

*Winter  
Light*

A Christian's  
Search for Humility

Bruce Ray Smith



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Published by:

Kalos Press, an imprint of Doulos Resources, 195 Mack Edwards Drive, Oakland, TN 38060, USA; PHONE: (901) 451-0356; WEBSITE: [www.doulosresources.org](http://www.doulosresources.org).

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Published 2011

Printed in the United States of America by Ingram/Lightning Source

ISBNs:

978-0-9828715-8-4 (trade paperback edition)

978-0-9828715-9-1 (electronic/digital editions)

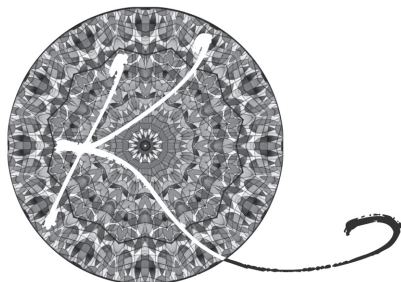
Library of Congress Catalogue Number: 2011928886

Cover credits:

Main photo by Inga Ropsa (<http://www.inga-design.com>)

Author photo by Sylvester Jacobs

Cover design by David Bedsole



FOR JANE



*L*ove means to learn to look at yourself  
The way one looks at distant things  
For you are only one thing among many.  
And whoever sees that way heals his heart,  
Without knowing it, from various ills . . .

~ Czesław Miłosz, "Love"

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# FOREWORD

In 2006, Bruce Ray Smith lost a job he was good at. For six years he had been teaching English and creative writing at a Catholic prep school for girls, where he was beloved by his students and well-regarded by his peers. By all counts, it was a good fit, but a new administration was looking for something different.

Bruce was devastated. It was tempting for him to take refuge in cynicism. Fighting against this, he turned to writing—not about cynicism, but something deeper, something more pervasive and troubling. He began to write about human pride, including his own. He wanted to know the meaning of humility. To do this well requires a level of candor so unnerving that few dare attempt it.

Halfway through *Winter Light*, the reader may think, “Why does this poor fellow do this to himself?” What is he trying to accomplish?” I have been Bruce’s brother, pastor, and friend for the past sixteen years. We have eaten, prayed, watched baseball together. What the reader needs to know is that Bruce Ray Smith takes what is wrong with the world, hard, and what is wrong with himself, harder still. This is why he writes as he does.

Bruce has something in common with St. Augustine, who once quipped to a friend in a letter, “I am the sort of man who writes to make progress, and who makes progress—by writing.” The book in your hands is one man’s anguished longing for something more of his Lord, and of his Lord’s internal rest. Bruce craves the rest and freedom



## Foreword

that comes from knowing who he is, in relation to his Father in heaven and to the precious but desperately fallen people around him.

Not since reading Dietrich Bonhoeffer's remarkable poem, "Who Am I?" many years ago, have I felt so invited into the inner life of another man. I wouldn't call it comfortable, because *Winter Light* is not. It stings. It is an exposé. Admissions abound that put every honest heart at risk. I found myself saying with alarming frequency, "Yes, exactly! This is my experience too." If humility is seeing ourselves as we really are, then such stinging is salutary and essential. It is the Master's word bearing fruit in us, as he promised: "Whoever loses his life for me and the gospel will save it."

Bruce and his wife Jane chose many years ago to live in a part of St. Louis called Old North. Their home is just a stone's throw from Interstate 70, which slices through their neighborhood, cutting them off from Broadway and the Mississippi River several blocks to the east. The people who live there are colorful. Many are imaginative and ambitious homesteaders. Fresh tuck-pointing marks late nineteenth-century renovated dwellings; wrought iron fences and brick sidewalks dot the landscape. New commercial enterprises have sprung up.

It can be an intriguing place to live and even to visit, but can also try the patience of the soul. Absentee owners abandon their properties to weeds and vandals. Buildings gutted by fire are exposed for years to the elements. Like other urban neighborhoods, it can be loud, sometimes dangerous. These things have vexed Bruce for years, but Old North is his home. It has shaped, tested, and enriched him.

