

# Bridal Mysticism

## An Overview

By Marilyn Hughes

*The Out-of-Body Travel Foundation!*

**<http://outofbodytravel.org>**





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Having worked primarily in radio broadcasting, Marilynn Hughes spent several years as a news reporter, producer and anchor before deciding to stay at home with her three children. She's experienced, researched, written, and taught about out-of-body travel since 1987.

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## Part I

### Bridal Mysticism



"The Lover rose early and went to seek his Beloved. He found travelers on the road, and he asked if they had seen his Beloved. They answered him: 'When did the eyes of thy mind lose sight of thy Beloved?' The Love replied: 'Since I first saw my Beloved in my thoughts, He has never been absent from the eyes of my body, for all things that I see picture to me my Beloved.'

The bird sang in the garden of the Beloved. The Lover came and he said to the bird: 'If we understand not one another's speech, we may make ourselves understood by love; for in thy song I see my Beloved before mine eyes.'

Whether Lover and Beloved are near or far is all one; for their love mingles as water mingles with wine. They are linked as heat with light; they approach and are united as Essence and Being."

*Ramon Lull*

Bridal Mysticism was first identified in the Old Testament and continued into the New Testament and found itself expressed very vividly in the lives of certain saints who came to be known as the Bridal Mystics.

In the scriptures, God's love for His people was often characterized as a similar relationship to that of the Bridegroom and the Bride. It was typified this way to show the ecstatic love and mystical union which can be achieved between a human person and the divine, wherein God becomes in a sense 'the lover.'

In the Old Testament, we see this most clearly in the 'Song of Songs:'

“How does your lover differ from any other, O most beautiful among women? How does your lover differ from any other, that you adjure us to? My lover is radiant and ruddy; he stands out among thousands. His head is pure gold; his locks are palm fronds, black as the raven. His eyes are like doves beside running waters, His teeth would seem bathed in milk and are set like jewels. His cheeks are like beds of spice with ripening aromatic herbs. His lips are red blossoms; they drip choice myrr. His arms are rods of gold adorned with chrysolites. His body is a work of ivory covered with sapphires. His legs are columns of marble resting on golden bases. His stature is like the trees on Lebanon, imposing as the cedars. His mouth is sweetness itself; he is all delight. Such is my lover, and such my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem. Where has your lover gone, O most beautiful among women? Where has your lover gone that we may seek him with you? My lover has come down to his garden, to the beds of spice, to browse in the garden and to gather lilies. My lover belongs to me and I to him; he browses among the lilies.”

*Song of Songs 5:9-16, 6:1-3*

In the New Testament, it is most clearly expressed in the Book of Revelation.

“Then I saw a new heaven, and a new earth. The old heaven, the old earth had vanished, and there was no more sea. And I, John, saw in my vision that holy city which is the new Jerusalem, being sent down by God from heaven, all clothed in readiness, like a bride who had adorned herself to meet her husband. I heard, too, a voice which cried aloud from

the throne, Here is God's tabernacle pitched among men; he will dwell with them, and they will be his own people, and he will be among them, their own God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death, or mourning, or cries of distress, no more sorrow; those old things have passed away. And he who sat on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. (These words I was bidden write down words most sure and true.) And he said to me, It is over, I am Omega, the beginning of all things and their end; those who are thirsty shall drink-it is my free gift-out of the spring whose water is life. Who wins the victory? He shall have his share in this; I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But not the cowards, not those who refuse belief, not those whose lives are abominable; not the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, not those who are false in any of their dealings. Their lot awaits them in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, and it is the second death.

And now an angel came and spoke to me, one of those seven who bear the seven cups charged with the seven last plagues. Come with me, he said, and I will show thee that bride, whose bridegroom is the Lamb. And he carried me off in a trance to a great mountain, high up, and there showed me the holy city Jerusalem, as it came down, sent by God, from heaven, clothed in God's glory. The light that shone over it was bright as any precious stone, as the jasper when it is most like crystal; and a great wall was raised high all around it, with twelve gates and twelve angels at the gates, and the names of the twelve tribes of Israel carbed on the lintels; three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south,

three on the west. The city wall, too, had twelve foundation stones; and these, too, bore names, those of the Lamb's twelve apostles."

*Apocalypse 21, 1-14*

Interestingly, the notion of the union of the soul with that of God is not restricted to Catholicism or Christianity. Many of the world religions expressed a concept of mystical union with God, although the ways and means vary.

In Hinduism, for example, it seems the purpose of such mystical union is to free the soul from duality.

## HINDUISM

"Real Indian philosophy, even in that embryonic form in which we find it in the *Upanishads*, stands completely by itself. And if we ask what was the highest purpose of the teachings of the *Upanishads* we can state it in three words, as it has been stated by the greatest *Vedânta* teachers themselves, namely *Tat twam asi*. This means *Thou art That*. *That* stands for that which is known to us under different names in different systems of ancient and modern philosophy. It is *Zeus* or the *Eis Theos* or *To On* in Greece; it is what Plato meant by the *Eternal Idea*, what Agnostics call the *Unknowable*, what I call the *Infinite in Nature*. This is what in India is called *Brahman*, the being behind all beings, the power that emits the universe, sustains it and draws it back again to itself. The *Thou* is what I called the *Infinite in man*, the Soul, the Self, the being behind every human Ego, free from all bodily fetters, free from passions, free from all attachments (*Atman*).



The expression: *Thou art That*—means: thy soul is the Brahman; or in other words, the subject and the object of all being and of all knowing are one and the same.

This is the gist of what I call *Psychological Religion* or *Theosophy*, the highest summit of thought which the human mind has reached, which has found different expressions in different religions and philosophies, but nowhere such a clear and powerful realization as in the ancient *Upanishads* of India.

For as long as the individual soul does not free itself from Nescience, or a belief in duality, it takes something else for itself. True knowledge of the Self or true self-knowledge, expresses itself in the words, "*Thou art That*" or "*I am Brahman*," the nature of Brahman being unchangeable eternal cognition. Until that stage has been reached, the individual soul is fettered by the body, by the organs of sense, nay even by the mind and its various functions.

In most of the religions of the ancient world [says Müller] the relation between the soul and God has been represented as a return of the soul to God. A yearning for God, a kind of divine home-sickness, finds expression in most religions, but the road that is to lead us home, and the reception which the soul may expect in the Father's house have been represented in very different ways in different religions . . .

According to some religious teachers, a return of the soul to God is possible after death only. . . .

According to other religious teachers, the final beatitude of the soul can be achieved in this life. . . . That beatitude requires knowledge only, knowledge of the necessary unity of what is divine in man with what is divine in God. The Brahmins call it self-knowledge, that is to say, the knowledge that our true self, if it is anything, can only be that Self which is All in All, and beside which there is nothing else. Sometimes this conception of the intimate relation between the human and the divine natures comes suddenly, as the result of an unexplained intuition or self-recollection. Sometimes, however, it seems as if the force of logic had driven the human mind to the same result."

*Tertium Organum, P.D. Ouspensky, Excerpts of Max Muller, 1922, sacred-texts.com*

In Judaism, this sort of mystical union is told in conjunction with the knowledge of Merkabah (The Throne Chariot of God) and is likened to a consuming fire.

## JUDAISM

"This insistence upon a high level of moral and religious fitness as the indispensable prelude to a knowledge of the Merkabah has its counterpart in the mysticism of all religions. The organic life, the self, conscious and unconscious, must be moulded and developed in certain ways; there must be an education, moral, physical, emotional; a psychological adjustment, by stages, of the mental states which go to the make-up of the full mystic consciousness. As

Evelyn Underhill (*Mysticism*, p. 107) says: "Mysticism shows itself not merely as an attitude of mind and heart, but as a form of organic life. . . . It is a remaking of the whole character on high levels in the interests of the transcendental life."

That the Rabbis were fully alive to the importance of this self-discipline is seen by a remark of theirs in *T.B. Haggigah*, 13a, as follows: "A certain youth was once explaining the *Ḥashmal* (*Ezekiel*, i. 27, translated 'amber' in the A.V.) when fire came forth and consumed him." When the question is asked, Why was this? the answer is: "His time had not yet come" (*lāv māti zimmēh*). This cannot but mean that his youthful age had not given him the opportunities for the mature self-culture necessary to the mystic apprehension. The *Ḥashmal*, by the way, was interpreted by the Rabbis as: (a) a shortened form of the full phrase *ḥāyot ʿesh mē-māl-lē-loth*, i.e. 'the living creatures of fire, speaking'; or (b) a shortened form of *ʿittim ḥāshoth ve-ʿittim mē-mälle-lōth*, i.e. 'they who at times were silent and at times speaking.' In the literature of the mediæval Kabbalah, the *Ḥashmal* belongs to the 'Yetsiratic' world (i.e. the abode of the angels, presided over by Metatron who was changed into fire; and the spirits of men are there too). According to a modern Bible commentator (the celebrated Russian Hebraist, M. L. Malbim, 1809-1879) the word signifies "the *Ḥayot* [i.e. 'living creatures' of *Ezekiel*, i.] which are the abode [or camp] of the *Shechinah* [i.e. Divine Presence] where there is the 'still small voice.' It is they [i.e. the *Ḥayot*] who receive the Divine effluence from above and

disseminate it to the Ḥayot who are the movers of the 'wheels' [of Ezekiel's Chariot]."

Many more passages of a like kind might be quoted in support of the view that the attainment of a knowledge of the Merkabah was a hard quest beset with ever so many impediments; that it pre-supposed, on the one hand, an exceptional measure of self-development, and, on the other, an extraordinary amount of self-repression and self-renouncement.

But the mention of *fire* in the preceding paragraph leads us to the consideration of an aspect of the Merkabah which brings the latter very much into line with the description of mystical phenomena in literature generally. Every one knows how the image of fire dominates so much of the mysticism of Dante. The mediæval Christian mystics--Ruysbroeck, Catherine of Genoa, Jacob Boehme, and others--appeal constantly to the same figure for the expression of their deepest thoughts on the relations between man and the Godhead. The choice of the metaphor probably rests on the fact that 'fire' can be adapted to symbolise either or both of the following truths: (*a*) the brightness, illumination which comes when the goal has been reached, when the quest for the ultimate reality has at last been satisfied; (*b*) the all-penetrating, all-encompassing, self-diffusing force of fire is such a telling picture of the mystic union of the soul and God. The two are interpenetrated, fused into one state of being. The soul is red-hot with God, who at the same time, like fire, holds the soul in his grip, dwells in it."

*Jewish Mysticism, J. Abelson, 1913, sacred-texts.com*

In the Mystery Religions, there are many manifestations of this idea. However, it seems in the mysteries there more instances of mystical unions between various gods and goddesses.

An image of the mystical union can also be seen in the Alchemical Marriage most often associated with Christian Rosenkreutz.

### MYSTERY RELIGIONS

“Christian Rosencreutz, having prepared in his heart the Paschal Lamb together with a small unleavened loaf, was disturbed while at prayer one evening before Easter by a violent storm which threatened to demolish not only his little house but the very hill on which it stood. In the midst of the tempest he was touched on the back and, turning, he beheld a glorious woman with wings filled with eyes, and robed in sky-colored garments spangled with stars. In one hand she held a trumpet and in the other a bundle of letters in every language. Handing a letter to C.R.C., she immediately ascended into the air, at the same time blowing upon her trumpet a blast which shook the house. Upon the seal of the letter was a curious cross and the words *In hoc signo vinces*. Within, traced in letters of gold on an azure field, was an invitation to a royal wedding.

C.R.C. was deeply moved by the invitation because it was the fulfillment of a prophecy which he had received seven years before, but so unworthy did he feel that he was paralyzed with fear. At length, after

resorting to prayer, he sought sleep. In his dreams he found himself in a loathsome dungeon with a multitude of other men, all bound and fettered with great chains. The grievousness of their sufferings was increased as they stumbled over each other in the darkness. Suddenly from above came the sound of trumpets; the cover of the dungeon was lifted, and a ray of light pierced the gloom. Framed in the light stood a hoary-headed man who announced that a rope would be lowered seven times and whoever could cling to the rope would be drawn up to freedom.

Great confusion ensued. All sought to grasp the rope and many were pulled away from it by others. C.R.C. despaired of being saved, but suddenly the rope swung towards him and, grasping it, he was raised from the dungeon. An aged woman called the "Ancient Matron" wrote in a golden yellow book the names of those drawn forth, and each of the redeemed was given for remembrance a piece of gold bearing the symbol of the sun and the letters *D L S*. C.R.C., who had been injured while clinging to the rope, found it difficult to walk. The aged woman bade him not to worry, but to thank God who had permitted him to come into so high a light. Thereupon trumpets sounded and C.R.C. awoke, but so vivid was the dream that he was still sensible of the wounds received while asleep.

With renewed faith C. R. C. arose and prepared himself for the *Hermetic Marriage*. He donned a white linen coat and bound a red ribbon crosswise over his shoulders. In his hat he stuck four roses and for food

he carried bread, water, and salt. Before leaving his cottage, he knelt and vowed that whatever knowledge was revealed to him he would devote to the service of his neighbor. He then departed from his house with joy."

*The Chemical Marriage of Christian Rosenkreutz, By  
Johann Valentin Andreæ, sacred-texts.com*



Mystical Marriage of Venus and Neptune in Mystery Religions

In Buddhism, practitioners meditate and discipline their minds to eventually achieve Nirvana:

## BUDDHISM

"THEN SAID MAHAMATI to the Blessed One: Pray tell Us about Nirvana?

The Blessed One replied: The term, Nirvana, is used with many different meanings, by different people, but these people may be divided into four groups: There are people who are suffering, or who are afraid of suffering, and who think of Nirvana; there are the philosophers who try to discriminate Nirvana; there are the class of disciples who think of Nirvana in relation to themselves; and, finally there is the Nirvana of the Buddhas.

Those who are suffering or who fear suffering, think of Nirvana as an escape and a recompense. They imagine that Nirvana consists in the future annihilation of the senses and the sense-minds; they are not aware that Universal Mind and Nirvana are One, and that this life-and-death world and Nirvana are not to be separated. These ignorant ones, instead of meditating on the imagelessness of Nirvana, talk of different ways of emancipation. Being ignorant of, or not understanding, the teachings of the Tathagatas, they cling to the notion of Nirvana that is outside what is seen of the mind and, thus, go on rolling themselves along with the wheel of life and death.

As to the Nirvanas discriminated by the philosophers: there really are none. Some philosophers conceive Nirvana to be found where the mind-system no more operates owing to the cessation of the elements that make up personality and its world; or is found where there is utter indifference to the objective world and its impermanency. Some conceive Nirvana to be a state where there is no recollection of the past or present, just as when a lamp is extinguished, or when a seed is burnt, or when a fire goes out; because then



there is the cessation of all the substrate, which is explained by the philosophers as the non-rising of discrimination. But this is not Nirvana, because Nirvana does not consist in simple annihilation and vacuity.

