

32. When you looked at me
your eyes imprinted your grace in me;
for this you loved me ardently;
and thus my eyes deserved
to adore what they beheld in you.

33. Do not despise me;
for if, before, you found me dark,
now truly you can look at me
since you have looked
and left in me grace and beauty.

Bridegroom

34. The small white dove
has returned to the ark with an olive branch;
and now the turtledove
has found its longed-for mate
by the green river banks.

35. She lived in solitude,
and now in solitude has built her nest;
and in solitude he guides her,
he alone, who also bears
in solitude the wound of love.

Bride

36. Let us rejoice, Beloved,
and let us go forth to behold ourselves in your beauty,
to the mountain and to the hill,
to where the pure water flows,
and further, deep into the thicket.

37. And then we will go on
to the high caverns in the rock
which are so well concealed;
there we shall enter
and taste the fresh juice of the pomegranates.

38. There you will show me
what my soul has been seeking,
and then you will give me,
you, my life, will give me there
what you gave me on that other day:

39. the breathing of the air,
the song of the sweet nightingale,
the grove and its living beauty
in the serene night,
with a flame that is consuming and painless.

40. No one looked at her,
nor did Aminadab appear;
the siege was still;
and the cavalry,
at the sight of the waters, descended.

THEME

1. These stanzas begin with a person's initial steps in the service of God and continue until the ultimate state of perfection is reached, which is spiritual marriage. They refer, consequently, to the three states or ways of spiritual exercise (purgative, illuminative, and unitive) through which a person passes in advancing to this state, and they describe some of the characteristics and effects of these ways.

2. The initial stanzas treat of the state of beginners, that of the purgative way.

The subsequent ones deal with the state of proficient, in which the spiritual betrothal is effected, that is, the illuminative way.

The stanzas following these refer to the unitive way, that of the perfect, where spiritual marriage takes place. This unitive way of the perfect follows the illuminative way of the proficient.

The final stanzas speak of the beatific state, that sole aspiration of a person who has reached perfection.

*The beginning of the commentary
on the love songs between the bride and Christ, the Bridegroom.*

STANZA 1

Introduction

1. The soul at the beginning of this song has grown aware of her obligations and observed that life is short [Jb. 14:5], the path leading to eternal life constricted [Mt. 7:14], the just one scarcely saved [1 Pt. 4:18],

the things of the world vain and deceitful [Eccl. 1:2], that all comes to an end and fails like falling water [2 Sam. 14:14], and that the time is uncertain, the accounting strict, perdition very easy, and salvation very difficult. She knows on the other hand of her immense indebtedness to God for having created her solely for himself, and that for this she owes him the service of her whole life; and because he redeemed her solely for himself she owes him every response of love. She knows, too, of the thousand other benefits by which she has been obligated to God from before the time of her birth, and that a good part of her life has vanished, that she must render an account of everything—of the beginning of her life as well as the later part—unto the last penny [Mt. 5:26], when God will search Jerusalem with lighted candles [Zeph. 1:12], and that it is already late—and the day far spent [Lk. 24:29]—to remedy so much evil and harm. She feels on the other hand that God is angry and hidden because she desired to forget him so in the midst of creatures. Touched with dread and interior sorrow of heart over so much loss and danger, renouncing all things, leaving aside all business, and not delaying a day or an hour, with desires and sighs pouring from her heart, wounded now with love for God, she begins to call her Beloved and say:

Where have you hidden,
Beloved, and left me moaning?
you fled like the stag
after wounding me;
I went out calling you, but you were gone.

Commentary

2. In this first stanza the soul, enamored of the Word, her Bridegroom, the Son of God, longs for union with him through clear and essential vision. She records her longings of love and complains to him of his absence, especially since his love wounds her. Through this love she went out from all creatures and from herself, and yet she must suffer her Beloved's absence, for she is not freed from mortal flesh as the enjoyment of him in the glory of eternity requires.¹ Accordingly she says:

Where have you hidden?

3. This is like saying: O Word, my Spouse, show me where you are hidden. In her petition she seeks the manifestation of his divine essence, because the hiding place of the Word of God is, as St. John asserts [Jn. 1:18], the bosom of the Father, that is, the divine essence, which is alien to every mortal eye and hidden from every human intellect. Isaiah

1. From this perspective, she considers, in looking back, the journey that was undertaken in order to reach her goal. The commentary on the last five stanzas treats more directly of this desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ.

proclaimed in speaking to God: *Indeed, you are a hidden God* [Is. 45:15].

It is noteworthy that, however elevated God's communications and the experiences of his presence are, and however sublime a person's knowledge of him may be, these are not God essentially, nor are they comparable to him because, indeed, he is still hidden to the soul. Hence, regardless of all these lofty experiences, a person should think of him as hidden and seek him as one who is hidden, saying: "Where have You hidden?"

Neither the sublime communication nor the sensible awareness of his nearness is a sure testimony of his gracious presence, nor are dryness and the lack of these a reflection of his absence. As a result, the prophet Job exclaims: *If he comes to me I shall not see him, and if he goes away I shall not understand* [Jb. 9:11].

4. It must be understood that if a person experiences some elevated spiritual communication or feeling or knowledge, it should not be thought that the experiences are similar to the clear and essential vision or possession of God, or that the communication, no matter how remarkable it is, signifies a more notable possession of God or union with him. It should be known too that if all these sensible and spiritual communications are wanting and individuals live in dryness, darkness, and dereliction, they must not thereby think that God is any more absent than in the former case. People, actually, cannot have certain knowledge from the one state that they are in God's grace or from the other that they are not. As the Wise Man says, *We do not know if we are worthy of love or abhorrence before God* [Eccl. 9:1].

The soul's chief aim in this verse is not to ask for sensible devotion, in which there is neither certain nor clear possession of the Bridegroom in this life, but for the manifest presence and vision of his divine essence, in which she desires to be secure and satisfied in the next life.

5. The bride of the divine Song of Songs had this very idea when, longing for union with the divinity of the Word, her Bridegroom, she asked the Father: *Show me where you pasture and where you rest at midday* [Sg. 1:7]. In requesting him to disclose his place of pasture, she wanted him to reveal the essence of the divine Word, his Son. For the Father does not pasture anywhere else than in his only Son, for the Son is the glory of the Father. And in begging that he show her his place of rest, she was asking to see that same Son. The Son is the only delight of the Father, who rests nowhere else nor is present in any other than in his beloved Son. He rests wholly in his Son, communicating to him his essence at midday, which is eternity, where he ever begets him and has begotten him.

When the soul, the bride, cries: "Where have you hidden?" she seeks this pasture, the Word, her Bridegroom, where the Father feeds in