



The Song is a poem. Do not at first try to understand: let the text take hold and it will open up a universe to us.

The Song awakens our own experience, going straight to our heart since it is about the Lover and the Beloved. It is a poem about a love encounter. The author let this encounter happen as in a dream in order to unveil its mystery; the call of love comes from elsewhere. Search, meeting, flight are enchanting and are true inasmuch as they reveal a mystery: Someone else draws us. This explains the title of the book: The Song of Songs. In Hebrew, it is one of the forms of the superlative: The Song par excellence or The Sublime Song.

The Song is both the intuition and the experience of the search for the unique beyond every veil. He too is likewise fascinated searching for him or her whom he has chosen—one who is all for him and irreplaceable, this discovery of Yahweh, the fierce God as the spouse, is not entirely new in the Bible. The prophets relied on their conjugal experience to speak about the covenant of God with his people (Hos 1:2). Rather, they used the words of human love to express their special relationship with God. One day, this relationship was to be offered to all Israel.

While he lets the dream of love to unfold, the author of the Song relives the hope of the chosen people. God's beloved is Israel with its land. Just like the most fervent minority in Israel, the author-poet waits for the coming of the Beloved as Messiah-King and Spouse of the chosen community. This background of the Song explains the use of comparisons which would seem strange in the case of ordinary engaged couples, but which are in fact allusions to the past in Israel, to its Temple and its land.

We must admit that, in seeing the connections between the Song and the love songs of the Middle East, today many biblicists think that the Song was at first one of them and that an image of God's love for his people was only seen there at a later time. This hypothesis may sound reasonable, but it just seems that way. Unfortunately, it leaves nothing but platitudes or incoherence, precisely where we suspect that the clues of the poem are to be found.

Therefore, we have to go back to what tradition has always discerned: in the Song, just as in the great prophets, although with different words, the experience of God-Love is what inspired the entire dream and what invited human images. The Song is not a song about human love which was put in the bible after having received a religious interpretation: Jewish tradition considered it to be the song of divine love from the beginning. The fact that God is not mentioned is intentional: he is present from beginning to end, but this One Alone at the same time Love and Lover is far different from the "God" of human religions.

The Author of the Song

The Song is presented as being the work of Solomon: it is only a borrowed name as is the case with other books in the Bible. The author was a “spiritual” and a sage of the third century before Christ, one of those who wrote the “Wisdom Books” of the Bible.

In Israel as in many countries, the marriage ritual included “the bridegroom’s song” and “the bride’s song” (Jer 7:34; 16:9; Rev 18:22). We know, for example, the Egyptian love poetry; but in Israel nothing remains of the popular songs of love. In fact, our author has done what the great musicians do in using popular melodies for the composition of their great works of art. The Song used expressions and even settings from traditional love songs in order to say what these did not say. Yet in speaking about Love the words used shed light on human love.

The Song in Christian Countries

In Christian countries, the monks took possession of the Song. They who had given up human love passed over the mystery of the love encounter in ordinary life. They saw the song as an allegory, a picture of spiritual experience. The expressions of carnal love in no way embarrassed them: it helped them to understand how strong the love relationship with the One Alone can be, how heady and devouring.

In fact they were to give back to Christianity a treasure they had found. In the twelfth century in Europe there appeared the first signs of a recognition of human love which had been ignored during the barbaric centuries. It was then that the spiritual experience of a few great monks and hermits was decisive. The Song reread and commented by them gave rise to an awareness of the mystery of love. The love songs and stories, fairly crude in the beginning, were gradually replaced by the literature of “courtly love.” From then on, century after century, the primacy of married love would be affirmed.

At times, it is said rather cynically that love ends in marriage and that is what movies and television never cease to repeat whenever a decadent culture only acknowledges love when it promises what it will not fulfill. The song put at the center of longings the aspiration to true love: this always irradiates from God and, like himself, is faithful until death and beyond.

