

THE SOUL'S BETROTHAL-GIFT

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# THE SOUL'S BETROTHAL-GIFT

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# THE SOUL'S BETROTHAL-GIFT

BY

HUGH OF SAINT VICTOR

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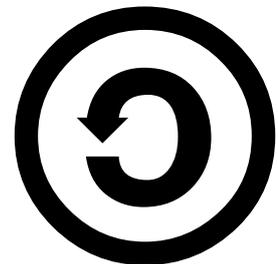
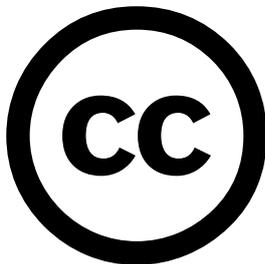
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## PREFATORY NOTE

HUGH OF SAINT VICTOR, eldest son of Conrad, Count of Blankenburg, was born in 1096 at Hartingham in Saxony. Much against the wishes of his parents he took the habit of the Canons Regular of Saint Augustine, and studied his master to such effect that, both as theologian and as writer, he merited his traditional title of *alter Augustinus*. He remained at the monastery of Hamerleve, near Halberstadt, until 1115, when he removed to the monastery of Saint Victor at Paris. He became head of the School of Saint Victor in 1133, and so remained until his death in [1141]. Hugh was one of the greatest spirits of his age, at once philosopher, mystic, and chief founder of the scholastic theology. This little treatise, *Soliloquium de arrhâ animae*,\* sent by him to his friends at Hamerleve, simple and beautiful as it is, contains the distillation of his acute psychology, profound philosophy, and lifelong prayer and contemplation. Eight centuries have scarcely aged it, for in it there is nothing corruptible.

FST

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\* The text used by the translator is that of Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 176.951B-970D, collated with the 1526 edition of Bade & Petit, Paris (*Opera*, vol. 2), from which some readings have been taken.

## PROLOGUE

HUGH, in every way a servant of your sanctity, to his beloved brother G. and to the other servants of Christ abiding at Hamerleve; that you may walk in a single peace and attain to a single rest.

I have sent for your charity a soliloquy\* of love, entitled *The Soul's Betrothal-Gift*,† to teach you where you should look for true love and how you ought to stir your hearts to heavenly joys by diligence in meditation. So, dearest brother, I ask you to receive it with the rest of the brethren in memory of me; and do not let the others be excluded by my sending it specially to you, nor let your privilege be made less by my giving it to all in common. I do not mean to provoke you by the style of this request, for I make it only because I cannot conceal my feeling of devotion toward all of you.

Salute brother B. and brother A. and all the rest, whose names, though I cannot recount them now and one by one, I desire may all be entered in the book of life. Farewell.

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\* We should call the work a dialogue, but since the two speakers, Man and his Soul, form but one person, Hugh rightly terms it a soliloquy.

† *De arrhâ animae*. The word *arrha* in mediaeval Latin meant gifts presented by the bridegroom to the prospective bride at her betrothal, just as an engagement ring is given to-day.

## SOLILOQUY CONCERNING THE SOUL'S BETROTHAL-GIFT

the speakers being Man and the Soul

MAN

I will speak in secret to my Soul, and ask of her in friendly talk what I desire to know. No stranger shall have entry, but we will consult alone, freely and in private; for thus I shall not fear to seek out what is hidden, nor shall she blush to make true answer.

Pray, tell me, Soul of mine, what it is that you love above all things. I know your life is love, and that without love you cannot exist. But I would have you confess to me, without fear or shame, which of all things you choose as worthy of love.

I will say more, to make you understand even more plainly what I am asking. Look on the world and all that's in it. You will find there many beautiful and attractive sights that entice men's hearts, and, according to their several likings, kindle their desire to enjoy them. Gold and precious stones have their lustre; the beauty of the flesh a goodly seeming; figured tapestries and brilliant robes their colours. Such things are without number, but why should I recount them to you? You know them all, you have seen almost every one, and have tried the most part. Even now you are recalling many you have seen, and you are still looking at many by which you can test and try what I am telling you. Tell me then, I pray: Which of all these do you esteem as the single object which you would alone embrace and ever enjoy? For I am sure that either you love some one of these things that are seen, or that, if you disregard

the whole of them, you have something else that you love better than them all.

SOUL

I cannot love what I have never seen, nor have I yet been able to love any one of all these things that are seen; yet up to now I have not found anything I can love more. By many trials I have learnt that the love of this world is false and fleeting; a love which I am always forced to lose as soon as the object I have chosen perishes, or to change as soon as anything I like better takes its place. So while I cannot exist without love and find as yet no true love, still do I waver, unsure in my desires.

MAN

I rejoice that at least you are not set upon the love of temporal things, but I am sorry that you rest not yet in the love of things eternal. If you were making a home of your place of exile, you would be still more unfortunate; but because you are lost in exile, you are ready to be brought back to the road. If you wanted to have an eternal love in this transitory life, you would be making your home in exile; but now you are lost in exile, because, so long as you are distracted by a lust for temporal things, you do not find the love of eternal things. But a great beginning of salvation can come to you through having learnt to turn your loving to a better end; for you may be torn from all your love of temporal things, if only you are shown a greater beauty that more willingly you may embrace.

SOUL

How can that be shown which cannot be seen? And that which cannot be seen,—how can it be loved? If there is no true and lasting love in temporal things and such as can be seen,

assuredly that which cannot be seen cannot be loved at all; and, if an everlasting love is not discovered, endless misery ever pursues the living. Without love no one can be blessed; for to be unhappy consists in this alone, to love not that which is. Nay, for who would call him, I would not say, blessed, but even a man, who, forgetful of humanity and rejecting the peace of fellowship, loved himself alone with a sort of solitary and wretched love? Therefore you must needs approve the love of visible things; or, if you take this away from me, you must show me something else which may be loved with more profit and more pleasure.

#### MAN

If, then, you think these temporal and visible things ought to be loved, because you perceive in them a kind of beauty of their own, why do you not rather love yourself, who in outward mien wholly excel the charm and beauty of things visible? Could you but look upon yourself, could you but see your face, assuredly you would know the severity of the reproof you deserved when you thought anything outside yourself worthy of your love.

