

## 12. Part V. Encounter continued

### 3. The Experience of God : A Question about Jesus (pages 114-122)



The gentleness of God so exposes our faults that we feel cast off by God, unworthy of anyone's love. We can go through it so long as we know we are not alone. We want someone to understand, someone to love us. We need Jesus.

1. What is especially important to us is to see where Jesus is in John's experience of 'todo'(gift) and 'nada' (space for the gift).  
(see page 116)

2. Jesus is ever present in John's prayer and life.

He often began his letters with 'Jesus be in your soul!' and tells people when they feel the need of support to go to Christ, because that is where he goes, to that 'spotless mirror of the Eternal Father'.

‘The power unleashed on John of the Cross in the *Living Flame* is identified as the vitality of the Risen Christ –

“I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me” (Flame 2.34; Galatians 2:20).

The letting-go discussed in *Ascent* has one motive and model:

“love for Jesus Christ” whose only food was “doing the will of his Father” (Ascent I, 13.4).

The one who enters the space of the purified soul in *Ascent* is named as the “Son of God” (Ascent II.15.4).

And the desperate longing which fuels the pain of night is disclosed as a need for the Easter Jesus,

on the model of Mary Magdalene

anxious at the sepulchre’ (see Night II.13.6-7).

## Toledo Advent 1577

In Toledo John felt need to encounter Jesus:

‘Where have you hidden, Beloved?’

The Romances or Ballads on the Incarnation form the Prologue to all John’s writings.

‘They are his statement on who Jesus is for him’(page 119).

Today we tend to approach the mystery of Jesus the way his first disciples did – what theologians call ‘Ascending Christology.’ Starting from his obvious humanity, we are drawn into his prayer-communion with the God he called ‘Abba’, and so into his divinity.

## Ascending Christology

God's perfect  
human Word,  
symbol of the  
Divine Word  
of the Self-giving  
always Transcendent  
God



Communion in the  
Love-Spirit that  
unites Jesus and God,  
symbol of the  
Divine Love-communion  
of the  
always Transcendent  
God

## Romance 1. Father, Son & Spirit share one love

In the Beginning the Word was. He lived in God,  
and possessed in Him His infinite happiness.

That same Word was God ...

The Word is called Son. He was born of the Beginning,  
who had always conceived Him, and was always conceiving Him,  
giving always of His substance, yet always possessing it.

And thus, the glory of the Son was the Father's glory,  
and the Father possesses all His glory in the Son.

Romance I. continued Father, Son & Spirit share one love

As the Lover in the Beloved, each lives in the other,  
and the Love which unites them is one with them.



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## Romance I. continued Father, Son & Spirit share one love

With the one and with the other, He is equal in excellence.  
Three Persons, and there is one beloved in all three.  
And one love in them all, makes of them one Lover;  
and the Lover is the Beloved in whom each one lives;

For the Being which the three possess, each one possesses,  
and each of them loves Him who bears this Being.  
Each one is this Being which alone unites them,  
in an ineffable bond which cannot be put into words.  
Thus it is infinite the love which unites them,  
for the Three have one sole Love which is their essence;  
and the more love is one, so much the more is it love.



## Romance 2. Words of love within the Trinity

In that immense love which proceeds from the two, the Father speaks words of great affection to the Son, words of such profound delight, that no one can comprehend them; only the Son rejoices in them for they are meant for Him.

What he hears, is said in this way:

"Nothing contents me, my Son, apart from your company, and when something gives me joy, I love it in You.

The more something resembles you, the more it gives me satisfaction ...

In you only is my delight, O Life of my Life!

## Romance 2. continued Words of love within the Trinity

“You are light of my light.

You are my wisdom,

the image of my substance, in whom I am well pleased.

