

# Drinking from a Dry Well (Summary)

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## Part One: In prayer: The Vertical Dimension

### Chapter 1: Loving Attentiveness (main insights from 'when the well runs dry')

#### Truth and Freedom

- The mysterious process which leads from dryness to floating
- Prayer is a form of life; changing and dynamic
- New situations demand new ways of seeing and creative new responses
- We have basic enduring beliefs, but the real meaning of these beliefs, and their implications for our lives, unfold only gradually. Often this unfolding is painful, groping, and obscure. Since prayer is a form of life, subject to life's law of growth, the pray-er cannot settle into a familiar pattern of comfortable mediocrity without regressing in his or her love of the Lord.
- **Three stages of growth in prayer:**
  - Courtship – getting to know
    - May be infatuation but 'infatuation is not love, precisely because we do not really know the object of our infatuation. We are in love with our own romantic fantasy rather than with the real person before us. The object of our "love" exists only in our own imagination.'
    - The problem in prayer is not the invisibility of God. Rather in both prayer and human relationships, the cost of real self-knowledge is greater than most people are willing to pay. We cling to our illusions, and our ignorance, about our real selves
  - Honeymoon – knowing to loving
    - Transition from knowledge to experience – knowledge is no longer central
    - The relationship moves from the head to the heart (experiencing, loving). We seek not insight but the joy of being with the one we love. The same transition takes place in our relationship to the Lord. Now we are not so inclined to reflect as we were before. We are drawn simply to be present to him in love, to sit before him, to bask in his love."
    - Director: two things:
      - 1) It is good to let go of meditative prayer and simply be present to the Lord
      - 2) It won't last forever – "I love you, yes; but to a large extent this is because you fulfill me and all my desires".
  - Married life – loving to truly loving

- We need the ‘for worse’ as much as the ‘for better’ to make love real. In the better we learn the joy of loving; in the worse we learn to love unselfishly...not because I feel good about it but because the other’s happiness and well-being are important to me.
  - **Learning to let go:** the third stage of a good prayer life is the ‘dry well’ (dark night); this is a critical moment in our relationship with the Lord...Many pray and enter this dark night but few persevere through it, because they do not want to pay the price for growth.
  - Mediocrity...can happen in prayer too, because even though the Lord does not have a dark side, our own struggle with the deepening relationship becomes a problem. *We need to risk total honesty with God. We need to let him reveal the truth about our darkness.*
  - *The Lord normally leads us gradually into the dry-well stage of our life of prayer and love. There is a transitory stage of on-and-off dryness...the important feature of this transition from the honeymoon to the dry well is its unpredictability. We never know what to expect when we come to prayer, and the expectations are usually frustrated.* → Why the unpredictability: Because the purpose is to teach us to let go and let God, we cannot control the rhythm of his comings and goings.
- **The transformation stage:**
  - Every pray-er... finds the leap of faith demanded to persevere in the dark night or dry well a fearsome challenge. They need encouragement and some insight into what the Lord is doing. Otherwise they will become discouraged and lose their way.”
  - The intermittent dryness of the transitory stage gradually becomes our normal ‘permanent’ state’. Once we learn to let go and let God control the rhythm of our prayer experience, then the dryness becomes more and more the normal pattern. The oases of insight and of joyful experience become rarer, few and far between. We begin to suspect, fearfully, that this dry well or dark night is not just a passing phase of prayer. In fact, when pray-ers who have entered this third stage ask me anxiously how long it will last, I usually reply, “How long do you plan to live?” That is not very consoling for someone in the dark night, but it is the truth.
  - Fortunately, we can come to be at home in the darkness.
- (Referring back to Ch. 4 & 5 ‘When the well runs dry’) The signs (from St John of the Cross) by which we can distinguish a genuine call to live in the darkness of the dry well from a dryness due to our own negligence or to illness; how to cooperate with the dryness.
  - *Have a good spiritual director and trust his or her judgment that the darkness is really God’s will for us, even though it may seem to us*

*that we have lost him because of our own sinfulness.* This is crucial advice, since in the early stages of the dry well it will seem that we have been abandoned by the Lord we so much desire. At this time - up is down, dark is light, and absence is encounter. We can scarcely be good interpreters of our own experience.

