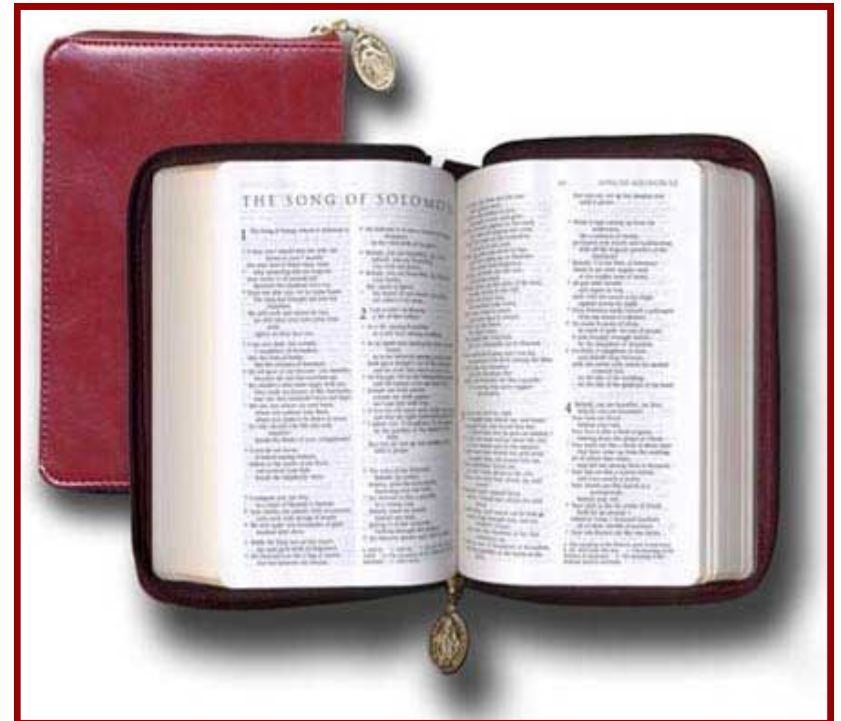




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## ***SONG OF SONGS—67***

***(SONG OF SOLOMON)***



***THESE NEW HERETICS***

*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.*

### **These New Heretics**

‘Catch us the little foxes that spoil the vines.’ I am still on the foxes. They are those who strip the vines as they go along the path. Not content with turning aside from the way, they must also make a desert of the vineyard by indulging in falsehoods. It is not enough to be heretics, they must also be hypocrites, adding sin to sin beyond measure? They are those who come in sheep's clothing, to strip the sheep and despoil the rams. Do you not see how these purposes are fulfilled, when we find the people robbed of their faith and the priests of their people? Who are these robbers? In appearance they are sheep, in cunning they are foxes, but in their cruel deeds they are wolves. They wish to appear good without being so, and to be evil without appearing so. But they are evil, and only desire to appear good that they may not be alone in their evil. They are afraid to appear evil, lest they prove less than evil. For malice has always less power to harm when it is obvious; no good man is ever deceived except by a pretense of goodness. It is to cause the downfall of the good that they strive to appear good; they avoid the appearance of evil so that their malice may have full play. It is not their nature to foster virtues, but to gloss over their vices with a veneer of virtue. Then they honor their blasphemy with the name of religion. Innocence they define as doing no open harm, so that it is only the appearance of innocence that they make their own. To hide their immorality they take a vow of celibacy. Moreover, they suppose immorality consists only in taking a wife, whereas marriage is the only condition which justifies sexual intercourse. They are coarse and ignorant, and altogether contemptible. But they must not be dismissed lightly, I assure you, for they will become more and more ungodly, and their talk will slither along like cancer.

**‘Now the Spirit says openly  
that in later times some will depart from the faith,  
heeding deceitful spirits and the doctrines of demons,  
through the pretension of liars  
whose consciences are seared,  
who forbid marriage and enjoin abstinence  
from foods which God created  
to be received with thanksgiving.’**

