From the PREFACE

This book may be a new publication, but it should come as no surprise! That St. Francis de Sales, the "Doctor of Love," should write about the Canticle of Canticles is a rather natural development. It is quite consistent with both his own spirituality, wherein the union of divine and human love is both lived and taught, and with the contents of this sacred writing, which provides, in poetic form, a perpetual witness to this mystery of love.

What may be surprising, however, is the manner in which St. Francis de Sales treats the Canticle of Canticles. Unlike any contemporary commentary, which analyzes the successive words and verses of text, the saint’s work is more along the lines of a theological exposé.

The first of the translations given here is Francis’ own *Mystical Exposition* in which he interprets the Canticle with reference to contemplative prayer. While it may be argued that this is not a direct exegesis of the text, yet Francis’ explanation does elucidate the meaning of this inspired poem. For the goal of contemplation and the subject of the Canticles is one and the same – union with God. In this way, the topic of this sacred text and the Salesian perspective on prayer and united – each is a mystical conversation, corresponding to the attraction ("draw me") and movement ("we will follow") inspired by the Holy Spirit, and carried on in that secret colloquy which is so characteristic of true friends.

The second of the translation printed her is the systematic development of this theological mystery in the form of a *Commentary*. Drawn primarily from the *Treatise on the Love of God*, which Francis himself conceived as a commentary on the Canticle of Canticles, this compilation arranges the saint’s reference to the verses of the biblical text. In this way, we get a glimpse at the pervasive role the Canticles played in Francis’ own theology of love and its doctrinal development.

That these two writings are now available in English is the fruit of much work, while the holy Doctor himself wrote the *Mystical Exposition*, it was Father Andre Brix, an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales in France, who diligently arranged and edited the Salesian references to the Canticle. This translator has simply rendered these two texts into an English which, although stylistically uneasy at times, seeks to preserve the form and flavour of the originals. And, thanks to the work of the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales, these translations are now provided for others to read. All in all, the work is itself like the Canticles – it has been a true labour of love.

Hopefully, this labour will now reap its benefits. One value of these translations is to offer an insight into the life and thought of this eminent Doctor of the Church. In fact, it can be said that the Canticle of Canticles is the inspiration of Francis’ life, for he knew well that the history of the world is the history of salvation, which, in turn, is really a history of God’s love for us.

And therein lies a second value to the present publication. For in these writings, where Francis incorporates and explains the depth and extent of this love, we are given a sure guide in the ways of mystical theology, where affective and effective love unite in leading us to devotion. May it so lead us to such a life, that we too may join with St. Francis de Sales in singing this greatest of all songs.

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