- Also advises a simple “loving attentiveness” to what God is doing, cease trying to meditate or stir up our own feelings of love for the Lord.
- Analogy of surgeon operating: he renders us unconscious precisely in order to save our life...you do not judge the fruitfulness of the operation by the feelings the patient had while on the operating table, likewise, don't judge prayer by how you felt during the prayer itself, but by the good fruits in your life.
  - Are you more humble? Desirous of the good of others and the glory of God? More aware of your sinfulness and yet more confident that the Lord accepts you as you are?
- In the third stage we seek transformation; if I trust him I will submit freely and as gracefully as possible to his work in me. John of the cross says that for most people this work of transformation will be fully accomplished only in purgatory. *But for the pray-er who perseveres, the dry well is itself purgatory.*
- The transformation God works in me can benefit many others...an instrument shaped to the contours of the hand of God.
- **Attentiveness:** *not to the Lord himself (as He seems absent) but to what God is doing in us; that is, to the dryness and darkness, which we believe to be God's hand upon us. “If the Lord makes it dark, you make it darker”...trust the potter; lean in the direction in which the Spirit is blowing.* Don't resist his drying wind by trying to recapture the thoughts and rekindle the feelings of earlier days. Trust that God knows what He is doing even if we don't, and relax in his hands.

## **Chapter 2: Two Dark Nights**

(What happens when we come to be at home in the dryness or darkness...when we learn to live gracefully, day by day, by drinking from the dry well of prayer).

### **Five Types of Darkness:**

1. **The beginner** who simply does not know how to pray (doesn't know where to start, what to do)
  - a. What to do: Teach techniques for prayer
2. **Negligence/attachment:** dryness and distraction in someone who has a life of prayer: dryness due to negligence that has crept into life (careless in daily prayer time, not coming to prayer prepared/disposed, disordered attachment in active life: resentment, preoccupation with self, a friendship competing with the Lord for center of attention).
  - a. What to do: Remove attachment or recapture earlier generous fidelity to prayer and this should cure the darkness

### 3. **Transitional dryness:**

*This is 1/3 of the types of 'positive' dryness/distraction in someone who has a life of prayer: there is no voluntary infidelity.*

Alternating with times of consolation.

- a. What to do: Let go and Let God. Let him be the boss. Seek the God of consolations, not the consolations of God. Seek not insights but transformation.

### 4. **Permanent positive Dryness:**

*This is 2/3 of the types of 'positive' dryness/distraction in someone who has a life of prayer: there is no voluntary infidelity.*

Dryness/darkness has become normal experience over long period of time, with only occasional, even rare, oases of consolation, then we are dealing with the more permanent positive dryness we call the dry well/dark night, the stage that John of the Cross tells us all the faithful prayers enter but very few are willing to endure to the end.

→ *It may begin with some apparently extraneous life crisis such as the death of a loved one, or menopause...but when the dryness or darkness persists even after we have worked our way through the normal grieving process; then we have to look deeper to discover its real cause....*

→ Dryness/darkness is not necessarily desolation (absence of peace) though it seems that way when we begin this third and longest stage of a good prayer life. *The most important factor in our learning to be at home in the dry well...is our fidelity in living the experience over several years.*

→ Particular charism of St. John of the Cross was to assist prayers in their journey through the dark night.

### 5. **Nights active and passive**

*This is 3/3 of the types of 'positive' dryness/distraction in someone who has a life of prayer: there is no voluntary infidelity.*

→ The 'state of contemplation' that John speaks about corresponds to the dry well; the time when God begins to take over the work of prayer, the pray-er does less and less, and God more and more. John calls the whole experience the dark night. The prayer is not simply passive but receptive and responsive.

→ Active and passive night: two sides of the same hand.

- Passive: what God does to effect our transformation (more imp.)
- Active: our role in cooperating with his transforming work in us.

→ In "Ascent of Mt. Carmel" John explains how to assist this divine work. Summary: *As the Lord draws us into the darkness, we should let go of everything that is not God.*

→ **Sense:** *"denudation of the soul's appetites and gratifications; this is what leaves it free and empty of all things, even though it possesses them...since the things of the world cannot enter the soul, they are not in themselves an encumbrance or harm to it; rather it is the will and appetite dwelling within it that causes the damage"*

