

The Way to Ultimate Meaning in the Mystical Theology of

St. John of the Cross

Larry Cooley, St. Paul's College, Winnipeg, Canada

1. Introduction

St. John of the Cross has a remarkable vision of the potential of human individuals for greatness. For him this potential lies in the faculties of memory, intellect, and will which he refers to metaphorically as the "the deep caverns of feeling." They are deep because "anything less than the infinite fails to fill them." Their depth lies in the fact that the object of their "capacity, namely God, is profound and infinite." It is this depth that lies at the core of the human dilemma. Since the capacities of the human memory, intellect and will are "in a certain fashion ...infinite, their thirst is infinite, their hunger is also deep and infinite, and their languishing and suffering [caused by their incapacity, on their own, to reach their object] are infinite death" (*The Living Flame of Love*, stanza 3, paragraph,18, 22; hereafter F.3.18, 22; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 680, 681;cf., Matthews 1995, 27).

This vivid description of human greatness and of the poignancy of human suffering can be stated in contemporary terms. In what follows I will attempt not only to present St. John's understanding of the human soul, its faculties and its discovery of ultimate meaning through union with God but also to transpose this understanding into Lonergan's framework of intentionality analysis. The transposition that I will offer is meant to be a series of hypotheses. As such they remain to be expanded and verified by further scholarship and intentionality analysis.

If we accept the results of Lonergan's intentionality analysis of human consciousness, we affirm that human consciousness is fundamentally constituted by an unrestricted desire to know, to value and to love. This radical desire is actualized in the operations of knowing; choosing and loving that occur on the empirical, intellectual, rational, responsible and loving levels of consciousness (Lonergan 1972, 9; 1973, 38; 1992, 343-371; 2004, 400;cf, Byrne 1995; Corso 1994; Doran 1993, 1995). These operations are remotely motivated, oriented and normed by the transcendental notions of intelligibility, reality, valuability and, I believe, lovability. Lonergan understands these transcendental notions to be natural dynamisms, which constitutes a divine call that, will be "transformed and fulfilled by the further call and gift of God's grace" (Rixon 2002a, 221,222). Vertin defines the transcendental notions as "purely heuristic yearnings presupposing nothing, mere anticipations of intentional fulfillment, absolutely *a priori* dynamic structures" (Vertin 1995, 247). The implication of this intentionality analysis is that these transcendental notions orient human consciousness toward a reality that is completely intelligible, necessary, good beyond criticism and unrestricted love. Such a reality would constitute ultimate reality for human beings. This reality would completely fulfill the fundamental human capacities (cf, Doran 1997, 76). Anything less than this reality would be ultimately reducible to it. Thus, anything less than it would only result in a partial fulfillment of the human capacities. Further,

since it would completely fulfill the human capacities, nothing beyond it would be required and so it would not be reducible to anything else (for this understanding of ultimacy see the inside of the cover of the Journal *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*). For Lonergan this reality is God. He conceives God "as the supreme fulfillment of the transcendental notions, as supreme intelligence, truth, reality, righteousness, goodness" (Lonergan 1972, 111). A further implication is that ultimate meaning is the joy that is experienced from knowing, valuing and loving that reality by participating in it's knowing, valuing and loving. As we shall see below, this participation would constitute a nonintentional and passive resting in God's knowing, valuing and loving.

Human beings, however, cannot know, value, and love unrestrictedly because their operations are finite. Further, they are incapable of complete authenticity in orienting and norming their operations by the transcendental notions. All our operations of knowing, valuing and loving are always biased to some degree. The first bias is dramatic in nature. Dramatic bias is created by the processes of psychological defense by which the self protects itself from the painful insights that would be necessary if the self were to integrate the unconscious dimensions of its wounded and rejected parts into consciousness (Lonergan 1992, 214-227). These operations are further biased by our individual and group needs, as well as the need of common sense to solve practical problems in the here and now and therefore to avoid the search for abstract and universal understanding (Lonergan 1992, 244-251).

This situation creates a profound dilemma for the human self. Because the transcendental notions inherently orient human consciousness toward complete intelligibility, absolute reality, good beyond criticism and unrestricted love, human consciousness can only find its ultimate fulfillment or meaning in an ultimate reality that lies radically beyond its grasp. Even if human persons and human groups were capable of healing themselves of all bias, so that they could authentically orient and norm all their operations by the transcendental notions, still, because they are finite, ultimate fulfillment would lie profoundly beyond their reach. Neither can relief be found for the radical existential anxiety that is created by the profound gap between human reach and human grasp by simply denying or repressing the desire. Such measures against the desire, though they may bring temporary relief, will only drive it underground, where it will wreck havoc by becoming further disordered and by attaching itself to things that will only increase the plight of emptiness.

Thus, from this perspective, the desire of the human heart is for an ultimate reality. This reality would not be reducible to anything else. It would therefore be absolute. It would be truly

valuable. It would therefore be a good beyond criticism. It would love which operates in an unrestricted manner. It would be therefore completely trustworthy. It would never abandon. To the extent that the individual and group have not done violence to this desire, they will find themselves crying out with St. John of the Cross "Where have you hidden, Beloved, and left me moaning?" (*The Spiritual Cantical*, stanza 1, paragraph 1; hereafter C.1. 1; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 478). Is there a way out of this dilemma? Is there an ultimate reality, which will fulfill all authentic human desires? Is there a process of healing that can eliminate the various forms of bias so that human consciousness is capable of receiving this fulfillment? Is there a process by which human finite consciousness can be integrated into or sublated by the consciousness of ultimate reality (cf, Doran 1997, 59, 64; McPartland 1995, 124)?

The life of St. John of the Cross is a remarkable journey, moving through the intense suffering of total emptiness, loss of meaning and abandonment by ultimate reality, to the realization of the joy of mystical union with that reality. His capacity to experience all the dimensions of this journey, to intellectually appropriate that experience and formulate this appropriation as a mystical theology is simply without peer. (For some of Lonergan's comments on what St. John is doing when he is appropriating his mystical experiences see Lonergan 1973, 38-39). This paper will highlight St. John's understanding of the way in which this most fundamental of human dilemmas can be resolved. Beginning with a brief biographical sketch of St. John's life, we shall move on to look at his understanding of the nature of ultimate reality. This will set the basis for a discussion of his understanding of the nature of ultimate meaning. Following this we will examine the insights that St. John gained into the way in which human beings can find the fulfillment of their deepest desires in ultimate meaning. We will close this discussion by reflecting on some of the implications of St. John's thought for those of us who are attempting to reach ultimate reality and meaning by way of our intelligence.

In my efforts to understand the thought of St. John, I have relied primarily on the fine translation of his collected works by Kavanaugh and Rodriguez as well as their very fine commentaries. In addition, there are now a number of excellent secondary sources (see for example: Culligan,

Meadow and Chowning 1994; Matthew 1995; May 2004; Rolheiser, Culligan, Copsey, Fleming and Matthew 1993; Stein 2002)

St. John's descriptions of the various dimensions of the journey of the human self to ultimate reality and meaning are characterized by a richness, vividness and vitality that comes from the fact that these descriptions are based upon what he personally experienced. Though his interpretations of his experience were informed by the scholastic philosophy and theology that he inherited, they carry an experiential or empirical quality that characterizes what we today refer to as the transcendental turn to the subject. We will briefly examine some of the experiences of St. John's life that grounded his mystical theology.

2. Biographical Details of St. John's Life

Helpful biographical outlines of St. John's life can be found in Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, Stein 2002 and Hardy 1982. St. John was a human being whose great stature enabled him not only to experience reality with a magnitude that far out-reaches that of the average individual, but also to appropriate this experience and give it remarkable intellectual expression. He was not only a great mystic, poet and teacher, but a man with a profound love of God. In formulating his insights into his own experience, he drew on extensive knowledge of theology, psychology and spiritual direction (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 35).