To the one who loves you, my Son, I will give Myself,

and the love in which I hold you,

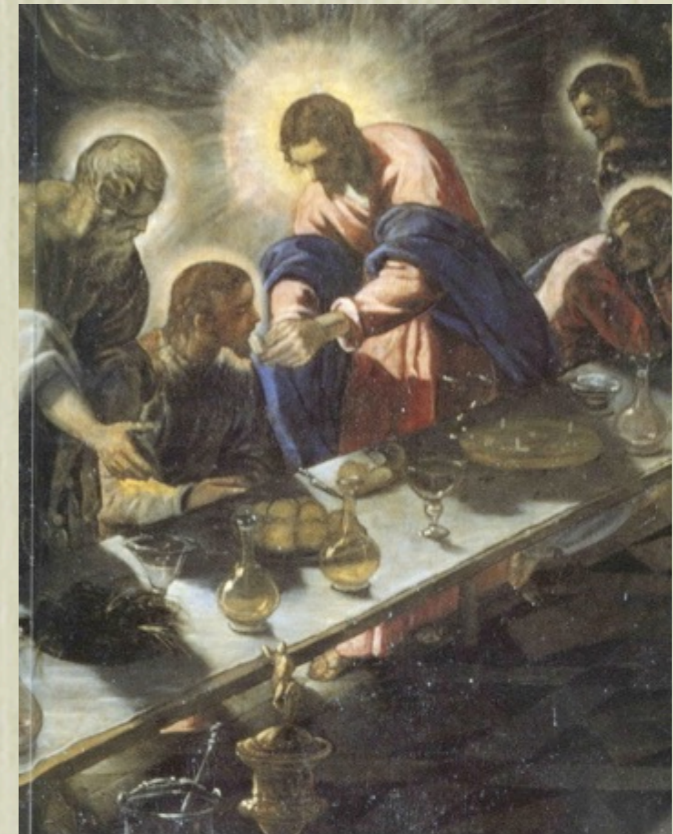
that same love I will place in them,

because they have loved you whom I love so much”.

## Romance 3. Creation as a bride for the Son

### The Father to the Son

‘A bride who will love you, my Son,  
I seek to give you,  
who because of You will be found  
worthy to share our company,  
and to eat bread at our table  
the same bread which I eat,  
that your bride may know  
the good I have in such a Son;  
and that she may rejoice with me  
in Your grace and fullness.’



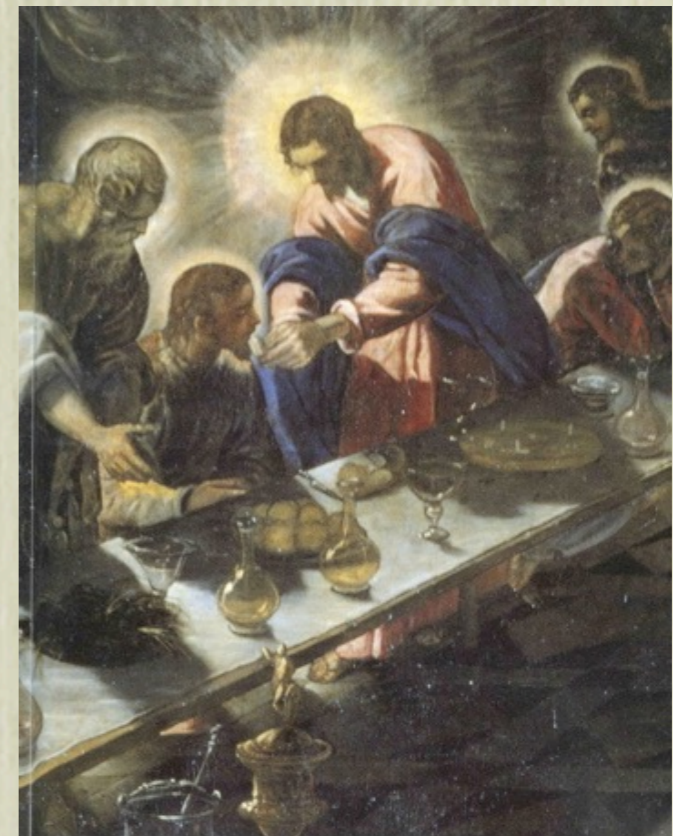
# Romance 3 continued. Creation as a bride for the Son

## The Son to the Father

I thank you, Father, (answers the Son).  
To the bride whom you give me  
I will reveal my splendour.

so that by it she may see  
how great is my Father,  
and how it is from your Being  
that I possess all I have received.

I will hold her in my arms  
and she will burn with Your love  
and with eternal delight  
she will exalt your goodness.



‘Poverty and bestowal are the coordinates of John’s system not merely because that is how things have to be for us human beings. Things are that way because that is how God is: Father, Son and Spirit are each absolutely poor because they each give themselves completely – so each is utterly rich with the other’s generosity.’

‘Father wants the bride to enjoy the Son; the Son wants the bride to relish the Father. It is as if creation were the fruit of an excess of unselfishness.’

## Romance 4. Creation as a bride for the Son

"Let it be done, then, says the Father,  
for your love invites it".

