Commentary on the Song of Songs

The Venerable Bede (AD 673–735)

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Introduction

Translated from Migne's Patrologia Latina, Allegorica expositio in Cantica canticorum, Vol 91

Book 1 - On Divine Grace, Against Julian

I thought it first necessary to warn the reader, when writing, with the help of divine grace, on the Song of Songs, that he should read the works of Julian of Eclanum, bishop of Campania, which he wrote on the same book, with the utmost caution, lest he should fall into the pit of harmful doctrine through the allure of eloquence. But, as it is commonly said, let him pick the grape, so that he may avoid the thorn; that is, let him scrutinize and choose the sound meanings in his words, so that he avoids the unsound ones; or rather do as Virgil said, You who pick flowers and strawberries growing on the ground, Flee from here, boys, a cold snake lies hidden in the grass; that is, abstain entirely from reading him, since there are those who have expounded the same book with sound meanings and simpler words. For he is a man, as skilled a rhetorician as he may be, yet a most fierce attacker of the grace of God after Pelagius, as his more explicit writings, which he madly penned against the stout defender of that same grace, Augustine, clearly show. In the cause of their duel, he first composed a booklet on Love, under the pretense that he would separate it from deplorable lust, but in truth to confirm his own heresy, by which, to summarize briefly, he teaches that we can do good by our free will, although we can accomplish it more easily with the help of divine grace:

just as travelers can indeed make the journey on foot, but with undoubtedly less effort, if they have horses to carry them; forgetful of the apostolic admonition which says: Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you both to will and to do (Philippians 2:12-13). And, what is graver, he is an opponent of him who did not say: Without me you can do little; but, Without me, he said, you can do nothing (John 15:5). He taught that the hidden sacraments of the law could only be seen by those that erudition and piety had made insightful; oblivious of the grace of God, which revealed the mysteries of the Scriptures even to the unlearned and ignorant, as the Evangelist says, Then he opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45). The same Evangelist testifies that they were unlearned when he says: Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and realized that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were astonished (Acts 4:13). He says that holy and noble love, infused in us by nature from the very origin of light and relying solely on the strength of the soul up to the utmost

old age, persists without any harm to its initial vigor; indeed, one disbelieving the Lord's statement, since without Him we can do nothing; but also the apostolic speech, "For we all offend in many things" (James 3).

And it is amazing where Julian learned that holy and noble love is infused in us by nature from the very origin of light, when the blessed Apostle, born of the patriarchs' lineage, says: "For we too were once by nature children of wrath" (Ephesians 2). But how otherwise by nature, except that when the first man sinned, abandoning holy love, vice grew as nature? It is amazing where Julian found or thought he could find a man, except salvation, in whom holy love, relying solely on the strength of the soul, would persist without any harm to its vigor up to old age, when he who deserved to rest in the bosom of his Creator due to his utmost love could find none among those enjoying his grace; rather, he humbly testified, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1). He says that our love, just as it draws from the body, which is disturbed and swift, so from the soul, which is sublime and continuous, but both are proven contrary to truth. But if our love drew from the body, and not rather from the soul, which is disturbed and swift, the Lord would not say: "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile the man" (Mark 7).

And again, if our love, not from the daily grace of God, but from nature, or the strength of the soul, had it as sublime and continuous, the Apostle would not say of his holy labors, surely pursued through sublime and continuous love: "But I labored more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15). And again, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Corinthians 3). But even if not from the Lord, but from himself he had his good works, in which without any contradiction sublime and continuous love holds sway, vainly he gave thanks to the Lord for what He did not give, saying: "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ Jesus" (2 Corinthians 2). He says the same, as long as it desires nothing of the will of paganism, moved as if at the sole discretion of the soul, and has joy in its acts, as free from disturbance, so also rejoicing in freedom. Which is to say openly, that aside from those things which pertain to the impulses of the flesh, it lies within the power of our spirit to determine what love it will submit to or how much;

and that same love, governed by the movement of the soul alone, that is, without any act of God's grace, possesses the perfection of good works as free and untroubled by any disturbance, which any prudent person clearly understands how far this is from the truth. For why does such a multitude of the faithful, seeking to love the Creator with all their heart, soul, and strength, and each their neighbor as themselves, not always achieve what they desire, unless because that same love is not moved by the will of the soul, as Julian assumed, but as Paul knew: "The love of God is spread in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5); and therefore it is not equal in all, because we each have different gifts

of grace given to us. And why are we often hindered by so many adversities, not only from outside but also from within our own mind, and unable to perfect all the good we desire, unless he is mistaken who says that our love alone, by the will of our mind, takes joy in its actions as free from disturbance as rejoicing in liberty? Truly the Psalmist sings, who says: "The steps of a man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way. When he falls, he will not be cast down, for the Lord upholds his hand" (Psal. 37:23-24).

Where he openly designates that not even amid the frequent helps of the Lord's protection can we be free from the disturbance of vices, nor should we rejoice in all the steps of our actions in the freedom of nature, but in divine direction. Julian vainly desires to except genital pleasure, saying it alone is not moved by the will of our soul; as if the frenzies of anger, pride, greed, gluttony, vainglory, and other such things are not much more laboriously conquered than the incentives of lust. These also come to disturb our soul before the time of puberty and, often subdued, continue to attack us even when lust ceases naturally. He says that the assistance of the Holy Spirit is given to our preceding endeavors and merits, and is still given, so that we may love the human race more earnestly. It pleased me to set this forth in his own words. "Therefore," he says, "when the mind of the wise man, who subjects pleasure to the dignity of love, both excites and orders the appetite, it never crosses the boundaries of duty, but advances to such greatness and beauty through efforts and merits, that the grace of the Holy Spirit begins to fan its noble fire; then there is that charity which strives to embrace not only relatives or citizens, but the whole human race in its bosom. In this one sentence, a Catholic reader easily perceives how many and great blasphemies there are.

For it is clear what he attributes to the free will of human liberty, and what to spiritual grace, because he testifies that the mind of man becomes wise by itself, possesses the dignity of holy and noble love by itself, can subject carnal pleasure to this love by itself, and can by itself both incite to virtues and order the appetite, to such an extent that it never crosses the boundaries of that duty by which the same love is cultivated. He asserts that the mind advances by its own efforts and merits to such greatness and beauty, that it is worthy of the assistance of the Holy Spirit; that is, the approach of the Spirit does not help the mind in the way a light or torch illuminates a dark house when it is lit; but rather, in the way the wind helps a burning or shining fire to glow more brightly; which indeed could have been kindled and burned without the breath of the wind, and could devour a great forest; yet it blazes more and more with the wind blowing. This is what he signifies by saying that the noble fire of the mind begins to be fanned by the grace of the Holy Spirit. After having presented so many goods of the mind, he says that after all these, the grace of the Holy Spirit begins in them, as if coming to assist, not as the inspiring author and precursor in us of good efforts and merits.

Nevertheless, consider what he believes is done in the noble fire of the wise mind by its fanning. "Then," he says, "there is that charity which strives to embrace not only relatives or citizens, but the whole human race in its bosom. You see, therefore, to how much power

he attributes to our mind, and what he attributes to the Spirit of grace; which, he says, comes late to assist the mind itself, and then does not infuse that charity by which God is loved, but only that by which the human race is loved; either forgetful or neglectful of the apostolic faith, which says that the love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom. V).

It is a lengthy task to bring forward all the absurdities which he put in this book and refute them with the testimony of truth. Let these few examples suffice, from which the rest may be inferred how detestable they are.

After these and countless other things in this way, with which he filled the first book by disputing against the grace of God, he defiled the second book with no less a plague of the same heresy. Explaining, then, what was said, that your breasts are better than wine, he most foully philosophized about the nature of milk, and then much more foully tried to transfer the quality of that nature to confirm his error. Because it is both horrid and too lengthy to present the whole, we have judged it sufficient to present a part. Thus, inserting himself into the persons against whom he was fighting under the name of the Manicheans, he said among other things: "For indeed he proclaimed our opinions to be agitated by the surges of errors to such an extent that we turned the slander upon the author himself; and for the sake of alleviating guilt, which sins of the will evidently burned, we subjected the very nature of the body to infamy, swearing that we come into this light incapable of goodness and full of iniquity. Thus, hardly anyone could be brought to justice by reason, what do I say, not even by the institution of the sacred law. For this opinion indeed depreciated the nature of flesh and blood. But after the saving mystery of the mediator between God and men occurred, to give an example of the most perfect virtue, he took on the nature of mortal man and showed that all the crimes were of behavior, not of seeds.

Finally, once our desires are turned towards better things, it is possible to fulfill not only the Law but also the commandments of the Gospel. To briefly respond to his words, we do not at all cast blame on the author of our nature when we say that we are conceived in iniquities and born in sins, but we confess that in the first parents of our nature, we were made in His likeness, so that we might live immortal and without sin in the delights of paradise with His grace aiding us. This most blessed purity of primitive life, if those first created had cared to preserve it, and had trusted the creator more than the enemy, then to this day, their progeny, holy and unsullied, would inhabit the delights of paradise, knowing neither death nor sin. But as they consented to sin, not out of any necessity of nature but from the neglect of their wandering mind, they were immediately excluded by the just judgment of the Creator from the place of paradise's pleasure, and sentenced to death for the sin they had rashly contracted, leaving the contagion of this sin to their offspring and race. Thus, it came to be that we, even unwillingly, are bound by the guilt of that sin which they voluntarily committed, so that not even the little ones, who can neither will good nor evil, can escape from this unless by the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Hence, Julian is proven wrong when he says, ”Guilt is imputed to us by the sole crime of the will,” and as he later more clearly expressed his view, saying, ”All crimes are moral, not seminal. What we inherited from Adam are seminal; the moral crimes, whether of our will, or from weakness and ignorance, we ourselves add. He is proven wrong when he blames those who subject the nature of our body, not the holy and immortal nature created for the first parents, but that which became corrupt after their transgression, to infamy, saying, ”I know that no good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh” (Rom. VII). And what the same apostle says, ”The flesh desires against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh” (Gal. V).

These things oppose each other so much that you do not do what you want. It is shown to be false when it blames those who testify that we come into this light incapable of goodness and full of iniquity. For indeed we profess that all men come into this light full of iniquity from the guilt of the first transgression; but it should far be from us to swear that we are born incapable of goodness. But the heretic, in order to deceitfully mislead the weak, has joined the lie of perfidy with the truth of catholic profession. It is shown to be false when it says that we swear that no one can be led to justice not only by reason, but even by the instruction of the sacred law. On the contrary, we confess that we can be led to justice by both reason and the doctrine of the holy law, with the help of the Lord, but without His grace, we cannot be justified either by the aids of natural reason or by the precepts of the divine law, as the Apostle testifies, because ”the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor. III), that is, the letter commanding kills if the Spirit is not present to enable the commands of the letter to be fulfilled. And the Spirit gives life by granting that the letter may be accomplished.

As for what he said about the Lord, ”that He would take on human nature to provide an example of consummate virtue,” he has secretly spewed out the poison of his heresy by saying ”the Lord coming in the flesh did not bestow gifts upon us, but examples of virtue”; whence he says shortly after, ”By His assumption of the flesh, He condemned the sins of our manners; not the nature of flesh itself, but by changing our works, so that the justification of the law might be fulfilled in us under His example. Likewise, in the exposition of the verse, ”Your neck is like necklaces”: ”When a beautiful neck is adorned by nature with ornaments of gems,” he undoubtedly increases happiness by industry; and as things worthy of each other befit each other, namely the honor of the necklaces and the beauty of the necks: thus also in you, whose nobility is shaped by doctrine, so that the virtues that nature begins, discipline may complete; for, rather, he should have said, ”Grace begins, grace completes, grace crowns. Again, after countless such things, which the devout reader will easily find in his very works, in the explanation of the verse where it is said, ”I will seize you and bring you into my mother’s house, there you will teach me,” he more openly revealed his insane opinions against the faith, saying of the Lord: ”Already in infancy, He has shown many things which we should learn:

First, that He is the maker of all born from the union of male and female, who fashioned for Himself a body from a virgin without the agency of a man; then, that no sin is innate to man, since He surrounded by the truth of flesh and free from stain; finally, that our origin

cannot, unless impiously, be attributed to the works of the devil, which should rather rejoice in the true God as not only the creator but also the indweller. By saying these things, he not only constructs an error, but also acts on it even with the intervening example. For Scripture bears witness that sin is congenitally inherent to man, which says, ”A heavy yoke is upon the children of Adam from the day they come out of their mother’s womb until the day of their burial, in the mother of all” (Eccles. 40). Indeed, blessed Job testifies this to be concurrent with man from conception, when he prays to the Lord and says, ”Who can make the clean from the unclean conceived seed? Is it not you who alone are” (Job 14)? And what consequence can there be, that it is said no sin is congenital to humans born from the union of male and female, because the Son of God, who for Himself without a man’s ministry, made a body from a virgin, was surrounded by the truth of flesh, and was immune from stain?

What is the rational consequence, that a pure man asserts the innocence of his nativity by the example of the Mediator of God and man born in the flesh, when the archangel said to the virgin mother concerning His nativity, ”The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1)? But to our progenitor after the guilt of transgression, the righteous judge said: ”I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, and you will be under the power of a man” (Gen. 3). But neither does that which he says, that our origin cannot ungodly be attributed to the works of the devil, which would rejoice in the true God as both creator and indweller, make sense either in Catholic or logical terms: for although the devil introduced sin to the first-formed, he did not deprive them of the natural course of the blessing, which they had heard: ”Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen. 1). Therefore, we are not deceived by that impiety which Julian reproaches us with, to attribute our origin to the works of the devil, which we know was established by the primordial work of God’s blessing.

However, far be it that we say our origin, after the evil of transgression, rejoiced in God before the remedy of second regeneration, which is made from water and the Holy Spirit, granted by the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. We have considered it necessary to note these few points from the numerous works of Julian previously mentioned, for the caution of readers, so that, being warned by these examples, they might examine more vigilantly during the remaining reading of his works, which often intermingle harmful statements with salutary ones. For in other small works as well, he does not hesitate to affirm his same heresy, even with much opposition from the most holy and learned Bishop Augustine. Finally, in the book he wrote about the Good of Constancy, he defends with great insistence what he claims to be the good of nature and the freedom of our will against the perfidy of the Manicheans. But as the truth proves, with great stubbornness he endures against the faith of heavenly grace. ”For this is,” says he, ”constancy, which chiefly asserts the power of free will, and its good, and the free motions of human nature and mind, demonstrating that every good of the mind is voluntary and subject to no circumstance.

However, not only do apostolic writings, but also my own thoughts teach me that not only the motions of the flesh, but also of the mind are free, which, although I often wish and strive with a fixed mind and indefatigable desire, does not permit me to apply myself to the devotion of prayer. If I had free motions of mind, I would so wish to keep my mind intent on prayers continuously as I easily manage to place the limbs of my body in any posture or location for prayer whenever I desire. And a little later: ”For it is this,” he says, ”that arms and excites the distinguished mind of each person, always reminding them of their freedom, and repelling all fears from them. How much better would he combat the Manichean if he were to say that it is the grace of God that makes the mind of each chosen one excellent and kindles it towards virtuous studies, always reminding them of their weakness and that without it, they can do nothing; and while repelling from them all trust in their own strength, inspiring them to sing to God: My strength, I will guard for you (Psalm 58)!

And again, after many things in which he proclaims the freedom of our will, he says: ”For indeed, as it has been excellently argued by the most learned and orthodox, no one can truly be harmed by anyone but himself; and there is absolutely nothing by which anyone is made miserable against his will. What then shall virtue fear, except its own failure, by which man is eternally harmed? This opinion can stand nowhere except among heretics, because it is clear and evident that Adam’s sin harms all men, not by themselves, but by him who, with his first crime, damned the entire human race, unless freed by the grace of Christ, perpetually. The malice of heretics harms those who, desiring to know and hold the Catholic faith, drag those unaware and unwilling into destruction. However, Julian, fearing that if in such a large work you attributed everything by which we live rightly to the freedom of our will, he would be detested and anathematized as an open enemy of God’s grace by everyone, he made mention of it even in this place; and he did so so subtly that he did not say it imparts virtues, but only aids and strengthens constancy among us. ”For it is of divine grace,” he says, ”to love and strengthen constancy, which can preserve other virtues; and defend virtue against all things that resist it.

Where he used a very cautious word, not to say that it grants constancy, as if we did not already possess it, but rather helps and strengthens it, as if it had already arisen from us, like the wind aids the flame of a fire, which it does not ignite itself but, having been lit from elsewhere, it helps it burn more brightly; and to prevent it from being extinguished, it strengthens it by blowing. As we have shown in the same book concerning Love, we have explained his meaning more fully. But near the end of this booklet, Julian himself openly reveals with what intention he worked through all these statements in all the works he considers. ”It is a scandal,” he says, ”to the Manichean, because it is fabricated,” that is, we confess, denying our Lord, who is true. He offends because we assert a good nature, because we assert the free will of man. But even in the book he wrote to Demetrias the Virgin of Christ, concerning the Institution of the Virgin, he reveals in the same manner his thoughts about the power of free will. A certain book, which some of our people read eagerly, they rashly presume to be the work of the holy and catholic doctor Jerome, not at all

perceiving that the sweetness of soothing eloquence and the perversion of seductive heresy clearly prove that this little work is not his.

Rather, he himself, with divine words, attacked and crushed the faith—or rather the perfidy—of this same heresy in the Dialogue of Atticus and Critobulus, which he published while Pelagius was still alive, when Julian, still a young boy, like a little king cobra in a snake's den, was being nurtured by him. In this book, therefore, Julian and in other little works declares that he confirms this same heresy of his, writing thus: "As often as I have to speak about the formation of morals and the conduct of holy life, I am used first to demonstrate the strength and quality of human nature, and to show what it can accomplish. And a little later: "Therefore, the order of exhortation which I have followed in other little works, I think must be especially observed here, where the good of nature ought to be declared more fully, the more perfect the life is to be formed. Again, in the progress of the same book: "For how many philosophers," he says, "have we both heard and read about, and we ourselves have seen chaste, patient, modest, generous, abstinent, kind, spurning both worldly honors and pleasures, and lovers of justice no less than of wisdom? Whence, I ask, do those who are strangers to God obtain these qualities that please God? Whence these good things in them, except from the good of nature?

And since all these things which I have mentioned, whether one person has them all at once, or individual people have individual qualities, and since the nature of all is one, they show by their example that all things can be in all, which we find individually in each. But if even without God, people show what they were made by God to be, see what Christians can do, whose nature has been renewed in Christ for the better, and who are helped by the support of divine grace. And after many such remarks, speaking about blessed Job, he says, "Oh man, evangelical before the Gospels, and a disciple before the apostolic precepts! Who, revealing the hidden riches of nature, and bringing them forth publicly from himself, shows what we all could do. Likewise, a little later, he says, "Nor do we so defend the good of nature, as to say that it cannot do evil, which we indeed profess to be capable of both good and evil; but we vindicate it from this injury alone, that we are not seen to be driven to evil by its fault, since we do neither good nor evil without will, and we are free to always do one, since we can always do both. For why are some going to be judges, others judged, unless because the will is different in the same nature? And because, although we all can do the same, we do different things?

And a little later, mentioning that Adam was cast out from Paradise, and Enoch was taken up from the world, he added: "For indeed, neither would that one have deserved to be punished, nor this one to be chosen by the just God, unless each could have done both. This is to be understood about the brothers Cain and Abel, and also about the twins Esau and Jacob; and it must be known that the cause is solely of the will, when merits are different in the same nature. And again, a little later: "Nor indeed," he says, "is there any other cause that makes it difficult for us to live well, than the long habit of vices, which, when it infects us from childhood, gradually corrupts us through many years, and later holds us bound and

attached to itself, so that it seems to have a certain power of nature. Likewise, after many things, where he excellently instructs a virgin dedicated to God, and would indeed complete a very useful and wholesome work, if he were teaching her to implore divine grace's support in all things, and not to trust in her own freedom and strength; just as in that book which we said was written by him about the Good of Constancy, he would greatly benefit those devoted to virtues, if he did not intermingle the virulent vices of errors. But if a little leaven, as the Apostle testifies, corrupts the whole lump (I Cor. V), how much more so the greatest poison?

"We attribute," he says, "iniquity to the just, cruelty to the pious, when we complain that he has commanded something impossible in the first place. Consequently, we think man ought to be condemned by him for not avoiding those things which he could not avoid. And a little later, he says, "He who is just could not command something impossible: nor is he who is pious going to condemn man for the things he could not avoid. In these statements, which I have excerpted from one of his pamphlets, it is evident to any learned person how many errors there are. I have brought together many such statements to show by numerous instances of errors that this book, which some claim was written by the Catholic blessed Jerome, is not, and to make readers more cautious since they would learn that it is heretical. I also found it convenient to briefly respond to these statements individually, as they evidently are more glaring in their impiety than light itself. Therefore, concerning his assertion: "Many philosophers possess patience, chastity, modesty, and other virtues from the goodness of nature"; it is agreed that whoever among the philosophers did not know Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God, could have no true virtue nor any true wisdom. To the extent that they may have had any semblance of wisdom or virtue, they received all of it from above;

not only by the gift of their initial condition but also through his daily grace, who, not abandoning his own creation, bestows his gifts upon men as he deems fit, giving great things to the great and little things to the small. Therefore, when he says, "All things can exist in all men, as individual things are found in individuals"; he contradicts Scripture, which says, Not everything can be in everyone, for the Son of Man is not immortal; where it is manifestly hinted that when this mortal person puts on immortality, only then can all good virtues be found in all; and even then, not from the goodness of nature, but by the grace of him of whom it is written, So that God may be all in all. But our daily experiences of fragility also prove that not all things can be present in all people, where so many are found who, striving with utmost zeal, are by no means able to attain those virtues which they see others possess. To say that men without God show what kind they were made by God is so far from the truth that even men close to God cannot, in this present life, show what kind they were made by God in the beginning. For who can be greater in wisdom or life than he who, before paying the debt of the flesh, was caught up to paradise or the third heaven, beheld the converse of the heavenly citizens, and heard their discourses?

Yet he says, “I delight in the law of God according to the inward man, but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind” (Rom. 7). Which the parents of the human race, as long as they kept the goodness of nature unblemished, certainly could not say. To say that the nature of Christians has been better restored by Christ and that they are aided by divine grace, if it is meant only of those things given to us in the remission of sins through baptism, is heretical; but if it is also said of his daily grace, by which he continues to restore and help us in mind and body, it is Catholic. To say that blessed Job revealed in his exceptional virtues the hidden wealth of nature, and showed in himself what we all could achieve, would be better said as he revealed the ineffable riches of divine grace, and in himself showed that this could be given to all who will. To say that we are not driven to evil by nature’s vice, who neither do good without will nor evil, contradicts the Apostle who says, “I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh. For the will to do good is with me, but the ability to carry it out is not. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want, this I do” (Ibid.).

That it is said we are free to always do one thing when we are always able to do both contradicts the prophet who speaks to God, saying, ”I know, O Lord, that a man’s way is not his own, nor is it for a man to walk and direct his steps” (Jer.). But it also places itself above the Apostle, who said, ”Therefore I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin” (Rom. 7). That it is said judgments are not made by anything else, nor judged, except because, in the same nature, there is a different will, and because when we all can do the same, we do different things, contradicts the Catholic faith, which also professes that even infants are to be judged, those who, placed in the same nature, before they were able to do or wish anything good or evil, or at least to know it, were taken without baptism.

That Esau and Jacob and others like them are said to be distinguished solely by the cause of the will, so that they would have different merits in the same nature, contradicts the Apostle, who spoke about them, saying, ”For though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, so that God’s purpose of election might stand, not because of works but because of him who calls, it was said to her, ’The elder shall serve the younger.’ As it is written, ’Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated’” (Rom. 9). That it is said no other cause brings us the difficulty of living well than the long habit of vices contradicts Scripture, which says, ”A grievous yoke is upon the children of Adam from the day they come forth from their mother’s womb” (Ecclus. 40). That it is said the Lord has not commanded anything impossible, being just, is indeed true if it looks to His help, to whom the Catholic voice prays, ”Lead me in the path of your commandments” (Ps. 119). But if it trusts in the powers of its own soul, it is refuted by the truthful statement of the same just Creator, who says, ”Without Me, you can do nothing” (John 15).

What he says, that a pious man would not condemn a person for something he could not avoid, contradicts the same opinion of the pious Redeemer and just judge, which He even said about infants, ”Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom

of God" (John III). However, as Saint Augustine says, "the punishment or damnation will be very mild for all who, apart from the sin they inherited, did not add any other sins. Yet, such people cannot be wholly immune from damnation, since the Apostle clearly says that death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who did not sin (Romans V). And as if to ask why it reigned over all who did not sin, he immediately provides the reason, adding, "In the likeness of Adam's transgression" (Ibid.), meaning not because of their own sins, but because Adam the transgressor begot them as his likeness. Therefore, concerning this part of the question, we must say what we have heard the same apostle Paul say, who, disputing about Esau and Jacob being born of one act of intercourse but with different fates, says, "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For Moses said, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

Therefore it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy" (Romans XI), and so on, until much wearied by this question, he thus concluded: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! (Ibid.). We thought it fitting to preface these excerpts from the works of Julian to the cautious reader. Let us hence turn our style to the exposition of the Song of Songs, and, in this most difficult book to understand, diligently following the footsteps of the Fathers, devote whatever we can of our saving study, with the help of the grace of God which we defend. In this work, I warn the reader not to judge me superfluous if I wish to explain in greater detail about the nature of the trees or aromatic herbs, which are numerous in this volume, according to what I have learned from the books of the ancients. For I did this not out of a desire for arrogance, but to address my own and my fellows' ignorance, who, born and raised far beyond the world, that is, on an island of the Ocean sea, can only know what happens in the principal parts of the world—Arabia, India, Judea, and Egypt—through the writings of those who were present.

Headings in the Song of Songs

I. The synagogue desires the Lord to come in the flesh, and upon His coming, it meets Him with devoted love. II. The early Church, darkened by the persecution of unbelieving Jews, laments and invokes trembling help from her beloved Redeemer. III. The Lord, rebuking the Church, admonishes her, though fearful, of the grace given to her against all the snares of the enemies. IV. Strengthened by the words of God, the Church recalls to memory His conduct in the flesh, His passion, and resurrection. V. The Lord praises her, who has been strengthened, and in return desires to rejoice with her in the slight peace of the present life. VI. The Lord, recalling the joy of the virgin mother, also embraces with praise the virtue of chastity in His bride. VII. Introduced into the understanding of heavenly sacraments, the Church desires to be refreshed and to rest under the protection of her Redeemer.

VIII. He adjures the believers not to disturb the peace of the Church. IX. The Lord, appearing in the flesh, excites the Church to preach, because the long winter of infidelity which had oppressed the world has passed, and He commands to detect and refute the foul deceptions

of heretics. X. The Church, favoring the commands of the Lord, prays often that He may come to her to help through the inspiration of secret grace. XI. The Church explains how the Gentiles attained the faith of Christ in order; and He rejoicing in her vows, commands the faithful not to disturb her rest. XII. The synagogue marvels at the faith inspired in the Church, devoted through the mortification of the flesh and the power of prayer. XIII. She responds that she has come to the bed and the couch of the peaceful King, that is, to the rest and internal refreshment of souls, and she excites those who admired her to behold the beauty of the King.

XIV. Delighted with the faith of the Church, the Lord specifically commends all her members, that is, each and every faithful person, with praise; and foretells that the rage of persecutors will be inclined to her reverence, for whose love He Himself bore the wounds of the cross. XV. He describes the sweetness of the doctrine of her preachers, the fruits of their works, and the fragrance of the most delightful repute. XVI. He commits her to be tested by the winds of tribulations, so that her constancy may be proved the more. XVII. Conscious of her devotion, she prays that He would come to inspire her. XVIII. The Lord, testifying that He has already come to her and has been delighted by her pious works, commands the heavenly citizens to also rejoice in her good deeds. XIX. Resting from the tumults of the world, the Church is roused by the voice of the Lord to correct some in whom her hope and love had begun to grow cold; she, excusing herself by the love of rest, begins to be kindled to act by His secret remorse, but the effect does not immediately follow her beginnings; wherefore, seeing the virtues of great doctors, she casts away whatever of worldly desires clung to her.

XX. In these faithful ones, she beseeches the more perfect that in times of her remorse or prayer, they also commend her to the Lord. XXI. They, in turn, ask to be told something of her virtues, that inflamed by their sweetness, they may be more fired up in her love. XXII. She acts on the request, and chanting with appropriate praise the virtues and power of his might, again asks in what minds his footsteps are usually found. XXIII. He responds that He is delighted by the desires of the pious saints and fruitful works, and He gathers all the perfected in the virtues of chastity to eternal joys. XXIV. Hearing this, the Lord praises the devotion and actions of the Church; yet He also teaches that He is not greatly desired in this life. XXV. He says the perfection of the whole Church should be preferred to many through the world, many assemblies of false brothers, many choirs of the innocent.

XXVI. Hearing the Church being praised by the Lord, the synagogue also is incited to admire her, especially since she is terrible to all her enemies by the invincible struggle of virtues, which the Apostle teaches will happen at the end of the world. XXVII. The Church responds and declares, through her doctors, what has been the cause of her military preparation, namely, the care of all churches from which one Catholic Church is constituted. XXVIII. And the synagogue confesses that she was troubled with sudden astonishment at the preaching of the Gospel; rejoicing in her salutary efforts, the Church asks that she may return to the recognition of her Redeemer. XXIX. But the Redeemer Himself, agreeing

to her entreaties, testifies that nothing in her should be seen more than the diligence in virtues. XXX. Again, describing the praises of His beloved as was customary, He first notes in the joining of her thighs the unity of both peoples believing in and loving Him.

XXXI. She, caught up by His praise, seizes the word from His mouth, heaps up praise, and prays for His coming, so that, with His cooperation, she may undertake the pious labors of action or preaching. XXXII. Beginning anew from the origin of the Church, she desires the Lord to be incarnate, so that by the support of human assumption, she may strengthen her arm to be able to rise to the contemplation of divine glory XXXIII. She, rejoicing in His desires, adjures believers from the Jews not to disturb the faith of the Gentiles.—XXXIV. They, obeying His commands, marvel at her sudden conversion with a suspicious mind. XXXV. He also admonishes the Church of the love by which He redeemed her through the tree of the cross, and commands her to bear always the memory of Him in heart and work. XXXVI. He also speaks to the synagogue about what should be done with the primitive Church from the Gentiles, which still lacks those who can be ordained as doctors.

XXXVII. And He adds that if anyone among them is exalted in life and word, he should be instructed in divine scriptures, so that he may be promoted to a degree; and if anyone is of simpler nature, the examples of the saints should be proposed to strengthen him more in faith. XXXVIII. She responds that she has been exalted by His gift and is capable in the rank of a doctor in perfect men. XXXIX. And the Church, being called in the peace of her Creator, declares that she has many peoples, marking that the nations of the Gentiles belong to her. XL. The Lord, favoring these things, testifies that He cares for the whole Church and commands those who bless to also undertake the ministry of preaching. XLI. The Church, obeying His commands, beseeches Him to be often present in the hearts of the faithful to assist in her spiritual endeavors.

The Song of Songs Reads Literally as Follows

Chapter 1. The Voice of the Church: Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth, for your breasts are better than wine, fragrant with the best ointments. Your name is oil poured out; therefore, the maidens loved you. Draw me after you, we will run to the fragrance of your ointments. The king has brought me into his chambers; we will exult and rejoice in you. Remembering your breasts more than wine, the righteous love you. Again the Voice of the Church: I am black but beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. Do not consider me, because I am dark, because the sun has discolored me. The sons of my mother fought against me; they made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept. Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture, where you lie down at noon, lest I begin to wander after the flocks of your companions. If you do not know, O most beautiful among women, go out, and follow the tracks of the sheep, and feed your kids beside the shepherds' tents. I have compared you, my love, to my cavalry in Pharaoh's chariots. Your cheeks are beautiful like a turtle dove's. Your neck is like a string of jewels. We will make you golden earrings studded with silver. While the king was at his table, my spikenard gave forth its fragrance. My beloved is to me a bundle of myrrh

that will lie between my breasts. My beloved is to me a cluster of henna in the vineyards of En-Gedi. Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves. Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly delightful. Our bed is green. The beams of our house are cedars. Our rafters are cypresses.

Chapter 2. I am the flower of the field, and the lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns, so is my beloved among the daughters. As the apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the sons. I sit under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit is sweet to my taste. The king brought me into his wine cellars, and he ordered love in me. Sustain me with flowers, comfort me with apples, for I am sick of love. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand will embrace me. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the hinds of the field, that you do not stir up nor awake my love until he pleases. The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a roe or a young hart. Behold, he stands behind our wall, he looks forth at the windows, showing himself through the lattice. My beloved speaks and says to me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For behold, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

My dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your countenance is lovely. Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes. My beloved is mine, and I am his, he feeds among the lilies until the day breaks and the shadows flee away. Turn, my beloved, and be like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bethel.

Chapter 3. On my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but found him not. I will rise now and go about the city; in the streets and in the squares I will seek him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but found him not. The watchmen found me, those who go about the city. Have you seen him whom my soul loves? Scarcely had I passed them, when I found him whom my soul loves. 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 who conceived me. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases. Who is that coming up from the wilderness, like a column of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the fragrant powders of the merchant? Behold, the litter of Solomon! Around it are sixty mighty men of the mighty men of Israel, all of them wearing swords and expert in war, each with his sword at his thigh, against the terrors of the night. King Solomon made for himself a carriage from the wood of Lebanon. He made its posts of silver, its back of gold, its seat of purple; its interior was inlaid with love by the daughters of Jerusalem. Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and look upon King Solomon, with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, on the day of the gladness of his heart.

Chapter 4. How beautiful you are, my friend, how beautiful you are! Your eyes are doves, except for what lies inside. Your hair is like flocks of goats that have ascended from Mount Gilead. Your teeth are like flocks of shorn sheep that have come up from the washing. All of them bear twins, and none among them is barren. Like a scarlet thread are your lips, and your words are sweet. Like a slice of pomegranate, so are your cheeks except for what lies inside. Your neck is like the tower of David, built with turrets. A thousand shields hang upon it, all the armor of the mighty. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that feed among the lilies until the day breathes and the shadows flee. I will go to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of incense. You are wholly beautiful, my friend, and there is no blemish in you. Come from Lebanon, my bride, come from Lebanon, come. You shall be crowned from the top of Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards. You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride, you have ravished my heart with one of your eyes and with one chain of your neck. How beautiful are your breasts, my sister, my bride! Your breasts are more beautiful than wine, and the fragrance of your ointments above all spices. Your lips, my bride, drip honey, honey and milk are under your tongue;

and the scent of your garments is like the scent of incense. You are a garden enclosed, my sister, my bride, a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed. Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with all choicest fruits; henna with nard, nard 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, which flow vigorously from Lebanon. Awake, north wind, and come, south wind; blow upon my garden, and let its spices flow.

Chapter 5. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat the fruit of his trees; come into my garden, my sister, my spouse. I have gathered my myrrh with my spices; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends, and drink; drink deeply, O beloved. I sleep, but my heart is awake. The voice of my beloved knocking: Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night. I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them? My beloved put his hand through the latch-opening, and my heart was moved for him. I rose to open to my beloved; my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, upon the handles of the bolt. I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had turned away and was gone. My soul failed me when he spoke; I sought him, but did not find him; I called him, but he gave no answer. The watchmen found me as they went about the city; they struck me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am sick with love. What is your beloved more than another beloved, O fairest among women?

What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you thus adjure us? My beloved is radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand. His head is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside streams of water, bathed in milk,

fitly set. His cheeks are like beds of spices, yielding perfume. His lips are lilies, dripping liquid myrrh. His arms are rounded gold, set with jewels. His body is polished ivory bedecked with sapphires. His legs are alabaster columns, set upon bases of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars. His mouth is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem. Where has your beloved gone, O fairest among women? Where has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you?

Chapter 6. My beloved has descended into his garden to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens and to gather lilies. I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine, he who feeds among the lilies. You are beautiful, my friend, sweet and comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army set in array. Turn your eyes away from me, because they have made me flee. Your hair is like a flock of goats, which have appeared from Gilead. Your teeth are like flocks of sheep, which have come up from the washing. All bearing twins, and none barren among them. Like a slice of pomegranate, so are your cheeks, without your eyes. Sixty are queens, and eighty concubines, and maidens without number. One is my dove, my perfect one, she is the only one of her mother, the chosen one of her who bore her. The daughters saw her and called her blessed, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her.--Who is she that comes forth as the morning rising, beautiful as the moon, selected as the sun, terrible as an army set in array? I went down to the nut garden, to see the fruits of the valley; to see if the vine flowered, and the pomegranates budded. I did not know, my soul troubled me, because of the chariots of Amminadib. Return, return, O Shulammite, return, return, that we may look upon you.

Chapter 7. What will you see in the Shulammite, except the dance of the camps? How beautiful are your steps in sandals, daughter of a prince! The curves of your thighs are like ornaments, crafted by an artist's hand. Your navel is a rounded bowl, never lacking mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat, surrounded by lilies. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle. Your neck is like an ivory tower. Your eyes are like the pools in Heshbon, near the gate of Bath Rabbim. Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon, which looks towards Damascus. Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel, and the flowing locks of your head are like royal purple bound in streams. How beautiful you are, and how lovely, dearest in delights! Your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like clusters of fruit. I said, I will climb the palm tree, I will take hold of its fruit, and your breasts will be like clusters of grapes, and the scent of your breath like apples. Your mouth is like the best wine, worthy for my beloved to drink, moving smoothly for my lips and teeth to taste. I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me. Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field, let us lodge in the villages, let us go early to the vineyards, let us see if the vine has budded, if the blossoms have opened, if the pomegranates are in bloom; there I will give you my love. The mandrakes give off their fragrance, and at our gates are all choice fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for you, my beloved.

Chapter 8. Who will give you to me as my brother, nursed at the breasts of my mother, so that I may find you outside, and kiss you; and now no one will despise me. I will take hold of you and bring you into the house of my mother, and into the chamber of her who bore me; there you will teach me, and I will give you a cup of spiced wine and the juice of my pomegranates. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me. I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, that you do not stir up nor awaken my love until she pleases. Who is this that comes up from the wilderness, flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved? Under the apple tree I awakened you; there your mother was corrupted, there she who bore you was violated. Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is as strong as death, jealousy as cruel as the grave. Its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly despised. Our little sister has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for? If she is a wall, we will build upon her a battlement of silver.

If she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar. I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers, since I have become in his eyes as one finding peace. Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon; he let out the vineyard to keepers; everyone for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand pieces of silver. My vineyard, which is mine, is before me. You, Solomon, may have the thousand, and those that keep its fruit, two hundred. You who dwell in the gardens, the companions listen for your voice; let me hear it. Flee, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of spices.

Book 2

The Song of Songs, in which that wisest of kings Solomon describes under the figure of the bridegroom and the bride the mysteries of Christ and the Church, namely the eternal King and His city, whoever wishes to read, must first remember that the entire congregation of the elect is generally called the Church. Yet now, for the sake of distinction, that portion of the faithful which preceded the times of the Lord's incarnation is called the Synagogue; while that which followed is named the Church. For the old Scripture is accustomed to designate the faithful people of that time by both terms. Both names, however, are Greek: Synagogue means congregation in Latin, and Church means convocation. By this name, it was more pleasing to call the faithful of this time, for a broader knowledge of spiritual understanding. Because it is proper for those who know how to hear and discern to be convoked; while stones or any other insensible things can be gathered together. However, both parts of the righteous, share the same faith and love of Christ; although they have different sacraments according to the reckoning of times, as the apostle Peter testifies, who says: Why do you tempt God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they (Acts XV).

For just as we, now that the mystery of the Lord's incarnation, passion, and resurrection has been accomplished, hope and believe to be saved, so too the earlier part of the Church, still expecting the future incarnation, passion, and resurrection of the Lord and Redeemer, believed that it would be saved through His grace, which it ardently desired to come. Thus the voice of this part resounds first in the song of love; to whom the holy prophets very often both pointed out the way of living and promised His advent, who, like a bridegroom coming forth from his chamber, would grant the entire world the grace of a new blessing, began, surpassing the voices of the heralds, to desire more the presence of its King and Savior, saying:

Chapter 1

[Song of Solomon 1:2] -- Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth. Which is to say openly: I beseech him not to always send angels, not prophets, to instruct me; may he himself, who has been promised for so long, finally come, and enlighten me with the light of his presence, and, as if offering a kiss, comfort me by speaking with his own mouth; but also receive

patiently the touch of my mouth, that is, not disdain to hear and instruct me when I inquire about the way of salvation. This desire of hers is known to have been fulfilled when, as we read in the Gospel: Jesus sat on the mountain, and his disciples came to him, and he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matt. V). And again, when he reminded his disciples of the dignity of his presence, that is, of his coming in the flesh, saying: Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I say to you, many kings and prophets desired to see what you see, and did not see it; and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it (Luke X). He also then opened his mouth to promise the unheard-of joys of the heavenly kingdom, when he had so often before opened the mouths of the prophets, who were promising his coming to the world.

But when the Synagogue, desiring the Lord to come, said through the prophets who proclaimed him, Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth, that is, may he himself impart to me the gifts of his doctrine, she suddenly turned her words to the very one for whom she was burning with desire, adding: For your breasts are better than wine. As if she were openly saying: Therefore I desire you to come, to be refreshed by your eyes, because the sweetness of your presence incomparably surpasses all the gifts which you sent through the heralds of your coming. Indeed, he says that wine represents the fervor of legal knowledge, and the breasts represent the rudiments of evangelical faith. About which Paul says: I have given you milk to drink, not solid food (I Cor. III). And again: For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified (I Cor. II). Thus, the breasts of the bridegroom are better than wine, because the rudiments of the New Testament immediately render those regenerated by water and the Spirit ready for the entry into heavenly life, which the long observance of the law could by no means accomplish, not even in those who, inflamed by the taste of heavenly sweetness, could truly say to God with the Psalmist: And your cup that intoxicates, how glorious it is (Psal. XXII)! The Apostle confirms this, saying: For the law made nothing perfect (Hebr. VII).

