



## *Holiness of Hymns and Purity of Praises*

# Commentary on the Book of Song of Songs, according to Origen of Alexandria:

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### **Introduction to Song of Songs:**

The Old Testament Book of Song of Songs, or using the Latin title of Canticle of Canticles, is traditionally attributed to the wise King Solomon (991-930 BC). Some Biblical scholars, however, conclude that the language and style of the Book point to a time after the Babylonian Exile that ended in 538 BC. It is one of the smallest books in the Old Testament. Ironically, as Origen the Scholar was controversial, Song of Songs was, and still is, controversial as to its origin, its style, its structure, and its nature. There are as many theories as the number of Jewish, Christian, and atheist commentators who have attempted to explain it, both allegorically and literally.



Lord Jesus Christ. 17th Century

Origen teaches that not all Holy Scripture is to be understood wholly in the literal or visible sense; there is much that becomes clear only if it is given a figurative or invisible meaning. He reads the Song with a pure heart and observes that it refers only to spiritual love. He does not see in it the slightest degree of obscenity.

Origen was the first Christian Father to systemize allegorical interpretation of Holy Scripture. He was not, however, the first Christian writer to compose a commentary on the Canticle of Canticles. Before him Hippolytus of Rome did, and after him, Saints Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa among many borrowed from him; but none equaled Origen in the depth of his mystical conception.

King Solomon wrote the Song of Songs in the form of a drama play, and sang it under the figure of the Bride (the soul made perfect in the image of God, or the Church), who is about to wed and is burning with heavenly love towards her Bridegroom, who is the Word of God. iWhen you

understand the Song of Songs, says Origen, ijoin with the bride in saying what she says, so that you may hear also what she heard. If you are unable to join the bride, i says Origen, it then make haste to join the Bridegroom's companions. And if they are beyond you, then be with the maidens who stay in the bride's quarter and share her pleasures. i

Not all of Origen's Commentary on the Canticle of Canticles survived in the original Greek text. Only fragments remain. The following is a summary of such fragments. The Scripture sections in parenthesis are the corresponding contemporary version of the old Scripture version (Septuagint text of the Bible) used by Origen.

### **Summary of Origen's Commentary:**

#### The Bride:

**iLet Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth. i (1: 2a)**  
When the Lord Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom, delayed His coming for so long, the soul grieved with longing for His love, and made this supplication to God, the Bridegroom's Father.

**iFor Your breasts (love) are better than wine, and the fragrance of Your ointments is above all spices. i (1: 2b)**  
While praying to the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom, revealed His breasts to the perfect soul. This statement means that the Lord Jesus Christ's teachings are better than the good wine or the teachings of the Law and Prophets.

**iThe fragrance of Your ointments is above all spices. i (1: 3a)**  
The bride (the soul or church) had knowledge of the



## *Holiness of Hymns and Purity of Praises*

spices, that is, of the words of the Law and the Prophets. But when the Only-begotten Son came into the world and was anointed with the Holy Spirit, the bride perceived the fragrance of the divine ointment to be vastly superior to the old spices.

**i Your name is as ointment emptied (spreading perfume). Therefore have the maidens loved You, have them drawn You.** (1: 4a)

### **The Daughters of Jerusalem or the Maidens:**

**i We will run after You into the fragrance of Your ointment (we will follow You eagerly).** (1: 4b) The Lord Jesus Christ's second coming will be when His name is so spread throughout the globe as to make it an odor of sweetness in every place. The maidens or young souls growing up in years and beauty discover that God emptied Himself, and they draw Him to themselves. The young maidens do not yet have the bride's confidence. They follow behind the Bridegroom, while the bride walks side by side and holds His right hand. The King brought her alone into His chamber. The maidens are glad for her; for there is no envy in respect to virtues.

