

THE ARGVMENT OF THE CANTICLE OF CANTICLES.

*Proem.
in Eccle.*

Salomon, called also *Ecclesiastes*, and *Idida*, according to these three names (as S. Ierom noteth) writte three bookes of three particular arguments, directed to three degrees of people, with three distinct titles, all tending to one end, the true seruice of God, which bringeth to eternal felicitie. In the first he teacheth the principles of good life, to flee from vices, and follow vertues: belonging to such as *beginne* to obserue Gods law, wherein true wisdom consisteth: and this booke is called the *Prouerbes*, or *Parables*, that is to say, Pithie, brief, sententious precepts; of *Salomon*, which signifieth *Pacificus*, *Peaceable*, or Pacifier: *the sonne of Daud, King of Israell*. In the second he exhorteth to contemne this world, shewing that true felicitie consisteth not in any worldly or temporal things, but in the eternal fruition of God, which is obtained by keeping his commandments. And this booke he intitleth: *The wordes of Ecclesiastes*, which is *Concionator*, Preacher, *Sonne of Daud, King of Ierusalem*, because he there exhorteth such as haue made some progresse in vertues, called *Proficientes*, signified by the inhabitants of the Metropolitan citie Ierusalem; whereas in the former he stiled himself king of Israell, proposing precepts mete for all the twelue tribes, and all vulgar men desirous and beginning to serue God. In both bookes, for more auctoritie sake, making mention of his godly renowned father the Royal Prophet Daud, with his owne title also of king. But in this third booke he only expresseth his proper name Salomon, whom God singularly loued, wherof he was called *Idada*. Because this alone, without mention of father or king, was most conuenient for the *Perfect*, who not as seruants, or yong scholars are moued by feare of auctoritie, but as children are sweetly drawne by loue. And this he writte in verse, intitling it not simply a Canticle, but *The Canticle of Canticles*, as preeminent aboue other Canticles. The bridal song for the Mariage, to be solemnized between God himself and his glorious spouse. For though

King Salomon according to his three names writte and intitled his three bookes.

Salomon Pacificus, king of Israell.

Ecclesiastes, Preacher king of Ierusalem.

Idida, Beloued.

This Canticle doth excel other Canticles.

All are not mete to read it.

al holie Scriptures are the fpiritual bread, and food of the faithful, yet al are not meate for al, at al feafons. Some parts are not for finners, nor for beginners, nor for fuch as are yet in the way towards perfection, but only for the perfect. According to the Apoftles doctrine: *Milke is for children, that are yet vnskillful of the word of iuftice. But ftrong meate is for the perfect, them that by cuftom, haue their fenfes exercifed to the difcerning of good and euil.* With what moderation therfore, and humilitie, this Canticle of Gods perfect fpoufe may be read, the difcrete wil confider, and not prefume aboue their reach, but be wife with fobrietie. For here be very high and hidden Myfteries, as Origen teacheth in his lerned Commentaries (which S. Ierom tranflated into Latin, and fingularly commendeth) and fo much harder to be rightly vnderftood, for that the feruent fpiritual loue, of the inward man, reformed in foule, and perfected in fpirite, is here vttered in the fame vfual wordes and termes, wherwith, natural, worldlie, yea and carnal loue of the outward man, old Adam, corrupted by finne, is commonly expreffed: and are fo much more dangerous to be miftaken, as we are more addicted to proper wil, & priuate iudgement, or fubieft to carnal, or paffionate motions. Wherefore it femeth moft mete to kepe the fame order in reading thefe three bookes, which the auctor wife Salomon obserued in writing them. And which Philofophers alfo folow in their forme of difcipline. For they firft lerne and teach Moral Philofophie, then Natural, & laftly Metaphifikes which is their Diuinitie. As Salomon had geuen them example: firft teaching *precepts of good life*, and maners, in his *Prouerbes*: after, difcourfing of natural thinges, in *Ecclefiaftes*, deduced thence a conclufion, which prophane Philofophers wel vnderftood not, *to contemne this world*: and finally cometh to high myftical Diuinitie, in this fupereminent *Canticle*: written in an other ftile, in *uerfe*, and in *forme of a facred Dialogue* betwen Chrift and his fpoufe: or as Origen calleth it, in forme of an *Enterlude*, in refpect of diuers fpeakers & actors, & of diuers perfons, to whom the fpeeches are directed,

*Formæ
dramatis.*

Beft methode in lerning is to beginne with doctrine of good life, then ftudie to know natural thinges: and finally contemplate diuine myfteries.

A facred dialogue or Enterlude.

	and of whom they are vttered. For by <i>the Spous or Bridgrome</i> , is not only vnderftood Chrift as Man, but alfo as God, and the whole Bleffed Trinitie; to whom manie prayers, praifes, and thankes are offered vp: and by whom manie benefites are geuen, praifes returned, & promifes made to his fpoufe. Likewife by the <i>Spoufe</i> or <i>Bride</i> , the ancient fathers vnderftood three fortes of fpoufes: al espoufed to Chrift, and to God: to witt, his <i>General Spoufe</i> , the whole Church of the old and new Testaments; of al that are, and shal be perfect, making one myftical bodie, free from finne, without fpotte, or wrinkle, fanctified in Chrift. Alfo his fppecial fpoufe, which is euerie particular holie foule. And his fingular fpoufe, his moft bleffed & moft immaculate Virgin Mother. This being the general fumme of this excellent Canticle, remitting the reader, for explication therof to the lerned deuout Commenters, both of ancient and late writers, we shal alfo endeuour to gether the fame contents more particularly, not before the chapters, becaufe we can not there fo conueniently diftinguifh the fame by verfes, but in the margent. Where we shal efpecially note the fpeakers, as femeth more probable of euerie parcel, according to the firft fenfe (not hauing rowme for more) perteyning to the General fpoufe, the Catholique Church: which is the great, and euerlafting holie Citie of God the eternal King.	God & Chrift the Spous, or Bridgrome.
<i>Ephef. 5.</i>		Three fpoufes.
<i>Origen.</i>		The General.
<i>S. Ierom.</i>		
<i>S. Aug. lib. 8.</i>		
<i>de Gen. li.</i>		
<i>S. Greg.</i>		The Special, and
<i>S. Beda.</i>		Singular.
<i>S. Tho. Ar-</i>		
<i>bor. Geneb.</i>		
<i>Del Rio.</i>		The particu- lar contents are fette in the margent of eu- erie chapter.