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LUX ET ORIGO

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Lux et Origo

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Christian mysticism is, in a way, a microcosm of our faith. Many mystics have experienced the presence of Christ in completely different ways from one another, yet all sought to draw nearer to God. It is because of the diverse expressions of mysticism that we can all be challenged to contemplate God in new or different ways. Mysticism can “look” different for many people, yet as Christians, we are all called to love the Divine mystery more fervently. Teilhard de Chardin used prayer accompanied by rigorous scientific knowledge and research as a means to further understand God’s creation and evolution. St. Julian of Norwich experienced God in a series of visions while she was gravely ill. St. Francis of Assisi strove to see God in all created beings. These are a few examples of mystics whose lives and relationships with God varied greatly, but it is undeniable that they all deeply loved God.

One of the reasons why the three articles in this issue go together so well is because they take three very different approaches to understanding mysticism, yet all are intended to draw one closer to God. Light as the source of creation, the presence of God within creation, and the vastness of God beyond our comprehension all seem strikingly divergent. Yet in all cases, the focus is on nothing but God — God as the *lux* (light) of the world, God as the *origo* (source) of all being, and God as all that is beyond our understanding.

We believe in a God with infinite wisdom as human beings with finite knowledge. Therefore, there will always be more we *could* know about God and more we may *wish* we knew

about God, but we will never know it all. There will always be mystery. This is a good thing. The mystery of God allows us to engage our curiosity, and it encourages us to be more at peace with the unknown. God invites us to ask questions and strive to know Him more deeply. But God also invites us to sit in silence, breathe, and place our total trust in Him. We will never know everything, but God will provide us with all we *need* to know. He will give us our daily bread.

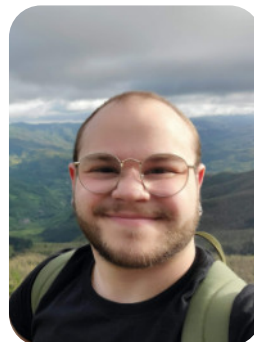
Kirsten Pinto Gfroerer begins this issue with an exploration of light — light as the source of creation, light as the Good, light as the glorious love of the Holy Trinity. She writes, “the creation story teaches us that the promise in the midst of the dark is not only that the light will come again, but that light is always present. All that is has light as its substance and ground. Light is here, in the dark, in the fabric of everything. And this light is the glory of God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three persons and one God held in unity by the life of love.”

Then, the Ven. Simon Blaikie writes on what he learned on a recent trip to Holy Island. He reminds us that we are *all* called to draw ever closer to the Lord, and that we experience the mystical presence of God in silence, stillness, and witnessing God’s beautiful creation. We must remember, he says, that “the Divine mystery lives within every human being...”

Following this, Cinna Baran writes on the idea that God is Nothingness — a paradoxical idea put forth in one of Meister Eckhart’s sermons. His article explores what this concept means, how it is not contradictory to the Christian faith, and how Paul experienced this when he encounters Jesus on the road to Damascus.

Durell Desmond concludes this issue with a poem titled “Shadow and Light.”

Peace be with you; I hope you enjoy.



CINNA BARAN

Editor of Rupert’s Land News



Light

Photo: [Rene Böhmer](#)

KIRSTEN PINTO GFROERER

Light,

We have passed the midnight of the year, but our Northern world is still in its deep dark cold; the dawn is still far off.

In this time, the church, in her wisdom, turns our attention to light. Three of the four major feast days in the season of Epiphany are associated with light. The feast of Epiphany revolves around the Magi following the light of the star to the Holy Child. The readings for the feast begin with the call from the prophet Isaiah in chapter 60, “Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.” Then, at the feast of Candlemas on February 2nd, we celebrate the presentation of Jesus at the temple and Simeon proclaims that Jesus is the “light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel.”¹ At this feast we bless the candles which will light our sanctuaries for the year to come. Finally, just before the beginning of Lent, we celebrate the feast of the Transfiguration, when Peter, James, and John gaze upon Jesus in the glorious light of His divinity as He stands with Moses and Elijah on Mount Tabor. The church is telling us something important with these feasts: she is telling us that in the midst of the dark we are in light. She is making sure that we hear with our minds and our hearts and our bodies that which we were taught on the eve of Christmas. “The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not.”²

Light is the first creation. The God who creates the heavens and the earth, before creating any particular thing, speaks light into being. Light makes life possible. Light makes perceiving and seeing that life possible. Light is the ground and energy of all that comes after.

