

Satori
in
St. John of the Cross

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. . . when I read . . . John of the Cross: 'To possess all things, resolve to possess nothing; to be all things, be willing to be nothing'—I understood . . . and added a word on the margin: 'Taoistic.'

John Wu, *Beyond East and West* (1937)

THE INTENT OF this essay is to illuminate and extend this informed intuition of the late and distinguished John Wu.¹ That is, we shall submit that St. John of the Cross, who never left sixteenth-century Spain, experienced *satori*. Inevitably, as might follow, it is also to enlist San Juan fully into an enlarging Buddhist-Christian dialogue.

In general, John (1542–91) has been honored rather than incorporated into the experience of even the Western Church. And so his acquisition of the unique title, "The Mystical Doctor," in 1926, can be an inadvertent token of his being beyond reach. But the unadulterated John had, to some extent, been put beyond reach with his moral and almost physical exile at his death four centuries ago. The lot of the Mystical Doctor is symbolic of a larger and melancholy story, recited in the extraordinary work of the late Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*.² Mysticism was to be rendered defensive, and devotional piety, Western Bhaktism, if you will, became more or less normative for the modern Christian religious imagination.

This old order of things was more than pointedly exemplified three generations ago by the spiritually astute Abbot of Downside Abbey in

¹ Incidentally, an edition of his own translation of the *Tao Teh Ching* is still in print: (Boston: Shambhala, 1989).

² Trans. Michael B. Smith (University of Chicago Press, 1992).

England, John Chapman. He put it plainly and pertinently: "for fifteen years or so, I hated St. John of the Cross, and called him a Buddhist. . . . Then I found I had wasted fifteen years, so far as prayer goes."³ Dom Chapman was, to be sure, rehabilitative of John, and in the next generation the irrepressible Thomas Merton, incidentally John Wu's good friend, emerged as probably the Mystical Doctor's foremost disciple of our century. And John of the Cross, one might note, has been seen as enabling Merton's late turn to the East. Merton himself enables this essay. As he put it six months before his untimely passing in 1968: "Frankly, I would say that Zen is nothing but John of the Cross without the Christian vocabulary."⁴ Moreover, a dissertation on John and Zen, that of Jakov Mamic, *Giovanni della Croce e lo Zen Buddismo* (Rome: Teresianum, 1982) has been published at the very center of Christendom, even if inevitably embodying some limiting strictures of that genre. These are auguries of a new age.

Oriental partners, for their part, can hardly be expected to have a command of the spiritual masters of the West. Eckhart, of course, is familiar enough. But from the Japanese side, for instance, it would appear that none of the three among the most eminent in dialogue—D. T. Suzuki, Keiji Nishitani, and Masao Abe—has made acknowledgement of the Mystical Doctor.⁵ At the same time, it would seem like a Heidegger or even a Nietzsche has figured prominently. Even if they are not, one must add, exactly representative figures of Western religion!

If I am not mistaken, deep theological, as over against philosophi-

³ *Spiritual Letters* (1935; London: Sheed and Ward, 1989), 269.

⁴ *A Retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani*, ed. Jane Marie Richardson (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1992), 177. On John as enabler, one can see William H. Shannon, Thomas Merton's *Dark Path* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1981).

⁵ Suzuki's works, of course, are too numerous to recount here. He may well have contacted John via his encounter with Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968); for Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. Jan Van Bragt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); and Abe, *Zen and Western Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), and esp. his more recent "Kenosis and Emptiness," *Buddhist Emptiness and Christian Trinity*, eds. Roger Corless and Paul F. Knitter (New York: Paulist, 1990). Also see Abe's *The Emptying God*, eds. John Hicks and Christopher Ives (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990). A curious Oriental exception would be Gunapala Dharmasiri, *A Buddhist Critique of the Christian Concept of God* (Antioch, California: Golden Leaves, 1988), who is aware of John but shamelessly triumphalist and combative generally.

cal, dialogue, has been inhibited by the inherited convention that Eastern and Western religion are more or less mutually exclusive. For example, assumptions about Western "dualism" can foreclose dialogue. But to vary the ancient maximum of Terence about our common humanity, our assumption will be that "nothing" *divine* "is alien." Truly "divine"—to which we shall recur.