But if the breasts of Christ, that is, the beginnings of the Lord's faith, are better than the wine of the law, how much more does the wine of Christ, that is, the perfection of evangelical doctrine, surpass all legal ceremonies! If the sacraments of His incarnation lead to life, how much more do the recognition of His divinity and the glory of His vision! For the bridegroom himself signifies that he has not only milk, but also wine, when he says later: I drank my wine with my milk. How much his wine excelled the wine of the law, he mystically signifies in the Gospel, where, when the old wine failed at the typical nuptials of the Church, he himself made new wine from water, truly worthy of greater praise. And rightly does he call the bridegroom's breasts by a member of a woman's body, to manifestly speak figuratively from the very beginning of the song. Just as in the Apocalypse, which is also a typical book, when John says about Him: I saw in the midst of the seven golden lampstands one resembling a Son of man, dressed in a long robe (Apoc. I). He adds, And he was girded about the breasts with a golden girdle. Nor does the bridegroom himself, that is, our Lord, refuse to transfer to himself the figure of the female sex, when through Isaiah he says: Shall I, who

cause others to bring forth, not bring forth myself? says the Lord. If I who grant generation to others, will I be sterile?

And again: As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you (Isa. LII). And in the Gospel to the unbelieving city: How often have I desired to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing (Matth. XXIII)?

[Song of Solomon 1:3] -- The fragrance of the finest ointments. The finest ointments are the gifts of the Holy Spirit, by which the breasts of Christ have a fragrance, because the holy teachers, the ministers of the evangelical milk, progress in the love of virtues through the anointing of the Spirit. And indeed the ointments were good, with which the prophets and priests were visibly anointed under the law; but those ointments are the finest with which the apostles and their successors are invisibly anointed. Of these Paul says: And He who anointed us is God, and who sealed us, and gave us the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts (2 Cor. 1). And the apostle John: And the anointing which you have received from Him, remains in you (1 John 2). And you do not need anyone to teach you, but as His anointing teaches you about all things, etc. (Ibid.). Also, they are fragrant with the finest ointments when they spread the reputation of their good works or preaching far and wide; just as they themselves say: But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ Jesus, and manifests the fragrance of His knowledge through us in every place (2 Cor. 2). Moreover, he gives the reason why His breasts are fragrant with the finest ointments, while he adds:

[Song of Solomon 1:3] -- Oil poured forth is your name. Nor is it to be wondered if his limbs exude with ointments, for he himself received his name from oil, so that by anointing he is called Christ, that is, the anointed one. That anointing indeed of which Peter says: ”How God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power” (Acts 10). For indeed, the Holy Spirit is accustomed to be understood by the name of oil, as the prophet testifies, who in the praises of the same bridegroom says: ”God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions” (Psalms 45). Therefore, his name is not oil dropped, but poured forth, because as his precursor said of him: ”God does not give the Spirit by measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand” (John 3). He is also rightly considered by the name of poured oil among his elect, upon whom, appearing in the flesh, he lavishly poured out the gift of his Spirit, so that the things once held secret in one nation, Judea, now, by clear grace, flooded the ends of the whole world, fulfilling the prophecy which said: ”I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh” (Joel 2). Explaining this, the apostle Peter said: ”Exalted therefore at the right hand of God, and having received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, he has poured forth this gift which you see and hear” (Acts 2). Therefore, his name is oil poured forth, because it is rightly named for what it is, that is, full of the Holy Spirit, rightly named for what his gift of the Spirit works, anointing the hearts of the elect.

[Song of Solomon 1:3] -- Therefore, the young maidens have loved you. He calls young maidens the souls which, reborn in Christ, have cast away the filth of the old man. These adhere so much more to the love of their Creator, as they recognize themselves to receive solely by

His grace, both the remission of sins and the gifts of the Spirit, through which they advance in virtues. Hence, they openly profess and say that the Love of God, namely the root of all virtues, has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom. V). It is also not to be doubted that the earlier saints loved the Lord with a perfect love, and that their pious throngs can mystically be called young maidens, who trampled the examples of the old sinner through the faith of truth, and pursued the rewards of a new life with undoubting hope. Therefore, one of them, certain already of the future good things, speaks to his soul, saying: Your youth will be renewed like the eagle's (Psal. CII). But these things now more aptly fit the heirs of the New Testament, because they are specifically regenerated to God as sons of adoption through the washing of grace. The more they love Him, the greater gifts they receive from Him, so that as soon as they are freed from the flesh, if they have lived rightly, they ascend to the joys of the heavenly kingdom.

[Song of Solomon 1:4] -- Draw me, we will run after you. So far, this is the voice of the Synagogue; that is, of that people who, faithfully devoted, anticipated the incarnation of the Savior, who responded with the prophets preaching for a long time at the beginning of the song: Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth; that is, let him appear himself, and speaking mouth to mouth, may he grant me examples of living, and gifts. Then, in the following verses, she indicated what kind of gifts those would be, how much to be loved by chaste souls. Hence, the voice of the Church is introduced, that is, of those who came to faith after the time of his incarnation. For she first prayed for the Lord to come and bring her the kiss of peace; this one, knowing he has now come in the flesh and already ascended to heaven, no longer asks him to descend to her in the same way, but rather desires to follow him to heaven. Which, seeing that it cannot be done by herself, rightly implores the guidance of him to whom she wishes to come. Draw me, she says, we will run after you. As if she plainly says: Indeed, we would wish to run in your ways, to follow the footsteps of your works which you marked living on earth, to reach you presiding in heaven; but because without you we can do nothing, we pray that you deign to give us your hand;

help us running to you with your assistance. Thus, indeed, we can only rightly run and finish the race if we run with you as leader and helper. Hence the Apostle, who boasts, saying: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith (II Tim. II), in another place clearly teaches whether he could direct his steps by himself, or ran being drawn by the Lord, saying: But I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me (I Cor. XV). Though it is said in the singular number, Draw me, it is joined, We will run, because the Church of Christ is one throughout the world, and it consists of many faithful souls; who in this place are called maidens, due to the life of new conversation.

[Song of Solomon 1:4] -- The king has brought me into his chambers. The eternal king's chambers are the inner joys of the heavenly homeland, into which the holy Church has now been brought through faith and will be fully brought in the future through reality. The bride, that is, the Church of Christ, speaks to the young maidens, the faithful souls, her

members newly reborn in Christ. Therefore, I beseech the bridegroom to help us, running after him, by giving his hand, lest we fail; because I have already tasted the sweetness of the heavenly kingdom, I have already tasted and seen that the Lord is good. I have already known the good things prepared for me in heaven, revealed by him. And then, turning to the one who revealed these things to her, her king and Lord, she hastens to give thanks for his benefits, saying: [Song of Solomon 1:4] -- We will exult and rejoice in you, etc. Which is to say openly, By no means do we exalt ourselves for the received gifts; but in everything that we live well, we exult, indeed, we will always exult and rejoice in your mercy; remembering always, how much kindness you have shown us, in how you have been pleased to mitigate the austerity of the law with the grace of evangelical faith.

[Song of Solomon 1:4] -- The righteous love you. Therefore, not in ourselves, but we will exult and rejoice in you, mindful of your gifts, because all those who are upright in heart have learned that you are to be loved before all and above all. Nor can those who prefer anything to your love be completely righteous, from whom alone they have whatever good they possess. And consider what he said earlier: The young maidens loved you; but now, he says, The righteous love you. And it should be gathered that he called youth nothing other than the uprightness of heart, when those who have cast off the impurity of the old man put on the new man, which is created according to God in justice, and holiness, and truth. Likewise, the righteous love you, because no one can truly love the Lord unless they are upright. For whoever violates the righteousness of justice by deed, word, or even thought, in a wicked manner, vainly say they love the Creator, whose commands they despise. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, as the evangelist John testifies (1 Epistle V). But after the holy Church has been brought into the cellars of Christ, namely through the knowledge and hope of heavenly goods, after she has learned to love him with an upright heart, and to rejoice and exult only in his grace, it remains to show what struggle she undergoes for the same love of him, and what affliction she endures for the acquisition of the goods she has tasted.

[Song of Solomon 1:5] -- I am black, etc. Black evidently from the adversity of oppressions, but beautiful in the comeliness of virtues; truly, the more beautiful in the sight of the internal judge, the more harassed and seemingly defiled by the greater oppressions of the foolish. However, the daughters of Jerusalem, to whom she speaks, are called souls imbued with heavenly sacraments, longing for the home of the heavenly homeland. For consoling these in her tribulations, the holy mother says: I am black, but beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem. As if she plainly says, Indeed, I appear very vile in the eyes of the persecutors; but before God, I shine gloriously in the confession of truth. Therefore, it does not behove you to be saddened in this exile of labors, who remember that you are citizens of the heavenly homeland, who hasten toward the vision of eternal peace through the adversities of the fleeting world.

[Song of Solomon 1:5] -- Like the tents of Kedar, etc. Kedar was the son of Ishmael, of whom it was said: His hand against all, and the hand of all against him (Gen. XVII). The truth

of which prophecy is proven today by the nation of the Saracens, who are hated by all and descended from him: and the Psalmist, besieged by afflictions, affirms this when he says: I have lived with those who dwell in Kedar, my soul has been a long-time sojourner. With those who hate peace, I was peaceful (Psal. CXIX). For neither is it read that David suffered any hatred from the Ishmaelites themselves; but wanting to exaggerate the evils he suffered from Saul or his other adversaries, he lamented that he was vexed by the wickedness of the nation, which never sought peace with anyone. On the contrary, Solomon was peaceful both in name and in life. Hence, as Scripture testifies, all the kings of the lands desired to see the face of Solomon, to hear the wisdom that God had given into his heart. Therefore, he says: I am black but beautiful, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon; it is distinguished thus: she is black as the tents of Kedar, beautiful as the curtains of Solomon. For the holy Church, often darkened by the afflictions of unbelievers, seems as if it were an enemy to the entire world, fulfilling the word the Lord said, And you will be hated by all because of my name (Matt. X).

Thus, she is always beautiful in the sight of her Redeemer, as if truly worthy to be visited by the King of peace himself. And it should be noted that Kedar, by its very name, which signifies darkness, hints at either wicked men or unclean spirits. Just as Solomon, who is interpreted as peaceful, also indicates by the mystery of the name itself; of whom it is written, His empire will be multiplied, and peace will have no end; upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, and so on (Isaiah IX). And when it is said that the Church is black like the tents of Kedar, it is placed not for truth, but for the estimation of the foolish, who think it provides a dwelling for vices or evil spirits within itself. But when it is called beautiful as the curtains of Solomon, it is placed as an example of truth, because, as Solomon was accustomed to make tents for himself out of the skins of dead animals, so the Lord gathers the Church for himself out of those animals who have learned to renounce carnal desires. Hence he said to all: If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me (Matt. XVI). And the Apostle says, Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth (Coloss. III). Some, reading this sentence thus, Black am I but beautiful, say that the Church is black in her carnal members or false brethren, like the tents of Kedar;

but beautiful in her spiritual members, like the curtains of Solomon. But if we pay attention to what is written about the Lord, We saw him, and he had neither form nor beauty (Isaiah LIII); which was said not about his sin, for he had absolutely no sin, but about his passion, it is evident that the Church too, not because of sins or the vices of sinners, but because of her temptations and her sufferings, with which she is constantly exercised, claims to be black. This sense is affirmed also by the following words, when it is said:

[Song of Solomon 1:6] -- Do not consider me because I am dark, etc. Which is to say openly: Do not marvel at me, O daughters of Jerusalem, that is, souls devoted to God, because I am despised by men, because the heat of temptations, which for my inner beauty I do not cease to endure, has rendered me outwardly dark, whom, nonetheless, the heavenly grace

has granted to be inwardly charming. Which is like the apostle Peter: Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you, but rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings (1 Peter 4). And indeed, sometimes the name of the Lord Himself is signified by the sun, as it is said of His ascension: The sun was lifted up, and the moon stood still in its place; sometimes of His chosen ones, as He says: The righteous shall shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Matthew 13). But in this place, it is better that the fervor of tribulations be figured by the appellation of the sun, according to what He Himself says about seeds sown on the rock: When the sun rose, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away (Matthew 13). Which, later explaining it, He says thus: When tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away (Matthew 13), clearly declaring that tribulation and persecution are figured by the term "sun.

Just as those who reside quietly at home often have whiter limbs, while those who work in the vineyard or garden or any other outdoor labor often have darker limbs due to much sun, so does the holy Church, the more earnestly she girds herself for spiritual combat, perceive fiercer snares of the old enemy rising against her. And just as the sinner is often praised in the desires of his soul, and he who commits iniquity is blessed, so sometimes the just man is reproached in the virtues of his soul; and he who acts rightly is cursed, as Paul attests, who says: We bless when reviled; we endure persecution; when slandered, we entreat (1 Corinthians 4). But He Himself, whose cause it is for which it happens, teaches the faithful that this ensnarement of blasphemy should be of little account, indeed that they should rejoice in it, saying, "Blessed are you when men curse you; and if they persecute you and say all manner of evil against you, and so forth (Matthew V). Because therefore the holy Church sees itself adorned internally with faith and virtues, but bears witness that it is burned externally by persecutions, it remains to show whence it endured the first rage of persecution. It follows:

[Song of Solomon 1:6] -- "The sons of my mother fought against me, etc. It is the voice of the primitive Church, which receives the wars of tribulations from the Synagogue itself, from which it derives its carnal origin, as the Acts of the Apostles most fully teach. In this sentence, firstly, it must be noted that the bride of Christ rightly asserts that she has been darkened by the sun, who used to work as a subordinate laborer cultivating and guarding the vineyard. There was, however, one vineyard of Christ in Jerusalem, namely the primitive Church itself, which on the day of Pentecost, that is, on the fiftieth day after the resurrection of the Lord, was dedicated by the coming of the Holy Spirit. At that time, its guardians were the apostles themselves. But after the persecution occurred, during the time of the blessed martyr Stephen, all were dispersed throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except for the apostles, it happened that there were many vineyards, that is, many churches of Christ in various places, preaching the word to those who were dispersed here and there. Indeed, by the action of divine providence, this dispersion of the Church of Jerusalem was the occasion for establishing many churches. Hence it is well that our codices have "They were scattered; in Greek it says diesparisan, that is, "they were disseminated throughout

the regions of Judea and Samaria. And shortly after, "Those who were disseminated went about evangelizing the word of God:

because the Jewish persecutors, indeed wishing to overthrow the Church, unwillingly spread the seed of the word more widely, and by persecuting one Church in Jerusalem, unwillingly caused many Churches to exist widely. So, when the primitive Church said it was darkened by afflictions, because the sons of its mother, that is, the parricidal Synagogue, hated and attacked it, it immediately added how much it had profited from these same afflictions, adding in the person of those to whom the care of preaching was entrusted: "They made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept."

[Song of Solomon 1:6] -- And as if to say openly, "The bitterness of my persecutors has brought me such advantage and utility, that I have become the keeper of many vineyards, that is, churches of Christ, after the primitive vineyard, that is, the Church which I first began to establish and guard in Jerusalem, was scattered by their multitude. But the not keeping of the vineyard is to be referred not to the mind, but to the place: for indeed at that time, a significant part of the Church withdrew from Jerusalem due to persecution, which nonetheless retained the entire integrity of faith fixed in the heart, and even took up the duty of preaching with devout mouth, as we have said before. Some think that this phrase, 'They made me the keeper in the vineyards, my own vineyard I have not kept,' should be distinguished in such a way that by the name of 'vineyard,' the Church of Christ is indicated; but by the appellation 'vineyards,' the various decrees of the law and the diverse traditions of the Pharisees are understood. And they say, 'They have placed the Church among the vineyards,' who compelled the faithful to be circumcised, and to observe the ceremonies of the carnal law. Among these was he who said, 'And frequently punishing them in all the synagogues who believed, I will persecute them even to foreign cities' (Acts XXII).

Therefore, he did not keep his own vineyard, with no small number of the faithful being scattered by him from Jerusalem, as if hewing down the branches of the heavenly vineyard. Yet the root of it could by no means be uprooted. But because the greater the adversity that tempts the faith of the elect, the more urgently it is necessary that they invoke the Redeemer's help, fittingly the holy Church, after lamenting that the sons of her mother rose up against her, and that her vineyard was shaken by their invasion, mindful of the Lord's promise where He said, 'In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world' (John XVI), with a solicitous heart turned to Him, prays, saying:

[Song of Solomon 1:7] -- Tell me, O you whom my soul loves, where you pasture, etc. Well indeed does she call him whom she seeks for protection, the beloved of her soul, because the more serious the danger from which she wishes to be rescued, the more she loves him through whom she knows she will be saved. This is similar to what the Psalmist says, "I will love you, O Lord, my strength" (Psalm 17). Which openly means, Therefore I do not cease to love you with all my mind, because I perceive that without your grace I can have no strength. She also implies that he is a shepherd, saying, Where you pasture, where you lie at midday. According to what he himself testifies in the Gospel: "I am the good shepherd, and I know

my sheep, and my sheep know me" (John 10). He who pastures his sheep lies among them at midday, because he refreshes the hearts of his faithful ones with the memory of heavenly sweetness, so that they do not wither in the heat of temptations, and he is accustomed to mercifully dwell in them. Thus also the Psalmist says, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures" (Psalm 23). Hence John says, "He who abides in love abides in God, and God in him" (1 John 4). Therefore, because many false prophets go out into the world, saying "Look, here is Christ," or "There he is" (Matthew 24), the Church of Christ must always carefully discern who they are in whom he can be found, both in their profession and in their deeds; and she must implore him with pious words to deign to reveal himself: Tell me, she says, O you whom my soul loves, where you pasture, where you lie at midday.

[Song of Solomon 1:7] -- "That I may not begin to wander among the flocks of your companions, etc. As if he says openly, Because the multifarious persecution by my adversaries affects me like the heat of the midday; I beseech you to declare to me, O my Redeemer and Protector, in which places I might find those who are refreshed by the grace of your presence, and what are those teachings among all that align with your evangelical truth, lest, with your help being delayed, I might perhaps stumble upon the congregations of those who err, for without your guidance, I can in no way enter the path of truth. For even heretics can not inappropriately be called his companions, inasmuch as they carry around either the confession or the mysteries of his name. Did not the bride of Christ do this, when the false apostles came to Antioch, namely, his companions, and preached, Except you be circumcised according to Moses, you cannot be saved (Acts XV), already wearied by no small fervor of sedition and question, finally sent Paul and Barnabas to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, to more certainly discern what was the truth of the Gospel? And after the conflict was finished, it was proven among them, whom James, and Cephas, and John, and the other apostles educated, that the Lord Christ was the shepherd and dweller, and that his flock, the Church, was to be safeguarded from the flocks of companions, that is, from the people of the heretics.

Did not the bride of Christ also do this in subsequent times, when the sons of her mother fought against her, that is, when heresies rose up against her from within her, soon diligently seeking what was the truth of faith, by convening the councils of the Fathers? But, because the same bride, that is, the Church of Christ, while seeking the help of his presence in her tribulations, adds on behalf of the weak. That I may not begin to wander among the flocks of your companions, he immediately rebukes the same trepidation with kind reproof, as if saying that evangelical thing, Ye of little faith, why did you doubt (Matt. XIV)? For it follows:

[Song of Solomon 1:8] -- If you do not know yourself, O fairest among women, go forth, etc. Why, he says, do you speak in such a way as if you could by any means be abandoned by me amidst temptation, and you complain that you have been darkened by the excessive fervor in guarding our vineyard from the enemies, as if by the sun of midday, which I myself

have endowed through the washing of regeneration to be already fair among women, that is, among the synagogues of other doctrines, but I have decided that you should be rendered much fairer by the examination of tribulations? But if you perhaps do not know this, do you not now remember that no one is crowned unless he has competed according to the rules (II Tim. II)? Withdraw from my company, and follow after the footsteps of the flocks; that is, imitate the acts of those who err, although I have decreed you rather to be the keeper of my one flock, which was to have one fold and one shepherd.

[Song of Solomon 1:8] -- And feed your kids beside the tents of the shepherds. That is, feed lost listeners, having followed the doctrines of foolish teachers, abandoning the words of the wise, which are given by the counsel of teachers from one shepherd. For indeed if you love me, I have ordered you to feed my lambs, that is, the souls serving me simply and innocently with the word of salvation; I have wanted you to devote such care to this duty, that you would prefer to endure all adverse things, even to undergo the torment of death itself, rather than desist from their feeding. But if you do not know that you have been betrothed to me under such a condition, rather feed your kids, that is, those united with erring teachers, yielding to the luxurious and proud; who are rightly called kids, and your kids, namely, who are to be placed on the left in judgment. Yours indeed, because they are not instructed according to the rule of my commandments, but rather according to your errors, that is, those whom you retained before you were joined to me. However, the Lord does not say this by commanding, but rather by threatening, and by indicating what happens to those who, not bearing the adversities of temptations, separate themselves from the unity of the peace of the church. As in the Gospel, when he says: Either make the tree good and its fruit good; or make the tree bad and its fruit bad (Matt. XII). He does not command us to do evil, but teaches what reward awaits evildoers. Because indeed the Lord does not want the holy Church to be ignorant of itself, but earnestly desires it to learn what it has received from him as gifts, and what it must suffer or do for his love, he consequently indicates to it what its state is when he adds:

[Song of Solomon 1:9] -- I have likened you, my friend, to my horse-drawn chariots of Pharaoh. For indeed, He calls His cavalry the army of the children of Israel, whom He freed from Egyptian bondage, leading them across the Red Sea into the desert, and brought into the land of the inheritance promised long ago, while the chariots of Pharaoh, which pursued them and wanted to drag them back to servitude, were drowned in the same sea. He calls it a cavalry because just as a charioteer is accustomed to presiding over his cavalry, so the Lord Himself then presided over that people, governing and leading them through the path of salvation. And He compared His Church, which He made His friend through the water of regeneration, to that cavalry: for just as the people were indeed greatly terrified by the approaching chariots of Pharaoh, but were nevertheless saved by heavenly protection, so He has always taught the Church to trust in His protection amidst the threats of persecutors. For even the fact that a pillar of fire then illuminated the people of God, while thick darkness overshadowed the Egyptian troops, so that throughout the whole night they couldn't approach each other; this too never ceases to happen in the night

of this age, when the divine dispensation, separating the just from the reprobate with precise judgment, illuminates the just with His grace, but leaves the others in the deserved blindness.

And even this, when they came to the Red Sea, the children of Israel were freed with the waters divided, while the Egyptians, with the waters returning upon them, were drowned with their horses and chariots, is it not evident that the very wave of death, which will face all mortals, carries the wicked to destruction, but opens the path to salvation for the pious? The other events too, which we read happened to the cavalry of God, that is, the people of Israel, during the time of the Egyptian persecution, are found, the more diligently they are explained, the more clearly they reveal themselves as a foreshadowing in the holy universal Church, of which that was a part. And since it is taught in this verse how the Lord protects the Church amidst adversities, it remains to be shown how much the Church itself maintains the love of the same Lord and protector in the face of adversities. It is added:

[Song of Solomon 1:10] -- Your cheeks are beautiful, etc. It is said to be the nature of the turtle-dove that, if deprived by the loss of its mate, it does not unite with another. This suitably applies to the chastity of the Church, which, although widowed by the death of its Lord and Bridegroom, is so bound by His memory—knowing that He has risen from the dead and now reigns in heaven—that it cannot accept the company of others, content with the love of Him alone, to whom it hopes eventually to reach. Hence, instructed by the words of an excellent teacher, it usually declares that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. VIII). Therefore, since the seat of modesty is typically in the cheeks, it is rightly said to the holy Church, fearing that it might stray from the way of truth through the examples of the wicked (as it says: Lest I begin to wander through the flocks of your companions), by the response of Truth itself: Your cheeks are beautiful, like those of a turtle-dove. This means, I have adorned you with such a virtue of saving modesty that you may never be corrupted, either by the desire of transient things or by the hearing of perverse doctrines, from the chastity of the faith promised to me. And what is the greatest grace for preserving this sobriety, He reveals by adding the following.

[Song of Solomon 1:10] -- Your neck is like jewels, etc. Through the neck, we transfer food into the body to be nourished, and we utter words to reveal the secrets of our hearts to others. Thus, rightly in the neck of the Church, the figure of teachers is designated, who instruct the ignorant with the word of edification, and with the office of the same instruction, transmit the food of salvation to the members of the holy Church entrusted to them. This neck rightly resembles necklaces. Necklaces are ornaments that usually hang on the necks of virgins. Although by the word ”necklaces,” sometimes all ornaments of matrons are denoted, because the steadfastness of spiritual teachers is fortified and adorned with heavenly virtues, as they show by their deeds what they teach with their words. Little chains are also ornaments for the neck of a virgin; namely, chains of gold interwoven with

small rods, and sometimes varied with added silver rods, as this thought proves, which take their name from the resemblance to the sea eel. These aptly signify the woven nature of the divine Scriptures, by which the beauty of the holy Church increases, as each of the faithful, seeing the sayings and deeds of the fathers, strives to shine more and more with virtues. For the gold, from which the little chains are said to be made, is the brightness of spiritual understanding; the silver, with which they are said to be interwoven, is considered the brightness of heavenly eloquence.

What he promises in the plural number, "We will make for you," is about those through whom the sacred Scripture, by the acting and cooperating Spirit of God, was ministered to us; many of whom, at the time when Solomon was prophesying this, were yet to come. Therefore, he surrounds the neck of the bride with golden little chains, interwoven with silver, because he prepared divine apexes to be instilled in those he placed in charge of teaching the faithful in the Church. He surrounds his neck with little necklaces composed of craftsmanship, while every faithful soul, in all that it speaks and acts, indeed in all that it lives and breathes, continually directs its attention to the Holy Scriptures, diligently guiding its mind and words according to their examples. Thus this little verse is connected to the previous one, stating that they are beautiful like the cheeks of the holy Church's turtle-dove, that is, its inviolate modesty persists; because frequent meditation on the divine Scripture does not allow it to err. The ancient translation has this passage: "We will make gold likenesses for you with silver markings until the king is in his resting place. In which assuredly, the brightness of the heavenly homeland is properly expressed by the name of gold, whose likenesses, and not that incorruptible brightness itself, are shown to us in this life through the Holy Scriptures, the Apostle saying: "For now we see through a glass darkly, that is, in likenesses; but then face to face" (I Cor. XIII).

Finally, Moses himself, to whom, as we read in Exodus, God spoke face to face, as a man speaks to his friend (Exod. XXXIII), knowing that he had not seen His glory itself, prayed, saying: "If I have found grace in your sight, show me your way, that I may know you," and again, he said, "Show me your glory"; which the Lord also revealed when responding to him, saying, "You will not be able to see my face; for no man shall see me and live" (Exod. XXXIII). Therefore, the vision of the divine face is not denied to us, but it is denied to those still living in this mortality; yet, it is promised to the pure-hearted in the future. Furthermore, this likeness of his face and perpetual beatitude is shown not only to the fathers, appearing in the angels of the Lord, but it is also not obscurely shown to us reading the writings of the fathers today, as we strive with our mind always to retain what they said about the glory of the heavenly homeland and continually sigh to see it. These likenesses with the distinctions are made of silver because with the shine of spiritual words, heavenly mysteries are revealed to us. And because in this life alone, and not in the future, we need the comforts and aids of such likenesses, it is aptly added:

[Song of Solomon 1:12] -- As long as the king is at his recline. That is, as long as Christ is in his secret, and has not yet appeared to us in the glory of his Father, to render to each

according to his work. Then indeed, as Isaiah says: "The eyes of the saints will see the king in his beauty" (Isaiah XXXIII). And hence the Apostle also says: "Your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, our life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Colossians VIII). But he was in his recline, that is, in his hidden place, the king Christ, not only before his incarnation and ascension into heaven, but even at that time when he appeared visibly to the world in the flesh, because not then either did he show the clarification of the assumed humanity or the eternal glory of divinity to his faithful who remained with him in the flesh, which he promised to all the elect as a reward of faith in the future life. However, our edition, which is translated from the Hebrew source, joins the end of this verse, where it is said: "As long as the king is at his recline," to the following verse, which is to be discussed henceforth. But the Church, having received so many gifts or promises from her Creator, immediately responded, and declared with what devotion of works she received them, by adding, saying:

[Song of Solomon 1:12] -- While the king was at his table, etc. However, he calls the king's table the time of his incarnation, through which he deigned to humble himself for us and be lowered so that we might be raised. In this table, he also wished to refresh his church with vital food and himself to be refreshed by its good deeds. Hence, he says: I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever (John 6). And again, speaking to the disciples about the believing peoples, he says: I have food to eat that you do not know about (John 4). Truly the smell of nard represents the fragrance of good action. While the king was at his table, he says, my nard gave its scent: because when the Son of God appeared in the flesh, the Church grew in the fervor of heavenly virtues. Not that it did not have spiritual and God-devoted men before his incarnation, but because without any doubt, it then dedicated itself to more rigorous pursuits of virtues when it realized that the entrance to the heavenly kingdom would be open to all who live rightly as soon as they were freed from the bonds of the flesh.

It should be noted that the description of this verse was also literally fulfilled in the deeds of Mary Magdalene, who held the type of the Church, when she, with the Lord reclining at the dinner, poured ointment of nard on his head and feet, and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment, as the holy Gospels testify. In one Gospel, it is also indicated what the nature of this nard is when it says: A woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly ointment of pure nard (Mark 14): because its tops spread like spikes; therefore, the perfumers celebrate the spikes and leaves of the nard with twin gifts. Physiologists write that it is principal among ointments. Hence, it was suitably prepared for the anointing of the Lord's body. Moreover, it is a shrub, they say, with a heavy and thick root, but short, black, and fragile, although it is oily, smelling like cypress with a harsh taste, a small and dense leaf. There are many kinds of it, but all are precious, except the Indian one, which is more precious.

[Song of Solomon 1:13] -- A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me, etc. And this, according to the letter, we read was fulfilled concerning our Savior when, after His passion was ac-

complished and His body taken down from the cross, Nicodemus came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds' weight. And they took His body and wrapped it in linen cloths with spices. Therefore, the beloved of the Church was made a bundle of myrrh when the Lord, anointed with myrrh and aloe, was wrapped in linen cloths: indeed, this bundle abides between the breasts of the bride when the Church unceasingly meditates in her innermost heart on the death of her Redeemer. For who does not know that the place between the breasts is the heart? And the bundle of myrrh shall abide between the breasts of the bride when every soul consecrated to God strives, with intent mind, as much as it can, to imitate the death of Him by whom it knows itself redeemed, mindful of that apostolic saying, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians V). Truly, because the glory of the resurrection soon followed the death of our Mediator and Savior, rightly the bride adds:

[Song of Solomon 1:14] -- My beloved is to me a grape-cluster from Cyprus in the vineyards of Engaddi. And indeed, according to the surface of the letter, the sense of this verse is: Just as the Cyprus island is accustomed to produce clusters of grapes larger than other lands, and just as in the city of Judea, called Engaddi, vines more noble than the rest are grown, from which a liquid flows not of wine but of balsam, so my beloved to me is connected with a special love above all others, so much so that no creature can separate me from His affection. Typically, however, just as myrrh, because of its bitterness (for it is as healthy for healing infirmities as it is bitter to taste) signifies the sorrow of the Lord's passion, where He Himself also received myrrhed wine to drink from the soldiers, and buried by the disciples was anointed with myrrh, as we have said; so also the cluster not incongruously announces the joy of His resurrection. For wine gladdens the heart of man (Psalm CIII). Hence, the Lord in His resurrection became a cluster of Cyprus who had been a bundle of myrrh in His passion. Rightly He abides between the breasts of the bride, because the same was turned into a cluster for a vineyard. Holy Church, therefore, never removes the memory of the Lord's death from her heart, because He who died for her transgressions also rose for her justification.

And to her who follows in His footsteps, He provided an example of rising after the anguish of death. He is also remembered as being in the vineyards of Engadi; for in the vineyards of Engadi, as we have mentioned before, balsam is produced, which in the making of chrism, is customarily mixed with olive oil, and consecrated by episcopal blessing, so that all the faithful may be signed with this anointing during the laying on of hands by the priest, by which the Holy Spirit is received; with which also the Lord's altar, when it is dedicated, and other things which ought to be sacred, are anointed. Hence, very rightly through the vineyards of Engadi, divine charisms are figured. And the bridegroom is in the vineyards of Engadi, because the Lord himself appearing in the flesh is full of the Holy Spirit, and he himself bestows the gifts of the Spirit upon believers. Therefore, he calls balsam trees vineyards, because they rise in the manner of vineyards, which without supports do not sustain themselves; indeed, they are more similar to the vine than the myrtle, and distinguished by perpetual foliage, their height remains within two cubits; their seed has a taste similar

to wine, its color red, the branches thicker than myrtle, which at certain times of the year ooze balsam. And the farmers are accustomed to cut their sprigs with sharp stones or bone knives; for the touch of iron spoils it.

Through these incisions, juice of excellent scent flows out, beautifully dripping with tears, collected in small horns of wool. Because it flows through a cavity in the bark, it is often called opobalsamum (for in Greek, opi means cavity), and the richest vein of each tree is struck three times in the summer heats. The most noteworthy is the first tear of the tree, the second from the seed, the third from the bark, the least from the wood. All these things, if considered carefully, most fittingly pertain to our Redeemer: who humble in the flesh, but appearing full of grace and truth, was wounded for our iniquities, and from his wounds poured out for us the sacraments of life and salvation. Hence, he himself, who is the power and wisdom of God, speaks in Ecclesiasticus, ”And my scent is as the pure balsam” (Eccli. XXIV). Truly amazing is the order of words, that first the bride says, while the king is at his table, her nard has given forth its fragrance; then she compares him to a bundle of myrrh; thirdly, she calls him a cluster of henna; lastly, she remembers him to be in the vineyards of Engadi. Because first the devoted woman anointed the Lord reclining at the dinner with nard; then the disciples wrapped him anointed with myrrh for burial after the crucifixion, and after these things, he himself distributed spiritual gifts to the faithful with the joy of the resurrection soon to come.

Nor should it be overlooked that Engadi is translated as the fountain of the kid: by which name the sacred baptismal font is clearly shown, into which, still sinners and worthy of the left side, we descend; but, cleansed from the foulness of sins, and to be counted among the lambs, we ascend. And right when he meant the joy of the Lord’s resurrection, by saying, ”A cluster of henna is my beloved to me,” he immediately added, ”In the vineyards of Engadi,” that is, the fountain of the kid, which is plainly to say, ”In the spiritual gifts, which from the time of baptism are conferred upon the faithful. Thus far, the Church enumerates the gifts it has received from its Redeemer; these attest to the tokens of love. To which he soon replied in turn for remuneration:

[Song of Solomon 1:15] -- Behold, you are beautiful, my friend, etc. Behold, you are beautiful in pure works, by which you conduct yourself soberly, justly, and piously in this age. Behold, you are beautiful in the simplicity of heart, because for the sake of the intention of eternity, you persist in good deeds, awaiting the blessed hope and the coming of the glory of the great God. Your eyes are doves, the eyes of your heart are simple and pure, and entirely free from any duplicity of deceit and pretense. Therefore, they are very blessed, because such shall see God. Likewise, your eyes are doves, because your senses are endowed with spiritual understanding; for since the Holy Spirit descended upon the Lord as a dove, rightly the spiritual sense and gifts are denoted by the term dove or doves. Likewise, the friend of Christ has the eyes of doves, because every soul that truly loves Him inwardly is not kindled by any desire for external things, like the manner of kites, nor does it contemplate anything harmful against any living beings. This is said to be characteristic of dove-like gentleness,

which considers all things that occur with a simple, gentle, and humble heart. Hearing, therefore, from the Lord the twin beauty attributed to her, both of work and of intention with the simplicity of a pure heart, she immediately responded with a devoted voice:

[Song of Solomon 1:16] -- Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, and comely. As if it openly says: Indeed whatever beauty, simplicity, and spiritual grace I have, I have certainly received this through you, by whom I have also obtained forgiveness of sins and the efficacy of good action. But you are truly beautiful and comely without comparison, because you are God before the ages, always begotten from the Father, and when the time of my redemption came, conceived and born of the Holy Spirit and the virgin mother; not only free from all stain of iniquity, but also full of grace and truth, and you came into the world, and lived in the world; moreover, to all who partake of your grace, so that they too might be beautiful with virtues, you have given. Therefore, you are beautiful and comely, that is, wonderful both by the perpetuity of divine nature and the dignity of the assumed humanity. The splendor of whose beauty, because it usually becomes known to hearts at rest from exterior act, the more freely, the more clearly, according to that of the Psalmist, “Be at leisure and see that I am God” (Psalm 46), it rightly adds:

[Song of Solomon 1:16] -- Our bed is in bloom. For sometimes the holy Church, as though in a bed with the Lord, indeed her Bridegroom, rests; sometimes it stands with Him against the enemies in the battlefield; it stands in the battlefield when, in the face of sharper assaults of temptations, it engages in the struggle of faith against the wicked even unto blood; but it rests in the bed when, as times smile with peace, it renders free service to Him, turning the serene gaze of the mind to behold the glory of His majesty. Hence, rightly is the same bed said to be in bloom, because indeed the saints enjoy the tranquility of the times, and then they especially dedicate themselves to sacred readings, fasts, prayers, and other fruits of the Spirit, when they refrain from the labors of tribulations. Then they elevate themselves higher in the contemplation of heavenly matters, when they receive a serene time free from external disturbances. Moreover, the bed of the Church can rightly be understood to be in bloom, not only because of the works of purity, through which each of the elect arrive at the fruit of eternal life, but also because of the offspring of the faithful, whom the Church herself customarily brings forth to God, fragrant with the bloom of faith, through water and spirit.

To this action, which indeed the Lord cooperates with and confirms the word, she subjects herself more diligently the more she perceives a tranquil and peaceful time from the persecution of the envious by His granting. And it is to be noted that throughout the text of this little book, the bride always desires to remain in the house or in the bed or any other inner place with her Beloved, which is more fitting for the female sex; but the Bridegroom himself, which is fitting for the male, calls his friend to external works, namely, to the vineyards or gardens or other such things: because indeed the holy Church, if it could be, always desires to converse with the Lord in the peace of worldly tranquility, to propagate and nurture heavenly offspring for Him. But truly, He disposes that she be exercised with frequent

tribulations in the present time, in order that she may come to eternal goods purer, and lest, if all temporal things perhaps run prosperous, delighted by the residence of the present exile, she might yearn less for the heavenly homeland. Therefore, the bride of Christ, desiring to live a quiet life with Him, consequently indicates what kind of houses she would like to receive Him in, saying

[Song of Solomon 1:17] -- The beams of our houses are of cedar, etc. Indeed, he calls his houses the various assemblies of the faithful throughout the world, from all of which the universal Church consists. However, the beams and ceilings designate the various orders of the faithful in these houses of the Church: for both are usually placed on high, but the beams are made for fortification, while the ceilings contribute more to the decor of the houses than to their fortification. Therefore, the beams signify the holy preachers, by whose word and example the structure of this same Church is supported so that it might stand, who by the strength of their doctrine withstand the storms of heretical attacks, lest they cast it down. The ceilings are likened to the simpler servants of Christ, who know rather to adorn the Church with their virtues than to defend it with words of doctrine and to fortify it against the onslaughts of perverse teachings. The ceilings, however, hang fastened to the beams, because it is necessary that whoever in the holy Church desires to shine with sublime virtues must cling with all their mind to the words and examples of the highest fathers, by which they are raised above earthly pursuits.

And it is well said that these beams are cedar and the ceilings are cypress, because it is known that both trees possess the properties of incorruptible nature, exceptional height, and remarkable fragrance, which aptly befits those who can say with the Apostle, We are the good aroma of Christ to God (II Cor. II), and, Our conversation is in heaven (Philip. III), and, Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation? and the rest (Rom. VIII). But also this, that the scent of cedar is known to drive away serpents, as the poet has said, Learn also to kindle fragrant cedar in your stables, and with the smell of galbanum to drive away heavy snakes: it is fittingly attributed to the high ceilings, that is, to the teachers, who are accustomed by the power of the heavenly word to repel the poisonous doctrines of heretics, and to drive them away from misleading the simple. This too, that its resin, called cedar resin, is so useful in preserving books that when they are smeared with it, they suffer neither moths nor the decay of time, who does not see how well it fits those same holy preachers, by whose spiritual sense the Sacred Scripture was composed, which by no heretical cunning can be corrupted, nor can any age of the passing world consume it; so much so that until heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or one tittle shall pass from the law, until all things be fulfilled (Matt. V)?

When the Lord said this about the law, how much more did He mean it to be understood about His Gospel? The cypress tree also, in that it is apt for healing the ailments of bodies, and that its graceful foliage is not displaced by any force of winds, expresses constancy, and the action of those who adorn the holy Church with higher virtues as ceilings do. Hence, the bride, that is, the holy Church, or any chosen soul, marvels at the beauty of her beloved;

she praises the softness and cleanliness of the flowering bed; she proclaims the internal beauty of her houses, by which she suitably welcomes the beloved. But because toil rather than rest is fitting for the state of the present time, and in this life the elect, with Christ's help, are more engaged in pious deeds than enjoying peaceful leisure, he calls the bride to the exercise of labors and to enduring the companionship of the wicked, adding:

Chapter 2

[Song of Solomon 2:1] -- I am the flower of the field, and the lily of the valleys, etc. Indeed, you are delighted, O beloved, to bloom with secret virtues in quiet; but remember that I am the flower of virtues, from whom alone all spiritual fruit arises, and in whom alone you can have a flourishing rest. I am the flower of the field, because I desire the grace of my fragrance to be known throughout the breadth of the world. This cannot be fully accomplished if you do not, even if occasionally, leave the quiet you delight in, and gird yourself for the duty of preaching, which you ought to exercise. I am also the lily of the valleys more than of the mountains, for I am accustomed to reveal and manifest either the clarity of my glorious humanity or the splendor of eternal divinity in those who humbly submit to my rule of faith and love; who seek to follow my will rather than their own. And although they delight in the leisure of my internal contemplation, they do not refuse to advance to the labor of preaching when I command it. I have granted you the participation in my clarity so that you are compared to a lily, and evidently endowed with the white perfection of deeds and the precious splendor of a pure heart.

But lest you desire to have the security of rest in this life, know that in the present you must converse with the reprobates and bear the daily stings of the perverse; but in the future, you must hope for rest with the elect alone. For as the lily among the thorns, so is my beloved among the daughters, because you must endure not only adversities from those who are utterly alien to you in both mind and profession but also often suffer more sharply from the wickedness of those souls whom you rejoiced to have received into the number of daughters through the font of regeneration and through faith and the reception of heavenly sacraments. It can indeed be understood in what he said, I am the flower of the field, the birth of the undefiled Virgin. It can indeed be understood in what he added, And the lily of the valleys, the humility of those same parents of his. For he appeared as a flower not in a garden, but in a field, who took on from the untouched flesh of the Virgin Mother, flesh ignorant of sin and full of virtue; of whom Isaiah said, A rod shall come forth from the root of Jesse, and a flower shall ascend from his root (Isa. XI). He himself has germinated as the lily in the valleys, who moreover chose humble and poor parents for himself, from whom God would be born as man. Whence the Psalmist also says, "And the valleys shall be filled with wheat" (Psalm 64).

