

o8. Part V Encounter

1. The Experience of God I (pages 94-102)



‘When John says ‘night’, what come to his mind is not so much suffering, even redeemed suffering, as presence.

‘John’s teaching has been directing us to:

- a God who gives himself [Flame],
- the space we make for the gift [Ascent],
- the opening God himself carves for the gift [Night],
- a project which stretches from God’s plan in eternity to its final fulfilment in heaven [Canticle].’

‘The pattern of John’s experience:
‘*todo*’, ‘everything’ the gift;
‘*nada*’, ‘nothing’, the space’ (page 116).

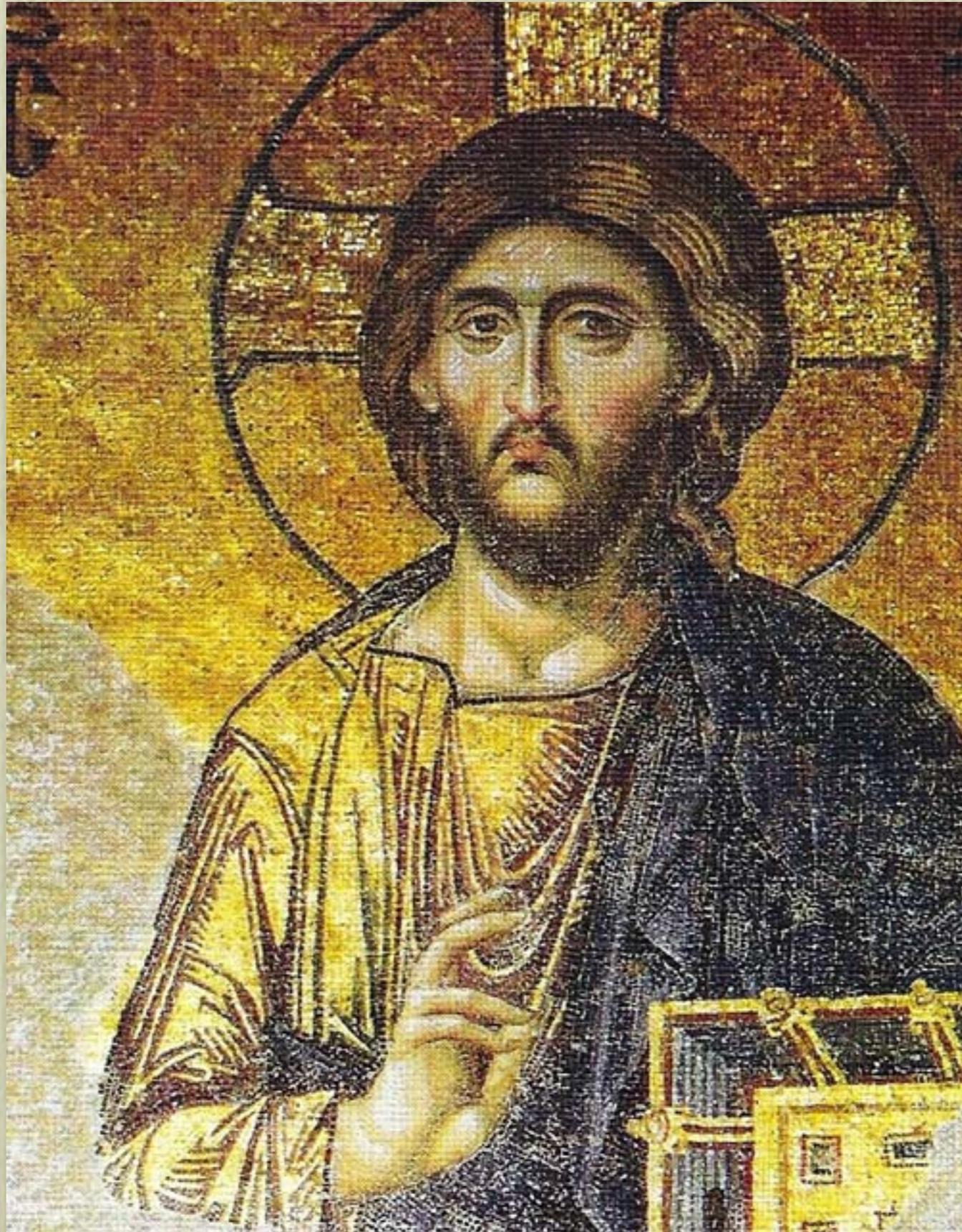
‘This is the meaning of the ‘*nada*’, ‘nothing’:
a space shaped for Christ’ (page 124).