Again, some philosophers explain deliverance as though it was the mere stopping of discrimination, as when the wind stops blowing, or as when one by self-effort gets rid of the dualistic view of knower and known, or gets rid of the notions of permanency and impermanency; or gets rid of the notions of good and evil; or overcomes passion by means of knowledge;-- to them Nirvana is deliverance. Some, seeing in "form" the bearer of pain are alarmed by the notion of "form" and look for happiness in a world of "no-form." Some conceive that in consideration of individuality and generality recognisable in all things inner and outer, that there is no destruction and that all beings maintain their being for ever and, in this eternality, see Nirvana. Others see the eternality of things in the conception of Nirvana as the absorption of the finite-soul in Supreme Atman; or who see all things as a manifestation of the vital-force of some Supreme Spirit to which all return; and some, who are especially silly, declare that there are two primary things, a primary substance and a primary soul, that react differently upon each other and thus produce all things from the transformations of qualities; some think that the world is born of action and interaction and that no other cause is necessary; others think that Ishvara is the free creator of all things; clinging to these foolish notions, there is no awakening, and they

consider Nirvana to consist in the fact that there is no awakening.

Some imagine that Nirvana is where self-nature exists in its own right, unhampered by other self-natures, as the variegated feathers of a peacock, or various precious crystals, or the pointedness of a thorn. Some conceive being to be Nirvana, some non-being, while others conceive that all things and Nirvana are not to be distinguished from one another. Some, thinking that time is the creator and that as the rise of the world depends on time, they conceive that Nirvana consists in the recognition of time as Nirvana. Some think that there will be Nirvana when the "twenty-five" truths are generally accepted, or when the king observes the six virtues, and some religionists think that Nirvana is the attainment of paradise.

These views severally advanced by the philosophers with their various reasonings are not in accord with logic nor are they acceptable to the wise. They all conceive Nirvana dualistically and in some causal connection; by these discriminations philosophers imagine Nirvana, but where there is no rising and no disappearing, how can there be discrimination? Each philosopher relying on his own textbook from which he draws his understanding, sins against the truth, because truth is not where he imagines it to be. The only result is that it sets his mind to wandering about and becoming more confused as Nirvana is not to be found by mental searching, and the more his mind becomes confused the more he confuses other people.

As to the notion of Nirvana as held by disciples and masters who still cling to the notion of an ego-self, and who try to find it by going off by themselves into solitude: their notion of Nirvana is an eternity of bliss like the bliss of the Samadhis-for themselves. They recognise that the world is only a manifestation of mind and that all discriminations are of the mind, and so they forsake social relations and practise various spiritual disciplines and in solitude seek self-realisation of Noble Wisdom by self-effort. They follow the stages to the sixth and attain the bliss of the Samadhis, but as they are still clinging to egoism they do not attain the "turning-about" at the deepest seat of consciousness and, therefore, they are not free from the thinking-mind and the accumulation of its habit-energy. Clinging to the bliss of the Samadhis, they pass to their Nirvana, but it is not the Nirvana of the Tathagatas. They are of those who have "entered the stream"; they must return to this world of life and death.

THEN SAID MAHAMATI to the Blessed One: When the Bodhisattvas yield up their stock of merit for the emancipation of all beings, they become spiritually one with all animate life; they themselves may be purified, but in others there yet remain unexhausted evil and unmaturing karma. Pray tell us, Blessed One, how the Bodhisattvas are given assurance of Nirvana? and what is the Nirvana of the Bodhisattvas?

The Blessed One replied: Mahamati, this assurance is not an assurance of numbers nor logic; it is not the mind that is to be assured but the heart. The Bodhisattva's assurance comes with the unfolding

insight that follows passion hindrances cleared away, knowledge hindrance purified, and egolessness clearly perceived and patiently accepted. As the mortal-mind ceases to discriminate, there is no more thirst for life, no more sex-lust, no more thirst for learning, no more thirst for eternal life; with the disappearance of these fourfold thirsts, there is no more accumulation of habit-energy; with no more accumulation of habit-energy the defilements on the face of Universal Mind clear away, and the Bodhisattva attains self-realisation of Noble Wisdom that is the heart's assurance of Nirvana.

There are Bodhisattvas here and in other Buddha-lands, who are sincerely devoted to the Bodhisattva's mission and yet who cannot wholly forget the bliss of the Samadhis and the peace of Nirvana-for themselves. The teaching of Nirvana in which there is no substrate left behind, is revealed according to a hidden meaning for the sake of these disciples who still cling to thoughts of Nirvana for themselves, that they may be inspired to exert themselves in the Bodhisattva's mission of emancipation for all beings. The Transformation-Buddhas teach a doctrine of Nirvana to meet conditions as they find them, and to give encouragement to the timid and selfish. In order to turn their thoughts away from themselves and to encourage them to a deeper compassion and more earnest zeal for others, they are given assurance as to the future by the sustaining power of the Buddhas of Transformation, but not by the Dharmata-Buddha.

The Dharma which establishes the Truth of Noble Wisdom belongs to the realm of the Dharmata-

Buddha. To the Bodhisattvas of the seventh and eighth stages, Transcendental Intelligence is revealed by the Dharmata-Buddha and the Path is pointed out to them which they are to follow. In the perfect self-realisation of Noble Wisdom that follows the inconceivable transformation death of the Bodhisattva's individualised will-control, he no longer lives unto himself, but the life that he lives thereafter is the Tathagata's universalised life as manifested in its transformations. In this perfect self-realisation of Noble Wisdom the Bodhisattva realises that for Buddhas there is no Nirvana.

The death of a Buddha, the great Parinirvana, is neither destruction nor death, else would it be birth and continuation. If it were destruction, it would be an effect-producing deed, which it is not. Neither is it a vanishing nor an abandonment, neither is it attainment, nor is it of no attainment; neither is it of one significance nor of no significance, for there is no Nirvana for the Buddhas.

The Tathagata's Nirvana is where it is recognised that there is nothing but what is seen of the mind itself; is where, recognising the nature of the self-mind, one no longer cherishes the dualisms of discrimination; is where there is no more thirst nor grasping; is where there is no more attachment to external things. Nirvana is where the thinking-mind with all its discriminations, attachments, aversions and egoism is forever put away; is where logical measures, as they are seen to be inert, are no longer seized upon; is where even the notion of truth is treated with indifference because of its causing bewilderment; is

where, getting rid of the four propositions, there is insight into the abode of Reality. Nirvana is where the twofold passions have subsided and the twofold hindrances are cleared away and the twofold egolessness is patiently accepted; is where, by the attainment of the "turning-about" in the deepest seat of consciousness, self-realisation of Noble Wisdom is fully entered into,--that is the Nirvana of the Tathagatas.

Nirvana is where the Bodhisattva stages are passed one after another; is where the sustaining power of the Buddhas upholds the Bodhisattvas in the bliss of the Samadhis; is where compassion for others transcends all thoughts of self; is where the Tathagata stage is finally realised.

Nirvana is the realm of Dharmata-Buddha; it is where the manifestation of Noble Wisdom that is Buddhahood expresses itself in Perfect Love for all; it is where the manifestation of Perfect Love that is Tathagatahood expresses itself in Noble Wisdom for the enlightenment of all;--there, indeed, is Nirvana!

There are two classes of those who may not enter the Nirvana of the Tathagatas: there are those who have abandoned the Bodhisattva ideals, saying, they are not in conformity with the sutras, the codes of morality, nor with emancipation. Then there are the true Bodhisattvas who, on account of their original vows made for the sake of all beings, saying, "So long as they do not attain Nirvana, I will not attain it myself," voluntarily keep themselves out of Nirvana. But no beings are left outside by the will of the

Tathagatas; some day each and every one will be influenced by the wisdom and love of the Tathagatas of Transformation to lay up a stock of merit and ascend the stages. But, if they only realised it, they are already in the Tathagata's Nirvana for, in Noble Wisdom, all things are in Nirvana from the beginning.

*The Lankavatara Sutra, A Buddhist Bible, Dwight Goddard, 1932, sacred-texts.com*

In Christianity, Meister Eckhart and Angelus Silesius expressed essentiality, removing all the excess in the personality which serves no purpose. By achieving the essential, the divine can be reached. And thus reached, a divine union becomes possible.

## CHRISTIANITY

"Like the That, the divine Essence, so also the Thou, the self, possesses a twofold aspect. "God and Godhead," Eckhart states, "are as different from one another as heaven is from earth. And I maintain still further that the outer and the inner man are as infinitely different as heaven and earth." The outer man is the empirical or personal I, the mortal body with its psychic filling, the earthly, creaturely I which constitutes a distinguishable person and makes a man a Henry or a Conrad. This all-too-human I, which appears and passes away, accidental and fundamentally unreal, can never aspire to become one with the divine Reality. It is but the outward shell which encloses the inner or essential I.

The central thought which runs through the *Cherubinic Wanderer* may be summed up in Eckhart's phrase, "Wouldst thou have the kernel, then must the shell be broken." For kernel and shell Angelus employs the scholastic terms essence and accident.

"Become essential, Man. When the world fails at last,  
Accident falls away, But Essence, that stands fast."

In order to liberate the inward, essential self, the outward, accidental self must be abandoned. Self-abandonment (*Gelassenheit*) constitutes the indispensable mystical technique by means of which the goal of union with the divine is to be attained. The corner-stone upon which the whole structure of mysticism rests is the gospel paradox that the self is saved by being lost, lives by dying. In the mouth of Angelus Silesius this was no mere rhetorical trope. He accepted it in its fullest significance and pursued it to its furthest conclusion. The truth that selflessness is the apex of the spiritual life doubtless represents in a general sense the open secret of all the higher religions. But the paradox implicit in the selflessness of self is usually eluded by diluting selflessness to an amiable altruism. For Angelus, however, self-abandonment meant not merely the abandonment of egoistic motives, but the abandonment, the radical annihilation, of the self itself. The self must make an unconditional surrender of its selfhood. It must lose all sense of self-identity, of particularity, of otherness. Above all, it must be quit of all desires, whether for rewards, for happiness, for a future life, or even for God himself; for the persistence of any desire attests



the fact that the desiring self still lives on. It must die. It must cease to be. The categorical imperative of Angelus Silesius is *Sei nicht* – Be not.

*Angelus Silesius, 1624- 1677, Excerpts and Analysis  
from 'The Cherubic Wanderer'*

In the Sufi mysticism of Islam, Bridal Theology seems to have a very similar feel to that of the Christian mystics. Their union with God is expressed as the delectable delights of the greatest lover.

## ISLAM

“THE traveller on the path,  
 'Tis he who knows from whence he cometh;  
 Then doth he journey hastily,  
 Becoming as pure from self as fire from smoke.  
 Unfolded to him are a series of revelations  
 From the beginning. Till he is led away  
 From darkness and sin.  
 He now retraces stage by stage his steps  
 Till he reaches his goal the Perfect.  
 Thus is the perfect man evolved  
 From the time he first exists  
 As inorganic matter,  
 Next a breath of spirit, and he is living  
 And from God draws his motive powers.  
 Next the Truth makes him lord of his will,  
 As in childhood his discernment of the world unfolds.  
 And now the world's temptations assail him.. . .  
 Anger appears and desires of the flesh,  
 And then avarice, pride, and gluttony;  
 His nature becomes evil,  
 Worse than an animal or demon;

Now is he at the lowest point of all,  
 The point opposite to Unity.  
 . . . Should he remain fettered in this snare,  
 He goes further astray than the beasts;  
 But if there shines a light from the spirit world,  
 Divinely attractive,  
 Or if he can find a reflection of proof,  
 Then will his heart respond in a feeling of kinship  
 To this Light of the Truth,  
 And he will turn back and retrace his steps  
 From whence he came.  
 To faith assured he has found his way  
 Through certain proof, or the wonder  
 And attraction of the Divine,  
 . . . He throws away his selfhood utterly  
 And ascends in the steps of the most Pure . . .  
 You are plurality transformed into Unity,  
 And Unity passing into plurality;  
 This mystery is understood when man  
 Leaves the part and merges in the Whole."  
*The Secret Rose Garden of Sa'd Ud Din Mahmud*  
*Shabistari, Florence Lederer, 1920*

"Therefore it behoves me to shorten my discourse.  
 Arise, O son! burst thy bonds and be free!  
 How long wilt thou be captive to silver and gold?  
 Though thou pour the ocean into thy pitcher,  
 It can hold no more than one day's store.  
 The pitcher of the desire of the covetous never fills,  
 The oyster-shell fills not with pearls till it is content;  
 Only he whose garment is rent by the violence of love  
 Is wholly pure from covetousness and sin.  
 Hail to thee, then, O LOVE, sweet madness!  
 Thou who healest all our infirmities!

Who art the physician of our pride and self-conceit!

Who art our Plato and our Galen!

Love exalts our earthly bodies to heaven,

And makes the very hills to dance with joy!

O Iover, 'twas love that gave life to Mount Sinai,  
When "it quaked, and Moses fell down in a swoon."

Did my Beloved only touch me with his lips,

I too, like the flute, would burst out in melody.

But he who is parted from them that speak his  
tongue,

Though he possess a hundred voices, is perforce  
dumb.

When the rose has faded and the garden is withered,  
The song of the nightingale is no longer to be heard.

The BELOVED is all in all, the lover only veils Him;  
The BELOVED is all that lives, the lover a dead thing.

When the lover feels no longer LOVE's quickening,  
He becomes like a bird who has lost its wings. Alas!"

*The Secret Rose Garden of Sa'd Ud Din Mahmud  
Shabistari, Florence Lederer, 1920*

In the Baha'i faith, Baha'u'llah utilized the symbol of the Heavenly Cup as the method and means wherein God gathered in the spirit to His sublime mysteries:

### BAHA'I

"Wherefore, put thy hand into thy bosom, then stretch it forth with power, and behold, thou shalt find it a light unto all the world.

How crystal this cool water that the Cup-Bearer bringeth! How bright this pure wine in the hands of the Beloved! How delicate this draught from the

Heavenly Cup! May it do them good, whoso drink thereof, and taste of its sweetness and attain to its knowledge.

It is not fitting that I tell thee more,  
For the stream's bed cannot hold the sea.

For the mystery of this utterance is hid within the storehouse of the Great Infallibility and laid up in the treasures of power. It is sanctified above the jewels of explanation; it is beyond what the most subtle of tongues can tell.

Astonishment here is highly prized, and utter poverty essential. Wherefore hath it been said, "Poverty is My pride." And again: "God hath a people beneath the dome of glory, whom He hideth in the clothing of radiant poverty." These are they who see with His eyes, hear with His ears, as it is written in the well-known tradition.

Concerning this realm, there is many a tradition and many a verse, of broad or special relevancy, but two of these will suffice to serve as a light for men of mind and heart.

The first is His statement: "O My Servant! Obey Me and I shall make thee like unto Myself. I say `Be,' and it is, and thou shalt say `Be,' and it shall be."

And the second: "O Son of Adam! Seek fellowship with none until thou hast found Me, and whenever thou shalt long for Me, thou shalt find Me close to thee."

Whatever high proofs and wondrous allusions are recounted herein, concern but a single Letter, a single Point. "Such hath been the way of God ... and no change canst thou find in the way of God."

*The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys, Baha'u'llah,  
1993, sacred-texts.com*

Despite these variations, there seem to be some common elements. 1.) They require self-discipline in the moral virtues, 2.) At the core of the practice, the soul must seek self-abandonment. In other words, detach from the material world in order to become united to God.

In the Catholic Tradition, which is what we will focus on in this overview, the mystical marriage was often accompanied by visions of an actual wedding feast.

In the history of Bridal Theology in Catholicism, there has been an estimated seventy seven Bridal Mystics to date. Three quarters of those were also stigmatists.

