

CISTERCIAN STUDIES SERIES: NUMBER TWO HUNDRED TWENTY-SEVEN

Emma Cazabonne

A Light to Enlighten the Darkness

CISTERCIAN STUDIES SERIES: NUMBER TWO HUNDRED TWENTY-SEVEN

*A Light to Enlighten
the Darkness*

Daily Readings for Meditation
during the Winter Season

by

Emma Cazabonne

Cistercian Publications
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Texts have been adapted from various works
in the Cistercian Fathers Series
Cistercian Publications 1970-2008

© Anthology copyrighted 2008 by Cistercian Publications

The work of Cistercian Publications has been made possible
in part by support from Western Michigan University
to the Institute of Cistercian Studies

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A light to enlighten the darkness : daily readings for meditation during
the winter season / [edited] by Emma Cazabonne.

p. cm. — (Cistercian studies series ; no. 227)

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 978-0-87907-227-8 (pbk.)

1. Catholic Church—Prayers and devotions. 2. Light—Religious
aspects—Catholic Church—Meditations. I. Cazabonne, Emma.

II. Title. III. Series.

BX2182.3.L54 2008

242'.2—dc22

2008011414

Printed in the United States of America.

*To John and to my Greek Orthodox family;
to Mothers Aelred, Marie-Rose, Gail, Nettie,
and to all my cistercian brothers and sisters;
to Anne, who led me to the Taboric light.*

The Contents

Foreword by David N. Bell ix

Introduction

The Cistercians and the Theology of Light 1

Daily Readings for Meditation 9

The Cistercian Authors 113

Further Reading in the Fathers 119

Index 123

Foreword

God is light, says Saint John, and in him there is no darkness at all (1 Jn 1:5). This is a terrifying concept, for it means that in the presence of God there is no concealment, no hiding place, and all our manifold imperfections are revealed in that shadowless and, in one sense, merciless light. ‘What is more terrible to sinners’, asks Geoffrey of Auxerre, ‘than to appear before the face of the Sun of Justice shining with full strength?’ (Mar 16¹). And that we are all sinners is manifestly obvious, though not always to ourselves.

Four centuries or so after Saint John, pseudo-Dionysius takes up the same theme, but gives it a different nuance. He lists light as one of the divine names of God, and sees in the finite and visible sun a symbol of the infinite and invisible deity. Just as the sun illumines all things, so too does God. He gives his light to all who can receive it in the measure in which they can receive it—John of Forde would agree (Dec 30)—and it is his light that creates us, gives us life, preserves us, and perfects us. By illuminating our minds, he

drives out ignorance, and the more we yearn for his light, the more he bestows it.² For pseudo-Dionysius, therefore, God's light is a creative and illuminating power which is a manifestation, a true revelation, of God himself.

Five hundred years after pseudo-Dionysius another eastern writer takes up the same subject, and leaves in no doubt whatever that God and light are inseparable. Which writer? Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022), a monk of the great monastery of the Studios in Constantinople. Abbot of Saint Mamas in the same city, he ended his days as a contentious hermit in a small ruined oratory on the other side of the Bosphorus. God's light, Symeon tells us,

shines around us without any diminution, without change, without alteration, without form. It speaks, works, lives and gives life, and transforms into light those whom it enlightens. It is we who bear witness that God is light (1 Jn 1:5), and those deemed worthy to see him have all seen him as light. Those who have received him have received him as light, for the light of his glory goes before him and it is impossible for him to appear without light. Those who have not seen his light have not seen him, for he is the light, and those who have not received the light have not yet received grace.³

Symeon's unequivocal views anticipate what would later develop into a violent controversy which first divided the eastern Church and then had a profound impact on its

theology. The controversy was the Hesychast Controversy, and the essential question at issue was not whether God is light—that was clear from no less an authority than Saint John himself—but exactly what sort of light he is. More precisely, if a Christian mystic experienced God as light, did he or she experience the uncreated light of God or created light? The difference is of first importance. If we may use an analogy, it is rather like the difference between holding the hand of a living person, and holding a plaster cast of that person's hand. In the former case, we are actually in contact with the person—indeed, in a certain sense, we are in contact with the whole person, since the hand is an integral part of the body—but in the latter case, the contact is merely symbolic. It is the same with God's light. If we experience the uncreated light, then we are in contact with God; and if we are in contact with God, we may participate in his divine attributes: his goodness, beauty, knowledge, joy, perfection. The more we participate, the more like God we become; and although we can never become God—the creature can never become the Creator—we can become, as William of Saint Thierry puts it, 'what God is' (*quod Deus est*).⁴ Such is the nature of what the eastern theologians—and a few westerners (including William and Bernard of Clairvaux)—refer to as 'deification'. But if we experience only the created light, that vital contact is missing, participation is impossible, and deification cannot be achieved.