And by these words  
the world was created,  
a palace for the bride,  
made with great wisdom,  
constructed in two apartments,  
one above and the other below.

The lower was furnished  
with infinite variety,  
while the one above was made  
beautiful with marvellous jewels,  
that the bride might know  
the Bridegroom who was hers.



## Romance 4 continued. Creation as a bride for the Son

In the upper apartment  
were placed the hierarchy of angels;  
Human nature, however,  
he placed in the lower apartment,  
for man, in his being,  
is a lesser thing.

Though beings and their places  
were separated in this way,  
they all form one,  
who is named the bride;  
for love of the same Bridegroom,  
makes of them one bride.  
The higher beings possess  
the Bridegroom in rejoicing.



## Romance 4. continued Creation as a bride for the Son

The lower beings possess him in hope,  
from the faith which he infuses in them,  
telling them that one day  
he will exalt them.

And that from their low state  
He would lift them up,  
in such a way that no one  
could despise it any more.





## Romance 4. continued Creation as a bride for the Son

The Bridegroom would make himself wholly like his human creatures, and he would come to them and dwell with them; and God would be man and man would be God, and he would walk with them and eat and drink with them.



## Romance 4. continued Creation as a bride for the Son

He himself would be  
with them continually  
until the consummation  
of this world,  
when, joined they would rejoice  
together in eternal song.

For He was the Head  
of this bride whom he holds,  
to whom all the members of the just  
will be joined,  
all who form the body of the bride.



## Romance 4. continued Creation as a bride for the Son

‘He would take her tenderly in his arms  
and there give her his love;  
and when they were thus one,  
he would lift her to the Father  
where God’s very joy would be her joy.

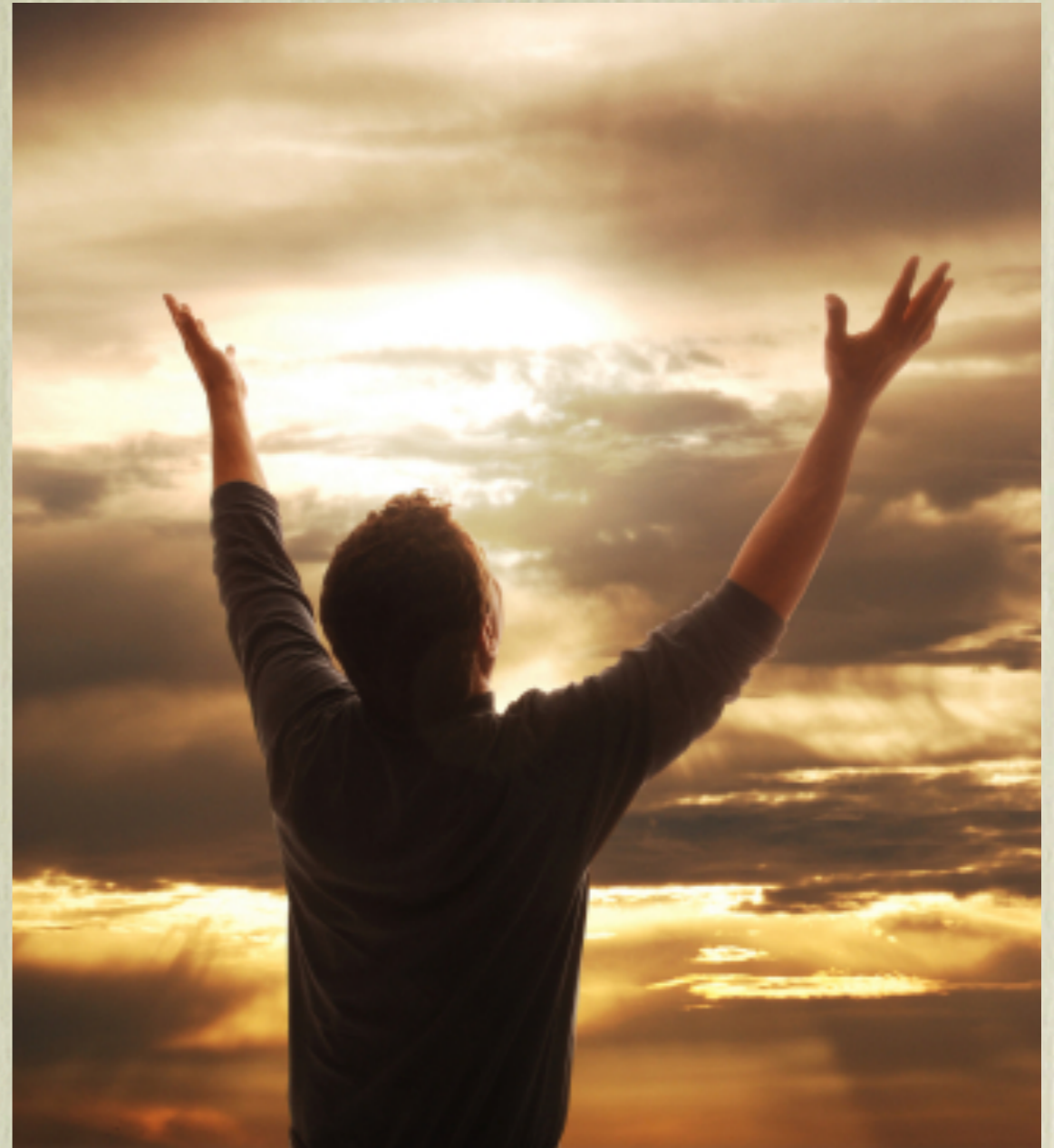
For as the Father and the Son  
and He who proceeds from them  
live in one another,  
so it would be with the bride;  
for, taken wholly into God,  
she will live the life of God.’



