

THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS ON A TEMPORAL PURGATORY

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 12.

SHOWS HOW THIS AWFUL NIGHT IS A PURGATORY, AND HOW IN IT THE DIVINE WISDOM ILLUMINATES MEN ON EARTH WITH THAT LIGHT IN WHICH THE ANGELS ARE PURIFIED AND ENLIGHTENED IN HEAVEN.

SECTIONS 1. Two purgatories. **2.** The infused wisdom of love. **3.** Infused love and knowledge of the angels. **4.** Of men. **5.** Increasing in holiness is advancing in knowledge. **6.** Joy of the union of intellect and will in God.

1. WHAT I have said will enable us to see how the dark night of loving fire purifies in the darkness, and how the soul in the darkness is set on fire. We shall also see that, as the dark and material fires in the next life purify the spirit,¹ so the loving, dark, and spiritual fires here, purify and cleanse the soul.² The difference is that in the next world they are purified by fire, and here, purified and enlightened by love. David prayed for this love when he said, 'Create a clean heart in me, O God!'³ for cleanness of heart is nothing else but the love and grace of God. 'The clean of heart' are called blessed by our Saviour, and it is as if He had said, blessed are those who love, for blessedness can come of nothing less than love.

2. The following words of Jeremias, 'From on high He hath cast a fire in my bones, and hath taught me,'⁴ show plainly that the soul is purified when it is enlightened in the fire of loving wisdom, for God never grants the mystical wisdom without love; it being love itself that infuses it into the soul. David also saith that the wisdom of God is silver tried in the purifying fire of love; 'words of our Lord are chaste words, silver examined by fire,'⁵ for the dim contemplation infuses into the soul love and wisdom, in every one according to its necessity and capacity, enlightening the soul, and cleansing it of all its ignorances [*sic*],

according to the words of the Wise Man, 'He hath enlightened my ignorances.'⁶

3. Here, also, we learn that the wisdom which purifies the ignorances of the angels (giving them knowledge, enlightening them on what they are ignorant of),⁷ flowing from God through the highest, down to the lowest, in the order of the heavenly hierarchy, and thence to men, is that very wisdom which purifies these souls and enlightens them. All the works of the angels, and all the inspirations they suggest, are, therefore, in Holy Scripture, truly and properly said to be their work and God's work: for, ordinarily, His inspirations come through the angels; they receiving them one from another instantaneously,⁸ as the light of the sun penetrates many windows at once, arranged one behind the other. For though it is true that the light of the sun pierces all, yet each window conveys and pours that light into the next, somewhat modified, according to the nature of the glass; somewhat weaker and fainter, according to the distance from the sun.

4. Hence it follows, with respect to the higher and lower angels, the nearer they are to God the more they are purified and enlightened in the general purgation; the lowest in rank receiving their illumination in a less perfect degree. But man, being the last in order to whom this loving contemplation is to be granted,⁹ must receive that enlightenment according to his capacity in a limited degree, and with suffering. For the light of God which illumines an angel enlightens him, and sets him on fire with love, for he is a spirit already prepared for the infusion of that light; but man, being impure and weak, is ordinarily enlightened, as I said before,¹⁰ in darkness, in distress and pain—the sun's rays are painful in their light to weak eyes—till the fire of love, purifying him, shall have spiritualised and refined him, so that being made pure he may be able to receive with sweetness, like the angels, the union of this inflowing love, as we shall explain, with the help of our Lord; but, in the meantime, this contemplation and loving knowledge come upon the soul through trials and loving anxiety, of which I am now speaking.

5. The soul is not always conscious of this burning and anxious love; for in the beginning of the spiritual purgation all the divine fire is employed in drying up and preparing the soul, rather than in setting it on fire. But when, in course of time,¹¹ the soul has become heated in the fire, it then feels most commonly this burning and warmth of love. And

now, as the understanding is being purified more and more in this darkness, it happens occasionally that this mystical and affective theology, while inflaming the will, wounds also by enlightening the other faculty of the understanding with a certain divine light and knowledge, so sweetly and so divinely, that the will, aided by it though inactive,¹² glows in a marvellous manner, the divine fire of love burning within it with living flames, so that the soul appears to have received a living fire with a living understanding. This is what David referred to when he said, 'My heart waxed hot within me, and in my meditation a fire shall burn,¹³ so vehemently that I thought it to be already on fire.'

