encounter healing in the deeps of life -- restoration of authenticity. For one who trusts the goodness of the one who has given his life and acts creatively out of that clarity about life is able to show others the way. This is a time of sweetness and painful joy.

Finally-the tenth step. All that is me is gone. I look different. My bones are put together differently, for I have gone forth from the flesh and only the Father dwells here. One who encounters me- encounters not me but the Father who now dwells within me. St. John says this is not for this life but is when I am wholly assimilated to God. It is a place of clear and immediate vision of God. There is a story I once heard that was used to describe the self-depreciation of many of the Mexican people dwelling in poverty in which a stranger went to the door of a small hovel to seek help with his car. When he pounded on the door the Mexican came and shouted through to the stranger, "There is no one here, Senor, only me." The tenth step is like that. When someone approaches you they find there is nobody home-only God. When they encounter you they encounter the Mystery itself. When they encounter you, they encounter the reality of the goodness of the creation. It is not that you are God, but that God has so totally claimed you that one is in the presence of the Father when he is in your presence. It is totally willing to be God's man and having God somehow mysteriously say YES. Jesus spoke of it as: "I and the Father are one." This is what it means to have ascended into heaven. I live with God. Yet here is where I am. There is symbol. The weight of transparency is unending. This is endlessness. This is glory.

This is the gift of God. This is the journey of the Dark Night. Keep the faith--it is God who gives the journey.

-Millie Baggett-

