

SESSION 7

Passive Purifications

OVERVIEW OF SESSION 7

III. PASSIVE PURIFICATIONS (PASSIVE PURGATIONS)

A. Notion

B. Night of the Senses

C. Night of the Spirit

III. PASSIVE PURIFICATION (Passive Purgation)

A. NOTION:

1. Recall that:

- a. We are still here in the “Purgative Stage”
- b. “Active Purification” is what the soul can affect by its own efforts

2. PASSIVE PURIFICATION

- what God Himself does in our purification

3. St. John of the Cross on the necessity of Passive Purifications:

“However assiduously the beginner in mortification exercises himself in all these actions and passions, he can never completely succeed – far from it – until God shall effect it in him passively by means of the purgation of said night.”



4. Thus, the Passive Purification is manifestly *mystical*, that is, they are of the mystical order of things
5. Division into the: “(Dark) Night of the Senses” and “(Dark) Night of the Spirit”

B. (DARK) NIGHT OF THE SENSES

1. WHAT IS THE “NIGHT OF THE SENSES”?

“A prolonged series of profound and persistent aridities (dryness) that submerge the soul in a very painful state and severely tests its perseverance in the desire for sanctification.” (Aumann 161)

2. “SENSES”

- a. Here means not only the external and internal senses
- b. BUT ALSO the appetites and discursive intellect (desires and imagination)

3. WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE “NIGHT OF THE SENSES”:

- a. Initial “honeymoon” period of a soul experiencing God

The soul here is clearly in love with the things of God



- b. The soul here **has already had practice** in the life of virtue, prayer, active purifications, etc.
- c. But a **profound purification is needed** lest the soul sees itself as already or close to being a saint.
- d. God leads the soul into the **Night of the Sense; withdraws the delight** and the light that they are accustomed to up until now
- e. Thus they are led into a “night” where there is **dryness and no pleasure/consolation** in spiritual things

4. THE REASON FOR THE “NIGHT OF THE SENSES”

(according to St. John of the Cross):

- a. God is no longer communicating Himself to the soul via the delight of the senses (external or internal)
- b. **He is beginning to communicate Himself through an act of infused contemplation** (not of the senses)



5. HOW CAN ONE DISCERN THE PRESENCE OF THE “NIGHT OF THE SENSES” AS TRULY FROM GOD?

- a. SIGN #1: **The soul finds does not find delight/consolation in the things of God nor in any created things**



- 1) Note that it is neither
- 2) If a soul finds no delight/consolation in the things of God but does in created things, we know that it is not a true “Night of the Senses”
- 3) But cannot go on this alone!

b. SIGN #2: The memory is fixed on God, but the soul thinks that it is falling back/failing God because of its dryness/distaste of the things of God

1) The distaste or dryness CANNOT be spring from:

a) Lukewarmness (not caring)

b) Bodily infirmity

2) The desire to serve God is still there (the devil would not arouse the desire to serve God)



c. SIGN #3: **Inability to meditate or reason by using the “imagination”**

- 1) This is because God is infusing contemplation
- 2) And thus a person’s “active” action is being necessarily eclipsed by God’s infusion of contemplation



d. Note: **All three signs must be verified in a clear manner!**

6. **POSSIBLE OTHER CAUSES** (and thus not a true “Night of the Senses”)

a. **Lukewarmness**

- Distaste for things of God
- Accompanied by strong inclination for recreation and worldly diversion
- Danger of sin (venial and mortal)
- Remedy: repentance and active purifications

b. **Mental Infirmities**

- Must be careful to discern symptoms of mental infirmities
- This can be difficult
- But a good spiritual director is always discerning if something is being caused by a mental problem

c. **Diabolical Activity**

- Temptation, disturbance, etc.
- Aridity (dryness) is accompanied by strong temptation and sinful suggestions of unusual tenacity
- The devil tries to disturb the peace and tranquility of the soul in order to get it to withdraw from the practice of prayer
- May be permitted by God
- Remedy: exercises of piety, prayer, etc.



