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IN MY FATHER’S HOUSE there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?” (Jn 14:2).

This promise of Jesus carried Mother Teresa of Calcutta through the darkest days of her life. Her intimate union with Christ was shrouded in darkness in spite of her efforts to break through it. She endured for many years what John of the Cross calls the “Dark Night of the Soul.”

But in Rome today—5 September 2016—a joyful celebration will give witness to the Church’s belief that Mother Teresa’s life is no longer cloaked in darkness, but that she is bathed in the light of the Blessed Trinity. She will be declared a “Saint,” one who will delight forever in the presence of God.

Mother Teresa has set an example for us as we still labor in the “shadow of death” and challenges us to spread God’s light: “Words which do not give the light of Christ, increase the darkness.” Our faith is our guiding light as we live our Christian life. The moments of light in the midst of darkness are harbingers of the joy that will one day be ours:

“I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me, because I live and you will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you.” (Jn 14:18–20)

Edward O’Donnell
Mother Teresa’s Dark Night

At the time of her death in 1997, few could have anticipated the news that, for nearly half a century, excruciating pain and fierce darkness afflicted the ever-smiling Mother Teresa. English-speaking readers have, indeed, been taken by surprise with the publication of *Mother Teresa, Come be My Light*.¹ Some say they are shocked by the terrible darkness that endlessly plagued the woman known as the Saint of Calcutta. What shall one say about this horrible suffering that plagued this much-revered and greatly admired icon of the Good Samaritan, as John Paul II called her?

In any case, this book, chiefly of letters from and to Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, will surely be a modern spiritual classic, for it is a unique report about the agonizing journey to God of a much loved contemporary, letters that she wanted no one else to read. Is it not a blessing that her advisors thought better of her request? The inner spiritual struggle of this valiant woman has much to teach us about the meaning of suffering and darkness in the spiritual life.
Mother Teresa’s Dark Night

The founder of the Missionaries of Charity endured her unspeakable agony from the time she started “the work” in 1948 till her death in 1997, with only one brief period of respite. Darkness and pain invaded the very depths of her faith-filled soul. Readers have been quick to label her experience a dark night, and very dark it was. Mother Teresa sought and received counsel about her darkness from trusted advisors, including two archbishops of Calcutta. Her counselors constantly reassured her that her interminable pain and emptiness were the lot of the great saints.

Surely that assurance was some consolation, but there is little evidence that Mother Teresa received much help in better understanding her incessantly painful journey. We may ask, “What would the master of the dark night, Saint John of Cross, say to this saintly woman who wanted only to satisfy ‘the thirst of Jesus’?” (p. 31). What wisdom is there for us ordinary followers of Jesus in the sufferings of this woman who wanted nothing other than to love God with all her heart, she who wrote, “My mind and heart are habitually with God” (p. 203)? Why did this paragon of virtue, who soothed the pain in others, suffer so interminably herself?
Words from John of the Cross to Mother Teresa

A word of caution. We know much about Mother Teresa’s inner life but not everything. Even members of her community were unaware of her searing and endless pain. What transpired in the secrecy of her confessions or in the privacy of unwritten spiritual direction is not known, nor do we know what lost correspondence might have revealed about her inner life. So we must speak of her darkness with some reserve and reverence. That said, let’s ask what Friar John of the Cross might say to Mother Teresa about her darkness.

First of all, John would likely greet Mary Teresa—as she sometimes signs herself—with the usual salutation to his correspondents: “Jesus be in your soul, my daughter in Christ.”

Sensitive as he always was to the good in others, John would commend Mother Teresa’s service to the poorest of the poor and most especially he would affirm her faithfulness to prayer. John would also note for himself a kinship with Mother Teresa’s constant use of spousal imagery in her relationship with Christ. John of the Cross with Teresa of Avila brought bridal mysticism into the Carmelite tradition, and this spousal tradition subsequently has become the major mystical symbolism in the Christian West.

The Voice that sent Mother Teresa to her new “call within a call” (p. 40) addressed her as spouse: “Your
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Vocation is to love and suffer and save souls.... You will suffer...but if you are My own little Spouse—the Spouse of the crucified Jesus—you will have to bear these torments in your heart.” Mother Teresa could hardly have imagined how intense her suffering would be. Yet, she was urged, “Trust me lovingly—trust me blindly” (p. 97). Her trust in this experience thrust this smallish nun into a lifetime of intense suffering that would transform her into someone who loved her God and her neighbor beyond all measure. She was and is an icon of the Good Samaritan.

