

4-1-2010

# Embracing Darkness: A Theological And Psychological Case Study Of Mother Teresa

C. Kevin Gillespie S.J.

*Saint Joseph's University*, [president@sju.edu](mailto:president@sju.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://scholarship.sju.edu/pres\\_ofc](http://scholarship.sju.edu/pres_ofc)



Part of the [Psychology Commons](#)

---

## Citation

Zagano, Phyllis, and C. Kevin Gillespie. "Embracing Darkness: A Theological And Psychological Case Study Of Mother Teresa." *Spiritus* 10.1 (2010): 52-75. Print.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Administration at Scholarship@SJU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Office of the President by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@SJU. For more information, please contact [kmudrick@sju.edu](mailto:kmudrick@sju.edu).



PROJECT MUSE®

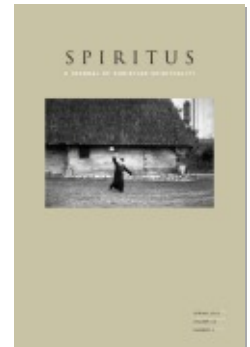
---

## Embracing Darkness: A Theological and Psychological Case Study of Mother Teresa

Phyllis Zagano  
C. Kevin Gillespie

Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality, Volume 10, Number 1, Spring 2010, pp. 52-75 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press  
DOI: 10.1353/scs.0.0086



➔ For additional information about this article  
<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/scs/summary/v010/10.1.zagano.html>

# Embracing Darkness: A Theological and Psychological Case Study of Mother Teresa<sup>1</sup>

PHYLLIS ZAGANO AND C. KEVIN GILLESPIE

Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who died in 1997, burst again onto the world stage in August 2007 with publication of a number of her letters in a volume edited by Father Brian Kolodiejchuk, a native of Canada and member of the men's branch of Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity and postulator for her canonization cause.<sup>2</sup> The Doubleday volume, *Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta*, is a 340-page study that includes many of her letters and diary entries interspersed with commentary by Kolodiejchuk. It is important to note from the outset that the volume is not a complete set of her writings, which reportedly run to eight volumes,<sup>3</sup> but rather a carefully edited book prepared by the postulator of her cause for canonization.

The book caught the glare of the world's spotlight immediately on publication. News writers and pundits seized on variations of the headline "a saint's dark night," writing, for example, about "Mother Teresa's crisis of faith" and "Mother Teresa's Struggle With Faith and Doubt."<sup>4</sup> However, many writers were unable to follow the deeper discussion regarding spiritual Dark Night, and none evidenced knowledge of her early life. Some seized on the reports of her interior darkness as proof of the non-existence of God. Chief among these was Christopher Hitchens, the violently anti-Teresa pundit and author of *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*,<sup>5</sup> who characterized her letters as "scrawled, desperate documents." Writing in *Newsweek*, Hitchens asks:

So, which is the more striking: that the faithful should bravely confront the fact that one of their heroines all but lost her own faith, or that the Church should have gone on deploying, as an icon of favorable publicity, a confused old lady whom it knew had for all practical purposes ceased to believe?<sup>6</sup>

Hitchens' ignorance, both of the Church and of the interior life, underscores the reality of Mother Teresa's apparent plight. If, indeed, Mother Teresa had ceased to believe, her situation could be easily classed as a case of confused clinical depression. Or she might be suffering depression in response to a genuine Dark Night. Or she might be suffering depression in response to other life experiences. Or she might be suffering a genuine Dark Night.

Defending her against the public misunderstandings and worse, Spanish Cardinal Julián Herranz Casado, retired president of the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts and a priest of Opus Dei who is now a member of the Pontifical Congregation for the Causes of Saints, said: “This is a figure who had moments of uncertainty and discouragement, experiencing the classic dark night that God gives to chosen people in order to forge them on the road to holiness.”<sup>7</sup>

Herranz Casado clearly argues for Mother Teresa’s holiness, and takes the published written record as proof text. Others, like Hitchens, argue the opposing view from the same texts. While there are gradations between the views typified by Herranz Casado and Hitchens, such is the broad dichotomy of opinions on Mother Teresa. Was she a “confused old lady” who had “ceased to believe”? Was she depressed? Or was she suffering the “classic dark night” God grants individuals “on the road to holiness”?

In order to evaluate Mother Teresa’s interior state as evidenced in the writings available, we must use both theological and psychological models. The experience of the absence of God in her life she relates could, on the face of it, present Dark Night. Her personal and social history, on the other hand, might give more evidence of clinical depression.

It is important, therefore, to distinguish the theological model, Christian spirituality’s tradition of Dark Night, from the psychological model, clinical depression. It is also important, at the outset, to recognize that Dark Night is neither psychological depression nor the spiritual desolation (as opposed to spiritual consolation) explained by Ignatius of Loyola.<sup>8</sup> We make these distinctions first through an explication of Dark Night through the writings of John of the Cross, and then of depression. We then evaluate her depressive life events that would have colored her experience of God. Finally, we stipulate the ways Dark Night may be evidenced in her writings.

## **DARK NIGHT**

The concept of Dark Night is often called “dark night of the soul” and popularly understood as a feeling of abandonment. F. Scott Fitzgerald expressed this popularization well: “in a real dark night of the soul it is always three o’clock in the morning. . . .”<sup>9</sup> Popular conceptions cannot absorb the subtleties of John of the Cross’ explanations of initial loss and eventual purification of memory.<sup>10</sup> Following John’s explications, Dark Night is most simply understood as initially marked by the inability to practice discursive meditation combined with the absence of emotional satisfaction from the spiritual journey, while a deep commitment to Christ as the way to union is maintained.<sup>11</sup> While there are psychological components to the Dark Night, John of the Cross contends Dark Night is really only understood in the light of faith, through Scripture:

In discussing this dark night, therefore, I will not rely on experience or science, for these can fail and deceive us. Although I will not neglect whatever possible use I can make of them, my help in all that, with God's favor, I shall say, will be Sacred Scripture, at least in the most important matters, or those that are difficult to understand. (*Ascent*, Prologue, 2)<sup>12</sup>

John's key point is that Dark Night is a theological—not a psychological—event. While Dark Night can be examined with “science,” and in fact psychology can assist in the discussions, we agree one must turn to theology “in the most important matters, or those that are difficult to understand.”

54

John carefully and clearly explains the Dark Night of the Senses and the Dark Night of the Spirit in his works *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night*. The Dark Night of the Senses has a double set of signs. Those John describes in *The Dark Night* (I: 9, 2–8) examine and describe God's initiative; those in the *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (II: 13, 2–4) present the more subtle points of the individual's response. John describes the Dark Night of the Spirit in *The Dark Night* (I: 8, 1–3; I: 12, 1–2), and in detail in the Second Book of *The Dark Night*. He also mentions it in the Second and Third book of *The Ascent*.