The mystical marriage generally occurs through the means of a vision wherein the soul attends a wedding banquet along with Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary and many of the saints and angels.

In most cases, Christ tells the soul that He takes her for his bride and oftentimes will present her with a ring. In the cases of male Bridal Mystics, the Virgin Mary often takes a more central role in the vision, but the bridegroom remains Christ.

Afterwards, the soul is often noted to receive signal graces which increase charity within their souls and a sense of the constant presence of God.

Ironically, they feel this even though according to St. Teresa of Avila, ecstasies and ecstatic visions become much more rare.

There are several names for this point in the spiritual life: Transforming Union, Consummate Union and Deification. The most common term used is the Transforming Union.

St. Teresa of Avila called it "the seventh resting-place of the interior castle." She achieved this state only five years before her death.

In the mystical marriage itself, the Lord hastens to take a special interest and care in the life of the soul. Many Bridal Mystics also enter into the sufferings of Christ more deeply and in a more intimate manner.

As a husband and wife should share in the life of the other, the mystical marriage manifests this same participation in one another's lives.

St. John of the Cross also explains the Transforming Union in a way which can be assimilated to seem a description of the greatest expression of a sacramental marriage, as well.

"When the soul has been raised to the high state of spiritual marriage, the Bridegroom reveals to it, as His faithful consort, His own marvelous secrets most readily and most frequently, for he who truly and sincerely loves hides nothing from the object of his affections. The chief matter of His communications are the sweet mysteries of His incarnation, the ways and means of the redemption, which is one of the highest works of God, and so it is to the soul one of the sweetest."

*St. John of the Cross, The Spiritual Canticle*

In Pope John Paul II's 'Theology of the Body,' he explains that in the highest expression of the

sacrament of marriage between a man and a woman, the erotic portion of the relational communion between man and woman becomes holy as the couple rise above the common norm of viewing those of the opposite sex with 'lust' rather than the higher expression of a deep abiding love and usefulness, one for the other.

"Christ's ethos reveals a new order of values which demands that we rediscover the true gift contained in the erotic. If the human spirit does not do this task, then the body's passions will stop at mere lust. If the body stops at lust, man will never experience the fullness of Eros and the erotic will never seek the true, good and beautiful. Eros desperately needs ethos."

*Pope John Paul II The Theology of the Body: A Simplified Version, By Rev. Msgr. Vincent M. Walsh, J.C.D.*

In this distinction, the man understands interiorly and places supreme value on woman and all of her attributes as the woman learns to value the same in man. They seek each other in love, not lust.

Rather than remaining utilitarian objects to one another to gratify a sexual need, their union makes the two stronger and makes them sharers with one another in the mysteries of the redemption. Their efforts and good works one to the other serve to assist their partner in moving closer and closer to God.

In contrast and similitude, the Bridal Mystics seek out their beloved Lord in a love which surpasses all understanding. But their longing for God is not unlike the bride who longs for her husband. The erotic nature of such seeking between man and

woman remains an erotic but differentiated expression: because in the seeking of the Lord, there is a most definite quality that the mystic places upon Him as 'lover.' Bridal Mysticism, then, takes the highest expression of the love between a man and a woman on earth and ascends it to a heightened state of the love between man and God.

And this miraculous union between the bride and the bridegroom, the mystical marriage, opens up the mysteries of the redemption for many through the writings that have been set aside by those few who have attained it. Their words open for those of us who remain behind the opportunity to envision what love is meant to become in all of us in its highest expression.

St. John of the Cross states that the mystical union is achieved when the Bridal Mystic has perfected the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. He goes on to say that most human beings following a spiritual path in this life will enter into one or two of the perfections of the Holy Spirit, but those who enter into all seven are few.

This sheds light on the process by which those who seek to understand the station that the Bridal Mystics have achieved and how they have gone about achieving it.

Ironically, it also sheds light on the matter and nature of a truly holy marriage between a man and a woman. In its perfection, the man and woman would be also seeking to perfect those seven gifts of the Holy Spirit in one another.

Thomas Kempis in the classic 'The Imitation of Christ' describes well the love between the soul who seeks God as his spouse, but also the nature of love as



it would manifest in its highest manner between a man and woman in marriage.

“O Lord God, my holy Lover, when Thou shalt come in my heart, all that is within me shall be filled with joy. Thou art my glory and the exultation of my heart. Thou art my hope and my refuge in the day of my tribulation. But because I am as yet weak in love and imperfect in virtue, therefore do I stand in need of being strengthened and comforted by Thee. Where do Thou visit me often, and instruct me in Thy holy discipline . . . so that I may become . . . courageous to suffer, and steadfast to persevere. A great thing is love [excited by Thee], a great good above all goods. It alone lighteneth all that is burdensome, and beareth equally all that is unequal, for it carrieth a burden without being burdened, and maketh all else that is bitter sweet and savory. The noble love of Jesus impelleth us to do great things, and exciteth us always to desire that which is the more perfect . . . Love often knoweth no measure, but growth fervent above all measure . . . Lover watcheth, and sleeping slumbereth not. When weary, it is not tired; when straitened, it is not constrained; when frightened, it is not disturbed; but like a vivid flame and a burning torch, it mounteth upward and securely passeth through all.”

*Thomas A. Kempis, The Imitation of Christ*

Pope John Paul II states in ‘The Theology of the Body’ that man and woman were first created as self-sustaining beings to stand alone before God in the garden of Eden, but later brought them together. He called this ‘Original Solitude.’ Before Eve was created,

Adam stood alone. And this aloneness, according to 'The Theology of the Body,' relates to both men and women in that we all stand alone in some sense in this world.

But then God determined that "it is not good for man to be alone; I will make a helper fit for him."  
*Genesis 2:18*

In these very words, something profound is revealed. Each one of us stands in original solitude, but God has created the option of sacramental marriage in order that we might have a helper.

Bridal Mystics enjoy the self-same quality with the Lord, they become helpers to one another in a spousal union.

In a certain sense, the same quality could be applied to spiritual friendships, in that we are called to be helpmate's to one another.

Anthony de Mello stated in "The Way to Love: The Last Meditations of Anthony De Mello" that love is by its nature something that we cannot do. It is more a state that we come to be. Not unlike God's nature, which simply emanates love; we as spiritual seekers must realize that in trying to 'do' anything we are already ceasing to love.

"Love so enjoys the loving that it is blissfully unaware of itself. The way the lamp is busy shining with no thought of whether it is benefiting others or not. The way a rose gives out its fragrance simply because there is nothing else it can do, whether there is someone to enjoy the fragrance or not. The way the tree offers its shade. The light, the fragrance and the shade are not produced at the approach of persons and turned off when there is no one there. These

things, like love, exist independently of persons. Love simply *is*, it has no object."

*The Way to God: The Last Meditations of Anthony De Mello, Doubleday Image, 1992*

Just as in Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body wherein he states that love within marriage must be a free gift to the other, Anthony de Mello says that "Freedom is just another word for love."

Interestingly, Anthony de Mello takes this one step further when he identifies perhaps one of the most common mistakes we as human beings make in loving one another.

"Love springs from awareness. It is only inasmuch as you see someone as he or she really is here and now and not as they are in your memory or your desire or in your imagination or projection that you can truly love them, otherwise it is not the person that you love but the idea that you have formed of this person, or this person as the object of your desire not as he or she is in themselves. Therefore the first act of love is to see this person or . . . this reality as it truly is . . . When you set out to serve someone whom you have not taken the trouble to see, are you meeting that person's need or your own?"

*The Way to God: The Last Meditations of Anthony De Mello, Doubleday Image, 1992*

He then regards it as equally important to look carefully upon ourselves,

"to ruthlessly flash the light of awareness on your motives, your emotions, your needs, your dishonesty,

your self-seeking, your tendency to control and manipulate . . .”

*The Way to God: The Last Meditations of Anthony De Mello, Doubleday Image, 1992*

De Mello’s observation points us back to the importance of realizing our original solitude. In the matter of the first place, we always stand alone before God: And in the matter of the second, when we are called to be a helpmate (either in sacramental marriage or in friendship), we must first truly love the other by clearly seeing them.

For the Bridal Mystics, it states in ‘The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology’ by Father Adolphe Tanquerey, that there are three chief characteristics to be observed within someone who has achieved this transforming union found within the mystical marriage of bridal theology. Intimacy with God, Serenity of Spirit and Indissolubility, which not unlike Christian marriage becomes permanent.

In ‘The Three Ages of the Interior Life’ By Father Garrigou-Lagrange, he notes that there are exceptions to these rules especially with regard to serenity. Some Bridal Mystics will continue to bear the sufferings of Christ within their person, either physically or in spirit, so they will have the appearance of serenity at some times, but not quite so at others.

Interestingly, Fr. John Arinterro, O.P. describes some of the delights of the mystical marriage as ‘divine touches,’ which to the bride produce profound rapturous feelings and bond the soul closer to God. Not unlike the sexual union bonds the man and

woman engaged in a truly sacramental nature to one another, making them one flesh.

“On reaching the espousal, the union is even more intimate and permanent, and the touches of the Beloved are not only felt in the faculties, which they captivate and unite, but they penetrate still further and are felt in the very depth of the soul. As the soul is more and more purified by those delicate touches, the awareness of the divine becomes much more evident. Souls sometimes feel not only that they are working divinely with all their faculties, but that they are actually living a divine life, although this manner of living is not yet continual. The union is completed and perfected in the spiritual marriage wherein it is also made permanent. God takes full possession of the whole soul and unites it to Himself in a most intimate manner.”

*The Mystical Evolution, Fr. John Arinterro, Tan Books, 1992*

Sister P. Marie Eugene, O.C.D. makes the distinction between spiritual betrothal and spiritual marriage which is so closely intertwined with that of a holy sacramental union between a man and a woman it is uncanny.

“We recall that in the rapture of the betrothal, there was a certain separation of soul and spirit, the spirit rising up above the soul – like the flame mounting up from the furnace – and being carried away in God. In spiritual marriage, union is complete. No longer the spirit alone but the whole soul is drawn into its center where God is. And so in this union

there is no transport felt nor separation between the parts of the soul. All is peace and inner unity."

*I Want to See God, P. Marie Eugene, O.C.D.,  
Christian Classics 1953*

Compare these words in relation to the Bridal Mystics and the mystical marriage to the sacramental union of man and wife in Pope John Paul II's 'Theology of the Body.'

"The body is meant to manifest the human spirit. When Christ spoke of a man leaving his parents and cleaving to his wife, He defended the inviolable rights of marital unity . . . When speaking of our waiting for "the redemption of the body" (Romans 8:23), Paul does not say that the body is evil but that man is sinful and has forgotten the clear nuptial meaning of the body . . . The body is a manifestation of the spirit and Christ defended conjugal unity as a sacramental sign . . . Human sex is at the service of the communion of persons, the deepest level of human ethics."

*Pope John Paul II The Theology of the Body: A  
Simplified Version, By Rev. Msgr. Vincent M. Walsh,  
J.C.D.*

At the heart and center of Bridal Mysticism is the deepest understanding of human and divine relationships as manifested in their most exalted expression. It gives each of us a framework to understand that higher love which stands at the root and core of all human longing.

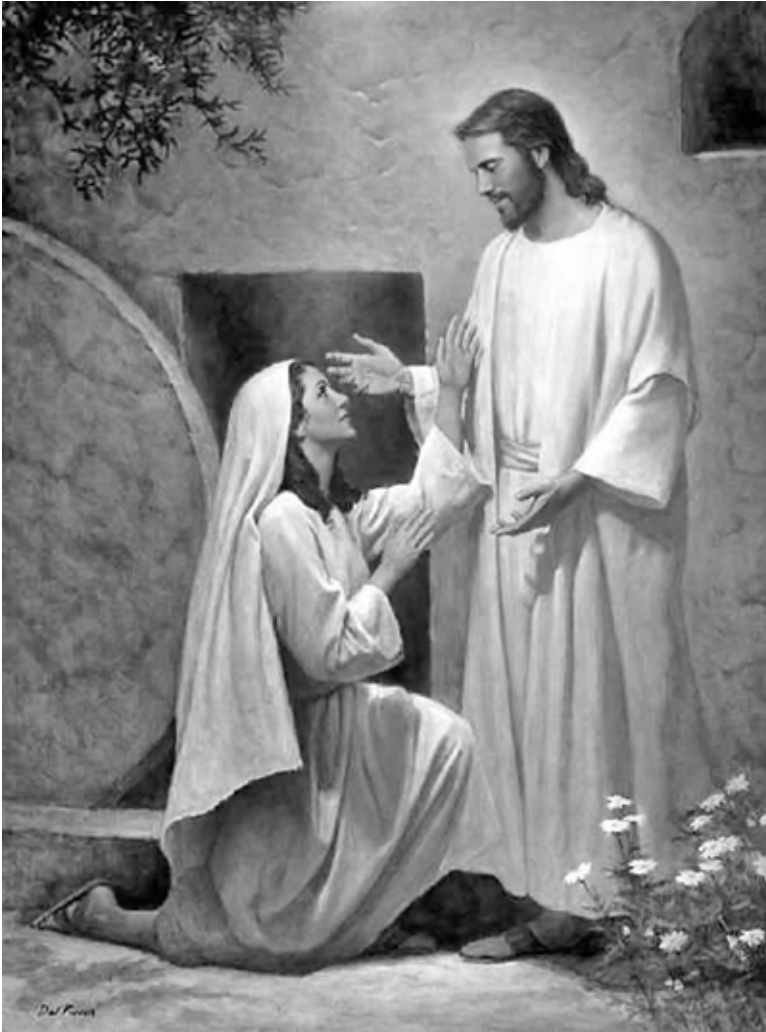
So the spiritual benefit to us in reading these accounts of the great Bridal Mystics is that it exalts our own understanding of love.

And if it seems a difficult road to follow, remember the words of the anonymous writer of 'The Epistle of Privy Counsel.'

"May Jesus help you now, for now you need him. All the suffering in the world outside is nothing compared with this. For now you are your own cross. And this is exactly the way to reach our Lord, who said, "'Let a man carry his cross," first in the suffering his self brings, and then "follow me" into blessedness, to the heights of perfection, to the sweet taste of my love, to the divine experience of myself.'" This is where you see your need to feel sorrow, and your desire to be rid of self-awareness. You have to bear the burden of yourself as your cross before you can be united to God, or experience in your spirit him who is perfect love. It is here, too, after you have touched and stamped by this grace, that you see something of, and in part experience, the great value of this work, supreme above all else."

*The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works, Author Unknown, Penguin Books, 1961*

**Part II**  
**Bridal Mystics**  
**St. Mary Magdalene**



Mary Magdalene with Jesus by Del Parson



"Mary said, "This world is a cemetery. It is filled with corpses. For this reason, the Lord set the world on fire so that the dead might awaken and spirits might be set free. And now the fire burns, and we tend it so that it might burn brightly, and we dance within the fire, for we are on fire with the Spirit of Yahweh. If you are utterly burnt away, you will rejoice in the True Light." A woman asked Mary, "Are you the one the Lord loved dearly?" Mary said, "The Lord loved the world, and gave Light and life to the world, so that no longer would anyone have to live in darkness. He loved me as the Soul of the World, so that embracing me he might embrace the world and uplift it to the bridal chamber. I am she whom the Lord loves, as is the soul of Light in you." Mary said, "The one who finds me will find the Anointed, for I am the house in which the Lord dwells . . . Disciples of Mary said to her, "We are going on a pilgrimage to the holy land so we might see where you and the Lord lived." Mary said to them, "The holy land is wherever a child of Light goes, and it is where the child of Light abides. The holy land is where the Anointed and the soul are joined. It is the bridal chamber . . . Mary spoke, and said, "There is baptism, chrism, and wedding feast, and there is the ransom and bridal chamber. Baptism is water, chrism is fire, and the ransom is earth. The wedding feast is in the air, for in the Spirit we shall meet the Anointed in the air on the Day of Joy, and then the element of the bridal chamber shall be fully revealed. Everything the Lord

accomplished he accomplished in a mystery, and the Anointed Bride is the mystery.”