For he himself is wheat, as he refreshes us with the bread of life; he himself is the lily, as he has the divinity in the brilliance of the golden light in purity. And beautifully, in the lily, the outer brightness gradually unfolds first, and thus the golden color, which was hidden within, eventually opens: for the Lord, born into the world, first appeared as a sublime

man to those who truly believed in him; but as time went on, it became known that he was truly God. And all the elect, through the sacraments of his humanity received, tend toward the contemplation of divine brightness. Therefore, when the weary Church, burdened by adversities, had said to the Lord, ”Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, and comely; our bed is flourishing with flowers,” and the other things that follow, surely desiring in times of peace to give effort to behold that beauty and comeliness, and to produce flowers either of good deeds or of the souls of the faithful, he himself responded, ”I am the flower of the field, and the lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns, so is my beloved among the daughters,” as if saying openly: Remember that I, who could be born of a Virgin, who am God before the ages, appeared humbly in the world at the end of times as man; I always showed myself to be a companion of the humble and the poor in spirit, I reached death by steps of humility:

you, however, cease seeking the security of peace in this world; rather, shine brighter and softer like a lily among thorns; even if afflicted by the thorns of those close to you, more gracefully show the truth of your beauty. Having been praised by the Lord, the Church, for having kept the chastity of its faith undefiled among the spears of the faithless, and for having shone more gloriously among the horrors of the wicked, immediately responds with greater reciprocal praise, and recounts how the uniquely holy one stands out among the faithful deeds of the good.

[Song of Solomon 2:3] -- ”As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, etc.” This is what the Psalmist speaks of, ”For who in the clouds can be compared to the Lord? Or who is like God among the sons of God?” (Psalm 88). Just as the apple tree, which is pleasing to sight, smell, and taste, tends to surpass the wild trees, so does the man God rightfully surpass all who are pure men among the saints; and the merit of those who are sons of God by grace transcends the power of him who is the son by nature. Hence John says, ”And we have seen his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1). Hence Apostle Paul says, ”And Moses indeed was faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken: but Christ as a son over his own house.” (Hebrews 3:5-6). Let the cedar shine therefore; let the cypress lift itself in height; let the other trees of the forests display the miracles of their beauty, fragrance, and worth. The apple tree surpasses them all, which, besides the sweetness of its smell and appearance, also contains the power for nourishment. Let the righteous shine with their virtues: he who, born of a Virgin, provides us with the supports of eternal life, surpasses all. Whence it is well added:

[Song of Solomon 2:3] -- Under the shadow of him whom I desired, I sat, etc. As if it were openly said, Therefore I judge my beloved to be preferred before all others, because in the sole protection of his piety, for whose desire I always burned, I find refreshment from the heat of tribulations, because I feel the most pleasant fruit of his gifts, by which I trust I am to be continually refreshed. But the holy Church desired to breathe a little under the shadow of the Author, when she complained that she was darkened by the excessive sun of persecutions, because the sons of her mother fought against her, when, imploring the help

of his presence, she anxiously cried: Tell me, whom my soul loves, where you feed, where you rest at noon; when, not only worn out by the weariness of pressures but enticed by the memory of his beauty and comeliness, she said: Our bed is flowery. She showed that she had attained the desire, when she said: Under the shadow of him whom I desired, I sat, and his fruit was sweet to my throat. And it should be noted that above she proclaimed that the beams of her houses were cedar and the panelling cypress, yet she did not consider this protection sufficient for her, nor did she confess herself content with the contemplation of their loftiness and beauty; but she diligently sought the tree of life alone, in whose shadow she might rest, whose fruit might refresh her;

because although some saints are able to propose for us sublime examples of their virtues, to show us the path of heavenly life by preaching, to bring the support of their intercession with the Lord, yet to none of them, but to our beloved Savior alone, must we say, But the sons of men will put their trust under the cover of your wings; they will be satiated with the fatness of your house (Psalm 35). Whence it is deservedly said that as an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the sons. Rightly then is the only Son preferred to all the sons of God, who protects us like a shady tree from the heat of the pursuing world, refreshes us with heavenly sweetness like an unfading apple. How great the refreshment of his sweetness, how great its virtue, is subsequently shown, when it is said:

[Song of Solomon 2:4] -- The king brought me into the wine cellar, etc. Just as soon, she says, as the sweetness of His grace touched the throat of my heart, I felt myself so revived in spirit, and translated from the enjoyment of lowly things to heavenly desires, just as if, having been brought into the wine cellar, I were refreshed by the new fragrance and also by a cup. Therefore, rightly, He who gave such goods, converted me to loving Him with unquenchable charity. Typologically, since the grace of the Holy Spirit is often designated by the term wine; the Lord attesting, when He says that new wine is to be put into new wineskins (Matthew IX, Mark II, Luke V), that is, the fervor of spiritual gifts is to be infused into pure hearts. The wine cellar ought to be understood as the Church, in whose unity alone the Holy Spirit is typically given and received. Therefore, the beloved brought his friend into the wine cellar, because the Lord has gathered the Church from the whole world into one house for Himself, which He consecrated with the gift of His Spirit; this fabric, since it stands primarily on the foundation of charity, by His own work, it is rightly added after she said she was brought into the wine cellar, ”He ordained charity in me.

He ordained charity in me, she said, that is, He graciously gave to me to have ordered charity, that everyone should love the Lord God with all his heart, all his soul, all his strength; he should love his neighbor as himself, and also tolerate his enemy by loving him. He who either does not know or neglects this order of charity is the one about whom the very ordainer and bestower of charity says, ”He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me,” etc. (Matthew X). Although the ordination of charity can rightly be understood as also being for confirmation, because things placed haphazardly are weak;

but those placed in order remain firmly, so it is rightly said that the Lord ordained charity in the Church, which He is known to strengthen in the hearts of His faithful with suitable progress. It can also be understood thus what is said, "He ordained charity in me," as if it were said, He loved me with ordered charity, that is, He united all my members, that is, all the elect, to Himself with pious charity; but He embraces the more eminent with greater affection as is fitting, when it is said, "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end" (John XIII). He therefore loved all; and yet a more tender love towards a certain one is intimated when it is said, "That disciple whom Jesus loved" (John XXI).

In the Church, according to the distinction of merits, He loves some more than others. Again, "He ordered love in me": He Himself loved me first, and by loving me, in order that I might learn to return His love, He granted it; hence He says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John XV). Hence also the apostle John says, "This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son as a propitiation for our sins" (1 John IV). Again, the Lord ordained love in the Church, because the very love by which He chose her before the ages, through some degrees of progress, He demonstrated in the increments of times; for the Apostle, as a witness, says, "God commends His own love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans V). And with the increasing revelation of the same love, John says, "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God, and we are" (1 John III). Again, concerning the same perfect love, which no greater can be, and which itself can never diminish, the Lord Himself says: "He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and the rest" (John XIV).

For when He said with the verb of the present tense, "He who loves me," which can in no way be done unless one is first loved by Him, and kindled by the grace of His Spirit to love Him, what is it that He immediately subjoined with the verb of the future tense: "He will be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him"? unless it is that he who is still now loved by God, so that by believing he may be able to love, will then certainly be loved by God, so that by seeing Him he may love Him more, and with His face revealed, he may love Him more truly with all his strength, as he endures nothing from lesser things that could hinder this love. Therefore, the Lord ordains love in the Church, by which He either loves her Himself or enflames her to hold rightly to love of Him and neighbor. And how much that very love, having perfectly absorbed the mind, raises it from the love of feeble things, He teaches in the following verse, when He says:

[Song of Solomon 2:5] -- "Sustain me with flowers, surround me with apples," etc. For the soul languishes with love when it truly tastes the ordered love of its Creator in itself, because when it is kindled to seek the light of eternity, it tires from the love of temporality, so that it cools in its zeal for the passing world as much as it rises more ardent to contemplate the joys of the eternal kingdom. But let us see, soul, who burns with such love, what place it seeks to lie down in, where it may rest when weary. "Sustain me," it says, "with flowers, surround me with apples." In the flowers are still tender beginnings of virtues, in the apples perfection is

signified. Therefore, the soul languishing with love beseeches the daughters of Jerusalem, that is, those souls who preceded it in heavenly desire, to help its own beginnings with good examples, and to recall to its memory more frequently by what start, by what course, by what end they completed the way of virtues, so that through the sight of these, as if by a most pleasing scent of flowers and apples, it may lie down more softly and sweetly in the love of its Creator. This can equally be understood both from the deeds of the saints which we have before our eyes and from those which we gather from the fields and groves of the Scriptures, as well from the deeds or sayings of the preceding fathers.

[Song of Solomon 2:6] -- His left hand under my head, etc. In the left hand of Christ, temporal gifts are signified, and in the right hand, the happiness of eternal life. Therefore it is written elsewhere of him, who is the power and wisdom of God, "Length of days is in his right hand, and in his left hand riches and glory. Therefore the holy Church shows, the soul perfectly intent on the love of its Redeemer shows, what kind of rest it might find in this life which it so eagerly seeks, how it desires to lie in that flowery bed of virtues with its beloved in this exile of pilgrimage. He says, "His left hand under my head, and his right hand shall embrace me. But he calls his head, the principal part of the mind; and the beloved places his left hand under the head of his bride when the Lord confirms the hearts of the faithful still dwelling in this life with the knowledge of his understanding, lifts them up with participation in his sacraments, grants them the pledge of his Spirit, and suggests the comforts of the holy Scriptures. And his right hand shall embrace her when he also promises her the everlasting kingdom of heavenly life after this life. And it is well said that the left hand supports the head, and the right hand embraces her, because we receive temporal gifts as an aid for this pilgrimage, but we shall see heavenly rewards without end.

Rightly then does the bride, who earlier languished in love and sought to be supported by flowers and surrounded by apples, now attest to having the hand of her beloved under her head. For even if the lover of the Creator delights in the flowers of virtues, in the progress of neighbors with whom he reaches the vision of His face, and in the remembrance of the examples of ancient saints, whereby he is stirred to love God or his neighbor more ardently, yet there is a singular hope for those who truly desire to rest, which is to be supported by the hand of their Author. And indeed, at first the left hand, so that through this, they may be deemed worthy to reach the embrace of the right hand; for the right hand will not embrace anyone unless the left hand first accepts them to be cherished, that is, no one will sublimely see His glory in the future who has not faithfully inclined to receive the mysteries of His humility in the present. Did not Paul, who showed himself to be the most faithful minister of this bride, saying, "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy; for I espoused you to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11), take care to place the left hand of the bridegroom under her head to lead to the embrace of the right hand?

For he said, "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2). Again, he urges her to strive for the embrace of the right hand, saying,

"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth, where Christ is seated on the right hand of God" (Col. 3), and "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with Him in glory" (ibid.). Therefore, he says, "His left hand is under my head, and His right hand doth embrace me. As if to say openly: may the temporal blessings of my Lord and Savior, which help me to rest a little from the lusts or disturbances of the world, assist me; but the promise of eternal things, in which I am perpetually rewarded, delights me more. How truly pleasing to the Lord is the rest of such a bride, that is, the Church or any chosen soul, is shown in her subsequent response, when it is said:

[Song of Solomon 2:7] -- I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and the hinds of the field, etc. The daughters of Jerusalem signify souls burning with the desire for the heavenly homeland. The bridegroom adjures these souls not to awaken the bride resting in His love, neither presume to disturb her happily asleep from human disturbances. For whoever unduly disrupts an elect soul, either speaking to God in devout prayers or meditating on divine commandments or promises in sacred readings, indeed awakens the bride of Christ from blessed slumber before she herself wishes. For the bride herself desires to awaken refreshed by this most blessed sleep since she knows to devote herself to divine duties at the appropriate time and then to return at a fitting time to care for the necessities of human frailty. Therefore, whoever does not fear to impede any of the faithful intent on heavenly studies indeed harms his own virtues, which he believes to possess. Hence, the bridegroom rightly adjures the daughters of Jerusalem by the gazelles and the hinds of the field not to do this. By gazelles and hinds, notably pure animals and enemies of poison, the works of spiritual virtues are figured; which, just as they excel in purity, so they have been accustomed to scorn, even destroy and annihilate the harmful schemes of the ancient enemy.

And beautifully referring to the gazelles and hinds, he adds, of the field, to patiently express the simplicity of pure souls and those blooming with sincere faith in which virtues arise and are nurtured. Thus, the bridegroom adjures the daughters of Jerusalem by the gazelles and hinds of the field not to awaken nor rouse the beloved until she herself wishes. As if he openly says: I adjure all the faithful, and by their own virtues, which they desire to nurture with a pure heart, not to disdain the holy studies of the brethren, not to hinder them recklessly, but let each one rejoice in the progress of others just as in their own, and let them fear to inflict losses on the spiritual gain of the brethren as they would fear to inflict on themselves; for he undoubtedly diminishes his own virtues who scorns to spare, rather to assist, the virtues of his neighbor as much as he can. The bride gladly receiving this adjuration of the bridegroom immediately responds: The voice of my beloved. It is understood, This is the one I heard adjuring the daughters of Jerusalem not to wake me resting in His embrace until I myself wish. For surely it is necessary for a soul filled with God to greatly rejoice when amidst the adversities of the world it happens to hear His comforting voice, either through the gift of hidden inspiration or through meditation or hearing of sacred scriptures.

For even if we are not yet allowed to behold the face of our beloved, it is already a great gift to be refreshed in the meantime by the sweetness of His words in the holy Scriptures. A great benefit is conferred to those to whom a higher gift is granted that, with a gaze of a pure mind lifted to heavenly things, they may even now taste some of the sweetness of future life. Hence it is fitting, after the bride joyfully says, The voice of my beloved, immediately desiring to also see the same beloved but not yet able, she adds,

[Song of Solomon 2:8] -- Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains, etc. He calls those mountains and hills who, with singular purity of mind, transcend the common conduct of the holy Church, almost like the blooming plain of the fields, and the more they render themselves lighter from the desire of the lowly, the more capable of contemplating the heavenly they become. Of whom Isaiah, when describing the coming in the flesh of the Mediator of God and men, said: ”And in the last days, the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be prepared on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills” (Isaiah II). For rightly that mountain is said to be on the top of the mountains, and to be exalted above the hills, that is, it is remembered as being higher than the high men, because, indeed, in the last days, a man appeared among men, but He existed as God with the Father before the ages. But coming upon these mountains, the Beloved is said to leap, to pass over these hills, because the Lord frequently illuminates the hearts of the sublime with the grace of His visitation. And it is beautifully said that he does not remain on these hills, but leaps or passes over them, because the sweetness of internal contemplation, as high as it is due to the recognition of heavenly things, is equally brief and rare, due to the heaviness of minds still held down by the mass of the flesh.

For the corruptible body weighs down the soul, and the earthly habitation depresses the mind that thinks on many things (Wisdom IX). Nor should it be thought contrary to this sentiment, that the Beloved Himself also promises His spouse in the Gospel, saying: ”Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world” (Matthew XXVIII). And again, ”If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him” (John XIV). For He always remains, through His faith and love, and through the assistance of His grace, with all the saints; but more excellently, for a short time, He appears to a few of the more sublime, to whom He wills and when He wills: for it is the saying of a few, and of those who, due to the loftiness of their hearts, are compared to mountains and hills, ”For whether we are beside ourselves, it is to God; or whether we are sober, it is for your cause” (II Corinthians V). But it is said to all the faithful, ”Whoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him, and he in God” (I John IV). It is for the entire Church to hear with a faithful heart, ”Because God is love; and he that dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him.

It is only for the perfect to say, ”For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (II Peter I). An evident example of this contemplation is further added, when it is said,

[Song of Solomon 2:9] -- My beloved is like a roe or a young deer. And indeed, all who know well how to explore the natures of these animals discover many things in them that most fittingly apply to the beloved of the Church, that is, the Lord and Savior. But in this place, it is especially to be noted that they delight in dwelling in the heights of the mountains and in giving very swift leaps, because of which they are seen by us more rarely than oxen or donkeys or other such animals, which, being domesticated together, we use as often as we please. This is very suitably adapted to the height of supreme contemplation, which is not within the discretion of human speculations but in the grace of God, appearing when it wills. I believe Isaiah, who is indeed an exalted mountain, saw Him seated upon a high and elevated throne not when he chose, but when the Lord willed; he saw and the heavenly hosts singing due praises to Him. Paul, also a mountain, much despising earthly things and touching the stars with his summit, was caught up into paradise and into the third heaven, not when he disposed, but when it pleased God, and heard the secret words which it is not lawful for a man to speak.

It certainly agrees with the humility and truth of the assumed humanity that the Lord is compared not to a stag but to a roe or a young deer—smaller animals, who among men appeared not only as a man but as a humble man. He became a young deer because He took true flesh from the fleshly material of His ancestors; for He was made of the seed of David according to the flesh (Rom. I). And David himself says, As the deer longs for the water brooks, so my soul longs for you, God (Psalm 42). And again: He has made my feet like hinds' feet (Psalm 18). But concerning the other deer, His companions in life, he says, The voice of the Lord makes the deer give birth (Psalm 29); for He indeed prepares the deer when He bestows the gifts of virtues on the faithful; because that they may direct the course of their minds to higher things, ceaselessly thirst for the fountain of life, drive out and trample upon the serpents of heretical speech with their spiritual scent, ruminate on the word of life, and maintain the measure of salvific discretion in the straight steps of their actions is not in their power but in the divine granting. Therefore the voice of the Lord prepares the deer because His grace places the saints in the height of virtues.

From such deer was born the fawn rightfully beloved of the bride, that is, of the Church or of every faithful soul, because Christ according to the flesh is from the fathers, who is over all, God blessed forever. And since the sublimity of the contemplative life is expressed in these verses, it remains, therefore, for the perfection of the active life, which is common to the whole Church, to be demonstrated. It follows:

[Song of Solomon 2:9] -- Behold, he stands behind our wall, etc. For now the beloved remains in the vicinity of the bride, now leaping upon the hills on high, because the same Lord and Savior of ours, presents Himself to the more perfect at times, when He wills, even if through a glass and in enigma, and He always shows the invisible grace of His presence to all the elect. Concerning the manifestation of His presence, it is now rightly said, Behold, he stands behind our wall, for He indeed remains with us, nay He remains in us, so that He cannot be seen by us, as John attests, who says: No one has ever seen God (1 John 4). If we love one

another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us (ibid.). But the wall which excludes us from His sight is the very condition of our mortality, which we have earned by sinning, we who were so conditioned in the first parent that if we had never consented to sin, all the elect would endlessly and without any labor see the light of divine contemplation, that now very few of the more perfect, with the greatest labor, reach by purifying their hearts through faith. But in this wall, divine mercy made windows and lattice-work from where He would look upon us, for He opened to our minds, however burdened by the blindness of this age, the grace of His knowledge, and frequently refreshes us with the light of His hidden inspiration. By this sight of His inspiration, because our gracious Creator chiefly acts to draw us from the love of temporal things to attain the joys of heavenly peace, it is aptly added:

[Song of Solomon 2:10] -- Behold, my beloved speaks to me, ”Arise,” etc. All things have their season, and all things pass in their own time under heaven (Eccles. III). Therefore, the bride of Christ, namely the Church, or any chosen soul, has a time for resting; likewise, it has a time for rising to work. Finally, as above, he adjures the daughters of Jerusalem not to awaken or arouse her until she pleases, and now, with a changed tone, he himself bids her to rise and come quickly to him; no longer does he consent to her entering the flowery bed with celestial studies, but rather he instructs her to go out with him to cultivate the vineyards and drive away harmful beasts from them, as the subsequent song teaches; adding to provoke and inflame her zeal that, with the winter seasons passed, the mild spring now aids the industry of the laborer, and even the arrival and songs of spring birds make the rural places more joyful than the courtly ones, and the bloom of flowers promises future fruit to the farmers. But since we have barely touched the surface of the letters, let us now turn our pen to exploring the depths of the allegorical senses. It was said above, under the figure of a roe or a fawn of the hinds, how the Lord reveals the secrets of heavenly contemplation through internal visions.

It was said under the figure of him standing behind our wall and looking through windows and lattice, how he often illuminates the whole Church, though still invisible, with the frequent regard of salutary compunction. It remains now to intimate how he incites the same Church, either to the office of preaching or to the exercise of good works. ”Arise,” he says, ”hurry, my friend, my dove, my beautiful one, and come. Arise from that bed much beloved by you, in which you delight in caring for yourself through psalms and prayers and other studies of life. Hurry, and come to also devote care to the salvation of others, through the zeal of diligent preaching: for indeed we hurry to the Lord who calls us, by performing works of virtue for His cause.”

[Song of Solomon 2:11] -- For now the winter is past, etc. This is what the Apostle says: The night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light (Rom. XIII). For as the darkness of night is correctly expressed by the harshness of winter and rains, so too is the storm of unbelief, which governed the whole world until the time of the Lord’s incarnation. But when the Sun of righteousness shone

upon the world, with the old perfidy of wintry unbelief soon departing and being driven away, flowers appeared on the earth, for the beginnings of the nascent Church shone in the faithful and pious devotion of the saints. The time of pruning has come. That is to say, as the Lord mentions in the Gospel, who, when He declared Himself the true vine and His Father the vinedresser, immediately added and said, Every branch in me that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit (John XV). The duty of pruning can also be properly understood according to what the Apostle says: Putting off the old man with his deeds, put on the new (II Cor. III). Explaining this himself elsewhere, he says: Therefore, putting away all falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor (Eph. IV). And again: Let the one who steals steal no longer, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands (Ibid.).

[Song of Solomon 2:12] -- The voice of the turtledove has been heard in our land. The voice of the preacher has been heard in the land, which has now begun to be ours, having received the word of faith; of which it is said in the psalm of the first Sabbath, that is the resurrection of the Lord, which has become the first of the Sabbaths; "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof" (Psalm 23). For the voice of the turtledove, which by its sound usually signifies the end of winter and the coming of spring, suits those who know how to say that the darkness has passed away, and the true light now shines (1 John 2). The voice of the turtledove, which humbly resounds with a groan instead of a song, fits those who, mindful of their pilgrimage and the promised homeland, are accustomed to say: "But we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for the adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." They also cry out to their listeners, "Be miserable, and mourn; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into sorrow." The bird itself, which is a lover of chastity, and always dwells on mountain peaks and treetops, represents the life of those who declare for themselves and others that it is good for a man not to touch a woman (1 Corinthians 7), and, "Our conversation is in heaven" (Philippians 3). For the fact that it shuns the roofs of men and their company and prefers to live in forests and deserts, signifies those who, although placed in the world in body, are separated from it in mind and desire to see the things above.

[Song of Solomon 2:13] -- The fig tree has produced its early fruit. They call the early and immature figs "grossi," which are unsuitable for eating and fall off even with a light touch if shaken. And when the turtle dove is singing, the fig tree produced its early fruit, for when the apostles were preaching in Judea, the synagogue produced many who had zeal for God, but not according to knowledge; who would rather hold to the still imperfect and as if immature observance of the letter of the law than receive in it the sweetness of spiritual understanding. Apponius explains this verse in such a way that the fig tree produced its early fruit when the synagogue brought forth apostles, who, being generated from it, would minister the sweetest food of doctrine to believers. And since, when the synagogue brought forth either the apostles who preached the Gospel or those who still tried to prefer the ceremonies of the law over the Gospel, nevertheless, at that time, the faith and salvation of the whole world followed, it is right to add:

[Song of Solomon 2:13] -- The flowering vines have given forth their fragrance. For through the blossoming of the vines, the beginnings of the multiplying Churches, from that one which was first planted in Jerusalem, through its fragrance diffused far and wide, its fame was expressed. For what is more pleasant than the fragrance of a flowering vine? Since indeed the juice expressed from their flowers makes the kind of cup that is suitable for both health and pleasure. Who would not easily see the comparison with the reputation of good deeds? Therefore, the example of the vines, from which wine is born that gladdens the heart of man, is fitting both for the churches of the faithful in general and for the elect individually, who bring forth spiritual joy and gladness for themselves. According to the Apostle: "This is our glory, the testimony of our conscience" (I Cor. III). And as the Psalmist says, "All the glory of the king's daughter is within" (Psalm XLV). Saint Jerome explains these verses thus: "the voice of the turtle-dove has been heard in our land: The turtle-dove, the most chaste bird, always dwelling in the heights, is a type of the Savior." And a little later, "And immediately the turtle-dove says to the turtle-dove: The fig tree has brought forth its green figs, that is, the precepts of the old law have fallen, and from the Gospel, the flowering vines have given forth their fragrance."

Book 3

[Song of Solomon 2:10] -- ”Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away,” etc. If, according to the Apostle’s exposition, the Rock was Christ (1 Corinthians 10), what are the clefts of the rock except the wounds which Christ received for our salvation? In these very clefts the dove resides and nests, whether each meek soul or the entire Church, places its sole hope of salvation in the Lord’s passion, relying on the sacrament of his death to protect themselves, as if from the snatching of a hawk by an ancient enemy, and strives to bring forth spiritual offspring—either children or virtues—in the same. Hence well Jeremiah, under the guise of Moab, urging heretics to the unity of ecclesiastical faith, says, ”Leave the cities and dwell in the rock, inhabitants of Moab. Be like a dove nesting in the highest mouth of the cleft” (Jeremiah 48). Moreover, the wall which is usually constructed of stones to fortify vineyards (whence it is said in the song of Isaiah, ”My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill, and he built a wall around it” [Isaiah 5]) signifies the guardianship of heavenly virtues by which the Lord surrounds the Church, his vineyard, lest it be ravaged by the incursions of unclean spirits like those of wicked creatures. Hence, therefore, the Psalmist says, ”The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them” (Psalm 34).

And the Apostle, speaking of angels, says, ”Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1). Thus, in this secure wall, the bride and friend of Christ, like a dove, finds a hole for herself, while the Holy Church has learned to defend itself from the deceptions of the devil through angelic help. Therefore, the Lord exhorts the same Church, He exhorts every soul devoted to Him, to the exercise of holy and fruitful labor; and He says, ”Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away. For behold, the winter is past,” and so on, until He says, ”Arise, my love, my bride, and come away; my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff.

As if He openly says, ”After the tempest of the Gentile life has been removed by divine mercy, after the flowers of saving conversation have already emerged on earth, after the vines have begun to be pruned by the celestial husbandmen with the sickle of discernment so that the wicked are separated from the just and the vices from the virtues, after the herald of salvation has already widely resounded in the world, after the world itself has been converted to the acknowledgment of the truth, and the most delightful fame of new life has spread among the Gentiles, I beseech you, O greatly beloved company of faithful

souls, to whom I have bestowed the gifts of my friendship, whom I have deigned to unite to myself as a bride, to whom I have given the simplicity of the dove-like mind by the infusion of my Spirit, for whose health and life I have taken upon myself wounds and death, to whom I have granted the help of heavenly protection against invisible enemies; I beseech you, I say, who have been made the recipient of such gifts, not to become sluggish in idle ease, but to rather hasten to gird yourself with zealous effort and diligence in the esteemed struggle for eternal rest."

[Song of Solomon 2:14] -- Show me your face, etc. You who in the hidden recesses of quiet, like a dove in the clefts of the rock, or in the hole of the wall, desire to be concealed, I pray that you come forth into the public sphere of action, and show your faith from your works, and declare to others also outwardly as an example what beauty you have within. For indeed to me, who perceive the inner part of the heart, I consider your face shown when I see your action demonstrating unblemished, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, for the benefit of others. For as long as one does something to the least of these, they do it to Me. Let your voice sound in my ears, namely the voice of praise or preaching, that is, either which praises me in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, or which by proclaiming stirs the mouths and minds of others to my praise. Therefore, the bride shows her face to the Lord in what she does in His sight; she also shows the sound of her voice in what she rightly says before Him. It is also to be considered more attentively what He says, Show me your face. He says, yours, not another's, that is, holy and unblemished: for such I have made it, cleansing it by the washing of water with the word; such I have perfected by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, signing upon you the light of my face.

Let your voice sound in my ears, not another's, that is, the one which I taught you to have on your wedding day, by which you promised to keep your chastity for me. Again show me your face, let your voice sound in my ears, that is, to me, not to others, show your face. To my ears, not others, remember to give your voice; that is, for the sake of my love, not any other reason, and take care to do good works and speak holy words; for whoever expends their good works or words for human approval shows the beauty of their face or the sweetness of their voice to externals rather than to the Creator. But also according to the letter, women who strive to beautify the face of their body for the deception of fools and to soften their words over oil are transgressors of this Lord's precept, and therefore remain unworthy of that eminent praise by which the Lord glorifies His bride, adding,

[Song of Solomon 2:14] -- Because your voice is sweet, etc. Indeed, the voice of that soul is sweet to the Lord, which knows how either to announce the words of the Lord to neighbors or to resound praises to the Lord Himself sweetly with the prophet, How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth (Psalm 119)! That face seems beautiful to the Lord, which strives to present itself as worthy to behold His face, which is accustomed to say to Him from the innermost heart, I have sought Your face, O Lord; Your face will I seek; do not turn Your face away from me (Psalm 27). However, our diligence in cleanliness

will not be sufficient for us, if we do not also correct those who err, as much as we can, if we do not care to defend the weaker ones from their snares. Hence it is added:

[Song of Solomon 2:15] -- Catch for us the little foxes, etc. Indeed, the foxes that destroy the vineyards are heretics and schismatics, who with the teeth of perverse doctrine are accustomed to tear apart the flourishing vineyards of Christ, that is, the unripe minds of the faithful. If only we did not know how much they tend to damage them! Therefore Christ commanded His bride, with her maidens, whom He usually calls the daughters of Jerusalem, that is, with preachers exalted in holy humility, busily in pious labor to catch the little foxes, that is, as soon as they begin to discern and challenge the tricks of the fraudulent; lest, having grown larger over time, they are driven away from harming His spiritual vineyards with that much more difficulty, as they have already accustomed to graze longer; and beautifully, He who had first spoken of the vineyards in the plural, again used the singular number. For ”our vineyard has blossomed”; thus indeed, He calls many vineyards one vineyard, just as He wished to call many churches throughout the world one Church for Himself. For He said the vineyards have blossomed, to show widely germinating populations of the chosen; and rightly, where He admonished to catch the foxes, there soon marked the singular appellation vineyard, to teach that for this reason above all, heretics should be pursued and crushed, lest the infestation tear apart and scatter into parts the faith of the Church, which ought to be one.

Moreover, the nature of foxes aptly aligns with the manners and words of heretics, because they are indeed very deceitful animals, which hide in holes or caves, and when they appear, they never run in straight paths, but in winding turns. How these fit with the deceit and fraud of heretics, anyone can easily understand. It should not be overlooked that He did not say, ”Catch for yourselves,” when speaking to the children of the Church, or ”Your vineyard has blossomed”; but, ”Catch for us the little foxes, for our vineyard has blossomed”; so that He might more strongly incite all, who could, to conquer or correct the wickedness of heretics or bad Catholics, showing that they serve Him in this endeavor, and to demonstrate Himself as the defender of the vineyard, which is the rewarder of pious labors. Rightly, therefore, His beloved friend and bride responds immediately with the simplicity of a dove’s heart:

[Song of Solomon 2:16] -- My beloved is mine, and I am his, etc. The meaning of this response is as broad as it seems to be briefly concluded. For it may rightly be understood in this way: My beloved is mine, and I am his, we are united by true and sincere love. It may also be understood in this way: My beloved has promised me such words of His divine exhortation, consolation, and promise, and I will always offer Him a clear face of my conduct and a pure voice of my speech and grace. But it can also be very decently accepted that, since pronouns usually have great force, the Church, that is, the multitude of all the elect, says, My beloved is mine, and no other; and again, My beloved is mine, not to anyone else, implying that He grants eternal favor of His love and repays fruitfully; and I am His, not to anyone else; I am His, not any other crowd of people, implying that I am always united with Him in full devotion of humility and obedience. To all these meanings aptly fits what follows:

[Song of Solomon 2:16] -- Who feeds among the lilies. That is, who is accustomed to rejoice in the most radiant and sweetest fragrance of my virtues, who delights in the most pleasing fruit of the glittering churches throughout the world. Thus indeed the holy universal Church is sometimes described in the plural as lilies, sometimes in the singular as a lily. For as it says, As a lily among thorns, so is my beloved among the daughters. Similarly, it refers to vineyards in the plural, where it says: Blooming vineyards; and again in the singular as a vineyard, where it adds, For our vineyard has blossomed, it represents the one Church. It is named in the singular because there is one heart and one soul of the multitude of believers (Acts IV); and it is also very aptly named in the plural because that unity of faithful heart and soul is no longer contained in a few, but in a multitude of believers. Noteworthy is also that lilies, even in that they are accustomed to heal limbs burned by fire, correspond to the acts of the saints. If they chance to detect hearts being burned by the flames of vices, they immediately extend the help of brotherly love to heal them, and lest the heat of desire or luxury, arrogance or anger, or other crimes overwhelm them, they provide them with the refreshment of their consolation and exhortation with diligent care.

Some interpret the Lord feeding among the lilies as among the purest choirs of virgins, and rightly so, because both their chastity of the flesh shines outwardly and the brilliance of their inviolate hearts shines inwardly. Again, the Lord feeds among the lilies, that is, among the most pleasing virtues or bands of saints, in the very reason that He is born among them; for since He Himself, the Mediator of God and men, willed to be of one nature with His Church, hence the same Church is often called His body and He the head of the body of the Church. He feeds among the lilies when the number of the faithful within the Church is increased through the fountain of regeneration. He feeds among the lilies when the faithful, who are certainly members of Him, advance in the love of the highest by the illustrious examples of previous faithful. And it is noteworthy that here the beloved is said to feed, while above he is said to lead the pastures: the bride saying, Tell me, whom my soul loves, where you feed, where you rest at midday; for he is fed in us, because we are His body, and members from His member; He feeds us because He is our head, in whom we all rightly glory, each saying, But now has He exalted my head above my enemies, implying that He will also later exalt us, and gather us to the head;

and since this pasturing of the Lord, which takes place in the progress of His saints, extends to the end of this age (for when they reach His vision, they will have nothing further to advance in), it is rightly added:

[Song of Solomon 2:17] -- Until the day breaks, etc. That is, until the eternal light of the future age arises, and the shadows of this present life, that is, of ignorance or error, under which even we faithful now walk, who use the lamp of the word of God, until they pass away. For when that day desired by all nations begins to break forth, the Lord will no longer feed among the lilies, that is, among the assemblies of the saints, whom He will rather refresh with the eternal vision of His glory. ”I will be satisfied,” he says, ”when your glory is revealed” (Psalm 16); and, ”Blessed are those who hunger now, for they shall be

filled" (Matthew 5). Nor is this, which compares present life to the shadows of night, and future life to the day, contrary to the apostolic saying; which testifies of this life we now live, saying, "The night is far gone; the day is at hand" (Romans 15); for, to speak briefly, the present life of the faithful, who, casting off the works of darkness, put on the armor of light, is indeed day in comparison to the unbelievers, who know or love nothing of true light; but in comparison to the future blessedness, where true light is seen eternally, it is still a very dark night. However, because the holy Church in this world recognizes two spiritual lives, one active and the other contemplative, Divine Scripture customarily speaks now of this, now of that, and now of both together.

Above, making mention of the contemplative life, it says of the Lord, "Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. And then beginning with the active life, it says, "Behold, he stands behind our wall," and so on, until it says, "Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes. All these things, well considered, urge us to the duty of good action. Then he adds of both together, "My beloved is mine, and I am his; he feeds among the lilies until the day breaks and the shadows flee away": for in both lives the beloved feeds among the lilies, because the Lord delights in the pure outward works and the sweet inner contemplation of the eternal ones of his chosen ones, and he is refreshed in his members. And this until the true light of day breaks, for then neither are we troubled by any labor of good work, nor do even the most perfect behold heavenly things through a glass darkly and momentarily, but the whole Church will see the King of Heaven in His beauty forever: of which vision, since any taste, however slight, greatly delights the spouse of Christ, it is aptly added:

[Song of Solomon 2:17] -- Return, be like, my beloved, a roe or a young deer, etc. Because, he says, you have stirred and provoked me to cultivate the vineyards, that is, to instruct and multiply the faithful people, who have been ordered to drive away the cunning plots of attackers, like little foxes, from these same vineyards, because you wanted me to show my face to you, although you have not yet promised to reveal your face clearly to me, but making your acquaintance partly known to me, as if you speak to me through windows and lattice work. I beseech you to return more often from general instruction, to illuminate more sublimely the hearts of the more advanced, and just as the gaze, though rare, is with delight seen on the mountains from the roe or the young deer, so may your presence be any kind of traces of your greatness in the exalted minds. I pray that you reveal the sweetness of immortal life, which you promise to all my members in recompense, to be speculated upon even by some along the way, albeit from a distance. Furthermore, the name of the mountains suits the minds of those who have learned to open the eyes of the heart to the contemplation of heavenly things; when it is said, Over the mountains of Bether. For Bether is interpreted as a rising house, or a house of watches;

and those who ascend more diligently in mind to the desires of the higher things, who more zealously watch to receive these, deservedly see the heavenly mysteries more excellently

than others. But if it is read, as some manuscripts have, Over the mountains of Bethel, that is, the house of God, it has no question at all; for it is clear that the hearts of the righteous are rightly called mountains of the house of God, as opposed to the mountains of Samaria and Esau, and the like, that is, of heretics and all the proud. In another edition, we have seen written instead of this name, Over the mountains of spices and perfumes, which equally fits the minds of the saints, who are not dried up by vain thoughts, but, as with the healthful juices of the aromatic tree, are always refreshed with the internal sweetness and charity: about which juices and perfumes it has been signified often in this volume under the name of incense, myrrh, and aloes, and the like. But because lovers of truth come not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles, and from both peoples one Church of the faithful is gathered, it remains in the song of love, after the vocation of Judea and the most sweet dialogue with its Redeemer, also to relate specifically how the Gentiles, in what order, have come to the recognition of salvation, and with what love they have held this found. Thus follows the voice of the beloved Church from the Gentiles.

Chapter 3

[Song of Solomon 3:1] -- On my bed I sought him by night, etc. For a long time, he says, I have sought the Lord with great enthusiasm, whom my soul now wholly loves; whom I also loved even then, though not yet known, insofar as I loved the reasoning of wisdom, truth, and divine worship. But because I sought him in my bed, that is, still subjected to the allurements of my flesh, and because I sought him by night, that is, in the darkness of profound ignorance (for no angel, no prophet, no unquestionable teacher showed me the light of divine knowledge), I did not prevail to find him whom I sought. When I truly realized this, I proposed in my mind to rise from the bed of carnal pleasures, to gird myself for the labor of salvific inquiry, to wander lands and seas, to approach the teachings of all whom I heard to be wiser, and to diligently seek if I might find any true wisdom, or any certain thing that would lead to eternal blessedness. But although I traversed the world with great labor, distinguishing the words of the wise, I could learn nothing certain and indubitable about the way of truth.

These were the aspirations of a pagan desiring to know God yet not knowing Him, as attested by the studies of philosophers who explored so many lands and composed so many volumes in search of truth and wisdom, as attested by Scripture, which says, ”Now all the Athenians and the strangers staying there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. This is also attested by the sermon of the Apostle, who, speaking in the council of the Athenians, said, ”As I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you: the God who made the world and all things therein, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands” (Acts XVII). This is attested by the devotion of the centurion Cornelius, who learned to seek knowledge of divine worship from God through prayers and alms. This is also attested by the work of the Ethiopian, who, coming from the ends of the earth to the temple of the Lord, approached to worship Him whom he did not know, and burned with such love of the truth that he did not

know, that sitting in his chariot he diligently studied the readings, which were frequently proclaimed to be divine.

But seeing his persistence in the search for truth, the Lord at length deemed to manifest Himself to him who had long sought Him, and to whom He had inspired to seek, He also granted to find. As He Himself had long ago promised through the prophet, saying: "The afflicted and the needy seek water, and there is none, their tongue is parched with thirst; I the Lord will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys" (Isaiah XLI). Clearly, those are the fountains of which the Psalmist, thirsting, said, "As the deer desires the water brooks, so my soul desires You, O God" (Psalm XLI); those are the rivers He promises to His faithful, saying, "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water" (John VII). Hence it is rightly added:

[Song of Solomon 3:3] -- "The watchmen who go about the city found me," etc. The watchmen who go about the city are the heralds of truth, who always keep watch with devout care for the protection of the holy Church, which is spread throughout the entire world, and who strive to ensure that it is not corrupted by the faithless through the word of preaching. These watchmen found the pagan world in its anxious search for truth and showed it what it sought, when Philip revealed the light of the Gospel to the eunuch and instructed him in the knowledge of the prophetic words he was reading; when Peter infused Cornelius and his household with heavenly grace, which he so greatly desired; when Paul made known to the Athenians the God whom they worshipped in ignorance; and when others revealed to many others the long-sought and long-desired presence of their Creator. It is as if the pagan world, which by God's grace was to be transformed into the bride of Christ, said to the city's watchmen, "Have you seen him whom my soul loves?" as they eagerly accommodated their ears to the teachers coming to them and intently sought to discern if the way they preached was indeed the way of truth.

[Song of Solomon 3:4] -- After I had slightly passed by them, etc. The one who wishes to enjoy the teaching of truth should not approach it hastily and negligently: for the one who desires to meet the beloved must necessarily pass very diligently by those who proclaim his name, and familiarly insert himself among their assemblies, so that he may thus more closely deserve to attain the knowledge of him whom they preach. For we also say that we have passed through a book when we have read it to the end. Therefore, the angel said to Daniel about the mysteries he was seeing, "Many shall pass through and knowledge shall be multiplied" (Dan. XII). Therefore, after I had slightly passed by them, he says, I found him whom my soul loved. For a seeker of truth ought to pass through the watchmen, that is, to mingle and unite himself with the assemblies of the faithful teachers, as has been said, and to run through their sayings or writings with frequent meditation. When he does this even slightly, he soon finds the beloved whom he sought, because according to the voice of Paul and Isaiah, "The Lord will accomplish his word upon the earth briefly" (Rom. IX), specifically what he said, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark XVI). And

of which the Apostle says, "But what does the Scripture say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth'" (Rom. X). This is the word of faith which we preach; "that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. X).

