

DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL: EVIL OR THE SHADOW OF GOD?

By Elaine A. Yaryan*

There you are! Come right in and let me take your coat. I was afraid the weather might have kept you away today and I am eager to show something to you. A treasure, really. It has to do with our last visit, when we were talking about evil and suffering and God's will in the midst of it all. Here, follow me. We will have to go to the inner room. This treasure is spiritual, mind you, but I must warn you in advance that it is not very religious. Of course it used to be dreadfully religious but the Craftsman has been at work so it is taking a different shape. No, we won't disturb him by seeing his work before it is finished. He is funny that way — it seems to give him exceptional pleasure when people see his work before it is complete. I have to admit I do not always like it when he works because from one session to the next I grow rather fond of the new shape and to be quite honest I feel resentful sometimes when I see him coming along, whistling cheerfully, tools in hand. But then when he, skilled Craftsman that he is, finishes and steps back for awhile I cannot help myself rushing in with a glad cry of approval. His work is always splendid.

So, are you ready to take a look? The treasure, my friend, is a self-portrait of the Craftsman. An engraving, actually. It is extraordinary because it has his children and his story etched into himself, hidden away within him. Yes, it sounds a bit confusing but when you see it you will understand. I wish that we had time to look at the whole picture but since we do not, let us look at the part where God hides himself for awhile. I have only seen it just recently myself and am still getting used to the changes. We will need to walk carefully. The engraving is still fresh and as you shall see, the Craftsman chose to carve it right on the walls. Yes, it goes right around the corners and into all the closets and cupboards — a great, sweeping, floor to ceiling affair. Now and then he knocks a hole in one wall to expand the room, just so the engraving will fit. He is very determined. The Craftsman has yet to reach some places but he assured me that when he is finished not one inch will be left untouched. You will see what I mean in a moment. Come with me now to the inner room and we will see what the Craftsman has been up to.

As we walk along let me tell you about the time I first met the Craftsman. No, not that pale, blond-haired fellow staring down from the picture in the church's nave. (It took me quite awhile to get past that limpid picture and read his story as it really is.) The One that I read about was robust, a Craftsman, a walker of hills. He had children clustered about him, because he is a lover of all who have simple hearts. The very air around him seemed to have healing properties, although he looked ordinary enough. Oftentimes in the evening he could be found sitting with a motley group of men and women, eating, singing, talking about everything under the sun. I began to love him as I read.

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His story drew me in so that I became part of the whole great drama. I was watching the Craftsman go about, full of grace and truth, when a malignant shadow crept into the scene, falling across children, sparrows, and the ancient city itself. A great, splintered cross moved toward me. My God. He was beneath it, staggering under the weight. I shudder to tell you the next part. Screaming mobs lined the road, spitting, fists waving. The air was fetid with profanity as they cursed the bleeding Craftsman, the walker of hills and lover of simple hearts. Outraged at their cruelty I rushed to one of them and grabbed her by the shoulders, whirling her around to see who could perpetrate such a crime. Oh, the inexpressible agony then. I stared into my own face. With a deafening blow the first nail hit its mark.

I looked at the Craftsman's dying form, bound to that cross. Ever so gently, in his pain he whispered "Father, forgive them." With those three words, he spilled an eternity of pure love into my soul.

That was when he began the engraving.

And now here we are at the newest part of the picture I was telling you about. As you can see God himself fills this part of the picture but his children cannot find him. To them it feels as if he disappeared. One of his children, St. John of the Cross, called this part of the picture "the dark night of the soul." When the Craftsman made his engraving in John's heart he spent much time on this portion. Some of God's children, I am told, do not have a dark night in their engraving but the Craftsman assures me that he has everything planned so that when all of the engravings are eventually brought together, the picture will be complete. (I must confess I was quite upset when he started carving the dark night on my wall but I did not see it on anyone else's. He was ever so patient though, explaining again and again that it will all fit together when the grand engraving is finished.)