St. John was born and named Juan de Yepes in 1542 in a Spanish town called Fountiveros. As a young man he demonstrated a gift of compassion toward the sick through his work in a hospital for the poor. Between 1559 and 1568 the saint studied the humanities at a Jesuit school in Medina and the arts and theology at the great University of Salamanca. In 1563 he entered the novitiate of the Carmelites and was ordained a priest in 1567. During this year he first met St. Teresa of Avila and committed himself to her efforts to reform the order.

In 1577, because of conflicts of jurisdiction within the order, St. John was abducted in Avila and taken to in a monastery in Toledo. Here he reasoned that the jurisdictional statement did not apply to him and that he was not obliged to renounce the reformed way of life that he and Saint Teresa had embraced. As a result he was imprisoned for nine months in the monastery prison. During this time he suffered intensely. The cell where he was confined alone was narrow and dark with limited air, and he was subjected to floggings and starved. When he escaped he was near death. During his imprisonment he wrote *The Spiritual Cantical*.

After his escape he became re-involved in the reform and held various significant offices. In 1590 St. John refused to support his provincial's plans to change Saint Teresa's constitutions and to expel her close collaborator from the order. As a result, in 1591 he was stripped of his office in the order and was willing to go to Mexico.

In 1591 the saint contracted erysipelas, which gradually and very painfully worsened over a three-month period. He died on December 13, 1591. In 1726 he was canonized and in 1926 he was declared a Doctor of the Universal Church.

The Dark Night poem was written in 1578 or 1579. The Ascent of Mount Carmel treatise was written between 1581 and 1585. St. John's commentaries on the Spiritual Cantical, the Dark Night and the Living Flame of Love poems were written between 1582 and 1591 (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 9-37).

St. John's understanding of ultimate reality and ultimate meaning as well as the nature of the journey into these realities is not merely an abstract theoretical construction. It is permeated with the empirical flavor of lived experience. It is very much based upon the self-appropriation of his experiences of suffering and development along a trajectory that led to the most sublime experience of mystical union with God, who for him is ultimate reality.

3. St. John's Understanding of Ultimate Reality

St. John is a Christian mystical theologian. For him God is ultimate reality. As a Christian, St. John believes that God is Trinitarian in nature, being "three Persons in one God" (*The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, book 2, chapter 9, paragraph 1; hereafter A.2.9.1; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 177, 770). This God is imminent in the universe:

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. By it he conserves their being so that if the union should end they would immediately be annihilated and cease to exist (A.2.5.3; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 163)

However, this God also transcends the universe:

...among all creatures...none bears a likeness to God's being or unites proximately with him. Although truly...all creatures carry with them a certain relation to God

and a trace of him...God has no relation or essential likeness to them. Rather the difference that lies between his divine being and their being is infinite. Consequently, intellectual comprehension of God through heavenly or earthly creatures is impossible; there is no proportion of likeness (A.2.8.3; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 174)

Thus, in God's transcendence, God is "utterly beyond" (Matthew 1995, 96)

God is at the center of the soul and of the universe (cf., Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 770). Concerning the soul, St. John states, "The soul's center is God" (F.1.12; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 645). Today we would say that God is at the center of human consciousness on both its conscious and unconscious levels. With reference to the universe, St. John tells us that God not only communicates natural being to creatures, but that through God's Incarnation God "clothed them in beauty by imparting to them supernatural being...since in human nature he was united with them all" (C.5.4; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 497). For St. John, the universe is flooded with traces by which "one can track down ...[God's] grandeur, might, wisdom and other divine attributes" (C.5.3; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 496;cf., Matthew 1995, 30). Thus, for St. John, not only human nature but also the whole universe is entirely "clothed...in beauty and dignity" (C.5.4; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 497).

Space will not allow us to explore the many remarkable descriptions that St. John gives of God. Several are relevant to this discussion. God as God is: loving, self-bestowing, transforming and fulfilling.

3. 1 God as Loving

It is St. John's experience that God loves us first. This is a God who presses in upon us in order to create within us new capacities for loving (Matthew 1995, 75). In a letter that he wrote in 1591 from Ubeda he formulates his understanding of God's love in the following way:

...Have a great love for those who contradict and fail to love you, for in this way

love is begotten in a heart that has no love. God so acts with us, for he loves us

that we might love by means of the very love he bears toward us (*The Letters*33,

hereafter L.33; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 764)

3. 2 God as Self-Bestowing

For St. John, because God is loving God is self-bestowing. God bestows God's self through the "operation of infused contemplation...[which] is nothing else than a secret and peaceful and loving inflow of God which...fires the soul in the spirit of love" (*The Dark Night*, book 1, chapter 10, paragraph 6; hereafter N.1.10.6; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 382; Matthew 1995, 56). This self-bestowal is a pure gift. The human individual, on the basis of his or her own efforts, cannot achieve it. In order for union with the divine to be achieved, "God must take over" (N.1.4.3; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 367; Matthew 1995, 70). This self-bestowal is so generous that it seems to the individual that God "has no one else in the world to favor nor anything else to do, that everything is for the soul alone" (F.2.36; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 672; Matthew 1995, 26). In God's union with the individual God rejoices to say "I am yours and for you and delighted to be what I am so as to be yours and give myself to you" (F.3.6; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 676; Matthew 1995, 26).

3. 3 God as Transforming

When God bestows God's self on the individual, the individual is transformed. "God's purpose ...is to exalt the soul" (F.2.3; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 659). Matthew translates this as, "God's purpose is to make the soul great" (Matthew 1995,26). God "invites" the individual into "perfection and completion of love" by giving the individual "a sublime experience of glory" (F.1.28; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 652-653). This blazing fire of God which is "so mighty it would consume a thousand worlds", burns gently within the individual and in so doing "divinizes and delights" him or her (F.2.3; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 658). St. John's understanding of this transformation is amazing and radical, for he believes that as a result of the transformation the individual actually participates in the being of God. In what is perhaps his most dramatic formulation of this understanding he states, "What God seeks, he being himself God by nature, is to make us gods through participation, just as fire converts all things into fire" (*The Sayings of Light and Love*107; hereafter S.107; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 93). The general principal that guides St. John in his interpretation of the experience of mystical union is that it is "the property of love...to make the lover equal to the object loved" (C.28.1; cf., N.2.13. 9;C.12.7-8; C.32. 6;L.11; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 584, 427, 518, 600, 745; Matthew 1995, 112, 164). As Matthew notes, "love does not just admire; it creates ' likeness '"(Matthew 1995, 112).

3. 4 God as Fulfilling

Finally, we note that for St. John, God is the fulfillment of the immensely deep “caverns” of human consciousness. Union with God gives human consciousness "abundant and lofty knowledge of God, which is all loving and communicates light and love to its faculties and feeling" (F.3.1; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 673). These, "admirable favors" are so intense that St. John cries out "O lamps of fire!" In describing these lamps of fire, St. John's states:

...It ought to be known that God in his unique and simple being is all the power and grandeur of his attributes. He is almighty, wise, and good; and he is merciful, just, powerful, loving, and so on; and he is the other infinite attributes and powers of which we have no knowledge. Since he is all of this in his simple being, the soul views distinctly in him, when he is united with it and deigns to disclose this knowledge, all these powers and grandeurs, that is: omnipotence, wisdom, goodness, mercy, and so on...Each of these attributes is a lamp that enlightened the soul and gives off the warmth of love (F.3.2; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 673-674).

Lonergan characterizes this fulfillment as "God's love flooding our hearts." This experience constitutes an apprehension of transcendent value, which is:

...the experienced fulfillment of our unrestricted thrust to self-transcendence, in our actuated orientation toward the mystery of love and awe. Since that thrust is of intelligence to the intelligible, of reasonableness to the true and the real, of freedom and responsibility to the truly good, the experienced fulfillment of that thrust in its unrestrictedness may be objectified as a clouded revelation of absolute intelligence and intelligibility, absolute truth and reality, absolute goodness and holiness (Lonergan 1972, 115-116).

What greater fulfillment of the human capacity for knowing, willing and loving could be asked for! In this description of the way in which ultimate reality fulfills all of our capacities, we are already moving our discussion toward a reflection on what, for St. John, constitutes ultimate meaning for human individuals and groups.

