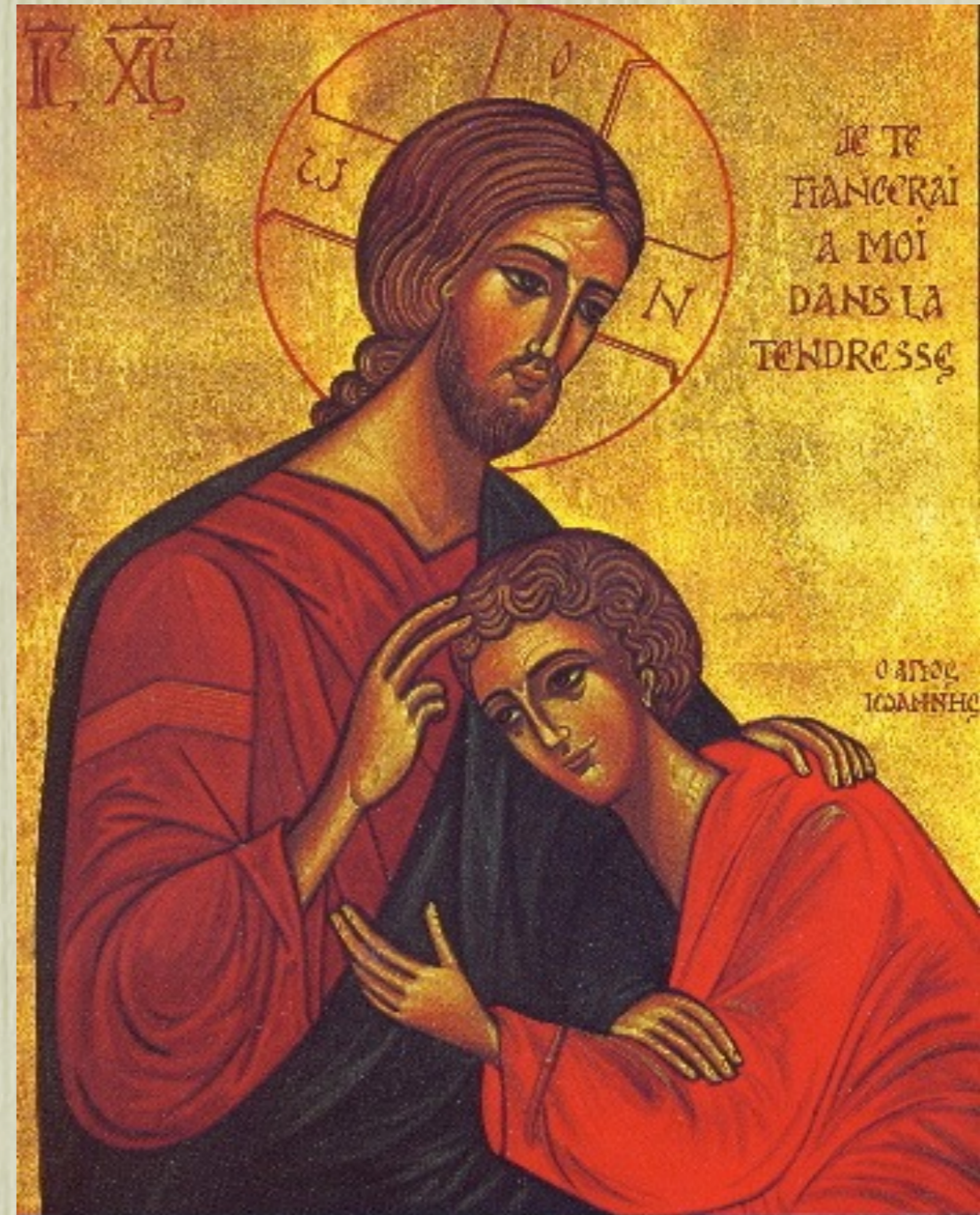


03. Spiritual Canticle & Living Flame of Love



Iain Matthew The Impact of God – Part I Entry

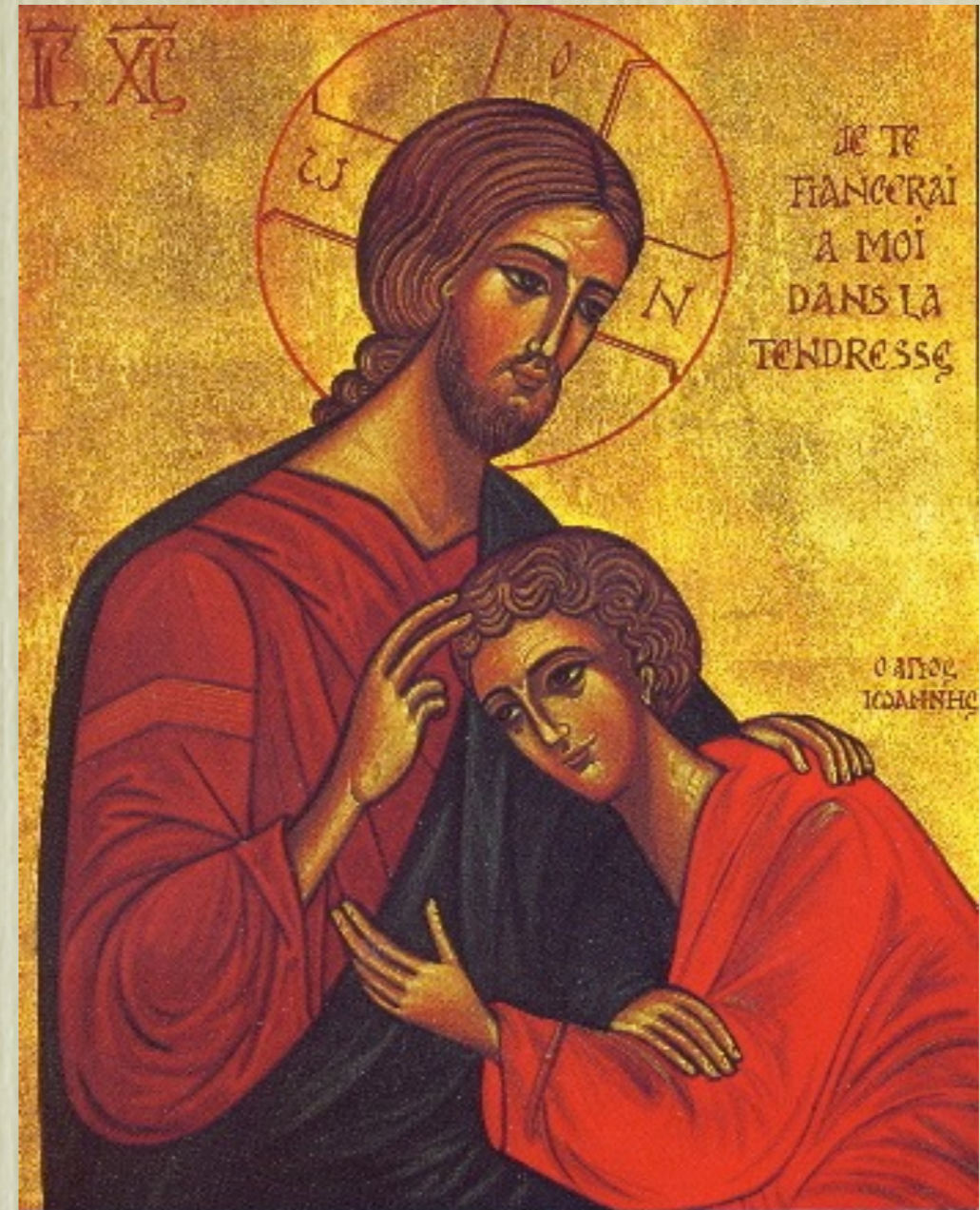
1. Impact (pages 1-4)

- We sense ‘a call to freedom, to wholeness, to more than what we are now. John of the Cross felt this as a call to reach out for God. But within us an unvoiced fear can make change impossible’.
- Is the call real? Will we experience communion with God? While we may not choose to follow a different call, ‘we may never fully choose this one’. John says the call is real. ‘He testifies to a God who is pressing in to meet me, to change me, to fill me where my need is deepest.’ God is love and love changes people.

- Faced with darkness we are tempted to give up.
- The Spirit of God is brooding over the chaos / darkness and has the power to command: 'Let there be light!'
- 'Light shines in the darkness'.



- John teaches us that we are not alone in this journey.
- It is Jesus' longing that we share his journey.
- We are called to share in Jesus' communion with God.



Gregory the Great c.600



‘Because of the ardent love of her heart, Mary continued seeking him when she could not find him, even after the other disciples had gone away. In tears she kept searching, and, a fire with love, she yearned for him. Thus it happened that she alone saw him. She had already sought and found nothing, but she continued seeking and so found the object of her love.