*The Sophian Gospel of St. Mary Magdalene (3, 4, 12, 23)*

# St. Teresa of Avila



"1. WE now come to speak of divine and spiritual nuptials, although this sublime favour cannot be received in all its perfection during our present life, for by forsaking God this great good would be lost. The first time God bestows this grace, He, by an imaginary vision of His most sacred Humanity, reveals Himself to the soul so that it may understand and realize the sovereign gift it is receiving. He may manifest Himself in a different way to other people; the person I mentioned, after having received Holy Communion beheld our Lord, full of splendour, beauty, and majesty, as He was after His resurrection. He told her that henceforth she was to care for His affairs as though they were her own and He would care for hers: He spoke other words which she understood better than she can repeat them. This may seem nothing new, for our Lord had thus revealed Himself to her at other times; yet this was so different that it left her bewildered and amazed, both on account of the vividness of what she saw and of the words heard at the time, also because it took place in the interior of the soul where, with the exception of the one last mentioned, no other vision had been seen.

2. You must understand that between the visions seen in this and in the former mansions there is a vast difference; there is the same distinction between spiritual espousals and spiritual marriage as between people who are only betrothed and others who are united for ever in holy matrimony. I have told you that though I make this comparison because there is none more suitable, yet this betrothal is no more related to our corporal condition than if the soul were

a disembodied spirit. This is even more true of the spiritual marriage, for this secret union takes place in the innermost centre of the soul where God Himself must dwell: I believe that no door is required to enter it. I say, 'no door is required,' for all I have hitherto described seems to come through the senses and faculties as must the representation of our Lord's Humanity, but what passes in the union of the spiritual nuptials is very different. Here God appears in the soul's centre, not by an imaginary but by an intellectual vision far more mystic than those seen before, just as He appeared to the Apostles without having entered through the door when He said: 'Pax vobis.'

3. So mysterious is the secret and so sublime the favour that God thus bestows instantaneously on the soul, that it feels a supreme delight, only to be described by saying that our Lord vouchsafes for the moment to reveal to it His own heavenly glory in a far more subtle way than by any vision or spiritual delight. As far as can be understood, the soul, I mean the spirit of this soul, is made one with God Who is Himself a spirit, and Who has been pleased to show certain persons how far His love for us extends in order that we may praise His greatness. He has thus deigned to unite Himself to His creature: He has bound Himself to her as firmly as two human beings are joined in wedlock and will never separate Himself from her.

4. Spiritual betrothal is different and like the grace of union is often dissolved; for though two things are made one by union, separation is still possible and

each part then remains a thing by itself. This favour generally passes quickly, and afterwards the soul, as far as it is aware, remains without His company.

5. This is not so in the spiritual marriage with our Lord, where the soul always remains in its centre with its God. Union may be symbolized by two wax candles, the tips of which touch each other so closely that there is but one light; or again, the wick, the wax, and the light become one, but the one candle can again be separated from the other and the two candles remain distinct; or the wick may be withdrawn from the wax. But spiritual marriage is like rain falling from heaven into a river or stream, becoming one and the same liquid, so that the river and rain water cannot be divided; or it resembles a streamlet flowing into the ocean, which cannot afterwards be disunited from it. This marriage may also be likened to a room into which a bright light enters through two windows--though divided when it enters, the light becomes one and the same.

6. Perhaps when St. Paul said, 'He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit,' he meant this sovereign marriage, which presupposes His Majesty's having been joined to the soul by union. The same Apostle says: 'To me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.' This, I think, might here be uttered by the soul, for now the little butterfly of which I spoke dies with supreme joy, for Christ is her life.

7. This becomes more manifest by its effects as time goes on, for the soul learns that it is God Who gives it 'life,' by certain secret intuitions too strong to be

misunderstood, and keenly felt, although impossible to describe. These produce such over-mastering feelings that the person experiencing them cannot refrain from amorous exclamations, such as: 'O Life of my life, and Power which doth uphold me!' with other aspirations of the same kind. For from the bosom of the Divinity, where God seems ever to hold this soul fast clasped, issue streams of milk, which solace the servants of the castle. I think He wishes them to share, in some way, the riches the soul enjoys; therefore from the flowing river in which the little streamlet is swallowed up, some drops of water flow every now and then to sustain the bodily powers, the servants of the bride and Bridegroom.

8. A person who was unexpectedly plunged into water could not fail to be aware of it; here the case is the same, but even more evident. A quantity of water could not fall on us unless it came from some source--so the soul feels certain there must be someone within it who lances forth these darts and vivifies its own life, and that there is a Sun whence this brilliant light streams forth from the interior of the spirit to its faculties.

9. The soul itself, as I said, never moves from this centre, nor loses the peace He can give Who gave it to the Apostles when they were assembled together. I think this salutation of our Lord contains far deeper meaning than the words convey, as also His bidding the glorious Magdalen to 'go in peace.' Our Lord's words *act* within us, and in these cases they must have wrought their effect in the souls already disposed to banish from within themselves all that is

corporal and to retain only what is spiritual, in order to be joined in this celestial union with the uncreated Spirit. Without doubt, if we empty ourselves of all that belongs to the creature, depriving ourselves of it for the love of God, that same Lord will fill us with Himself.

10. Our Lord Jesus Christ, praying for His Apostles, (I cannot remember the reference), asked that they might be made one with the Father and with Himself; as Jesus Christ our Lord is in the Father and the Father in Him! I do not know how love could be greater than this! Let none draw back from entering here, for His Majesty also said: 'Not only for them do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in Me'; and He declared: 'I am in them.'

11. God help me! how true these words are, and how clearly are they understood by the soul which in this state of prayer finds them fulfilled in itself! So should we all but for our own fault, for the words of Jesus Christ, our King and our Lord, cannot fail. It is we who fail by not disposing ourselves fitly, nor removing all that can obstruct this light, so that we do not behold ourselves in this mirror wherein our image is engraved.

12. To return to what I was saying. God places the soul in His own mansion which is in the very centre of the soul itself. They say the empyreal heavens, in which our Lord dwells, do not revolve with the rest: so the accustomed movements of the faculties and imagination do not appear to take place in any way that can injure the soul or disturb its peace.



13. Do I seem to imply that after God has brought the soul thus far it is certain to be saved and cannot fall into sin again? I do not mean this: whenever I say that the soul seems in security, I must be understood to imply for as long as His Majesty thus holds it in His care and it does not offend Him. At any rate I know for certain that though such a person realizes the high state she is in and has remained in it for several years, she does not consider herself safe, but is more careful than ever to avoid committing the least offence against God. As I shall explain later on, she is most anxious to serve Him and feels a constant pain and confusion at seeing how little she can do for Him compared with all she ought.' This is no light cross but a severe mortification, for the harder the penances she can perform, the better is she pleased. Her greatest penance is to be deprived by God of health and strength to perform any. I told you elsewhere what keen pain this caused her, but now it grieves her far more. This must be because she is like a tree grafted on a stock growing near a stream which makes it greener and more fruitful. Why marvel at the longings of this soul whose spirit has truly become one with the celestial water I described?

14. To return to what I wrote about. It is not intended that the powers, senses and passions should continually enjoy this peace. The soul does so, indeed, but in the other mansions there are still times of struggle, suffering, and fatigue, though as a general rule, peace is not lost by them. This 'centre of the soul' or 'spirit' is so hard to describe or even to believe in, that I think, sisters, my inability to explain my meaning saves your being tempted to disbelieve me;

it is difficult to understand how there can be crosses and sufferings and yet peace in the soul.

15. Let me give you one or two comparisons--God grant they may be of use; if not, I know that what I say is true. A king resides in his palace; many wars and disasters take place in his kingdom but he remains on his throne. In the same way, though tumults and wild beasts rage with great uproar in the other mansions, yet nothing of this enters the seventh mansions, nor drives the soul from it. Although the mind regrets these troubles, they do not disturb it nor rob it of its peace, for the passions are too subdued to dare to enter here where they would only suffer still further defeat. Though the whole body is in pain, yet the head, if it be sound, does not suffer with it. I smile at these comparisons--they do not please me--but I can find no others. Think what you will about it--I have told you the truth."

*St. Teresa of Avila*

# St. John of the Cross



"The breathing of the air,

The song of the sweet nightingale,

The grove and its beauty

In the serene night,

With the flame that consumes, and gives no pain.

THE soul refers here, under five different expressions, to that which the Bridegroom is to give it in the beatific transformation.

1. The aspiration of the Holy Spirit of God after it, and its own aspiration after God.
2. Joyous praise of God in the fruition of Him.
3. The knowledge of creatures and the order of them.
4. The pure and clear contemplation of the divine essence.
5. Perfect transformation in the infinite love of God.

"The breathing of the air."

2. This is a certain faculty which God will there give the soul in the communication of the Holy Spirit, Who, like one breathing, raises the soul by His divine aspiration, informs it, strengthens it, so that it too may breathe in God with the same aspiration of love which the Father breathes with the Son, and the Son with the Father, which is the Holy Spirit Himself, Who is breathed into the soul in the Father and the Son in that transformation so as to unite it to Himself; for the transformation will not be true and perfect if the soul is not transformed in the Three Persons of the

Most Holy Trinity in a clear and manifest degree. This breathing of the Holy Spirit in the soul, whereby God transforms it in Himself, is to the soul a joy so deep, so exquisite, and so grand that no mortal tongue can describe it, no human understanding, as such, conceive it in any degree; for even that which passes in the soul with respect to the communication which takes place in its transformation wrought in this life cannot be described, because the soul united with God and transformed in Him breathes in God that very divine aspiration which God breathes Himself in the soul when it is transformed in Him.

3. In the transformation which takes place in this life, this breathing of God in the soul, and of the soul in God, is of most frequent occurrence, and the source of the most exquisite delight of love to the soul, but not however in the clear and manifest degree which it will have in the life to come. This, in my opinion, is what St. Paul referred to when he said: "Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father." The blessed in the life to come, and the perfect in this, thus experience it.

4. Nor is it to be thought possible that the soul should be capable of so great a thing as that it should breathe in God as God in it, in the way of participation. For granting that God has bestowed upon it so great a favor as to unite it to the most Holy Trinity, whereby it becomes like God, and God by participation, is it altogether incredible that it should exercise the faculties of its understanding, perform its acts of knowledge and of love, or, to speak more accurately, should have it all done in the Holy Trinity

together with It, as the Holy Trinity itself? This, however, takes place by communication and participation, God Himself effecting it in the soul, for this is "to be transformed in the Three Persons" in power, wisdom, and love, and herein it is that the soul becomes like God, Who, that it might come to this, created it to His own image and likeness.

5. How this can be so cannot be explained in any other way than by showing how the Son of God has raised us to so high a state, and merited for us the "power to be made the sons of God." He prayed to the Father, saying: "Father, I will that where I am they also whom You have given Me may be with Me, that they may see My glory which You have given Me." That is, "that they may do by participation in Us what I do naturally, namely, breathe the Holy Spirit." He says also: "Not for them only do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in Me; that they all may be one, as You, Father, in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that You have sent Me. And the glory which You have given Me, I have given to them: that they may be one as We also are one. I in them and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in one, and the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have also loved Me," -- that is, in bestowing upon them that love which He bestows upon the Son, though not naturally as upon Him, but in the way I speak of, in the union and transformation of love.

6. We are not to suppose from this that our Lord prayed that the saints might become one in essence

and nature, as the Father and the Son are; but that they might become one in the union of love as the Father and the Son are one in the oneness of love. Souls have by participation that very God which the Son has by nature, and are therefore really gods by participation like unto God and of His society.

7. St. Peter speaks of this as follows: "Grace to you and peace be accomplished in the knowledge of God, and Christ Jesus our Lord; as all things of His divine power, which pertain to life and godliness, are given us by the knowledge of Him Who has called us by His own proper glory and virtue, by Whom He has given us most great and precious promises: that by these you may be made partakers of the divine nature." Thus far St. Peter, who clearly teaches that the soul will be a partaker of God Himself, and will do, together with Him, the work of the Most Holy Trinity, because of the substantial union between the soul and God. And though this union is perfect only in the life to come, yet even in this, in the state of perfection, which the soul is said now to have attained, some anticipation of its sweetness is given it, in the way I am speaking of, though in a manner wholly ineffable.

8. O souls created for this and called to this, what are you doing? What are your occupations? Your aim is meanness, and your enjoyments misery. Oh, wretched blindness of the children of Adam, blind to so great a light, and deaf to so clear a voice; you do not see that, while seeking after greatness and glory, you are miserable and contemptible, ignorant, and unworthy of blessings so great. I now proceed to the

second expression which the soul has made use of to describe that which He gave it.

"The song of the sweet nightingale."

9. Out of this "breathing of the air" comes the sweet voice of the Beloved addressing Himself to the soul, in which the soul sends forth its own sweet song of joy to Him. Both are meant by the song of the nightingale. As the song of the nightingale is heard in the spring of the year, when the cold, and rain, and changes of winter are past, filling the ear with melody, and the mind with joy; so, in the true intercourse and transformation of love, which takes place in this life, the bride, now protected and delivered from all trials and changes of the world, detached, and free from the imperfections, sufferings, and darkness both of mind and body, becomes conscious of a new spring in liberty, largeness, and joy of spirit, in which she hears the sweet voice of the Bridegroom, Who is her sweet nightingale, renewing and refreshing the very substance of her soul, now prepared for the journey of everlasting life.

10. That voice is sweet to her ears, and calls her sweetly, as it is written: "Arise, make haste, My love, My dove, My beautiful one, and come. For winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in our land, the time of pruning is come: the voice of the turtle is heard in our land." When the bride hears the voice of the Bridegroom in her inmost soul, she feels that her troubles are over and her prosperity begun. In the refreshing comfort and sweet sense of this voice she, too, like the nightingale, sends



forth a new song of rejoicing to God, in unison with Him Who now moves her to do so.

11. It is for this that the Beloved sings, that the bride in unison with Him may sing to God; this is the aim and desire of the Bridegroom, that the soul should sing with the spirit joyously to God; and this is what He asks of the bride in the Canticle: "Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come; my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall, show me your face, let your voice sound in my ears."

12. The ears of God signify the desire He has that the soul should sing in perfect joy. And that this song may be perfect, the Bridegroom bids the soul to send it forth, and to let it sound in the clefts of the rock, that is, in the transformation which is the fruit of the mysteries of Christ, of which I spoke just now. And because in this union of the soul with God, the soul sings to Him together with Him, in the way I spoke of when I was speaking of love, the song of praise is most perfect and pleasing to God; for the acts of the soul, in the state of perfection, are most perfect; and thus the song of its rejoicing is sweet to God as well as to itself.

