

Love Song

Epilogue

Solomon's Song of Songs
The Window of Love

Throughout this study I have maintained that the human-body-and-material-reality-are-bad, mind-and-spirit-are good allegorizing approach to this book, favored for centuries by Jewish and Christian interpreters, dishonors our God who made material reality, human bodies and human sexuality and pronounced it all “good.” And so, I have said that this faulty approach is also misleading and unhealthy for us.

The Song of Songs, Us & Jesus

Love, sex and marriage are good creations of God, and when understood and practiced by us in accordance with His design, they are beautiful, glorious and immensely pleasurable blessings for us. And in our proper and luxurious enjoyment of them, we bring glory to our Lord and God.



Concerning the Song of Songs, then, it is vitally important that we understand this skillfully crafted and God-inspired collection of lyric love poetry first of all at the level of real, physical, messy, man and woman, mutual desiring, wooing, seeking, finding, committing, consummating and living in the holy bond of marriage commitment including sexual expression. We must not rush to see in this book only as a symbolic expression of God's love for His people, or Christ's love for the individual believer, etc. However, once we allow the Song of Songs to speak honestly concerning very human, nerve tingling as well as soul stirring, physical realities, it then gives us significant clues to the deeper, higher, foundational realities of the character, purposes and love of Almighty God. The Song of Songs then becomes for us a good and proper **Window to Ultimate Love** found in our Almighty God who achieves for us Eternal Salvation through Jesus Christ the One-and-Only Son of God. Ours is a God of delight, of beauty, of blessing, of

enjoyment, of light, of life... Ours is a God who invites us into a “Hero Quest” that is about moving from the ultimate “unhappy situation” of being lost and dying forever to the ultimate “desirable situation” of being saved and secured in life eternal. Seeing and understanding the Hero-Bride's domestic quest from single virgin to married wife and “domain of love” helps us to realize in deep and heart-stirring ways what God desires for us and does for us in Jesus Christ our Mediator, Redeemer, Savior and Lord.

So, allow me to close with words about the structures of transformation in myth (clues to ultimate reality!) and our Ultimate Quest from Dr. Duane Garrett whose interpretive insights we have been drawing upon throughout this study...

Myth tends to relate two pairs of concepts as “A is to B as C is to D.” The structure of myth can be expressed in a simple formula (Levi-Strauss, p.228): There are two “characters” in this structure: the protagonist of the story and the redeemer, the person (or event or thing) that transforms the protagonist. There are also two initial functions or spheres of existence.

The formula, as developed further by a number of scholars, describes the structure of transformation in which the protagonist of the story begins in one sphere of existence but longs to be in another sphere of existence. We may call these two, respectively, the “unhappy situation” and the “desired situation.” The protagonist, however, is incapable of achieving this change of sphere of existence. The protagonist needs the redeemer. In order to fill the redeeming or transforming function, it is necessary that the redeemer be simultaneously in both spheres of existence—in both the unhappy situation and the desired situation. The redeemer cannot relate to the protagonist if the redeemer is not also in the unhappy situation. On the other hand, the redeemer cannot help the protagonist if the redeemer is not in the desired situation. The redeemer is an agent who functions simultaneously in both spheres of existence and relates to the protagonist on each side of the equation.

There are three movements that take place in the grammar of transformation as described in this model. First, there is a mediation of opposites, whereby the redeemer simultaneously exists in both spheres of existence. This enables the redeemer to mediate for the protagonist, who longs to move from the unhappy situation to the desired situation or sphere of existence yet also desires to do so without loss of identity or self.

Second, a double negation occurs. This double negation involves, first, the fact that the protagonist is in a negative situation and must accept the fact that he/she is in such a condition. Specifically, the protagonist must acknowledge his/her inability to move from the first sphere of existence (unhappy situation) to the second sphere of existence (desired situation). This negation is itself negated when the protagonist allows the redeemer to mediate transformation. When the protagonist submits to the mediation of the redeemer, the protagonist is able to attain his/her desire, but it is only attained by negation, the protagonist's abandonment of attempts to attain the desired situation by acting as agent.

Third is the emergence of dialectical identity, in which the protagonist goes through a permutation from the unhappy situation to the desired situation. In the first, the protagonist is an agent in that sphere of existence (the unhappy situation). As an agent, the protagonist is free but trapped (e.g., suffers from lack of intimacy, joy, life, or significance). Then the protagonist moves from being agent to being a sphere of existence. That is, after the redemption, the protagonist is no longer agent but is now a sphere of existence in which the real agent of existence, that which gives identity, is the desired condition. The permutation or inversion of the protagonist is this: he/she no longer claims to be the agent of his/her existence but finds

“real existence” under the agency of that which was sought as mediated by the redeemer. The protagonist does not become a controlling agent in the desired situation; rather, the protagonist becomes the domain of the desired reality. This reality can be called “real existence.”