1 ¹ *The Sublime Song: it has come from Solomon*

• **1.5** *I am sunburned yet lovely.* The beloved represents the Jewish community, poor and fervent, returning home after the exile, when Israel had lost its reputation and its independence. She is the one who admits: *I failed to tend my vineyard*, namely, my land, Palestine.

And the King, the Lover, is the Lord. This first love poem is the dream of the beloved in which she already enjoys the day of her return to the king and tells herself the longed-for dialogue that they will have “on that day.” The choir shows her the place, which she already knows, where she will find the lover: *The Shepherds’ Tent*, an expression designating Mount Zion, the Holy City, where the descendants of David—the King—Shepherd—ruled.

At the end of this poem (2:7) we will find the Lord’s answer to those asking: “When would this dream be fulfilled?” *Don’t arouse or stir up love before her time has come.* God is looking toward a true love experience; all the delays for his coming are due to the fact that our heart is not yet really ready.

I am sunburned yet lovely. She was chosen and looked upon in spite of her tanned face—and perhaps precisely because she had been marked by suffering, errors and deception. She gained in no longer counting for anything in her own eyes and this humility had more value before God than many good works. She was already burnt perhaps by the regard of the one who wanted her for himself.

She

² Shower me with kisses of your mouth:
your love is more delicious than wine.

³ Your oil smells sweeter than any perfume,
your name spreads out like balm;
no wonder the maidens long for you.

⁴ Lure me to you, let us fly!

Bring me, O king, into your room,
and be our joy, our excitement.

We will praise your caresses more than wine,
how rightly are you loved.

• ⁵ I am sunburned yet lovely,

O daughters of Jerusalem,
dark as the tents of Kedar,
as the tent curtains of Solomon.

⁶ Stare not at my dark complexion;
it is the sun that has darkened me.
My mother’s sons were angry with me
and made me work in the vineyards;
for I had failed to tend my own.

⁷ Tell me, my soul’s beloved,
where do you graze your flock,
where do you rest your sheep at noon?
Why must I be wandering
beside the flocks of your companions?

Chorus

⁸ If you do not know yourself,
most beautiful woman,
follow the tracks of the flock
and pasture your young goats
beside the shepherds’ tents.

He

⁹ To a mare in Pharaoh’s chariot
would I liken you, my love.

¹⁰ Your cheeks look lovely between pendants,
your neck beautiful with strings of beads.

¹¹ We will make you earrings of gold
and necklaces of silver.

She and he

¹² While the king rests on his couch,
my perfume gives forth its fragrance.

¹³ My lover is for me a sachet of myrrh
lying between my breasts.

• 2.8 A springtime of announcement: love comes to seek the beloved. Finished are the trials that seemed to have no end and no sense. The lover is pleased to sing the beauty of his beloved.

Here faith is required of the reader: we have just closed a paper telling us of millions of galaxies blown like a bubble of soap fifteen thousand million years ago, and then the Song speaks of Him seeking a love among the innumerable descendants of the little "homo habilis." Is it true? Possible? These hundreds of thousands of centuries and suns are perhaps but a cloud of smoke which hides at a different depth the mystery of the Supreme Person, the source of love. A love that is not only human, for while experiencing it himself, at the same time his Spirit lights its flame in us.

We have said that this text has the sound of its time. The verse 2:15 is surely an allusion to the difficulties of a community unable to give itself, as it would wish, in its search for its God. Are we ever able to find a peaceful place, where at least, there are no mosquitoes, and more than insects, preventing us from enjoying the presence of God?

¹⁴My lover is for me a cluster of henna from the vineyards of Engedi.

¹⁵How beautiful you are, my love, how beautiful! Your eyes are doves!

¹⁶How handsome you are, my love, how handsome! Our bed is ever green!

¹⁷The beams of our house are cedar, our rafters are fir.

2 ¹I am the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valley.

²As a lily among thorns, so is my love among women.

She

³As an apple tree in a forest, so is my lover among men. I sought his shade, there I sat; his fruit is sweet to my taste.