- The right time to abandon ‘the use of our natural senses’ is when they no longer help us to encounter God. *“Ah who has the power to heal me? Now wholly surrender yourself! Do not send me any more messengers, they cannot tell me what I need to hear.”* Spiritual Canticle – 6.
- *Messengers*: beauty of nature, joy in the love of friends, favorite songs, scripture passages...no longer tell us what we need to hear – then and only then should we abandon them in our prayer.
- Why? If they are good, why not good for us at this stage of prayer? They are only creatures, shadows of the Creator, and now (like the bridegroom) they have done their job, they have brought us to their maker. Once God desires to encounter us directly and personally, they (like John the Baptist) must fade out of the picture). The bride must come face to face with the bridegroom, without any intermediaries.
- The problem here and now: our loves are not ordered. When John speaks of ‘appetites’ and ‘gratifications’, he means what St Ignatius of Loyola calls ‘disordered attachments’. It is not love for our friends that ‘causes the damage’ of which John speaks. It is rather that these loves are disordered. *“Absent thee from felicity awhile”*.  
 → *Of course, we many not be able to recognize this disorder. We may think God is really our center ad these other loves’ are not a problem. That is why the passive night (what God does to strip us of these attachments) is the more crucial. He knows when and where there is disorder in our loves. If we are to grow, we have to trust his judgment – and cooperate with his work of denudation. This demands radical trust. It would not be so hard to accept the Lord’s removing from our lives friendships that were obviously evil, attachments that were clearly disordered. But our faith is put to the test when his two-edged sword cuts into what we value most and love best. Then it is truly difficult, even heroic, to cooperate with Him.*

### **Nights of sense and spirit**

→ The dark night of contemplation must purify and transform not only our sensible faculties but also these interior faculties of our soul. For John, the latter is the crucial transformation.

→ **Sense**: senses purged and accommodated to the spirit (common)

- Souls who have made a basic commitment of their lives to the Lord. Have rejected grave and even venial sin, but can be prevented from growing by attachment to the good.
- Order of sense: temptations that come from what we see, feel, hear

→ **Spirit**: spirit (faculties of memory, understanding, and will) is purged and denuded as well as accommodated & prepared for union with God through love (not common, because few persevere).

- Image of bird tethered: by cord (mediocrity), by thread (attachment → it still cannot fly)
- Eg. Law-and-order person who clings to familiar structures which give security, although God wants to launch him into the unknown
- *“My ‘attachment’ in these cases is not to sensible gratifications but to the goods of the spirit: to my understanding of what is right and proper’ to my memory of the blessings of the Lord in my history; to my will (my desire) to cling to God and his will.”*
- *My way of seeing, my way of understanding, my memory, my desire*

#### → Rooting sense in spirit

- The dark night – John’s discussion of the passive night; God purifying and transforming us.
- Level of sense: we desire what gratifies our senses
- Level of spirit: we desire to please the Lord and do his will
  - Book 1: nights of sense.
  - Book 2: *Sense to spirit – the real purgation of the senses begins with the spirit; all the imperfections and disorders of the sensory part are rooted in the spirit and from it receive their strength. All good and evil habits reside in the spirit and, until purged, the senses cannot be completely purged of their rebellions and vices.”*
    - eg. *Garden and weeds – we can chop away at them, “but they will resurface unless and until the Lord digs out the roots in our ‘spirit’, our interior faculties of memory, understanding and will.*
    - *In the night of sense, there is a certain ‘reformation and bridling of the appetites’, bringing them into submission to our will...however our will is not purified! There is still self-love in our will and we must “allow the Lord full freedom to transform us, his scalpel must cut deeper into the center of our soul”*
- The realization of what the Lord is doing in darkness can bring peace.

### Chapter 3: Seeing by Faith

(The Dark Night of the Soul: The mysterious process of transformation and our part in it).

#### The Challenge of Growth

- Prayer is life, therefore it inevitably involves change...openness to growth means moving into the dry well/dark night of prayer...it involves submitting to a process of purification and transformation...we risk losing all the security blankets to which we naturally cling.
- Aside from long-range goal of transformation into God (wood in fire), “John does speak of the positive aspect of our journey in darkness (ascent of Mt Carmel), not only at the end but also along the way...”learning to be at home in the dark”. At the end of the journey of course, all will be light.

- 1 Cor 13:8-10 Love never ends...for John the dark night is the time when even in this life, prophecy and tongues and “knowledge” pass away (*sensible, perceptible messengers of God*).
- *Faith is a way of seeing in the dark, and hope a way of possessing what is still beyond our reach.* They are far from the perfect seeing and possessing which we long for, but they are far better than the ‘childish ways’ we have left behind us (childish ways of seeking securities for our own self-satisfaction, and now just loving him for his sake).