### **The Bride:**

**i The King has brought me into His chamber.** (1: 4c)

### **The Daughters of Jerusalem or the Maidens:**

**i Let us rejoice and be glad in You. We will love Your breasts (we extol Your love) more than wine.** (1: 4f)

### **The Bride:**

**i Equity has loved You (how rightly You are loved).** (1: 4e) When the Lord Jesus Christ leads the soul of the bride to understand His mind, she is said to be brought into the King's chamber, in which are hid the treasures of His wisdom. The maidens beg the Bridegroom that as the bride has obtained her perfection, so may they likewise merit coming to the King's chamber. The maiden had not yet

reached that degree of blessedness, nor attained perfection, nor produced the fruits of perfect charity in conduct and work as to enable them to experience the breasts of the Bridegroom. The maidens have not yet cast away iniquity and come to equity. **i If you love Me, keep My commandments.** In him who keeps His commandments, there is no iniquity.

**i The sons of my mother have fought against me (my brothers have been angry with me).** (1: 6) Saint Paul is a good example of a son of the mother Church that fought against her. But the persecutor of the Church later repented and joined his sister in preaching the faith that he formerly sought to destroy. The bride now sings, **i They have contended against me, they have made me the keeper of the vineyard; my vineyard I have not kept.** (1: 6b) Again Saint Paul or any other saint is a good example. He himself bore loss so that he may gain others. His vineyard he has not kept.

**i Tell me, You whom my soul (my heart) has loved, where You feed, where You lie in the midday, lest I have to go veiled (I be found wandering) beside the flocks of Your companions.** (1: 7) As soon as the bride holds the Bridegroom He goes away. He does this frequently throughout the Song. Origen himself experienced this happening; The Lord Jesus Christ has slipped away repeatedly until he holds Him and is clean of his Nephew's arm. **i The soul asks Christ where He feeds at full day when the light is brightest. Unless He tells her, she shall be vagrant looking for Him, running ashamed after other people's flock, and covering her face.**

### **The Bridegroom or the Beloved:**

**i Unless you know yourself, O fair (O most beautiful) one among women, go forth in the footsteps of the flocks, and feed your goats (young ones) among the shepherd's tents.** (1: 8) The soul of the believer or the Church has the priority to know and understand itself as the height of spiritual health and blessedness. It is a great evil not to know itself. The Bridegroom warns the Church saying, **i Either know yourself, that you are the bride of the King and made beautiful by Me because I have presented to Myself**



## *Holiness of Hymns and Purity of Praises*

a glorious Church, not having a spot or wrinkle, or go forth in the steps of the goatsí flock and feed. Not the flocks of sheep, who will sit at the right hand, but the goats who will be set upon the left!í That is, if she is among the goats, she cannot be with the Good Shepherd.

**il have compared you my love, to My filly (the steeds) among Pharaohís chariotsí** (1:9) The bride is compared to the Lordís company of horsemen among Pharaohís chariots. The horsemen of the Lord have drowned the horsemen of Pharaoh in the Red Sea.

### **The Bride:**

**iMy spikenard has yielded His odor.í** (1: 12) My spikenard, with which I anointed the Bridegroom, has come back to me, bearing with it the Bridegroomís own odor. Its natural odor has been mastered or multiplied by the Bridegroomís fragrance, and it has brought back His own sweetness to me.

iMary brought a pound of ointment of spikenard of great price, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped them with the hair of her head. And the whole house was filled with the odor of the ointment.í (Mark 14: 6 & John 12: 3)

**iA sachet for a myrrh-drop is my Nephew (my Lover) to me, He shall abide between my breast. A cluster of cypress (henna) is my Nephew to me from the vineyards of Engaddi.í** (1.13) Nephew, here, is the Bridegroom or the Lord Jesus Christ, because she, the bride, is the church of the gentiles, and the brother is the church of the former Jews, where the Lord Jesus Christ was born. Cypress here refers to grapes that surpass everything in the way of odor and of flowery scent. Engaddi is a district of Judea that means in Hebrew éthe eye of temptationí and represents the world that tempts us. éTo meí here is to teach us that He is not a cluster of cypress for everyone, but only to the black and beautiful.