Years ago, Bruce invited me to go fishing with him on a lake in Illinois. I paddled. Bruce fished. From what I remember, it was a good day for the fish— but we salvaged the time with conversation and not a few laughs in an otherwise tranquil place. We could have talked about pride and humility, but we didn't. Most people don't when they go fishing.

It did not occur to me at the time that Bruce was a proud man. Did he hide it well, or was he more humble, then? Has a bit more humility been wrung out of his soul in the years since we unstrapped his canoe from the roof racks of his Toyota? Most of us who know Bruce don't think of him as a proud man. But he must know, for as the Scripture says, "Who knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit within him?" (I Corinthians 2:11)

We should let Bruce speak of what he knows. He wants to speak of it. He is writing for his progress. He is also writing for ours.

There is a great deal at stake. This book, especially the parts that sting, has the potential to change us. In the final analysis, as valuable as character is for every generation, it is not humility that we are so hungering and thirsting for. As Bruce puts it in these pages, "I want more. I want to *live in Him* . . . I want humility because I want much more."

~ Kurt Lutjens



# SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED

Something has happened to me.

I overhear myself, my own voice saying, “I don’t know,”  
and sometimes, “I was wrong.”

Sometimes, I keep silence. Sometimes, now, I listen.

I have never listened.



## *Something Has Happened*

*I*t began this way.

“I love you,” I told God, “with all my heart, with all my soul—.” I knew the rest, but stopped. I lived, had always lived, for no one but myself. My life belonged to no one but myself.

It took, I think, three days, and then I said, and meant it: “Do what you have to, Lord.”

Do what you have to do to make me yours.



*I* had no doubt that God would act. He did. He took from me so many things, so suddenly, that I began a list of them: every position of authority. Beloved work, a beloved house. Diversions which consumed me. Everything I had thrown together, everything I had put to use, to construct what I called “my life.”



*My* life. So I thought of it.

God himself was one of my troubles, one of my pleasures.

No more than one of the troubles, one of the pleasures  
of “my life.”



*God* acts. I knew that he would act.

How nebulous that “spirituality” some think of when  
they think of God!

I knew that he would act.



*Something Has Happened*

God honors me. It is an honor to be taken seriously by God.

But he will be himself.

I was, I am, afraid of him. And right to be afraid.



I am not a humble man.

I want to know God, and despite my fear, to love him; I want to know my fellows and be known by them.

With little knowledge of myself and less of God, I say it: I desire the end of that which has defined me for myself, my pride.



I am “waiting on God.”

I am waiting on God, who heard my prayer and took, at a stroke, my shelter, my identity, colleagues who loved me, students who admired me. And my livelihood, of course.

What now?

I will, at some point, lose my confidence and lose my way. I am afraid, not only of God but for my small, conventional mind, the meanness of my expectations. But I am not of two minds. I am not a worldly man. I do not know how, nor do I wish, to keep myself in comfort, come what may.

I do know what it means to suffer, what it means to be saved.



This, then is my testament, my prayer against myself, against my assumption that nothing, no one, matters so much as I. I hope to find out what it means, in the language of my Lord, to die. What it means, perhaps, to live.

I call these jottings, in the fall of the year, at the fall of my earthly expectations, my Winter Journal.

Let winter come!

Let my change come.<sup>1</sup>



## A PRAYER AGAINST MYSELF

*T*his afternoon, I was pressed for time, and other shoppers, most of them elderly, impeded my progress down the aisle at the grocery store. I was furious; they were, I was certain, at fault. This feeling of mine, this near-conviction, will not, of course, bear scrutiny. These old folk did their shopping exactly as I do, carefully, sometimes indecisively, sometimes unaware of their surroundings. They can, in fact, be charged with nothing but an unintentional obstruction of my will.

My will. And why is my will, I am driven to ask, more important than the wills of others?

The answer is, I'm afraid, "Because it's mine."





## *A Prayer Against Myself*

*I* imagine telling the truth: “I believe, in spite of the evidence—I have unshakeable faith—that I am, of every living creature, that One, the one who matters. What matters, in all the universe, is that my will be done.” Though we live by this astonishing creed, we know better than to give it voice.

Pride will not bear scrutiny.



