

By the time Dante wrote the Divine Comedy, it was almost impossible to speak of the Christian doctrine of resurrection of the body without using imagery from the Song of Songs. The reason for this was that the Song had been read by Christians as an allegory of the "marriage" of God and the Resurrected Church since the time of Origen, who originated the allegory in 240 AD. Perhaps it is for this reason that King Solomon, the assumed author of the Song, is made the spokesman for the doctrine of resurrection in the Divine Comedy. This essay will concern itself with the influence of marriage imagery from the Song of Songs on the Divine Comedy as it relates to resurrection of the body and final union with God through love.

The essay is divided into four sections. The first discusses the significance of Solomon in the Comedy as a Christ-type, as an archetype of the Wise Monarch, and as an author.¹ After establishing that Solomon's authorship of the Song probably influenced Dante's choice of him as spokesman for resurrection, the first section considers resurrection as presented in the Bible. The second section deals with the allegorization of the Song as it reached Dante, through Bernard, author of Sermons on the Song of Songs. The third section is a canto-by-canto discussion of the Comedy's images of resurrection as influenced by the allegorized Song. The essay ends with consideration of the most important "lesson" drawn from the Song by the Church fathers, that love must be ordered according to divine priorities if man ever intends to unite with God. This idea is central to the concept of resurrection as presented in the Comedy and to the Comedy as a whole.

SECTION I

King Solomon's role in the Divine Comedy is spokesman for the doctrine of resurrection of the body. Dante and Beatrice are in the circle of the Wise in the sphere of the Sun when they encounter the ancient king who "breathes from such a love that all the world below hungers for news of it."² It seems strange at first that Solomon is encountered in Paradise, rather than in Purgatory or Hell. He was the subject of much controversy in the Medieval Church.³ To the Christians he seemed Oriental, sensuous and pagan. His fondness for women and propensity for building shrines to goddesses of fertility removed him from the favor of the Jahvist, or legalistic writers of the Book of Kings, and thus from the favor of the stricter elements of the Church in Dante's time.⁴ Dante is making the rather unorthodox assertion that his worth as a Wise man, author and monarch who brought lasting peace during his reign outweighed the "sinful" last years of his life. Stranger than Solomon's position in Paradise is the fact that an Old Testament character should be the spokesman for resurrection, one of the central and distinguishing articles of New Testament faith.

There are many ⁴reasons why Dante could have found Solomon a suitable speaker for resurrection. Chief among them are his Wisdom, his image as a prefiguration of Christ, the writings attributed to him in the Vulgate: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Wisdom and the Song of Songs. Although all of these reasons are important, and will be briefly discussed, the primary connection between the King and the doctrine is, I believe, his authorship of the Song.

The Wisdom of Solomon, Aquinas tells the reader in Paradise, Canto 10 is "so deep that, if the truth be true, there never arose a second of such vision."⁵ Later, in Canto 13, line 90, he explains this Wisdom more fully, "I have not spoken so darkly but that thou canst see that he was a king, who asked for Wisdom so that he might be fit to be a king...Therefore, if thou note this ...(thou seest) that royal wisdom is that unmatched vision on which the arrow of my intention strikes." Solomon is the acme of wisdom necessary to rule well. His is not vain intellectual agility, but regal prudence. It is practical wisdom, based on rightly ordered love,⁶ that is concerned with the practical problems of choice and action. Choice implies the counsel of the intellect and the desires of the flesh. Solomon's wisdom lies in his "marvelous capacity of mediating between the intellect and the concupiscible."⁷ He was divinely appointed⁸ and in him the "supreme virtue of wisdom was raised to the gift of prophecy and he became the eternal right ruler in temporal affairs."⁹

Royal wisdom in the earthly sense gives a foretaste of the Divinely Royal Wisdom with which the triumphant Christ will rule the Resurrected City of God in the Last Days. Thus, Solomon, who possesses that "royal wisdom," comes close to embodying the monarch Dante longs for in De Monarchia. Dante states in Book I, Chapter IV of Monarchia¹⁰ that the

...work proper to the human race, taken as a whole, is to keep the whole capacity of the potential intellect constantly actualized, primarily for contemplation, and secondarily, by extension and for the sake of the other,

for action. And...it is evident that in the quiet or tranquility of peace the human race is the most freely and favorably disposed toward the work proper to it--which is almost divine, even as it is said, 'Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels.' Whence it is manifest that universal peace is the best of all those things which are ordained for our blessedness.

