

## Theology 60282: John of the Cross: A Mystic's Mystic

**Syllabus**  
HC, SS

Theology Department  
University of Notre Dame  
Summer July 7-25 2014  
3 credits; Monday through Friday  
8:30—11:00 a.m.

### Course Description:

This course explores from theological perspectives the texts of John of the Cross (1542-1591), saint and doctor of the church, mystic and Spanish poet.

In the late nineteenth century Spanish literary critics took notice of the stunning beauty of the poetry John of the Cross. Spanish poets then quickly perceived the significance for them of the poetry of this Carmelite friar. A consensus soon formed that some of John of the Cross' poetry ranks not only with the very best of Spanish poetry but also with world-class poetry. This course explores the teachings of John about the contemplative life as well as the primacy of his poetry. The basic object of this course is to explore intelligently the Sanjuanist corpus of writings.

Theologians of the first half of twentieth century especially led by the Dominican Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P. (1877-1964), not only investigated John's writings theologically but even used John's framework and categories (along with Teresa of Avila's writings) as a major resource for a Western theology of mysticism. Teresa and John became *de facto* the standard resource for this theology. However, these theologians neglected the theological significance of John's poetry. Garrigou-Lagrange directed Pope John Paul II's doctoral thesis on faith in John of the Cross.

In the sixteenth century the Dominican Melchoir Cano, O.P. (1509-1560) authored an influential text called *De locis theologicis (On Theological Places)* in which Cano designated theological sources and authorities. This course will take a page from Cano and ask whether the writings of John of the Cross are a valid theological resource and what significance John's texts have for Trinitarian, Christological and Pneumatological theology and what anthropology his writings presuppose? This course will also explore John's use of scripture, his notion of human freedom, grace, glory, deification, creation and John's supposed apophaticism. We shall also ask where on the spectrum of Augustinian and Thomistic thought to assign John of the Cross.

Other themes to be explored in the poetry and prose of John of the Cross will be: the centrality for John of the theological virtues of faith, hope and love; John's use of Bridal mysticism; his basic premise that the mystical life requires what he refers to as emptiness, nakedness, poverty of spirit (*todo y nada*); contemplation; the experience of the dark nights; mystical mutuality and equality and friendship with God; desire and detachment; and the *sophia* character of John's theology. The course will seek to answer this question: Is John of the Cross' mystical theology a path to full authentic humanity? Karl Rahner, S.J., claimed that the Spiritual Exercises affected the way he did theology, we shall ask whether John of the Cross can help one become a more contemplative theologian and what such a contemplative theology may

contribute to the formation of a more contemplative church. Finally, can John of the Cross help in the search to overcome the divorce between Spirituality and Theology. As the course progresses participants will monitor Bernard McGinn's proposals that one study mysticism 1) from the perspective of presence 2) and through the lens of human consciousness with help from Bernard Lonergan, S.J. We shall also ask how one can pray with John's poetry. Finally, we ask: what contribution can John of the Cross make to the retrieval of an everyday sacramental mysticism?

**Required Text:**

*The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*. Revised edition; translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1991. One can order at 1-800-832-8489. It is important to use this edition and translation for this course for reasons that will become clear during the course.

Please read ahead of time in the above text the "Biographical Sketch," pp. 9-28.

**A Brief Text that will be very helpful as preparation for this course:**

Matthew, Iain. *The Impact of God: Soundings from St. John of the Cross*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995. This gem is an **excellent** introduction to the spirituality of John of the Cross.

"Now You Know Media" has recorded (CDs audio) 15 twenty-five minute lectures by K. Egan on "John of the Cross: Poet and Mystic," which can be a helpful overview and introduction to this course. NYKM has guaranteed students in this class a discount of 12 per cent off whatever the current sale price is at the time of the purchase. Call 1-800-955-3904 and state that you qualify for the discount as a student in this class using code *Egan2*. You can also check on the NYKM web site.

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We shall study one commentary each week along with the poems on which John commented: **Week One:** *Dark Night*; **Week Two:** *The Living Flame of Love*; **Week three:** *The Spiritual Canticle*. The professor will lecture on *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, a text that ought NOT be read until one has studied other commentaries by John as well as his poetry, letters, *Sayings of Light and Love*.

**Assignments:** 1) Thorough preparation of texts to be studied in class. 2) brief reflection papers on the text studied that week, due on Saturdays at noon with a possible option of an oral exam to take the place of the third reflection paper. Nightly assigned brief readings will form discussion matter on the following day.

**Professor:** Keith J. Egan, Ph.D., [Egan.1@nd.edu](mailto:Egan.1@nd.edu); 574-273-6064 (h); 574-276-1769 (c).