*I* am the kind of man who wants to know, and if possible, know why. But God draws a line and says, “No further.”

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God,” says Moses, “but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever.”<sup>1</sup>

Some things belong to God.



*A Prayer Against Myself*

Like every proud man, I dislike proud people. What seems so right to think about myself seems silly, even dangerous, in my neighbor.

How ugly my neighbor's pride! I see how authority, no matter how small the office, goes to his head. I see in him how pride is father to presumption, envy, anger, every kind of ill spirit, even when the stakes are paltry.



With what ferocity I express—have always expressed—my checks and disappointments! I am furious at the three-car accident which halts my progress on the highway and the rock against which I stub my toe.

No one knows such intense, irrational frustration as that man who, scarcely aware of his assumptions, thinks himself a god.



*A Prayer Against Myself*

I cannot, at once, believe God and believe myself to be a god.



Dare I trust myself? The very eyes through which I see are proud.

Is it possible to learn humility?

I dare trust God to guide my seeking and to change my heart.



High stakes.

To learn humility, it seems to me, might mean no less than to discover what it is to be a man.

What does it mean to be a man? Not to be nothing, not to be “a stone, a plant, a microbe,”<sup>ii</sup> not to be a god, but to be a man?



There is that something I call *I*, which questions and assesses all it hears or reads—or remembers, dimly, from its dreams. That part of me, that voice which yields or refuses, says yes or no, which sometimes says no to its own desire—

There is that something. Someone who decides.

I am not quite at the mercy of my own disquiet, my confusion, my temptation to despair. I am, though I am not sure what I mean by it, myself.

And yet I pray against myself.

*I pray against myself.*



*A Prayer Against Myself*

I choose God: I declare myself.

I declare against myself.



Looking at my wife in lamplight, reading, I see at once that there is no way to account for it, this life I called my own.

Why am I here? Why she here, reading?

I have, I admit, allowed myself to be distracted. For years, I applied myself to pointless ambition, ephemeral desires, accumulating and discarding. I discarded without a thought, without regret, those things I longed for.

What things? Everything. Possessions, reputation, praise.

I was blind to the mystery of being, of being here, of being here and not elsewhere, of being here now.<sup>iii</sup>

Pride has kept me from wonder.



*A Prayer Against Myself*

“I know what it means to suffer. What it means to be saved.” I said it, but meant only this: I am a desperate man. I am not resourceful. It is not for form’s sake that I pray.

I know from my experience, I know very well what the Psalmist means: “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.”<sup>iv</sup>

How such a man can be proud I do not know.



I am ashamed to recognize myself in Bernard of Clairvaux’s *Steps of Humility*. I am the man who, in conversation, does not desire to teach or learn, but rather to “know that you know that he knows.”<sup>v</sup> I am that man who says to himself, “I am not as other men are.”<sup>vi</sup>



## *A Prayer Against Myself*

In conversation, when I do not understand, I let the matter pass. I do not care enough about my fellows. I do not care enough to interrupt.



Though I suffer from my isolation, I persist in it. I have not wanted to be known; I have hidden myself from others as best I could.

I understand, I have always understood, that to let myself be known puts my illusions about myself, puts everything I have invested in myself, in danger.



*A Prayer Against Myself*

Though I like to think myself broad-minded, a lover of knowledge, I am in fact penurious and small, an ignorant man.

I do not love learning, not really. Everything I learn proves yet again how much I do not know. I do not like to be reminded of my ignorance.

I prefer my illusions.



As for the knowledge I possess, the things I preen myself for knowing, Proust is right: "What one knows does not belong to oneself."<sup>vii</sup>





## *A Prayer Against Myself*

For most of my life, I now realize, I didn't want others to love me. I wanted them to be impressed by me. I didn't want to know others; I instinctively resisted being known. I was aware of my loneliness: pride made me suffer. I was willing to suffer.



“*B*y the word of the Lord,” says the Psalmist, “the heavens were made / And the host of them by the breath of his mouth.” With the forming of a thought, the speaking of a word, God makes his desire reality: “For he spoke and it was done.”<sup>viii</sup>

To be God: the thought exhilarates as it debases. To speak: to have. To form the desire and effect it. Never to know frustration.

