

The transcendent mystery of God, the Alpha and the Omega, energizes the spiritual life of both individuals and worshipping communities. This Divine Mystery is the love that is infatuated with humankind, in spite of our devastating sinfulness. Readers will discover how to create lives that are soul-wise and centered in the profound mystery. In a world where pedestrian values often obscure the Holy, this collection of meditations offers comfort and hope to world-weary pilgrims.

## **Alpha and Omega: Meditations on the Divine Mystery**

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at  
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/5106.html?s=pdf>

**YOUR FREE EXCERPT APPEARS BELOW. ENJOY!**

The background of the entire cover is a deep blue night sky filled with numerous stars of varying sizes and colors, including bright white and yellow stars and some fainter, reddish-orange stars. In the center of the image, there is a prominent nebula with a mix of blue and white hues, and some darker, reddish-brown filaments. The overall effect is a sense of vastness and cosmic wonder.

# Alpha and Omega

*Meditations on the Divine Mystery*

**Louis E. Bauer**

Copyright © 2010 Louis E. Bauer

ISBN 978-1-60910-600-3

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Hawfields Press  
Mebane, North Carolina  
2010

Printed in the United States of America.

First Edition

Front cover photo used with permission of NASA, ESA, and the Hubble Heritage Team (STScI/AURA)-ESA/Hubble Collaboration..

Acknowledgment: D. Gouliermis (Max Planck Institute for Astronomy, Heidelberg)

Back cover photo used with permission of European Space Agency & NASA. Acknowledgement: E. Olszewski (University of Arizona)

## Contents

Chapter 1: Light in the World's Darkness .....	1
Chapter 2: Taking Out the Trash .....	4
Chapter 3: The Risk of Faith.....	7
Chapter 4: The Scandal of Grace .....	10
Chapter 5: Come Lord Jesus, be our Guest.....	13
Chapter 6: The Night of Wonder!.....	15
Chapter 7: Peering into the Father's Heart.....	17
Chapter 8: Can You Imagine?.....	20
Chapter 9: Just Sheer Ecstasy! .....	23
Chapter 10: You, yes you, are my Beloved! .....	26
Chapter 11: Hearing what is Really Said.....	28
Chapter 12: May we Forgive, Lord, as we have been Forgiven!.....	31
Chapter 13: Clearly, Steadily and as a Whole .....	34
Chapter 14: Is That All There Is?.....	37
Chapter 15: The Blind One Sees.....	40
Chapter 16: Having the Experience and Recognizing the Meaning .....	43
Chapter 17: Silence in the Garden .....	47
Chapter 18: Simon of Cyrene .....	49
Chapter 19: Going Home, Cleansed! .....	51
Chapter 20: The Journey Home .....	53
Chapter 21: The Final Moriah?.....	55
Chapter 22: He is Risen! He is Risen! .....	57
Chapter 23: Peace be with You.....	59

*Louis E. Bauer*

Chapter 24: God's Gift of Peace.....	62
Chapter 25: Possessed by the Christ.....	66
Chapter 26: Named Into Eternity.....	69
Chapter 27: The God of the Sparrows.....	72
Chapter 28: Eyes of Compassion.....	75
Chapter 29: Burdens Shared.....	78
Chapter 30: Take a Break, Will Ya?.....	81
Chapter 31: Divine Dining.....	84
Chapter 32: Follow the Leader!.....	87
Chapter 33: Finding Your Self.....	90
Chapter 34: An Epitaph for an Unknown Child.....	93
Chapter 35: But What about Me?.....	97
Chapter 36: Paradise Regained!.....	100
Chapter 37: Hidden in the Faces of Others.....	103

## Chapter 1 Light in the World's Darkness

*Oh, come, oh, come Emmanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel,  
that mourns in lonely exile here,  
until the Son of God appear.  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
and death's dark shadows put to flight.*

**T**his stirring Advent hymn, sung for centuries by the church, ushers in this sacred season of waiting and anticipation. It is a hopeful prayer of people who know they sit in darkness and cannot find the light within themselves. It is the confident song of a people who can bear the darkness, because light will come. Light will come, as surely as it dawned the first Easter morning.