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

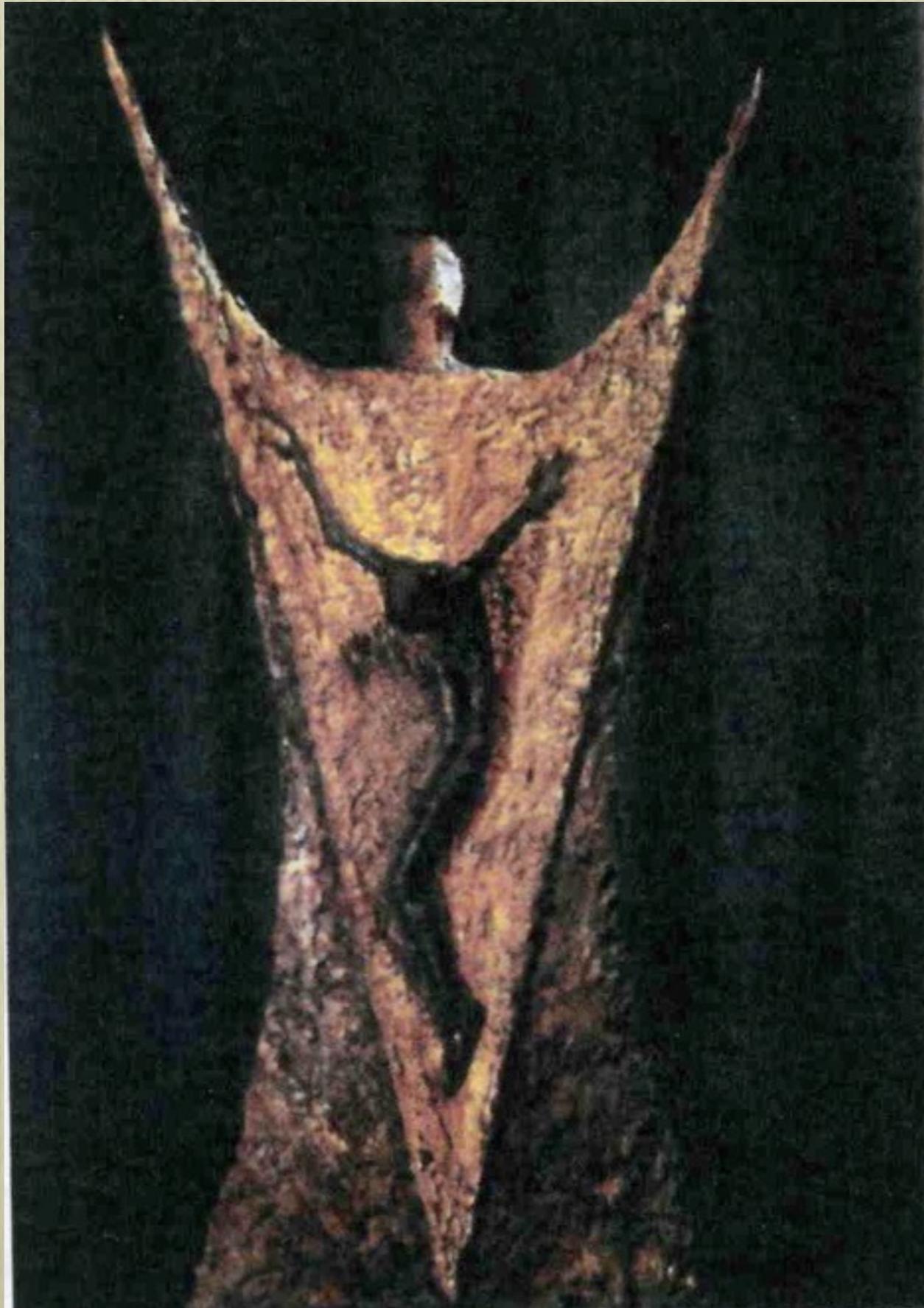
1. In communion with God through communion with Jesus

Religious experiences deepen our communion with God insofar as they draw us, not to themselves, but to Jesus: his person, his face, his heart, his revelation, his 'Body'.

'Religious experiences, charismatic gifts, supernatural phenomena, insights and uplifts – these are all excellent, if they point to Christ; they can be real motives for love, if they do not glue us to themselves but impel us to Christ, his word, his community' (page 125).