14. It is unnecessary and useless, therefore, to utter long tirades against these foolish and obstinate men. It is enough that they should be known for what they are, so that you may be on your guard against them. They should be dealt with, then, either by being forced to send away their women or to leave the Church, as they cause scandal in the Church by their way of life and their consorting with women. It is regrettable that not only distinguished laymen but also some of the clergy - even some of episcopal rank who should rather have been seeking them out, give them support for payment, and accept presents from them. 'But,' they say, 'how are we to condemn men who have neither been convicted of error nor admit it?' This is nonsense, not so much a reason as an excuse. They can easily be dealt with by this means, if by no other. As I have said, you must separate the men from the women, although they claim they are living celibate lives, and require the women to live with others of their sex who are under similar vows, and similarly men with men of the same way of life. In this way you will protect the vows and reputations of both, and they will have you as witnesses and guardians of their celibacy. If they do not accept this, you will be completely justified in expelling them from the Church to which they have caused scandal by their blatant and illicit cohabitation. Let these measures suffice to trap the little foxes in their cunning, and to edify and protect the beloved and glorious Bride of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is God above all, blessed for ever. Amen.

***END OF SONG OF SONGS — 67***

2. Indeed they have not been overlooked by the Holy Spirit, since he has plainly prophesied about them, saying by the Apostle: 'Now the Spirit says openly that in later times some will depart from the faith, heeding deceitful spirits and the doctrines of demons, through the pretension of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and enjoin abstinence from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving.' These are clearly the people to whom he refers. They forbid marriage, they abstain from foods which God has created - this matter I will examine later. But now consider whether this is not a machination of demons rather than a human error, as the Spirit foretold. Inquire of them who the founder of their sect is; they will not give a name. When has there been a heresy of human origin without its own leader? The Manichees had Manes for their leader and teacher, the Sabellians had Sabellius, the Arians Arius, the Eunomians Eunomius, and the Nestorians Nestorius. So also with other such scourges, each has its own acknowledged leader from whom it takes its origin and name. What name or title will you ascribe to these men? Surely their heresy is not of human origin, nor did they receive it from a human being. God forbid that we should regard it as a revelation of Jesus Christ - let us rather see it, without any question, as the Holy Spirit foretold, as a deceitful suggestion of demons, a deceitful hypocrisy of lying hypocrites who forbid marriage. They say this as hypocrites, with the cunning of foxes, pretending that their words are inspired by a love of chastity, whereas their motive is rather to foment and increase immorality. This is so obvious that I wonder how any Christian could be taken in by it, unless there are people so stupid that they do not perceive how a man who condemns marriage opens the door to every kind of impurity, or so full of wickedness and soaked in devilish malice that they deny the evidence of their eyes and rejoice in men's ruin.

3. Take from the Church the honorable estate of marriage and the purity of the marriage-bed, and you will surely fill it with concubinage, incest, masturbation, effeminacy, homosexuality - in short, with every kind of filthiness. Choose then which you prefer: that all who practice these enormities should be saved, or only the few who are celibate. How few are to be classed with the latter, how many with the former! Our Lord and Savior does not desire either of these ends. Shall immorality receive a crown? There is nothing more difficult to reconcile with the purity of God. Is the whole world to be condemned apart from a few who are celibate? It is not the nature of our Savior to act like this. On earth, celibacy is rare; but the fulness of grace has not wasted away because the harvest is so small. How indeed could we all have received of that fulness if it were only the celibate who were allowed to share it? This reasoning cannot be disproved, there can be no reply to this. Nor, I think, to the other. If there is a place in heaven for righteousness, yet there is no fellowship between the righteous and the base, just as there is no fraternization between light and darkness then certainly there is no place in the scheme of salvation for any who are unclean. If anyone should think otherwise, let him be persuaded by the voice of the Apostle, who declares without any ambiguity: 'Those who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.' How shall this cunning little fox now creep out of his hole? I think he is caught in his own lair; in it he has made, so to speak, two tunnels for himself, one to go in by, and one to go out of. This is his habit. Now see how both ways of escape are closed to him; for if he puts only the celibate in heaven, salvation ceases to exist for most people; if however he puts every kind of filthiness on a par with chastity, then righteousness ceases to exist. But it would be more accurate to say that he himself ceases to exist, for he cannot escape by either way, but is shut up for ever, caught in the pit he dug himself.