### **The Bridegroom or the Beloved:**

**iBehold you are fair, My neighbor (My beloved);**

**behold, you are fair. Your eyes are doves.í** (1: 15) Now, the Bridegroom declares the bride after she knew herself and grew in faith, not only fair among women, but as a neighbor to Himself. éMy neighborí here indicates that the bride is not fair if she has been away from her Spouse; she becomes beautiful only if she is united with the Word of God. Then He honors her with even loftier praise by telling her that she is fair not only when she is thus close to Him, but fair also if she should be away from Him for a while. This is clear by the fact that He repeated, iBehold, you are fair,í without any qualification. Her eyes are compared to doves, because she now understands the Divine Scriptures, not after the letter, but after the spirit; for dove is the emblem of the Holy Spirit, who descended in the form of a dove. It is as though He said, iYou have an upright outlook or pure eyes that seek to see spiritual things, your eyes are spiritual eyes, seeing and understanding the spiritual way. í

### **The Bride:**

**iBehold, You are good, my Nephew, behold. You are fair indeed. Our bed is shady (our couch is verdant).í** (1: 16) The bride speaks, for now she looks more closely with doveís eyes at the beauty of her Spouse, and considered the fairness of the Word of God. The bed that she shares with the Bridegroom denotes the soulís body or the human body. Although the soul is still in the body, she has been considered worthy to be admitted to the company of the Word of God. It is shady and not dry. It is fruitful as if it were bushy with a thicket of faith and good work. In the same context Saint Paul says that our bodies are members of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Psalmist also says, ithe sun shall not burn you by day, nor the moon by night,í because we are leafy with the abundance of the fruits of the Spirit.

**iThe beams of our houses are cedars, our rafters of cypresses.í** (1: 17) The Bridegroom is teaching the Church the nature of the common dwellings with His bride. The rafters or the larger beams are made of cypress wood, which possess greater strength and sweetness of smell. That rafter denotes the Bishop as being sound in good works and fragrant with the grace of teaching. The beams denote the priests, and are made of cedar wood that does not corrupt



## *Holiness of Hymns and Purity of Praises*

and has fragrance, to show that priests ought to be full of the virtue of incorruption and the fragrance of the knowledge of God.

### **The Bridegroom or the Beloved:**

**iI am the Flower of the field (the rose of Sharon) and the Lily of the valleys; as the lily among the thorns, so is My neighbor among the daughters.**† (2: 1) The Bridegroom says these words about Himself and the bride. Among the cultivated field, or the Jews cultivated by the prophets, He was the flower, but could not advance beyond the flower to achieve the perfection of the fruit, or the lily. Among the untilled valleys or the Gentiles, however, the Lord Jesus Christ became the Lily in these valleys in place of the Tree of Life that was planted in Paradise, and the heavenly Father clothed Him with a robe of flesh, as never Solomon in all his glory had the power to possess. He became the flower of the whole field, that is, of the whole world. His neighbor likewise is every soul that draws near to Him and follows His example, may be a lily too. Then, praising the Bride, the Lord Jesus Christ says, **iAs the lily among the thorns, so is my neighbor amid the daughters.**† The lily often grows among the thorns. The thorns are the heretics who clamor around the church, or the daughters. For the heretics all begin by believing (daughters), and afterwards depart from the faith. They did not become neighbors.

### **The Bride:**

**iAs the apple among the trees of the wood, so is my Nephew (my Beloved) among the sons (men); in His shadow (shade) I desired and sat, and His fruit was sweet in my throat (mouth).**† (2: 3) Hearing the above words, the bride replies to the Bridegroom and compares Him to the apple that possesses both excellent taste and smell. The bride is now occupied with and describes the Bridegroom. She is addressing the maidens. The sons are heavenly ministers. The trees of the wood are the heretics. The Lord Jesus Christ is to the soul as an apple tree is in the church, and the unfruitful heretics will be sentenced by the divine judgment to be cut out and cast into the fire. The fruit of the

Word of God is sweet in her throat because of the continual meditation on the Law of God. She desires to sit beneath His shadow. We must first be fashioned in the shadow of the Way, of the Life, and of the Truth, and apprehend in part, in order that later on, if we persevere, we may achieve the face-to-face apprehension. At that time all shadow will be removed, and the truth alone will abide.