What is that? You would like to know how the dark night comes and why God hides himself for awhile? You want to hear what the children say and do when they cannot find him? You will have to repeat that last question, your voice became faint. Oh, you also want to know what to do if the Craftsman should begin to engrave the dark night into your heart. There now, no need to be frightened. Even though it is a stern part of his portrait, with tears and tribulation, as you can see perfect love also fills the picture. I will tell you as much as I can but the Craftsman is really the one who knows all about it.

Perhaps I should begin with the time the dark night came into my heart. That, after all, led me to discover his ways with some of his other children when they thought he had gone. What a comfort it has been to listen to their stories and know that our engravings belong together, that the same Craftsman is at work in all of our hearts. By the end of our stories perhaps some of your questions will be answered.

It had been many years since I first met the Craftsman. The engraving was already well underway. God had begun giving me words to share with his children. Some of them were just simple little songs. Often we stayed up late at night, God and I. Our friendship was warm, sweet. One morning when we were talking God told me that he had a purpose for me, that he wanted me

to be a giver of bread to his children, the ones who were famished for truth. He showed me how some of his children when they are starving, develop a peculiar nausea for the very food that would restore them to health. Those were the children he particularly wanted me to feed.

Because I love him so, I wanted to say yes right away, but I was very fearful and did not think I could do what he required. What if the famished children would not eat? What would I do then? What if they turned against me, as famished children have been known to do when a bread giver comes with food? I remembered stories of some other of his children who had a similar purpose, and how fearsomely they were sometimes treated. It was hard to tell God how frightened I was, since I was most eager for him to think well of me. There was no way around the truth, though. Shamefaced, I blurted out my fear. He only smiled in his usual generous way. "It is time for you to read Gideon's story again," he said.

God promised that he would give me everything I needed to feed the children — he would "supply seed for the sower and bread for food." It would take time to get me in shape for the work, but if I would agree, he would send the Craftsman along. (As you may have guessed already, the engravings equip the children for their work.) I knew from past experiences that engraving sometimes hurt, but there was no way to know how the next set of engravings would feel or how long they would take. After that conversation we continued on as usual, doing the dishes, folding laundry, taking the children to the dentist, going to church and the like.

One day many months later a coolness came into my soul. It was barely noticeable at first. I had trouble understanding why the Craftsman first came to Israel and not to China or Japan. When I turned to ask him, he was gone. A cold fog eddied about the inward room. The feeling passed but the question remained. I kept reading his letters as usual, but somehow they lost their brilliance. Now and then they shone as they had at one time, but gradually, steadily, they grew dim. The darkness increased week by week, filling every place where God's warm love belonged. Oh, the terror that grew in my heart. Where had he gone? Why did he stay away? Did he not see what was happening?

My soul was thick with black darkness, with the putrid stench of evil that filled the air that dreadful day when the cross loomed high and the Lord died. His engraving seemed draped in a shroud. All of our years of friendship seemed like a half forgotten dream. Some days I wept in grief, thinking he was gone forever. When I remembered his gentle voice telling me about the famished children and my task as giver of bread, the pain was nearly unbearable. Like a raging flood temptation swept through again and again, urging me to throw faith away. "It's all a sham!" the muddy waters roared. "You don't really believe all that nonsense about the Craftsman, do you?"

"But how could you bear it?" you ask.

Whenever I reached a place of utter despair God came back. Not for long, mind you, just long enough to give a bit of hope and rest. For a season, perhaps a few hours or days, he stayed close by, washing my face, giving me morsels

of bread. Then he was gone again. Part of the darkness was fearing his next departure! How I dreaded the return of temptation. God never would tell me where he had gone or when he would be back or even why he went away. All he would tell me was that I needed to let go of my striving. Imagine that! I did not even know that I was striving. But he said to let go, so I tried very, very hard.

