

DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL

BOOK ONE THE DARK NIGHT OF SENSE

Chapter	Title	Page
1.1	The Imperfections of Beginners	
1.2	The Imperfections of Pride	
1.3	The Imperfections of Spiritual Avarice	
1.4	Imperfections of Spiritual Lust	
1.5	Imperfections of Wrath	
1.6	Imperfections of Spiritual Gluttony	
1.7	Imperfections of Envy and Sloth	
1.8	A Beginning Explanation of the Dark Night	
1.9	The Signs of This Night	
1.10	How Souls Must Act on the Dark Night	
1.11	The Enkindling	
1.12	Benefits From the Night of Sense	
1.13	More Benefits	
1.14	The Many Trials	

BOOK TWO THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SPIRIT

Chapter	Title	Page
2.1	When the Night Begins	
2.2	Imperfections of Proficient Souls	
2.3	Explaining the Two Nights	
2.4	Explanation of First Stanza	
2.5	The Grief and Torment of Contemplation	
2.6	Other Kinds of Pain	
2.7	Afflictions of the Will	
2.8	Other Afflictions	
2.9	The Purposes of Purgation	
2.10	Fire Enkindling Wood	
2.11	The Vehement Passion of Divine Love	
2.12	Resemblance to Purgatory	
2.13	Other Delectable Effects	
2.14	The House at Rest	
2.15	Blessings From the Darkness	
2.16	Walking Securely in Darkness	
2.17	Why Contemplation is Secret	
2.18	Why Contemplation is a Ladder	
2.19	The First Five Steps of the Ladder	
2.20	The Second Five Steps of the Ladder	
2.21	The Three Colors	
2.22	A Happy Chance	
2.23	In Darkness and In Concealment	
2.24	Both Houses Purged	
2.25	Three Qualities of the Night	

PROLOGUE

I will teach on the eight stanzas, first in a general way and then line by line. The first two stanzas teach about the two spiritual purgations (of sense and of spirit). The other stanzas teach about the wonderful effects of spiritual illumination and divine union. (Note: This book ends suddenly after the author taught only on the first three stanzas.)

STANZAS OF THE SOUL

1. *On a dark night, Kindled in love with yearnings – oh, happy chance! –
I went forth without being observed. My house being now at rest.*
2. *In darkness and secure, By the secret
ladder, disguised – oh, happy chance!
In darkness and in concealment, My house being now at rest.*
3. *In the happy night, In secret, when none saw me,
Nor I beheld aught, Without light or guide, save that which burned in my heart.*
4. *This light guided me More surely than the light of noontday
To the place where he (well I knew who!) was awaiting me –
A place where none appeared.*
5. *Oh, night that guided me, Oh, night more
lovely than the dawn,
Oh, night that joined Beloved with lover, Lover transformed in the Beloved!*
6. *Upon my flowery breast, Kept wholly for himself alone,
There he stayed sleeping, and I caressed him, And the fanning of the cedars made a breeze.*
7. *The breeze blew from the turret As I parted his locks;
With his gentle hand he wounded my neck And caused all my senses to be suspended.*
8. *I remained, lost in oblivion; My face I
reclined on the Beloved.
All ceased and I abandoned myself. Leaving my cares forgotten among the lilies.*

The reader should know that the soul recites these stanzas only after she has already reached union with God through love. She has gone through severe trials which mark the narrow way of eternal life. The soul realizes that this road is narrow and that few enter it (Mt.7:14), so she sees herself as fortunate. The soul rejoices and says:

Dear Reader: This Simplified Version contains the same chapter numbers and paragraph numbers so you can easily consult the original text.

Book 1 –The Night of the Senses

*On a dark night, Kindled in love with yearnings –oh, happy chance! -
I went forth without being observed, My house now being at rest.*

Exposition

1. The soul explains how it went forth from itself and from all things. Because she has died to herself, she can live a delectable life with God. This going forth was a “dark night” (purgative contemplation) which passively caused in the soul a negation of self and of all other things.
2. The soul accomplished this because of her love for the Spouse. Here, she extols her great happiness in journeying to God. In this night were her three enemies (the world, the flesh and the devil) which could not impede her, because, by purgative contemplation, all her evil desires of sensuality and all her passions were destroyed.

1- The Imperfections of Beginners

“One Dark Night”

Three States

1. Souls enter this night when God draws them from the state of beginners (those who meditate) and sets them in the state of progressives (those already in contemplation). The goal is to arrive at the state of the perfect (which is divine union). To best explain this night and why God places the soul there, I must explain the characteristics of beginners, so they realize the weakness of their state. Hopefully, they take courage that God will bring them into this night, which strengthens the soul and makes it ready for God’s delights. I will only speak briefly and then go on to explain the dark night itself.

God’s Tender Love

2. The soul, after its conversion to God’s service, is spiritually nurtured and caressed by God as a tender mother nurses her child with milk and pleasant food. As the child grows, the mother hides this tender love, places bitter aloes on her breasts and makes the child walk. In this way, the child assumes greater obligations. The mother is like a symbol of God’s grace. As soon as the soul is regenerated by fervor, God provides milk and pleasure in spiritual exercises (without any labor of the soul). God provides the breast of His tender love.

Need to Acquire Virtues

3. The soul delights in long prayers and even in fasts. She is consoled by the sacraments and divine things. Beginners are moved to these spiritual practices by consolations. However, beginners have many faults in their spiritual actions. Not having habits of strength, they work like feeble children. To show how beginners lack virtue, I will use the seven capital sins. The dark night cleanses these capital sins and releases many blessings.

1.2 – The Imperfections of Pride

1. Beginners feel fervent and diligent in spiritual things. This inner satisfaction with themselves causes a secret pride. They even desire, in a vain way, to speak and teach others about spiritual things. They condemn others who do not have the same devotion and even boast like the Pharisee, who praised his own works and despised the publican. (Lk.18:11-12)

The Devil's Actions

2. The devil increases their fervor and their desire to do more. Their presumption increases. He knows that these extra works are valueless and are actually vices. Beginners reach a point where no one else appears good. They slander others. They see the mote in their eye and miss the beam in their own eye. (Mt.7:3) They swallow the camel, while straining out the gnat. (Mt.23:24)

The Confessor

3. When their spiritual director speaks of this behavior, they think he does not understand or is just not spiritual. They seek a different confessor who fits their taste, because they want people to esteem and praise them. They flee those who would set them straight and put them on a safe road. They even harbor ill will against them. They resolve much, but accomplish little. They give so much outward evidence that others esteem their spirituality. The devil leads them into public displays of holiness. They are pleased with themselves and eager to be noticed.

4. They want to be their confessor's favorite penitent and are always filled with envy. They don't confess their sins clearly and make them appear less evil. At times, they tell their sins to another confessor so their own is not aware. They tell their confessor only their good points so they appear greater, whereas, they should be humble and desire to be accounted as nothing.

Sadness With Faults

5. Some beginners make little of their faults and then grow sad to see themselves fall into sin (when they thought they were already saints). They become angry with themselves. They ask God to remove their faults, but only for their own peace and not for God's honor. They do not realize that if God took away their faults, they would be more presumptuous. They seek praise (like the foolish virgins asking others for oil) and do not like to praise others.

6. From these imperfections, some souls develop greater and more harmful ones. Other souls only experience the early stages of these vices. Although souls vary much, few beginners avoid these errors entirely in their time of fervor.

A Different Approach

Those who go on to perfection proceed quite differently. They make progress by humility, thinking nothing of themselves. They consider others as better and have a holy envy of them. The greater their fervor and the more numerous their works, the greater is their humility. They realize how much God deserves to be served and how little they do. The more they do, the less they are satisfied. They love God so much that they seem to do nothing. This loving anxiety absorbs them and they never notice what others do. They always see others as better than themselves.

Knowing they are of little worth, they want others to think the same. When others praise them, they do not believe it. It is strange that people should say good things about them.

Different Qualities

7. With great peace, they want others to teach them (the complete opposite from those who would teach others). These humble souls desire to be no one's master. If commanded, they would gladly set aside their own road for another, because they never think they are right in anything. They rejoice when others are praised. They have no desire to speak of their own works (even to their spiritual directors) because they see them as so little. They want to speak of their faults and sins not of their virtues. They speak to those who account them of little worth.

These qualities are simple, genuine and pleasing to God. The Spirit leads these souls to keep their treasures hidden and to cast out all evil. God gives this grace to the humble and denies it to the proud.

8. They will give their heart's blood to whoever will serve God. They bear their imperfections with humility, fearing God and hoping in Him. These kind of beginners are in the minority. Therefore, God leads into the dark night all whom he wishes to purify, so He can lead them on.

1.3 The Imperfections of Spiritual Avarice

1. Many beginners have spiritual avarice. They are not satisfied with the spirituality God gives them because they do not find the consolation they want. They waste their time in listening to spiritual counsels and in reading many books, rather than working on being detached and perfecting a poverty of spirit.

They burden themselves with images and special rosaries, always changing back and forth. Some adorn themselves with wax medals (very popular in that day) or relics. They are like children with trinkets.

True Devotion

True poverty of spirit seeks only devotion and grows weary with multiplicity. True devotion comes from the heart and seeks the substance represented by these spiritual things. To reach perfection, these attachments must be killed

2. For ten years, one person (who had much understanding) always carried a cross formed by palm held by a pin. Another used a rosary made from fish bones. Clearly, this devotion was no less precious because their rosaries had no value.

Make Progress

These souls make good progress because they have no attachment to visible instruments. They give away all they have and delight in having nothing (spiritual or temporal). They set their eyes on interior perfection, giving pleasure to God and not themselves.

The Dark Night

3. Until God brings about the passive purgations of the dark night, the soul cannot be purged from these imperfections. However, the soul should do all it can to purge itself and be taken into that Divine care, where it will be totally healed. No matter how much the soul labors, it cannot purify itself for Divine union. God must take it and purge it by dark fire, in the way I will describe.

1.4 - Imperfections Concerning Spiritual Lust

Imperfections

1. To avoid wordiness, I will set aside many other imperfections of beginners. I will only describe a few important ones which cause the rest. One I will call "spiritual lust" which has many imperfections. This is not the sin of lust but merely the imperfections which must be purged.

Often, in spiritual exercises (when the soul is powerless to prevent this), impure acts and movements assert themselves in the soul's sensual parts. This happens even in deep prayer or during Communion or Confession. These are not in the soul's power and have three sources.

Human Nature

2. The first cause is the pleasure that human nature takes in spiritual things. When both spirit and sense are pleased, then every part of man is moved to delight. The higher part (the spirit) delights in God. The sensual part is unable to enjoy anything else, so it enjoys what is impure and sensual. While deep in prayer with God, the soul is conscious (with great displeasure) of the rebellion of the senses. This often happens in Holy Communion when the Lord bestows His love. The sensual nature receives that love according to its manner.

Each person is composed of body and spirit. When one part receives, both participate. Even when the soul has made some progress, the sensual part still receives God's Spirit with its imperfection. When the sensual part is purged in the dark night, it no longer has these weaknesses. Then it will share in the Spirit according to the Spirit's manner.

The Devil

3. The second cause of these rebellions is the devil. To disturb the soul at prayer, he stirs up these motions of impurity. If the soul pays attention it will cause great harm.

The devil uses fear to get the person to stop praying. Some souls abandon prayer altogether, because they are attacked more during prayer time than any other. This is true. The devil attacks the soul during prayer to make them give it up. Besides that, he very vividly portrays impure things which are closely related to spiritual things which benefit the soul. He does this to frighten the person whenever he gazes upon an image or meditates.

If someone tends to melancholy, they will suffer greatly. This trial reaches a point that they believe the devil is always present. They have no power to prevent this except with great effort. When these impurities attack through melancholy, the person is not usually free until healed of that problem (unless the dark night has removed all the impurities).

Fears

4. The third source of this war upon the soul is the person's own fears concerning impure imaginations and motions. Some experiences recall these images and cause these souls to fear, through no fault of their own.

Tender Nature

5. Some souls are so tender that, as soon as they receive consolation in prayer, the spirit of lust inebriates them, delights their sensual nature, and plunges them into this enjoyment. The enjoyment and the consolation remain without the soul's consent. Their natures are tender and their blood is easily excited. The same thing can happen to souls stirred by anger or grief.

Complacency

6. Another problem is that a certain bravado arises when the soul performs spiritual actions. This takes place in the presence of certain persons before whom they display vain gratification. This is also a lust in the complacency of the will.

Spiritual Friendships

7. Some make spiritual friendships with others which come from lust and not spirituality. These friendships do not cause love for God, but bring remorse of conscience. When the friendship is spiritual, the love of God grows with it. When the soul remembers the friendship, it remembers God and has greater desire for God. God's Spirit increases good by adding more good.

Effects of Sensual Spiritual Love

A spiritual love coming from sensuality produces contrary effects. When the friendship grows, love for God decreases. As sensual love grows, love for God grows colder. The soul also experiences a remorse of conscience. If the love of God truly grows in the soul, the sensual aspects of the friendship will grow less.

Two distinct loves do not help one another. One predominates and quenches the other. Jesus said, "What is born of the flesh is flesh. What is born of the Spirit is spirit." (Jn.3:6) A friendship born of sensuality ends in sensuality. What is of the spirit grows in the Spirit. This is the difference between the two.

8. The dark night purifies spiritual love and removes sensual love. The beginning of the night causes both to be lost.

1.5 - Imperfections of Wrath

Not Having Consolation

1. Because beginners seek spiritual consolations, they have imperfections coming from wrath. They are embittered when these consolations cease and they accept this very poorly. They easily irritate themselves and other people (who cannot tolerate them).

When they lose their delight in prayer, they are disappointed, as a child removed from the sweetness of the breast. The soul commits no sin by this vexation (when not indulged) but the imperfection must be purged

Spiritual Anger

2. Others experience a different spiritual wrath. They are irritated by the sins of others and keep watch on them with an unholy zeal. Sometimes they even reprove others in anger. They set themselves up as the master of virtues. All of this violates spiritual meekness.

3. Others are vexed at themselves when they see their own imperfections. Their impatience is not humble. They want to be saints in one day. They propose to accomplish a great deal, but when they make resolutions, they do not keep them. Then, their annoyance increases. They will not wait for what God intends for them. This imperfection against spiritual meekness can only be remedied by the purgation of the dark night. On the other hand, some souls are so patient concerning their spiritual progress that God would like to see them more upset.

1.6 - Imperfections of Spiritual Gluttony

1. Almost all beginners (no matter what their progress) fall into the imperfections of spiritual gluttony. They are lured by the sweetness of spiritual exercises, and seek this spiritual sweetness. They should seek spiritual discretion which God values much during their journey.

Spiritual gluttony continually leads them to the extremes. They go far beyond moderation (where true virtues lie).. Some people kill themselves with penances. Others weaken themselves with their fasts (undertaken without any advice). These souls avoid their directors and even go against what has been commanded.