While she was seeking, her longing grew stronger and stronger, until it was allayed in the embrace of Him whom she was seeking ... At first she did not recognise him, but then Jesus said to her: 'Mary' ... as if to say: 'Now recognise the one who recognises you' ... Outwardly it was He who was the object of her search, but inwardly it was He who was teaching her to search for Him.'

2. Echoing the Impact (pages 5-12)

- 1542-1591
- 1563 left nursing to join the Carmelites
- 1577 (aged 35) in monastery cell-prison in Toledo (central Spain)

- In the prison cell John composed The Spiritual Canticle (completed 1582)

Where have you hidden Beloved?

Why have you wounded my soul?

I went out to the wilderness calling for you
but you were gone.

Oh shepherds keeping your watch in the hills,
if by chance you meet with my Love
tell Him I suffer in my lonely grief
and I soon will die.

But I have searched for my Love in the mountains,
I have searched among the meadows and the fields.
He has poured out a thousand graces in them
so my heart might be healed.

Yet my heart is not healed



‘In his darkness there was disclosed to him
Christ’s desire to love him’.

He discovered a God who ‘gives himself to the poor’.

‘What excludes us from John’s writing is not our
being too low down some scale of perfection ...
We are excluded, not by where we are, but by an
unwillingness to go farther. We are welcomed in
when we wish to seek, to change, to be changed.
We can hear John’s answer if we can share his
question: “Beloved, where?”.

3. Picking up the echo (pages 13-18)

- ‘His word came from experience. This experience gave him access to others at their point of need.’
- ‘John’s greatest gift is not so much to tell us what to do, nor to pinpoint our place on the map, but to draw back the curtains and disclose the whole journey as real.’
- ‘John has a word for us which is relevant and sensitive. But it is also urgent. If his writing is on fire at his end, the flame of his own experience, it catches fire again at our end, as he sees our potential.’

- ‘John’s aim is not to extract yet more effort, but to open the path to what will genuinely meet the need.’
- ‘His word is not so much “perfection”, as if it were only about me becoming myself. He prefers to call it “union” – “union with God”, the “union of love”.’

Part II Gift

4. A quiet man speaks (pages 19-27)

Living Flame

poem & prose commentary for Ana de Peñalosa, who opened her home to Carmelite nuns.

Written (1586? aged 44) at Granada when Vicar Provincial (travelled 8,600 miles). Written in a fortnight.

John at his most relaxed, and so most intense.



John of the Cross – Oh llama de amor viva : The Living Flame of Love

Stanza 1

Flame, alive, compelling,
yet tender past all telling,
reaching the secret centre of my soul!
Since now evasion's over,
finish your work, my Lover,
break the last thread, wound me, and make me whole.

Stanza 2

Burn that is for my healing!
Wound of delight past feeling!
Ah, gentle hand whose touch is a caress,
foretaste of heaven conveying
and every debt repaying:
slaying, you give me life for death's distress.

John of the Cross – Oh llama de amor viva : The Living Flame of Love

Stanza 3

O lamps of fire bright-burning
with splendid brilliance, turning
deep caverns of my soul to pools of light!
Once shadowed, dim, unknowing,
now their strange new-found glowing
gives warmth and radiance for my Love's delight.

