



St. John of the Cross and Dr. C.G. Jung: Christian Mysticism in the Light of Jungian Psychology

James Arraj

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Many current attempts to revitalize the life of prayer are inspired by either the writings of St. John of the Cross or the psychology of Dr. C.G. Jung. Both are excellent choices. Even better would be a program of renewal under their joint inspiration.

Yet such a program faces three serious challenges: theological misgivings about the compatibility of Jung's psychology with Christian belief, long-standing misinterpretations of St. John's doctrine on contemplation, and the need to clarify the relationship between Jung's process of individuation and contemplation.

Parts I and II are devoted to resolving these first two problems, while Part III gives a practical demonstration of the relationship between individuation and contemplation in St. John's life and writings and in a variety of contemporary spiritual problems.

Let me put it more concretely. I am enthusiastic about the prospect of using Jung and St. John as practical guides in the interior life. But when this enthusiasm begins to run away with me I see Victor White deep in conversation with Jung in the tower at Bollingen and their subsequent estrangement. Or I see Juan Falconi and Antonio Rojas in the Madrid of the late 1620's evoking the name of John of the Cross with the best of intentions to fuel a popular enthusiasm for contemplation, yet paving the road that led to a distrust of mysticism that has lingered to our own day.

Although these problems are serious and will force us to take a difficult journey through the thickets of epistemology and the history of spiritual life in the 17th century, I believe they are surmountable and will help lay foundations for a renewal of the life of prayer and a practical science of spiritual direction.

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