This hymn's honesty about darkness—not just the darkness of December's lengthening shadows, but also the darkness deep within the life and heart of this world—seems so out of place as the sparkling, colorful lights of shopping malls beckon to us to find the truth of life by emptying our wallets and purses to Christmas vendors.

Listen as you hear the Christmas music of the malls this year, and note how rarely you hear this hymn. It is too honest in its mournful cry that we need to be delivered from darkness. It is too honest about our darkness to overshadow the lilting dreams of a white Christmas.

There is an old Sufi story in which a stranger comes upon a man on his hands and knees under a street lamp in front of his house. He is looking for his keys, and the stranger, moved by the man's desperation, gets down on his own hands and knees to help him out. After a long time of futilely scouring the ground, the dust-covered stranger asks, "Where, exactly, did you drop them?" "In my house," comes the reply. Exasperated, the stranger asks, "Then why are you looking out here?" And the man replies, "Because it is too dark in the house!"

The season of Advent and this great hymn of the church dare us to *stay in the darkness*, to have the courage to remain in the darkness, so that the key to life may be revealed in the midst of our darkness. This season

*Louis E. Bauer*

of Advent, which begins with the lengthening and darkening of winter's shadows, comes to its fulfillment on a dark night in late December when a dazzling star over Bethlehem mirrors the light of God's loving smile beaming over all the earth.

And what is the darkness in which *you* wait, painfully yearning for light? What is the darkness in the secret chambers of your heart? What is hidden deep within you that is casting dark shadows over your heart's joy?

Is it the sense of being alone in the world, even when amongst friends and loved ones? Is it a sense of failing to live up to expectations—of having failed others, as well as yourself? Is it that fleeting awareness, becoming more frequent now, that it is five o'clock in the afternoon of your life and the sun is setting and the shadows deepening? Is it the ache for one you have loved who is no longer with you, without whom life is, at best, bittersweet?

What is the darkness in which you dwell *this moment...this Advent day?*

Don't flee from that darkness to search for the keys under the world's streetlamps. You will never find your keys anywhere except where you have lost them, unless aided by one who can shed true light in your darkness. Stay in the darkness, for there our Father wants to come and be with you. To hold your hand in comfort, to squeeze you to his breast in compassion, to assure you that you are precious beyond your wildest imagination. Our Father wants to come to dwell with you where you have lost your keys, where you cannot unlock the shackles that bind you. To give you freedom. To give you joy. To give you the kingdom in all its shining brilliance.

I have an Advent parable from West Africa to share with you. You may wish to ponder this little story throughout this season of darkness, as the light of Christ begins to shine. The darkness of night had settled upon Sorbonne-Goon-Gou, a little village of eighty-five people on an island in the Niger River. Susan and I were in the desert country of Niger, on this mere slip of land accessible only by a little, hand-hewn pirogue. An evening breeze had mercifully cooled the 104-degree heat of the day. We peered into the darkness as we sampled the chewy morsels of a goat, killed in honor of our visit. We perceived shadows moving about in the night. There was no moon, and the stars were obscured by the dust blown off the Sahara Desert by the Harmattan winds. A lonely kerosene lamp burned outside the mud hut where we sat, and we marveled at how our

*Alpha and Omega*

neighbors could move so confidently through the deep darkness of the night.

The previous night, all the children on the little island had gathered in their tattered rags around that lonely kerosene lamp to sing songs of joy, songs of love, songs of hope, songs of promise, laughingly clapping their hands and dancing.

Now, the evening before our departure, a young man named Doula crept up in the dark and began speaking a slow, articulate French that we could understand. He spoke of how hard life was in his village. Now that the millet and rice had been harvested, he would have to leave his family and travel many miles across Ghana to Nigeria in search of some work until the next planting time. The light of the lonely kerosene lamp danced upon the handsome ebony of his pained face.

