

John of the Cross

III. Spiritual Canticle

22-35

Spiritual Marriage

life of love in perfect union



John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza 22 (Transposed from Stanza 27 in the first version of the Canticle)

[Chorus]

The bride has entered
the sweet garden of her desire,
and she rests in delight,
laying her neck
on the gentle arms of her Beloved.

'The spiritual marriage is incomparably greater than the spiritual espousal, for it is a total transformation in the Beloved in which each surrenders the entire possession of self to the other with a certain consummation of the union of love. The soul thereby becomes divine, becomes God through participation, insofar as is possible in this life.'(22.3)

'His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me!'

(Canticle 2:6; 8:3)

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Stanza 22 (Transposed from Stanza 27 in the first version of the Canticle)

[Chorus]

The bride has entered
the sweet garden of her desire,
and she rests in delight,
laying her neck
on the gentle arms of her Beloved.

'Come and enter my garden, my sister, my bride, for now I have gathered my myrrh with my fragrant spices'(Song of Songs 5:1).

'Who will give you to me as my brother, nursed at the breast of my mother, that I might find you alone outside and kiss you, and no one despise me'(Song of Songs 8:1).

'Winter is now past, the rain is gone, and the flowers have appeared in our land'(Song of Songs 2:11).

'I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me'(Galatians 2:20).

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza 23 (Transposed from Stanza 28 in the first version of the Canticle)

[Chorus]

Beneath the apple tree:
there I took you for my own,
there I offered you my hand,
and restored you,
where your mother was corrupted.

'Under the apple tree I raised you up; there your mother was corrupted, there she who bore you conceived' (Song of Songs 8:5).

John also quotes Ezekiel 16:5-14.

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza 24 (Transposed from Stanza 15 in the first version of the Canticle)

[Bride]

Our bed is in flower,
bound round with linking dens of lions,
hung with purple,
built up in peace,
crowned with a thousand shields of gold.

'The Son of God on the cross betrothed our human nature to himself, and by consequence every human soul'(23.2).

'The bride calls it 'our' bed, because both she and the Bridegroom, Christ, have the same virtues and the same love (which is the Beloved's), and both share the same delight as the Holy Spirit says: 'My delights are with the children of men'[Proverbs 8:31]'(24,3).

'Her virtues [linking dens of lions] are bathed in love [purple], because each one of them is ever making her love God, and in all things and in all works they lovingly move her to more intense love of God'(24,7).

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza 25 (Transposed from Stanza 16 in the first version of the Canticle)

[Chorus]

Following your footprints
maidens run along the way;
the touch of a spark,
the spiced wine,
cause flowings from the balsam of God.

'The touch of the spark by which you awaken the soul
and the spiced wine by which you lovingly inebriate her,
cause her to direct to you the flowings of the movements
and acts of love which you cause in her'(25.11)

• 'Draw me, and we shall run after you in the odour of your ointments'(Song 1:3).

'I have run the way of your commandments when you enlarged my heart'(Ps 119:32).

'They shall be inebriated with the plenty of your house; and you will give them
to drink of the torrent of Your delight, because with you is the fountain of life'

(Psalm 36:9-10).

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza 26 (Transposed from Stanza 17 in the first version of the Canticle)

[Bride]

In the inner wine cellar
I drank of my Beloved. I went abroad
through all this valley,
I no longer knew anything,
and lost the herd which I was following.

'In this stanza the soul speaks of the sovereign favour God granted by recollecting her in the intimacy of his love, which is the union with Him, or transformation in Him through love.'(26.2)

'In this transformation the two become one.'(26.4)

'My soul filled with delight as soon as the Bridegroom spoke'(Song 5:6).

'There you will teach me and I shall give you a drink of spiced wine'(Song 8:2).

'He put me in the secret wine cellar and established charity in me'(Song 2:4).

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza 27 (Transposed from Stanza 18 in the first version of the Canticle)

There he gave me his breast;
there he taught me a sweet knowledge;
and I gave myself to Him,
keeping nothing back;
there I promised to be his bride.

‘In this interior union God communicates himself to the soul with such genuine love that neither the affection of a mother, with which she so tenderly caresses her child, nor a brother's love, nor any friendship is comparable to it. The tenderness and truth of love by which the immense Father favours and exalts this humble and loving soul reaches such a degree — O wonderful thing, worthy of all our awe and admiration! — that the Father himself becomes subject to her for her exaltation, as though he were her servant and she his lord. And he is as solicitous in favouring her as he would be if he were her slave and she his god. So profound is the humility and sweetness of God!’(27.1)

John of the Cross :*'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza 27

There he gave me his breast;
there he taught me a sweet knowledge;
and I gave myself to Him,
keeping nothing back;
there I promised to be his bride.

'In that sweet draught of God, wherein the soul is immersed in God, it surrenders itself to him wholly, most willingly and with great delight, desiring to be wholly his and never again to have anything in itself that is alien from him ... Inasmuch as God transforms the soul into himself, God makes it to be wholly his and empties it of all that it possessed and that was alien from him. Wherefore the soul is indeed completely given up to God, keeping nothing back, not only according to his will, but also according to what it does, even as God has given himself freely to the soul. So these two wills are surrendered, satisfied and given up to each other, so that neither shall fail the other, as in the faithfulness and stability of a betrothal.'(27.6)

Canticle of Canticles 1:2-4

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!
For your love is better than wine,
your anointing oils are fragrant, poured out perfume, your name;
therefore the maidens love you.
Draw me after you, let us make haste!
The king has brought me into his chambers.
We will exult and rejoice in you;
we will extol your love more than wine!