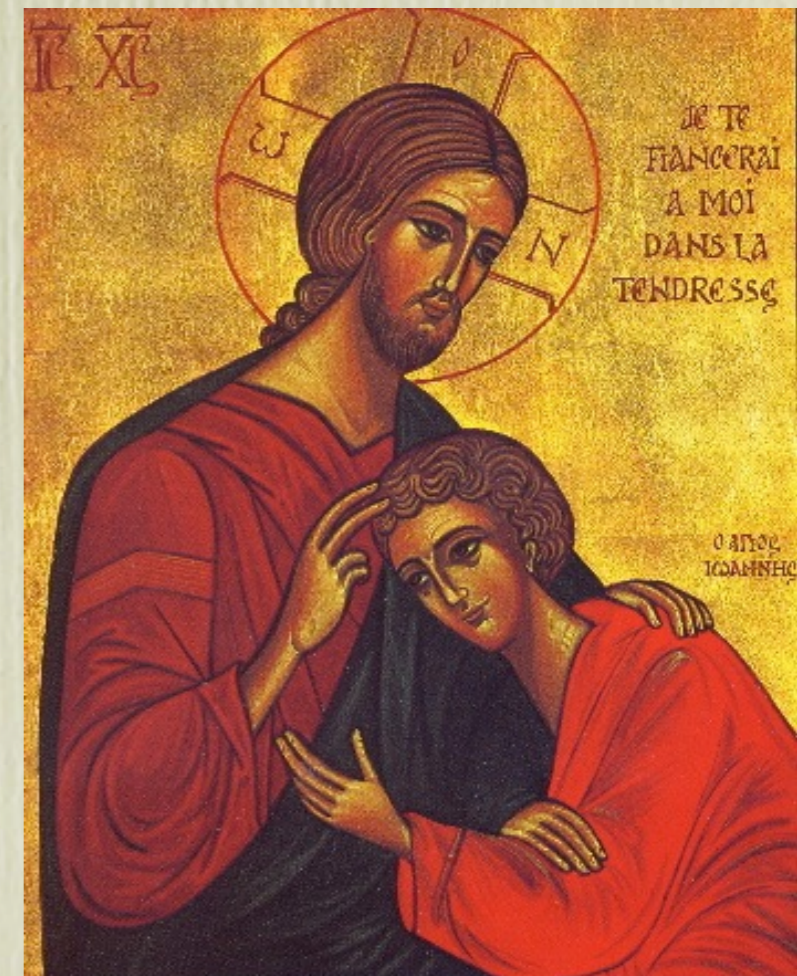
Stanza 4

Ah! gentle and so loving
you was within me, proving
that you are there in secret and alone;
your fragrant breathing stills me,
your grace, your glory fills me
so tenderly your love becomes my own.

O living flame of love, tenderly wound my soul
to its deepest inner heart, without oppression.
Come, consummate our love,
tear through the veil of our union.
If it be your will come and rend the veil of the temple.

Yet gently your hand does wound
as you rend through the veil of my temple.
Come, take this life that I give,
So that I might come to live in this our dying.

O lamps of fire in deep caverns of feeling,
Once obscured and blind
Are now leading in the warmth
and the passion of Your love.



- ‘All initiative belongs to God. When God speaks God acts, and God’s action is one of self-giving.’

‘I am yours, and for you, and I am pleased to be as I am that I may be yours and give myself to you’(LF 3.6).

‘If you are seeking God, know that much more is God seeking you’(LF 3.28).

‘God’s purpose is to make the soul great’(LF 2.3).

‘When the deep caverns of the soul are empty and pure, the thirst and hunger and sense of spiritual longing is more than can be borne ... The capacity of these caverns is deep, because that which they can hold is deep and infinite; and that is God’(LF 3.18, 22).

‘All the soul's infirmities are brought to light. They are set before its eyes to be felt and healed. Now, with the light and heat of the divine fire, it sees and feels those weaknesses and miseries which previously resided in it, hidden and unfelt, just as the dampness of the log of wood was unknown until the fire was applied to it and made it sweat and smoke and sputter. This is what the flame does to the imperfect soul.’(LF 1.21-22).

‘The soul is like the air within the flame, enkindled and transformed in the flame, for the flame is nothing but enkindled air’(LF 3.9).

‘You should not bear being attached to anything, whether it be to the practise of meditation, or to anything, whether sensory or spiritual, which delights you, or any way of thinking. You should be very free regarding everything, because any thought or discursive reflection or satisfaction upon which you may want to lean would impede and disquiet you, and make noise in the profound silence of your senses and spirit, which you possess for the sake of this deep and delicate listening.’

(LF 3.34).

‘My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God’(Psalm 84:3).



‘Is not my word like a fire, says the Lord?’(Jeremiah 23:29).

‘I have come to cast fire upon the earth,
and how I wish it were blazing already’(Luke 12:49).

Light in darkness



- ‘The point is that *he*, John, said it, that he *said* it, and that it is possible to relate to God in this way.’
- ‘His God anticipates, initiates, gives, transforms, like a flame entering till it engages the deepest centre. John’s universe is drenched in a self-outpouring God.’

Teilhard ‘God is the heart and the beyond of everything’.

- ‘Permeating the commentary is an awareness of a self-communicating God, a God whose plan is to fill us with nothing less than himself.’
- ‘The Flame is a person, “the Spirit of your Bridegroom”, the Breath of Christ.’

O living flame of love, tenderly wound my soul
to its deepest inner heart, without oppression.
Come, consummate our love,
tear through the veil of our union.
If it be your will come and rend the veil of the temple.

Yet gently your hand does wound
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