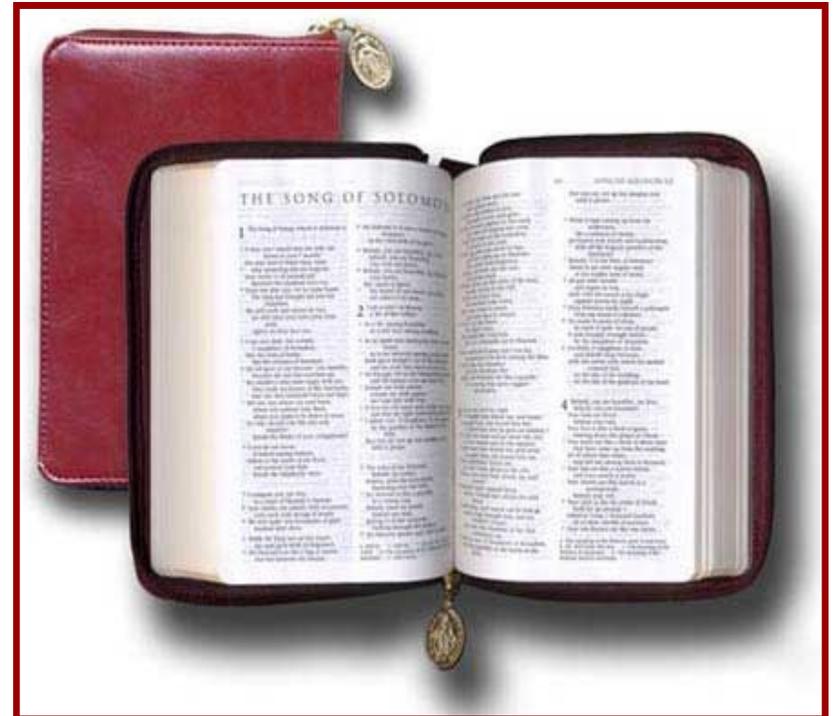




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## ***SONG OF SONGS—81***

***(SONG OF SOLOMON)***



***A RETURN  
TO THE  
MORAL LEVEL***

*The Song of Songs is the story of the love between God and the soul. God is deeply in love with us, and wills our love in return. This love between the soul and God, which is the most intimate love possible, is expressed in the analogy of the bride (the Church) and the bridegroom (Jesus), where the intimacy of love is especially expressed. Commentary on the Song of Songs is presented by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and takes the form of sermons on the meaning of the various allegories used in the psalms and are presented in the order Saint Bernard composed the commentaries. Introductory comments are made by the Early Church Fathers.*

### **A Return to the Moral Level**

Some of you, I hear, are resentful because for some days I have been regaling you by talking of the amazing and wonderful mysteries of God, yet the sermon I was giving savored too little if at all of moral considerations. This is most unusual. But allow me to repair the omission. I cannot continue without completely covering the subject. Tell me then, if you remember, at what point I began this misuse of the Scriptures, so that I can go back to it. For it is for me to make good these losses, or rather it is for the Lord on whom we all depend. From what point then shall I begin? Perhaps from this: 'In my little bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves.' I think that must be the place, for from that point on I had only one thought, to penetrate the obscurity of these allegories and reveal the secrets of Christ and his Church. Let us return then to the search for the moral meaning, for I cannot be indifferent to what is to your advantage. And this task will be fitly undertaken if we consider the Word and the soul in the same way in which we considered Christ and the Church.

**For he is the one of whom you have heard holy David  
sing in his Psalm 'Great is the Lord, and great is his power';**

**and again  
'The Lord our God is upright,  
and in him there is no unrighteousness.'**

2. But someone says to me, 'Why do you take these two together? What have the Word and the soul in common?' Much, on all counts. In the first place, there is a natural kinship, in that the one is the image of God, and the other is made in that image. Next, their resemblance argues some affinity. For the soul is made not only in the image of God but in his likeness. In what does this likeness consist? you ask. Take first the Image. The word is truth, it is wisdom and righteousness. These constitute the image. The image of what? Of righteousness, wisdom, and truth. For the image, the Word, is righteousness from righteousness, wisdom from wisdom, truth from truth, as he is light and God from God. The soul is none of these things, since it is not the image. Yet it is capable of them and yearns for them; that perhaps is why it is said to be made in the image. It is a lofty creature, in its capacity for greatness, and in its longing we see a token of its uprightness. We read that God made man upright and great; his capacity proves that, as we have said. For what is made in the image should conform to the image, and not merely share the empty name of image - as the image himself is not merely called by the empty name of image. You know that it is said of him who is the image of God that although he was in the form of God, he did not think it robbery to be equal with God. You see that his uprightness is indicated because he is in the form of God, and his greatness in his equality with God, so that in the comparison of uprightness with uprightness and greatness with greatness, it appears on two accounts that what is made in the image agrees with the image, just as the image also corresponds in both respects to that of which it is the image. For he is the one of whom you have heard holy David sing in his Psalm 'Great is the Lord, and great is his power'; and again 'The Lord our God is upright, and in him there is no unrighteousness.' He is the image of this upright and great God; therefore the soul which is in his image is like him.