### **Accepting my sinfulness**

- Two sides to the dark: says something about me and something about my Lord.
- The problem most generous prayers encounter is that they are overwhelmed by the realization of their own nothingness and sinfulness...it is dark not because the Lord is absent but because he is *too* present...our eyes cannot stand his light. *That realization alone should bring great consolation to the pray-er who fears she had lost the God she loves.*
- *“Too often she becomes fixated on her own “darkness” and nothingness. The devil enters in to convince her that she is hopeless, that her Lord could never find anything worth loving in her...(Green☺) “Why do you have to be outstanding? Why can’t you be an ordinary sinner like the rest of us?”*
  - Take God very seriously; but don’t take yourself seriously at all (qtd. St Theresa of Avila).
- The Lord has known our darkness all along; from the first moment he called us. God is not surprised by our sinfulness – we are. And the danger is that, with a kind of perverse pride, we can become fixated on this sinfulness, obsessed by it.
- To grow in love we have to accept and come to peace with our sinful condition...not because we like it, but because the Lord accepts and loves us as we are. He does wish to purify and transform us. But that is his work. We do not make ourselves worthy of his love by bemoaning our sinfulness. Rather, he makes us worth by loving us. This is the truth that will set us free.

### **Understanding faith and union**

- To be at home in the dark we need some understanding of what God is doing to bring about our transformation, and how we can cooperate with his work of love.
  - In a general way:
    - The Lord is purifying us of attachments to everything that is not himself
    - We must let go and let God
  - Ascent of Mt. Carmel: Book II, Chapters 1-9 – more detailed explanation of transformation process and our part in it.

- “In the night of sense there is yet some light, because the intellect and reason remain and suffer no blindness. But this spiritual night of faith removes everything, both in the intellect and in the senses. Thus the night of sense ‘resembles’ twilight, whereas the night of faith is comparable to midnight.” The first night is more external as we have seen, whereas “The second, darker night of faith, belongs to the rational, superior part; it is darker and more interior because it deprives this part of its rational light, or better, blinds it”.
- **Faith**
  - Like the sun swallowing up the lesser lights of the night sky, “the light of faith in its abundance suppresses and overwhelms that of the intellect.
  - Faith informs us of matters we have never seen or known...yet we come to know the, through hearing, by believing what faith teaches us, blinding our natural light and bringing it into submission.
  - Faith, manifestly, is a dark night for man, but in this way it gives him light. The more darkness it brings upon him the more light it sheds. For by blinding him it illumines him.
  - *The soul is not united with God in this life through understanding, nor through enjoyment, nor through imagination, nor through any other sense; but only faith, hope, charity (according to the intellect, memory and will) can unite the soul with God in this life.*
- **Cooperating with God in the transformation process**
  - If God brings us into this dark night and unites us to himself, then we must cooperate by letting go of and renouncing every natural means (all that is not God), and by seeking him only by faith, hope and love. What we need, in other words, is a “method” of emptying and purifying the spiritual faculties of all that is not God. (Book II, 6,6)
  - John is addressing those who have begun to enter the state of contemplation “those whose prayer has become habitually dry and dark because the Lord is encountering them directly in the darkness of faith and no longer by means of sensible “messengers”.
  - *If he makes it dark, we should make it darker. We should try to dance to God’s music even if we do not understand the words of the song or recognize the melody.*
  - The crux of the matter is spiritual freedom – not feeding and clothing ourselves with spiritual feelings, good works etc....being denuded of my spiritual possessions:
    - *“My spiritual possessions (my own ideas of God and goodness, my consolations, even **my** desire for God) are what really block me from achieving true spiritual freedom. Only the self-denial that attacks these possessions can cooperate effectively with God’s work of contemplative*



*darkness. Only such a radical self-denial incarnates a living by pure faith.”*

- We can learn to be at home in the dark. We can learn to ignore the thousand points of created light that seek to entice us, and to live solely by the dark light of true faith. Then we can cooperate effectively and happily with the Lord’s transforming work in us.

### Faith, hope & charity

- How concretely, do we ‘let go and let God? How do we make it darker? (Book II chapters 10-32 & Book III. Ascent).
- The spirit (interior faculties of the soul: intellect, memory & will) must be darkened in the transforming process → darkening is accomplished by the theological virtues.