Note, too, Symeon's emphasis on transformation. God's light 'transforms into light those whom it enlightens', and

Symeon himself experienced this, not once, but many times. He was, we might say, a ‘natural mystic’, and could never quite understand why others were not. On one occasion, when he was praying and saying silently ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner’ (Lk 18:13), a divine light suddenly filled the room. He lost all consciousness of where he was and saw nothing but light. Indeed, it seemed to him that he had been united with the light, transformed into light, and that he had left this world altogether. He was overcome with tears and filled with an inexpressible joy.⁵ The same principle, though with less detail, appears in Gertrud the Great (see Dec 22), John of Forde (Jan 28), and Gilbert of Hoyland. ‘Anyone on whom your lightning flashes’, says Gilbert, ‘becomes a flash of lightning. Anyone on whom you shed a ray of your light, you make like yourself’ (Feb 7). For those who followed Symeon, the light they experienced was understood to be the light of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, but it is rare to find this idea in the west. Isaac of Stella, always individual (and always difficult), approaches it when he speaks of the mind soaring above all corporeality into the realm of the incorporeal and the unseen (Jan 21–22). There, as if on Mount Tabor, ‘it gazes on Jesus, Jesus transfigured, glorified’, but the experience is too much for us. We cannot tolerate that glory, and our reason, intellect, and understanding fall on their faces (Jan 23).

On the whole, however, we do not find in the west the same profound theology of light as we do in the east, but what we do find—as is clear from this rich anthology—is deeply rewarding. Indeed, the only reason we can respond

to the light at all is because of what Augustine called the *scintilla rationis*, the ‘little spark of reason’,⁶ which is the key to our creation in the image of God. From being children of darkness, we are called to be children of light (Mar 10); and if God himself dwells in light unapproachable (1 Tim 6:16: the phrase occurs again and again), he sent his Son to us to be the light of the Church in a dark world (Jan 6/3, Jan 13). ‘From Him to his whole Church’, says John of Forde, ‘emanates all the radiance there is’ (Feb 21), although—alas!—the Church has not always opened its eyes to that light. Yet if his light is his grace—and Isaac of Stella tells us that it is (Jan 25)—then, in and through that grace, we may be enlightened. The light of grace is the dawn of the spiritual day, and it leads us from the darkness of ignorance and ill-will into the daylight of wisdom, virtue, and justice: the daylight of Christ himself (Jan 25). But let us remember at all costs that this enlightenment is not for us alone. Our business in this world is not to seek our own selfish illumination. The light of charity (or the light that is charity), says John of Forde, shines internally for itself, but shines outwardly for others (Feb 13), and it is a standard theme of medieval spirituality that you cannot love God unless you also love your neighbour. Few are clearer on this point than Baldwin of Forde. We should not flatter ourselves, he tells us, that we love God, we should not deceive ourselves in thinking that we love God, if we do not love our neighbour, for the love of God is ‘made known, strengthened, and fortified’ in the love of our neighbour.⁷

The Christian path is not simply a quest for personal illumination, but a demand that that illumination be put into practice. If we have the light of Christ in our heart (Feb 12), it is there to shine both for ourselves and for others. If, by the light of God's grace, we are enabled to see more clearly, it is so that we may see more clearly how we may serve our neighbour. If God is the life-giving light which instructs our minds by his wisdom and truth (Jan 4), that is not for our own selfish enjoyment. As Bernard of Clairvaux tells us, when the soul loses the light of contemplation (and that light is always rare and fleeting),

she does not permit herself to fall into the darkness of sin or the idleness of sloth, but holds herself within the light of good works. And that you might know that good works are light, Christ said *Let your light shine before others* (Mt 5:16); and there is no doubt that this was said about works that others could see with their eyes. (Feb 29)

As Watkin Williams observed long ago, 'the mystic life is no less morally obligated by the life of justification, at every stage of its growth, than is the latter the instinctive expression of the former'.⁸

And who are our neighbours to whom we owe such devotion? Everyone, both good and bad alike, for God's light shines on all (Feb 24). And not only does it shine on all—good and bad, just and unjust—it shines on all equally and freely (Feb 25), and that is something which it is too easy (and too convenient) to forget. It is true that we live

in darkness, and many passages in this anthology testify to that. We read of the darkness of ignorance, of sin, of our separation from God, of mistaken opinions, of errors, of ungodliness, of unbelief, of this world in general. But the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (Jn 1:5). Our business is to do all that we can to help shed that light, and the task is difficult, demanding, sometimes unpleasant, and often wholly unrewarding.