I am spared much; I have not the means, and not quite the will, to aim for the kind of power some men pursue.

But, God help me, I am one of them.

That same infected blood flows in my veins.



## *A Prayer Against Myself*

I admit to envy, a sin I deprecate in others and to which I had thought myself immune. Envy is a strain, a virulent strain, of pride: I should not be so surprised, so mortified to find myself infected.

How can I admit that any other thinks, perceives, so well as I, that any other speaks so well as I? A proud man, seeing the truth about himself, is a bitter man.

He hates the one who threatens his illusion.



This evening, Jane and I meet with neighbors, all of them Christians, to pray about injustices in our corner of the North Side. Many of these neighbors are poor, ill-educated, ill-equipped to defend themselves, and I anticipate, unhappily, the role of defender, spokesman. In fact, several of them pray, unprompted, with such passion and eloquence, with such profound understanding of the Scriptures, that I am forced to confront, yet again, my pride.

I had—I confess it—preened myself upon my singularity. My neighbors, I discover, are as passionate, as eloquent, as knowledgeable as I.

## *A Prayer Against Myself*

I feel foolish, ashamed, but also pleased, relieved. Pleased because I have more brothers and sisters than I knew. Pleased because God keeps and teaches them well. Relieved because this may be the first time God has answered my prayer for humility without having to hurt me.



“It is good for me that I have been afflicted,” says the Psalmist.<sup>ix</sup>

I myself, in my small way, have been afflicted. I, too, am shown the tenderness of God.

I am not a masochist. I don't want God to hurt me.

I choose to trust him: I trust he takes no pleasure in my pain.

Do I welcome pain?

With trepidation. I am not a masochist.



## *A Prayer Against Myself*

“Let us make a name for ourselves,” cried the builders of the tower of Babel, “lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the earth.”<sup>x</sup>

Jesus understands them. He understands the nature of despair: “Those who do not gather with me,” he declares, “are scattered abroad.”<sup>xi</sup>

To Jerusalem, our Lord cries out, “How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”<sup>xii</sup>

Humility permits us to be gathered. Jesus gathers us: we are gathered together, every one who is willing, gathered together in him.



## *A Prayer Against Myself*

When Jesus exclaims, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven,” his disciples respond with bewilderment: “Who then can be saved?” Our Lord’s reply must be the theme of my Winter Journal: “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”<sup>xiii</sup>

Do I pray against myself? Do I pray against my pride? Do I hope to find my way to humility? I have no power to change myself.

No power at all.

I know nothing but God’s mercy. I want nothing but this gift, to know him.



To know God.

I say it with fear—with fear and longing together—but I say it.



## *A Prayer Against Myself*

*I* do not wish to be a parody of him whose name really is I Am. I have but an intermittent sense of who I am, but know what I cannot be: I am not that one who is, in himself, complete.

I was not meant to be alone, and he who persists in thinking he is God must be, in the end, alone. Like Richard III, he will find nothing but himself and no escape from self: “Richard loves Richard: that is, I am I.”<sup>xiv</sup>



“*H*e has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,” exclaims Mary, in the Song that bursts from her at her kinswoman Elizabeth’s house.<sup>xv</sup> I understand her. Pride, my pride, is fundamentally an act of imagination: I imagine myself to be what I am not.

Pride divorces me from God and from my fellows; it makes certain I will have no reference point, no way of guessing what or who I am. I am scattered, as the builders of Babel, they who felt the urge to “make a name for themselves,” were scattered.

What need God do, to punish me, but leave me to myself?



## *A Prayer Against Myself*

This morning, at the breakfast table, I oppose, object, refuse. I am beside myself.

I am literally beside myself.

I sit beside myself and see myself at war against my wife, who loves me. I turn our quiet morning conversation, our little “talk,” into a battleground.

I defend myself—I defend my indefensible assumptions about who I am. I insist, with anger, that Jane see me as I see myself.

As I have seen myself.

For I begin to see myself in a different light. The man Jane loves, I understand to my despair, is smaller, needier, more vulnerable, fearful, sinful than the man I thought myself to be.