**iBring you me to the house of wine (banqueting house).**† (2: 4a) The bride speaks here to the friends of the Bridegroom (holy angels, apostles, and prophets.) The house of wine is the heavenly banquet or royal feast, where the wine and wisdom of God is always renewed. In another homily, Origen thinks that in the above verse the Lord Jesus Christ is talking to the maiden or the catechumens, saying: **iBring Me in, I stand at the gate and knocks; if any man shall open to Me, I will come in to him.**† Not only into the house, but also into the house of wine! Let your soul be filled with the wine of the Holy Spirit. As to the bride, she already received the Lord Jesus Christ, and He reposes between her breasts.

**iSet You in order charity in me. (His banner over me was love)**† (2: 4b) The bride still addresses the same persons. Teach me the different degrees of charity (not love) toward other people, in proportion to their merits. In another homily, Origen thinks that this is the Lord Jesus Christ talking to the maiden or the catechumens, saying: **iThe charity of many is in a state of disorder; you accord Me second place in your loving.**† He that loves father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. The Lord Jesus Christ is not saying not to love father and mother, but He is asking us to set the order right.

**iStrengthen me with amoyrs (cakes of raisin), encompass me with apples, because I am wounded (lovesick).**† (2: 5) Here after she has entered the King's Chamber and beheld His mysteries, the bride is amazed and begs the friends and companions of the Bridegroom to strengthen her and support her on an amoyr tree or an apple tree. All men are called trees, whether fruitful, unfruitful, fragranced, or without fragrance. The apple tree bears sweet fruits. The amoyr tree bears no fruit, but has a sweet fragrance only. The church or bride wants to be strengthened





## *Holiness of Hymns and Purity of Praises*

with members that are fruitful with good works. Also she hopes the members that only invoke the name of the Lord (fragrance), but are not yet bringing forth any fruits of faith, to grow in faith and may become fruitful trees one day (evangelizing effort). For the dart of charity has wounded her, since God is Charity. The wound of Charity includes all the others attributes of God such as wisdom, might, justice, goodness, loving-kindness, and longsuffering.

**iHis left hand is under my head, and His right hand shall embrace me.î** (2: 6) The Holy Book of Proverbs 3: 13, 16 says, ðLength of life is in Wisdom right hand, and in Her left hand riches and glory.í Thus the Church or the perfect soul receives riches from the Bridegroom because He became poor though He was rich, that through His poverty we might be made rich. The Church also receives the glory of the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the head of the Church. His right hand refers to the length of life of the Lord Jesus Christ or His sempiternity, whereby the Word was God and with God from the beginning, before the first sin and fall of man. Thus the Church was healed by He who made Himself sin for us. The Bridegroom's arm may be my pillow and my soul may recline upon the Word of God. Do not seek elsewhere for rest for your head. When you have that, all things His left hand holds (riches and glory) will be bestowed on you.

**il have entreated you, you daughters of Jerusalem, by the powers and the forces of the field (by the gazelles or by the does of the field), whether you have raised and roused up charity (do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases).î** (2: 7) The bride is speaking to the maiden, urging and exhorting them, even adjuring them by the things that are dear to them, to raise charity up and rouse up, so far as it pleases the Bridegroom. Every soul, especially a daughter of Jerusalem who has the beginning of faith, is said to have a field or a life to be cultivated to the will of God. (How long, O daughters of Jerusalem, O maidens, sleeps there in you the love that does not sleep in me, because I have received the wounds of love?) When the Maker of the Universe created you, He sowed in your hearts the seed of love. In unbelievers and in those of doubtful heart, the Divine Word is still asleep; but He is wakeful in the saints.

**iThe voice of my Nephew (Beloved)! Behold here He comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping over the hills.î** (2: 8) While the bride was addressing the maiden, she perceived the Bridegroom's voice talking with some people from afar. Afterward the Bridegroom appeared before her eyes leaping upon mountains and skipping over hills with great bounds, coming to His bride with all speed. The Church recognized the Lord Jesus Christ, in the beginning, by His voice alone and through prophets, until the fullness of time when she saw Him with her eyes, with the powers of spiritual grace. If you are a mountain in faith and virtues, the Word of God leaps upon you; if you have not managed to be that, but are a hill, which is of lower grade than a mountain, then He skips across you. He does not skip across the mountains, nor does He leap upon the hills!