2. They are unreasonable. They set bodily penance above obedience (which is more acceptable to God than any other). Their one-sided penance is the penance of beasts who are driven by pleasure.

No Obedience to Director

All extremes are vicious and in doing their own will, the person grows in vice not in virtue. By disobedience, they acquire spiritual gluttony and pride. The devil stirs up this gluttony, by increasing their desires. Because obedience is bitter to them, they often change what is commanded. They come to such evil that they lose any desire to perform spiritual acts that obedience commands. They do only what they want. Really, it is better for them not to do any exercises.

These souls will insist that their spiritual director grant their requests, almost forcing them to do so. If this is refused, they become peevish (as little children) thinking they are not serving God. They cling to their own will. When their directors try to place them in God's will, they fall away, thinking that what pleases them must please God.

Other Problems

4. Others, because of this gluttony, do not know their own sinfulness. Having little fear of God's greatness, they demand permission from their director to receive Communion often (John wrote centuries before the Church allowed daily Communion.). They frequently communicate without their director's consent and conceal the truth from him.

Desiring to communicate continuously, they make careless confessions, more eager to receive Communion than to receive it perfectly. They would be holier if they had the opposite inclination and asked their directors for less Communion. The best road is that of humble resignation, because their boldness does them great harm.

Sensual Experiences

5. Instead of praising God in Holy Communion, they seek sensible sweetness. They are intent on this pleasure. When they do not experience this, they think they have accomplished nothing.

In this, they judge God incorrectly. God's graces in Communion are the most important and the sensual experiences are the least important. Often, God withholds sensible sweetness so the person approaches Communion in faith. However, these souls want to taste God as if He were comprehensible. This is impure faith and opposed to God's nature.

Inconstant Like Children

6. They make the same mistake in prayer. They believe that its purpose is to experience devotion. Striving for this sweetness wears their faculties and their heads. They become discouraged and feel that they failed. They lose the true devotion of perseverance, humility, mistrust of self and a desire to please God alone.

Not experiencing pleasure in prayer, they are no longer inclined to pray and frequently abandon it. They are children who act from inclinations and not from reason. They read many books and meditate hoping to receive consolations. Very justly and wisely, God denies this favor. Otherwise, their spiritual gluttony would breed many evils. Instead, they must enter the dark night and be purged of their childishness.

Need For Trials

7. These souls have another great imperfection. They are weak and do not journey the hard road of the cross. Someone attached to sweetness is naturally opposed to self-denial.

8. They have many other imperfections which the Lord can heal by the temptations, aridities and trials of the dark night. They need spiritual temperance and sobriety which lead to mortification and submission in all things. Perfection does not consist in the pleasantness of our prayers but in the ability to deny ourselves. These persons must practice self-denial until God purifies them in this dark night.

1.7 - The Imperfections of Spiritual Envy and Sloth

Envy

1. These beginners also have imperfections coming from envy. They are displeased in seeing the spiritual good of others, who outstrip them on this road of perfection. They do not want to hear others being praised. They contradict this praise and are upset when they are not praised. This violates charity, by which we should rejoice in goodness.

Charity has only a holy envy. Although sorrowful at not having virtues, the person would rejoice by charity that others do have them. The holy soul rejoices when others outstrip them in God's service.

Sloth

2. By spiritual sloth, beginners are upset by not receiving spiritual sweetness, and so they grow weary in spiritual exercises. Once deprived of sweetness, they either do not return to prayer or they pray unwillingly. Due to sloth, they abandon the way of perfection (because it is the way of negation). They take the road of pleasure and abandon God's will.

Measuring God By Self

3. Beginners want God to will what they will. So, they find it difficult to accommodate their will to God's will. They think that whatever does not give them pleasure is not God's will (as if God is satisfied when they are satisfied). They measure God by themselves and not themselves by God. Jesus said, "Whoever wishes to lose his life will gain it and whoever gains his life will lose it." (Mt.1;25)

4. Aiming at sweetness, they are upset when commanded to do something that gives no pleasure. They are too weak to accept the trials of perfection. They are soft and resist the cross (which holds true delights of the spirit). They want complete freedom in spiritual matters and resist the narrow way of the cross. (Mt.7:14)

5. These beginners' imperfections show how much they need God's help to become advanced souls. God does this by the Dark Night which weans them away from sweetness. He gives them aridities and inward darkness which cause them to gain true virtues.

No matter how much the beginner tries to purify himself, he cannot succeed until God does this. May God give me divine light to describe this night that is so dark and difficult.

1.8 - A Beginning Explanation of the Dark Night

“On A Dark Night”

Two Kinds

1. This night is contemplation and produces two kinds of purgation, sensual and spiritual (according to man’s two parts). In the first night, the senses are subdued by the spirit. In the second night the spirit is purged and made ready for union. The night of sense is common to many souls. These are the beginners. The night of the spirit comes to few. These are the proficient.

2. This first night is bitter and terrible to sense. The second night is horrible and awful to the spirit. Since the night of sense is common and much is written, I shall speak just briefly. Later, I will treat the night of spirit more fully. About this, little is said and little is known by experience.

Leading To a Higher Prayer

3. The beginner’s conduct contains much self-love and selfish inclinations. God wants to lead these souls further to a higher love and to free them from meditation, taking them to a prayer in which they can commune with Him more abundantly, because they are completely freed from imperfections.

By this stage, souls have persevered in virtue and in prayer. They have abandoned their love for the world and have gained some degree of strength in God. They can refrain from selfish desires and can suffer some light aridity, without turning back to sweetness.

Complete Change

Just when they delight in prayer and believe that God’s sun shines most brightly, God suddenly turns the light into darkness. He shuts the door and turns off the sweet spiritual water which they thought they could taste at will. Because they were beginners, God opened every door. (Rev.3:8.)

Now, they are so completely in the dark, that they do not know where to go. They cannot go forward with their meditations because their inward senses are immersed in night. The dryness removes all consolation in prayer and in virtue. They experience no sweetness, only bitterness. God sees that they have grown. They are ready to lay aside the swaddling clothes and be taken from the gentle breast. So, He sets them down and teaches them to walk. This feels strange. Everything seems to be wrong.

4. This happens sooner to recollected souls than to others. Recollected souls have no desire for the world (a needed condition to enter this night of sense). Ordinarily, no great time passes after the beginning fervor before these souls enter this night of sense. The majority will enter it and experience these aridities.

5. We could bring forth many scripture passages (especially the Psalms and prophets) but I do not wish to spend the time.

1.9 - The Signs of This Night

1. Aridity can come from many sources - from sins, imperfections, lukewarmness or bodily indispositions. Therefore, I will give the three principal signs that aridity comes from God.

No Consolation

2. The first sign is if the soul feels no consolation in God's things and also finds no consolation in created things. God uses this night to quench sensual desire and does not allow the soul to find pleasure in anything. If these conditions are true, this aridity very probably does not come from sins and imperfections. Otherwise, the soul would desire these things that are not of God. The soul's lack of enjoyment in the things of God and in things of earth might come from bodily indisposition or melancholy. Therefore, a second sign is needed.

Purgative Aridity

3. The second sign is that the soul's memory remains centered on God with care and solicitude. Because the soul finds no sweetness, it thinks it is backsliding and not serving God. But, obviously, this aridity does not come from lukewarmness because the soul has a solicitude for God's things. God's purgative aridity is accompanied by great desires to serve Him.

Melancholy or bodily illness might increase the aridity, but the aridity still purges the desires which are deprived of all pleasure and yet remain centered in God alone. Bodily indisposition alone is different from purgative aridity. With purgative aridity, the senses are weak and feeble because they experience little pleasure. The spirit, however, is ready and strong.

The Cause

4. God causes this aridity. He transfers to the spirit the consolations and strength of the senses. The soul's natural strength and faculties remain barren and dry because they cannot use these consolations. Man's sensual part has no capacity for pure spirit. When the spirit receives the pleasure, the flesh has no taste and is too weak to do anything.

The Spirit Grows

The spirit is fed and goes forward in alertness, anxious to please God. Yet, the soul is not conscious of this sweetness in her spirit and experiences aridity. The soul experiences strangeness because it has grown accustomed to sensual consolations. The spirit is not yet purged and cannot experience this new touch of love. Only after the dark night will the soul experience this spiritual pleasure. At this point, it is arid and misses the former pleasures.

5. In the desert God gave the Israelites heavenly food. (Num.11:5-6) However, they still remembered their earthly food in Egypt and took delight in it rather than in the delicate sweetness of angelic food. In the presence of heavenly food, they wept for the flesh pots of Egypt. Our desires do the same, making us seek our own wretched food and set aside the indescribable blessings of heaven.

Purging of Desires

6. The aridity comes from the purging of sensual desires. Although the spirit feels no sensual sweetness, it does feel an inner strength. This is the beginning of a secret and hidden contemplation. Besides causing aridity, this contemplation inclines the soul to be alone and quiet, without being able to think.

At this stage, the soul must know how to be quiet and must not be anxious to perform acts (inward or outward). If the soul is not anxious, it will be free from care and will experience an inward refreshment. This refreshment is delicate, and if the soul desires to experience it, it will experience nothing. The gift works when the soul is at ease. It is like air which the hand cannot clasp.

7. The Spouse says to the soul "Withdraw your eyes from me, for they make me soar aloft". (Song 6:5) God is using a different path and the soul hinders God's work if it tries to act.

God is Working

God works in contemplation (which the soul enters by abandoning meditation). He binds the interior faculties and does not allow the soul to use its understanding, to delight in its will or to reason with its memory. Whatever the soul does hinders what God is accomplishing by the aridity of sense.

This spiritual and delicate peace performs a quiet and solitary work, producing a satisfaction far removed from the earlier sensual pleasures. God bestows this peace to make the soul spiritual. "Surely the Lord will proclaim peace." (Ps. 85:9)

Cannot Meditate

8. The third sign is that the soul cannot meditate or reflect with its imagination. God no longer communicates by reflections (which gave knowledge) but by pure spirit (which have no knowledge). He uses an act of simple contemplation which the exterior senses and the interior senses of the soul's lower nature cannot grasp. From now on, imagination and memory cannot find support in any meditation.

The Growing Night

9. Sometimes, the soul experiences difficulties in meditation from physical weakness. When this passes, the soul can act as before. The purgation of desires is quite different. Once this night begins, the inability of the faculties increases. With some persons, in the beginning, the process is not continuous and they do not abandon these meditative reflections. Possibly, due to their weakness, they could not be weaned away immediately. However, as the night continues, this inability of the faculties grows. For the soul to make progress, the workings of sense must end.

Some Not Called into Full Night

Some souls do not walk in contemplation. Sometimes, they have aridities and sometimes they can meditate. God sets these souls in the night to reform their desires and remove spiritual gluttony. He doesn't put these souls in this night to lead them into contemplation, for not all who deliberately walk in the spirit are brought into contemplation. Not even half. Why? Only God knows. So, He never completely weans these souls away from reflection. He does this just for short periods.

1.10 - How Souls Must Act in the Dark Night

Fear of Being Lost

1. God leads the soul into contemplation by not allowing the faculties to work. During the aridities of this dark night, spiritual persons suffer much because they fear being lost on the road. They think God has abandoned them and that there will be no more spiritual blessings.

They grow weary, and try to focus their faculties in meditation. They make efforts with great inner unwillingness. This is a mistake. Formerly, their soul was taking pleasure in the quiet and not working. Then, they abandon that pursuit of quiet and try to meditate. This is profitless.

In seeking what their own spirit wants, they lose their peace. They abandon what they have already accomplished, to do it over again. They leave a city so they can re-enter it. This is useless and the soul gains nothing.

A Different Path

If no one understands them, these souls turn back. Because of their difficulties in meditating, they either abandon the road or are hindered from advancing. They overwork because they think that they

are negligent. All their efforts are useless. God is leading them by contemplation which is different from meditation and reasoning.

2. These souls should take comfort and persevere in patience. Let them trust God who does not abandon simple souls. He gives them all they need, until He brings them into the clear pure light of love. He will give this after the second night (if they merit it).

No Meditating

3. During this night of sense, they must not give themselves to reasoning and meditation. They must allow their soul to be at rest, even if it seems to be doing nothing because they have no desire to think. The souls think they are weak. Really, they are accomplishing much by persevering in prayer, without making any effort.

The soul must stay free from all knowledge and thought, not troubling itself about what it should meditate upon. It must have a loving attentiveness to God, with no anxiety or desire to experience Him. All these yearnings only distract the soul from the peaceful quiet of contemplation which God is granting.

Not Wasting Time

4. Let them set aside any scruples that they are wasting time. They must enjoy a freedom of spirit because any inner effort will lose the blessing which God gives by peace of soul.

Suppose a painter were drawing someone's face and the person desired to do something. These actions would hinder the painter's work. The soul should just be at peace. Any indulging in its own desires will make it conscious of its sensual emptiness. If the soul seeks support in feelings and knowledge, it will keenly feel this emptiness. At this point in the road, consolations cannot be supplied.

5. The soul must pay no attention when the faculties seem lost. In fact, it should desire this. The soul can receive in abundance if it does not hinder this infused contemplation. Its spirit will be enkindled and this secret contemplation will make the soul burn with love. Contemplation is a secret, peaceful, loving infusion which (if the soul permits) will enkindle the soul with love. The next line says: Kindled in love with yearnings.

1.11 - The Enkindling

“Kindled in love with yearnings”

1. Due to the impurity of human nature, the soul does not feel this enkindling at first because it has not yet taken hold. Also, the soul does not understand its own state and does not give contemplation a peaceful abiding place.

Yearning Soon Felt

Soon, the soul feels this yearning and it increases as the soul is enkindled with divine love. The soul doesn't know where this affection comes from. From time to time, it sees this flame growing so greatly that it desires God with yearnings. As David said, “Because my heart was enkindled (in contemplation's love), my reins were also changed” (Ps.73:21) He went from sense to spirit.

He also says “I was brought to nothing and annihilated and I knew not (73:22). The soul does not know the way and finds itself annihilated concerning both earthly and heavenly things. It is enamored without knowing how.

Effects

At times, this enkindling in the spirit grows so great that the soul's very bones seemed dried up by thirst. The natural powers seem to be fading away. Their warmth and strength are perishing in the intensity of the living thirst of love. "My soul thirsted for the living God." (Ps.42:2) This living thirst kills. Although the vehemence of this thirst is occasional (and not continuous) the soul is always experiencing it to some degree.

God's Habitual Care

2. The soul does not feel this love, only the dryness and aridity are caused by it. Also, the soul experiences a solicitude for God and a grief that it is not serving Him. This solicitude pleases God and leads the soul into that secret contemplation. After the senses have been purged (of natural affections and powers), Divine love is enkindled. Before this happens, the soul knows only the suffering of this dark purgation. The soul is freed from imperfections and acquires virtues to make itself ready for divine love. The next line says:

"Oh, happy chance!"