Dante's ideal monarch has the highest degree of love for all men, for "under a perverted government a good man is a bad citizen, but under a right one, a good man and a good citizen are convertible terms. And such right governments purpose freedom, to wit, that men should exist for their own sakes."¹¹ True love for man is the desire to make him truly free.

Solomon was famed in Hebrew tradition as the "Prince of Peace." He had "peace all around him on all sides...all the days of Solomon."¹² According to many sources,¹³ the rebirth of Solomon as Melchizedek was a central hope of Israel in the establishment of the Peaceable Kingdom¹⁴ under a messianic leader. The Jews' hope for a messiah was in large a hope for the return of Solomon, a king with:

the spirit of understanding and wisdom, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord...with righteousness shall he judge the poor. The wolf shall lie down with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid...and a little child shall lead them. (Isaiah 11:2-6)

By promising his followers citizenship in the Resurrected Kingdom, Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament type of Solomon as ruler over a Peaceable Kingdom and went beyond it. Thus, Dante sees Solomon rewarded in Paradise by being designated spokesman

for resurrection, the miracle that will complete and perfect the Peaceable, but earthly, Kingdom over which he ruled while alive.

There are other parallels between Solomon and Jesus; one of them has to do with Solomon's most significant action, the erection of the first permanent Temple in Jerusalem. The temple was an often used metaphor for the body in the New Testament. In I Corinthians 3:16-17, for instance, it is said, "...ye are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. If any man defile the temple of God him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." Jesus also referred to his body as a temple which, if destroyed, would be raised again in three days. Jesus promises to raise the temple of the body as Solomon did the temple of earthly worship. Solomon's concern for the temple of the Lord in the Old Testament sense leads to his concern in Paradise for the resurrection of the temple in the New Testament sense: the resurrection of the body.

The Book of Matthew makes two specific connections between Solomon and Jesus, both of which are apocalyptic. The first is in Chapter 6:28-30: "And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" The context of this passage in Matthew is the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus promises reward ⁱon ~~on~~ heaven for suffering on earth and warns people to arrange their

values according to God's standards and not their own. This passage is traditionally interpreted to refer to the after-life, when the souls, which are not "tomorrow cast into the oven," are "clothed" with the incorruptible, resurrected body.

The second passage is Matthew 12:42: "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it. For she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here." This passage establishes a parallel not only between Jesus and Solomon, but between Sheba and the Church, which is at the heart of the Christian allegory of the Song.¹⁵ All of the Christ-Solomon parallels mentioned so far touch upon either the Last Days of the Apocalypse or upon resurrection, which is associated with the Last Days.

This connection is made explicit by Bernard in his Sermons on the Song of Songs: "Our Christ is the first and chiefest Flower of the Human race. Jesus is the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valleys...He appeared as the First Fruit of Resurrection."¹⁶ These epithets are taken from the Song, Chapter 2:1, where they apply to Solomon. Bernard makes the connection between Christ and the Lover of the Song, in specific reference to resurrection. This particular identification is, I believe, very important in the Divine Comedy.

The three works attributed with certainty to Solomon in the Vulgate are Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs.¹⁷ These writings were considered by Origen to cover the three branches of knowledge over which Solomon had been granted dominion by the

Lord. Ecclesiastes, he saw corresponding to the area of Natural Knowledge, Proverbs to Moral Knowledge and the Song of Songs to Inspective Knowledge.¹⁸ Ecclesiastes' recurring theme is, "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity." The fact that all life is entropic, leading toward death, is driven home in this book and, thus, Origen calls it natural, or temporal. It tells of judgment, punishment and hell, in terms as hopeless and harsh as those of the Inferno. The persona the writer adopts is that of the "Preacher." In Proverbs, he is the "Father," giving advice to his son so that he may grow into righteousness. He explains the dangers of the "Strange Woman" who leads to cupidity, and extols the virtues of the "Chaste Wife," who leads to wholeness and uprightness. Origen calls the nature of Solomon's knowledge as presented in this book "moral," and the atmosphere of confidence in the moral perfectibility of man is comparable to that of Purgatory. The persona of the writer of the Song is that of "lover," which well describes Dante the pilgrim as he appears in Paradiso. This rough correspondence between Solomon's three books and Dante's cantica is interesting, but it is not our purpose in this essay to posit any exact correspondence between them.

