



The Dark Night of the Soul

San Juan de la Cruz

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"Dark Night of the Soul" (Spanish: La noche oscura del alma) is the title of a poem written by 16th-century Spanish poet and Roman Catholic mystic Saint John of the Cross, and of a treatise he wrote later, commenting on the poem.

Saint John of the Cross' poem narrates the journey of the soul from its bodily home to its union with God. The journey is called "The Dark Night", because darkness represents the hardships and difficulties the soul meets in detachment from the world and reaching the light of the union with the Creator. There are several steps in this night, which are related in successive stanzas. The main idea of the poem can be seen as the painful experience that people endure as they seek to grow in spiritual maturity and union with God. The poem is divided into two books that reflect the two phases of the dark night. The first is a purification of the senses. The second and more intense of the two stages is that of the purification of the spirit, which is the less common of the two. Dark Night of the Soul further describes the ten steps on the ladder of mystical love, previously described by Saint Thomas Aquinas and in part by Aristotle. The text was written while John of the Cross was imprisoned by his Carmelite brothers, who opposed his reformations to the Order.

The treatise, written later, is a theological commentary on the poem, explaining its meaning by stanza.

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