I want to be cured of the ills with which my pride afflicts me. But even without them, even freed from isolation, contempt and self-contempt, I will be no better. I still won't know how to live; I won't know, not here nor in heaven, how to be until I learn who I am, who I am now and who God meant, means, me to be.



*A Prayer Against Myself*

Even as a child, I held myself separate from others and could not bear reproof. I did not know that I was proud; I am not sure I knew the word or the concept. But I was aware of myself, aware of my self-regard.

Even that much clarity may be rare. Pride is hard to detect because it is a way of seeing: a lens through which one sees. How then does one become aware of it?

I do not know.

Nonetheless, I am encouraged. I do identify my pride; I am dismayed by it.

A beginning.



“Disassembled man”: Derek Walcott’s phrase.<sup>xvi</sup> I myself am so in pieces, I must marvel at God: how does he find in me the semblance, even, of a person?

How can he know me?

How can it be that a man like me, so helpless, in such disarray, presumes?

In spite of me, in spite of my absurd assumptions about myself, my Lord pursues me, waits on me, attends me.

He knows, better than I do, who I am.





*A Prayer Against Myself*

I have no power to heal myself, no power to change my heart. No power against my pride.

What can I do but wait on God?

Very well.

I will wait on him.

# CONFESSION

I am, I admit, afraid.

When I prayed “Do what you have to, Lord,” he answered me.

God *answered* me.

He answered me, and thus I am afraid.



God tells us that he is good, and I believe him. But he will do as he wills. Is he not God?

I do not define him or direct him; I cannot, in any way, control him.

When I say “my God,” I speak the language of love.

He is himself.



## *Confession*

If fear is the price of love, of life, I accept. I accept the conditions.

# NOTES

## Chapter 1. Something Has Happened

- i. *Let my change come*: See Job 14.14, KJV. “If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come.”

## Chapter 2. A Prayer Against Myself

- i. “*The secret things belong to the Lord our God*”: Deut. 29.29.
- ii. “*a stone, a plant, a microbe*”: Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, 116.
- iii. *I was blind*: cf. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, 19. “There is no reason for me to be here rather than there, now rather than then. Who put me here? By whose command and act were this time and place allotted to me?”
- iv. “*This poor man cried*”: Ps. 34.6., KJV.
- v. *I am the man who, in conversation*: Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux, *The Steps of Humility*, 13.41.
- vi. “*I am not as other men are*”: *ibid.*, 13.42.
- vii. *Proust is right*: Marcel Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, 573.
- viii. “*By the word of the Lord*”: Ps. 33.6, 9.

- ix. *"It is good for me"*: Ps. 119.71.
- x. *"Let us make a name for ourselves"*: Gen. 11.4.
- xi. *"Those who do not gather with me"*: Matt. 12.30.
- xii. *"How often I wanted"*: Matt. 23.37.
- xiii. *"Assuredly, I say to you"*: Matt. 19.23-26. See also Mark 10.23-27.
- xiv. *"Richard loves Richard"*: William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, 5.3.184.
- xv. *"He has scattered the proud"*: Luke 1.51.
- xvi. *"Disassembled man"*: Derek Walcott, *The Prodigal*, 53.

### Chapter 3. Pitiful Fledgling

- i. *"I never knew you"*: Matt. 7.23.
- ii. *"unaccommodated man"*: William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, 3.4.104-105. "Thou art the thing itself," Lear tells the ragged, apparently witless Edgar: "Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art."
- iii. *"with charity instead of partiality"*: C. S. Lewis, "Two Ways with the Self," *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, 194.
- iv. *blessed, unaware*: The allusion is to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," *Poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 186-209, lines 282-287. The mariner's sudden change of heart about the water-snakes, the "thousand slimy things" that

swarm round the vessel, marks the turning point of the poem:

O happy living things! no tongue  
Their beauty might declare:  
A spring of love gushed from my heart,  
And I blessed them unaware:  
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,  
And I blessed them unaware.