**iMy Nephew (Beloved) is like a roe (gazelle) or a young hart (stag) upon the mountain of Bethel.î** (2: 9a) The roe and the hart are among the animals that are accounted clean and can be eaten in the Holy Book of Deuteronomy. Divine Scripture likens a holy man to a hart. The voice of the Lord or the Word of God makes the harts or the Saints perfect. The bride compares the Bridegroom to a young hart because even though the Lord Jesus Christ was in the form of God, a Son was given to us, and a Child was born. The knowledge of the Trinity is called high mountain, and no one can achieve possession of it, unless he is made a hart, or holy. A roe or little deer in Greek denotes one who possesses a keen power of sight. The deer is the enemy and the slayer of serpents. Thus the Savior is a roe in respect to His sight, and a deer in respect to His work. We have to be pure of heart to see God, not physically, but by the mind and spirit, and that comes only through the Lord Jesus Christ's revealing. Why the large hart and the small roe? It is because salvation of believers depends on faith (likened to a roe), and on the perfection of their works (likened to the hart that conquers and destroys the poison of serpents). Bethel means the House of God. Not all mountains are houses of God, but only those that are mountains of the Church.

**iBehold, He stood behind our wall, leaning against the windows, looking through the nets (lattice). My nephew**



## *Holiness of Hymns and Purity of Praises*

**answered, and He says to me: ěArise, come, My neighbor, My fair one, My dove. Lo, the winter is past, the rain is gone, and the flowers have appeared in the land. The fig tree has put forth her green figs, the vineyards have yielded their sweet smell. (2: 9b-13a)**

In the drama before us: the bride is standing outdoors, and for love of her Spouse she is looking to see if perhaps He may be coming. The Bridegroom is not to be understood as always in the house, nor is He in perpetual attendance on the bride. And then all of a sudden she sees Him, overtopping the crests of nearby mountains. On reaching the wall, the Bridegroom stands a while behind it, considering the nets of the Devil. He is taller than the nets. He looks through these nets and speaks to the Bride saying, ĩArise, come My neighbor, My fair one, etc.Ĥ A window is one of our senses; Christ looks out through it.

The spiritual interpretation is that the Word of God, the Bridegroom, teaches the soul that abides in the royal house, which is the Church. The Words comes leaping upon the mountains, that is, revealing to her the meaning of high truths of heavenly wisdom. Good conduct and belief in the right doctrines allow the soul to be in the Church. There are many rooms in this house, some are called chambers, and another is the house of wine, according to the degrees of graces and spiritual gifts. He does not show Himself openly to her yet, rather looking at her through the nets. Then He urges her not to sit idle in there, but to go to Him outside and try to see Him not through windows and nets, but face to face. Unless she comes forth and advances from the letter to the spirit, from the Law to the Gospel, she cannot be united with Him.

Lo, the winter is past, the rain is gone: the Passover when He suffered was when winter was past and rain stopped. Spiritually up to the time of the Lord, the prophetsĤ rains poured the Word upon the earth only until the arrival of St John the Baptist. This is not, however, a loss for the believers, for now the river makes the City of God joyful, when a fountain of water is springing up into everlasting life is found in every faithful heart. Now the flowers have appeared in our land, etc.

The snares of temptations of the devils are called nets. The Bridegroom conquering the snares of the Devil teaches the bride that the way to the Lord Jesus Christ leads not through idle ease and pleasure, but through many trials and temptations. But He has torn and trampled them, and so emboldens His Church that she too dares to trample and to pass over the nets with all joy.