[Song of Solomon 3:4] -- I held him and will not let him go, etc. All the more fervently, she says, I held the one found, because it took longer to find the one I was seeking. I proclaim that I will never let him go, but instead strive to persevere and progress continually in his love, so that I may also endeavor to call the Synagogue, through which I received the hearing of the word and the ministry of regeneration, back to faith in his name. For it is established that at the end of the age, Judea shall receive the faith which it now opposes in unfaithfulness, which can only happen through the teaching and ministry of those who will then be found faithful among the Gentiles. For the Apostle plainly says, "Blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, and so all Israel shall be saved" (Rom. XI). Indeed, what the Church says, "I held him and will not let him go until I bring him into my mother's house, and into my mother's chamber," should not be understood as though she will let Christ go after she has instructed the Synagogue's people in faith in his name, but rather that she loves him with such affection, seeks what is his with such zeal, that she endeavors to subject even her kindred people to him, according to the Psalmist's words, "Our eyes are upon the Lord our God, until he has mercy on us" (Ps. XXIV).

For certainly, no one who raises their eyes to God to ask for mercy lowers them again after finally receiving that mercy, since it is the greatest sign of received mercy for someone to always have their eyes intently on God and to contemplate his glory without end. It should be noted, however, that the sequence of this chapter was also fulfilled literally in Mary Magdalene, who held the type of the Church: for when the Lord, whom she loved with all her heart while alive, was taken from her sight by death and burial, she sought him in her bed, held captive by such love for him that the memory of him did not leave her heart even when her limbs were given to rest. She sought him through nights, namely those two in which he rested in the tomb; yet she did not find him, as the time for his resurrection had not yet come. She arose in the morning with spices, and anxiously searching, she came to the tomb; and even then, she did not immediately find the one she was seeking, but first the angels, certainly guardians of the Church, found her. Inquiring about the Lord from them, and hearing that he had risen, she finally came to see him. She held him, and no longer let him go, having truly recognized that he had triumphed over death.

And she hastened to bring him into her mother's house, for she proclaimed his resurrection to the assembly of the disciples, who had preceded her in Christ and had encouraged her to piety by their examples.

[Song of Solomon 3:5] -- I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles, etc. If we look at the preceding verses, we will not find in them that the bride reached rest or sleep, but rather that, leaping from the bed, with the greatest effort of searching, she reached

the discovery of her beloved. And how now does the same beloved adjure the daughters of Jerusalem not to awaken her, nor to cause her to wake, unless perhaps because the soul, as though tranquil in the most blessed sleep, knows how to rest in divine love? Just as someone sleeping has closed the bodily eyes to external things and has often opened the eyes of the heart in the vision of hidden things; so indeed, the mind given to the love of heavenly matters withdraws from the concerns of the visible, so that it may keep watch more perfectly and freely in the contemplation of the invisible. And it is no wonder that love is compared to sleep, for it averts the sense of the mind from the desire for the visible and turns it to the desire for the invisible, just as it is compared even to death, with the same song saying, "Love is as strong as death": because just as death destroys the body, so too does the brilliance of internal life extinguish external delights.

Hence, it is rightly that the daughters of Jerusalem are adjured, that is, the souls of the faithful, sighing with an anxious mind for the companionship of the heavenly citizens, not to awaken the beloved, that is, not to hinder a mind devoted to God from the intention of heavenly desire with an untimely interruption. This too can rightly be understood concerning the general state of the Church, whose peace to disturb is to oppose the will of Christ: concerning whom, as enough has already been said above, now it may suffice to speak more sparingly. Let the reader remember only this, that for this reason the verse is repeated in the song of love so that the Lord may signify that He has no less care for the Church gathered from the gentiles than for that gathered from the Jews, but He bears equal concern for the peace of both, as both are united in His singular most beloved house and family. Once upon a time, Judaea believed that it was alone loved by God, that the word of salvation was entrusted only to itself, not also to the uncircumcised gentiles, as evidenced by Luke, who says: "And the apostles and brethren who were in Judaea heard that the gentiles also had received the word of God.

When Peter had come to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying, 'Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?' " Also, in another place, "On the next Sabbath, almost the whole city came together to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy; and contradicted the things spoken by Paul" (Acts XI). Hence, the adjuration of the daughters of Jerusalem not to awaken the beloved can also rightly be taken to mean that He commands those who had gone ahead in faith from the Jews not to trouble those or contradict the salvation of those who had come to faith from the gentiles. Where also, what He says, "Until she pleases", can be understood in this way, that the Church from the gentiles would of its own accord submit itself to watchings and labors for the Lord. Therefore, it is next added that the same daughters of Jerusalem are astonished because the grace of the Holy Spirit is poured out upon the nations.

[Song of Solomon 3:6] -- Who is this that ascends through the desert? etc. Who is this, they ask, worthy of such praise, of such wonder, who has not been cleansed by the mystery of circumcision, nor yet washed in the font of regeneration, and already is imbued with the

new grace of the Holy Spirit, already speaks in tongues, and magnifies God? such as we have never remembered happening in our nation, since either the testament of circumcision was given to the fathers, or the washing of baptism was given to us. Who ascends through the desert: rises from the depths of pleasures to the heights of virtues, lifting eyes to the eternal mountains; indeed, lifting, and longing to reach Him who dwells in heaven. Yet ascends through the desert, that is, through the midst of those nations which were not fruitful in any virtues, which no prophet of God, no patriarch, no angel coming, had instructed in the worship of a healthier life, whose faith is of greater miracle, because she most recently recognized and accepted this invincibly, according to what the Lord Himself attests in her praise, saying: I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is, and you hold fast to my name, and did not deny my faith (Rev. 2). But this is said as an example of the Israelite people, who, freed from the darkness of Egyptian servitude, ascended through the desert's journey to the promised land.

Hence, the desert can also rightly be taken in a good sense, that is, denoting that way of life which is separated from the enticements of the world, devoted solely to the scrutiny of God's law and the observance of heavenly precepts, which, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, is fed only by the manna of the heavenly word, and drinks from the fountain of life that emanates from the spiritual rock. Hence, ardently and fervently singing: My soul thirsted for you, my flesh how many times to you in a dry and barren land without water (Psalm 62). Therefore, the Church ascends through the desert, to reach the promised kingdom; and also, how she ascends is shown when it is added, Like a pillar of smoke from spices. Smoke is usually born from fire, born seeking the heights, to be consumed, and gradually withdraw from human sight. In this way, the Church ascends, which, kindled by the fire of the Holy Spirit in the love of its Creator, strives with all effort of virtues towards the heavenly; nor does it desist from its beginnings, until, abstracted from human things, it is seized into the invisible joys of heavenly life; and just as smoke, at one and the same time, can be seen to arise and disappear in the higher parts where it was first seen, so the Church is always newly born through the grace of the Holy Spirit in some of its members until the end of the world;

in some, which were first born to God, it is always gathered to the heavenly. Which rightly is not simply compared to smoke, which can be dispersed anywhere, but to a pillar of smoke, so that both the unity of her faith and the simple ascent to the heights may be signified. Moreover, concerning the enemies of God, who are elevated not by any heavenly desire, but solely by the pride of arrogance, it is said that once they have been honored and exalted, they will fail like smoke; and just as in the mind of the depraved, worldly greed burns, conversely fervor burns in the heart of the good, and the virtue smokes, so it was right to say, "Like a column of smoke," adding:

[Song of Solomon 3:6] -- "From the aromatics of myrrh," etc. Indeed, myrrh, which is suitable for embalming bodies, as the arrangement of the sacred burial of the Lord also proves, signifies the chastity of the flesh. Frankincense, which is accustomed to be offered to God

in prayers, expresses the virtue of prayer; as the Psalmist also attests in prayer, "Let my prayer be set before You as incense" (Psalm 140). The entire powder of the perfumer signifies all the works of virtues, which are therefore not compared with complete spices, but reduced to powder, so that we may be reminded to distinguish the good works we do with diligent intention and to examine them with the sieve of careful discernment to ensure that nothing unseemly remains in them. The perfumer, who prepares and sifts this powder, is understood to be either the person himself who strives for virtues or the Lord, the giver of virtues. Moreover, it should be noted that when mentioning aromatics, he rightly first calls myrrh, then frankincense and the entire powder of the perfumer, according to that order which the Lord also sets in the Gospel, saying, "Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning" (Luke 12). Which is to say in other words, "Depart from evil and do good" (Psalm 34). Mortify the desires of the flesh and offer to God the pleasing vows of the heart.

Thus the beloved of the heavenly bridegroom ascends through the desert like a column of smoke from the aromatics of myrrh and frankincense and the entire powder of the perfumer, because whether the holy Church or any perfect soul grows in the higher virtues through daily progress, which by the flame of charity renders to its author the most delightful fragrance of chastity and prayer, indeed of all spiritual fruits; although it can also be rightly understood that the beloved of Christ ascends, like a column of smoke from the aromatics of myrrh, frankincense, and the entire powder of the perfumer, because his one and the same Church is built from many faithful persons, each flourishing in diverse virtues, some insist more greatly on mortifying the pleasures of the flesh after the example of him who said, "I discipline my body and keep it under control" (1 Corinthians 9); some are peculiarly dedicated to frequent prayers like the symbol of frankincense; others labor to offer God the fruits of good works. Yet all are inflamed by the one same fire of the Spirit, like one single column of smoke, with undivided zeal and common devotion seeking the heights of heavenly life. Nor should it seem contradictory to the diligent reader but rather sufficiently consistent to understand, that the same beloved both is said to be asleep and to ascend through the desert: for she is shown to sleep when the daughters of Jerusalem are adjured not to awaken her.

And the same daughters of Jerusalem testify that she ascends, when they immediately respond, "Who is this coming up from the wilderness? At one and the same time, she both sleeps and ascends, when the soul, as much as it can, distances itself from external cares and carnal desires, and approaches the vision of its Creator by the progress of good operation or thought; which when it is said to ascend through the desert, it is indicated to where it ascends and what is the cause of its ascent, with the voice of the Church that ascends being added.

[Song of Solomon 3:7] -- Behold, the little bed of Solomon, etc. Thus, to the little bed and chariot of Solomon, that is, of the peaceful king, evidently our Lord and Savior, is his ascent: namely, to the little bed in which he rests eternally in peace; and to the chariot, from which he is refreshed by the feasts of life without end. The cause of ascending, however, is that the

middle of his chariot, to which he ascended, is spread with love; to which, even if the ascent is purple, that is, bloodied by intense struggle, nevertheless the sweetness of love, which is known to reside in it, greatly invites the daughters of Jerusalem, that is, the souls of a religious mind, to ascend to it. Therefore, the little bed of Solomon is the glory of supreme blessedness, in which the king of peace himself perpetually rests with his saints; toward which little bed the beloved of the king himself, that is, the Church through the desert of this world, strives daily, and partly has already reached, as much as she has sent her faithful toward future rewards. But she will reach it entirely, when at the consummation of the world, the Creator himself and the king of that same heavenly city will have gathered his chosen from the four winds, and as he says elsewhere, He will have girded himself and made them recline, and passing by will have ministered to them.

But even in this life, the little bed of Solomon is the quiet behavior of the saints, secluded from worldly tumults, which, with the conflicts of vices now suppressed or put to sleep, imitates the happiness of perpetual peace. Hence also the prophet, And his place was made in peace, and his habitation in Zion (Psalm LXXI), that is, in the sublime contemplation of future goods. And the apostle Peter, If you are reproached in the name of Christ, you are blessed; for the Spirit of the glory of God rests upon you (I Peter XLIX). To each of these couches, what is suitably said applies: ”Because Solomon’s bed is surrounded by sixty mighty ones of Israel’s mightiest,” because both the present peace and rest of the Church are defended by holy preachers against the attacks of heretics, and the internal rest of the heavenly homeland is contemplated with firm intent by the more perfect ones. Therefore, it is well said of that bed of the king of peace that it is surrounded by mighty ones. It is also fittingly added, ”From the mightiest of Israel. For indeed, Israel is interpreted as ”man seeing God”; because those who wish to either protect the present peace of the Church by preaching or contemplate that peace which is in heaven, must be vigilant, stand in faith, act manfully, be strengthened, and strive to render themselves worthy of the divine vision. ”From the mightiest,” he says, ”of Israel”;

because all who strive towards the joys of the divine vision are rightly called by the name Israel. But ”the mightiest,” he says, ”among them” are undoubtedly those who are either exalted by the heavenly gift of contemplation or undertake the ministry of preaching properly. They are aptly designated by the number sixty, for such ones surely expect the denarius of eternal reward for the perfection of good deeds: for God perfected the adornment of the world in six days and rested from His works on the seventh, rightly implying by the number six the light of perfect action, for which eternal rest is hoped. Furthermore, that the rewards of good works are symbolized by the number ten, everyone knows who understands why those laboring in the vineyard of Christ received a denarius in payment. ”All holding swords,” etc. Those holding swords of which the Apostle says: ”And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6), skilled in those battles of which he admonishes, saying, ”Put on the armor of God, that you may stand against the wiles of the devil; for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers,” etc. (Ibid.).

And rightly skilled, for great skill in war is needed by those who, enclosed in flesh and placed on earth, fight against spiritual wickedness in the heavens with great skill, rather they need great grace from God, since the frailty of the flesh fights when stirred up against the archangel with battles of so many thousands of years.

[Song of Solomon 3:8] -- Each man has his sword on his thigh, etc. By the thigh, carnal propagation is usually designated; hence it is written: All the souls that came out of the thigh of Jacob were seventy (Exod. I). Soldiers of Christ have a sword over their thigh when they suppress the movement of carnal desires with the severity of the spiritual word. And this is because of the night terrors, that is, lest they be struck down by the traps of the ancient tempter if they are found secure and unarmed, lest, having been overwhelmed, the bed of the true Solomon, which they ought to have guarded, be defiled; this applies to both beds of the eternal King that we mentioned, that is, both the present peace of the Church and the future one can equally be understood. For holy teachers fear lest the status of the present Church be violated by the darkness of heretics; they fear, those who have accustomated to open the eye of the mind to the contemplation of future joys, lest the light of divine revelation be obscured in them by the nocturnal disturbance of demonic perturbation. But if the strongest from Israel, in whom there is no deceit, who are the most skillful in wars, have a sword over their thigh because of the night terrors, what should I and those like me do? With how much fear should we serve the Lord, who are less skilled in spiritual combat and less strong in performing the things we speak of?

One refuge alone remains for us, to adhere to Him, to place our hope in Him whom we know cannot be overcome, to seek His protection with the prophet, often saying: The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? (Psalm XXXVI). My light, indeed, to train me for battle; my salvation, to make me strong and invincible in battle. For if we persist in preaching, perhaps we too will deserve to hear with the same prophet. His truth will surround you with a shield; you will not fear the terror of the night (Psalm XC). Some strong ones who surround the bed of Solomon interpret this over the angels, who fight against the aerial powers for the peace of the holy Church, whose understanding seems to contradict what is said: Each man has his sword on his thigh; for how can they suppress the enticement of the flesh with the sword of continence, or assess it, who have no nature of flesh from which they subsist? So the Church, coming from the Gentiles, says, Behold the bed of Solomon, seventy strong ones surround it from the strongest of Israel, and so forth; as if to clearly say: Why are you surprised, O daughters of Jerusalem, that is, believing people from Judea, that I ascend through the desert in the manner of sweet-smelling spices of virtues?

See that the king, to whose company I hasten, is peaceful, that bed of his inner peace is safe from the snares of the wicked and accessible only to the good, towards which I strive to arrive. But if it delights to hear, I will recount even more of his riches.

[Song of Solomon 3:9] -- King Solomon made himself a palanquin, etc. It is called a palanquin because it carries the bodies of those seated or reclining at a banquet, or because it is usually carried from place to place according to the opportunity of the times. The holy

Church is rightly compared to this, as it lifts believers to the feast of eternal happiness and is carried throughout the entire world by the ministry of its preachers. But the Lord made this palanquin for Himself from the woods of Lebanon, because He built the Church from souls strong in spirit and steadfast in constancy. Indeed, the woods of Lebanon excel greatly in height, appearance, and their incorruptible nature. [Song of Solomon 3:10] -- He made its columns of silver. James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be columns. He made these columns of silver, in truth, because He established holy teachers in the splendor of the heavenly word to confirm the faith and to uplift the state of the Church.

[Song of Solomon 3:10] -- Its recliner of gold. He made a recliner in the palanquin when He promised the faithful the hope of perpetual rest. "Take my yoke upon you," He says, "and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew XI). And He made this recliner of gold because He prepared for us the resplendent glory of the eternal divine vision. Hence it is said, "Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father; and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (John XIV). [Song of Solomon 3:10] -- Its ascent of purple. True purple is dyed with the blood of shellfish. Therefore, the ascent of Solomon's palanquin is purple because our King and Lord loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood (Revelation I). And no ascent to this palanquin is found but purple, because no one enters the Church unless imbued with the sacraments of the Lord's passion. Hence He Himself said, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (John VI).

[Song of Solomon 3:10] -- In the midst of love He established it, etc. With that very love with which He suffered for us: for no one has greater love than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends (John 15). And as the Apostle says, But God commends His love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly (Rom. 5), for through this middle part He prepared His Church's stratum place, where faithful souls might rest softly, because He filled it entirely within with the love of heavenly things. And this is what He added, For the daughters of Jerusalem, that is, for the souls burning with the desire of heavenly things. For as much as God commended His love toward us by suffering for us, He kindled more souls to love Him in return and to suffer for Him. The purple ascent can also be specially understood in those who shed their blood for Christ. They are rightly said to have ascended to the golden headrest by the purple ascent, because they reached the love of perpetual rest through the labor, the art of tribulation. To whom it aptly applies what follows, because He established it in the midst of love. For this reason, they are ready to shed their blood for the heavenly King, because He inflamed their hearts, which are the middle part of His couch, with His love. Whence the Apostle, while describing the purple ascent of the couch, said:

But we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation works patience, patience works proof; immediately he took care to add about the golden headrest, saying: Proof however works hope, and hope does not disappoint. And then he concluded about the love, with

which the middle is established, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts (Rom. 5). Therefore, to the daughters of Jerusalem who are amazed and praising the Church from the nations, which ascends to heaven like a colonnade of smoke from aromatic spices, He Himself returns the reasons for His ascent, explaining that the bed of the peaceful king to which He hastened, is safe from the incursions of evil; and that His couch, where He hopes to be refreshed, although the ascent is arduous, nevertheless has a headrest shining like gold; and established in the midst of His love, for which reason He hastens to ascend, knowing that God is love, and he who abides in love, abides in God, and God in him (1 John 4). With these words having been said, in a wonderful and proper order, after narrating the gifts of His King, He also begins to extol His own appearance and adornment, inviting everyone to see this, and after He has been called Himself, He also takes care to call others, having taken up the task of evangelizing, while it is subsequently added:

[Song of Solomon 3:11] -- Go forth, and see, daughters of Zion, King Solomon. The daughters of Zion are also the daughters of Jerusalem, that is, souls longing for the joys of the heavenly homeland. For Zion means watchtower, or the watchman, Jerusalem means vision of peace: both names fittingly apply to the inhabitants of the same heavenly city, where they enjoy eternal peace and always behold the face of their Creator. Therefore, go forth, he says, daughters of Zion, and see King Solomon. Go forth from the tumultuous life of the world so you may be able to see the King of Peace; go forth in mind and action from the midst of Babylon, you who desire to have a part in the heavenly Jerusalem, according to the command of that true Solomon, who says: Come out of her, my people, that you be not partakers of her sins; thus he himself, wishing to separate us from the company of the world and to provoke us to heavenly joys, willed to suffer outside the city walls for our sake, as the Apostle beautifully and fully explains, saying: Jesus, to sanctify the people through his own blood, suffered outside the gate, let us then go to him outside the camp, bearing his reproach. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the one to come (Hebrews 13). And because our Lord Jesus Christ must be confessed to be not only the true Son of God but also the true Son of Man: the Son of God indeed eternally born before the ages; the Son of Man, in time made at the end of the ages, rightly, after it was said: See, daughters of Zion, King Solomon, it was immediately added.

[Song of Solomon 3:11] -- In the diadem with which his mother crowned him. For this is clearly to say, "Behold the Lord in the humanity which, taken from the Virgin mother, he placed at the right hand of the paternal majesty." Indeed, his mother crowned him with a diadem when the blessed and undefiled virgin, conceiving by the Holy Spirit, provided to him from her flesh the material of that most holy flesh, in which appearing to the world and dwelling among us, he would destroy the reign of death by dying and restore life to us by rising again, and by ascending to the heavens, would exalt it with the glory of the everlasting kingdom. Therefore, the daughters of Zion, seeing King Solomon in his natural beauty, also marvel at the diadem with which his mother crowned him, because the elect, believing and confessing the glory of the Son of God equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit, also recognize the assumption of the human nature in which he overcame the dominion

of death to be clarified forever, not by the power of his own substance, but by the work of the Word who assumed it, that is, the only Son of God; whose vision of the diadem, one of the daughters of Zion, herself most noble and already departing from the bounds of earthly desire, admiringly said, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death" (Hebrews 2).

[Song of Solomon 3:11] -- On the day of her betrothal, etc. At the time of his incarnation, when he proceeded from the virginal womb to marry the Church, as a bridegroom from his chamber, it was a day of the joy of his heart, for he rejoiced that through the dispensation of his incarnation the world would be brought to the knowledge and vision of eternal divinity. Hence, when many flocked to his faith, it is written: "At that hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them to little ones' (Luke 10). Hence the Redeemer himself, having led humanity through his blood to the heights, speaks to the citizens of heaven, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost' (Luke 15). Because therefore the daughters of Jerusalem, marveling at the coming of the bride, said, 'Who is she who comes up through the desert,' and so on; she aptly praises the bed, praises the litter of the bridegroom, and finally praises the bridegroom himself, to whose embrace she hastens. She remembers the humanity assumed for her in God, which at the time of her response created the mystery of the incorrupt mother; so that it shows she rightfully aspires to the glory of his divine vision, for which he himself would have taken on the habit of human nature. Hence rightfully, she, who so subjugated herself to the praises of her Redeemer, who invites her own cohorts, namely the daughters of Zion, to praise with maternal affection, also received a worthy recompense of praise from that same bridegroom and Redeemer; to whose voice it is joined.

Chapter 4

[Song of Solomon 4:1] -- How beautiful you are, my friend! etc. He said that the Church is beautiful, repeating it because he saw it to be commendable both in action and in preaching. Clearly in action, by which it ascends to him through the desert, like a column of smoke from aromatics; in preaching, however, by which it strives to bring even its neighbors into its fellowship, saying: Go forth and see, daughters of Zion, King Solomon. And rightly, first by action, then by preaching, according to the example, namely, of him, of whom it is written, "All that Jesus began to do and to teach" (Acts I). [Song of Solomon 4:1] -- Your eyes are those of doves, etc. Your senses are lofty and venerable in the contemplation of spiritual matters, by which you also deserved to see and recognize my gifts, which you recently expounded; my diadem, which you preached. For, as we mentioned above, the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove, and thus the name of that spiritual grace is fittingly signified.

[Song of Solomon 4:1] -- Without that which lies hidden within. Without the invisible reward in the heavens, which in your pilgrimage on earth you are not yet able to see. For this is the greater beauty of glory, which cannot be worthily evaluated at present. And beautifully, where he praises the simplicity of her eyes, that is, the knowledge of what is hidden in her,

he also calls her a friend, according to the Lord's words: "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you friends, because everything I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (John XV).

[Song of Solomon 4:1] -- Your hair is like a flock of goats, etc. If the sharpness of the spiritual senses is rightly understood in the eyes of the bride, the purity of countless general thoughts can not inappropriately be recognized in the hair, which in the saints, even though sometimes undertaken for the administration of temporal things, are never separated from the intention of heavenly matters. For it is written that Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in Asia. He was hurrying, if possible, to be in Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost (Acts 20). Here, he was indeed occupied with such thoughts regarding the earthly journey; but he was undertaking the earthly journey with the intention of a heavenly reward. This must also be understood about the trade of tent-making, which he practiced with Aquila and Priscilla, for the thoughts with which they fulfilled it were indeed temporal, but the gaze was fixed on the eternal, so that by this earthly work they might support the ministry of the Gospel, which was heavenly. Thus, the hair of the bride is aptly compared to the flocks of goats that ascended from Mount Gilead.

These are clean animals and are accustomed to climbing the heights of cliffs or trees for the sake of seeking food, because evidently, the thoughts of the elect, as we said, even though they engage in earthly matters, nonetheless aim at heavenly things, and even when they care for the needs of the flesh, they direct the sharpness of the mind rather towards the well-being of the soul and the heavenly nourishment. Moreover, in the eyes of the bride, the preachers of the Holy Church can also be understood, through whom the hidden secrets of heavenly mysteries, which the general multitude of believers does not see, are revealed. In the hair, the faithful people can also be understood, who, although they are less skilled in overseeing and governing the steps of the Church, nonetheless provide it with great honor through their numerous acts of obedience. Of these things, the Lord Himself, when preaching to the disciples sent to preach, said, "You will be hated by all because of my name; he immediately added by consolation, "Not a hair from your head will perish" (Luke 12). This is to say plainly: although the hate of persecutors rages, they cannot even seize your slightest, namely your head, from among those who belong to me. Hair, in this context, is aptly compared to herds of goats; for sinners are customarily designated by goats;

and since the entire Church truly acknowledges that it cannot be free from sin, how much more must those who are in a common life do this, because we all offend in many ways (James 3)! Therefore, the faithful have sin, but they nonetheless strive through daily advances of good works toward that life where they may be free from all sin. For this reason, it is aptly added about those same goats: "Which ascended from Mount Gilead: for they dwell indeed on the mystical mount, all who are united to the body of their Redeemer. But the goats ascended the same mount, seeking the upper parts of the mount to graze, as they who are humble and conscious of their sins and frailty, fired by the very fear of their weakness, always strive to lift themselves up to the pastures of heavenly life in Christ. Indeed, we

read in the Book of Numbers and Chronicles that Mount Gilead had very good and abundant pastures. This aptly fits that very high and very fruitful mountain from which the city itself, which is built on it, that is, the holy Church, is wont to say: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want; in a place of pasture, there he has placed me" (Psalm 22). The name of the mountain itself is also pertinent, being called "a heap of testimony.

For the Lord is the heap of testimony, because in Him is gathered and united all the multitude of the saints, namely the living stones, who have been proved by the testimony of faith, as the Apostle says. Thus, the hair of the bride is compared to flocks of goats, which, grazing on this mount, always strive to ascend to higher places, because whether the temporal thoughts of the elect or the more fragile people of the Church, the less they find themselves to be free from fault, the higher they seek the help of Him from whom they understand themselves to be liberated.

[Song of Solomon 4:2] -- Your teeth are like a flock of shorn sheep, etc. Just as in the hair of the Church, the people who are still dedicated to more fragile deeds are designated, in the teeth, the more perfect ones and those suited for governing the Church are denoted, because the former excel in number, the latter in firmness; the former inwardly refresh with the word, the latter, even if they grasp less of the internal mysteries, adorn the Church externally with good works. Is not he rightly called the shepherd of the Church, of whom it was said: "Rise, Peter, kill and eat" (Acts 10)? Kill, by teaching to anathematize what they worshipped in their evil ways, and graft them, having returned to the profession of true faith, into the unity of your body, which is the Church of Christ? Indeed, above, these same teachers were designated under the name of eyes; but they are eyes, because they sharply perceive the secrets of spiritual mysteries; they are teeth, because they rebuke the wicked with the word of truth and transfer those rebuked and purified into the holy members of the Church. They are the teeth of the Church, because they prepare the bread of the word of God for its little ones, to whom they themselves are not sufficient to be eaten.

Pious nurses are accustomed to chew pieces of bread with their teeth and insert the small morsels into the mouths of infants while nursing, until they gradually lead them away from milk to the use of bread; thus the holy mother Church has teachers who, like breasts, minister the milk of milder doctrine to beginners; these same teachers also provide the bread of stronger word to those who are well progressing. But in order to rightly advance, it is necessary for them to gradually and by parts provoke to learn higher things, and first entrust more open things concerning spiritual secrets to them, and these discussed with careful and diligent exposition, as if already chewed beforehand by teeth, so that by doing this repeatedly, they gradually render them capable of the more interior secrets. These teeth are rightly compared to a flock of shorn sheep that have come up from the washing, because they are cleansed by the font of baptism and stripped of their possessions. And indeed, it is for all to be purified by the washing of Christ's life, because unless one is born of water and the Spirit, and the rest (John 3), it is for the perfect, and especially those to whom the care of feeding his sheep is entrusted, to renounce all that they possess. Which, both those first

and foremost teeth of the Church, that is, the apostles, and a great crowd of the primitive Church, are recorded to have done.

[Song of Solomon 4:2] -- All bear twin offspring, etc. The sheep of Christ bear twin offspring, because all whom the holy teachers bring to God through preaching, they instruct in the twin love of the same God and neighbor. They bear twins, because they imbue the disciples whom they instruct with the knowledge of faith and good works. And there is none barren among them: there is no sheep of the supreme shepherd which does not produce offspring of good work; among whom there are many who rejoice in the offspring of both work and doctrine. But neither will those be counted among the barren who, washed by the fountain of salvation, are immediately taken from this life. For they have had the offspring of faith, which either they professed for themselves, or others professed for them; they have had the desire for good works, which they would have exercised among the sheep of Christ, if they had been granted more time. Concerning such it is written: "Being made perfect in a short time, he fulfilled long times" (Wis. 4:13). For his soul was pleasing to God; therefore He hastened to take him away from iniquity (Ibid.).

[Song of Solomon 4:3] -- Like a scarlet ribbon, your lips, etc. The lips of the bride are compared to scarlet because the Church ceaselessly proclaims the price of the Lord's blood by which it was redeemed; but it continually sings: But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians XIV). And it should be noted that her lips are compared not simply to scarlet, but to a scarlet ribbon: for a ribbon is typically used to bind the hair. If by the hair of the bride the faithful people are understood, the ribbon that binds them and fits them more properly to the head, what else is it understood to be but the doctrine of truth? With which it is necessary to confirm the immature minds of believers and diligently apply them to the love and worship of their Creator, lest the wicked roam freely through idle acts and flee from the embrace or adornment of the true head, lest they impede even the eyes, that is, those who ought to show them the light of justice, by undue relaxation. Just as the good deeds of disciples sometimes become an example of virtue for teachers, so more often their neglect causes harm to the teachers' good actions. Therefore, he says, like a scarlet ribbon, your lips, and your speech is sweet, because the Church customarily fortifies and as it were dyes its doctrine, which restrains the minds of the weak from licentiousness, with the memory of the Lord's passion.

For nothing more effectively restrains the voluptuous from carnal desires than when they hear or recall that the Lord of glory was pleased to be incarnate and suffer for them. Hence rightly the Lord considers such speech sweet because he very gladly accepts it when he sees us recount and meditate on this to one another, for the sake of which he himself came down to us from heaven. If we say that thoughts are represented by hair and spiritual senses of the faithful by eyes, the end of the exposition is the same: because we restrain the unrestrained wandering of superfluous thoughts by no other order more easily than by the memory and frequent recollection of the Lord's blood. But also, often when we entertain harmful thoughts with an incautious mind, and are suddenly checked by God, we imprint

the sign of the holy cross on our breast and discard what we were contemplating wickedly, as if binding our hair with a scarlet ribbon, because we suppress the loose thoughts with the trophy of sacred blood. If this salutary binding is lacking, they sully the whole beauty of the head by drifting, because they disturb the tranquillity of the mind and cover the sharpness of the eyes, because they obscure the grace of spiritual senses with the improper meditation of carnal things.

[Song of Solomon 4:3] -- Like a fragment of a pomegranate, etc. We have also previously taught that shame is designated by the cheeks, because surely a sudden blush usually spreads over these when we are embarrassed. However, the pomegranate, because it is of a rosy color, quite fittingly hints at the mystery of the Lord's Passion, just as does the scarlet. For it was fitting that the manner of our redemption is indicated frequently in sacred song by the repetition of figures, as also intimated in other prophetic Scriptures. Therefore, because the holy Church is not ashamed of the cross of Christ, but even rejoices in the reproaches and sufferings for Christ, and usually carries the banner of his cross on her face, it is fittingly remembered that her cheeks are like a pomegranate fragment. Nor is it inconsequential that they are compared not to an entire pomegranate but to a fragment; for in a broken pomegranate, both the part of the redness that was exposed is seen, and the part that lay hidden inside, whiteness, is revealed. Thus, the bride has the redness of a pomegranate on her cheeks when the Church confesses the sacrament of the Lord's cross in words. She also shows the whiteness of the broken pomegranate when she proves the chastity of a pure heart through being struck by pressures and deeds, just as the cross itself of her Redeemer reveals what it holds within of saving grace.

Again, she shows the red color on her cheeks when the foremost and most eminent of her members, that is, the holy martyrs, shed their blood for Christ. She also adds the white when these same martyrs, during their suffering or after completing their passion, shine forth even with miracles. Nor should we overlook that the pomegranate encloses a great abundance of seeds within one outer peel, whence it is also called the apple of seeds, which indeed cannot be seen when the pomegranate is whole, but become clear how numerous they are when it is broken. So indeed the holy Church, the more she is broken by adversities, the more clearly she reveals how many grains of virtues she embraces under the covering of one faith. And rightly it is added: Besides that which lies hidden within, because indeed the confession of the life-giving cross in the Church can be heard by all, the pressures on the Church can be seen by all; also the brilliance of charisms, which heals the sick, raises the dead, cleanses lepers, drives out demons, and other such things can be viewed by both infidels and the faithful, they can also be marveled at. But she alone knows with what love of invisible life she is held, with what flame she burns in the vision of her Creator, with what love she ignites in the progress of her members.

[Song of Solomon 4:4] -- As the tower of David, your neck, etc. And we have said above about the neck, which signifies the holy teachers who continuously enrich the Church by nourishing it with spiritual sustenance and strengthen it in faith through the words of

holy exhortation. But also, the fact that the neck, positioned in the middle, connects the head to the body, aptly suits those through whose ministry the Church is united to Christ, who handed down the nourishment of life received from the Lord Himself. The Apostle, commending the grace of the Gospel, says about them: "Which at first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him" (Hebrews 2). Hence, it is written about Him: "And He gave to the disciples the loaves, and the disciples gave them to the crowds; and they all ate and were satisfied" (Matthew 14). This was done in such a corporal manner to signify also the spiritual acts of the Lord, because evidently, He entrusted the bread of heavenly doctrine to the first members of His Church, namely the apostles, who then served it to the body of the Church subjected to them, and thus succeeded by ministers of the word in order, the full nourishing of salvation was spread throughout the world. That neck is rightly said to be like the tower of David.

If the city of David is the Church of Christ, the tower in that city is the unassailable constancy of the preachers who, to defend the edifices of faith and repel the weapons of enemies, were built with higher strength than other believers from the strong hand and beloved king, which the name David signifies. The bulwarks with which this tower is constructed are understood to be either the sacred Scriptures or the defenses of divine gifts. For He compared the neck of the bride to a tower, when the Lord made the first teachers of the Church, with the grace of the Holy Spirit given, invincible to their enemies. He added bulwarks to the tower when He opened their understanding to comprehend the Scriptures (Luke 24), and proved true the words of their preaching against the sayings of the preceding fathers. He added bulwarks to the tower when He also bestowed upon them the gifts of performing signs, so that by new works of miracles they might assert the divine nature of the new things they preached, and through the healing of bodily diseases, they might more easily attract those they taught to the salvation of the soul.

[Song of Solomon 4:4] -- A thousand shields hang from it, etc. The thousand shields hanging from the tower of David are innumerable defenses of divine protection, by which the holy preachers are assisted by the Lord so that they cannot be overcome by enemies, and they also teach their listeners to be helped against the attacks of enemies, whether visible or invisible. All the armor of the mighty is every instruction or operation or heavenly doctrine, through which these same teachers not only evade but also overcome the ranks of evil spirits, when by preaching they rescue many of those whom they had held deceived from their dominion, and transfer them from vessels of wrath into vessels of mercy; and fittingly, where there is mention of spiritual war, there the tower of David, not the tower of Solomon, is set as an example, since the name and person of both kings often represents the figure of the eternal king: for David means strong in hand, or desirable to see, and rightly by this name is designated the Lord, where it is taught to fight against the enemies of the Church, so that it proceeds to the combat unafraid, reminded that it is aided by Him who cannot be overcome, and strives more urgently to conquer the more it knows His face to be desirable to see, to which it will come when the enemy is defeated.

Book 4

[Song of Solomon 4:5] -- Your two breasts, etc. The same mysteries of Christ and the Church are repeated in various ways and in many forms, but repeated they always bring something new, which either provides an explanation for the same mysteries or through the novelty itself, delights the minds of the listeners further. Therefore, the same teachers who were previously designated by the names of eyes or teeth or neck, are now expressed by the term breasts: indeed, they may rightly be called eyes, because they perceive the hidden mysteries; rightly called teeth, because by rebuking the wicked, they as it were chew, and pass them into the body of the Church softened and humbled; rightly called neck, because to the whole body of the Church, they minister eternal joys by preaching, as if they were providing vital breath, and prepare the food of doctrines by which it is refashioned for salvation. But they are most aptly called breasts now, because they pour out the milk of the saving word to those who are still infants in Christ. Nor does he say "your two breasts" without reason, with the addition of a number, since no woman usually has more or less than two breasts: he says two breasts, to suggest that the infants of the two peoples, namely the Jewish and the Gentile, are to be nourished in faith. Finally, Paul says:

James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the Gentiles, and they unto the circumcision; and so forth (Gal. II). But see what Peter, who was sent to the circumcision, says: As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious (I Pet. II). By saying this, he also explains the mystery of the Church's breasts, saying that it is reasonable to desire the milk of the Lord, because He is sweet. Again, let us see if Paul, who was sent to the uncircumcision, also performs the duty of the breasts; for he says: And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ, I have fed you with milk, and not with meat (I Cor. III). These two breasts are like two twins of a roe, because they are indeed offspring of the one to whom it is so often said in this song: Be thou like to a roe or to a young hart.

Like twins of a roe, because with the pure eyes of their hearts, they discern what is to be done, what avoided, by which path of virtues to proceed, because with a sagacious mind they perceive the words' complexities to be avoided, and hasten in the swift course of good works from the valley of weeping to the place which God has appointed; so that walking

from virtue to virtue they may deserve to see Him in Zion, that is, in the watchtower of eternal habitation. For roes excel in both the swiftness of their feet and the sharpness of their eyes; hence those who are ordered to show the way of knowledge and virtue to the unlearned are fittingly compared to these. As he says, like two twins of a roe; well twins, because imbued with the same faith, renewed by the same sacraments, the teachers of both peoples gather all whom they educate into the one Church of Christ. Thus, Peter says of those who believed from the uncircumcision: And God, who knows the hearts, bore them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith (Acts XV).

[Song of Solomon 4:5] -- Those who are fed among the lilies, etc. The holy teachers are nourished by the pure and resplendent flowers of the divine Scriptures, and lest the milk of salvific doctrine, with which they feed the little ones, should lack, they always read in the writings of the Fathers what they ought to achieve, how they should teach, and they satisfy their hearts as though with vital sap, and this until the end of the world. For after that day shall dawn which the Psalmist desiringly spoke of: For one day in your courts is better than a thousand (Psalm 83), there will be neither a time for teaching nor a time for learning. The prophecy will be fulfilled which says: And they shall not teach each other, saying: Know the Lord, for they shall all know me (Jeremiah 31); but with all the shadows of this world entirely inclined and consumed, the saints will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Matthew 13), each receiving rewards according to what they have learned, done, and taught. Beautiful, indeed, as far as the natural order is concerned, is the vanishing of the night, the inclination of the shadows, because the darkness of the night, as philosophers say, is nothing other than the shadow of the earth. For the sun, circling the earth, brings with it light and day; on the other hand, from the side where it is absent, it leaves the shadow of the earth.

And this is the primordial division whereby God divided between the light and the darkness. These shadows, with the sun setting, and now and then rising again, gradually begin to lift, and as much as the sun descends under the earth, these shadows grow and rise, until, at the midpoint of the night, the sun being set under the middle of the earth, the shadows themselves, now raised, occupy the middle of the earth, and then, with the sun gradually proceeding, they also gradually bend towards their setting, until, with the dawn appearing, they entirely inclining vanish away. Therefore, the shadows of the earth do not reach the stars because the sun, created larger than the earth, makes a pointed shadow which, before it reaches the stars, dissipates, and the splendor of the sun spread all around the earth freely illuminates the stars that look upon it. Hence, the present life is night; the sun of justice, Christ. Whose light is often concealed from us by the heavy mass of earthly desires, so that it is not seen. And as strictly as He recedes from us, we are darkened; as graciously as He returns, we are illuminated. Truly, however, we will enjoy His light when, all darkness of present affliction and blindness being now inclined and dispersed, we will see Him as He is (1 John 3).

Yet, being mindful of our salvation in all things, He did not leave the night of this life entirely in darkness, but like planting stars in the sky, He proposed to us the examples of the saints, through which we might walk the path of our deeds unfalteringly.

[Song of Solomon 4:6] -- I will go to the mountain of myrrh, etc. In myrrh is represented the mortification of the flesh, or the endurance of sufferings for the sake of piety; in incense, the high devotion of prayer is expressed. But the mountain of myrrh, and the hill of incense, represent the very loftiness of the mind of those who effectively overcome the struggle of the flesh, and fervently lift themselves to the love of heavenly things. Indeed, to this mountain and this hill the Lord goes, because He will often deign to visit and dwell in the hearts of those who strive for virtues. Hence, He says: I will dwell in them, and walk among them (II Cor. VI). Praising the Church, therefore, and enumerating each member of its virtues, He suddenly adds: I will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of incense, which is openly saying: I will frequent them and glorify them with benevolent enlightenment, whom I observe to be exalted in the virtue of suffering or prayer. I will come often and make my abode with them; whom I regard as purifying from the pollution of the body and perfecting sanctification in the fear of God. Not that He proposes to desert it, which He praised, and to go to others, but because He intends to daily add new peoples to the same Church and to extend it throughout the entire world.

Nor is it incongruous that these things, since the speech is about the Church from the nations, might be understood regarding the calling of the Synagogue, which is to occur at the end. For He returns an answer to her desire, in which, having found Him previously, she said: I held Him and would not let Him go until I brought Him into my mother's house. And in the next verse, He taught that the Church of the Gentiles would never let Him go, as He said: Your two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies, until the day breathes and the shadows flee away; that is, teachers will be in you, who will instruct two peoples, concordant in humble and chaste love until the end of the age, when the day of eternal retribution will appear. Then, because He is also going to call Judea, He more manifestly insinuates, adding: I will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of incense; not because on coming, He will find it in the height of virtues, which having given a bill of divorce has long since departed from His faith, but because by coming, He will make it worthy of His fellowship. Hence, He well immediately subjoins about the very ample beauty of the one and the same Church, which is to be gathered either from Judea or from all nations throughout the world.