Trying, of course, was the whole problem. Nothing worked anymore. On it went for endless months. You can see here, in this part of the picture, how God actually carried me in his arms through the whole ordeal, but I did not know it at the time. Once I tried to tell some other children about my grief but they shook their heads and looked bewildered. "Must be stress," they said. "Try exercising a bit more. You know, vegetables, fresh air, that sort of thing. Your problem is all those classes at the university. You really ought to take more time to smell the roses." One of them asked if I had been dabbling in the occult.

Now, look over there at that tree with a dove in it.

One day I was out cutting the lawn. Passing by the little spruce tree I noticed a pair of tiny liquid eyes peering out. There, scarcely an arm's reach away, was a grey dove sitting on her nest. Apparently the noise of the lawnmower meant nothing to her, nor did a giant human towering mere inches away. Undaunted, the courageous mother stayed fast on her nest, nourishing the young life beneath her wings. As I looked into her ebony eyes I saw the love of God, holding, sustaining, protecting, nourishing his young. I saw myself in the shadow of his wings. The dark place was the shadow of his wings. A warmth stirred within the cold place.

Not long after that I awoke one morning to the dear sound of the Craftsman wielding his tools. He was singing Psalm 30. Joy broke into the weak, sickened places. My voice was hoarse and completely unlovely but I joined him on verses 11 and 12. The icy, hellish fear was gone. Just like that.

I have left out much of the story but that is because I want you to hear the other stories before our time together draws to an end. You asked what I learned from the dark night. I can only think of one thing at the moment, and that is that God is very big and I am very small.

Since that time God has given me portions of his letters that talk about the darkness. He showed me how Moses and the prophets, David, Job, and John the Baptist and many others went through seasons of darkness. In fact it seems that every time I read his letters now I see where he is hidden and then revealed. Some of his revealing is promised for later, but he always keeps his word so it is as good as done. My goodness, one of God's children, Meister Eckhart, said it perfectly: "God is like a person who clears his throat while hiding and so gives himself away." Even when he is hidden there are still clues that he is around.

Pardon me? Yes, I agree wholeheartedly. We all would do well to pay more attention to those clues.

At the end of my darkness God took me back to Calvary where once again I looked up into his broken face. Forgive my weeping, I cannot help it. I

understood then that he took all of the darkness into himself. He died in that dark night. Oh, but joy of all joys, after the suffering of his soul he saw the light of life and was satisfied.

David saw the Lord, you know, in the distant future, there on that cross. Some of his night songs were for the cross. Others were from his own times in the dark. Excuse the roughness in my throat. I will sing a few of the lines for you:

To you I call, O Lord my Rock; do not turn a deaf ear to me. For if you remain silent, I will be like those who have gone down to the pit.²

Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I.³

O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water . . . On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night.⁴

David's darkness came several times. I believe his first experience was the rejection by King Saul, when David fled to the wilderness and lived like an animal. There he wept before God, wondering whatever became of the one who helped him slay Goliath. Why did God allow Saul to persecute him so dreadfully? Did he not know, did he not care? How painfully David struggled and suffered there, remembering past blessings. Years passed with no hope for change.

Even as David suffered, though, his love kept him reaching out to God. "You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light."⁵ As he faced temptations to fear, to give in to the devouring tactics of his enemy, David lifted his voice and sang: "I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."⁶ In this way David waited as the dark night found its place in his engraving.

You will recall, I think, the story of Job. His dark night came with tribulation on every side. The terrible loss of his children and material wealth. His friends' misunderstanding. The accusations. Even his wife chided him to curse God and die. That taunt was the crux of his suffering. Whatever happened to the God Job had trusted all of his life? Nothing he knew about God made sense anymore. In his terrible season of loss the easiest thing in the world would have been to curse God and die. Again and again the temptations came. Listen to Job's broken cry from the dark night:

If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling! . . . But if I go to the east, he is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find him. When he is at work in the north, I do not see him; when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him. But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold. My feet

have closely followed his steps; I have kept to his way without turning aside. I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread . . . God has made my heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me. Yet I am not silenced by the darkness, by the thick darkness that covers my face.⁷

God never really explained everything to Job, at least not in this life. That part of the story still mystifies me, I must admit. Even so, Job came through the dark. Where would we be without his story? There he is, up to the left beneath the palm trees. Those fellows sitting at his feet are Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. Where is Elihu? I am not sure.