### **DARK NIGHT OF THE SENSES**

John describes three signs drawn from God's action in the Dark Night of the Senses in *The Dark Night*, and gives three signs as experienced by the individual in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, which explain the individual's recognitions and realizations:

While the two sets of signs are not mirror images of each other, they are interrelated. The individual's sense of abject powerlessness to meditate (*Dark Night*, I: 9, 8) is reflected in John's description of “the realization that one cannot make discursive meditation or receive satisfaction from it as before.” (*Ascent*, II: 13, 2) While there are many causes possible, when all else is ruled out this clear sign—powerlessness to meditate discursively—is key in recognizing God's request that the individual give up his own power (and authority) over prayer. Here, God's request—demand, actually—is that the individual let go of what is essentially self-initiated and self-directed mental prayer. This is a frightening demand. But the soul is helpless in the face of it, since discursive meditation is impossible.

Similarly, “. . . the memory ordinarily turns to God solicitously and with painful care, and the soul thinks it is not serving God but turning back.” (*Dark Night*, I: 9, 3) and the soul has “an awareness of a disinclination to fix the imagination or sense faculties on other particular objects.” (*Ascent*, II: 13, 3). No matter how the soul attempts to restore a practice of discursive meditation, the effort is, literally, fruitless. Simultaneously, there is disinclination to step

away from usual practice, and a deep interior dread that the soul is abandoning proper spiritual practice altogether.

According to John, as God withholds the soul's ability to relish discursive prayer, the experience of darkness spreads, for the soul cannot ". . . get satisfaction or consolation from the things of God . . . [nor] from creatures either . . ." (*Dark Night*, I: 9, 2). The disruption of interior peace spreads to a general malaise, more caused by lack of understanding than by understanding. The soul is invited through Dark Night to a deeper union. It does not understand, and if told, cannot understand (or believe) God's actions. Even so, the soul so arid, so nearly despondent "likes to remain alone in loving awareness of God . . . without any particular knowledge or understanding" (*Ascent*, II: 13, 4). That is, even without emotional satisfaction—interior or exterior—the soul will spend time alone with God, unable to present images or words, willing to merely be present to God's hidden care, love, and majesty. That step takes enormous trust, and a belief that the experience is not merely acedia or sloth.

As the soul suffers Dark Night of the Senses, it may be further invited to experience Dark Night of the Spirit, and its consequent further purification. John says that contemplation in Dark Night of the Senses:

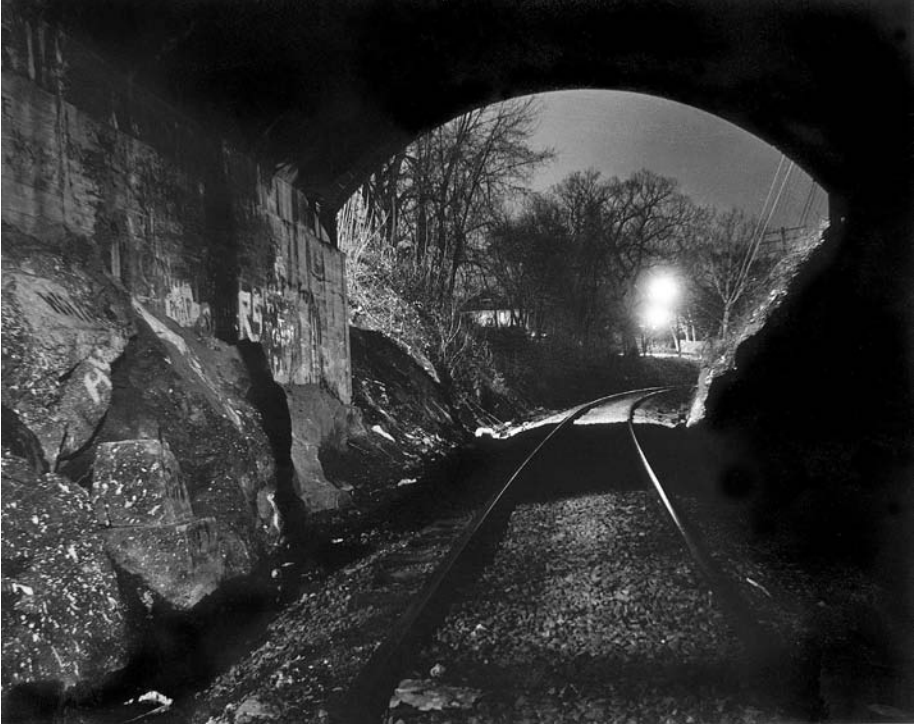
. . . causes two kinds of darkness or purification in spiritual persons according to the two parts of the soul, the sensory and the spiritual. Hence one night of purification is sensory, by which the senses are purged and accommodated to the spirit; and the other night or purification is spiritual, by which the spirit is purged and denuded as well as accommodated and prepared for union with God through love (*Dark Night*, I: 8, 1).

## **DARK NIGHT OF THE SPIRIT**

The conditions for transition to Dark Night of the Spirit are less clear. John's contemporary translators, Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, summarize its effects as explicated in the Second Book of *The Dark Night*, as follows:

Darkness and affliction are the two negative effects of the night. These stem from a conflict between the divine and the human (chs. 5–6); the remembrance of past prosperity with a hopeless feeling about the present situation (ch. 7); and the powerlessness of the soul's faculties, unprepared to perceive the divine object (ch. 8).<sup>13</sup>

Such are the three distinct afflictions in Dark Night of the Spirit. The first notes the soul's poverty in receiving the gift of interior insight, described as the pure bright light of wisdom that illuminates interior impurities so well and clearly that the soul is deeply grieved on recognizing them. "Because the light and wisdom of this contemplation is very bright and pure, and the soul in which



*Beta Bridge Underneath* © Ed Deasy

it shines is dark and impure, a person will be deeply afflicted on receiving it” (*Dark Night*, II: 6.4).

The second affliction is marked by interior powerlessness. The soul is unexpectedly and completely drawn into contemplation, such that it suffers an incomprehensible helplessness (“weakness”): “Since this divine contemplation assails them somewhat forcibly in order to subdue and strengthen their soul, they suffer so much in their weakness that they almost die . . .” (*Dark Night*, II: 5.6).

The third affliction again demonstrates the soul’s powerlessness, as if it is “being undone”, and recognizes an interior darkness comparable to Jonah’s: “. . . the soul at the sign of its miseries feels that it is melting away and being undone by a cruel spiritual death . . . and it suffers an anguish comparable to Jonah’s in the belly of the whale [*Jon. 2:1–3*]” (*Dark Night*, II: 6.1).

The afflictions, or purifications, of the Dark Night of the Spirit affect the memory, the intellect, and the will. On this last point, John writes:

The afflictions and straits of the will are also immense. Sometimes these afflictions pierce the soul when it suddenly remembers the evils in which it sees itself immersed, and it becomes uncertain of any remedy. To this pain is added the remembrance of past prosperity, because usually persons who enter this

night have previously had many consolations in God and rendered him many services. They are now sorrowful in knowing that they are far from such good and can no longer enjoy it. Job tells of his affliction . . . (*Dark Night*, II: 7, 1).<sup>14</sup>

Overall, the soul experiences a sense of abandonment, which is secretly assuaged by the dark contemplation it suffers, to a deepening of the theological virtues of faith, hope and love.