"Enlightenment" itself can be de-alienated and diffused. If the same "rain falls on the just and the unjust," *a fortiori* the same light shines on East and West. Culturally refracted. The light metaphor delineates the Gospel of John, and Paul himself speaks of the "children of light," going so far as to urge that "anything illuminated turns into light" (Eph. 5:9, 13). Of course, a Christian *gnosis* as exemplified in a Clement of Alexandria would eventually be subordinated to a Christian agapeic moralism. This may be a product of popularization and a reaction against the vagaries of a dualistic Gnosticism. But the older tradition could still survive, even in the individual who may well have been decisive in the shifting of the balance, St. Augustine. And so in *The Confessions* there are moments when the renunciant can sound like a Zen master: ". . . in the flash of a trembling glance, my mind arrived at That Which Is."⁶ But the subject is not *satori* in St. Augustine.

"Light" happens to be, if you will, a *Leitmotif* of the Mystical Doctor. *Luz* (light) he uses 436 times, plus countless variants.⁷ By this he means various things, above all "the divine light" (*la divina luz*), a phrase enshrined at the opening of the prologue of his first work, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. Our standard translation begins: "A deeper enlightenment . . ."⁸ John's light is interchangeable with wisdom. And wisdom, of course, is not knowledge raised to its highest degree so much as a reversal of knowledge: "Knowing by unknowing."⁹ The resonances are universal.

But we must yet anticipate a fundamental objection. It can be object-

⁶ Trans. Rex Warner (New York: Mentor, 1963), 154.

⁷ See the new and superb *Concordancias de los Escritos de San Juan de la Cruz* (Roma: Teresianum, 1990).

⁸ *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD, and Otilio Rodriguez, OCD (rev. ed.; Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1991), 114. Hereafter CW.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 626; and in the original, "*entendo no entendiendo*," *Obras Completas* (2nd ed.; Burgo: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 1990), 868.

ed that any essay in comparative religious experience is vain, since we have access only to the text, not the experience. To the contrary, it can be responded, we *do* have access to the experience. As Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle put it: "recent cases of Westerners too coming to enlightenment through Zen practice are no longer so rare."¹⁰ Academic discussion is likely to take the form of whether or not spiritual experience is culturally "mediated" or "unmediated."¹¹ Suffice it for now to note that Suzuki would allow that both Buddhist and Christian experience may be mediated, a view shared by the distinguished Western historian of Zen Buddhism, Heinrich Dumoulin. For Dumoulin, "an experience is ultimately inseparable from its interpretive content."¹² Dumoulin is reinforced by the acute conclusions of Robert F. Gimello:

Thus, rather than speak of Buddhist doctrines as interpretations of Buddhist mystical experiences, one might better speak of Buddhist mystical experiences as deliberately contrived exemplifications of Buddhist doctrine.¹³

To be sure, Buddhists enjoy no monopoly here! The very distinguished historian of the church, Jaroslav Pekikan, for example, has himself advanced the provocative thought that conflicts over dogma may account for textual variants in the Bible.¹⁴ Whatever, if one can get to the depths, differences in the pre-cultural core of elemental spiritual experience may be more apparent than real.

We need not be too abstemious about method. No matter how enlightened John may have been, he still saw "through a glass darkly" (I Cor. 13:12). And so do we. Our way is more symbolic than scientific, synthetic than analytical, catholic than confessional. From alienation we appeal to the Catholic principle of analogy, bearing in mind that analogy affirms similitude and *implies* dissimilitude. To affirm the one

¹⁰ *Living in the New Consciousness*, trans. Paul Shephard (Boston: Shambhala, 1988), 122.

¹¹ E.g., Steven T. Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Oxford, 1978).

¹² *Christianity Meets Buddhism*, trans. John Maraldo (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1974), 162.

¹³ "Mysticism and Meditation," in Katz, 193.

¹⁴ In *Luther the Expositor* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 9-10. No longer, of course, a novel suggestion.

is not to deny the other. We are concerned not with a facile homogenization, but with what Raimundo Panikkar terms "homeomorphic" structures. And from the strictures of classical scientific method, we appeal to Quantum theory and our recovering sense of the mutual enfoldedness of all that is.