The Word became flesh
and lived among us



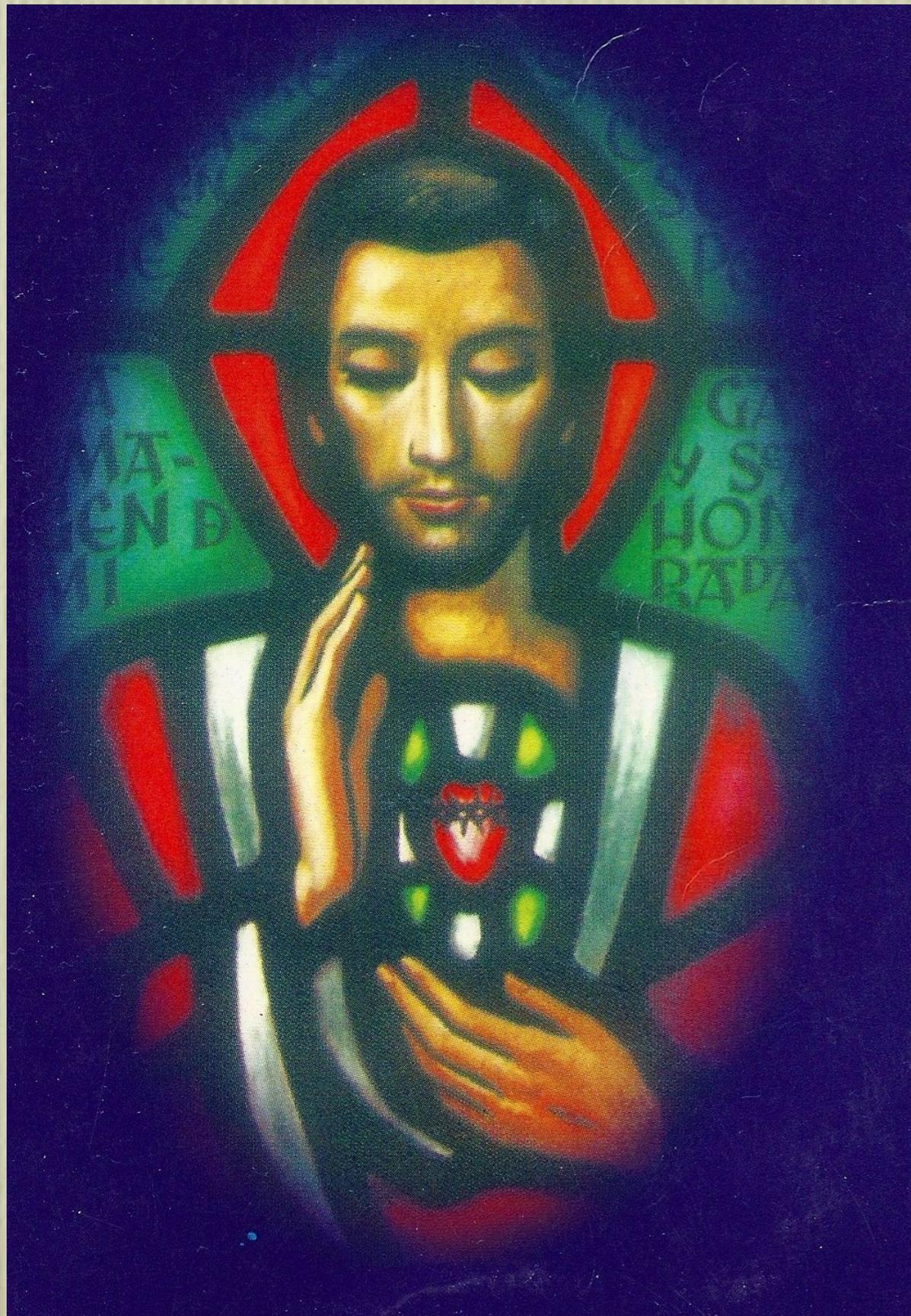
‘We have seen his glory,
the glory as of a father’s only son,
full of the gift of truth’(John 1:14).

‘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”
(Flame 2.2), in resurrection’
(Iain Matthew, 131).



‘From his fullness
we have all received,
grace upon grace.’

‘God’s love has been
poured into our hearts by
the Holy Spirit who has
been given to us.’
(Romans 5:5)



‘The heart of God descends
in haste to his creation,
with the weight of an infinite love,
and the heart of creation rises
towards God,
drawn by an attraction
that dominates all others in it.