We will return to the signs of Dark Night of the Senses and Dark Night of the Spirit as they are specifically related in Mother Teresa's published writings. However, John is not quick to observe a soul is suffering the purifications of Dark Night. He observes the soul may or may not be troubled by something else. He does warn that while

. . . individuals are being conducted along a sublime path of dark contemplation and aridity . . . they will meet someone who, in the style of Job's comforters [Jb. 4:8–11], will proclaim that all of this is due to melancholia, depression, or temperament, or to some hidden weakness . . . (*Ascent*, Prologue, 4).<sup>15</sup>

But, equally, he says:

When one is incapable of making discursive meditation on the things of God and disinclined to consider subjects extraneous to God, the cause could be melancholia or some other kind of humor in the heart or brain capable of producing a certain stupefaction and suspension of the sense faculties (*Ascent*, II 13:6).

Hence, before evaluating Mother Teresa's spiritual experience, let us first turn to the means for a psychological evaluation of the signs she presents.

## CLINICAL DEPRESSION

Does Mother Teresa present signs of clinical depression? She wrote, in a letter to Jesus:

That darkness surrounds me on all sides—I can't lift my soul to God—no light or inspiration enters my soul . . . what do I labour for? If there is no God—there can be no soul—If there is no soul then Jesus—You also are not true—Heaven, what emptiness—not a single thought of Heaven enters my mind—for there is no hope—I am afraid to write all those terrible things that pass in my soul. They must hurt you.<sup>16</sup>

In more than forty of her published writings, Mother Teresa bemoans the “dryness,” “darkness,” “loneliness,” and “torture” she is undergoing. She compares the experience to hell, and at one point says her suffering has driven her to doubt the existence of heaven and even of God.



Before ruling a genuine experience of Dark Night in, or out, in this or any case study it is important to make a careful psychological assessment. Hence the question: Was Mother Teresa clinically depressed at the time she made these statements? We use the fourth edition of *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR)*, published by the American Psychiatric Association, to determine clinical depression. Diagnosis of depression requires five or more of the following symptoms, including a depressed mood and a loss of interest or pleasure present within a two-week period: 1) constant depressed mood; 2) lack of enjoyment or pleasure in most activities; 3) unaccounted for weight loss; 4) sleeplessness or over sleeping; 5) demonstrated restlessness or marked slowness; 6) daily fatigue; 7) daily feelings of worthlessness or excessive inappropriate guilt; 8) diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness; 9) thoughts of death or suicide.<sup>17</sup>

While Mother Teresa clearly suffered, one might argue she displayed none of these symptoms for an extended period of time, and certainly never exhibited five or more of them concurrently. It might be argued she exhibited two symptoms, (7) feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt and (8) diminished ability to think or concentrate, both tied to her relationship with God in prayer. For example, in an undated letter, she wrote:

I call, I cling, I want—and there is no One to answer—no One on Whom I can cling—no, No One—Alone. The darkness is so dark—and I am alone—Unwanted forsaken—The loneliness—of the heart that wants love is unbearable—Where is my Faith?—even deep down right in there is nothing, but emptiness & darkness—My God—how painful is this unknown pain. It pains without ceasing—I have no faith. . . .<sup>18</sup>

The initial impression, at least, is that she lacked the complete constellation of depressive symptoms. Hence, we might immediately be led to rule out the clinical diagnosis of depression.

However, there remain other influences in her life that must be accounted for before making any final determinations. In espousing the Thomistic principle that “grace perfects nature,” we must investigate how Mother Teresa’s character and personality were influenced by the developmental and social experiences of her life. In this respect, while the psychiatric categories of the *DSM-IV-TR* do not explain her words that point to intense and even desperate experience, other psychological constructs may do so. Such categories are offered by two streams of thought from within the field of psychology of religion. One stream flows from experimental research, while the other emerges from psychoanalytical theory.

## EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH

In the past two decades, extensive research has developed around the psychological constructs “religious coping,” “resilience,” and “spiritual struggle.” Initiated by psychologists of religion, Harold G. Koenig, M.D. (Duke University Center for Spirituality, Theology and Health), Kenneth Pargament (Bowling Green University), Julie J. Exline (Case Western Reserve University) and their colleagues, a whole stream of research has emerged and been extended to a variety of populations. Mother Teresa’s statements suggest she experienced what psychology terms “spiritual struggles.” Pargament, *et al.* consider “spiritual struggles” as “. . . marked by expressions of pain, anger, fear, doubt and confusion—all signs of a spiritual system under strain and influx. In short, we define spiritual struggles as efforts to conserve or transform a spirituality that has been threatened.”<sup>19</sup>

These authors describe three types of “spiritual struggles”: Interpersonal, Intrapersonal and Divine. According to Pargament interpersonal struggles are characterized by conflicts with one’s family, friends and congregations.<sup>20</sup> Despite the difficulties surrounding the establishment of her religious congregation, the Missionaries of Charity, Mother Teresa’s interior struggles do not seem to have emanated from such conflicts.

Intrapersonal spiritual struggles, according to Pargament, are those filled with doubt and uncertainty about spiritual matters wherein one questions the ultimate value of his or her religious tradition. The intrapersonal spiritual struggle also does not seem to fit Mother Teresa completely, since there are no indications she is questioning her Christian beliefs or her Catholic tradition.

However, Pargament’s third type of struggle, characterized by a tension between the individual and the divine, may fit the case of Mother Teresa. Psychological literature indicates this tension between the individual and the divine often occurs in response to pain and suffering.<sup>21</sup> Certainly Mother Teresa witnessed the enormous suffering of the people she ministered to for so many years. It was this suffering that drew her out of the comfortable confines of her Loreto convent and school. Do her writings suggest she had internalized the anguish of those to whom she ministered such that she identified with it to the point of burnout? We think not, for her witness and writings, rooted in her profound—if often confusing—prayer life, do not indicate she was ever on the verge of emotional collapse, and yet she wrote: “The place of God in my soul is blank . . . I just long & long for God . . . He does not want me. . . .”<sup>22</sup> It is, however, possible that her spiritual struggle may have been influenced by an earlier event in her life. We now turn to explore a second stream of research that serves to explain Mother Teresa’s spiritual struggles further.

## PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY

The second stream through which we can find psychological meaning in Mother Teresa's desperate words comes by means of psychoanalytic literature. In order to develop these perspectives, it is important to mention salient features about Mother Teresa's childhood. Tellingly, as her good friend Eileen Egan was preparing a book about her in 1960, she asked her to speak only about the order she had founded, the Missionaries of Charity. "I am going to ask you for a big sacrifice—In the book you are writing—*please* omit anything about me personally—You can tell everything about the Sisters and the work—I want you to leave me and my family out. Begin from 1948." Eileen Egan followed her request. Nevertheless, Mother Teresa's early years are important in understanding the depth of her feelings of abandonment by God as evidenced in the writings we have available.