We need first affirm what John is. That is, his explicit identity. If enlightened, he was not, of course, some conscious "perennialist," but, ironically, a son of the prophets. Or, if you will, he was a perennialist *and* a particularist. That is, he was a paradox, and his paradoxes are not ultimately Neoplatonic, but Pauline.¹⁵ He was, as he could put it, "a blind man leaning on blind faith." And faith in "God alone," "the naked Christ,"¹⁶ In sum, John is an orthodox Christian.

Impeccably orthodox, in fact, but ironically catholic. We are all part of something larger than ourselves, and to John this applies to an uncanny degree. Beyond his explicit identity looms an implicit universality. We allude to the likes of David Bohm's "implicate order," with its mysterious and centripetal "holomovement." And in this subliminal realm the ironies abound. We can proceed with the one wherein John's fully orthodox faith is correlative with his radical doctrine of "emptiness." *Vacío* (empty) is in fact a term that John uses at least 173 times, again plus variants.¹⁷

That is, one is tempted to say, as much as ever a Buddhist. Of course, our obvious link is in the *via negativa*, the idea of the incommensurability or ineffability of God or ultimate reality, with subsequent resort to negative categories. E.g., God as "the Great Nothing." And while, in the West, the structures of the *via negativa* go back to the Greeks, its source, ironically, can be seen in the *revelation* of the radical otherness of the God of the Old Testament. Its tetragrammaton, the Hebrew term for God, can be rendered the Nameless. But this "link" to the East has been rather subterranean in most of modern spirituality. That is, it has been a "missing link."

The magisterial Eastern exploration of the *via negativa* is in Keiji Nishitani's *Religion and Nothingness*. With nothingness, or *Sunyata*,

¹⁵ Esp. see Federico Ruiz, *Místico y Maestro: San Juan de la Cruz* (Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 1986), 84-85, 233.

¹⁶ *Obras*, 187, 192.

¹⁷ And, one can add, his collected works are contained in a single volume.

as Absolute, Nishitani distinguishes between a "relative nothingness," and an "absolute nothingness." The former is set in opposition to being; the latter is at bottom *one* with being. The first points to nihilism; the second, to emptiness, with which it is convertible. And this emptiness is not metaphysical esotericism, of course, but moral philosophy. For example, it calls for an "absolute openness," an imperative of Zen. Again, emptiness "in its original form" is in "self-emptying," a "divine perfection."¹⁸ The Pauline analogies (Phil. 2:6-7) would seem audible. Interestingly, after working his way through, if I may, philosophical heavyweights from Heraclitus to Heidegger, Nishitani climaxes with the founder of the friars minor, i.e., St. Francis. That is, with "minority," as Franciscans might say. *Less is more*. But first Nishitani posits Eckhart as our "most radical example of negative theology."¹⁹

About this he may not be right. As suggested earlier, Nishitani may not know St. John of the Cross. Not, at least, like a Louis Cagnet. The late Cagnet wrote of John's demand for "absolute emptiness, the desert," and went on to say that in his "vertiginous 'naughting' . . . the saint goes farther than any before him."²⁰ John's doctrine of poverty of spirit would call upon us to put our "all in nothingness" (*nona-da en nada*). He even sings, "Oh happy nothingness" (*Dichosa nada*),²¹ which can call to mind the ancient refrain of the *O felix culpa*, the paradox of "the happy fault" of Adam that is foundational to the faith.

This is to suggest that while John's doctrine of "annihilation" is radical, it is anything but eccentric. It is rooted in the denial of self enjoined upon the disciples in the New Testament, of which the best of the religious were its greatest traditional exemplars, but it is embodied in the annals of renunciants universally. Dōgen, for example, whose Enlightenment was within a year of St. Francis's great experience on Mount Alverna in 1224, was "Franciscan" in his emphasis upon radical poverty. More directly and fascinating, as early as 1551, a decade be-

¹⁸ Nishitani, 96, 105, 59.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁰ *Post-Reformation Spirituality*, trans. P. Hepburne Scott (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1959), 48.