4. St. John's Understanding of Ultimate Meaning

One of the characteristics of St. John that makes him such an attractive personality is his passion. A single-minded eros runs throughout his work. His is a passionate search for and union with his one great love: God. Given his early developmental experiences, it is not surprising that St. John's search for God would be characterized by an ardent and blazing desire. As Rolheiser, Culligan, Copsey, Fleming and Matthew (1993, 17) state:

He was a love-child, conceived of a passion so powerful that his father willingly renounced his family and their rather substantial wealth, privilege and status to marry a peasant woman for whom he felt a love so strong that nothing else mattered other than consummation and community of life with her. John was a child of that union, in every way.

Given the experience of such an ardent love between his father and mother, it should not be unanticipated that when he came to describe what we today would refer to as ultimate meaning, he used the metaphor of marriage. Drawing the erotic imagery of the *Song of Songs* and St. Paul's image of the Church as the bride of Christ, St. John metaphorically describes union with God as marriage. For him, ultimate meaning is something like marriage to God. He tells us that "Spiritually speaking, there are two kinds of life: One is beatific, consisting in the vision of God, which must be attained by natural death...The other is the perfect spiritual life, the possession of God through union of love (F.2.32; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 670). St. John refers to the beatific spiritual life as "the glorious marriage" (C.40.7; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 630) while he refers to the perfect spiritual life, which is "the highest state attainable in this life", as "the spiritual marriage" (C.12.8; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 518). It follows that ultimate meaning for St. John would be the meaning that occurs when one has entered into the glorious marriage. Since the glorious marriage is only possible after death, St. John, of course, had no experience of it. His descriptions of the glorious marriage represent an extrapolation from the experience that he actually had in the spiritual marriage. Thus, for St. John the ultimate meaning that is attainable in this life is the meaning experienced in the spiritual marriage. Of this he had first-hand experience. Therefore, we will begin our discussion of ultimate meaning by examining St. John's remarkable descriptions of the spiritual marriage.

St. John's descriptions of the spiritual marriage are extravagantly beautiful. It constitutes "a total transformation in the Beloved, in which each surrenders the entire possession of self to the other with a certain consummation of the union of love. The soul thereby becomes divine, God through participation" (C.22.3; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 560-561). The "delight of God's glory is experienced and enjoyed in the substance of the soul now transformed in him" (C.22.5; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 562). Once the soul has reached the state of spiritual marriage, its substance, though not its faculties, is in permanent union with God (C.26.11; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991 577). St. John interprets this experience of union as being due to the spiration of the Holy Spirit which fills the soul "with good and glory and delicate love of God...[and] "produces in the soul...lofty knowledge of the Godhead (F.4.17; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 715). Through this spiration the soul is made "capable of breathing in God the same spiration of love that the Father breathes in the Son and the Son in the Father. This spiration of love is the Holy Spirit himself (C.39.3; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 623). Thus, in this union of love that occurs in the substance of the soul, the soul is united with the divine Trinity. Stated more profoundly, the soul has become God through participation.

We are now in a position to ask how this spiritual marriage fills the deep caverns of the soul. In contemporary terms, how does the spiritual marriage constitute the beginning of the fulfillment of the human individual's desire for perfect intelligibility, necessary being, good beyond criticism and unrestricted love? St. John's answer to these questions is very explicit and must be quoted in full. He states:

Since every living being lives by its operations...and the soul's operations are in God through its union with him, it lives the life of God....

The intellect, which before this union understood naturally by the vigor of its natural light by means of the natural senses, is now moved and informed by another higher principle of supernatural divine light, and the senses are bypassed. Accordingly, the intellect becomes divine, because through its union with God's intellect both become one.

And the will, which previously loved in the base and deadly way with only its natural affection, is now changed into the life of divine love, for it loves in a lofty way with divine affection, moved by the strength of the Holy Spirit in which it now lives the life of love. By means of this union God's will and the soul's will are now one.

And the memory, which by itself perceived only the figures and phantasms of creatures, is changed through this union so as to have in its mind the eternal years mentioned by David [Ps. 77: 5].

And the natural appetite that only had the ability and strength to relish creatures (which causes death), is changed now so that its taste and savor are divine, and it is moved and satisfied by another principle: the delight of God, in which it is more alive. And because it is united with him, it is no longer anything else than the appetite of God (F.2.34; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 670-671).

Put succinctly, "the intellect of this soul is God's intellect; its will is God's will; its memory is the eternal memory of God; and its delight is God's delight; although the substance of this soul is

not the substance of God" (F.2.34; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 671). As St. John notes, though the substance of the soul is now in permanent union with God, the faculties are not (C.26.11; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 577). In our day-to-day living, our faculties continue to function in accordance with their natural nature. However, from time to time they become united with God and then function in a more divine way through participation in God. At these moments not only will their functioning change but the knowledge gained will be qualitatively different from that gained through their normal operations.

Lonergan's vision of ultimate meaning is very similar to St. John's. He states: "For the spirit of inquiry within us never calls a halt, never can be satisfied, until our intellects, united to God as body to soul, know *ipsum intelligere* and through that vision, though then knowing aught else is a trifle, contemplate the universe as well" (Lonergan 1997, 66; cf. Crowe 1984; 1989, 78).

Returning to St. John's thought, we will now ask what is his understanding of the content of this knowledge? What is the nature of this knowledge? How is this knowledge acquired?

Referring to the content of this knowledge, St. John tells us that the soul "experiences in God an awesome power and a strength that sweep away every other power and strength. She tastes there a splendid spiritual sweetness and gratification, discovers true quiet and divine light, and tastes sublimely the wisdom of God reflected in the harmony of God's creatures and works" (C.14&15.4; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 526). Continuing, St. John states, "This experience is nothing but a strong and overflowing communication and glimpse of what God is in himself" (C.14&15.5; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 527). Thus, it appears that this knowledge is a knowledge provided by the divine light. Illuminated by this light the soul, through the wisdom of God, grasps the harmony of the universe and the nature of God as God is in God's self.

Concerning the nature of this knowledge, St. John refers to it with three names: contemplation, mystical wisdom and mystical theology (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1979, 394). St. John defines contemplation as "nothing else than a secret and peaceful and loving inflow of God, which, if not hampered, fires the soul in the spirit of love" (N.1.10.6; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 382). Further, for St. John, contemplative knowledge is unique in that it belongs simultaneously to the cognitional and volitional levels of the soul. It "is knowledge and love together, that is loving knowledge" (F.3.32; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 686; cf., 1979, 396). St. John is quite explicit about this knowledge being both cognitional and volitional in nature. He states "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" (C.27.5; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 582; cf., 1979, 395). This contemplative knowledge is also called mystical knowledge because it is "hidden knowledge of God"..."[given] secretly, without [the soul] knowing how." Contemplation is thus "knowing by unknowing" (C.39.12; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 626). It is thus not "clear...but dark" because it is a knowledge stripped of accidents. In this life therefore, contemplation "is a ray of darkness" (C.14&15.16; cf., N.2.16.3; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 532, 431; cf., 1979, 394, 395). However, though this knowledge may be dark, in the sense that it is not a conceptual knowledge, it is nevertheless a profoundly experienced knowledge. "I do not think", states St. John, "anyone who has not had such experience will understand this well. But, since the soul experiencing this is aware that what she has so sublimely experienced remains beyond her understanding, she calls

it 'I-don't-know-what' Since it is not understandable, it is indescribable, although, as I say, one may know what the experience of it is" (C.7.10; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 502;cf., 1979, 396).

Given that this knowledge is an understanding of the harmony of the universe and the nature of God, which is mystical in nature and therefore nonconceptual or dark, how is it acquired? Through the scholastic theory of knowledge, which St. John inherited, he gives us a very penetrating epistemology of contemplative or mystical knowing:

In contemplation God teaches the soul very 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. For this knowledge is not produced by the intellect that the philosophers called the agent intellect, which works on the forms, fantasies, and apprehensions of the corporal faculties; rather it is produced in the possible or passive intellect. This possible intellect, without the reception of these forms, and so on, receives passively only substantial knowledge, which is divested of images and given without any work or active function of the intellect (C.39.12; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 626;cf., 1979, 394).