This is not the light of the sun or the moon. The sun and the moon are created on the fourth day, after the waters are divided into oceans and the firmament, after the dry land is separated from the waters, and after the grasses, herbs, and trees have been brought forth from the earth. This light is not the material light brought to us by the sun, this light is behind, and before that light.

This light is not physical, rather, it is, as St. Augustine teaches in the thirteenth book of his *Confessions*, spiritual light. It is God sharing God with creation. God wanted to share God so God said, “let there be light.”³ This light is the love of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God lights the world that is coming to be because God is, at essence, Love. Love is not a property or an attribute of God, love is the life of God, the energy, the vitality of God — and what is love except seeing and being seen, communicating oneself and receiving the other? Love is sharing reality. Light makes sharing reality possible.

¹ Luke 2:32

² John 1:5

³ Genesis 1:3



Photo: [Rohan Makhecha](#)

The church fathers and mothers teach us that we are created out of nothing. Before light was created, before God shared God's glory, the world was formless and void. All that is created is thus created from nothing and the light which is the glory of God. Imagine this creation of light, this splendour of brightness, at the beginning. This radiant glory in which the creation will happen. By sharing the light of the love of the Trinity, the Creator puts seeing and beholding, communication and communion at the centre of living. All that will be created will have this light as its beginning and will thus share in God. When we know any creature, we will know something of God. As the Psalmist says, "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light."⁴ Light makes the divine life *the* reality of creation by being the life force of creation and by making it possible to behold God in creation.

Pseudo-Dionysius says that light is "The visible image of the Good. It draws and returns all things to itself, all the things that see, that have motion, that are receptive of illumination and warmth."⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius will go on to say that this light "returns them (humans) to the truly real."⁶ Light is the communication of God in creation,

which binds us and draws all creation into God. The God who creates light is a God who wants to be seen, who is entering into relationship, who is connecting all of creation to Godself.

Darkness is not created. It is not spoken into being on the first day of creation. It is there but it is not created. If we follow the tradition of the church which teaches that we are created out of nothing, this means that darkness is nothing. The first verse of Genesis in *The Orthodox Study Bible*, a translation of the Septuagint, reads as follows. "In the beginning God made heaven and earth. The earth was invisible and unfinished and darkness was over the deep."⁷ Here, we see darkness as incompleteness, limit, insufficiency, and need. Nothing, like darkness, is a lack. It is not seeing, not knowing, not understanding. As a creature made from nothing and light, I cannot make myself.

⁴ Psalm 36:9

⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius. *The Complete Works*. Trans: Colm Luibheid. *The Classics of Western Spirituality*, Paulist Press, New York, 1987. pp. 75

⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 76

⁷ Genesis 1:1-2



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Photo: [Marek Piwnicki](#)

Creatures are light receptors, not light makers. Sergei Bulgakov says it helpfully, “The creature is distinct from the deity itself not in respect of the source of its being, but only in respect of the particular mode of its reception of that being.”⁸ Creation and God are not different in their substance; we are made of the glory of God combining with our need for God. We are made of God sharing God with us who have a great need to become. Creation receives being into its nothing and becomes its own particular glory.

This darkness, nothingness, is not evil. We must be very clear on this. God does not allow evil by making us out of nothing and light. What God does is allow creation to exist even though creation is not God. What God allows is becoming. God is complete, sufficient, eternal and infinite. In creation God makes being that is not complete, he makes being that needs to *become*. God is love and God wants this nothing to become full of light. This allowance of God creates a space, a place, in which development, learning, beholding, growing, and choice happens in creation.

The definition of all creation is thus to be a light receptor. Darkness is the place in which our natural receptiveness, our natural need, happens. Evil came into the world because humans didn’t want to need; we didn’t want to be dependant. We wanted to know and live without the light of God. We wanted to know good and evil for ourselves. We have declared that we don’t want to receive light; we want to make our own light. But creatures cannot make light. We can block light by our resistance to it, we can be diminished by it, and we can diminish others. By our blocking the light with our refusal to be its receptors, light is fragmented, it does not flow through. By refusing light in our dark places, in our weak places, in our relationships of interdependence, we fragment light, we break the flow. In so doing, creation can be distorted into something malformed and even monstrous. History has shown the great sorrow of human evil. It shows the results of blocking the light.