13. "Your voice is sweet," says the Bridegroom, "not only to you, but also to Me, for as we are one, your voice is also in unison and one with Mine." This is the Canticle which the soul sings in the transformation which takes place in this life, about which no exaggeration is possible. But as this song is not so perfect as the new song in the life of glory, the soul, having a foretaste of that by what it feels on earth,

shadows forth by the grandeur of this the magnificence of that in glory, which is beyond all comparison nobler, and calls it to mind and says that what its portion there will be is the song of the sweet nightingale.

"The grove and its beauty."

14. This is the third thing which the Bridegroom is to give the soul. The grove, because it contains many plants and animals, signifies God as the Creator and Giver of life to all creatures, which have their being and origin from Him, reveal Him and make Him known as the Creator. The beauty of the grove, which the soul prays for, is not only the grace, wisdom, and loveliness which flow from God over all created things, whether in heaven or on earth, but also the beauty of the mutual harmony and wise arrangement of the inferior creation, and the higher also, and of the mutual relations of both. The knowledge of this gives the soul great joy and delight. The fourth request is:

"In the serene night."

15. That is, contemplation, in which the soul desires to behold the grove. It is called night, because contemplation is dim; and that is the reason why it is also called mystical theology -- that is, the secret or hidden wisdom of God, where, without the sound of words, or the intervention of any bodily or spiritual sense, as it were in silence and in repose, in the darkness of sense and nature, God teaches the soul --

and the soul knows not how -- in a most secret and hidden way.

16. Some spiritual writers call this "understanding without understanding," because it does not take place in what philosophers call the active understanding which is conversant with the forms, fancies, and apprehensions of the physical faculties, but in the understanding as it is possible and passive, which without receiving such forms receives passively only the substantial knowledge of them free from all imagery. This occurs without effort or exertion on its part, and for this reason contemplation is called night, in which the soul through the channel of its transformation learns in this life that it already possesses, in a supreme degree, this divine grove, together with its beauty.

17. Still, however clear may be its knowledge, it is dark night in comparison with that of the blessed, for which the soul prays. Hence, while it prays for the clear contemplation, that is, the fruition of the grove, and its beauty; with the other objects here enumerated, it says, let it be in the night now serene; that is, in the clear beatific contemplation: let the night of dim contemplation cease here below, and change into the clear contemplation of the serene vision of God above. Thus the serene night is the clear and unclouded contemplation of the face of God. It was to this night of contemplation that David referred when he said, "Night shall be my light in my pleasures"; that is, when I shall have my delight in the essential vision of God, the night of contemplation

will have dawned in the day and light of my understanding.

"With the flame that consumes, and gives no pain."

18. This flame is the love of the Holy Spirit. "Consumes" means absolute perfection. Therefore, when the soul says that the Beloved will give it all that is mentioned in this stanza, and that they will be its possession in love absolute and perfect, all of them and itself with them in perfect love, and that without pain, its purpose is to show forth the utter perfection of love. Love, to be perfect, must have these two properties: it must consume and transform the soul in God; the burning and transformation wrought in the soul by the flame must give no pain. But this can be only in the state of the blessed, where the flame is sweet love, for in this transformation of the soul therein there is a blessed agreement and contentment on both sides, and no change to a greater or less degree gives pain, as before, when the soul had attained to the state of perfect love.

19. But the soul having attained to this state abides in its love of God, a love so like His and so sweet, God being, as Moses says, a consuming fire -- "the Lord your God is a consuming fire" -- that it perfects and renews it. But this transformation is not like that which is wrought in this life, which though most perfect and in love consummate was still in some measure consuming the soul and wearing it away. It was like fire in burning coals, for though the coals may be transformed into fire, and made like it, and ceased from seething, and smoke no longer arises

from them as before they were wholly transformed into fire, still, though they have become perfect fire, the fire consumes them and reduces them to ashes.

20. So is it with the soul which in this life is transformed by perfect love: for though it is wholly conformed, yet it still suffers, in some measure, both pain and loss. Pain, on account of the beatific transformation which is still wanting; loss, through the weakness and corruption of the flesh coming in contact with love so strong and so deep; for everything that is grand hurts and pains our natural infirmity, as it is written, "The corruptible body is a load upon the soul." But in the life of bliss there will be neither loss nor pain, though the sense of the soul will be most acute, and its love without measure, for God will give power to the former and strength to the latter, perfecting the understanding in His wisdom and the will in His love.

21. As, in the foregoing stanzas, and in the one which follows, the bride prays for the boundless knowledge of God, for which she requires the strongest and the deepest love that she may love Him in proportion to the grandeur of His communications, she prays now that all these things may be bestowed upon her in love consummated, perfect, and strong."

*St. John of the Cross*

# St. Veronica Giuliani



“St. Veronica Giuliani, a Capuchin Nun, endured accusations, doubts and great humiliations at the hands of her community because of her many spiritual favors, including that of the stigmata. After enduring the sufferings for some time, she experienced the mystical espousal. The event took place on April 11, 1694. She received a mystical ring from the hand of Jesus which many witnesses were privileged to see. One witness related, “This ring encircled her ring finger as ordinary rings do. On it there appeared to be a raised stone as large as a pea and of a red color” The ring was not always visible, but at times was seen clearly.”

*Mysteries, Marvels and Miracles in the Lives of the Saints*

# St. Bernard of Clairvaux



Mysteries, marvels and miracles

## MYSTICAL MARRIAGE

“The return of the soul is its conversion, that is, its turning to the Word to be reformed by Him and to



be rendered conformable to Him. In what respect? In charity. It is that conformity which makes, as it were, a marriage between the soul and the Word when, being already like unto Him by its nature, it endeavours to show itself like unto Him by its will, and loves Him as it is loved by Him. And if this love is perfected the soul is wedded to the Word. What can be more full of happiness and joy than this conformity? What more to be desired than this love, which makes thee, O soul, no longer content with human guidance, to draw near with confidence thyself to the Word, to attach thyself with constancy to Him, to address Him familiarly and consult Him upon all subjects, to become as receptive in thy intelligence as fearless in thy desires? This is the contract of a marriage truly spiritual and sacred. And to say this is to say little: it is more than a contract, it is embracement. Embracement, surely, in which perfect correspondence of wills makes of two one spirit. Nor is it to be feared that the inequality of the two who are parties to it should render imperfect or halting in any respect this concurrence of wills; for love knows not reverence. Love receives its name from loving, not from honouring. Let one who is struck with dread, with astonishment, with fear, with admiration rest satisfied with honouring; but all these feelings are absent in him who loves. Love is filled with itself, and where love has come it overcomes and transforms all other feelings. Wherefore the soul that loves, loves, and knows naught else. He who justly deserves to be honoured justly deserves to be admired and wondered at; yet He loves rather to be loved. They are Bridegroom and Bride. What other bond or constraining force do you seek for between

spouses than to be loved and to love? . . . God says: If I be Father, where is My honour? He says that as a Father. But if He declares Himself to be a Bridegroom, where is My love? For He had previously said: If I be Father, where is My honour? He says that as a Father. But if He declares Himself to be a Bridegroom, where is My love? For He had previously said: If I be Lord, where is My fear? God, then, requires that He should be feared as Lord, honoured as Father, but as Bridegroom loved. Which of these three is highest and most to be preferred? Surely it is love. Without it fear is painful and honour without attraction . . . Neither of these will He receive if it be not seasoned with the honey of love. Love is sufficient by itself, it pleases by itself, and for its own sake. It is itself a merit, and itself its own recompense. Love seeks neither cause nor fruit beyond itself. Its fruit is its use. I love because I love; I love that I may love. Love, then, is a great reality. It is the only one of all the movements, feelings, and affections of the soul in which the creature is able to respond to its Creator, though not upon equal terms, and to repay likewith like. For example, if God is wroth with me, may I be similarly wroth with Him? Certainly not, but I shall fear and tremble and implore pardon . . . But how different is it with love! For when God loves, He desires naught else than to be loved, because He loves us for no other purpose than that He may be loved, knowing that those who love Him become blessed by their love itself . . . Love that is pure is not mercenary; it does not draw strength from hope, nor is it weakened by distrust. This is the love of the Bride, because all that she is is only love. The very being of the Bride and her only hope is love. In this the Bride

abounds; with this the Bridegroom is content. He seeks for nothing else; she has nothing else. Thence it is that He is Bridegroom and she is Bride. This belongs exclusively to a wedded pair, and to it none other attains, not even a son. The Bridegroom's love, or rather the Bridegroom who is Love, requires only love in return and faithfulness. Let it then be permitted to the Bride beloved to love in return. How could the Bride not love, she who is the Bride of Love? How could Love not be Loved?

Rightly, then, does she renounce all other affections and devote her whole self to Him alone who is Love, because she can make a return to Him by a love which is reciprocal. For even when she has poured her whole self forth in love, what would that be in comparison to the ever-flowing Flood of the Fountain? Not with equal fullness flows the stream of love from the soul and the Word, the Bride, and the Bridgroom, the creature and the Creator. What then? Shall the desire of her who is espoused perish and become of non effect, because she is unable to contend with a giant who runs His course, to dispute the palm of sweetness with honey, of gentleness with the lamb, of brilliance with the sun, of love with Him who is Love? No. For although, being a creature, she loves less, because she is less; nevertheless, if she loves with her whole self nothing is wanting where all is given. Wherefore, as I have said, to love thus is to be wedded; because it is not possible to love thus and yet not to be greatly loved, and in the consent of the two parties consists a full and perfect marriage. Can anyone doubt that the soul is first loved by the Word, and more dearly? Assuredly it is both anticipated in

loving and surpassed. Happy the soul whose favoured lot it is to be presented with the benediction of a delight so great. Happy the soul to which is granted the experience, the embracement of such sweetness, which is naught else than a love holy and chaste; a love sweet and delightful; a love as serene as it is sincere; a love mutual, intimate, powerful, which not in one flesh, in one spirit joins together two, and makes them no more two, but one, according to St. Paul: 'He that is joined to God is one spirit.'"

*St. Bernard of Clairvaux*

"I confess, then, though I say it in my foolishness, that the Word has visited me and even very often. But although He has frequently entered into my soul, I have never at any time been sensible of the precise moment of His coming. I have felt that he was present; I remember that He has been with me; I have sometimes been able even to have a presentiment that He would come; but never to feel His coming or His departure. For whence He came to enter my soul, or whither He went on quitting it, by what means He has made entrance or departure, I confess that I know not even to this day . . . It is not by the eyes that He enters, for He is without colour; nor by the ears, for His coming is without sound; nor by the nostrils, for it is not with the air but with the mind that He is blended; nor again does He enter by the mouth, not being of a nature to be eaten or drunk; nor lastly is He capable of being traced by the touch, for He is intangible.

You will ask, then, how, since the ways of His access are thus incapable of being traced, I could know that He was present. But He is living and full of energy, and as soon as He has entered into me He has quickened my sleeping soul, has aroused and softened and goaded my heart, which was in a state of torpor and hard as stone. He has begun to pluck up and destroy, to plant and to build, to water the dry places, to illuminate the gloomy spots, to throw open those which were shut close, to inflame with warmth those which were cold, as also to straighten its crooked paths and make its rough places smooth, so that my soul might bless the Lord and all that is within me praise His Holy Name. Thus, then, the Bridegroom-Word, though He has several times entered into me, has never made His coming apparent to my sight, hearing, or touch, It was not by His motions that He was recognized by me, nor could I tell by any of my senses that He had penetrated to the depths of my being. It was, as I have already said, only by the movement of my heart that I was enabled to recognize His presence, and to know the might of His power by the sudden departure of vices and the strong restraint put upon all carnal affections. From the discovery and conviction of my secret faults I have had good reason to admire the depths of His wisdom; His goodness and kindness have become known in the amendment, whatever it may amount to, of my life; while in the renewal of the spirit of my mind, that is, of my inward man, I have perceived in some degree the loveliness of His beauty, and have been filled with amazement at the multitude of His greatness, as I meditated upon all these things.

But when the Word withdrew Himself, all these spiritual powers and faculties began to droop and languish, as if the fire had been withdrawn from a bubbling pot; and this is to me the sign of His departure. Then my soul is necessarily sad and depressed a He shall return and my heart grow warm within me, as it is wont, which indeed is the indication to me that He has come back again.

After having then, such an experience of the Word, what wonder that I should adopt for my own the language of the Bride, who recalls Him when He has departed, since I am influenced by a desire, not indeed as powerful, but at least similar to hers. AS long as I live that utterance shall be in my mind, and I will employ, for the recalling of the Word, that word of recall which I find here in the word "Return." And as often as He shall leave me, so often shall He be called back by my voice; nor will I cease to send my cries, as it were, after Him as He departs, expressing the ardent desire of my heart that He should return, that He should restore to me the joy of His salvation, restore to me Himself. I confess to you, my sons, that I take pleasure in nothing else in the meantime, until He is present who is alone pleasing to me."

*St. Bernard of Clairvaux*

# St. Catherine Dei Ricci



“THUS, then, were Catherines ecstasies and especially that of the Passion authentically acknowledged as of Divine origin, and in nowise a delusion. The moment had now come for her to receive the full accomplishment of Gods promises. Eight years, or thereabouts, had gone by since Jesus Christ had appeared to her during that bad illness in her father s house, to tell her of her approaching recovery and to show her the splendid betrothal-ring with which He meant one day to espouse her. This miraculous occurrence now actually took place; and the following account of it is handed down to us, in the graceful words of Serafino Razzi:

"On the 9th of April, 1542, being Easter Day, and the maiden Catherine being in her cell towards early dawn, our Lord Jesus Christ appeared to her covered with glory, bearing a brilliantly shining cross on His shoulder, and a magnificent crown on His head. He had with Him His glorious Virgin Mother, Mary; Saint Mary Magdalen; Saint Thomas of Aquinas; and another Blessed of the Order. The saints little cell became instantly full of dazzling light; and amidst the light was a multitude of angels gracefully clad, and ranged in due order, with divers musical instruments in their hands. Beholding such majesty, Catherine was struck with a great fear; and (having first, not with standing her awe, carried out what obedience prescribed as to all visions) she prostrated three times in adoration of Jesus. Then did the most holy Mother of God pray her Divine Son to be pleased to take Sister Catherine for His Spouse. He therewith gladly consented; and whilst the Blessed Virgin held forth the hand of His humble servant hastened to draw from His own finger a brilliant ring which He Himself placed on Catherine s left fore-finger; and, as He placed it, He said: My daughter, receive this ring as pledge and proof that thou dost now, and ever shalt, belong to Me. And when the holy maid longed to tell her gratitude, but could find no words worthy of such a grace, then the angels suddenly began to draw from their instruments melody so sweet that her narrow cell seemed all at once to be Paradise.

"Jesus, after that, earnestly commended to His spouse the practice of humility, obedience, and all Christian virtues; filled her soul with some of that heavenly joy



that is the portion of His well-beloved ones; and disappeared from sight, followed by all His train."