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza 27

There he gave me his breast;
there he taught me a sweet knowledge;
and I gave myself to Him,
keeping nothing back;
there I promised to be his bride.

'Like the bee that sucks honey from all the wild-flowers
and will not use them for anything else,
the soul easily extracts the sweetness of love
from all things that happen to her,
that is, she loves God in them.

Thus everything leads her to love.'(27.8)

'I turn to my Beloved, and he turns towards me. Come, my beloved, let us go into the field, let us abide together on the grange; let us rise very early and go to the vineyards to see if the vine is in flower and if the flowers bear fruit, if the pomegranates have blossomed; there I will give you my breasts'(Song 7:11-13).

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza 28 (Transposed from Stanza 19 in the first version of the Canticle)

Now I occupy my soul
and all my energy [*'caudal'* - river in spate] in His service;
I no longer tend the herd,
nor have I any other work
now that my every act is love.

'All our works and all our trials, even though they are the greatest possible, are nothing in the sight of God. For through them we cannot give Him anything or fulfil his only desire which is the exaltation of the soul . . . Since there is no way that God can exalt the soul more than by making her equal to Himself, He is pleased only with her love, for it is love that makes the lover equal to the object loved'(28,1).

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

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Now I occupy my soul
and all my energy [*'caudal'* - river in spate] in His service;
I no longer tend the herd,
nor have I any other work
now that my every act is love.

'By directing the activity of the interior and exterior senses toward God, her use of the body is now conformed to his will'(28,4).

'Desires [the 'herd'] to serve the appetites of others, through ostentation, compliments, flattery, human respect, the effort to impress and please people by her actions, and many other useless things'(28,7).

'The union of love of God is a habitual and loving attentiveness of the will to God'(28,10).

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza 29 (Transposed from Stanza 20 in the first version of the Canticle)

If, then, I am no longer
seen or found on the common,
you will say that I am lost;
that stricken by love,
I lost myself, and was found.

'When the soul reaches the state of union of love, a little of this pure love is more precious to God and to the soul and more beneficial to the Church, even though it seems that one is doing nothing, than all other works put together.'(29,2)

‘Great wrong would be done to a person who possesses some degree of this solitary love, as well as to the Church, if we should urge such a person to become occupied in exterior or active things, even if the works are very important and demand only a short time. Since God has solemnly entreated that no one awaken a soul from this love, who will dare to do so and remain without reproof. After all this love is the end for which we were created.

Let those, then, who are singularly active, who think they can win the world with their preaching and exterior works, observe here that they would profit the Church and please God much more, not to mention the good example they would give, were they to spend at least half of this time with God in prayer, even though they may not have reached a prayer as sublime as this. They would then certainly accomplish more, and with less labour, by one work than they otherwise would by a thousand. For through their prayer they would merit this result, and themselves be spiritually strengthened. Without prayer they would do a great deal of hammering but accomplish little, and sometimes nothing, and even at times cause harm’ (29.3).

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza 30 (Transposed from Stanza 21 in the first version of the Canticle)

With flowers and emeralds
chosen on cool mornings
we shall weave garlands
flowering in your love,
and bound with one hair of mine.

'This hair is her will and the love she has for the Beloved. This love assumes the task of the thread in a garland. As the thread binds the flowers together, so love fastens and sustains the virtues in the soul' (30,9).

'Love is the bond of perfection' (Colossians 3:14).

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza 31 (Transposed from Stanza 22 in the first version of the Canticle)

You considered
that one hair fluttering at my neck;
you gazed at it upon my neck
and it captivated you;
and one of my eyes wounded you.

'God loves the soul upon seeing that its love is strong [neck] without cowardice or fear; and alone, without other loves; and flies to God without anything detaining it'(31,5).

'The eye refers to faith . . . single-hearted fidelity'(31,9).

Canticle 7:6

Your head crowns you like Carmel,
and your flowing locks, like purple;
a king is held captive in the tresses.

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza 32 (Transposed from Stanza 23 in the first version of the Canticle)

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.

'God loves the soul within Himself, with Himself, that is, with the very love by which He loves Himself' (32,6).

John of the Cross :‘*The Spiritual Canticle*’.

Stanza 33 (Transposed from Stanza 24 in the first version of the Canticle)

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.

‘There are three reasons why the soul should not forget her sins: first, so as always to have a motive against presumption; second, to have cause for rendering thanks; third, to incite herself to greater confidence, for if while in sin the soul received so much good from God, how much more remarkable favours will she be able to hope for now that God has placed her in His love, outside of sin?’(33,1).

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza 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.

'You say that you know me by name, and that I have found grace in your sight; show me, then, your face that I might know you' (Exodus 33:12-13).

'You are precious and glorious in my sight; I love you' (Isaiah 43:4).

'I am black but beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem; the king has loved me and brought me into his inner chamber' (Canticle 1:5).

'To the one who has more will be given' (Matthew 13:12; Luke 19:26).

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza 34 (Stanza 33 in the first version of the Canticle)

Chorus

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.

'The bride has the eyes of a dove with which, in loving contemplation, she looks at God'(34,3).

'How beautiful you are, my love; how beautiful. Your eyes are doves.'(Canticle I,15)

John of the Cross : *'The Spiritual Canticle'*.

Stanza 35 (Stanza 34 in the first version of the Canticle)

Chorus

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.

'It is God alone who works in the soul, without any means. This is a characteristic of the union of the soul with God in spiritual marriage: God works in and communicates Himself to her through Himself alone, without the intermediary of angels or natural ability, for the exterior and interior senses, and all creatures, and even the very soul do little towards the reception of the remarkable supernatural favours which God grants in this state.'(35,6)

'I shall lead her into solitude and there speak to her heart'(Hosea 2:14).