7. SOME POSSIBLE SIDE-EFFECTS OF THE “NIGHT OF THE SENSES”

- Possible persecutions/ridicule
- Even from good people (particular suffering), friends, superior, etc.
- Loss of reputation, possessions
- But remember – it is for detachment

8. NOT ALL SOULS SUFFER THE “NIGHT OF THE SENSES” TO THE SAME DEGREE

a. Depends on:

- the grade of perfection to which God intends to elevate the particular soul
- the amount of imperfections needing purification
- the energy, docility, patience, etc. of the particular soul

b. God always gives His grace in the proper measure needed by the individual soul



9. DISCIPLINES TO BE OBSERVED DURING THE “NIGHT OF THE SENSES”

a. Complete loving submission to the will of God

- Not viewing the purgative state as something evil but see it in as a means of progress in the spiritual life and fortification of the soul

b. Perseverance in Prayer

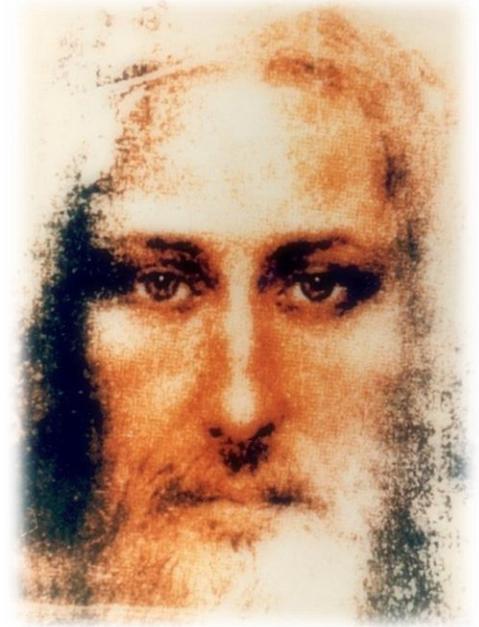
- In spite of dryness, aridity, monotony, difficulty
- Imitation of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane (praying even amid agony with *greater intensity* – see Lk 22:43)
- This will probably be difficult

- Thus, necessity of pressing ahead while asking God for the strength to do so
- This is where many souls turn back or fall back
- They abandon prayer right at the point where they are receiving the grace to make giant strides along the road to sanctity (Aumann 165)
- The soul must realize that it is on the verge of a new type of prayer – infused contemplation



c. **The Soul Must Remain in Peace and Quiet**

- “content simply with a loving gaze from God, without any particular consideration and without any desire for delight or sensation.”
- Remember that the soul is beginning to receive infused contemplation and is not practicing “ascetical” prayer and thus the delights/joys of such are being purged away
- Forcing the delight or sensation may actually work against what God is doing!



d. **Docility to a Prudent Spiritual Director**

- Crucial at this point
- Must be careful into whose hands we place ourselves!
- Spiritual Director must be careful to know what he or she can handle
- Pray for God to supply
- If not, God will supply in other ways
- Soul must remain humble and seek all of these



10. **BENEFITS OF THE NIGHT OF THE SENSES** (Aumann 166)
(St. John of the Cross)

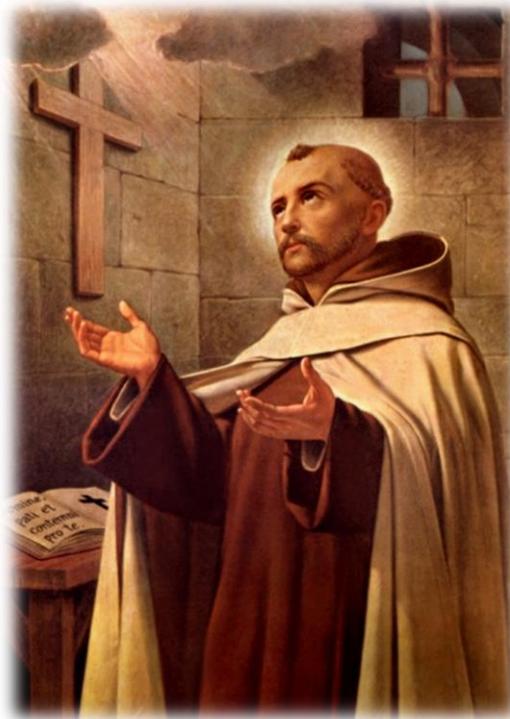
- Knowledge of oneself and one's weaknesses
- Greater respect and courtesy toward God
- More vivid understanding of the grandeur of God
- Profound humility, submission, obedience to the will of God
- Love of neighbor
- Purification of vices
- Recollection in God with a fear of falling back
- Exercise of the virtues
- Liberty of spirit in experiencing the fruits of the Holy Spirit
- Victory against the temptations – of the world, of the flesh, of the devil

