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## ALLEGORIES OF DIVINE LIFE

As a vehicle for conveying the Life Divine, the allegorical is non-pareil. How enchanting, how lovely, how exquisite it is! An eternal relationship exists between God and individuals. And yet, where is one to get the capacity to grasp the significance, the implications of this relationship? Will not one's understanding be coloured by one's worldliness? And still, since it is a Divine Play that is being conveyed, there is the hope and possibility that the capacity may come through.

The *Song Of Songs* is a perfect example of an allegory of the Life Divine. What other 'worldly' symbol so perfectly conveys the meaning inherent and implied in one who has fallen in love with the Divine? No simile is ever perfect yet does not this one convey something of the special relationship between the Divine and individuals? There exists a unique parallel between the stages of spiritual unfoldment and progressive approach to the Divine and the play between, and progress towards, the consummation of the Bride and the Bridegroom.

From the mystic's point of view, the courtship, betrothal, and consummation between the two lovers must have appeared tailor-made as a mirror and reflection of his/her own innermost experience of his/her own soul. It is easy to understand how the mystic could compare the insatiable desire of two lovers, their intimate and intense relationship, and their total commitment and contemplation of each other with his/her own inward communion with the Divine.

Thus we find such Christian mystics as St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. John of the Cross, and William of St. Thierry equating the Divine Word with the Bridegroom and the human soul with the Bride. We find St. Francis of Sales exhorting, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ also loved the Church and you wives, love your husbands as the Church loveth her Saviour." This love is the sweetest, most captivating of all sentiments and nowhere is this expression better exemplified than in the love between the Divine (and His Word) and the human soul. Between human beings this love finds its fullest expression in the love between the Bride and the Bridegroom. They have one inheritance, one dwelling place, and in consummation, one body.

The Bride (the soul) is first and foremost a lover. It is neither fear nor gain that motivates her. Hers is a love relationship. All is offered; nothing is withheld. Consummed in love, she seeks the "kiss of his mouth". Even as the Bride pines for her lover, so does the soul thirst for God.

St. Bernard opened his commentary on the *Song of Songs* explaining "the delightful ploy of speech, let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth." Here is the soul aspiring for that unshakable bond, the undivided love, the indivisible unity. The kiss symbolizes a revelation of, a demonstration, a declaration of devotion. This embrace is all encompassing. "Love is filled with itself, and where love has come it overcomes and transforms all other feelings." Love knows naught but itself. The Bride and the Bridegroom, what else do they seek but to love and be loved?

The Bride, the soul, has nothing but love and in this love the Bridegroom is content for he seeks nothing but love. The Bridegroom, who is love itself, requires only love, and the Bride devotes her entire self to Him in the hopes of making Him content.

St. John of the Cross stated that "Saying of love understood mystically, such as the Songs between the Soul and the Spouse, cannot be fairly explained by words of any kind." Who can write down that which God reveals to loving souls wherein He dwells? "It is for this reason that, by means of figures, comparisons, and similitudes mystics sometimes exude, overflow, and utter secret mysteries from the abundance of the Spirit, rather than explain these things rationally.

Thus, St. John, having fallen in love with the Divine, intuitively, instinctively, interpreted the *Song of Songs* from his own inner experience. Inspiring images of beauty, sweetness, and enchantment poured forth from his heart describing the relationship of the Bride and the Bridegroom, the Soul and God. From peak to peak to the summit of perfection, the soul pursues her beloved. In a language which inspires the heart of the reader to feel every impulse, every wound, every beckon and call, every throb of excitement and expectation of the soul, one is bound in St. John's web of love.

St. John leads us from the search for the Beloved, to the Betrothal, the marriage - all the states experienced by the Bride and employed by him as a dramatic representation of the love play between the soul and the Divine. The dialogue of love has thus been the vehicle and inspiration for

an incomparable expression of Divine Love the likes of which is one of the most sublime and loveliest that the human heart has experienced or the human mind has ever expressed.