A fourth book attributed to Solomon is included in the Vulgate, but was only recently considered official canon: the Wisdom of Solomon. It portrays Wisdom as a female god who mediates between man and God and who speaks through Solomon. The book was familiar to Dante, as is indicated by his quoting from it in his Letter to Can Grande.

Of the four works mentioned above, the Song of Songs is the one which Christian tradition has associated with the unseen mysteries of the after-life, of which resurrection is one. Origen wrote a commentary on the Song in which he systematically allegorized it. The two lovers of the Song, Solomon and Sheba, are seen to represent Christ and the Church, and the Word and Soul, as Groom and Bride. While the direct influence of Origen upon Dante cannot be documented, the influence of Origen upon Bernard can be traced.¹⁹ Bernard, a key figure in the Paradiso, accepted the tradition based on Origen's allegory and extended it. Since Bride and Groom imagery is used in the last part of Purgatorio and throughout Paradiso in connection with the mystery of resurrection, it seems probable that Dante was aware of Bernard's interpretation of the Song and, therefore, found it most apt to put word of the mystical marriage in the mouth of its author, Solomon.

Before going further into discussion of the Song as it figures in the Divine Comedy, we should consider the traditional concept of Resurrection, especially as it is presented in the Bible.

Resurrection is the promised reward of every Christian for his faith; it is necessary for one to have faith in the reality of Christ's resurrection and his own in the Last Days if one is to be saved.²⁰ Jesus had power over death both in terms of raising his followers, such as Lazarus, and in terms of raising himself from the dead in three days as he promised: "I should lose nothing (through death) but should raise it up again at the last day...every one which seeth the Son and believeth on him may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:38-40)

Resurrection is to occur "in a moment, in the twinkling of

an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality...then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."

(I Corinthians 15:52-54) Revelations 20:13 also gives an account of this event: "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead, which were in them: and they were judged every man according to his works."

The resurrected flesh is to be like the flesh of Jesus,²¹ transformed. And "there is to be neither Jew nor Greek, there is to be neither bond nor free, nor male nor female; for ye are all to be one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28) All restrictions of the flesh are to be eliminated because "the creature itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." (Romans 8:21) The flesh is to be free and "of the light,"²² but remarkably like familiar mortal flesh. "Behold my hands and feet," the risen Jesus says in Luke 24:39, "see that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." The particular identity of the resurrected person is to be maintained in the outward form by which he was known in life. Nonetheless, the body will be essentially changed.²³ The "vile body," according to Phillipians 3:21, shall be "fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself."

In the eschatological schema offered by Christianity, the Resurrection of the body follows a series of plagues and unnatural

events. According to Revelations, the four horsemen of the Apocalypse will be released upon the earth, followed by the seven plagues, and the Battle of Armagedon between the Anti-Christ and Christ. The latter is victorious, of course, and all bodies are resurrected from the dead and are judged according to their actions, or works.

While the damned are condemned to a second death due to the Judgment, the saved are granted a second birth. They become physically part of the City of God, resurrected Jerusalem. The City is described as "coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." (Revelations 21:2) Jerusalem is the Church Triumphant, the Resurrected Church, which is composed of the resurrected bodies and saved souls of all believers. As it is put in Romans 12:4-5, "For as we have many members in one body and all members have not the same office; so we, being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." Or, in terms closer to the marriage metaphor, "And God hath both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by his own power. Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall you take them the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? God forbid. Know yet ye not that he which is joined to a harlot is one body? For two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is One Spirit." (I Corinthians 6:14-17) This is a central paradox in Christian doctrine. Individual identity shall be retained and fulfilled by the resurrection, yet at the same time all shall literally become one in Christ.