We are not, however, alone in our efforts. The Christian church of the Middle Ages, both eastern and western, had no doubt whatever that help was needed and that help was available. The greatest help, of course, comes from the ever-Virgin Mother of God, the *Theotokos* or ‘God-bearer’ of eastern Christianity, the unique castle which Jesus entered (Dec 29), the Star of the Sea. And whoever calls on her (says Saint Bernard) will never despair:

Keeping her in your thoughts, you will never wander away. With your hand in hers, you will never stumble. With her protecting you, you will not be afraid. With her leading you, you will never tire. (Jan 1)

After Mary come the saints, and apart from illuminating our paths with their own light (Feb 24), the saints also offer us models, exemplars, to imitate (Feb 23). ‘Follow the guiding light of the Fathers who have gone before you’, says Gueric of Igny: it is the straightest way to find Jesus (Feb 3). But to imitate the saints is no small demand and no small task. ‘I want you to be like Saint John’, says Bernard of

Clairvaux (Feb 22), and the fact that we are most unlikely to succeed in this endeavour is irrelevant. God does not expect us to succeed; he expects us to try. Once again, it is Baldwin of Forde who sets forth the matter with eminent clarity:

If it be granted me from above to love God and love my neighbour, then even though my own merits are poor and meagre, I have a hope which is above and beyond all my merits. I am certain that through the communion of love the merits of the saints will profit me and that the communion of the saints can make good my own imperfection and insufficiency.⁹

Sometimes, it seems, God's light can overwhelm a soul and ravish it into an experience and state of being which cannot be described. We are told that the body of Ida of Louvain was 'bathed all over with a light so bright as to gleam like some unearthly substance' (Mar 3)—so bright, in fact, that the poor sister who witnessed the event thought she had been struck blind (Mar 3). 'Fiery rays, like sunbeams' shone forth from Ida's face, and 'after Communion, the gaze of her eyes would become so lightsome and bright that the objects on which she focused them would themselves begin to emit a brilliant glow, which you observe for yourself' (Mar 4). Gertrud the Great of Helfta felt the light which came from Christ's 'deifying eyes' penetrate her very being and produce in all her limbs 'an extraordinarily supernatural effect' (Feb 6). John of Forde seems to have experienced something similar, but he is far more discreet (Jan 14).

Sometimes the experience was simply ineffable, utterly overwhelming (Feb 2), and one entered what pseudo-Dionysius described as a ‘dazzling darkness’ which was beyond light as we know it. There our blinded intellect is filled and over-filled ‘with the utterly intangible and invisible nature of splendours beyond all beauty’.¹⁰ This, for any Christian, is clearly the summit of the spiritual path, and from the time of the early Church it has been regarded as a true foretaste of the Beatific Vision. On the other hand, as we have said, it is an experience as fleeting as it is infrequent—even Bernard, who was no stranger to ecstatic raptures, twice describes it as ‘extremely rare’ (*rarissimus*)¹¹—and it also possesses a less pleasant aspect. As Baldwin tells us,

if it should happen that we experience just a taste (*modicum*) of something good, it only serves to remind us of our misery, for what we experience is rare and superficial, and in no way complete.¹²

Our misery is the result of our unlikeness to our Maker. Created as we are in the image of God, we have besmirched that image with the dross of sin, and dwell now in the ‘land of unlikeness’, the *regio dissimilitudinis*.¹³ And if a single ray of the divine light should shine upon us, it will reveal all too clearly our manifold deformities and inadequacy (Mar 1). And how do we deal with this? The Christian Church, both east and west, has been (for once) united in its answer: strive to regain the lost likeness, strive to become more like God. Few are clearer on this point than Bernard

of Clairvaux. The more we are enlightened, the more like God we become; the more like God we become, the more clearly do we see him; and when we are wholly like him, then we shall see him as he is, face to face (Feb 9, Feb 27, Mar 8). 'Do not be like the world', says Bernard, 'be like the Word!' (Feb 20). In the eastern church, as we have seen, the process is known as deification, 'becoming like God', and it is a process which begins here and now, this very minute, though it continues forever.