#### SOUL

The eye sees all, itself it does not see; and we cannot see our own face, wherein sight dwells, in the same light wherewith we view the rest of things. Men learn their features from the evidence of others, and know the likeness of their countenance by hearing of it more often than by seeing it. Or do you perhaps bring me some other kind of mirror, wherein I may know and love the lineaments of my heart?—as if indeed one would not very rightly call a man a fool, who, to feed his self-love, was for ever studying the image of his face in a mirror. And, so because I cannot contemplate my face and the image of my countenance, to find out what it is like, I am the readier to

extend the sympathy of love to what seems admirable outside me; and this the more because love can never endure to be solitary, and therein ceases in some measure to be love, if it does not pour its force of loving into a sharer of its comradeship.

#### MAN

He is not by himself with whom is God, and the power of love is not destroyed when its appetite is restrained from low and worthless things. He does himself a greater wrong, who admits to the fellowship of his love anything shameful or indeed unworthy of it. So everyone must first of all consider himself, and, when he knows his own worth, thenceforth love nothing lower than himself, for fear he do his love a wrong. For even what, considered in itself, is fair becomes of little worth when set beside a fairer; and as it is unfitting to mate the ugly with the beautiful, so it is most unseemly to put things that have but very low and fancied beauty on a level with the fairest of all. You would not have your love to be a hermit; yet see you have her not a harlot. You seek a unique love; see that it be uniquely chosen. You know that love is fire, and fire must have fuel if it is to burn; but have a care that you throw not on it what gives but smoke and stench. It is a property of love that it must resemble that which it loves; and by the very fellowship of loving you will be in some measure transformed into the likeness of that to which you are united by its power. And so, my Soul, give heed to your beauty and understand what sort of beauty you should love. Your face is not invisible to you; your eye sees nothing well, if it sees not itself; for when it is made very clear for contemplating itself, no foreign image from without or shadowy fantasy of truth has power to deceive it. And if perchance your inner vision is dimmed by neglect, and you have no power to contemplate yourself as is fit and

profitable, why do you not at least use another's judgement to consider what you should think about yourself?

You have a bridegroom, but you know him not. He is the fairest of all, but you have not seen his face. He has seen you, for else he could not love you. So far he has not wished to show himself to you, but he has sent you gifts; he has given a betrothal-gift, a pledge of love, a sign of his affection. If you could know him, if you were to see his likeness, you would no more hesitate about your beauty; for you would know that one so fair, so handsome, so graceful, so unique, would not have been taken with your appearance, had he not been attracted by comeliness, eminent and admirable beyond the rest.

What, then, will you do? You cannot see him now, for he is absent; and so you do not fear or blush to do him wrong, despising his single love for you, and prostituting yourself wickedly and without shame to other desires. Do not so: and if you do not yet know what he is like that loves you, think at least upon the gift that he has given you. Perhaps from that gift of his which you possess you will be able to find out the feeling with which you ought to love him, the care and diligence with which you ought to keep yourself for him. His is a splendid gift, a noble present; for it did not befit the great to give small gifts, nor would the wise have given great gifts for small return. Therefore what he gave you is great, but what he loves in you is greater. So it is something great he gave you: what was it, Soul of mine, your bridegroom gave? You wait, perhaps, and do not know what I am going to say. You are considering from whom you have received anything great, and you do not find that you possess or have received anything to boast about. So I will tell you, and you shall know what your bridegroom gave.

Look at the whole of this universe, and consider whether there is anything in it that does not serve you. All nature steers her course to this end, that she should submit herself to your service and be devoted to your use; ministering with unflinching

abundance to your pleasure and your needs alike. This is the purpose that heaven, earth, air, the seas, and all that in them is, cease not to fulfil. To this the circle of the seasons ministers with never-failing food; renewing the old, rebuilding the decayed, restoring the consumed, by its yearly renewals and resurgent births. Who do you think ordained this? Who commanded Nature with one consent to serve you? You receive the benefit and know not its author: the gift is manifest, its bestower hidden. And yet reason itself will not let you doubt that this is not your due, but the free gift of another. So who he is concerns you much; for he that gave you all and so much, is much to be loved; and he loved you much who had the power to give so much and wished to give it. His gift, then, shows him as loving you so much and so much to be loved, that it is as foolish not to long further for the love of one so powerful, as it is wicked and perverse not to love him again who loves you so.

Look, then, my rash and silly Soul, look what you are doing when you long to love and be loved in this world. The whole world is subject to you, and yet you do not scorn to admit to your love, I do not say the whole world, but scarcely a scrap of it, which is eminent neither in fair seeming nor in needful usefulness nor in great extent nor in exceeding goodness. If, indeed, you delight in these things, delight in them as subjects, as things that do you service, as gifts, the betrothal-gift of your bridegroom, as the presents of a friend, the bounty of a lord. Yet, so that you shall always remember what you owe to him, do not love them instead of him or as well as him, but love them for his sake, love him through and above them.

Have a care, my Soul, that (God forbid it) you are not called a bride but a harlot, if you rate the presents of the giver above the affection of the lover. You do yet greater wrong to his charity, if you receive his gifts and make no return by loving him again. Either reject his gifts (if you can) or if you cannot, pay them back with love. Love him, love yourself for his sake,

love his gifts for his sake. Love him that you may enjoy him, love yourself because you are loved by him. Delight in his gifts because they have been given by him. Love him for yourself and yourself for him, love his gifts, as given by him to you for your sake. This is a pure and chaste love, having in it nothing sordid, nothing bitter, nothing passing; comely in chastity, pleasant in sweetness, stable in eternal durance.

SOUL

Your words have kindled me, I have conceived a warmth, and I grow hot within. For although I have not yet seen him who, you tell me, is so lovable, yet I confess that by the sweetness of your speech and the pleasantness of your persuasion you are firing me to his love. I am forced to love him above all things, if only by your arguments, from which I see that I have received them all as a pledge of his love. But yet indeed one thing remains, which for me will much diminish the gladness of this love, unless your hands of consolation wipe it away like all the rest.