We can transpose this scholastic understanding of how mystical knowledge is acquired into contemporary terms by making use of Lonergan's intentionality analysis of human consciousness. Transposed, the passive intellect is the capacity of human intelligence to receive insight into the intelligibility that is universal to the different species or categories of being. In ordinary human knowing, the object that is the agent of insight is either a datum of sense or of consciousness. Thus, in ordinary human knowing insight is always into empirically given data. The agent intellect, in transposition, becomes the transcendental notions of intelligibility, reality, valuability and lovability. Through these notions human intelligence is profoundly active. These notions anticipate intentional fulfillment on the empirical, intellectual, rational, responsible and loving levels of consciousness by motivating, orienting and norming the operations of knowing, choosing and loving. As such, they "illuminate" the empirically given object in such a way that, where appropriate, its intelligibility, reality, valuability and lovability stand out to be understood, known, chosen and loved. Ordinary human knowing is discursive. The knowing of the object is not immediate. For example, on the intellectual level, the transcendental notion of intelligibility guides the process of abstracting what is essential to

having the insight. Further, the intelligible content that is abstracted must be formulated or conceptualized. Each of the levels of consciousness possesses its own discursive operations.

What St. John is telling us about the way in which mystical knowledge is acquired is that God is the agent of this knowledge. There is no sensory object to act as an agent of the insight. Further, since there is no sensory object, the transcendental notions are not activated. Thus, the empirical level of consciousness is inoperative and the four higher levels of consciousness are completely passive. When human consciousness is in this state, God is able to infuse a knowledge of the "harmony of nature" and of "God as God is in himself." In contemporary epistemological terms this knowledge would take the form of a primordial knowing, that is, a "knowing which, on the level of insight, is constituted by an insight not issuing in the concept" (Tekippe 1996, 453). In Tekippe's epistemological analysis mystical knowing is the most primordial of all knowing (ibid. 463). In this context of attempting to understand mystical knowing, I would extend Tekippe's analysis by hypothesizing that in mystical knowing, intelligibility is grasped without being conceptually expressed, reality is grasped without issuing in the judgment of fact, valuability is grasped without issuing in the judgment of value and lovability is grasped without issuing in a decision to love. This would be the case because in mystical knowing the four higher levels of consciousness are entirely passive and receive their content without the active involvement of the transcendental notions. In this state, one is not discursively conceptualizing, judging facts, judging values and deciding to love the object known and valued by way of these discursive operations. Does St. John have the capacity to describe this state of loving knowledge? In many ways his description is unmatched:

Accordingly, the intellect of this soul is God's intellect; its will is God's will; its memory is the eternal memory of God; and its delight is God's delight; and although the substance of this soul is not the substance of God, since it cannot undergo a substantial conversion into him, it has become God through participation in God, being united to and absorbed in him, as it is in this state (F.2.34; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 671).

Lonergan also emphasizes that the transforming union with God brings about "the transformation of the conscious operation of the intellect and will, and an intellectual vision of the Trinity or some divine attribute" (Rixon 2001, 486). He writes that in this union there is, "A break across consciousness; intellect and will engaged in supernatural operations (the presence of God in the soul, in my soul)" (quoted in Rixon 2001, 486).

As marvelous as this vision of ultimate meaning is, St. John tells us that the union of the spiritual marriage is not yet as perfect as union will be in the glorious marriage of the next life (F.2.34; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 671).

Concerning the glorious marriage St. John states, "Everything [concerning the spiritual marriage] can be called a sketch of love in comparison with that perfect image, the transformation in glory" (C.12.8; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 518). In summary, in the glorious marriage, God is always awake within the substance of the soul, communicating knowledge and love (F.4.15; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 714). With his metaphor of the glorious marriage, St. John is, of course, referring to the beatific vision. This clear vision of God assimilates the soul completely into God. St. John states "this vision is the cause of the soul's complete likeness to God." In this state the soul "will be called, and shall be, God through participation" (N.2.20.5; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 445). As given in the beatific vision St. John describes God as "infinite beauty", "infinite grace", "infinite goodness", incomparable "freedom and sovereignty" and a delight of the will that cannot be compared to the delights and satisfactions provided by the things of this world (A.1.4.3-7; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991 124-126).

Here, then, is a remarkable vision of the ultimate meaning of human life, a meaning to be found in the glorious marriage or beatific vision. This meaning is the meaning that human consciousness is given by becoming divine by way of participation, integration into or sublation by the consciousness of God. In this act of participation, human intelligence knows through the divine intelligence. Thus, it will not only know the essence of natural being but also the essence of the divine being. In knowing through the divine intelligence, it knows unrestrictedly all of reality. In willing through the divine will, it wills unrestrictedly a good beyond criticism. In loving with the divine love that the three persons of the Trinity have for each other, it loves unrestrictedly all that is good. But even more remarkably, the individual will experience himself or herself as not only knowing unrestrictedly but being known unrestrictedly; not only willing unrestrictedly but being willed unrestrictedly and not only loving unrestrictedly but also being loved unrestrictedly. What a fulfillment of the transcendental notions that orient and norm the operations of human consciousness! What higher meaning could there be than to know, will and love perfectly and to be known, willed and loved completely! In this participation in God our human knowing, willing and loving are complacent. That is, they are not the intentional and active striving for an end, but rather are the nonintentional resting in the end (cf, Doran 1997). Thus, the meaning experienced through this participation would constitute a passive joy since it is a meaning that is infused into human consciousness without the operations of consciousness functioning. It is also passive, when given in the spiritual marriage, because in that state its object is not clear and distinct on the level of intelligence (A.3.17.1; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 294).

This understanding of the nature of ultimate reality and meaning gives rise to two pressing questions. How does one come to participate in ultimate reality and thereby derive the meaning that alone fulfills the capacities of the human individual to know, value and love? If the mystical marriage is the ultimate meaning in this life for which the human individual is created, why do so

few attain it? In the next section of the paper we will examine the way in which St. John answers these questions.

5. The Way to Ultimate Reality and Meaning

St. John's understanding of the nature of ultimate meaning as union with God through love creates a profound dilemma for the human individual. In this section, we will explore the nature of this dilemma and St. John's understanding of the divine solution to it.

5.1. The Human Dilemma Concerning Ultimate Reality and Meaning

The dilemma faced by the human individual who is pursuing ultimate reality and meaning, as St. John understands it, is twofold. First, ultimate reality and meaning are not attainable by way of the natural operations of the human faculties. Second, even when God makes Godself available to the human individual, the natural operations of the human faculties are usually too disordered to attain the union of love with God.

5.1.1. The Unattainable Nature of Ultimate Reality and Meaning

St. John's understanding of the human dilemma is based upon his belief that there are two orders of reality: the natural and the supernatural orders. For him, the distinction between creatures and God is qualitative. "God has no relation or essential likeness" to creatures. "Rather the difference that lies between his divine being and their being is infinite. Consequently, intellectual comprehension of God through heavenly or earthly creatures is impossible; there is no proportion of likeness" (A.2.8.3; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 174).

Human intelligence is radically incapable of uniting individuals with God through knowledge because it operates only in a natural way. It can only know objects that are presented to it through the senses (A.2.3.2; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 157). Therefore, the "intellect, by its own power, extends only to natural knowledge, though it has the potency to be raised to a supernatural act whenever...[God] wishes" (A.2.3.1; cf, A.2.4.4; A.2.8.3; C.26.4; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 157;cf, 160, 174, 575). Lonergan makes a similar point when he states: "God is not a datum... Again, between this world and God there is no relationship that can be verified" (Lonergan 1974, 95; cf. Crowe 1989, 83).

Further, the will is completely inadequate to the task of uniting individuals with God through love. The human will desires those things that are apprehended by the other faculties that appear to the individual as "good, suitable, delightful, ... satisfying and precious." Therefore, "since God is not apprehensible to the faculties, he cannot be the object of the appetites and satisfactions of the will. Since the soul cannot enjoy God essentially in this life, all the sweetness and delights it tastes, however sublime cannot be God" (L.13; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 747). It follows that "here below" the individual "... cannot enjoy God as he is in himself" (L. 13; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 748).