3. At first, God leads the soul into this night of sense to bring it into conformity with the spirit. Later, He will purify this spirit to bring it into union. This purgation occasions so many benefits that it is truly a happy chance. The soul can escape the restrictions of the senses and its lower self. I want to list the benefits of this happy chance. They are all included in the line:

"I went forth without being observed"

4. The soul ceases to rely on its own sensual powers (which are so limited in seeking God). At every step, these faculties stumble into imperfections and ignorance (which we listed in the capital sins). This night frees the soul. It quenches all these pleasures (from above and below) and makes all meditation into darkness. Later, the soul will rejoice to see that something so severe and adverse gives so many blessings. By this dark night, the soul goes forth from created things to eternal things. This is a great fortune for two reasons:

1. The soul's desires for all things are quenched.
2. Few others were able to persevere to enter this narrow gate.

The Narrow Gate and Narrow Road

The narrow gate is the night of sense in which the soul establishes itself in faith. After this first night, the soul can journey by faith in the narrow way of the second night of the spirit (which unites the soul to God). This road is so dark, narrow and terrible that even fewer travel it. Its benefits, however, are far greater than the night of sense.

I will now speak of the benefits of the night of sense, so I can move on to describe the night of the spirit.

1.12 - Benefits From the Night of Sense

1. Although the soul thinks that blessings are being removed, this purgation really bestows many blessings. Abraham had a great feast when he weaned Isaac. (Gen.21:8) Heaven also rejoices to see God take away the milk and make the soul eat the food of robust persons. In the aridity, this dry food of infused contemplation is given to the spirit.

Knowledge of Self

2. The greatest benefit is the knowledge of self and of one's sins. Really, all God's gifts come wrapped in this knowledge. The emptiness of the faculties (compared with the previous abundance) and the difficulty the soul has in doing good works, make the soul see its lowliness (which it could not see in its prosperity).

In Exodus, God, humbled the Israelites, by commanding them to remove their festal garments and adornments. He told them to "put on everyday working dress so you may know the treatment you deserve". (Ex.33:5) God was saying "Your festal garments make you feel less humble. Put off this attire and see yourselves clothed with vileness so you can know who you are.

In this aridity, the soul knows the truth about its own wickedness. When it found much pleasure in devotion, it was satisfied and thought it was serving God. Certainly, good souls do not explicitly seek their own satisfaction, but their contentment in spiritual experiences plants the idea in them.

When the soul puts on the working attire of abandonment and its first lights have turned into darkness, it gains a self-knowledge which is excellent and necessary. The soul sees itself as nothing and sees that it can do nothing.

Serving God

The soul has little satisfaction and feels grief for not serving God well. God esteems this knowledge more than all the consolations the soul experienced and all the works it performed (however great they were). These former experiences were occasions for imperfection and ignorance. From this working attire of aridity come self-knowledge and other benefits which I will now describe.

More Respect

3. First, the soul communes with God with more respect and courtesy. In prosperous times, God's comforting favor made the soul bold, discourteous and ill considered.

This happened to Moses at the burning bush. He was carried away by pleasure and would have gone directly to God if he had not been commanded to take off his shoes. This shows the need for respect in communing with God. Having obeyed in this matter, Moses became so discreet that he did not dare to even look at God. (Ex.3:6) Having removed the shoes of his desires, he was conscious of his sinfulness (a fitting preparation to hear God's word).

God prepared Job to speak with Him by leaving him naked on a dunghill, persecuted by friends and filled with anguish. (Job 2:7-8) Then the Most High lifted up the poor man, spoke with him face to face and revealed His wisdom in ways He had not done in Job's prosperity.

Enlightenment

4. Another excellent benefit in this dark night is enlightenment. Isaiah said "Thy light shall shine in the darkness." (58:10) The soul receives knowledge of God's greatness and of its own lowliness. By quenching sensual attachments, God frees the understanding. The soul can now see truth because sense pleasure in spiritual things had darkened the spirit. Aridity enlightens and quickens the understanding.

Instructed

God can instruct supernaturally any soul that is empty. He cannot give this instruction to those experiencing the beginning sweetnesses.

5. Isaiah asks “To whom shall God teach his knowledge? (28:9) He answers, “To those who are weaned from the milk.” (28:9) The first milk of spiritual sweetness and delectable meditation does not prepare the soul. To listen to God, the soul must be detached. True preparation comes from withdrawal.

Habakkuk says, “I will stand upon my watch (detachment from sense). I will make my step firm (not lean upon meditation) in order to contemplate (to see what comes from God) (2:1). Aridity brings a self-knowledge which leads to knowledge of God. Augustine says “Let me know myself, Lord, and I shall know You.”

The Pathless Road

6. To show the effectiveness of this night of sense, I quote David’s words, “In the desert land, waterless, dry and pathless, I appeared before you to see your power and your glory.” (Ps.63:1-2) To know God’s glory, David experienced aridity and detachment, not spiritual delights. On this “pathless road” to God, he forms no conception of God and does not walk by meditations. The road to knowing God and self is “pathless”, a dark night of voids. This first night does not lead to the abundance of the second night. It is only its beginning.

Spiritual Humility

7. The soul also enjoys the benefit of spiritual humility (true knowledge of self) which purges all the imperfections coming from spiritual pride. The soul sees itself as dry and does not believe that it is making greater progress or outstripping others (as it believed before). The soul sees others making this progress.

Love For Neighbor

8. Another benefit is love of neighbor. The soul esteems others and judges them differently than before. Aware of its own sinfulness, the soul never sees the sinfulness of anyone else. “I was dumb and humbled and kept silence from good things and my sorrow was renewed.” (Ps.39:2) The good seems to have completely departed. The soul has nothing to say about its own goodness or the goodness of others. It is dumb and mute.

9. In this condition, souls become obedient along the spiritual road. Seeing their own sinfulness, they listen attentively and want everyone to tell them what they ought to do. The dark night sweeps away the presumption they had in their prosperity. All the imperfections of spiritual pride are swept away.

1.13 - More Benefits

Purified From Spiritual Capital Sins

1. This night also purifies the imperfections of spiritual avarice, by which the soul coveted the pleasures found in spiritual exercises. The soul now finds difficulties in prayer and does not seek the sweetnesses of meditation. In this night, God makes the soul ready to serve without the sweetness. It acts for God alone, not its own profit.

2. The night also frees the soul from spiritual lust because these impurities happened when the pleasures of the Spirit overflowed into the senses.

3. The night purifies the soul from spiritual gluttony. I will not go into detail. It is enough to say that the night cleanses the soul from all the evils which souls experience when they desire spiritual sweetness.

Desires are Curbed

In this night, God curbs the soul's desires, allowing it to experience no sweetness (from above or below). The soul is reformed. The passions lose their strength and become sterile (just as when the milk is not taken). The soul's desires (like the breast) dry up. In this spiritual sobriety, there is no disturbance, only the tranquility of God.

4. As a second benefit, the soul habitually remembers God and fears going backward on the spiritual road. The soul no longer clings to its imperfections because these deaden and darken the soul.

Other Virtues

5. Also, the soul enjoys a number of virtues. It practices patience and longsuffering by persevering in prayer even when there is no consolation. Not seeking consolations (which are no longer there) the soul is free to love God alone.

The soul practices all the theological, cardinal and moral virtues, especially fortitude (the needed strength in these weaknesses).

6. This night bestows four benefits: peace, habitual remembrance of God, purity of soul and practice of the virtues. Describing this night, David wrote, "When I think of God, I groan. As I ponder, my spirit grows faint." (Ps.77:4)

Anger, Envy and Sloth

7. The night also purges the soul of spiritual anger, envy and sloth. Softened and humbled by these trials, the soul becomes meek toward God, self, and neighbor. The soul is no longer disturbed with itself, its neighbor, or with God. It no longer complains because God does not act quickly to make it holy in a short time.

8. The soul is no longer envious. It does not grieve when others are preferred because now it grieves from its own sins. Its envy becomes a virtue, because the soul desires to imitate the virtues of others.

9. Sloth and irksomeness toward spiritual things (which came from its desire for sweetness) are no longer strong. The soul has a new weariness which comes from God removing all the pleasures in spiritual exercises.

What God Communicates

10. During the dryness, God communicates the purest spiritual love and a delicate spiritual knowledge when the soul least expects this. Each manifestation is of greater worth than what the soul previously enjoyed. In the beginning of the night, the soul does not see this, because the spiritual touches are so delicate.

11. The soul also gains liberty of spirit and the twelve fruits of the Spirit. It is delivered from its three enemies: world, flesh and devil. Their powers have no strength to war upon the spirit.

Seeking God Alone

12. The soul journeys to God in a purity of love. No longer attracted by sweetness, the soul desires only to please God. No longer presumptuous or self-satisfied, it is now fearful and timid concerning itself. This holy fear increases and preserves the virtues. The soul finds no pleasure or consolation from its own spiritual exercises. However, at certain times, God infuses a quiet delight.

13. The soul grows in its concern for God and in its yearnings to serve Him. Even without consolations, the soul desires to serve. This greatly pleases God. “An afflicted spirit is a sacrifice to God.” (Ps.51:17)

Not Observed

14. Having passed through this purgation and having received many benefits, the soul cries out, “Oh, happy chance! I went forth without being observed.”

The soul’s three enemies (world, flesh and devil) did not observe it leaving behind those consolations, which would bind the soul and prevent it from reaching the liberty of God’s love.

15. When the soul’s four passions (joy, grief, hope and fear) are calmed by mortification, when the soul’s sensual nature is lulled to sleep by the aridity, and when the harmony between the exterior senses and the inner faculties is achieved, the soul’s enemies cannot obstruct its spiritual liberty. The house remains quiet:

1.14 - THE MANY TRIALS

“My house being now at rest”

The Road of Illumination

1. When this house of sensuality was at rest and the desires were lulled to sleep, the soul went forth on the road of the spirit. This is the road of the progressives and proficients. It is called the way of illumination or infused contemplation. On this road, God Himself feeds the soul without its active help. Some few will later enter the second formidable night (of the spirit) to reach divine union. Only the smallest number enter this, for this night of the senses contains trials and temptations which last a long time.

The Many Trials

I want to list the trials. To some, the angel of Satan (the spirit of fornication) presents himself to buffet the senses with violent temptations and to trouble the spirit with vile imaginations. These afflict the soul more than death.

In this night, the spirit of blasphemy roams abroad and the soul conceives intolerable blasphemies. Sometimes the suggestions are so violent that the soul almost utters them. This is a grave torment.

3. At other times, the perverse spirit molests them. This spirit darkens their senses and fills them with scruples and perplexities. These confuse the soul which can find no satisfaction or help in counsel or thought. This is one of the severest horrors of this first night and is very close to what happens in the night of the spirit.

For Those Entering the Second Night

4. God sends these trials (in the night of the senses) to those whom He intends to lead into the second night (though all do not reach it). In this way, He accustoms their senses and faculties to the union of wisdom (which is given in the second night). Only if tested by trials and temptations can the soul stir up its sense of wisdom. “He that has not been tempted, what does he know? He who is not proved, what does he recognize?” (Ecc. 34:9-10) Jeremiah says, “You chastened me, Lord, and I was instructed”. (31:18) The interior trials are the best form of chastisements because they purge all consolations and humble the soul so God can exalt it.

Length of Time

5. I cannot say how long the soul must remain in this penance of sense because the strength of the temptations vary. The extent of the trials depends on the imperfections which need to be purged and the degree of union to which God will raise the soul. God varies both the time and the intensity. He purges quicker and with greater intensity those who are ready to suffer more.

Weak Souls

God purges weak souls gently with slight temptations. Therefore, He keeps them for a longer time in this night. He regularly gives them sensual refreshments, so they do not fall away. These souls attain perfection only after a long time and some never attain it.

Properly speaking, they are neither in the night nor out of it. Although they make no progress, God wants them to continue in self-knowledge. So, God tries them sometimes and then assists them with consolations at other times. Otherwise, they would return to the world's consolations.

God Himself accompanies weaker souls. To exercise them in love, He is sometimes close and sometimes distant. Otherwise, they would not learn to reach God.

6. The souls who go on to the divine union of love remain a long time in these aridities, no matter how quickly God may lead them. This is seen by experience. Now, I will treat of the second night, that of the spirit

BOOK TWO OF THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SPIRIT

2.1 - When this Night Begins

State of Proficients

God does not lead the soul immediately into this second night. Even many years might pass after the soul has left the state of beginners and has entered the state of proficients. After coming out of a rigorous imprisonment (night of the senses), the soul has great satisfaction in the things of God and enjoys a more abundant delight.

Not bound by meditation and anxiety, the soul enjoys serene and loving contemplation (even though its purgation is not complete). The spirit (the principal part) has not yet been cleansed. Although the soul experienced great trials, the purgation of sense is not perfectly completed. Because of the oneness between body and soul, a communication always occurs between spirit and sense.

Previews of the Second Night

The soul, from time to time, will experience darkness and perils (sometimes even more intense than in the night of the sense). These trials are previews of the coming night of the spirit. Although experiencing periods of this night, the soul soon returns to its usual serenity. God uses this method to purge certain souls who will not rise as high as others. On many occasions, He causes night and then brings day. David says "He sends his crystal contemplation like morsels." (Ps.147:7) These morsels of dark contemplation are never as intense as the second night which God uses to bring the soul to union.

Blessings and Weaknesses

2. After the purgation of sense, the progressives experience interior sweetness, very easily and in greater abundance. Because the senses are purer, the soul can feel the pleasures of the spirit.

However, the sensual part is weak and cannot experience the strong things of the spirit. Although purified by the first night, these proficients experience many frailties (including weakness of the stomach). They are fatigued in spirit by the spiritual communication made to their sensual parts. “The corruptible body presses down the soul.” (Wis.9:15) These divine communications are not strong, intense or very spiritual (as is needed for Divine union) because the weak sensual nature participates in them.

When the communications are given to both the spirit and the senses, raptures, trances, and dislocation of bones occur. Those who are perfect (purified by the second night) no longer experience raptures or torments of the body because they enjoy liberty of spirit. Their senses are neither clouded nor transported.

To show the need for this second night (of the spirit) I want to describe some imperfections and perils of these proficient souls (who have passed through the first night but not the second).

2.2 - IMPERFECTIONS OF PROFICIENT SOULS

Habitual Imperfections

1. These proficient have both habitual and actual imperfections. The habitual imperfections are imperfect affections which remain have remained in the spirit. They are roots which the night of sense could not purge. That first night purged the branches (the new stains) but not the roots (the longstanding stains). The purging of sense begins contemplation and leads to the purging of spirit. It accommodates sense to spirit but it does not unite spirit with God. The “old man” (deep imperfections) remains, although the soul cannot perceive him. The second night must remove these stains for the soul to gain union.