### **The Bridegroom or the Beloved:**

**ĩArise, come, My neighbor, My fair one, My dove; for lo, the winter is past, the rain is gone and has departed to itself, the flowers have appeared on the earth, the time of pruning the vine is come, the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land, the fig tree has put forth her buds, the vines in flower have yielded their sweet smell. (2: 10b Ĥ 13a)** The Lord Jesus Christ is talking to the soul that is worthy and prepared for Him, or to the Church by means of her bodily senses Ĥ that is through the Scriptures Ĥ as it were through windows. Then He calls her to come out from her bodily senses or the flesh and into the spirit. For lo, the winter is past, the tempest of desire has fled from her soul, and the flowers of virtue can begin to burgeon in her. The dove denotes the Holy Spirit. But when the great and more hidden mysteries are in question, and the things that many people cannot grasp, then the Holy Spirit is represented as a turtledove that always dwells on mountain ridges and in the top of trees (for example when He appears to Moses or one of the prophets.) But in the valleys, in the things that all men understand, He figures as a dove. Thus the turtledove denotes the deep wisdom of God, for this bird spends its life hidden from crowds. The spirit of man, which the fig tree is a figure of, does not yet bear the fruits of the spirit, but is just beginning to put forth buds, and is called to put aside the corporeal and come to Him and be made a sharer of His perfection. The vineyards are the flowers when they first come to faith; but when they are adorned with godly works, then they yield their sweet smell. Pruning correlates to the remission of sins.

ĩArise and come, My neighbor, My fair one, My dove; in the shelter (clefts) of the rock by the outwork (in the secret



## Holiness of Hymns and Purity of Praises

places of the cliff), show ME your face. Let Me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is fair (lovely).<sup>1</sup> (2: 13b-14) Here the Lord Jesus Christ goes a step further, indicating to the soul or the Church the place where she is to come. It is to a sheltered place (the rock is the Lord Jesus Christ) beyond the second wall that surrounds a city (city is a figure for the world). It is also a more secluded place to lay aside her veil and show her face to Him. For she managed to get past winter unscratched, and it is spring when repose is given to her soul and calmness to her mind. Her face is now renewed according to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ who created it, not having a spot or wrinkle, but holy and without blemish; she has reached perfection. When the bride has learnt to speak and opened her mouth to the Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ says to her, "Let Me hear your voice,"<sup>1</sup> because your voice is sweet and your face is comely.<sup>1</sup>

**Catch us the little foxes that destroy the vines, and our vineyards will flourish.**<sup>1</sup> (2: 15) The Bridegroom is speaking now to the companions, or to the good angels and Church leaders. He is telling them to catch the little foxes that lurk in the vineyards when they are just budding, and do not let the vines develop their flowers. Foxes are the wicked powers of demons. The flowers are the virtues that enable the soul to discern which thoughts are according to God, and which are from the devil. As long as the fox or bad thought is still little, it is easily driven from the heart. When it has grown up and become a matter of habit, it can no longer be driven out, and only the Bridegroom Himself will be able to do it. Some holy doctors and teachers of the Church receive the power of catching foxes, to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and all power of the enemy.

Blessed is the man who enters holy places,<sup>1</sup> says Origen. But far more blessed is he who enters the Holy of Holies! Blessed is the man who observes the Sabbath, but more blest he who keeps the Sabbath of Sabbath! Likewise when you have been through many beautiful songs and Holy Psalms, then set your course for greater heights and sing the Song of Songs.<sup>1</sup> ✠

### Holy Bible "Music" Word Search

All the words listed below are in the puzzle to the left, right, up, down or diagonally. Circle each letter of the words you find. After you have found all the words, the leftover letters will reveal the mystery word.

Antiphonal	Lamentation
Banquets	Merrymaking
Bass	Minstrel
Bugle	Moses
Castanets	Musicians
Choirs	Orchestra
Cymbals	Percussion
Dance	Psalttery
Dirge	Religious
Faith	Sounds
Fife	Spiritual
Harmony	Tabernacle
Horn	Tambourine
Instrumental	Timbrels
Instruments	Trumpet
Israelites	War
Kings	Worship

H K G L P S M U S I C I A N S  
T I E N A L P S A L T E R Y L  
I N N O I T A T N E M A L N A  
A G I S T K N N I S E W A O B  
F S R T E S A E O M R C A M M  
W U U E P I O M M H B I N R Y  
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R I B A U R S R N R R I E H D  
S G M T R C A T A D R T T L C  
H I A S T H B S L E S E S N S  
I L T A B E R N A C L E M N A  
P E R C U S S I O N F I F E I  
N R O H S T E U Q N A B T M S  
B U G L E R T S N I M O S E S  
D I R G E A L A U T I R I P S