⁸ Bulgakov, Sergei. *Sophia: The Wisdom of God*. pp. 61

Christ, in His Incarnation as God and man, allowed all the light of His divinity to shine through His humanity, His need. He was unafraid of weakness and dependence on God; no light was blocked by any exercise of ego or desire to assert His right to make light or to own light. God was fully available in the person of Christ. This brilliant light revealed the diminishment and distortions of our humanity, and we hated what we saw. Thus, we refused the light definitively by crucifying Christ. However, because Christ is God and man, in the crucifixion light becomes present to all the wrongs of all of history because God remained the light of love all the way unto death, into nothing, into our fragments and rose again from the dead, thus saturating ultimate evil with the presence of eternal light. God took light into our ultimate refusal to receive light and loved us there for all eternity. "The light shines in the dark and the darkness comprehended it not".

Why does all of this matter? It matters because it is midwinter and midwinter is hard and naturally dark. "The world's whole sap is sunk" as John Donne puts it so eloquently in his poem "Nocturnal upon St. Lucy's Day." The world's whole sap is sunk, and so is our sap sunk on these cold dark days. We are in a time of latency, of little energy, of waiting in the dark. This is not 'evil', this is the natural rhythm of creation. We are nothing and light and that light is a gift from God; sometimes we have to be still and wait upon that light to give us strength. Winter can teach us that, but it can also make us scared, impatient, and restless.

To compound issues, the world is not only naturally dark in this time in history, it is also unnaturally dark, fragmented, and sometimes the present evil seems monstrous. "There are wars and rumours of wars."⁹ The political and environmental weather of the world is harsh and cruel. Just so, our understanding of light and dark are crucial to us now.

The creation story teaches us that the promise in the midst of the dark is not only that the light will come again, but that light is always present. All that is has light as its substance and ground. Light is here, in the dark, in the fabric of everything. And this light is the glory of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons and one God held in unity by the life of love. No one and nothing can withhold the light of God from any created thing.

