

SUMMARY INTERPRETATION OF THE SONG OF SOLOMON¹

[Christ and His Church, in *The Song of Solomon*]

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Translator's² Introduction: *The Song of Solomon*, or *The Song of Songs*, as it is called in the opening verse, is a prophetic poem which sets forth in an allegorical or mystical manner the relation between Christ, the Bridegroom of our souls, and His Church, the Bride. An allegory is a narrative describing real or supposed facts for the purpose of presenting certain higher truths or principles than the narrative itself, taken literally, could have taught; it is "a figurative sentence or discourse, in which the principal subject is described by another subject resembling it in its properties and circumstances. The real subject is thus kept out of view or barely indicated; and we are left to collect the intentions of the speaker or writer from the resemblance of the secondary to the primary subject." *The Song of Solomon* depicts—under the allegory of the bridal love of Solomon and Shulamite—the mutual love of the Lord and His Church. The representation of Christ as the Bridegroom and the Church as the Bride is a favorite allegory, or picture, in the Bible. Cp. Ps. 45; Hos. 2:19, 20; Matt. 9:15; John 3:29; Eph. 5:25–29. The poem shows a beautiful progression of thought; the heart of the believer declaring: 1. Jesus is mine, He belongs to me; 2. I am Christ's, I belong to Him; 3. In spite of all obstacles our union of love will be established throughout eternity.

"In studying this book, which presents difficulties in more than one respect, it should be noted that whoever does not understand God's revealed plan of salvation, and has not experienced the love of Christ nor love to Christ in his heart—to him this book will remain a sealed book; and he will probably become guilty of the error made by the majority of modern critics, who find in *The Song of Solomon* nothing but a collection of Oriental love-songs." (Kretzmann, Pop. Com. of the Bible (OT), Vol. II, 277.)

In regard to the canonicity of *The Song of Solomon*, let it just be briefly said, that it found acceptance into the Old Testament Canon—gathered and concluded under the guiding hand of the learned scribe Ezra, a contemporary of the Prophet Malachi—and its canonicity was thenceforth never questioned by the Jewish Church. And, while we have no direct citations in the New Testament from *The Song of Solomon*, there are nevertheless many thoughts and pictures found in the New Testament which allude to things in *The Song of Solomon*—as is also the case with a goodly number of the hymns of our *Lutheran Hymnal*. Whoever therefore at all accepts the Old Testament Canon, must let *The Song of Solomon* stand as a canonical book. Also this book, then, is, according to Paul's testimony, II Tim. 3:16, "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," and for comfort.

I. Introduction

The Canonicity of the Song of Songs—According to the tradition of the Jewish Church the Prophet Malachi is unanimously accredited as being the last prophet of the Old Testament; and his Book is the last one to find acceptance into the Old Testament Canon, which was gathered and concluded under the directing hand of a contemporary of his, the scribe Ezra.³ Since that day the Canon of the Old Testament has, because of the painstaking concern of the Jewish Synagogue, remained absolutely unchanged. Whoever, in the times that followed, spoke of, or in any way referred to, the "Scripture," wanted to have it understood that by "Scripture" is meant precisely this canonical collection which was kept strictly separated from all subsequent literature. Of this very Canon, therefore, do Christ and the Apostles speak every time they refer to the "Scripture"; and to

¹ *Lehre und Wehre*, Bd. 54, 1908: *Summarische Auslegung des Hohenlieds*, H. Speckard.

² The translator is the Rev. Paul W. Ludwig, Sr., Gordonville, Mo.

³ As to Ezra having collected the canonical books, Edward J. Young in *An Introduction to the Old Testament* has this to say: "In all probability these books were gathered by Ezra and those who immediately followed him. Concerning this period very little is known, but it seems to have been a time when attention was given to the Scriptures, and it may well have been that these sacred books were then collected. Nor does this necessarily mean that some inspired additions were not made to certain books at a later time. Such may very well have been the case." (p. 43)—Ed.

each word of “Scripture” do they give testimony that it is God’s own inviolable Word. (Cp. Luke 24:44; John 10:35; II Tim. 2:16; and others.) In this Canon, concluded a half millennium before Christ, *The Song of Solomon* is included. This is a fact which simply cannot be contested.

The canonicity of *The Song of Solomon*, according to our knowledge, has never been called in question except by Graetz, who was unsuccessful in his attempt. The claim of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* is entirely incorrect, that the canonicity of *The Song of Songs* was contested until the time of Rabbi Akiba (executed A.D. 135), and only through the weight of his testimony the book attained full canonical worth and acceptance. On the contrary, the Old Testament Canon was ever acknowledged by all parties of Judaism. Even in the controversies of the Talmudists over the sanctity or sacredness of individual Old Testament books, the point in question was not their canonicity but their *worthiness* to be in the Canon. There were those who took offense at the contents of certain books, and who could not understand why they should have found acceptance in the Canon. And it was those who found fault with the contents of *The Song of Solomon* and denied its worthiness to be incorporated in the Canon, against whom Akiba passionately declaims when he says, among other things: “No one in Israel has ever doubted that the hands are polluted through *The Song of Solomon*. On the contrary, no day of all antiquity is to be esteemed more highly than the day on which Israel was given *The Song of Songs*. All hagiographies (sacred writings) are holy, but *The Song of Solomon* is the most holy.”

This well-established canonicity of *The Song of Solomon* is furthermore not in the least affected by the assertion or claim that it is nowhere cited in the New Testament. Surely, the canonicity of an Old Testament book cannot possibly be dependent on whether or not it is cited and has direct quotations in the New Testament; for then there could be no question at all of a Canon of the Old Testament Scriptures before the conclusion of the New Testament Canon. Besides, there are other Old Testament books to which we find no direct references in the New Testament Writings. The canonicity of a Biblical book is a historic question, which is, with respect to the Old Testament, decided on the basis of the testimony of the Old Testament Church. This testimony *The Song of Songs* can fully claim for itself since it is represented in all book lists and its canonicity was never questioned in the ancient Jewish Church. But we do not even grant the validity of the claim that the book is nowhere cited in the New Testament. True, we read nowhere in the New Testament: “Thus saith Solomon in *The Song of Songs*.” It does not follow, however, that no reference is made to its contents. On the contrary, anyone who will take the time and the pains to compare the following New Testament references with those indicated from *The Song of Solomon* will, we feel confident, become convinced that the opposite is true. (Just compare Matt. 21:33f. with Song of Solomon 8:11; Luke 12:35–37 with 5:3f.; John 7:33, 34 and 8:21 with 5:6; John 3:29 with 5:1; Matt. 26:6, Mark 14:3, and John 12:3 with 1:3, 12; Eph. 5:27 with 4:7; Rev. 3:20 with 5:2; Eph. 5:32 with the whole Song. In the Old Testament, compare Ps. 45; Ezek. 16; Isa. 35:1–3; Isa. 54; Jer. 31:3; Lam. 2:13; Hos. 2:19, 20 and 11:8 with Song of Solomon 6:4.) Still other passages in both the Old and the New Testament will be referred to in our exposition of the Song. The thoughts and images of *The Song of Solomon* have been turned to good account also in many of our church hymns. Just to point to a few in *The Lutheran Hymnal*: No. 67:4 (Song of Sol. 8:3); 77:13, 14 (4:7); 215 (1:4); 305:2 (5:2); 343:1–3 and 345 (whole Song); 347:1,2 (2:16; 6:3); 349:3, 5 (1:5, 12); 356, 357, and 362 (whole Song); 632:4 (1:8–17; 2:1; 4:7, 9–16; 6:4–7:13; 8:10–12); 652:3 (1:3; 2:6; 8:3).

The contents of *The Song of Solomon* as well as its pictures and figurative expressions were frequently employed in the succeeding books of the Old Testament, as the few Old Testament references above, and many others, will amply bear out. It is true that before the composition of *The Song of Songs* the relation of God to Israel was represented by way of veiled allusions under the picture of a marriage⁴ (compare Ex. 20:5 with Ex. 34:14; Lev. 17:7; 20:5, 6; Num. 14:33; Deut. 32:16, 21⁵; and others). But it cannot be denied the later writers were quite familiar with this picture and also employed it frequently.⁶ The same could be said of the portrayal

⁴ Note expressions such as these: “go a whoring,” “commit whoredoms,” “hear whoredoms,” “provoked” or “moved to jealousy,” all in connection with Israel’s idol worship instead of the worship of the true Lord Jehovah. —Translator’s footnote.

⁵ Vitringa. re. Deut. 32:21: *Est autem metaphora hic manifeste desunita a marito, qui cum ab uxore illicitis amoribus indulgente se spretum videat, et inde, etc.*—Translator’s footnote.

⁶ Compare especially Ezek. 16:6–8, 14, 31c–32, 38; Isa. 54:4–6; Jer. 31:3; Hos. 2:19–20. —Translator’s footnote.

of Israel as the Lord's vineyard. All this surely goes to show that the Prophets searched God's Word, also in *The Song of Solomon* and found therein—let this be clear—not a love-sick shepherd couple, but the Messiah and His Church.

Author and Time of Composition—The superscription gives Solomon as the author. The words **אֲשֶׁר לְשֹׁלֹמֹה** says Ewald, “can have only one meaning: belonging to Solomon as composer. Other explanations, as ‘A Song in honor of Solomon,’ ‘in the style of Solomon,’ ‘dating from the time of Solomon,’ express the opinion which the present day commentator has formed in his own mind with respect to this Book, not the meaning of the ancient composer. For according to the opinion of the men who wrote the superscriptions the name with **לְ** was obviously intended always to designate the author of the book. Just because this use of **לְ** in superscriptions had become standard, the preposition cannot be interpreted in any other way.”⁷ But there are many expositors—and Ewald himself at the head of this group—who have a very definite interest in contesting the authorship of Solomon. For whoever finds in *The Song of Songs* a love affair between Solomon and a shepherdess, who spurns his advances, or a satirical poem, “directed against the Solomonic royal dynasty or against his harem practice which constituted such a threat and menace to a wholesome life,” or something similar, can, of course, not let Solomon be the author of it. Consequently, in the interest of such interpretations the superscription of the Song must be explained away. That is done by some in this wise that **לְשֹׁלֹמֹה** is translated: “dedicated to Solomon,” “in honor of Solomon,” and the like; by others—and they seem to be in the majority—that the title is not to be attributed to the author of the Song. “From the days of antiquity,” writes Ewald, “*The Song of Songs* (without superscription) was preserved until after the Exile because of its great beauty and was already for that reason regarded as a revered remnant of the ancient times. The belief that Solomon was the composer, which became ever more common as time went on, settled the matter.” Another hand, Ewald goes on to say, wrote the superscription but, due to the erroneous idea that the renowned Solomon was the author, *The Song of Songs* gained acceptance into the Canon.

And when we ask, on what the bold claim is based that the superscription is not that of the composer, the *Britannica* answers in the name of many: “On linguistic grounds it is certain that the title is not from the hand that wrote the poem.” It is quite apparent that in a superscription of four words an argument based on ‘linguistic grounds’ can have little weight. What is more, in the development of this argument the attention is shifted to an area much narrower than the four words in question so that a claim on such grounds simply becomes untenable. Because in the Song itself the shorter poetic form of the relative pronoun **שֶׁ** is used, in the superscription, however, the full prosaic form **אֲשֶׁר** the Poem must of necessity have two redactors. These are the “linguistic grounds” of the *Britannica*; and this is the only basis on which Ewald founds his claim, “that a different author wrote at least the last two words thereby becomes incontrovertibly certain.” Over against this inflated assertion, let it just be said that Delitzsch and other skilled Hebrew scholars find no linguistic hindrance whatever for the assumption that superscription and poem were written by the same hand.⁸

⁷ Grammatically the **לְ** could also mean: dedicated to Solomon. In *Lehre und Wehre*, Bd 25, 193, the **לְ** in the superscription of Psalm 72 is taken in this sense. Yet there the words **שֶׁר מְזִמּוֹר**, or a similar expression do not appear. Furthermore, the superscription makes it quite clear that this Psalm was composed by David. Unless there are compelling reasons to the contrary, the **לְ** in superscriptions is always to be taken in the sense which Ewald suggests.

⁸ With regard to the superscription, Young in his *Introduction* simply states: “The book claims to be by Solomon” (p. 323). Moeller in his *Grundriss fuer Alttestamentliche Einleitung* does likewise: *Als Verfasser wird in der Ueberschrift Salomo genannt* (p. 297). Delitzsch in his Commentary as published in translation by Eerdmans (p. 18) and in his *Biblischer Commentar* (p. 20) translates the superscription: “The Song of Songs, composed by Solomon” (*Das Lied der Lieder, verfasst von Salomo*). He even adds: “We may even suppose that the superscription was written by the author, and thus by Solomon himself.... He who entitles him merely

Not only does the superscription designate the Song as a work of Solomon, but the content, language, and time of composition confirm him as the author. The indiscriminate reference to all parts of the great Solomonic empire demonstrates that the Poem originated before the division of the kingdom. The reference to Tirzah, chapter 6:4 points in the same direction, since that city was the residence of the kings of Israel, the Northern Kingdom, from the time of Jeroboam (I Kings 14:17) to the days of Omri (I Kings 16:23).⁹ The whole Song breathes a Solomonic pomp and splendor. In that well-known passage, Matthew 6:29, Solomon's glory is especially pointed out by Christ Himself. The Author of *The Song of Songs* speaks of the most exquisite things as of matters with which he is perfectly familiar. His Poem presents itself in a garb of Solomonic magnificence and reveals itself thereby as a production of Solomon.

Furthermore, I Kings 4:32, 33 it is said of Solomon: "He spake of trees, from the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five." Here it is expressly said that he spoke *shirim*, or songs. Nothing would, therefore, seem to be more evident than the assumption that *The Song of Songs* is the *shir hashshirim*, the noblest and best of all of Solomon's songs, as the superscription states. Already the *Midrash* explains the superscription thus: "The most praiseworthy, the most excellent, the most esteemed of the songs." Every other understanding is linguistically untenable, as Delitzsch establishes in the preamble of his exposition of the Book. In addition, *The Song of Songs* is exceedingly rich in the description of things in the creature-world and in illustrations taken from nature. This is again a strong indication that this Poem has that man for its composer who "spake of trees, from the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall," and who "spake also of beasts and of fowl and of creeping things and of fishes." A purely objective criticism, then, has not the least cause to deny Solomon's authorship of *The Song of Songs*; but with subjective criticism you cannot argue; you have to leave it to its own notions.

Different Methods of Interpretation—*The Song of Solomon*, called by Delitzsch "the most difficult book of the Old Testament," has kept interpreters occupied from time immemorial. Already the *Targum* made it an object of most diligent treatment. Origen wrote a work of ten volumes on it. Saint Bernard preached 86 sermons on the first two chapters; and his pupil, Gilbert von Hoiland, continued the work of the master in 48 sermons up to chapter five. Of the more recent commentators we mention the following: J. D. Michaelis, Jakobi, Herder, Kleuker, Godet, Hitzig, Ewald, Graetz, Hoelemann, Delitzsch, and Hengstenberg. All interpretations of the Book are of three kinds, of which the second is a replica of the first. These interpretations are the literal, the typical, and the allegorical.

The Literal Interpretation—The literal, or rationalistic, commentators take the Poem in its literal meaning, or shall we say, in the sense of its letterism. Solomon and the Shulamite are to them real persons of earthly flesh and blood. On this common basis their interpretations vary only according to the individual's taste and intelligence. For Theodoret of Mopsuestia, the Song is Solomon's answer to the complaints of his people, raised on account of his marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh; for another, it is a "wedding-song" or "wedding-play" that was presented on that occasion. Hugo Grotius makes it a love-chatter between Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter. It is particularly since Jakobi that the former, not so frequently occurring sensuous, voluptuous, literal

'Solomon' is most probably himself." Still Delitzsch in declaring the titles as original is careful in that he adds the expressions: "We may even suppose" (*Wir duerfen sogar annehmen*) and "most probably himself" (*ist doch am wahrscheinlichsten er selber*). We have no absolute historical proof that these superscriptions, whether in *The Song of Songs* or in the *Psalter* are original. What Young in his *Introduction* has to say about the titles in the *Psalter* also holds *mutatis mutandis* for *The Song of Songs*: "The titles of the Hebrew text when studied with the aid of a legitimate textual criticism, are to be regarded as trustworthy and of great value in determining the authorship ... of the Psalm in question. Many Christian scholars have regarded them as inspired, but whether they are inspired or not, they are an ancient and a valuable source of information concerning the *Psalter*" (p. 296f.)—Ed.

⁹ ...and "the tower of Lebanon, which looketh toward Damascus," chapter 7:4, was the watch-tower which Solomon (according to I Kings 9:19 and II Chron. 8:6) ordered built on Mt. Lebanon over against Damascus, where Rezon reigned, who was Israel's adversary as long as Solomon lived (I Kings 11:23–25).—Translator's footnote.

interpretation took a considerable upswing. Jakobi was the first to make a distinction between Solomon and the oft-named “beloved” in *The Song of Songs*. Ewald is one of Jakobi’s chief pupils; and he has made such a beaten path of it that since then everybody follows it. In secular and also in many religious books and periodicals one comes in contact with his interpretation (compare *Britannica* V, 32f.; *Century Magazine*, 1883; *Homiletic Review*, 1900). Ewald pronounces *The Song of Songs* to be “a drama not intended for the stage.” But his *dramatis personae* are 1. King Solomon; 2. The Shulamite; 3. The “Beloved,” Shulamite’s rightful bridegroom; 4. The Women of the Harem, called “The Daughters of Jerusalem”; 5. The Shulamite’s Stepbrothers; 6. The Shepherds in the Field; 7. Various Voices of the People—truly a whole modern theater cast!