I can see you are wondering why God hides himself. Why must this part of the engraving even exist? Your question is understandable. Perhaps we had best look now at the stories of some of God's other children, those who came after his letters were written. They cannot answer all of our questions, only the Craftsman can do that and even he has chosen to wait till the Unveiling. Even so, we shall find these children's experiences enlightening.

Some of the stories were given to me by a blessed friend, one who went through her own dark nights and stayed close by while I was in mine. (She is the one, by the way, who gave me God's bread when I was famished.) The other stories were treasures that their authors left. Honest pages bound in obscure books, some of them hidden for many years before anyone saw their value. Even now they are tucked away in the seminary's basement library shelves, hidden among the lectionaries and catalogues of religious things. One could easily pass them by altogether.

If you recall, I mentioned St. John of the Cross a little while ago. John lived in the last half of the sixteenth century, a deeply spiritual man who spent many hours praying, fasting, and meditating on the mysteries of God. He had a particularly blessed ministry of writing letters to seeking hearts. It was John's belief that the dark nights were a necessary stage of growth in the life of God's children. This will sound rather bookish but let me quote some of what John had to say:

. . . God now sees that they have grown a little, and are becoming strong enough to lay aside their swaddling clothes and be taken from the gentle breast; so He sets them down from His arms and teaches them to walk on their own feet, which they feel to be very strange, for everything seems to be going wrong with them.⁸

God sets them in this night only to prove them and to humble them, and to reform their desires, so that they go not nurturing in themselves a sinful gluttony in spiritual things.⁹

Yes, I admit John had a different way of speaking about God, talking about swaddling clothes, the gentle breast, and such. If you remember, though, David said nearly the same thing in Psalm 131. The Craftsman engraves himself in many ways. We shall be so amazed at the Unveiling, when we see him in

his fullness. I think most of us will blush as we recall how small our picture of God was.

Well, then, back to brother John. According to John the darkness is not evil at all. He believed that during the dark night of the soul God is invading the human soul with his pure light. When the light shines upon all the frailties and hidden evil of the heart it appears to the soul that she is estranged from God, that she has been cut off from him. There is a terrible finality to all of it from the soul's point of view.¹⁰ After a long time in the dark the soul begins to be purified of her greedy love of spiritual experiences and is transformed into a love for God himself. As this process happens the soul begins to see everything with the light of God. You might well imagine how slow the whole process is.

John is very encouraging to those who travel in the dark. He insists that souls make the most progress when traveling along unfamiliar roads, since one cannot go anywhere new if one always stays in the same old place.¹¹ He urges those who are in the dark to have a quiet and attentive heart, to let go of anxiety over not being able to feel God's presence anymore. In due time the light will come back. Meanwhile one should not give much attention to nagging fears over not being able to offer useful service anymore.

About a hundred years after John lived and died another of God's children, Brother Lawrence, wrote about times of suffering, including dark nights. (Yes, those two names do sound odd to our modern ears. But then perhaps our names would sound odd to John of the Cross and Brother Lawrence.) Brother Lawrence said: "The Lord knows best what is needful for us. What he does, he does for our good. If we really knew just how much he loves us, we would always be willing to receive anything from his hand. We would receive the bitter or the sweet without distinction."¹²

The main thing that God wants from his children, Brother Lawrence taught, is an attentive heart. During times of prosperity, during dark nights, during sickness or health, the child of God needs to learn to have a simple heart that is turned gladly toward God. It was the aim of Brother Lawrence to keep his heart turned toward God every moment of every day. Being an honest man, he admitted that such a trustful resting in God did not come easily or quickly and he often failed. Nonetheless, his teaching sounds very much like that of Jesus in the passage where he talks about considering the lilies of the field. When I first read Brother Lawrence's book I had trouble interpreting his engraving. Some of it was quite different from my own. As time passes, though, it is becoming more clear. You really must read his book for yourself.