⁹ Matthew 24:6

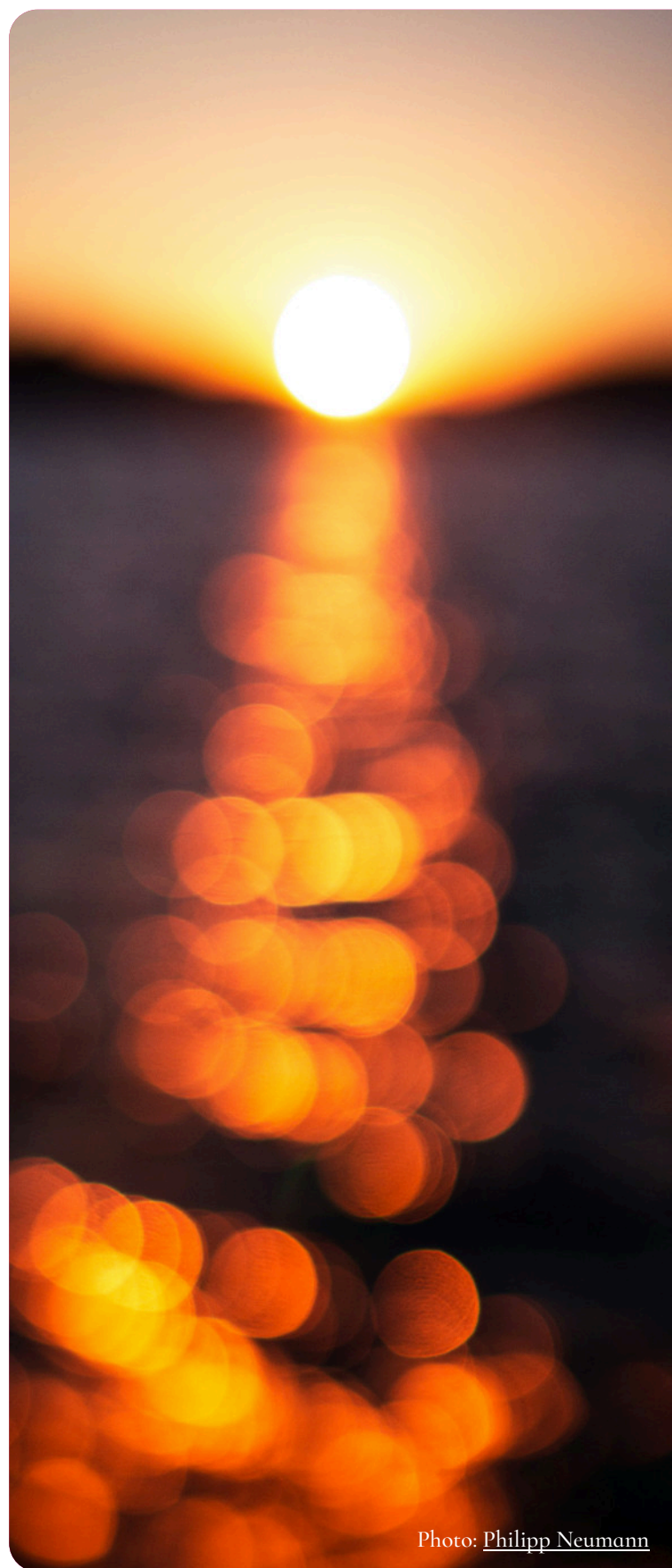


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Light is present even in the deep dark because creation is present in the deep dark. If you are present in the deep dark, light is there because you are formed in God and held in God, in the light of God's shared glory. Furthermore, even when that deep dark has been perpetuated by our human refusal to receive light, even when I refuse the light, still light is present. Christ on the cross is present at the place of our refusal, loving all of us and bringing light.

The difference that Christianity makes is that Christians do not believe that this light is a right or privilege of all people, all plants and all animals. Christians believe that this light is the *reality* of all people, all plants and all animals — all creation. The difference between a right and privilege and a reality is fundamental. When we fight for rights and privileges, we do so from energy stores we believe to be our own. We think that *we* are granting someone or something rights and privileges that they didn't have before. We think that *we* are making a new reality, a new world filled with light. However, when we attempt to make new realities, we again only block light by our ego and pride. It is exactly for this reason we must remember that we are not the makers of light in dark places — we are the receptacles of light in dark places. This difference asks for us to act with humility, hope and love; this difference asks that we live in forgiveness.

As Christians, we have been shown that human weakness, our dark, our nothingness, is not to be denied or hidden.

Rather, it is to be the place of light. Thus, we as Christians have a great responsibility to the glory that is in every dark place. God is present, even in the monstrous fragments which seem to block the light. God is present through the cross of Jesus Christ. By his death and resurrection, we are forgiven for our blindness and brought into God's ever-present light again. By the grace of God's forgiveness, we are called to receive the light as we are naturally able and to let light flow through our fragments and our inability to respond.

So, daily, in the dark of midwinter and the evils that we face, we return to the words of Isaiah for courage and strength:

“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.”



KIRSTEN PINTO GFROERER

Kirsten Pinto Gfroerer is a lay theologian and counsellor living near the woods on Lake Winnipeg. Her book *Anchorhold: Corresponding with Revelations of Divine Love*

contemplatively explores the theology of Julian of Norwich. The Viridescent Circle Podcast is her newest project. To learn more about Kirsten's work visit www.kirstenpintogfroerer.com.



The Presence of God

SIMON BLAIKIE

Photo: Marco Angelo

On a warm June afternoon in the summer of 2024, I sat beneath the cross on St. Cuthbert's Island with Psalm 27 open on my lap. I had come to meditate upon the fourth verse. "One thing I asked of the Lord, this I seek, to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to enquire in His temple." As I read and re-read the passage the world seemed to pause for just a brief moment in time and I understood that the Psalmist's prayer had become my prayer: I was sitting in the house of the Lord at that very moment. The prayer was not about some distant eschatological hope, rather, it was an invitation from the Immanent God who journeys with each of us throughout our lives. My eyes moved from sea to sky to birds to seals. The beauty of our Lord's creation shimmered as the light reflected brightly from the waves that crashed upon the shore just below me. In that briefest of moments, reality shifted somehow, and I had become present to the mystery of life and its Creator. All the distractions and noise, both auditory and visual, faded into the background as I sat in God's presence. There was an "at-homeness" about it.

Holy Island is a tidal island off the coast of Northumberland, UK and is only available to drive to via the causeway at low tide. St. Cuthbert's Island, less than 200 meters from Holy Island, is accessible by foot at low tide. I had come for four weeks to study, pray, and meditate in silence, solitude, and stillness. In four short weeks I engaged with the Divine mystery in mind, body, and soul in ways that I believe all of humanity is invited to experience.