²¹ *Obras*, 1092.

fore John got to the university, we have letters to Spain from the Jesuit mission in Japan about disputes with the bonzes over a variety of Buddhist doctrines, including that of “the Void (Nihil).”²² It remains possible, if not probable, that John was privy to this literature.

Chances are the saint’s doctrine of *nada* came from his own tradition and his own experience. It is, of course, foundational for the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*. We have already cited John Wu’s response to the stunning antitheses that serve as the effective climax of its Book I:

In order to come to be all,
Seek to be nothing.
In order to know all,
Seek to know nothing.

One can hardly avoid observing, incidentally, that Suzuki, in his historic dialogue with Merton, could use almost identical language: “To be absolutely nothing is to be everything.”²³ It is no less central to John. John’s litany of antitheses in fact forms the core of his unique sketch which precedes the text of the *Ascent*, what I fancy his “mandala” of Mount Carmel.²⁴ And at its very center is his incantatory invocation: “nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing.” And I know nothing like this in our literature.

Annihilation is, to be sure, no end in itself but, foundational for illumination. That is, for “*satori*.” There are passages where this is made explicit. For example, in the second book of the *Ascent*, John advances that when the proficient has been purified and emptied of “all apprehensible images and forms,” he will “reside in pure and simple light” and indeed be “perfectly transformed” into it. He goes on to write that through the elimination of one’s veils of illusion and through living in “pure nakedness and poverty of spirit . . . he will be transformed into pure and simple wisdom, the Son of God.”²⁵ This is but

²² Henri de Lubac, *La Rencontre du Bouddhisme et de l’Occident* (Paris: Aubier, 1952), 61. But there was generally mutual incomprehension at that time. Most of the *padres* were exclusivists; and from the other side, a Zen monk himself drew up the decree of persecution. Neil S. Fujita, *Japan’s Encounter with Christianity: The Catholic Mission in Pre-Modern Japan* (New York: Paulist, 1991), 160.

²³ Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, 109.

²⁴ *cw*, 111.

²⁵ *Obras*, 249–50; *cw*, 198–99.

one of scores of passages where, one might note, John evokes his doctrine of divinization. A doctrine scarcely congruent, incidentally, with dualism. Passages like this are doctrinally rich—and rich for dialogue. They would serve to qualify any intrinsicist-extrinsicist dichotomies. One might also note that John uses both personal and impersonal “God-talk.” The “Son of God,” but “perfectly transformed” into the light. Nishitani, happily, speaks of ultimate reality not as “the opposite of the personal,” but as the “personally impersonal”!²⁶

Enlightenment, of course, is more familiar language among Eastern masters. Let us first have recourse to D. T. Suzuki, who has probably written more on the subject than anyone available to us. One might commence by observing his ecumenic and perhaps exceptional view of Zen as “the ultimate fact of all philosophy and religion, including Christianity.” The vitalizing element of religion he designates “the Zen element,”²⁷ a construct which may owe something to Friedrich Von Hugel’s classic, *The Mystical Element of Religion* (1908). Suzuki’s “Zen element” simply echoes the acute synthesis of a Henri Bergson, who characterized “religion . . . as the crystallization . . . of what mysticism had poured, while hot, into the soul of man.”²⁸ Whatever, by these terms alone, the Mystical Doctor is assuredly a Zen master.

But our case is based on more than some grand deduction, and “the Zen element” can suggest that Enlightenment can be a variable thing. Suzuki would see, of course, Zen (Ch’an) Enlightenment as the Chinese interpretation of the Buddha’s Enlightenment, but it would not seem entirely clear if he would limit it to specific dogmatic content, e.g., the Four Noble Truths. Masao Abe might definitely postulate dogmatic content. The fundamentals would apparently be “the law of dependent co-origination and the absence of a substantial independent existing nature within any phenomenal being.”²⁹ He notes, maybe slyly, that *satori* does not infuse a knowledge of Greek or Latin! We might add Pali or Sanskrit! Suzuki provides a clue in noting *satori*’s appeal to the “*via negativa*.”³⁰ For him, *satori* is not a judgment about truth

²⁶ p. 60.