⁴He has taken me to the winestore; his banner over me reads: "Love."

⁵Oh, strengthen me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples, for love makes me sick!

⁶His left hand is under my head; his right arm embraces me.

He

⁷I beg you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and hinds of the field, not to arouse or stir up love before her time has come.

She

• ⁸The voice of my lover! Behold he comes, springing across the mountains, jumping over the hills,

⁹like a gazelle or a young stag. Now he stands behind our wall, looking through the windows, peering through the lattice.

¹⁰My lover speaks to me,

He

"Arise, my love, my beautiful one!

¹¹Come, the winter is gone, the rains are over.

¹²Flowers have appeared on earth;

Hos
14:6;
Sir 24:17

8:3

3:5;
8:4

• **3.1** *On my bed at night I looked for the one I love.* Love keeps us awake. Mary Magdalen goes through the entire city looking for Jesus and, for the first time, passersby laugh at her. She comes into the house without seeing the porter and he does not dare stop her; she knew that she would reach Jesus. *I held him and would not let him go*, but one day Jesus will say to her: “Do not hold on to me” (Jn 20:17).

• **6.** *Who is this coming from the wilderness?* We probably have here an evocation of God coming up from the desert to his Temple—Solomon’s Temple. Through Solomon, it is God himself with his Messiah whose coming is awaited. At the time of Moses Yahweh accompanied his people, hidden in a cloud of smoke.

Again the lover sings the praises of his beloved. Most probably this passage uses traditional couplets that the newlyweds sang during the wedding feast, each praising the other.

You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride. How can we speak well of God, and of a God-Lover? Perhaps it is this aspect of God that is the most difficult for us to discover. Yet how do we understand that the whole Bible speaks of election, of the chosen people, and the elect? Would it be because some are not chosen and are condemned, or rather because God’s love is always at the same time the love of a father and of a lover? Because of that he came in the person of his Son, the “Spouse,” as he calls himself.

Notice the last verse of 3:11, which, like 6:8, is similar to Psalm 45.

Today throughout the world, men and women seek to attain, beyond the polluted and materialist world, something or someone transcendent. The ways are not lacking and the “oriental” doctrines, more often their imitations, have droves of readers.

the season of singing has come;
the cooing of doves is heard.

¹³The fig tree forms its early fruit,
the vines in blossom are fragrant.
Arise, my beautiful one,
come with me, my love, come.

¹⁴O my dove in the rocky cleft,
in the secret places of the cliff,
let me see your face,
let me hear your voice.
Your face—how lovely!
Your voice—how sweet!”

¹⁵Capture the foxes, the little foxes
that spoil the vineyards,
our vineyards in flower.

¹⁶My lover is mine and I am his;
he shepherds his flock among the lilies.

¹⁷Before the dusk blows and shadows flee,
return, my lover, be like a gazelle
or a young stag on the rugged hills.

She

3 • ¹On my bed at night
I looked for the one I love,
I sought him without finding him;
I called him and he did not answer.

²I will rise and go about the city,
through the streets and the squares;
I will seek the love of my heart...

³ I sought him without finding him;
the watchmen came upon me,
those who patrol the city.
“Have you seen the love of my heart?”

⁴As soon as I left them,
I found the love of my heart.
I held him and would not let him go
till I had brought him to my mother’s house
to the room of her who conceived me.

He

⁵I beg you, daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles and hinds of the field,
not to arouse or stir up love
before her time has come.

Chorus

• ⁶Who is this coming from the wilderness?