It is improbable that many of us will experience the true foretaste of the Beatific Vision here on earth, that 'divine inebriation' which overcame Ida and Gertrud (Mar 2, Mar 9).¹⁴ It is equally improbable that many of us will see 'the whole world gathered up in a single ray of light' (Dec 21). Few of us are 'natural mystics' like Symeon the New Theologian, and it would be unwise to go to Communion in the expectation of experiencing what Ida experienced (Mar 9). But so what? The spiritual path in general, and the monastic spiritual path in particular, is not an unending quest for 'spiritual highs' and paramystical phenomena. It is, rather, an unending quest for God, and loss of self is better understood not in an ontological way, when (if we may quote the great Teresa), the soul flows into God as a tiny stream enters the sea,¹⁵ but as the loss of self-will, that self-centredness and egocentricity which so often and so effectively prevents us from being illumined by the light of the knowledge of God. God's rebuke to Bernard is absolutely to the point: 'Why should you want to see Me in My splendour, while you still

do not know yourself?’ (Mar 8). But ‘if we cannot behold the wonders reserved for the life to come’, says Bernard, ‘we may at least contemplate something of the marvels accomplished for us on earth’ (Jan 5). One may ask, in fact, if the momentary, rare, ecstatic experience of God himself is the aim and goal of the Christian path, why Christ ever bothered to become incarnate at all. In Jesus of Nazareth we see ‘the splendour of glory and brightness of eternal Light in the clay vessel of our flesh’ (Jan 6/2), and Saint Gregory Palamas, the ‘Light of Orthodoxy’, made it eminently clear that when the Second Person of the Trinity became flesh, he also became matter. In and through the Incarnation, the whole of material creation was redeemed and sanctified, and our purpose in this life is not the selfish pursuit of Altered States of Consciousness, but the manifestation of the principle of the Incarnation in our own lives.

Our business in this world, in fact, is to cultivate the light of the virtues—faith, hope, temperance, and prudence—and with their help (says Aelred),

let the light of wisdom shine like the splendour of the sun, and let the light of spiritual knowledge, which waxes in some of us and wanes in others, appear like the beauty of the moon. (Jan 19)

Our task is the pursuit of wisdom, truth, holiness, and goodness (Feb 1); and if, in the course of this pursuit, God decides to bestow upon us the hyper-light of ecstasy, so be it. If he does not, so be it. If he is indeed God, he presumably

knows what he is doing. We, all too often, do not. However enlightened we may be, we are still in darkness; and if we are enlightened at all, the little light we have only makes us realize that we need to be enlightened yet more. The greater the light shed by our own lamp, says Gueric of Igny,

the more truly does the lamp itself reveal our darkness. . . . The measure of our enlightenment remains this: that those who are able to know their own inadequacy and recognize what is lacking in them are judged as having made great progress towards the light of truth. (Mar 1)

‘I do not ask to see / The distant scene’, wrote Cardinal Newman, ‘one step enough for me.’¹⁶ Step by step, seeing light in His light (Dec 22, Jan 6/2, Mar 12), we may make our slow progress towards the end for which we were created. Let us, therefore, fix our sight on the Sun of Righteousness (Jan 20), ask that our hearts and minds be illumined and cleansed by him, pray that the light of the Mother of God and the saints may help us in our quest, seek to show forth what little light we have in our love for our neighbours, clothe ourselves in the light of the virtues, and pray, again with Newman, a simple prayer: ‘Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom, / Lead thou me on.’¹⁷

David N. Bell

Feast of Saint Macarius the Great 2008

Notes to the Foreword

1. The references are to the passages in the anthology.
2. Ps.-Dionysius, *De div. nom.*, iv.5-6. [*On the Divine Names*; an English translation by Colm Luibheid is available in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (New York-Mahwah, 1987) 47-131].
3. Symeon the New Theologian, ed. Basile Krivochéine, *Catéchèses* 28, 106-115; SCh 113:136.
4. William of Saint-Thierry, ed. Jean Déchanet, *Lettre aux Frères du Mont-Dieu* §258; SCh 223: 348 [*The Golden Epistle* CF 12:94].
5. Symeon's autobiographical account, written in the third person, appears in his *Catéchèses* 22.88-100; SCh 104: 372.
6. Augustine of Hippo, *De civ. Dei*, XXII.24.2. [*The City of God*]
7. Baldwin of Forde, Sermon 15.62; CCCM 99:244 [*Baldwin of Forde: Spiritual Tractates* XV, CF 41:179].
8. Watkin Williams, *The Mysticism of S. Bernard of Clairvaux* (London, 1931) p. 35.
9. Baldwin of Forde, Sermon 15.88; CCCM 99:251 [CF 41:190].
10. Ps.-Dionysius, *De myst. theol.*, i. [*The Mystical Theology*; Luibheid, 133-141].
11. Bernard of Clairvaux, *De grat. et lib. arb.*, v.15; SBOP 3:177 [*On Grace and Free Choice*, CF 19A:71]; *In Cant.*, serm. 69.2; SBOP 2:202 [*Sermon 69.2 On the Song of Songs*, CF 40:28].
12. Baldwin of Forde, Sermon 17.9; CCCM 99:271; CF 41:50.
13. See Étienne Gilson, trans. A. H. C. Downes, *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard* (London-New York, 1940; rpt. Kalamazoo, 1990), Chapter Two (pp. 33-59).
14. There are interesting and instructive parallels to be drawn between such ideas as these and the 'drunken' (*sukr* in Arabic) stream of Muslim mysticism.
15. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, VII.2.4.
16. John Henry Newman, 'Lead kindly light', verse 1.
17. *Ibid.*