By “real existence,” one means significance, love, intimacy, value, or life. The protagonist sought “real existence” but was unable to attain it while continuing to act as agent, governing and directing his/her existence. The protagonist feared, however, that he/she would be destroyed, swallowed up, or lose identity if he/she simply surrendered to the desired reality and allowed it to make him/her its domain. But the redeemer, functioning at the same time in both spheres of existence, is able to bring the protagonist through the process of transformation. One might say that the redeemer gives the protagonist the means and the courage to undergo this transformation. And the protagonist is not swallowed up at all. In the redeemed condition, he/she is not consumed. Loss of status as “agent” does not entail loss of identity; it means a new identity that is also a dialectical identity. Through a relationship with the redeemer, who exists in both spheres of existence, the protagonist finds both freedom and access to the desired sphere of existence. But the protagonist does not become the exact counterpart to the redeemer, who operates in both spheres. The protagonist accepts the negation of his/her role as controlling agent and becomes the domain in which the desired condition operates (Duane Garrett, *Song of Songs*, pp. 108-109; See also Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*).

According to this model, the Song of Songs, in its frank and obvious celebration of love, sex and marriage, points us finally to the deeper, higher, foundational story of salvation in Jesus Christ.

The virginity of the woman (representing isolation and imprisonment) speaks to the isolated souls of men and women. We exist behind emotional barriers as lonely, autonomous souls longing for freedom and love. We long for release from isolation, rejection and death. We are autonomous but not free. We nevertheless fear intimacy and its theological counterpart, holiness. If it breaks through to us it may destroy us... We have eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, have recognized our nakedness, and have clothed ourselves. We do not want to be found naked, and we know that if intimacy breaks through our barriers, our shame will be made visible. We cannot bear to let go of the false freedom of being an autonomous agent. We are aware of our need to transcend our isolation, corruption and finitude, yet we fear the eternal, infinite and pure. We are in need of transformation similar to that which the Song celebrates as the virgin marries and becomes the domain of love.

The Song, thus, gives us clues that the human need for intimacy is universal and that the condition is not hopeless. And this is where the Christian Gospel and the Song of Songs meet.

1) According to the teachings and traditions of the Eastern Church, the fundamental human dilemma is *mortality*.

- Humanity (protagonist) is in the unhappy situation of living in a sphere of existence bounded by death.
- We long to enter the desired situation: God’s sphere of existence which is immortality (partaking of the divine nature), but we have no way to do so on our own.
- Christ, the God-man, is simultaneously mortal and immortal, finite and infinite, and perishing and imperishable.
- He is the redeemer. He is the mediator.

As God he shows us our negation, our mortality, but as man he is united to us. In him, the human race undergoes the process of transformation. In his death he negates our negation, and in his resurrection he releases the human race from the bondage of death. In him we have a new identity, a dialectical identity grounded not in our becoming gods but in our becoming domains in which the divine life now exists. Our eternal life is not a matter of our becoming agents that have power over life and death. It is a matter of the divine spirit, or the power of the resurrection, living in us. We have surrendered all attempts to become divine through our own agency or to control the power of life and death. Instead, “the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20) (p.115-116)

2) According to the teachings and traditions of the Western Church, humanity’s principle problem is *guilt* whereby we merit only divine wrath.

- Humanity (protagonist) is in this unhappy situation and longs to be free of it.
- We long to enter the desired situation, to be righteous, to be without sin, to be rightful objects of divine love and not wrath.
- Again, we have no way to enter the desired situation via our own agency.
- If we could by our “works” enter the desired domain of righteousness, then we would be agents that control righteousness and we would, in Paul’s words, have something to boast about (Rom 4:2), but this is not possible for us.
- Christ enters our dilemma as the one who is without sin and yet is made sin for us (2 Cor 5:21).
- Once again, he is the redeemer who mediates the two opposites.

As the one who is in the desired situation of being without sin, he confronts us in our negation (our guilt), but as the one who is in the unhappy situation, the one who bore our sin, he negates our negation. Our quest for righteousness ends not with our attaining it but with our inversion or permutation., We are not agents who attain righteousness or masters over righteousness; we are the dwelling in which righteousness lives (Rom 6:16-20). The body is now dead because of sin, but the spirit lives because of righteousness (Rom 8:10). In short, we become the sphere of existence where righteousness now rules as controlling agent. Christ himself is now our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption (1 Cor 1:30) (p.117).

At the deepest level, Jesus is the “Beloved” and we are the “beautiful ones” invited to come away with Him.