2. The soul also has a “deadening of the mind”, a natural dullness caused by sin. There is also a distraction and an outward clinging of the spirit which must be refined by the second night. These habitual imperfections belong to the proficient and cannot coexist with Divine union.

Greater Difficulties

3. All do not have the same imperfections. Those whose spirit is superficial and sensual have greater difficulties and dangers. They enjoy abundant spiritual perceptions (in sense and in spirit) and often see visions of the imagination and of the intellect. They also experience delectable feelings in which both the devil and the soul’s imagination can practice deceptions.

Delusions

The devil delights in impressing these perceptions. With great ease, he can delude the soul, unless it is cautious and resigns itself to God’s will. By faith, the soul must protect itself from these visions and feeling because the devil leads many souls to believe false prophecies and makes them presume that God (or the saints) are speaking. These souls trust their own imagination, which the devil can fill with presumption and pride. They are attracted by vanity, and they allow others to see them in holy acts (like raptures and other manifestations).

They become bold with God and lose their holy fear (which should guard all the virtues). These falsehoods tend to multiply. When they do increase, it is doubtful that the soul can return to the pure road of true spirituality. They fall into these evils because they gave themselves too securely to spiritual feelings, just when they were beginning to make progress.

Need For Second Night

4. These imperfections are more incurable when the soul believes it is more spiritual than others. I say this so that proficientes can see that they must enter a second night. No matter how much they have worked, all these imperfect habits need Divine purification.

5. Also, the soul's lower part shares in these divine communications, which, therefore, cannot be as intense or strong as needed for union. Only in the second night can sense and spirit be perfectly purged and the soul walk in pure dark faith. This is the proper means of being united with God. "I will betroth you with me by faith." (Osee 2:20)

2.3 - EXPLAINING THE TWO NIGHTS

1. These souls have become proficients because their senses have fed on sweet communications. The senses are now united (and in agreement) with the spirit. In this way, they are prepared to endure the severe purgation of the spirit, in which both the sensual and spiritual part of the soul must be completely purged. Both must be purged together. The purgation of sense is only completed when the purgation of the spirit has begun.

Both Purged Together

Because all sensual disorders are rooted in the spirit, we should call the first night of sense a correction and restraint of desire rather than a purgation. Only in the dark night of the spirit are all habits (good and bad) brought into subjection. Until the spirit is purged, the rebellions of sense are not thoroughly removed.

2. In the second night, both sense and spirit are purged together. The soul needs this first night and the period of tranquility which precedes the second night. In this way, sense is united with spirit and is somewhat cleansed so it can suffer with greater fortitude. The soul needs this fortitude because the purgation is violent and severe. If the soul does not correct its weaknesses or gain fortitude by enjoying God's delectable communion, its nature will not be strong enough to bear the sufferings.

Still A Low Stage

3. These proficientes are still at a low stage of progress. They follow their own nature in dealing with God (the gold of their spirit not yet being refined). They will think, speak and experience God as little children. They have not yet reached the perfection of union.

Once into union, they will do great works in the spirit and their actions will be more divine than human. To accomplish this, God strips them of the old man and clothes them in the new (Eph.4:24). He strips their sensual and spiritual faculties. He leaves their understanding dark, their will dry, their memory empty and their feelings bitter. He removes the previous experience of the spiritual blessings.

This privation is required so that the soul can receive the spiritual form (the union of love). The Lord brings this about by pure, dark contemplation. I originally applied the words "a dark night" to the first night, but it principally applies to the second night. So, I will teach concerning the second night.

2.4 - EXPLANATION OF FIRST STANZA

*"On a dark night, Kindled in love with yearnings
– Oh happy chance –
I went forth without being observed, My house being now at rest"*

Exposition

1. This stanza concerns purgation, contemplation and detachment. These words mean “My soul had no support from the understanding (due to darkness), from the will (due to constraints) nor from the memory (due to anguish). I remained in this dark night of my faculties. Only my will was touched by yearnings for God, so I could go forth from my little understanding, from my weak love and from my limited experiencing of God. I was not hindered by sensuality or the devil.”

2. This was a great happiness. My faculties were calmed and I abandoned my actions to accept God’s actions. By this purgation, my understanding was turned from the natural to the divine. My knowledge came from Divine Wisdom not from natural strength. My will became divine and loved with the purity of the Holy Spirit. The transformed memory now had perceptions of glory. My soul’s affections were renewed by God’s molding.

2.5 – THE GRIEF AND TORMENT OF CONTEMPLATION

Infused Contemplation

1. This dark night of God flows into the soul and purges natural and spiritual imperfections. It is called infused contemplation (or mystical theology). God secretly instructs the soul in the perfection of love. The soul does nothing and does not even understand this infused contemplation. Through His loving wisdom, God produces striking effects and prepares the soul for Divine union. The same wisdom which purges and illumines the blessed in heaven also purges and illumines the soul on earth.

Why Darkness?

2. Why is this Divine Light called a dark night? Divine wisdom is both darkness and torture for two reasons. First, Divine Wisdom transcends darkness. Second, wisdom causes pain, affliction and darkness because the soul is still sinful.

3. Divine things (which are clear in themselves) appear dark to the soul. The clearer the light, the more it blinds. Looking directly at the sun overwhelms our visual weaknesses. When this Divine light assails an unpurified soul, it causes spiritual darkness. The light overcomes, overwhelms and darkens natural intelligence.

Mystical theologians call infused contemplation, “a ray of darkness”. This great supernatural light transcends the intellect’s natural strength. David says, “Near to God and around Him are darkness and cloud.” (Ps.97:2) Our understanding sees darkness because it is blinded by so vast a light. When the soul not yet transformed, the illumining ray of Wisdom causes thick darkness.

Purging the Soul’s Darkness

4. In the beginning this darkness is very painful. Although contemplation has many good benefits, the unpurged soul experiences many bad sufferings. God’s light and the soul’s darkness (two contraries) cannot coexist and are at war. They work against each other because contemplation purges the soul’s imperfections. I will show this inductively.

5. God’s light and wisdom are bright and pure. The soul is dark and impure. As sickly eyes suffer pain from a bright light, so the soul suffers from contemplation. However, this assault expels impurities and when it happens, the pain resulting from the soul’s sinfulness is immense. The soul feels itself to be unworthy. It believes that God is against it and that it has set itself against God.

This causes more grief, because the soul actually thinks that God has cast it out. Job said, “Why have you set me against thee so I am burdensome to myself?” (Job 7:20) In this clear light, the soul sees

its own sinfulness and God's blessings. It knows it is unworthy of God and believes that all his blessings are over. The soul is immersed in the knowledge of its own evils which this Divine light reveals. By its own strength, the soul can only remain unworthy. David said, "You have corrected man because of his iniquity." (Ps. 38:12)

Other Sufferings

6. The soul also suffers pain is from its natural, moral and spiritual weaknesses. This Divine contemplation assails the soul to both strengthen and to subdue it. The soul nearly swoons away in weakness (especially when the force is greater). Sense and spirit, as if beneath an immense weight, suffer such agony that the soul would like to die. Job said, "I desire that He not communicate with me in great strength, lest the weight of His greatness oppress me." (Job 23:6)

7. Due to this oppression, the soul feels it is far away from God's favor. The source of its help has vanished. None seem to have pity. Job said, "Have pity on me because the hand of the Lord has touched me." (Job.19:21) Although God's hand is gentle, the soul experiences it as heavy. His hand only touches the soul (not weigh it down). He wants to favor the soul not chastise it.

2.6 - OTHER KINDS OF PAIN

Divine Meets Human

1. A third suffering comes from the meeting of God's purgative contemplation and the soul's human faculties. God assails the soul and strips away habitual attachments, to which the soul is united and conformed. The Divine consumes the soul's spiritual substance and absorbs it into profound darkness. Because of its sins, the soul feels it is melting away in a cruel, spiritual death. Like Jonah in the darkness of the whale's belly, the soul must stay in this grave of death until its spiritual resurrection.

As the Pains of Hell

2. This suffering transcends all description. "The lamentations of death compassed me about, the pains of hell surrounded me. I cried in my tribulation." (Ps.18:4-5) The greatest sorrow is that the soul thinks that God has abandoned it and hurled it into the darkness. This is an overwhelming grief. David says, "You plunged me into the bottom of the pit ... your wrath lays heavy upon me." (Ps.88: 7-8) When this purgation is most severe, the soul feels the pains of hell. They feel unworthy of God, as if chastised and cast out by His anger. The soul believes that this will last forever.

3. The person also feels forsaken by creatures, especially friends. "You have put my friends far from me." (Ps.88:9) Jonah, in the whale's belly, testified to this. "You cast me into the deep and I said, 'I am banished from your sight.'" (Jon.2:4-5) He also said, "The bars of the world were closing behind me forever." These bars are the soul's imperfections which impede its enjoyment of delectable contemplation.

Soul's Poverty and Sinfulness

4. The fourth pain comes from the excellence of the gift. Contemplation's majesty and greatness cause the soul to become aware of its own poverty and sinfulness. The soul feels impoverishment in temporal, natural and spiritual goods. Contemplation immerses the soul in the trials of imperfections, the emptiness of faculties and abandonment of spirit. God purges the soul in its substance (both sense and spirit) and in its faculties (interior and exterior). He reduces the soul to a state of aridity, emptiness and darkness. Aridity purifies the senses. Emptiness purifies the faculties. Thick darkness purifies the spirit.

A Consuming Fire

5. God accomplishes this work by dark contemplation, The soul experiences a suspension of natural perceptions. This is very afflictive (as if a man could not breathe). As fire consumes rust on metal, so God removes a lifetime of imperfect habits. Because these imperfections are deeply rooted in its very substance, the soul suffers great inward torment. Ezekiel said, "Heap together the bones and I will burn them in the fire. The flesh will be consumed and the bones will be destroyed." (Ez. 24:10) This describes the pain in both sense and in spirit. "Then I will set the empty pot upon the coals so its metal becomes hot, its uncleanness is destroyed and its rust consumed." (24:11) This describes the grave suffering of the soul being purged. In some sense the prophet says that the soul itself must be destroyed so that the rust of its affections can be purified. These passions and imperfections have become natural to the soul.

As the Pains of Hell

6. While being purified like gold in a furnace, the soul is conscious of its own complete undoing and its dire poverty. It sees itself nearing its end. "Save me, Lord (cries the soul) for the waters enter my soul and I am mired in the deep with nowhere to stand. My throat is hoarse from crying out and my eyes have failed, looking for my God." (Ps.64: 1-3) God humbles the soul to exalt it. Later God must quickly quiet these feelings or else the soul would die in a short time. These feelings are at their greatest intensity only on occasion.

Sometimes, these feelings are so keen that the soul seems to see hell opened. In truth, they go down alive into hell. They are purged here on earth (as they would be later). A soul that goes through this night spends little or no time in purgatory.

2.7 - AFFLICTIONS OF THE WILL

Remembering Its Prosperity

1. These afflictions and constraints sometimes pierce the soul and give it a clear reminder of its suffering and an uncertainty of finding any remedy. The soul also remembers the previous times of its prosperity, when it enjoyed many consolations and gave great service to God. This causes greater grief because the soul cannot reenter that happiness.

Job said, "I who was wealthy am suddenly broken to pieces ... " (Job 16:12-16)

So Many Afflictions

2. There are so many afflictions and so many scripture passages that I cannot adequately write of them. I will quote Jeremiah: "I am a man who knows afflictions ... He has worn away my flesh and my skin. He has broken my bones ... He has left me to dwell in the dark like those long dead ... Even when I cry out, he stops my prayer ... He set me up as a target for his arrow. He has sated me with bitter food and has pressed my face in the dust. My soul is deprived of peace. I have forgotten what happiness is. I tell myself my future is lost, all that I hoped for from the Lord. Remembering it over and over leaves my soul downcast within me." (Lam.3:1-20)

Uncertain About a Remedy

3. By these complaints, Jeremiah depicts vividly the soul's sufferings in this spiritual night. Such a soul deserves great compassion. Later, it will experience the happiness of blessings. Job says "He brings the gloom into light." (12:22) and David says "The night shines as the day." (Ps. 139:12) Right now, however, the soul experiences dreadful pain and great uncertainty about any remedy. The soul believes that the evil will never end and that God has set it in a dark place to bring about this great anguish.

Besides the abandonment of the night, the soul finds no support in any instruction or in a spiritual master. The director can point out reasons to be comforted but the soul cannot believe him. Seeing so clearly its own sins, the soul thinks the director speaks as he does because he does not understand. Instead of being comforted, the soul suffers because the director's advice contains no remedy. This is true.

Until God completely purges the soul, there is no remedy for this affliction. The soul is as powerless as a person in a dark dungeon who cannot move or see. He will feel no favor until his spirit is humbled, softened and becomes so pure that it can become one with God's Spirit. According to the degree of union willed by God, this purgation is longer or shorter, of greater or less severity.

Lasts For Years

4. This night, no matter how severe the trials, must last for some years to be effective. During these years, God will send intervals of relief. Then this dark contemplation will assail the soul in an illuminative and loving manner. The soul leaves the dungeon and is brought into liberty. It feels God's loving friendship and abundant spiritual communication. The soul can see the health being given to it and has a foretaste of the abundance that it hopes for. Because the sweetness is so great, the soul occasionally thinks the trials are over. This happens often in the spiritual life. When the soul is in the trials, it feels that it will never escape. When in blessings the soul thinks the troubles are over. "I said in my abundance ... 'I shall never be moved.'" (Ps.30:6)

Trials Not Over

5. The soul thinks this way because, when the spirit possesses one thing, it cannot possess its opposite. Although somewhat purged, the spirit, influenced by the soul's lower part, still has desires which can cause pain. In times of abundance, David thought he would not experience affliction. The soul sees this abundance and cannot see the roots of imperfections which still remain. Its trials are not conceal these roots and make the soul feel that nothing more needs to be done. The soul never has complete relief. The enemy is hushed and asleep, but he is still within and the soul fears he will come to life and attack.

Immersed in Trials Again

This is what happens. When the soul feels secure and is not alert, God suddenly immerses the soul in an affliction which is greater than in the past. This new affliction might also continue longer than the first. Again, the soul believes its blessings are over. It thought it could suffer no greater affliction and knew it was enjoying great blessings (after the first trial). In spite of its previous experience, the soul believes that it will never be happy again. The soul's perception of reality causes this belief and annihilates whatever is contrary.

Like Purgatory

7. This is why the souls in purgatory wonder if they will ever be set free. Although they have faith, hope and charity, they realize they are deprived of God. This prevents them from enjoying these virtues. They have a great love for God but cannot believe that God loves them or that they are worthy of His love. Deprived of Him and left in their miseries, they think that they should, with perfect justice, be hated and cast out by God forever.

The soul in this dark night knows that it loves God and would give a thousand lives for Him (which is the truth). This love brings no relief, only greater affliction. Loving God so much, the soul cares about nothing else. Seeing itself so wretched, it cannot believe that God loves it or why He even should love it. The soul has reason only to be hated by God and by everyone else. The soul suffers much, seeing in itself reasons why God (whom it loves so much) should cast it out.