The following is a brief presentation of Ewald’s conception of *The Song of Solomon*: On a journey Solomon met a young shepherdess of surprising beauty. Suspecting no evil, she had drawn near to the royal chariot, chapter 6:11. By order of the King she is immediately taken captive and brought to Jerusalem. In the First Act of this drama, chapters 1–2:7, Solomon seeks to win the love of this young maiden (Shulamite), but he does not succeed too well. The Act opens with a monolog. The Shulamite, thinking of her absent lover, says: “Give me a kiss. Take me, together we shall flee,” etc., verses 1–4. But, noticing the presence of the women in the king’s harem, she praises her own beauty and explains why it is that her skin is so dark, verses 5–6. In verse 7 she then utters a cry for help to her beloved. The King suddenly appears and tries to win her with all manner of flattery and promises, verses 8–11. But the Shulamite refuses to accept his attentions and repulses him disdainfully, extolling the handsomeness and affection of her lover, chapters 1:12–2:5.

Finally she falls down in a swoon, verses 6–7. The Second Act covers chapters 2:8–3:5. In this Act the Shulamite, in the absence of the King, speaks to the women of the harem surrounding her. She describes to them her former blissfulness. So vivid is her recollection of her lover that she sees and hears him though he is absent. She hears his voice, verse 8; sees him hurrying near for her deliverance, verse 9a; yes, finds him already looking in through the window, verse 9b. She hears what he was wont to say as though it were now, verses 10–14; she even weaves a little song, verse 15, into her speech. And in verses 16–17 she vows to her lover unending faithfulness, and expresses the hope that the hour of deliverance from Solomon’s harem may soon strike for her. This hope she bases on a dream which she claims to have had repeatedly, chapter 3:1–4. Her excitement has now risen to such a pitch that it all ends in a fainting spell that brings relief, verse 5.

The Third Act comprises chapters 3:6–8:4. In order to get the Shulamite to yield to his wishes, Solomon has meanwhile decided to elevate her to the position of his rightful spouse. In preparation for the public marriage he has gone into the country with his court and taken the Shulamite along. (N.B. The text says nothing of this.) He also had a new bridal chariot made, verse 9. The First Scene of this Act, chapter 3:6–11, is performed out on the street. The people stand there in line and wait for the approaching royal bridal procession. Suddenly a voice from out of the waiting multitude cries: “There they come,” verse 6. Another confirms the announcement, verses 7–8, and invites the women of the harem who had remained in the palace to come out, verse 11. The Second Scene of this Act, chapters 4:1–8:4, is staged in the women’s apartment. The actors are: Solomon, the Shulamite, and the women of the harem. (Strange, is it not, that according to Ewald Solomon should always do his courting in the presence of his whole harem!) Solomon begins with a eulogy on the Shulamite’s beauty, verses 1–7, bids her come down from Lebanon, verse 8 (had not Ewald pictured her as being with him in the women’s apartment?), even calls her his sister, verse 12! In reply to his words of praise, the Shulamite tells the King about a dream she had had about her lover, chapter 5:2–8, and praises his beauty and love, verses 10–16. Following another brief interruption, during which the harem women promise the Shulamite that they will help her find her lover, Solomon begins to praise her, chapters 6:1–7:9, during the course of which he, as Ewald puts it, “becomes rather wild and bombastic.” But the Shulamite remains unimpressed, also by this lengthy eulogy. She answers the King simply and briefly: “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is toward me,” verse 10. Then she addresses her lover, as though he were bodily present, invites him to go with her out into the field, verse 11f., suddenly wishes that he were her brother, chapter 8:1, and finally falls down again in a faint, verse 4. So again, the Shulamite has, according to Ewald, frustrated the King’s designs by her steadfast loyalty to her lover.

The Fourth Act follows, chapter 8:5–14. We give it in Ewald’s own words: “Joy, O joy! The curtain rises, and shepherds in the field see in the distance the Shulamite already coming home, ‘leaning upon her beloved,’ verse 5. It is true, we do not read how the Shulamite escaped out of the hands of the King (*sic!*); but a poet does not have to relate it as does a historian. It is enough if he succeeds in carrying out the idea of the play. At least the Shulamite hints at how she escaped, verse 10: her unconquerable virtue broke the violent passion of the King; and what else was there for him to do but to dismiss her, who from the start remained aloof? We see the Shulamite coming up from the wilderness with her lover, who is proud of having regained possession of her and also somewhat triumphant and derisive over the King, verses 5–12. Now they are drawing nearer. The Shulamite has already advanced with her lover to several places which she lovingly recalls: the apple-tree, where she had occasionally awakened her lover resting in the shade at noon-day; the place which saw him born, which therefore was precious and sacred to her.¹⁰ Such a place is truly memorable. With that the play has also reached its conclusion and goal: triumph of innocence; contempt for the King who finds his desires unfulfilled. The Shulamite ends the fiery speech, the crown of the whole Song, and the poet lets her lover say just one more word, to indicate his presence, he begs the Shulamite for one little song out of her mouth, verse 13; and she intones the melody of the lay which she sang as a prisoner in the King’s palace, yearning for the arrival of her lover to stage her rescue, verse 14, compare chapter 2:17.”

It must immediately become evident to every unprejudiced reader that Ewald in this interpretation handles the text in a very arbitrary manner, yes, most of the time gives way to his imagination. In our exposition of the “Song” other factors will be pointed out which make it simply impossible to accept such or similar interpretations.

The Typical Interpretation—Not much needs to be said in regard to this interpretation, since it is essentially the same as the literal interpretation. It, too, finds in *The Song of Songs* a love story in which the earthly Solomon and a shepherdess play the leading part, only that it then brings into prominence the typical interpretation that the story is supposed to contain. Such expositors, Delitzsch, for instance, want everything in the Song applied, first of all, to Solomon and the Shulamite and then, in the second place, to Christ and His Church; and this second sense is then to be the more important one, for the sake of which the Song was composed and taken up in the Canon. This is the same kind of cavalier treatment that is accorded all Old Testament prophecies by this kind of interpreter. We need not discuss in detail that such an interpretation of *The Song of Solomon* is to be rejected simply because it violates the established hermeneutic rule, that a Scripture has only *one* intended meaning (compare *Lehre und Wehre* 13, 105).¹¹ Besides, the same insurmountable textual and grammatical difficulties that plague the literal interpretation will of necessity confront also the typical exposition.

The Allegorical Interpretation—Since in our interpretation of *The Song of Solomon* it will be fully shown that the allegorical interpretation alone meets the intention of the Holy Ghost, we here wish but briefly to state what

¹⁰ Ewald adds by way of explanation that in the Orient a birth in the open field is not uncommon (Gen. 35:16). Even Virgil was born *cum mater Maja rus ivisset* (when his mother Maja had gone into the country). *Donati vit. Virg.* C. 1.

¹¹ Although “Scripture has only one intended meaning,” yet one must keep in mind that it often has a number of fulfilments. Thus Berkhof in *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* writes: “*The fulfilment of some of the most important prophecies is germinant, i.e., they are fulfilled by instalments, each fulfilment being a pledge of that which is to follow.* Hence while it is a mistake to speak of a double or treble sense of prophecy, it is perfectly correct to speak of a two or threefold fulfilment” (p. 153). The article in *Lehre und Wehre* 13, 105 on *Vier Thesen ueber das Schriftprinzip*, to which Speckard refers us, does not contradict the above but rather substantiates it in its use of Exodus 12:47: “Neither shall ye break a bone thereof” as in illustration of a typical act which found a twofold fulfilment in Scripture. Although the term “twofold fulfilment” is not used, still in essence the author of the article says as much: “As in Exodus 12:47 the literal meaning of the passage only applies to the passover lamb, thus in John 19:36 it only applies to Christ.” Here the author is really speaking of two fulfilments as is evident from the context, the one, the Old Testament fulfilment, when a bone of the passover lamb was not broken, the other, the New Testament fulfilment, when according to John 19:36 the legs of Jesus were not broken. Therefore he states in reference to John 19:36: “The fulfilment of that typical act is reported as being performed on Christ, the antitype.” Whether *The Song of Songs* should be subjected to such a typical interpretation is quite another question.—Ed.

is to be understood by “allegorical interpretation.” By it we do not understand a definite interpretation of individual passages and pictures found in *The Song of Songs*, which this or that expositor has put on them, but by it we understand every interpretation which adheres to the principle: that by Solomon and the Shulamite Christ and His Church are meant. This principle is the only point in question. Of this principle alone we speak when we talk about an allegorical or traditional interpretation; nothing but the acceptance of this principle we demand, as required by Scripture itself. Every interpretation which adheres to this principle, gives due consideration to text and grammar, and is in keeping with the analogy of faith, which we let stand untouched on its own merits. On the other hand, we can acknowledge no interpretation as competent which deviates from the above-mentioned principle: as, for instance, by having the Shulamite mean the individual believing soul, or the Jewish nation, or the Virgin Mary, or the human nature of Christ, etc., even though in certain things it may have something excellent to offer.

The Impossibility of the Literal Interpretation—The literal interpretation, in which we include also the typical, conflicts with the canonicity of *The Song of Solomon*, since it makes this Book, especially certain parts of it, simply unworthy of authorship by the Holy Ghost. Justly does Hengstenberg say in his *Auslegung des Hohenliedes*: “The description of bodily charms, even of plain nudities, as they are hardly touched upon in secular literature, stands out in a most offensive way in the literally interpreted *Song of Songs*. The whole thing is a collection of flirtations, some charmingly portrayed, others in bad taste. The boundary which separates Holy Scripture from secular literature has been shifted in an intolerable manner when *The Song of Songs*, interpreted literally, is still declared worthy of the Canon” (page 258).

The literal interpreters themselves can justify the canonicity of *The Song of Solomon* only by completely relinquishing its true concept. Ewald’s understanding of canonical writings he voices in his commentary, page 35, in the following words: “Holy Scriptures were to the collectors obviously national writings; and from this point of view it seemed quite proper after the Exile to receive this Song, which was already honored as a work of Solomon, into the Canon. And what could be found in the book that would make it unworthy to take its place beside the other Writings? Does it not convey and carry out an ethical idea? Where would you find vice defended therein?” Delitzsch subscribes to a similar definition of canonicity. He writes on page 8 of the commentary: “We are conscious of no prejudice which would make impossible an impartial estimation of the understanding as brought to the fore by Umbreit and Ewald. It satisfactorily declares the reception of the Book into the Canon because it has, thus understood, a moral motive and aim.” If that is all that is required for canonicity, then Shakespeare’s dramas, too, could be declared worthy of acceptance; for a little bit of ethical content could be squeezed also out of them.

The impossibility of the literal interpretation is evident, secondly, from this, that only by doing violence to both language and text will one be enabled to make any sense out of it at all. For one thing, the title of the Song itself obviates the literal interpretation. May the superscription have been placed by whomever it will, it is there; and to it, as Ewald points out, the Song owes its acceptance into the Canon. By the consensus of the best Hebrew scholars the title can have no other meaning than: the best, the noblest song, the crown of all songs. If “natural love” is really the theme of *The Song of Songs*, as the literal interpretation claims it is, then by virtue of the title a secular love song is exalted above all the songs and hymns of the Holy Scriptures.

The words, chapter 1:2–4, are ascribed to the Shulamite by Ewald, but attributed to the daughters of Jerusalem by Delitzsch, who calls them a “table-song of the women” (p. 21). Worthy of earnest consideration here is the remarkable change of number, abruptly from singular to plural. We read: “Let him kiss me,” verse 2; “Draw me,” verse 4, then suddenly: “We will run after thee”; “The King hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee,” verse 4. How do the literal interpreters come to terms with this noteworthy change of number? Delitzsch relies on his sensitive hearing, and says: “From the words with which a solo voice intones the first line: ‘let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth,’ one can at once detect that she who here speaks is but one of many who share Solomon’s kisses.” Ewald, on the other hand, lets the “virgins,” verse 3, be the Shulamite’s playmates and has her speak, now in her own name, now in the name of them all. But verse 4 does not fit such an understanding; for it reads: “Draw me after thee, we will run” (namely, flee out of the

palace). Therefore “we” must here mean the Shulamite and her absent lover. But while the literal explanation comes to grief right from the start, this change of number is strong proof of the allegorical interpretation. The Church can speak of herself either in the singular or in the plural number. Nothing could be more natural that that the Church, an idea unity, should be spoken of in the plural, since she does consist of many members.

In verse 7 the Shulamite suddenly speaks of Solomon as of a shepherd. Delitzsch manages to get himself out of this difficulty only by saying: “The country girl has no conception of the business of a king. In her simplicity she thinks of the calling of a shepherd as the noblest and best. She thinks of the shepherd of nations as the shepherd of sheep.” Such naiveté on the part of the Shulamite is astounding, but is far surpassed by the naiveté of the interpreter who makes this claim and expects it to be accepted. But how fitting for the allegorical interpretation! Christ is indeed both King and Shepherd. Detrimental to the literal explanation is, furthermore, the remarkable fact that the pronouns and verbs applying to the “daughters of Jerusalem” are invariably given in the masculine form (cf. 2:7; 3:5; 5:8; 8:4). Ewald simply ignores and skips the whole thing. Doepke merely exclaims: “Here again the *enallage generis!*” Graetz deals with these passages according to the principle which dominates his whole exposition. He says: “In the Song of Songs we have to contend with a corrupt text”; and he proceeds to correct here, as in many other places, the presumed mistakes. Delitzsch muses: “The *enallage generis* in the Song of Solomon belongs perhaps to the overlaying of the highly poetical by the vulgar.” To the allegorical comprehension of *The Song of Songs*, however, this *enallage generis* presents no difficulty. On the contrary: “This exchange of gender points to the fact that the daughters of Jerusalem are not real female individuals, and goes hand in hand with many another indication of the ideal characteristics of female personages which confront us in *The Song of Songs*” (Hengstenberg, p. 48). Then, too, much of the figurative language used in *The Song of Solomon* makes a literal understanding quite impossible. Read, for instance, chapter 7:2–5 and ask yourself whether these representations can really be understood as a description of a female individual. Impossible! These and other descriptions exceed all bounds and make sense only when applied to unbounded subjects, Christ and His Church. Other linguistic and grammatical impossibilities will be duly noted in our interpretation of *The Song of Songs*.

In the third place, the literal explanation contradicts all sound principles of psychology. It is unthinkable that a man like Solomon should ever have played such a pitifully absurd role as *The Song of Songs*, understood literally, has him play. And it is less imaginable that the Holy Ghost should let him appear in such a role, the same Holy Spirit by whose inspiration the holy Writer, I Kings 11:4, 6, reports with a sad heart: “His wives turned away his heart after other gods.... And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord; and went not fully after the Lord, as did David, his father.” According to a literal interpretation of *The Song of Solomon*, the Shulamite is also a psychological absurdity. That a simple country girl should compare her lover to an enormous quantity of exotic plants; that she should in all seriousness ascribe to him a golden head (where the hair is described as being black, chapter 5:11), an ivory abdomen; that a bride should rejoice and be glad at her bridegroom’s love with other maidens, and to desire him for a brother; that a “really pure virgin” should not merely have dissolute dreams, but should repeat them in minute detail—why, all this is simply inconceivable for a rational person. Therefore, even though *The Song of Songs* does not bear the superscription: “This book must be explained allegorically,” we can, nevertheless, see it written in the Song itself in practically every line. Yes, it is written therein so distinctly that people for centuries never understood it differently. Hengstenberg writes with reference to this point: “The allegorical interpretation is favored by the consensus of the Jewish Synagogues.... All Jewish witnesses which we know favor the allegorical interpretation, none speak against it. In a goodly number of Jewish testimonials it is expressly certified that no other explanation had ever occurred to them.” And with respect to the Christian Church he says: “In times when the Christian Church flourished and had a clear grasp on the meaning of Scripture it always rejected with horror the literal interpretation” (p. 256f.). In like manner Ewald concedes: “The oldest mode of explanation which we know and can trace is the allegorical, according to which not natural, but spiritual love is meant; not Solomon, the Shulamite, and a youth, but two unknown and unnamed persons yearn for a lasting union. Historically this allegorical interpretation can be traced no earlier than the third century after Christ; but among Jews and Christians it is fully developed by that time while the literal interpretation is unknown or held in contempt” (p. 30).

While thus the allegorical interpretation has the testimony of the Church of all ages in its favor, the most ancient defenders of the literal interpretation are all theologically people of doubtful reputation: Theodoret of Mopsuestia, Castellio, Grotius, Simon Episcopius; nor are the names of most of the newer exponents of literal interpretation any more commendable. On the whole, as Hengstenberg avers, the literal interpretation “came into vogue in the era of rationalism, in the time of the deepest humiliation of the Church of Christ, a period destitute of all good taste and bereft of all sound ecclesiastical judgment; and the one who first gave it status was J. D. Michaelis, the chief representative of Esau’s worldly-mindedness” (p. 259).