[Song of Solomon 4:7] -- You are entirely beautiful, my friend, etc. You are beautiful not only in the distinguished members of the elect, which I have specifically enumerated, but also in those who seem small and fragile, and you shine with the beauty of virtues, and you are free from the stain of vices. For He has blessed all those who fear the Lord, small and great alike (Psalm 113). Hence, in his Apocalypse, John speaks of the heavenly homeland of the same Church: "Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of

life" (Revelation 13). These things are said not because in this life any of the saints can be entirely free from all faults or perfect in virtues; since it is written truly, "There is no one on earth who is righteous, who does what is right and never sins" (Ecclesiastes 7); but because the holy Church, as the Church of Christ, is pure in faith and conduct; if any defilement or depravity touches it, it does not belong to it, but must be quickly purged away with all effort, as something foreign. Similarly, Blessed John says, "Everyone born of God does not commit sin" (1 John 3); because His seed remains in him, and he cannot sin, as he is born of God. For in as much as the seed of God's grace, through which they are reborn, remains, they cannot sin;

but in as much as they do sin, grace has temporarily left them, so that they may recognize what they are of themselves, who lived righteously through grace. This same grace, having cleansed them from all evil after this life, and shining with perfect beauty, will lead them into that city where, as it is said, nothing impure can enter; and then in the friend of the bridegroom, this will truly be fulfilled, for which she now strives with all the effort of virtue, that she may be entirely beautiful, without any stain.

[Song of Solomon 4:8] -- Come from Lebanon, etc. Lebanon, if we follow the Hebrew etymology, is interpreted as whiteness; if the Greek, incense. Finally, above, where we read, To the hill of frankincense, some codices have, To the hill of Lebanon. However, both names evidently sound out the industry of virtue. The bride of the Lord, that is, the Church or a holy soul, comes to Him, not only when called out of the body and receiving the reward of eternal recompense but also while living in this age, she progresses to better things with each increase of good works as if by so many steps she approaches Him who is singularly good. She reaches there when, freed from bodily bonds, she deserves to see His face. He thus sees the bride placed in Lebanon and advises her to come to Him because when the Lord observes a faithful soul, adorned with good deeds, offering the incense of pure prayer to Him, He delights in her pious endeavors and encourages her to persist in what she has begun.

He does this either through the secret admonition of His inspiration, through the meditation of the divine Scriptures, through the exhortations of other faithful, or even through the beneficial provision of her circumstances, whether laborious or pleasant, acting kindly toward her so that, either worn by the troubles of the present exile, she may more ardently desire the homeland of everlasting rest, or elevated by the current achievements of good deeds, she may more sweetly covet the unfailing joys of the heavenly city. Thirdly, He commands the bride to come from Lebanon because He requires progress in His chosen ones of good operation, salutary speech, and pure thought. Or certainly, He says, Come from Lebanon, my bride, come from Lebanon, come: come through the best life you may exercise while living in the body; come freed from the body, to receive the perpetual life of the soul; come thirdly with the body received again, to witness the perfect joys of the resurrection. And because many of the chosen, not only for the purity of their lives but also for the correction of others whom they educated, attain the eternal reward, it aptly follows:

[Song of Solomon 4:8] -- You will be crowned from the head of Amana, etc. Amana, Sanir, and Hermon are mountains of Cilicia or Judea, providing dens for lions and leopards and likewise other wild beasts; which clearly designate the proud hearts of the unbelievers, in which unclean spirits have their seat. On the contrary, concerning the elect, the Lord says through the prophet, ”Upon whom will my Spirit rest, but upon the humble and quiet, and the one who trembles at my words” (Isaiah 7)? For the demons are indeed lions, because of their pride; leopards, because of their cruelty or the variety of their malicious arts. Therefore, when the holy Church has rescued such souls from the power of darkness through its preachers and has converted them to the knowledge of true light, it happens that these preachers receive the crown of life not only for themselves but also for those whom they have acquired for the Lord, according to that saying from Proverbs, ”The crown of the aged is their children’s children; and the glory of children is their fathers” (Prov. 17). And the Apostle concerning those whom he taught: ”What is our glory, our hope, or joy, or crown of glory, if not you before our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? (1 Thess. 2). And it is to be noted that he does not say, “You will be crowned from Amana, Sanir, and Hermon; but from the head of Amana, and from the power of Sanir and Hermon.

Therefore, when the church converts the humble common people to the Lord, it gains a crown from the sides of the mountains, where the beasts had lurked, because it receives a reward for the salvation of the contradictory people. But when it has led the very princes of malice and the public persecutors to the way of life, it is crowned evidently from the head and the summit of the mountains, because the reward grows with the labor of the struggle. Similar to what is added, ”From the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards”: for the dens of lions are like the mountains of leopards, for those who, driven by a more fierce fury of the malign spirits, prevail in harming the flock of Christ by force and deceit: whom, when the Church has subdued and recalled to the grace of humility and piety, will itself be crowned from these, because it will rejoice in their eternal salvation. For those who, having nothing of contrary virtue, only pursue the good through deceit, are not named dens of lions, but more aptly dens of foxes: hence the Lord said to the scribe offering service deceitfully to Him but not prevailing against the church, ”The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” (Matt. 8). In the name of the foxes, He designated lightness and deceit; in the appellation of the birds, the loftiness of that mind.

But when the Church has also saved these, it becomes so that the Son of Man rests by merit of humility and sincerity, where previously the wicked spirits had usurped homes for themselves in boasting and lightness.

[Song of Solomon 4:9] -- You have wounded my heart, my sister, etc. This statement can be understood simply, as he might have wished to express the greatness of the love he has toward the Church through the remembrance of the wounded heart. He rightly calls her his sister and bride, because he has joined her to himself with the bond of the heavenly bedchamber, and because he himself deigned to become a man and naturally exist as her

brother. It can also be according to what Isaiah said: But he was wounded for our iniquities, he was bruised for our transgressions (Isaiah 53). He then subsequently explains what is the chief cause of receiving this wound, saying:

[Song of Solomon 4:9] -- In one of your eyes, etc. We have already said that in the eyes of the Church, either her spiritual senses or those who are able to see and demonstrate her spiritualities, the teachers are understood: furthermore, in the hair, the multitude of people, who, although they cannot reach the height of that discourse in which the Lord says: If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me (Matthew 19), nonetheless they tend towards heavenly things by the way of good actions, of which He previously said: If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments. You shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself (Ibid.). But there, while the eyes and the hairs are described in the plural number, indicating a multitude either of leaders or listeners; here, in one of the eyes, the unity of the teachers or of the spiritual knowledge, which they teach, is commended, of which it is written: One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all (Ephesians 4). Also, in one strand of the neck, the unity of those who are accustomed to adhere to spiritual teachers with pious devotion is praised, covering them with reverential services, just as hairs cover the neck:

for even in the neck of the Church the same teachers were shown above. Luke designates this unity of hair when he says: The multitude of believers were of one heart and one soul (Acts 4); nor did any say that anything of what they possessed was their own, but they had all things in common (Ibid.). What the neck, to which this same hair was attached, might do, he subsequently intimates, saying: With great power, the apostles gave testimony of the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord (Acts 6). He says, therefore: You have wounded my heart, my sister, my bride, you have wounded my heart in one of your eyes and in one strand of your neck. As if to say plainly, Indeed the whole form of your body, which spreads far and wide throughout the world, O Catholic Church, appears beautiful and spotless to me; but this is what remarkably arouses me above others to love you, because you are proven to have the unity of the same faith and love, both in your illustrious faithful and in your subjects. This is what led me to endure the wound of death in your behalf. Because I desired you to strive for unity in all your members, both in the greater and lesser, and the stronger and the more moderate, so that with one and undivided mind you may strive for that life in which the unity of true peace and glory reigns.

[Song of Solomon 4:10] -- How beautiful are your breasts! etc. Just as in the neck, eyes, and teeth, so too in the breasts are understood the teachers of the Church; but this is different in that they are to be regarded with these names either when they speak wisdom among the perfect or when they refute those who contradict; indeed, when they become weak for the weak in order to gain the weak, they are rightly said to have the office of breasts, because they impart the milk of milder doctrine to those of small understanding, namely to those

who cannot yet comprehend the bread of a higher word. For they are teeth when they rebuke the restless; they are breasts when they comfort the faint-hearted and support the weak. And rightly does he praise and marvel at the beauty of the breasts in his sister and bride, for it is a work great before God and of wondrous virtue, when one who is capable of revealing the higher secrets of truth to the more perfect does not disdain to instruct the weak in the rudiments of faith. Rightly does the Lord testify that such a soul is his sister and bride, because he considers her most worthy of his love and union, as he sees her become an imitator of his work. For he himself, to make us strong from the weak, did not refuse to be weak for a time, even to die so that we might live.

Though he was the bread of angels in divinity, he willed to hide himself in the assumption of flesh, so as to nourish human faint-heartedness and make them capable of the same heavenly bread. For since an infant is less fit to feed on bread, by thus consuming the bread the mother in a way incarnates herself, and through the humility of the breast and milk's juice feeds the child on that same bread. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1). This is the eternal food by which the angels are refreshed, for they are satisfied by seeing His glory. But the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (Ibid.), so that thus also the wisdom of God, which consoles us as a mother, might refresh us with that same bread, and through the sacrament of the incarnation lead us to the knowledge and vision of divine love. But the holy teachers also transform the bread by which they are themselves sublimely nourished into milk by which they nourish the little ones, while the higher they contemplate eternal joys in God, the more humbly they sympathize with the weakness of their neighbors.

[Song of Solomon 4:10] -- Your breasts are more beautiful than wine. At the beginning of this song, this verse has already been explained, where it was said: "Because your breasts are better than wine," and it was understood that these words also demonstrate the beginnings of the evangelical faith surpassing all the virtue of the Mosaic law, because it led no one to perfection, since it could not bring its worshippers, even the distinguished ones, into the kingdom of heavenly life; but the grace of faith leads those reborn in the font of baptism, even infants and those who die at a very young age, to heavenly joys. For many documents prove that the ceremonies of the law should be compared to wine, but most especially that which happens when the wine runs out at the mystical wedding of the Church, so that, with the Lord miraculously working, water is made into far better wine: where it is indicated typically that the literal observation of the law would come to an end, and what was veiled in the letter would be revealed by the grace of the Gospel, the spiritual love of water would intoxicate the house of heavenly marriage, that is, the holy Church, which Christ deemed worthy to consecrate as His bride. Therefore, the breasts of the bride are more beautiful than wine, because the beginnings of evangelical faith surpass the legal decrees, even those that have proven to be fragrant with no little taste and sweetness of virtues.

But it should be noted more carefully in these words that the beloved praises the breasts of his beloved bride above, but here the same beloved praises the breasts of his sister and

bride, and testifies that they are to be preferred to wine: for this reciprocal insertion in the sacred song is not to be thought of as in vain, but so that the unity of Christ and the Church may be more deeply recommended. For He is the head of the body of the Church, and she is the body of this head. Hence the Apostle also said: "The two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery. But I speak concerning Christ and the Church" (Eph. 5). Therefore, by a similar example, the breasts of the bridegroom and the bride are praised as if they were the same, because the same teachers of the Church are the teachers of Christ: of the Church, obviously, because they teach it; of Christ, however, because they teach at His command, because they teach His precepts to it, because by teaching they advance it to His companionship. Finally, the Apostle, who said: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1), also said again; "We are your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4). And in another place: "All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas" (1 Cor. 3).

[Song of Solomon 4:10] -- And the scent of your ointments, etc. The scent of the Church's spiritual ointments is the fame of the gifts; of which it is written: Their voice has gone out unto all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world (Psalm XVIII). And when Mary Magdalene anointed the Lord with nard as a type of the holy Church, it is written: And the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment (Matthew XXVI); where it is mystically signified that with the devout services of the Church, which are performed in honor of her Redeemer, the whole world would be filled. If, by the name of wine, the legal observance is rightly expressed, as was proven above by evangelical authority, what prevents the sweet rumor of the saints of that time from being indicated by the name of aromatic spices? Therefore, he says, the scent of your ointments is above all spices, because there is no doubt that the fame of the Christian faith, widespread throughout the world, has far surpassed the fame of the righteous who were among the earlier people. Therefore, because it has brought a public conflict to the world, having renounced the worship of the gods, it has endured public persecution from the world until it conquered: for it is not fitting for the Bride of Christ to be compared to base and vile things, either to wine, which taste consumes, or to spices, which the air customarily disperses, since even to the legal observance, it is of very little praise if it is said to surpass the cups or the spices that are suited to the senses of the flesh.

[Song of Solomon 4:11] -- A dripping honeycomb, your lips, bride. A honeycomb is honey in the wax; but honey in the wax is the spiritual sense of divine words in the letter, which is rightly called a dripping honeycomb: for a honeycomb drips when it has more honey than those wax cells can hold, because thus indeed is the fertility of the holy Scriptures, that a verse which is usually written in a short line, if carefully examined and expressed, is found to fill many pages with how much inner sweetness of spiritual understanding it contains. To give one example, the Psalmist says: Praise the Lord, Jerusalem (Psalm 147); which according to the letter indeed exhorts the citizens of that city, in which was God's temple, to offer praises to Him. But according to allegory, Jerusalem is the Church of Christ spread throughout the world; again according to tropology, that is, the moral sense, any holy soul is rightly called Jerusalem; also according to anagoge, that is, the understanding leading to

higher things, Jerusalem is the habitation of the heavenly homeland, which consists of holy angels and men. It fits all appropriately, though many distinctions, that Jerusalem means vision of peace, which is commanded to praise the Lord: for no single holy soul can offer as many praises to God as the Church throughout the world; nor is the universal Church itself as perfect while wandering on earth away from the Lord, as it reigns blessed in the presence of its Lord in heaven;

nor can the peace of the saints, which is meanwhile in the hope of seeing God and being delivered from evil, be equated to the vision of that peace which they have in reality, who, delivered from all evils, enjoy the highest good. Therefore, a honeycomb, not only full of honey but also dripping, are the lips of the bride, when the teachers of the Church, either in legal figures, or in prophetic sayings, or in the very words of the Lord, or in mystical deeds, demonstrate the manifold abundance of interior sweetness that exists, and prepare from them the sweetest and most wholesome mental feasts for His faithful members, that is, good listeners. Nor is it contradictory that the lips of the bride are earlier compared to ribbons and now to a honeycomb, since the latter delights by satisfying the throat, the former constrains by binding the hair; the latter refreshes inside, the former ties outside. For the same teachers are both ribbons in their salutary precepts and honeycomb in their heavenly promises: ribbons, when they restrain us from the flow of carnal pleasures; honeycomb, when they promise us the gifts of heavenly joys. Likewise, they are ribbons in those things which openly teach what must be done or avoided; honeycomb in those things that, having been done or spoken typically, reveal what mystery of salvation they hold within.

[Song of Solomon 4:11] -- Honey and milk are under your tongue. In milk is the instruction of the little ones, in honey the doctrine suited for those who are more advanced is signified. The Apostle teaches about milk, when, reproaching some who had fallen from the faith, he says: And you have become such as need milk, not solid food. He teaches about wisdom with honey, when he says: Just as one who eats much honey, it is not good for him, so he who is a seeker of majesty will be overwhelmed by it (Prov. XXV). He does not forbid eating honey, but eating too much, because we are not altogether forbidden from searching the majesty of God, especially since it is sung in the praise of the righteous themselves: They will speak of the glory of your majesty and of your wondrous works (Psalm CXLIV); but we are called back from attempting those things which exceed our measure. Hence, he also says elsewhere about lovers of heavenly wisdom: If you have found honey, eat what is sufficient for you, lest being filled you vomit it up (Prov. XXV). It is fitting, however, that honey and milk are recalled under the tongue: for he has the word of God on his tongue when he speaks it; he has it under his tongue when he meditates diligently in his heart on what ought to be spoken; he has honey and milk under his tongue when he rightly knows to discern what should be spoken to beginners, what to those who are advancing; and also to those who are perfect in knowledge and charity. And these things themselves, when the appropriate time comes, he dispenses through the ministry of his tongue according to the capacity of the listeners.

[Song of Solomon 4:11] -- And the scent of your garments, etc. The garments of the Church are its works, as attested by John, who speaking of her future blessedness, says: "The marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready, and it was granted to her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure" (Rev. XIX). For the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And blessed Job: "I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a diadem" (Job XXIX). Moreover, as often stated, in incense are signified the supernal desires of the just and the soaring fervor of frequent prayers. Hence rightly the scent of the bride's garments is compared to the scent of incense, because all that the holy Church works for the Lord, render the office of prayers for her; nor otherwise could that apostolic dictum, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. V), be fulfilled, unless all that we devoutly do, commends us devoutly like intercession to our Creator. For neither the Apostle himself nor any of the saints could always devote time to prayer to the exclusion of sleep, food, or other necessities of this life; but because the just continually perform what is just, through this the just pray without ceasing, and never cease from prayer unless they fall into sin. Therefore, the scent of their garments smells like the scent of incense, because the fame of the good works they do ascends in the divine judgement like prayers.

This verse harmonizes with what was said above: "And the scent of your ointments surpasses all aromatics"; for in that instance, by the name of ointments is shown the infusion of the Holy Spirit, which enlightens the hearts of the faithful and prepares them for spiritual battle; here, by the term garments, are shown the outward deeds of the just. Hence, with a beautiful distinction, the works done through humans are compared to the scent of incense; but the gifts bestowed by divine largesse exceed the mode of comparison, as the scent of the Church's ointments is said to transcend all aromatics. Since mention of incense is often made in this song, and what it typologically signifies is known, it is fitting to instruct the ignorant a little about the nature of this aromatic. It is a tree of Arabia, similar in bark and leaf to the laurel, emitting sap like that of almonds, which is collected twice a year, in autumn and spring. But in the autumnal collection, the trees are prepared by cutting their bark in the intense heat of summer, and the rich foam that springs forth solidifies when collected on the smooth surface of palm bark, and what remains on the tree is scraped off with iron, thus it appears bark-like. This is the purest and whitest incense. The second harvest truly, the same winter, with bark incised. This exits red, nor is it considered comparable to the former, and of the young tree it is whiter, but of the old more fragrant.

That which depends on the roundness of the droplet, we call male; but the drop beaten out by a blow, we call manna. The region producing incense is called Sarvia, which the Greeks say signifies mystery, impassable everywhere by rocks, and from the right carried up by inaccessible sea cliffs; a single narrow path extends the length of the forests for one hundred thousand paces, or, as others say, eighty; the width is half. High hills rise, and trees spontaneously grow and descend into the plains. It is agreed that the land is clayey, with rare and nitrous springs. These things, as we have found in ancient books, have been briefly said about the nature and location of incense. Almost all of these, if anyone diligently attends, suitably align with the virtues of the saints, especially because the region in which

it is born is called mystery: for the trees spontaneously grow, appropriately fitting those whose supreme virtue is not compelled by laws or edicts, but is usually wonderful due to voluntary offering, as the Lord says: If you wish to be perfect, go, sell all that you have; and the rest (Matt. XIX). When the trees are incised, the tear of the incense flows, what does it indicate but the compunction of the humble heart, from which pure prayer, sweetened with tears, is usually generated? That it has rare but nitrous springs, it suits those from whose belly, as the Scripture says, rivers of living water flow, that is, the gifts of spiritual doctrine emanate (John.

VII), also suitable for cleansing the minds of neighbors. For nitre is usually very suitable for healing infirmities and for washing away impurities. That the region is surrounded on all sides by the fortification of cliffs and rocks, agrees with the merits of those about whom the Lord speaks through a parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, and surrounded it with a hedge (Matt. XXI). For the Lord planted the Church, establishing it with the precepts of life, and surrounded it with the hedge of His protection, safeguarding it everywhere so that it cannot be exterminated by evil spirits or men. Moreover, after the Lord individually praised each member of the Church in detail, he likewise lastly commended with worthy praise the ointments with which it was entirely anointed. For none of its members, whether small or great, are not consecrated by the spiritual infusion of this anointment; for whoever lacks this, is not in the body of the Church. He also praised its garments, that is, its works of justice, for with these its entire body is adorned. For no one in it merits eternal life unless clothed in just works, which either he did; or, if he was an infant, others did in him and for him. But because it seemed slow to the supreme lover to praise the members of his spouse individually, it seemed little to liken each precious thing to each of her parts, he praises her entirely, and simultaneously compares her to many great things, subjoining:

[Song of Solomon 4:12] -- A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, etc. The garden is the Church, which produces various sprouts of spiritual works, which are subsequently listed under various names of spices. It is a fountain that overflows with saving doctrine, by which it waters the minds of its faithful, as if they were herb beds of spices, which it had prepared spread out. Hence it is written: A deep water, words from the mouth of a man, and an overflowing torrent, the fountain of wisdom (Prov. XX). Therefore, the Apostle says: I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase (I Cor. III). I planted, as if in the Lord's garden, the spices of virtues; Apollos watered, as if from the sealed fountain of heavenly doctrine; but the Lord, as his workers, helped, lest they labor in vain. But this garden is enclosed, because the Church, fortified with the protection of its Lord and Redeemer, persists lest it should ever be violated by the invasion of impious ones, either of unbelieving men or unclean spirits, and delayed in the bearing of heavenly fruits by being trampled upon in all directions. This fountain is sealed, because the word of faith, which is in the Gospel, protected by seals, can never be disturbed by any attack of the erring. For there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all (Ephes. IV). Whoever

attempts to break this seal of the living fountain errs, and cannot profane the fountain of life;

but rather kills himself in this, while the impious thrust themselves forward; like the example of the Egyptian army, which was drowned in the mystical Red Sea baptism, whereby the people of God were saved, when they presumptuously entered into sacred things not by believing, but by pursuing. And because the same holy Church, which is designated by the name of the sacred irrigated garden, was first indeed located in the small sod of Judea, but was soon greatly amplified throughout the whole world, it is rightly added:

[Song of Solomon 4:13] -- Your branches are a paradise of pomegranates, etc. Because the early Church, which was at Jerusalem, produced many people for God from water and the Spirit, it is rightly said that the sacred garden, assisted by the irrigation of the divine fountain, emitted a paradise, not of any kind of trees, but of pomegranates with the fruits of apples. The pomegranates, which bloom with a blood-red color, signify the triumphs of those in the Church who, after the general washing of the sealing fountain, are also baptized with their own blood. However, the fruits of the apples indicate the works of general virtues, or those who perform the works of virtues: although among the pomegranates, which this garden is first said to emit from itself, the whole assembly of the baptized can rightly be accepted, because undoubtedly the regenerating fountain is dedicated to the mystery of the Lord's passion. For as many of us as were baptized in Christ Jesus, were baptized into His death. For we were buried with Him by baptism into death, so that just as Christ rose from the dead by the glory of God, we also might walk in newness of life (Rom. VI). However, after the many pomegranates, follow the fruits of apples and spices, worthy of such a beginning, because after the ascent of the fountain sprinkled with His precious blood, through which we become the children of God, it necessarily follows that the fragrant fertility of virtues, with which the grace of our regeneration is adorned and always grows, comes.

[Song of Solomon 4:14] -- Cyprus with nard, nard and saffron. Cyprus in Egypt is an aromatic tree, with leaves like those of the jujube, and a seed whiter than coriander. This is cooked in oil and then pressed; this called Cyprus, a royal ointment is prepared from it. The best is in Egypt, the second in Ascalon of Judea, the third on the island of Cyprus. Some say this is the tree called privet in Italy. We read about manna, which was like white coriander seed; and since the seed of Cyprus is claimed to be of the same quality, rightly by the same as itself, it designates heavenly blessing. This seed is sent into oil and cooked, which is the gift of heavenly grace received by hearts illuminated with the fat of charity, and when the flames of temptations are brought, its power is shown to all more clearly. Nard, however, which holds the type of the Lord's burial, testifies the work of Mary, who anointed Him with this aroma at the impending passion; as He Himself explained, saying: For in pouring this ointment on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial (Matt. XXVI).

And the garden, or the fountain of the Lord, buys cyprus, when the Church teaches its children to seek above all the grace of heavenly refreshment, to hold the light and anointing of love in the heart, to not be overcome by the fire of tribulations, but with these very opportu-

nities, to show how much and what kind of divine grace seed they have received. He joins cyprus and nard, when he instructs them with the faith of the Lord's passion more eagerly in time or he teaches them to imitate this to be suffered by themselves, with saffron, having almost a gold-colored flower; he shows them those who shine with greater grace of love; which, as gold to other metals, so it surpasses all virtues. Now, he says, faith, hope, and love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love (I Cor. XIII). Against this, Jeremiah lamenting the destruction of his people says: Those brought up in scarlet embrace dung (Lam. IV). Indeed, they embrace dung who are brought up in scarlet, when those, who once seemed to shine brightly with the flowers of most pleasing charity, afterwards begin to immerse themselves in the foul wallows of vices. But also the fact that saffron is said to confer the relief of refreshment to the burning limbs of the languid fits the acts of the highest virtue, which are accustomed to temper minds from the heat of carnal pleasures, and to kindle towards the joy of desiring the heavenly fatherland.

Indeed, that nard is said to scatter the cold of the faint-hearted and warm the limbs, it is evident that the memory of the Lord's passion drives away the sluggish fear of dying from the hearts of the faithful, and inflames and makes them eager, not only by mortifying their vices, but also by laying down their lives for Him.

[Song of Solomon 4:14] -- Pipe and cinnamon, etc. The pipe, which is also called cassia, is counted among aromatic trees. It has a robust and purple bark, which is said to be very beneficial for curing internal ailments. Due to its brevity, some consider it among fragrant herbs; these rightly signify those humble in spirit, for whom is the kingdom of heaven; who, as if clothed in purple, always remember the passion of the Lord, always prepared to suffer for the Lord, like the one who said: "For your sake we are killed all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered" (Psalm 43). For this virtue, which more than any other, has the habit of subduing and removing internal troubles and lusts when we recall what God suffered for us, recognizing that we suffer less than we deserve. Cinnamon holds the same significance: for this tree is short in trunk but strong and fragrant, and very useful in medicine, excelling double the pipe. Hence it may aptly be understood that Scripture intended to express the progress of humility, placing cinnamon after the pipe: for since it is said to be of a dark or ashen color, it suits the minds of the humble, who, conscious of their own frailty, know to say to God in daily prayers: "I speak to my Lord, though I am but dust and ashes" (Gen. 18). And again: "I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42).

And well does it place cinnamon, an ash-colored tree, after the purple-colored pipe, because our thoughts of the Lord's wound give rise to contempt for our own virtue. The bark of it is valued, and since it is round like a reed and slender, it takes the name cinnamon. For in Greek, ammomum is said to mean 'spotless. He says, "Pipe and cinnamon with all the trees of Lebanon. Just as the pipe and cinnamon signify the humble thoughts of the just, so do the trees of Lebanon show their lofty actions, because these not only excel in fragrance and healing like the pipe and cinnamon, and boast the glory of their bark, but

also rise to great height and strength. Hence, they are suitable for larger buildings, as also attested by this song, in which it is said: "The beams of our houses are cedar. And again: "King Solomon made himself a carriage of the wood of Lebanon. Therefore, the pipe and cinnamon come forth in the garden of the Lord with all the trees of Lebanon, because those who are admirable in humility and patience in the holy Church, together with those who firmly support the Church by preaching or performing virtues, await the palm of heavenly reward. Myrrh and aloe express the restraint of the flesh, because it is the nature of these aromatics that bodies anointed with them after death do not decay, as evidenced by the burial of the Lord.

For just as the corruption of dead flesh indicates the rottenness of luxury, so the preservation of it, where it is typically received in a good sense, aptly demonstrates the virtue of continence and chastity, which restrain our members from vices. Indeed, the first of those ointments are those about which the Apostle says: "But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Cor. 12), and the rest he wonderfully discusses regarding those great virtues in which charity holds the summit, the great master of eloquence. A truly beautiful conjunction, that myrrh and aloes with all the chief ointments may arise in the Lord's garden, for as we restrain the flesh from lasciviousness, it follows that we may receive the greater gifts of the Spirit. It has been contradicted, for wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sins (Wisdom 1). For the Holy Spirit of discipline will flee deceit (Ibid.). Now myrrh is a tree of Arabia, reaching a height of five cubits, similar to a thorn, which the Greeks call acanthus, whose gum is green and bitter, whence it also took the name myrrh. All this aptly relates to the mortification of the flesh, which feels bitter for a time but is most willingly accepted in the hope of an ever-blooming homeland, of which Peter says:

"He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven" (1 Peter 1). It is rightly compared to thorns because, to save the mind perpetually, it temporarily afflicts the body with the pricks of labors. But that its spontaneously flowing gum is more precious, while that obtained by wounding the bark is cheaper, who would not see that it is a greater virtue before God when someone with a healthy and vigorous body, even with an abundance of external things smiling upon them, strives to discipline and subject it to servitude rather than when, pressed by illness or other adversities of the world, they unwillingly restrain the flesh from lasciviousness and are coerced into the remedy of abstinence? Although this too should rightly be numbered among great virtues, when someone, patiently, humbly, and gladly accepting the lashes of paternal correction, reaches the gifts of the promised inheritance through these means. Aloe too, if considered more closely, is aptly likened to the continent: for it is a tree of very pleasant and superior odor, whose wood the ancients used as a substitute for incense on altars. Yet its juice is extremely bitter, but suitable for many medicines. Thus indeed the restraint of bodily pleasures through conti-

nence is bitter in the act itself but glorious by the merit of virtue and most pleasing to the inner judge.

[Song of Solomon 4:15] -- Fountain of gardens, well of living waters, etc. The fountain of gardens is born among others in the enclosed garden of the Lord, because the heavenly doctrine has proceeded into the world from the primitive Church, which would generate many churches for the Lord, that is, spiritual gardens. To which fountain it is rightly inferred, the well of living waters which is a fountain, except that a well is always at a height, whereas a fountain, being always submerged in height, can also be at the highest peak of the land. Therefore, one and the same doctrine of the Church is the fountain of gardens, because it produces spiritual fruits in those whom it instructs, and it is the well of living waters: indeed a well, because it is not open to everyone; not placed conspicuously, but stored uniquely in the heart of the saints through the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Hence no one from the beginning of this age knew it. For if they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory. But to us, he says, God has revealed it through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2). However, of living waters, because of the divine and heavenly words, which always proceed unfailingly from the hidden treasures of divine grace and lead to life, whoever they wash and irrigate.

For living waters are usually called those that eternally flow from a spring source, in contrast to those which are either collected in cisterns by the abundance of rains, or in ponds or which, by the melting of snow, flow temporarily with great force in torrents, but dry up when clear weather returns. To these, rightly, is compared the brief and swollen boastfulness of worldly doctrine, which often seems to pour out infinite and profound rivers of eloquence and learning in various ways; but all these soon dry up as if they had never been when the Sun of righteousness and the summer of evangelical clarity shine. Of these, the Lord Himself complains through the prophet, saying: They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and hewed out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water (Jer. 2). And Isaiah: Behold, the Lord will ascend on a light cloud and will enter Egypt; and a little later: And the water will dry up from the sea, and the river will be desolate and dry up (Is. 19). He says, a well of living waters, which flow swiftly from Lebanon. He speaks of Lebanon, of the very Church, which is both white and high through life. For Lebanon is interpreted as whiteness; and it pours out to its listeners, as if beneath its fields, the streams of saving wisdom: as the Lord also says in the Gospel: Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture says, rivers of living water will flow from his belly;

and the evangelist adds as an explanation: Now he said this about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive (John 7). For rivers of living water flow from the belly of him who believes, when from the heart of the faithful flow the streams of holy preaching. Which flow, he says, swiftly from Lebanon: he rightly added swiftly, to not only signify the descent to us of living waters but also to show the unassailable power of the things coming. For as no one can restrain the outpouring rivers from a high mountain, so the flow of the apostolic word, because it proceeded from a heavenly source, because it was divinely urged

to run, could be overcome by no struggle of opposing powers and could not be deflected from its path; rather souls would first give way than cease from the irrigation of vital doctrine. What is that in the Psalm, "The stream of the river makes glad the city of God" (Psalm 45). Rightly does it gladden the Church, which not only receives from the Lord a stream of living waters, but also the same stream comes with such force of heavenly grace that it cannot be obstructed by any obstacle of contrary power. The well of living waters can also not inappropriately be taken as a sign for those who, whatever earthly thought they find in their heart, customarily draw it out, and strive to bring it forth with devout confession and cast it away:

that by the merit of chastity and humility, they may prepare within their hearts a dwelling-place fit for God, and make a path for the living waters, that is, heavenly gifts, through the veins of hidden inspiration by their diligent cleansing: following the example of the blessed patriarch Isaac, who, when hindered by the Philistines, was accustomed to dig wells useful to himself and his own, which they, out of jealousy, tried to obstruct. He diligently purified these wells by his diligent labor and persisted in digging until the living water responded to him from the depths. Such indeed is our contest with evil spirits, as they strive to cloud the water of wisdom in us or, if they can, to completely exclude it, by casting the rubble of vices into our senses. But we, on the other hand, with diligent industry and frequent prayers and watchings, should strive to expel these temptations they have injected into us in order that we may be capable of invisible gifts.

But since the Lord called His garden enclosed, watered by a living fountain, planted with fragrant scents and trees, since He declared it to be irrigated with the waters of wisdom, and to have wells for the hidden mysteries, and living waters for the eternity of goods to which they lead for drinking, since He asserted that these waters flow with a persistent and absolutely invincible force, it remained that once everything was firmly and orderly arranged, the adversaries were by no means denied some access for tempting, but rather it was shown that they could in no way be hurt by torrents coming from here and there; indeed, the more it was tested by the blasts of adversities, the more the internal sweetness of its fruits would be revealed. Hence, now, from the voice of the Lord Himself it is added:

[Song of Solomon 4:16] -- "Arise, O north wind, and come, O south wind," etc. For in the north or south, He signifies the tempests of frequent temptations with which the Church was to be buffeted, so that it might become known how much spiritual grace and internal strength it possessed. If we consider any difference between the names of the north and south, one being cold and the other a warm wind, it can not unreasonably be taken as the severity of the intimidating world in the north and the blandishments of deception in the south: for by this twofold assault the garden of the Lord is proved to be tempted, as He Himself shows when explaining the parable of the good seed: "But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that hears the word, and anon with joy receives it; yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while: for when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns

is he that hears the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful" (Luke 8). Now, when the Lord seems to say in an imperative tone: "Arise, O north wind, and come, O south wind, blow upon my garden," He does not command the wicked to do evil, but allows them to use their free will as they wish.

He can also make good things from their evil actions as He wills and render them, with unbiased judgment, the torments they have deserved for their evil deeds. The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart to afflict His people (Exodus X); but shortly after, having freed those who were afflicted, He punished eternally the one who had afflicted them. Concerning the head of all sinful men, He says of the blessed Job: "Behold, he is in your hand" (Job I); and when he went out and struck him with the greatest blow, does it not seem to you that he said to the very turbulent and harsh winds: "Blow upon my garden, and let its spices flow out"? For the spices flowed out from the garden shaken by the winds, when the holy man was struck by adversities and scattered the wonderful fragrance of his virtue far and wide. Hearing that the Church must be tested by the blasts of temptations, it in no way contradicts the providence and arrangement of its Beloved; rather, so that it may not be overcome by adversities and not corrupted by prosperity, it seeks His help in all things, who brings forth the winds from His treasuries; and as the blessed Job says: "Who made weight for the winds" (Job XXVIII): which in other words means: "Who does not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear" (I Cor. X). XVII.

[Song of Solomon 4:16] -- "Let my beloved come into his garden," etc. Let the Lord come into His Church, so that He may keep it spotless and always fruitful with the crop of faith. He who promised to remain with me until the end of the world, then more graciously shows me the presence of His coming when He sees me being assailed by greater temptations from enemies, and may He kindly grant that He Himself is my beloved above all. For I trust that as long as I can truly say: "I will love You, O Lord, my strength" (Psalm XVII); and: "He will deliver me from my mighty enemies, and will set me on high above the heights of the heavenly kingdom" (ibid.). And let Him eat the fruit of His apples; and let Him gladly look upon and gratefully accept the works of His saints, according to what He Himself said to His disciples about the Samaritans who would believe in Him: "I have food to eat that you do not know of" (John IV); which He made clear when He said about the calling of the Gentiles: "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work" (John VI). "Lift up your eyes and see the fields, for they are already white for harvest. And he who reaps receives wages and gathers fruit for eternal life" (John IV).

On the contrary, when He was hungry and sought fruit on the Jewish fig tree and did not find any, He condemned it to perpetual barrenness. For He made this figuratively, signifying that although He desired the salvation of the Synagogue, since it despised the fruit of salvation, it deserved to be punished with the vengeance of eternal faithlessness. It can be specially taken as the voice of the perfect members of the Church, that is, those who remember to serve God with sincere and fixed intention. "Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat the fruit of his apples"; as if they were openly saying, "O that the Lord would come

quickly, that He, being gracious, may repay us the reward for our pious devotion! And as we have always cared to love Him and to render the fruit of righteousness which He has given, so may He show us the happiest recompense of His love by receiving us unto Himself. While it is fitting for all saints to say this at all times, how much more when they see the state of the present Church shaken by the storms of temptations! To their desire, He Himself gratefully responding at once by His voice, testifies that He has already done what was asked.

Chapter 5

[Song of Solomon 5:1] -- "I have come into my garden, my sister, my spouse." "I come," He says, "very often into My Church; indeed, during her time of wandering, I by no means cease to do this. But I come to correct those who wander, to help those who are weak, to confirm those who doubt in faith; and to feed on the perfect fruits of those who are doing well as on very sweet dishes, to defend those who are striving from the snares of the enemies, and to reward those who have conquered the enemies with the crown of My perpetual vision. I have gathered my myrrh with my spices." By myrrh, those are meant who have either ended their lives by martyrdom or those who have crucified their flesh with its vices and desires. By spices, generally all who are renowned for the fame of their good works are meant. And He gathers His myrrh with His spices when He cuts off His martyrs along with His other chosen ones from this life by a certain sickle of death, as they have come to the maturity of the perfection granted to them, and leads them to the inner joys of supreme happiness.

[Song of Solomon 5:1] -- I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey, etc. Those who in sacred writings seek the sweetness of spiritual insights and know how to elucidate them through preaching for the salvation of listeners are compared to the honeycomb. Those who eagerly taste the prepared meals of the word and desire to consume them insatiably are likened to honey. Also, the strong and eminent preachers of heavenly things are represented by wine, whereas the still weak listeners are expressed by milk. And when the inner judge approves the life of all these, differing indeed in various modes of study, but united by one hope of supernal recompense, it is as if he eats honeycomb with honey and drinks wine with milk. Not only does he himself delight in the pious deeds of the elect, but he also encourages his faithful to such a banquet of the mind, that is, to rejoice in the good intentions of the saints, when he adds:

[Song of Solomon 5:1] -- Eat, my friends, and drink, etc. That is, you too who are my friends by doing what I have commanded you, are also most dear, embracing me with undivided love: therefore I beseech you to fill your hearts with the acts of the saints, as with the choicest feasts. And not only take care to recall these things to memory, but also turn the very memory of them to the fruit of imitation. For this is indeed to eat honeycomb and honey after the repast, after drinking wine and milk to become inebriated, not only to rejoice in the wondrous virtues of the good, but also to follow these, and through their retracing, to shake off the torpor of our mind, and to kindle with greater zeal the love of eternal things. On the contrary, the prophet says to some, You have eaten, but you were not satisfied; you

have drunk, but you were not inebriated (Hagg. I). For indeed, one eats the banquets of the vital table, but is not satisfied; one drinks the cup of salvation, but is not inebriated, who has indeed learned the words of the Scriptures, has known the examples of the just, but has not changed his own life, nor corrected his manners; he drinks, but is not inebriated, who joyfully hears the precepts of life, but remains sluggish and lazy in fulfilling them. However, if in the Lord's statement above, who said:

I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey, and I have drunk my wine with my milk, we should wish to accept this signified that He has translated His saints from this world to the heavens, and introduced them into the society of the heavenly citizens, who are indeed His body, it will follow that this admonition of which we now speak should be understood as given to the same citizens of heaven: for when He said He had eaten His honeycomb with His honey, and drunk His wine with His milk, that is, gathered the saints into the growth of His heavenly body, He immediately turned His face and words to the inhabitants of heaven, saying: Eat, my friends, and drink, and be inebriated, most dear. Which is in other words to say: Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep which was lost (Luke XV). Indeed, by a most fitting comparison, they are likened to honeycomb and honey, those whom, pleasing to Himself from the foundation of the world, the Lord, rising from the dead, has taken with Him from the underworld to the heavenly kingdoms: so that the sweetness of the holy souls which He has lifted to eternal joys in heaven is indeed compared to honey. In the honeycomb, however, there is no less happiness for those who have merited to ascend to the courts of the heavenly city through Him, both in body and in immortal soul.

About whom the evangelist clearly testifies, because as the Lord was dying on the cross, the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and after His resurrection came into the holy city, and appeared to many (Matthew XXVII). For those who rose from the dead at the rising of the Lord are also believed to have ascended together with Him when He ascended to the heavens. Nor should faith be given by any means to their rashness, who think that afterward they returned to dust, and again were enclosed in the graves, which had been opened long before by them, to whom they had appeared alive a little before, in the manner of the dead. Thus, the bridegroom ate the honeycomb with his honey, when the Lord led all those who had faithfully served Him from the beginning of this life, some rejoicing in the immortality of the flesh, others still awaiting the rewards of the resurrection, to eternal life, and together elevated them all with unspeakable glory among the company of angels in happiness. Thus far, the Lord had praised abundantly the beauty and virtues of the holy Church, beginning with the saying: How beautiful you are, my friend! how beautiful you are! your eyes are like doves. This praise was carried so far that it was even to be tested by adversities; that where this began to be done, she invoked the unique help of the same Redeemer;

and He, delaying nothing of the prayers, under the name of myrrh and spices, gathered those who had either been tested by oppressions or adorned with other virtues, to the heavenly homeland. And He declared that the whole life of the holy Church, which is distinguished

by teachers, and by its hearers, was accepted by Him under the name of honeycomb, honey, and milk. When these things are fulfilled, follows the voice of the Church desirous to cling to the Lord rather in the hiddenness and silence of contemplation than through the labor of preaching, to incite the weapons and fury of the wicked against her.