The Cistercians and the Theology of Light

AN INTRODUCTION

CLAIRVAUX, Chiaravalle, Vauclair, Clairlieu, Clairmont, La Clarté-Dieu, l'Étoile. . . . These are just a few among many cistercian monasteries having a name connected with clarity, with brightness, with light.

This did not happen by chance. It is the logical reflection of what is manifested in medieval cistercian architecture. Following a bernardine inspiration, the greatest abbey churches included an elevation of the nave—normally a two-story elevation—to allow more apertures and direct light. Around 1147 and again in 1182,¹ the General Chapter itself, the legislative body of the Cistercian Order, required *albus*—white or clear—glass for the church windows, what we now call *grisaille* (grey) glass; this again was to ensure a maximum of light.

Still today when we enter for instance the abbey church of Pontigny in France, we feel overwhelmed by the flood of light. We find the same architectural principle in the conception of the chapter room—where the community met daily—and the refectory: both were designed in a way to allow direct light to illuminate the rooms.

The soul of cistercian architecture is obviously not color, but light. The mystical play of light on stone reflects the glorious and eternal beauty of Christ in our passing world. Christ is the Word, and the light of the world,² and ‘the spirituality expressed in cistercian architecture is one of place, word, and light.’³

Indeed this luminous effect is itself the manifestation of something profound, for there is a meaningful relationship between cistercian spirituality and the environment the monks create. Their way of life, their way of relating to God, influences greatly their architecture. The latter is the external manifestation of the former.

This needs to be set in the medieval context. Among the most influential ideas of the twelfth century M.-D. Chenu identified ‘the image of light everywhere zealously employed, as well by mathematicians as by men of literary bent’.⁴ The note he appended to this assertion reveals that the idea permeated the domains of metaphysics, patristics, theology, and liturgy.

More recently, Emero Stiegman has demonstrated that light imagery was indeed very important in the twelfth century.⁵ Bernard of Clairvaux summed up this conviction

most expressively, estimating, along with the evangelist Saint John, that the experience of God can be spoken of only in terms of light and darkness.⁶ In fact, Guerric of Igny, Aelred of Rievaulx, Gilbert of Hoyland, and William of Saint-Thierry⁷ exulted as much as Bernard did⁸ in the imagery of light. Many other generations of cistercian monks and nuns did too, if we judge by the elements of light present in their liturgical hymns.

John Morson and Hilary Costello⁹ have also emphasized a traditional theology of enlightenment present in the teaching of Guerric of Igny. Guerric seemed to have delighted in a theology of light, characteristic of cistercian teaching, by going so far as to develop a fourfold enlightenment in his sermons on Epiphany. He discerns four stages of spiritual progress, each of which is called light: light of faith, light of justice, light of knowledge, and light of wisdom.¹⁰

A modern example will suffice to show that this is still a preponderant dimension of cistercian spirituality. Thomas Merton, deeply rooted in the teaching of our Fathers, wrote in 1964 that:

The true call to monastic contemplation is . . . a call to renounce all that opposes this ‘ineffable light’ of God in Christ, to submit totally and without reservation to the light of Christ, to accept one’s own helplessness and one’s own deficiency, indeed one’s own impurity and darkness in the presence of his light, and yet to seek with all one’s heart to become transformed

by contemplation and love into the very purity of the light itself.¹¹

Here again, the monastic quest is evoked in terms of light and darkness: a struggle in which, little by little, light will conquer all darkness in us, until we are all transformed into the image and likeness of our Creator, ‘the Father of lights’.¹²

To use the concise expression of Dom Augustine Roberts, one can affirm: ‘The mysticism of light in the first Cistercians . . . has remained the characteristic of cistercian spirituality’.¹³

To cite but one well-known example of contemporary cistercian architecture, I point to the restructuring of the new abbey church of Cîteaux, inaugurated in March 1998. The young architect, Denis Ouailarbourou, has spent a great deal of time living with the brothers and reading the Cistercian Fathers. In an article describing the entire project, he lists ‘light’ as the first of five requirements.¹⁴ One of the most striking results of his work is probably what he calls *les puits de lumière*, mines of light. In other words, by means of a new architectural device, he aimed at the same thing as the medieval cistercian architects did: to allow as much natural light as possible to invade the place of prayer. And I can testify that he has succeeded in doing so. His own explanation gives an idea of the preponderance of light in an example of modern cistercian architecture.¹⁵ Light does not seem foreign either to the minimalist architect John Pawson in his design of the new cistercian foundation in Czech Republic, Nový Dvůr.