Meaning of The Song of Solomon—The purpose of *The Song of Songs* is to portray the immutable love and faithfulness of Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom, toward the Church. We are shown therein that this love is the same at all times; yes, and humanly speaking, only increases as often as the Church, out of weakness, does not conduct herself toward her Lord as a bride should demean herself toward her bridegroom. At the same time, it is pointed out how blessed the Church is in this love of Christ, even in times of great tribulation; and, conversely, how unhappy she feels when the Bridegroom, for salutary chastisement, temporarily withdraws from her the certainty of His love. Many subordinate ideas join themselves to this basic thought; they must, however, never be violently separated from the original concept.

Furthermore, *The Song of Solomon* has for want of a better expression an ecumenical character. The bride of *The Song of Songs* allegorically represents the Church among all nations and of all times. It is incorrect to find merely the destiny of the Old Testament Church, or even, as Hengstenberg holds, only specific times of the Old Testament Church, displayed in any given sections of the Song. Even though definite times of the Old Testament Church may have been the immediate occasion for this or that portrayal in *The Song of Solomon*, still these portrayals are idealized and therewith removed from history, which is always bound to some definite place and to some specific time. Thus one can apply the beautiful description, chapter 2:8–17, with equal justification to the Church after Saul’s death as after the first Christian Pentecost, or to the time of Constantine the Great or the Lutheran Reformation or the founding of our Synod. This is precisely the merit of *The Song of Songs*. The *summa summarum* of all Church History, general or particular, may be comprised in this word of the Savior: “A little while, and ye shall not see me: and, again, a little while, and ye shall see me.... Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy,” John 16:16, 20. This exchange of seeing and not-seeing, of sorrow and joy, of lamenting and rejoicing is in *The Song of Solomon* so amply set forth in a whole series of portrayals.

But what the Church experiences in her totality are, at the same time, also the life-experiences of the individual believing soul. She, too, comes to know the continual interchange of joy and sorrow. Now she lies in the dust, sighs and cries to God like a prisoner behind heavy iron bars:

Bow down Thy gracious ear to me
And hear my cries and prayers to Thee,
Haste Thee for my protection;
For woes and fear
Surround me here.
Help me in mine affliction.

My God and Shield, now let Thy pow’r
Be unto me a mighty tow’r
Whence bravely I defend me
Against the foes
That round me close.
O Lord, assistance lend me.

L.H., 524:2, 3 (Cf. 534:1)

This time of the Church's depression is soon succeeded by a time of joy restored by the Lord, when she, like the lark, flutters in the dawn of grace, mounts upwards, and sings:

My heart for joy is springing
 And can no more be sad;
 'Tis full of mirth and singing
 Sees naught but sunshine glad.
 The Sun that cheers my spirit
 Is Jesus Christ, my King;
 The heaven I shall inherit
 Makes me rejoice and sing.
 Be unto me a mighty pow'r

Thus, also the individual soul, depending upon the mood or state of mind she happens to be in, finds in the various parts of *The Song of Songs* her own thoughts and feelings expressed, hears in it her Friend and Bridegroom speak to her, and joyfully accepts the caresses of His unfathomable love.

Section I—Chapters 1:1–2:7¹²

The Shulamite, the Bride of the heavenly Solomon, had for a time withdrawn herself from her Bridegroom. She had let herself be deluded by strangers, had permitted herself to become entangled in the things of this world. This brought her into spiritual and bodily distress. But, when they are in trouble, they visit Thee, O Lord; they pour out a prayer when Thy chastening is upon them (cf. Isa. 26:16). In her affliction love's longing awakens mightily in the Shulamite; and, thinking of her rightful Bridegroom, she exclaims, verse 2: *Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth; for thy love is better than wine*. The consciousness of guilt makes the Bride shy. She therefore starts speaking in the third person: *Let him kiss me with kisses of his mouth*. She does not feel worthy of his full love; so her heartfelt desire is: "Let Him grant me to enjoy but a little of His former love, give me only one kiss of the many kisses of His mouth which He used to bestow upon me." But while the Bride sighs thus, the full excellency of her former love-relationship vividly comes to her mind. She therefore immediately continues in the second person, saying: *For thy love is better than wine*. With the Godwrought longing, *Let him kiss me!* the old relationship is again restored. True desire for God is faith itself. In this her longing she senses her Bridegroom's nearness; and so she addresses Him also as one present: *Thy love is better than wine*. She wants to say: "Thy love is better than the best the earth can offer. That person finds himself in a truly blessed state, who is intoxicated with the rich goods and gifts of Thy house—torn away from the world through the caresses of Thy love."

Once the memory of the Beloved has been aroused in the Bride the recollection of her former happiness comes vividly before her. Such recollections never follow one another in a logical order. Love does not operate with logic, neither does this Bride. Recalling the sweet endearments of her Beloved and reliving the rapture she then experienced, the Bride goes on to say, verse 3: *Because of the savor of thy good ointments* (rather, "As to odor, Thy ointments are good") *thy name is as ointment poured out, therefore do the virgins love thee*. Imagining herself in the Bridegroom's arms, her heart is quickened by the sweet scent of His ointments. This ointment, however, is not something different from the person of her Bridegroom as is the case with other people; no, He Himself according to His name is a poured-out ointment. All that He does and says, yes, everything that His name implies, sends forth the fragrance as of a costly perfume. From Him streams forth the savor of life unto life. The Bride has but to think of His name and she is immediately surrounded by the sweet

¹² The linguistic notes of the author, which introduce this section, have been omitted by the translator, the Rev. Paul W. Ludwig, Sr., 246 S. 2nd St., Decatur, Ind. 46733—Ed.

scent of a precious and exotic perfume.¹³ Now, even as the sweet scent of a precious ointment attracts, so also the odor of the name of Christ! *Because thy name is as poured-out ointment*, says the Bride, *therefore do the virgins love thee*. The Church, an ideal unity, is spoken of in the plural since she does consist of many members. The “virgins” are the individual members of the Church.¹⁴ The feminine is used because the Church is likened to a bride. The virgins, that is, the souls who have renounced the adulterous love and the sensual pleasures of the world, love this Bridegroom and find in His love the true life and full satisfaction.

The Shulamite has called to mind the time when she stood in the full enjoyment of her heavenly Bridegroom’s love. The remembrance thereof was so vivid that she addressed Him as one present and highly extolled His love. But now she returns to the realization that she is still parted from her Beloved, and therefore says, verse 4: *Draw me; we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee*. Note the change from singular to plural in this verse. The Church is a unit, however a body with many members; and so she can speak now in the singular, now in the plural. This sudden change in number, occurring frequently in *The Song of Songs*, has been a puzzle to the advocates of the literal interpretation, many of whom have run amuck in their thinking, as Goethe once said of the philosophers. *Draw me*, says the Bride, “tug at my heart and draw me with Thy heavenly love. I cannot come to Thee, except Thou first comest to me. But if Thou dost draw me, then we can and *will run after thee*. The King has already led me into His chamber, has chosen and called me to His glory. But of what good is the chamber to me, if He is not Himself there? As Thou hast called me unto Thy glory, so do also Thyself come to me. Not for the splendor and grandeur of Thy chambers, Thy palace, Thy heaven, but for Thee do I long! *Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee*, Psalm 73:25.¹⁵ In Thee will we be glad and rejoice; in Thy words of endearment will we glory more than revelers in their wine. He that is upright loves Thee, must love Thee.”

But how about the integrity of the Church? Thinking about this the Bride of the heavenly Solomon is moved to make a confession of her guilt. Trusting in His grace she says: *I am black but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Look not upon me because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me. My mother’s children were angry with me: they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept*, verses 5, 6. The “daughters of Jerusalem” of whom mention is made here, as also in chapters 2:7; 3:5, 10; 5:8, 16; 8:4, are, according to our opinion to serve only for the embellishment of the picture, without any thought of particular persons. Attempts have been made to see in them the angels, the peoples related to Israel, the peoples of the earth in general, the individual members of the Church, and the like. However, none of these interpretations seem to fit. We prefer to take them as a poetic elaboration of the picture without thinking of certain individuals. Expressed in prose, the thought would be about this: “Whoever looks at me, the Church, after the manner of my outward appearance in the world and judges according to carnal standards, is bound to find little in me that will please him.” In verse 4 it was said: *The pious, the godly, love Thee*. But outwardly the Church, the Bride of the heavenly Solomon, as she also confesses, does not look as if she were the pious and devout one, who dares to love the King of kings and hope to be loved by Him. According to her outward appearance she is black like the sun-burned, dust-laden, rain-coaked tents of Kedar.¹⁶ But inwardly, she is lovely as the “curtains of Solomon.” Despite her external swarthy, her frailty and sinfulness; despite her worn features which show the results of the vehemence of temptation and divers afflictions she is still a royal tent. *Es glaenzet der Christen inwendiges Leben, Wenngleich*

¹³ By the play on words *Sh'mekha—Shemen—Sh'manekha* the comparison becomes more pointed. In general *The Song of Songs* is replete with paronomasias.

¹⁴ Cf. Luther’s interpretation of Psalm 45:14.

¹⁵ Cf. hymn 429, vs. 1, in *The Lutheran Hymnal*—Translator’s footnote.

¹⁶ Hengstenberg *schreibt*, S. 13 *seiner Auslegung des Hohenlieds*: “*Die Kedarener sind ein arabischer Stamm. Von den Zelten der Araber sagt Troilo: ‘Sie haben schwarze Zelte von lauter schwarzhaarigen Ziegen.’ Diese dunklen und groben Zelte bieten einen melancholischen Anblick dar.*” (Hengstenberg writes, page 13 of his Interpretation of *The Song of Songs*: “The Kedarenes are an Arab tribe. Troilo describes their tents thus: ‘They have black tents made from their black-haired goats.’ These dark and crude tents have a melancholy aspect.”

*sic von auszen die Sonne verbrannt.*¹⁷ Within this Bride is lovely by virtue of the Bridegroom's love, righteous in His righteousness. "And you," the Bride goes on to say, "who find fault with my swarthinness—who is at fault? Is it not you, who are incensed at me? You children of my mother, you who were born and reared in my house, do not want to be satisfied with the beauty which my heavenly Bridegroom has bestowed upon me. You seek honor and prestige with men; you lust after the pleasures of this life. Thereby you have made me the keeper of strange vineyards, inveigled me into the business of this world so that I often neglect my own vineyard and fail faithfully to fulfill the task and execute the business to which I have been called."¹⁸

The Bride has confessed her guilt. The consciousness of guilt engenders the feeling of being separated from God. The unfulfilled Law forms a wall of partition. From behind this barrier of guilt and the Law the Church calls (verse 7) for her Savior. The picture changes. It is not so much God in the capacity as King but as Shepherd whom the Church desires in the consciousness of her guilt. Similar to the words David utters in Psalm 119: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Thy servant," (verse 176) the Bride says, in a more poetical form, verse 7: *Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon; for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?* "Kiss me," verse 2; "draw me," verse 4; "tell me," here in verse 7, is a *gradatio ad minus*. It is the begging of a sinner who feels his guilt and deems himself utterly unworthy. The Canaanite Woman finally wanted only the crumbs, the malefactor only to be remembered. "Though I am altogether unworthy of Thy love, oh, let me at least hear Thy voice once again! Give me a sign by which I can observe where Thou art, whom my soul loves. Let me not be disgraced before the flocks of Thy companions, the kingdoms of this world. 'My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?' " Thus the Bride implores and complains in her soul's distress.

To this begging of His beloved the Bridegroom prompted by His love must answer. He therefore says, verse 8: *If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents.* The Lord's answer contains Law and Gospel, reproof and comfort. "How is it," Jesus said to His parents, "that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" Luke 2:49. Similarly here: "If thou to thine own hurt know not where I am, it is thine own fault. Seek Me, but in the right place, and thou wilt find Me. Follow the tracks of the flock, the footsteps of the believers who have gone before thee: they will lead thee to the right spot. Feed thy flock next to the shepherds' tent-houses, that is, on the green pastures of My Word. In the Word thou wilt always find Me. That precisely is the cause of all thy trouble: thou hast not steadfastly continued in My Word. Return thither; occupy thyself diligently and faithfully with My Word, and thou hast found Me." To such earnest preaching of the Law, however, comforting Gospel is added. The very fact that He hears her voice, answers her entreating plea, shows that He will not reject her. Moreover, He gives her the title: *Thou fairest among women*. Despite her dark color He still thinks her beautiful. So He still loves her; for only the eyes of One whose heart is filled with perfect love can find such a lowly Bride, as the Church is of herself, beautiful.

But no sooner had the Bridegroom let His voice be heard again than He poured out His love-filled heart for His Bride. Verses 9–11: *I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots. Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, thy neck with chains of gold. We will make thee borders of gold with studs of silver.* The Bride had said, verse 7: "Let me not be made ashamed, as one disgraceful, graceful, before the flocks of Thy companions." To that the Bridegroom answers: "No; thou shalt not have to be ashamed. On the contrary, I liken thee unto the horses and chariots of Pharaoh. Despite thy lowly appearance thou art My

¹⁷ Cf. our Wisconsin Synod Gesangbuch, No. 407.

¹⁸ The very people within a church body who find much to criticize in the Church as it appears before them and who severely judge its shortcomings contribute extremely little toward relieving "the affliction of Joseph." On the contrary, they hinder the Church in the performance of its responsibilities and by their evident self-righteousness do not do honor to the Church. They are frequently the kind of people described in Romans 2:1. Cf. Dr. Stoeckhardt's *Roemerbrief*, p. 70f.

pride and My might. In thee, in thy babes and sucklings, have I ordained strength. As Pharaoh is proud of his cavalry and bestows great care on it, so art thou My deep concern, and I will adorn thee most beautifully.”¹⁹

By comparing His Bride to the mounted troopers of Pharaoh the Bridegroom had represented Himself as a King; for only kings and princes have military forces at their command. The Bride, therefore, now also speaks of Him as a King; she calls Him her Beloved even as He had just called her His love. She says, verses 12–14: *While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof. A bundle of myrrh is my well beloved unto me; he shall lie all night betwixt my breasts. My beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of Engedi.* “As long as the King sat at His table, that is, as long as He was present with His grace, providing me with food and drink, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof. Everything I had received from Him gladdened my heart and I took great pleasure therein.” The same picture is used here as we have Proverbs 9:1, 2, where it is said of divine and true Wisdom exhibited among men on earth: “Wisdom hath builded her house ... she hath mingled her wine, she hath also furnished her table.” The King had said in the preceding verse: “We will adorn thee most beautifully.” To this the Bride replies: “As long as Thou art at my side, the spikenard of Thy love gives forth a delightful fragrance; but without Thee all adornment is of no worth!” (Should a bride be forsaken by her bridegroom, then the items of adornment that she has received from him can bring her only sadness. But when he himself is present and assures her of his love, then her “spikenard,” that is, everything she has received from him, is extremely lovely in her sight.) Yes, as long as she feels herself secure in His love, her spikenard gives a sweet smell; for He is to her like a tiny sack of myrrh that she carries in her bosom and like a tuft of fragrant cypress blossoms. In short, He is to her the sum total of all joy and bliss. Paul Gerhardt expresses the same thought in verse 10 of his well-known hymn: *O Welt, sieh hier dein Leben* (No. 163 in our Wisconsin Synod *Gesangbuch*). It is also to be noted that the Bride makes comparison only with things that have intrinsic value, a value that is readily available to those who use them. As a precious ointment or a fragrant flower sends forth its fragrance to everyone and in doing so gives of itself, so the fragrance of an incomprehensible love flows from the Lord Jesus, wherever He is, a love that is His very being, for He is love. The longer we meditate on these comparisons, the more meaningful they become. Divine truth is never prosaic.

Upon this eulogy of the Bride, in which she does not with a single syllable give praise to herself but only to her Bridegroom, extolling His gifts of grace, the latter answers, verse 15: *Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves’ eyes.* Christ’s Bride is very pretty in the adornment which she has from Him and which is now truly hers, yes, is now credited to her as her own dignity and beauty. This is the loftiest expression of our God’s kindness that He not only extols His grace toward us, but also praises in us what must be credited solely to His grace. God delights in the beauty that is the sinner’s by grace. Who can fathom this mystery? His love for sinners is incomprehensible. “Thou hast doves’ eyes,” eyes of holy sincerity and purity.

The praise of the Bridegroom the Bride now returns in double measure, verses 16, 17: *Behold thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant; also our bed is green. The beams of our house are cedar, and our rafters of fir.* He is handsome in appearance and has a pleasing disposition. The conjugal love-relationship with Him affords her interminable happiness. This bliss will not fade, but always flourish. The heavenly Bridegroom, however, has many houses where He dwells with His Bride. These houses are the individual Christian congregations all over the world. All these houses are built of choice material, of cedar and cypress wood. In other words, each Christian congregation, insofar as it is a Christian congregation, consists purely of people, chosen, holy, and beloved of God. Considering all that the Bridegroom means to her, the Shulamite happily exclaims,²⁰ chapter 2:1: *I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.* Through Thee, my heavenly Bridegroom, I am elegant and lovely—as the lily; and, like her, I grow in the valleys, that is, am accessible to everyone and freely offer my gifts to all.

¹⁹ He says, verse 11: “I will bedeck thee with golden chains studded with silver ornaments.” Since He is using the picture of a cavalry, He continues with the metaphor and speaks of things with which kings used to decorate their horses and horsemen. By this, of course, spiritual adornment is to be understood. We cannot agree with those, however, who with Hengstenberg hold that *particular* spiritual gifts are to be understood. We on our part content ourselves with the words of hymn 183, stanza 3. in *The Lutheran Hymnal*.