My days were filled with walking the beaches and stopping to gaze upon God's creatures. Holy Island is the summer grounds of adolescent grey seals. I would often take along *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace* by John O'Donohue, an Irish mystic who died a few years ago. For me, that simple title captures the essence of mysticism. The work gets to the heart of what mystics are seeking and suggests that perhaps we are all mystics. O'Donohue writes, "The beauty of the earth is the first beauty. Millions of years before us the earth lived in wild elegance. Landscape is the first-born of creation. Sculpted with huge patience over millennia, landscape has enormous diversity of shape, presence and memory. There is poignancy in beholding the beauty of landscape: often it feels as though it has been waiting for centuries for the recognition of the human eye... How can we ever know the difference we make to the soul of the earth? Where the infinite stillness of the earth meets the passion of the human eye, invisible depths strain towards the mirror of the name."¹

It was impossible for me to rest in these words even for a short time without coming to the full realization that humanity is not separate and distinct from creation, but is very much woven into its fabric. There is a certain peace to be found in realizing our lack of specialness.

YHWH said, "Be Still, and know that I am Lord."² Stillness: the absence of frantic hurrying about, busyness, and the delusion of multi-tasking. Jesus went away from the crowds to pray — He did so in solitude and silence. One of the gifts of Holy Island was the time and space to sit with God and just listen. Taking that gift back home has proven to be difficult at times, but not impossible. For it is possible to find, as I have, in small, empty, and quiet corners that beckon us to enter. The call to be in relationship with the Divine is a call to all, not only a few. We need not, and most do not, experience the paranormal and miraculous such as visions and stigmata to live contemplative lives focused on always being in God's presence. The practices I took with me to Holy Island, such as contemplative prayer and *Lectio Divina*, provided me with a foundation upon which to gently inquire and, perhaps most of all, *listen* to the still quiet voice. And I brought those practices home again, somehow transformed...new, yet not new.

I believe that Jesus welcomes an inquiring mind. He wants us to engage with the world, to wrestle with the tough questions, and encounter Him in all people. A friend of mine with whom I regularly share coffee often reminds me that at the heart of the Divine mystery is love. To love God and know that you are loved by God is a good place to begin and an even better place to end. In between, we are invited to behold the beauty of the world as the 19th century mystic St. Therese of Lisieux did. She is quoted as having said,

"Far away on the horizon we could see the great mountains... The sight of these beauties made a deep impression on my thoughts; I felt as if I were already beginning to understand the greatness of God and the wonders of heaven far away on the horizon."³ It is an invitation to participate in something bigger than ourselves and not to assume Lordship over it.

¹ O'Donohue, John. *Beauty: The Invisible Grace*, New York: Harper Collins, 2004, pp. 32-33

² Psalm 46:10

³ <https://laudatosimovement.org/news/10-saints-whose-care-for-creation-still-inspires-us-today/>

Photo: [Marc-Oliver Jodoin](#)

There are some who believe that Holy Island is a ‘thin’ place. That is, a place where the curtain between heaven and the world we inhabit is particularly translucent. It was one of many reasons why I came to that particular island for my retreat. I wondered if I, too, would experience its ‘thinness’. When I left four weeks later, I had come to understand that the ‘thinnest’ place of all is within each of us. The Divine mystery lives within every human being and the veil that separates that glory, from our smallness can be parted — if only briefly and seldomly. God invites us inward as much as he invites us out into the world. It is within our relationship with the Mystery, which we refer to as God, that we find the love to share with the world — the love that every mystic seeks.

One day I hope to return to Holy Island. For now, I will cherish the presence of God as I am able to... often

stumbling along the way, but occasionally catching glimpses of a reality far beyond my own. And that is what my trying to lead a contemplative life has gifted me with: a relationship with the Mystery.

**SIMON BLAIKIE**

Simon Blaikie currently serves as the Executive Archdeacon in the Diocese of Rupert’s Land. Following a 26-year career in the Canadian Armed Forces, he moved into parish ministry in 2007. He is a student of contemplative practices and mystical theology and strives to live as a Benedictine Oblate.