## Romance 5. Creation as a bride for the Son

‘By this bright hope  
which came to them from above,  
their wearying labours were lightened;  
but the drawn-out waiting  
and their growing desire  
to rejoice with their Bridegroom  
wore on them continually.

So, with prayers and sighs  
and suffering, with tears and moaning  
they asked night and day  
that now he would determine  
to grant them his company.



## Romance 5. continued Creation as a bride for the Son

‘Some said: “If only this joy would come in my time!”  
Others: “Come, Lord, send the one whom you will send!”  
And others: “Oh, if only these heavens would break, and with my own eyes I could see him descending; then I would stop my crying out.”



## Romance 5 continued Creation as a bride for the Son

“Clouds, rain down from your height,  
earth needs you,  
and let the earth open,  
which has borne us thorns;  
let it bring forth that flower  
that would be its flowering.”



## Romance 5 continued Creation as a bride for the Son

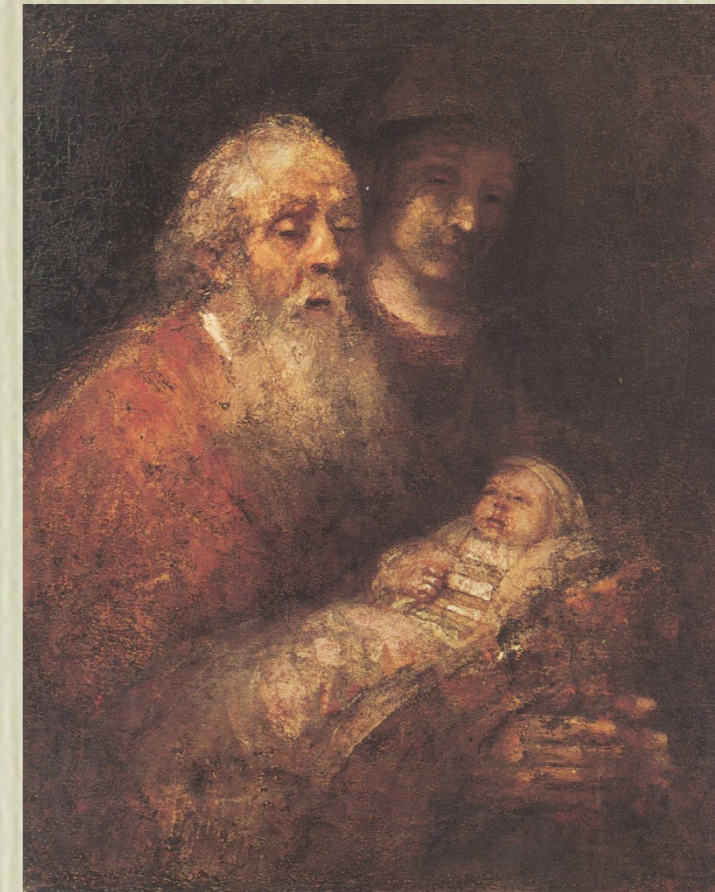
Others said: “What gladness for the one who is living then, who will be able to see God with his own eyes, and touch him with his hand, and walk with him, and enjoy the mysteries he will then ordain.”