MAN

Faithfully I assure you that there is nothing in this love that you could properly dislike; and yet for fear that I may seem to be deceiving your credulity rather than furnishing testimony to the truth, I would have you explain to me what is troubling you; so that you may be reassured by my reasons and grow yet stronger in your desire for him.

SOUL

I wish you to remember, and I do not think you have forgotten, what you said a little earlier, when you were commending a praiseworthy and honourable love; namely that love should not only be one, but a chosen one, that is to say, that it should

be set on the beloved alone and only on loving him. Thus love is not perfectly to be approved if another loves at the same time as the one, or if one is loved alone who is not worthy to be loved in the highest degree.

See then; I love one who is uniquely chosen and uniquely loved, but I suffer this wrong to my affection that while I love him alone, I am not alone in being loved by him. For you know with how many and indeed what kind of beings I share this pledge of his love with which you reproach me. For how can I pride myself on the privilege of being loved alone, since I received this pledge, which you tell me is so great, in common not merely with bestial men, but even with the beasts themselves? What does the light of the sun profit me more than the creeping things and worms of the earth? All alike live and breathe, all have the same food and drink. Why is this so great a gift? Why is it so special? Surely you see what sort of gift it is! And so you do not prove consistently that he ought to be loved alone, if you do not show that in each or in some respect he has loved singly. For I agree that these things would be great and worthy of a single love, were they but singly given.

#### MAN

I cannot object to your carefulness, for it clearly shows that you desire to love perfectly and therefore are seeking out so carefully the source of perfect love. And so I gladly undertake to argue this with you in order to defend the love of one who is so very good from the imputation of the wrong which you allege, and at the same time to restore you to wholeness, lest in your mistrust you waver at all from your love of him. There are three points in which you may find what is troubling you. You must distinguish between the gifts you have received from your bridegroom; for some are given in common to all, some to a single kind, others to an individual. Those are given to all in

common, that serve all men and you alike for your benefit; those are given to a single kind, that are granted to many (though not to all) in common with you and for your benefit; those are given to you individually that are given to you alone. Why then, surely he does not love you the less, because he has granted certain of his gifts to all men at once, as well as to you? Surely he would not have made you any happier, if he had given the whole world to you alone? Suppose for a moment there are no men, no beasts created on the earth, and you alone possess the riches of the world; where now is the pleasant and profitable fellowship of human intercourse; where the solace, the pleasure you now enjoy? See then; in the fact that he created these things together with you for your solace, there also is much to profit you. If the world itself and all these things are your servants, how can you say that they were not all made for your sake? Does the head of the household eat his bread alone? Does he alone drink his brewage? Is he alone clothed with his garments? Does he warm himself alone by his fire? Does he dwell alone in his house? Yet he says not unfairly that everything belongs to him that those possess who serve him, whether by way of love or subjection. Everything then, whether it serve you or is necessary for those who serve you,—everything is given you: for all things expend their service upon you.

#### SOUL

What was troubling me you have denied rather than destroyed. For I complained of this: that loving but one I was not loved alone: for I see my pledge of love granted equally to others. Your arguments have persuaded me thus far, to believe that all that I see to be given for the common use of them that serve me, was also given specially to me. In this matter I acknowledge you have spoken very suitably, but not sufficiently about what

is troubling me. From what you say I learn that everything by which the life of creatures without reason is maintained, is preferably to be reckoned as a part of my wealth, for that all that nourishes them is intended for my use. But the privilege of a single love does not follow from this, because these creatures are well known to be subject not to me alone but likewise to all men, who are moreover very numerous indeed. So as to all these things that are granted for the common use of mankind, those men are wrong who count any of them as a part of their own wealth, although they unjustly claim them as their own. And so there is a love of the Creator towards mankind, directed to the whole species; in respect of which love men can pride themselves over the other creatures, but not over one another. For, as you said when you asserted this single love of his, among other things was given me the fellowship of men; but since my fellowship was just as much granted to them, as theirs to me, I cannot find anything special in this gift. For in this fellowship I am injured, not only by the loss of the glory of singleness, but also by the vileness, in which I share. For how many infidels, criminals, impure, are there, who can likewise boast of this fellowship!

#### MAN

You ought not to worry because you share the use of temporal things with good and bad alike, nor should you think that these are loved alike by God, just because you see them share alike with you in all these things. For as beasts were created, not for their own sake, but for man: so evil men do not live for their own sake, but for that of the good. And as their life subserves the use of the good, so all by which their life is nourished can doubtless be considered as enriching the good. And therefore the bad are allowed to live among the good, so that their company may be a source of exercise for the lives of good men,

whom they warn by their enjoyments to seek in preference to these, their own good things, and such as the bad cannot impart to them; moreover they are forced by the wickedness of the bad to love virtue the more firmly. Lastly, the bad are allowed to live among the good, so that these, seeing them deprived of divine grace and rushing through every dangerous path of vice, may learn what thanks they should return to their Creator for their salvation. Indeed the method of the divine dispensation for the increasing of our salvation and the teaching of our glorification demands this. For as in the life of beasts we do not call it a very high happiness to use temporal things, so also in the life of the bad we shall learn that there is no very high happiness in being master of them. In the same way, these things are rightly granted to good and bad alike; for the good would not believe that more desirable things were being saved for them, were it not that they saw that all these transient things were common alike to good and bad. No further, then, should you complain of the company or the prosperity of the bad, nor think that on that account they are to be reckoned as having the privilege of a singular love; for you have them as fellows in the use and ownership of passing things, because they are profitable to your salvation (as we have just now said) in this respect, that they are able, not only to use them with you, but also to possess them.

But what am I to say about the company of the good? For it alone remains to consider whether you are unable to glory in the single love of your bridegroom, because you are loved by him in company with the good. For this reason I would have you remember that opinion which I asserted earlier and which you then decided was, as it were, insufficient to deal with what was then in question and which it was desired to prove. And so I now return to discuss it with you more carefully: whether or not the truth of it agrees with something that may serve to confirm what we are striving to show. For I said that even the

company of men was granted you as a gift of the Creator, that you might receive therefrom a comfort of life, and not have to pine away deserted in a kind of solitary and idle existence.