Sharing the same attraction with our Cistercian Fathers and Mothers without knowing it, I felt irresistibly drawn to divine light as early as my first observership in a cistercian monastery. I began then to copy anything I could find on light, and after almost twenty years of monastic life my notes have come to fill three compact and dense notebooks. I exploited some of the captivating mines of light in two little articles on light in Bernard.¹⁶ And following up on my article on Gregory Palamas,¹⁷ the father who synthesized so brilliantly the teaching of the eastern christian tradition on taboric light, I plan, in a future study, to show light as a common element between byzantine and cistercian spirituality.

This volume is a humble beginning, a simple sharing of my notebooks. It focuses uniquely on cistercian spirituality. The following texts, all excerpted from cistercian works, aim at nourishing the love of light, the light of the world to come, the light who is our God, the God who shines in our hearts, the divine light which has attracted our Cistercian Mothers and Fathers as many other spiritual men and women.

I have included a variety of cistercian authors: eleven monks and three nuns. I could have chosen many other texts. The collection actually begins with an exception: a text by Gregory the Great on Saint Benedict, the legislator of the Cistercians. Then there are sermons commenting on the Song of Songs by Bernard of Clairvaux, Gilbert of Hoyland, and John of Forde, the three successive cistercian commentators of that biblical book, as well as excerpts of

liturgical sermons written by Cistercian Fathers from the first and second generations, and passages written by cistercian nuns. Each text is preceded by a title which I have added.

To avoid a heavy presentation, I have avoided using a system of footnotes to identify biblical quotations and have instead used simple notations. I have included only biblical citations related to light.

Originally conceived to follow the genre of the traditional *century*, a collection of a hundred texts, this *florilegium*¹⁸ has instead taken the form of an original schema more suited to modern minds.

In the northern hemisphere, winter is characterized by few hours of natural sunlight. The winter darkness very much affects human beings. Scientists and physicians acknowledge that our body and mind can be upset by what is now termed ‘seasonal affective disorder’. Likewise, I believe, our spiritual health can be affected by exposure to inner darkness. Cistercian spirituality, grounded in a positive anthropology, is light oriented. I have therefore chosen to offer one cistercian text on light for each day of the winter season, to help our minds focus on the light of Christ, and remain steadfast in hope during the gloomy winter season.

This choice makes the book relevant for all Christians, independently of their respective liturgical calendars. I have taken the liberty of proposing three texts for the two days most related to light in the christian tradition: December 25th, Christmas, and January 6th, Epiphany or Theophany.

When the Russian pilgrim met the monk who introduced him to the Jesus Prayer, he was given a nice image: the monk said to him that the *Philokalia* was like a piece of glass which enabled us to contemplate the sun present in Scriptures, just as we use a little glass to protect our eyes to look at the sun.¹⁹ May this collection also be a humble and useful tool to attract you, the reader, to the light present in our Cistercian Fathers and Mothers, to help you love the eternal Sun who shines through their writings, and to enable you to ‘walk as children of the light’.²⁰

Introduction Notes

1. Chrysogonus Waddell, *Twelfth-Century Statutes From the Cistercian General Chapter*. *Studia et Documenta* 12 (Brecht: Cîteaux, Commentarii Cistercienses, 2002) 71 and 101.

2. See Jn 8:12 and 9:5.

3. Terry N. Kinder, *Cistercian Europe, Architecture of Contemplation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company—Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2002) 12.

4. M.-D. Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) 51–52.

5. Emero Stiegman, ‘The Light Imagery of Saint Bernard’s Spirituality’. *The Joy of Learning and the Love of God: Essays in Honor of Jean Leclercq*, E. Rozanne Elder ed. Cistercian Studies series 160 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1995) 327–388.

6. As demonstrated by Stiegman, ‘The Light Imagery’, 352–62.

7. Stiegman, ‘The Light Imagery’, 335.

8. Stiegman, ‘The Light Imagery’, 350–351.

9. In Gueric of Igny, *Liturgical Sermons*, Volume One. Cistercian Fathers series 8. Introduction and translation by Monks of Mount Saint Bernard Abbey.

(Spencer: Cistercian Publications—Shannon: Irish University Press, 1971) xxxviii–xlvi.