[Song of Solomon 5:2] -- I sleep, and my heart watches. As if to say, With the cessation of persecutions for a time, I have begun to have some rest in the Lord even in this life, enjoying His leisure gladly, and now with all the desire of my heart, I keep watch for that rest which knows no end. I sleep, because, by His grace, I enjoy a little tranquility in this life in worshipping Him. Nor am I bound by so much labor of preaching as the early Church endured, nor struck by so many conflicts of the faithless as the numerous congregations of the nascent Church endured at first. And my heart watches, because the more freely I am free from external attacks, the deeper within me I see that He is the Lord. This indeed the holy Church says concerning those who, in the calm of temporal life, desire to serve the Lord with psalms, fasts, and other prayers and alms of temporal life, by quieter actions. But because this life is one of labor, not rest, soon she feels the voice of the Lord awakening her, and urging her to the toil of preaching, so that she may remember that in the time of this exile, the desired rest is neither wholly denied its taste nor eternally granted its full enjoyment. For it follows:

[Song of Solomon 5:2] -- The voice of my beloved knocking: Open to me, my sister, etc. For the beloved knocks at our door when the Lord stirs us to the progress of virtues, when He admonishes us of the joys of the promised kingdom to be obtained, just as we also knock at His door when we seek from Him the progress of virtues and the entrance to the kingdom, mindful indeed of His promise, who said: Knock, and it shall be opened to you (Luke 11). And He also declares that He knocks at our door, when He says: Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with me (Rev. 3). We open to the Lord knocking in two ways: when we open the sanctuary of our hearts to receive His fervent love, which we already have to some extent; or certainly when we open the hearts of our neighbors to receive His fear or love, which they have not yet had, by preaching. There is also a third knocking of the Lord at our door, when He admonishes us through prior infirmities that we are to be taken from this life. Concerning this, He Himself says in the Gospel, And you, he says, be like men waiting for their master when he will return from the marriage feast, so that when he comes and knocks, they may open to him immediately (Luke 12).

We open immediately to the Lord knocking thus if we gladly receive death, and do not fear to be led to His judgment, remembering that we have pleased Him with good works and always honored Him; according to the Psalmist, And the honor of the king loves judgment (Psalm 96). But in this place, if carefully considered, the Lord seems rather to seek that opening of a faithful soul which happens in the instruction of neighbors. For it is certain that she had opened her own heart to Him because desiring to depart to Him, freed from the bonds of the flesh, she could say: I sleep, and my heart watches. It is certain that the

beloved had already entered her because she had honored Him with the marks of so many and such great names, that she could say: My sister, my friend, my dove, my undefiled: my sister, because made co-heir of my kingdom; my friend, because having left the yoke of servitude, you have become conscious of my secrets; my dove, because enlightened by the gift of my spirit; my undefiled, because set apart from busy actions, you are exalted to divine visions. But when He says, Open to me, He undoubtedly requires the minds of those who were not yet worthy of all these to be opened to Him by preaching, as the following words declare, which say:

[Song of Solomon 5:2] -- Because my head is filled with dew, etc. The head of Christ is God, as the Apostle says (I Cor. 11); but His curls are the collected thoughts in the minds of His faithful, which do not flow dispersed, but remain held together by discipline. The dew and drops of the night, which fall from above amid the darkness and cold, are the minds of the wicked, surely obscure and blind, and always desiring earthly things. Of such it is said: Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall grow cold (Matt. 24). The Lord has commanded that we love Him, and also love our neighbor. But when we venerate Him with lesser love than we should, and when many, which is worse, hold no affection of charity toward Him at all, what else but the head of Christ is filled with dew? And when the wicked spend their hatred instead of love towards the servants of Christ, who gather into the guardianship of their minds and adhere more closely to the love of their Creator, do not His curls become wet with the drops of the night, and do they not gravely endure the oppressive chills of blind persecution? Therefore, when such a time arises, the Lord justly stirs the Church from the slumber of sweet studies in which it delights, and commands it to insist upon the word of preaching, and by frequent exhortation to warm, enlighten, and open up to Him the hearts of the wicked, which were closed against Him, so that entering in, He may dwell there by faith, preferring that the Church reach salvation for many through labor, rather than having rest in the few who were saved, although praiseworthy by frequent meditation on heavenly goods. Provoked to the labor of preaching, the Church responds to the Lord:

[Song of Solomon 5:3] -- I have stripped off my tunic, etc. As if he openly says, I have abandoned the affairs of weak matters, how can I take them up again? For he who girds himself for the duty of preaching and takes on the care of governing souls, it remains that he should also be vigilant to provide the necessities of temporal aids to those to whom he preaches eternal things. Therefore, the Church in those who prefer to conduct their care in secret rather than be occupied with the hardships of laborious actions, remembers having stripped off their tunic and cannot put it on again: for since the tunic figuratively denotes the occupations of this age, the Lord Himself testifies, when speaking about the coming of His last judgment, and says: And let him who is in the field not return to take his tunic (Matthew 24); mystically admonishing that he who has occupied his hand and mind towards the progress of spiritual fruits should not return to desire the pleasures of the world which he had cast away.

[Song of Solomon 5:3] -- I have washed my feet, etc. Now I have cleansed my thoughts, which once were accustomed to touch the earth, with frequent tears of secret compunction, and, as much as was possible by manners, I have made them worthy of heavenly entry, so that I can say that our feet were standing in your courts, Jerusalem (Psalm 121); that is, although I have not yet deserved to enter the very walls of the heavenly city, nevertheless, I have so purified my thoughts to such an extent that I remember that frequently, by the steadfast gaze of my heart, I have tasted some not insignificant beginnings of those joys, and how can it be that descending from the height of contemplation, I would again be defiled by the filth of the world? For aside from the concern of temporal support that we have spoken of, it is very difficult, even for an excellent teacher, not to be occasionally moved by some fault of vainglory or indeed of anger if, when speaking of divine and heavenly matters, he is heard humbly; vainglory, if by humbly obeying, he gains many flocks of believers for the Lord, anger if he is rebuked; vainglory if his speech is praised. Hence James says: Do not be many teachers, my brothers, because you take up greater judgment; for in many things we all offend (James 3).

Hence the Lord himself, upon the return of the disciples from preaching, washed their feet, signifying that even the greatest preachers cannot avoid all sins at least in the thoughts by which they touch the earth; but whatever these sins may be, he himself, being merciful, will wash them away. Therefore, the holy Church delights in the sweet and wholesome studies of a quiet life, in those who have deserved to experience such things; and excuses the duty of preaching, saying in a way with Moses: I pray, Lord, send whom you will send (Exodus 4). But because the Lord especially wants our love for Him to be known in the love for our neighbors, hence He replied to Peter, who professed to love Him three times, three times: Feed my sheep (John 21), it aptly follows:

[Song of Solomon 5:4] -- My beloved put his hand through the opening. My beloved puts his hand through the opening when the Lord secretly and invisibly kindles us with the hidden spur of divine love toward virtuous acts. He puts his hand to us when, seeing us longing to rest, he recalls to our memory his work in us—not only that we are men but also that we belong to him. He extends his hand to remind us of his work on our behalf: He left the bosom of the Father to become human like us, not only to be incarnate and dwell on earth, making us spiritual and heavenly, but also to die so that we might live forever. Therefore, rightly, our heart trembles at his touch, for when our conscience recalls his merciful deeds, it is filled with awe, inspired by prophetic insight: ”I have considered your works and was afraid” and hurries to aid in the salvation of others for whom God was incarnate and died. For by the name ”womb” is often meant the heart because just as food is digested in the womb, so thoughts mature in the heart through diligent reflection. Thus, Jeremiah says, ”My womb, my womb, I am in pain” (Jer. IV). What would it profit listeners if a teacher complained of pain in his stomach? But his intention was to greatly benefit them by testifying that his own conscience was troubled and filled with deep pain due to their rebellious acts.

The term ”womb” can also denote the softness and fragility of those who, either because they consider themselves less capable, tremble to undertake the duty of teaching, or because they delight in the ease of their rest, shy away. And the bride’s womb trembled at the beloved’s touch when, moved by divine compunction, the weak in the Church shook off their sluggishness and aroused themselves to practice good works, rising up to advise others through preaching. This is precisely shown in the following phrase:

[Song of Solomon 5:2] -- I arose to open to my beloved. To open to the Lord in this place signifies to preach the word of the Lord. For we open to the Lord, not only when we receive His coming into our heart through love, but also when we convert those who used to close their hearts against the truth by teaching them to accept it. And it is well that the bride recalls that she arose to open to her beloved, because it is absolutely necessary that everyone who intends to preach the truth first rises to carry out what he teaches, lest by preaching to others he himself be found unworthy. The following words are suitable, when it is said:

[Song of Solomon 5:5] -- My hands dripped with myrrh, etc. For in the hands are the works that are done by them; in the fingers is taken the discretion by which the works are directed: for certainly no parts of our body are distinguished by numerous joints, none are more apt for bending than the fingers. Hence it is that the Lord, about to give a sentence concerning the adulteress, first wrote with his finger on the ground, thus mystically advising us that whenever we intend to chastise or judge others, we should first humbly carve out our own conscience with diligent discretion, carefully considering lest we also be tempted. It has often been said that myrrh signifies the continence of the flesh and martyrdom: hence the sense is clear that the hands of the spouse drip with myrrh, when the holy soul dedicates itself to works of continence; and her fingers are full of the most proven myrrh, when, examining herself with careful discretion, she finds that she lives continent only with a view to heavenly recompense. For those who seek the favor of human praise, who, according to the judge himself, have received their reward, these indeed seem to drip with myrrh from their hands, but in no way have their fingers filled with the most proven myrrh, because if they do not only give their wealth to the poor, but also deliver their bodies to the flames, if they do not have charity, it profits them nothing.

Therefore, because the one who wants to teach others must himself abstain from carnal enticements and be ready to suffer for the confession of faith, it was fitting that when she said: I arose to open to my beloved, she immediately added: My hands dripped with myrrh. And because the same continence or passion ought to be performed only with the intention of eternal reward, she rightly added: My fingers are full of myrrh. Again, the hands of the spouse drip with myrrh when her workers, that is, the holy teachers, subject their bodies to salutary mortification, and her fingers are full of the most proven myrrh when they progress so much in tribulations that their invincible patience is also declared, according to the Apostle: But we glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation works patience, and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope does not disappoint (Rom. V).

[Song of Solomon 5:5] -- I opened the bolt of my door to my beloved. The bride opened the bolt of her door to her beloved, when each chosen soul made the temple of her heart worthy of divine visitation and indwelling. She opens the bolt of the door to her beloved knocking, when, suddenly inspired and enkindled with a desire for heavenly things, she strives to open wider the bosom of her mind to receive the taste of that same heavenly sweetness. For it had been said above that the beloved, having sent his hand through the hole, touched her and shook her with trembling: deeply inflamed by his touch, she now desires to be touched not through the narrowness of the hole by his hand, but, with the door of her heart opened, to enjoy his most blessed embrace, that is, to be more fully satisfied with the sweetness of divine illumination, which she had sensed briefly and modestly. But since the perfect vision of eternal joys is granted to none of the elect in this life, which is reserved for all the righteous in the next life as a reward, it is rightly added:

[Song of Solomon 5:6] -- But he turned aside, etc. For this is what the Psalmist says: ”Man approaches a deep heart, and God will be exalted” (Psalm 63). For the more the human heart, purified by faith and prayer, is lifted up to contemplate the glory of the divine vision, the more it finds what it seeks to be higher, and to which it should ascend at the time of the promised reward. Ecclesiastes is similar: ”I have said, I will become wise; and it moved further away from me, and much more than it was” (Ecclesiastes 7). It should not be overlooked that he does not simply say, ”I opened my door,” but he says, ”I opened the lock of the door for my beloved. For he had closed the chamber of his heart with a lock lowered deeply, so that no profane or insidious person might enter it, according to Solomon: ”With all keeping, keep your heart; for from it flows life” (Proverbs 4). He opened it again for his beloved, so that, with all the impure throngs repelled, he might provide a free space for the Creator.

Nor should it be considered contradictory that we said before, that the bride opens to her beloved in the droplets of night and the dewy cold, when the Church or the faithful soul ignites the heart of neighbors to the praise of the Creator, whom they did not know or did not care for, and now we interpret that she unlocks the lock of her door for the same beloved, in that she, through the progress of compunction, more widely opened her mind to his entrance: for the same moment achieves both, because the internal aspiration that sets anyone to gather souls for God equally kindles him to love the same Creator more ardently. And no other cause rightly motivates anyone to teach than the love of God. And while anyone delights in opening the soul of a neighbor to receive the gifts of divine mercy through teaching, he necessarily renews his own mind by these actions and opens it more widely to the entrance of heavenly grace. Finally, it is clearly revealed by the following words to the bridegroom how much she progressed, as she cared to open the hearts of neighbors, which she saw darkened, to the Lord, grievously enduring that he whom she was burning for was weighed down, as if by dewy cold and drops of night, by the infidel torpor of others. For it follows:

[Song of Solomon 5:6] -- My soul melted, etc. The sweeter, he says, that I received the voice and proximity of my beloved through the aperture of secret compunction, the more sublimely whatever coldness was in me heated up; whatever was rigid, melted; so much so that I found nothing sweet except to be resolved into tears; and he whom I was unable to retain, though touched by his grace at a moment, I now delight to seek in his departure with weeping and lamentation. And this also, while I was melting from my former rigidity and pouring out my soul within me, gave me no small increase: seeing how the charity of many grows cold, as he himself complains, that it is beset by the drops of the night, that is, the dark tumults of the wicked. And because the wicked have destroyed his law, therefore I have taken more care to love his commandments above gold and topaz.

[Song of Solomon 5:6] -- I sought him, and did not find him, etc. This is the voice of those in the holy Church who are accustomed, having transcended the care of fleeting things, to walk only in the highest goods and to always love the entrance to the heavenly homeland: about whom there is no doubt that they cannot always be affected by the same power of sweetness with the desire for heavenly things as they will, because certainly this virtue is not in the will of the mind elevated to heavenly things, but only in the gift of the God who elevates and illuminates. Therefore, as often as the chaste soul either desires to depart to the Lord, or, while placed in the flesh, to be raised by the taste of future beatitude, and yet immediately does not obtain what it seeks, it must then say with a groan: Because I sought him, and did not find him; I called, and he did not answer me. For he is always found by those who seek well, to have mercy; he always responds to those who call well, to care for them for perpetual salvation: but he does not always respond to this end, or offer himself to be found, that what he promises to those arriving in the homeland, he extends to those still journeying on the road of this exile. Finally, let us say more often daily with bowed knee to the Father: Thy kingdom come; nor do we distrust that we are heard, nor do we immediately receive what we ask for, but we patiently and joyfully endure the effect of our prayer, until we obtain it at the end.

[Song of Solomon 5:7] -- The watchmen found me, etc. The watchmen who go about the city are the holy teachers to whom the care of the Church has been entrusted so that they may protect it from the attack of depraved doctrines, both by word and example, and may kindle ever more the fear and love of their Creator. These indeed go about the city because in all the places of the holy Church, spread out everywhere throughout the whole world, their bodily presence and living voice, or the doctrine inserted in writings or work, is found. They find the bride weary from seeking her beloved, and they strike and wound her because they inflame more with the word of their teaching the soul found anxious with heavenly love; and whenever they discover anything earthly remaining in it, they extinguish it and render it insensible to all lower things, as if wounding by striking: for when the Apostle, describing the armor of God, says: And the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph. VI); is it any wonder if one touched by this sword is said to be struck and wounded? For with this stroke of the sword, a wound is received, of which it is said elsewhere, I am wounded with love.

[Song of Solomon 5:7] -- The keepers of the walls took my cloak from me. The keepers of the walls are also the highest teachers, as they strive to also instruct those capable of governing and fortifying the Church. I believe Timothy, Titus, and others like them, the laborers of truth, were the walls of God's city; and Paul, when he gives them exhortatory commands, what else is he to be understood as but a keeper of the walls? For he showed himself to be a keeper of the city, which he diligently went around, when he enumerated his virtues saying: Besides those things which are external, the daily pressure that is on me—my concern for all the churches (2 Cor. 11). He also taught that he was a keeper of the walls when he said to Timothy: But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry (2 Tim. 4), and similar instructions. And to Titus: For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you (Tit. 1). The keepers of the walls take the cloak of the bride who is struck and wounded, when apostles or apostolic men, touched by divine love, take away the ties of passing things from any soul, so that, freed from lower cares, it may seek its Creator's face with freer course. For the cloak is the same, which is over the tunic; where he says: I have taken off my tunic, signifying the entanglements of earthly matters.

[Song of Solomon 5:8] -- I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, if you find, etc. Worthily, the bride languishes with love, having been struck and wounded by the sword of the Spirit, she casts off the garment of carnal desire, for as much as the holy soul gains strength in God, so much is she made weak and infirm towards the affection of this world, as if debilitated. Nor is it surprising if a perfect soul is said to languish for those things that are of the world, since the Apostle does not hesitate to call those who have perfectly left the world dead: For you are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God (Galatians VI); and concerning himself: The world is crucified to me, and I to the world (ibid.). The daughters of Jerusalem are citizens of the heavenly homeland, who partly still wander on earth, partly already reign there. But in this place, when it is said: I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him that I languish with love, it seems to address that part of them which, having been on earth, has not yet deserved to see the Lord perfectly, whom nevertheless they often find when they receive Him in their heart through love. Therefore the bride adjures these daughters of Jerusalem that if they find her beloved, they announce to him that she languishes:

for we are indeed this bride, and the girlfriend of our God and Lord, inasmuch as by adhering to Him we become one spirit with Him, and being inflamed with desires for eternal things, and sighing for the face of our Creator whom we do not yet see, we come to His servants, whom we believe to lead an angelic life on earth, and we humbly ask them to commend us also to the Lord during their devoted prayer time, and to intercede for us so that we may deserve to see His face. This is indeed what we do, adjuring the daughters of Jerusalem to refer the magnitude of our love to God, and for us to equally petition for heavenly help so that we may see His glory. Whence also, such a response is universally given by these daughters of Jerusalem, which clearly corresponds to the devoted exchange of the faithful. For it follows:

[Song of Solomon 5:9] -- How is your beloved better than another beloved, etc. It is open for a faithful brother to say to another faithful brother: I beseech you, because I find that you are fervent in the love of the Redeemer, also speak to me of Him, confirm me with a salutary exhortation, so that the same love in my heart may grow by His benefits and gifts. Indeed, for a long time, conscious of my sins, I began to have fear of Him, but now, with the strength of the mind increasing, having become more secure about the forgiveness of sins, I am delighted to hear something about His love. Therefore, tell me, go ahead, what is your beloved like from your beloved? That is, from the part where he should rather be loved than feared. You have also such a word in the Song of Isaiah: A vineyard was made for my beloved in a horn, in a fertile place, and so forth, until it says: The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the man of Judah, his pleasant plant (Isaiah V). However, the beloved from the beloved can be understood as the Son from the Father, just as light from light, God from God, which is rightly believed and confessed. For just as there is one love and one divinity of the Father and the Son, so there is one affection, with John bearing witness, who says: And everyone who loves Him who generated, loves him who is born of Him (1 John III). A worthy response follows from the part of the bride.

[Song of Solomon 5:10] -- My beloved is white and ruddy, etc. White, because appearing in the flesh, he committed no sin, nor was deceit found in his mouth (1 Peter II); ruddy, because he washed us from our sins in his blood (Revelation I). And white well first, then ruddy, because first he came into the world holy, and afterwards, through his passion, he left the world bloodstained. Chosen out of thousands, because from all humanity there is one Mediator between God and men, through whom the world was reconciled, alone among mortals was he worthy to hear from God in heaven: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (Matthew III), that is, in whom nothing offensive to me is found, and all the weight of virtue in which I rejoice. Hence Ecclesiastes rightly says of him: One man among a thousand I found; a woman among them all I have not found (Ecclesiastes VI): understand one shining with perfect justice. This needs to be understood in these words, the subsequent sentence declares, which says: Only this I have found, that God made man upright, but he has sought out many schemes. His head is the best gold. The Apostle says, because the head of the woman is the man; the head of the man is Christ; and the head of Christ is God (1 Corinthians II); which indeed head is the best gold, because just as gold is considered nothing more precious among metals, so the unique and eternal goodness of God justly surpasses all the good things which He Himself made.

[Song of Solomon 5:11] -- His hair lifted like palm trees, etc. The hair of the beloved's head is the throng of saints, who adhere to God with faithful service; and deservedly are they compared to raised palm trees, because they expect the sweetness of perpetual reward. Hence it is that the Psalmist says: "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree" (Psalm 92). Deservedly they are said to be black as a raven, because they acknowledge that they cannot have this sweetness from themselves, but hope to receive it from him who said: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me" (John 15). Indeed, they realize they have nothing but darkness from themselves, as

the Apostle reminds: ”For ye were once darkness, but now are light in the Lord” (Ephesians 5). Nor is it surprising that we are compared to the blackness of ravens before the washing of regeneration, since the Master of truth said to the apostles themselves who were already following him: ”If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children” (Matthew 7). But let us also see if the lawgiver found any raven-blackness amidst the raised palm trees in the hair of the spouse? For seeing the light of divine glory, he immediately recognized the darkness of human depravity, and rebuked it, saying:

”Lord, Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, who keeps steadfast love for thousands, who forgives iniquity and transgression and sin, and none is innocent before you by themselves” (Matthew 7). Therefore, the hair of the spouse, that is, the cohorts of the righteous, are raised like palm trees, black as a raven, because they tend toward the joys of victory indeed through the mercy of the Lord, but recognize themselves. This verse can also be understood in regard to those spirits who eternally adhere to their Creator in the heavenly homeland. The higher they contemplate the glory of the unchangeable and everlasting majesty, the more truly they perceive how weak and vile everything created is. Apponius interprets the hair of the bridegroom as the virtues of the angels, adding: ”By ’the raised palm branches,’ he indicated that the aforementioned ministries never waver in their strength and duty but always remain lofty; just as the leaves of the palms, always holding the force of greenness, are elevated high. Julian speaks of this thus: ”The hair can also be signified by another comparison, where the form of the curls seems to imitate the brilliance of gold. His hair, like the raised palm branches, that they may appear surely curly and glowing. And a little later: ”As if he were to say: To the divinity of the saints of his, both men and angels minister in attendance, and celebrate the honor of the king with continuous praise;

and so they are conspicuous in the dignity of their ministry, that they excel like palm leaves, shine like gold. But yet they understand Him whom they serve so well that not only do they assume no airs of pride, but in great humility appear dusky and dark. Moreover, another translation, instead of ”raised palm branches,” used a single word, ”his hair like a fir tree. We indeed know that in Greek, the fir tree is called “elates,” and it never changes with the infirmity of withering; hence it seems “elates” in this place is a Greek word, not Latin, meaning the name of the tree specifically. Pliny the Elder also seems to confirm this when writing about perfumes, he says: ”Moreover, there is a tree pertaining to these perfumes, which some call ’elates,’ which we call fir, others palm, and others spathe. From these words, it can be inferred that ”elates” are trees having some similarity to the palm or fir, apt for making perfumes. Thus, our interpreter called ”elates” palm branches, which means fir trees related to palms, so that we might understand not the common type of fir used for buildings and ships, but the special type suited for perfumes; which also aptly fits the symbols, for the hair of the bridegroom is compared to trees of perfumes, implying that the crowds of saints, who familiarly adhere to their Creator like hair to the head, are filled with the grace of virtues.

When they diligently serve the divine majesty, they ornament the head like perfumed hair embellishes the bridegroom. Finally, Mary Magdalene poured nard on the Lord's head, making his hair similar to the raised palm branches, which means aromatic trees, in the mystery of her great devotion.

[Song of Solomon 5:12] -- His eyes are like doves beside streams of water. What should typically be understood of the bridegroom's eyes John reveals when he recounts that he saw the Lamb having seven horns, immediately adding by way of explanation: These are the seven spirits sent forth into all the earth (Rev. IV). He calls them seven spirits, meaning the seven gifts of the one and same Spirit, which Isaiah lists in the most recognized order of divine operation, because the Holy Spirit of discipline flees deceit. The Spirit delights in residing in those minds which, like living waters, make themselves clear; which allow nothing dirty, nothing dark, nothing that should not be approved by all lovers of truth, or indeed by Truth itself, which searches hearts and reins, to exist within them. It is well said, not "beside stagnant waters," but "beside streams of waters"; for if you inquire where these waters flow, where they run, the source of life from which they spring is revealed, that is, our Lord, from whom the hearts of the elect derive whatever purity and brightness they have. He said, In him will become a fountain of water springing up into eternal life (John IV); for those who seem to have purity of either word or deed but do not aim at the heavenly kingdom through that same purity, whether they dissemble or are simply ignorant, they indeed are to be counted not among streams, but among stagnant waters.

However, those who open themselves to impurities, giving place to evil spirits, are likened not to clean waters but to wallows of mud, in which swine delight. Swine, therefore, take pleasure in the swamps, while doves in the streams of water, because unclean hearts offer a fitting dwelling for unclean spirits. But blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matt. V), and they are filled with the light of divine gifts. These gifts, indeed, because they are given freely to the faithful and solely by the cause of heavenly benevolence, it is aptly added:

[Song of Solomon 5:12] -- Things that are washed in milk, etc. For rightly by the name of milk, the gifts of divine generosity and pietas are indicated, because surely mothers who nourish their young offspring provide them with the nutrition of milk out of gratuitous and natural cause of affection. Therefore, the doves with which the eyes of the bridegroom are compared are washed in milk, because we have been saved by grace through faith, and this is not from ourselves, it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). Thus, these doves, that is, the gifts of the Spirit, are said to be washed in milk, since they never had any filth, as it is said by the Psalmist: The words of the Lord are pure words; silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times (Psalms 12:6), since it is clear that they never had anything of earthly pollution that should be purged by fire. Thus the Son, coeternal with the Father, and rightly believed to be born of the Father, and never not to have been born, is rightly, truly confessed and believed; and you have countless other such things in the Scriptures. Also, these doves dwell by the fullest streams, because whatever hearts overflow with the love

of virtues, this spiritual grace most willingly inhabits, illuminating them with the higher regard of its presence, that those who diligently tend to heavenly things with the purity of sincere intention may be distinguished.

If we wish to understand the preachers of His word to be in the eyes of the Lord, we will find them to be like doves over the streams of water: like doves indeed, because they are simple; over the streams of water, because they are enriched with spiritual grace. They are often described by the streams of water, because they attentively engage with the Holy Scriptures, which are often figured by the name of waters, by which, being taught, they may more easily recognize and avoid the snares of the devil. Indeed, doves over the streams of water commonly reside not only for drinking, or for washing, or for the pleasantness and cleanliness of the place; but no less with the intention, that in the clarity of the waters they might foresee the shadow of the coming hawk, and thus avoid impending danger from the enemy. The form of whose nature is in the open, because we have need of constant meditation on divine words, so that reading either the deeds of the saints or their sayings, we may diligently examine with a watchful mind by what kind of open assault the ancient enemy strives to fight and overthrow us, with what machines of fraud he tries to defeat and supplant us. And as soon as we perceive his future plots, our only refuge is to seek the crevices of our rock, that is, the protections of the Lord's faith, and we should strive to defend ourselves with the sign of His passion.

But also let us swiftly with quick flight seek the cavern of the wall, that is, let us seek the frequent intercessions for us to the mercy of the pious Creator by the saints, or angels, or humans. This is considered necessary for all the faithful, especially those upon whom is placed the burden of caring for and teaching others. These are indeed the most firm and safest protections of the holy Church, for which the Lord above said, "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come, my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff. Well, it is said of these same doves, that is, the spiritual ministers of the word, "They are washed with milk, and sit beside full streams," to imply that they are first of all renewed by the washing of baptism: which is not absurdly expressed by the term milk, because among those sacraments are numbered by which the infancy of the holy Church is either accustomed to be born or to be nourished. If we believe there is any difference between rivulets of waters and full streams, it may be understood that in the rivulets of waters is the teaching of the Old Testament, whose followers have truly learned to say to God, "But the children of men shall trust in the protection of your wings" (Psalm 62), obviously lest they be seized by the snares of the aerial powers, like the claws of hawks. "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of your house;

and you shall make them drink from the river of your pleasures, for with you is the fountain of life" (Psalm 35, 10). In the full streams can be not inconveniently understood the perfection of evangelical doctrine, of which such is the fullness that no greater can be for those dwelling in this life. Distinguishing between the two, the evangelist said, "For the law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1); and since the knowledge

of both Testaments is given to the teachers of the truth, rightly the eyes of the Lord are said to be like doves over the rivulets of waters, which are washed with milk, and sit beside full streams.

Book 5

[Song of Solomon 5:13] -- His cheeks are like beds of spices, etc. Just as the words on the lips of the Lord expressed what He spoke, so in His cheeks the modest piety and sternness of His countenance are simultaneously expressed. For if it could rightly be said of a mere man, the wisdom of a man shines in his face, how much more in the face of that man who is the power of God and the wisdom of God, would the highest virtue and wisdom shine forth to those who consider well? His cheeks, he said, are like beds of spices planted by perfumers. For as beds of spices decently and orderly arranged grant great pleasure both to those who see and smell them, so He, appearing in man the mediator of God and men, by the sweetness of either His virtues or His doctrine enlightened those present and attracted those who were absent by His fame. By perfumers, by whom these beds are planted, understand the prophets and apostles, who in complete harmony inserted not only His words but also His manners into the sacred pages; these foretold the future mysteries of His incarnation, those narrated the deeds done.

I think it is to the appearance of His cheeks that it is to be referred, that He exulted in the spirit, rejoicing in the faith of the little ones, that He grieved over the hardness of the hearts of the unbelievers, that He rejoiced for the disciples when He was about to raise Lazarus so that they might believe, that He looked upon the weeping sisters or friends of Lazarus and wept and troubled Himself, that at the approach of His passion He began to be sorrowful and mournful, that He did not give any time to laughter or vain words, that He did not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor did He rebuke by the hearing of His ears, that like a lamb He was led to the slaughter, and as a sheep before the shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth (Isa. LIII, 7). But His lips, lilies distilling pure myrrh: lilies, because they promise the brightness of the heavenly kingdom; distilling pure myrrh, because they preach that this is to be reached by the contempt of present pleasures. From thence, He said, Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matt. IV). Again, His lips are like lilies, because He commands us to shine with the brightness of sanctity; distilling pure myrrh, because He commands us to endure bravely whatever adversity may occur for the preservation of this.

He prefigured lilies in His lips when He taught His audience to be poor in spirit, meek, mourning, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers.

He promised to each of these the reward of eternal happiness; He added myrrh to the lilies when He immediately added: Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matt. V). Again, His lips shone like lilies when in one and the same person He taught that He was truly God and truly man. For indeed, the golden color which was within was fittingly adapted to the truth of the divinity that was in Christ, especially because it is threefold, as if to represent the one undivided glory of the same holy Trinity. The outer whiteness properly designates the purity and sanctity of the assumed humanity. But the same lips distilled pure myrrh when in His divinity always impassible, He predicted that in the man whom He had assumed, He would suffer bonds, scourging, spitting, reproaches, and death. Therefore, His lips both imitate the appearance and scent of lilies, when He says: The Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works (Rom. II, 6; Matt. XVI, 27; Rev. XXII, 12). They distill pure myrrh when He says: But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation (Luke XVII, 25).

[Song of Solomon 5:14] -- His hands are like cylinders of gold, etc. After the lips, the Church praises the hands of her Redeemer, that is, His deeds after His words, because He showed by His actions that what He taught with words was to be believed. For instance, while teaching on the mountain, the crowds were amazed at His doctrine. But to follow this amazement with faith, He descended from the mountain and cleansed a leper with a mere touch of His hand. This is also why, marveling at His deeds, His fellow citizens said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? (Matthew XIII). For wisdom pertains to the lips, and virtues to the hands. Rightly does he declare His hands to be like cylinders, to denote both their easy power and their unfathomable knowledge of action. It is well known that turning (lathe work) is quicker and more inexplicable than other arts. For example, one who works with an adze, chisel, axe, or hammer, operates more laboriously and with frequent use of a ruler and careful scrutiny to avoid errors. But he who works with a compass does not need an external rule; rather, he can maintain the direction of his work within the instrument itself. Therefore, the Lord's hands are like cylinders because He readily accomplishes what He wills, because He speaks and they are made. Finally, He said: "Pick up your mat and walk.

And immediately, rising, he took up his mat and walked, who had been paralyzed for thirty-eight years (John V, 8, 9). His hands are like cylinders because He holds within Himself the rule of all justice. Unlike our poverty, He does not need to learn from sacred writings lest His work deviate from the truth. Hence it is said of Him, "How does this man know letters, having never learned? (John VII, 15). He knew because He was indeed older than the letters and the law, nay, the judge of the lawgiver Himself. His hands are like golden cylinders full of hyacinths. For in gold, which excels all metals, the excellence of divinity is signified as is evident from frequent exposition. Therefore, his hands are golden, because no faithful person is ignorant that the virtues which he exercised in man are accomplished divinely. These are rightly also said to be full of hyacinths, because they undoubtedly excite us to the hope and love of heavenly things. The hyacinth, indeed, is a gem of a sky-blue

color. The Lord has hyacinths in his turned hands, so that he may adorn vessels of election, which he prepares for glory, with such gems, that is, he may gladden the hearts of his elect with the desire and expectation of celestial glory. If we take the pigments designated by this name in the hyacinths, it does not deviate from the appropriate significance of truth: for the hyacinth is a pigment of a purple color and a pleasant scent.

Hence the poet, gathering precious things as an example of love, adds: The gifts are of laurel, and the sweetly red hyacinth. And the hands of the Lord were full of purple flowers, because dying for our life, he soaked them in the redness of his own blood at the nailing. But another translation teaches that gems rather than flowers are to be understood in this place by the name of hyacinths, which says: His hands are turned, golden, full of tharsis: for tharsis among the Hebrews is the name of a stone which among us is called chalcedony. His belly is ivory, etc. The belly holds the most fragile place in our limbs, because it lacks bones to protect it and it contains the vitals, all of whose wounds are dangerous. But ivory is the bone of the elephant, which is said to be an animal of great chastity and cold blood. Hence, its death is often sought by the dragon, as it desires to cool its burning entrails by drinking its blood. The sapphire is a stone, the color of which, the sacred history testifies, which says: And they saw the God of Israel under his feet, as it were the work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the sky when it is clear (Exodus XXIV, 10). Therefore, the belly of the beloved signifies the fragility of his humanity, by which he was conformable to us. The ivory indicates the beauty of chastity, by which in human flesh he remained undefiled by corruption of sin.

The sapphires express the sublimity of heavenly virtues, with which he shone in the flesh. He says, his belly of ivory, adorned with sapphires. As if he openly says, the fragility of the mortal substance in him shall indeed be true, but this shall be utterly free from the lasciviousness of mortality and shall rather shine with the excellent glory of divine works. And beautifully did he say his belly was entirely of ivory, yet not wholly adorned with sapphires, but marked with sapphires, so that part appears ivory, part sapphires. For his belly was indeed of ivory, because the fragility which he assumed was free from all sin, just as no contagious heat can be found in the bone of a dead elephant. He was distinguished by sapphires, because amidst the passions of assumed humanity, he showed frequent signs of perpetual divinity: for it pertains to the frailty of humanity that the little child is born to us, to the power of divinity that he is born of the Virgin, and the same birth is proclaimed by angelic voices and celebrated with mysteries; to the power of divinity that he is shown by the indication of a star, to be adored by the Magi, to the frailty of humanity that he is fled from his homeland by the snares of a treacherous king; to the frailty of humanity that he could be led and tempted by the devil, to the power of divinity that, with him conquered and repulsed, he is honored by angelic ministries;

to the frailty of humanity that he asks the Samaritan woman for water, to the power of divinity that he testifies that he can give the same the fountain of living water; to the frailty of humanity that he is wearied from the journey, to the power of divinity that he promises

eternal rest to those who follow him; to the frailty of humanity that he sleeps in the boat, to the power of divinity that, when awakened, he commands the winds and the sea; to the frailty of humanity that he was crucified and died, to the power of divinity that at his death the elements trembled along with the earthly and even the heavenly beings; to the frailty of humanity that he was embalmed with spices and buried, to the power of divinity that he rose and ascended into heaven; it pertains to the frailty of humanity that Isaiah says: He has no form or comeliness, and we saw him despised (Isaiah LIII, 3). And shortly after: Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we did not respect him (ibid.); to the power of divinity that John says: We saw his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth (John I). Therefore, the sapphire was distinguished as the ivory belly of Christ, because his immaculate and undefiled incarnation shone with frequent miracles of divine majesty.

It should be noted that Scripture says of the sapphire color, that it is such in appearance as the sky when it is clear. By the name of the clear sky, the sublimity of divine majesty is not incongruously represented, as attested by the Psalmist, who, describing the incarnation of our Redeemer, says: His going forth is from the end of the heavens, and his circuit to their ends (Psalm XVIII). This is what he himself said to the disciples about himself: And you believe that I came from God; I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and going to the Father (John XVI, 28). But the bride herself saw the form of the sapphire in the ivory belly of her beloved when, with the voice of her first pastor, she said: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. XVI, 16), because indeed, in the holy, innocent, undefiled Son of Man, separated from sins, she recognized the pure fullness of divinity.

[Song of Solomon 5:15] -- His legs are marble columns, etc. By the term ”legs of the Lord” are indicated the paths of His incarnation, by which He deigned to come to our salvation. These are well compared to marble columns, because they are both strong and straight. For what is stronger than marble? What is straighter than a column? Did the Psalmist not behold the strength of marble in His legs when he said: ”And He, as a bridegroom coming out of His chamber; rejoiced as a strong man to run a race” (Ps. 89)? Did he not also see the straightness of the columns when he again said: ”The Lord is righteous in all His ways” (Ps. 145:17)? Hence it is that when He was placed on the cross, His legs were not broken, although permitted by the governor, just as His garments could not be torn. For the seamless tunic remained intact, signifying the Church, which is His chosen garment, without spot or wrinkle, forever maintaining its unity. His legs remained unbroken, so that the mystery of His advent in the flesh, sacred and inviolable, might endure against every hammer of false doctrine. For Pilate, the judge, symbolizes the mallet. Yet the columns of marble stand firm and repel the blow, even if the impious mallet of heretical speech attempts to strike. Insane doctrine may say insane things about the Lord, but the truth of the gospel stands and prevails. Regarding these columns, it is aptly added, ”which are founded on golden bases.

For the golden bases are the counsels of divine providence, in which it was eternally decreed before the ages, that everything to be created temporally in the world would be; including the very incarnation of our Savior and our salvation in Him, as testified by the Apostle who says: "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love" (Eph. 1:4), and Apostle Peter says that we were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot; and foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world, but made manifest in these last times (1 Pet. 1:19-20). Thus, the marble columns, to which the Lord's legs are compared, are founded upon His golden bases, since all the steps of our Savior, by which He willed to come from heaven to earth, to move upon the earth, to descend to the underworld, to rise from the tomb, and to return to heaven, are firm like marble, straight like the heavens, ordered to the rule of divine precept, as if founded upon golden bases. Concerning these bases, He Himself says: "For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak" (John 12:49); and if you wish to know why the bases are golden, listen to what follows: "And I know that His command is eternal life" (John 12:50).

[Song of Solomon 5:15] -- His appearance is like Lebanon, etc. Why, he says, should I labor to describe each of his members individually? I will summarize it briefly. Just as Mount Lebanon, famous in Phoenicia, is notable for its height and grandeur, so our Lord rightfully surpasses all those born of the earth in a superior grace. As the same mountain is fertile with noble trees, thus he uplifts all the saints with his protection, lest they descend to the depths; and having them rooted in himself, he preserves them from being shaken by the winds of temptations. As the beauty, strength, height, and fragrance of cedars surpass all the splendor of forests, so my beloved is beautiful beyond the sons of men; grace is diffused on his lips, therefore God has blessed him forever (Psalm 44:3), and other such things as the following psalm, greatly transcending measure and companionship, describes about him. And it is to be noted that the same beloved is compared both to Lebanon, which produces notable trees, and to the cedar, which Lebanon itself produces among other trees, as if one and the same person both generates and carries trees, and is generated among trees and carried by himself. For our Lord Jesus Christ, who with the grace of his divinity generates, nurtures, and carries all the elect from the beginning of the world to its end to life, also made himself a man among men when he wanted, and filled that man with the grace of his Spirit, albeit far superior to others;

indeed it is said of them: To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift (Eph. 4); but of him: For God does not give the Spirit by measure. For the Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand (John 3). Therefore, the Lord was chosen like the appearance of the cedar, because the entire forest of the holy Church, in which he was born, surpassed in unique and singular dignity. His appearance is like Lebanon, which among remarkable trees also brings forth the cedar, because among his elect he created even himself, the kind of man he wished, as if a tree of life in the midst of paradise, like if a painter also depicts himself among others in his order with suitable

colors, or any historian recounts many things of many people: for example, lawgiver Moses or evangelist John describing things worthy of memory about themselves as well. Thus indeed the mountain of whiteness (which the name Lebanon means), that is, our Redeemer among innumerable fruitful trees, which would praise the name of the Lord, also brought forth the cedar, a wood evidently more excellent than others, that is, himself, who not only would praise the name of the Lord, but also would come blessed in the name of the Lord.

[Song of Solomon 5:16] -- His throat is most sweet, etc. If in the lips of the Lord, where it is said above: "His lips are the purest lilies," we take the words of His mouth, then what should we understand by His most sweet throat except sometimes the taste of those same words? For many, when reading or hearing, can speak the words of the Lord, can easily scrutinize the mysteries of faith; but very few are found who truly feel in the palate of their heart how sweet they taste. Hence, in the exceptional praise of the saints, it is said: "They shall abundantly utter the memory of Your great goodness, and shall sing of Your righteousness" (Psalm 145:7). For it belongs to those who rejoice in the justice of God, who have habitually tasted by inner love the abundance of His sweetness, and also preach its memory to others; for those who have not yet learned to taste His sweetness must necessarily fear more than rejoice in the justice of His judgments. Finally, Peter, abundantly conveying to us the memory of the Lord's great sweetness, which he had well tasted, says: "Desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby in salvation; if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Peter 2:2-3). Likewise, because the vital breath is conducted through the throat to the lips to form speech, just as in the lips of the Lord were the words that He spoke;

so in the throat most fittingly can be understood the very internal and hidden disposition of His piety and kindness, by which it was made possible for Him to speak outwardly to us. Indeed, Paul says: "The grace of God our Savior has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God" (Titus 2:11-13). When He gave us the hope of the glorious appearing of the great God, His lips will then be as lilies; when He taught us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires, to live soberly, righteously, and godly, it is the same lips of His dripping the first myrrh. But that eternal grace, which appeared to us in this promise or teaching, whenever it pleased Christ, is rightfully His most sweet throat to us, as we can have no sweetness apart from it. Finally, the beloved Himself showed what the sweetness of His throat can accomplish not only in the voice of speech but also in the very breath, when after the resurrection, appearing to His disciples, that is, the first members of His bride, He breathed on them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). And He is wholly desirable. The whole Christ is God and man, that is, word, soul, and flesh;

and He is wholly desirable because not only from the unchangeable majesty of perpetual divinity but also from the glorified substance of assumed humanity must be understood what the apostle Peter says: "Into which things the angels desire to look" (1 Peter 1:12).