The Dark Night

John of the Cross would want Mother Teresa to know that the contemplative journey is an encounter with not one but with a variety of nights. Thus, setting aside worldly desires is a night. Second, the life of faith is a dark night, and God is darkness to every human person, since God is beyond all human knowing (A 1.2.1). Finally, there are dark nights that are called by John the “Night of the Senses” and the “Night of the Spirit.” John is here speaking of those who receive the gift of a dark contemplation, a purifying dark contemplation, that first liberates one from sense inadequacies and attachments. Then comes a dark night that liberates the human spirit from all that prevents it from an
intimate union with God through love, the Dark Night of the Spirit. The awful sufferings and darkness that Mother Teresa endured with love and patience and her continuing growth in her relationship with Christ say to me that she traveled deeply into the Dark Night of the Spirit. However, John of the Cross never meant his writings to be about spiritual statistics but to be an aid in understanding how to respond to God’s love.

Dark night is a complex metaphor that encompasses the many ways that God’s inflowing love prepares one for divine union. With every fiber of her being, Mother Teresa’s heart ached for that loving union with God: “I long to be only His” (p. 52). Her intense longing for God made darkness inevitable, and the intensity of her desires and her profound capacity for love made the darkness last as long as it did. God’s loving work on Mother Teresa was meant to bring her into a very deep union with God’s self. Mary Teresa from the beginning wanted only what would unite her to the thirsting Jesus. She accepted all the pain, emptiness, and darkness that it took for this union to be a reality. She could write, “I have come to love the darkness” (p. 208).
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A Contemplative in Action

Mother Teresa never laid claim to being a contemplative or a mystic. We have learned to be tentative about calling someone a mystic because that profound experience of God remains a mystery that human eyes cannot penetrate. I want to say, however, that Mother Teresa was a contemplative in John of the Cross’s terms. John says of the kind of darkness that she experienced, “This dark night is an inflow of God into the soul which purges it of its habitual ignorances and imperfections… and which the contemplatives call infused contemplation or mystical theology” (N 2.5.1). For John this dark contemplation issues in transformation in God through love. Every page that Mother Teresa wrote is about her love of Jesus, a love that grew more intense throughout her life. A few days before she died, a sister overheard her say, “Jesus, I never refuse you anything” (p. 331).

John wants Mother Teresa to know that the contemplative graces that she received are the very same as the grace that God instilled into her heart when she was baptized. In other words, John wants her to realize that contemplation is an outgrowth of her Christening (CB 23.6). Contemplation for John is not some kind of superconsciousness. Rather, contemplation is the gratuitous loving presence of God who transforms one into a loving partner-
ship with God’s very self. It is a relationship that grows in love because it feasts on the Eucharistic Body of Christ. John could share with Mother Teresa, who loved the Eucharist, a portion of a poem that illustrates that his mysticism is a sacramental mysticism:

This eternal spring is hidden
in this living bread for our life’s sake,
although it is night.
It is here calling out to creatures;
and they satisfy their thirst, although in darkness,
because it is night.
This living spring that I long for,
I see in this bread of life,
although it is night.
“La fonte” or “Song of the soul that rejoices in knowing God through faith”

John of the Cross would have listened attentively to Mother Teresa’s concerns about the pain and the darkness that simply would not let up. Most of all, John would be careful to let Mary Teresa know that her principal guide in the spiritual life is the Holy Spirit. In his day, John emphasized that the Holy Spirit is one’s chief guide and that everyone else is an auxiliary guide. With Yves Congar, John thus saw the spiritual life as one long epiclesis—a journey under the auspices of the Holy Spirit. John was very annoyed with the spiritual guides of his time who, he said, can be blind guides, even blacksmiths of the soul whose coarse hands mar
the work of the Holy Spirit (FB 3.62, 43, 42). John vehemently faults anyone who impedes the work of the Holy Spirit. Mary Teresa trusted that God spoke through her advisors with whom she was as candid as a child is with her mother.

Mother Teresa read at least some of John of the Cross’s writings sent to her by friends. To these friends she wrote, “I am just reading his works. How wonderfully He writes about God…” (p. 217). We do not know whether she read John on the dark nights of contemplation and the suffering that John describes there.