Purification of the interior faculties of the Soul	Accomplished through a corresponding theological virtue	How to cooperate with God	General
<b>Intellect</b>	<b>Faith</b> causes a void of understanding in the intellect. <i>Faith brings certitude but not clarity, only darkness. Obscure certitude that God is &amp; is lovingly present, without any clarity of who He is or what He is doing.</i>	Empty our understanding of all that is not God. Don't seek any type of spiritual experience, or to prolong or recapture them. The Lord is seeking to empty us of all except his own transforming darkness.	Each virtue/gift when received in its purity in the dark night so fills the faculty in question with its brightness that it drives out all natural activity.  Emptying is primarily and essentially God's work & not ours.
<b>Memory</b>	<b>Hope</b> begets an emptying of possessions in the memory. Hope always pertains to the unpossessed object. If something were possessed, there could no longer be hope for it.	Don't cling to or try and evoke memories or feelings. Don't be attached to places of prayer, private devotions... When the Lord places you in a cloud of unknowing; fashion for yourself a "cloud of forgetting"	Dark/dryness of prayer is not a sign of failure but of growth – darkness is evidence that the Lord is not absent but more present, and in a deeper way, than ever before.
	<b>Three kinds of harm that come from not emptying the memory (Book III)</b>	1. From the world – vainglory (thinking oneself holy from past experiences) 2. From the devil – can only work through our natural faculties (senses) – is helpless & impotent when we keep our memories 'in darkness and secure' 3. Privative harm – all memories are an impediment to & deprive us of divine union "what the eye doesn't see, the heart doesn't want".	This is a critical, dangerous period in prayer life – many lose their way at this point. They fail to grow either because they misinterpret the dry/darkness or in understanding they do not wish to pay the price.
	<b>Three benefits from emptying the memory</b>	1. Tranquility 2. Peace 3. Disposition to be moved by the Holy Spirit	Ideas/memories/desires in prayer are not the problem: it is attachment to these. The Lord empties the soul of them precisely in order to free it of any attachment to created "messengers" ...anything but the Lord himself

<b>Will</b>	<p><b>Love</b> produces the nakedness and emptiness of affection for all that is not God.</p> <p>Charity causes a void in the will regarding all things, since it obliges us to love God above everything. One has to withdraw his affection from all in order to center it wholly on God.</p>		Spiritual Directors: be firm but gentle.
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- “Good philosophy does not change reality. It leaves everything as it is. Its true fruit is not “knowledge of new facts”, but rather a clearer picture of the situation, which troubled us before we began to philosophize about it. Thus it enables us to get on with the business of living well” (qtd).

### Being ‘lovingly attentive

- The real danger in the early stages of contemplation: the sense that I should be *doing* something...that one’s idleness may be an insult to God. But once the pray-er is reassured that being lovingly attentive is all he or she must do then it becomes easy to rest in the presence of God.
  - “It is sad to see many disturb their soul when it desires to abide in this calm and repose of interior quietude...since these individuals do not understand the mystery of that new experience, they imagine themselves to be idle and doing nothing”
  - Must learn to abide in quietude with a loving attentiveness to God and pay no heed to the imagination & its work.
- How to be lovingly attentive when God seems absent?
  - Don’t try to force meditative prayer, persevere patiently; trust in God.
  - *Attend lovingly to the darkness itself; convinced in faith that this darkness is the very presence of God...it somehow involves gazing steadily into the darkness, not allowing our attention to be distracted by the thousand points of created light that seek to divert us from the darkness, hoping (sometimes against hope) that the very darkness will someday reveal itself as radiant light.*

## Part Two: In Loving Service: The Horizontal Dimension

### Chapter 4: Liking and loving

#### The second arm of the cross

- Vertical: me and God
- Horizontal: me and the world
  - There is a tension between the two
  - Earlier generations emphasize the vertical more
  - Every true disciple: is in, but not of, the world. They are sent into the world but do not belong to the world.
- Can John of the Cross help here? Is his image of the world bad?
  - John stresses that all creation is inherently good (including human love), the problem is our *disordered attachment to creatures*.

- *The 'nada' is not a rejection of creatures as bad/worthless. It is an affirmation that all of them, good as they are, are not God. Since we tend to allow them to compete with God for the center of our lives, we need to get disentangled from our attachments and to allow the Lord alone to truly be our center.*
- Similarities/differences & distortions of understanding in John & Ignatius' teaching.
- **Spiritual Exercises**
  - "Spiritual exercises are every way of disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments, and after their removal, of seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of our soul" (Spiritual Exercises, St Ignatius).
  - A smorgasbord from which retreatants can select whatever helps them to the end in view: finding the will of God for them.
  - The end vs. means distinction is crucial for Ignatius... the 'nada' of John...essential visions are identical: *total and unfettered centering on God and his will is the whole purpose of the spiritual life.*
  - John aims teaching at people past the beginner's stage. Ignatius gives detailed instructions for first week...but by the 4<sup>th</sup> he gives much less, assuming the pray-ers would have discovered their own way of proceeding. Ignatius then 'fades' into the background to leave the retreatant to encounter the Lord directly.
  - Director should be brief in presenting the matter – because knowledge doesn't fill and satisfy the soul but understanding and relishing the truth that comes from one's own encounter with the Lord in the Gospel.
  - The 3 kinds of humility: living in the truth
    1. Opposition to mortal sin
    2. Opposition to venial sin (ingratitude to Creator)
    3. Desire and choose poverty *with Christ poor, insults with Christ loaded with them*, to be accounted worthless and a fool *for Christ* rather than be esteemed as wise and prudent in the world. For so Christ was treated before me → the supreme truth: Jesus Christ has loved me unto death. ***I can only be truly humble, live in this truth, by being with him wherever He is.*** Humility is truth. Truth is love: his love for me "unto the end" and the return of love that unites me totally with Him.