It is in Jesus
that these two hearts meet,
and they unite so profoundly
that the two hearts become one.’

(Jules Chevalier, ‘The Heart of Jesus’, page 76).



- ‘No one has ever seen God. It is God’s only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, who has made God known.’ (John 1:18).
- ‘I am in the Father and you are in me and I am in you’ (John 14:20).
- ‘I pray that they will be one as we are one, with me in them and you in me’ (John 17:21).

‘I live, no longer I. It is Christ who lives in me’ (Galatians 2:20).

‘All of us, with unveiled faces,
seeing the glory of the Lord
as though reflected in a mirror,
are being transformed into the same image
from one degree of glory to another;
for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit’ (2 Corinthians 3:18).

‘When John seeks “an experience of God”, he does not mean “feeling” as opposed to “not feeling”; he means “reality” as opposed to “mere theory”. He is not looking for a shot in the arm to brighten a dreary day; he is looking for a person with whom he is content to be, even if the day stays dreary ... His search is not for a feeling of encounter, but for encounter ... He wants, not just perfection, but nothing less than union’ (page 95).

I. God is always beyond.

God sustains everything, but is not grasped by anything .

God remains absolute mystery.

2. Yet we need to encounter God!

Together these account for most of the deviations in human living – trying to fill the need with something else, or trivialising God so that I can grasp God’(page 97).

‘A feeling of dryness does not prove God’s absence.

A feeling of holy warmth does not prove God’s presence.

The reality of God is, simply, deeper’ (page 97).

‘Some think that when they cannot understand God, or sense or feel God, that God is further away. The truth is more the opposite: it is when you understand God less clearly that you are drawing closer to God ... You do well at times, whether life or faith is smooth or hard, to hold God as hidden, and so to cry out to God “Where have you hidden, Beloved?” (John of the Cross, SC I.12).

‘Believing, hoping, loving are the only means for union with a transcendent God’ (page 98).

‘Believe, trust, love, and you are receiving the gift. These form the meeting place; they *are* the encounter’ (page 94).

‘Live only in dark and genuine faith, and sure hope, and unmitigated love ... Be joyful and trust in God’ (John of the Cross, Letter Oct 12 1589).

‘Live in faith and hope, even though it be in darkness, since it is in this darkness that God is supporting you. Cast your care on God, since God cares for you. God will not forget you’ (Letter June 20, 1590).

‘Because the role of faith, hope and love is to withdraw you from what is less than God, consequently, they unite you to God’ (Night II.21.II).

‘God is close. Our response has to be at root a receiving, and that receiving cannot but put us in contact with God... Believe, hope, love, and you are receiving God’ (page 101).

‘Where God is a God who reveals and gives, to believe and to love is to encounter God’ (page 102).

Part V. Encounter

2. The Experience of God II (pages 103-113)

‘Faith, hope, love translate commitment –
above all God’s to us’ (page 103).

Faith

Be - **lieve**

Be in **love**

Choose to place oneself in the **love** God offers us

Faith

‘The more faith you have, the more you are united with God.’

(Ascent II.9.1)

‘Faith is the theological gift, which lifts a person into God’s own life. It comes from God and leads to God ... By faith we know with the Son’s knowing’ (page 101).

‘In faith the Spirit communicates, not words, but personally, the **Word**’ (page 103).

‘Like the pillar of cloud in the wilderness, faith illumines. Faith gives **light**’ (Ascent II.3.5).

Like the jars of Gideon (Judges 7:20), faith contains the light of God.
When we die the jar is smashed and the light blazes forth.

‘O fount like crystal
If only, on your silvered-over face,
you would suddenly form they eyes I so long for,
which I bear sketched deep within my heart’ (SC Stanza 12).

‘A spring of water, welling up, a fountain spreading out into a sunlit pond which reflects the bright sky on its surface’(silvered-over face)’ (page 105).

Image shifts to that of a gold vase that is silver-plated.

The propositions of faith = the silver. They give us God (the gold).

Hope

‘The more hope you have, the greater your union with God.’

(Ascent III.7.2)

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

Ascent Book III, 6.3

‘The build-up of anxiety or worry
which problems and crises can cause a person
in no way helps to bring about a better situation;
rather, it normally makes matters worse,
and harms the person herself ...
It is obviously never any help getting anxious ...
To bear it all with calm, peace, tranquility,
not only opens her to many blessings;
it also helps her, in these difficulties themselves,
to come to a better decision
and to apply a remedy that will actually do some good.’