²⁰ Many interpreters with whom we do not agree assign these words to Christ.

The Bridegroom not only confirms this comparison, but stresses the praiseworthiness of His Bride by placing her in contrast with others, verse 2: *As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.* He means to say: “For Me, thy Bridegroom, there is only one flower, and thou art it: thou white, humble, fragrant Lily of the Valley. True, there are many daughters, churches, who want to serve Me and gain My favor with all manner of work-righteousness, but I regard them all as thorn-bushes. They make a rank growth, take from thee air and light; but they have neither scent nor fruit, bear nothing but thorns of self-righteousness.” By this praise of her Bridegroom the heart of the Bride is enkindled to indite a new song of praise, verses 3–5: *As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting-house, and his banner over me was love. Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples; for I am sick of love. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me.* As with a child in a moment of extreme joy over a gift the speech becomes a monolog in the third person, so the Bride here speaks throughout of her Bridegroom in the third person. “My Beloved is like an apple-tree among the trees of the forest. From Him I derive not only shade and shelter, but also delicious, sweet-tasting fruit. Yes, He brings me to the banquet-hall, He intoxicates me with His love, He makes me drink with rapture and bliss. Oh, my heart cannot contain it, cannot endure it! His love is too great: it makes me ill, it bursts open my heart, it kills me. Help; help me! Fetch and bring whatever may serve as refreshment and strengthening for a sick one! But, no! No harm can come to me; for (verse 6): ‘His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me.’ ” The Bride has entered upon the highest enjoyment of love that she is capable of in this life, which also St. Paul has in mind when he writes, Ephesians 5:32: “This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” Delitzsch also remarks that this “sickness of love” has its parallel in the spiritual realm. God, indeed, often grants His children times when they may in a special measure taste and feel how good the Lord is (Psalm 34:9).

In this His Bride is not to be disturbed. “It is impossible but that offences will come; but woe unto him, through whom they come!” Luke 17:1. Yes, woe unto all who wantonly disturb the peace and quiet of the Church! Theirs will be a great responsibility! That is what the Bridegroom means to say in verse 7: *I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake, My love—tilt he please* (rather, “till it please her”).

Section II—Chapter 2:8–17

At the close of the first section the heavenly Solomon had commanded that no one awaken His Bride “until it please her.” What pleases Him pleases her. “What pleaseth God, that pleaseth me” (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, No. 529). The reverse is also true, “Hast thou not seen How thy desires all have been Granted in what He ordaineth?” Having granted the Church a time of peace and quiet, the Bridegroom Himself arouses her to renewed activity in the world. She has gained strength inwardly through the merciful gifts of His love and is, therefore, now capable of carrying out and fulfilling her mission call in wider circles. Such an awakening on the part of the Bridegroom does not disturb the Church, but redounds to its furtherance. The Lord extends the same call here, as in Isaiah 60:1: “Arise, shine!” The Bride hears the voice of her Beloved, who calls her to take up new work. And she has a vision of His approach. She says, verses 8, 9: *The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, showing himself through the lattice.* She hears Him, and sees Him traveling along swiftly and gracefully, like a gazelle; and, before she knows it, He is standing by the side of her home, looking in the window. Such spiritual occurrences transcend time and logic. Yes, the Church sees Christ approaching in the full vigor of His merciful power; He comes to visit her: to call her forth to enjoy the beauties which He has prepared, and to be active in His interest.

Having had the vision of His hasty coming the question immediately arose within the Bride as to the purpose of His coming. This implied question is answered by her Bridegroom, verses 10–14: *My beloved spake and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is*

heard in our land; the fig-tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell, Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely. The time of winter, of which it is said here that it is past, is, according to the context, not really a picture of a time of tribulation but of spiritual unfruitfulness. It is not until the next chapter that the Lord leads His Church into a specific season of sorrow and suffering. The world has passed through a period unfavorable for the work of the Church. Wars, political struggles, or other worldly affairs had engaged the minds of men. And so the Church could carry on her work only in a restricted sphere. But now a new and propitious time of grace dawned. God had permitted a spiritual spring-time to come over the land. Therefore the Church is now also to quit her inactivity and briskly go to work in new vineyards. To such service the Lord calls His Church with the gentlest and most appealing words, calling her, “My love, My fair one, My dove,” and praising her lovely form and sweet voice. He coaxes her with importuning and flattering words: *qumi lakhi ul'khi lakh* (arise and come along with me!) This might well serve all preachers as a model to teach them how they should encourage the Congregation of the Lord to all manner of service and labor in the kingdom of God.

Following up this kind of encouragement on the part of the Bridegroom, the Bride exclaims, verse 15: *Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.* These words the Church directs to her own members, particularly the teachers and preachers in her midst. As in the spring, with the reawakening of nature, all manner of pernicious insects appear, so also the coming of a spiritual springtime is usually attended by religious fanatics. Through these the devil seeks to thwart God’s design in granting a special time of grace. In such times the Church, therefore, has particular cause to concentrate on hindering the destructive work of false prophets. What a pity it would be if they should succeed in destroying the vineyards that are now in full bloom!

To this challenge: “Take us the foxes, that spoil the vines,” the Bride then adds, in verse 16: *My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies.* It might at first glance seem as if this verse did not fit into the context. But that is not so. It is just in this that the Church proves her fidelity to the Lord, that she “holds fast the faithful Word as she has been taught” (cf. Titus 1:9). “Ye are my friends,” Jesus says, John 15:14, “if ye do whatsoever I command you.” What the Lord, however, has commanded His disciples to do, and accordingly His entire Church, we read Matthew 28:20 and elsewhere. To “contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3), to fight for purity of doctrine, is not injurious to faith and love; but, on the contrary, is proof of their existence. The more sincerely and ardently an earthly bride loves her bridegroom, with the more profound indignation will she repulse the advances of another!

The Bride of Christ, the Church, is now busily at work: letting her sweet voice be heard through the preaching of the Gospel, and restraining all false prophets. In all her toil and labor she feels sure of her Savior’s love and gracious presence. He is with her, “pasturing His flock among the lilies” (RSV). Therefore she will also patiently wait for the time when the Lord shall lead her to the eternal marriage feast in heaven. Not by way of a demand but as giving permission she says, verse 17: *Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether* (Luther: *Scheidebergen*, mountains that separate us). Such a spiritual springtime, as described here, also our Church experienced, particularly in the days of her founding. At just that time there sounded the trumpet call of the youthful Lutheran Church in our land: “Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines; for our vines have tender grapes.” Just as the Church at large, so also have the individual Christian congregations each their special, spiritual springtimes. We cannot bring about such times; God must give them. Our task is to observe the signs of the time, so that we will not miss the opportune moment. For this, too, is the voice of the Beloved: “Work, while it is day!”

Section III—Chapter 3

This chapter is a unit which, however, has two distinct parts: the first covering verses; and the second, verses 6–11. The theme of the chapter is the Church, namely the suffering and militant Church on her march

through the wilderness of this world. Although the subject matter in both parts is the same, nevertheless the viewpoint from which it is being dealt with in each part is a different one. In the first part the Church is pictured to us as she appears to those who, as her true members, travel with her in the valley of affliction. In the second part, however, the inspired poet leads us to higher ground, as it were, and from this vantage point lets us view the Church's march through the wilderness of this world. According to this viewpoint, this march takes on a different appearance and that is what is being pictured to us in the two parts of the chapter. In the first part the Church speaks and tells what it feels like to be involved in war and suffering. However, she speaks as a personified unit in the name of her individual members. She speaks of the trials with which the individual believers are confronted in the heat and toil of the day. All the sighs and laments of the individual members of the Church are being summed up and placed into the mouth of the Church as an idealized individual.

In the name of all her members she says, verses 1–4: *By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways will I seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth? It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.* In the foregoing part the Lord had presented His Church with a new spiritual spring and had called her to work in the vineyards. Joyfully the Church had taken up the work and let her sweet voice be heard in the preaching of the Gospel. She also had taken great pains to ward off the false prophets. But now times have changed! In the wake of the beautiful spring, a hot, dry summer has followed. The crops that looked so promising in the spring now were a pitiful sight. Again it seemed as if the Church had labored and toiled in vain. Night has fallen in Zion. The lamps of many are smoking, or have already gone out. The oil of true faith is scarce. This troubles the Bride, the little flock of true children of God. She feels like an orphan in a strange, cold world. She does not know what to make of it that her glorious message and her faithful work are bearing so little fruit. She is often on the verge of losing confidence in the efficacy of the Word. In her trials she almost believes that the Lord has withdrawn from her and no more acknowledges her work. And so she sighs and laments time and again: "O Lord, look down from heav'n, behold And let Thy pity waken; How few are we within Thy fold, Thy saints by men forsaken" (Hymn 260). But the Lord does not seem to hear her. Upon her bed, in these nights of affliction, she seeks Him and apparently He does not want her to find Him. *I sought him, but I found him not.* She arises and walks about in the market-places and on the streets of the city, that is, she looks around in the crowd of those who laid claim to being the true Church, and hopes to find indications that He is among them "with His good gifts and Spirit." But everywhere she finds dead works, a spiritless piety, many kinds of offenses.

In her ardent search she is met by the city's watchmen, the teachers of the Church. Among them she hopes to find comfort for her great sorrow. She hopes they will help her to overcome her sore trial. She takes for granted that these watchmen know about the deplorable condition of the city of God, that they also share with her, the little flock of God's true children, the desire to establish the proper worship of God in spirit and in truth. Believing that the watchmen are being moved by the same thoughts which move her heart day and night, she abruptly puts the question to them: *Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?* But, alas, these watchmen have ceased to be true watchmen of the Church. They show no understanding of the Bride's deep sorrow. They deem it odd indeed that the Bride should search for God in the city of the true God. A mere outward churchliness is just to their liking; for then they can perform the functions of their office in a mechanical way and will be spared all worries and concerns of their office. They meet the Bride's query with silence. They regard such questioning as enthusiasm which one best of all passes by in silence. As a result, the small band of believers retreats more and more into the background. Off and on a believing soul sighs secretly with Elijah: "I, even I only, am left."

But the Lord has not utterly forsaken His Church; He permits Himself to be found by those who earnestly seek Him. The Bride declares: *It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth.* She again rejoices in the gracious presence of her beloved Bridegroom; experiences anew the truth of His promise: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20); and confidently lifts up her head and says: "I believe in the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints." And in this faith she

eagerly embraces Him and clings to Him with all her might. Her determined resolve is: *I would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house and into the chamber of her that conceived me.* She will now redouble her efforts to establish the true worship in her midst, among her people and in her congregation. She will no longer merely sigh in secret, but openly portray her Beloved before the eyes of all men as Him “who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption,” (I Cor. 1:30). This indication of loving zeal on the part of His Bride pleases the heavenly Bridegroom so much that He again (verse 5) grants her a period of refreshment, and with severe threats charges all her adversaries not to disturb her. (Text and interpretation of verse 5 as in chapter 2:7.)

Section IV—Chapters 4:1–5:1

In the first half of the preceding section we were given a very vivid picture of how the congregation of believers advances, through cross and suffering, toward her heavenly home; how individual members of the Christian Church often face such great trials that they begin to think the Lord has forgotten them and does not want to let Himself be found by them. But then we were also shown that the Lord in mercy again espouses the cause of His own, delivers them out of their trials, and grants them a time for rest and recuperation. In the latter half of that section the holy singer drew a beautiful picture of the homecoming of the believers after all their suffering and sorrow in this life. Our fourth section joins itself to the first half of the third chapter. The inspired poet therein further amplifies how exceedingly good the Lord is to His children, how He assures them of His love and grace, encourages and makes them willing to serve Him faithfully, and looks upon their works with pleasure. In keeping with *The Song of Songs* he does it in this way: that he lets the Bridegroom engage in a very endearing dialogue with His Bride, the first part of which we have here in verses 1–5: *Behold thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks: thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from Mount Gilead. Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing; whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them. Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely; thy temples are like a piece of pomegranate within thy locks. Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men. Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies.* With the exception of the addition “within thy locks” the wording of the first verse is exactly the same as that in chapter 1:15. These frequently occurring, literal repetitions indicate that *The Song of Songs* is a unit and does not, as has often been taken for granted, consist of different, individual poems and songs, which have no relation to one another. At the same time these repetitions (as eg. vs. 6) are the only sign by which one can recognize the speakers. Purely bodily excellencies are depicted in these five verses, namely, the beauty of the eyes, the hair, the teeth, the lips, the mouth, the forehead, the neck, and the breasts. The eyes are lovely to look at, as the eyes of doves. The hair is heavy and flowing as that of a herd of goats which is ascending the side of a hill. The teeth are perfect “like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins” (RSV). The lips are like a scarlet thread and the mouth is lovely. The forehead is smooth, without wrinkles, and of a white-reddish color, “like halves of a pomegranate” (RSV). The neck is massive but shapely “like the tower of David whereon hang a thousand bucklers” (RSV). The breasts offer a lovely sight “like two fawns, twins of a gazelle that feed among the lilies” (RSV). The portrayal of all these physical excellencies is, of course, to be understood in a spiritual sense; for the Church is not a real, but an ideal woman.

In interpreting the various illustrations one has to keep in mind that it is necessary to differentiate between the illustration as such and what has been added for the sake of embellishment. Otherwise one is in danger of losing the actual point and misunderstanding the comparison. One also has to be very careful not to draw far-fetched and forced comparisons so as not to let the whole interpretation become a mere arbitrary exercise of the imagination. In the whole wide world there are hardly two objects which do not have something in common. Still this is no reason why it is possible to compare one object with any other. Wood is a very useful object and the same can be said of water. Still it would be absurd to make wood an image of water and vice versa. Therefore we regard it as an arbitrary and absurd interpretation to compare the hair with “the most

distinguished members of the church,” or to apply the teeth to “the teachers and preachers,” who, as it were, first of all masticate the spiritual food, and rightly divide the word of truth. The same would be true if one wants the neck to portray “the sacred divine Scripture,” upon which Christ is united with the Church as with His spiritual body. In interpreting figures of speech we also hold to the principle that the Scripture interprets itself. When such an interpretation is wanting, we prefer to refrain from an interpretation of such an illustration, instead of making use of one far-fetched.

As to the illustrations used in verses one to five, the text itself strongly indicates how they are to be interpreted; for the Bridegroom comprises the sense of it all in these words: *Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee* (v. 7). What is meant thereby the holy Apostle sets forth clearly and plainly, Ephesians 5:25–27: “Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” So the paragraph in question obviously pictures to us the purity, holiness, glory, and spotlessness of the Christian Church, in short, the beauty that God’s grace bestowed upon her. Every interpretation of these comparisons, which is not in accordance with them, is in our opinion trifling and harnesses the understanding and appreciation of *The Song of Songs*. If on the contrary we hold to this that in these comparisons the Church is presented to us in all her beauty with the grace of God bestowed upon her, it should not be too difficult to give each feature of the general picture a correspondingly correct interpretation. Then the portrait of the Church would look about like this: Her eyes are like those of a dove (vs. 1b). Hers is a singleness of heart and constant faithfulness toward her Bridegroom. Her hair is like a herd of goats that moves down from Gilead (vs. 1c). An abundance of spiritual blessings in heavenly treasures is poured out upon her. Through these numberless spiritual treasures, gifts, and benefits she is adorned as magnificently as a young maiden is embellished and made beautiful by a luxuriant abundance of hair. Her teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes which come up from the washing and bear twins (vs. 2); her lips are like a crimson thread and her mouth is lovely (vs. 3a). That is, her word, her message, is true and pure, “no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate (Isa. 34:16). It is a sound and wholesome doctrine which she proclaims, and it is presented in a form that is attractive and appealing; all her speech, uttered with wisdom and tact, is “like apples of gold in the framework of silver” (Prov. 25:11). Her forehead is smooth and of a white-reddish color, like a piece of a pomegranate (vs. 3b). She has an eternal youth; on the Church, this heavenly Bride, you see no wrinkles, nor detect other signs of approaching old age and atrophy. Her neck is like the tower of David with its armory, whereon hung the shields of many valiant men (vs. 4). She presents a majestic bearing and appearance. Around her neck she wears weapons and emblems of victory in many battles. There hang the shields of Moses and the Prophets, the Apostles and Evangelists; the shields of many thousand martyrs; that of an Athanasius, an Augustine, a Luther, and of many, many other heroes of Israel. Above all else, however, her beloved Bridegroom Himself, the mighty Champion of the tribe of Judah, has slung His battle and victory emblem around her neck, and to this sign of Golgotha given her the promise: *In hoc signo vinces*. But, though the Church offers a majestic and warlike appearance, she is nevertheless of a motherly, peaceful disposition. That is proven and shown by her breasts, which are like twin roes feeding among the lilies (vs. 5). She is not at all imperious; she does not seek after worldly might. On the contrary, her only ambition is to take all poor sinners to her tender breasts and to nourish them with the sincere and unadulterated milk of salvation. In short, that is the picture of the Church, painted in quick strokes, as presented in these five verses. It is indeed a lovely, highly instructive, and extremely comforting portrait. It shows us what a glorious appearance the Congregation of poor but pardoned sinners has in the eyes of God. But it also holds before our eyes the ideal which we, as members of the Church, must ever seek to strive after.

