

Love Languages of God

Speaking about God is not for the faint of heart. Theologians have struggled with it since Day 1, or perhaps Day 8 if we think of it Biblically.

The great **Saint Thomas Aquinas** provides an extraordinary example of this difficulty. His life's work, the **Summa Theologiae**, is a marvel of Aristotelian logic applied to conceptualization of God. It is rightly considered one of the greatest written works of western civilization.

And yet, he chose to abandon it at the end of his life. He left this magnificent monument of Christian thought unfinished. On December 6, 1273, while celebrating Mass on the feast of St. Nicholas, he received a revelation so profound that it left him silent. When his friend and secretary, Brother Reginald, implored him to continue with his opus, Aquinas replied:

“The end of my labors has come. All that I have written appears to be as so much straw after the things that have been revealed to me.”

We can only speculate about the nature of this revelation. Perhaps God briefly lifted the veil from His smile, and Aquinas was left speechless. Earthly wisdom fades before the ineffable.

The great part is that apparently Aquinas's contemporaries and subsequent generations did not interpret his sudden silence on the matter as a retraction or refutation of his work. Instead, they recognized it as a testament to the limitations of human understanding when faced with divine revelation.

Modern theologian **Peter Rollins** explores this very topic in his own treatise called **“How (not) to speak of God”**, in which he describes the challenges of knowing the unknowable. In his preface, which he wrote after completing his book, he reflected..

“Looking over what I have written, I find myself wondering once more why I have chosen the subject of God. After all, this area must be among the most

difficult and dangerous of them all. So much ink has been spent in writing of God and so much blood has been spilt in the name of God that I shudder each time I think about writing on the subject. Because of this concern I have often found myself drawn to the sentiment expressed by the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein in the final sentence of his influential Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus:

‘What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.’ “

Rollins continues...

“Time and again I have found great wisdom in this phrase, and yet I have *not* left these pages blank. Perhaps part of the reason why I find myself unable to stay silent derives from the fact that long before I ever came across this sentiment ... I learnt a very different type of wisdom, one that I have never been able to shake. In short it was this: *God is the one subject of whom we must never stop speaking.*

At first these two approaches seemed like oil and water, yet I could not completely reject either. ... I began to feel that these positions need not be enemies.

... I found myself drawn to the Christian mystics (such as Meister Eckhart), for while they did not embrace total silence, they balked at the presumption of those who would seek to *colonize* the name ‘God’ with concepts. Instead of viewing the unspeakable as that which brings all language to a halt, they realized that the unspeakable was precisely the place where the most inspiring language began.”

Later in his book, Rollins writes,

“So in a sense, *when it comes to God*, we have *nothing* to say to others and we must not be ashamed of saying it. Our approach must be a powerless one which employs words as a way of saying that we have been left utterly breathless by a beauty that surpasses all words. This does not mean that we remain silent – far from it. The desire to get beyond language forces us to stretch language to its very limits. As Samuel Beckett once commented, we use words in order to tear through them and glimpse at what lies beneath. *The desire to say nothing, to create sacred space*, opens up the most beautiful

type of language available – the language of parables, prose and poetry. This is why the mystics would write so extensively about how nothing can be written and would preach beautiful sermons about the futility of words. “

And so we have mystics like **St. Symeon the New Theologian's Invocation to the God, the Holy Spirit.** (*I invite you to close your eyes and let his invocation become your own prayer*)

Come, true light.

Come, life eternal.

Come, hidden mystery.

Come, treasure without name.

Come, reality beyond all words.

Come, person beyond all understanding.

Come, invisible whom none may touch and handle.

Come, for you continue always unmoved, yet at every instant you are wholly in movement; you draw near to us who lie in hell, yet you remain higher than the heavens.

Come, for your name fills our hearts with longing and is ever on our lips; yet who you are and what your nature is, we cannot say or know.

Come, for you are yourself the desire that is within me.

Come, my breath and my life.

Come, the consolation of my humble soul.

Come, my joy, my glory, my endless delight.

And, of course, we have the **Song of Songs**, The Song of Solomon, which Ildar recited so eloquently. Written around the 10th century BC during the reign of King Solomon, it is a collection of love poems celebrating the romantic and intimate relationship between a bride (the Shulammite woman) and her bridegroom (often considered Solomon)..

This is perhaps one of the first and greatest efforts to create sacred space by opening up the most beautiful language of poetry and allegory. Like most of the

Bible, it contains layers of meaning and more precious treasure the deeper one is led into it.

Most mystics and theologians see this poem as a love dance between God as Lover and the Soul as beloved. Lets take another glimpse at this love language...

I again invite you to close your eyes if you are so inclined, as the soul declares to God:

I sat down, delighted, in his shade;
his fruit was sweet to my mouth.

⁴He brought me to his wine-house;^[6]
his banner over me was love.^[7]

Sustain me with raisin-cakes;
refresh me with apples,^[8]
for I am love-sick.

The voice of my beloved — here he comes! —
leaping across the mountains,
skipping over the hills.

My lover responded, and said to me,
"Get up, my love, my beautiful, and come away!

¹¹For now winter is past;
the rain is over and gone.

¹²The flowers are appearing on the ground,
the time of singing has come,
and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.

¹³The fig tree ripens its figs,
and the vines blossom and spread fragrance.
Get up and come, my love, my beautiful,
and come away!"

Aquinas and Rollins have warned us of the limitation of rational thought and spoken word in conveying the experience of God. The Song of Solomon provides a perfect

example of how we can express God's love in a way that transcends our symantec language.

Of course, metaphor, poetry and allegory are not our own tools for expressing the ineffable. Music is a gift from God of the highest order to convey our experience and adoration.

So, let's see what happens when we utilize metaphor, poetry, music, and voice to express our experience of God.

Ildar, would you provide an example?

[Palestrina, Nigra sunt sed Formosa]

Palestrina: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihjrRkT1-5c>

Finally, let us conclude with the inspired poetry and music of Saint Hildegard of Bingen, celebrated medieval abbess, mystic, and patron saint who is patron feast day is celebrated later this month. Her opus work Ordo Virtutum, which features a soul's search for the divine, uses poetic and intimate language to express the soul's journey, echoing the passionate and mystical tone of the Song of Solomon. This is from the segment "O dulcis Divinitas"

Oh sweet divinity, o gentle life, in which I
shall wear a bright robe, accepting that
which I lost in my first formation - I cry to you
and invoke all the Virtues.

Oh let me come to you freely, that you may
give me the kiss of your heart.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=lMxBpPcoWf0>

May our souls rejoice and resonate with the Bridegroom's overflowing Love.

Amen.