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Theology II—P.T. Denton Jr.

“This I Believe” Essay

Locked in Dracula's castle, Jonathan Harker—the protagonist of Stoker's novel—joyfully laments, “No man knows till he has suffered from the night how sweet and dear to his heart and eye the morning can be.”ⁱ Although affliction is a universal experience, I am particularly empathetic to Harker's plight, for I have suffered from the night in almost exactly the same manner as he. Inherently blessed and cursed with a genetic disorder of connective tissue called Marfan syndrome, I was given beta-blockers as a kindergartener, catalyzing a self-perpetuating cycle of nightmares that haunted me for the next five years. Many were the nights I spent huddled in my bed, cowering in the sinister yet comforting glow of a lamp and clutching a stuffed alligator or a toy gun or a small, wooden cross—whatever totem I thought would best protect me. In sleep there were monsters, and the fear of them denied me that best and most basic of human medicines. Though I am long off the beta-blockers and the nightmares have mostly faded, the profound impact of that fear can be seen in my propensity for daytime naps and late-night work sessions, my mild dependence upon chemical sleep aids, and a preoccupation with nighttime security: I never go to bed without first locking doors and making sure I have a flashlight handy.

Yet, though fear gripped me with all the power of Hell during the night, the first fingers of light banished it to the back of my mind; as the eyelids of morning opened, mine slid peacefully shut. I learned how sweet and dear to my heart and eye morning was, and I placed my hope in the rising of the sun. Soon, no matter how long and dark and filled with terror the night, I could get through it, for I knew that the dawn was coming. So this I believe: when

you're inevitably going through Hell, the certainty that you'll reach Heaven gives you the strength to keep on going.

That's not to say I'm some sort of fatalist; that I think we should unquestionably accept suffering and simply hope our way through it. I obviously exalt the morning—I have placed my hope in it. And you cannot exalt the morning without also damning the night, for light is wholly inimical to dark, and to experience but a photon of it will make you crave it until you can do nothing but work to shine it wherever possible, by whatever means necessary, and with all expedient speed. But no matter the effort you put into alleviating it, there will always be suffering. It's embedded in our genes; it's woven in to the fabric of our universe. Night always falls. But if night always falls, then day must also always break. As the writer of Lamentations said, “This I recall to mind, therefore I have hope.”ⁱⁱ

This truth is evinced not only in Lamentations, but throughout that curious book we call the Bible—which, even if you're not a believer, you should accept as a psychological profile of humanity, an exceedingly personal yet panoramic narrative spanning the ages. The tale of Job is a monument to it, as is Luke's account of the good thief on the cross. Yet the greatest testament to it comes from the Old Testament, from the familiar passage of Ecclesiastes 3. “To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.”ⁱⁱⁱ Undoubtedly there is a time to mourn, but we can last through that time, for there is also a time to dance. A time to weep but also to laugh. A time to break down but also to build up. A time to kill but also to heal. A time to hate but also to love. A time to die but also to be born.

There is a time to suffer from the night. But that's okay, for the sun is rising, and soon a time will come to revel in the dawn.

i Stoker. *Bram Stoker's Dracula (Optimized for Kindle)*. Loc. 832

ii *The Holy Bible*, Authorized Version of King James. Lamentations 3:21

iii *The Holy Bible*, Authorized Version of King James. Ecclesiastes 3:1