3. But I ask: Is there no difference between the image of God and the soul which is made in its image, since we attribute greatness and uprightness to it, too? Indeed there is. For the soul receives according to its capacity, but the image receives in equal measure with God. Is there no more to say? You must mark this as well: the soul is endowed with both by God who created him and made him great, but the image of God receives them by God's begetting. And who can deny that this is a much greater dignity. Although man received his gifts from God's hands, the image received them from God's being, that is from his very substance. For the image of God is of the same substance as God, and everything which he seems to share with his image is part of the substance of both, and not accident. There is yet one more thing to be considered, in which the image is no less superior. Everyone knows that greatness and righteousness are distinct in their nature, but in the image they are one. Furthermore they are one with him who is the image. For the image, greatness is not merely the same as unrighteousness, but existence itself is greatness and uprightness. It is not so with the soul; its greatness and uprightness are distinct from it and distinct from each other. But if, as I argued before, the soul is great in proportion to its capacity for the eternal, and upright in proportion to its desire for heavenly things, then the soul which does not desire or have a taste for heavenly things, but clings to earthly things, is clearly not upright but bent, but it does not for all this cease to be great, and it always retains its capacity for eternity. For even if it never attains to it, it never ceases to be capable of doing so, and so the Scripture is fulfilled. Truly man 'passes as an image,' yet only in part, so that the superiority of the Word may be seen in its completeness. For how can the Word fail to be great and upright, since it possesses these qualities as part of its nature? Man possesses these gifts in part also because if he were completely deprived of them there would be no hope of salvation, for if he ceased to be great he would lose his capacity, and, as I have said, the soul's greatness is measured by its capacity. What hope of salvation could there be for one who had no capacity for receiving it?

9. I am not speaking against him personally, for in the same council he gave humble assent to the Bishops' pronouncements when they found this and other passages deserving of censure, and he retracted them with his own mouth. I am speaking against those who are apparently still copying out and poring over this book, contrary to the apostolic prohibition promulgated in that same Council, following the Bishop with obstinate insistence in opinions he has disclaimed, and preferring to have him as their instructor in error rather than in its correction. As we are considering the difference between the image and the soul, I thought it worth taking the opportunity to make this digression, not only for its own sake but for yours, so that if any of you had at any time drunk forbidden waters, which seem to taste sweeter, they might take the antidote and disgorge them, and come with cleansed minds to that which remains to be said, according to the promise I made, about the likeness of the soul to the Word, and may drink joyfully, not of my fountain, but of that of the Savior, the Bridegroom of the Church, Jesus Christ our Lord, who is God above all, blessed for ever. Amen.

***END OF SONG OF SONGS — 81***

8. It is not without cause, therefore, that Pope Eugenius himself and the other bishops at the recent Council at Reims condemned the exposition made by Gilbert, Bishop of Poitiers, in his commentary on Boethius' treatise On the Trinity, a very sound and orthodox work. This is what Gilbert said: 'The Father is truth, that is, he is true; the Son is truth, that is, he is true; the Holy Spirit is truth, that is, he is true. And these three are not three truths but one truth, that is, one being who is true.' What an obscure and confused explanation! How much nearer the truth, and how much more reasonable, to have said, on the other hand: 'The Father is true, that is, he is truth; the Son is true, that is, he is truth; the Holy Spirit is true, that is, he is truth. And these three are one being who is true, that is, they are one truth.' This is what he would have said if he had been content to echo the teaching of Fulgentius; 'There is one truth, of one God, or rather there is one truth which is one God, who does not allow the service and worship due to the Creator to be confused with what can be given to the creature.' He was a good teacher, and spoke truly of the truth; he had reverent and orthodox opinions about the true and pure simplicity of the divine substance, in which there can be nothing but itself, and itself is God. There are sundry other passages in this book in which the aforesaid bishop is clearly at variance with the true teaching of the Faith, and I will adduce one of these. When Boethius said, 'God, God, God - refers to the substance,' this commentator of ours adds: 'Not what is but by which it is what it is.' God forbid that the Church should give assent to the proposition that there is any substance, or any other thing, by which God is what he is, but which is not God.