- v. *"Do not let your left hand know"*: Matt. 6.3.
- vi. *"enjoys the air it breathes"*: William Wordsworth, "Lines Written in Early Spring," *The Poetical Works of Wordsworth*, 81-82, lines 11-12.
- vii. *"For whoever exalts himself"*: Luke 14.11, 18.14; Matt. 23.12.
- viii. *"one man loved the pilgrim soul in you"*: W. B. Yeats, "When You Are Old," *Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, 40-41, lines 7-8. Gonne, for years the object of Yeats's devotion, and often his verse, married Major John MacBride, instead of the poet, in 1903.
- ix. *"I greet him the days I meet him"*: Gerard Manley Hopkins, "The Wreck of the *Deutschland*," *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 51-63, line 40.
- x. *"too high for me"*: Ps. 131.1, KJV.
- xi. *"Take my yoke upon you"*: Matt. 11.29.
- xii. *"Master, it is good for us"*: Luke 9.33.
- xiii. *"What is man, that you are mindful of him"*: Ps. 8.4.
- xiv. *"What is man, that you should exalt him"*: Job 7.17.

- xv. *"I have uttered"*: Job 42.3.
- xvi. *At my conversion*: cf. Abraham Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, 93. "Faith precedes any palpable experience, rather than derives from it."

#### Chapter 4. Not A Virtue, but a Recognition

- i. *"done what was your duty to do"*: Luke 17.10.
- ii. *"how to stay quietly in my room"*: Pascal, *Pensées*, 37. "Sometimes, when I set to thinking about the various activities of men, the dangers and troubles which they face at Court, or in war, giving rise to so many quarrels and passions, daring and often wicked enterprises and so on, I have often said that the sole cause of man's unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his room."
- iii. *"Come to me"*: Matt. 11.28.
- iv. *"I trust in the mercy"*: Ps. 52.8.
- v. *"I'm sure that if one is brave"*: Vincent Van Gogh to Theo Van Gogh, 7 or 8 September 1889, *Letters of Vincent Van Gogh*, 464.
- vi. *"Yes, real life"*: *ibid*, 464.
- vii. *It is natural to make a list*: See, for example, Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and its Fruits*, vol. 8, 239-243.
- viii. *"a really ghastly amount"*: Florence Allshorn, "The St. Julian's Community," in J. H. Oldham, *Florence Allshorn and the Story of St. Julian's*, 83.
- ix. *"the misery caused by pride"*: *ibid.*, 87.

- x. *"I must start"*: Czesław Miłosz, "To Raja Rao," *New and Collected Poems, 1931-2003*, 254-256, lines 40-42.
- xi. *"O wretched man that I am"*: Rom. 7.24.
- xii. *"In every one of us"*: Czesław Miłosz, "Report," *New and Collected Poems, 1931-2003*, 589-590, line 8.
- xiii. *"Preserve me, O God"*: Ps. 16.1.
- xiv. *"You are an offense to me"*: Matt. 16.22-23.
- xv. *"Deny yourself"*: Matt. 16.24. "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.'"
- xvi. *"But who do you say that I am?"*: Matt. 16.15.
- xvii. *"You are the Christ"*: Matt. 16.16.
- xviii. *"A servant is not greater than his master"*: John 13.16, 15.20.
- xix. *"For you died"*: Col. 3.3.
- xx. *The Psalmist is right*: Ps. 51.10. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, / and renew a steadfast spirit within me."
- xxi. *"Seventy times seven"*: Matt. 18.21-22. "Then Peter came to Him and said, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.'"
- xxii. *The Psalmist crying*: Ps. 130.1.



- xxiii. *“When thou hast done”*: John Donne, “A Hymne to God the Father,” *The Complete English Poems*, 490-491, lines 5, 11, 17.
- xxiv. *William Cowper concluding*: William Cowper, “Light Shining Out of Darkness,” *Poetical Works of William Cowper*, 485, lines 23-24.
- xxv. *“And what does the Lord require of you . . . I will give you rest”*: Mic. 6.8, Isa. 30.15, John 10.9, Rom. 12.8, 1 Thess. 5.17, Matt. 11.28.
- xxvi. *As surely as the woman*: Matt. 9.20-22.
- xxvii. *“The Lord takes pleasure”*: Ps. 147.11.
- xxviii. *“It is the Father’s good pleasure”*: Luke 12.32.