It is clear, therefore, that given St. John's radical distinction between the natural and supernatural orders and his conviction that our faculties are part of the natural order, it is impossible for human individuals, on their own, to unite with ultimate reality and thereby attain ultimate meaning. However, for St. John, this does not mean that the situation is hopeless. It is his experience that God takes the initiative to bridge the gap between the natural and supernatural orders by condescending to be united through loving knowledge with human individuals. Nevertheless, this does not mean that God's free gift of God's self is attained immediately by everyone. As we will see, human desire is usually too disordered to center itself on God's gift of God's self in a way that is proportioned to the gift.

5.1.2 The Disordered Nature of Human Desire

We must begin this discussion of the nature of human desire by noting that St. John gives complete support to the principle that creatures are good in themselves (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, 1991, 104) and that the ordered desire for creaturely objects— be they persons, places, things, ideas or memories— is good because these promote human life. From St. John's perspective, "Every desire for union with an object is implicitly a desire for union with God" (Culligan, Meadow and Chowning 1994, 95, 96). Thus, the problem does not lie with creatures or ordered desire for them. Rather, the problem is created when our desires for creatures become disordered. For St. John, a desire is ordered when it is open to its tacit orientation toward union with God. A desire is disordered when it is completely centered on natural goods (Culligan, Meadow and Chowning 1994, 96). In the language of today, we would say that a desire has become disordered when it has become attached, in a compulsive way, to a natural good (May 2003, 60). St. John's own articulation of this insight is stated clearly: "Those are decidedly hindered, then, from attainment of this high state of union with God who are attached to any understanding, feeling, imagining, or opinion, desire, or way of their own, or any other of their works or affairs, and know not how to detach and denude themselves of these impediments" (A.2.4.4; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 161).

In the language of intentionality analysis, our most fundamental desires are the transcendental notions. Therefore, we can conclude that our deepest desires become disordered when the intrinsic finality of our transcendental notions toward God becomes truncated, or cut short, precisely at the point where they should guide consciousness through and beyond creatures to the creator. When the transcendental notions are truncated in this way, objects are desired as ends in themselves and as the sole source of human fulfillment. As such, they cease to be relativized to by God (Doran 1999). As Lonergan states: "Man's transcendental subjectivity is mutilated or abolished, unless he is stretching forth towards the intelligible, the unconditioned, the good of value" (Lonergan 1972, 103;cf. Crowe 1989, 93).

It would appear, then, that if the union of love with God is to be attained, a therapy of desire is required (cf, Culligan, Meadow and Chowning 1994, 100). Since, for St. John, the therapy that is required is a therapy of our desire for God, ultimately only God can fulfill the role of therapist. How then does God conduct the therapy that will act as the solution for the dilemma that we had been discussing?

5.2 The Divine Solution to the Human Dilemma: The Dark Night

St. John refers to the therapeutic process by which our transcendental notions are healed of their truncation as the dark night. The Spanish word which is translated as "dark" is *oscura*. The root meaning of this word is captured in the word *obscure*. Thus, when St. John uses the word "dark", he is referring to what has become obscure in our lives; especially our relationship with God. During the dark night our deepest relationship with God becomes hidden from our conscious awareness (May 2003, 26, 67;cf, Matthew 1995, 60-61)

In the dark night process, God helps us detach our desires from their natural objects. As such, St. John tells us that it is a preparation for the union of love. If this union of love is to occur "the soul must first be set in emptiness and poverty of spirit and purged of every natural support, consolation, and apprehension, earthly and heavenly." The "old self" must be stripped away (N.2.9.4; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 413). This dark process is necessary because "two contraries cannot coexist in one subject" (N.2.5.4; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 402). We cannot be attached to creatures and at the same time possess the complete openness to God's love, which is a prerequisite to the union of love. This process is dark for three reasons. First, it is dark in its point of departure. Its point of departure is our need to renounce the things of this world to which our disordered desires have become attached. Examples of such objects could be sensory goods, natural knowledge, natural goodness, and natural loving commitments. This process of detachment by way of renunciation is dark or obscure because it removes from us the foundations on which we have lived our lives and transplants us into nothingness. We seem to have no place on which to stand securely (Stein 2002, 45-46). Thus, St. John states "the mortification of the appetites can be called night (A.1.12.1; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 145). The description that St. John gives us of the method to be used during the active night of the senses can be aptly applied to the entire night. It is the process of "disencumbering, emptying, and depriving the faculties of their natural authority and operations to make room for the inflow and illumination of the supernatural" (A.3.2.2; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 268). Our entrance into the dark night is often initiated by reversals in our lives, reversals such as unemployment, failure of marriage, loss of a loved one through death and failure in our achievement goals (cf, Matthew 1995, 81; May 2004, 64).

Second, the process of detachment is dark in the path it takes. The path it follows is the way of faith. This path is obscure because faith is a dark knowledge relative to the clear insight of our natural operations (Stein 2002, 46). The knowledge of the supernatural which faith provides cannot be rationally demonstrated to be true.

Third, the process of detachment is dark in its goal, which is God. Even in the bliss of union of love God remains hidden, for only in the beatific vision will God be known in God's essence (cf, Stein 2002, 46). During the night this goal is at its darkest because our whole relationship with God is thrown into obscurity.

Loneragan describes the processes of the dark night as a "long conversion". For him the process of transformation, which is a life, lived according to the "religious aim" established by the conversion from non-faith to faith is the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* (Robert 1994, 336, 340, 341;cf. Robert 1995, 159-161).

The dark night has both active and passive dimensions. "The active way, ... comprises what one can do and does by oneself to enter this night. The passive way is that in which one does

nothing, but God accomplishes the work in the soul while the soul acts as the recipient" (A.1.13.1; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 147-148). St. John divides the dark night into the night of the senses and the night of the spirit, both of which have the active and passive dimensions.

5.2.1 The Dark Night of the Senses

The dark night of the senses is concerned with our sensuality. Our sensuality has two aspects. First, it involves our sense perceptions on the basis of which we gain knowledge of the physical world. Second, it involves the "enjoyments and the desires called forth in the soul through sensory perceptions" (Stein 2002, 113). Examples of these enjoyments are food, sexual union, persons, places and things (Culligan, Meadow and Chowning 1994, 85-86). The night of the senses is primarily centered in this latter aspect of our sensuality (Stein 2002,113). To be more precise, this night has as its goal, not the elimination of these enjoyments and desires, but rather the attachment of the self to these sources of fulfillment (Culligan, Meadow and Chowning 1994, 95, 97). As St. John states, "all of a person's attachment to creatures are pure darkness in God's sight...Darkness, an attachment to creatures, and light, which is God, are contraries and bear no likeness toward each other...Consequently, the light of Divine union cannot be established in the soul until these affections [attachments] are eradicated" (A.1.4.1-2; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 123-124). St. John is concerned with the "denudation" of these attachments. "This [denudation] is what leaves...[the self] free and empty of all things, even though it possesses them (A.1.3.4; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 123). Thus, what the night of the senses seeks to eliminate is not the desire for sensory fulfillment, for this desire is necessary for the continuance of human life, but rather the disorderedness that can creep into this desire (cf, A.3.15.1; Rodriguez and Kavanaugh 1991, 290; Culligan, Meadow and Chowning 1994, 95-96).

5.2.1.1 The Active Night of the Senses

The active night of the senses involves a use of a "method of emptying the sense faculties, with regard to the appetite, of their visible objects" (A.2.6.6; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 168). St. John's method for healing our attachments to sensory desires involves the mortification of these attachments (cf, Culligan, Meadow and Chowning 1994, 94). St. John gives several counsels that together constitute his method. First, "have habitual desire to imitate Christ in all your deeds by bringing your life into conformity with his." Second, "renounce and remain empty of any sensory satisfaction that is not purely for the honor and glory of God" (A.1.13.3-4; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 148). Third, he gives his well-known maxims:

Endeavor to be inclined always:

not to the easiest, but to the most difficult;

not to the most delightful, but to the most distasteful [and so on]

(A.1.13.6; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 149).