4. And so by the greatness which it retains even when it has lost its uprightness, 'man passes as an image,' but he limps, as it were, on one foot, and has become an estranged son. Of someone like this, it can, I think, be said: 'the estranged sons have lied to me, they have become weak, and have limped away from the path.' They are well called 'estranged sons,' for they are sons inasmuch as they keep their greatness, and estranged because they have lost their uprightness. If they had completely lost the image, the psalmist would not have said 'they have fallen away' or some such thing. But now 'man passes as an image' because of his greatness; but as far as his uprightness is concerned, he limps, he is troubled, and he is torn away from the image. As Scripture says: 'Truly man passes as an image; he is troubled in vain.' Utterly in vain; for he goes on to say, 'He piles up riches and does not know for whom he gathers it.' Why does he not know, unless because he is bending down to the ground, the earth which he heaps up for himself? Also, he does not know for whom he is piling up the riches he is committing to the earth. It may be devoured by the moth, dug up by a thief, stolen by an enemy, or destroyed by fire. So it is to the unhappy man who is bending and brooding over earthly things that the melancholy voice from Psalms refers: 'I am troubled. I am bowed down to the earth. I go in sadness all the day long.' He has experienced the truth of the saying of the Preacher: 'God made man upright, but he is bowed down by many troubles.' Then immediately afterwards he is told mockingly, 'Bow down, so that we may walk over you.'

5. But how have we arrived here? Was it not that we wished to show that uprightness and greatness, the two virtues we had described in the image, were not one in the soul or with the soul, as we showed in our declaration of faith that they are one in the Word and with the Word. It is clear from what we have said that uprightness is distinct from the soul and from the greatness of the soul, since even when it does not exist the soul remains, and is still great. But how can it be proved that the greatness of the soul is distinct from the soul? It cannot be proved as the diversity of the soul and its uprightness was proved, since the soul cannot be deprived of its greatness as it can be of its uprightness. Yet its greatness is not the soul; for even if the soul is never found apart from its greatness, yet that greatness is found outside the soul. You ask where? In the angels, for the greatness of the angels derives from the same source as the greatness of the soul, from its capacity for the things of eternity. For if we agree that the soul is distinct from its righteousness, in that it can exist without it, can it not be assumed that it is also distinct from its greatness, which it cannot claim as its own property? And since the one is not found in every soul, and the other is found otherwise than in the soul, it is obvious that each without distinction is distinct from the soul. Likewise that of which the soul is the form that has no form, whereas its greatness is the form of the soul. It must be its form when it is inseparable from it. All differences between substances are of this kind, both those which are proper to one thing exclusively and those which have many different forms. The soul itself does not consist of its greatness, any more than a crow consists of its blackness or snow of its whiteness, or a man of his ability to laugh or his ability to reason, but you never find a crow without blackness, or a man devoid of the ability to laugh and to reason. So the soul and the greatness of the soul are inseparable, yet they are distinct from each other. How can they be other than inseparable, since the one is the subject and the other the substance? Only that supreme and uncreated nature, which is God the Holy Trinity, reserves for itself this pure and unique simplicity of essence, that there is not found in it one thing and another thing, in one place and another place, at one time and another time. It dwells in itself; it is what possesses and what it is, always and unchangingly. In the Trinity many diverse qualities are united, so that it does not suffer plurality as a result of multiplicity of elements, nor change as a result of variety. It contains all places, and not being contained in anything, sets all things in order. All time is subject to it, not it to time. It does not await the future, or look back at the past, or experience the present.

6. Beloved, beware of those who teach new doctrines, who are not logicians but heretics, who blasphemously argue that the greatness by which God is great, the goodness by which he is good, the righteousness by which he is righteous, and finally the divinity by which he is God, are not God. 'God,' they say, 'is God by reason of his divinity, but the divinity is not God.' Perhaps it does not condescend to be God, because it is what makes God what he is? But if it is not God, what is it? Either it is God, or it is something which is not God, or it is nothing. Now you do not admit that it is God, nor, I think, will you argue that it is nothing; but you make out that it is so necessary to God that not only can God not be God without it, but by it he is God. But if it is something which is not God, either it will be less than God, or greater, or equal to him. How can it be less, if by it God is God? You must then postulate that it is greater, or equal. If it is greater, it is itself the highest good, but it is not God. If it is equal to God, there are two beings which are the highest good, not one; but the Catholic faith rejects both these conclusions. Now we hold the same beliefs about his greatness, his goodness, his righteousness and his wisdom as we do about his divinity, that they are all one in God and with God. Nor does his goodness come from any other source than his greatness, nor his righteousness nor his wisdom from any other source than his greatness and goodness; nor do all these attributes together have any other origin than his divinity, nor do they exist apart from him.

7. But the heretic says 'What? Do you deny that God is so by his divinity?' No; but I allege that the divinity by which God is God is itself God, lest I make out that anything is more excellent than God. For I maintain that God is great by reason of his greatness, but is himself that greatness. Otherwise I might be setting something else above God; and I confess that he is good by his goodness, but it does not exist apart from him. Otherwise I might seem to have found something better than he; and so on with regard to other attributes. I go on my way in freedom and safety, without stumbling, as they say, holding the view of him who said, 'God is great with the greatness which is himself, otherwise the greatness would be greater than God.' As noted by Saint Augustine that was, that mighty hammer of heretics. If this can be properly predicted of God, it can also be said, 'God is greatness, goodness, righteousness, and wisdom' even more correctly and with greater reason than saying, 'God is great, good, righteous, and wise.'