And so, just as the life of the bad is an exercise for you, so the life of the good is a solace, for they indeed are such as you should not disdain to have as sharers of your happiness and love. For if you really love the good, whatever benefits are expended upon them make the charity that is in you to rejoice with them, not as if at another's benefit, but as if at its own. And so, though it were a blessed thing for you or anyone alone to enjoy that love, yet far more blessed is it to delight in the mutual rejoicing of the many good; because, when the feeling of love is spread abroad into those souls who share it, the joy of charity and sweetness is increased. For spiritual love may in a better way be single to each, when it is common to all. Nor is that made less by the sharing of many whose fruit is found in each one, the same and whole. And so the fellowship of the good takes nothing from your privilege of single love, because your bridegroom loves you in all of them, whom he loves on your account; and in this way he also loves you singly, because he loves nothing without you. And do not be afraid that his feeling will be divided by the love of several, as if by desires, and on that account will be the less toward each, as being somehow parted and divided amongst all; on the contrary, he is present to each as to all, because even if he loved each single one without all sharing therein, he would expend no different or greater love upon them. Therefore let us all love the One singly, that all may be singly loved by the One, for no other beside that One is fit to be singly loved by all. And let all men love themselves as one in the One, that they may be made one in the loving of One. That love is single, but not private; alone, yet not solitary; shared, but not divided: common and singular; a single love of all and the whole love of each; growing no less by sharing, failing not through use nor growing old by time,

ancient and new, desirable in affection, sweet in experience, eternal in fruit, full of mirth, refreshing and satisfying, and never cloying.

#### SOUL

Very pleasant to me is what you declare: and I confess that I am now beginning more ardently to desire his love for the same cause that once made me begin more and more to turn from it. But truly there is still one thing remaining to my desire, and if I can attain this by your help, I shall not doubt that enough has been done for me in all these ways. It is this: if in any way it may be shown me in what manner this bridegroom of chastity is present to each whom he loves as if to all, in feeling and in action. And of his feeling indeed I shall have no doubt, if I recognise it to be true in action.

#### MAN

My Soul, even if you are so persistent in your undertaking, and do not think that enough has been done for you; even if you do not at once recognise the singular bounty your bridegroom has expended on you; yet do I freely grant your petition, for I know that this your insistence springs rather from devotion than from importunity. For in this matter also, your best of lovers has provided for you, so that you should not be without something which you could boast of as especially received from him; for just as he gave some things in common to all creation and some to particular species, so also he grants gifts to one alone. The things that are in common are those which come to be used by all, such as the light of the sun, the breath of air; but those given to one kind, are what are given not to all but to a particular group; such as the faith, wisdom, learning. But those given singly are imparted as proper to some particular person, as the headship of the apostles to Peter, the

apostolate of the Gentiles to Paul, the privilege of love to John. Consider, therefore, my Soul, what you have received in common with all, what in common with some, what singly for yourself alone. He loved you *in* all those gifts, whether given in common to all, specially to some, or singly to you. He loved you *with* all those with whom he associated you by sharing in his gift. He has loved you *before* all those to whom he has preferred you by his gift of singular grace. *In* every creature you are loved; *with* all the good you are loved; *before* all the wicked you are loved. And lest it seem a small thing to be loved in preference to the wicked, how many are there of the good who have received less than you have? But because I see you, in your desire of a single love, turning rather towards what was singly given (although much could yet be said concerning those things in which and with which you are loved), I would prefer that what has already been said should suffice you. Yet I would not have you think it a little thing to have been loved either in such great matters or with such company, having all the good as your fellows, and as your servants the bad and all things created. And so you have seen, Soul of mine, how great are the things wherein you are loved and you have seen the kind of people with whom you are loved; now as to those before whom you are loved, consider as best you can. To you, my Soul, I speak: you know what you have received and now must better know, for fear you may begin either to presume concerning those things you have not received, or to be ungrateful for those you have received.

I would I could bring to your mind the help it has been to you and the pleasure it has been to him who gave all these things to you. For he gave all this to you to make you always mindful of it, and never by forgetting it to grow lukewarm in your love of him.

First, consider, my Soul, that once you were not; and that you received of him as a gift, that you began to be. Therefore it

was his gift that you were made. But did you give him something before you were made, for which he repaid you by this gift,—that you were made? To whom, then, are you preferred, in that you were made? Who could receive less than the gift of being made? And yet unless there had been this receiving of something, he had not been able to begin, who yet was not; and unless to be were better than not to be, he who is would have received nothing more than he who is not. Wherefore then, my God, didst thou make me, unless because thou wishedst me to be, rather than not to be? And thou lovest me more than all that have not been found worthy to receive that gift from thee. When, therefore, my God, thou gavest me being, thou gavest me something good and great, good and fair, thy own good; and when thou gavest it me thou settest me before all to whom thou hast not chosen to give this thy so great good. Soul of mine, are we to say anything when we speak with this our God, our God by whom we were made,—we who were not, and have received more fully than all who were not made? So forthwith, we say something; and we say much, when we say this—and this we must ever say, ‘Let us never forget him from whom we received so great a good’. Who, indeed, if he had given nothing more, were yet for this itself ever to be praised by us and loved. But now he has given more, for he has given us not only Being, but fair Being, comely Being, which, as much as it surpasses Nothing by its existence, so much does it exceed Something by its form, a Being which greatly pleases, and not only because it is, but because it is such as it is. And in this, my Soul, behold yourself preferred to all things which you see have not received such and so excellent a good as that of existing. But not yet can a limit be set to the bounty of the best of givers, for he gave something beside, and furthermore attracted us to the likeness of himself. For he wished to attract to himself by likeness, those whom he was attracting to himself by love. So he gave us also to be beautiful, he gave us also to live; in order

that by our existence we might excel all that is not, by our form all that is unordered or ill-constituted, and by our life all that is inanimate. You are bound by a great debt, my Soul; you have received much, and you have had none of it from yourself. And for all these things you can make no return, except only to love; for what was given to you for love cannot be repaid better or more fitly than by love. And indeed you have received all this for love, for God could have given life to other of his creations, but he loved you more than them in this his gift. And he did not love you more because he found more to love in you; but, because he loved you more as a free gift, he made you such that forthwith he had more cause to love you.