### Liking and loving

- Growing into the third kind of humility – we can desire it but not make it happen. Similar to John's darkness → but for Ignatius, the darkness is not only in prayer but also "in the marketplace" of our lives...our very involvement in the world becomes the 'sandpaper' of our sanctification.
- *To like people*: to feel good about them, to enjoy their company, felt compatibility.

- *To love people:* not a question of feelings but will. We should sincerely desire the good of all men and women – those who like us and those who dislike us, even those who hate us. Unless we are masochists, we cannot like all people. But we can – and must – love them. We must desire their good, their salvation, their happiness here and hereafter...the Lord must transform us to enable us to love all people as he loves them...*all too often we will have to love those who we do not find it easy to like, and sometimes those we find it extremely difficult to like, even among people with whom we share much of our lives.*
- Friends: we all need such friends who image God's love and acceptance to us. They give us courage to risk loving a God we cannot see...but there will not be many such soul-friends in a person's life.
- This is when the third kind of humility becomes a real and awesome ideal for the true disciple of Jesus. Can I really love – sincerely desires the good of – those whom I find it hard to like and who make it clear their dislike for me? Only if the process described by John of the Cross as the dark night of the soul has so bonded me to the Lord that my whole desire is to be "with Christ" wherever he is – even in poverty, insults, and contempt.

## Chapter 5: To Labor with Christ

### Ordering means to end

- The apostle who seeks to grow in his vocation inevitably lives in dynamic tension – between personal love for God and service of his people. Philippians 1:20-24 → the animating principle for Paul: to be with Christ wherever He is. Jesus is in the center.
- This kind of centering does not come easy...even in the cloister...only gradually and painfully does the *dark night purify us of our attachments to those goods that compete with God for the center of our hearts.*
- The question is: what is best for *me*? For Ignatius what matters is not *what I choose but why I choose it.*
  - In every good choice, as far as depends on us, our intention must be simple. I must consider only the end for which I am created, that is, for the praise of God our Lord and for the salvation of my soul. Hence, whatever I choose must help me to this end for which I am created.
- The true apostle should be an instrument shaped to the hand of God.

### Obedience: fixing our eyes on God

- ***For Ignatius the ideal and goal of the apostolic life is the third kind of humility: the lived desire to be with Christ wherever he is, even in poverty, insults and contempt...Jesus (humanly) recoiled from rejection...but what mattered most to him was being united to the Father whatever the cost.***

- ***To the extent that the desire to be with Christ wherever he is has come to possess our souls, we are truly united with him in his work of saving and transforming the world.***
- *Both John and Ignatius speak of “detachment” of being free from all our disordered attachments in order to be free for God and his will...(John)* The bird’s tethers (be they large ropes or tiny threads) must be cut it is to be free to soar to God. And he sees the prayer experience of the dark night as the essential means whereby the bonds are cut. Ignatius agrees. Given his apostolic charism, however he also stresses the value of what I have called “marketplace darkness” in setting us free. And, while I have described the tension between loving and liking as one essential elements\ of this...the central notion in Ignatius’ own vision of apostolic purification is obedience.

### **Obedience/apostolic principles**

- Our apostolic goal should be *the good of the people we serve*. That is the end. The practices we promote and the topics we discuss are but means to that end; so should be chosen insofar as they contribute to it.
- Principle of unity: respect for legitimate authority. Superior’s actions may not be praiseworthy, and I should recognize them as such, however for pastoral concern “when preaching in public or in speaking before the people”, I may need to speak up or disagree, in the right place and at the right time. I don’t wish to do more harm than good by my indiscriminate dissent.
- Obedience/unity: that I surrender my own will and judgment to the Lord working in his church...if we believe in the value of unity, we are prepared to sacrifice something of our own autonomy for the good of the whole, for the well-being of the community itself, and also for the sake of the corporate ministry to which we are called.
- The conviction that it is really God to whom I surrender my autonomy. Hence my obedience is not just a matter of practicality or efficiency....it is God himself to whom I surrender my will and judgment. Once I forget that crucial fact I risk a real crisis of faith.
- *Genuine obedience considers not the person to whom it is offered, but Him for whose sake it is offered.*