Every being needs love, inhales love and exhales love. For love is the basic breath of the Life Divine. Love knows no fear and so, love needs no falsehood to support it. It is only fear that makes individuals warp the face of truth so as to make it appear more pleasant for those whom they fear. Love seeks no reward for it is its own reward. That is the sole motive – the joy of loving and being loved. Love is the Life Divine – the Life Divine is love.

The heart is the alter whereupon the lamp of love is lit. When the heart is ablaze with love, the entire being of an individual becomes as if on fire. Like live embers in one's chest, so does one feel the Divine surge of love as it flares up. The piece of coal, one's heart, when it comes into contact with the live ember, love, also becomes a live ember. The heat of fervor thus rages and roars and reduces one's being to ashes. As the impurities are burned away, a song of sweetness, a symphony of celestial sounds, breaks forth. An incredible sweetness, a constant joy beings to overflow and delight fills the heart.

Love, love, love. Do you want knowledge? Then love. Do you want faith? Then love. Do you want the Life Divine? Then love. Love is the Presence of the living God placed within the human soul. Love is not something to be purified.

The human soul is God's Bride and when love is free and directed towards the Divine, the soul becomes like unto God. Ponder, O my soul, that most holy canticle so that love may be kindled in you. Participate in the conversation between the Bridegroom and the Bride so that, just as like produces like, such affections will be possessed and understood by you.

Just as a bride has only one desire, one aspiration, one love, so must the soul emulate her. Fix your gaze steadily upon the Lord and entrust yourself completely and without reserve unto Him, my soul. Let love itself be the guide, the inspiration, and the purifier. "Love alone fully understands Divine things."

St. Francis divided love into two divisions. First is a love in which one loves for what it will bring one, and the second type is a love for love's sake. It is this latter type which is the superior love and which is necessary

for the Life Divine. This type of love in which one regards every act in one's life as an offering of love to God for God's sake in the central point in St. Francis' teaching. It brings a nobleness, an intensity, to every act as well as a simplicity which gives the soul great joy and peace. This type of love engenders a loving detachment and creates a readiness to follow a Life Divine. To serve God with a love Divine is to be free. Humility, happiness, enthusiasm, all the virtues gather to such a soul. Life itself become a continuous offering to the Divine.

St. Francis used simple expressions. His message was simple and clear. There is no need to make the Divine complex and mysterious, far off and hard to understand. His simple message exhorted one to be like a bee searching for honey, like a magnet's attraction to the loadstone, like a mother's love for her child.

How easy it is. If one's parents are in need of assistance, love points homewards, not towards the monastery. If one is a Prince, love points towards performing one's princely duty and preserving the Royal Line, not towards a premature chastity. If one is married, love points towards providing and protecting one's family not towards a vow of poverty in the desert.

Love leads and for some it leads here, and for others there. To follow is to serve, is to surrender, for no other reason than the Divine Life commends it. "O law all of love and all for love." Everlasting peace and happiness comes to those who obey the Life Divine. "Yes, we are in this world not to do our own will, but the will of Thy goodness which has placed us here."

If the Bridegroom doesn't come, the Bride becomes anxious and her ardour increases. She languishes, she suffers, she lives in hope and constant expectation. Ten-thousand tears fall and yet but an instant's appearance all is forgotten, all is her joy in His sweet smile.

Gradually, step by step, the Bridegroom's sweet will leads the Bride from courtship to betrothal and then from betrothal to marriage and consummation. Who can mark the beginning of the continuous waves of the ocean? It is an impossible task. If any one decided to do so, the wave which one starts the calculation will be considered the beginning. The wave with which one stops will be for them, the end. There is a beginning and an end for that individual's count. There is no beginning or end for the Life Divine. Love is without beginning or end. To describe that love, the mystics have described a drop of that ocean. But

every drop is saturated with His sweetness and thus every drop is pure nectar. The same sweetness exists in every drop and thus no matter where one drinks, one will taste only His love.

Be lamps of love. Love saturates all activities with joy and peace. Love ennobles the least and the lowest. Love God. Love the Life Divine. Love yourself for the Divine that is enshrined therein. Love others for the Divine that is enshrined in them. Live the Life Divine.