13. It is surprising to some people that they meet their death not only with patience, but also, apparently, joyfully. But they do not take into consideration the mighty power of the devil not only over men's bodies, but also over their hearts. Once he is admitted, he will take possession. Is it not more surprising that a man should lay violent hands on himself than that he should suffer violence willingly at the hands of another? Yet we have frequently seen the devil exercising this power over many who have drowned themselves or hanged themselves. Indeed, there is no doubt that it was at the devil's suggestion that Judas hanged himself. But I find it much more surprising that he could put it into the heart of Judas to betray the Lord than suggest to him that he hang himself. The obstinacy of these men has nothing in common with the constancy of the martyrs; for they were endowed by their piety with a contempt for death, whereas these others are prompted by their hardness of heart. Thus the Prophet, speaking perhaps with the voice of a martyr, says 'Their heart is as fat as butter, but I have meditated on the law,' meaning that, although the suffering looks the same, the intention is very different, for the one hardened his heart against God, whereas the other meditated on the law of the Lord.

12.. Many other persuasive arguments are adduced by lying and hypocritical spirits to deceive these dull-witted and foolish people, but it is not necessary to answer all of them. For who can perceive all of them? Besides, it would be an endless task and quite unnecessary. For these men are not to be convinced by logical reasoning, which they do not understand, nor prevailed upon by references to authority, which they do not accept, nor can they be won over by persuasive arguments, for they are utterly perverted. This is indisputable, for they prefer death to conversion. The end of these men is destruction, fire awaits them at the last. They are prefigured in Samson's exploit of setting fire to the tails of foxes. Often the faithful have seized some of them and brought them before a tribunal. When questioned on the points of their belief which are suspect, they have denied everything completely, as they always do, and when examined by the ordeal of water they have been found to be lying. But when detected and unable to make any further denial because the water would not receive them, they have taken the bit between their teeth, as the saying is, and instead of confessing their blasphemy freely and with penitence, they have declared it openly, alleging that it was true piety, and for it they have been ready to suffer death, which those standing by have been equally ready to inflict. So people have attacked them, making new martyrs for the cause of godless heresy. We applaud their zeal, but do not recommend their action, because faith should be a matter of persuasion, not of force, though no doubt it is better for them to be restrained by the sword of someone who bears not the sword in vain than to be allowed to lead others into heresy. Anyone who punishes a wrong-doer in righteous wrath is a servant of God.

4. But there are some, differing from the rest, who maintain that marriages may take place, but only between virgins. I cannot see on what reasonable grounds they make this distinction, unless it be that they all at their pleasure jostle each other in their struggle to tear apart the sacraments of the Church with their poisoned fangs, those sacraments which are, as it were, their mother's womb. For when they allege, as they apparently do, that our first parents were virgins, how can this possibly affect the freedom of marriage in such a way that it cannot be contracted between those who are not virgins? But they mumble that they have found something or other in the Gospel which they mistakenly suppose gives credence to their absurdities. I suppose that they mean the statement in Genesis that 'God created man in his own image and likeness, male and female created he them' was followed by Our Lord's saying 'Therefore what God has joined together let no man put asunder.' 'God joined them together,' they say, 'because they were both virgins, and they could not subsequently be lawfully separated; but the union of those who are not virgins shall not be presumed to be of God.' 'But who has told you that their virginity was the reason for their marriage? This is not what the Scriptures say.' 'But were they not virgins?' you say. Indeed they were; but the marriage of people who are virgins is not the same thing as the marriage of people because they are virgins. Even so, you will not find it expressly stated that they were virgins, although they were. It is the difference in sex which is meant by the saying 'Male and female created he them,' not virginity; and rightly so, for it is the difference in sex which is the essential element in marriage, not physical virginity! Rightly then, when marriage was instituted, the Holy Spirit spoke of the distinction of sex, but made no mention of virginity. He left no trail for cunning little foxes to follow. They would readily have done so, though without result. But if he had said 'He created them virgins' would you then have immediately inferred that only virgins marry? What capital you would have made out of that one statement! What denunciations you would have uttered about second and third marriages! How you would have reviled the Catholic Church for being prepared to marry prostitutes and panderers, inasmuch as she is ready to believe that they are abandoning an immoral way of life for an honorable one! Perhaps you would also find fault with God for commanding the Prophet [Hosea] to marry a whore? But as it is you have no pretext, and elect to be a heretic for no apparent reason. And the argument you use to fabricate your error appears more likely to destroy it. It does not strengthen your case but greatly weakens it.