I will say something further; he was completely desirable, even before the glorification of his humanity; he was completely desirable from the very moment of conception until the triumph of his passion: desirable to his mother when she said, ”Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38); desirable to the blessed womb that bore him; desirable to the breasts that nursed him; desirable to the angels who sang a hymn at his birth; desirable to the shepherds who, seeing him, glorified and praised God; desirable to the magi who, coming from the east to seek him, worshipped him with gifts where they found him; desirable to the old Simeon who, awaiting his promised vision of his birth until his last days, took him in his arms, blessed God, and joyfully embraced death; desirable to the prophetess Anna who, upon seeing his birth, rendered fitting praises to the Lord in her confession; desirable to all who saw him at twelve years of age in the temple, astonishing the elders and teachers with heavenly wisdom; desirable to the disciples when they quickly followed him, leaving behind all they had, when he called them; desirable to those same disciples when they said, ”Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68); desirable to all the people and publicans who, hearing his word, justified God; desirable to Peter on the mountain when he said, ”Lord, it is good for us to be here” (Matthew 17:4); desirable on the cross to the thief who prayed, ”Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). And not only is he desirable to those who saw him in the flesh and loved him, but also to those of whom he said to the disciples, ”Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see what you see and did not see it; and to hear what you hear and did not hear it” (Matthew 13:17). And to us, who, being born into the world after his ascension to the heavens, share the common promise with the earlier saints, as he said: ”If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3).

[Song of Solomon 5:16] -- Such is my beloved, etc. The more devoutly the Church or any holy soul loves God, the more familiarly it considers God as a friend; for he who still, because of weakness of mind or consciousness of sin, observes the divine commandments with servile fear, must necessarily call Him more as Lord than as Father or friend, because he has not yet reached that apostolic perfection, by which he may deserve to hear: But I have called you friends, because all that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you (John 15:15). But Abraham, because of his outstanding faith and love, is deservedly called a friend of God; and the Lord speaks to Moses, as a man is accustomed to speak to his friend (Exodus 33:11). However, having heard the quality of the beloved, about which the daughters of Jerusalem had inquired, they add another question, by adding:

Chapter 6

[Song of Solomon 6:1] -- Where has your beloved gone, etc.? For the sake of the beauty of the song, the roles of those conversing are varied. However, it is the same Church of Christ, which is expressed under the name of the bride, that is indicated by the daughters of Jerusalem. These are therefore called the daughters of Jerusalem or Zion because they consist of many souls that derive their origin from that heavenly city, which is the mother

of us all. For this reason, it is called a bride, or sister, or friend, or suchlike, to signify that it is one and not divided, although spread far and wide throughout the world. And the variety of persons conversing about the bridegroom signifies, as we said above, the delightful conversation of the faithful of Christ, through which they encourage one another to his love. The bride had adjured the daughters of Jerusalem to notify him, if they found her beloved, that she languished with love for him; because indeed the common joy of the whole catholic Church is that all the elect should pray to the Lord for its welfare. The daughters of Jerusalem had asked the bride what her beloved was like, because the faith of Christ ought to be both learned and taught only in the unity of the catholic faith;

and hearing his form, which they earnestly requested, they also inquire where he has gone, because it is in the unity of the holy Church that it should be learned in whose hearts and in what manner of life the Lord is chiefly to be found. Therefore, when we come together and speak of the Lord with pure intention, we are all daughters of Jerusalem as many as long perfectly for the things above and truly profess that we are sojourning on earth and have our homeland in heaven; and yet each one of us is rightly said to converse with the bride of Christ and seek an answer from her when he diligently ensures that he speaks or hears nothing from a brother other than what the rule of catholic peace dictates. However, the Church is called the most beautiful among women because, although there is much beauty in the churches of Christ throughout the world, as of women fertile with spiritual flowers, the beauty of the whole catholic Church, which is completed as one from all these as its members, is greater. For let it not be that in this place we accept the women as the synagogues of heretics, or schismatics, or pagans, or erring Jews! For the bride of Christ cannot be said to be the most beautiful of those women who are found to have no true beauty.

But the beautiful women are the churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and innumerable others of this kind consecrated to God throughout the world, of which one is rightfully called the most beautiful, which consists of all of them.

[Song of Solomon 6:1] -- Where has your beloved gone, etc.? The beloved is said to depart and turn away, not because the Lord ever abandons those whom He has already acquired and continues to acquire others, but because by the power of His divine nature He can be present everywhere. Thus, He goes or turns away to associate with others whenever He wills, yet still preserving in grace those whom He has already gathered to Himself. As He says to Moses: ”Gather for me seventy men from the elders of Israel, whom you know to be elders of the people and officers, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and I will take some of the spirit that is on you and put it on them” (Numbers 11:16). Not that He lessened the grace given to Moses, but because He made those whom Moses had, partakers of that grace. This is like the example of a flame, from which when you light a candle, you ignite it with light, and the flame from which you light it remains whole. It can also be rightly understood that the beloved departs and turns away from the bride for a time, when we, longing with love for Him, are inflamed to the point of shedding tears, fulfilling the duty of

prayer with fixed and unwavering intent, transferring the entire mind from carnal desires to eternal things. Yet, He does not always grant what is desired.

Therefore, we rightly ask those whom we believe to know and are worthy of such a quest, where the Lord has gone or turned away, desiring to be shown the presence of those who with greater virtues and signs of a pure mind reveal the divine grace within them, so that by their example and discourse, we may also ourselves be instructed and more and more progressively grow in the love of our beloved. And they rightly say, "And we will seek Him with you," because any soul that tries to seek Christ without the companionship of the holy Church will not be counted among the daughters of Jerusalem, but rightly among those of whom the mother of holy Samuel, holding the type of the Church, says to the despising priest of the synagogue: "Do not consider your maidservant as one of the daughters of Belial" (1 Samuel 1:16).

[Song of Solomon 6:2] -- My beloved has gone down into his garden, etc. It is already known what the garden of the beloved is. For he himself said: A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse. Certainly, his garden is the Church; his garden is each chosen soul. And well has he said, My beloved has gone down into his garden, adding his, that is, the garden he himself made, he himself cultivated, he himself planted with the spices of virtues, he himself irrigated with the fountain of his grace so it would not wither; he himself enclosed it with the wall of his protection so it would not be defiled by outsiders. This is the garden of which he himself said: The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden, and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air lodged in its branches (Luke XIII). The mustard seed, indeed, is the word of the Gospel, humble in appearance, fervent in power; which, being received by the Father, God and man himself sowed in his Church, and gave it such increase that, like a noble tree, it spread its branches of faith and virtues far and wide over the world, in which even angelic spirits rejoice for human salvation, and the citizens of heaven believe that they have gained increased rest when earthly beings are recalled to the heavenly realms.

For it was not in vain that the same beloved, about to be captured in the garden, crucified in the garden, buried in the garden, rose victorious from the dead in the garden. He wanted to be believed by Mary, who first deserved to see the glory of his resurrection, as a gardener, for in his own garden, namely the Church, among the various plantings of divine gifts, he also took care to plant the virtue of patience in this life through the contempt of death, the desire for blessed immortality in the reception of the body after the dissolution of the body, with the hope of blessed peace to end this life. And indeed, he is said to have descended into his garden, but not to have entered it: for the place of the beloved is on high, since he dwells in high places, and regards the lowly (Ps. 112). The place of the garden is in the low, in the valley of tears; but he who descended unto it from above, disposed the ascent in his heart, by which he might reach the place of supreme happiness. Hence appropriately it is said above in regard to the same garden, that is, the Church: Who is this that comes up from the wilderness, like a column of smoke perfumed with myrrh? Thus a marvelous dispensation

of divine mercy, that the Lord is said to descend into the Church, and the Church to ascend to the Lord.

For divine grace descends to us from above, which, by assisting us, makes us ascend upwards. This was mystically signified in Exodus, when the Lord descended upon Mount Sinai, and Moses ascended: for the latter ascended to gain the progress of virtues; the former descended to impart gifts. Therefore, after having said: My beloved has descended into his garden, he also adds how the same garden is constituted, with what produce it is fruitful, when he immediately subjoins: To the beds of spices. For the bed of spices is the mind of the faithful, taught by the discipline of right faith, as if composed of equal sides on both sides, and frequently turned over by careful digging, and purged of useless weeds; for indeed with careful consideration it examines itself, and with diligent thought endeavors that nothing profane, nothing unclean, nothing contrary to salutary matters, may be found by the heavenly Farmer; and strives to render itself worthy, in which the beloved, the sower of righteousness, may propitiously plant the spices of virtues with his grace, and by his frequent assistance, may water them lest they wither. This most beautifully declares its heavenly desire, at the beginning of the forty-first psalm, in accordance with the Hebrew truth, saying: As the deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, God (Ps. 41). But descending into his garden or to the bed of spices, it is shown what the Lord does there, when it is added:

[Song of Solomon 6:2] -- To be fed in the gardens, etc. He is fed in the gardens, because He delights in the pious labors of the saints; He is fed in the gardens, because they are indeed His members to whom the fruits of righteousness come; and it should be understood not only of carnal but even of spiritual alms, which He predicted He would declare in judgment: “As long as you did it to one of these least of my brethren, you did it to me” (Matthew 25). He gathers lilies when He leads the righteous, having attained to the perfect whiteness of merits, out of this life and brings them to the heavenly kingdom. This He fully emphasizes with the spur of immense charity, adding the following two verses:

[Song of Solomon 6:3] -- “I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine,” etc. I prepare a delightful pasture for my beloved in the beds of spices, that is, in the pure hearts of the faithful, and my beloved to me, who is fed among the holy desires of chaste minds, returns this in exchange for His grace by fulfilling the same desires of His faithful ones whom He has nurtured. He fulfills them by plucking them from this paradise of sacred pleasure and gathering them into the secret chambers of the heavenly mansions, where before His glory, with eternal immortality of flesh and spirit, they shine brightly with a dual aspect like lilies, that is, both golden and white, and as if spreading the sweet fragrance of their virtues throughout all the inhabitants of the eternal homeland. Thus far, the voice of the holy Church is heard, seeking and praising her Lord and desiring to see His face; but since He can never be absent from His lovers, but where two or three are gathered in His name, there He is in the midst of them, indeed even if one of His own is enclosed among lions, detained in the depths of the sea, or surrounded by the belly of a whale, if separated from

other mortals, there He is with him. Therefore, His voice follows, declaring to those who search for Him and converse about Him that He was always present with them and heard what they spoke about, rewarding their devotion to Him with worthy praise, saying:

[Song of Solomon 6:4] -- You are beautiful, my friend, sweet and comely, etc. Jerusalem is called the vision of peace, by which name the habitation of the heavenly homeland, which the highest peace possesses, is very frequently signified. You are beautiful, friend of the bridegroom, sweet and comely like Jerusalem. The Church or any holy soul, indeed a portion of the Church, which by the purity of clean operation, the sweetness of divine praise, the pleasantness of mutual love, immediately becomes an imitator of the heavenly city, is sweet and comely like Jerusalem in the same way Isaiah speaks: Like the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make stand before me, says the Lord, so will your seed stand (Isaiah 66). It is also terrible as an army set in array, when through fixed intention of pure prayer it repels every incursion of the demonic army from itself, when through frequent proclamation of the heavenly word it breaks all the weapons of errant doctrine, when through continuous examples of good works it even challenges the depraved habits and life of false believers and leads them back to the path of truth.

The Church is terrible as an army set in array, when each believer remains in the calling in which he was called, when leaders grant the form of saving doctrine and perfect operation to the subjects, when the continent purify themselves from every filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord, when the married so enjoy this world that by diligent liberality of alms they do not neglect to compare for themselves the rewards of the future age. Indeed, the prophet teaches that the Church consists in this triple distinction of faithful persons, when he asserts that only three men, namely Noah, Daniel, and Job, will be delivered in the time of heavenly vengeance. And when each of these have kept their own position inviolate, they indeed show an army set in array and on this account make the bride of Christ insurmountable to all enemies: likewise any perfect soul, when it works with such virtues that it leaves no place for vices, undoubtedly persists terrible to enemies as an army set in array:

for if, by way of example, it so strives for continence that it does not hold the virtue of humility, or if it thus exercises the works of alms so as not to refrain the tongue from the fault of superfluous speech, or so insists on frequent prayers that it neglects to bestow the affect of love to the neighbors, such a soul is indeed less terrible to enemies, because it has arranged the army of its virtues less perfectly, having disposed faith firmly in part but left it inert in another part. But because the one and same Church of Christ partly already rejoices with its King in heaven, and partly still fights for Him in the world, that which it says: ”You are beautiful, my love, sweet and lovely as Jerusalem,” can be understood about that part of it which, having completed its struggle and finished its course, has already received the crown of righteousness. But what follows, ”Terrible as an army set in array,” can suitably be taken to refer to those who, still held in the body, resist with strong faith the adversary lurking around them in the manner of a roaring lion. Likewise, the Church is beautiful,

sweet, and lovely as Jerusalem, in those things which it works spiritually and worthily for God within itself. It is terrible as an army set in array, because it strives to spread its spiritual empire throughout the whole world, even against the powers of the world.

And indeed the empire of the Romans once, or the Greeks, or other nations, was set in array like an army, because it certainly oppressed the world with great power: but it was not sweet and lovely as Jerusalem, because it did not know how to hope for or imitate the joys of the peace of life. But truly the Church is both beautiful and sweet and lovely as Jerusalem, because it is accustomed to live a heavenly life on earth; and terrible as an army set in array, because it strives to draw even the barbarous minds and morals of various nations to its own rite. Yet, because it does not yet deserve to see the face of its beloved as it most longs to, it subsequently hears:

[Song of Solomon 6:5] -- Turn your eyes away from me, etc. As if it were openly said, "Indeed, I have given you dovelike eyes, by which you might know the secrets of the Scriptures, by which you might distinguish virtues from vices, by which you might know the paths of righteousness through which you would still come. But beware lest you seek to turn those same eyes to see me as well. For no man shall see my face and live (Exodus 33). For there will be a time when, released from fleshly bonds, you will come to me, and then what I promised will be fulfilled, because he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him (John 14). But now, while you are still established in the body and wandering away from perpetual goods, turn away the eyes of your mind from the contemplation of divine majesty and essence, because they have made me fly away, that is, those spiritual senses of yours, with which you have desired to know me perfectly, although they are very exalted, are not sufficient in this life to comprehend me perfectly, but can only reach to the extent that they might discern that the glory of the divine nature is of such sublimity that it cannot be seen, except by those who have been completely taken away from visible life and introduced into the invisible.

Therefore, we are commanded at present to turn away the eyes of our inquiry from knowing the substance of God, because they have made him fly away from us, not that he, being sought, recedes further, who promises, saying, 'Seek, and ye shall find' (Luke 11); but that we may learn from him revealing, that the purer the heart with which he is sought, the more certainly it will be understood how incomprehensible he is. Which is similar to what the Psalmist says, 'Man approaches with a deep heart, and God will be exalted' (Psalm 63). As if it were said in other words, human frailty lifts up the eyes of the heart intent on seeing God, and they make him fly away, because by that same inquiry the senses, exercised and enlightened, recognize that the eminence of divinity is higher than they could previously think, and it is most truly said in another psalm, 'His greatness is without end' (Psalm 145). By this response, the Lord wished to satisfy the holy Church's desire, by which she was anxiously seeking him openly, and not in a riddle: longing to see him whom she loved, as the previous verses of this song declare abundantly. Therefore, he urges her not to seek

in the way a reward which is reserved for her in the homeland, but to remember in the meantime that she must walk by faith, so that she may reach the vision:

distinguishing these times very beautifully, as the evangelist John says: 'Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is' (1 John 3). But lest the Church might perhaps bear heavily that she could not yet enjoy the full contemplation of her Creator, he enumerates for her the manifold pledges of the spirit which he has bestowed upon her, so that she may more patiently bear the delay of that one supreme and singular good which she has not yet received, but is about to receive in the time of eternal recompense. For it follows:

[Song of Solomon 6:5] -- Hair like a flock of goats, etc. These verses and the following ones placed above have been fully explained to the best of our understanding; but let us not hesitate to reiterate in explanation what the author of the sacred song did not hesitate to repeat in writing, so that we may either recall what was said before to memory or, with the help of divine grace, do something new usefully. But that whether these or countless other things in the Scriptures that have already been said are repeated, is a sign of firmness because it is the word of God, and it is truly fulfilled, as the patriarch Joseph testifies explaining the king's dream. Therefore, in the hair of the bride is intimated the manifold sublimity of thoughts; in the teeth, however, the firmest stability of her words is intimated, because they cooperate in speaking with the lips and tongue, and they arise insensibly from the brain, nor do they hurt when cut. For who is wise and would mourn, and not rather rejoice, when the superfluous lightness of thoughts is taken away from him? Hence, in a great mystery, the teeth of the lawgiver are read as unmoved when he was full of days, and a razor did not ascend upon the head of Samuel, because he was a perpetual Nazarite to the Lord, that is, holy. For it was signified that not one jot or one tittle would pass from the law until all is fulfilled (Matthew V);

and that in the prophetic mind, no cut should be made of penitence onto fleeting thoughts. However, the same hair of the bride is well likened to a flock of goats: for the law commanded that any soul which sins through ignorance, when it realizes its guilt, should offer a spotless goat to God as a sacrifice. And our hair is compared to a flock of goats when the errors of our thoughts offer tears of compunction and prayers in penance to the Lord as an offering. Moreover, it cannot inconveniently be understood that a flock of goats is placed for that which is accustomed to seek sustenance in the high places of rocks or bushes: for the thoughts of the elect, always striving for heavenly things, rejoice to be fed in the heights, not in low pleasures; of these goats, it is well added, that they appeared from Gilead: for Gilead means a heap of witness. And this term rightly designates the mind of the righteous when it proves by sure indications of virtues that it has renounced earthly desires; since the mountain Gilead got its name because Jacob and Laban made a heap in it, in testimony of their friendship or pact that they would not harm one another, when the same Laban had

sought his idols with Jacob and did not find them. Therefore, Laban signifies the world, Jacob the mind supplanting vices.

And Laban seeks his idols with Jacob and does not find them when the lovers of this world, examining the hearts of the elect, do not find anything of theirs in them. Jacob also makes a heap in testimony that he does not touch the substance and boundaries of Laban, when, having gathered in himself a wealth of virtues, like living stones, the devoted mind says to God, Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians III). And Laban brings stones for the construction of the same heap, when the world itself by its temptations provides an occasion for virtue to the faithful. A covenant is made between Laban and Jacob that they should not harm one another, while the just one declares and says: The world is crucified to me, and I to the world (Galatians VI). From this heap, therefore, appears the flock of goats, to which the spouse's hair is compared, when from a faithful mind a multitude of frequent high thoughts is generated; and from this same flock, for those sins we have committed ignorantly, we offer an unblemished goat to God, when we punish our recognized sins with humble contrition of heart. However, Galaad is the name not only of the mountain, but also of the city founded upon it.

Hence, rightly it can bear the figure of the Lord, our Savior, and of the Church or of any holy soul that is placed upon it. Indeed, above where it is added, "Your hair is like a flock of goats coming down from Mount Gilead," we understood it as said of that incomparably high mountain, who said of Himself: "A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. But here, where the name of the mountain is not mentioned, and it is simply said, "which appeared from Gilead," nothing prevents us from understanding it as said of the city built upon it, that is, the Church or a just soul. For a holy soul is rightly called a heap of testimony, which is built high with the collection of various virtues, and the whole Church is rightly called by this name, to whose peoples the Apostle Peter said: "Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also as living stones are being built up" (1 Peter II). This is also fitting for the Lord, as we said above, to whom the assembly of all the elect is gathered, who give testimony with a pure conscience by pious profession and good deeds. "Your teeth are like a flock of sheep which have come up from the washing. We said that in the teeth of the spouse, the words of the holy Church can be understood:

rightly, therefore, they are said to be like a flock of sheep, because nothing in them, but the brightness of virtues and innocence is seen, while in all things they seek the grace of their Creator, either by teaching, or by praying, or by giving praises to Him; rightly, those sheep are said to have ascended from the washing, because nothing impure, nothing unclean, nothing that is not purified by the fountain of knowledge, is brought forth from the mouth of the just, according to the exhortation of the Apostle saying: "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Ephesians IV). On the contrary, whoever brings forth filthy, or contemptuous,

or harmful, or even idle words from his foul heart, his teeth are not likened to sheep coming up from the washing, but rather to pigs emerging from a wallow. It is fittingly added:

[Song of Solomon 6:6] -- All lambs of twin births, etc. For all the sheep with which the bride's teeth are arranged are multiplied by twin births, because every speech of the elect is fruitful with the twin love, that is, the love by which God and neighbor are loved; every speech talks about the perpetual health of mind and body; every speech is accustomed to fortify its listeners through the arms of justice which must be held both on the right and the left; every speech desires to deal with the promise of life, which is both present and future; nor does anything proceed from the mouth of the righteous that is not advantageous to the fruit of eternal salvation. And fittingly, indeed, the sheep, by which the bride's teeth are bestowed, are said to bear twin offspring, because without doubt through the things we say, we are able to benefit our neighbors and to instruct them in the way of virtue; through those things which we healthily think, we benefit ourselves. We ourselves make a living sacrifice to the internal judge on the altar of the heart, but to our neighbors, for edification, we disclose what we carry within ourselves only through words. Whence someone, pleasing the Creator with such a sacrifice, said, "In me are, God, God, your vows, which I will render in praises to you" (Psalm 53).

But if in teeth, as previously mentioned, we understand preachers to be designated, and in hair, listeners, which most aptly corresponds, not only because the former minister speech and nourishment to the body, and the latter provide gentle adornments to the head, as beneficial instruments, but also because the former are placed first in the forefront, like predecessors, and the latter, like successors, cover the back part of the head, it is evident that it is fitting for those who are still unskilled and weaker to listen to and obey the teachings of the elders. But those very teachers, it is fitting not only to fulfill the divine commands but also to increase the flock of the supreme shepherd by preaching.

[Song of Solomon 6:7] -- As the rind of a pomegranate, etc. It was said above that in the cheeks of the Church the insignia of her modesty is figured, in the pomegranate the ministry of the blood of the Lord is depicted. And the bride of Christ has cheeks like a pomegranate, because a faithful soul does not blush at the passion of its Redeemer, neither to confess in words nor to imitate in deeds; but with all shame and confusion, which lead to death, set aside, she delights to proclaim openly, saying: But far be it from me to glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians VI). And prudently, because he had compared the cheeks of the Church to the rind of a pomegranate, he therefore added, Without your hidden things, because evidently the rind of a pomegranate shows indeed only redness on the outside, but conceals inside many seeds with which it abounds. Thus indeed a soul devoted to God, and healthily modest, strives through all things to safeguard itself by the virtue of the life-giving cross, but under the same sign of the cross, it contains many kinds of virtues which do not appear outside, but truly refresh the mind within.

[Song of Solomon 6:8] -- There are sixty queens, etc. Both queens and concubines indeed approach the king's bed, they bear children for the king, but not both adorn the king's

head with a royal diadem. Therefore, both signify souls that adhere to the preaching of truth, and through the word of faith and the fountain of saving baptism, beget spiritual offspring for the eternal king, but there is some, indeed not little, difference of their minds: for queens are those minds that serve the doctrine with the view of the heavenly kingdom. However, concubines are those who announce Christ for the sake of carnal and temporal pleasures only, not sincerely. Of such the Apostle says: "Whether by pretense or by truth Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice" (Phil. I). The Lord Himself also distinguishing between them says: "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. V). "But whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Ibid.). Both, therefore, approach the king's bed, but not both reign with Him, because those who destroy their own teaching by their deeds deprive themselves of the comforts of the everlasting kingdom. Therefore, those are rightly considered by the number sixty, those by eighty: for the number ten, because of the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) signifies the knowledge of divine law;

the number six, in which God perfected the world, designates the perfection of good works. Truly, because five multiplied by twelve makes sixty, the number of sixty queens can also thus be interpreted, that those who regulate all the senses of their body, namely, sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell, according to the rule of apostolic doctrine, are rightly designated by the number sixty. And these are the queens, because those who now follow the commandments of the apostles, whose number is twelve, through all the offices of their members, then together with the same apostles are joined to the joy of the perpetual king. Likewise, when eighty is taken in a negative sense, it not unjustly suggests the cares and entanglements of earthly and temporal matters, because naturally the course of this world is encompassed by four seasons, and the world itself is divided into four zones, namely, east, west, north, and south. Sixty, however, are the queens, because as many souls as follow the recognition, which they received by the perfection of the sacred law, engage in good actions; these also fight here in the kingdom of faith, and in the future will enter into heavenly marriages with the true king. And eighty concubines, because those who expend the knowledge of truth and the mystery of the word, which they seem to practice, in the pleasures of weak and passing things, indeed when their lamps are extinguished at the arrival of the bridegroom, are excluded by the gate of the heavenly kingdom due to the voluptuousness of temporality.

And there is no number of young maidens. Understand by young maidens those souls who have recently been reborn in Christ, who are not yet sufficient for the duty of preaching; and therefore, as if not yet noble, not yet suitable for the royal bed, they assist in the service of the queen with faithful watch, because they joyfully obey the commands of the holy Church humbly. Of whom we read above: Your name is like poured-out oil, therefore the young maidens loved you; that is, the souls which are not yet left old through guilt, but are already renewed by grace. Of whom there is no number, because the total number of the citizens of the heavenly homeland surpasses the measure of our estimation. For it cannot be taken

of our peaceful king, namely the true Solomon, that he does not know the number of his faithful: for He who counts the multitude of the stars and calls them all by names (Psalm 146), how much more would He know the number of His elect, whose names He wrote in heaven, the number He foreknew before the ages.

[Song of Solomon 6:9] -- My dove is one, my perfect one. There are indeed sixty queens, because there are many faithful souls around the world who, having accepted the knowledge of the word, take on the task of multiplying the offspring of the Church for the reception of the heavenly kingdom. There are also eighty concubines, because there are also souls who, focused on earthly matters, engage in doctrine, and although they themselves succumb to carnal lures, nevertheless generate spiritual offspring for God by preaching. And there are maidens without number, because countless bands of Christian people are found, who, although not yet suitable for the office of governance and teaching, nevertheless obediently and faithfully offer the devotion of their faith and works to the service of the Holy Church, namely the bride of Christ. But above all these, that is, both true and feigned members of the Church, rightfully excels the universal Church itself, which in its same faithful members from the beginning to the consummation of the age, from the rising to the setting of the sun, and from the north and the sea praises the name of the Lord. Of which praise it is most beautifully said: My dove is one, my perfect one. It is indeed one, because it does not accept the division of schism; it is one, because not one was collected before the law, another under the law, another under grace, another from the circumcision, another from the uncircumcision;

but just as there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, that is, one catholic multitude of all the elect everywhere, and in every place of the world, and in every age, subject to the same one God and Father. From which Luke teaches it is called catholic, saying: The churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were built up, and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, were multiplied (Acts IX). For what is in Latin here, is in Greek catholos. From which it is clearly evident that the Church is called catholic because it is built up in all parts of the world in one peace, in one fear of the Lord, and is filled with the same comfort of the Holy Spirit. From which unity of the Spirit, it is also rightly called a dove: for the Spirit descended upon the Lord in the form of a dove, showing both its simplicity and the Lord's upon whom it descended. Because the Lord made His Church a participant in the spirit of simplicity, He rightly calls it His dove, rightly also calls it perfect, not only because it is formed from all the people of the righteous but also because it is perfected by the reception of all virtues and divine gifts. It is the one chosen by its mother, the mother who brought it forth.

The mother and progenitor of the present Church is the one about whom the Apostle says: "But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother" (Gal. IV); which is rightly and justly called our mother, because every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, descending from the Father of lights (James I). Hence it is also said in the Apocalypse of John: "And he showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God" (Apoc. XXI).

For the holy city Jerusalem descends from heaven from God, because whatever good the present Church knows, does, hopes for; it receives all this from above, either through the King of heaven Himself or through the ministries of the heavenly citizens. Therefore, it is rightly chosen by its mother who brought it forth, since of course that heavenly city approves only those from human society who serve God in unity of faith and love. Otherwise, the Donatists, or any others who separate themselves from the unity of the Catholic Church, whether by open dissension or profane action, are, because they refuse to have the perfection of the simplicity of the dove, separated from the lot of the chosen in judgment and placed on the left side. The name of mother and progenitor of the Church can be most fittingly understood by the grace of the Holy Spirit, through whom the Church itself is born to God and consecrated, because, in Hebrew, the spirit is called in the feminine gender.

The Lord Himself teaches that this should be rightly called the Church's mother and progenitor, saying: "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John III). And immediately, distinguishing spiritual birth from carnal birth, He added: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit" (John III). To this mother and progenitor, the one dove of Christ is rightly chosen and perfect, because, leaving behind all the crowds of schismatics, the one Church, which He now nourishes and keeps in the unity of Catholic peace, is then uplifted by spiritual grace to the joys of the heavenly homeland.

[Song of Solomon 6:9] -- The daughters saw her and acclaimed her most blessed, etc. It seems here that the same daughters are mentioned as the maidens previously named, because while here he brings daughters, queens, and concubines to the forefront, he had earlier mentioned queens, concubines, and maidens together. Therefore, great praise is due to the Catholic unity, which both the mother by grace, who bore them, chose perpetually, and the daughters whom she begot and nurtured to God by the Spirit. As soon as they saw it, that is, as they learned of her chaste life and heard of the gifts of the inheritance promised to her, they rightfully never cease to bless her. And both queens and concubines extol her with just praises, that is, whether these who are truly part of her kingdom or those souls who adhere to her in name only, but are earthly in hope and mind, all certainly acknowledge that she is worthy of eternal praise, understanding for sure that nothing of true and unshakable good can be found without her company. Indeed, since before the end of the world, Judea too is to be gathered to the grace of its Redeemer, and will also praise that same perfection of the holy Church along with others, it is fittingly added from the voice of the Synagogue itself, marveling:"

[Song of Solomon 6:10] -- Who is this that comes forth, etc. Therefore, this Synagogue, converted to the faith of Christ, speaks, marveling at the Church being exalted by divine grace so much that it cannot be overcome by any powers of the worldly empire, even though it is very humble. "Who comes forth," it says, because it did not stand in one place, did not appear for a short time, but extended its faith and fame over the whole world, and throughout the ages of the passing world, it does not cease striving for the crown of eternal

life. It comes forth, however, as the dawn rising, because the rise of true light in it, after the darkness of ignorance, is shown far to the world, as its heralds are admonishing and saying that the night has passed, but the day has approached. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, and so on (Rom. XIII).

[Song of Solomon 6:10] -- Beautiful as the moon, chosen as the sun, etc. Beautiful as the moon, because illuminated by the Sun of righteousness, it passes through the night of this world, and floods it with the light of heavenly knowledge and evangelical way of life; chosen as the sun, because it receives the image of its same Creator and illuminator in itself, walking in all righteousness, holiness, and truth, and truly giving thanks to Him, because the light of Your face, Lord, has been signed upon us (Psalm IV). Also beautiful as the moon, in the night of present life, where, with the varying state of times, now bright to the world, now despised and oppressed; now full of the brilliance of virtues, now disfigured by the vices of the wicked, it imitates in many ways the path of the moon increasing and waning. Chosen as the sun, in the day of future blessedness, where, with the state of eternity remaining, it will shine with the true vision of unchangeable light, fulfilled by His promise, in which it is said: The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Cant. VI). Terrible as an army set in array, because it could never be restrained by any clouds of adversity, without showing in itself the beauty of both the moon and the sun: namely, the moon, in the laborious light of good action in the meantime; the sun, in the hope of eternal blessed recompense.

And well terrible as an army set in array, because the more perfectly it places the order of virtues in itself, the more terrible it is to the aerial powers, and the whole Church and every faithful soul stands: for in certain good deeds, for example, vigils, fasts, manual labor, meditation on Scriptures, the word of preaching, modest silence, whoever does not know how to hold necessary order, errs. For these and many other such things, as they are often held usefully, so also they are sometimes healthfully interrupted for a time. But there are more excellent gifts of virtues, without which one cannot attain life, such as faith, hope, and charity; which ought therefore never by any consideration of time or place to be absent from the hearts of admonishing faithful. Therefore, whatever soul continually fortifies itself with more eminent virtues, and also diligently girds itself for the exercise of lesser ones, where place and hour are fitting, this is terrible to all adversaries as an army set wisely and firmly in order proceeds. This while a few followers of the Jews believe and worthily admire the struggles of the Church, she herself agrees with the one praising and immediately indicates the reason for her military preparations, responding with the voice of the doctors, that is, leaders of her spiritual militia.

[Song of Solomon 6:11] -- I descended into the garden of nuts, etc. For the garden of nuts is the present Church, where we are scarcely able to perceive each other's consciences. Indeed, nuts are all fruits which are covered with a harder shell; conversely, all soft things are generally called evil. Therefore, the life of the righteous is rightly compared to nuts, where they preserve the sweetness of spiritual fruit in their innermost heart in such a way that

they cannot make it known to others, how great it is. Hence, it is necessary that Mother Church always keeps a cautiously ordered line of teachers, while she takes care to battle for them and to defend them from the enemy, whose senses and hearts she often does not know. It can also be understood this way: Just as the nut or almond has a very bitter shell and is surrounded by a very hard casing, and after the harsh and hard parts are removed, the sweetest fruit is found inside, so too every correction and labor of continence, which the holy Church is exercised in, seems bitter indeed at present, but produces in the future the sweetest fruit, according to the saying of the Apostle Paul: "For all discipline seems for the moment not to be joy, but grief; afterward, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews XII). However, the valley fruits say the fruit of humility, as it is in the Psalm:

"And the valleys will abound with grain" (Psalm LXVI), because indeed the humble are exuberant with the refreshment of heavenly grace. The valley fruits say the good works of the faithful of the holy Church, exhibited in the depths of the earth, but bringing their workers to the merits of the heavenly kingdom. Of which also the Psalmist says, "He planned ascents in his heart in the valley of tears to the place you have set for them" (Psalm LXXXIII). And the bride descended into my garden, to see the fruits of the valley, when the teachers of the Church, from the height of their secret tranquility and divine contemplation, which they are often granted, turn the acumen of their mind to consider the state of the same Church, to diligently explore how much the faithful are progressing in good deeds, how much they still need the help of teachers, and to provide them with vital fruits for cultivation.

[Song of Solomon 6:11] -- To see if the vine has blossomed, etc. He looks to see if the vine has flowered, when he carefully examines whether the hearts of those he instructs propose new endeavors of virtues to be undertaken spiritually, according to the saying of the Psalmist, "They will go from strength to strength" (Psalm LXXXIII). He looks to see if the pomegranates have budded, when he diligently observes if there are any who desire to be poured out in their own blood in imitation of the Lord's passion, following the admonition of the Apostle Peter, who says, "Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose" (1 Peter 4:1). Thus, the Church proclaims her evangelical labors to the astonished Synagogue. And she, being pierced with a healthy fullness, professes that she has long remained deprived of such great salvation due to profane blindness and ignorance, responding in this way:

[Song of Solomon 6:12] -- I did not know, my soul was troubled within me, etc. I did not know the gifts of spiritual grace with which you were illuminated by the Lord to bring forth the fruits of faith among all nations. The internal anxiety of my mind troubled me because of the sudden introduction of the New Testament in place of the old, while the proclamation of the gospel suddenly filled the whole world instead of the books of the prophets and the law, which I knew to be divine and written by the Holy Spirit. Like swift chariots, it quickly traversed not only Judea and Samaria, but also the borders of all nations, to my amazement and astonishment. I rightly compare it not just to chariots, but to quadrigas; for indeed the

authority of four writers commended it to memory, but the mind and hand to write were directed by one Spirit of God through Jesus Christ, like if you see one quadriga prepared for the course by the harmonious speed of four horses, but governed by the guidance of one charioteer, so that they run on the right path. Indeed, I had heard for a long time that four authors would write about Jesus with equal consent, but what spirit drove them, what utility and truth, how much glory and salvation their scripture contained, alas, I deserved to realize and know so late!

Moreover, that the quadrigas are called the heralds of the New Testament in the name of Aminadab, signifies the Lord Savior, who, presiding over the chariot, filled the hearts of the preachers with the grace of His Spirit, through whom, by the preceding notion of the saving doctrine, He would reach the peoples about to believe in Him. For Aminadab, who was the great-grandson of the patriarch Judah, in both his person and name indicates the Lord Savior: namely, by his person, because the genealogy of the Lord's incarnation descends from Abraham to King David, from David to Joseph and Mary, in the same manner as the names of Judah and David, and Solomon, and other fathers, from whom Christ descended according to the flesh, are sometimes taken by the prophets to signify Him; as in the phrase, "Judah is a lion's cub. To the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down, he crouched as a lion, and as a lioness; who shall rouse him up? (Gen. XLIX). And again: "And I will cleanse them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, and David My servant shall be king over them" (Ezek. XXXVII). And in this very volume: "Go forth, daughters of Zion, and see King Solomon" (Cant. III).

However, by his own name, Aminadab, which means "of my people, spontaneous," he fittingly designates the Mediator of God and men, who, although he was God before the ages, united with flesh, when he wanted and how he wanted, appeared as a pious Redeemer among the people of the Church. He became a part of his people through spontaneous kindness, of whom he was the Creator and ruler by natural power. When the Synagogue confesses the long delay of its mind, by which it was hindered from understanding the mysteries of the Lord's incarnation, the Church promptly responds by comforting and exhorting: Return, return, O Shulammite. Return to the knowledge of your Redeemer, from whom for so long you miserably wandered away, so that being imbued with his sacraments, you may become worthy of entering the heavenly life; return to the peace of our brotherhood, which you considered, for a long time, to be despised due to the cause of discordant religion. Return, return, so that we may look upon you: return in the purity of faith, return in the perfection of works, to the love of the Lord together, so that with joyful eyes and minds, we may contemplate the beauty of your chastity, which we have long desired, and with Christ's love uniting us together, we may be built into one house of faith, both in Him, as in the cornerstone. However, I do not remember ever reading the name Shulammite elsewhere;

indeed, it seems to be the name of some noblewoman, either proper or derived from a place, who was distinguished at that time by much glory of wisdom, or beauty, or virtue. But if Shulammite, as some say, means despised or captive, this name is fitting for the Synagogue,

which, because of the fault of treachery, departed from the grace of its creator, as much as it was captive under the yoke of sin, it remained unworthy in respect to divine kindness. But the Shulammite is asked to return, so that by the obedience of returning to the Lord, she may deserve to be freed from the binding of harmful captivity and be made worthy of the sight of her Redeemer and Savior. While the Church admonishes the Synagogue to return to the grace of its Redeemer, the Redeemer himself, agreeing to her devoted exhortations, suddenly interjects his speech and declares that the consolations of her exhortations are now about to come to effect. For he says:

[Song of Solomon 6:13] -- What will you see in the Shulammite, etc.? It is as if he is openly saying, ”Indeed, you lament that the Synagogue has been estranged for so long, and you pray for her to return to me, and it delights you to see her face adorned for me. But you should know that the time is near when you will see nothing in her of the old infidelity and aversion, but only works of virtues and spiritual struggles. So what, then, will you see in the Shulammite,” he says, ”except the dances of the camps, that is, the army of peace? For in choruses the voices of singers resonate together; in camps, the hands of those who love to fight. So what, then, will you see in her, except the choruses of the elect, who with heart and soul united proclaim the praises of their Creator? And they are indeed the choruses of the camps, because by serving the Creator they repel and disturb all the enemy’s ranks.” He says this and turns with his customary sweetness to praise the Church itself, which he rejoiced was concerned for the salvation of the Synagogue, thus adding:

Chapter 7

[Song of Solomon 7:1] -- ”How beautiful are your steps, etc.! He rightly began his praise from her steps and concluded in the grace of her mouth. Thus he concluded: ”And the fragrance of your breath, like apples; your throat, like the best wine. Whereas above, beginning from the eyes, he seemed to end with the commendation of only the upper members: for this variation both provides beauty to the song and grants a fitting place to the mysteries being sung. For since he saw her not sitting idle in secure rest but proceeding to the conflict of preaching, he rightly first admired the beauty of her steps, that is, the constancy of her works, by which she wished to demonstrate examples of virtues to those she would teach. Concerning these steps, of course, the Psalmist prays to the Lord, saying: ”Complete my steps in your paths” (Psalm 16), that is, direct my actions on the narrow path which leads to life. But these steps are in sandals, when our actions, which those who have gone before us in righteousness have secured by their examples, are fortified by the same. For we are shod with the skins of dead animals, when in the works of righteousness, in which we read that the previous saints were also clothed, we also, by imitating them, more confidently and purely enter the way of virtue. Of what kind of footwear the Apostle says, ”And having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace” (Ephesians VI).

For whoever evangelizes peace of truth to others, it is first necessary that he himself adorns and strengthens the steps of his works with the examples of the preceding fathers, so that he does not show any other way of living or teaching to his followers except that which was

trodden by the fathers, indeed by the Lord himself, mindful of that apostolic precept: "Be imitators of me, brothers, as I also am of Christ" (I Corinthians XIV). Thus teaching, he ascends to that height and beauty of virtues of which the prophet and apostle have spoken, saying: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace" (Romans X)! Now he calls her the daughter of a prince, indeed of him of whom it is written: "All the glory of her, the king's daughter, is within" (Psalms XLIV). Among other promises of heavenly gifts, he himself speaks to her through the prophet: "You shall call me 'Father,' and will not turn away from following me" (Jeremiah III).--It should be noted that the blessed Jerome, knowledgeable in Hebrew truth, writing against Jovinian about the daughter of the prince, placed in this passage the daughter of Aminadab, where he also explained that this verse could be understood in relation to a virgin dedicated to God, saying: "Your steps have become beautiful in sandals, daughter of Aminadab! which means, of the people offering themselves willingly. For virginity is voluntary; and therefore the steps of the Church are praised in the beauty of chastity.

