

10. Healing Darkness I : An inflow of God (pages 72-76)



1. There is somewhere to go.
2. Only God can take us there.
3. God does act to take us there – transforming us in darkness

‘Not every suffering is night. But any suffering can become night.

For it to be night there have to be three elements.

For it to be “sheer grace”, in darkness, leading to union,

there has to be:

– an inflow of God; (God is always flowing). ‘in?’

– darkness – that is, the suffering, with the accent
on bewildering suffering;

– a creative response: faith, acceptance.’

We have the assurance that where God finds space, God enters.

Fonte

(Composed in the dark Toledo prison, deprived of the Eucharist).

(The river Tajo)

‘The stanzas tell of an ocean-sized waterfall, which is
Father surrendering to Son,
Son self-emptying to Father,
Spirit-water spilling out to create a universe.

The cosmos comes to drink it, though all – heaven, people, hell –
are already drenched in it.

John knows it, believes it.

He sees it welcomed, cupped and offered
in the Bread of Life’ (page 73).

Fonte

How well I know the living spring that flows though it is night!

That ever-living spring is hidden fast
and yet I found its dwelling place at last although by night.

Its origin? All that I know or see,
in the beginning from it came to be, but in the night.

Nothing on earth so beautiful as this:
heaven and earth meet here, and meeting kiss, though it is night.

Down to its deepest depths man may not go,
nor ford its flooding waters; this I know though it is night.

Light, source of light, by which all light was made,
whose brilliance never falters, cannot fade, though it is night!

So mighty and unceasing is its flow,
it waters heavens, earth and realms below,

although by night.

Something I know of its almighty force,
the flowing stream that issues from this source

although by night.

From these two streams wells forth another flow
yet neither stream precedes it, this I know,

though it is night.

This deathless spring, hidden in living bread,
brings life to us who, lacking it, were dead,

for it is night.

To all that lives: 'Come, drink your fill!' it calls
'Come to this water, for the darkness falls,

and it is night!'

This living spring, so very dear to me,
is here, within the bread of life I see,

though it is night.

‘In *Fonte* John sings of a God who is community’ (page 73).

‘In *Fonte* John shares his faith too in the Eucharist. For him, Eucharist is not simply our ritual galvanising our togetherness. It is an act of the Trinity involving us in their togetherness. Nor is Eucharist a merely passive object of adoration. It is an activity of Christ, powerfully summoning his creatures to the water (see stanza twelve) (page 74).



To all that lives: ‘Come, drink your fill!’ it calls
‘Come to this water, for the darkness falls, and it is night!’

‘John sees Christ here active, torrential, receiving the full force of all that God is and unleashing its flow upon us – the “everlasting fountain” released in the living bread “brings life to us”(stanza eleven)’ (page 74).



This everlasting fountain hidden in living bread, brings life to us who, lacking it, were dead, for it is night.

1. 1578 Toledo
2. 1590-1591 slander, nearly thrown out, dying

‘Love greatly those who speak against you and do not love you, because in this way love will come to birth in a heart that has none. That is what God does with us: God loves us that we might love God, through the love God has for us’ (Letter 33, 1591).

‘It is impossible that God fail to play his part. by communicating Himself, at least in a hidden way. It is more impossible for the sun not to shine in a tranquil, open place. The sun is up early and shining on your house, ready to shine in it if you open the curtains.

So God, who never sleeps nor slumbers as he keeps watch over Israel (see Psalm 121:4), will enter our empty souls and fill us with divine blessings. God is like the sun, shining over us to communicate himself to us’ (Flame 3.46-47).

The Triune God is the fountain.

I am graced to see God present and acting in the suffering,
to look for the movement of God's Spirit.

Suffering makes me aware of my incapacity and my need
and so faces me towards the Beloved
who alone can draw me into the communion
which alone heals and fills my life.