‘Hope releases the soul’s fluidity not just “from” but “for”
– for what is really meant to fill it. And that is God.

John knows only two realities: the present, and eternity.

Hope pulls memory off the suction pads of yesterday
and tomorrow, and cups it upwards in the present.

The “sacrament of the present moment” it is called.

Eternity is bearing down, like an inverted triangle,
upon one point in time only: now.

Iain Matthew p. 107 continued

Worry is not just a pain; it is a tragedy,
because it absorbs in something less
what is meant for something greater.
Hope means easing the mind
of what inflames it or frightens it,
and cupping it upwards to the God who alone can fill it.'

Iain Matthew p. 107 continued

‘When John speaks of the mother of Jesus, it is in this connection. She moved freely, refusing to let herself be paralysed by past or future. In her mountain climb, she renounced the need for pre-planned handholds, opting instead to surrender to the guidance, the hand, of Another. Her hope set her free to be possessed fully in each present moment by the Holy Spirit.

As with faith, so with hope, John can emphasise a letting-go, in this case of past and future, only because he is convinced that God is hovering, pressing, to come in and fill the gap.’

Love

‘Other experiences do not unite you to God. Only love does this.’

(Ascent III.30.4)

‘Love is God’s gift by which we choose God and want what God wants. The Spirit of God is loving us and putting us in the current of love between the Son and the Father. We love with the Spirit’s loving’ (page 101).

‘You should realise that the value of your good works, fasting, alms, penances, prayers etc. does not depend so much on their quantity or quality, but on the love of God which you bring to them ’(Ascent III.27.5).

‘John defines love as aligning our will perfectly to God’s.
But in practice that means not aligning it to anything else’ (page 99).

This has the benefit of our not being dependent on
anything less than God

‘Love heals history, where the Spirit has power to turn every wound, even the wounds of sin, into “wounds of love”.

‘Love decodes the meaning of the world, which John reads as “a limitless sea of love, engulfing him” (Flame 2.10). He knows from inside that love is life-blood: “A person who has no love is dead” (SC 11.11) .

‘Love is God’s activity: “our” love is like a kite, hanging in the wind of God’s love for us. This activity of God is called the Holy Spirit.’

‘The Holy Spirit is the Flame, the principal agent, the principal Lover. Love is first God’s gift of God’s Self ... Our love is the offspring of this outpouring : Love is our Spirit-given “Yes” to an inpouring God.’

‘Give me an experience of God.’ Turn to God present within you, and love God. You may not feel God’s presence, but want God, value God. give yourself to God, say yes to God, adore God. Love God and you are experiencing God.’

‘The “Yes” of love centres me, unites me to God who is my centre.’

‘Love creates likeness like fire turning everything to fire.’

‘You looked with love upon me
and deep within your eyes imprinted grace;
this mercy set me free,
held in your love’s embrace,
to lift my eyes adoring to your face’ (SC Stanza 32).

‘That is John’s vision: a God, constantly gazing at the universe,
personally meeting the eyes of each person in the universe,
with a look that “cleanses, makes beautiful, enriches and enlightens”.
God’s love is creative: it elicits and forms –
“taking you and placing you in God’s Self, making you like God”.
Our love is a Yes to that.’

‘A little of this pure love is more precious to God, more precious for us, and of more benefit to the Church, even though it seems to be doing nothing, than all other words put together ... Since (in the Song of Songs) God adjures them not to wake the bride from this love, who would dare to do so and escape reprimand? It is for this goal of love that we were created’ (SC 29.2-3; quoted page 113).



Only in God



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words and music John Foley

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Only in God will
my soul be at rest,
from Him comes
my hope, my salvation.

He alone is
my rock of safety,
my strength,
my glory, my God.



Trust in Him
at all times, O people,
and pour out
your heart.

God Himself
is a refuge for us
and a stronghold
for our fears.



Only in God will
my soul be at rest,
from Him comes
my hope, my salvation.

He alone is
my rock of safety,
my strength,
my glory, my God.



Many times have I
heard him tell
of his long-lasting love.

You yourself, Lord,
for all those who labour
for love of your name.



Only in God will
my soul be at rest,
from Him comes
my hope, my salvation.

He alone is
my rock of safety,
my strength,
my glory, my God.