

life', describes the sort of contemplation I have in mind as 'a loving, simple and habitual attention of the mind to God'. Bossuet called it the prayer of simplicity and explained it very clearly. It is the normal development of mental prayer, active contemplative reaching into the lowest grade of passive prayer which St Teresa called the prayer of quiet. It would seem that the distracted mind of the active worker for souls cannot normally go higher. But what he may lack in the reach of actual prayer he can compensate for in virtual prayer, that is, in the faithful and generous doing of God's will in his appointed state of life. As we have seen, charity is nothing else than the doing of God's will. Our Lord said that his meat was to do his Father's will. He is our Way; and they who spend their days in toil and care for souls are living the life that he lived. It is unthinkable that in such a life they should not be able to reach the heights of union. It was in fact apostolic men in the world whom Christ had primarily in mind, along with the twelve, when he offered to the Father his prayer for their unity in the divine life. This is, I think, clear from the context.



THE SONG OF LOVE—II

A MODERN COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS

DRAW me.' After being impelled almost irresistibly to beg for the divine embrace, after reflecting on the incomparable worth of God's love and realising that without the assistance of the Beloved she cannot attain to it, the soul calls upon him to draw her to himself. Is it then necessary that the Spouse should be drawn to follow him, as if she came unwillingly and not of her own free choice? Is she so weak that she cannot walk alone? Or is she so reluctant that pressure must be brought to bear upon her? Her request is due to none of these causes. Abundant evidence exists in the physical universe of the law of attraction. The rain in the clouds is attracted towards the earth: the moisture from the warm earth is sucked up as vapour

towards the sun. The planets that revolve about the sun are kept in their regular orbits by yielding to its influence, whilst the sun itself and the myriad stars that form the milky way are being swept inevitably to a definite point in space. The most vast as well as the most distant bodies are subject to this power. So likewise, in the spiritual sphere, all souls are attracted towards their one true centre, God. But whilst material things obey unconsciously the law of gravitation or attraction, no spiritual nature can be drawn to God except of its own free will.

That is why the soul cries out: *Draw me!* She recognises in God the love, the power and the authority which alone can regulate her life. Outside his love, creative influences will fail to operate: outside his power she can but rush like some shooting star or erratic comet to her destruction: outside his authority she cannot observe the true progress of her spiritual orbit. She must be drawn to the fount of Love, otherwise she will be sterile: she must be drawn to the source of truth, otherwise she will err: she must be drawn to the well-spring of life otherwise she will die. Is it not a passive yielding to God's embrace, a submission, a complete surrender which is required of the soul? And, to allow herself to be drawn is essentially the same as not to resist his attraction. For, as a result of man's first fault and his inherent inclination towards independence, the soul unwittingly retreats from the divine encounter. Through ignorance, through fear of what she does not fully comprehend, she is moved unconsciously to pull in the opposite direction. She would, if left to her own device, fly off at a tangent. Yet if the baneful effects of Adam's disobedience are to be counteracted and the soul's potentialities are to be developed to their fullest capacity, she must submit unhesitatingly to the action of God's love.

Draw me, she cries. My difficulties arise through the constitution of human nature. Placed midway between heaven and earth, made to the image of God and yet uniting in myself both angel and beast, I long for light but pursue after shadows. Instinctively, I know that my ultimate happiness depends on the possession of Beauty, Power, Riches and Wisdom, but I am deceived by counterfeits and expend my

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energies in running after phantoms. I long to come to God, but I am drawn to earth: I yearn for Reality but bow down before idols.

How is this tension to be resolved? How are these two contrary elements, spirit and flesh, to be reconciled? Is mind to be submerged into matter, so that man can live like a free and healthy animal? Or must the mind trample upon its earth-bound partner in its endeavour to scale the stars? Both these alternatives have found their fervent disciples, not always with the happiest results. The truth lies somewhere in the middle way. Spirit and body are not two separate entities that enjoy an independent existence, but two consistent principles of one and the same entity. They are correlatives, complementaries, not contradictories. Though the soul may live without the body, she cannot see, hear, touch, taste or smell without the organs of sense provided by the body. So essential to the well-being of the soul is her humble partner that even in heaven the soul is unable to enjoy the full measure of her beatitude without the companionship of the resurrected body. To attain a peace on earth, then, analogous to the peace that is enjoyed in heaven, these contrary inclinations must be resolved on a plane higher than either of the two antagonistic elements. They must both submit to the unifying attraction of God. As all movement ends in rest, all pain in consolation, all life in death, so all tension ends in complete tranquillity. The drawing power of divine love issues, not in the displacement of body and soul, but in their sure and peaceful order. Divine love, if unresistingly and consciously yielded to, will correlate the demands of spirit and matter and produce conditions ideally suited to man's perfect well-being.