60

The youngest of Nikola and Dranfile Bojaxhiu's three children, Agnes Gonxha was born in Skopje on August 26, 1910. Trained as a pharmacist, Nikola Bojaxhiu became a prominent entrepreneur who traveled throughout the Mediterranean making not only business contacts, but political ones as well. His fluency in five languages (Albanian, Servo-Croat, Turkish, Italian and French) no doubt contributed to his financial success, as well as to his regional influence. Further, Nikola Bojaxhiu instilled in his children a pride for their family and their region: "Never forget whose children you are!"<sup>23</sup>

With the outbreak of World War I in 1914 Nikola Bojaxhiu's business and influence grew. He was a prominent landowner, a member of the Skopje's city council, and a building contractor. Mother Teresa's later reticence about her family was real—she seldom spoke about her father—but we can only wonder the significant lessons he gave his daughter in the hospitality that he practiced in serving the poor. Her father told his children, ". . . never take a morsel of food that you are not prepared to share with others."<sup>24</sup> One biographer notes Mother Teresa and her siblings remembered their father for his generosity, his giftedness as a story-teller and his strict discipline.<sup>25</sup>

For our purposes, it is important to recognize that in 1910, when Agnes was born, Skopje was part of Serbia, and both Serbia and Albania were part of the Ottoman Empire. Political unrest erupted shortly after Agnes' birth, as predominantly Greek Orthodox Serbia attempted to annex predominantly Muslim Kosovo to gain access to the sea. Serbia initiated a policy of mass murder of Albanians in Serbia and North Albania, both predominantly Catholic. Catholics were a small presence in the Skopje diocese, which was 50% Orthodox and 40% Muslim.

Terror struck nearby, as the home of nearby Albanian Catholic family was attacked and some of the women were raped and killed. Such violence was becoming increasingly common. We can easily postulate that deep fear pervad-

ed the Bojaxhiu family during those years of ethnic and religious violence. In retrospect, it is understandable that Mother Teresa did not wish to speak about her childhood.

As an Albanian nationalist, Nikola Bojaxhiu opposed the formation of the Yugoslavia out of the ruins of World War I. In 1919, he attended a political gathering of fellow Albanian nationalists in Belgrade. Upon returning home, he experienced severe stomach pains. As the severity of the illness became apparent, her mother asked young Agnes to fetch a priest to administer the last rites. When Agnes arrived at the parish no priest was available, but she located another priest at the local train station. The priest went to the Bojaxhiu home and administered last rites to her father. We can only speculate the anxiety that must have gripped nine-year old Agnes as she faced her father's death. He began hemorrhaging and was rushed to a hospital. Emergency surgery was performed to no avail. He died the next day. It was later determined he had been poisoned by the Yugoslav police, a form of political assassination not uncommon in those tumultuous regions.<sup>26</sup>

Her father's funeral drew large crowds, no doubt due to his prominence as a businessman and the perceived heroic nature of his death. As described by Anna Sebba, the funeral was a major event: "Large crowds attended, including official delegates from the city council and representatives of other religions. On the day of the funeral every jeweler's shop in the city was closed; the pupils in all the city's schools received commemorative handkerchiefs. The number of handkerchiefs given away was, traditionally, an indication of the wealth of the person who had died. . . ." <sup>27</sup> The tragic prominence of her father's death remained deep in historical silence until her own prominence brought it to light against her wishes.

A full psychological understanding of Mother Teresa requires us to consider the impact this tragedy had on her spiritual identity. Following Nikola's tragic death, the Bojaxhiu family's financial fortunes greatly diminished as Nikola's partner received the entire business estate, leaving his wife Drana and the children only the house they lived in. With diminished finances, however, Drana still followed the example of her beloved deceased husband of hospitality and giving to the poor.<sup>28</sup> Nikola's death also led Agnes to draw more closely to the Jesuit-run parish of the Sacred Heart. Through parish pastoral and worship services, Agnes began the practices that eventually led her to join a religious institute. The pastor, Father Franjo Jambrankovic, S.J., guided Agnes' spiritual growth and encouraged her to assist in the creation of a parish sodality. His guidance, along with that of a good friend of the Bojaxhiu family, Skopje's bishop, Janez F. Gnidovec, C.M. (1873–1939), supported Agnes as she moved beyond the loss of her father into an emerging religious identity.<sup>29</sup>

## A PSYCHOANALYTIC PORTRAIT

Our psychoanalytic exploration is based on the Thomistic principle of grace perfecting nature, which the Jesuit psychoanalyst William Meissner has recast in psychoanalytic terms as “ego energy.”<sup>30</sup> With Meissner, we must state at the outset that any psychoanalytic insight gleaned from our investigation is not meant to reduce her mystical experiences to a simple cause. Such insight may, however, help us understand the meanings and depth of her experiences, specifically focusing on the meanings of her feelings and words of abandonment by God. What Meissner writes in his psychoanalytical biography of Ignatius of Loyola may also be applied to Mother Teresa. He writes:

On the assumption that *gratia perficit naturam*, I would argue that insofar as divine causality is exercised through grace in the soul, it operates in and through natural psychic capacities and functions. By implication, then, Ignatius’ mystical experiences did not occur without grace, but it did not take place without his free psychic response and in terms codetermined by the dynamic forces operating within his heart and mind. There is no “either-or” here, but “both-and.”<sup>31</sup>

For a child, the death of a parent can represent not only a loss, but a catastrophic event. The death of a father through a political assassination may mean even more. We need not speculate whether Agnes was psychologically traumatized by her father’s murder (the diagnosis Posttraumatic Stress Disorder was only recognized in 1980). That she rarely spoke of her childhood, much less of her father’s death, and never referred to it as an assassination (as did her brother Lazar),<sup>32</sup> perhaps makes such speculation even more warranted. However, the fact and the manner of her father’s death may offer some clues to the ways in which she handled losses later in her life. More specifically, the loss of her father may offer some insight into the ways in which she later experienced the loss of God.

Certainly, the agony of her father’s death would have been scarred into her memory. That he died when she was at such an impressionable age, combined with the way he died and the way his death was commemorated, may have sowed the seeds of activism planted in her earlier religious formation in her family, in the parish sodality, and later in the Sisters of Loreto.

Indeed, her father’s heroic death may have influenced the “stirring call” that Agnes felt in response to Father Jambrankovic’s description of how Jesuit priests from Yugoslavia had, in 1924, embarked on missionary activities in Bengal. During a retreat, Agnes and her fellow sodalists were asked to meditate upon the three questions designed to be an invitation for the retreatant to develop a sense of the heroic: “What have I done for Christ, what am I doing for Christ and what will I do for Christ?”<sup>33</sup>



© Jim Crotty

We are led to consider then, the possibility that Mother Teresa's interior experience was colored by her father's tragic death. While for some this assertion may seem a hyperbolic hypothesis, another psychoanalytic work may lend support. In his book, *Surviving Trauma: Loss, Literature and Psychoanalysis*, David Aberbach (McGill University) indicates a relationship between childhood grief and mysticism. He notes both John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila experienced the death of a parent at a relatively young age.<sup>34</sup> Indeed Teresa of Avila described her life in the Church as beginning with her mother's death, when Teresa was twelve. Others have described similar childhood losses in the lives of Ignatius of Loyola and Thérèse of Lisieux.<sup>35</sup>

While neither Aberbach nor we wish to suggest mystic experience is a by-product of loss or of psychological adaptations stemming from grief, neverthe-

less the “yearning and searching of the mystic”<sup>36</sup> can be compared to that of the bereaved. Aberbach reminds us that John of the Cross’ father died shortly after John was born, leaving his widow and three sons in even deeper poverty. Aberbach writes:

The awful sense of abandonment which pervades the Dark Night is likely to be especially strong among those who suffer loss, as John did, in childhood. The greatest affliction of the Dark Night, which John depicts so movingly, is probably little different from the anguish suffered by any child bereaved of a loved father.<sup>37</sup>

64

Aberbach furthermore cites the conclusion of British author and historian Edward FitzGerald Brenan: “. . . the thought that God has abandoned it (the soul), of which it has no doubt; that He has cast it away into darkness as an abominable thing.”<sup>38</sup>

For Aberbach, the “finding” and “being found” as the mystic experiences Dark Night has its parallel in the grieving process. From a psychoanalytic perspective, then, might not the mystic be replicating earlier experiences? From a theological perspective, then, might God’s grace be building upon a natural event, the early loss of a beloved figure? Aberbach believes that “finding” the lost person might have its parallel in mystical “finding” and illumination. He states that there are instances of this phenomenon in Jewish, Christian, and Hindu traditions, and refers to Teresa of Avila’s remark, “‘the wound of love’ as caused by the intense longing for the hidden God.”<sup>39</sup>

By the same token, would the loss of a beloved parent condition her sense of being abandoned by God? That is to say, was the death of her father the means by which grace led Agnes to grow to live not only an exemplary life of charity, but a mystical one at that? Furthermore, might not her father’s horrific yet heroic death have served as a significant means through which Agnes was motivated to lead a heroic life of her own? Certainly, there was the example of her mother’s love and generous compassion for the poor as well as the influence of her Jesuit pastor and the local bishop.<sup>40</sup> But, taking Aberbach’s comments on the relationship between grief and mysticism, we are led to believe that her father’s death influenced (but did not determine) Mother Teresa’s spiritual struggle. If Thomas’ dictum is correct and Meissner’s interpretation accurate, God’s sanating grace of presence healed the void left by her father’s death.

When, as an adult, Mother Teresa experienced God’s intense presence, and then God’s absence, her grief over the presence and loss of her beloved father may have psychologically conditioned this new experience.<sup>41</sup> As Mother Teresa grieved the absence of her beloved God, she may have recognized the depth of young Agnes’ grief at the loss of her beloved father. But her psychological state

could not be classed as depression, the criteria for which state “The symptoms are not better accounted for by Bereavement, i.e. after the loss of a loved one,”<sup>42</sup> in this case her sense of abandonment by God.

## LOSS OF GOD

The most disorienting part of Dark Night is the painful loss of the experience of God. As H.T. Hunt notes:

The enhanced self-awareness of spontaneous mystical experience and/or prolonged meditative practice allows a direct experience of Being as presence-openness. . . . However, these initially freeing and blissful realizations can entail a later price . . . it is here that we find a deeply disorienting ‘metapathology’ of emptiness and despair. . . .<sup>43</sup>

65

Hunt’s “‘metapathology’ of emptiness and despair” is dependent on the loss of what was once known. While the experience of the loss of God is real, and echoes the experience of other losses, the individual invited to Dark Night is also invited to give up all “knowledge” of God—all analogy, all experience, all understanding, in order to be freed to meet God.

If, indeed, the young Agnes’ suffering is reflected in the adult Mother Teresa, it is that the adult is here being invited to give up whatever “fatherly” image she might have had of God in order to free her to meet Being as Being, without personal or cultural overlays. That is, to progress in her spiritual life, Mother Teresa would necessarily give up her interior analogous relationship between herself and her own father as well as between herself and any image of God as father. Therefore, in Dark Night she would re-experience the grief of losing her father, this time the replacement “father-God” of her own creation.

In relinquishing ideas of God, the mystic also relinquishes ideas of self; the painful combined loss of self and God brings crisis. The method of grieving can seem patterned on prior grieving or, indeed, be mistaken for it. Numerous studies—both theological and psychological—find that those who experience Dark Night exhibit some of the symptoms of depression, often leading arid interior lives. The essential distinction, of course, is how the interior aridity is accepted and in how those lives are lived.<sup>44</sup> That Mother Teresa managed to live an apparently joyful exterior life and remain dedicated to her many works is key to the evaluation of her interior life.

That evaluation can only progress from her writings, with the support of what is known from her exterior life. It is difficult to evaluate an incomplete set of documents when others are known to exist. Even so, we here seek evidence of her experience of Dark Night in her published writings.



## EVIDENCE FROM HER WRITINGS

The extraordinary ministerial works of Mother Teresa are well known. Her writings, however, have been carefully guarded and released only in edited form by the postulator of her cause, who copiously opines that the spiritual struggles Mother Teresa evidenced are marks of Dark Night and therefore of her sanctity. We do not necessarily disagree with that possibility, but we warn that we consider here an incomplete and heavily edited set of writings published in the midst of the examination of her cause for sainthood.

Early in these writings, Mother Teresa speaks to her definite understanding of God's word in her heart directing her to take up the work that became the institute of men and women she founded, the Missionaries of Charity. Many of her communications are with Belgian Jesuit Father Celest Van Exem (1908–1993), her spiritual director during her discernment to depart Loreto and begin her work with the poor. Seeds of her new call are evidenced in her September, 1946 letter to him, where she echoes Ignatius of Loyola's vocational wonderings: "After reading the life of St. Cabrini—the thought kept on coming—why can't I do for Him in India what she did for Him in America—why was she able to identify herself so much with the Americans as to become one of them?"<sup>45</sup>

Her wonderings soon became concrete. Some years before, at the age of 32, and with the permission of her confessor, she made a private vow never to deny God anything. God's invitation—demand—that she work with the poor soon became unavoidable. In a letter to Father Van Exem, she references her communications with Archbishop Ferdinand Périer (1875–1968), a Jesuit who oversaw the Archdiocese of Calcutta from 1921 until his retirement in 1960. She wrote in October, 1947 to Father Van Exem:

I am glad [His Grace] is not interested in the "voices & visions." They came unasked—and they have gone. They have not changed my life. They have helped me to be more trustful and draw closer to God—They have increased my desire to be more and more His little child. . . . I attach no importance to them as regard the call because my desires to immolate myself were just as strong before they came. Why they came I do not know—neither do I try to know. I am pleased to let Him do with me just as it pleaseth Him.<sup>46</sup>

She focuses not on the intensity of her experiences, but on the substance of her perceived call. During this period of initial discernment in the fall of 1947 she writes again to Father Van Exem: "You know that I don't want to leave Loreto, I have no personal reason whatsoever, absolutely none—but the call, the life, and the work which God wants me to do is so different to the life and work of Loreto, that I would not be doing His Will if I stayed."<sup>47</sup> Within days she assures the Archbishop she is absolutely sure of her call, and knows "Nothing will happen to me, but only whatever He has arranged in His Great Mercy."<sup>48</sup>

As it happened, she departed from her Loreto convent with five rupees, wearing a simple sari. She reports great joy and comfort at her decision and an exuberance in her prayer life that seems to confirm it. She is certain, for example, that “God wants me to give myself completely to Him in absolute poverty . . . to give myself without any reserve to God in the poor. . . .”<sup>49</sup> and she soon notes “My soul at present is in perfect peace and joy.”<sup>50</sup>