## Romance 6. The Old Testament reaches its goal in Simeon

In these and other prayers a long time passed;  
but in the later years their fervour greatly increased;  
When the aged Simeon burned with longing,  
and pleaded with God that he might see this day.

And so the Holy Spirit answered the good old man,  
and gave him his word that he would not see death  
until he saw Life descending from the heights,  
until he took God himself into his own hands,  
held Him in his arms, and pressed Him to himself.





## Romance 7. The Incarnation

Now that the time had come when it would be good to ransom the bride serving under the hard yoke of that law which Moses had given her, the Father, with tender love, spoke in this way:

"Now you see, my Son, that your bride was made in your image, and so far as she is like you she will suit you well.

Yet she is different, in her flesh, which your simple being does not have.

In perfect love, this law holds:

that the lover become like the one he loves; for the greater their likeness, the greater their delight.

Surely your bride's delight would greatly increase, were she to see you like her in her own flesh".

## Romance 7. continued The Incarnation

“My will is yours”, the Son replied,

“and my glory is that your will be mine.

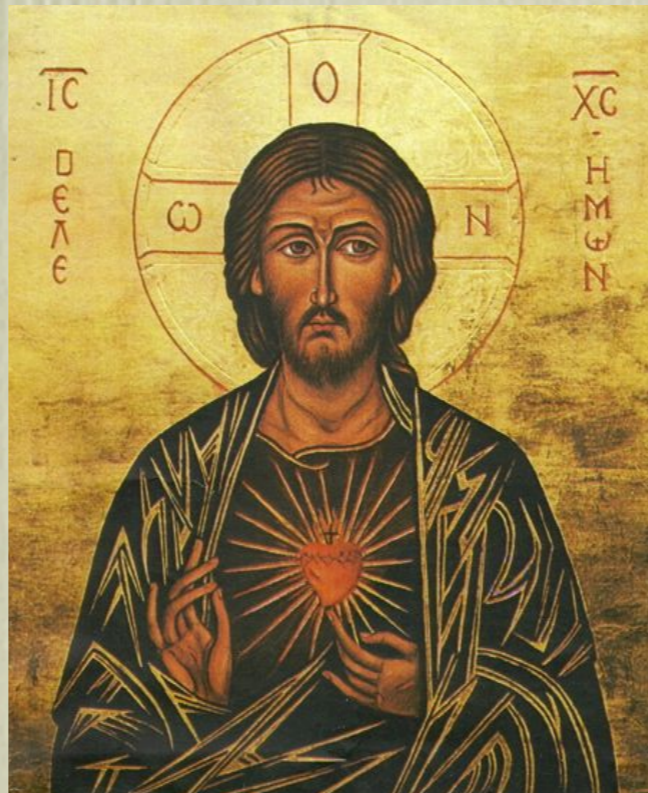
This is fitting, Father, what you, the Most High, say;  
for in this way your goodness will be more seen.

Your great power will be seen, and your justice and wisdom.

I will go and tell the world,

spreading the word of your beauty and tenderness,

and of your sovereignty.



## Romance 7. continued The Incarnation

I will go and seek my bride,  
and take upon myself  
her weariness and labours,  
in which she suffers so;  
and, that she may have life,  
I will give my life for her,  
and, lifting her out of that deep,  
I will restore her to you”.



‘The emphasis is on being with, on company, but company that shares pain. The Son wants to ‘be with’ from the inside, from inside her weariness and troubles in which she suffers so’(page 122).



## Romance 8. The Incarnation continued

Then he summoned an Archangel called Gabriel,  
and sent him to a virgin called Mary,  
At her consent the mystery was wrought,  
in whom the Trinity clothed the Word with flesh.  
And though Three did this work,  
it was wrought in the One,  
and the Word lived Incarnate  
in the womb of Mary.

And he who had only a Father,  
now had a mother, too.  
She was not like others  
who conceive by man.

From her own flesh, He received his flesh,  
and so He is called Son of God and of man.



## Romance 9. The Birth



When the time had come for him to be born,  
He went forth like a bridegroom from his bridal chamber,  
embracing his bride, holding her in his arms.

He, whom the gracious Mother laid in a manger  
among some animals that were there at the time.  
men sang songs and angels melodies,  
celebrating the marriage of two such as these.

## Romance 9. continued The Birth



But God, there in the manger, moaned and wept tears - tears that were the jewels brought by the bride to the wedding. The Mother gazed in sheer wonder on such an exchange: in God, man's weeping, and in man, joy: things usually so alien, one to the other.