All in



Nothing

CINNA BARAN

Photo: [Ryan Olson](#)

“If we are to know God it must be without means...if we do see God in this light, it must be quite private and indrawn, without the intrusion of anything created. Then we have immediate knowledge of eternal life”.¹ This is one of many striking statements written by Meister Eckhart, a German theologian, philosopher, mystic, and Roman Catholic priest in the 13th and 14th centuries. He wrote his “Sermon Nineteen” on a particular passage in the Bible. It read, “Paul rose from the ground and with open eyes saw nothing”.² Meister Eckhart proceeds to state four meanings for this: 1. Nothing was God; 2. Paul saw Nothing but God; 3. In all things Paul saw Nothing but God; 4. When Paul saw God, he saw all things as Nothing.³ Meister Eckhart concludes his sermon saying, “let us pray to our Lord that we may come

to that understanding that is wholly without mode and without measure”.⁴ This fourfold sense can sound contradictory and borderline heretical to say considering what we affirm and believe about God as Christians. If God is Creator and Creation, how could God be “nothing”?

In order to understand Meister Eckhart’s argument, it is important to distinguish “Nothingness” from “nothing”.

¹ Von Hochheim, Eckhart. “Sermon Nineteen,” in *Teachings of the Christian Mystics*, edited by Andrew Harvey. Shambhala Publishers: Boston & London, 1998, pp.95

² Acts 9:8

³ Eckhart, pp. 94

⁴ Ibid, pp. 96

Meister Eckhart is *not* making any sort of argument against the existence of God. Instead, I believe he has a twofold meaning in mind for the Nothingness which Paul experiences. First, God's Nothingness refers to that which existed before time and space. Genesis 1 tells us that it is God who willed all things into existence. This means that God "existed" before existence, setting all time and space into motion. Put another way, God was not created but caused creation. In this way, Meister Eckhart's "Nothing" refers to the God which was outside of space and time in order that space and time may be. It may seem contradictory, but there is only all existence, all being, within the scope of nothingness. "...all things are the divine nothing, because there is nothing but God".⁵

Second, God's "Nothingness" should be understood in relation to Christian mysticism, which is a difficult thing to describe. Denys Turner writes, "for the medieval mystical traditions, the Christian soul meets God in a 'cloud of unknowing', a divine darkness of ignorance. This meeting with God is beyond all knowing and beyond all experiencing".⁶ These two notions of Nothingness go hand in hand in dealing with the complex notions of the unknown. Yet this raises a problem: how and what could we possibly *know* that is *beyond knowing*? Well, the answer, of course, is nothing — the great Nothing. For Meister

Eckhart, in order to know God at all, we must submit ourselves to the unknowable.

These kinds of statements — ones that *seem* contradictory, yet actually reveal truths — are called paradoxes, and Christianity is full of them. A God which is wholly One Being, yet also three distinguishable and inseparable persons is a paradox. A being which is 100% divine, yet 100% human (Jesus) is a paradox. God being outside of time and space yet also present in all time and space is a paradox. Likewise, in Meister Eckhart's argument, God is Creator, Creation, and Nothingness all at the same time.

Understanding paradoxes, then, brings us back to this story of Paul. Upon encountering Jesus on the road, Paul is blinded — an experience which many would assume to be horrifyingly bad. Yet, this is not so. Though his vision is restored several days later, Paul has had an undeniably life-changing experience which causes him to go from a persecutor of Christians to a preacher of the Gospel. However, in order to get there, Paul had to endure a period of darkness. Like Abraham — believing it was the will of God to sacrifice his son, Isaac — who travelled for three

⁵ Milone, L.J. *Nothing but God: The Everyday Mysticism of Meister Eckhart*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2019, pp. 71

⁶ Turner, Denys. *The Darkness of God*. Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. i



