

TWO MEDIAEVAL CISTERCIANS SING THE VIRTUES OF THE TURTLE-DOVE

‘Holy love and holy fear are like the two eyes of the dove in the Canticle, for the dove is of all birds the most timorous and the most loving.’

—Hélinand of Froidmont (ca. 1160–after 1229) in *The School of Self-Knowledge: A Symposium from Mediaeval Sources* (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1956), chap. 2 (drawn from his *Liber de cognitione sui*).

‘The voice of this little bird [i.e., the turtle-dove] is more of a moan than a song, and thus reminds us that we are but pilgrims on the earth and have here no continuing city. So when a holy soul sighs for the presence of Christ, grieving that the coming of the Kingdom is so long delayed, and hailing from afar its longed-for fatherland with plaints and sighs, do you not think that such a soul is like the turtle-dove, that chaste and mournful bird?’

—*Saint Bernard* (1090 or 91–1153, Abbot of Clairvaux and Doctor of the Church) *on the Song of Songs* (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1952), chap. 27.1.

‘The turtle-dove has something else to recommend it, besides its plaintive voice. It is a chaste bird, content with one mate and living in solitary widowhood, if that mate dies; therefore its voice may be regarded as enjoining chastity.’

—*On the Song of Songs*, chap. 27.2.

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