And so she set out on her mission, which grew more and more difficult. The task of finding a place for the sisters she had gathered around her pressed on her and she thought longingly of her Loreto convent. In a 1949 journal entry, she wrote: “I walked and walked till my legs and my arms ached—then the temptation grew strong. . . . You have only to say the word and all that will be yours again. . . . This is the dark night of the birth of the society.”<sup>51</sup>

These words may also mark the beginning of her Dark Night. We can recognize in her writings the baffling signs of the Dark Night of the Senses. For example, where John states the first sign is the inability to make discursive meditation (*Ascent*), and that God “. . . does not allow it [the soul] to find sweetness or delight in anything” (*Dark Night*), these echo in her letter to Calcutta Archbishop Périer of March 18, 1953: “Please pray specially for me that I may not spoil His work and that Our Lord may show Himself—for there is such terrible darkness within me, as if everything was dead. It has been like this more or less from the time I started “the work.” Ask Our Lord to give me courage.”<sup>52</sup>

John’s second sign in *Ascent*, “. . . the memory ordinarily turns to God . . . and the soul thinks it is not serving God but turning back,” is also evidenced. In a September 3, 1959 letter to Jesus, sent to her confessor Father L. Trevor Picachy, S.J.<sup>53</sup> she writes:

. . . what emptiness—not a single thought of Heaven enters my mind—for there is no hope—I am afraid to write all those terrible things that pass in my soul—They must hurt you.

In my heart there is no faith—no love—no trust—there is so much pain—the pain of longing, the pain of not being wanted—I want God with all the powers of my soul—and yet there between us—there is terrible separation—I don’t pray any longer—I utter words of community prayers—and try my utmost to get out of every word the sweetness it has to give—But My soul is not one with You. . . .<sup>54</sup>

Her “letter to Jesus” above may also evidence the third of John’s signs of Dark Night of the Senses from God’s perspective, “. . . the powerlessness . . . to meditate” (*Dark Night*, I: 9, 8). In it, Mother Teresa continues: “. . . and yet when alone in the streets—I talk to you for hours—of my longing for You—How intimate are those words—and yet so empty, for they leave me far from You—”<sup>55</sup>

Later writings evidence another sign: “. . . an awareness of a disinclination to fix the imagination or sense faculties on other particular objects . . .” (*Ascetic*, II: 13, 3) along with her acceptance of her condition. Her correspondence with Archbishop Périer evidences her dismay at God’s apparent abandonment. His counsel intuits her condition. In 1956 he had written:

With regard to the feeling of loneliness, of abandonment, of not being wanted, of darkness of the soul, it is a state well known by spiritual writers and directors of conscience. This is willed by God in order to attach us to Him alone, an antidote to our external activities, and also, like any temptation, a way of keeping us humble in the midst of applauses, publicity, praises, appreciation, etc. and success. To feel we are nothing, that we can do nothing is the realization of a fact.<sup>56</sup>

Her pain was directly evidenced in a 1957 letter to Archbishop Périer, in which she spoke of her continued attempts at prayer: “I want to speak—yet nothing comes—I find no words to express the depths of the darkness. In spite of it all—I am His little one—& I love Him. . . .”<sup>57</sup> Her willingness to be empty of any feelings for God, or feelings of God’s love came in a 1959 letter to Father Picachy: “I do not know how deeper will this trial go—how much pain & suffering it will bring to me—This does not worry me any more. I leave this to Him as I leave everything else. I want to become a Saint according to the Heart of Jesus—meek & humble. That is all that really Matters to me now.”<sup>58</sup>

Mother Teresa’s condition remained unabated through the ensuing years, and the depth of her anguish is palpable. During a 1961 retreat, she wrote to her spiritual director, Jesuit Father Josef Neuner<sup>59</sup>: “The place of God in my soul is blank—There is no God in me—When the pain of longing is so great—I just long & long for God—and then it is that I feel—He does not want me. . . .”<sup>60</sup> Mother Teresa’s intense sense of abandonment—“He does not want me”—resonates with John’s signs. The intellectual and emotional consequences of that feeling of abandonment are crushing. But what is the resolution? Careful spiritual direction would encourage her to accept her situation, and would further instruct her on the introduction to the *via negativa* she was suffering.

Despite her loss of interior solace: “. . . there is such a deep loneliness in my heart that I cannot express it. . . .”<sup>61</sup> She writes: “. . . and yet this terrible pain has never made me desire to have it different—What more I want it to be like this for as long as he wants it”<sup>62</sup> As she wrote to Father Neuner, in 1962, “How cold—how empty—how painful is my heart—Holy Communion—Holy Mass—all the holy things of spiritual life—of the life of Christ in me—are all so empty—so cold—so unwanted.”<sup>63</sup>

As noted above, the function—if it can be called that—of Dark Night is to strip away all notions of God, to perfect the memory, intellect and will of the individual. The grace Mother Teresa was apparently receiving was through

such an apophatic mystic experience, a difficult stripping away of all notions of God until one is left completely abandoned and alone, to the point of doubt. The mystic on entering this Dark Night senses deep abandonment precisely because he or she is being led more deeply into the mystery of God, and eventually into the realization that all her cherished notions of God are inadequate. It is the sudden and deep realization that all ideas about God are lacking that sometimes sends the soul into a depressive free-fall. The suffering is not over the loss of God, but rather the loss of cherished notions of God. Hence the “darkness” that pervades the psyche, and which mystics eventually understand as the blinding brightness of Being. The concurrent loss of self, particularly for the individual who believes he or she exists in relation to that prior-held notion of God, is bewildering, and the reflexive grasp at prior notions only serves to deepen the darkness. Only as the individual releases his or her conceptions of God does resolution appear.

Somewhat later, Mother Teresa’s writings evidence another of John’s signs: “. . . a person likes to remain alone in loving awareness of God . . . without any particular knowledge or understanding” (*Ascent*, II: 13, 4). Once she accepts, and then welcomes the suffering caused by her sense of abandonment, she begins to regain peace: “For the first time in these 11 years—I have come to love the darkness—for I believe now that it is a part—a very, very small part—of Jesus’ darkness and pain on earth.”<sup>64</sup>



*Old Pilings in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan* © Jim Crotty

We can never pinpoint the exact transition from Dark Night of the Senses to Dark Night of the Spirit. Souls can move from one to the other and then return for deeper purification before entering the darkest night. However, by her own admission she eventually grew to accept the darkness, ending her 1961 letter to Father Neuner: “Let Him do with me whatever He wants as He wants for as long as He wants if my darkness is light to some soul—even if it be nothing to nobody—I am perfectly happy to be God’s flower in the field.”<sup>65</sup>

We can see here Mother Teresa coming to a truce of sorts with her experience. We know nothing, really, about her early interior life, prior to her entrance to Loreto, and prior to her call to leave those comfortable surroundings. We can assume through gleanings of her earlier writings in this volume that her prayer was filled with the discursive meditation she would have been initiated into by the Jesuit priests in her home parish and through her novitiate training. The Loreto Sisters, the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary were, after all, founded by Mary Ward, who sought to form a company of women with the practices and ministries of the Society of Jesus. Hence, her inability to practice discursive meditation combined with a loss of appetite for other spiritual practices would have hit her especially hard.