This description of her beauty on the part of her Bridegroom moves the Church to make this solemn vow, verse 6: *Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense*. Chapter 2:17 shows that these are the words of the Bride. There the grammatical construction requires that the words be attributed to the Bride. It is a characteristic of *The Song of Solomon* to put certain modes of expression into the mouth of the same person. Only as words of the Bride does this verse seventeen fit into the context and truly make sense. Therefore we also do not doubt that the words of verse six

are words of the Bride. This verse contains, as we have already said, a solemn pledge of the Church. The Church promises her heavenly Bridegroom to the end of days to remain true to her calling and to preserve her beauty for the sake of her own salvation. The meaning of verse six is so apparent that even Delitzsch remarks: “Without having any desire to allegorize we dare not omit the remark that the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense remind one of the temple, where the incense of myrrh and other spices was offered up to the Lord, Exodus 30:34ff.” *Har hammor* is perhaps an intended allusion to *har hammoriyah* (II Chron. 3:1), the mountain of the vision of God. At any rate, “mountain of myrrh” and “hill of frankincense” are fitting names for a place where one communes with God in devout meditation and prayer. As to content, the Bride says about what David voices (Ps. 119:32): “I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.”

The Bride’s vow makes her appear even more beautiful in the eyes of her Bridegroom, so that He, summarizing His former praise of her, calls out to her: *Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee* (vs. 7). But the Bride is still sojourning in an evil, hostile world. The hills and heights, the dens of lions and leopards (vs. 8) are symbols of hostile forces. From out of this malicious world Christ calls His Church whom because of her vow (vs. 6) He here for the first time calls Bride. In verse 8 He says: *Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions’ dens, from the mountains of the leopards.* Twice He says: “with me.” That is an indication how this coming away from, this separating one’s self from the world, can alone be done, namely, through Christ, through the faith in Christ. We are not dealing here with a local, physical separation. Truly to follow Christ is a spiritual thing, a matter of the heart. If it required bodily separation, then the Christians would have to leave the world. Out of that sort of erroneous notion emanated monasticism, and from it stems all separatistic pietism to this very day. No, whoever is with Christ, united with Him by faith, is also *eo ipso* separated from the world. Such a one can and will no longer be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, but will come out from among them, and be separate (II Cor. 6), and will have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5). By every association with the children of the world that exceeds the civic, occupational, and social intercourse demanded by love of the neighbor the Christian’s relationship to Christ is endangered and his God-given beauty sullied. To the worldly-minded Christendom of our day this exhortation of the Bridegroom: “With me, with me, away from the world,” can, therefore, not be published loudly enough.

To give emphasis to His earnest admonition, Christ further says to His beloved Bride, verse 9: *Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck.* “As pious children,” to quote from the *Berleburger Bibel*, “can by their obedience, love, and pleasing demeanor steal their parents’ heart, even so do the children of God win the heart of the Lord Jesus when they with the eyes of faith look to Him in all that they do and leave undone.” Calling attention to a specific feature, “with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck,” is psychologically correct. It is usually a specific feature, a single glance, and the like by which love is awakened in a human lover. On the basis of such a specific feature he judges the disposition and personality of his beloved. This common experience of the human lover underlies the above-named specific features. Here, in fact, they are of far greater importance. For no adornment, no virtue, nor any work of the Church can be severed from faith, which is the common ground for all that is truly good. Whatever, therefore, of true excellence is found in a child of God, even though it appear ever so insignificant, is proof and evidence of faith and, as it were, wins over God’s heart.

The Bridegroom, inflamed to new love by one look from the eyes of His Bride, further praises her loveliness in the words of verse 10: *How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices!* The sundry manifestations of her love for Him (thus we translate the plural *dodayik*)²¹ the Bridegroom esteems more highly than does the reveler his wine. All her works are, as Paul states, Philippians 4:18, “an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God.” They offer proof that she, the heavenly Bride, is anointed with the heavenly oil, the Holy Ghost. But Christ here uses nearly the same words which the Church employed, chapter 1:2, 3, to extol His excellency. This implies that whatever the Lord finds well-pleasing in the Church she does not have of herself, but is given

²¹ The Septuagint here has, as in other passages, *mastoi sou*, which Luther translates *deine Brüste* (your breasts).

her by Him. Just as the sun alone produces all colors and, in the final analysis sees only itself in the beautiful, varied color scheme of every flower, even so is each and every splendor of the believers one of grace, and stems alone from Christ, the Sun of Grace. He sees in them only His own glorious beauty, but speaks of it as originally and properly belonging to them. So dearly does Christ love His Church; so closely has He embraced every believer in His heart.

The following verse brings into prominence a specific trait of the Bride which is particularly pleasing to the Bridegroom. We read in verse 11a: *Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue.* Since reference was already made to the Church's doctrine and preaching in verses 2 and 3, we here think particularly of prayer. Prayer drips from her lips when she speaks with her mouth; but even when her mouth does not speak, prayer is found under her tongue. The Spirit ever makes intercession for the believers with groanings which cannot be uttered. In spirit the believers pray without ceasing, sing, and make melody in their heart to the Lord. Saying, "Abba, Father," is an essential attribute of all true children of God. Their whole life is in reality a life of prayer. Their praying consists not really of individual acts only, but is rather a condition given together with their child-relationship to God. David says in Psalm 63: "I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches. My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me." Yes, even in sleep the believing soul's communion with God is not interrupted. What the Bridegroom finds under the tongue of His Bride is honey and milk. In other places of Scripture the Word of God is likened to honey and milk. So it is really His Word that is under her tongue. Just as children here on earth speak the language of their parents, even so do God's children speak the language of their Father in heaven. As to its content, every prayer uttered in faith, every true confession, is nothing else than God's Word, a stammering and lisping of that which God has spoken and which He teaches His children to speak. Our present verse (11b) contains this additional praise: *The smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.* Garments are used in Scripture as a symbol both of the righteousness of faith and of the righteousness of life. And since verse 7 already touched on the righteousness that is ours by faith, we take the garments here, in connection with prayer, to represent the believers' righteousness of life, their holy, God-pleasing conduct. Their pious, honest, and upright walk exudes as pleasant an odor as that which emanated from Lebanon, a picture that Hosea uses, when he says of Israel (chap. 14:6): "His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon."

In the following verses the picture changes. The Bridegroom now likens His Bride to a garden. This change ought not at all surprise us, for the simple reason that no single illustration can fully do justice to the many-sided characteristics of the Church. That is why in Scripture the Church is compared to many things. Here the emphasis is on the vitality and fruitfulness of the Church, and for that purpose he hits the idea of a garden. Verse 12: *A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.* First of all, the point is stressed that the Church is His, the heavenly Bridegroom's, garden. "Thou art my inclosed garden." He means to say: I surround thee as with a wall. I protect thee against all intruders. And thou wouldst want to admit no stranger, but remain My enclosed garden. In the midst of the world, amid the mass of unbelievers, the Church manifests herself as a closed-off garden of the Lord. She is the Communion of Saints, among whom is not found a single hypocrite or ungodly person. She acknowledges only One as her Gardener and Lord; she neither bows to the will and command, nor gives heed to the voice, of any other. For Him who planted her she grows and thrives, for Him she bears her fruits. But for the successful growth of a garden an appropriate water supply is an absolute necessity. And such a well-irrigated garden is the Church. She is planted by the rivers of water. And just as she is a unique garden, so she also boasts a matchless water, a water that can be drawn from no natural Jacob's well. It is the life-giving, life-sustaining grace of her heavenly Bridegroom; and the fountain in which this water flows is His Word and Sacrament. This heavenly, gracious water of life flows nowhere save in the Church—*extra ecclesiam nulla est salus*—so she is called "a shut-up spring, a sealed fountain." This—water makes the Church fruitful; wherefore also the fruits she bears are "pleasant fruits" (vs. 13). Already in the earliest days of the Christian Church, as soon as she began in greater measure to manifest her regenerating power in the decaying heathen-world, men outside of the Church imitated her works of charity. Also in our day people make the boast that more active love is to be found among children of the world and lodge-men than

among Christians. But all fruits that have not drawn their sap and strength from the “shut-up spring and sealed fountain” are not truly “pleasant fruits,” but nothing more than wild knobs of selfishness.

There now follows a wonderful description of the Church’s fruitfulness. We read, verses 13–15: *Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices. A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.* This is certainly a vivid portrayal of the spiritual vigor, and fruitfulness of the Church. But let us refrain from trying to discover anything more in the picture. We deem it foolish to attempt to interpret the individual fruits here mentioned and to apply them to specific virtues and works of the believers. In its totality the picture is beautiful; but when you make application of the details, it becomes insipid. The Church is like a fruitful garden in which all manner of fruits flourish; she is, as Paul puts it, Philippians 1:11, “filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.”

In response to this praise of the Bridegroom, the Bride exclaims, verse 16: *Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.* The words: “Let my beloved come into his garden, etc.,” can, of course, be spoken only by the Bride; and since the punctuation in the Hebrew text points to the homogeneity of the two parts of this verse, we take the whole as words coming from the Bride. One might understand the north wind and the south wind to represent sorrow and trial. But we deem it fully sufficient to let the Bride simply say this to her own Beloved: “May the sweet fragrances of my garden surround Thee, my heavenly Bridegroom. Yea, do come into Thy Garden and eat of its pleasant fruits. Grant me Thy gracious presence; and let all my doing and forbearing please Thee. Walk in the garden of Thy Church on earth as Thou walkest among the saints in heaven, and soon turn our believing into seeing.”

To this invitation the Bridegroom replies, chapter 5:1: *I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.* Christ gives His Church the promise: “I am coming into My garden.” He gave this promise to the Church of the Old Covenant, and fulfilled it by His coming in the flesh. This promise He gives also to the New Testament Church, and will fulfill it by His coming to Judgment. But this coming of the Lord, which is spoken of here, must not be applied exclusively to His first and second visible appearing. Also then we can speak of a special coming apart from His usual coming in the Word when Christ grants His Church special times of revival. The latter is a coming different from the former not in kind and manner, but in intensity. So also the individual Christian has times in which he experiences a special coming of Christ; these often are times of great sorrow. The heavenly Bridegroom comes into His garden and finds refreshment there. But this refreshment is mutual. When the heavenly Gardener comes into His Garden, He brings refreshment to those who go to make up His Garden, namely, the believers. These very ones who in their entirety form the Garden are being addressed as “my friends,” and are invited to eat and to drink. The Church, an ideal unity, is actually composed of a great number of parts. To this Church He comes for refreshment and at the same time He invites all her members to partake of this refreshment by rejoicing in His grace. Without doubt Isaiah 55 is based on this passage: “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Harken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.” On the whole we find the imagery and the thoughts of *The Song of Songs* reflected everywhere in the writings of the Prophets and of the New Testament. Even though *The Song of Songs* were removed from the Canon, its substance would still remain in the Scripture.

Section V (First Half)—Chapter 5:2–7

In regard to this section, Hengstenberg in his interpretation of *The Song of Songs* has this to say: “We here have one of the most important sections of the Old Testament before us, a worthy counterpart of Isaiah 53.

Till now love was predominant. The daughter of Zion rejoices and shouts that her King is coming to her (Zech. 9:9; Matt. 21:9). Now a dark scene sets in. Now Solomon has a vision of what the Apostle Paul sets forth as a result of the historical development: *The election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded* (Rom. 11:7). Solomon likewise foresees that which still was a mystery and an object of prophecy even for the Apostle, namely *that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved* (Rom. 11:25, 26).²² Having then followed this up with the statement that the Jews at the bottom of their hearts still “had a certain sensitivity and susceptibility,” that the “heart still wakes” (cf. *The Song of Solomon* 5:2), Hengstenberg continues: “In Luke 12:35–37 the Lord says: ‘Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding, that when he cometh and knocketh, they will open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the lord, when he cometh, shall find watching.’ ” With respect to these words of our Savior, Hengstenberg says: “We have here an unmistakable reference to the situation before us. What the Lord requires and asks of His own, stands in open contrast to the Shulamite’s behavior: when the Bridegroom came and knocked, she did not open unto Him immediately; instead of having her loins girded about, she had taken off her clothes; the Bridegroom found her not watching and waiting for Him—but fast asleep.” In this allusion we have an indication of the fact that everywhere where in *The Song of Songs* we have a special reference to the daughter of Zion, we also have a more extended reference and meaning.

On the strength of this extension the first parallel as the actually intended meaning of the passage in question is being dropped. We regard it as altogether wrong if one wants to find very definite destinies and conditions of the Old Testament Church pictured or prophesied in *The Song of Songs*. Despite all efforts the picture in no case corresponds to the respective historical period of the Old Testament. Such an historical exegesis results in a distortion of the picture and of that which has been pictured, i.e., of the text and of that to which one endeavors to apply the text. Hengstenberg offers us striking examples of such a distortion almost on each page of his book. On the contrary, *The Song of Songs* describes conditions which have their parallels in the whole earthly existence of the Church as well as of individual congregations and of single Christians. Whatever it pictures to us there in divers illustrations has throughout the years, in the life of the Church, repeated itself again and again, and will continue to do so to the end of time. And that applies particularly to the section under our present consideration. Upon times of religious revival, of spiritual agility and activity there have, in the Church in general as with individual congregations and Christians in particular, always followed times of languor and inertia. The word: “Their eyes were heavy” (Matt. 26:43) finds general and specific application again and again. For that very reason the Scriptures so diligently admonish all Christians not to become weary, sluggish, and sleepy, but to arise from sleep, to be alert, sober, and vigilant. And where can you find a better lesson teaching preparedness and readiness for the Lord’s coming than in the parable of the Ten Virgins, Matthew 25?

In the previous section we were given a picture of vigorous, spiritual activity in the Church. The Church was likened to a well-watered garden in which all manner of precious fruits flourished and grew. The Gardener Himself walked among the fruit trees of His garden, and was refreshed by its exquisite fruits. But now follows a different time, a time of spiritual indolence and drowsiness. The Bride says, verse 2a: *I sleep, but my heart waketh*. This spiritual sleep does not as yet constitute spiritual death. There is still a little life and conscience left. The Bride still speaks. The condition pictured here is similar to that of a nurse who becomes drowsy on night duty. She tries to fight sleep, but by and by she yields to the extent that she sits back comfortably and closes her eyes. Her sense of duty still wrestles with sleep: ever so often she is startled into consciousness, and says to herself: “No, I haven’t fallen asleep; I’m still awake, at least enough so that I will hear the slightest movements of the patient.” That such a state of drowsiness, if not immediately overcome, will quickly turn into sound sleep is obvious and is known to many a one through personal experience. That is the very condition described here. The Church, the individual congregation, or single Christians, are severely assailed by sleep.

²² As to the correct exegesis of this passage, vide D. Stoeckhardt, *Roemerbrief*. Hengstenberg namely finds in 5:2 of *The Song of Songs* “the basis for the promise, that at some future date all of Israel, the people at large will be saved” (cf. *Das Hohelied Salomonis* ausgelegt von E. W. Hengstenberg, Berlin, 1853, p.135).

Those in question notice it too and reproach themselves; but often enough these reproaches soon dwindle down to mere excuses, and so one falls into a state of self-delusion. This is best illustrated in the individual Christian; the application to a congregation or to the Church at large can readily be made. The matter stands thus: the Christian has begun to get tired; sleep presses down his eyelids. He also is aware of it. He tells himself ever and again: “You are not as energetic and zealous anymore as you used to be. You no longer strive for sanctification with your former eagerness. The matters pertaining to the kingdom of God do not find priority with you anymore. You are negligent as pastor, teacher, layman in doing the work of the Lord. You lack the right zeal, the proper faithfulness, conscientiousness, and joy which a child of God ought to exhibit.” Sad to say, very often these first remonstrances of conscience go unheeded. One begins to make all manner of excuses and to pass over these matters in pure self-deception, saying: “I have already borne my part of the burden and heat of the day. In the thing of chief importance I am, thank God, not lacking: I have the pure doctrine, I stand in the faith, ‘my heart waketh.’ ” If there are many like this and the number of such increases who thus sink into spiritual drowsiness, then this becomes the condition of an entire congregation, of many congregations, yes, of the whole Church. Outwardly there may still be some appearance of spiritual life; but the omniscient God pronounces upon such a church-body the sentence: “I know thy works, that thou hast the name that thou livest, and art dead” (Rev. 3:1).

This, then, is the condition of the Bride, as described in the opening verse of Section V. Now, in the midst of her slumbering period, the Bridegroom comes. The Bride hears how He knocks at her door with His Word. She says, verse 2b: *It is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.* The Bridegroom comes to her with very endearing words; but, at the same time, also in a state which does not please her, the drowsy, debilitated Bride. He Himself offers his state as the reason for requesting admittance: *My head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.* He comes as a night wanderer. He is wet to the skin from the chilly dampness of the Palestinian night, and shivers from the cold. To receive Him would entail many an inconvenience, much labor and suffering, for the Bride. She had rested so comfortably and taken her ease, and was disturbed by no one. Even the children of the world were pleased with her and had established themselves in her house. What would they say if she all of a sudden admitted a drenched night-wanderer, and acknowledged Him as her beloved Bridegroom? The Bride deliberates upon the matter. She doesn’t flatly say, “No!” to her Bridegroom, standing without and knocking. That wouldn’t do. She cannot before all the world renounce her Bridegroom. Such resoluteness would make too much of an uproar. Firmness in either the one or the other direction is offensive to most people. As men, on the one hand, hate a determined Christianity: so they also, on the other hand—especially in good society—detest vulgar rationalism. Religiosity? Certainly! But, by all means, not religion! Churchliness? Certainly! But, by all means, no firm testimony, in word and deed!