Play 'Incarnate'

- ‘That is who Jesus is for John of the Cross, as he begins [Advent 1577 at Toledo] months of isolation and bitter disapproval, when everything – his body, his friends, his sense of purpose, even the God of his fathers – turns stranger.

In faith, Jesus is the one whom John encounters at his side, weeping his tears and feeling his anguish, sweetening what is immeasurably bitter by his spousal love.’





Matthew 11:28-29

## Part V. Encounter

### 4. Jesus, the Experience of God (pages 123-133)

Iain Matthew page 123

‘Where is Jesus in John’s doctrine of God’s self-gift; and where is Jesus in the doctrine of making room?’

First, God’s gift, the *todo*, the all, which gives the *nada* any meaning.

When John says, ‘Not this, nor that, nor that, but faith’ it can bring a marvellous sense of spaciousness and freedom, but it can also bring a feeling of rootlessness. It is all very well his telling us to let go of secondary supports, but we have to hold on to something.

(i) Ascent II, chapter 22

Hold on to faith = hold on to Jesus. He is God's *todo* to us

He is the gift for whom space must urgently be made

‘God has become silent and has no more to say: what God used to say partially, to the prophets, God has now said totally, in God’s Son, giving us his Son who is our everything’ (Ascent II.22.4).

‘You will not take from me, my God, what you once gave me in your only Son, Jesus Christ, in whom you gave me all I long for; so I will rejoice: you will not delay, if I do not fail to hope’ (Sayings, 26).

‘Set your eyes on him alone, because in him I have said everything to you’ (Ascent II.22.5).

## (ii) Canticle, chapter 37

‘Love takes us on a journey deeper into Christ. Deeper, but always into him’ (page 126).

‘And so up to the caverns, set deep into the rock – almost out of sight – we’ll find a way to enter, there to taste the pomegranate wine’ (Canticle Stanza 32).

‘The caverns, the living space, are the mysteries of Jesus (see Cant. 37.3). Entering means taking on the shape of Jesus’ life so as to meet Jesus’ heart’ (page 126).

‘The soul longs really to enter these caverns, Christ’s caverns, so that she might indeed be absorbed, transformed, drunk with the love their wisdom contains, hiding herself in the heart of her Beloved’ (Canticle<sub>2</sub> 37.5).

‘For John, Christ is the receding depth which makes the divine  
‘always new and increasingly amazing’ (Canticle<sub>2</sub> 14.8).

‘Jesus is the only place from which one can gaze on the Father  
unrestrictedly: ‘thanking the Father and loving him anew with  
great delight and feeling, through his Son, Jesus Christ. And this  
she does united with Christ, together with Christ’ (Canticle<sub>2</sub> 37.6).

‘Heaven will be that: a total entry into the caverns of Christ’s heart,  
and infinite space for the Father.’

(iii) Ascent II, chapter 7

‘As it becomes clear that John’s programme can lead, not just to upright behaviour, but to inner poverty and total emptiness, it is hardly surprising that we may feel misgivings. That is where John’s hinge chapter, 2 Ascent 7, aims to meet us’ (page 128).

1. narrow gate, denying self, taking a cross, following him
2. Jesus experienced night of senses and night of spirit

‘You can go there because Christ has been there. That is John’s logic.’

(page 130)

## 4. Jesus, the Experience of God continued

- *Todo* ‘Heaven will be that:  
a total entry into the caverns of Christ’s heart,  
an infinite space for the Father’ (page 127).
  - *Nada* ‘It is not enough for Jesus to have said “night”;  
it is important in John’s view that he should have  
experienced it, since “he is our example and our light” (page 129).
- ‘On the cross, the heart of Jesus became  
a massive space for the fire of the Spirit to burn –  
free to blaze out “more intense than all the fires in the world”  
in Resurrection’ (page 131).

‘*Night* means to tell us, not so much what is actually happening in the night of the spirit, but how it feels’ (page 122).

‘The *nada* is Jesus’ emptiness: the darkness that can eat into human life, with its threat of isolation and its appearance of chaos, has taken on Christ’s contours. It has become a space for his Father to fill’ (page 132).

‘John’s vision commits believers ...  
to allow Jesus to work out his dying and rising in their lives.’

(page 133)



Jesus.

It is his faith, his hope and his love  
that are given me by the Spirit of God.

It is the flame of his love that embraces me.

It is the spring of life welling up in his heart  
that wells up in mine.

Jesus' heart is totally open to God,  
and he gives me his heart.