

*Excerpt from*  
**ORPHEAN PASSAGES**

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And even so it is: faith is a shifting thing, after all.

This is not similar to the world's shift (from which we seek escape in our nouncing, our creeds, and the Old Rugged Cross); rather, it is the world's shift, is in that shift and with it and under it.

Faith-flux. Faith flows. To be in faith is to be changing—as the wind blows the grass and makes it to bow down, as the sun wakes it and makes it grow, as the grass itself opens tiny flowers to the heavens. To be in faith is ever to be moving through the passages of faith, and to be moved by them. It must be the verb, then: *faithing*.

And three things cry the change of it:

1. That it is *relationship*, as I have said earlier, which manifests its life in change and which, to be, must also still be changing.

2. That it is relationship—*with the living God*, whose life against our lives mercifully, gracefully, changes.

Faithing is the constant losing of one's balance, the constant falling forward (which is the risk required even for so common a locomotion as walking). It is the constant loss of stability, the denying one's self and dying into God; into God Yahweh; into a Who and not a What; into a God who groans, grows angry, repents himself, returns, does battle, lifts his child on eagles' wings, teaches the child to walk, delights in promising and keeping promises, suffers the disregard of his delinquent child, yet cannot make that child as Admah nor set him as the Zeboiim; into a God who threatens general destruction of his people and then, instead, comes among the people himself as an infant prepared to be destroyed!

Faithing is dying into a living God and not a stone, neither a calf nor an icon, neither a principle nor an ideal, neither a temple nor a tradition nor a statute, neither a memorial nor an objective (not *terminus a quo* nor *terminus ad quern*, both of which may be defined, neither of which is alive, neither of which is). The God *autonomous*, the God *a-nomos* altogether, the God eternally the same, this God is, by a paradox, also one who walks the garden in the cool of the evening and then, some years later, announces to the Baptist: "It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Holy and jealous—yes, he is. But merciful as well. Hidden, yes. Supernal and above all worlds, yes. And silent therefore: so silent that the Psalmist wailed, "Thou hast forsaken me!" So silent and so still that the eerie stillness seemed, to Elijah on Horeb, to make its own sound—a sound of the absence of sounds. Silent, yes. And yet he is a speaker as well, words and

sentences and discourse flowing from his mouth, a voice, a speaking voice: the Word!

He, to whom we relate, does in that relationship and for it, on account of it and of his grace, change. He is a living God. He may be the God transcendent; nevertheless, and marvelously, he is also an accommodating God. The relationship itself calls change of his mercy.

To be in faith is to be changing. And three things cry the change of it:

3. That it is a relationship with the living God—*enacted in this world*, this world of the furious swirl, in which all things flow.

This is the forum for our lived relationship. This establishes the conditions of it (yea, though heaven finally provide the alternative to it). And these are the conditions the dear God willingly accepted, in which to whisper, *Thou*. Or what else is the incarnation about?

The incarnation certainly does not mean that God dwelt in the world as a hookworm in a hog—that is, in, but apart from; in, but different from; in, but not *of* created existence nor of the sin that had disfigured it. No, that were a lesser miracle, being the lesser sacrifice, and somewhat parasitical. Other gods, the false gods, came only to be fed and to be praised. This God, at the incarnation, came to feed and to serve. This God, born of a woman, accepted for himself all the conditions of this existence. He was not just in the flesh; he *was* flesh. No foreign matter, he, but matter itself. No *seeming* human, as the Docetists taught; but human, *doulos* to all that jerks us left and right, and obedient even unto the starkest and most signal change, the Change Progenitor, the one that causes terror in every other change we suffer, to which all other changes tend: death.

The world is forever a flowing thing. Until the end of it, when the trumpet shall shock it still, all our lives and our experience are borne upon this flux. It is the unspeakable love of God that he comes to meet us *in the very terms of this world*.

Three things, then—the arena where we meet; and we who meet, a living God and living creatures; and the meeting itself, relationship—three things declare that faithing itself is a verb, a house a-building, yet undone.

Ah, little children! Faith is not yet surcease, nor hiding, nor retreat, nor an island in the waters. Ah, children, you cheapen it by your chatter, judging some to be "in faith" and others "out of faith" as though it were a fixed condition and you, the "faithful" had the right to make distinctions, as though faith, once experienced, were ever thereafter the same. Oh, dear children, "faithing" is neither a stone nor doctrine nor any product of your desiring. It is, rather, the frightful thing: a *drama*, wherein God is the protagonist, the first and greater wrestler, while we are the antagonist, Jacob at Peniel, terribly, terribly deep in the night.

And having said so, I commiserate with you. It is hard, indeed.

For such dark drama as this *does* dissolve our power over anything. No, we cannot keep a thing, not even ourselves nor our identities; and it does insist that

something else has power over us, even a thing we cannot fully know nor name (though faithing is finally the process of namings, his and ours together). And so we are afraid, dear children. I know. And sometimes we feel so lost.

*Faith*, if ever it is to be a noun, is properly the whole play, from the first scene to the last, done up and done. But we do not know that last until we are there, until we have come to it both through and by our tribulation. (God knows; but we don't know as we are known.) Therefore, while we are still involved in it, we cannot truly use the fixing noun. "Faithing" allows—appallingly, it presumes—change.

But having heard that, hear too the blessing it implies: When the relationship between the Lord and us is troubled; when we, like Jeremiah, spit against the Deity; or when we cry, as surely we will in the deep sincerity of our souls, "There is no God!" then, if all we had for definition were the noun *faith*, we would have to judge ourselves faith-less, fallen from the faith, cast out. And that were the worst of deaths to die. On the other hand, if it is faithing which we are experiencing, and if this desolated cry arises from one scene in a long and fluid play, then even the desolation may have its place in the changing relationship, caused by previous action, causing actions subsequent; then despair may be an episode in the drama. And then we are not fallen from the faith, but rather falling within it—and even this, dear child, may be *of* the faith.

For faithing consists in the living relationship. And the whole of the actor's involved: his soul and his body, his eyes and all he sees, his cowlick, his mouth, his ecstasies and his dejections. And when he dies not isolate, but dies from scene to scene, from gesture to gesture, and horror to holiness, why, that were a fruitful death indeed.

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