Draw me, urges the soul. Draw me away from the seductive wanderings of the memory, from the restless curiosity of the understanding, from the imperious demands of the will. Draw me from the insidious promptings of my passions and from the enervating pleasures of sense. Draw me rather to the remembrance of your past mercies, to the understanding of your mysterious ways, to the love of your incomparable goodness. Use my senses to draw me to you through the beauties of nature, through the harmony of music, the

touch of the sun's warmth, the scent of flowers, the taste of earth's fruits. Draw me to you, so that everything may prove to be, not a counter-attraction or a cause of separation, but a means of union and a bond of peace.

As soon as the soul attains to the state in which she allows herself to be drawn to God, and even prays with urgency and insistence to be drawn, then all the faculties follow in her train. And sometimes so eager is their alacrity to combine with the will in serving God, that, in the persons of the maidens, they say: *We will run after thee*. Their promptitude is immediately obvious in their quick interest, animated zeal and immense effort. Then the following after Christ becomes, not as one from afar, as was Peter's after Gethsemane, not a slow, painful plodding on as of the disciples who were weary in the way, but a strenuous race in which the speed of the leader is matched by that of the followers. When the will is caught up by love, then nothing seems difficult: and the labours of striving and the disappointments at not attaining are gloriously transfigured. 'Where there is love', says Saint Augustine, 'there is no labour: or, if there is labour, then the labour is loved.'

Under the impulse of love, obedience to the promptings of the Spirit becomes less irksome and painful, so that with every movement of body and mind the soul approaches one step nearer to the goal of holiness. In revelation, in the Incarnation of the Son, in the mission of the Holy Spirit, in the dispensation of the sacraments and in other ways, God is continually drawing the soul to himself: and her belief, her acceptance and her growing in love is the way in which she runs. 'I ran the way of thy commandments when thou didst enlarge my heart' (Ps. 118). Thus, the care of God for the soul consists mainly in drawing her to himself: whilst her attainment of spiritual maturity consists in submitting to his attraction and in running after him.

All run, but only one gains the prize. She whose love is more ardent runs more swiftly and arrives sooner: and when she arrives at her journey's end, she suffers no repulse nor even delay: the gates are opened to her and she is brought in as one beloved and warmly welcome. The others, though fervent in spirit, follow afar off: they are still weak

in love and unable to press forward with the same intensity of devotion. Thus, she is able to recount to them: *The king hath brought me into his chamber.*

God does not merely draw the soul into his presence when she responds with love: he brings her to the enjoyment of his innermost secrets. He is not satisfied with granting any kind of happiness and fulfilment to his spouse, but brings her into the closest contact with himself, knowing that only in indissoluble union with him is abiding and unfailling bliss to be found. This is the reward of love. For though the repression of the wanton and inquisitive senses by rigid discipline is commendable, though the fulfilment of duty and a filial reverence are acceptable to the Beloved, it is only ardent affection that wins access to his bedchamber. Mary was called to his feet, Saint Peter to his side, Saint John to his bosom, Saint Paul to the third heaven: but the spouse is called into the inner chamber where, in perfect intimacy and peace, she and the Beloved may converse together.

O place of true repose, which may not unfitly be called a chamber! O place in which God is beheld in peace and tranquillity and in which is experienced the influence of his loving, benign and perfect will! That vision does not terrify but soothes: it does not arouse curiosity but allays it: it tranquillises the spirit instead of wearying it. Here the God of peace renders all things peaceful; and the soul, looking up with unflinching gaze at his ineffable stillness, is herself awed into quiescence. . . .

But why does the soul feel constrained to excuse her outward appearance in the words: *I am black but beautiful, O ye daughters of Jerusalem?* It is evident that some of her companions speak disparagingly of her: she is obliged to meet the attacks and reproaches of those who envy her glory, and who, while in the body they appear to be her maidens, are yet far removed from her in spirit.

She has run to the inner chamber of the Beloved, and with what eagerness and haste! She has not faltered on the way, but expended every ounce of energy and strength; and now, weary, footsore, splashed with mire and torn by thorns, she is not prepossessing in appearance. The bystanders criticise her abject and humble exterior, they draw attention to

her lack of comeliness. She is an object of scorn and mockery. How easy it is for those who make no effort to despise the weariness and exhaustion of those who strive! How easy for the non-combatant without a scratch to laugh at the wounds of those who fight! God allows this for his own divine purpose, to ground the soul in humility and to wean her from the applause of men. He wishes her to accept both suffering and mockery through love.

See with what patience and gentleness she receives their remarks! She does not irritate them by laying emphasis on the favours she has been given, but strives to be pacific with them who are enemies of her peace. She humbly acknowledges that she is black, that outwardly her appearance is vile: yet inwardly she is beautiful because she contemplates with unveiled face the glory of the Lord. Like Paul, she is reputed ignoble, the offscouring of this world: yet also like him, she has been raised above all earthly loves and brought to the inner sanctuary of God.

Growth in the love of God is not measured by the soul's degree of sensible devotion, but by the magnitude of her sufferings courageously borne. The thought of God may be rest: but the companionship of God is labour and suffering. The nearer the soul approaches to her divine lover, the more deeply will she experience the bitterness of his Passion and share in his ignominy and failure: the more often, too, will she be an object of derision to those who are insensitive to spiritual ideals. . . .