Similarly the Bride here gives no decided answer; she just cannot gear herself up to make a definite confession. She doesn’t at all address directly her Bridegroom or anyone else. And that is also a sign of sleep-induced numbness that one does not want to speak up. What the Bride now says, she says to herself; and she does not wish that her Bridegroom hear it, being totally unmindful of the fact that He understands her thoughts afar off. Her monologue goes like this, verse 3: *I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?* These words express not only the effeminacy and indolence that was hers, but also the deep-seated conviction that she, the Bride, in her present state and condition, is no longer a suitable match for her Bridegroom. If she asked Him in, received Him as He is; in other words, if she again professed loyalty to every Word of God, and insisted that in her midst every Word of Scripture be once more given unqualified obedience, then her comfortable rest would be over with; then trouble, work, and conflict would become the order of the day; yes, then she would defile herself in the eyes of all hypocrites and children of the world.

While the Bride is engaged in this monologue, the following happened, as she herself relates, verse 4a: *My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door.* The Bridegroom tried to push back the bolt that was on the inside by putting His hand through a small opening right above the door-lock. She sees His hand, the hand which had already done so much for her, yes, had so often lain under her head and pressed her to His heart, chapter 6. So she continues, verse 4b: *And my heart was thrilled within me* (RSV). The sight of this hand

awakened in her all the former blissful experiences, but at the same time also made her extremely conscious of the fact that she was no longer what she used to be. Therefore in a feeling of mingled fright and joy her heart was thrilled within her.

Now she is fully awake, she herself tells us (vs. 5): *I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet-smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock.* To this Hengstenberg remarks: “She wishes not merely to go to meet the Bridegroom, but has also worthily prepared herself to receive Him.” And the *Berleburger Bibel* has this comment: “These heavily perfumed ointments are best understood as the savor of the works of penitence and faith, with which she wanted to demonstrate to the Bridegroom the sincerity of her love.” Other allegorical commentators give a similar interpretation. But if this interpretation is correct, if the Bride had indeed already attained to such rich “works of repentance and faith,” it is hard to perceive why the Bridegroom (*vide* vs. 6) hurriedly departs. Surely the Savior of sinners is otherwise never in the habit of fleeing from a truly penitent sinner. We have a different understanding of the abovementioned heavily perfumed ointments, which, in our opinion, fits better into the context and generally makes the whole scene much more meaningful.

When we look at the Bride as she displays herself in verse 5, it must be obvious that the ointments are applied heavily: they drip from her hands and fingers. Besides, it isn’t at all said that she undertook an anointing before opening to her Beloved, that she (as Hengstenberg would have it) first “worthily prepared herself to receive Him.” No—compare the text!—just as she arises to open the door, the ointment drips from her hands and fingers. We, therefore, do not interpret this ointment as the genuine ointment of repentance, faith, and love, but as a certain unctuous fluid which outwardly resembles real ointment and is only too often called that and considered as such. Just in times of greatest decline the Church has abounded in excellent organization, pompous church services, “unctuous” talk, showy works of charity, and the like. How, for instance, also in our time, the hands and fingers of the Roman Church and many others drip with this “unction”! (Prayer among the sects has all too often become a mere opening ceremony. Whenever a meeting of a purely civic or political nature involving all sorts of people is held, as a rule some member of the cloth has to give the invocation and another the benediction. *Der Lutheraner* (Vol. 64, p. 39) gives us a glaring example of this out of the General Synod. Such a state of outward churchliness, the so-called practical Christianity—while inwardly unbelief, doubt, so-called science, and worldliness have nearly destroyed all life—seems here to be pictured. Just as the Bride, the Church, having awakened from her sleep, arises, that is, as the lit fie flock that was not yet dead in her outward communion begins to stir and seeks to exert its influence, just then it becomes particularly manifest how great her ruin, how deep her fall. To adduce a more recent example to illustrate the thought: When *Der Lutheraner* nearly 64 years²³ ago began its course through the lands, it became evident to thousands of believing souls what corruption had held sway in the Lutheran Church; then many, who had thus far comforted themselves with the outward aspect, the ostentatious organization, of the German State Church, and so forth, came to realize that this sort of thing did not constitute the right kind of ointment. (Cf. Esra 9:10; Neh. 8:9.)

The Bride has arisen to open to her Beloved. And since she herself makes mention of her very costly anointing, we may assume that it was not of the right sort. Otherwise her mention of it would of course amount to self-praise. As she, therefore, finally opens the door to admit her Bridegroom, He is gone! Verse 6: *I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake; I sought him, but I could not find him: I called him, but he gave me no answer.* The Lord deals with the Bride here just as we read Revelation 3:17ff. There He charges the Church of the Laodiceans: “Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked,” and then adds: “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous, therefore, and repent.” Even so the Lord here rebukes and chastens His Bride who had become so worldly, so sluggish and drowsy. He hides His gracious presence from her. She should come to realize how wretched and miserable and blind and naked she is without Him. She should also learn to know the true character of those whom she had hitherto looked upon with great pride as the watchmen of her walls (cf. vs. 7). Now that her Beloved is gone,

²³ This was written in 1908.

she recalls the full impact of His words on her. When He with such tender and endearing words had asked for admittance, her “soul failed,” (vs. 6) that is, her breath left her, her heart tightened up within her, as though squeezed in a vise. Now that it all comes back to her she can’t, for the life of her, understand how it was possible that she didn’t open to Him immediately. Now she feels deep contrition—not too late, but late indeed. Now she becomes fully aware of what heartache it brings when one neglects the opportune hour of grace. Now she seeks Him, and does not find Him; she calls Him, and He does not answer. Indeed, Lord, “in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them” (Isa. 26:16).

In this wretched state the watchmen come upon the Bride. Verse 7: *The watchmen*²⁴ *that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me.* In times of spiritual awakening it has happened again and again that especially the watchmen, that is, the various officials of the Church, in their majority, were the very ones who vigorously opposed such new, Spirit-wrought awakening. “Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?” the Pharisees exclaimed triumphantly (John 7:48). And this attitude of the “rulers” has in the course of Church history—just to mention the time of the Lutheran Reformation—repeated itself time and again in similar fashion. In such times their true character as “wolves in sheep’s clothing” becomes manifest. Thus the small body of believers found itself completely deceived. But that’s the way it has to come. All trust in men, in ecclesiastical offices and honors, and whatever other chaff there be, must utterly be gone before Christ can again be to His own what He should be and would be to them. The founders of our Synod, too, experienced this. With reference to it Walther writes in *Der Lutheraner* (Vol. 9, p. 1): “Just as we Saxon clergymen were on the point of establishing here a Church, patterned after the false, Roman principles which we then held concerning the Church, its office and authority,” the hypocrisy of our leader became manifest. “With this discovery it soon was evident that our faith had, to a large extent, been founded upon human authority and not solely on the Word of God. We now began to subject to a thorough examination what we had thus far regarded as being truly and genuinely Lutheran, and behold, with amazement and dismay we recognized” where we had drifted. “God granted us grace ... so that we wholeheartedly returned” to the true doctrine of the Lutheran Church.

The Bride was ill treated by the watchmen, “the keepers of the walls,” who were given her for her protection and her defense. While she just in general terms states “they smote me, and wounded me,” she does give special emphasis to one part of their maltreatment: They “took away my veil from me.” That was the greatest hurt that they could inflict upon her: they robbed her of the mark of her station as bride. In this way these “keepers of the walls” treat the Bride; that is, these well-fed prelates, these dignitaries of the Church, deny to the newly awakened little group of believers the right to call themselves a church. Expressions such as the following are then used: “This people who knoweth not the law are accursed” (John 7:49). We—we are the Church. They are a disorderly crowd without any learning or standing. Where is your call? Who gives you the right to take up a position over against us? Your complaint, your zeal, your contending for the “pure doctrine,” as you say, is nothing but fanatical enthusiasm. This means to take away the veil from the Bride. And how nicely Satan, who hides behind these “keepers of the walls” and works through them, knows how to deal with the individual Christian, also without “keepers,” every Christian experiences more or less. The temptation: “Are you really God’s child?” (cf. Matt. 4:3), is still one of the chief temptations of the wicked Arch-enemy.

We cannot close this first half of the Fifth Section in a more fitting manner than with the words of Christ, John 7:33, 34 and 8:21, which contain an apparent allusion to our present passage. There Jesus says to the Jews: “Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me....: I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins.” Luther says in this connection: “These are dreadful words; I do not like to read them. And this is under present circumstances the best counsel that we do not get the idea, the Gospel which we now have will stay with us forever: tell me twenty years hence how it is. When the present pious, upright preachers are dead and gone, others will appear on the scene who will preach and do what pleases the devil. The Word cannot long remain, for men’s ingratitude is too great; thus disdain and satiety cause it to depart, and God cannot look on indefinitely. When once the Word is gone, then

²⁴ Let it be noted merely as a curiosity that Hengstenberg understands the watchmen to be angels.

you cannot endure to be deprived of it, but will want to become pious and be saved, obtain God's grace, forgiveness of sins, and heaven; it will, however, be all in vain! That is the worst: when Christ is gone, then I must seek all this and not find it. For if He is no longer present, nothing remains but reason, which will not do it; reason, man's intellect, cannot grasp Christ; Christ is too lofty. But there is no help for the world: she doesn't believe it; I am almost tired of it. The Jews, too, acted and behaved that way. Christ, God's Son, Himself came, after that the Apostles, and warned them; but they didn't believe it. So must Germany do likewise and suffer the consequences. It will be even so with us—how can it be otherwise?—we shall see.” (Erl. 48, 187ff.) Luther was a true prophet. And, therefore, the experience both of the Jews and of Germany should serve us as a warning and incline our hearts to heed this word of St. Paul: “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (I Cor. 10:12).

Section V (Second Half)—Chapters 5:8–6:9

In her fruitless search for the Bridegroom, described to us at the close of the first half of this section, the Bride meets the daughters of Jerusalem. To them she says, verse 8: *I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him that I am sick of love.* The “daughters of Jerusalem” mentioned here and in other places, we take to be imaginary persons. The inspired poet introduces them here, in order that he might through them convey to us the Bride's thoughts. He wants us to know that she has come to true contrition over her bad behavior toward her Bridegroom. In accord with the character of *The Song of Songs*, we should learn this directly out of the Bride's own mouth. To this end the poet introduces the daughters of Jerusalem, to whom the Bride pours out her heart, and they in turn, by their questions (vs. 9) elicit from her a song of praise, in which she describes the wonderful qualities of her Bridegroom. The message to her Beloved, with which the Bride charges the daughters of Jerusalem, proves that she has now become a truly penitent sinner. She does not seek to excuse her ill behavior towards her Beloved when he knocked at her door. She does not point to the fact that she has undergone a change for the better. She lays no claim whatsoever to His grace. Nothing should be told her Bridegroom but that she loves Him, is “sick of love” for Him. Now, where there is the right kind of love, there is, of course, also true faith; for true love is a fruit of faith. In the midst of her deep sorrow, for which the Bride has only herself to blame, she still is sure that she loves her Bridegroom. And since she could not have such love in her heart if He had already fully rejected her—as she had indeed deserved—, she takes this for a sign that He is still kindly disposed towards her even though He has withdrawn His gracious presence from her and seemingly pays no heed to her pleading call. In full reliance on His grace, she bids the daughters of Jerusalem tell her Bridegroom that she is “sick of love.”

The daughters of Jerusalem hear the Bride's request, and then put to her the query, verse 9: *What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? What is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us?* The daughters of Jerusalem do not ask: “Who is thy Beloved?” as though her Beloved were at all unknown to them, but: “What is thy Beloved more than another beloved?” They mean to say: “What advantage has He over every other friend? By what does He distinguish Himself? What moves you to single Him out with your love?” And with that they bestow on the Bride the title: “O thou fairest among women!” Thus the Bridegroom Himself had called her, chapter 1:8. Accordingly, they give her a title which the Bridegroom has conferred on her. It is evidently the poet's intention to make known to us through the daughters of Jerusalem, how even now the Bridegroom feels about His bride. Despite her recent ill demeanor she is still to Him the “fairest among women.”²⁵

In answer to the question the daughters of Jerusalem had put to the Bride she now gives them a grand description of her Bridegroom's wonderful qualities. She says:

Verse 10: *My beloved is white and ruddy*

²⁵ The “women” spoken of here, as in chapter 1:8, among whom the Bride is the fairest, we likewise consider imaginary persons who have a purely rhetorical significance. He who speaks in superlatives must of necessity speak comparatively. These “women” are, therefore, mentioned for the sake of comparison, with no reality ascribed to them.

The chiefest among ten thousand.

Verse 11: *His head is as the most fine gold;
His locks are bushy,
And black as a raven:*

Verse 12: *His eyes are as the eyes of doves
By the rivers of waters,
Washed with milk,
And fitly set:*

Verse 13: *His cheeks are as a bed of spices,
As sweet flowers:
His lips like lilies
Dropping sweet-smelling myrrh:*

Verse 14: *His hands are as gold rings,
Set with the beryl:
His belly is as bright ivory
Overlaid with sapphires:*

Verse 15: *His legs are as pillars of marble,
Set upon sockets of fine gold:
His countenance is as Lebanon,
Excellent as the cedars:*

Verse 16: *His mouth is most sweet:
Yea, he is altogether lovely.
This is my beloved,
And this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.*

In this exalted hymn the Bride describes her Bridegroom as a human being, according Him the parts that are peculiar to man. This whole description is a magnificent paraphrase of Psalm 45:2: "Thou art fairer than the children of men." Her Beloved is white and ruddy. In practically the same words Zion's princes are described in Lamentations 4:7. Her Beloved is, therefore, of princely blood and race. But even among his fellow princes he is preeminent. There is none other like Him. He has an outstanding characteristic that distinguishes him and makes him recognizable as "the chiefest among ten thousand." Whoever looks at Him aright cannot mistake Him for any other among the children of men. His *head* is as the finest gold: the noblest head, with which none other can be compared, even as among all metals gold is by far the most precious. From this noble head hangs an exuberance of sparkling, black *hair*, which heightens its beauty, just as the attractiveness of gold is enhanced by a dark frame. Whoever glances at this head is met by a pair of eyes of wondrous purity and animation, *eyes* comparable to white doves at merry play by the rippling brook. And as the eyes themselves, so also their setting displays youthful vigor and strength. The rest of His sublime countenance corresponds to the eyes and their immediate surroundings. His *cheeks* are graceful and pleasing, like fragrant flower beds and full of the freshness of youth, like growing aromatic herbs. Aromatic, too, is His speech; for from His *lips* drips the sweet-smelling myrrh of most gracious words. His *hands* are of noble and irreproachable form: like rods of gold. Every deed performed by His busy hands is like a priceless gem. His body is beautifully proportioned, white and smooth, as though chiseled out of ivory by an artist; and through the white, tender skin shimmer the branching, blue veins as though it were set with sapphires.

Accordingly, her Friend is of slender and graceful physique, yet there is not a hint of effeminacy in him. On the contrary, He is powerful and of great vigor. His *legs* stand defiant and firm, like pillars of white marble

set upon golden bases. Thus there are wondrously united in Him both beauty and strength, grace and firmness, tenderness and defiant power. His entire appearance is most majestic, like the majesty of Lebanon. And, although a member of the human race, He is, nevertheless, outstanding among men, as is the cedar among the trees of the forest. He is wood, so to speak, flesh of the flesh of men; however, no common and dry, but noble and evergreen wood, like that of the cedar. And as in His body, and in the parts and members of His body, beauty is paired with power, and tenderness with firmness, so is also His sublime majesty coupled with affability and kindness. The word coming out of His *mouth* is sweetness, and He is altogether loveliness. The sight of His majesty does not engender fear and alarm, but rather love and confidence. With warranted pride, therefore, the Bride exclaims at the conclusion of her description: “This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.”

Whoever gives this presentation, in which the Bride describes the excellency of her Bridegroom, any amount of serious consideration, will surely come to a twofold conclusion. He will, first of all, recognize the fact that the handsome physical features here enumerated have spiritual qualities and excellencies as their background, yes, that they really are symbols of the Bridegroom’s majesty, vigor, affability, faithfulness, constancy, and His singular beauty and perfection. Secondly the conviction will thrust itself upon him that no mere man could possibly be described here. The picture in every way far surpasses that of the paltry person of a mere human being, also that of a Solomon, to whom Delitzsch applies it.²⁶ No; the individual features of this portrayal are at least in part so extreme that they have rhyme and reason only if applied to an unlimited personality. Here, we are convinced, no mere man is described, but the Man who would, without over-estimating Himself, say: “Behold, a greater than Solomon is here,” Matthew 12:42; yes who, upon Philip’s request, “Lord, show us the Father!” could answer him: “Philip, he that hath seen me hath seen the Father,” John 14:8, 9. Indeed, whoever will but listen, to him every line of this magnificent description speaks out with distinct voice: “A greater than Solomon is here!” In short, this portrayal fits none other than the God-man Jesus Christ, blessed forever! It is the indescribable glory of Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, that is presented to us here in pictures and figures of speech, so that we may perceive and know a little of it by faith until our eyes shall, one day, be big and strong enough to see Him as He is, I John 3:2.

