“IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD”: APOCALYPSE AND THE EDUCATION OF THE SOUL

Author: Ross Woodman

It may be that in writing “In the Beginning Was the Word”: Apocalypse and the Education of the Soul Dr. Ross Woodman is one of the first contemporary Western Bahá’ís to plunge unabashedly into the opaque sea of Bahá’í mysticism and to attempt to use language as symbolism and metaphor to reveal some of its mysteries. This brave undertaking must have been difficult for him to put into words. No matter how gifted a writer may be, to relate a very subjective experience that envelops another world of reality, he or she is obliged to use the structure of a sensible grammar so that the reader’s mind can decode what it reads into thought-pictures for the “inner eye” to see. In addition to this involuntary process taking place deep within us, the reader is also required to interpret these pictures and symbols cognitively in order to understand their inner meanings as the author intended. While this latter effort may be true for comprehending any profound written message, it is doubly true of the mystical essay, which is not meant to be a logically analyzed composition whose contents can be dissected paragraph by paragraph for its intellectual substance. Rather, it transmits a message to the reader’s deeper inner self, there to be absorbed and digested, as food for the soul.

This process is much like our absorption of a beautiful piece of music, or poetic impressions, or a painting that freezes a moment of perfection or completion. Once we begin to appraise them intellectually for their “correctness” or “accuracy” by whatever standards we decide to use, their beauty flees. We experience an account of mysticism in much the same way we experience a great work of art. As a result of this different, even unusual, method of comprehension, the mystical essay requires a different set of criteria for its appreciation.

Its main element would be a process for “letting go” of the control our intellect exerts over us for most tasks we perform and allowing an inner light to be turned on. Unlike our intellect, which is an active energy, this inner light gently illuminates a mode of consciousness that allows us to experience the world of the mystic as he or she recounts it. Yet, only another mystic can know whether or not that experience is authentic, regardless of how its subject has interpreted it, for the interpretations of mystics vary. But the experience itself is described with uncommon similarity. In the introduction to The Seven Valleys, Bahá’u’lláh describes this desire and yearning for union with the Beloved as that which would “make thy soul to shake with the flashing light. . .”