6:3;
Hos 29:13

Is 65:1;
Jer 29:13

Mt 7:7;
Pro 7:15

Gen
24:67

2:7;
8:4

Rev 12:6

We believe that God has revealed himself beyond Christian revelation; however confusion should be avoided. Even if the same words are used: mystic, contemplation, spirituality, the meaning is often different, and the Song shows us, just as do the Letters of John, what is proper to Christian mysticism:

– the Christian search for God is not first of all to “experiment,” but to love another;

– this search is not for “something” to be attained at the end of a long period of ascetic discipline, but for someone who gives and will give himself when he wishes;

– if we speak of spirituality it is a question of the Spirit of God at work in us. He leads us, perhaps, by very diverse ways, but always leads to union with Christ on the cross;

– our ultimate experience of God will always be that of an authentic marriage where the two become one, where the human person is transformed, becoming all that God is, without ceasing to be oneself. This experience has had innumerable witnesses, and these knew, or know, that no other way of wisdom can give them what they have become.

There seems to be a pillar of smoke,
with fumes of myrrh and frankincense.

⁷Look, it is Solomon’s carriage!
sixty warriors escort him,
the strongest of Israel,
⁸all girded with swords,
all seasoned in battle;
each is ready with sword at his side,
each prepared for the terrors of the night.

Ps 91:5

⁹King Solomon has made for himself
a carriage of wood from Lebanon,
¹⁰its columns of silver,
its back of gold,
its seat of purple cloth,
its framework inlaid with ivory.

1K 10:18

¹¹Come, daughters of Zion,
see king Solomon wearing the diadem
with which his mother crowned him
on the day of his wedding,
on the day his heart rejoiced.

Is 61:10;
62:3

He

4 ¹You are beautiful, my love,
oh, how beautiful you are!
Your eyes behind your veil are doves.
Your hair is like a flock of goats,
streaming down the heights of Gilead.

6:5-7

²Your teeth are like sheep newly shorn,
coming in droves from the washing,
each one opposing its twin,
not one has been left alone.

³Your lips are like a thread scarlet;
your voice is enchanting;
your cheeks behind your veil
are like halves of a pomegranate.

⁴Your neck is the tower of David,
a display of trophies
a thousand bucklers hang on it,
all of them worn by heroes of war.

⁵Your breasts are like twin fawns
of a gazelle feeding among the lilies.

7:4

⁶Before the dawn breaks and shadows flee,
I will hasten to the mountain of myrrh,
to the hill of frankincense.

⁷You are wholly beautiful, my love,
perfect and unblemished.

Eph 5:25

• 4.12 After Isaiah's poems celebrating the new Jerusalem, the bride of the Lord (Is 61:10 and 62:5), the Song of Songs contemplates the virginal bride who will be the New People.

You are a garden enclosed. She has kept herself totally for the Blessed One: the virginal bride whom God hoped for after the many prostitutions of his people—and differing from so many religions and religious practices where one seeks one's own profit, where God is never treated as someone. Virginity consecrated to God: a way of saying that he suffices, and that we can give him everything without having previously or at the same time tried all the other experiences.

Here again, we find Mary-Virgin.

Let my lover come to his garden. Most of the time, our good deeds are not particularly important to God because they are not wholly for him and we have already cashed in on 95% of their value. We hoped that others would see and know about them, we feel better for having done them, and finally we ask God to also take them into account. In the end, he found no fruit which had not been touched or tasted by others.

⁸ Come from Lebanon, my bride,
come with me from Lebanon.
Come down from the summit of Amana,
from the crest of Senir and Hermon,
from the dens of lions,
from the mountain haunts of leopards.

⁹ You have ravished my heart,
my sister, my bride;
you have ravished my heart
with one of your glances,
with one bead of your necklace.

¹⁰ How sweet is your love,
my sister, my bride!
How delicious is your love more than wine,
and the fragrance of your perfume,
than any spice!

¹¹ Your lips distill nectar, my bride;
milk and honey are under your tongue.
Your garments have the scent of Lebanon.

Ps 45:9;
3:8;
Is 55:1

• ¹² You are a garden enclosed,
my sister, my bride;
a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain.

¹³ Your plants are an orchard
of pomegranates, all with choice fruits,
with henna and nard,

¹⁴ nard and saffron,
calamus, and cinnamon
with every kind of incense trees,
myrrh and aloes
and all the finest spices.