²⁷ *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (First Series) (New York: Grove, 1949), 268.

²⁸ *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, trans. R. Ashley Audra and Cloudesley Brereton (New York: Henry Holt, 1935), 227.

²⁹ *Buddhist-Christian Studies* (1988), 71.

³⁰ *Essays*, 68.

but, as he puts it, that which makes a judgment possible. Let us quote him:

In judgment there are a subject and a predicate; in Enlightenment subject is predicate and predicate is subject; they are merged as one, but not one of which something can be stated. . . . this is the wall against which all philosophies have beaten in vain . . . in which prevails the principle, '*Credo quia absurdum est*. . . . Enlightenment . . . comes . . . in a mysterious way without any previous announcement.³¹

One might, incidentally, note the "Credo" quote. And from all-but-fundamentalist Tertullian. To the question of faith we can recur.

What Suzuki and the Buddhist masters seem to accentuate is the thought of Hui-neng, sixth patriarch after Bodhidharma. That is, Enlightenment as "seeing into one's own nature"—meaning the Buddha-Nature. Suzuki goes so far as to characterize this "the most significant phrase ever coined in the development of Zen Buddhism."³² And this would seem to constitute the positive content of "emptiness": Buddhahood.

It goes without saying that this "most significant phrase" cannot be found in John of the Cross. But I submit that the *thing* can. That is, that which transcends the phrase. In the Christian tradition one is unlikely to speak of "seeing into one's own nature," but of apprehending one's "true self." The term, popularized by Thomas Merton but adumbrated as early as Paul (Rom. 7:15), is more or less endemic to our mystical way, if eventually eclipsed by devotional religion. But our best spirits embody *both* the mystical and the devotional traditions, as with St. Francis or St. Catherine of Genoa and her direct and compelling: "My 'Me' is God" ("il mio Me Dio").³³ The classic formulation, however, remains that of Paul: "I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). And, as it happens, this is recapitulated by St. John of the Cross in "the enchanting garden" of the *Spiritual Canticle*—if not under the Bodhi tree: "in this soul is verified the words of St. Paul:

³¹ Ibid., 68–69.

³² Ibid., 19.

³³ P. Umile Bonzi da Genova, *S. Caterine Fieschi Adorno* (2 vols.; Marietta, 1960–62), I, 171.

'I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me'.'³⁴ Yes, the Mystical Doctor did see his own nature.

But the economy of Paul's language corroborates the intuition or experience of the *Tao Teh Ching* that this is not that about which, as Suzuki put it, "something can be said." Directly, at least. Still, John manages to more than stammer (if at times he quite literally stammers: "*no sé qué que quedan balbuciendo*," i.e., "I-don't-know-what behind the stammering."³⁵ His recourse is, of course, to poetry, that is, to symbolic language, which in him stands as a model of verbal indirection and existential concretion. His prose is inevitably less successful in elucidating the mysteries of his "spiritual marriage," as with Cantic 38 and his "aria," as I would think of it, on the "what" or the "that" (*aquello*). For example:

this 'what' is so proper to the soul that no event or adversity, whether great or significant, will suffice to take it from her. But she will attain the endless possession of the 'what' to which God has predestined her from eternity. And this is the 'what' . . .³⁶

This may be kindred to the Zen experience of "Suchness." The Mystical Doctor finally turns the matter over to the language of his own Master, the Christ: "Neither eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the human heart . . ."

We have run aground ineffability, and ineffability implies an evanescence of boundaries. Including, as earlier intimated, the boundaries of night and day. And so, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, seen mystically, *sub specie aeternitatis*, is really "an inflowing of God into the soul." Indeed, this dark night, seen divinely, is verily "a divine light."³⁷ Night has become day; *nada, todo* (nothing, everything). Or, as Suzuki put it in his historic dialogue with Merton: "zero=infinity and infinity=zero."³⁸

We can remark that what we might call the ontological lines of con-

³⁴ *Obras*, 773; *cw*, 562.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 16; *cw*, 502.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 861; *cw*, 620.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 541-42; *cw*, 401.