5. Now hear a text which will either confound you utterly or correct you, and which completely crushes and destroys your heresy. 'A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives; but if the husband die, she is free to marry whoever she chooses, in the Lord.' It is Paul who permits a widow to marry whomever she chooses and you contradict this and say that no woman except a virgin may marry, and then only to a virgin and not to whomever she chooses. Why do you shorten God's arm? Why do you limit the abundant blessings of marriage? Why do you restrict to a virgin the right which is granted to all her sex? Paul would not permit it unless it were lawful. But 'permit' is an understatement; he also commends it. 'I wish,' he says, 'the younger women to marry,' and there is no doubt that he includes widows. What could be clearer? What he permits, then, because it is lawful, he also commends because it is expedient. Is a heretic to forbid what is both lawful and expedient? He will persuade no one of anything by his prohibition, except that he is a heretic.

6. There remains some criticism to be made about these men because of the rest of the Apostle's words, for, as he predicted, they abstain from foods which God ordained to be received with thanksgiving, thus proving themselves to be heretics, not for their abstinence in itself but for the heretical spirit in which they undertake it. I myself practice abstinence from time to time, but my abstinence is a reparation for sin, not a scrupulous observance devoid of reverence. Are we to censure Paul for disciplining his body and bringing it into subjection? I will abstain from wine because in drinking wine there is the possibility of excess; but if am weak I will use it sparingly, following the apostle's counsel. I will abstain from flesh meats, lest they over-stimulate the flesh and with it the lusts of the flesh. I will be at pains to take even bread in moderation, lest because of a loaded stomach I get tired of standing to pray, and lest the prophet bring this reproach upon me also, that I gorge myself with bread. I will not even get into the habit of gulping down pure water, lest fulness of the stomach lead to the stimulation of desire. It is not so with the heretic. He avoids milk, and everything made from it, and even goes so far as to refuse any food which is produced by copulation. This would be a right and Christian course of action if it were taken not because such things were the result of copulation but so that they might not become its cause.

Now it is not to be wondered at if those who do not acknowledge the Church decry her statutes, reject her ordinances, regard the sacraments with contempt and refuse to obey her precepts. The successors of the Apostles, they say, are sinners, whether they are archbishops, bishops, or priests, and are fit therefore neither to administer nor to receive the Sacraments; for to be a bishop is incompatible with being a sinner. This is untrue. Caiaphas was a bishop, and what a great sinner he was, pronouncing the sentence of death on Our Lord. If you say he was not a bishop, the witness of John will confound you, for he records that he prophesied in the year that he was High Priest. Judas was an apostle, and chosen by the Lord, even if he was covetous and wicked. Or have you doubts about the apostolate of someone the Lord chose? 'Have I not chosen you twelve,' he said, 'and one of you is a devil?' You hear that he was chosen as an apostle and proved himself a devil, and yet you deny that a man who is a sinner can be a bishop? The Scribes and Pharisees sat in Moses' seat, and those who did not give them the obedience due to bishops were guilty of disobedience, for the Lord himself gave this command when he said: 'Whatever they say, do it.' It is clear then that although they were Scribes and Pharisees, although they were great sinners, yet because of the seat of Moses, the saying which he uttered applies to them: 'He that hears you hears me; he that despises you despises me.'

10. Let no one tell me that a child has no faith, for his mother imparts her own to him, wrapping him in the sacrament of baptism as in a cloak, until he is ready to embrace it in its purity and fullness, if not by his own experience, yet by conscious assent. It would be a narrow garment which could not cover both of them. But the faith of the Church is wide. Is it less than that of the Canaanite woman, which was certainly wide enough to cover herself and her child? Consequently the answer she heard was: 'Woman, great is your faith. Be it done for you as you desire.' Is it less than the faith of those who let the paralytic down through the roof, gaining for him health of mind and body? When he saw their faith, he said to the paralytic: 'Have faith; your sins are forgiven,' and a little later 'Take up your bed and walk.' He who believes these things will easily be persuaded that the Church is right to claim salvation for children baptized in her faith, and the crown of martyrdom for the infants who were killed for Christ. This being so, those who are re-born in baptism will take no harm from the saying: 'Without faith it is impossible to please God,' since those who have received the grace of baptism to witness to their faith are not without faith, nor will they suffer ill from that other text: 'He who does not believe shall be lost,' for what is believing but having faith? So a woman shall be saved by child-bearing if she continues in faith; children shall be strengthened by the new birth of baptism; grown men who cannot preserve their continence shall redeem themselves by the thirtyfold fruit of marriage. Through the mediation of angels, the dead shall profit by the prayers and sacrifices of the living, of which they have needed and to which they have a right. Those who are still on the way shall lack no manner of consolation from those whose course here is done. Through God, who is everywhere, and in God, they shall lack no kind of love and compassion from those who are not physically present with them. For this is why Christ died and rose again, that he might be Lord of the living and the dead. This is why he was born as an infant and advanced to manhood through all the stages of life, so that he might not be lacking to any stage.