**God’s Absence**

What would John reply to Mother Teresa about her terrifying anguish over her experience of God’s absence, an absence that John himself encountered in the tiny jail cell to which his brothers confined him and during his own experience of the dark nights? Recall his lines: “Where are you hidden, / Beloved and left me moaning?” (CB 1). And he speaks of “the heart, wounded with the sorrow of your absence” (CB 9.3). John would assure Mary Teresa that God is, in fact, powerfully and lovingly present in this darkness that suggests God’s apparent absence. In reality, Mother Teresa’s experience of darkness, coupled with her fervent longing to be in God’s presence, reveals that God is doing in her
what only God can do. John of the Cross describes the dark nights as God’s loving, gentle, and caring work on the soul that he calls “most beautiful” (CB 1.7). Darkness comes because God’s love and light are the rays like those of the sun blinding the human eye, a light so strong that the eyes of the spirit are darkened. God’s love and light blind human perception and cause a disorienting darkness that purifies the human spirit so that it can truly enter into a transforming relationship (union) with God.

God’s Work of Art

Years ago I watched with fascination as Irish potters crafted heavy, large pots, and side by side with them Portuguese potters were sculpting tiny pots with delicate long slim stems to hold a single flower. Skilled artists astonish us with their artistry. John of the Cross marveled at God the artist whose loving touches fashion the human heart into a heart aflame with love. God does God’s work of liberation with love and light, for the dark night is always for the sake of love and light. However, divine love and light throw the human person into confusion because obstacles in the human heart, imperfections John calls them, prevent the human person from seeing God’s light and from feeling God’s love. John wants Mother Teresa to know that all the signs in her life are that God, her loving
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creator and redeemer, is at work within her and that God sculpts her heart for loving union with God. God’s loving touches prepared Mother Teresa so that, when God’s work was accomplished, her soul would “soar (volar) to God” (N 2.25.4), words from the last few lines of the Dark Night of the Spirit (N 2.25.4).

A Woman of Great Desires

John of the Cross says that the onset of the dark night occurs when one no longer can meditate yet longs to be alone with God. Mother Teresa may well reveal such a state when she writes, “I am afraid I make no meditation—but only look at Jesus suffer” (p. 203). Moreover, the diminutive Mother Teresa is a woman of great desires, desires for union with God: “I have been longing to be all for Jesus... and so love Him as He has never been loved before” (p. 47). Yet, she reports dryness, the absence of consolation, and emptiness—all of which John of the Cross reports occur during the dark nights. They are, in fact, signs that God’s love is at work.

As with all his directees, John urges Mary Teresa to set aside all worries and especially all scruples. He does not want her or anyone to waste time on useless worries that sap one’s spiritual energy and that take one’s focus off the bridegroom, who wants to coax one into a loving relationship, a love for
which we were created says John of Cross (CB 29.3).

Friar Juan readily notices that his correspondent is a woman of great desires. She writes continuously about her longings and desires for Jesus: “I long to be really only His” (p. 52). Her desire to minister to the poor for God’s sake was also intense. She wrote to the Archbishop of Calcutta:

“Please tell me, does the Good God give these desires and not mean them to come true?... I long, I desire to bring to Him many, many souls—to make each soul love the Good God with a burning love—to carry His love into every street and slum, every home and heart.” (p. 94)

There are countless quotations like these throughout her letters. John of the Cross lets Mary Teresa know that desire is what prepares her for union with God (FB 3.26). For John, the dark night liberates the deepest desire of the human heart, a desire like that of Saint Augustine who wrote, “Our souls are restless until they rest in you.”

She Lived Her Prayer

The Spanish Carmelite wants this indefatigable foundress to share with him what occurs when she prays, for we pray as well as we live and we live as well as we pray. We know that this servant of the poor was faithful to prayer, but her letters reveal little of what occurred during that early morning
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hour of prayer and the time she spent at the daily celebration of the Eucharist, other than the desires that filled her heart. But, I must say that my impression is that Mother Teresa’s prayer and life were so intermeshed that they differ little from each other, which is the very goal of prayer—habitual recollection of God’s loving presence.

Dark Night of Love

John may well want to recite for Mother Teresa the poem “Dark Night,” as he recited his poems for the Carmelite nuns of his day. He would share his poem with Mother Teresa so that she may know what will in the end take the place of her darkness, emptiness, and pain. John tells his readers that his poem *Noche Oscura* (Dark Night) was composed on the other side of the darkness when “love’s urgent longings” bring one into the presence of her “beloved,” into a divine loving embrace, when she will discover a “night more lovely than the dawn!” His deeply erotic poem, *Noche Oscura*, tells the story of a young woman in search of her lover. Though she grew in years, Mary Teresa was always that young woman who left home at eighteen searching for her beloved. John assures her: “Know this you who search for God, God searches for you much more” (N 3.28).
What Does Mother Teresa’s Darkness Mean for Us?