10. *Lumen fidei, lumen iustitiae, lumen scientiae, lumen sapientiae*. Guerric d'Igny, *Sermons*, Tome 1. Sources Chrétienues, 166. Introduction, texte critique et notes par John Morson et Hilary Costello. Traduction sous la direction de Placide Deseille. (Paris: Le Cerf, 1970). 3ème sermon 3, 276, 98–99.

11. Thomas Merton, 'The humanity of Christ in Monastic Prayer' in *Monastic Studies* 2 (Berryville, Virginia: 1964) 19–22.

12. James 1:17.

13. *One Yet Two: Monastic Tradition East and West*, edited by M. Basil Pennington OCSO, Cistercian Studies series 29 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1976) 166.

14. Denis Ouaiïlbourou, Martine Plouvier, F. Placide Vernet, 'Une nouvelle église pour les moines de Cîteaux—1998', *Pour une histoire monumentale de l'abbaye de Cîteaux 1098-1998*, edited by Martine Pouvier, *Studia et Documenta* 8 (Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses, 1998) 366.

15. D. Ouaiïlbourou, 'Une nouvelle église', 368.

16. E. Cazabonne, 'À la rencontre du Soleil: relecture des Sermons de Saint Bernard pour le cycle de la Nativité', *Collectanea Cisterciensa* 58 (1995) 331–344. And 'Access to Inaccessible Light: Bernard's Use of 1 Tm 6:16', *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 38 (2003) 275–284.

17. Emmanuel Cazabonne, 'Gregory Palamas (1296–1359): Monk, Theologian, and Pastor', *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 37 (2002) 303–332.

18. On the genres of *florilegium* and century, see Jean Leclercq OSB, *The Love of Learning and the Desire of God: A Study of Monastic Culture*. Translated by Catherine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961) 228–230.

19. See *The Way of a Pilgrim*, translated by R. M. French, edited by Dennis Joseph Billy (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori Publications, 2000) 7.

20. Those Pauline words (Eph 5:8) happen to be Saint Bernard's very last words in Sermon 86 on the Song of Songs, his last sermon on this biblical book: *ut filii, inquit, lucis ambulate. Sancti Bernardi Opera* edited by J. Leclercq and H. M. Rochais (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1958) 2:320, line 10.

*Daily Readings for
Meditation*

Long before the night office began, the man of God was standing at his window, where he watched and prayed while the rest were still asleep. In the dead of the night, he suddenly beheld a flood of light shining down from above more brilliant than the sun, and with it every trace of darkness cleared away. Another remarkable sight followed. According to his own description, the whole world was gathered up before his eyes in what appeared to be a single ray of light.

Keep this well in mind. All creation is bound to appear small to a soul that sees the Creator. Once it beholds a little of his light, it finds all creatures small indeed. The light of holy contemplation enlarges and expands the mind in God until it stands above the world. In fact, the soul that sees him rises even above itself, and as it is drawn upward in his light all its inner powers unfold. Then, when it looks down from above, it sees how small everything is that was beyond its grasp before.

Gregory the Great
Dialogues 2.35

December 22

Brightest Morning

O love, to see you is to be in ecstasy in God. To cling to you is to be joined to God by a nuptial contract. O serenest light of my soul, very brightest morning, ah, break into day in me now and begin so to shine for me that by your light I may see light¹ and that through you my night may be turned into day. By the love of your love, O my dearest morning, let me reckon everything that you are not as if it were nothing and void. Ah! Visit me now in the morning at daybreak that I may suddenly be transformed entirely into you.

Gertrud the Great of Helfta
Spiritual Exercises, 5

¹ *Ps 35:10*

The day will breathe forth life, the night will breathe its last. The night is the devil, night is the angel of Satan, though he may disguise himself as an angel of light.¹ Night is the Antichrist, whom the Lord shall slay with the breath of his mouth and destroy with the brightness of his coming. Is not the Lord the day? Clearly he is the day, bright and throbbing with life. He puts the shadows to flight with the breath of his mouth, and destroys the phantoms with the brightness of his coming.

When the day breathes forth life the shadows truly lie prostrate, for when the fullness of night pervades all things, then no trace of shadows can remain! For when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away!

Bernard of Clairvaux
Sermon 72 on the Song of Songs, 5

¹ *2 Cor 11:14*

December 24
The Eve of Christmas

Be Enlightened

*Come to him and be enlightened:
and your faces shall not be confounded.¹*

Behold, I am approaching you, O consuming fire, my God. Ah! Devouring me, a speck of dust, in the fiery vigor of your love, consume me utterly and absorb me into yourself. Behold, I am approaching you, O my dulcet light. Ah! Let your face light up over me² so that my darkness may become like noonday in your presence. Behold, I am approaching you, O most blessed union. Ah! Make me one with you by the glue of living love.