We can never know precisely when her experience of Dark Night of the Senses intersected with her experience of Dark Night of the Spirit, but the organic development of her writings show her memory, intellect and will beginning, at least, to be purified by theological hope, faith and love. The night of the spirit,<sup>66</sup> marked by passive dark contemplation, seems evident. Hence we look to her writings for further evidence of this deeper purification.

John writes that the soul suffers deeply: “persons feel so unclean and wretched that it seems God is against them and they are against God” (*Dark Night II*: 5, 5). What would best mark Mother Teresa’s passive night of the spirit would be evidence of her interior insight combined with acceptance of interior powerlessness and interior darkness. What we do not have, possibly because of her editor’s reticence, is substantial evidence of her painful growth in interior insight. John likens the experience to a log as it meets flame. In this “purgative contemplation,” he writes, the soul is stripped “of the habitual affections and properties of the old self to which the soul is strongly united, attached and conformed . . .” (*Dark Night II*: 6, 1) and purged of “all contrary qualities” (*Dark Night II*: 10, 2).

While there is extensive evidence of her suffering the seeming abandonment by God, and of her eventual resolution that her trials are in fact allowed by God and may be the result of God’s blinding and penetrating light, there is little evidence of her recognition of her failings and consequent reconciliation through faith, in hope, to her human condition. This is not to say it did not occur, but rather that evidence may be lacking because her letters have

been so heavily edited, or because some documents were destroyed, as she had requested.

Her pain, however, is evident. In an undated letter to Father Neuner, she relates her joy at the young women coming to join her in her ministry, noting, “As for myself, I just have the joy of having nothing—not even the reality of the Presence of God—No prayer, no love—no faith—nothing but continual pain of longing for God.”<sup>67</sup> Even so, she is convinced she is doing God’s work. She wrote to Father Picachy in 1962, “The only thing that remains is the deep and strong conviction that the work is His.”<sup>68</sup>

As her life and ministry progressed, Mother Teresa was more and more circumspect in writing about her interior life and struggles. But, it appears that beginning in the 1960s and to the end of her life she was more at peace with her lack of feelings in prayer. In a February, 1974 letter to a California priest, Father Don Kribs, she wrote: “God cannot fill what is full—He can fill only emptiness—deep Poverty—and Your “Yes” is the beginning of being or becoming empty. It is not how much we really “have” to give—but how empty we are—so that we can receive fully in our life and let Him live His life in us.”<sup>69</sup>

In 1970, twenty-seven years before her death, Mother Teresa’s fame began to explode. Malcolm Muggeridge’s 1970 BBC-TV documentary and 1971 best-selling book, *Something Beautiful for God*, threw her forcefully onto the world’s stage. The book, which begins: “I should explain, in the first place, that Mother Teresa has requested that nothing in the nature of a biography or biographical study of her should be attempted,” evidences her personal reticence.<sup>70</sup> She won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. As her fame increased, so did her reticence. While Mother Teresa was open with directors, we have little from her own hand to grant further indication of her interior life. Such gives insight into the fact of her Dark Night. If in humility she hid her condition—and we know she sought to destroy her writings—she would have avoided a trap. In 1999, Archbishop Périer appointed Father Josef Neuner as Theological Censor on the commission preparing the case for beatification. Some years later, he wrote he was thoroughly convinced of the divine origin of her vocation and mission.<sup>71</sup>

## CONCLUSION

What are we to conclude? We can be certain Mother Teresa suffered much sadness in her life, but there is no real evidence of her being clinically depressed. We can be certain that she was invited to Dark Night of the Senses, and the signs of Dark Night of the Spirit are never clear. We can also recognize that Agnes’ experience in relation to her father’s tragic death contributed in some measure to the development of a resilience that shaped her amazing ministry and profound prayer life.

The purpose of Dark Night of the Spirit is union with God, and its length is indeterminate: “They remain in this condition until their spirit is humbled, softened and purified . . . that it can become one with the Spirit of God. . . .” (Dark Night II: 7, 3). That Mother Teresa suffered physical (and possibly emotional) exhaustion could be both effect and cause of her difficulties in prayer. Yet, we have evidence in her writings that she entered into a purification of memory through which she accepted the darkness. As John explains, “. . . the soul must empty itself of all that is not God in order to go to God. . . . Every possession is against hope” (Ascent III: 7, 2). As she accepted the loss of feeling in prayer, she seems to have relinquished her ideas about God and increasingly delivered herself to hopeful abandonment, both interiorly and exteriorly.<sup>72</sup>

Her prayer—even in darkness—propelled her to greater missionary zeal, which in turn exhausted her. Clearly on John’s “ladder of love” (*Dark Night II*: 18, 3–4), Mother Teresa evidenced such detachment that all her psychic (and physical) energies were directed at God and her understanding of God’s will. So, even the fact she often nodded off during community prayers and meditation may evidence her total self-donation and personal abandonment to God. Her deep thirst for God, like Christ’s deep thirst for souls, was never quenched; her deep suffering at her lack of “feeling” in prayer mirrored Christ’s passion.

## NOTES

1. Portions of this paper were delivered at American Psychological Association, Division 36 Religion & Spirituality Conference, Columbia, MD, USA, February 29, 2008.
2. The study was first published in four parts in 2002 by the news agency Zenit.
3. Carol Zaleski, “The Dark Night of Mother Teresa,” *First Things* (May 2003): 24–27.
4. James Martin, “A Saint’s Dark Night,” *The New York Times* (August 29, 2007): A:23; Christopher Howse, “Sacred mysteries, Mother Teresa’s crisis of faith,” *The Daily Telegraph* (London) (September 1, 2007): 29; Christopher Howse, “Mother Teresa’s Doubts,” *The New York Times* (September 3, 2007) A:12; Raymond J. De Souza, “Mother Teresa’s darkness,” *National Post (The Financial Post, Canada)* (September 1, 2007): A23; Keith McDonald, “The burning question,” *The West Australian* (Perth) (October 6, 2007): 38; Unsigned Editorial, “Mother Teresa’s Struggle With Faith and Doubt,” *The New York Times* (August 31, 2007): A:20; “Mother Teresa, Like All Believers, Chose Harder Path,” *The Washington Post* (September 8, 2007): B:9.
5. NY: Hachette Book Group, 2007.
6. Christopher Hitchens, “*The Dogmatic Doubter; The nun’s leading critic argues that the psychic pain revealed in a new book was a byproduct of her faith*,” *Newsweek* (September 10, 2007): 41.
7. John Thavis, “Vatican officials say new book illustrates Mother Teresa’s strength,” *Catholic News Service* (August 27, 2007).
8. See B-V. Aufavure, “Depression and Spiritual Desolation,” *The Way* 42:3 (July 2003): 47–56.
9. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Crack-Up*, Ed. Edmund Wilson, (NY: New Dimensions Paper-book, 1936), 75.
10. Constance FitzGerald’s classic text is now joined by her 2009 Plenary Address to the Catholic Theological Society of America, “From Impasse to Prophetic Hope: Crisis