## Confession

- i. *Lord, you have known me*: Ps. 138.6. “Though the Lord is on high, yet he regards the lowly; / But the proud he knows from afar.”

## Chapter 5. “A Child in Tears for an Apple”

- i. *“The great rage, you see”*: Shakespeare, *King Lear*, 4.7.77-78.
- ii. *“Nor is he any longer self-satisfied”*: Fénelon to Madame la Comtesse de Montberon, n.d., *Letters of Love and Counsel*, 238.
- iii. *“like a tree beside the waters”*: Ps. 1.3.
- iv. *“by the power of his resurrection”*: Phil. 3.10.

- v. *"Thy will bee done"*: Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici*, in *"Religio Medici" and Other Works*, ed. L. C. Martin, 75.
- vi. *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom"*: Ps. 111.10, Prov. 9.10.
- vii. *"Walk humbly with your God"*: Mic. 6.8.
- viii. *"Behold the proud"*: Hab. 2.4.
- ix. *"I struck the board and cry'd"*: George Herbert, "The Collar," *Complete English Works*, 149-150, lines 1-2.
- x. *But as I raved*: *ibid.*, lines 33-36.
- xi. *"the obscure sorcery of the earth"*: Salvatore Quasimodo, "19 Gennaio 1944," *Tutte le poesie*, 230-231, line 17. The translation is mine.
- xii. *"a sign that reaches beyond life"*: *ibid.*, line 16. The concluding lines of Quasimodo's poem are striking:
- We seek a sign that reaches beyond life,  
Beyond the obscure sorcery of the earth  
Where even now, through tombs of rubble,  
The grass, malignant, urges up its flower.
- xiii. *Here is a child, our Lord says*: Matt. 18.2-3. "Then Jesus called a little child to Him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, 'Assuredly I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.'"
- xiv. *Why Dubuffet? Why George Macdonald?*: Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985), born in Le Havre, was a painter, sculptor, and graphic artist. The Scotsman

George Macdonald (1824-1905) is the author of *Lilith*, *Phantastes*, and several children's classics, including *The Princess and the Goblin* and *At the Back of the North Wind*.

- xv. *I mean to pull my cloak about me*: With apologies to J. K. Rowling, whose Harry Potter possesses just such a cape.
- xvi. *"I have come that they may have life"*: Jn. 10.10.
- xvii. *"Out of his heart will flow"*: Jn. 7.38.
- xviii. *self-love, "which is troubled and disquieted"*: St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to a Devout Life*, 167. "Besides, this anger and vexation against ourselves tend to pride, and flow from no other source than self-love, which is troubled and disquieted to see itself imperfect."
- xix. *I can "no longer live by thinking"*: William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 5.2.50.
- xx. *"And just as you want men to do"*: Luke 6.31. See also Matt. 7.12.
- xxi. *"He hardly recognizes himself"*: André Louf, *The Way of Humility*, 21. "Such a person has henceforward attained a profound peace because his whole being has been destroyed and rebuilt by grace. He hardly recognizes himself. He has become a different person."
- xxii. *Like those sheep in John's Gospel*: Jn. 10.9. "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."

## Chapter 6. Working It Out

- i. *Be a servant, Jesus says*: Matt. 20.27-28. “And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.”
- ii. *“Study to be quiet”*: I Thess. 4.11, KJV.
- iii. *“Work out your own salvation”*: Phil. 2.12.
- iv. *Like Abraham*: Heb. 11.8.
- v. *“Now I am here”*: George Herbert, “Affliction I,” *Complete English Works*, 44-46, lines 55-56.
- vi. *“Watch and pray”*: Matt. 26.41, Mark 14.38.
- vii. *“What? Could you not watch?”*: Matt. 26.40.
- viii. *“Inasmuch as you did it”*: Matt. 25.40.
- ix. *“Assuredly I say to you”*: Mark 10.29-30.
- x. *“Give and it will be given to you”*: Luke 6.38.
- xi. *“How little of the sea”*: Samuel Rutherford, to Matthew Mowat, 1637, *Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, 189.
- xii. *“In his presence”*: Ps. 16.11.
- xiii. *“Mercy and truth have met together”*: Ps. 85.10.
- xiv. *“Praise,” says the Psalmist, “is beautiful”*: Ps. 147.1.
- xv. *“It is I; do not be afraid”*: Matt. 14.27.
- xvi. *When he who kills and brings to life*: Deut. 32.39. “Now see that I, even I, am He, / And there is no God besides me; / I kill and I make alive; / I wound

and I heal; / Nor is there any who can deliver from  
my hand.”

xvii. *who “speaks and it is done”*: Ps. 33.9.

xviii. *“Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul”*: Ps. 131.  
2.