If you look carefully at that part of the engraving you will see another of God's children hidden in his bosom. Her name is quite a mouthful, Jeanne Marie Bouvier de La Motte Guyon. She is mostly known as Mme. Guyon. She was a fascinating lady and caused quite an uproar among the religious leaders of her day. (She lived in France, by the way, at the time of Louis XIV, that long-haired king with all the gloves and wigs.) Mme. Guyon experienced many years of the dark night. Amid persecution, imprisonment, false accusations, family strife, and illness she let the Craftsman do his work. Some of

her writings are very hard to understand. When I first read her autobiography I was quite taken aback. Like John of the Cross, her language is often foreign and some of her ideas strange. We would do well, though, to read what she has to say about the dark night. She called dark nights by several names, including "dry seasons." Speaking of dry seasons she wrote:

Dear reader, you must realize that God has only one desire. Certainly you can never understand a dry spell unless you understand what his desire is. His desire is to give himself to the soul that really loves him and to that soul which earnestly seeks him. And yet it is true that this God who desires to give himself to you will often conceal himself from you — from you, the very one who seeks him!

... But the fact you will have spiritual dry spells is not the issue. The important question is what you will do in a time of spiritual dryness. At this point you must learn something about your natural tendencies. It will be the natural thing for you, during a dry season, to try to prove your love to the Lord ... you will try to prove to the Lord your faithfulness toward him; you will do this by exerting your strength. Unconsciously you will be hoping by such self effort to persuade him to return more quickly.¹³

Mme. Guyon goes on to say that during the dark night the child of God needs to rest in him, quietly worship him, and patiently wait for him to return. When temptation comes one should turn away from it and run to God. It does not matter whether one can feel God's presence during temptation. The important thing is to run to God who will give strength to overcome.¹⁴

Even though much of her book was hard for me to understand, enough of it shone with the love of God that I wanted to find out more about Mme. Guyon. When I looked her up in one of those dusty old religious encyclopedias though, the author dismissed her as a "very neurotic woman." Well! It may be true that her writing exposed some of the corners in her heart where the Craftsman had yet to work. But is that not the case for us all? None of our engravings will be complete until the Unveiling. I was greatly tempted to mark in the margin of that encyclopedia.

Forgive my outburst. It simply agitates me when modern people look at everything exclusively through a microscope or Dr. Freud's Guide to the Universe. Surely those two instruments are not the end-all of truth! I suppose such thinking is understandable for those who have yet to feel the Craftsman's touch. For the children of God, though, it seems that the first lessons we should learn are the value of mystery and the smallness of our own minds.

For example, just the other day I read a book by Georgia Harkness that discusses the dark night experience. Dr. Harkness is one of God's children and has many good things to say. I struggle greatly, however, with her view of the dark night. Dr. Harkness believes that the dark night is "both a sin and a sickness."¹⁵ According to Dr. Harkness the dark night is "... fun-

damentally an anxiety neurosis” and is never the direct will of God in the believer’s life.¹⁶ She does write sympathetically about the suffering involved, calling the night the “worst of all hells” and describing the experiences of several other children including George Fox and John Bunyan. Yet she seems to leave God’s bigness aside in her approach.

As I understand it, her problem with accepting the dark night goes back to the idea that God uses evil to bring about good. Dr. Harkness has trouble interpreting that part of the engraving.

You are right. Most of us struggle with the problem of evil. I wonder, though, why more of us do not struggle with the problem of good? If one is a problem then the other has to be as well.

In all fairness, though, I can see how hard it is for Dr. Harkness since some engravings are nearly impossible for me to interpret. All the same, I believe there is more at work in the dark night than neurotic impulses and unbalanced chemicals.