There is a legend told of Saint Teresa of Jesus that, when she fell off her donkey into a muddy stream, she complained to God that it was no wonder he had so few friends when this is the way he treated them. What are we to think of our feeble spiritual lives when we read about the God who led saintly Mother Teresa through such terrifying darkness? First of all, God does not allow one to be tried beyond one’s ability to suffer the pain and darkness caused by our obstacles to God’s love. In any case, John of the Cross thinks that few undergo the great sufferings of the night of the spirit. Moreover, God’s grace will always be at hand when God calls one into a deeper holiness. With the kind of humility that marked Mother Teresa’s every turn in life, we can trust that God will take us where we can grow and no further.

Darkness Shared with her Patroness

When Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu became a Loreto sister, she took the name of Thérèse of Lisieux. Both women showed remarkable courage in the face of darkness, a darkness which Thérèse called her “Night of Nothingness.” John of the Cross, whom Thérèse studied avidly, has one last word for Mary Teresa: “When evening comes, you will be examined in love” (Sayings 60). John would want
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Mother Teresa to know that the love that burns so passionately in her heart will bring her into an unimaginable union with God, to “what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, [into] what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9). Dark Nights are all about love and light, and Mother Teresa’s heart was single-mindedly centered on her boundless love for her crucified God. Hers was the pain of someone madly in love with a God who was madly in love with her. No sanity rivals such madness. The Light of the World invited Mary Teresa: “Come be my Light.” The darkness she endured with endless patience has become a light like that of Christ, a light for a world too full in our day of meaninglessness darkness, whereas the darkness that afflicted Mother Teresa brought to fruition the love that God had birthed within her at baptism.

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NOTES


Can Even the Love of God Come to an End?

Who has not suffered for the end of a love?” This phrase was the beginning of a response to a question posed by a woman who had written in an Italian magazine about a sad end to her relationship with her own partner. This same question, on the spiritual plane, could be formulated in this way: “Can even the love of God come to an end?”

Although, love, in itself, is forever, it cannot hold up if it is not fed or renewed every now and then like the fire in the fireplace. God’s love—no, it doesn’t end.

Luckily, it remains unchanged, since God, unlike us, never changes his mind and does not regret even if he would often have all the reasons to do so. He doesn’t regret his love for us, just as a mother would not regret her love for her child despite his/her bad behavior. But even if she would regret, God will never regret, because he cannot retract on himself.

He, in fact, has loved us from always, from the time we did not yet exist. From the time the Father, conversing with his eternal Son—in the same way...
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a husband talks to his wife of the desired fruit of their love—says, “Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves” (Gn 1:26). It is this motherly paternity that indissolubly ties him to us and is the reason why he cannot forget us.

Fragility of Love

Being in exile for a long time and not seeing signs of change, Israel began to imagine that God had forgotten his people, but it was not so. “Yahweh has abandoned me, the Lord has forgotten me” was Israel’s lament. But at that very moment, the Lord addressed her with these reassuring words:

“Can a woman forget her baby at the breast, feel no pity for the child she has borne? Even if these were to forget, I shall not forget you. Look, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands, your ramparts are ever before me.” (Is 49:14–16)

Israel, because of her unfaithfulness, can forget her Lord and come to believe that he too has forgotten his people. This is the worm that infects and causes love to die. At the human level, it creeps into both sides; at the level of relationship with God, it breaks-down on the human side.

It may creep in when we are well and have our problems under control. It is easy, during those times, to forget to look for the Lord in the most intimate room of the heart. Perhaps we may still
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be able to say the prayers learned from our grandmother, but we don’t seek a true, deep, and frequent dialogue it with God.

And then, it is as if God is not. Everything in our lives develops and is resolved at a horizontal dimension. And so the believers—the layperson, the priest and/or religious—keep living their lives and attend to their daily routine by simply using their good sense, which is better than nothing but without any reference to Providence or to the presence of God at their side. And problem begins here, at this point.

As we have already said, the love of God for us doesn’t end. But, nevertheless, if we continue with our same level of rapport, the love of God ends. “Love,” wrote the Italian sociologist Francesco Alberoni, “is a state of grace—something very far away from certainty. It is the strongest emotion that the human being can experience, but it is also very unsteady.”