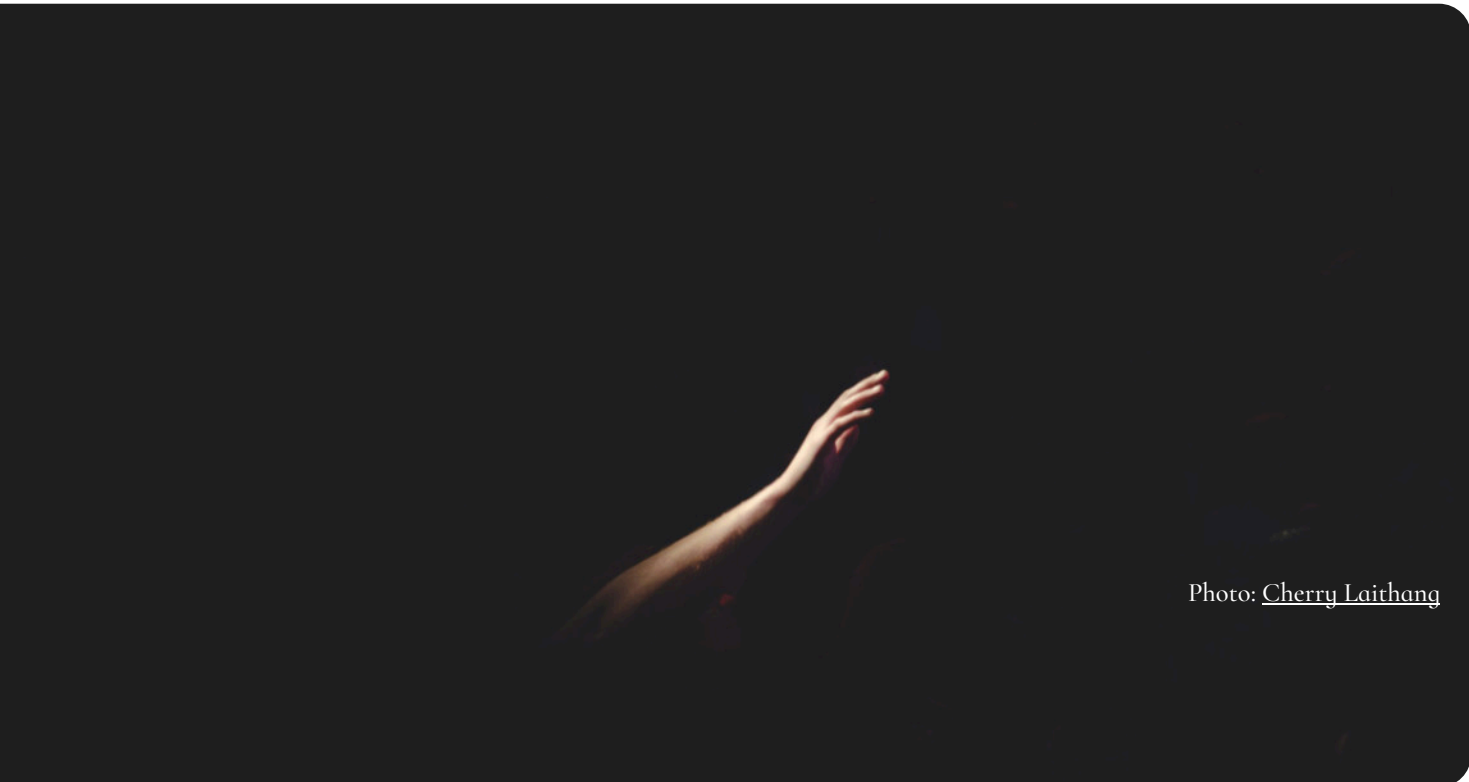


Photo: [Cherry Laithang](#)

days with fear and trembling, Paul too traveled for three days in darkness and uncertainty. In other words, Paul was blinded in order that he may see.

What I believe Meister Eckhart is getting at provides us with an excellent entry point into Christian mysticism. Recognizing the supreme unknowability of God and, in humility and reverence, submitting wholeheartedly to God’s wonderous and divine mystery. While Paul’s blindness was literal, it was also an allegory from which we can all learn. At the cost of a temporary sacrifice, Paul briefly caught sight of the Nothingness which is the unknowability of God. With great fervor and sincere faith, perhaps we will be lucky enough to glimpse this unknowable yet paradoxically palpable aspect of God. “For God to be perceived by the soul, she must be blind”.⁷

The Nothingness of God is difficult to wrestle with and even attempt to understand. Thus, it is even more difficult to describe. But God is ever-present to us in our hearts and minds, in the mundane and the mystical. The beauty of mysticism comes from a loving relationship with God founded upon faith, trust, and an openness to be taken wherever the Spirit leads you — even if that’s somewhere beyond comprehension. God invites every one of us to have

this loving relationship with Him. Thankfully, we have received the wisdom of many mystics who have sought to know and love God above all else. Meister Eckhart is just one of many who invites us to submit to the will of God, to deepen our bond with Christ, and to fall into the unfailing wisdom of the Holy Spirit. By doing so, he challenges all of us to “go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God”.⁸

⁷ Eckhart, pp. 95

⁸ Haskins, Minnie Louise. “The Gate of the Year.” White Balloon, <https://www.whiteballoon.co.uk/directory/funeral-written-content/the-gate-of-the-year/>



CINNA BARAN

Cinna is in his final term at the University of Winnipeg majoring in philosophy and minoring in Latin. He loves to learn, laugh, and be outside. When he’s not working or at school, you can usually find him by the water or admiring the sky.