And then he said, “Do you remember last night, when you were in front of my hut? It was very dark, wasn’t it? We are too poor to buy kerosene for our lamps.” We looked up at the shadows darting through the night. Only one kerosene lamp burned in the village—the one the villagers had brought us and placed by our hut.

The next morning, Yacouba, our Muslim guide and head-man of the village, loaded our gear into the little canoe that would return us to the mainland. I reached deep into my pocket for a 5000- CFA note (worth about twenty dollars) and handed the money to Yacouba, asking him to share our gift with the villagers so they could buy kerosene for their lamps. They had slain a precious goat in honor of our visit, had sacrificed their one lamp that we could see in our darkness.

Such selfless sacrifice of this little village is an Advent picture of our God, who gives from the depths of his love and generosity, that the light of his Christ might shine in darkness and warm our winter hearts. How else can we respond, other than in profound gratitude, giving deeply—very deeply—as we have been given unto, so that the lamps of our brothers and sisters may burn brightly with the light of his love and grace and truth?

People of our Advent God, people of unbounded hope in the future, in whose darkness the light of Christ has shined, enlightened People of God, let us learn to give deeply, to share profoundly, so that others may see, through all kinds of this world’s darkness, the light of our Lord and his unfailing love.



## Chapter 19

### Going Home, Cleansed!

*T*he dark, metallic clouds were now gathering, weighted with tears of sorrow. An eerie silence shrouded the wind-swept hill. The few who gathered at the foot of his cross wept silent tears, and a host of angelic beings bowed their heads in wondrous awe. His death was approaching with surprising swiftness, each breath becoming now a mortal gasp. Was it all coming to its swift end because his precious body was simply weak and frail? Or was it the final fatigue of having borne, throughout his precious life, the immeasurable enormity of human sin upon the broad shoulders of his love? He who had given away all that he had, even his heart, he who was homeless and had no place in the world to lay his weary head, had only one possession now to bear into eternity: his cross.

By all standards of life in this world, defeat was now at hand on that holy hill. There seemed to be so little to show—to place before his Father—for a life lived in absolute and total dedication to this wild and strangely searching love of his Father. His precious words, blessing the peacemakers of the world, the poor in spirit, the gentle and merciful, the pure in heart, seemed to fall on deaf ears and hardened hearts, and become lost in the shifting sands of the desert. Only a heart pierced by divine love could look down from the torture of the cross to forgive the abandonment of broken friendships and the disloyalty of frightened followers. All that faithful obedience...and only a cross to show for it.

But oh! The power in that cross. Only a cross could bridge the chasm between fallen Eden and Paradise. Only the wide arms of his cross could bridge the abyss between God and humanity. If ever there was a place upon this green earth where a person's head should be bowed down in shame, it was here on Golgotha. But the profound mystery is this: it has become the one place where humankind has a right to lift its head in wonder and awe. You and I would have called these hours an ending, but Jesus entered into them as if they were really just the beginning. He was not anxious and pressured, as one whose plans were being brought to nothing. He was quiet and sure-footed, as one who knows his way through even the darkest and deadliest moment of life. He was not

*Louis E. Bauer*

stumbling away into death. He was climbing confidently into eternity, reaching out his hand for a scepter, exchanging his bloody crown of thorns for a glistening diadem of priceless jewels. And he was inviting anyone who would follow him to climb on his shoulders and hang on tightly to his nail-pierced hands, until everyone was home safe in his Father's house.

He was not losing anything that day—not even his life. He was winning something. Something that people have cradled in their hearts ever since, whispering it to themselves: Clean! Clean from sin! Washed clean as driven snow in the blood of the lamb. There is power in the blood of the Lamb, and we are clean from all the ugliness that befouls our lives and shames our hearts and drives us to despair about our worth.

Now it was nearly finished. He has trekked the long road that had begun back in Bethlehem in a cradle. A road that made its ways through human hearts in Galilee and now seemed, finally, to end here atop a hill on a cross, outside the holy city. Was it only finished, or had something been accomplished? Was it the end, or was this only the beginning of a solemn procession of souls like you and me into eternity, souls who would take his prized possession—his cross—as the precious gift of life?