Alberoni’s description of love is also suitable for spiritual love. However, regarding the Divine Plan of God and our relationship with him, some precise statements are necessary to make. On the one hand, it is true that at one level “love is a state of grace.” We are speaking, in fact, of God’s love...
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for us that, when we respond to his love, it makes our hearts able to love as only he knows how, for everybody and without limits. On the other hand, regarding the definition of love as “the strongest emotion that the human being can experience,” when applied in relationship with God, we need to be sober and prudent. Only in very rare cases and special graces granted by the Lord to certain saints, who are called to a role of exceptional testimony, is it possible to talk about this kind of emotion.

There are saints for whom the strength of this divine love has split their hearts in two, such as Teresa of Avila or Phillip Neri, but this is rare and infrequent. Yet, most saints have lived the love of God on a rather simple level of faith and have continuously renewed themselves in prayer and in charity toward others.

Need for Dialogue

Regarding instability: if God’s love does not ignite us, then the fire of love will certainly consume itself into a smoldering end and eventually die, like a smoldering love of so many nuptial rapports. The magnetic attraction that once had united the two can end and very often does end. Though the culprit can be attributed to external causes, in reality quite often the end of the relationship emanates internally within the couple.
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Recent studies on marriage say that the internal motivations for the break-up of a couple may actually be the inability to sustain a live and sincere dialogue between the two, which then leads to a separation from working together toward a common goal.

Fundamentally, as far as it concerns human partnership, the same causes can also be said about the end of the love of God. Not for nothing did Teresa of Avila—who personally knew this by both negative and positive experiences—say these unsurpassed words of wisdom about prayer:

“In my opinion, prayer is nothing else than a friendly relation, staying often together with Whom you know loves you.”

Yes, because if we don’t draw away from the business of life to listen to the Lord, how can we be consciously be aware of his love for us. And if we don’t frequently return to converse with him, how can it be possible to plan life together, accepting what happens come what may, and collaborate together with the assurance of God’s presence on our side when everything might seem to be desperate or even hopeless.

How could we understand suffering, if we don’t allow him to bring us back to the Garden of Olives
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or under the cross, where Jesus fought to keep his rapport with the Father in order to keep himself faithful to him? Dialogue must be kept alive.

If it is true that we are never forgotten on behalf of God, we cannot take for granted that we will not forget him, when in fact we do— many times over. And, if we habitually forget about God, taking for granted that maybe he loves and has a plan for us, we begin to get used to doing things by ourselves and, in practice, we live as “singles” on the spiritual plane. We don’t plan together anymore. We become Christians but not believers; the Other is present and next to us, but we don’t regard him at all. In effect, we live as if God is not.

**Invitation to Intimacy through Prayer**

In ancient times, it was difficult to find a radically atheistic person in the modern sense of the word. When the psalmist, for example, speaks of the “fool” as the one who says “there is no God,” he doesn’t intend to affirm that there is no Creator but that God is irrelevant for our lives. Contrary to what the psalmist claimed, the people of Israel—having experienced the presence of God during the history of their nation—felt the Lord very near. The Lord of Israel, the same God that spoke to Moses—“I am who I am”—made Moses understand that he would always be near to them and liberate them:
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“I am the One who shall be there with you, undoubtedly.”

Even Israel had forgotten more than once. It was able to regain its fidelity by experiencing the darkest moments in its history, when the people cried out to the Lord and he heard them and came to their aid. The Lord said, “Come back, come back Israel” during such precarious moments.

In Hebrew the invitation to conversion is not an invitation to change behavior, rather it is a call to return to his Lord. Only this call could bring the people to change their behavior. Israel, distracted by thousand of voices and external distractions, did not listen to the call. It was the Lord who took the initiative toward Israel. “I will seduce her,” says the Lord by the mouth of the prophet Hosea, speaking of Israel as his bride:

“I will bring her back from the desert and I will speak to her heart. Then she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt, and in that day she won’t call me ‘my master’ anymore; ‘my bridegroom’ she will call me.” (Hos 2:14–16)

The desert is where the Lord wants to lead Israel. It is not the place of desolation but a place of silence that allows for listening—a place for falling in love. Israel had changed its way and attitude towards
God. No longer was he seen as a partner but seen as its Master and salvation lay in the rediscovery of a once lost love.