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ABOUT  
  
BRUCE RAY SMITH

*B*ruce Ray Smith was born in Dunedin, Florida, in 1952. He spent most of his life as a teacher, and eventually acquired a Ph.D in English literature, from Washington University in St. Louis. Though unquestionably a Christian living in, and struggling with, the twenty-first century, his love of seventeenth-century English prose is evident in *Winter Light*, his first book.

The part of his life most relevant to *Winter Light* began in 1980, when he returned from L'Abri Fellowship in Greatham, England (he was a student, not a teacher), to join a small group of Christians who had moved to, and formed a church in, a poor, racially mixed neighborhood on the north side of St. Louis. Most of them, who were young then, are still in the same neighborhood thirty years later, and remain a tight-knit community. Bruce chose not to pursue an academic career when he realized that the meaning of his life was tied, in every way, to his church (Grace and Peace Church) and his neighborhood.

For more information about Bruce, visit the website [www.bruceraysmith.com](http://www.bruceraysmith.com).

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# KIND WORDS ABOUT



## *WINTER LIGHT*

In the honest pages of *Winter Light*, I found the prideful secrets of my own heart revealed. As I read I breathed a quiet, “me too.” Bruce Ray Smith’s particular quest for humility gives voice to our common longing for transformation. We want to be changed, but the heart is deceitful above all things. We want to know God in our very bones, but there is a cost. With poetic and personal style, Smith offers a deeply insightful reflection on pride and humility that flows from the narrative of his life and prayers. *Winter Light* is that rare kind of book, where literary writing meets lived, biblical theology. It’s a treasure!

Andi Ashworth  
Author, Co-Director of Art House America  
Nashville, TN



I commend Bruce Ray Smith’s book *Winter Light*. Once I had begun to read I could not stop—both because of the raw power of the content and because of the brevity and starkness of the style which match the subject so well. I was deeply moved by its sometimes painful honesty and by the moments of profound joy that light up these pages.

Bruce is acutely insightful in his analysis of our arrogant and self-centered manner of living and of our need to recognize our spiritual poverty and to discover our dependence on the support and love of others. This slim volume deserves to be widely and often read. I know that I will return to it again and again and use it as an aid for my own self-reflection and prayers. The endless patience and grace of God shines a bright light across this bleak landscape of the heart.

*Jerram Barrs*

*Professor of Christianity and Contemporary Culture  
Resident Scholar at the Francis Schaeffer Institute  
Covenant Theological Seminary  
St. Louis, Missouri*



When Martin Luther penned the first of The Ninety-five Theses, “When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ said, ‘repent,’ he meant that the entire life of believers should be one of repentance,” he gave a gift to us all, for he cast a glorious light upon the blessed path to close communion with our Triune God. *Winter Light* modeled that life of repentance with a ruthless beauty and searching vulnerability that I find rare in Christian authors. Because Bruce Ray Smith found God’s searching grace a holy gift (Acts 5:31), I was encouraged as a reader to do the same. He helped me to kiss the blade of God’s convicting grace and pull it in. I have been significantly helped in my repentance

and faith by this work. I am a thankful debtor to the author, a brother I have not met, but who has helped me “find the old paths, and walk in them.”

*Joe Novenson  
Senior Teaching Pastor  
Lookout Mountain Presbyterian Church  
Lookout Mountain, GA*



*B*rother Lawrence himself could well have written this story; and those of us who find strength, hope, and instruction in Brother Lawrence's words will find those same things here in the confessional words of Bruce Ray Smith.

*Phyllis Tickle  
Editor, Author, Playwright,  
& Compiler of The Divine Hours  
Millington, TN*