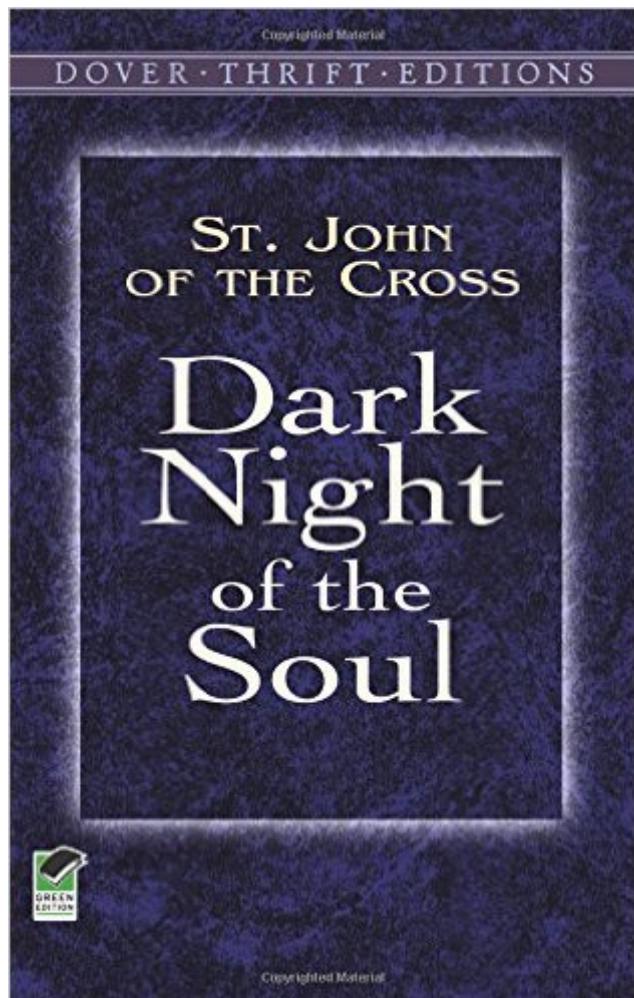


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Dark Night Of The Soul (Dover Thrift Editions)



Synopsis

The great Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross became a Carmelite monk in 1563 and helped St. Teresa of Avila to reform the Carmelite order — enduring persecution and imprisonment for his efforts. Both in his writing and in his life, he demonstrated eloquently his love for God. His written thoughts on man's relationship with God were literary endeavors that placed him on an intellectual and philosophical level with such great writers as St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. In this work — a spiritual masterpiece and classic of Christian literature and mysticism — he addresses several subjects, among them pride, avarice, envy, and other human imperfections. His discussion of the "dark night of the spirit," which considers afflictions and pain suffered by the soul, is followed by an extended explanation of divine love and the soul's exultant union with God. This fine translation by E. Allison Peers "is the most faithful that has appeared in any European language: it is, indeed, much more than a translation for [Peers] added his own valuable historical and [critically interpretive] notes." — London Times.

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Customer Reviews

John of the Cross's writings show the total intensity and detachment of one who has reached a point of union with God that is a sheer gift of grace. The Dark Night of the Soul is among the greatest writings of mystic theology and experience, and highly recommended for those who have some understanding of the concepts of which he writes. The total turning of the will to God, to a point where nothing on earth can satisfy the lover except union with the Beloved, is a marvellous and

deeply moving "sight" - and the exquisite poetry here is one of the best expressions in the history of Christianity. This said, it is essential that one have background in order to understand this work. (More easily understood introductions, such as Thomas Dubay's "Fire Within," should precede reading the Dark Night.) John is by no means writing of depression or misery, nor is his path one which is common to all (or indeed many) Christians. Let the serious Christian seeker approach this work with humility - it pre-supposes knowledge and an openness to divine love that is far from universal. And, above all, take John's cautions against self-deception to heart as much as he did.

"The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross" consists of the writings of this 16th century Spanish Mystic and Doctor of the Church. St. John was a Carmelite friar and friend of St. Theresa of Avila. A valued spiritual counselor, many of his works were written as instruction to religious who sought his guidance. The book consists of four major works and many minor works. The major works are "The Ascent of Mount Carmel", "The Dark Night", "The Spiritual Canticle" and "The Living Flame of Love". Each of the major works consists of a poem, written by St. John, and an extensive, word by word, explanation. In the explanation, St. John reveals his own theology, supported by verses from Scripture. The minor works consist of letters written to his contemporaries as well as a collection of St. John's poetry. This is definitely not light reading. The reader must concentrate on his the text in order to appreciate what he is reading. I am glad that I read it from two perspectives. From an historical perspective, it provides the reader with a good introduction into the world of mystical writing. More importantly, from a spiritual perspective, this book gives the reader an insight into God's call to all Christians to draw themselves more closely to Himself. The spirit of this book is difficult to explain. It is a classical book which is better experienced than described.