³⁸ *Zen and the Birds*, 110.

vergence in John are most apparent (or evanescent—the same thing) in his finale, *The Living Flame of Love*. This would seem as it should be. Whatever, in its rhapsodic third stanza, “eternal life is a juncture of all goods.”³⁹ Time and space frames have a way of liquefying into simultaneity; the empty “caverns” of earth are absolutely full, that is, full of the Absolute; love is wed with light into “loving knowledge” or “wisdom;” “fire” and “water” verily are one. We might also note that John is literally getting to the elements. In fact, three of the four, as then understood. And in the climax of the *Spiritual Canticle*, he even adds the fourth: Air, and “the breathing of the air.” And this breathing is so intimate that one cannot tell *whose* breath. And so the soul “breathes out in God to God the very breath that God breathes out” to the soul.⁴⁰ This kind of coinherence is reiterated in the finale of the climactic *The Living Flame* in an “awakening,” and “it is rightly asserted that our awakening is an awakening of God and our rising is God’s rising.”⁴¹

What we have in this extraordinary language is not just awakening, but divinization: Plenitude, interpenetration, boundarylessness. Nothing is “clear and distinct” (*clara y distinta*, against which interestingly, John of the Cross issues an early caveat⁴²), for all is present: *Nada, todo*. And the fusion of the two is, I submit, *satori* in St. John of the Cross. In, at least, its prelogical core.

John seems to be speaking here from what the Buddhists call “Original Nature.” So much of this seems disarmingly homeomorphic with the East. “Form is emptiness,” sings the great *Heart Sutra*, and “emptiness is form.” Here is Suzuki’s: “. . . in Enlightenment subject is predicate and predicate is subject.” He speaks of the underlying unity of *prajna* and *karuna*; really, John’s love and light. “This logic of contradiction,” Suzuki affirms, is the dialectics of “*prajna*.”⁴³ That is, the logic of Enlightenment. Abe reinforces this construction in writing of the essential dialectics as “the interpenetration and mutual reversibility of all things. . . . The unity of opposites is fully realized in Shunyata

³⁹ *Obras*, 970; *cw*, 675.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 863; *cw*, 623.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1055; *cw*, 711.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 370; *cw*, 279.

⁴³ *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (Third Series) (London: Rider & Company, 1953), 314.

because Shunyata is boundless openness without any center of circumference." Again, spatial and temporal values are ultimately "interpenetrating and reciprocal."⁴⁴

The Mystical Doctor might say: "The Father and I are one" (John 10:30). And this might be a not inappropriate application of Nishida Kitarō's "Self-contradictory Identity."⁴⁵ But let us attempt to conclude with a congruent if not common denominator, that of the "coincidence of opposites." A denial of opposites, of course, is endemic to much of Eastern religious culture. And, the *coincidentia oppositorum*, as its great Western master, Nicholas of Cusa, would insist, is the least objectionable name for God. And it may be the most experiential.⁴⁶

We have tried to suggest that if one has got to the coincidence of opposites, one has got to essential *satori*. Therein would seem to be a unity of temporal and spatial simultaneity, interpenetration, totality. And "totality" would seem to honor not only the philosophy of Hwa Yen Buddhism,⁴⁷ but Hegel's irreproachable "the true is the whole."

Even Mircea Eliade's "the terror of history." The merely historical as conveyor of mystery. Masao Abe has the magnanimity to relate that Buddhism is weak in history. In fact, he writes "very weak."⁴⁸ Western religion, of course, rooted in the ignominy of Egypt and Exodus, and the "scandal" of the Incarnation, is yoked to history. Whatever, we might offer the Mystical Doctor as one who sought no flight from the terrors of history. To the contrary, his Enlightenment was historical experience but, to be sure, not *just* historical experience. And, if we might venture a final irony and essential localization—to which it is by no means to be restricted—Enlightenment was in his *darkest* hour, the

⁴⁴ "Kenosis and Emptiness," 21.

⁴⁵ Robert E. Carter, *The Nothingness Beyond God: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nishida Kitaro* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), esp. Ch. III: "Self-Contradictory Identity," 58–80.