2.8 - OTHER AFFLICTIONS

Difficult to Pray

1. This dark night also hinders the soul's affections and faculties. It cannot raise its mind to God nor pray to Him. It seems like God is surrounded by a cloud which the prayer cannot pierce. "He has closed my path with square stones." (Lam.3:44) Its prayer is without sweetness or strength. The soul thinks that God does not hear. "When I cried, He shut out my prayer." (Lam.3:8)

The soul must "put its mouth in the dust." (Lam.3:28), so it can hope and endure with patience. God is working and the soul can do nothing. The soul cannot pray, be attentive at Divine Office, or attend to temporal matters. It has a forgetfulness of memory. Periods of time pass and the soul does not know what it did or thought, or what it will do. It cannot pay attention to what occupies it, even though it tries.

A Forgetfulness

2. The night purges the light of the understanding, affections of the will and the knowledge of the memory. The soul is annihilated concerning everything. "I was annihilated and I knew it not." (Ps.73:22) This unknowing causes a forgetfulness which comes from an interior recollection in which contemplation absorbs the soul.

The Darkness Varies

To be prepared for divine union, the soul and its faculties must be absorbed in the dark spiritual light of contemplation. This darkness, which withdraws the soul from all desires and perceptions, varies in its intensity. There is more darkness when the divine light is purer. There is less deprivation and less darkness when the divine light is less pure. It seems incredible that the purer is darker, but the reader must understand the dictum. The brighter that supernatural things are, the darker they appear to our natural understanding.

3. Let me use the example of natural light. A ray of sunshine which is free from specks is less clearly visible. The eye can more easily see a ray of sunshine which has many specks, because light itself is never seen. Light is visible only when reflected in the specks. If the ray of light had no specks, it could not be seen. A perfectly clear ray absorbs other lights and is itself not seen.

Thinks Itself in Darkness

4. The ray of contemplation assails the soul with a divine light which transcends the soul's natural powers. This deprives the soul of all desires and perceptions coming from natural light, and leaves the soul dark and empty in its spiritual and natural desires.

While being purged by this light, the soul thinks it is in darkness, just as the perfect ray of light seems invisible. Later, when this ray of divine light strikes something spiritual (like a perfection or an imperfection a truth or falsehood) the soul will understand this more clearly than before the purgation. The soul will realize that it now has a spiritual light to discern its imperfections. A ray of light is invisible until someone puts out their hand. The light is seen when it strikes the hand.

Unrestricted Light

5. Because this light is pure, simple and not restricted by any intelligible object (natural or divine) and because the soul faculties are emptied, the soul perceives whatever is presented (from above or below) with great facility and great comprehensiveness. Paul says, "The spiritual man searches all things, even

the deep things of God.” (1Cor.2:10) “Wisdom reaches wherever it wills because of its purity.” (Ws.7:24) Wisdom’s purity it is not limited to a particular desire or perception.

A soul purged concerning its affections and perceptions has pleasure in nothing and understands nothing in particular. It dwells in emptiness and darkness. In this soul, Paul’s words are fulfilled, “Having nothing, yet possessing everything.” (2Cor.6:10) Such poverty of spirit deserves happiness.

2.9 - THE PURPOSE OF PURGATION

To Exalt the Soul

1. The purpose of this dark night is to give light in everything. The night humbles the soul to exalt it. It impoverishes the soul so it can move forward in God’s way. After the night, the soul can enjoy all things (above and below) while still having total detachment and liberty. The spirit is simple, pure and detached from natural affections (both actual or habitual) and can share freely in the Divine Wisdom. In this wisdom, the soul can preeminently experience the sweetness of all creation.

Without purgation, the soul cannot experience this abundance of spiritual sweetness. One desire or one attachment can hinder God from communicating the spirit of love (which contains all sweetness).

Casting Out the Natural

2. The Israelites retained one single affection. Because they wanted to enjoy the food of Egypt, they could not relish the manna (which had sweetness for everyone). So, the soul cannot enjoy the delights of the spirit’s liberty if it remains attached to particular objects or perceptions.

The Spirit’s perceptions differ from the perceptions of human nature. To possess these preeminent perceptions, the natural perceptions must be cast out. To arrive at these great gifts, the soul must be annihilated by the darkness and emptiness. Once purged, the soul can receive the highest divine light which transcends all natural light and cannot be possessed by the soul’s natural understanding.

Long and Painful

3. To be united with that light and become divine, the understanding must be purged of natural light and brought into a darkness. This will last until God has annihilated the soul’s habitual way of thinking. After this, the divine illumination will take place. Because this power of understanding was so natural, the darkness will be profound, frightful and most painful. This is substantial darkness, felt in the deepest substance of the spirit.

The affection of love given in divine union is also divine, subtle, delicate, intimate and transcending all feelings and all desire. To attain and experience this lofty affection, the will must be purged because the soul’s natural powers cannot receive this delight. This purging is proportioned according to the soul’s natural attachments to both human and divine things.

Prepared For Delights

Exhausted and thoroughly tried in the fire of dark contemplation and having driven away every evil spirit (as Tobias did by setting the fish’s heart on the coals – 8:3) the soul has a pure disposition. Now, it can feel the rare, sublime touches of Divine love. The soul sees itself transformed. All desires which oppose union have been expelled.

4. In its communion with God, the soul is filled with a glorious magnificence which includes innumerable blessings. These spring from delights which exceed all that the soul can naturally possess. By nature, the soul is weak and cannot receive these blessings. “Eye has not seen. Ear has not heard.

Man cannot conceive what God has prepared.” (Is.54:4; 1Cor.2:9). The soul must be purged of all natural help and consolation. Being empty, poor in spirit and freed from the old man, the soul can live this new life (the state of union with God).

New Knowledge

5. The soul will also attain a sense knowledge and a divine knowledge which is beyond the soul’s common experience and knowledge. The soul will see with new eyes. These are as different from its natural eyes as spirit is from sense and divine from human.

Therefore, the spirit must be made used to hardships. By purgative contemplation, the spirit is placed into great anguish and affliction. Its memory must be removed from all pleasant knowledge. The soul must see itself as a pilgrim and all things must seem strange, different than they used to be.

Leaving Aside Former Experiences

This night draws the spirit away from its ordinary experience of things and brings it nearer to divine understanding (which is foreign to all human perceptions).

The soul seems to be leaving itself. At times, the soul wonders if it is under some charm or spell. It marvels at what it sees and hears. Though the outward life remains the same, everything seems strange and rare. The reason is this. The soul is becoming remote from its senses and from knowledge of created things, so God can annihilate and form it. This gift belongs more to the next life than to this one.

Preparing the Soul

6. The soul suffers these afflictions so that God’s inflowing can beget it anew. These are birth pangs which bring forth the spirit of salvation. “In thy sight, O Lord, we have conceived. As in the pangs of labor, we have brought forth the spirit of salvation.” (Is.26: 17-18)

This night prepares the soul for an inward peace and tranquility which “surpasses all understanding.” (Phil.4:7) Therefore, the soul must abandon its natural peace, (which was really no peace at all since rooted in imperfections). The soul thought it was peace because it followed its own inclinations for peace. It experienced a two-fold peace (of sense and spirit) because it was filled with spiritual abundance (which was really imperfect).

Withdrawing From Peace

The soul must be disquieted, purged of this peace and withdrawn from it. Jeremiah lamented this night, “My soul is withdrawn and removed from peace.” (Lam.3:17)

7. This painful disturbance involves many interior imaginings and stirrings. Seeing all these miseries within itself, the soul believes that it is lost and the blessings gone forever.

The pain is deep, and causes vehement spiritual groans and cries which, at times, receive vocal expression. When the pain is severe, the soul dissolves into tears. This relief comes seldom. “I was exceedingly afflicted and humbled, I roared with the groaning of my heart.” (Ps.38:8)

Overflowing Pain

This roaring involves great pain. The sudden and acute remembrance of its miseries causes affliction to arise and surround the soul. Job describes these afflictions, “Even as the overflowing of the waters, so is my roaring.” (Job 3:24)

As waters overflow and fill everything, so this affliction overwhelms and penetrates the soul completely, filling it with spiritual anguish in its deepest affections and desires. I cannot exaggerate the extent of this suffering.

8. The work of this night hides any hope of daylight. Job said, "In the night my mouth is pierced with sorrows and they sleep not who feed upon me." (Job.30:17) The mouth is the will, pierced by the pain of doubts which never cease.

Deep Pain and Deep Results

9. The warfare and the soul's striving are deep because the peace will be deep. The spiritual pain is intimate and delicate because the love will also be intimate and refined. If the finished work is to be pure and intimate, so must the labor be. The stronger the building, the greater the work. Job says that the soul is fading within itself and is consumed without hope. (Job.30:16)

Upon reaching perfection, the soul will attain innumerable blessings and virtues (in its substance and in its faculties). Before that, the soul must first see itself as withdrawn, deprived and empty of these blessings. The soul must believe that it is far from them, can never reach them, and that all good things are over. Jeremiah said "I have forgotten good things." (Lam.3:17)

Why Suffering?

10. Why does this sweet and blessed light of contemplation (which contains all the good things of perfection) produce these painful beginnings and disagreeable effects? The answer is easy. Contemplation and the divine inflowing do not cause these afflictions. They cause only sweetness and delight. The soul does not experience this sweetness of consolation because of its own weakness and imperfection. This lack of preparation makes the soul unfit to receive. When the divine light assails the soul, its own weaknesses cause the suffering.

2.10 - LIKE FIRE ACTING ON WOOD

1. For greater clarity, I will compare this purgative knowledge acting upon the soul to fire acting upon a log of wood.

Dries the Wood

First, the fire dries the wood by causing the wood to shed the water within it. The fire then makes the wood black, dark and unsightly. The wood even gives forth a bad odor. By drying the wood little by little, the fire drives out the unsightly qualities which are contrary to the fire's nature. The fire then enkindles the wood externally and gives it heat. Finally, it transforms the wood, which becomes as beautiful as the fire itself.

The wood has its weight (which is greater than fire) and its substance (which is denser than fire). However, only when enkindled, does it have the qualities of the fire. The fire causes the wood to be dry, hot and give light.

Reveals

2. Before transforming the soul into itself, the Divine fire of contemplative love purges it of contrary qualities. It drives out what is unsightly (but only after making them more unsightly). By contemplation the soul can see the evils which it never perceived before (because they were so deeply rooted).

As these evils are driven out, they reveal themselves. The soul sees them in the light of contemplation. In reality, the soul is no worse than it was before. As the soul sees these evils within itself, it realizes that it deserves God's wrath. By this comparison we understand many things.

3. The light which transforms the soul (at the end) is the same light which purges it (at the beginning). The fire that makes the log into itself is the same fire that purged the log.

From Weaknesses

4. These afflictions do not come from divine wisdom. "All good things come to the soul with her." (Wis. 7:11) They really come from the soul's weakness and imperfection. The soul needs purgation. The wood could not immediately be transformed into fire. It had to be made ready.

Purgation

5. This shows that souls suffer in purgatory only because they have imperfections. When these are removed, the afflictions cease and enjoyment begins.

Seeing the Work Done

6. From this example, we learn how the purged soul is more enkindled. The wood grows hotter as it is better prepared. However, the soul does not always feel this warmth. Only in those moments when contemplation assails it less strenuously, does the soul see what is happening and can enjoy the work being done within.

For example, the worker draws the iron out of the furnace to see what is being done. So, only when the soul is taken out of the flame for a moment can the amount of enkindling be seen.

Attacking Deeper Imperfections

7. We can also see that the soul suffers more intensely after a period of relief. After removing the more outward imperfections, the fire attacks the more inner imperfections. The sufferings become more intimate as the fire refines those imperfections which are rooted in the inmost part. As the fire penetrates the log, it acts with much more vehemence to possess that inner part.

8. We also learn why the soul thinks it is full of evil and that any good is impossible. When touched by contemplation, the soul experiences a bitterness. When fire touches burning wood, it receives no air. When the air does come (those periods of relief) the soul can rejoice.

A New Assault

9. The soul has overwhelming joy in these periods of relief and hopes that the trials won't return. At the same time, it is certain that they will quickly return because it sees that the roots still remain. It knows that its joy is incomplete and that a new assault is threatening. The reason is this. Comparing the purged and the unpurged parts of itself, the soul can see clearly what remains to be purged.

The wood's inner part is the last to be enkindled. The difference between the outer part (which has already been enkindled) and the inner part is obvious. When the soul is assailed in this more inner part, it believes that it will never again experience happiness. The soul is plunged into the most inward of sufferings and all exterior good from without seems over.

10. It is well to leave aside these sad experiences and speak of the fruits of the soul's tears.

2.11 – THE VEHEMENT PASSION OF DIVINE LOVE

Wounded By Love

1. This fire of love (much like material fire) begins to take hold of the soul. This enkindling somewhat resembles the enkindling in the sensual part. However, this second fire is as different as the soul is from the body, or the spiritual from the sensual. This enkindling happens in the spirit. The soul vividly feels itself wounded by divine love and has a foretaste of God. It understands nothing because the intellect is in darkness.

2. The spirit feels itself passionately in love. This love is infused and the soul is passive, not active. This love shares in divine union and has some of its qualities. These are God's actions upon the soul. The soul itself is passively subdued and needs only to give its consent. All the warmth and passion of love comes from God's love which unites itself to the soul. The more the soul is recollected and withdrawn from any enjoyment of heaven and earth, the more it can receive the wound of love.

Gathering the Powers

3. In this purgation, God weans all the soul's inclinations and gathers them in. They cannot find pleasure anywhere. In this way, God draws the soul to Himself and gives it that fitness needed to receive the strong union of love. The soul must love with all its strength. Its powers cannot be dispersed in other enjoyments. "I will keep my strength for you." (Ps. 59:9), that is, I will keep all my desires and faculties for You, not using them except for You.

4. The reader can now realize how strong this enkindling of love in the spirit must be. God recollects all the soul's energies and desires (of both spirit and sense) so that every faculty can work in harmony and truly fulfill the first commandment. "You shall love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength." (Dt. 6:5)

Suffering in Total Desire

5. When the soul is gathered in, touched and wounded, its strength and desires are gathered into the burning of love. The appetites are enkindled with desires but they do not possess and are not satisfied. They are like the hungry dogs, whom David describes as running about and howling because they do not yet possess. (Ps. 59:15-16) This divine fire so dries up the spirit and enkindles the soul's longings that a person will pine for God in a thousand ways. "In her many ways does my flesh long for you." Another translation says "My soul loses itself for you."