¹⁵ You are a garden fountain,
a well of living water
streaming down from Lebanon.

She

¹⁶ Arise, north wind! Awake, south wind!
Blow upon my garden
and spread its fragrance abroad.
Let my lover come to his garden
and eat its choicest fruits.

He

5 ¹ I have come to my garden,
my sister, my bride;
I have gathered my myrrh with spices,
I have eaten my honey and my honeycomb,
I have drunk my milk and my wine.

• 5.2 Experience of our heaviness: how many times has God passed without our recognizing him? “I will come like a thief at an hour you least expect” (Rev 3:3).

I slept, but my heart kept vigil. It was not the sleep of those who expect nothing, but if *the spirit is willing*, the flesh is weak. He came laden with his blessings (this is the meaning of the “dew”), but the opportunity missed: He is recognized when it is too late: we did not open at once because we were actually afraid of anything unknown. He knew it was not yet time, but he does not go away without leaving a sign of his calling: *myrrh from my hands dripped*. Something has been sown that will ripen later.

The watchmen came upon me (v. 7). Here we have one of the features of the poem alluding to the political situation of the Jewish community that has returned from exile. There has been rebuilding but foreign domination continues; this has been figuratively expressed in 1:9: *horse harnessed to Pharaoh's chariot*. The stress is the same as that in the contemporary poem of Isaiah 26.

• 10. Without doubt we find here traditional verses from the “song of the bridegroom” and the “song of the bride” (see Introduction) but as nothing remains of these popular songs, it is difficult to say whether there are any allusions to the land of Israel and to the Temple. Here Israel remembers the splendor of the first Temple and as at this time they only have a very modest sanctuary, they dream of a new Temple that the Lord himself will visit.

Friends, eat and drink!
Drink your fill, my dearest ones!

She

• ²I slept, but my heart kept vigil.
I heard the knock of my beloved.
“Open to me, my sister, my love,
my perfect one, my dove!
My head is wet with dew,
my hair with the drops of the night.”

³I have taken off my robe;
must I put it on again?

I have washed my feet;
must I soil them again?

⁴My lover thrust his hand
through the lock opening
and my heart thrilled for him.

⁵I rose to open the door.
Myrrh from my hands dripped
on the handle of the lock.

⁶I opened to my lover
but he had turned and gone—
my soul went after him!
I sought him but did not find him;
I called him but he did not answer.

⁷The watchmen came upon me
those who patrol the city;
they beat me and wounded me;
they took away my mantle—
oh, those guardians of the walls!

⁸I beg you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
if you ever find my lover—
Oh, what will you tell him?
Tell him that love makes me sick.

Chorus

⁹How is your lover better than others,
most beautiful woman?
How is your lover better than others,
that you do so beg us?

She

• ¹⁰Radiant and ruddy, my lover
stands out among thousands.

¹¹Pure gold is his head,
palm fronds are his hair,
glossy black like the raven.

¹²His eyes are doves

• **6.1** *My lover is mine, and I am his.* How far we are from Moses after ten centuries of salvation history! (For Deuteronomy which also speaks of love, attributes to Moses more than he actually said.) Here we find the message of the great prophets. Let us remember, however, that for them, the bride-to-be, the spouse, is always the collective Israel. Only in the Christian community (but already in certain psalms), the Bible will be read as the history of the personal love of God for his people: those he has known beforehand and sanctified.

If God reveals himself as Love and Lover, it is not a way of speaking; he tells us what is his very nature. God's eternity is a feast of love, with its constant creativity from which proceed the Persons of the Son and the Spirit constantly reabsorbed into the joy of this union. Often we hesitate to think and to express it, so obsessed are we by the idea that if God is infinitely great, he must be, to begin with, a gentleman according to our fixed ideas, a great scholar, of course, and a great engineer as well.