God's man has gone home now. Not to the grave, but to share the joy of the angels. Even now, they rejoice as the Son comes home to give his Father the only trophy he has: a cross. A cross that bears on it the name of everyone who will turn to him and trust his grace. A cross toward which we may lift our faces when we breathe our last moments on this earth and proclaim: "Father...into your hands I commit my spirit."

Love has triumphed—love has won the victory!

## Chapter 34

### An Epitaph for an Unknown Child

*He gave his life as a ransom for many*

**T**his is the story of a person of power. This is the story of a helplessly weak man. He has a name. His name is David which in his native Hebrew tongue means, “the one who is beloved.” Summing up the great achievements of his career, they said of him at the end of his days: “Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David. The time that David reigned was forty years...and his kingdom was firmly established.” At the threshold of manhood, they said of him at the beginning of his days, “Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. The Lord said, ‘Rise and anoint him, for this is the one.’”

His career was meteoric. The youngest of many. A simple shepherd lad. He tamed the ravings of a mad king with the gentle harmony of his lyre. He slew a giant with pebbles, shattered his enemies with his bloody sword, and strutted through the come-hither looks of crowds of adoring women. “The beloved” was a person of great power—but could this powerful man slay the demon within that waited in the shadows to seize his soul?

“In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle...” In the spring of the year, when little boys take to the playing field to prove their prowess. In the spring of the year, when the sap rises and the yearning to seize life blossoms. “In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle..., ” the beloved stayed home. Had war lost its meaning? Had the sheer challenge of conquest and shaping the world according to one’s will, lost its edge? Had the energies for career peaked? Had the spring valleys of lush greenery yielded to a stiff wind from the valley of dry bones? Was he bored? Was he empty? Had he lived a lie?

It happened late one afternoon, when the final darkness hints of the dusk of a man’s life. It happened late one afternoon, when the light of a naked sun illumines and reveals all life’s illusions. “The beloved” rose from the loneliness of his couch and paced about on the roof of the king’s house. He saw from the roof the outline of a woman. A woman, bathing.

Gently sponging her body with cool water. Passion filled his emptiness. Her touch would heal, for the unnamed woman was very beautiful. "The beloved" stared helplessly as the unbridling power of his passion drew the two together into the worst of all possible lies.

"Bring her to me," begged the king. And they escorted her to him, a humble offering to the gods who create the shadows of the afternoon. Then the king seized her, for who could resist this patriarchal power? This powerful man caressed the wife of Uriah and fleetingly satisfied his deepest yearning. "The beloved" committed a royal rape, blasphemed the woman in her holy purification, and betrayed the trust of his loyal underling, Uriah the Hittite. As the afternoon light waned before the coming darkness, God looked down upon Eden and wept at the sight of his "beloved's" trembling nakedness. And the woman, shattered in her personhood, degraded in her body, returned to the safe refuge of her own home. At nightfall, a chorus whispers in the shadows, "If a man lies with another man's wife, he shall be put to death." So speaks the Torah.

"I am pregnant," she cries out to him in horror and shame. But what will be revealed, must now be hidden. And so the cover-up begins. "Bring the Hittite from the battle line to the safe sanctuary of my court," orders the rich master. The poor Hittite man who had one little lamb whom he cuddled and cherished. With the cunning of his father, Cain, "the beloved" schemes to murder his brother. Intoxicating the Hittite with wine, "the beloved" prods him to go down from the royal court to his home, to wash his feet, to make love with Bathsheba, his little ewe lamb, that the unknown child might have a name.

But these are times of war and its glories, and this war is holy. The integrity of Uriah juxtaposes blatantly with the desperation and lies of David. Uriah pleads to return to the battle so he can defend the honor of the ark of God. And the demon smiles, as "the beloved" pens a letter to his soldiers, instructing that the Hittite be abandoned on the front line of death. Clutching the sealed letter tightly in one hand and his sword in the other, faithful Uriah sets forth toward the city wall, carrying in his hand the writ of his own execution. God looks down upon his pasture and weeps for another little lamb who will be slain.