After the Bride had answered the daughters of Jerusalem upon their question: “What is thy beloved more than another beloved?” the latter come with the further query, chapter 6:1: *Whither is my beloved turned aside that we may seek him with thee?* The Poet’s intention in having the daughters of Jerusalem interrogate the Bride thus is: to give her occasion to declare herself concerning her present relationship to the Bridegroom. That no seeking is any longer necessary, that conversely she has already found her Beloved and is enjoying His gracious presence, is shown by her calm and positive reply, verse 2: *My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.* She knows where her Bridegroom is, namely, in His garden; in other words, is with her. She is aware of His presence; for she is being nourished by Him and He is gathering, that is to say, He is again delighted to be in her presence. She tastes and sees again that her Lord and Savior is good. That this is really what she meant is definitely shown by the last part of her answer, verse 3: *I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies.*

Yes, she has again found her Beloved; and He forthwith addresses her with most endearing words, verse 4: *Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners.* Tirzah was a city in the half-tribe of Manasseh, which King Jeroboam chose for his residence, I Kings 14:17. As the name indicates, it was an exceptionally beautiful city; for Tirzah means “the charming one.” According to her outward appearance, the Bridegroom says, His Bride is beautiful as Tirzah; but as to her disposition, she is comely as Jerusalem, the city of peace, where the God of love and peace reigned. While she, however, harbors in her heart the peace which the world cannot give, and labors to procure it for others, she is, at the same time, “terrible as an army with banners” over against all enemies of the truth and all champions of a false peace.

²⁶ The objection that it would be highly improper for a woman to describe the naked body of a man (cf. vs. 14b), Delitzsch counters with the remark, “that it is not the bride or the lady-love, but the wife into whose mouth the poet puts such language.” An exposition which has to resort to such a comment in order to safeguard the decency of *The Song of Solomon* in our opinion condemns itself.

Though given to seeking peace, she is, nevertheless, properly aggressive²⁷ and mighty in battle against the kingdom of falsehood and darkness.

Looking upon the excellency of His Bride. He also adds, verse 5a: *Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me.* Luther: *achen reich bruenstig.* The words: “Turn away thine eyes from me,” are not to be taken as a command that should really be carried out, but as a rhetorical figure of speech by which the Bridegroom wished to express most emphatically the great fervor of His love. The Bridegroom goes on to say, verses 5b–7: *Thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Gilead: thy teeth are as a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them. As a piece of a pomegranate are thy temples within thy locks.* The words of this eulogy are practically the same as those of chapter 4:1–3 and were explained at that point; their interpretation need, therefore, not be repeated here. But the fact that the Bridegroom praises His Love, the Church, with the same words as in chapter four, is to indicate that the old relationship between Him and her has again been fully restored. God bears no grudge against a repentant sinner. Whomsoever He has forgiven his sins, the same is through such forgiveness again fully and completely reinstated in the former relationship of love; on him rests again all His favor.

The following two verses, with which the Bridegroom closes His complimentary remarks, are very difficult. We read, verses 8–9: *There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number, My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her. The daughters saw her, and blessed her; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her.* To begin with, we shall refrain altogether from giving an interpretation of the numbers sixty and eighty, since none is known to us which amounts to more than mere fantastical play of words; such as a rule is the case also with regard to various other numbers in Holy Scripture. Concerning the persons mentioned, Hengstenberg writes: “The queens are the principal Christian nations; the concubines, such nations as occupy a subordinate position in the kingdom of the heavenly Solomon; and the virgins without number are the nations not yet united with the heavenly Solomon but destined to be.”²⁸ Similarly other expositors, even though these do not, like Hengstenberg, combine therewith the thought that “the Daughter of Zion, after her reunion with Christ, will with her excellent gifts and virtues outshine the other nations that had been taken up and received into the Church.” We cannot assent to such an interpretation. Surely the Lord Christ cannot possibly mean to say: “Among all the leading Christian nations, among all the nations that still are to be converted My Church which I now have among the Jews is and remains the dearest!”

But how these verses are to be understood, on that point we venture to express only a conjecture. Christ has on earth a twofold kingdom: the Kingdom of Power and the Kingdom of Grace, the Church. In number and appearance the Church is a poor, insignificant, little flock; and, therefore, she often has the feeling that her status in this world is like that of a maidservant who is tolerated only with much ill-will. And so the Lord gives the Church this comfort: “Thou dost mean more to Me than all the nations of the earth. They must all serve thee after all. Thou art the axis about which the world’s history revolves. Thou art the one and only, the select one of thy mother, the flower of all humanity. In this transitory world thou art a spiritual, eternal kingdom which cannot perish. For thy sake I enthrone and dethrone kings; for thy sake I let world empires rise and fall. And though the great of this world despise thee, they will, nevertheless, have to marvel again and again at thy vigor and acknowledge that nothing can compare with thee.”

A thought similar to the one we find expressed here, St. Paul sets forth, Ephesians 1:20–23, when he says: God set Christ “at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion ... and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” So while Christ, according to this word of the Apostle, is the Lord over all things, He is not only the Lord but at the same time also the Head of His Church, organically united with her. She stands in a very singular relationship with Him, and occupies a position so highly privileged such as no kingdom of this earth can ever attain. All greatness, might, riches, and glory of the kingdoms of this world grow

²⁷ Cf. the articles by F. P., *Lutheraner* 1896, pp. 14, 24, 34, 42.

²⁸ *Dos hohe Lied Salomonis* ausgelegt von E. W. Hengstenberg. Berlin 1853, p. 168.

pale when placed into comparison with the Church. Despite all want of outward greatness, the Church is still “A chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people,” I Peter 2:9. She is the only Beloved, the only Dove, the only devout One, the one chosen out of all humanity to be Bride of Christ, who is God over all. That is the thought we find contained in the above verses, expressed in metaphorical language so typical of *The Song of Solomon*. This explanation at least remains within the framework of Scripture and fits into the context.

Section VI—Chapters 6:8–8:4

[Editor’s Note: By an oversight section VII, the concluding installment, was printed in the July 1966 issue in place of section VI. This is the omitted section. We are sorry to have inconvenienced our readers.]
 [Sections VI and VII have been placed in correct order for this online version of the essay. –WLS Library Staff]

In the closing verses of the preceding section the heavenly Solomon praised the excellence of His Bride and gave her the assurance that, among all the kingdoms and nations of the earth, she occupied a unique position, yes, that she, and she alone, was His chosen Bride. Filled with new courage and zeal for her work by such praise and consolation, the Church has risen from out of the dust of sadness and gloom, shaken off all faintheartedness, and again joyously gone to fulfill the tasks of her blessed calling. All this we learn out of the mouth of the daughters of Jerusalem, who exclaim in great amazement, verse 10: *Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?* She appears “like the dawn that dispels the darkness of night, beautiful as the silvery moon ruling the nightly sky in tender majesty, pure as the sun, whose light is purity personified, imposing as an army moving forward with victorious power.”

To this high praise on the part of the daughters of Jerusalem the Bride replies in becoming humility, verses 11–12, really speaking to herself: *I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished, and the pomegranates budded. Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib* (i.e., my princely people). It is very hard to give any interpretation at all to these two verses as well as to the one following: and when you think you have found one whose meaning fits into the context, it still remains a question whether the same can be justified linguistically. We can, therefore, only suggest an interpretation of this passage; and in defense of our explanation we can only urge the point: that it is not as preposterous as many another, nor does it do as much violence to the text as many others. Of this we believe everyone can convince himself who, for instance, will compare Starke’s *Synopsis*. Thus, we take verses 11–12 to be the words of the Shulamite, uttered in reply to the outcry of wonderment voiced by the daughters of Jerusalem (v. 10). She says: *I went down into the garden of nuts to inspect the shrubs of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished and the pomegranates budded* (vs. 11). That is, “I have no particular works to show forth; I have really done nothing more than rejoice over the seedlings which the heavenly Gardener has planted in my garden; I only admired the work of His hands.” And “Or ever I was aware my soul made me like the chariots of my princely people.” In other words, “I am not at all conscious of all the grand and glorious things for which the daughters of Jerusalem praise me.” In similar fashion will the righteous answer the Lord on the Last Day, and say to Him: “Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?” (Matt. 25:37–39).

But the daughters of Jerusalem insist on it that the Shulamite is really as wonderful as they have described her, namely, *fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners*. Therefore they now call on the Bride to give them an all-around view of herself as she briskly attends to the execution of her God-given work. Thus we understand their request: *Return, return, O Shulamite, return, return, that we may look upon thee* (vs. 13a). With deep humility the Bride replies: *What will ye see in the Shulamite?* (vs. 13b). That is, “What is there worth seeing in me, the lowly maid?” The daughters of Jerusalem answer: *As it were the*

company of two armies (vs. 13c).²⁹ What they mean to say is: “To us you have the appearance of a host of angels. When we look at you and see how you perform your blessed work; when we behold how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of thy messengers, that publish peace, bring good tidings of good, and publish salvation (Isa. 52:7); when we see how the Gentiles come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising (Isa. 60:3), it seems as though we were seeing a delightful company of angels.”

By this conversation, which the daughters of Jerusalem and the Shulamite engaged in, chapter 6:10–13, the inspired poet had referred to the course of the Gospel throughout the entire world. He now has the Bridegroom take up this new thought and vividly depict the Church on her progress through the world. The Bridegroom says, chapter 7:1: *How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince's daughter! The joints of thy thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a cunning workman.* The Bridegroom is closely observing His Bride as she carries on her work of bringing salvation to men lost in sin. He sees her *with shoes*, her “feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:15). She steadily advances in her work of evangelizing the world. As she advances, the Bride exhibits a truly heavenly gracefulness. Her victory is won, not by physical means but alone by the proclamation of the Word. Her walk is like the swinging of a cunningly wrought golden chain.

The Bridegroom goes on to say: *Thy navel is like a round goblet which wanteth not liquor: thy belly is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies* (vs. 2). In her course through the world the Church offers to all men well-flavored drink and nourishing food. Her navel may be likened to a goblet filled with good wine; her whole abdomen, to a heap of grain rimmed with lilies. In other words, the Church tenders nothing but exquisite drink and salutary food in attractive form. You see, the Church is thought of as a woman, and here indeed as a nursing mother. With “navel” and “belly” those organs are referred to by which the proper food is prepared for the suckling. The organs are perfect and exceedingly lovely; and therefore is also the food produced by them nourishing, strengthening, and healthful. The Church, the Mother of us all, lives solely and alone by the Word of Truth; and it is only from this Word that she produces the right food for each of her children. Whether she applies the Word for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, or for comfort, it is always wholesome food, through which the child of God can be made perfect, fully equipped toward every good work (II Tim. 3:16, 17). However, taking the “navel” and “belly” to be the seat of the Church’s sustaining strength, her “breasts” (Word and Sacrament) now come into consideration as the organs which dispense the nourishment. Whatever spiritual food the Church possesses she imparts to others through her “breasts.” Their gracefulness and tenderness the Bridegroom now praises with the words: *Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins* (vs. 3).

But while the Church on her progress through the world is intent that others may grow thereby, she is also concerned about their protection and defense. She does not only labor in the Word and doctrine, but is also bold in warding off false teaching. The Bridegroom alludes to that when He continues: *Thy neck is as a tower of ivory; thine eyes like the fish-pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim :thy nose is as the tower of Lebanon, which looketh toward Damascus* (vs. 4). Her neck is an ivory tower: elegant and strong, built out of material out of which no earthly tower is erected. Her neck is a tower of divine truth. The Word of divine truth, as we now find it in Scripture, is hard and unbending as is ivory, but at the same time, like it very valuable, delightful, and brilliantly white. Situated on this tower are her eyes, clear as the pool in Heshbon. And just as in clear, quiet waters all objects are sharply reflected, so also in the eyes of the Church; that is, she discerns the spirits and judges all doctrine according to the infallible rule of the divine Word. Thereby she becomes formidable to all gainsayers of the truth, all false teachers, hypocrites, and deceivers. Her nose thus compares to the watchtower which Solomon, according to I Kings 9:19 and II Chronicles 8:6, ordered built on Mt. Lebanon over against Damascus, where Rezon reigned, who was Israel’s adversary as long as Solomon lived, I Kings 11:23–25. Although the Church is a populous city, yet no unclean spirit is found in her: she is a communion of nothing but believers and saints.

²⁹ *Mahanaim* is the Hebrew word used and means two camps. Gen. 32:2, the double camp of angels is meant, “God’s host.” In our present verse we doubtlessly have an allusion to that.

After describing the separate parts, the bridegroom now views His Bride's head as such for an overall impression. So He says: *Thine head upon thee is like Carmel, and the hair of thine head like purple; the King is held in the galleries* (vs. 5), that is, the King is held captive in the curls, is fettered in love by the beauty of the Shulamite's curls. Such is the usual translation and interpretation given the last part of this verse. The sense of the translation in the Septuagint is about this: "The heavenly King is held in fetters of love by the sublime beauty of the Church." Like Graetz, we prefer Luther's translation, even though it does not correspond with the Hebrew punctuation: "The hair of thine head is like the King's purple, tied in braids (*in Falten gebunden*)." The total impression of her head is one of pleasing majesty, like that which Mt. Carmel produces upon a spectator. From this head wave her curls in rich abundance, a symbol of diverse spiritual blessings in heavenly things, as to fineness and softness with their luster and silkiness resembling the royal purple of a sovereign's garments.

Now the Bridegroom with one glance takes in her whole figure, and exclaims, vv. 6–7: *How fair and how pleasing art thou, O love, for delights* (that is, in thy caresses). *This thy stature is like to a palmtree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes* (vv. 6–7). He means to say: "In thee all is beautiful and glorious, without blemish and spot. I greatly desire thy beauty (Ps. 45:11); for My delights were with the sons of men (Prov. 8:31). Thou shalt no more be termed *Forsaken*; neither shall they land any more be termed *Desolate*: but thou shalt be called *Hephzibah*, and thy land *Beulah*: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married" (Isa. 62:4).

So fervently does the heavenly Bridegroom love His Bride that He, humanly speaking, can hardly await the time when He shall lead the complete number of the elect to the heavenly marriage feast. To the latter He refers with the following words: *I said, I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof: now also thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine, and the smell of thy nose like apples; and the roof of thy mouth like the best wine* (vss. 8–9a). "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church" (Eph. 5:32). What is painted here in pictures shall one day become reality; and this reality will be far more glorious than we can now even faintly envision. For then the perfected saints will shout to one another with joy, saying: "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready" (Rev. 19:7). Yea, "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9).

The Bride, too, is filled with longing for the heavenly marriage supper. Since she heard her Beloved speak of it in such glowing terms, her longing is heightened to the extent that she, in holy impatience, interrupts Him: *That goeth down sweetly, causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak* (vs. 9b). "Yes," she wants to say, "may my throat, that is, the word out of my mouth, be unto Thee as truly good wine, which brings on sweet dreams in a sleeper and thus causes him to talk in his sleep." At this reference to the heavenly marriage supper the Shulamite's soul is filled with rapture; and to this sublime bliss she can give no better expression than to say in a truly child-like way: *I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me* (vs. 10).

However, the Bride is fully conscious of the fact that between the now and the beginning of the heavenly marriage feast there is still a time of labor. She, therefore, wants to work while it is day. Fanatical indeed are the churches and the Christians who, at the prospect of the promised salvation and because of their longing for it, neglect the work assigned to them in the world and in the vineyard of the Lord. Our yearning for the rest that remaineth to the people of God should strengthen rather than weaken our energy, our desire for the work that is ours here below. The more ardently we await our final consummation, the more conscientiously should we redeem the time, and strive to make the most of the pound entrusted to us. This the Bride, who in all her rapture of love still preserves the proper sobriety, is more than eager to do. Wherefore she extends to her Bridegroom the invitation: *Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth; there will I give thee my loves* (vss. 11–12). The heavenly Bridegroom is to go with her out into the field and pass the night with her in the villages, is to accompany her to the highways and hedges, yes, to help her to carry out, throughout the entire world, the work to which He has called her. She will as His gardener go to work early with Him in the vineyards; she will carefully take care of everything; she will pay close attention to the need of every plant, and, as the condition of each requires, will water, and prune, and

tie them up. There she will give Him her “loves,” that is, will constantly give proof of her love for Him by laboring faithfully in His vineyard. For this kind of work is indeed a labor of love, work which can never be carried out in the right way without true love for Christ. Whomsoever the Lord Jesus gives the command: “Feed my sheep,” work in My vineyard!—to him He first repeats the question: “Lovest thou me?” (John 21:17).

In the first part of the next verse the Bride gives the reason for requesting her Beloved so urgently to go forth with her into the field. She says: *The mandrakes give a smell* (vs. 13a). The fragrance of the mandrakes attracts her to the open field, out into the wide world. She lifts up her eyes and sees that the field of the world is white to harvest (John 4:35). She is sure that the heavenly Bridegroom has His mandrakes, His love-plants, among all the nations of the world, plants which testify to the great love with which He loves the children of men. In other words, the Church knows that in all places there are some of the chosen of the Lord; and that is why she is so eager to go into all the world. She wants to bring to those whom God predestinated the Word which can save their souls. And just because it concerns the elect, she is sure in advance of the success of her Gospel ministry, so that she can say to the Bridegroom: *And at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved* (vs. 13b). Wherever the Word is proclaimed, there the Church garners some souls as the fruit of her preaching, and carefully stores them up for the Bridegroom, for eternal life, just as a husbandman is wont to store some of the best fruits of his fields on a shelf above the door of his house. Yes, she wants to apply herself faithfully to doing the work which she still has to carry out in the world. But all the while she is again and again filled with a deep longing for the eternal rest, for the consummation of her hope, for the heavenly marriage feast. This is indeed the manner of all genuine Christians: with their feet and hands they labor unceasingly in the world, but their hearts are in heaven, from whence they look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. At night they retire with the joyful sigh:

Head, hands, and feet reposing
 Are glad the day is closing,
 That work came to an end;
 Cheer up, my heart, with gladness!
 For God from all earth's sadness
 And from sin's toil relief will send.