6. Therefore, the soul is "kindled in love with yearnings". The soul loves and suffers in all its inner thoughts, in all its experiences, at all times and all places. It finds rest in nothing else. Job says, "As the deer longs for the shade and as a hired hand awaits his wages, so I had empty months and wearisome nights. If I lie down, I am filled with restlessness until the dawn." (Job 7:2-4)

Everything becomes narrow for the soul. It cannot live within itself (on earth or in heaven). The soul is filled with grief and darkness and suffers afflictions without hope of light or of spiritual good.

Multiplied

7. This yearning and grief are multiplied in two ways. First, the spiritual darkness afflicts the soul with doubts. Secondly, God's love inflames and stirs with loving wounds. These two sufferings are joined together. Isaiah describes it "My soul desired you in the night" and "In my spirit, I will watch until morning." (26:9) This grieving happens in the innermost part of the spirit (the spiritual affections).

Nevertheless, in these dark afflictions, the soul feels within itself a certain friendship with the night,

which gives it company and strengthens it greatly. In fact, if the darkness is removed, the soul feels alone and weak. The cause is this. The soul received strength from this dark fire. When the fire ceases, the power and heat of love also cease.

2.12 – RESEMBLANCE TO PURGATORY

Creating A Clean Heart

1. This dark night of loving fire both purges and enkindles the soul. In purgatory, souls are purged with dark material fire. In this life, they are purged with dark spiritual fire. The difference is this. Fire is used in the next life while love is used here below. David asked for this love. “Create in me a clean heart.” (Ps.51:12) Jesus calls those with clean hearts “blessed”, that is, “enkindled with love.”

2. God always bestows mystical wisdom with love because love alone infuses this wisdom. Jeremiah says, “He sent fire into my very frame and he taught me.” (Lan.1:13) David says, “The wisdom of God is silver tried in fire.” (Ps. 12:7) This dark night sends into the soul both love and wisdom (according to the soul’s capacity and need) and purges the soul of its ignorance.

Purging the Angels

3. Also, God uses this same wisdom to purge the angels and give them knowledge of what they did not know. This wisdom flows from God through the hierarchies of angels to men. The angels’ works and inspirations are the work of both God and the angels, because angels receive these inspirations from other angels. If we placed many windows together, the ray would pass through. Each window and each would pass on the ray according to many factors, the nature of glass, the power and brightness of the ray and how near the window is to the sun.

4. The angels who are closer to God are more completely purged and receive greater illumination. The lower angels receive divine illumination with less power. Man, the lowest soul, receives God’s communication in a limited way and with great pain.

Preparing Man’s Spirit

God illumines each angel because he is a pure spirit and is ready for that infusion. However, when God illumines impure and weak man He does so according to his nature. This causes him weakness and distress (as a weak eye looking at the sun).

God’s light enkindles a passionate love within the soul that will cause suffering until this same passionate love refines the soul. Then the soul receives the light in the sweetness of union. Once purged, the soul can receive this loving infusion as the angels do. Before that time, the soul suffers the constraints of love’s yearnings while receiving this knowledge.

Effects After the Darkness

5. In the beginning, the soul does not always perceive this enkindling because the Divine fire is only drying the soul and making it ready. Later, the soul will experience love’s heat.

After the darkness has purified the understanding, this mystical knowledge enkindles the will and also illumines the intellect with a delectable knowledge. This moves the will into a marvelous fervor. These living flames burn in the soul which sees itself as a living fire. David says, “My heart smoldered within me. In my thoughts, a fire blazed up.” (Ps.39:4)

Higher and Lower Touches

6. An enkindling of love always accompanies the union of will and intellect with God. This gives the soul great delight. Although the soul receives other lower touches without much purgation, the soul experiences this sublime touch. This Divine touch begins the perfection of union which the soul seeks only after many trials.

7. In these passive spiritual blessings, the will sometimes loves without its intellect understanding. At other times, the intellect understands and the will does not love. Just as fire contains both light and heat, so this dark night contains both God's love and light. Sometimes, this light enkindles the will in love while leaving the intellect in darkness. At other times, it gives the intellect light but leaves the will in aridity. God does whatever He wills.

2.13 - OTHER DELECTABLE EFFECTS

Workings In Will and Intellect

1. This type of enkindling also explains other delectable effects. Sometimes this mystical understanding flows down into the intellect. Then, the soul becomes enlightened in the midst of darkness, but the will remains in aridity, without any actual union of love. This serenity is so delightful that I cannot give it a name. God's presence is felt in many different ways.

2. Sometimes this light wounds the will and enkindles a tender and strong love. At times, the two faculties (will and intellect) are joined. Their union is deeper to the degree that both are purged. However, until reaching this state, the soul experiences the enkindling in the will more than understanding in the intellect.

Why Felt More In Will?

3. If both faculties are to be equally purged, why does the will feel the inflaming of love more commonly than the intellect? This passive love does not act directly upon the will because the will is free. Rather, this heat strikes the soul's substance and moves the affections passively. This is a passion of love and not a free act of the will. These passions of love subdue the will and they take the will captive. It loses its liberty because the passions carry it away.

The intellect experiences a purging less frequently because the intellect can only receive passive knowledge in a detached and passive way. This can only happen after a purgation. Until this happens, the soul feels this touch of knowledge less frequently than the passion of love. The will doesn't have to be so completely purged because the passions themselves enkindle impassioned love.

What the Soul Is Lacking

4. This fire and thirst is spiritual and is much different than in the first night. Although sense always participates in the spirit's work, it is the soul's superior part (the spirit) which feels the keenness of this thirst. The spirit understands what it is feeling and lacking. Although the senses suffer affliction, the spirit sees this suffering as nothing compared to the great good that it lacks.

Before the Fire Catches

5. When this night first begins, the soul does not feel this enkindling because the fire has not caught on. So, God gives the soul a sense of His love. The soul then suffers great anguish, thinking that it has lost God and fearing that God has abandoned it.

At the night's beginning, the soul has these yearnings and its greatest suffering comes from fear. If the soul could know that all is not lost, that what is happening is for the best (as it is) and that God is not

angry, the soul could accept these sufferings and rejoice that God is pleased. The soul esteems God's love and would be glad to suffer (even to die many times over) to please God.

After the Fire Catches

Once the fire catches on, the soul has great power and a desire for God through the heat of love. In great boldness, the soul disregards everything. Love's power inebriates the soul so that it serves God alone. It even does strange and unusual things to find the One Whom it loves.

6. Because of her love, Magdalene did not care how many men were at the supper, what they thought or how it would look if she wept. She went without delay so that she could reach Him for whom her soul was already kindled and wounded. Even when Jesus was enclosed in the tomb and surrounded by soldiers, she was not impeded. Because of the inebriating power and boldness of love she went at daybreak to anoint His body.

Foolish Questions of Love

7. This inebriating power caused her to ask someone who seemed like a gardener if he had stolen the body. This was a foolish question. If he had stolen the body, he would not tell her or let the body be taken back.

All Things are Possible

In the vehemence of this love, all things seem possible. Love believes everyone is of the same mind and that everyone is involved in what they themselves love. When the Bride went out to seek the Beloved in the city streets, she believed that everyone was looking for Him. She begged everyone to tell Him that she loved Him. By her love, Magdalene believed that she could take the body away, no matter how difficult that would be.

Making Progress

8. As the soul makes some progress in this purgation, it becomes aware of these yearnings and follows the will's affections. It has the vehemence of a lioness or a she-bear, when their young have been stolen and they cannot find them. This is the wounded soul in its seeking for God. Because of the darkness, the soul feels separated from Him and cannot live in this impatient love. It either gains its desires or it dies. Rachel said to Jacob, "Give me children or else I die." (Gen.30:1)

The Soul's Boldness

9. How can this soul, which feels so unworthy of God, have the strength, boldness and daring to journey towards union? Love continually gives it strength. The soul desires to be united, joined and made equal with whom it loves. The soul wants to be perfected in love's good things. Because it has not gained union, it hungers and thirsts. Love gives the will the strength to become impassioned. The enkindling makes it bold, even though the soul sees itself as unworthy (because still in the dark).

Why the Darkness?

10. Why does this Divine light cause darkness at first and only later illumine the soul? I will answer the question directly. The darkness and evil do not come from the Divine light but from the soul itself. From the illumination, the soul understands that she is the source of darkness.

When the light first comes, the soul can see only what is within itself. The soul sees its weaknesses (which it didn't see before because it didn't have this light). This is why the soul is conscious only of darkness and evil. After being purged and knowing its sins, the soul will also see the blessings of the light. Only after all these imperfections have been driven out, will the soul see the benefits from this night of contemplation.

All Becomes Divine

11. God favors the soul by purging and healing it. He uses a strong lye of bitter purgation in the soul's spiritual and sensual part. He cleanses all imperfections (natural, sensual and spiritual). He empties the inner faculties, constrains the spiritual and sensual desires, and weakens the natural powers (a condition the soul could never attain by itself). God makes the soul die to all that is not naturally God. Once stripped of its skin, the soul can be clothed in the new man created in God's way (Eph.4:24). Through union with Divine light, the human understanding becomes Divine. By union with Divine love, the will becomes Divine.

The memory and desires are all changed and divinely converted. The soul is now a heavenly soul, more divine than human. Desiring God alone, the soul exclaims the third line.

2.14 – THE HOUSE AT REST

*I went forth without being observed,
My house now being at Rest.*

1. The metaphor is clear. Someone leaves his house by night. He waits for everyone to be asleep so they do not hinder him. The soul wants to perform a rare, heroic deed outside of the house and be united with its Divine Beloved. To do this, the soul has to leave the house, because God is found only outside and in solitude. The Bride desired to “find you alone so that my love can be communicated to you.” (Song 8:1-2)

The enamored soul must go forth at night (when its desires and passions are asleep). When awake, they hinder the soul from going forth in freedom. Jesus called them “the enemies of his own household.” (Mt.10:36) Their activities must be put to sleep so they do not hinder the blessings of union. While they are alive and active, their natural activity hinders the soul's reception of contemplation. Their natural ability cannot receive supernatural blessings, because which God wants to infuse these secretly and in silence. To receive this infusion, the faculties must remain passive and not interject their base inclinations.

2. By this “happy chance” (the faculties, passions and desires being asleep) the soul can go forth unobserved, i.e. without being burdened. Put to sleep, these powers cannot notice or feel anything. They cannot hinder the soul from leaving its sensual house and attaining the union of perfect love.

3. Only an experienced soul would see that escaping sensuality is a happy chance. The soul was subjected to sins and was at the mercy of its desires. Now, the life in the Spirit brings inestimable blessings which I will describe in the following stanzas.

2.15 – BLESSINGS FROM THE DARKNESS

*In darkness and secure, By the secret ladder, disguised –
O happy chance!
In darkness and concealment, My house being at rest.*

1. In this stanza, the soul continues to sing of certain aspects of the darkness and affirms that happiness came through them. It replies to tacit objections that, due to these afflictions, it has run a risk of being lost. On the contrary, it has escaped from its enemies who hindered its progress.

In the night, the soul changed its garments and disguised itself in three colors (which we will describe). It escaped by the secret ladder (which is living faith). By this ladder, the soul went forth in complete hiding to fulfill its purpose in great security. In this night, the desires, affections and passions are put to sleep. If awakened they would not consent to this.

2.16 – WALKING SECURELY IN DARKNESS

All Is Dark

1. This night darkens the desires and faculties (sensual, interior and spiritual). They lose their natural light, so supernatural light can illumine them. They are put to sleep and experience nothing (divine or human). The soul's affections can find support in nothing. The imagination cannot reflect. The memory is gone. The intellect understands nothing. The will is arid. All the faculties are useless. Besides all this, a thick cloud of afflictions covers the soul, keeping it far from God. In this darkness, the soul travels "securely".

2. The reason is clear. Through its own desires, tastes, reflections, understandings and affections, the soul always strays. When they are all hindered, the soul is secure against going astray. It is free from itself and from its enemies (the world and the devil). When the soul's desires are quenched, its enemies cannot use them to make war.

Secure in the Darkness

3. Therefore, the greater the darkness and the more completely the soul's faculties are impeded, the greater is the soul's security. Perdition comes from the soul's desires and activities. Good comes from God alone.

When hindered from seeking evil, the soul's faculties can receive God's blessings which will make these faculties divine. The soul sees that its desires are not diverted to useless or harmful things. On the contrary, they are kept from vainglory, pride, presumption and vain rejoicing. The soul is not lost. It has gained much.

Why No Attraction?

4. A question arises. If God's blessings are profitable to the soul and to its security, why does God darken the desires and faculties? Why does the soul have no taste or attraction for these blessings?

The soul gains much from having no pleasure in spiritual things because its own desires and faculties are base, impure and totally natural. Although the faculties have a desire for the supernatural, they can only receive the supernatural in a natural manner. The saying goes, "Whatever is received is received according to the nature of the recipient." These faculties cannot receive the supernatural in a divine manner. They receive only in a human, natural and base way. They must be in darkness so they can be purged.

Once purged and annihilated, they will lose this human way of acting. They will receive, feel and taste the supernatural in a sublime way. This would be impossible if the old man did not die first.

Only From God

5. All spiritual things must be given by the Father of lights. Human desires and free will cannot experience these blessings in a spiritual manner. Even if the soul exercises its taste for God and seems to be experiencing the supernatural, it will experience these spiritual blessings only in a human and natural manner (as it experiences natural things). Spiritual blessings do not go from man to God but come from God to man.

Many people fix their faculties upon God, thinking that this is spiritual. Perhaps, these are really just natural desires and actions. These souls just have a natural facility, which directs their faculties to whatever they desire.

Darkened Desires

6. If I have an opportunity I will describe certain signs which show whether the interior actions of the soul are natural or spiritual, or both natural and spiritual. Just know that the soul can be moved supernaturally only after the faculties have been darkened and have no more strength.

7. O spiritual soul, when you see your desires darkened, your affections arid and your faculties with no capacity, do not be troubled. Rejoice! God is freeing you from yourself and taking everything out of your hands. Your hands can never labor so effectively and so securely (due to their clumsiness and uncleanness) as when God takes your hand and leads you blindly to a goal you do not even know. Your own eyes and your own feet could never travel this road correctly.

A Traveler Seeks New Roads

8. In this darkness, the soul travels securely and makes greater progress because it receives help in a way it least understands. In fact, the soul believes it is losing ground. It has never experienced this new feeling which drives it, dazzles it and makes it depart recklessly from its former ways. The soul thinks it loses ground because it is going away from what it knew and enjoyed. It travels by a way it does not know and in which it finds no enjoyment.

A traveler, going to new lands, must take unknown and untried roads. His past experience is no guide. He must proceed on the advice of others. He reaches new countries only by abandoning what he knows. He must follow new and unknown roads. A beginner in a new profession proceeds in darkness. He gets no knowledge from past experiences. So, the soul, although traveling in darkness, makes progress. God is the blind soul's Master and Guide and the soul rejoices when it discovers this. It is "in darkness and secure".