5.2.1.2 The Passive Night of the Senses

St. John refers to those who had been practicing the active night of the senses as beginners. They persevere in meditation and prayer. It is "through the delight and satisfaction they experience in prayer that they had become detached from worldly things and have gained some spiritual strength in God" (N.1.8.3; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 376). Yet these methods have a strong sensory component and are inadequate to bring about full union with God. Therefore,

God now leads them "into the exercise of spirit, in which they become capable of a communion with God that is more abundant and more free of imperfections." At this point, God "closes the door" on "the spring of sweet spiritual water they were tasting as often and as long as they desired." As St. John states, this inaugurates the time of great spiritual suffering:

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 the interior sense 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 (N.1.8.3; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 376).

The suffering that occurs at this time is intense because the beginners believe "that God has abandoned them" (N.1.10.1; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 381). When this occurs the beginners are being invited to move from meditation to contemplation. For the senses this contemplation is dark and dry. This contemplation is mysterious because it "is secret and hidden from the very one who receives it" (N.1.9.6; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 379; Stein 2003, 51). This movement from meditation to contemplation marks the transition from beginners to proficients, from the way of purgation to the way of illumination (Stein 2003, 54; N.2.3.1; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 398,774). St. John gives three signs that the beginner is being invited to move from the process of meditation to that of contemplation:

1) that since these souls do not get satisfaction or consolation from the things of God, they do not get any from creatures either;

2) that the memory ordinarily turns to God solicitously and with painful care, and the soul thinks it is not serving God but turning back, because it is aware of this distaste for the things of God [this purgative dryness is therefore not the result of lukewarmness toward God];

3) the powerlessness, in spite of one's efforts, to meditate and make use of the imagination, the interior sense, as was one's previous custom. At this time God does not communicate himself through the senses as he did before, by means of the discursive analysis and synthesis of ideas, but begins to communicate himself through pure spirit in an act of simple contemplation in which there is no discursive succession of thought (N.1.9.2,3,8; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 377, 378, 380).

Thus, our exterior sensual attachments to the things of this world are purged or mortified during the active night of the senses by way of self-discipline and our interior sensual attachments to the things of God are purged or mortified during the passive night of the senses by way of spiritual aridity (cf, N.2.6.4; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 405). However, this purgation of the senses is but a small part of the purgation required if we are to attain union with God. The most profound purgation that we have to undergo is that of the spirit.

5.2.2 The Dark Night of the Spirit

Why, we might ask, is a further night of purgation required once we have become proficient? St. John gives us several reasons. First, the "sensitive purgation...serves more for the accommodation of the senses to the spirit than for the union of spirit with God. The stains of the

old self still linger in the spirit...[and must be] wiped away by the use of the soap and strong lye of this purgative night" (N.2.2.1; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 397). The "imperfections and disorders of the sensory part are rooted in the spirit and from it receive their strength (N.2.3.1; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 398). As the saint states, the "imperfections [of the spirit] are deeply rooted in the substance of the soul" (N.2.6.5; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 405). The substance of the soul is also referred to by St. John as the heart (F.2.9; 4.10; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 661,711). It is the deepest center of the soul (F.1.9; 4.3; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 644, 709; cf, 774,776). The substance or heart of the soul is not identical with its faculties since it is the heart that God speaks to after God has made "the natural acts of the faculties fail" (F.3.54; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 695). Transposed to the intentionality analysis framework I would hypothesize that the substance of the soul would be the self as subject or the I-self (cf, Lonergan 1988, 162-179; Harter 1999, 6-7; Nemeck and Coombs 1982, 45; 1987, 168, 180).

Proficients are therefore not yet perfect or pure in heart. They still possess "natural, moral, and spiritual weaknesses" (N.2.5.6; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 403). Space will only allow us to discuss the spiritual weaknesses and then only the habitual types of these weaknesses. Further, we will only discuss "the habitual affections and properties of the old self to which the soul is strongly united, attached, and conformed" (N.2.6.1; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 403). Primary among these attachments that must be purged is that the of the heart to the light of its intellect (in transposition, the intellectual and rational levels of consciousness), to the affections of the will (in transposition, the responsible and loving levels of consciousness) and to the discursive knowledge of the memory (cf, N.2.8.2; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 410). These attachments must be purged because "two contraries cannot coexist in one subject"

(N.2.5.4; N.2.9.2; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 402,413). It is impossible to be attached to the operations of our faculties and the products of these operations and at that same time to be fully open to the union with God through love. Even one such attachment is enough to hinder the reception of the "intimate delight of the spirit of love that contains eminently in itself all delights" (N.2.9.1; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 412). As St. John states "the spirit, still affected by some actual or habitual attachment or some particular knowledge or any other apprehension, is unable to taste the delights of the spirit of freedom" (N.2.9.2; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 412). It is important to note that it is not the annihilation of the operations of the faculties that is being referred to here, but rather the attachment of the heart to these operations and their products. As we noted above, in the union of love all of these levels of consciousness as well as our memory receive their ultimate fulfillment.

The second reason for the necessity of the night of the spirit is that the faculties of the soul are powerless and unprepared to perceive the divine object (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 401, footnote 2). For example, the natural operation of the intellect is to grasp the essence of particular classes of natural things. On the other hand, the wisdom with which God seeks to fill it in the union of love is "divine", "general and simple" and "not particularized by any distinct object of affection" (N.2.5.2; 2.8.5; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 401, 411). The natural operation of the will is to desire the natural objects that are presented to it by the intellect. On the other hand, the "affection of love" that is bestowed on the will in the union of love is "divine" and as such is "so sublime...[that it] does not naturally belong to the will." As such it exceeds "every affection and feeling of the will and every appetite" (N.2.9.3; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 413). Finally, the objects of the memory are the remembered natural objects that have been known and willed in the past. On the other hand, the memories that will be recalled as a

result of the union of love will be those of "the feeling of glory" and "the goods the soul possesses and enjoys in the union with her Beloved" (C.26.8, 9; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 576,577). Whereas by itself the memory can only perceive phantasms of creatures, it now has "in its mind the eternal years mentioned by David [Ps. 77: 5] (F.2.34; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, 1991, 671).

For St. John, the dark night of the spirit is the infusion of divine wisdom into the soul. This infusion has two effects: it illuminates and purges the soul. Concerning the purgative affect St. John states, "This divine wisdom is not only night and darkness for the soul but also affliction and torment." It is darkness because it exceeds the natural capacities of the soul and therefore cannot be grasped by the discursive operations of the faculties. It is torment to the soul because of the imperfections of the soul and therefore it is "painful, afflictive and also dark for the soul." (N.2.5.1-2; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 401). Concerning the illuminative effect, as these faculties are emptied of their functioning, they will be illuminated by the divine wisdom. As the heart is purged of its attachments to the operation of its faculties and their objects it will come to experience the joy of union with God. Thus, during the dark night of the spirit God "leaves the intellect in darkness, the will in aridity, the memory in emptiness, and the affections in supreme affliction, bitterness, and anguish by depriving the soul of the feeling and satisfaction it previously obtained from spiritual blessings" (N.2.3.3; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 399) in order that the divine wisdom may be infused into the soul.

What then, is the specific nature of the process that occurs in the dark night of the spirit? Paralleling the night of the senses, the night of the spirit has both an active and passive component.