Hymn 554, stanza 5 (original 5th stanza)

Also the particular work of the Church, of her teachers and preachers, is “sin's toil,” a labor necessitated, made hard, and retarded by sin. As faithfully and diligently and eagerly, therefore, as the Church does her work, so happily does she look forward to the time when she will completely belong to her beloved Bridegroom. This intense longing causes the Bride to exclaim: *O that thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother! When I should find thee without, I would kiss thee; yes, I should not be despised* (chap. 8:1). She says: “Thou art my Brother, as concerning the flesh the Woman's Seed, descended from Eve; Thou didst like myself nurse at a human breast. Oh, that I might soon find Thee without, outside of this wicked world! Then I would kiss Thee; and no one would dare anymore to despise me. Oh, that Thou wouldst soon appear, that I also might appear with Thee in Thy glory!” (Col. 3:4). Then the world will come to know what she now refuses to recognize, that Thou art the Lord, true God from eternity; and that I am Thy Bride. And as no one can then any longer despise Thee, so no one will anymore treat me with scorn. For then *I would lead thee and bring thee into my mother's house, who would instruct me: I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranate* (vs. 2).

When the day of this world is ended, the Bride wants to enter with Him, her beloved Bridegroom, into the true home of her mother, that is, of mankind. “Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come” (Heb. 13:14). Even though many by their own fault will not get into the house not made with hands, it is, nevertheless, their rightful home, the house which God has prepared and intended also for them for their eternal abode. Into this house the Shulamite would “lead” and “bring” Him, namely, by bringing such there as belong to Him. As soon as the Church has brought the last of the elect out of this world into heaven, she has, as it were,

brought Christ Himself back into heaven; for when the last of the elect is safely garnered, then Christ's work in this world of sin and death is at an end. In that sense she says: "I would lead thee and bring thee into my mother's house." And then He should instruct her, fill her with perfect knowledge; and she would give Him "to drink spiced wine and the juice of the pomegranate." Then she will love Him with all her heart, with all her soul, with all her mind, something that is not possible for her here below because sin still clings to her. Now she knows only in part, but then she will know even as also she is known of Him. Now her love is imperfect and her praise very faulty, but then it will be perfect as it is meant to be.

As the Bride vividly transports herself into the time which knows no end, the future is already come to be presence, the promised inheritance a reality, so that she exultantly cries out: *His left hand should be under my head, and his right hand should embrace me* (vs. 3). In faith she already is actually in perfect bliss; for "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). Faith really and truly possesses everything that the promise contains. The Bridegroom once more grants His Bride, yes, favors every Christian with, a season of extraordinary enjoyment of His love, and does not want her to be disturbed therein. Therefore He calls out: *I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, until he* ("it," RSV) please (vs. 4).

Section VII—Chapter 8:5–14

Hoelman compares this closing paragraph of *The Song of Solomon* to a steep, difficult pathway up the summit of a high mountain. This comparison is well warranted. The conclusion is without a doubt the most difficult part of *The Song of Songs*. It is simply impossible to render an interpretation satisfactory in every respect, especially in matters of detail. Here applies in a special measure the Pauline phrase: "Now we see through a glass, darkly" (I Cor. 13:12). But, on the other hand, this mountain top of *The Song of Songs*, reaching into the clouds, offers such an excellent view, that it is well worth the effort to undertake the ascent, even though one will not succeed in climbing every peak or gaining a foothold on every crag. Literal interpreters give this concluding portion of *The Song of Solomon* the title: The Homecoming. And this last section truly depicts a homecoming: not the coming of an earthly bride into an earthly home but the arrival of the heavenly Bride into her heavenly Home.

This final act is introduced by the question of the daughters of Jerusalem, verse 5a: *Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?* This query is similar to that of chapter 3:6, but, at the same time, also essentially different from it. There the Church's uninterrupted march through the wilderness of this world was being pictured to us, as she is surrounded by a cloud of prayers: her sacrifices in suffering, and her work of love. There we were told that at the end of the individual believer's journey a magnificent bridal chariot stands ready to take him, or her, to meet the heavenly Bridegroom, on whose head every perfected saint will sparkle as a gem in His golden crown. Here in this place, however, no mention is made of the said "pillars of smoke" enveloping the Church. Nor is it said that the Bride goes to meet her heavenly Bridegroom, for He is with her; He is not awaiting her, but is walking along side of her, and she is leaning on His strong arm. The final and full union of the Church with her Bridegroom is now become reality. The graves have opened up; the Judgment has taken place; world and time are passed away. The Bridegroom now leads His Bride to His heavenly Father, to deliver up the kingdom to Him (I Cor. 15:24).

On their advance to the Father, the Bride, looking back upon her history from its earliest beginning, says to her Beloved, verse 5b: *I raised thee up under the apple tree; there thy mother brought thee forth; there she brought thee forth that bare thee.* Here we have the Augustinian phrase, *Si homo non periisset, Filius hominis non venisset.* Since the end takes one back to the beginning, the Bride thinks of the tree that stood in the midst of Paradise. "Under this tree," she means to say, "I aroused and excited the fervor of Thy love. Thou hadst created me in Thine image to enjoy Thy perpetual communion, and I became unfaithful to Thee; I, on my part, broke the bond of love. This, however, on Thy part, had the blessed consequence to inflame Thee to even greater love for me, the unworthy. 'Thou com'st to share my misery' (Hymn 85:8). Under the apple tree, where I lay in my blood, in the misery of my sinful condition, there 'Thy mother brought thee forth; there she brought

thee forth that bare thee.’ ” (By the expression “Thy mother” humanity is to be understood, specifically the Jewish race, Romans 9:4, 5.) In a very significant manner both the curse and the blessing are portrayed here which the human race, all mankind, fell heir to under the Tree of Knowledge. By repeating the words “brought thee forth” emphasis is laid on the painful child bearing of the woman (Gen. 3:16), which began under that fateful tree because of sin; but equally emphatic is the result which this bringing forth, by virtue of the promise of the woman’s Seed (Gen. 3:15), had for humanity, namely, that God Himself was born a man.

The Bride goes on to say, verse 6a: *Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm.* The Bridegroom should put His Bride as a seal both upon His heart and upon His arm, that means: “I am the seal of Thy love and Thy power. In me the genuineness of Thy love and Thy strength is made manifest; therefore am I unto Thee as a seal.” Only when taken in this sense does the following “for” have real meaning. For, says the Bride, verse 6b, *love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.* “Love, yes, love in its essence, in the absoluteness of its perfection,” says the Bride, “is of super-human strength, as the strength of death; and love’s jealous zeal is of unyielding persistence, as the persistence of hell, firmly bent on attaining its object.” To that idea—this is the unuttered, but self-evident conclusion—the love of the heavenly Bridegroom corresponds. For that she, His Bride, is the seal. Without such love and such jealous zeal He would never have achieved what He did accomplish when He wooed her. To this double comparison the Bride adds another expression, in which she does not make a new comparison, but simply says what love—love in the highest sense—is. She says: “The coals thereof are coals of fire, a flame of Jehovah.” The meaning of these words cannot be, that the love spoken of here is something produced by God, as the literal exponents water down this expression. The gradation, “strong as death, hard as the grave, a flame of Jehovah,” imperatively demands a much more intensive meaning. It can be none other than this: genuine, true, absolutely perfect love is to be found only in Jehovah Himself. The Bridegroom, therefore, who manifests a love for His Bride that is to be found alone in God, must Himself be God. Accordingly, this last expression contains a confession of Christ’s deity. Thus this whole phrase, “Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm,” gains its true significance: the work of redemption is the seal of the Bridegroom’s deity. For a mere man “can by no means redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him: (for the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth forever)” (Ps. 49:7, 8). And in all eternity will this seal shine forth in Him. Throughout eternity will all the holy angels and perfected saints by this seal perceive ever anew: that God once walked on earth, that God once upon a time was born into man’s misery of sin, without Himself, however, becoming a sinner, and suffered and died for their sins. And therefore will the gladsome strain sound forth before the throne of the Lamb in all eternity: “Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God forever and ever. Amen” (Rev. 7:12).

The Bride now describes the love, which she had just called “a flame of Jehovah,” still further with the following words, verse 7a: *Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.* For the purpose of emphasis the verse begins with “many waters,” to emphasize the great contrast between water and the “coals of fire” and “flame of Jehovah” mentioned in the preceding verse. Ordinarily fire is quenched by water. A strong, persevering rainstorm puts an end to the greatest forest fire. In the love of the heavenly Bridegroom, however, is seen a fire, a divine flame, which no waters nor floods could quench. To woo His Bride the Bridegroom was compelled to fight many waters and traverse deep floods. He cried Himself weary (vs. 3) when He called out: “Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me” (Ps. 69:1, 2). But, behold, the whole black deluge of the world’s sin, and the raging torrents of His sufferings could not drown Him nor extinguish His love. Indeed, something quite singular transpired here: the whole world, death, and hell, yea, even the righteousness of the Law and divine Justice, rose up against a single Man, and did not overpower Him! Victoriously He came through all the waters and purchased and preserved His Bride.

But this fervent love of the Bridegroom was, moreover, a purely spontaneous love, by no means merited. That is the last characteristic of His love to which the Bride makes reference when she says, verse 7b: *If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.* For this love there is

absolutely no equivalent. Every attempt to pay for this love, or to adduce one's own merit, worthiness, and righteousness as ground or basis for it will net the one who undertakes this nothing but scorn and disdain. This love fills the hungry with good things, but sends the rich empty away. Whoever would enjoy this love for time and eternity, must completely despair of all his own worthiness and in faith plead with the publican: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Luke 18:13). Thus the Church Triumphant, by means of the above imagery, praises Christ's love as an almighty, unfailing, constant love; a love as it is found in God alone; a love which no lack of response can quell; yes, a love that is positively unmerited and unmeritable.

Following the example of the Bride, the Bridegroom now, too, reviews the past, and tells her according to what plan He had led and governed her. He says, verses 8–9: *We have a little sister, and she hath no breasts: what shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for? If she be a wall, we will build upon her a palace of silver: and if she be a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar.* We are all aware of the fact that a certain incongruity will obtain if one attributes the above words to the Bridegroom. But the same incongruity is by no means removed if one assigns these words to the Bride, or to the daughters of Jerusalem, or to the inspired Poet, or even to the Shulamite's stepbrothers (cp chap. 1:6). Upon due consideration of all circumstances, it would appear to be the most suitable to take these verses as the speech of the Bridegroom. To point out just this one thing: He alone, and this repeatedly, calls the Shulamite HIS sister, and also once before (chap. 1:11) spoke in the *pluralis majestaticus*—in other words, the Bridegroom goes back to the time when He wooed His Bride (cp Ezek. 16). He describes the unattractive figure the Bride had at that time. She was little and had no breasts. But that did not keep Him from wooing her. He had compassion on her. He reared her, and caused her to grow as the bud of the field (cp Ezek. 16:7). But He knew from the start that there would come to pass what has actually often enough happened. As soon as the Church of the Old as well as of the New Testament attained some eminence, there came "the day in which she was spoken for." Many suitors appeared on the scene, vying with one another for her favor, in order to estrange her from her Bridegroom and make her to serve theft purposes. Now, whenever the Church in such temptations stood firm as a wall, refusing entrance to the specious art and sophistry of the time, to megalomania and the carnal desire to dominate, in short, to all the world's vain glamour, the Bridegroom built upon her a palace of silver, that is, made it known before all the world that precisely then His Church is "fair as the moon, clear as the sun and terrible as an army with banners" (chap. 6:10), when she remains unentangled with the ways and conduct of the world in every shape and form. On the other hand, whenever the Church, like a door, proved herself accessible to that which proceeds out of the flesh and out of the world, the Bridegroom enclosed her with boards of cedar, that is, permitted all manner of affliction to come over her as a salutary chastisement. The use of such precious material as cedar boards is to point out the fact, that the Lord, with all the chastening of His Bride, never has the intention of rejecting her. No, even when inflicting punishment upon her, He deals with her as His Bride, and places her in a royal prison. To them that love God all sufferings are a "cedar-wood" imprisonment; they work together for their good.

Pondering the last words of her Bridegroom, and recalling, alas, how often she was wanting in due faithfulness and constancy, the Bride, in the person of the Church Triumphant, now jubilantly exclaims, verse 10: *I am a wall, and my breasts like towers: then was I in His eyes as one that found favor.* She means to say: "He has now carried out His counsel concerning me, has made me what had always been His intention and desire, namely, His eternally faithful (wall) and gloriously adorned (breasts like towers) celestial Bride. When this purpose of His was accomplished, I became as one who had found peace. Now all struggle and toil of the wandering in the wilderness are ended. As He is the Solomon, the King of Peace, so am I now a Shulamite, one who through Him and in Him has attained true and everlasting peace."

She has found peace, has come unto the rest that remaineth for the people of God (Heb. 4:9). In this her current state of blessedness her thoughts go back to the former times, and she offers thanks to those who helped her attain such bliss. She says in retrospect, verse 11: *Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-Hamon; he let out the vineyard unto keepers; every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand pieces of silver.* In Baal-Hamon, the place of tumult, in a world full of turmoil, Solomon had a vineyard. He appointed prophets, apostles, evangelists, preachers, and teachers as keepers of this vineyard. Their task was to bring the entire crop of the vineyard to the Lord of the vineyard, that is, to save all those whom He had chosen for His own. This fruit is

called a thousand pieces of silver. To this Luther remarks: “The limited number, a thousand, stands for an infinite number. The number one thousand indicates that these keepers come with their fullest reward and their best products. Thus have Peter, Paul, John, and others who were appointed keepers, labored in the vineyard and cultivated it in such a way that it yielded a tremendously rich harvest. For the Word of God cannot be taught without producing fruit” (St. Louis, Vol., V, Col. 1657).

Answering upon the Bride’s thinking, as expressed in verse 11, the Bridegroom exultantly says, verse 12a: *My vineyard, which is mine, is before me.* “My Kingdom of Grace,” the Bridegroom means to say, “which I once had in the place of turmoil and over which I appointed keepers, now stands before My eyes as a Kingdom of Glory in full perfection. The entire yield of My vineyard is harvested: not a single one is lost of all whom the Father has given Me.” “And that is due to Thy merit!” the Bride replies, as she takes upon herself to continue, verse 12b: *Thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof, two hundred.* The thousand pieces of silver, the entire yield of the vineyard, which every keeper was to bring in, belong by right to the Lord of the vineyard, are justly His. But also to the keepers of the fruit a reward is due. Thus the Church Triumphant gives God alone all glory and, at the same time, also pays her thanks to those who once upon a time labored as faithful keepers in the Lord’s vineyard. That she is speaking only of faithful laborers, is indicated by the words, “those that keep the fruit thereof.” It should strike us as strange that it is not the Lord but the Church that determines the reward. We must bear in mind that the Church which speaks here is the Church Triumphant, the Church which is of one mind with the Lord, and that, therefore, everything she determines and says is done solely in the name of the Lord. In addition to that, the fact remains that the service rendered by these faithful keepers was not so much a service done to the Lord as to His Church. As far as the Lord is concerned, He could have cultivated His vineyard and preserved its fruit without the help of such keepers. On His part it was pure grace that He appointed men as keepers. But on the part of the Church there was a debt: for her such service of the keepers was an absolutely necessary service. And, therefore, it is she who in His name tenders the keepers a rich reward, a double tithe for their service: the promise Luke 6:23: “Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven.”

Now two more verses follow. These verses do not constitute the close of this last section, but rather spell out the Grand Finale of the entire *Song*. The inspired singer saw, as in a vision, the complete earthly course of the Church and witnessed her arrival in the heavenly home; and what he saw he set before our eyes in a variety of pictures. But the Church still lives in time, is still on her pilgrimage here on earth. On that account there is also very much in place a word addressed to the suffering and militant Church as well as a word coming out of her own mouth, to let the Song close on a harmonious note. The next words, then, are directed to the Church Militant which as yet “dwells in the gardens” (churches). The Bridegroom says, verse 13: *Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause one to hear it.* “Now then, My beloved Church,” the Bridegroom means to say, “fill the world with the sweet voice of thy preaching. Fear thou not; thou wilt not ‘be put to shame before the flocks of thy companions’ (chap. 1:7; cf. the comment on this). On the contrary, everywhere will many give heed to thy sweet voice. After all, consider that Thou art in My service; let Me, therefore, ever hear thy voice, even when it appears as though thou wert spending thy strength in vain.” Upon this word of comfort and exhortation out of the mouth of her beloved Bridegroom, the Church Militant, in final reply, says, not by way of command, but as a permission, verse 14: *Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices.* That means: Go, my Beloved, and let Thy course through the world, in my preaching, be like the rapid flight of a deer and the joyful bounding of a young hart. Grant that the last fruits of Thy vineyard may soon be fully harvested, so that the eternal Sabbath may soon dawn. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Amen.