Gertrud the Great of Helfta
Spiritual Exercises, 4

¹ *Ps 33:6*

² *Ps 118:135*

It is to the shepherds watching and keeping the night watches over their flock that the joy of the new light is announced, and for them the Saviour is said to be born. Upon the poor and the toiling, not upon you that are rich and have your consolation, and with it the divinely-denounced woe; the day of sanctification has dawned amid the watches of the night, so that the night is illuminated as the day, or is rather changed into day, since the angel says, not this night, but this day is born to you a Saviour. For the night is passed and the day is at hand, the true Day of true Day, the salvation of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is over all things and is himself true God, blessed for evermore. Amen.

Bernard of Clairvaux
Sermon 5 for Christmas Eve, 5

December 25
[Reading Two]

The Sun of Justice
and the Sun of Glory

Anyone who now neglects internal holiness shall not be admitted hereafter to the contemplation of majesty; the Sun of glory shall never shine on him on whom the Sun of justice has not risen; nor shall he see the dawn of tomorrow who has not lived in the light of today. For, as the apostle teaches, the same Christ, who of God is made unto us justice today, shall appear as our life tomorrow, when we also shall appear with Him in glory. Today he is born for us as a little one, that man may no more presume to magnify himself upon earth, but that we may rather be converted and become as little children. But tomorrow he will show himself to us as the great Lord and greatly to be praised, so that we also shall be magnified in glory when every man shall have praise from God. For those whom he justifies today, he will magnify tomorrow, and to the consummation of holiness shall succeed the vision of Majesty.

Bernard of Clairvaux
Sermon 5 for Christmas Eve, 3

You fear the Lord of the angels, but love the little child. You fear the Lord of majesty, but love the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes. You fear him reigning in heaven, but love him lying in the manger. But what sign did the shepherds receive? You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. This sign meant that he is the Saviour, that he is the Christ, that he is the Lord. But is there anything great about being wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a stable? Are other children not wrapped in swaddling clothes? What does this sign mean then? It means a great deal if only we understand it. We do understand it if we do not merely hear these tidings but also have in our hearts the light which appeared with the angels. He appeared with light when these tidings were first proclaimed to make us realize that it is only those who have the spiritual light in their minds who truly hear.

Aelred of Rievaulx
Sermon 3 for the Nativity of the Lord, 37–38

My advice is that you go now to the Word, and he will teach you his ways, so that you will not go astray in your journey and, desiring the good but not recognizing it, wander in a pathless place instead of along the highway. The Word is the light.¹ The unfolding of your words gives light and imparts understanding to children.² Happy are you if you too can say, 'Your word is a lamp for my feet and a lantern for my path'.³ Your soul has received great profit if your will is unswerving and your reason enlightened, willing and recognizing the good. By the first it receives life and by the second vision; for it was dead when it desired evil, and blind when it did not recognize the good.

Bernard of Clairvaux
Sermon 85 on the Song of Songs, 2

¹ *Jn 1:9*

² *Ps 118:130*

³ *Ps 118:105*

When it was night we were incapable of any good, so the Light freely came into the world and took the world by surprise. We were born when it was night, we were brought up in the night, but though composed of clay from beneath, we are also of spittle from above—spittle from the Head, clay from beneath the foot. When mud made of this clay and spittle was smeared on the eyes of the man born blind his eyes were opened. That universal night is past in which all have sinned; it has gone, the Sun is shining, the darkness has so vanished that those who could not work previously have not the least excuse now if they refuse to work in the daylight. As he who is the Day says: ‘If I had not come and given them my message’, meaning, ‘if I had not shone on them they would not have been at fault; as it is, their fault can find no excuse.’¹

Whoever does not make use of grace given is neglecting the duties of the daylight and is rightly rebuked for idleness.

Isaac of Stella
Sermon 16,13–14

¹ *Jn 15:22*

December 28 The Lord Pitched His Tent in the Sun

David says of the Lord that he pitched his tent in the sun, and comes out of his pavilion like a bridegroom. He exulted like a giant to run his race: his going out is from the highest heavens.¹ What a leap he made from the highest heavens to the earth! Indeed I can discover no place, other than the earth, where he would pitch his tent in the sun: that is, where he who dwells in unapproachable light² would deign to reveal his presence openly and in the light. For he appeared upon earth and lived among men. Upon earth, I say, in plain sight, which is meant by pitching his tent in the sun, namely, in the body which he was pleased to prepare for himself for this purpose from the Virgin's body, that in it he who is by nature invisible might be seen, and so all mankind should see the salvation of God on his coming in the flesh.

Bernard of Clairvaux
Sermon 53 on the Song of Songs, 7

¹ *Ps 18:6-7*

² *1 Tm 6:16*