The purpose of prayer is the return to this desert silence and search for God in the inner self, in order to renew and keep alive our awareness of God’s love for us. Jesus reminds us, “When you pray, go to your private room, shut yourself in, and so pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.” This reward is the certainty of the love of the Father, which is renewed every time we dialogue face to face in prayer.

The “Beloved” Disciple

The fourth Gospel speaks about the remarkable role played by the “beloved disciple,” who, being nearest to the Teacher during the last supper, was the first to hear the traitor. “The beloved” stood under the cross together with Mary. The one, who even before Peter, recognized the risen Lord on the lake of Genezareth.

Historically, that disciple is John, the brother of James, who took the Mother of Jesus home as his own natural mother and went together with her to Ephesus. However, at the time of the writing of this Gospel, the community of the faithful believed that Can Even the Love of God Come to an End?
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this “beloved disciple” was not John, but rather it meant the ideal disciple, the believer, who is able to recognize the risen Jesus in every day life.

Even Jesus in his earthly life—apart from his Mother—had many people that were near to him, such as Peter, Mary of Magdalene, and John. His blood was shed for all his disciples and everyone who was present at his last supper; nobody was excluded.

In order to experience this love, it is necessary to take upon ourselves the role of the “beloved disciple” and be with Jesus under the cross. He offered his own Mother as a mother. The “beloved disciple,” who, seeing the empty grave, undoubtedly believes that Jesus is risen from the dead.

The “beloved disciple” believes in love because this love is nurtured in the inner colloquium of his/her heart, like Mary, who preserved all things, weighing them each before the presence of God. The “beloved disciple” is inspired to pray after the example of Jesus before his disciples in Gethsemane, who urged them to pray so as not to fall into temptation—the temptation to surrender in desperation and doubt.
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in the presence of evil, as well as to fall into the temptation of making a routine of not renewing our love for God but allowing it to die with time.

We need to put, from time to time, our hearts over the heart of Jesus so that by feeling his love we may be able to listen to his word. If we don’t understand what really is said to us, then the love of God is like the seed fallen on rocky ground or among the thorns and thistles, where the distractions, worries, selfishness, and evilness can suffocate and kill it.

If, on the contrary, it lands on the fertile ground of listening ears—l’amore non muore (the loves that does not die)—but brings forth fruit, making life fertile, defending it from doubt and desperation. The Lord is there always, at our door, but we must open it to him and allow him to enter. He desires to dine with us, but he awaits our invitation.

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Book Notices

_Angels Unaware_ By Megan McKenna
Paulist Press Paperback $14.95

Megan McKenna focuses her spiritual ken in this book on the messengers of God who have played such important roles in Hebrew and Christian scriptures. She writes about Michael, the protector; Gabriel, archangel of truth; and Raphael, companion angel. At one point McKenna calls angels “mysteries of God’s imagination.” As usual, the author spices up this material with stories from many different religious traditions. McKenna concludes that the guardian angels of the poor, the dispossessed, and the persecuted are deeply appreciated. This is one book on angels that refreshingly stays grounded on earth.

_The Enduring Heart:_
_Spirituality for the Long Haul_
By Wilkie Au

Paulist Press Paperback $18.95

In middle age, people are overwhelmed by a yearning to abandon the trivial, to create a better self, and to begin living in relation to life’s ultimate questions. Wilkie Au offers a guidebook for traveling the road of middle age. It acts as a type of “spiritual triple-A auto club,” providing both a map for middle life’s journey and roadside assistance for those who find themselves stuck along the way. Transitions peak in middle age—loss of all sorts—yet, for believers, loss is never the final word. Crammed with stories, examples, and excerpts from both classic and contemporary writers, this book shows that God is always there to meet us, wherever we are on the journey. This is spirituality that endures, spirituality for the long haul.
The Way of Transformation is a play on the title of St. Teresa’s classic The Way of Perfection. Written for her Discalced Carmelite nuns, it is nonetheless considered Teresa’s “operations manual” for anyone genuinely committed to the spiritual life. But by “perfection” she doesn’t intend the futile pursuit of idealized flawlessness, as some might think. Rather, Teresa means achieving an authentic human fulfillment—a true becoming of that person we are meant to be.

Father Marc Foley provides substantial introductions and notes to carefully selected excerpts from John’s own writings, presented in a systematic order. This allows the book to function as both a primer of John’s teaching and a profound introduction to the contemplative way. The introduction offers a helpful biographical summary of John’s life as well as a chronology of key events in his life to situate his texts in a clear historical context.