11. They do not believe that there remains after death the fire of purgatory, but allege that when the soul is released from the body it passes straight to rest or to damnation. Let them ask of him who said that there was a sin which should not be forgiven in this world nor in the world to come.

7. But what is the reason for this wholesale avoidance of everything produced by copulation? This close scrutiny of food, these detailed instructions, arouse my suspicions. If you commend it to us on medical grounds, we will not censure you for taking care of your body - for no one ever hates his body - provided it is done in moderation. If you give as your reason the disciplinary value of abstinence, that is the routine of spiritual therapy, we will even approve it as laudable, so long as by bringing the flesh into subjection you curb its lusts. But if you limit the goodness of God after the insane manner of the Manichaeans, so that what he has created and given to be received with thankfulness, you, ungrateful, thoughtless and censorious, judge to be unclean and shun like the plague, then I certainly do not commend your abstinence. On the contrary, I condemn your blasphemy. I am inclined to say that it is you who are unclean, when you brand anything as unclean in itself. 'To the pure all things are pure,' says one who is a clear thinker. Nothing is unclean except to one who thinks it unclean. 'But to the corrupt and the unbeliever nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted.' Woe to you who spew out of your mouth the very food which God has created, considering it too unclean and unworthy for you to absorb into your own body. But it is you, polluted and unclean, who are spewed out by the Body of Christ, which is the Church.

8. I am not unaware of their boast that they, and they alone, are the Body of Christ. But since they believe this, they must also believe that they have the power of consecrating the Body and Blood of Christ on their altars every day, to nourish them to become members of the Body of Christ. To be sure, they confidently claim to be the successors of the Apostles, and call themselves apostolic, although they are unable to show any sign of their apostolate. How long is their light to remain under a bushel? 'You are the light of the world' - this was said to the Apostles, therefore the Apostles are set on a candlestick, to give light to the whole world. The successors of the Apostles should be ashamed to be the light, not of the world, but only of a bushel, so that they are the darkness of the world. Let us say to them: 'You are the darkness of the world,' and pass on to other matters. They claim to be the Church, but they contradict the saying of Our Lord, 'A city set on a hill cannot be hid.' Do you believe that the stone which, being cut from the mountain by no human hand, itself became the mountain and filled the world is shut up in your caverns? They do not seek to make known their opinions; it is enough to mutter in private. Christ holds his heritage undiminished, and will always do so, and the ends of the earth are his possession. They take themselves out of this mighty heritage when they try to take it from Christ.

9. Look at those detractors. Look at those dogs.

They ridicule us for baptizing infants, praying for the dead, and asking the prayers of the saints. They lose no time in cutting Christ off from all kinds of people to both sexes, young and old, living and dead. They put infants outside the sphere of grace because they are too young to receive it, and those who are full grown because they find difficulty in preserving chastity. They deprive the dead of the help of the living, and rob the living of the prayers of the saints because they have died. God forbid! The Lord will not forsake his people who are as the sands of the sea, nor will he who redeemed all be content with a few, and those heretics. For his redemptive grace is not a trifling thing; it is very plenteous. How can the small number of these men be matched with the greatness of the prize? They cheat themselves of the prize when they empty it of its meaning. What does it matter if a child cannot speak for himself? The voice of the blood of his brother - and of such a brother - cries out to God from the ground. His mother the Church also stands by his side and cries out. And what of the child himself? Does he not seem to you somehow to be looking with longing for the wells of salvation? Do you not think you hear him crying out to God and calling out in his whimperings, 'Lord, I suffer violence; answer for me'? He demands the help of grace because he suffers violence from nature. It is the innocence of the poor child which cries out; it is his ignorance; it is the weakness of one doomed to die. All these cry out his brother's blood, the devotion of his mother, the helplessness of an unhappy child, and the unhappiness of a helpless one. Their crying rises to the Father. Now the Father cannot act unlike himself; he is a father.