The exact process by which the bodies of the believers are

to join into the "one body" which is at once Christ's body and the body of his Bride, is never made explicit in the New Testament, although Isaiah 60:5 has been taken by some²⁴ to approximate what is to take place. "Then, (when the Lord shall arise upon thee and his glory shall be seen upon thee) shalt thou see and flow together and thine heart shall fear God and be enlarged because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee and the Gentiles shall come unto thee."²⁵ Ephesians 2:14-22 also offers an idea of the process by which many become one:

But now in Christ Jesus ye who were sometime far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made all one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us. Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace...Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple of the Lord: In whom ye will be builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Just as the body was considered the temple of God in the New Testament, the Resurrected Church was to be a temple constructed of many bodies and souls. Another passage in the same book, Ephesians 5:25-32, works out the bride/groom metaphor in detail, relating it to the "one body" concept:

Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself, the saviour of the body, for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that he might present it

it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot nor wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife, loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church. For we are members of his body, of his flesh and his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

These two passages from Ephesians have been quoted at length because they clarify the relationship between the bride/groom metaphor and the idea of the One Body in Christ, or the Resurrected Church. What Origen and those who followed after him saw in this choice of imagery was the implication that union between Christ and the Church, akin perhaps to sexual union, will take place when time has ceased. Dante considers and examines this implication in the Divine Comedy.

SECTION II:

The Douay version of the Bible, translated from the Vulgate, prefaces the Song of Songs with a concise summary of its meaning as officially allegorized by the Catholic Church:

This Book is called the Canticle of Canticles, that is to say the most excellent of all canticles concerning the union of God and his people, and particularly of Christ and his spouse: which is here begun by love and is to be eternal in heaven. The spouse of Christ is the Church: more especially as to the happiest part of it, the perfect soul, of which every one is His Beloved, but above all others, the Immaculate and ever blessed Virgin Mother.¹

Clearly the most erotic portion of the Bible, the Song has always been safely locked away under the label of allegory by Orthodox religion. According to mainstream Hebrew tradition, a man was not allowed to read it before he was thirty and past the "temptation of the flesh." The sensual level of the song was denied by Orthodox Jewry in favor of an abstract portrayal of the complex relationship between God and the people of Israel. Despite this effort to declare the erotic content of the song extrinsic to the "real" meaning, the vitality of its sexuality could not be suppressed entirely. Early Christian commentators, whose influence is still felt as we can see from the Douay Introduction quoted above, recognized the essential sexuality of the poem and projected it onto the allegorical level. Origen, one of the first important Christian mystical writers, wrote extensively on the first two chapters of the Song, but died before he could allegorize it entirely. His influence was so pervasive that by the Middle Ages, it became almost impossible

to talk of the final union between God and the Resurrected Church without employing marriage terms from the Song of Songs.² Bernard was especially influenced by Origen's work.³ Bernard's inner life "was modelled upon the Song of Songs, the book which spira ti tale amor,"⁴ Bernard's influence on Dante is clearly demonstrated by the crucial role he plays in the Comedy, as well as by the role given his thought in Dante's theology. A large part of his thought is expressed in terms of the marriage metaphor from the Song of Songs; to understand the connotations of Dante's imagery from the Song, therefore, it is necessary to examine the allegory as it reached him through Bernard.

Origen's allegory extends the metaphor of Christ as the Groom and the Church/Soul as the Bride which had long existed in the New Testament. Christ's first miracle was turning water into wine at Mary's request for a wedding at Cana.⁵ This act opens the stay of the Groom on earth. John the Baptist actually calls Jesus "the bridegroom" the first time in the Gospels. (John 3:29) Later, explaining why his disciples eat on the Sabbath, Jesus says: "Can the children of the bridechamber mourn so long as the bridegroom is with them? But the day will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them and then shall they fast." (Matthew 9:15) He compares the kingdom of heaven to a marriage feast in Matthew 22:1-14, and refers to himself as a groom in the familiar story of the foolish virgins. (Matthew 25:1-13.) There are more examples in the Gospels, but let these suffice. The later books of the New Testament developed upon this motif, unknowingly preparing the ground for Origen and his followers.

Mentioned earlier, in discussion of resurrection, were the passages from I Corinthians 6:15 and Ephesians 5:25-32, both of which say that all Christians will be "members of Christ's body" upon resurrection and that this one body will be the bride of Christ. The Bride will be of "one spirit" with Him, even as men and women on earth are "one body."⁶ Paul writes to the Church at Corinth: "for I am jealous over you with Godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to One Husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." (II Corinthians 11:2) This metaphor is made again in Romans 7:4: "Wherefore, my brethern, ye also become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye shuld be married to Another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." The most explicit evocation of imagery from the Song which occurs in the New Testament, however, is found in Revelations, chapters 19-22. After the four horsemen are released, but before the Last Judgment, John hears a voice of "many waters and many thunders" that says:

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.⁷ And He saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb...⁸ (Revelations 19:7-9)

After the Last Judgment, John is told to "Come hither, I will shew thee the Bride, the Lamb's Wife," (Chapter 21:9) and is shown the City of God which he describes in great detail. Jesus tells John, "Behold, I come quickly" three times in Chapter 22,

and "The Sprit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of Life freely...Surely I come quickly." This last passage is clearly reminiscent of the Song's repeated invitations to sexual pleasure from both main figures.⁹

Origen believed that men have inner senses (inner sensorium) given by grace to each soul. These senses can combine in countless ways to produce various spiritual states. There is inner sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. The soul's duty is to develop these senses, for to let them die is spiritual death.¹⁰

Bonaventura, writing nearly one thousand years later, expands Origen's concept:

By faith in Christ, the uncreated Word, the soul recaptures two mystical senses of hearing and vision: hearing to accept the sayings, and vision with which to contemplate the splendours of his light. By the virtue of Hope, the soul sighs for the coming of the Word and begins anew to experience the sweet odour of Christ, as by a veritable sense of smell. Finally, by love of Christ, hastening to embrace the Word Incarnate who comes, the soul receives in return from Him such a heavenly delight that in a very ecstasy of love it finds itself anew experiencing such a feeling of intimacy as can only be compared with the physical senses of taste and touch. The soul adorned with these new senses is like the Spouse in the Song of Songs, delighting in all of her senses in the presence of the Bridegroom, celebrating in song its union with God.¹¹

In Sermon 13 of Sermons on the Song of Songs, Bernard links these mystical senses with the Incarnation. Since God was made flesh, flesh was made sensitive to the Divine through Love. "Love of the heart is in a manner carnal," he writes, "with which

the heart of man is affected toward Christ according to the flesh and towards the actions he did while in the flesh. I consider the principle cause of this that God, who is invisible, willed to render Himself visible in the Flesh to dwell as Man among men." Thus, Bernard affirms the body, considering its impulses and senses naturally good because they help man relate to God.

Having reinterpreted the senses so that they are not metaphorical, yet still not carnal, but rather mystical, Origen examines the first verse of the Song: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for thy breasts are better than wine." He sees this as a plea for direct spiritual contact in the form of words, which like kisses proceed from the mouth. He goes into great detail to explain why the Bride refers to her lover as "him" and then immediately indicates his presence, by saying "thy breasts." Christ fulfills the prayer of the pure spirit so quickly that he actually appears to her between her first and second phrase.

The sense of smell is brought in in the next verses, when the Bride says that she will run after Him "to the odour of thy ointments." Bernard¹² identifies the sweet smell of ointment with scriptural revelation, glimpses of eternal truth, and bases this on II Corinthians 14: "God...maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place."¹³

Details of interpretation such as those above allowed Origen to construct a coherent love story on the literal level out of the Song. Each shift in time or voice or tense meant something had "happened" on the level of plot. What makes trying to force the song into a coherent story difficult is the fact of its

fragmentary construction, varying in age and authorship. Since there is little to be gained from summarizing his plot surface, then, or imitating his effort to "make sense" out of the Song, this essay will select elements from his work which apply most directly to the Divine Comedy.

The mystical sense of taste becomes important in the Middle Ages as a means for believers to make contact with God.¹⁴ In Chapter 2:3 of the Song, the Bride tells us, "As the apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow, whom I desired; and his fruit was sweet to my palate. He brought me into the cellar of wine, he set in order charity in me." Origen saw this passage as referring directly to the sacrament of Communion, in which the "apple" which drops from the tree/lover is the Host and the "cellar of wine" the place where the Blood is kept, the heart of Christ.¹⁵ Tasting the body of Christ was seen as necessary to salvation by Paul.¹⁶ Communion also served as the symbolic reminder that the saved are all one body in Christ: "For we being many are one bread, and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread." (I Corinthians 10:17) The reason that it was important to ingest Christ's body, according to Origen, was that it was the resurrected, transformed body of Christ which, once swallowed, acted upon the physical senses to transform them to mystical senses through which man could perceive God.¹⁷ Thus, those "who have tasted of the Good Word...have tasted of the world to come." (Hebrews 6:5)¹⁸

The passage from the Song quoted above, Chapter 2:3, has another significance central to Christianity and to the Comedy.