#### SOUL

The more I hear, the more I long to hear: go on, I pray, and tell me what comes next.

#### MAN

After being, and after being beautiful, after the gift of life, it is given you also to feel, it is given you to distinguish, and by that same love that gift is given you which, unless it had come first, nothing had been given by the bestower, nothing received by the needy. How sublime and lovely were you made, my Soul! Why did he wish you to have such beauty, unless the same, who clothed you in it, was preparing a bride for his chamber? He knows the work for which he created you; he knows what kind of adornment fits that work; and so he gave what was becoming and so greatly has become you, that even he who gave it, loved it. He outwardly adorned it with the senses and he lighted it with wisdom; giving the senses as it were an outer, and wisdom an inner habitation; attaching the senses outwardly, as it were some gleaming gems, but inwardly making fair the aspect of your countenance with wisdom, as

with a natural beauty. See, your attiring exceeds the beauty of all jewels: see, your face excels the fashioned comeliness of all things. It was fitting that she should be altogether such, who was to be brought unto the bridal-chamber of the King of heaven. How much [were you] loved and before how many, when you were made in such a fashion! What an especial gift was this, not granted to all, not to be granted indeed but to those who were loved and fit to be loved! Much could you boast of and much you ought to have guarded; lest you might lose such a gift, sully such attiring, destroy such beauty; lest once it were lost or lessened, you would become more unhappy than if it had not been received by you or made so perfect; lest the shame of your foulness might torture you at the same time as the penalty of the loss of your beauty, and being cast out you might become yet viler than if you had not been accepted. That gift, then, you should have guarded and you should have taken precautions against this loss, so that what you guarded would have lasted and what you were wary of would not have happened.

But look what you have done, my Soul; you have deserted your betrothed, and prostituted your love with strangers. You have corrupted your wholeness, befouled your beauty, scattered abroad your attiring. So vile, so disgraceful, and so unclean have you become that you are no more worthy of the embraces of such a betrothed. You have forgotten your betrothed and you have not given him fitting thanks for such great bounty. You are become a harlot: and through your great fornications your breasts are fallen. Your brow is become wrinkled, your cheeks withered, your eyes sick and dazed, your lips drawn and pale, your skin dried, your strength broken; hateful are you to your very lovers.

SOUL

I hoped that all your praise of me would lead to another end: but I see you told me this to my greater shame, so that the more hateful you showed me to be, the more ungrateful you would prove me for the great benefits I have received and not guarded. So I would that what you have told me had not been done, or at least that what has been done had not been told me; so that oblivion might cover my shame, even if forethought had not avoided the guilt.

MAN

This was not said to your shame but for your instruction, so that you should become the more indebted to him who made you when you were not and redeemed you when you had perished. For of that also I reminded you in order to declare his love; so taking occasion therefrom I will even now begin to tell you, how much this your betrothed, who appeared so lofty when he made you, deigned to be humbled when he renewed you. There so sublime, here so humble, yet not less lovable here than there, because not less admirable. There in power he conferred great gifts upon you, here in pity he endured terrible things for you. For he deigned to come down to where you lay, to raise you up to whence you fell, and he deigned in his kindness to suffer the burden you bore, so that he could justly give you back what you had lost. So he came down, took on, endured, conquered, restored,—came down to a mortal, took on mortality, endured suffering, conquered death, restored mankind; look, my Soul, wonder at these great marvels, these great favours displayed for you. Consider how much he loved you, who deigned to do so much for you. You had been made fair by his gift, you became foul by your own wickedness. But you were made clean again and comely by his goodness; for his charity yet worked in both ways. Once when you were not, he

loved you; he loved you so that he created you. Afterwards when you were foul, he loved you so as to make you beautiful; and to show you how much he loved you, he would not set you free from death except by dying, so that he should not only lavish on you the bounty of his kindness, but also display to you the true feeling of charity. And now he loves you with as sincere a charity as if you had always stayed by him; he neither casts your guilt in your teeth, nor upbraids you with his bounty. And if thereafter you faithfully persevere with him, if you desire to love him as is fitting, and if you keep your love undefiled for him, he promises to make you gifts yet greater than before.

#### SOUL

Now in a way I begin to love my fault; for, as I see, it has been of no small advantage to me to have done evil, since thereby he has made clearer to me than light what I used to long to know through all my prayers. O happy is my fault when he is drawn by charity to forgive it; for that charity which is also his is made manifest to me who long for it and desire it with all my heart. Never had I known his love so well, had I not tried it in such perils. How happy I was to fall, who have risen the happier from my falling. No greater, no truer love, no holier charity, no warmer affection: innocent he died for me, finding nothing in me that he might love. What then, Lord, hast thou loved in me, and loved so much that thou didst die for me? What didst thou find in me for whom thou wert willing to bear hardships so great?

#### MAN

My Soul, accuse yourself before the Lord, you who so far have been thankless for his great gift and have refused to recognise his most plentiful mercies. But that you may be even better able to understand how much you owe him, I would have you mark

me closely, while I set forth to you his other bounties in the manner I have begun upon.

SOUL

This I ever long to hear, for it is so sweet to me, that I would desire to hear you repeat it without ceasing, did I not also hasten on to the rest that is yet to be heard.

MAN

So you had gone away and perished, and because you were sold at a price in your sins, he came after you to buy you back, and so loved you that he weighed out for you the price of his Blood, and by such a bargain brought you out of exile and redeemed you from slavery.

SOUL

I did not know that God loved me so much: no more ought I to think meanly of myself who was so pleasing to God that he chose rather to die for me than to lose me.