### **Discernment in the dry well**

- *Obedience in the marketplace is the correlate of the dark night of prayer. In both cases we see by ‘faith alone’...therefore obedience will not be easy, as the dark night is not easy.*
- It is easy enough to obey when the decisions don’t touch my life directly, or when I know less about the matter in question than others...*but when the matter in question touches my own area of competence (including my own self, whom I know much better now), then obedience is clearly most difficult. That is why I can now appreciate better Ignatius’ stressing that it is the Lord we obey. I have had to undergo a real purification, akin to the*

*dark night, of my motivation for obeying. Human nature rebels, as it does in the darkness of prayer, and I have had to learn to center more and more on the Lord's will in the decisions of ecclesiastical and religious superiors. John's 'loving attentiveness' to God and his working, applies equally well in this marketplace area of my life...the dark times are not only the most challenging; they are also the most productive of real purification and transformation.*

- Obedience is also challenging and transforming in another sense: if it is God whom I obey, then I cannot just follow blindly what any human being thinks to be his will...authority can give general guidelines for the church/community. But...it cannot spell out how I should deal with each person and situation I face. I have to sense (discern).
- Just as in prayer we can come to be at home in the dark night; we can (also) learn to be peace in the obscurity of God's call in our active lives...discernment goes from learning the rules to the habit of discerning love...gradually we develop a sense for what please the Lord and what does not.
- What really gives us this 'dark peace' is remembering one's experience of the Lord. He has been faithful in the past, in my past. He has written straight with my crooked lines. Rom 8:28

### **All things in God**

- Active and passive night also apply to our life of service. It will be primarily be God's work (passive night), but does demand our cooperation (active night).
- Many enter the dark night of ministry but few persevere – idealism clouded, disappointment, lack of appreciation, experience of human frailty, mid-life crises, burn-out...when crises arise, generosity is tested, temptation to give up in desolation is strong  
→ Mostly don't give up entirely but settle for comfortable level of mediocrity. They carve out a niche for themselves in which they can live and serve without being too much disturbed by others or by their own frailty...they bargain with the Lord, they give him something, but not what he desires...is this bad? Not entirely. There is genuine love for the Lord here, and he will surely bless them...but it is a sad situation, considering what might have been...it simply postpones until purgatory the work of purifying transformation which the Lord wished to accomplish in this life...if we refuse to cooperate with the Lord's purifying fire, we delay the day of full union with him...
- Apostolically we also fail to become instruments *shaped to the hand of God*. We work *for* him, but we cannot *do* his work, because we have set limits to what he can do in and through us.
- ***For those who want to cooperate – the spiritual exercises and the ascent. How do we cooperate with the Lord's purifying work in us? The general principle is the same as that given by John for prayers in the dark night: Center totally on God, and let go of all else when the***

***Lord takes it away. My projects, my ideas of how best to serve, my expectations of others – all these are but means. They are not bad. In fact, they are good and necessary, since we are called to cooperate actively in the work of redemption. But we should not clutch & cling to them. Our grip on them should be loose and relaxed, so that the Lord can change or remove them whenever he wishes.***

## **Chapter 6: The prayer of the apostle**

### **John complements Ignatius**

- Love ought to manifest itself in deeds rather than in words
- Love consists in a mutual sharing of goods; the lover gives and shares with the beloved what he possesses and vice-versa
- Discernment is where prayer and action meet. It is the art of discovering in prayer, how the Lord wishes us to act. Discerning love is that habitual sensitivity to the Lord's voice and desires that comes from long years of living with him in love.
- Three key elements of Ignatian apostolic prayer:
  - Formal mental prayer
  - Examination of conscience
  - Retreat
- The spirituality of John of the Cross brings these to maturity, building on the solid initial foundation of the spiritual exercises

### **Prayer: waiting on a quiet God**

#### **Distractions**

- Recurring complaint among experienced pray-ers → cooperate with the Lord by disciplining ourselves to ignore them. This is the active night of sense and spirit.
- Reasons for distractions:
  - Can be beginners lack of depth or area of negligence in life of mature pray-er
  - *But assuming that the person is well-grounded and generous than we have to conclude that the distractions are a normal, though frustrating, sign of the dry well or dark night. In that case, Theresa of Avila tells us, we should simply learn to ignore them, to realize that they are on the surface of our consciousness, whereas the Lord is working encountering us at a deeper level, "in the soul". (ex. Spoiled children at an adults party).*
- Handling distractions:
  - While praying; ignore them.
  - Outside of prayer: discipline them – make the imagination pay a price for disrupting the prayer time with some mortification.
- Prayer of recollection:

- When the Lord brings all the faculties to quiet and enables the pray-er to be totally centered on him. This is a supernatural gift that only the Lord gives, for a time and occasionally.
- Distractions at mass
  - Most alarming to sincere pray-ers – distractions during the Eucharist, even at the time of consecration and communion. *Even in the Eucharist it seems we are asked to drink from a dry well. It is a frustrating experience...it seems to be the normal experience of pray-ers in the dry well. Even at the Eucharist, we must learn to let go and let God. Even here we must set aside our own expectations concerning what should be happening, what we should be feeling”.*
  - ***We have to learn to live with God’s silence; confident that he will speak when he has anything to say. From a deeper perspective...God is not really silent, but we are deaf. He speaks in the “still small voice” of the Elijah story (1 Kings 19:12), which our ears are not sensitive enough to hear.***
  - The Lord is speaking in the Eucharist for example, but now in a deep and quiet way that, for us, is drowned out by the surface noises of own thoughts and imaginings. The fact remains, though, that as far as we can tell the Lord is silent. We cannot hear him. He will speak audibly when we are ready. But in the meantime we have to trust that this frustrating dryness is really a sign of growth: a sign that he is taking us deeper, that the surface consolations, which delighted us before can no longer, satisfy us. In this sense, at least, “everything is fine.”
- Apostolic distractions
  - May not be distractions, but inspirations from him concerning our choosing and acting.
  - Important to distinguish:
    - Talking (to ourselves) – being wrapped up in myself & my problems, forgetting Our Lord = real distraction.
    - Listening (to the Lord) – bring problems to him to talk about and give him time to respond if he wishes → This is the substance of my encounter with him.
  - Better to begin prayer surfacing all our concerns, and handing them over to the Lord “Lord, if you wish to speak to me about them, fine. But if not, let them pass away”.
- Listening prayer – what matters is the quality of time with the Lord, at least a half hour daily.

### **The Examen: two sides of the same hand (knowledge of God & of self)**

- Adaptation needed once in the dry well experience; evolves as we mature in prayer; becomes more contemplative, we don’t need a detailed analysis of the day to spot where the Lord has been calling us to greater generosity.
- Purpose: tool of self-knowledge



- Knowledge of God and self go hand-in-hand. Know and see self as God sees me.
- Each days Examen is part of an ongoing process of growth in self-knowledge and in sensitivity to the way the Lord is working in my life. It is an exercise in discernment whose goal is an ever-greater discerning love.
- Prayer and Examen fuse into a single activity in the life of the pray-er.
- Writing the 5<sup>th</sup> Gospel
  - Gradually our encounter with him becomes less centered on the Gospels and more an encounter with the Lord here and now *“but who do you say that I am (Mt 16:15). I must now write the ‘5<sup>th</sup> Gospel’ in my own prayer and life. Who He is for us and who we are for him. The paschal mystery is not just a historical fact. It is our story.*

### **Retreat: seeing the dark**

- Examen, monthly retreat & annual retreat – concentric circles in the life of the beginner in prayer → My whole life is a unity, a single story of formation and transformation. From his perspective, each day is not an isolated event but part of a much wider picture.
- Monthly Retreat:
  - We seek to see the month as a whole, to discover the unity of the Lord’s work in us during the past thirty days...in the recollection we ask the grace to see more clearly the “beautiful thing” the Lord is fashioning.
  - Regardless of the theme, the real purpose of the recollection is the same: *to discern how the Lord has been working in one’s live in the past month, and how sensitively we have responded to his loving call.*
  - Focus:
    - Growth in sensitivity to the Lord at work in my life
    - Revealing myself (and himself) to me
    - Shaping me to his hand
- Annual Retreat:
  - Seeing the whole year through the Lord’s eyes; a new chapter in the 5<sup>th</sup> Gospel has to be written. If we are spiritually alive and well, our answer to the question “who do you say that I am?” Will never be entirely the same as it was last year...only when I have some distance from the events in my life, can I see the divine meaning in them. A grace of revelation.
  - We should expect our retreat prayer to follow the same pattern as our daily prayer
  - Best time of year – “I am totally free to “lovingly attend” to the Lord and his work in me. This means distractions, and sometimes restlessness and misery. But it brings me to very center of myself,

my very reason for being and laboring. The anxieties and frustrations of daily life fall into place, as do the joys and successes.”

- Seeing in the dark vs. seeing *the* dark
  - Not about straining to see him
  - *Simply gazing steadily and unflinchingly into the dark itself...I can be at peace simply ‘seeing’ the dark as it is at present, convinced that the more I do so, the freer he is to shape me to his love and for his glory...these years of dryness are but a brief moment in the span of eternity.*