The ring given to Catherine was of pure gold, enamelled with red in symbol of the Blood of the Passion, and with a magnificent diamond set in the middle. It was said to have been always visible to her, but not equally so to others. It became visible, we are told, to different people from time to time, in different forms, according to the devotion of each and as God pleased. Sister Maddalena Strozzi saw it habitually, as a raised red circle round the finger, increasing, in the shape of a square stone, in the middle. Other sisters saw it now and then shining like a luminous circle. Others again, seeing it under one form or another, were at the same time conscious of a heavenly scent coming from it. Once, however, the whole community having put the saint under obligation to beg the favour of God saw the ring in its full real beauty and true form. Then every one of these consecrated virgins recognized in the mysterious pledge of betrothal a sacred gift, which the Divine Spouse gives, indeed, to whomsoever He pleases; but with which He specially loves to address one to whom He may say, in the joy of His Heart, *Una est columba mea, una est perfecta mea* (One is my Dove, My One perfection). Soon, both in the Monastery and in all Tuscany, Catherine was named with one voice "the Bride of Christ" *par excellence*."

*F.M. Capes*

# Blessed Catherine of Racconnigi



“She was born in a tumble-down shed, a fact that was symbolic of the whole of the material side of her life throughout which she had to endure indigence, ill-health and misunderstanding; but spiritually she was enriched with some of the more extraordinary favours which God extends to man. It is told of her that already at five years old she believed herself to have been espoused to the child Jesus by His all-holy mother, and that He gave her as her special patrons and protectors St. Jerome, St. Catherine of Siena and St. Peter Martyr. When she was nine and one day broke down in tears of tiredness over her work and the wretched state of her home, she was again visited and comforted by the holy Child. On the feast of St. Stephen in the year 1500 she was praying to that saint, and reminding him that as a deacon the Apostles had especially entrusted the care of women to him, when he appeared to her and spoke encouraging words, promising that the Holy Spirit would come upon her, and a voice exclaimed: “I am come to take up my dwelling in you, and to cleanse, enlighten, kindle and animate your soul.” After she had made a vow of virginity the mystical espousals were repeated and the mark of a ring appeared upon her finger, and she suffered the pains of a crown of thorns and of the other stigmata of our Lord’s passion, without, however, their becoming visible to the eye.”

*Butler’s Lives of the Saints*

# Blessed Stephanie de Quinzanis



“It was Blessed Stephanie's good fortune always to live with holy people and to have the edifying example of many holy friends. She was born of pious parents in a little village in northern Italy. While she was still very small, her father became a Dominican Tertiary. On visits with him to the Dominican convent, she met the holy stigmatic, Blessed Matthew Carrieri, whose influence was to last throughout her long life. He taught her the catechism and much of his own spirit of sanctity. In fact, he told her that one day she was to be his spiritual heiress. She did not understand this for many years.

Early trained to sanctity, Stephanie responded with the love of a true saint. She fasted and did penance from her earliest years. The visions that were to sweeten her mystical life began when she was seven, and at that time she made the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. She was favored with a beautiful visitation from Our Lord and several of the Dominican saints, and was given a splendid ring--as a token of her espousal to Christ. From then on, her heart and mind were centered on God, and no earthly attraction had power to distract her.

When Stephanie was 14, Blessed Matthew Carrieri died, and, shortly thereafter, appeared to her. Wounded with a terrible pain, the girl realized that she had received the sacred stigmata. This was the legacy the Blessed Matthew had promised her. Now she intensified her penances, and she meditated almost ceaselessly on the Passion. In addition to her physical endurance of the Passion, she had to

undergo a spiritual desolation and dryness. This aridity lasted forty years.”

*Saint Patrick's Church, Saints Online*

# St. Gertrude the Great



## ADVERSITY IS THE SPIRITUAL RING WITH WHICH THE SOUL IS BETROTHED TO GOD

"As Gertrude offered to God in her prayers all that she suffered in body and mind, and all the pleasures of which she had deprived herself, whether in the flesh or the spirit, our Lord appeared to her and showed her the pleasures and the pains which she had offered to Him under the form of two rings, enriched with precious stones, which He wore to adorn His hands. The Saint, perceiving this, repeated the offering frequently. When suffering a corporal affliction some time afterwards, she beheld Jesus her Lord touch her left eye with the ring which He carried in His left hand and which represented corporal afflictions and sufferings. From this moment she felt extreme suffering in this eye which she had beheld our Lord touch in spirit and this pain was never entirely removed.

She knew from this that, as the ring is the sign of espousal, so also sufferings in body or mind are testimonies of the spiritual espousal of the soul with God. Whoever suffers may say confidently with all truth: "My Lord Jesus Christ has espoused me to Him with His ring." If he recognizes in those afflictions the graces which he has received and returns thanks, he may add: "He has adorned me with a crown as His spouse." Thanksgiving in tribulation is a crown of glory more brilliant than gold and incomparably more precious than topaz."

*The Life and Revelations of St. Gertrude the Great*



# St. Catherine of Siena



"Then the Lord said to her, "Since for love of me you have forsaken vanities and despised the pleasure of the flesh and fastened all the delights of your heart on me, now, when the rest of the household are feasting and enjoying themselves, I have determined to celebrate the wedding feast of your soul and to espouse you to me in faith as I promised."

Before He had finished speaking His most glorious Virgin Mother appeared with the most blessed St. John the Evangelist, the glorious Apostle Paul, St. Dominc (the founder of the Order) and the prophet David with his harp. While David played sweet strains on the harp the Mother of God took Catherine's hand in her own most holy hand and presenting her to er Son courteously asked Him to marry her to Himself in faith. The Son of God, graciously agreeing, held out a gold ring with four pearls set in a circle in it and a wonderful diamond in the middle and with His most holy right hand He slipped it on to the virgin's second finger, saying, "There! I marry you to me in faith, to me, your Creator and Saviour. Keep this faith unspotted until you come to me in heaven and celebrate the marriage that has no end. From this ime forward, daughter, act firmly and decisely in everything that in my Providence I shall ask you to do. Armed as you are with the strength of faith, you will overcome all your enemies and be happy."

The vision disappeared, but the ring always remain on Catherine's finger and though no one else could see it, it was always before her eyes. In fact she frequently confessed to me in all humility that she

could always see it on her finger and that there was never a moment when it was out of her sight.”

*Blessed Raymond of Capua*

# St. Francis of Assisi



“The man of God, the blessed Francis,  
had been taught not to seek his own salvation,  
but what he discerned would help the salvation of  
others.

More than anything else he desired

to be set free and to be with Christ.  
 Thus his chief object of concern was  
 to live free from all things that are in the world,  
 so that his inner serenity would not be disturbed  
 even for a moment  
 by contact with any of its dust.

He made himself insensible to all outside noise,  
 gathering his external senses into his inner being  
 and checking the impetus of his spirit,  
 he emptied himself for God alone.

In the clefts of the rock he would build his nest  
 and in the hollow of the wall his dwelling.  
 With blessed devotion he visited the heavenly  
 mansions;  
 and, totally emptied of himself,  
 he rested for a long time in the wounds of the Savior.  
 That is why he often chose solitary places  
 to focus his heart entirely on God.

But he was not reluctant,  
 when he discerned the time with right,  
 to involve himself in the affairs of his neighbors,  
 and attend to their salvation  
 For his safest haven was prayer;  
 not prayer of a fleeting moment, empty and proud,  
 but prayer that was prolonged,  
 full of devotion, peace in humility.  
 If he began at night,  
 he was barely finished at morning.  
 Walking, sitting, eating, drinking,  
 he was focused on prayer.  
 He would spend the night alone praying in  
 abandoned churches and in deserted places where,

with the protection of divine grace, he overcame his  
soul's many fears and anxieties."

*The Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano*



Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, S. Francesco riceve le stigmate, Museo S. Pio V, Valencia

## THE VISION OF A MAN HAVING THE IMAGE OF A CRUCIFIED SERAPH

"While he was staying in the hermitage called L Verna, after the place where it is located, two years prior to the time that he return his soul to heaven, he saw in the vision of God a man, having six wings like a Seraph, standing over him, arms extended and feet joined, affixed to a cross. Two of his wings were raised up, two were stretched out over his head as if for flight, and two covered his whole body. When the blessed servant of the most High saw these things, he was filled with the greatest awe, but could not decide what this vision meant for him. Moreover, he greatly rejoiced and was much delighted by the kind and gracious look that he saw the Seraph gave him. The Seraph's beauty was beyond comprehension, but the fact that the Seraph was fixed to the cross and the bitter suffering of that passion thoroughly frightened him. Consequently, he got up both sad and happy as joy and sorrow took their turns in his heart. Concerned over the matter, he kept thinking about what this vision could mean and his spirit was anxious to discern a sensible meaning from the vision.

While he was unable to perceive anything clearly understandable from the vision, its newness very much pressed upon his heart. Signs of the nails began to appear on his hands and feet, just as he had seen them a little while earlier on the crucified man hovering over him.

His hands and feet seemed to be pierced through the middle by nails, with the heads of the nails appearing

on the inner part of his hands and on the upper part of his feet, and their points protruding on the opposite sides. Those marks on the inside of his hands were round, but rather oblong on the outside; and small pieces of flesh were visible like the points of nails, bent over and flattened, extending beyond the flesh around them. On his feet, the marks of nails were stamped in the same way and raised above the surrounding flesh. His right side was marked with an oblong scar, as if pierced with a lance, and this often dripped blood, so that his tunic and undergarments were frequently stained with his holy blood.

Sadly, only a few merited seeing the sacred wound in his side during the life of the crucified servant of the crucified Lord. Elias was fortunate and did merit somehow to see the wound in his side. Rufino was just as lucky: he touched it with his own hands. For one time, when the same brother Rufino put his hand onto the holy man's chest to rub him, his hand slipped, as often happens, and it chanced that he touched the precious scar in his life right side. As soon as he had touched it, the holy one of God felt great pain and pushed Rufino's hand away, crying out for the Lord to spare him.

He hid those marks carefully from strangers, and concealed them cautiously from people close to him, so that even the brothers at his side and his most devoted followers for a long time did not know about them."

*The Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano*



HOW THE MOTHER OF CHRIST AND ST JOHN  
THE EVANGELIST APPEARED TO BROTHER  
CONRAD, AND TOLD HIM WHO HAD SUFFERED  
THIS GREATEST SORROW AT THE PASSION OF  
CHRIST

"When Brother Conrad and the aforementioned Brother Peter, the two shining lights of the custody of Ancona, were living together in the Convent of Forano, such love and charity existed between them that they seemed to have but one heart and one soul; and they would make known to each other and share every mercy which the Lord should send them. Having made this agreement, it happened one day, as Brother Peter was praying, devoutly meditating on the Passion of Christ, and how his Blessed Mother, with St John the Evangelist and St Francis, were represented at the foot of the cross, as having been crucified with Christ in mental sufferings, he felt a great wish to know which of the three had suffered the greatest sorrow on account of the Passion of Christ - the Mother who had given him birth, the disciple who had laid his head on his bosom, or St Francis, who was, as it were, crucified with him. As he was meditating on this, the Virgin Mary appeared to him, with St John the Evangelist and St Francis, all clothed in the heavenly garb of glorified souls; and St Francis seemed to be dressed more richly than St John. At this vision Brother Peter was greatly terrified, but St John comforted him by saying: "Fear not, dear brother; for we are come to enlighten thee in thy doubt: know, then, that the Mother of Christ, and I, his disciple, have suffered above every other creature at his Passion, and after us St Francis has

suffered more than all others, and this is why thou seest him in such glory." And Brother Peter said: "Why then, most holy Apostle of Christ, are the vestments of St Francis more beautiful than thine?" "Because," answered St John, "when he was in the world, he wore a humbler dress than I." And having said these words, he gave to Brother Peter a glorious vestment that he had in his hand, saying: "Take this dress which I have brought for thee." Then St John being about to put it on him, Brother Peter fell down in terror, and began to cry out: "Brother Conrad, Brother Conrad, haste thou to help me! come and see most wonderful things!" And as he said these words, the vision disappeared. Then Brother Peter related to Brother Conrad all he had seen, and they together returned thanks to God."

### *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*



The Marriage Nuptial of St. Francis to Lady Poverty

## HE ASKS TO BE SHOWN WHERE POVERTY LIVES

“When blessed Francis reached them, he said to them: “Tell me, I beg you, where does Lady Poverty dwell? Where does she eat? Where does she rest at noon, for I languish with love of her?”

But they answered: “Good brother, we have sat here for a time and for times and for half a time. We have frequently seen her pass by for there are many searching for her. Sometimes many accompanied her, but she returned alone and naked, not adorned with any jewels, nor graced with any companions, nor wearing any clothes. She used to weep bitterly and say “The children of my mother have fought against me.” And we said to her: “Be patient for the upright love you.:

“Brother, she has not gone up to a great and high mountain where God has placed her. She is dwelling in the sacred mountains because God loved her above all the tabernacles of Jacob. Giants have not been able to touch the footprints of her steps and eagles cannot fly even to her shoulder. Poverty is the only thing that everyone condemns so that it cannot be discovered in the land of those living comfortably. She is hidden from their eyes, then, and concealed from the birds of the sky. God understands her path and He knows her place.

“If, then, you wish to reach her, brother, take off your clothes of rejoicing, and put aside every burden and sin clinging to you for, unless you are naked, you will not be able to climb to her who lives in so high a

place. Yet, because she is kind, she will easily be seen by those who love her and be found by those who search for her. To think about her, brother, is perfect understanding, and whoever keeps vigil for her will quickly be secure. Take faithful companions so that during the mountain's ascent you will have their advice and be strengthened by their help. For woe to the one who is alone! If he falls, he will have no one to lift him up. For if anyone falls, he should have someone help him!"

*The Sacred Exchange Between St. Francis and Lady Poverty*

OF A BEAUTIFUL VISION WHICH APPEARED TO  
A YOUNG MAN WHO HATED THE HABIT OF ST  
FRANCIS SO GREATLY, THAT HE WAS ON THE  
POINT OF LEAVING THE ORDER

"A young man, of noble birth, and of delicate habits, who had entered the Order of St Francis, was seized after a few days, through the devil's suggestions, with a violent dislike of the habit that he wore: he hated the shape of the sleeves; he felt a horror for the hood, for the length of the dress, and the coarseness of the material; so that it seemed to him as if he carried about him an insupportable weight; and, disliking the Order more and more, he determined to leave it and return to the world. It was the custom of this young man, at whatever hour he passed before the altar in the convent at which the Blessed Sacrament was reserved, to kneel down with great respect and, covering his head with his hood and crossing his arms on his breast, to prostrate himself, as he had

been taught to do by the master of novices. It so happened, that the night when he had made up his mind to leave the convent, he passed before the altar, and, kneeling down as he was wont to do, he prostrated himself to the ground, and, being ravished in spirit, the Lord sent him a most wonderful vision. He saw before him a great multitude of saints ranged in procession, two by two, clothed in vestments made of precious material: their faces and their hands shone like the sun; they sang, as they walked, to the sound of celestial music. Two of them were more nobly and more richly dressed than the rest, and surrounded by such a blaze of light that none could look on them without being dazzled. At the end of the procession was one so gloriously adorned, that he seemed, like a new knight, to be more favoured than the others. Now the young man, seeing such a beautiful procession, was struck with wonder; but although he could not guess the meaning of the vision, he dared not ask, and seemed struck dumb with amazement. When the procession had almost passed away, he took courage, and addressing himself to those who were in the rear, he said: "O beloved, I pray you tell me who are those wonderful beings who form this venerable procession." They answered: "Know, my son, that we are all Friars Minor, who are come from the glories of Paradise; and those two who shine forth brighter than the rest, are St Francis and St Anthony; and the last one you saw so especially honoured is a holy friar, lately dead, who having fought with courage against temptation and having preserved to the end, we lead in triumph to the glories of Paradise; and these splendid vestments which adorn us have been given to us by God, in exchange for the

coarse tunic we wore with so much patience in religion; and the glorious light which shines upon us has been given in reward for the humility, the holy poverty, the obedience, and chastity that we observed to the end of our lives. Now, my son, do not find the robe of religion too rough to wear; for if, clothed in the sackcloth of St Francis, and out of love to Christ, thou dost despise the world, mortifying thy flesh, and fighting valiantly against the devil, thou too shalt receive these splendid vestments, and shine with this glorious light." On hearing these words the young man came to his senses, and feeling himself much strengthened, he put far from him all temptation to leave the Order, confessed his sin to the guardian and to the brethren, and from that moment dearly loved the course vestment of St Francis and the severity of penance, and at length ended his life in the Order in a state of great sanctity."

