

Susan Muto PhD

Wholly in Love: St. John of the Cross on Every Disciple's Desire for Union with the Beloved

Dr Muto, a prolific author, delivered a fascinating presentation which focussed on chapters 2 – 7 of the First Book of the Dark Night of John of the Cross. Within John's overall schema, this section of his corpus of works corresponds to what may be depicted as the 'Passive Night of Sense', the origin of which is the divine action in the soul. Indeed, his assigned title reads 'A treatise on the night of the senses' and prior to John's detailed exposition of the nature of this night in chapter 8, he describes the tendency toward the capital sins in the spiritual order of which one may be unaware on account of the subtlety of these temptations (I Night 1-7), such subtleties being deftly treated in this presentation. The purgation of such unresolved conflicts is an existential process.

John's parenthetical treatment of this subject is a preamble to the exegesis of this night, wherein an opening up in prayer allows an expansion of the heart and makes space for the inflowing of divine love: *This dark night is an inflow of God into the soul, ... in which God teaches the soul secretly and instructs it in the perfection of love without its doing anything or understanding how this happens* (II Night 5:1).

For example, Dr Muto alluded to 'spiritual sloth and avarice'. In respect of the latter, John counsels against the desire for 'consolations' (I Night 3.1). The multiplicity of the senses engaging in (admittedly) 'spiritual' matters may distract from the requisite mortification and interior poverty to which one is called. One may be attracted more to the 'representation' of spirituality rather than to the essence itself. Somewhat allied to this is the matter of 'spiritual gluttony' (I Night 6), whereby the indiscretion of extreme ascetical practices may be involved: *they spend all their time trying to get some feeling and satisfaction rather than humbly praising and reverencing God dwelling within them* (I Night 6.5).

In relation to 'spiritual sloth', John concludes that this is evident when the soul becomes sad if it has *to desire God's will* (I Night 7.3). In a subtle manner they *measure God by themselves* (*ibid.*) and become bored when *told to do something unpleasant* (I Night 7.4).

John Quigley July 2021