5. Healing Darkness II – Bewildering suffering and faith (pages 77-85)

‘When John speaks of night, which comes upon us and wrests our control, he is not imposing suffering. Suffering is a fact, and John’s intention is to encourage us to bear it creatively’(page 77).

God does not cause suffering, but is present to us in it.

‘Where there is no love, put love, and you will draw love out.’

(Letter 56, 1591)

‘When you are burdened you are joined to God. God is your strength. God is with people who suffer. When there is no burden, you are just with yourself, your own weakness. It is in the difficulties which test our patience that the virtue and strength of the soul is increased and affirmed’ (Sayings 4).

‘Healing comes particularly in situations that take us out of our own control, in the kind of pain that is *bewildering*’ (page 78).

John’s memories of being carried as a baby by his mother as she went looking for work.

God is like that (see Night I, 1.2; 8.3; 12.1; page 80. and Flame 3.66; page 81)

John’s memories of his mother nursing babies at the breast, and weaning them.

God is like that.

John’s memories of children wriggling in their mother’s arms, when the mother is offering comfort.

God is like that.

John-Paul II

‘Physical, moral and spiritual suffering – like sickness, the plagues of hunger, war, injustice, solitude, the lack of meaning in life, the very fragility of human experience, the sorrowful knowledge of sin, the seeming absence of God – are for the believer all purifying experiences which might be called “Night of Faith” (Apostolic Exhortation for 4th centenary of John’s death, §14).

Iain offers three scenarios, page 82.

‘This is the night, where there is not only pain, but where the ground I stand on to face the pain seems to shift’ (page 82).

The 'mystical night'.

'The divine approach is registering in mind and feelings, but registering as painful contrast' (page 81).

'John is calling that the place, not of chaos, but of transformation' (page 84).

'In writing *Night*, John does not want to say,

"It's all right, you see, because this is the explanation."

He wants to say, "It's not all right; it's a mess.

But you are not alone in this. God is present in this.

Now is the time not to lose faith in God."

This is the third element to night ... our response to the suffering that bewilders is not to abandon faith in God' (page 85).

6. Beyond Sympathy (pages 86-93)

Iain Matthew page 87

“We put a lot of emotional energy into two areas: personal weaknesses, from which we long to be free; negative situations which come uninvited upon us. Left like that, they are a recipe for despair in the weakness and resentment at what hurts us.

To leaving it like that ‘night’ suggests an alternative.

When the negative comes upon you,

then remember your desire to be free –

free from the personal weakness which was crippling you.

It is here that God is doing it,

and it is important not to panic or run away.’

‘To trust that God is present can turn the pain, where there has to be pain, from death-throes into the pangs of birth.’

Climbing a mountain ‘speaks of communion where the goal is not to sink a solitary flag-pole into the summit, but to “make an altar of oneself” there for “a sacrifice of love.”’
(see Ascent I.5.7 ; page 87)

Not climbing alone. Take God’s hand offered to us.
There is no other way.

‘Our instinct for survival, coupled with the anxiety of our age for achievement and perceived meaning, conspire to make such a trust uniquely difficult’ (page 88).

‘John gives us the schemas, not to help us predict, but to encourage us to surrender’ (page 88).

‘Do not struggle for something you once had and have now gone beyond. Instead, take heart, persevere patiently [don’t run away], without pain [it’s okay to try to lessen the suffering]; trust in God [let God carry you] in loving attentiveness’ (page 88).

‘We may have to live as if God sustained us in order to discover that God really does sustain us’ (page 90).

We are called to trust. Not to panic but to hold on.

Not to collapse into the pain or to indulge it,

but to rely on God

and be attentive to God's presence and action in my soul.

When negative experiences come upon me (like the night),

I am to remember my longing and my need for God's inflowing life.

‘This is what turns pain into night: grieve, address what can be addressed, do not condone the sin that may be causing the situation, but trust that the Father holds this situation in his hands, and will turn it to blessing’ (page 93).