Secure In Suffering

9. The soul walks securely because it is suffering. The road of suffering is more secure and more fruitful than the road of action and fruitfulness. When the soul suffers, God adds His strength. Left alone, the soul would act in its own weaknesses. Also, in suffering the soul becomes more virtuous, wiser and more cautious.

The Soul is Absorbed

10. Another important reason for this security comes from the dark light of wisdom. This contemplation absorbs and immerses the soul in darkness and brings it so close to God, that it delivers the soul from all that is not God.

The soul undergoes a cure to regain its health. This cure is God Himself. His Majesty restricts the soul's diet and takes away its appetite. The soul is like a sick man, carefully attended to by his household. The light is not allowed into the room. All noise is silenced. He is given only nourishing food and in small amounts.

11. Contemplation causes these effects by bringing the soul nearer to God. The nearer the soul gets to God, the blacker is the darkness and the deeper is the obscurity.

The Immense Light of God

God's spiritual light is so immense and so transcends natural understanding, that the light blinds the soul more as it gets nearer. David said that God made darkness His hiding place and the dark waters of the clouds His tabernacle (Ps.18:12). This dark water is God's wisdom in our souls. The soul feels this darkness as something near to God (like the tabernacle where He dwells). What is supreme light in God is the blackest darkness in man. "Because of the brightness of Your presence, the clouds came out." (Ps.13:12) that is, they covered over the soul's understanding.

Great Peril

12. We live our life in great peril and we find the truth with great difficulty. To us, what is clear is dark and what is true is doubtful. We flee what we need and we embrace what harms us (and causes us to fall). All because they satisfy our eyes.

Man lives in great peril because he is guided by a natural light which dazzles him and leads him astray from God's road. To be secure from the enemies that live in his own house (his senses and faculties), the soul must close its eyes and walk in darkness.

Hidden in Dark Waters

13. In these dark waters, the soul is hidden and well protected because it is close to God. These waters are both God's dwelling place and the soul's protection. The soul is hidden from itself and from all evils that come from creatures. "You hid them in the shelter of your presence, safe from scheming enemies ... and from plotting tongues." (Ps.31:20) When hidden in God's face, the soul is protected from the disturbance of man. Dark contemplation safeguards against all that comes against the soul. The soul is safe from "plotting tongues" because it is engulfed in God's tabernacle. Its desires are stilled and its faculties are in darkness. The soul is free from imperfections (which contradict the spirit), safe from its own flesh and other creatures. The soul travels "in darkness and secure".

Fortitude

14. Another effective reason why the soul journeys securely in darkness comes from the fortitude which the soul experiences in these waters of suffering. Although the waters are dark, they refresh and fortify the soul with whatever it needs. Immediately, the soul perceives its genuine determination and its effective desire to avoid any offense to God and to do all to serve Him.

This dark love cleaves to the soul and makes it watchful. The soul seeks only to do or not to do what pleases God. The soul asks itself a thousand times if it has given cause for offense. It examines himself with greater care than ever. The soul's desires and faculties are withdrawn from everything else. It uses all its efforts to please God alone. In this way, the soul goes forth from itself to the sweet union of love "in darkness and secure".

2.17 – WHY CONTEMPLATION IS SECRET

2.18

"By the secret ladder, disguised"

Three Words

1. I need to explain three words, secret, ladder and disguised. Secret and ladder refer to this dark night. This contemplation is both secret and a ladder. Disguised describes the soul's conduct in this night.

The Master Teaches

2. This dark contemplation is secret because it is mystical theology, a secret wisdom which St. Thomas says is communicated to the soul through love. Secretly means it is hidden from the intellect and other faculties, which cannot attain it. The Spirit infuses it into the soul without them knowing. The soul does

not understand this and no one does (not even the devil) because the Master teaches the soul. Neither the devil nor the natural intellect can attain to this.

Secret Effects

3. The effects on the soul are also secret. It is secret when wisdom is purging the soul and it is secret afterwards when wisdom is clearly communicated. It is so secret that the soul cannot even give this wisdom a name. The soul has no desire to speak of it and can find nothing to describe this lofty understanding and delicate spiritual feeling.

Even if the soul could describe this wisdom, it would still remain secret. This inward wisdom is so spiritual that it entered the intellect without any sensual image. Therefore, sense and imagination (through which it did not enter) cannot account for it or describe it, even though the soul knows it is experiencing a rare and delectable wisdom.

Suppose someone sees what was never seen before. They might understand its nature, but could give it no name. They could not say what it is, even though the senses perceive it. How much less could the soul describe what did not enter by the senses! When God speaks to the soul, his language is intimate and spiritual. It transcends every sense and silences the exterior and interior senses.

Scriptural Examples

4. Scripture gives many examples. After God spoke to Jeremiah, he could only say “Ah. Ah, Ah”. (1:6) Moses, standing before God, trembled and could not even look at the burning bush. (Acts 7:32). His imagination was too dumb to express what he heard. The wisdom of contemplation is God’s language to the soul. Pure spirit speaks to pure spirit. The senses cannot perceive this language. It is secret. They cannot know it or say it. They have no desire to speak because they did not perceive it.

Cannot Describe

5. Spiritual souls would like to describe their state to their director but do not know how. When they experience purer contemplation, they even have a repugnance to speak. The soul only says that it is satisfied and conscious of God’s presence. All seems to be going well, but in describing his state of soul, he can speak only in general terms.

The soul can describe visions, feelings etc., because these perceptions are received by the senses. Pure contemplation leaves nothing to describe and is called secret.

Solitary Desert

6. Also, this mystical knowledge hides the soul within itself. Contemplation sometimes absorbs the soul and engulfs the soul in its secret abyss. The soul sees clearly that it has been carried far from every creature. It has become remote, placed in a profound retreat, in an immense desert with no boundary. Due to its secrecy, vastness and solitude, this is pleasant and lovely. As God raises it above all creatures, the soul finds itself even more hidden.

This abyss of wisdom exalts the soul and shows it how lowly are all creatures compared with this supreme knowledge and divine feeling. The soul realizes how defective are all the words used to describe God and how impossible it is to really perceive divine things, except by this illumination. The soul learns that it cannot know or experience divine things. It calls this contemplation secret.

The Unknowing

7. Contemplation has this superiority over the soul's natural capacity, because it is the road which guides the soul to Divine union. The soul advances to this union by not knowing humanly and by ignorance of divine things.

8. Speaking mystically, divine things are understood not when they are sought but when they are found. Baruch says, "None can know her ways or imagine her paths." (3:31) David proclaims this path, "Your lightning lit up the world and the earth trembled. The sea was your path, your way through mighty waters. Your footsteps shall not be known." (Ps.77:19-20)

"Illumination" is the enlightenment which contemplation causes in the soul's faculties. The "earth's trembling" is the painful purgation. The "sea" is God's path. His "footprints in the water" means the soul journeys to God in ways secret and hidden from the soul's sense (just as footprints on the sea are hidden from the senses). God's impressions upon the soul have the quality of not being known. Job is asked, "Do you know the wondrous work of him who is perfect in knowledge?" (37:16) The roads which God uses to perfect the soul are like clouds, because this contemplation is secret wisdom.

2.18 – WHY CONTEMPLATION IS A LADDER

To Ascend

1. Secret contemplation is a ladder for many reasons. First, men use ladders to climb to steal treasures which are in a high place. Without knowing how, the soul ascends this ladder to plunder the treasures of heaven. David says, "Happy are those whose hearts are set on pilgrim roads. They find spring water." and "The Lord provides water for those who lose their way." (Ps.84: 7-8)

To Descend

2. A ladder also allows men to descend. This contemplation raises the soul to God and also humbles the soul. God's communications humble while they exalt. On this road, to go up is to go down and to go down is to go up. Humility is greatness. God makes the soul climb the ladder so it can descend and descend the ladder so it might climb. As Proverbs says, "Humility goes before honors." (18:12)

Ups and Downs

3. The soul can see that, on this road, it will suffer many ups and downs. Prosperity is always followed by trials. Periods of calm are given to strengthen the soul for the poverty that soon follows. After the torment comes abundance. The soul sees that it must keep the vigil before celebrating the festival. This is the ordinary course of contemplation until the soul arrives at the state of quietness. It never stays long in one state. It is always ascending and descending.

4. The reason is this. Perfection is both a perfect love for God and contempt for self. The soul needs these two parts (knowledge of God and of self). It must experience one and then the other. The soul tastes the exaltation of God and then tastes humiliation of self. This continues until it has acquired perfect habits. Then, the ascending and descending will cease. The soul has gained divine union at the top of the ladder.

The Secret of Ascent

This ladder of contemplation coming down from God was prefigured by Jacob, who saw a ladder with angels ascending and descending. (Gen.28:12). This vision took place at night, when Jacob slept. "Night" expresses how secret is the ascent to God and how different it is from man's knowledge. To lose oneself and become as nothing is most profitable. However, man considers this the worse thing possible. To find sweetness and consolation is of least worth. However, man considers it the best.

5. This ladder shows that contemplation's principal characteristic is to be a science of an infused loving knowledge of God. It enlightens and enkindles the soul until it is raised step by step to its Creator (hence the word "ladder"). Love alone unites the soul with God. I will show each of the steps of this ladder and their effects. In this way, the soul can know where it is standing. I distinguish these steps by their effects (as do St. Bernard and St. Thomas) because we cannot know their nature. The ladder is so secret, God alone measures it.

2.19 Describes the First Five of the Ten Steps of St. Bernard and St. Thomas

First Step - Weakness

1. There are ten successive steps. The first step causes the soul to languish (for its own advantage). "Daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my Beloved, tell Him I am sick with Love." (Song 5:8) This sickness is for God's glory. The soul grows sick to sin and to anything not of God. David says, "My spirit fails me." (Ps.143:7)

As a sick man loses his appetite and his color, so the soul loses all desires. It changes the colors of its past life (like someone in love). The soul gets this illness from an excess of supernatural heat. This sickness and weakness are the first steps the soul must take to climb the ladder of purgative contemplation. Finding no support, consolation or resting place on the first rung, the soul moves on to the second step.

Second Step – Seeking God Always

2. The soul seeks God without ceasing. The Bride says she sought Him by night upon her bed (where she had fainted from the first step). Not finding Him, she decides, "I will arise and seek Him whom my soul loves." (Song 3:2) David says, "Seek always the face of God. Seek him in all things and do not delay until you find him." (Ps.105:4) In seeking the Lord, Mary Magdalene did not even notice the angels at the tomb.

At this step, the soul seeks the Beloved with great solicitude. In all things, it thinks of the Beloved. In all affairs, it is speaking about the Beloved. When it eats, sleeps or does anything, it cares only for the Beloved. In this second step the soul is recovering its health by love. By a new degree of purgation, it begins to climb to the third step.

Third Step – A Zeal For Serving God

3. This third step gives the soul a zeal to work "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord. In his commandments he is eager to labor greatly." (Ps.112:1)

Fear is a sign of love and often causes the soul to work. If fear does that, what will love itself accomplish? At this step, the soul sees its great works as small, its many accomplishments as few, its years of labor as short, because of the burning fire within. Jacob was made to serve seven more years to gain Rachel. He saw them as few because he loved her. (Gen.29:20) If Jacob accomplished much by his love for Rachel, how much more a soul can accomplish when the Creator takes possession by love? The soul suffers greatly because all it does for God seems so little. To be destroyed a thousand times for Him would comfort the soul, because it sees itself as useless and its attempts to love God as vain.

Also, the soul considers itself as worse than any other soul. First, love teaches the soul how much it owes to God. Second, from love, the soul knows that its many works are faulty. The soul is confused. Its works are lowly works and God is most high.

Obviously, the soul has no presumption, vainglory or judgment of others. From this solitude, the soul gains courage to climb to the fourth step.

Fourth Step – Suffering For the Beloved

4. This fourth step causes the soul an habitual suffering because of the Beloved. “Love makes all great and burdensome things to be as nothing.” (St. Augustine). The Bride says to the Spouse, “Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm; for stern as death is love, relentless as the nether world is devotion.” (Song 8:6B)

The spirit has great strength. It has subdued the flesh and accounts this accomplishment like a tree values a single leaf. The soul does not seek its own consolations (in God or in creatures). It does not even pray for favors because it has received so many. It seeks only to please God and to serve Him as He merits. No matter what the cost, the soul wants to return what it has received.

The soul says in its heart, “O God, how many seek their own consolations and desire your favors. How few make it their interest to please you. You are willing to give gifts. If we just used what we have received in your service, You would have to give them continually.”

This step of love is lofty. The soul seeks God with true love and accepts suffering for His sake. As a result, God habitually grants joy, by visiting the soul. Christ’s boundless love always comforts those who love Him. Jesus affirmed this through Jeremiah, “I remember the devotion of your youth, when you followed me in the desert.” (2:2) The soul is detached and finds rest nowhere. This step enkindles the soul to climb to the fifth step.

Fifth Step – An Impatient Vehemence

5. This fifth step makes the soul long impatiently for God. The soul experiences a vehemence to comprehend and be united with the Beloved. Every delay (however brief) seems long and oppressive. The soul continually thinks it is finding the Beloved. However, this desire is frustrated and the soul faints from its yearnings. “My soul longs and faints for the dwellings of the Lord”. (Ps.84:2) Rachel was at this step when she said to Jacob, “Give me children or else I shall die.” (Gen.30:1) On this step, the soul feeds on love which nourishes it according to the abundance of its hunger. This leads to the sixth step.

2.20 – THE SECOND FIVE STEPS OF THE LADDER

Sixth Step – Running Swiftly

1. On the sixth step, the soul runs swiftly to God, touching Him again and again. Because of hope, the soul can run without fainting. “The saints that hope in God shall renew their strength ... They shall fly and shall not grow weary” (as they did at the fifth step). (Is. 40:31) “As the deer desires water, my soul desires You, O God.” (Ps.42:1) Like a thirsting deer, the soul runs swiftly because its charity is greatly increased. At this stage, the soul is almost entirely purified. When you enlarged my heart, “I ran the way of Your commandments.” (Ps.119:32)

Seventh Step - Boldness

2. The soul becomes vehement in its boldness. In order to hope, the soul sets aside its own judgments. It doesn’t retreat and it takes no advice. Because God has given this vehemence, shame cannot restrain this boldness,. “Love believes all things, hopes all things, and is capable of all things.” (Cor.13:7) At this step, Moses told God to pardon the people or to remove his name from the book of life.

These souls obtain their requests. “Delight in God and He will give you the petitions of your heart.” (Ps.37:4) At this step, the Bride grew bold, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.” (Song 1:1) The soul aspires boldly to this step only when it feels the interior favor of the king extending his scepter of acceptance. Otherwise, it would fall from the ladder due to lack of humility. From this daring power to be bold, the soul climbs to the eighth step. Here it takes the Beloved captive and is united with Him.