6. This kindling of love, in the union of these two powers, the understanding and the will, is to the soul a great treasure and delight, because it is a certain touch of the Godhead¹⁴ and the foundation of the perfection of the union of love, for which the soul hopes. Thus the soul does not reach this sublime sense and love of God without passing through many tribulations, and accomplishing a great part of its purgation. But for other degrees of this union, lower than this, which are of ordinary occurrence, so intense a purgation is not required. From what we have said here it follows that these spiritual treasures, being passively infused into the soul by God, the will indeed may love and yet the understanding not understand, and likewise the understanding may be active while the will remains without love; for as the dark night of contemplation comprises both divine light and love, just as fire which has light and heat, it is not surprising that this loving light sometimes striking the will enkindles in it love, the understanding meanwhile remaining in darkness because the light has not fallen on it; at other times the light striking the understanding enlightens it and bestows knowledge on it while leaving the will dry, just as one might perceive the heat of fire without seeing its light, or the light without feeling any warmth, for it is the Lord who acts thus, infusing His gifts as He likes.¹⁵

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Saint John of the Cross, OCD (1542–91), Doctor of the Church, Book 2, Chapter 12 in his *The Dark Night of the Soul*, trans. Benedict Zimmerman, OCD (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1924), 127–132.

END-OF-CHAPTER NOTES (ADAPTED FROM FOOTNOTES)

¹ Así como se purgan los espíritus en la otra vida ... en esta vida se purgan y limpian, etc.

² Saint Teresa of Ávila, *The Interior Castle, The Sixth Mansions* [sic], 11.6.

³ Psalm 51[50]:10[12].

⁴ Lamentations 1:13.

⁵ Psalm 12[11]:6[7].

⁶ 'Ignorantias meas illuminavit.' These words have been expunged from Ecclesiasticus 51:26 by the Roman censure, and are no longer in the Vulgate. See *The Living Flame of Love*, 3.80.

⁷ Haciéndolos saber, alumbrándolos en lo que no sabían.

⁸ Blessed John Duns Scotus, OFM (1265 or 66–1308), Book 2; Sentences, distinction 10, single question. Secundum communem processum et ordinem revelantur majora Dei mysteria superioribus priusquam inferioribus, et ita superiores mittuntur ad inferiores, loquendo et illuminando eos interius, et alii inferiores mittuntur exterius ad illa revelata nuncianda hominibus vel explenda.

⁹ El hombre que está el postrero, hasta el cual se viene derivando esta contemplación amorosa.

¹⁰ *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Book 2, Chapter 10, Section 1.

¹¹ Andando el tiempo.

¹² Y sin ella hacer nada.

¹³ Psalm 39[38]:3[4].

¹⁴ Porque es cierto toque en la divinidad y ya principios de la perfección, etc.

¹⁵ See *A Spiritual Canticle of the Soul and the Bridegroom Christ*, 26.2 and a passage of *The Living Flame of Love*, 3.51, omitted in the former editions. See also Saint Teresa of Ávila, *Conceptions of the Love of God*, 6.11.

De lo que aquí hemos dicho se colige, como en estos bienes espirituales, que pasivamente se infunden por Dios en el alma, puede muy bien amar la voluntad sin entender el entendimiento; así como el entendimiento puede entender sin que ame la voluntad; porque pues esta noche oscura de contemplación consta de luz divina y amor, así como el fuego tiene luz y calor, no es inconveniente, que cuando se comunica esta luz amorosa, algunas veces hiera más en la voluntad inflamándola con el amor, dejando á [sic] oscuras el entendimiento sin herir en él con la luz; y otras, alumbrándole con la luz, dando inteligencia, dejando seca la voluntad (como también acaece poder recibir el calor del fuego sin ver la luz, y también ver la luz sin recibir el calor), y esto obrándolo el Señor, que infunde como quiere.

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