- of Memory,” *CTSA Proceedings* 64 (2009): 21–42. See also Constance FitzGerald, “Impasse and Dark Night,” in *Living With Apocalypse*, ed. Tilden H. Edwards (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 93–116, also in *Women’s Spirituality: Resources for Christian Development*, ed. Joann Wolski Conn (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1986), 287–311.
11. See Kevin Culligan, “The Dark Night and Depression” in *Carmelite Prayer: A Tradition for the 21st Century* (NY & Mahwah: Paulist Press), 119–138.
  12. John of the Cross, “The Ascent of Mount Carmel” in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, rev. ed. trans. by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991), 115.
  13. “The Dark Night” in Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, *Collected Works*, 402, fn. 2.
  14. See also *Ascent II*: 10, 2: “It produces blackness and darkness and brings to the fore the soul’s ugliness. . . .”
  15. “The Ascent of Mount Carmel” in Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, *Collected Works*, 116.
  16. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta*, Ed. Brian Kolodiejchuk, M.C., (NY: Doubleday, 2007), 193.
  17. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR)* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000), 356.
  18. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 187.
  19. Kenneth Pargament, *Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy: Understanding and Addressing the Sacred* (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), 111.
  20. Pargament, *Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy*, 111.
  21. Pargament, *Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy*, 111.
  22. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 2 and 198.
  23. David Porter, *Mother Teresa: The Early Years* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 7.
  24. Porter, *Mother Teresa*, 8.
  25. Gezim Alphon, *Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity?* (NY: Routledge, 2006), 93. Alphon argues that young Agnes was unable to deal with her father’s death and retreated into a childish relationship with a God-father figure.
  26. Alphon, *Mother Teresa*, 151.
  27. Anne Sebba, *Mother Teresa: Beyond the Image* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 13.
  28. Sebba, *Mother Teresa*, 16.
  29. Porter, *Mother Teresa*, 20–22.
  30. W.W. Meissner, *Life and Faith: Psychological Perspectives on Religious Experiences* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1987). Combining his training in psychoanalysis and theology, Jesuit priest-psychoanalyst Meissner has for more than forty years, published works seeking a contemporary understanding of the relationship between grace and nature. In this book, Meissner presents three principles concerning this relationship: the principle of reciprocal influence (for grace to be operative the ego must be able to receive its energizing impact), the principle of epigenesis (spiritual strengths are shaped by psychological growth), and the principle of compensatory activation (how grace serves as a sanitizing influence enabling healing). These principles provide insight into how Agnes Bojaxhiu was formed and healed psychologically and spiritually.
  31. W.W. Meissner, *Ignatius of Loyola: The Psychology of a Saint* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 347.
  32. Sebba, *Mother Teresa*, 14.
  33. Sebba, *Mother Teresa*, 18–19.
  34. David Aberbach, *Surviving Trauma: Loss, Literature and Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 86.
  35. W.W. Meissner, *Ignatius of Loyola: The Psychology of a Saint* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Kevin Culligan, “Saint Therese of Lisieux: A Case Study in the Psy-



- chology of Religion,” *Spiritual Life* 19:3 (Fall, 1973): 163–171; Constance FitzGerald, “The Mission of Thérèse of Lisieux,” *The Way Supplement* 89 (Summer, 1997) 74–96; C. Kevin Gillespie “Narcissism and Spirituality: The Cases of Henri Nouwen and Thérèse of Lisieux.” *Spiritual Life*, 53:2 (Summer, 2007): 108–177; Marc Foley, *The Context of Holiness: Psychological and Spiritual Reflections on the Life of St. Thérèse of Lisieux* (Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2008).
36. Aberbach, *Surviving Trauma*, 86.
  37. Aberbach, *Surviving Trauma*, 89.
  38. Gerald Brenan, *St. John of the Cross: His Life and Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973). Cited in Aberbach, *Surviving Trauma*, 89.
  39. Aberbach, *Surviving Trauma*, 87.
  40. Sebba, *Mother Teresa*, 17.
  41. We should note that contemporary psychological theory, building upon the theories of John Bowlby, Mary Ainsworth and Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, supports a five stage theory of grief: disbelief, yearning, anger, depression, and acceptance. Paul K. Maciejewski, Baohui Zhang, Susan Block & Holly Prigerson, “An Empirical Examination, of the Stage Theory of Grief,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 297 (2007): 716–723. The young Agnes may have experienced these five stages and arrived at “acceptance” of her father’s death by means of her relationship with God.
  42. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR)*, (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association: 2000), 356.
  43. Harry T. Hunt “‘Dark Nights of the Soul’: Phenomenology and Neurocognition of Spiritual Suffering in Mysticism and Psychosis,” *Review of General Psychology* 11:3 (2007): 209–234, at 213. Hunt examines the similarities between mystic experience and chronic psychosis.
  44. R. Sevensky, “Religion, psychology and mental health” *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 38:1 (January 1984): 73–86. The classic contemporary study remains Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (NY: Meridian, 1955).
  45. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 95–96. Compare St. Ignatius’: “What if I should do what St. Francis did, what St. Dominic did?” *The Autobiography of St. Ignatius of Loyola* tr. Joseph F. O’Callaghan, ed. John C. Olin (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974, 1972), 23.
  46. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 87–88.
  47. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 92.
  48. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 93.
  49. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 105.
  50. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 126.
  51. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 133–4.
  52. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 149. Archbishop Périer replied, in part, “Feelings are not required and often may be misleading.” 150.
  53. Lawrence Trevor Picachy, SJ (1916–1992) was appointed bishop of Jamshedpur, India in 1962 and later served as archbishop of Calcutta from 1969 to 1986. He was born in Leborg, West Bengal, India and well understood the class divisions and poverty of the country.
  54. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 193.
  55. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 193.
  56. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 167.
  57. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 172.
  58. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 185.
  59. Neuner (b. 1908) is emeritus professor of Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Institute of Philosophy and Religion in Pune.
  60. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 210.

61. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 158.
62. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*: 232.
63. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 232.
64. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 208.
65. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 212.
66. As explicated by John in the second book of *The Dark Night*, and in the second and third books of the *Ascent*).
67. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 227.
68. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 236.
69. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, 275.
70. Malcolm Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 15.
71. Michael Ireland, "New Book of letters by Mother Teresa shows determination to live her faith despite struggles and doubts" *Good News Daily* (August 27, 2007) at <http://www.goodnewsdaily.net/modules/news/article.php?storyid=5799> (accessed July 29, 2009), citing Josef Neuner, "What Mother Teresa's letters tell us," as told to Michael Gonsalves, October 18, 2003. See also Josef Neuner, "Mother Teresa's Charism," *Theology Digest* 49:2 (Summer 2002) 109–119 (translation of "Mutter Teresa's Charisma," *Geist und Leben* 74 (2001) 336–348.
72. The sense of hopeful abandonment may be seen as resembling Constance FitzGerald's recent construct of "prayer-of-no-experience," in "From Impasse to Prophetic Hope: Crisis of Memory," 22.