MAN

And what if you begin to think how many and of what degree have been brought low in comparison with you, who were not able to attain this grace which was given to you? You must have heard how many generations of men have passed from the beginning of the world till now, who being without the knowledge of God and the price of his redemption have fallen into everlasting death. To all of these your Redeemer and Lover preferred you, when he bestowed on you this grace that none of them were entitled to receive. And what say you? Why do you suppose you were preferred to all of them? Were you stronger, wiser, nobler, richer than all of them, that you, rather

than they, were entitled to receive a special grace? How many strong, how many wise, how many noble, how many rich were there among them,—and yet all perished, deserted and brought low? You alone are raised up in preference to all of them; no cause can you find except the freely-given charity of your Saviour. So, he chose you and picked you out, your Betrothed, your Lover, your Redeemer, your God. He chose you among them all and raised you up from them all, and loved you before them all. He called you by his Name, that always with you there should be a memorial of him; he wished you to share in his Name, to share in the truth of his Name, inasmuch as he has anointed you with that oil of gladness, wherewith he himself is anointed, so that he who is called Christian by Christ, shall be anointed by the Anointed.

#### SOUL

Much, I confess, has been conferred upon me; but I ask you why, if, as you tell me, I am already chosen, I am still kept waiting? Why am I not yet able to come to the embraces of my Betrothed?

#### MAN

You do not know, my Soul, you do not know how foul you used to be, how polluted, how ugly and dirty, divided and dissipated, full of all horror and enormity. And how come you to seek so quickly to be brought into that bride-chamber of shamefastness and chastity, unless you be first restored by being at least improved by some care and diligence? For the reason why you are being kept waiting, why your Betrothed still withholds his presence from you, and does not yet admit you to mutual embraces and sweet kisses, is that the polluted should not touch the clean, nor should the foul look upon the fair. And so when you have been made ready and fitly adorned,

then indeed will you enter without confusion into the bride-chamber of your heavenly spouse, there to dwell without being ashamed. Nor will you blush at your former disgraceful state when there remains in you nothing disgraceful or worthy of shame. First, then, seek to improve your beauty, adorn your face, compose your dress, wipe off your stains, renew your cleanness, correct your manners, and preserve your discipline: and then, when all has been changed for the better give back a worthy bride to a worthy bridegroom. But, something else I would say to you to make you the more careful that, because you are told you are the chosen, pride does not puff you up nor carelessness make you negligent.

Have you never heard what King Assuerus did, when he rejected Queen Vasthi on account of her insolence?—a notable deed, a useful example, a serious peril. She was brought low for her pride, and the King made an ordinance that, from all his kingdom, maidens, virgin and beautiful, should be gathered together and brought to the city of Susa, and there be delivered into the house of the women in the charge of Egeus the eunuch, who was the overseer and keeper of the king's women, and there were to receive the women's ornaments and other things needful for their use. And so, when all had been done according to the king's pleasure, they were decked out and adorned. So that for six months they were anointed with oil of myrrh, for other six they used certain perfumes: and so, made ready and adorned, they passed from the house of the women to the king's chamber; in order that she who of all of them should most have pleased the king's eyes should sit on the royal throne in place of Vasthi.\* See how many were chosen that one might be chosen—she, that is, who seemed to the eyes of the king more comely and adorned than all the rest. The servants of the king chose many for the adorning, the king himself chooses one

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\* Esther 2.

for his bridal-bed. The first choosing of many is done at the order of the king, the second choosing of one by the will of the king.

Therefore let us consider if perchance this example may be applied to the present matter with which we are concerned. A king, son of the supreme king, came into this world (which he had created) to espouse for himself a chosen wife, a single wife, a wife worthy of royal nuptials. But because Judaea disdained to receive him, when he appeared in the form of lowliness, she was cast off. And the servants of the king, that is to say the apostles, were sent throughout the whole world to gather together souls and bring them to the city of the king, that is, to Holy Church, in which is the house and dwelling-place of the king's women, that is of holy souls, who are made fruitful and bring forth sons, not to bondage but to the kingdom. And these, because they serve God not of fear but of charity, bring forth good works as unto freedom. Many therefore who are called enter the church through faith, and therein receive the sacraments of Christ—as it were certain unguents and remedies to the renewing and adorning of their souls. But since it is spoken from the mouth of Truth 'For many are called but few are chosen', not all who are admitted to this adorning are fit to be chosen for the kingdom; none but those indeed who have taken such care to purify and adorn themselves, that when they are brought into the presence of the king, they are found such as he would choose rather than reject. See therefore where you stand, and comprehend what you ought to do. For your Betrothed has placed you in the house where the women are adorned, he has given you various unguents and different spices, and ordered you to be served with royal food from his own table; he has given you whatever can be of value for health, for refreshment, for the restoring of your beauty and for the increasing of your comeliness. Be careful then not to neglect to care for yourself, that at your last hour when you are brought

again before the face of your Betrothed, you be not found (which God forbid) unworthy of his company. Prepare yourself as fits a king's betrothed, the betrothed of a heavenly king, of an immortal bridegroom.

#### SOUL

You have brought me bitterness again and smitten me with no small fear; for as far as can be understood from your words, I have altered my purpose, but I have not escaped my peril. I have changed my purpose because I am converted from that wavering and unstable love, which once distracted me, to a single love. I have not escaped peril, because (as you tell me) I do not attain the fruit of this love unless I take care to show myself worthy in every way. It remains then for you to explain to me more diligently this house in which the king's women are maintained, and the royal food which is given them, the ointments likewise wherewith they are anointed; and indeed all the other things which are employed for their adornment or beauty. For by his love I am roused henceforth to apply myself to those things without which I see that I cannot reach the enjoyment of love. And would that I might be found worthy to be that one whose beauty and adorning the king will praise! How happy she, and how much more chosen than the chosen, who shall bring her effort to this end; if I might bring my own thereto, how trifling should I now esteem all toil. And so I ask you to lose no time in telling me, one by one, what are those remedies by which I should remould my face to this beauty, because I do vehemently desire to please him whose charity towards me I know to be so bounteous and whose love is so pleasant.