Eighth Step – Laying Hold of God

3. The eighth step causes the soul to seize God and hold Him fast. “I found Him whom my heart and my soul love; I held Him and I will not let Him go.” (Song 3:4)

At this step, the soul satisfies her desires (but not continuously). Some souls climb here but do not remain. If this state were to be continuous, the soul would possess glory in this life. So, the soul remains here just a short time. God told Daniel (a man of desires) to stay at this step, “Daniel, stay upon your step for you are a man of desires.” The ninth step is for souls that are now perfect.

Ninth Step – Burning With Sweetness

4. This ninth step makes the soul burn with sweetness. It is a step of the perfect. By the Holy Spirit, the soul burns sweetly because of its union with God. Pope St. Gregory says that the Apostles burned inwardly and sweetly when the Spirit came upon them. I cannot speak of all the riches which the soul enjoys. Books cannot contain what must be said. The final, tenth step does not belong to this life.

Tenth Step – Total Assimilation

5. The tenth step causes the soul to become wholly assimilated to God because of the clear and direct vision of God. The soul possesses this only after death.

These souls (who are few) do not go to purgatory. Love has totally purged them. “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.” (Mt.5:8) This immediate vision causes the soul to be perfectly like God. “We know that we shall be like Him.” (1Jn.3:2) Although not having God’s capacity, the soul will become like to God. It is God by participation.

No Longer Secret

This is the secret ladder. On these higher steps, the ladder is no longer secret because God reveals much to the soul. On this last step (the beatific vision) nothing is hidden from the soul. It is completely assimilated. Jesus says, “On that day you shall not question me about anything.” (Jn.16:23) Until that day, something always remains hidden. No matter how high the soul is, it still lacks total assimilation into God’s essence.

By this mystical love, the soul rises above all things to climb to God. Love (like fire) always rises upward and wants to be absorbed in its very center.

2.21 – THE THREE COLORS

Two Purposes of a Disguise

1 and 2. To be disguised is to hide under clothing other than one’s own. The soul’s disguise reveals to the Beloved its desires to gain his favor. A disguise also hides the person from rivals, so he can accomplish his goals. So, a disguise reveals the heart to the Beloved and also disguises the desires from all enemies.

Three Colors

3. Touched by Christ's grace and longing to attain His goodwill, the soul goes forth in a disguise which portrays its heart to Christ. At the same time, the disguise protects the soul from the devil, the world and the flesh. This disguise has three colors, white, green and red, which denote the three theological virtues (faith, hope and charity). By these three, the soul will gain the Bridegroom's love and will travel in complete protection from its enemies.

Faith

4. Faith is a pure white tunic, which totally dazzles the sight of every intellect. When the soul is garbed in faith, the devil cannot see it nor harm it. More than any other virtue, faith protects against the devil (who is the soul's most cunning enemy).

Peter used faith against the devil. He wrote, "Resist him, steadfast in faith." (1Pt.5:9) The tunic of faith acts as a foundation for the other virtues. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. With faith, it is impossible to fail Him. God says, "I will espouse you to Me in faith." (Osee2:20) To be betrothed, the soul must be clothed in faith.

5. The soul wore this white garment of faith when it left the house. It walked in darkness. Its intellect received no aid from above (heaven seemed closed and God seemed hidden) nor from below. The soul passed through all the trials without failing the Beloved. These tribulations proved the soul's faith. The soul proclaims, "I have kept the hard ways." (Ps.17:4)

Hope

6. Over this white tunic, the soul places the green vestment of hope. This delivers the soul from its second enemy, the world. Living hope gives the soul such fervor for eternal things that, by comparison, the world's things seem dead and worth nothing.

The soul strips itself of worldly garment. It hopes for nothing in this world (present or future). It seeks only eternal life. Hope so lifts up the soul that the world cannot touch it or come within sight of it.

7. Clad in hope, the soul journeys in complete security. Paul calls hope "the helmet of salvation" (1Thes. 5:8), the armor which protects the whole head. This hope covers all the head's senses so they cannot be immersed in the world or be wounded by any enemy arrow. The helmet visor allows the eyes to look upward. This is hope's function, to divert the soul's eyes to God alone. "My eyes are always upon the Lord." (Ps.25:15) "Even as the eyes of a handmaid are upon the hands of her mistress, so our eyes are upon the Lord". (Ps.123:2)

8. Looking only to God (because nothing else satisfies it), the soul obtains everything from the Beloved. The Spouse tells the Bride that she wounds him by one glance of her eyes. (Song 4:9) By hoping in God alone, the soul gains success and victory. Disguised in hope, the soul can travel safely. It is devoid of every possession and fixes its eyes and its eyes totally on God.

Charity

9. Over the white and green vestments, the soul puts on the splendid red garment of charity which raises the soul to God. The soul is so beautiful and pleasing, that it says, "I am beautiful. Therefore, the king has loved me and brought me into his chambers." (Song 1:3) This causes greater love for the Beloved, who protects the soul from the third enemy, the selfishness of the flesh. Love of self cannot enter because the true love for God already resides here. Charity strengthens the other virtues (so they can protect the soul) and gives beauty to them (so they can please the Beloved). Without charity, no virtue

pleases God. Clad in love's red, the soul leaves behind all created things and journeys by the secret ladder of contemplation to perfect union.

Preparing the Three Faculties

10. These three virtues prepare the soul's three faculties (intellect, memory and will) for union. Faith removes natural knowledge from the intellect and prepares it for divine wisdom. Hope empties created possessions from the memory and places all hopes upon God. Charity voids desires from the will and focuses the soul's gaze on God alone. By withdrawing the soul from all that is not God, these virtues prepare the soul for divine union.

Clad in these three virtues, the soul must journey sincerely or else it will not attain perfect union through love. This disguise is absolutely essential to attain union with the Beloved. To succeed in this disguise and to persevere in gaining its desires is truly, "Oh, happy chance".

2.22 – A HAPPY CHANCE

1. This "going forth" was a happy chance because it delivered the soul from the devil, the world, and its own sensuality. Having gained this liberty of spirit, the soul went from low human things to high divine things. Its conversations are now in heaven. (Phil.3:20)

2. The reason I undertook this writing was to explain this night because many souls pass through it but know nothing about it. This explanation is now half-finished. I have shown the many blessings the soul receives in this night and how happy the chance that it went forth. To overcome the fears caused by the trials, the soul must be encouraged by the hope of so many blessings. This chance was fortunate because it took place "in darkness and concealment"

2.23 – IN DARKNESS AND IN CONCEALMENT

Hidden From the Devil

1. "In darkness and in concealment" describes the soul's great security on this road of contemplation. "In darkness and concealment" means that the soul is hidden from the devil. 2. The soul is also hidden from the devil's strategies, because contemplation is infused passively and secretly. The senses or faculties (interior and exterior) know nothing.

The soul's journey is freed from the problems which the faculties cause from natural weakness. The soul is also free from the devil who cannot know what is taking place within the soul because he only receives his knowledge from the sensual faculties. This spiritual and interior communication is remote from the senses. The devil cannot understand it.

Hidden From the Sensual

2. The soul is secure because its communications with God take place without the lower senses knowing them. In this way, the spiritual communications can be more abundant, because the sensual part does not hinder the spirit's liberty. Also, the journey is more secure because the devil cannot penetrate. Jesus said, "Let not your left hand know what your right is doing." (Mt.6:3). The soul must not let the lower part know what the higher part is doing. Let it be a secret between the soul and God alone.

The Devil's Strategy

Although the devil cannot get to know the exact nature of these intimate spiritual communications, he can realize that the soul is receiving a certain blessing. He knows because he sees the soul's great

repose and the silence of the sensual faculties. He cannot thwart these blessings in the soul's substance. Therefore, he tries to disquiet the soul's sensual part by using afflictions and fears. In this way, the devil hopes to disturb the soul's spiritual part, which is receiving the blessing.

God's Protection

3. When this communication shines only in the spirit, the devil cannot disturb it. Instead, the soul receives new benefits and more secure peace. Whenever the soul feels the devil's disturbing presence, the soul can wondrously enter deeper into itself, without any understanding or effort. In this depth, the soul has a sure refuge and is completely withdrawn from the enemy.

Fear remains outside. Inside, the soul's peace and joy increase. The soul realizes that it enjoys the spouse's sweetness, which the world and the devil can neither give or remove. In this state, the soul realizes that it is tormented only from without. Within are strength and peace. Solomon was "surrounded by sixty valiant men armed against the dangers of the night." (Song 3:7-8)

When the Senses Participate

4. When the senses participate in this spiritual communication, the devil more easily disturbs the spirit and the soul suffers torments and afflictions which exceed all description. There is a naked contact of spirit to spirit and the horror caused by the evil spirit is intolerable. The bride said this happened to her when she sought interior recollection, "I came down to the nut garden to see if the vines were in bloom. Before I knew it my soul troubled me because of the chariots." (Song 6:10) This is the noise of the devil.

How the Devil Can Act

5. Occasionally, God gives the soul favors through the mediation of a good angel. God habitually allows the devil to see these gifts which angels deliver. In this way, the devil cannot claim that he had no opportunity to conquer the soul (as he claimed concerning Job). (1:1-11) In their struggle for the soul, God allows a certain equality between the two warriors (the good angel and bad angel). In this way, the good angel's victory over the soul is of greater worth and the soul (faithful in temptation) is more abundantly rewarded.

False Visions

6. God often gives the devil permission to act in the same way that He is acting within the soul. When God gives the soul genuine visions through a good angel (Christ often reveals Himself through an angel because He seldom appears in His actual person), God allows the wicked angel to present false visions. If the soul is not cautious, it can be deceived. Many are. In Exodus, Pharaoh's magicians produced the same signs as Moses.

7. Besides imitating God through corporal visions, the evil one interferes in spiritual communications which come through angels. However, he can only counterfeit visions with forms. He cannot counterfeit those which have no forms.

When the Soul Cannot Hide

To attack the soul, the devil presents his frightful spirit in a spiritual communication. He wants to destroy spiritual things by the spiritual. While receiving the spiritual contemplation from the good angel, the soul cannot hide itself quickly enough to avoid being seen by the devil. So, he appears and produces a painful disturbance of spirit. Sometimes, the soul can quickly free itself and recollect itself by the spiritual grace given by the good angel. In this way, the horror can make no impression.

8. At other times, the devil prevails. He encompasses the soul with a disturbance that is greater than any torment in this life. This horrible communication passes from the devil's spirit to the soul's spirit.

It is not bodily and is more grievous than any sensual pain. This does not last long. Otherwise, the spirit would leave the body, due to the vehemence of the evil spirit. Afterward, the remembrance of this diabolical disturbance causes great affliction.

Refined By the Horror

9. All of this happens passively. The soul does nothing. Let it be known that the good angel permits the devil to assail this soul with such horror in order to purify the soul and prepare it for some great spiritual favor. God mortifies the soul to give life and exalt it. This comes later. The purgation is horrible, but the result is delectable, a contemplation so lofty that words cannot describe. The soul, refined by the horror of the evil spirit, can receive spiritual visions which belong to the next life. Each favor prepares the soul for the next.

When God Himself Visits

10. When God visits the soul through a good angel, the soul is not totally concealed and the enemy can come within reach. However, when God Himself visits the soul, there is total concealment from the enemy. This is because his Majesty acts substantially in the soul and no angel or devil can learn God's intimate communication. These blessings are totally sovereign touches of divine union, made directly upon the soul's substance. In just one such touch, the soul receives the greatest blessings because this is the loftiest possible degree of prayer.

11. The Bride entreats the spouse for these touches. "Kiss me with the kiss of your mouth". (Song 1:1) This intimacy with God is so close that the soul desires this divine touch more than any of God's favors. Even after the Bride receives many other favors, she seeks these touches. "Who will give You to me, my brother, so that I might find you alone outside, nursing at the breasts of my mother so I might kiss you and no one would despise me." (Song 8:1) The terms alone, outside, nursing at the Mother's breasts means that God alone makes this communication. The breasts of the soul's sensual parts have dried up and the soul can enjoy these blessings in liberty of spirit. The senses cannot ruin this and the devil cannot attack because he has no understanding of God's touches upon the soul's substance.

The House At Rest

12. The soul gains this blessing only by purgation, detachment and spiritual concealment. In its hiding place, union with God strengthens the soul. That is why it sings about "darkness and concealment".

13. When these favors are given only in concealment (only in the spirit) the soul sometimes sees (without knowing how) that its higher spiritual part is separated from the lower sensual part. It even believes that the two parts have nothing to do with each other. In a way, this is true. The blessings are totally spiritual. The sensual receives nothing. The soul becomes totally spiritual. In this hiding place of unitive contemplation the spiritual passions are to a great degree purged away.

2.24 – BOTH HOUSES PURGED

1. Speaking of its spiritual part, the soul says, "Since the higher and lower portion of my soul are at rest, I went forth to divine union."

Purged By the War

2. The war of the dark night has purged the soul's faculties and passions. In these same parts, the soul receives enjoyment and rest. Twice the soul says. "My house being now at rest". The first refers to the sensual (which must be purged first). The second refers to the spiritual. The soul enters into Adam's state of innocence.

The Divine Betrothal

3. By these substantial touches of divine union (which are concealed from the devil and the senses) this spiritual house becomes habitually and perfectly at rest (as much as life allows). By these touches, the soul has been purified and strengthened to receive this union once and for all. This is the Divine Betrothal between the soul and the Son of God.

As soon as the sensual and spiritual houses have become strengthened and their servants have been put to sleep, Divine Wisdom immediately unites itself with the soul, by a new bond of loving possession. “When the stillness encompassed everything, your all powerful word came from heaven’s throne.” (Wis.18:14-15) In the Canticle, the Bride found the Spouse only after others had stripped her and wounded her in the night. (Song 5:7)

Must Go Forth

4. To come to this union, the soul needs a great purity which is gained only by great detachment and sharp mortification. This is the Bride’s “stripping and wounding”. The new mantle of betrothal is put on only when the old mantle is stripped away. Therefore, if the soul does not go forth at night to seek the Beloved but seeks Him in her own bed at her own convenience, the soul will not find Him.

2.25 – THREE QUALITIES OF THE NIGHT

*On a happy night
In secret, when none saw me
Nor I saw anything
With no other light or guide
Than the one that burned in my heart*

The soul continues to praise the good qualities which were found by going through this night. It used three qualities to gain its goal quickly and surely.

First, in this night, God led the soul so secretly and so far from sense that created things could not touch, approach, disturb or hinder the soul.

Secondly, all the higher faculties experienced this spiritual darkness. The soul neither saw, remained in, nor sought anything that was not God. No forms, figures or natural perceptions impeded the journey.

Thirdly, no particular inner light nor any exterior guide supported the soul. Although a thick darkness deprived the soul of all light, the soul found its way by its longing for the Beloved. This made the soul soar upward to God, without knowing how.

(The book ends suddenly, with no commentary on the last five stanzas. This is not due to the saint’s death because he lived for many years after writing this.)