### *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*

HOW A LITTLE CHILD WHO HAD ENTERED THE  
ORDER SAW ST FRANCIS IN PRAYER ONE  
NIGHT, AND SAW ALSO THE SAVIOUR, THE  
VIRGIN MARY, AND MANY OTHER SAINTS TALK  
WITH HIM

"A certain pure and innocent child was received into the Order during the lifetime of St Francis, and the convent in which he lived was so small that the monks were obliged to sleep on mats. It chanced that St Francis came one day to that convent, and in the evening, after Compline, he went to rest, so as to rise up early to pray, as was his custom, when all the

other friars were still asleep. The said little child had made up his mind carefully to watch St Francis, to learn something of his sanctity, and find out more especially what he did in the night when he got up; and in order that he might not be overtaken by sleep, he laid him down by St Francis, tying the end of the cord he wore round his waist to the one which the saint wore, so that he was sure of being awakened when the latter got up in the night; and this he did so gently, that St Francis was not aware of his contrivance. When all the other friars were fast asleep, St Francis rose from sleep, and finding the child's cord tied to his own, he carefully untied it so as not to awake him and went alone into the wood which was near the convent. Entering into a little cell which was there, he began to pray.

Shortly after, the child awoke, and finding St Francis gone, and the cord untied, he rose up quickly and went to seek him. Perceiving the door open which led to the wood, he thought St Francis had gone that way; and entering into the wood, and hurrying on to the little cell, he heard the sound of many voices. Approaching near to hear and see whence they came, he saw a great and wonderful light all round the saint, and in the light was Jesus Christ, with the Virgin Mary, St John the Baptist, St John the Evangelist, and a great multitude of angels, all talking with St Francis. On seeing this the child fell to the ground as if he had been dead. The miracle of this holy vision being ended, St Francis rose to return to the convent, and stumbling in the way against the child, who appeared to be dead, with great compassion he took him up in his arms and carried

him in his bosom, as the good shepherd is wont to carry his lambs. Having learned from him how he had seen the vision, he forbade him to tell any man thereof so long as he, St Francis, lived. The little child grew up in the grace of God, and had a great devotion to St Francis. He became one of the most distinguished men of the Order. After the death of St Francis, he related the vision to the brethren

*The Little Flowers of St. Francis*



# St. Clare of Assisi



“It happened, and it helps to narrate it, that one time the sacred cycle of the Lord’s Supper occurred. The night was at hand when that betrayer did not fear to sell the Master, the corrupter of peace presumed to betray the nourisher of peace with a sign of peace, to condemn the day to darkness, to destroy light with gloom, to sell life through a mortal contract. The fear of death was already threatening and the blood sweat of the agony during which the Son, knowing His humanity, prays to the Father that drinking of the chalice might pass. The virgin seeks the secrecy of a cell and secludes herself. Prayer follows prayer, and sorrow upon sorrow. The cruel rapture, the abusive mockery, the bitterness which that holy and meek Lamb endured, enters the virgin’s mind, more intensely remains with her. While she recalls each event, while her mind focuses on them, the holy virgin is wrapt in ecstasy throughout the night and the following day, the light of her eye focuses on one thing. Her soul’s affections keep vigil and silence the demands of her body. Her mind pursues holy repose, while she thus remains focused, while she stays thus immobile. A watchful servant frequently returns and sees her remaining motionless. Her features do not change. When Friday has passed and the night which precedes that blessed Sabbath arrives, the devoted daughter then returns to her mother, lights a lamp, reminds her by signs of that mandate according to which the holy man had not long ago directed her that no day should pass during which the virgin did not place something to eat before her.

The mother awakens, as if she were then returning from some place. “There is no need for a candle, she

says. Isn't it day?" The servant responds to the lady, "That night has passed, as well as the following day. Another night has come." Then the mother says to her "Blessed be that sleep which I have so greatly desired! I have finally received my wish!" Yet, lest any arrogance arise or she swell with human praise, the mother forbade the young girl and said: "While I am still alive, may you be careful not to tell this to anyone." You who read these things, I pray, should consider how great is this virgin's perfection, how pure her spirit, how free and uninhibited the movement and weight of her flesh! Her mind is focused on Christ, and her body sleeps. Yet her sleep is not of the flesh: nature does not bring this sleep, yet the mind itself gives it a peaceful rest.

Thus a wall is leveled, the flesh's flabbiness is made lean, all lust completely buried, the stirrings of the flesh destroyed. Thus pleasure is mortified, kindling subdued that obstacles do not impede the soul's intentions, nor stubbornness delay promises, nor affection stifle or resist eagerness. What a peaceful sleep! What an enjoyable contemplation! What a sweet taste and delightful refreshment of the mind! What a happy drink with which the virgin inebriates her body, that it might be sobering for the mind. Thus foreign to the world, that, in heaven, she might be known close to her Spouse. The Apostle was desiring to be dissolved in his body thus to be united with Christ; more than him, this virgin, remaining in her flesh even for a while, becomes familiar with Christ. Her heart keeps watch, begs for the highest; her crooked flesh rests.

Her body submits, rejoices to employ, strives to obey, struggles to serve the laws of the soul. Her spirit is director; her flesh is governed; it serves; it obeys. There is no conflict, no opposition or combat between the two."

### *The Versified Legend of the Virgin Clare*

"Therefore let Mother Church rejoice that she had begotten and reared such a daughter who as a parent fruitful with virtues has produced many daughters of religion by her example, and has trained them for the perfect service of Christ by her thorough teaching. Let the Devout multitude of the faithful be glad that the King and Lord of heaven has chosen their sister and companion as His spouse and has introduced her with glory to His lofty and brilliant palace. Finally, let the multitude of saints rejoice that the nuptials of a new royal bride are being celebrated in their heavenly midst."

### *The Papal Decree of Canonization*

#### HOW ST CLARE ATE WITH ST FRANCIS AND HIS COMPANIONS AT ST MARY OF THE ANGELS

"St Francis, when residing at Assisi, often visited St Clare, to give her holy counsel. And she, having a great desire to eat once with him, often begged him to grant her this request; but the saint would never allow her this consolation. His companions, therefore, being aware of the refusal of St Francis, and knowing how great was the wish of Sister Clare to eat with him, went to seek him, and thus addressed him:

"Father, it seems to us that this severity on thy part in not granting so small a thing to Sister Clare, a virgin so holy and so dear to God, who merely asks for once to eat with thee, is not according to holy charity, especially if we consider how it was at thy preaching that she abandoned the riches and pomps of this world. Of a truth, if she were to ask of thee even a greater grace than this, thou shouldst grant it to thy spiritual daughter." St Francis answered: "It seems to you, then, that I ought to grant her this request?" His companions made answer: "Yea, father, it is meet that thou grant her this favour and this consolation." St Francis answered: "As you think so, let it be so, then; but, in order that she may be the more consoled, I will that the meal do take place in front of St Mary of the Angels, because, having been for so long time shut up in San Damiano, it will do her good to see the church of St Mary, wherein she took the veil, and was made a spouse of Christ. There, then, we will eat together in the name of God." When the appointed day arrived, St Clare left her convent with great joy, taking with her one of her sisters, and followed by the companions of St Francis. She arrived at St Mary of the Angels, and having devoutly saluted the Virgin Mary, before whose altar her hair had been cut off, and she had received the veil, they conducted her to the convent, and showed her all over it. In the meantime St Francis prepared the meal on the bare ground, as was his custom. The hour of dinner being arrived, St Francis and St Clare, with one of the brethren of St Francis and the sister who had accompanied the saint, sat down together, all the other companions of St Francis seated humbly round them. When the first dish was served, St Francis

began to speak of God so sweetly, so sublimely, and in a manner so wonderful, that the grace of God visited them abundantly, and all were rapt in Christ. Whilst they were thus rapt, with eyes and hearts raised to heaven, the people of Assisi and of Bettona, and all the country round about, saw St Mary of the Angels as it were on fire, with the convent and the woods adjoining. It seemed to them as if the church, the convent, and the woods were all enveloped in flames; and the inhabitants of Assisi hastened with great speed to put out the fire. On arriving at the convent, they found no fire; and entering within the gates they saw St Francis, St Clare, with all their companions, sitting round their humble meal, absorbed in contemplation; then knew they of a certainty, that what they had seen was a celestial fire, not a material one, which God miraculously had sent to bear witness to the divine flame of love which consumed the souls of those holy brethren and nuns; and they returned home with great consolation in their hearts, and much holy edification. After a long lapse of time, St Francis, St Clare, and their companions came back to themselves; and, being fully restored by the spiritual food, cared not to eat that which had been prepared for them; so that, the holy meal being finished, St Clare, well accompanied, returned to San Damiano, where the sisters received her with great joy."

*The Little Flowers of St. Francis*



# St. Colette





"St. Colette was especially devoted to St. John the Apostle, and it is this Saint who is featured in her mystical espousal. The Saint's spiritual experiences were told to only a few intimate friends, two being Fr. Pierre de Vaux and a nun of her order, Sister Perrine. Early in her work of restoration, St. John the Evangelist appeared in splendor and placed a miraculous ring on her finger, saying that he did so "by my own right and on behalf of the sovereign King and Prince of virginity and chastity." Fr. Pierre described the ring as: "of gold, very precious and beautiful.

Whereas the other recipients of mystical rings wore them on their fingers, St. Colette is an exception. Fr. Pierre writes that she customarily kept her treasure in a gold or silvers case and showed it occasionally to "her friars, confessors, and other persons who were much gladdened and consoled by the sight of it."

*Mysteries, Marvels and Miracles in the Lives of the Saints*

# Hildegard Von Bingen





“Almighty God, who founded the universe, has revealed wondrous deeds under various signs. God, who is wonderful in gifts, has distributed them to each and every creature in accord with the divine will. God, who wished to bring humanity back to the bliss of heaven, places before our eyes, in accord with the divine will, everything existing in the heavenly, earthly and subterranean spheres.

God's deeds are established in such a way that no creature remains so incomplete as to lack anything in its nature. Instead, each creature possesses the fullness of all that is perfect and useful. And thus everything emanating from Wisdom lives in it like a pure and uniquely beautiful jewel and gleams in the purest brilliance of its being. In addition, a human being who has fulfilled God's commandments is like the radiantly white and delightful garment of Wisdom. Such persons display on their green garments their good intentions and the living greenness of their deeds. Indeed they do so with the countless virtues of their marriage portion: an earring when they close up their ears to evil insinuations; a feeling of invigoration in their breast when they reject immodest desires; an adornment bringing strength to their arms when they defend themselves against sin. For all these things arise out of the purity of faith, which is adorned with the profound gifts of the Holy Spirit and the just writings of the teachers. And by our good deeds we believers bring all these things their completion."

*Hildegard Von Bingen*

# Meister Eckhart



“The sixth [and highest] stage comes when we are stripped of our own form and are transformed by God's eternity, becoming wholly oblivious to all transient and temporal life, drawn into and changed into an image of the divine, and have become God's son.

Blessedness consists primarily in the fact that the soul sees God in herself . . . Only in God's knowledge does she become wholly still. There she knows nothing but essence and God.

Between that person and God there is no distinction, and they are one. . . Their knowing is one with God's knowing, their activity with God's activity and their understanding with God's understanding.

Therefore it is in Oneness that God is found and they who would find God must themselves become One. . .

And truly, if you are properly One, then you shall remain One in the midst of distinction, and the multifold will be One for you and shall not be able to impeded you in any way.

When the soul is united with God, then it perfectly possesses in him all that is something. The soul forgets itself there, as it is in itself, and all things, knowing itself in God as divine, in so far as God is in it.

Nothing is as opposed to God as time. . . There is no process of becoming in God, but only a present moment, that is a becoming without a becoming, a becoming-new without renewal. . . All that is in God is an eternal present- time without renewal.

I have occasionally spoken of a light in the soul which is uncreated and uncreatable. . . . This light is not satisfied with the simple, still and divine being which neither gives nor takes, but rather it desires to know from where this being comes. It wants to penetrate to the simple ground, to the still desert, into which distinction never peeped, neither Father, Son nor Holy Spirit. There, in that most inward place, where everyone is a stranger, the light is satisfied, and there it is more inward than it is in itself, for this ground is a simple stillness which is immovable in itself. But all things are moved by this immovability and all the forms of life are conceived by it which, possessing the light of reason, live of themselves."

*Meister Eckhart*

# St. Martin de Porres



S. MARTINO DE PORRES, 1579-1639  
3 novembre, religioso

“He had believed in the goodness and beauty of all things made by God: heaven and earth and all things contained within the sphere of the universe, down to the least among the living creatures.

He had believed in the reality of the invisible world of the spirit. He had understood that that world surpasses the visible world in variety, in beauty and in perfection. And he had preferred that invisible world to all the natural satisfactions creatures here below can offer.

He had believed in the Son, light and revelation of the impenetrable light of the Father; in the Word, who being life and truth made himself the way for us. And he had followed Him along His way. Following Him, he had absorbed the doctrine of love which sums up and contains all the laws. He had understood the work of the Spirit of Love in the restoration of man from servitude to liberty.

And he had believed in and had entrusted himself to that new Mother’s heart, revealed to him by the mystery of the Incarnation; that most pure and holy temple of the union of the only-begotten Son of God with human nature, with all humanity, without exception of race or color or time or place, from which, like a bride, he received, together with His name, the title of his new nobility: “that we should be called, should be the sons of God.” 1 John 3:1”

*St. Martin De Porres*



# John Ruusbroec



## OF THE DESIRE TO KNOW THE BRIDEGROOM IN HIS NATURE

“A Man who lives this life in its perfection, as it has here been shown, and who is offering up his whole life, and all his works, to the worship and praise of God, and who wills and loves God above all things, is often stirred by a desire to see, to know, and to prove what, in Himself, this Bridegroom Christ is; Who for man's sake became man and laboured in love unto death, and delivered us from sin and the devil, and has given us Himself and His grace, and left us His sacraments, and has promised us His kingdom and Himself as an eternal wage; Who also gives us all that is needful for the body, and inward consolation and sweetness, and innumerable gifts of all kinds, according to the needs of each.

