



St. John of the Cross and Creation

Reading the Writings of John of the Cross

Introductory Summary : Presentation

General Introduction

A year devoted to John of the Cross does not allow us to read his works in the way we were able to do previously with Saint Teresa of Jesus and later with Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus. Once again this year, we propose a reading of texts by John of the Cross, but with a particular theme: creation. In this way, we will bring these texts into dialogue with selected passages from Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'*. This proposal may be seen as a way of reinterpreting the thought of John of the Cross around the central theme of ecology.

The works of John of the Cross offer a profoundly contemplative and mystical vision of creation. In his writings, nature is often portrayed as a trace of the Beloved, a discreet and veiled reflection of God, a symbolic language that speaks to the soul seeking the divine. Yet John of the Cross insists that we must not become attached to created things for their own sake. They are not the ultimate goal; when viewed in faith, they lead us to God. The danger is always that one might stop at the beauty of created things and lose sight of the Creator, which can then become a spiritual obstacle.

To understand John of the Cross's vision of creation properly, it is essential to place it within the whole of his doctrine. What he seeks above all is "union with God". This is the purpose of all his writings: to lead us towards this union. Far from hindering this search, creation is for him its privileged mediator. Everything depends on our relationship with creation. Faithful to the entirety of his teaching, John of the Cross wants us to look upon creation with a contemplative gaze—one of faith, hope, and charity. For him, creation is above all a mystery which, in revealing itself, reveals to us the mystery of God to whom we desire to be united: "I believe in one God, creator of heaven and earth..." (Creed).

The encyclical *Laudato Si'*, published by Pope Francis in 2015, broadens and updates this spiritual tradition within the context of the contemporary world. It rests upon the same sense of wonder before creation, but extends its implications: it introduces a social, ecological, and communal dimension that the writings of John of the Cross address less directly. One of the strengths of the encyclical is its reminder that creation is a living reality—wounded and threatened. *Laudato Si'* therefore calls for an integral ecological conversion, engaging the human person in every dimension: relationship with God, with others, with oneself, and with nature. The encyclical strongly emphasises the link between Christian faith and the commitment to protect our common home. Creation becomes not only a beauty to contemplate, but also a responsibility to shoulder, a common good to safeguard.

Where John of the Cross stresses the inner detachment necessary to see God beyond created things, *Laudato Si'* invites us to inhabit the world with attentiveness, simplicity, and active love as an expression of an incarnate faith. Thus, *Laudato Si'* does not replace the teaching of John of the Cross; rather, it offers it a contemporary extension, integrating ecological and social concerns within a vision of creation as gift, mystery, call, and mission. It draws Carmelite contemplation into a missionary, fraternal, and solidaristic dynamic, where praise becomes action and love of the Creator becomes care for creation.

We will therefore explore several key texts of John of the Cross on creation. Each will be accompanied by an introductory explanation, followed by selected passages from *Laudato Si'* presented in dialogue, and finally some questions to guide reflection. In fidelity to John of the Cross's own manner of teaching, these introductions and questions are neither restrictive nor exhaustive; the reader is free to form their own understanding and raise their own questions.

For 2026, the texts chosen are as follows:

1. Creation as 'a palace' (*Romances* 3; 4:1-38)
2. Creation as an icon (*Spiritual Canticle* B 5:1-4)
3. Creation as a 'messenger' (*Spiritual Canticle* B 4:1-7)
4. Creation as a quasi-sacrament (*Spiritual Canticle* B 14-15:1-5, 9, 28-29)
5. The 'awakening' of creation (*Living Flame* B 4:1-5, 14-15)
6. Creation drawn from nothingness (1 *Ascent of Mount Carmel* 4, 1-4)
7. Creation as a gift rather than possession (3 *Ascent of Mount Carmel* 20, 1-4)
8. Creation as the place of our liberation (*Prayer of a Soul Enkindled with Love*)



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