Ruth Burrows feels the same. Her book, *Ascent to Love*, is a fine discussion of St. John of the Cross’ understanding of the dark night. Ms. Burrows wrote in 1987 and is quite up to date with modern thinking, chemicals, and Dr. Freud. As a matter of fact, I have Ms. Burrows’ book with me. I have been reading it lately. Here, take a look at page 93:

The effects of what John calls “dark night,” a direct communication of God to created spirit, are not different in themselves from painful psychic states springing from various causes. The therapist naturally rushes in to put things right, to take away the burden, to impart confidence and joy. The spiritual therapist could do the same and inflict harm. The person in question is not battling with a purely human problem, and it will be noted that, in spite of the turmoil, emotional bleakness and sense of diminishment, they are fundamentally well. Far from being directed inwards, to checking up on how they feel, they should be directed away from themselves, encouraged to keep looking at Jesus as best they can, understanding what is happening to them in his light. They have to go against what they feel and cast themselves in faith into God. It is this effort of faith that develops them both humanly and spiritually.¹⁷

What I like best about Ms. Burrows’ thinking is the part about encouraging the children to understand what is happening in the light of Jesus. What a vital point she has made. Jesus said that he is the light of the world. When we come to times of darkness is it not the most sensible thing of all to go to the greatest light? It is good for us to think often of the promise in Revelation 22:5: “There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever.”

It is high time that we disabuse ourselves of the notion that because we are God’s children we will be excused from the evils that befall everyone else. Suffering and wickedness are a part of this broken creation. If God himself

came and tasted all the evil should we be so surprised that we, his children, might have to taste some ourselves? Look long and hard at the engraving, dear friend. God's children are hidden with Christ in him. What touches one touches the other and touches all. Here is part of the mystery that the enemy does not comprehend. The Craftsman can use suffering and darkness along with his other tools. One day the great Unveiling will be fulfilled and we shall stand with legions of angels and the souls of every person from the dawn of time. There, before our eyes, the engravings will join into one majestic offering of praise. All that has been hidden will be revealed. The parts of the engraving where God hides himself will gleam like fire in the spreading sun of Righteousness. Can we trust God enough in our smallness, both before and after the dark night, to complete the work he has begun?

Trust. That is what the issue really is. What shall we do when we are baffled by unkind circumstances? If God permits our older brothers to throw us in a well and then sell us into slavery, shall we curse God and die? Or shall we look back to our ancient brother Joseph and learn a trust lesson from his dark night? Is the dark night evil or is it the shadow of God's wings? Trust will tell.

The time is getting away from us. You have listened so patiently as always. Let me share one more thought with you before we leave the engraving. I can see that you still have many questions about the dark night and evil, the engraving process and how the Craftsman could inflict pain when he loves us so passionately. Jessie Penn-Lewis, one of God's special bread givers, had this to say:

The last thing that we contend for is our *spiritually religious self*. We fight desperately hard to keep an *experience*, but to die means to let everything go, for in death we can hold on to nothing. It is then that we become pliable . . . with no desires outside the will of God. We have nothing left to fight for. We die to our religious views, our old ways, and habits of thought, our certain methods of action, and even all the conscious experiences of the Presence of God, so that we possess God Himself rather than gifts from God. We surrender the "gift" for the Giver.

But when we have surrendered all, He returns all purified and held in Himself for Himself. As long as we wanted to keep even a "blessed experience," there was a mist between the soul and God. If we surrender even the manifested presence of God, we become rooted and fixed in God. Not that He wants to take all away, but He wants us to surrender, that He might reveal himself as an abiding reality.¹⁸

Your observation is keen. Those children in the scene where God hides himself are very close to his heart.

So are you.

Afterword

The dark night of the soul figures prominently in medieval mystic writings. Virtually all of the mystics who wrote about the dark night viewed it as a purification process, an infusion of divine light, and the direct work of God in the heart of the believer. Some of the Christian mystics who experienced and wrote about the dark night include Henry Suso, Rulman Merswin, John Tauler, Angela of Foligno, Mme. Guyon, Fenelon, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, and Catherine of Siena. John Bunyan, John Wesley, George Fox, Jonathan Edwards, Jessie-Penn Lewis, Oswald Chambers, C. S. Lewis, and Catherine Marshall have also written of the dark night experience although each had unique ways of framing their own encounters. Contemporary Christian singers John Michael Talbot and Pete Carlson have written songs that describe the dark night.