## MAN

Truly there is need for you to do so; and I pray that he who has already granted you the will to do this, may be pleased to grant the strength to carry it through. You ask what the house is; ask also what is the king's chamber. Put before yourself those two dwelling-places, because there is need for you to consider them both. In the house, the brides are made ready for the wedding; but in the chamber the nuptials are celebrated. The present Church is, as it were, the house in which the betrothed of God are made ready for their future marriage; the heavenly Jerusalem is the king's chamber in which those marriages are celebrated. After the times of adorning they pass from the house to the king's chamber: for after a time of doing good work they come to receive the fruit of their good work. Indeed the present church is called the house (*triclinium*) because of the three orders of the faithful—the married, the continent, the rulers or virgins. Let us see next what are the unguents and kinds of perfumes, what the food, and what the clothing prepared for the adornment of the brides. Nor should we pass over this, that the bridegroom himself, as it were by a free gift, first of all in a manner loves these foul and wicked ones; and so he freely lavishes on them all that may serve to their adorning. And they have nothing of their own to please him except they first receive it from him: so that you should know that it is even a part of his love that you have anything you can adorn yourself with, who indeed have nothing of your own except you receive it from him. First, here is placed the baptismal font and laver of regeneration, in which you wash away the uncleanness of past crimes. Then chrism and oil, by anointing with which you are anointed by the Holy Spirit. After this, anointed and perfumed with the oil of gladness, you come to the table and receive there the nourishment of the Body and Blood of Christ, wherewith you are feasted and refreshed; there you throw off that harmful

leanness of your past hungering, and with your former fullness and strength restored, you become in a manner young once more. Then you put on the clothing of good works; and you are decked with the fruit of alms, with fasting and prayer, with holy vigils and other works of piety, as it were with some embroidered tiring. Last of all come the perfumes of the virtues, whose sweetly-breathing scent dispels all the foetor of your past uncleanness, so that you seem to yourself in some way wholly changed and transformed into another person, and you are made more happy, more cheerful, and more safe. The Holy Scripture is also given to you as a mirror wherein to see your face; so that the arrangement of your adorning shall have nothing less or other than is becoming. What then do you say, Soul of mine? Do you know whether you have received any of these? Certainly you have been washed in the fountain, certainly you have eaten that same food from the king's table and have drunk of that same drink. But perhaps you have again been polluted: but you have tears wherewith again to wash yourself. Again the anointing has dried from off you; but by good and dutiful devotion, you may anoint yourself again. Once more prepared by long fasting, once more washed with tears, and once more renewed by the anointing of pious devotion, you shall return to your restoring.

See how things everywhere work together for you, by a good dispensation. You had not, and it was given you: you lost it, and it was restored you; nowhere were you cast away; that you might know how much he loves you, by whom you are loved. He does not want to lose you, and that is why he waits with such patience: and time and again, he grants in kindness what you have as often lost by negligence, provided only that you wish to repair the loss. O how many are already perished, who with you received these gifts, but did not merit with you to receive again what they had lost. Therefore you are more beloved than all of these, because to you is so bounteously

given what you had lost, which when it was lost by them was so sternly refused them. Perhaps no grace to do well was given you? Yet by his bounty good will was not refused you. If you do great works, you are raised high by mercy. If you do no great work, perhaps you are wholesomely humbled. He knows better than you what will help you: and on that account, if you wish to feel rightly about him, understand that every thing which is done for you by him is well done. Perhaps you have not the grace of virtues; but while you are shaken by the influence of vices, you are made the firmer in humility. Sweeter smells a weak humility to God, than a proud virtue. Do not dare to judge rashly of his ordering, but in fear and reverence always pray to him to help you, as he knows how. If any evils have remained in you, in his goodness he will wash them away: if any good has been begun, he will bounteously perfect it and bring you to himself by the way he chooses.

What more shall I say to you? Is there anything more we can possibly say to show forth this love? To you I speak, my Soul,—is there anything? What do you say? Even if you tell of your own matters, you cannot tell of another's: if of your own and another's, yet you cannot of all. For who can tell all things? and yet we know that charity is the origin of all things. Look, there were two men born, of the same degree, at the same hour of nativity. One was left in poverty, the other raised to riches, and each was the work of charity, because it makes the one humble by poverty and the other it consoles by abundance. One is weak, the other strong: the first is kept from doing evil, the second made robust so that he shall be strong for some good work: charity tries each of them, does not reject them. One is enlightened by wisdom, the other left in the simplicity of his senses; the latter that he may despise himself, the former that he may learn to know his Creator: yet charity desires to be with each of them. Such is the love of God towards us; and there is

nothing at all that human weakness bears which he (as far as is fitting to his goodness) does not dispose to our good.

### CONFESSION [OF MAN]

I confess to thee thy mercies, Lord my God, for that thou hast not forsaken me, sweetness of my life and light of my eyes. What shall I render to thee for all the things thou hast rendered to me? Thou wouldst have me love thee, and how may I love thee? Who am I that I should love thee, Lord, my strength, my firmament, my refuge, my deliverer, my God, my helper, my protector, horn of my salvation, my support—and how much more shall I call thee? Thou art the Lord my God. O my Soul, what shall we do for the Lord our God, from whom we have received so great and many gifts? For he was not content to give us the same gifts that he gave to others, but we recognise even in our ills that single lover, and love him only, both for our good and for our evils. Thou gavest me, Lord, to recognise thee, and thou gavest me, in preference to many other men, to understand what has been revealed concerning thy secrets. Others of my age thou hast left in the darkness of ignorance, and hast poured the light of thy wisdom into me rather than them. Thou gavest me more truly to know thee, more purely to love thee, more sincerely to believe in thee, more ardently to follow thee. Thou gavest me a wide perception, quick understanding, strong memory, clear speech, a pleasant discourse, persuasive teaching, efficacy in work, grace in conversation, progress in studies, purpose in things begun, solace in adversity, caution in prosperity; and wheresoever I turn, thy grace and mercy have gone before me. And often when I seemed to my self lost, suddenly thou didst deliver me; when I strayed, thou broughtest me back; when I was in error thou didst teach me; when I sinned, thou didst chastise me; when I was sad, thou didst console me; when I despaired, thou

didst comfort me; when I fell, thou didst raise me up: when I stood, thou didst hold me; when I went, thou leddest me; when I came, thou didst guard me. All this hast thou done for me, O Lord my God, and much else that it were sweet, ever to ponder, ever to tell, ever to give thanks for; in order that I may praise and love thee for all thy bounty, O Lord my God.