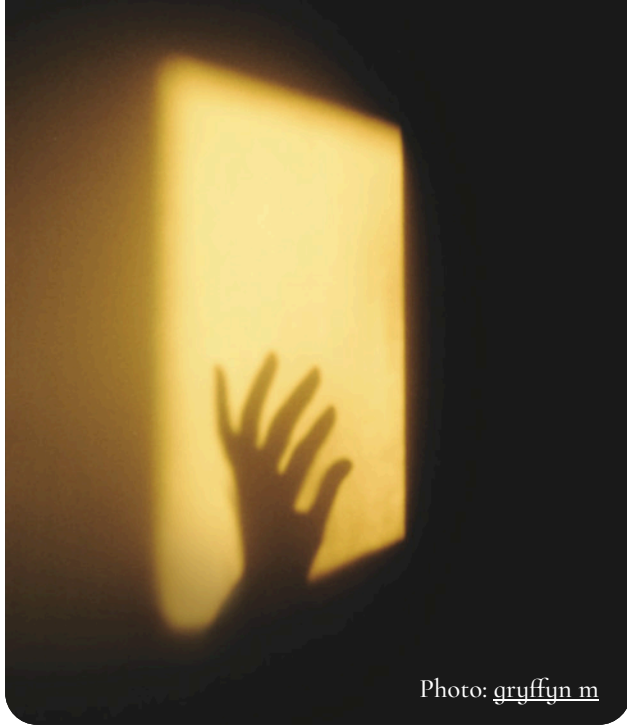


Photo: [gruffyn m](#)

Shadow and Light

DURELL DESMOND

Day and night are one of two
The sun and moon must rendezvous
Light and dark are both entwined
Perpetual dance thereto combined

As darkness dawns, the shadow spawns
The vanquished sun withdrawn
A requiem sung, the banshee cry
Moon howls in the mourning sky

The shadow born, branched out and grew
True darkness reigns, pure darkness brews
The dormant sun, rebirth is nigh
Lurking for its chance to purify

The sun awakes, my warmth, my light
Darkness dispelled, the deepest blight
The sun triumphant, the light shines brilliant
King Noctis in slumber, dethroned and grievant

Reduced to a shade, not absent, extant
As faint as a phantom still held remnant
New darkness grown in shadow of light
The darkness swallows in the dead of night

Out of the darkness and into the light
Darkness withdraws at the sight of sunlight
Unyielding dance, eternal, not finite
Existing together, the shadow and light

The stronger the light, the darker the shadow
Wherever one goes, the other must follow
Darkness inspires because there is light
And mystifies with the coming of night

Light shines brighter the deeper the darkness
without darkness there can be no brightness
The shadow exists to accentuate the light
With that, be bold, go forth and shine bright!

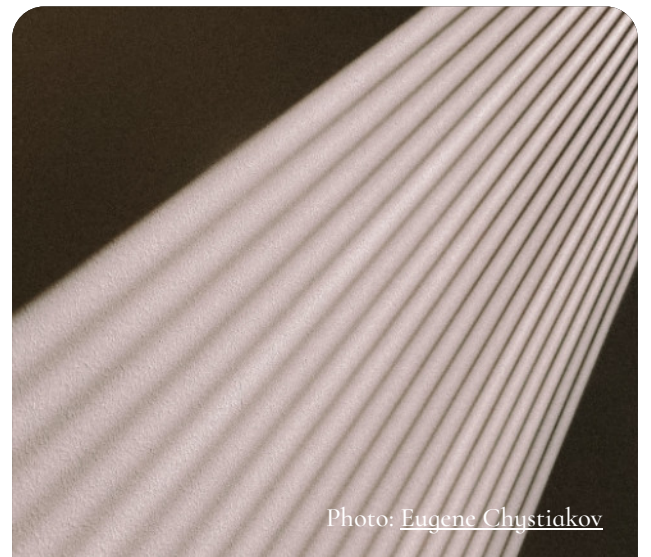


Photo: [Eugene Chystiakov](#)