Compare 6:8-9 with Psalm 45. This psalm was probably not written on the occasion of a king's marriage, but, with the imagery of a royal wedding, it spoke of the inauguration of the Messiah's reign. *The Queens and the favorites* are the pagan nations who submit to the Messiah-King; in no way will they prevent Israel from remaining *unique*.

beside running waters,
bathed in milk
and set like jewels.

¹³His fragrant cheeks
are like beds of spice;
his lips like lilies
dripping with myrrh.

¹⁴His hands are rods of gold
adorned with jewels;
his body is polished ivory
covered with sapphires,
¹⁵set upon bases of gold;
his legs are pillars of alabaster.
He has the stature of Lebanon,
excelling like the cedars.

¹⁶His mouth is sweetness itself;
he is most worthy of desire.
O daughters of Jerusalem,
such is my friend and lover.

Chorus

6 • ¹Where has your lover gone,
most beautiful woman?
Where has your lover turned,
that we may help you look for him?

She

²My lover has gone down to his garden,
to the beds of spices,
to pasture his flock in the garden
and to gather lilies.

³My lover is mine, and I am his;
he shepherds his flock among the lilies.

He

⁴My love, you are lovely
as Tirzah, beautiful as Jerusalem,
majestic as bannered troops.

⁵Turn your eyes away from me
for they bewitch me.
Your hair is like a flock of goats
streaming down the heights of Gilead.

⁶Your teeth are like sheep
coming in droves from the washing,
each one opposing its twin,
not one has been left alone.

⁷Your cheeks behind your veil
are like halves of a pomegranate.

• 8. *But my dove, my perfect one, is unique* (v. 9). Fitting for Israel and fitting also for whoever has received marks of God's special love. All are loved "in Christ" and some infinitely more than others who have received only one talent. Each one, however, is loved with a unique love which makes that person feel he/she is special, as if ignoring what others might have received even if they be Apostles or Our Lady. Love cannot but be jealous, even if there is no place for jealousy in the kingdom of God.

• ⁸Sixty queens, eighty concubines, virgins beyond number—
⁹but my dove, my perfect one, is unique, the only daughter and favorite of her mother.

She was called blessed by the virgins and praised by queens and concubines:

¹⁰"Who is this coming like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, majestic as bannered troops?"

¹¹I went to the nut orchard to look over the valley in bloom, to see if the vines had flowered, or if the pomegranates had blossomed.

¹²Before I became aware of it, my desire had set me on the chariot with the daughter of the prince.

Chorus

7 ¹Return, return, O Shulammitte, return, that we may look at you!

He

Why would you look at the Shulammitte, as dancing between two rows?

• **7.2** This description of the loved one, no doubt, is a traditional feature of the songs of the bride and bridegroom (see Introduction), but it certainly speaks of Palestine. The king held captive in the tresses is most probably the very small kingdom of Tyre in the north, also mentioned in Psalm 45.

• ²How beautiful are your feet in sandals, daughter of the prince!
 Your shapely thighs are like jewels, the work of a master artist.

³Your navel is a bowl well-rounded, never lacking exquisitely blended wine.
 Your belly is a mound of wheat with lilies around it.

⁴Your breasts are two fawns, twins of a gazelle.

⁵Your neck is an ivory tower.
 Your eyes are pools in Heshbon by the gate of Bath-rabbim;
 your nose, the tower of Lebanon looking towards Damascus.

⁶Your crowned head is Mount Carmel;
 your flowing hair is royal purple, which holds a king captive in its tresses.

⁷How beautiful you are, how lovely, my beloved, in your delights!

• **7.10** *I am my lover's but it is he who depends on me.* Taken from the words in Genesis (3:16), but here the curse that strikes the woman has turned another way; it is not she who is necessarily subject to her husband: it is he who needs her. God needs me and not to do a work for him! It is an experience of created life and of love that he wants to have together with me and that he can only have through me.

⁸ Like a palm tree, you are stately and like its clusters are your breasts.

⁹ I said, "I will climb the palm tree and take hold of its fruits."