5.2.2.1 The Active Night of the Spirit

This part of the night of the spirit is the active part because during it the individual does what he or she can in order to facilitate the union of love (F.3.45; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 691). As he did for the active night of sense, the saint provides a method for the active night of the spirit. He describes it as "a way to empty and purify the spiritual faculties of all that is not God" (A.2.6.6; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 168). For each of the faculties he specifies a principal that is meant to guide the individual in his or her application of the method to themselves. Concerning the intellect, he states that the individual "must go to God by not comprehending rather than by comprehending, and they must exchange the mutable and comprehensible for the Immutable and Incomprehensible" (A.3.5.3; cf, F.3.37; F.3.47; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 277, 688, 692). "It is impossible for this highest wisdom...of God, which is contemplation, to be received in anything less than a spirit that is silent and detached from discursive knowledge and gratification" (F.3.37, cf, F.3.47; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 688, 692). Concerning the will, St. John tells us that the "will should rejoice only in what is for the honor and glory of God" (A.3.17.2; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 294). Inordinate desires "are the source of unruly appetites, affections, and operations, and the basis for failure to preserve one's strength for God." The will must thus be purified of these inordinate desires (A.3.16.2; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 292). Turning to the emptying of the memory, St. John gives us the principal that, "As often has distinct ideas, forms, and images occur to...[individuals], they should immediately, without resting in them, turn to God with loving affection, in emptiness of everything rememberable." To the extent that the memory is filled with ideas, forms and images, it will be fulfilled by these objects rather than by God (A.3.15.1; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 290).

This guiding principle could very well be generalized to the emptying of the intellect and the will of their respective objects.

Concerning the more specific steps of his method, St. John recommends that as God draws the individual into the state of "solitude and recollection" he or she should not "apply...[his or her] faculties to anything, or encumber them, but detach them from everything" (F.3.65; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 700). The goal is to empty the natural operations of the memory, intellect and will of their objects and thereby render them inoperative (F.3.34, 41; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 687, 689). The state of solitude or inner idleness or spiritual listing to which God guides the individual can be recognized by the experienced qualities of peace, and inner absorption (F.3.35; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 687). When the individual realizes that he or she is not in this state, the saint recommends that he or she "should proceed only with a loving attention to God, without making specific acts. [Individuals]...should conduct themselves passively,...without efforts of their own but with the simple, loving awareness, as when opening one's eyes with loving attention" (F.3.34; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 686).

Obtaining the emptiness and dispossession of all things "is the equivalent to what [the individual]...can do of itself" (F.3.46; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 691). This is as far as the active night of the spirit can take the individual. St. John tells us that if we attain this emptiness "it is impossible that God [will] fail to do his part by communicating himself to [us], at least silently and secretly" (F.3.46; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 691). This action on God's part constitutes the passive night of the spirit.

5.2.2.2 The Passive Night of the Spirit

The passive night of the spirit constitutes the transition from the stage of the proficient to that of the perfect (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 375). St. John gives us an exquisite description of both the suffering and the glory of the passive night of the spirit:

Poor, abandoned, and unsupported by any of the apprehensions of my soul (in the darkness of my intellect, in the distress of my will, and the affliction and anguish of my memory), left to darkness in pure faith, which is a dark night for all these natural faculties, and with my will touched only by sorrows, afflictions, and longings of love of God, I went out from myself.

... My intellect departed from itself, changing from human and natural to divine. For united with God through this purgation, it no longer understands by means of its natural vigor and light, but by means of the divine wisdom to which it was united. And my will departed from itself and became divine. United with divine love, it no longer loves in a lowly manner, with its natural strength, but with the strength and purity of the Holy Spirit; and thus the will does not operate humanly in relation to God.

The memory, too, was changed into eternal apprehensions of glory.

And finally, all the strength and affections of the soul, by means of this night and purgation of the old self, are renewed with divine qualities and delights (N.2.4.1-2; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 400-401).

Though not in the context of discussing the nature of the dark night, Lonergan like St. John, emphasizes the transformation of our human operations that occurs as a result of the union of love. Speaking of the fulfillment that comes from being in love in an unrestricted fashion he states:

That fulfillment is not the product of our knowledge and choice. On the contrary, it dismantles and abolishes the horizon in which our knowing and choosing went on and it sets up a new horizon in which the love of God will transvalue our values and the eyes of that love will transform our knowing (Lonergan 1972, 106).

During the passive night of the spirit God is the agent (F.3.65; cf, F.3.67; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 700,701). "God works supernaturally in the soul. ... by communicating himself to it" (F.3.45, 46; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 691). When the faculties are in solitude and empty, and are therefore inoperative, God speaks to the heart (F.3.54; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 695). This communication of God's self to the individual is referred to by St. John as contemplation. Contemplation is the indwelling of God in the individual. This indwelling transforms the individual into the divine by enabling the individual to become God by participation. During contemplation the divine wisdom and love are infused into or received passively by the individual. Contemplation has several functions. Depending on which function it is fulfilling contemplation may be referred to as purgative, illuminative, or unitive (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 768). Contemplation functions purgatively when it eliminates the attachments of the self to its own operations and their objects (cf, N.2.7.4; Kavanaugh and

Rodriguez, 1991 408). It functions illuminatively when the individual is temporarily released from the purgation. During this time the individual "experiences great sweetness of peace and loving friendship with God in a ready abundance of spiritual communication" (N.2.7.4; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 408). Contemplation functions unitively when it draws the individual into the union of love (cf, N.2.23.14; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 454).

Transposed into the framework of intentionality analysis, the dark night of the senses and spirit fulfills two fundamental functions. First, it heals the individual of his or her attachment to the operations that occur on the empirical, intellectual, rational, responsible and loving levels of consciousness as well as his or her attachment to the objects of these operations. When the self becomes detached from these operations and their natural objects, the finality of the transcendental notions of intelligibility, reality, valuability and lovability is released from its truncation. Released in this way, the finality of the transcendental notions become a finality to complete intelligibility, absolute reality, goodness beyond criticism and unrestricted love. Second, it enables the individual to become divine by participation. This is possible because once the attachments to the operations and their natural objects have been healed the individual gains the capacity to render these operations inoperative and empty of their natural objects. When they are rendered inoperative and empty, they become capable of receiving the divine object. The divine life can now be infused into the self and its operations. As we noted above, this infusion of the divine life is the infusion of complete intelligibility, absolute reality, goodness beyond criticism and unrestricted love. It is this infusion that alone provides the ultimate fulfillment and therefore the ultimate meaning of human life. Conceived differently, this infusion could actually be the sublation of human consciousness by divine consciousness. It

is therefore by way of the dark night that God solves the human dilemma of having a capacity for ultimate reality, a capacity which it cannot by its own nature fulfill.

Though not using St. John's language of the dark night, Lonergan has a similar understanding of the process that leads to union with God. Speaking of the way in which grace enables us to do the good that previously we were unwilling to do he states, "The succession of such changes in willingness is the way of the mystic that first purges one of one's inordinate attachments, then opens one's eyes to things as they are, and eventually brings those that persevere to a transforming union with God" (quoted in Rixon 2002b, 82-83).

Before we leave this discussion of the dark night we need to note that though St. John tends to speak of the stages of the night in a linear and successive manner, such is not always the case. Rather, the human work and divine action involved in the nights may be parallel and simultaneous (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 355; cf, May 2004, 81, 95).

We are now in a position to ask an important question. If none of the operations and their natural objects and, we might add parenthetically, their possible supernatural objects (such as supernatural imaginative knowledge like visions, revelations, locations and spiritual feelings) can fulfill the function of being proportionate means to union with God, what then are the proportionate means (cf, A.3.7.1-2; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 278-279; Stein 2002, 84)?

5.2.3 The Proportionate Means to Union with God

For St. John, once again it is God who takes the initiative in providing the means that are proportionate to union with God. These are the supernatural gifts of faith, hope and charity (A.2.6.6; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 168). These three virtues prepare the three faculties (intellect, memory and will) for union with God. St. John reasons in the following way:

Faith darkens and empties the intellect of all its natural understanding and thereby prepares it for union with divine wisdom.

Hope empties and withdraws the memory from all creature possessions. ... It withdraws the memory from what can be possessed and fixes it on what it hopes for. Hence only hope in God prepares the memory perfectly for union with him.

Charity also empties and annihilates the affections and appetites of the will of whatever is not God and centers them on him alone. Thus charity prepares the will and unites it with God through love.

Because these virtues have the function of withdrawing the soul from all that is less than God, they consequently have the mission of joining it with God (N.2.21.11; cf, A.2.6.1-4; Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 448-449, 166-167).