Uriah is dead. The scheme accomplished. All is now hidden. The demon smiles. The afternoon of passion concludes in the morning of death, and the nakedness of "the beloved" is hidden from the peoples' eyes. Only seven days later, after fulfilling the ritual of lamentation and grief, the powerful man got what he thinks he wanted. David sent for

*Alpha and Omega*

Bathsheba and brought her to his house, and the little ewe of Uriah became his wife. And unto him was born in the city of David a child...A CHILD WHO HAD NO NAME!

The Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to "the beloved," and it became very ill,

For surely this child bears our infirmities  
and carries our diseases; ...struck down by  
God and afflicted. ...he was wounded for our  
transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon  
him was the punishment that made us whole, and  
by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep  
have gone astray; we have turned to the devices  
of our own hearts and the Lord has laid on him the  
the iniquity of us all.

Whether from guilt or from compassion, David pleads with God for the life of the child, denying his body with a fast and prostrating himself upon the ground before the Holy One.

God comes to a man in the afternoon of his life, in the searing heat of the day, to walk with him, to talk with him, to share the darkness of the lengthening shadows. What has been hidden must be revealed—the paradox of a parable brought the beloved to his knees. Perhaps, "the beloved," in the afternoon of his life, would yet learn that his power would lie in the weakness of his suffering love and in being loved by one whose suffering was anonymous.

In the absence of angels, only whispers now announce the news of reality. And the tormented father asks, "Is the child dead?" And they reply, "Yes, he is dead." And God looks down upon the world and weeps eternal tears for his unnamed child.

David went to console the woman, now his wife, Bathsheba. Again he held her close, still assuming that the power of his passion could heal the brokenness of life. "The beloved" has yet to learn what it means to love and be loved—it will take a lifetime to reach him.

And Bathsheba bore unto him in the city of David, another son, and David named him Solomon—the gift of shalom—believing that he would make peace between God and man. And then the Holy Scripture says, "But the Lord loved him"...and sent a message by his prophet Nathan, and

*Louis E. Bauer*

Nathan gives him a name: Jedidiah, which means “*the beloved of the Lord.*” Never again, in all of holy history, will that sacred name be spoken.

But whom did Nathan name on behalf of the Lord? Was it, indeed, the child Solomon, a sign of grace to David that he, “the beloved,” and his son, Solomon, “the beloved of the Lord,” were still endeared to him? Or was it the unknown, unnamed child, who is not remembered, except for his suffering and dying, who will bring peace between God and man? Is he the one whom the Lord loved, from the moment of conception that late afternoon?

It is said that we know something only because of its opposite. We know grace because of sin. We know peace because of conflict. We know triumph because of failure. We know what is revealed because of what is hidden. We know love because of hatred, the nearness of God because of the absence of God, joy because of sorrow, wholeness because of suffering, power because of weakness, the Light of the Lord, because of the darkness of God.

We do not know the name of the unknown little child—only that the suffering and death of his brief life made possible our knowing the tender mercy of Jesus, who was of the house and lineage of David. Because he gave himself up, we too are among the beloved of God. Surely goodness and mercy followed him all the few days of his brief life. And he will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. In his powerlessness, he transformed history. And may this epitaph remind us of him and hallow his memory: *He gave his life as a ransom for many!*

The transcendent mystery of God, the Alpha and the Omega, energizes the spiritual life of both individuals and worshipping communities. This Divine Mystery is the love that is infatuated with humankind, in spite of our devastating sinfulness. Readers will discover how to create lives that are soul-wise and centered in the profound mystery. In a world where pedestrian values often obscure the Holy, this collection of meditations offers comfort and hope to world-weary pilgrims.

### **Alpha and Omega: Meditations on the Divine Mystery**

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at  
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/5106.html?s=pdf>