11. CAUTIONS FOR THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

- a. **Be mindful of the SIGNS discussed above.**
- b. **Souls may not know when the night began and when it ends (or perhaps even what it is)**
 - They will need help understanding it
 - They will need help discerning it
 - They will need help navigating it
- c. **Different souls experience different degrees of intensity**
 - God may will a long period of time with great intensity
- d. **God may allow alternating periods of light/night**
 - So that the soul may not be discouraged
 - Remember, not necessarily a step-by-step

e. St. John of the Cross on when Night of the Senses starts:

- Can expect it while the soul is still practicing acquired mental prayer
- Night of the Senses serves as a transition from the Purgative State to the Illuminative Stage (from the Ascetical to the Mystical)



C. NIGHT OF THE SPIRIT

1. WHAT IS THE “NIGHT OF THE SPIRIT”?

“A series of passive purgations that are extremely painful and have for their object the completion of the purification that was begun but not completed by the night of the senses.” (Aumann 167)

2. All the imperfections and disorders that the Night of the Senses purges have their root in the spirit.

Until all the habits **rooted in the spirit** are brought into proper subjection, the imperfections of the senses cannot be purged thoroughly.

3. Also caused by the **action of God infusing contemplation**, although in a higher degree
4. Goes to the **root** of the smallest and most insignificant imperfection
5. While the “Night of the Senses” purges attachments of the senses (both exterior and interior)



The “**Night of the Spirit**” purges the **root of the senses** – that is, the spirit – and “weeds out” even the smallest of imperfections.

6. The soul feels the **grandeur of God** and sees the **contrast** between it and the soul's own imperfections

7. Result – the **soul can feel that intimate union with God is impossible**

Can submerge the soul into a state of **anguish** and **being terrified**.

8. Principle source of suffering in the “Night of the Spirit”:

- **Apparent abandonment by God.**



9. Possible effects on the soul (Aumann 168):

- Soul **deprived of all delight and satisfaction** in relation to God
- Soul is faced with **awareness of its own lowliness**
- God **appears** to be a ruthless and avenging judge
- Feels **desolation**
- Would welcome **death** as a release (though **not** suicidal)

10. In actuality though:

- It is reaching a **high level of perfection!**
- Being **transformed** from its weakness
- Undergoing a **true mystical experience**
- Being confirmed in **grace**



11. **Is the “Night of the Spirit” necessary to reach Christian perfection?**

“God can supply and has, in fact, supplied for the purifications of the night of the spirit by means of other intermittent trials, alternating light with darkness, until he raises the soul to the degree of purity and perfection to which he has predestined it.” (Aumann 168)

“But in order for anyone to reach the seventh mansions of transforming union and to scale the very heights of sanctity, the night of the spirit is indispensable...the soul cannot be united with God in the transforming union until it has been totally purified of all its weakness and misery. And this is the proper effect of the night of the spirit.” (Aumann 168)

12. **CAUTION!**

- a. There **cannot be any fixed “rule”** concerning the Night of the Spirit
- b. Because the **circumstances vary greatly**
- c. Can last for very **long periods** of time.
- d. God can **relax** the infused contemplation but these periods may be very brief, until the soul enters transforming union
- e. Remember that Passive Purgations **can extend throughout** the Illuminative and the Unitive Way!
- f. Nights of the Senses and Spirit are found **prior** to the transforming union with God

“In the formidable spiritual darkness wherein the soul is buried in its mystical cocoon and is incapacitated for working by itself or for possessing any initiative at all it believes itself to be imprisoned or buried in hell itself. Nevertheless, it is gradually undergoing the mysterious change from the conforming to the transforming union although the soul itself is scarcely aware of it...

“Thus, is verified the obscure and prolonged interior activity which renews souls and disposes them for the mystical espousal. Later, it leads them gradually to the total transformation which is required for the mystical marriage.”



(John G. Arintero, *The Mystical Evolution*, as cited in Aumann 169)

ASSIGNMENTS AFTER SESSION 7

Review the outline and all concepts covered in Session 7

Read Jordan Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, Chapter 13

Recommended Reading:

Ralph Martin, *The Fulfillment of All Desire*, Chapt. 13-14
(pp. 305-370)