By Sister Elizabeth Ruth, O.D.C., Carmel of Our Lady of Walsingham, Norfolk
St. John of the Cross is known as the Mystical Doctor, because in a pre-eminent way he is the director of men on their interior journey towards God. As a spiritual guide and deeply religious man, trained in theology at the best Spanish universities of his day, he was able, as few others, to elucidate scripturally and doctrinally the ways of the Lord. Primarily, though, he is a poet, and his poetry speaks for itself in deeply symbolic language, the language of love. He is also a man of his country and era. His two poles Toda-Nada, All-Nothing, no doubt were associated for him with the rugged beauty of Castile--the blazing Spanish sky above arid ground, with the sun glinting upon walled cities, the freezing night with brigands concealed in the darkness. John and Spain speak the language of extremes, just as St. Francis of Assisi was a man of the Umbrian hills set with flowers and vines

among shaded valleys. There is a tendency to contrast the harshness of one with the sweetness of the other, but this is to do a disservice to both. Both at heart are similar because they see the way to God as the way of giving all-desiring nothing but him, and letting the rest go: "My God and my All." In this, Jesus Christ is the model, and there is no spiritual growth apart from the earnest imitation of him. "Be continually careful and earnest in imitating Christ in everything, making your life conform to his," John writes in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, almost as a key sentence. Only in this light can we understand his insistence on the denial of desires. What he has in mind are all those selfish and self-seeking ways we go about trying to have God and what we want as well. It is not that other people and other things are not lovable and desirable, or that God wants the way to him to be miserable. It is that the only true joy is found in Jesus, and having him we have all else besides. John's writings sound demanding. He understood in an experiential way that God is not to be had on the cheap. Perhaps in our own day Bonhoeffer's works could be profitably re-read on the cost of discipleship, which John well knew--his had not been an easy life. In the journey of the soul to God as John depicts it in the *Ascent* and the *Dark Night* he points to faith as the guide, and faith is dark to the understanding. We must just trust God and go forward with no assurance apart from his word. The saint probes the causes of why many begin this journey but make no progress. It is that self-love insinuates itself, and this must be eradicated by persistent effort in action and loving attention to God in humble prayer, no matter if we feel dry or empty of inspiration: John reveals the way of prayer as a way of great self-denial. We must not rely on anything we can see, feel, taste, experience, for God is more than all these. Only dark faith touches and holds him, and in this there is nothing to delight the senses or boost the ego. By purifying the soul of all that is not God, God strips us in order to clothe us anew in Christ. Nothing gives place to the All, sorrow is turned into joy. In *The Spiritual Canticle* and *The Living Flame of Love*, where John treats more explicitly of union with God, he does so in terms of lover and Beloved. In the former he bases his poem and commentary on the *Song of Songs*, in the latter upon the imagery of the Holy Spirit as flame, wounding and burning as it prepares the soul to be consumed in the fire of love's ecstasy. But perhaps in his letters most of all we see John as an understanding counselor, warm and loving, yet allowing no compromises. The way of the Christian can only be the way of Christ and his cross, and John puts the Gospel demands before us in all their unadulterated strength. His is not a path of visions, ecstasies, abnormal phenomena. Rather, he rejects all these as diverting us from the God whom we can only know by faith, not by the "spectacular" which many so-called spiritual people seek. Union is not felt bliss but "the living death of the cross," as he says in the *Ascent*. God has spoken his final word in his Son, we have no need to seek anything but him as he is revealed to us

in his life and teaching. To want other words, other revelations, is to seek self...."Seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you." The words of Jesus are as true today as they ever were. Those who want God and seek him singlemindedly will find him to their everlasting Joy--as did St John of the Cross.

First of all, I don't understand why anybody would complain about the language of this translation. The work is about an excruciating and almost indescribable journey, and a book about such a subject should by no means be a light afternoon read. The very language of Dark Night of the Soul calls for intense engagement and is a fruitful exercise in itself. Furthermore, this language has an extraordinarily authentic quality that conveys something of the mystery St John of the Cross is pursuing. The work also gives so much to think about. I don't know that I agree with everything, but that's fine, and St John himself notes that each journey toward God will be somewhat different. But there is a lot that appeals to me. Truly, the journey toward God can be difficult. Reading about any character in the Bible from Abraham to David to Jesus confirms this. Life is such a strange mixture of the presence of God and the (at least seeming) absense, and persevering toward union with God means getting through these agonizing periods. In this book, St John of the Cross gives great hope as he accounts for those dark times and provides a framework for getting through them. This isn't a light read, and it is certainly a book that needs multiple readings. Nevertheless, it gives you a lot to think about and is ultimately well worth the effort.

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