

THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS ON ABANDONMENT

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 5, SECTION 6.

FIRST PAIN: DARKNESS OF SELF REVEALED IN THE LIGHT OF GOD.

IN THE first place, because the light and wisdom of contemplation is most pure and bright, and because the soul, on which it beats, is in darkness and impure, that soul which is the recipient must greatly suffer. As eyes weakened and clouded by humours suffer pain when the clear light beats upon them, so the soul, by reason of its impurity, suffers exceedingly when the divine light really shines upon it. And when the rays of this pure light strike upon the soul, in order to expel its impurities, the soul perceives itself to be so unclean and miserable that it seems as if God had set Himself against it, and itself were set against God. So grievous and painful is this feeling—for it thinks now that God has abandoned it—that it was one of the heaviest afflictions of Job during his trial. ‘Why hast Thou set me contrary to Thee, and I become burdensome to myself?’¹ The soul seeing distinctly in this bright and pure light, though dimly, its own impurity, acknowledges its own unworthiness before God and all creatures.

¹ Job 7:20.

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 6, SECTION 2.

THE SOUL FEELS ABANDONED BY GOD AND MAN.

BUT THE greatest affliction of the sorrowful soul in this state is the thought that God has abandoned it, of which it has no doubt; that He has cast it away into darkness as an abominable thing. The

thought that He has abandoned it is a grievous and pitiable affliction. David experienced the same trials when he said, 'As the wounded sleeping in the sepulchres, of whom Thou art mindful no more; and they are cast off from Thy hand. They have put me in the lower lake, in the dark places, and in the shadow of death. Thy fury is confirmed upon me; and all Thy waves Thou hast brought in upon me.'²

² Psalm 88[87]:5–7[6–8].

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CONTINUATION.

FOR, IN truth, when the soul is in the pangs of the purgative contemplation, the shadow of death and the pains and torments of hell are most acutely felt, that is, the sense of being without God, being chastised and abandoned in His wrath and heavy displeasure. All this and even more the soul feels now, for a fearful apprehension has come upon it that thus it will be with it for ever. It has also the same sense of abandonment with respect to all creatures, and that it is an object of contempt to all, especially to its friends; and so the Psalmist continues, saying, 'Thou hast put away my acquaintance far from me; they have set me an abomination to themselves.'¹

¹ Psalm 88[87]:8[9].



—Saint John of the Cross, OCD (1542–91), Doctor of the Church, extracts from Book 2, Chapters 5 and 6 in his *The Dark Night of the Soul*, trans. Benedict Zimmerman, OCD (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1924), 86, 89–90.

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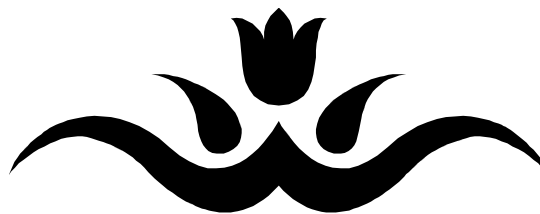
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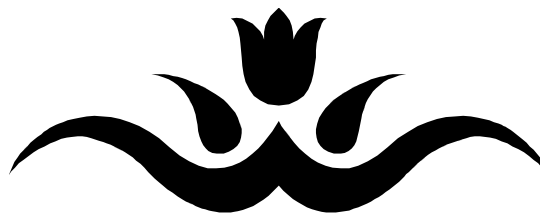
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