⁴⁶ One can see the author's "Merton, the Coincidence of Opposites and the Archaeology of Catholicity," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* (3, 1991), 257–70, with Merton, who incidentally translated a work of Cusa, enlisting him in characterizing a mystical experience as "a coincidence of all opposites" (263).

⁴⁷ Garma C. C. Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality: The Philosophy of Hwa Yen Buddhism* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania University Press, 1971).

⁴⁸ "Kenosis and Emptiness," 23–24.

appalling incarceration in Toledo, 1577-78.⁴⁹ Incarcerated in, if you will, an all but uterine dungeon. For, one can hardly avoid adding, a period of nine months, a powerful symbol. Of gestation and birth. The Spanish, perhaps uniquely, speaks of birthing as *dar a luz*: literally, to give light. Nishitani may have his variant: "Beneath the Great Death, the Great Enlightenment."⁵⁰

A final irony would be: Beneath the Great Incarceration, the Great Liberation. We allude to John's own great escape from the dungeon. That is, his *own* exodus experience, immortalized in his multi-layered stanza, "One dark night." At this point we shall do no more than allude—and suggest that John's "breakthrough" can represent a symbolic (and historical) incarnation of Nishitani's "absolute openness." Such openness is correlative with and perhaps corroborative of *satori* from Ummon to Abe. Let me simply suggest that one cannot read *The Living Flame of Love*, especially its third stanza, a hymn to authenticity and celebration of "the perfect liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21), without the conviction that John obtained just this kind of radical openness. And this is borne out by the all but shocking inscription that quite literally crowns John's "mandala" of Mount Carmel: "There is no longer any way here, for the just man there is no law, he is a law unto himself."⁵¹

Nietzsche could not have done better. Maybe even a Zen master.

To be sure, every Christian is not a John of the Cross any more than every Buddhist is a Zen master. But unlike Eckhart if, however unjustly, John was never accused of heresy.⁵² Accordingly, our essay on the illumination of St. John might help illuminate several of our more general inherited conventions.

First, I would conclude with John Wu that the Mystical Doctor is more "Taoist" than dualist. And dualism (duality really) is probably

⁴⁹ For the adventure see Bruno de Jesus-Marie, ODC, *St. John of the Cross* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1932), 175-79, 425. One might add that John, who is usually so abstemious about spiritual experience as to make him a Western counterpart to Lin Chi's, "If you see the Buddha, kill him," did confide something of this experience.

⁵⁰ p. 51.

⁵¹ CW, 111.

⁵² Including, incidentally, accused by one Karol Wojtyla, now Pope John Paul II, whose 1948 dissertation was on John: *Faith according to Saint John of the Cross*, trans. Jordan Aumann (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981).

more a function of *popular* religion that transcends particular religious frontiers than a denominator of religion East and West. Inasmuch as Christianity, where applied, is, above all, a religion of love, it does presuppose duality. But this is not dualism any more than is the dynamism of the Yin and Yang. If we are bound to language, perhaps in principle it would be more appropriate to denominate the Christian as "nonmonist," and the Buddhist, as is the convention, as "non-dualist."

Moreover, Christianity is not just a religion of faith and Buddhism one of experience. This could deny experience to the one and mystery to the other. A dialectic of faith and experience would seem a fact of experience, and it would certainly seem observable in the Mystical doctor. Suzuki, for example, who would not shrink from applying that dread word "dogmatic" to Buddhism,⁵³ writes of the Bodhisattva even as attaining a "highly illuminating faith."⁵⁴ This could sound like the faith of St. John. And David Loy, in his remarkable essay on the Zen Koan and *The Cloud of Unknowing*, cites Po Shan:

Bravely let go on the edge of the cliff
 Throw yourself into the abyss with decision and courage
 You only revive after death!⁵⁵

This bespeaks not just faith, but quite literally its Kierkegaardian leap!

The point of this essay is not to leap, but to look. To venture the view from Mount Carmel—as well as Mount Fuji. It could be a mutually enriching vision.

⁵³ *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* (New York: Schocken, 1963, 1963), 114.

⁵⁴ *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (Third Series), 84.

⁵⁵ *Buddhist-Christian Studies* (1989), 47.