

The Presence of God

By: Anonymous

Have you ever whispered out loud in the quiet hours of the night, "Where is my God?" and listened to the silence?

As I have searched for God's presence, I have heard only the echoes of an empty Earth. All of Creation bears the afterglow of his glory, but where can he be found? Yes, God is omnipresent; yes, he actively involves himself in human affairs; yes, his Spirit dwells in those who believe. But we do not see Him face-to-face. We do not walk with him in the Garden. Even Moses, the great prophet, was not permitted to gaze on God's face.

"And rightly so!" some would say. "It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the Living God, and even more so for a sinful human to stand in his presence!" True sayings, whose severity few grasp! And yet, I cannot help but desire God's presence, even if the holy fire shall burn me. To Christians God promises his presence once they are made holy and join him in heaven. But is it not natural to desire God's presence here, and now? The English poet John Donne expressed this very desire:

"No man ever saw God and lived. And yet, I shall not live till I see God; and when I have seen him, I shall never die."

Such a lofty goal! Such an insurmountable height! The challenges are many:

Challenge: "You are unworthy of God's presence."

Answer: "Unquestionably. And yet even the sinner may long for righteousness, and even a mere man may desire the presence of God --not out of entitlement, but out of thankfulness for God's grace and forgiveness."

Challenge: "Can you not wait until the end of the age when you may freely stand in God's presence?"

Answer: "But how many more lonely nights I must endure!"

Challenge: "You would die if you saw the face of God."

Answer: "Yes, but I cannot have anything else."

Challenge: "It is impossible to see the full glory of God."

Answer: "Then I will see as much of it as possible."

Challenge: "Your God cannot be found on Earth."

Answer: "Then I will search anyways."

Challenge: "Your God does not exist."

Answer: "Then all is in vain."

In the end, the conviction endures despite the barriers. Though we proceed from the Nothing, our faces turn towards the Infinite. The soul innately longs for God's presence, even if many suppress this longing through diversion. For what else could supply us with meaning and purpose? Careers and work come and go; relationships blossom and fade. The sun rises, and the sun sets, and in the end we are unfulfilled. Only the divine can bring total satisfaction. Saint Augustine knew it when he claimed:

"Thou awakest us to delight in Thy praise; for Thou made us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it rests in Thee."

For even the freshest, most expansive human endeavors would grow dull and tedious in the passage of eternity. The largest finite is nothing in the face of the infinite, and human activity in the absence of God eventually degenerates into meaninglessness.

I have had many terrible thoughts, but the worst of all is that I shall one day know everything, that nothing will remain to refresh my existence--no study to take pleasure in, no persons I have not yet met, no new experiences to enjoy--that I shall wither in eternal boredom.

Although there are many ways to characterize Hell, as for myself, I would liken it to a place of eternal dullness, the cosmic doldrums. To do the same thing over, and over, and over ...

Only the infinite God can save us from this fatal tedium; in him we find an inexhaustible supply of refreshment, fulfillment, and rest. And yet the true difficulty appears to consist in finding Him at all. The question that we all have asked, whether in pain and confusion, aimlessness and dissatisfaction, or triumph and gloating--"Where is God?"

The silence we hear in the night seems at first to be no answer at all, but perhaps it reveals more than we think.

To attempt an answer, we propose the following contrast between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the Devil: We may liken the former to a soft, sweet melody, growing almost imperceptibly to a tremendous crescendo at the end of the age. This melody speaks of God's presence in the everyday: in ordinary acts of kindness, love, faith, and self-sacrifice. It nearly passes below our threshold of detection, for the other melody--that of the devil's

kingdom--screams at us in a repetitious cacophony composed of the pleasures and distractions and false ideals the world brazenly shoves in our faces.

And now I must ask the uncomfortable question: Has God's presence already graced my life, and I do not recognize it? Accustomed to Satan's raucous chorus, do I mistake God's melody for something inferior and weak? Is the laughter of the heavens truly too loud for me to hear?

But certainly this proposition cannot completely satisfy our question! For surely Moses' face did not glow because of the mundane! Surely John of Patmos did not see the ordinary and because of it, prostrate himself before the throne!

Perhaps a different answer will prove more satisfactory. We propose that God's apparent absence actually benefits us--not only by shielding us from a holiness that would unquestionably destroy us, but also by increasing our desire for God. Perhaps through his absence now, we shall one day more deeply welcome his presence. This answer is attractive, as it shifts our attention towards a future hope. But is this enough?

My intellect may find a measure of peace in these answers, but my soul does not. The night fades, but I still do not hear from my God.

Whatever the case, I must learn to contend with the ordinary. And yet, I can still find encouragement. For even the fullness of God was once present in nothing less ordinary than a helpless baby, and this baby grew up to perform the greatest wonder the world has ever seen ...

Though I see now but dimly, soon I shall perceive things clearly. Though I hear but faintly, soon I shall listen in both understanding and wonder.

Amen, veni Domine Iesu.