May your breasts be clusters of the vine, your breath sweet-scented as apples, and your mouth like the best wine.

She

• ¹⁰ May the wine flow straight to my lover, flowing over from my lips.

¹¹ I am my lover's but it is he who depends on me.

¹² Come, my love, let us go to the countryside, and pass the night in the villages.

¹³ Let us go early to the vineyards to see if the vines have flowered, if the buds have opened, and the pomegranates have blossomed. There I will give you my love.

¹⁴ The mandrakes yield their fragrance; at our doors are the rarest fruits; both new and old I have stored for you, my love.

She

8 • ¹ If only you were my brother, nursed at my mother's breasts, I could kiss you outside if we met, without anyone despising me for it.

² I would lead and bring you into the house of my mother, and you would teach me there.

I would give you wine with spice and the juice of my pomegranates.

³ His left hand is under my head; his right arm embraces me.

He

⁴ I beg you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the powers of nature, not to arouse or stir up love before her time has come.

Chorus

⁵ Who is this coming from the wilderness leaning upon her lover?

• **8.1** *If only you were my brother.* A way of saying: Is there then no possibility for me to escape from social rules and conventions society intends to impose on us? Are we able to relate to God in feeling free from rites, religious attitudes, all of which are very useful, for sure, but only for a time and a given place?

Gen 3:16

Pro 7:13

2:6

2:7;
3:5

• 6. *Love is strong as death...* The Song ends with the promise of the eternal union of the Lord with his people. The love of the jealous God is strong, and strong also is the love that he puts in the heart of his children: who will separate us from the love of Christ? (Rom 8:35).

Love—as it is here expressed whether divine or human is the same if it is sincere—is far removed from what our society knows. The love of man and woman has been freed from the constraints of social life, and has overcome little by little the secular prejudices of masculine domination, thus becoming the privileged place for communication between persons, at the same time seen as an increased fear of “losing one’s own life” in binding oneself totally to another person. Many try to combine what is contradictory: a love that leads to the fullness of joy and the fullness of self, and a secret decision to break as soon as one sees the possibility of finding something better.

Here the biblical text gives priority not to happiness but to love. The Song is the will to know love at whatever cost, and the Gospel tells us the price. Marriage will be restored in such a way: people marry to respond together to a call, and happiness here below will be a free gift in the way God wishes to give it.

• 8. The last verses of the Song of Songs, from 8:8, were possibly phrases added to the poem later; they make political references. The fact that they have been inserted here is quite significant: it seems to confirm that what people read in the song were the aspirations of the Israeli community and its will not to turn away from its hopes.

He

I woke you under the apple tree,
where you were conceived by your mother,
where she who bore you was in travail.

• ⁶Set me as a seal on your heart,
set me as a seal on your arm.
For love is strong as death;
its jealousy lasting as the power of death,
it burns like a blazing fire,
it blazes like a mighty flame.

⁷No flood can extinguish love
nor river submerge it.
If a man were to buy love
with all the wealth of his house,
contempt is all he would purchase.

• ⁸We have a little sister
with her breasts yet unformed.
What shall we do for her
when her courtship is begun?
⁹If she were a rampart,
we would build towers of silver on it.
If she were a gate,
we would enclose it with panels of cedar.

She

¹⁰I am a rampart
and my breasts are towers;
thus I have become, in his eyes,
like one who brings peace.
¹¹At Baal-hamon Solomon had a vineyard,
which he gave over to caretakers;
for its fruit, each had to pay:
a thousand pieces of silver.
¹²But my vineyard is mine and I myself keep it.
You, Solomon, may have the thousand,
and the fruit keepers two hundred pieces.

¹³You who dwell in the gardens,
with your friends in attendance,
let me hear your utterance.
¹⁴Make haste, my love;
be like a gazelle or a young stag
on the spice-laden hills!

Gen
38:18;
Is 28:15;
Hos
13:14;
Dt 32:24;
4:24