My Soul, behold you have your betrothal-gift, and in that gift you know your bridegroom. Keep yourself intact for him, unpolluted, whole, uncontaminated. If once you were a harlot, now you are become a virgin, for his love is wont to restore wholeness to the corrupted and preserve chasteness in them that are whole. And ever think how great a work of mercy he has wrought upon you; and therein consider how much you are loved by him, because you know his bounty never fails you.

#### SOUL

Of very truth I confess this love is rightly to be called a single love, which though it be spread abroad among many, yet embraces each one singly. Of very truth this is a lovely and a wonderful good, that is common to all and everything to each. Ruling over all, thou fillest each, everywhere present, taking care of all, yet providing for each as if for all. So, indeed, when I give heed to his mercies around me, it seems to me (if I may say so) as if God did nothing else but provide for my salvation, and was as much occupied with watching over me, as if he had forgotten everyone and would be free for me alone.

He shows himself always present: offers himself always ready: wheresoever I turn me, he forsakes me not: whatever I may do he helps me alike: and he is ever present as perpetual watcher of all my actions or thoughts, and, so far as pertains to his goodness, as my individual co-worker: for he openly shows himself by the effect of his work. Whence it follows, that although we cannot yet see his face, we never can escape from

his presence. And I acknowledge that, thinking of this more carefully, I am confounded alike with a fear and a vast shame, when I picture him, whom I so strongly desire to please, as being everywhere in my presence and seeing all my secrets. O how much there is in me for which I begin to blush before his eyes; all of which now makes me far more fearful of displeasing him, than I am confident of pleasing him by what, if anything, in me is praiseworthy. O could I but be hidden from his eyes for a space until I could wipe off all these stains, and so at length come spotless into the sight of him who is without spot. For how can I please him in this state of ugliness, who thus am also most displeasing even to myself? Inveterate stains, stains foul and shameful, why do you cling so long? Away, depart, and never more presume to offend the eyes of my beloved. Do not deceive yourselves; you shall not bide with me (if he be my helper), although you could not be destroyed as long as I tarried in my sloth. I have sworn upon you that I will not keep or love you more, for I utterly detest and henceforth abominate your wickedness. And henceforth, even if I could not be seen by my Betrothed, I would refuse to be tainted by you; so how much the more now do I refuse, since I am plainly seen by him and the offending of him grieves me more surely than does my own wickedness. Depart, then; in vain do you yet cling to me, for even while you yet remain with me, you are not mine. I declare that you have no part in my destiny: henceforth I will have no communication with you. I have another pattern to which I desire to be conformed, and on that I perpetually look, and thence, as far as I can, I take my likeness ever more and more. And from this pattern I have learnt this also, that I ought to put an end to you, and now I know how I shall do it.

MAN

A wonderful thing has been done with us, which perhaps you do not yet wonder at, because you are not aware of what I would tell you. For I am thinking of how at the beginning of our discourse you brought forward many things which seemed to be against love, and yet by these the power of love has in each case been, not weakened indeed, but further demonstrated. You said that love could not be equally singular and common: but thence has been proved an even more marvellous thing, namely that this love is both common and singular at once. Again you said that you were not loved perfectly, in that you had been told that you were chosen for adorning, and yet you had not seen yourself taken into the bridal-chamber. But yet again far greater love was shown you, inasmuch as you may look for a greater perfection through his patience. Now at the last you have begun to doubt whether you could be loved by him in this your ugliness, which (albeit against your will) you now endure. But when you doubted this, you had already forgotten that you were once wholly foul and yet beloved. So if he deigned to love you then, when you were all shameful and had no beauty, how much more will he love you now, when you have begun to be made fair and to shed your former ugliness; for this too belongs to the praise of his love, that he deigns to love the imperfect. And although as yet he may see in you some things that do not please him, yet he loves just this, that you have begun to hate these things in yourself. For he does not regard your state as much as your intention, nor does he consider what you are, but what you wish to be. If indeed you are doing all you can, you will merit to be that which you have not yet begun to be.

## SOUL

Bear kindly, pray, with the last of my questions. What is that sweetness which sometimes touches me when I recall him in my heart, and so strongly and delightfully affects me that I begin to be, in a manner, estranged from my own self and withdrawn I know not whither? For suddenly I am made new and wholly changed; and it begins to be well with me beyond all I can suffice to tell. My conscience rejoices, all the misery of past sorrow is forgotten; the mind exults, the understanding becomes clear, the heart is enlightened, desires feel delight: and thereupon I see that I am somewhere else, I know not where; and, as it were, I hold something within me in an embrace of love, and I know not what it is, and yet I toil with all my effort to keep it always and never lose it. My mind struggles, in a sort of delight, not to depart from that which it longs to embrace for ever and as if it would find in it the end of all desires: to the utmost and unspeakably it exults, asking nothing further, wishing ever to be thus. Can this be my beloved? Tell me, I beg you, that I may know if it be he; that if he comes to me again, I may beseech him not to depart but ever stay.

## MAN

Truly it is your beloved that visits you; but he comes invisible, secret, incomprehensible. He comes to touch you, not to be seen by you. He comes to counsel you, not to be understood by you. He comes not to pour his whole self into you, but to offer himself to be tasted; not to fulfil your desire but to draw your love. He offers you some first-fruits of his love; he does not tender you the fullness of completed satisfaction. And this is the greatest feature of your betrothal-gift, that he, who one day will give himself to you to be seen and possessed for ever, now sometimes gives you a taste of himself, that you may know how

sweet he is. Now in the meantime be you consoled for his absence, inasmuch as you are continually refreshed by his visitation, so that you be not weary. My Soul, we have already said much; after all this, I pray you recognise the One, follow the One, lay hold on the One, possess the One.

SOUL

This I choose, this I desire, for this I long with all my heart.

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