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Mystic Cognition in Zen Buddhism and in Christianity: a study of D. T. Suzuki and St. John of the Cross,

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse and to compare mystic or higher cognition in two figures who can be seen as representative of their traditions. In doing so the study hopes to attain an insight into the relationship between the lived experience of Zen Buddhism and Christianity.

Apart from the Introduction and the General Conclusion, the body of the study falls into three parts. The first (Chapters I-III) deals with how higher cognition is attained, revealing that despite significant divergences the accounts of both authors move, as it were, in a parallel direction. The second part (Chapters IV-V) considers the mode by which higher knowledge is appropriated. Here, while emphasizing the differences between the two accounts, it is seen that this appropriation is based on the same fundamental elements for each. Finally, in the last part (Chapters VI-VII), the study looks at what is known by higher cognition. This is seen to contain an area where there is profound overlap, though one which also emphasizes the distinctness of each system.

Throughout the discussion it becomes apparent that each account contains the building blocks out of which the other could be constructed. The way in which this is so, however, is not the same for both. Suzuki's Zen Buddhism, thus, could be said to indicate John's Christian position, but finally to deny it, while John's view of higher cognition points to a form of higher knowing that includes Suzuki's but which concentrates upon aspects of knowing denied by Suzuki. These contrasting attitudes can be described as 'exclusive' (for Suzuki) and 'inclusive' (for John) and are seen, ultimately, to be the outcome of contrasting views upon the relation between the knowing subject and the object known.

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