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**LOVE IN THE LITERATURE OF WORLDWIDE RELIGIONS**  
**SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS**

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## **SUMMARY OF THE THESIS**

### **Introduction**

Too little has been written about love.

Even when we consider a single religious space, specialized studies focus only on certain aspects of love and there are few books that address this phenomenon in its entirety, even if love is an element of paramount importance, regardless of the area to which we refer.

With respect to comparative studies, they usually take into consideration two, at most three religions, and when referring to love in those traditions, they usually detect too few common elements or they restrain themselves to general observations, failing to recognize the big pattern, namely, the idea that in all areas taken into discussion (Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam), love manifests itself by a common model whose circularity is obvious: first, it gives itself unconditionally to all beings; at the same time, it requires reciprocity; also, those who commit themselves to it are invested with the attributes of the divine.

Despite the broad title, this work is not intended to cover everything related to the subject of "love" in these religions, or to conduct a survey of the evolution of this phenomenon in all of these areas. Such projects would be impossible, because they would reach an infinite number of pages. The approach of this book is much more modest. It only considers the matters regarding love that are the most acknowledged in these traditions, which are still sufficient to demonstrate the universality of the proposed model and the fact that, despite the obvious differences between the various religions, the similarities often prove to be stronger.

The work is multidisciplinary, addressing the topic from different perspectives: literature, philosophy, theology, anthropology, ethics. The first chapter is an overview of the way in which are perceived the divine, the world, man and the relationship between these elements in the most

representative branches of the five religions, from the point of view of philosophy, theology and anthropology. The second chapter considers the representatives of divinity in these traditions in terms of the literary texts underlying these religions. The next chapter discusses the ethics of love in these areas, which come as a result of the message of love given by the divine representatives. The fourth chapter describes the steps that lead to the union with the divine, which is perceived differently by the various systems. The last chapter examines the ways to pass from human love to spiritual love in the texts of religious literatures and the use of the images of human love in the description of the love between the divine and the human being.

### **Chap. 1. The relationship between the divine and the human soul**

The first chapter is an overview of the main branches of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, centered around the role that love occupies in the being of the divine, in creation and in man, and in the connection established between these factors.

In Hinduism, there were highlighted commonalities and differences between Shankara's absolute non-dualism, considered a model of monistic thinking, Ramanuja's determined non-dualism, that shares common elements with the traditional theism of the Abrahamic religions, the radically dualist system of Madhva, Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta, also called "the humanist Advaita", and Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga. In the context of Hinduism, the Shaiva Tantra system was also taken into consideration.

For Buddhism, emphasis was placed on the Mahayana path, characterized by a radical non-dualism, whose doctrines, such as Tathagata and Trikaya, have given this religion deeply theistic accents.

Regarding the Jewish, Christian and Islamic contexts, which conceive the divine as an essentially personal being, there were taken into consideration especially divine attributes and names, and also the doctrine of the Trinity in the case of Catholicism and Orthodoxy. A special place was reserved in the Jewish and Islamic areas to the Kabbalistic system and to Sufism.

In all these religions, there was pointed out the important position that love occupies in the being of the divine and in man, seen as a mirror of divinity, in the union of these two poles,

in the sustainment (or even in the creation) of the world and in the ultimate goal towards which human beings (and often creation) are headed.

## **Chap. 2. Representatives of the divine in literature and their message**

The second chapter is a review of the way in which are portrayed the representatives of the ultimate principle (or the divine principle itself, which appears in an earthly form), in the different literary texts of the religious traditions taken into consideration. This approach assumes that, even if the deity loves people with unconditional love, she wants them to manifest her love in the world and also to finally come back to her. Therefore, she incarnates, embodies on earth or appoints representatives to carry forward her message. Thus, Krishna incarnated on earth to liberate beings, assuring them of his love and asking them to surrender to him with faith and loving devotion. Buddha sought enlightenment to save and liberate all sentient beings, showing them the way of his great compassion. Jesus became embodied to save the world through his boundless love, while Muhammad taught people good faith, wisdom and compassion. A special category of representatives is occupied by Israel as God's beloved people, chosen by Him as a tool in His plan of salvation.

## **Chap. 3. Ethics of love**

Following the love message of the divine, all these great traditions have developed ethics of love. The third chapter of the book examines how all the five religions taken into consideration attach a great importance to the ethical and social dimensions of love, that translate into patience, tolerance, forgiveness, consideration for the feelings of the other, empathy for the suffering fellows, spiritual and moral support, as well as material aid. When referring to the relation between man and his peers, love can designate compassion, affection, kindness, caring, generosity of spirit and warmth of heart.

#### **Chap. 4. Stages of love and death**

The fourth chapter deals with the absolute love of man for the divine, the human being's return to divinity involving a number of degrees and stages of love that lead inevitably to the death of the ego, for where the divine dwells there is no room for human imperfection. This part of the paper describes how these stages are seen in the various religions and how the union with the divine is seen in these areas. While in some cases this union leads to the final annihilation of the human self, to its absorption into divinity, in others there remains an essential difference between Creator and creature. Often, the union with the divine results in the vivification of the transformed man, who starts to lead an active life by becoming the instrument through which Love flows towards all beings.

#### **Chap.5. Love between man and woman as a catalyst for spiritual evolution**

In the context of religion, love between a man and a woman can be seen from two angles: on the one hand, we are dealing with an attraction, often translated by sexual desire, for a person (generally a woman), which comes to be sublimated, transformed into devotion to the divine; on the other hand, the love between a man and a woman serves as a paradigm for the union of the divine and the human, which is often pictured as a marriage. This chapter of the book integrates an analysis of the jewels of mystical poetry and prose of these traditions.

#### **Conclusion**

In all these five religions, love manifests itself in similar ways, proving the validity of the model mentioned above. The divinity loves man unconditionally and this love is active, responding to his needs in such an extent, that she is sometimes born as a human being in order to show man the way to return home. However, this boundless love is not without expectations, because it is characterized by a desire to get an answer.

As respect to human love, it has several degrees. Firstly, there is the love for the self. Then, in a more advanced form, there is the love for the others, which involves charity towards them and towards the rest of creation. The highest form of love has the divine as its object. This



type of love involves the abolition of the loneliness that makes man a finite and isolated thing, representing a movement of the heart that transcends the limitations of individual vision and abandons itself to the absolute Reality. This love manifests itself as a form of organic life which involves reorganizing the entire self (conscious and unconscious), as a restoration of the whole character to the high level of divine life. Spiritual desires are useless if they do not initiate the entire movement of the self towards the One, who is not only the Reality of all that exists, but rather the object of love that attracts all living human beings home under the guidance of the heart. Spiritual fulfillment is the most difficult human achievement and the most complete expression of human love.

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