When a man beholds all this, he feels an unmeasured impulse to see Christ his Bridegroom, and to know Him as He is in Himself. Though he knows Him in His works, this does not seem to him enough. Then he must do as the publican Zaccheus did, who longed to see Jesus, who He was. He must run before the crowd, that is the multiplicity of creatures; for these make us so little and so low that we cannot see God. And he must climb up into the tree of faith, which grows from above downwards, for its roots are in the Godhead. This tree has twelve branches, which are the twelve articles of faith. The lower speak of the Divine Humanity, and of those things which belong to our salvation of soul and of body. The upper part of the tree tells of the Godhead, of the Trinity of Persons, and of the Unity of the Nature of God. And

the man must cling to that unity, in the highest part of the tree; for there it is that Jesus must pass with all His gifts.

Here comes Jesus, and sees the man, and shows to him, in the light of faith, that He is according to His Godhead immeasurable and incomprehensible and inaccessible and abysmal, transcending every created light and every finite conception. And this is the highest knowledge of God which any man may have in the active life: that he should confess in this light of faith that God is incomprehensible and unknowable. And in this light Christ says to man's desire: Make haste and come down, for to-day I must abide at thy house. This hasty descent, to which he is summoned by God, is nothing else than a descent through desire and through love into the abyss of the Godhead, which no intelligence can reach in the created light. But where intelligence remains without, desire and love go in. When the soul is thus stretched towards God, by intention and by love, above everything that it can understand, then it rests and dwells in God, and God in it. When the soul climbs with desire above the multiplicity of creatures, and above the works of the senses, and above the light of nature, then it meets Christ in the light of faith, and becomes enlightened, and confesses that God is unknowable and incomprehensible. When it stretches itself with longing towards this incomprehensible God, then it meets Christ, and is filled with His gifts. And when it loves and rests above all gifts, and above itself, and above all creatures, then it dwells in God, and God dwells in it.

This is the way in which we shall meet Christ on the summit of the active life. When you have laid the foundation of righteousness, charity, and humility; and have established on it a dwelling-place, that is, those virtues which have been named heretofore; and have met Christ through faith, by intention and by love; then you dwell in God and God dwells in you, and you possess the true active life."

*John Ruusbroec*

OF A DIVINE MEETING WHICH TAKES PLACE IN  
THE HIDDENNESS OF OUR SPIRIT

"When the inward and God-seeing man has thus attained to his Eternal Image, and in this clearness, through the Son, has entered into the bosom of the Father: here there begins the fourth and last point; namely, a loving meeting, in which, above all else, our highest blessedness consists.

You should know that the heavenly Father, as a living ground, with all that lives in Him, is actively turned towards His Son, as to His own Eternal Wisdom. And that same Wisdom, with all that lives in It, is actively turned back towards the Father, that is, towards that very ground from which It then he is enlightened by Divine truth, and he receives anew, every moment, the Eternal Birth, and he goes forth according to the way of the light, in a Divine contemplation. And

comes forth. And in this meeting, there comes forth the third Person, between the Father and the Son; that is the Holy Ghost, Their mutual Love, who is one

with them Both in the same nature. And He enfolds and drenches through both in action and fruition the Father and the Son, and all that lives in Both, with such great riches and such joy that as to this all creatures must eternally be silent; for the incomprehensible wonder of this love, eternally transcends the understanding of all creatures. But where this wonder is understood and tasted without amazement, there the spirit dwells above itself, and is one with the Spirit of God; and tastes and sees without measure, even as God, the riches which are the spirit itself in the unity of the living ground, where it possesses itself according to the way of its uncreated essence.

Now this rapturous meeting is incessantly and actively renewed in us, according to the way of God; for the Father gives Himself in the Son, and the Son gives Himself in the Father, in an eternal content and a loving embrace; and this renews itself every moment within the bonds of love. For like as the Father incessantly beholds all things in the birth of His Son, so all things are loved anew by the Father and the Son in the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. And this is the active meeting of the Father and of the Son, in which we are lovingly embraced by the Holy Ghost in eternal love.

Now this active meeting and this loving embrace are in their ground fruitive and wayless; for the abysmal Waylessness of God is so dark and so unconditioned that it swallows up in itself every Divine way and activity, and all the attributes of the Persons, within the rich compass of the essential Unity, and it brings

about a Divine fruition in the abyss of the Ineffable. And here there is a death in fruition, and a melting and dying into the Essential Nudity, where all the Divine names, and all conditions, and all the living images which are reflected in the mirror of Divine Truth, lapse in the Onefold and Ineffable, in waylessness and without reason. For in this unfathomable abyss of the Simplicity, all things are wrapped in fruitive bliss; and the abyss itself may not be comprehended, unless by the Essential Unity. To this the Persons, and all that lives in God, must give place; for here there is nought else but an eternal rest in the fruitive embrace of an outpouring Love. And this is that wayless being which all interior spirits have chosen above all other things. This is the dark silence in which all lovers lose themselves. But if we would prepare ourselves for it by means of the virtues, we should strip ourselves of all but our very bodies, and should flee forth into the wild Sea, whence no created thing can draw us back again.

May we possess in fruition the essential Unity, and clearly behold unity in the Trinity; this may Divine Love, which turns no beggar away, bestow upon us. Amen.

*John Ruusbroec*

# St. Perpetua

Martyr



"I saw a ladder of tremendous height made of bronze, reaching all the way to the heavens, but it was so narrow that only one person could climb up at a time. To the sides of the ladder were attached all sorts of iron weapons: there were swords, spears, books, daggers, and spikes; so that if anyone tried to climb up carelessly or without paying attention, he would be mangled and his flesh would adhere to the weapons.

At the foot of the ladder lay a dragon of enormous size, and it would attack those who tried to climb up and try to terrify them from doing so. And Saturus was the first to go up, he who was later to give himself up of his own accord. He had been the builder of our strength, although he was not present when we were arrested. And he arrived at the top of the staircase and he looked back and said to me: "Perpetua, I am waiting for you. But take care; do not let the dragon bite you." "He will not harm me," I said, "in the name of Christ Jesus." Slowly, as though he were afraid of me, the dragon stuck his head out from underneath the ladder. Then, using it as my first step, I trod on his head and went up.

Then I saw an immense garden, and in it a grey-haired man sat in shepherd's garb; tall he was, and milking sheep. And standing around him were many thousands of people in white garments. He raised his head, looked at me, and said: "I am glad you have come, my child." He called me over to him and gave me, as it were, a mouthful of the milk he was drawing; and I took it into my cupped hands and consumed it. And all those who stood around said:



"Amen!" At the sound of this word I came to, with the taste of something sweet still in my mouth."

### *St. Perpetua's Vision*

"We had died and had put off the flesh, and we began to be carried towards the east by four angels who did not touch us with their hand. But we moved alone not on our backs facing upwards but as though we were climbing up a gentle hill. And when we were free of the world, we first saw an intense light. And I said to Perpetua (for she was at my side): "This is what the Lord promised us. We have received his promise." While we were being carried by these four angels, a great open space appeared, which seemed to be a garden, with rose bushes and all manner of flowers. The trees were as tall as cypresses, and their leaves were constantly falling. In the garden there were four other angels more splendid than the others. When they saw us they paid us homage and said to the other angels in admiration: "Why, they are here! They are here!"

Then the four angels that were carrying us grew fearful and set us down. Then we walked across to an open area by way of a broad road, and there we met Jucundus, Saturninus, and Artaxius, who were burnt alive in the same persecution, together with Quintus who had actually died as a martyr in prison. We asked them where they had been. And the other angels said to us: "First come and enter and greet the Lord."

Then we came to a place whose walls seemed to be constructed of light. And in front of the gate stood

four angels, who entered in and put on white robes. WE also entered and we heard the sound of voices in unison chanting endlessly: "Holy, Holy, Holy!" In the same place we seemed to see an aged man with white hair and a youthful face, though we did not see his feet. On his right and left were four elders, and behind them stood other aged men. Surprised, we entered and stood before a throne: four angels lifted us up and we kissed the aged man and he touched our faces with his hand. And the elders said to us: "Let us rise." And we rose and gave the kiss of peace. Then the elders said to us: "Go and play." To Perpetua I said: "Your wish is gratified." She said to me: "Thanks be to God that I am happier here now than I was in the flesh."

Then we went out and before the gates we saw the bishop Optatus on the right and Aspasius the presbyter and teacher on the left, each of them far apart and in sorrow. They threw themselves at our feet and said: "Make peace between us. For you have gone away and left us thus." And we said to them: "Are you not our bishop, and are you not our presbyter? How can you fall at our feet?" We were very moved and embraced them. Perpetua then began to speak with them in Greek, and we drew them apart into the garden under a rose arbour. While we were talking with them, the angel said to them: "Allow them to rest. Settle whatever quarrels you have among yourselves." And they were put to confusion. Then they said to Optatus: "You must scold your flock. They approach you as though they had come from the games, quarreling about the different teams."

And it seemed as though they wanted to close the gates. And there we began to recognize many of our brethren, martyrs among them. All of us were sustained by a most delicious odour that seemed to satisfy us. And then I woke up happy."

*St. Satorus's Vision*

# St. Lutgard



St. Lutgard “was placed at the age of twelve in the Benedictine convent of St. Catherine near Saint-Trond, for no better reason than that the money intended for her marriage-portion had been lost in a business speculation, and that without it she was unlikely to find a suitable husband. She was an attractive girl, fond of pretty clothes and of innocent amusement, without any apparent religious vocation, and she seems to have lived at first as a kind of boarded, free

to come and go, as well as to receive visitors of both sexes. One day, however, while she was entertaining a friend, our Lord appeared to her, and, showing her His sacred wounds, bade her love Him and Him only. Accepting Him instantly as her heavenly Bridegroom, she renounced from that moment all earthly concerns. Some of the nuns who observed her sudden fervor prophesied that it would not last; but it only increased. So vividly did she come to realize God's presence that, when engaged in prayer, she beheld our Lord as with her bodily eyes. She would speak with Him familiarly, and if summoned away to perform some duty she would say, quite simply, "Wait here, Lord Jesus, and I will come back directly after I have finished this task." Our Lady frequently appeared to her, and once she had a vision of St. Catherine, the patroness of the convent; on another occasion she saw St. John the Evangelist, under the semblance of an eagle. Sometimes during her frequent ecstasies she would be upraised from the ground, or a strange light would be seen above her head.

In her meditations on our Lord's passion she was permitted to have a mystical share in her Saviour's sufferings, and her forehead and hair appeared at such seasons to be bedewed with drops of blood. Her sympathy was extended to all for whom Christ died; she felt their sorrows and sufferings as though they were her own. Indeed, in the ardour of her intercession for others she would entreat God to blot his name out of the Book of Life rather than withhold His mercy from the soul for whom she was pleading."

*Butlers Lives of the Saints*

# St. Alphonsus de Liguori



## ASPIRATION OF LOVE TO JESUS CHRIST

"I.

My Jesus, Thou alone art sufficient for me. My love, do not permit me to separate myself from Thee. When shall I be able to say, "My God, I cannot lose Thee any more?"

II.

Lord, who am I, that Thou shouldst desire so much to be loved by me? And whom shall I love, if I love not Thee, my Jesus? Here I am, Lord; dispose of me as Thou pleasest. Give me Thy love; I ask nothing more. Make me all Thine before I die.

III.

Eternal Father, for the love of Jesus Christ have pity on me. My God, I wish for Thee alone, and nothing more.

IV.

O my Jesus! would that I could be entirely spent for Thee, as Thou didst spend Thyself entirely for me! If I had died while I was in sin, I could no more have loved Thee; now that I can love Thee, I will love Thee as much as I can. To Thee do I consecrate all the remainder of my life. I wish only, and I wish in all things, that which Thou dost desire. When I see Thee for the first time, my Jesus, may it be with a look of mercy. May I die rather than ever offend Thee again. Thou wilt not leave me, I will not leave Thee; so shall our love endure in this world and in the next.

VI.

I should be too ungrateful, O my Jesus, if I loved Thee but little, after so many graces. Thou didst give Thyself all to me; I give myself all to Thee. Thou lovest those that love Thee. I love Thee; do Thou also

love me. If I love Thee but little, give Thou me the love Thou requirest of me. What hast Thou not done to oblige me to love Thee? Make me conquer all things to please Thee. VII. Accept the love of a soul which has offended Thee so deeply. Show me the immense good Thou art, that I may love Thee exceedingly. I desire to love Thee exceedingly in this life, that I may love Thee exceedingly in the next.

VIII.

I hope to love Thee for all eternity. O Eternal God! Oh that I had always loved Thee! Oh that I had died rather than have offended Thee! I give Thee my will, my liberty; dispose of me as Thou pleasest. May my only happiness be to please Thee, O Infinite Goodness. O my God! I rejoice in that Thou art infinitely happy.

IX.

Thou art omnipotent; make me a Saint. Thou hast sought me while I was fleeing from Thee; Thou didst love me when I despised Thy love; abandon me not, now that I seek Thee and love Thee. May I this day give myself wholly to Thee.

X.

Send me any chastisement, but deprive me not of the power of loving Thee. I thank Thee that Thou givest me time to love Thee. I love Thee, my Jesus, I love Thee; and I hope to die repeating, "I love Thee, I love Thee."

XI.

I desire to love Thee without reserve, and to do all that I know to be pleasing to Thee. I love Thy good pleasure more than all the pleasures of the world. I accept all the troubles that may happen to



me, provided I love Thee, O my God. O my Jesus! that I could die for Thee, as Thou didst die for me!

XII.

Oh that I could make all men love Thee as Thou deservest! O will of God, thou art my love. O God of love, give me love."

*St. Alphonsus de Liguori*

## St. Rose of Lima



“I was suspended in quiet contemplation, like a light uniting all things, when I saw a flash of wonderful splendor. In the centre of the radiance was a rainbow of lucent reflections and colours, and over

it another of equal grander. Above the upper arch stood the Cross, touched with purple and stained with blood, the nailholes visible. Within the arches shone the human form of my Lord, Christ Jesus, sending out rays of glory. He generously gave me strength to look upon His beauty, for this time I saw Him face to face! . . .

The arches were of fugitive colours, like none I see on earth. And looking upon my Lord in their midst I felt inexplicable flames of glory reach the depths of my soul, so that I could almost think myself free of the prison of this world.

Then, in the hands of the Lord, I saw a great scales, with balances and squadrons of angels, illustrious with festive ornament, who bowed before the Divine Majesty. They were joined by hosts of the souls of the blessed, who made ceremonious reverence before the Saviour, and then drew apart. The Angels, taking the balances, began to load afflictions, laying some upon others as if they wished to discover exactly the severity of each one, and when they were perplexed by this, Christ intervened and took upon Himself the office of arbiter. He made the scales true, and from the piles upon the balances distributed a heavy portion of adversity. Afterwards, placing new weights upon the balances, blessings were heaped upon blessings, and as the angels leaned to read the weight Christ intervened again, His omnipotent arm alone being equal to the task. He marked it exactly, and with great attention divided among the souls as many blessings as He had given them afflictions. To your handmaid He distributed inestimable riches. This done, the Saviour raised His voice and said with majesty: "Know that the grace

corresponds to tribulation. This is the one true Scales of Paradise." And when I heard Him speak I longed to rush out into the plaza and tell all people the truth. My soul almost left my body in its eager ardour, feeling that it could better travel through every land on its mission alone. For no one would cry out against his heavy cross if he knew the balances on which it has been weighed."

*St. Rose of Lima*