6. Conclusion

This, then, is the remarkable vision of St. John of the Cross, not only of ultimate reality and meaning, but also of the way in which we come to ultimate reality and the meaning. Ultimate

reality is, for St. John, God. God is fully transcendent of and imminent in the universe. From the viewpoint of intentionality analysis God is complete intelligibility, absolute being, good beyond criticism and unrestricted love. Therefore, God is the ultimate fulfillment of the purely heuristic yearnings of the transcendental notions of intelligibility, reality, valuability and lovability. This fulfillment lies radically beyond the natural reach of the operations of human consciousness. This is so, first, because it is transcendent and supernatural and, second, because, even when God lovingly chooses to give God's self to us, our operations are too disordered by attachments to receive the gift. However, even here God provides us with the means of properly ordering our operations. For St. John, the dark night is the process by which the purification necessary to the union of love takes place. Mortification purifies to the empirical level of consciousness. Faith purifies the intellectual and rational levels of consciousness. Charity purifies the responsible and loving levels of consciousness. Hope purifies the memory. "Finally, contemplation, God's self-communication to us in knowledge and love, purifies our entire being of everything that prevents our total transformation in God (Culligan, Meadow and Chowning 1994, 94). In my judgment this last purification is the purification of the self as subject.

St. John has given us a science or theology of the cross. This science constitutes an understanding of the nature of the kenotic process that leads to union with God. What is remarkable about this understanding is that it is based on the empirical data of inner experience rather than on a system of abstract truths (cf, Stein 2002, 9-13, 20).

What are the implications of St. John's astute insights into the nature of ultimate reality and meaning for those of us seeking to apprehend ultimate reality and meaning through the use of the operations on all of the levels of our consciousness? In my judgment, St. John certainly does not

intend that we should cease to use our intellectual, responsible and loving levels of consciousness in this pursuit. An understanding of the nature of the universe, and an effort to make it a loving place for intelligent life, which are not distorted by truncated transcendental notions, can be a significant prolegomenon to the reception of ultimate meaning. However, St. John would caution us to be ever on the alert for unconscious and cultural influences that can cause us to become attached to the natural objects of our operations and thereby truncate the finality of our transcendental notions. When these notions are truncated in this way, they become incapable of anticipating an intelligibility, reality, value and love that lies beyond their natural reach. Finally, St. John gives us a message of hope that would release us from the unbearable burden of rationalism. We cannot and need not achieve ultimate meaning on our own. What a relief it is to our rational consciousness to realize that ultimate meaning is waiting there as a sheer gift! All that is required of us is that we practice what Lonergan refers to as authentic interiority as we pass through the dark night. In this context this means following St. John's dictum that, "To come to a knowledge you have not you must go by a way in which you know not"(Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991, 111).

In this paper I have attempted not only to provide an understanding of St. John's thought on ultimate reality and meaning, but also to begin the transposition of his thought into the contemporary framework of the intentionality analysis of consciousness. However, further work in this transposition remains to be completed. St. John's astute analysis of the first movements of the mind would bear much fruit if it were transposed into the understanding, provided by contemporary psychology, of unconscious processes and their influence on our conscious operations. Specifically, I have in mind Bowlby's work on internal working models (1969/1980, 80; 1980, 229-233). In addition a transposition of his thought into contemporary developmental

interpretations of conversion, such as that provided by Conn (1986), would provide further insights into the journey toward union with God. Finally, St. John's understanding of ultimate meaning and the way to it is embedded in a Christian world-view. Can his understanding be transposed into the contemporary framework of inter-religious dialogue? I believe that it can and that such an effort would bear much fruit.

References

Bowlby, J. 1969/1982. *Attachment and Loss*: vol. 1. *Attachment*. New York: Basic Books.

Bowlby, J. 1980. *Attachment and Loss*: vol. 3. *Loss*. New York: Basic Books

Byrne, P. H. 1995. Consciousness: Levels, Sublations, and the Subject As Subject. *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies*. 13: 131-150.

Conn, W. 1986. *Christian Conversion: A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender*. New York: Paulist Press.

Corso, M. J. 1994. *Christian Religious Education for Conversion: A Lonerganian Perspective*. Ann Arbor: U. M. I.

Crowe F. E. 1989. Bernard Lonergan's Thought on Ultimate Reality and Meaning. *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea*. Edited by M. Vertin. Washington D. C. The Catholic University of America Press. Or originally published in *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 4 (1981), 58-89.

Culligan, K., Meadow, M. and Chowning, D. 1994. *Purifying the Heart: Buddhist Insight Meditation for Christians*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company.

Doran, R. M. 1993. Consciousness and Grace. *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies*. 11: 51-75.

Doran, R. M. 1995. Revisiting "Consciousness and Grace". *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies*. 13: 151-159.

Doran, R. M. 1997. "Complacently and Concern" and a Basic Thesis on Grace. *Loneragan Workshop*. 13: 57-78.

Doran, R. M. 1999. A personal communication.

Hardy, R.P. *Search for Nothing: The Life of John of the Cross*. 1982. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company.

Harter, S. 1999. *The Construction of the Self: A Developmental Perspective*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Kavanaugh, K. and Rodriguez, O. Trans. 1979. *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*. Washington, D. C.: I C S Publications.

Kavanaugh, K. and Rodriguez, O. Trans. 1991. *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*. Washington, D.C. I C S Publications.

Loneragan, B. 1972. *Method in Theology*. New York: The Seabury Press.

Loneragan, B. 1973. *Philosophy of God and Theology*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, Ltd.

Loneragan, B. 1974. *A Second Collection: Papers by Bernard J. F. Loneragan S. J.* edited by W. F. J. Ryan and B. J. Tyrrel. London: Darton, Longman & Todd; Philadelphia: Westminster.

Loneragan, B. 1988. *Collection*. Collected Works of Bernard Loneragan, vol. 4, edited by Frederick E Crowe and Robert M. Doran. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Loneragan, B. 1992. *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*. Collected Works of Bernard Loneragan, vol. 3, edited by Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Loneragan, B. 1997. *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*. Collected Works of Bernard Loneragan, vol. 2, edited by Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Loneragan, B. 2004. *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980*. Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, vol. 17, edited by Robert C. Croken and Robert M. Doran. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Matthew, I. 1995. *The Impact of God*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

May, G. G. 2004. *The Dark Night of the Soul*. San Francisco: Harper.

McPartland, T. J. 1995. Consciousness and Normative Subjectivity: Lonergan's Unique Foundational Enterprise. *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies*. 13: 111-130.

Nemeck, F. K. and Coombs, M. T. 1982. *Contemplation*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press.

Nemeck, F. K. and Coombs, M. T. 1987. *The Spiritual Journey*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press.

Robert, P. 1994. Theology and Spiritual Life: Encounter with Bernard Lonergan. *Lonergan Workshop*, vol. 10: 333-343, edited by Fred Lawrence. Boston College.

Robert, P. 1995. The Spiritual Subject. *Lonergan Workshop*, vol. 11: 145-163, edited by Fred Lawrence. Boston College.

Rolheiser, R., Culligan, K., Copsey, R., Fleming, U. and Matthew, I. 1993. *A Fresh Approach to St. John of the Cross*. Kildare, Ireland: The Guernsey Press Co.

Rixon, G. R. 2001. Bernard Lonergan and Mysticism. *Theological Studies*. 62: 479-497.

Rixon, G. R. 2002a. Derrida and Lonergan on the Human Subject: Transgressing a Metonymical Notion. *Toronto Journal of Theology*. 18; 213-229.

Rixon, G. R. 2002b. Bernard Lonergan to Thomas O'Malley November 8, 1978. *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies*. 20: 77-86.

Spiritual Heritage Education Network Inc. (SHEN)

<http://www.spiritualeducation.org>

Stein, E. 2002. *The Science of the Cross: A Study of St. John of the Cross*. Trans. J. Koepfel, O.

C. D. Washington, D.C.: I C S Publications.

Tekippe, T. J. 1996. *Scientific and Primordial Knowing*. New York: University Press of America, Inc.

Vertin, M. 1995. Judgments of Value, for the Later Lonergan. *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies*. 13: 221-248.