St. John of The Cross as Scholastic Philosopher

From The Ascent of Mount Carmel:

"There can be no concordance between light and darkness; as St. John says: *Tenebrae eam no comprehenderunt* The darkness could not receive the light (Jn. 1:5). The reason, as we learn in philosophy, is that two contraries cannot coexist in the same subject. Darkness, an attachment to creatures, and light, which is God, are contraries and bear no likeness toward each other..For a better proof of this, it ought to be kept in mind that an attachment to a creature makes a person equal to that creature; the stronger the attachment, the closer is the likeness to the creature and the greater the equality, for love effects a likeness between the lover and the loved...

“Faith, the theologians say, is a certain and obscure habit of soul. It is an obscure habit because it brings us to believe divinely revealed truths that transcend every natural light and infinitely exceed all human understanding. For the intellect, by its own power, extends only to natural knowledge, though it has the potency to be raised to a supernatural act whenever our Lord wishes. The intellect knows only in the natural way, that is, by means of the senses. If one is to know in this natural way, the phantasms and species of objects will have to be present either in themselves or in their likenesses; otherwise one will be incapable of knowing naturally. As the scholastic philosophers say: *Ab ojecto et potentia paritur notitia* Knowledge arises in the soul from both the faculty and the object at hand. If we were told of objects we had never known or seen resemblances of, we would in the end have no more knowledge than before.

“For example, if we were informed that on a certain island there was an animal whose like or kind we had never seen, we would then have no more idea or image of that animal in our mind than previously, no matter how much we were told…Such is faith to the soul; it informs us of matters we have never seen or known, either in themselves or in their likenesses. In fact, nothing like them exists. The light of natural knowledge does not show us the object of faith, since this object is unproportioned to any of the senses. Yet we come to know it through hearing, by believing what faith teaches us, blinding our natural light and bringing it into submission. St. Paul states: *Fides ex auditu* (Rom. 10:17). This amounts to saying that faith is not a knowledge derived from the senses but an assent of the soul to what enters through hearing...

Let it be recalled, then, that according to a philosophical axiom all means must be proportionate to their end. That is, they must manifest a certain accord with and likeness to the end so that through them the desired end may be attained...If the intellect, then, is to reach union with God in this life, insofar as is possible, it must take the means that bears a proximate likeness to God and unites with him. It is noteworthy that among all creatures, both superior and inferior, none bears a likeness to God's being or unites proximately with him. Although truly, as theologians say, all creatures carry with them a certain relation to God and a trace of him (greater or less according to the perfection of their being), yet God has no relation or essential likeness to them. Rather the difference that lies between his divine being and their being is infinite. Consequently, intellectual comprehension of God through heavenly or earthly creatures is impossible; there is no proportion of likeness...

“Contemplation, consequently, by which the intellect has a higher knowledge of God, is called mystical theology, meaning the secret wisdom of God. For this wisdom is secret to the very intellect that receives it. St. Dionysius on this account refers to contemplation as a ray of darkness. The prophet Baruch declares of this wisdom: ‘There is no one who knows her way or can think of her paths’ (Bar. 3:23). To reach union with God the intellect must obviously blind itself to all the paths along which it can travel. Aristotle teaches that just as the sun is total darkness to the eyes of a bat, so the brightest light in God is total darkness to our intellect. And he teaches in addition that the loftier and clearer the things of God are in themselves, the more unknown and obscure they are to us. The Apostle also affirms this teaching, saying that what is highest in God is least known by humans (Rom. 11:33)...

“We can gather from what has been said that to be prepared for this divine union the intellect must be cleansed and emptied of everything relating to sense, divested and liberated of everything clearly intelligible, inwardly pacified and silenced, and supported by faith alone, which is the only proximate and proportionate means to union with God. For the likeness between faith and God is so close that no other difference exists than that between believing in God and seeing him. Just as God is infinite, faith proposes him to us as infinite. Just as there are three Persons in one God, it presents him to us in this way. And just as God is darkness to our intellect, so faith dazzles and blinds us. Only by means of faith, in divine light exceeding all understanding, does God manifest himself to the soul. The greater one's faith the closer is one's union with God.”