Evelyn Underhill aptly names the dark night a process of "unselfing." In her classic work *Mysticism*, Underhill delineates several common characteristics of the suffering involved at such times: a withdrawal of the presence of God, a loss of the intuitive apprehension of God, the awareness of one's own utter impurity in contrast to God's holiness, a seeming moral stagnation with overwhelming temptation to evil, a dryness toward God, and intellectual stagnation (Underhill, 1945, 389-91).

Avoiding the conclusions of some modern Christians who equate the dark night with clinical depression, Underhill makes allowances for the possibility of emotional illness while affirming the mystics' view that the dark night is essentially a work of God. It is "... a phase of growth largely conditioned by individual temperament" (Underhill, 403). An example of the role personality plays in the experience may be seen in Henry Suso as compared to Teresa of Avila. Suso believed the night should be faced in a straightforward and manly fashion, as was his habit in facing other difficulties. Teresa of Avila, on the other hand, wrote sensuously of the dark ecstasy of longing for God during the night. Those who tend to be more intellectual are likely to feel the night most intensely in their intellect. Some will be most affected emotionally.

The greatest danger and temptation of the night, it would seem, is the abandonment of one's faith. Such temptation commonly takes one of two forms. For some it comes as a mighty conviction that one has been rejected by God forever because of one's sinfulness. While the person does not struggle with the fact of God's existence, he or she feels incapable of ever being saved, thus faith is useless. The other common temptation has to do with a pervasive sense of unreality to all that is spiritual. In today's rationalistic and materialistic culture the latter temptation is perhaps more common than the former.

Familiarity with and an appreciation for dark night experiences in the lives of believers through the ages is essential to adequate pastoral care. When believers suffer the profound alienation of the dark night they need both the support and intercessory prayer of their pastors. Attempts to get rid of the night by labeling it the product of stress, dysfunctional family background or mid-life crisis simply will not relieve the suffering nor will it help the one

who struggles. When a believer begins to experience what may be a dark night, pastors should take all factors into account. The experience may well be caused by clinical depression or a number of other disorders. Sometimes depression and other conditions are a *part* of the dark night. On the other hand, if it is fundamentally a spiritual experience the sufferer's greatest needs are unconditional love, intercessory prayer, and a good listener.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Yancey, Philip. *Disappointment With God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 237.
- ² Psalm 28:1-2 New International Version (NIV).
- ³ Psalm 61:1-2 (NIV).
- ⁴ Psalm 63:1, 6 (NIV).
- ⁵ Psalm 18:28 (NIV).
- ⁶ Psalm 27:13-14 (NIV).
- ⁷ Job 23:3, 8-12, 16-17 (NIV).
- ⁸ John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul* 3rd ed., trans. and ed. E. Allison Peers (New York: Image Books, 1959), 63.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 103.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 154.
- ¹² Brother Lawrence and Frank Laubach, *Practicing His Presence* trans., comp., and ed. Gene Edwards (Augusta, Maine: Christian Books Publishing House, 1973), 105.
- ¹³ Jeanne Marie Bouvier de La Motte Guyon, *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ* trans. and ed. Gene Edwards, Library of Spiritual Classics, vol. 2 (Augusta, Maine: Christian Books Publishing House, 1975), 28-9.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.
- ¹⁵ Georgia Harkness, *The Dark Night of the Soul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1945), 71.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.
- ¹⁷ Ruth Burrows, *Ascent to Love* (Denville, New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1987), 93.
- ¹⁸ Jessie Penn-Lewis, *Fruitful Living* (Dorset, England: The Overcomer Literature Trust, n.d.), 19-20.

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