Whence it is evident that those who interpret the chariots of Aminadab as the army of those persecuting the Church, whether of unclean spirits or evil men, err greatly, since it is clear that rather it should be understood about the prince of princes himself and his chosen people.

[Song of Solomon 7:1] -- The joining of your thighs is like a necklace, etc. Scripture often uses the thighs to symbolize the succession of offspring. For it says: All the souls that entered with Jacob into Egypt, and came out from his thigh, apart from the wives of his sons, were sixty-six souls (Gen. XLVI). Thus, in the thighs of the Church, rightly is its offspring taken as the spiritual generation, which is fulfilled through the mystery of the Word and the cleansing of regeneration. But the joining of its thighs is the unity of two peoples. Namely, the Jew and the Gentile, from which, united in one faith, the universal Church is perfected, and is increased and made fruitful with spiritual offspring until the end of the world. This joining is also likened to necklaces because the Catholic faith is declared by the testimony of good works. Moreover, these necklaces are crafted by the hand of a craftsman because the works of virtues, by which the Church is built from two peoples into one, are strengthened by the ineffable generosity of our Creator. For He is that craftsman of whom the Apostle says: And coming, he preached peace to you who were far off; and peace to those who were near, because through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father (Eph. II). And of whose marvelous craftsmanship the Psalmist states: The stone which the builders rejected, this has become the chief cornerstone.

This was done by the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes (Ps. CXVII). Of this craftsman's praise, the Apostle remembers Abraham the patriarch, saying: For he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Heb. II). Properly, then, after the sandaled steps of the bride, the joining of the thighs is praised, because through the ministry of preachers, the unanimous joining of believing peoples is perfected: and aptly,

in these places, the joining of the thighs is brought to mind, where Judah, gathered in faith at the end, promised to be united in Christ, is the partner of both peoples. It continues:

[Song of Solomon 7:2] -- Your navel is a rounded goblet, etc. The navel, which is the most fragile member of our body, rightly signifies the frailty of our mortality. And our navel becomes a rounded goblet never lacking in drink, when, reminded of our mortality and frailty, we strive to offer the cup of the word of salvation to our neighbors, so that, as we show mercy, the blessedness of heavenly mercy is repaid to us. There is also nothing to hinder that what is said about the alms of the general cup may be understood, about which the judge himself will say: "I was thirsty, and you gave me drink" (Matthew 25). For a bowl is another, larger, with two handles. About which the poet says, "But when the first rest has come to the feasts and the tables have been removed, And they place great bowls, and crown the wines. And this bowl is rightly said to be turned: for in this way the vessel which is made by turning is filled more quickly than by other crafts, so that namely the speed of bestowing piety, whether to those who need an earthly or a heavenly cup, or even both, may be shown, according to Solomon's statement: "Do not say to your friend, 'Go, and come again, and tomorrow I will give,' when you can give at once" (Proverbs 3).

But it must also be said that, as we mentioned above, turning is more indescribable than other arts, because surely from itself it produces its own rule, by which it may accomplish the work it does with disciplined roundness, and therefore rightly insinuates the simplicity of a truly pious mind, which makes alms with pure intention. For whoever gives a cup to the thirsty for this reason, that an equal rewarder may lavish abundance of the earthly cup on him, or for this reason offers the cup of the word to those erring, that the Lord may grant him greater abundance of knowledge, in which he may appear marvelous to men; the cup turned with a lathe is not matched by the navel made with other tools, because in doing a work of mercy as commanded, he does not seek from the Lord a direct and indescribable reward for sustaining his own fragility, but a temporal one. The navel of the bride's turned cup can also be understood to mean that the Church, or any holy soul, the more it remembers itself to be fragile, and still far distant from the immortality and incorruption it hopes for in the future, the more diligently it takes care to refresh itself with the continuous cups of the word of God and to become warmed in its love, saying that of the Psalmist: "And your cup overflows; how splendid it is!"

[Song of Solomon 7:2] -- Your belly is like a heap of wheat surrounded by lilies. The belly, like the navel, denotes our mortal condition: for it is the most certain and greatest judge of our weakness, which daily renews our body with nourishment, lest it fail, until that which we hold promised is achieved: Meat for the belly, and the belly for meat, but God shall destroy both it and them (I Corinthians VI). Therefore, our belly is like a heap of wheat, when mindful of our frailty, we prepare for ourselves the fruits of good works in the present life which perpetually nourish us. However, he says "heap of wheat" well, and not merely a store of wheat, to signify the virtues rising high. And since a heap, rising from a wider base, is usually narrower at the top, this figure rightly suits our good actions, which are fewer in

number when they are higher in merit. For you may see more who offer alms from their possessions to the needy than those who leave everything they possess; more good spouses than celibates; more who abstain from physical pleasures than those who lay down their lives for truth. And he well asserted that the same heap of wheat is surrounded by lilies, so we may perform all our good deeds for the sake of eternal love's sight, and allow no hostile encroachments into the field of our hearts, as we encircle all our deeds with the prospect of heavenly reward.

The works of almsgiving which we do for Christ in the poor can also be understood in the heap of wheat, concerning which He says: I was hungry, and you gave me food (Matthew XXV). And well after the bowl filled with cups, are the members of the bride compared to a heap of wheat, to signify that after drink, also, bread may be given to the poor: which indeed can be taken in both a spiritual and a bodily sense, that is, in those things by which we instruct the mind of an erring neighbor. For spiritual instruction is recognized as having the likeness of a cup in some words, and bread of life in others: for it has the similarity of a cup in open teachings, but of bread in mysteries. He hands the cup with those things which, as soon as they are heard, can be easily understood and do not require another explanation, as is the case with: "You shall not kill, you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness" (Deut. V), and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. XXII). He offers bread when he entrusts to his listeners words that are more difficult to understand, which, like food that reaches our insides through chewing, reach the innermost parts of our senses through interpretation. Such is the entire series of this song, such as the law: "Remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it" (Exod.

XX), where mystically it is admonished to sanctify the light of spiritual grace, in which alone we have true rest, that is, to keep it always unblemished in our hearts as we receive it on the day of redemption. Thus, these and similar words, to whose understanding we attain with the effort of interpretation, are rightly compared to a heap of wheat, which is brought to the use of our refreshment by no small labor of grinding, sowing, baking, and chewing. But clearer issues that never need the cup are rightly compared to a drink because abundant open commands or promises of God in the Scriptures, like a drink taken without delay or labor, can be understood as soon as they are heard and, when understood, stored in the repository of memory for the growth of our salvation. The immaculate womb of the divine fountain from which we are reborn into a new creature can be most suitably figured in the bride: which, like a heap of wheat hedged with lilies, because it obviously teaches all whom you regenerate in Christ to persist in good works with the sole gaze of heavenly glory. It is like a heap of wheat because it cleanses those whom it washes from all the chaff of sins and makes them conform through second birth to him who said of himself, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John XII).

It is hedged with lilies because, having freed them from the entanglements of sins with which they were carnally born, it also adorns them with the light of heavenly graces and confirms them.

[Song of Solomon 7:3] -- Two breasts, etc. We have spoken abundantly about this verse above; but now it should be briefly recalled that rightly after the belly of the bride, her breasts are commended, because indeed the holy Church offers milk to her little ones, whom she generates in Christ from the sacrosanct womb of the saving water, from the nourishment of the neophytes, with gentler doctrine, until she gradually instructs them to receive the bread of higher wisdom. Therefore, the breasts of the Church are those who instruct her little ones, that is, those recently reborn in faith: and it is well that they are mentioned as being two, because from two peoples, namely, the Jews and the Gentiles, the saving font which cleanses them and brings them forth by the heavenly mystery, gathers them. They are well compared to the two young fawns of a gazelle, because the true teachers take from the teachings of both Testaments what they preach. It is also fitting that these fawns are said to be twins, because the Testaments themselves are given by the same author, from the one of whom Ecclesiastes says: The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed, given by one shepherd through the counsel of masters (Ecclesiastes XII). Therefore, there are two breasts of the bride, like two twin fawns of a gazelle, because the teachers of the neophytes do not preach their own but speak as from God, before God in Christ;

He is the one shepherd, who from two flocks of sheep makes one fold; whose burning desire the bride above cries out: Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you rest at noon. He is the one teacher of the teachers, for he commanded his disciples, who are our teachers, saying: Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you (Matthew XXVIII). Rightly also is the name gazelle assigned to him, for it is a clean animal, noteworthy for its sight and speed, splitting the hoof and chewing the cud, and like all clean quadrupeds, armed with horns. If indeed saints of such nature are apt, because they have a split hoof in the discernment of good and evil, and customarily speak sweetly and as if chew the cud on things they discern are good from evil, who have learned to direct the eye of their heart far off, that is, to contemplate heavenly goods from earth; who eagerly desire to penetrate with a swift course the path of virtues; who rejoice that they have received from the grace of their Creator the cleanliness of mind and body, who, with the confidence of faith, raised against the strength of this world, are accustomed to say to God:

Through you we shall push down our enemies with the horn (Psalm XLIII), how much more this nature of the animal suits the meaning of the one who possesses all these gifts of virtues in himself and grants them to others according to the measure of his own gift.

[Song of Solomon 7:4] -- Your neck is like an ivory tower. Because through the neck, both voice and speech proceed, and food, through which all the members of the body are nourished, usually enters; rightly through the neck, as we have previously admonished, the form

of teachers is designated, who strengthen the whole body of the Church both with the voice of exhortation and refresh it with the sustenance of life. This neck, indeed, is like an ivory tower, because teachers provide both adornment and strength and the beauty of their lives to the holy city of God, that is, the Church. Because they are proven to be already dead to this world, they show themselves like ivory to all who see; and they defend the city of God, as a tower elevated and impregnable, from the assault of all enemies. For when they say that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for the destruction of fortresses, destroying counsels and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God (II Cor. X), they prove that they are positioned as a tower for the fortification of the holy city; and when the same Paul, describing his and his co-workers' lives, says: For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God, I am crucified with Christ (Galat. II), he signifies that the quality of ivory, that is, of a bone indeed dead but marked by exceptional beauty, belongs to him.

[Song of Solomon 7:4] -- Your eyes are like the pools in Heshbon, etc. The same holy preachers, who were compared to the bride's neck for the nourishment of the word, are also designated in the eyes; this means the inspection of the mysteries, which they learn in secret so that they can openly proclaim them, and through those things which they perceived in secret meditation, they minister the manifest nourishment of the holy Church by teaching. These eyes are rightly compared to the pools built in the gate of the city of Heshbon. He also calls this city, because of the abundance of inhabitants, the daughter of the multitude, because just as those same pools, with the citizens flocking to them, used to provide a continuous abundance of water, so the preachers do not cease to provide streams of doctrine to their listeners; with these streams, they themselves are always filled inwardly, just as the pools are full of living springs of water. These pools resonate with that once-famous probatical pool in Jerusalem, in which the water used to be stirred by an angel at certain times, and the first of the sick to descend was healed, because undoubtedly there is one God, one faith, one baptism; which, when the Holy Spirit descends into the font of life, washes one people of believers with the grace of second regeneration, which is aptly called the probatical pool, that is, for sacrificial use, indicating literally that sacrifices used to be washed in it by the priest;

and typically expressing that it is proper for those who are to be brought to the holy altar and offered as a sacrifice to God to be washed in the waters of regeneration. Heshbon is rightly set forth as a type of the Church, either because of its name, which is interpreted as girdle of sorrow, or because it once belonged to Sihon, king of the Amorites, and after he was killed it was seized by the children of Israel. For it is certainly known that the Church was once enslaved to the rule of the devil, the king of all iniquities, but after he was expelled and renounced, it became the city of its Redeemer. And now it has taken the name of Church, which was formerly called Gentiles, since, instead of the wanton and fleeting joy of this world, it has girded itself with the most salutary girdle of sorrow: namely, the girdle to restrain the loins of its mind from all uncleanness; and the girdle of sorrow, that being

utterly detached and alienated from temporal joys, fixed confidently in the heavens, it might hope to receive joys.

This city, that is, the Church, which is also called the daughter of the multitude because of the abundance of people flocking to the faith, has pools in its gate, to which the eyes of the bride are compared, because no one can enter her who has not first been sprinkled with the water of the salutary doctrine, who has not been cleansed by the washing of the water of regeneration, who has not been consecrated by the drinking of the living fountain. This was most clearly and beautifully prefigured in the tabernacle or the temple of Solomon, at whose entrance a basin or brazen sea was placed, where the priests who were about to enter would wash their hands and feet; doubtlessly for a certain mystery's sake, because the Lord would provide us with the washing of heavenly teaching, with the font of regeneration; by which we, initiated, might be able to enter either the fellowship of the present Church or the dwelling of its eternal home, which is in heaven.

[Song of Solomon 7:4] -- Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon, etc. Because by the nose odors and stench are usually distinguished, the dispensers of the word of God, who had previously been designated for certain reasons to the neck and eyes of the Church; now also for the cause of very beneficial discretion, which is proven by the fathers to be the mother of virtues, is designated in the nose, because certainly by the function of smelling, they are able to discern more than others, in which acts or words the good odor of Christ flourishes, and which exhale the lethal stench of depravity: for indeed the teacher, or any faithful person, has much need of discretion, lest perhaps vices disguise themselves under the guise of virtues, lest they carry something wolf-like under the sheep's clothing, lest cunning be mistaken for prudence, tenacity for frugality, the desire for revenge for justice, harshness for fortitude, the semblance of constancy for the stubbornness of fools. Hence rightly teachers, rightly the chosen ones, who have received this grace from the Lord, that they may be able to separate the odors of virtues from the stench of vices, are said to be like the tower of Lebanon, which looks towards Damascus, because they hold an eminent place in the holy Church, and always with the most cautious eye of the mind watch against the snares of the old enemy. For it has often been said that Mount Lebanon signifies the Lord the Savior and His Church.

Conversely, however, Damascus, because it signifies the city of the devil, that is, the crowd of reprobate angels or men, is as clear as light: for it was the metropolis of the whole of Syria, having the most impious and strong kings, who, as rightly carrying the emblem of the devil, inflicted frequent wars and captivities on the people of God, which clearly symbolize the temptations and snares of the devil, with which he continually attacks the Church. But also the fact that Damascus is called the drink of blood or the eye of blood corresponds to their signification, who delight in the allurements of the flesh and of blood, in whom even the very shedding of blood, which is inflicted on the innocent, is counted. It also corresponds to the most perverse intention of the demons, who labor to spiritually slaughter us, and take away from us the eternal life, which we have in Christ. Against both of them the Psalmist

prays to the Lord, saying: Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation (Ps. 51:14). For whoever is firmly established in Christ, watches with diligent caution over himself and his own, lest he be overcome by such wars, which are either openly inflicted by men, or secretly by the devil;

such a one can rightly be called the nose of the bride of Christ, and be like the tower which is constructed on Mount Lebanon to look towards Damascus, because skilled in discernment and living a sublime life, he provides continuous vigilance lest the Church be disturbed by sudden incursions of evils.

Book 6

[Song of Solomon 7:5] -- Your head is like Carmel, etc. In the head of the bride, the soul of the faithful is rightly understood, because just as the members are ruled by the head, so are thoughts arranged by the mind. Hence, even the thoughts themselves, which emerge countless times every hour and moment from the human mind, are aptly depicted as hair. What is said about one chosen soul is to be understood by the prudent reader as applying to the whole Church, because even though the multitude of believers differs in merits, they nevertheless have one heart and soul, insofar as they all aspire to the heavenly courts with one and the same faith, hope, and love. Scripture recounts that Elijah prayed on Mount Carmel kneeling, and after a long drought, he obtained rains from the Lord. Thus, the head of the bride is like Carmel, because the hearts of the chosen are elevated through their way of life and provide an ascent to the Lord through their daily progress in virtues. For Elijah is called the Lord God, who prays to the Father in them and, like dry fields, calls rains from heaven because he invisibly ignites them to pray to God, and through their prayers and merits, he often grants his gifts to a world in peril.

The name of Carmel, which is interpreted as the knowledge of circumcision, fits the head of the bride, that is, the ecclesiastical mind, which well knows it should not boast in carnal but in spiritual circumcision, about which the Apostle also debates much to the Galatians, and the prophet teaches, saying, ”Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart” (Jer. IV). The Jews refused to have this knowledge when they only glorified in the outward circumcision. Therefore, they did not know to have their head like Carmel because their mind was set on things below and on the glory of the flesh. Hence, they rightly deserve to be reproached by the voice of the blessed proto-martyr Stephen, saying, ”You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit” (Acts VII). And he says, ”The hair of your head is like a purple rope bound in channels. The hair of the bride’s head, as we said, represents the thoughts of the faithful soul. But the purple signifies the imitation of the Lord’s passion, to which the hair of the bride’s head is rightly compared, because every thought of the chosen ones is fortified by the holy faith of the cross, and every intention of their heart is ready to suffer for the Lord, so they may deserve to be resurrected with him.

But that the same purple is said to be bound in channels can either be understood to mean that the dyed wool, before it is woven, is stored separated in channels, or that, since the wool is dyed in the channels with the blood of the murex, it is there distinguished and tied separately to be dyed. For the purple dye is extracted by cutting with iron the shellfish, that is, the sea snails, which are also called "conchylia," releasing tears of purple color. When collected, they produce the purple dye. This mystically conveys one and the same meaning. For the channels that receive the king's purple denote the faithful hearts of Christ; thus, the wool that is sent to be dyed in the channels, so that it may become an ornament for the king after dyeing, represents the humility, the mildest and kindest of a faithful conscience, which through sufferings and works of justice attains the appearance of the eternal king. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Galatians 3). Now, this wool bound in the channels is dyed with the purple color, because the virtue of humility, fastened and as if bound in the hearts of the elect, is continuously animated by the memory of the Lord's blood to endure temporal tribulations, by which it may attain to the fellowship of the Lord's kingdom.

And what we have said about the purple bound in the channels can be understood in such a way that fleeces already dyed by the shellfish, before being spun into threads, are kept stored in compartments, symbolizing the higher virtue, since it represents the humility of those who are already exercised in frequent tribulations for the Lord, showing that they can be overcome by no adversities. They say that the perfect dye of purple never fades from sunlight or water sprinkling, and that the tint once received endures. Thus, the bride's hair on her head is bound in the purple channels of the king, when thoughts prepared in the devoted hearts for God are also ready to die for Christ, so that they may reign with him, making the purple, drawn from the channels, the highest ornament of the king. When the occasion for suffering is given, they show what they have rendered in that heart, bravely prepared to undergo all sorts of adversities and even death, if it happens, for the glory of their Redeemer. This was well represented in the Acts of the Apostles by Lydia, the purple-seller, who, being a fearer of God, was the first to believe and be baptized with her household when Paul preached in Macedonia, and who received him into her house, both when he first preached the word of faith and later when he suffered beatings, imprisonments, and bonds from the infidels.

For she foreshadowed in her profession, faith, and obedience the Church made up of the Gentiles, who, imbued with the confession of the Lord's passion, were themselves to shed their blood for it and to receive deeply in their hearts the apostolic doctrine expelled by the infidels.

[Song of Solomon 7:6] -- How beautiful you are, etc.! Previously, in the praise of the bride, it was said, You are beautiful, my friend, sweet and lovely like Jerusalem, terrible like an army set in array. There, therefore, along with beauty and loveliness, she is said to be terrible as an army set in array; here, she is stated to be beautiful and lovely in delights. However, according to human custom, it is difficult for one and the same person both to lead a life in

delights and to be terrible as an army set in array, because indeed delights soften the mind and do not allow it to focus on warlike matters. But where the delights are spiritual, that is, where the desire for eternal sweetness fills the mind's throat, there the soul becomes terrible to spiritual enemies, and as if an ordered army, it crushes all their weapons; rather, the more it comprehends the taste of internal satisfaction, the more terrifying it becomes to those who have completely lost the glory of the sweetness of heaven, for which they were created, to the bitterness of proud tyranny. And well did the lover of the holy soul say, How beautiful you are, how lovely! that is, how perfect in faith and work, and immediately he added, Most dear in delights.

For it is fitting that the soul, which is seen to be devoted to heavenly delights, should be most dear to the Lord, because indeed the more the pure mind tastes the food of life, the more it is inflamed with that love, and the more fervently it loves the heavenly, the more perfectly it is loved by the author and giver of celestial goods themselves. Therefore, the holy soul is most dear to the Lord in delights, because while it ardently hungers for the joys of internal refreshment, the love for its Creator increases in it; and since such a soul also fore-tastes no small portion of the delights of the future reward in the struggle of the present life, it is rightly added:

[Song of Solomon 7:7] -- Your stature is compared to a palm tree, etc. For the stature of the Church is indeed the uprightness of its good work, because, despising to bend down to earthly desires, it raises itself entirely to attain heavenly rewards. The Apostle admonishes concerning this, saying, "Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave" (1 Cor. 16). And the Lord Himself, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of servitude, by which the Egyptians oppressed you, so that you would walk upright" (1 Kings 10). The palm tree, moreover, is adorned with the hand of the victor. And also among the ancients, whoever had won in a contest was crowned with a palm. Therefore, the stature of the bride is compared to a palm, when the entire intention of the faithful, upright in love for heavenly things, meditating meanwhile while standing in the battle line, reflects on that prize, which is to be given as a reward when the contest is over. Likewise, because the palm tree appears rough in its lower parts but shows beauty and the sweetness of its fruit at the top, it is fittingly compared to the stature of the Church, or of any faithful soul, which bears rough labors on earth for the Lord, but hopes to receive a most pleasant reward from the Lord in heaven. The palm is rough near the ground, because the elect suffer persecution for righteousness.

It is beautiful and sweet at the top, because they rejoice in tribulations and exult, knowing that their reward is abundant in heaven. Similarly, just as the palm is covered with enduring leaves and preserves its foliage without replacement, who does not see that it holds the symbol of the stature of faith, which, while the state of the passing world changes, retains the same words of true confession, like leaves that neve fall and are kept, and maintains the same perfection of works that began from the outset, as if the beauty of the palms is held inviolate in His chosen ones until the end of the world? And he says, "Your breasts are like clusters. The breasts, as often said, are the teachers of the Church when they minis-

ter the milk of initial instruction to the little ones of Christ. But these same breasts are likened to clusters when those teachers, to whom the initial sacraments of His incarnation were entrusted, also reveal the secrets of the divinity, by which He is equal to the Father; and those who previously said, "We resolve to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2), afterwards say to those capable of receiving more profound teachings, "Whose are the fathers, and from whom according to the flesh, is Christ, who is over all, God blessed forever" (Romans 9).

The breasts of the Church are also likened to clusters when the masters of truth at the same time, reveal to mature listeners the great mysteries or teachings of the Scriptures, and offer to those weak in understanding the sustenance of life that they can grasp. To these they say, "If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments; you shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness. Honor your father and your mother, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself"; but to those they say, "If you wish to be perfect, go and sell all that you have and give to the poor" (Matt. 19), and the like. But these breasts are also likened to clusters, because the Apostle says, "For whether we are beside ourselves, it is for God; whether we be sober, it is for you" (2 Cor. 5). For they fulfill the function of breasts when they temper their words according to what the weak can hear; they are compared to clusters when, being elevated in mind, they are inebriated by the abundance of the house of God and of that house of God which is not made by hands but is eternal in the heavens. But since all the saints, whatever good they possess, have received it by the liberality of divine grace, it is rightly added:

[Song of Solomon 7:8] -- I said, I will ascend into the palm tree, etc. For the sole reason is that the breasts of the Church may be equaled to clusters of grapes, because the Lord has deigned to ascend into her and to gift her with His grace. For indeed, so that the teachers may preach both humble things to the little ones and lofty things to the perfect, so that they may both condescend and be temperate with the unskilled, and they themselves may drink deeply in the contemplation of heavenly things, this is not due to their own merit, but it is a gift from heaven. It was said above concerning the Lord, My beloved descended into His garden (Psalm 86); and now He himself says, I will ascend into the palm tree. However, the same Church, or perfect soul, is the Lord's garden, which is also the palm tree. But there is a difference between the Lord ascending into her and descending into her: for He descends into her when He sends her heavenly grace from above, by which she may become heavenly herself and be transferred to the things above; however, He ascends into the same when He more and more reveals the knowledge of His majesty to the faithful, when He inspires in those who are advancing the love of the heavenly homeland, as it were through certain steps striving towards the heights; when to those to whom He previously said, When you have done all that you were commanded, say:

We are unworthy servants (Luke XVII), He adds greater gifts, saying, I will no more call you servants, for the servant does not know what his lord does. But I called you friends (John XV). And again: Go, tell my brothers (John XV). Thus, the Lord descends into His

garden when He imparts heavenly gifts to the faithful; He ascends into the palm tree when He graciously bestows the increase of virtues on His advancing chosen ones, until He leads them to perfection: concerning which virtues it is aptly added:

[Song of Solomon 7:8] -- I will seize its fruits. For he indeed seizes the virtues of a faithful soul, so that with the most healthful touch of his compunction, he may always make them fruitful with greater blessing. The fruits of the palm can also be taken as each of the chosen ones, whom the Church brings forth to the Lord, as her own palm; these fruits it indeed seizes when it strengthens its own in faith and love, and to protect them from ever failing, it guards them with its protection to the perfect maturity of life, in accordance with that of the Psalmist: "You have given me the protection of your salvation, your right hand upholds me" (Psalm 17). Moreover, in what follows, "And your breasts will be like clusters of the vine," it can also be understood that those who do not neglect to announce even the small things they know kindly and simply to their neighbors, may sometimes be inebriated with a greater gift of wisdom; and this when the Lord ascends to the palm and seizes its fruits, because unless His grace brings us growth, unless our hearts are fortified by His grace, we can neither have great nor small goods. Aptly, the victorious tree of the cross can also be signified by the name of the palm, to which the stature of the bride is rightly compared, because the holy Church is raised up through the passion of its Redeemer so that it can remain upright, stable, and immovable.

It is rightly compared to this because even those who preceded the times of the Lord's incarnation symbolized the mysteries of His passion either by prophesying or even suffering, and the saints of our time also glorify the same sacred triumph of the passion, all indeed by believing and confessing, many however also by dying. But what the bridegroom says, "I said, I will go up to the palm, I will seize its fruits," fits that age when Solomon sang these things, when the Lord often promised through the voices of the prophets that He would come in the flesh for the redemption of the human race; when He proclaimed that He would ascend the tree, dying for His bride, destroying the dominion of death, and as a victor return to life. The fruits of the palm, which He said He would seize, are later signs of glory which followed the ascent of the cross, that is the brightness of His resurrection and ascension to heaven, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the salvation of the believing world. Which sense is aptly followed by:

[Song of Solomon 7:8] -- And thy breasts, etc. For truly, the first teachers of the Church, that is, the apostles, having completed His passion and resurrection, received a much greater knowledge of salvific doctrine than they had previously had, when appearing after the resurrection He opened their minds so that they might understand the Scriptures; when, having sent the Spirit from above, He granted them the knowledge of all languages; when it was falsely said by those mocking them that 'these men are full of new wine' (Acts 2). But they truly were like clusters of grapes because they were refreshed by the grace of spiritual gifts, the prophecy being verily fulfilled which said that new wine must be put into new bottles, and both are preserved (Matthew 9). And what follows aptly fits both senses:

[Song of Solomon 7:8] -- And the smell of your breath is like apples, etc. Indeed, in the smell of the mouth is the fame of good speech, and in the throat, however, is the very duty of voice dedicated to God. Both are worthy of praise in the Catholic Church, and both in every elected soul, because the voice itself, which teaches those present, and the fame of speech, which reaches the absent, whether through letters or through those who have heard, is proven to be full of virtue and grace. But because he compares the smell of the bride's mouth and throat to apples and the best wine, it can be distinguished that apples retain all their strength in freshness itself, but wine achieves its value from age. Therefore, it is rightly compared to both these types—the voice of the Church speaking and its fame, whose beginning and perfection are known to be wonderful. Moreover, because the strength and fragrance of the best wine are greater than that of apples, it is rightly said: And the smell of your breath is like apples. Your throat is like the best wine, it surpasses the grace of apples. So much does the present speech of the holy Church of God excel the fame that the words of those who hear can spread about it. However, thus far the bride has been praised, and when it came to saying that her throat is like the best wine, she seized the word from the bridegroom's mouth, and she, led by great love, strives to complete it rather. For she understood that by the term "best wine" the word of the Gospel was designated, in which alone is eternal salvation for believers, and she said:

[Song of Solomon 7:9] -- Worthy of my beloved to drink, etc. Wine, he says, the best, which my throat has compared, is worthy of my beloved to drink, because the word of the Gospel, which He has deigned to place in my mouth, is of such sublimity that it ought to be preached to the world only through Him, my beloved spouse and Redeemer. For He, first appearing in the flesh, through the mystery of regeneration, opened the heavenly path to the human race; He first preached the sacrament of His passion, resurrection, and ascension, by which the world would be saved, and then left it to be preached by His faithful ones; He drank the cup of salvation and thus offered it to be drunk by the Church. It should not seem absurdly placed, what is said, That it should be chewed by his lips and teeth, when it is said of wine. It is clear, however, that chewing is more suitable for food than for drink. Figuratively speaking, he calls the lips and teeth of the beloved the holy teachers, as has been proven above, because they chew the best wine which He has drunk, when they are delighted to scrutinize by frequent meditation and to confer the word of grace which they teach with one another.

Some understand this response of the Church to the speech of the Lord as subtly interwoven, so that when He, praising her, had said, Your throat, that is, the sweetness of your confession, is like the best wine, she immediately, agreeing with His words, would add, Worthy of my beloved to drink, and to be chewed by his lips and teeth. As if she were openly saying: I already desire greatly that my beloved may judge the affection and sincerity of the mind which I have towards Him by careful examination. For I trust that even if He examines this with as much care as He is accustomed to examine drink or food, because He has diligently endeavored to taste or chew it, He will already prove it worthy of His praises. Hence, the first pastor of the Church responded to the Lord asking him, You know that I love you;

and again: You know all things, you know that I love you (John XV). To whom, indeed, the beloved, still adding from the great ardor of the same charity, says:

[Song of Solomon 7:10] -- I am for my beloved, etc. I am for my beloved and not for another. To whom I offer the whole gift of my service and devotion. And his conversion to me, so that even in this mortal life, lest I become weary by labor, lest I bear lamps without oil, that is, lest I carry out good works without charity, his presence and constant regard may always help me, and finally he may lead me to immortal joys of the heavenly chamber. This which he says, And his conversion to me, can be understood as specially uttered from the figure of the Synagogue, that is, of those people who preceded the times of His incarnation: who, when they had heard Him promising above, I said, I will ascend into the palm tree, I will take hold of its fruits, that is, I will ascend the wood of the cross, on which I will die, and taking the fruits of the resurrection, I will offer them to believers who are nourished for eternal life, justly rejoicing, she declares, I am for my beloved, and his conversion to me, namely, that He who was accustomed to be always present to me in invisible presence, might deign to appear to me also in my nature and form. To the lovers of both times, what follows aptly applies.

[Song of Solomon 7:11] -- Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field, etc. For even the holy ones of old greatly desired the Lord to come for the salvation of the human race. Thus, praying, they say, "Stir up your might and come to save us" (Psalm 79). They desired him to go forth into the field, that is, for him who was invisible with the Father to appear visible to the world, according to Habakkuk, who prophesied future events as if they were already happening, "You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed" (Habakkuk 3). They too wished to go forth with him into the field, to announce the grace of the Gospel which, being seen and greeted from afar, they proclaimed would come, announcing it present in their age. They desired to dwell with him in the villages, that is, to commit the word of faith even to the pagans. For who does not know that the pagans derive their name in Greek from the villages, because they dwell far from the habitation or even the knowledge of the heavenly city? And what do you think Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, and the other prophets endured for his proclamations, who prophesied before the dispensation of Christ to come in the flesh, would have done if they could have lived with him in the flesh? Those things that follow, which fit the desires of the faithful saints of old with much propriety, are also added.

But the Church of our time, burning with equal fervor, rightly proclaims, "Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; you who have lifted up the man assumed for my salvation, placing him at the right hand of the Father in heaven, I pray that by the presence of divine grace, you may deign to come to me more frequently. You command me to cultivate my field, in which you have sown good seed—that is, you command to preach the Gospel you gave throughout the whole world; but because I can do nothing without you, I beg you, come forth with me into the field, that is, wherever you wish me to preach the word, be my helper and cooperator. We read that he himself said, at the coming of the day of judgment, "Two

will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left" (Luke 17). He who cultivated the field of his own or his brother's heart with the Lord's cooperation will be taken up; but he who trusted he had the fruits of good doctrines or actions from himself, will rightly be left by him whose help he neglected to seek. Let us dwell in the villages too, by teaching the hearts of foreigners; and let us not visit these in passing, but let us dwell in them as long as necessary until we make them from pagans to urbane, from foreigners and strangers to domestic, indeed our own.

[Song of Solomon 7:12] -- Let us rise early and go to the vineyards, etc. Thus let us dwell in the villages so that we may rise to cultivate the vineyards; thus let us make our residence among those who have already converted to the faith, and let us also strive to acquire others whom we may dwell among through evangelizing. And rightly she who is to say, Let us rise to the vineyards, has prefaced it with, Early; for Early speaks of the very rising of the true light, through which the world has been rescued from the power of darkness. Early then, he says, let us rise to the vineyards; as if he plainly says: Because the harm of ancient disbelief has departed, because the light of the shining Gospel now begins to appear, let us rise, I beseech you, to the vineyards, that is, let us give our effort to the churches to be established for God throughout the world.

[Song of Solomon 7:12] -- Let us see if the vineyard has bloomed, etc. The vineyard blooms when the Church receives the first elements of faith and confession. However, blossoms bring forth fruits when the faith and confession of the saints become prompt, even to the exercise of works of justice, lest their faith be found to be idle or dead without works. The pomegranates bloom when those who have advanced in faith and right action perceive the desire of suffering for righteousness: for the pomegranates, because they appear to be of a sanguine color, fittingly symbolize the passion either of the Lord Savior or of His faithful ones. Rightly in each of these instances the bride seeks the presence of her beloved, saying: Let us go forth into the field, let us dwell in the villages, let us rise to the vineyards, let us see if the vineyard has bloomed, and so forth; for in no way does the Church suffice either to proceed forth to good work by going out, or to persevere in the exercise of good works by dwelling, or to rise to salvation and the purpose of doing good, or to discern how much the souls of its hearers have advanced, without the grace of Him who, about to ascend to heaven, promised, And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (Matthew 28).

But if we are willing to accept these words as said by the person of the ancient righteous ones, the term "morning," where it says "Let us rise early to the vineyards," can not incongruously be understood to designate the very time of the Lord's incarnation; for many prophets and righteous men desired to see the times which the apostles saw; they longed to persist in the flesh until the new light of His coming, if it could be done, so that they might hear His words teaching in the flesh, and adhere to His promises, making conversation about Him in the flesh with those who would later believe in Him. The rest can be understood in the same

sense as above, where it says ”There I will give you my breasts,” namely in that place where we come to see the vineyards and the pomegranates, whether they bloom or bear fruit.

The breasts of the Church are known to be its teachers, those little ones of hers, who certainly offer these breasts to the Lord when they present their deeds and words in service of His preachers, so that, as nurses are accustomed to nourish little ones with diligent attention, so they strive to act in such a way that those who are still unlearned may, both by sight and by hearing, be able to progress in Christ, and reach the strength of spiritual youth, and become worthy to whom the voice of the blessed John may be said, ”I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one” (1 John 2). ”Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” (John 2). Rightly, indeed, the Church, having prayed to the Lord, saying, ”Come, my beloved, let us go into the field,” and the other things that follow, concluded thus, ”There I will give you my breasts”; as if she openly said: Therefore I beseech you greatly, that you may undertake the spiritual labor with me, so that I may always acquire new peoples for you, and may know how those who have already been acquired are doing, how much they have progressed in faith;

because I strive to subordinate very diligently to you the tutors of my little ones, in such a way that I may forecast for them nothing to follow except what You Yourself have commanded, whether by example or by word. He who said, ”We have become little ones in the midst of you, as a nurse cherishes her own children” (1 Thess. 2), thus desiring you, knew that he belonged to these breasts. The bride gave such breasts to her beloved, and to no one else, when, hearing from him, ”Separate to me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13), she immediately took care to obey His commands.

[Song of Solomon 7:13] -- Mandrakes have given their fragrance at our gates. The gates of Christ and the Church are the same teachers, who have also been expressed by the name of breasts: who, as often said, are breasts because they nurture his little ones and infants, frequently exerting effort so that even from their mouths perfect praise may be produced for the Lord. They are, however, gates, because those whom they teach, through the ministry of the word and regeneration, they introduce into the dwelling of the holy city; about whom the Psalmist says, The Lord loves the gates of Zion above all the dwellings of Jacob (Ps. LXXXVI). Hence also in Revelation, John says about the same city, And it had a great and high wall, having twelve gates (Rev. XII), because surely the first teachers of the Church, that is, the twelve apostles, are chosen. Therefore, in such gates, mandrakes gave their fragrance, when the apostles and their successors spread the fame of their spiritual virtues far and wide. Rightly, therefore, does the Church beseech the Lord to come there to bring heavenly aid to their preaching, where she knows that the preachers themselves are fragrant with exceptional virtues. But anyone who diligently investigates other natures of mandrakes, and how many medicines they suit, will indeed find that they are aptly suited to signifying the virtues of the faithful. For it is an aromatic herb, having a root resembling the shape of the human body; the fruit, however, is sweet-smelling, in the size of an apple.

Hence, the Latins also call it the apple of the earth. It also has such a virtue that through it sleep is often induced where the sick are troubled by the inconvenience of wakefulness. Indeed, one is troubled by the worst wakes who seeks to free his mind from the cares and desires of this world but, delayed by the use of wrong habits, is not yet able to obtain the rest he seeks. But he who strives to cure his weakness with diligent exercise of spiritual studies, comes, as the battles of vices gradually recede, to that mental quiet which the bride speaks of in the higher parts of this song, I sleep, but my heart wakes; that is, I rest from the cares of temporal things, and my heart watches in the contemplation of eternal goods. Likewise, if bodies must be cut for care, the bark of this plant, when put into wine, is given to drink so that, being asleep, they do not feel the pain. What the rationale of this nature signifies to be done in spiritual medicines is easily evident: for the soul languishes gravely that is subdued by great weights of vices; and it is offered as if to be treated by doctors when holy teachers urge it to resist carnal pleasures. But because it cannot be abandoned without great pain, that which was accustomed to be held with great love, it seems to be cut off from that which withdraws it from the long-established habit of allurements.

But lest this kind of separation should seem intolerable to the languishing soul, a healthful potion must be given, through which it, usefully lulled, does not feel the pain of the cut. The eternal punishment of the Gehenna flame must be brought back to mind, which will perpetually torture souls neglectful of their salvation; the glory of the heavenly homeland must be brought back to memory, where the taken-up souls of the righteous will reign without end with Christ: for this indeed is the health-giving potion of doctrine, which redeems the soul, long languid from God, either lulled by this world or rather dead, so that it may very easily endure the removal of all the delights it previously adhered to, and even rejoice in their removal. Again, it is said that the mandrake heals those who suffer from nausea, so that they are neither able to contain themselves, nor are delighted to receive food. But the food of the soul is the word of truth, which those who are neither able to receive by hearing, nor keep accepted in the stomach of memory through hearing, suffer from a very dreadful and dangerous ailment, because surely it must be that their life is to be despaired of who spurn either to preserve or at least to receive the bread of life:

for such languor, frequent examples of saints, and the present form of virtues are accustomed to provide healing, while anyone indifferent and neglectful at the sight or hearing of good works, upon remembering the glory of the heavenly reward, seeks to imitate the acts and temporary labors of good men so that he may merit to be held as a co-heir of their perpetual happiness. Therefore, anyone who is thus brought to the hope of salvation and life, as if through the fruit of the mandrake, whoever of the learned holds so great a grace of the Spirit, such study of piety, that anyone who sees or hears them, immediately changed in mind, begins to follow their life, they deservedly hold the form of the mandrake, because they fix the food of life in the hearts of the nauseous. And beautifully the bride, rich in living delights, not only promises the fruits of the vineyards and apples to be seen by the bridegroom, but also the odors of mandrakes and their health-giving juices: she boasts not only of having those things which can be eaten and drunk, but also those things which can

make food or drink grateful and pleasant to those who are disgusted, because the Church also offers before the presence of its author the gifts of the heavenly word, namely the foods and drinks of life, offers fit ministers, who bring these by preaching to those who hunger and thirst;

and moreover, by tasting them first themselves, that is, by first working, make them sweet to those who are disgusted. She brings forth, as if vineyards, innumerable troops of the elect; she brings forth pomegranate apples, the precious ranks of martyrs by the splendor of invincible confession; she brings forth spiritual charisms, which incite the hearts of the sluggish to contemplate and imitate the examples of the good.

[Song of Solomon 7:13] -- All the fruits, new and old, etc. The new and old fruits are the precepts or promises of the New and Old Testament, which the Church has kept for its beloved, knowing that He alone is the one who gave the precepts and who will render worthy rewards to those who keep them; knowing Him alone to be the one who delivered lesser commands through the angels to His ancient servants, and greater ones through Himself to us, or made promises of rewards. By this argument, the Church effectively counters the sects of the Photinians, who deny that the Lord Savior existed before Mary; and refutes the madness of the Manichaeans, who teach that the God of the law is different from the God of the Gospel. Likewise, the new and old fruits are the just of the New and Old Testament, none of whom, though distinguished by outstanding sanctity, could enter the gateways to the heavenly kingdom before the incarnate passion, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Savior. The Church of that time, which is now called the Synagogue by the grace of discernment, said, ”All the fruits, new and old, I have kept for you, my beloved. As if she openly says: I know very certainly that no one can be saved except by your grace, no mortal can become perfectly blessed before you, having become mortal, open the way of true happiness to the heavenly realms.

For all the just ones I have seen, I have kept for your most holy coming with certain faith, by which I learned that they would reach perfect happiness. Likewise, the Church of the New Testament expresses a similar sentiment through the voice of its first pastor, denouncing those who thought otherwise with this: Why do you test God, putting a yoke on the necks of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? but we believe to be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they do (Acts XV). The following sentence proves this exposition to be true, as it is added:

Chapter 8

[Song of Solomon 8:1] -- Who will grant me my brother, etc.? For this song bears witness in many places, and in all, and particularly in this place, that nothing carnal and according to the letter is sounded, but it wants to be understood wholly spiritually and typically: for what woman can there be who suddenly desires her lover, her beloved, not to be the young man as he was, but to be reborn to her as a brother in an infantile age and nursed at the breasts of her mother, whom she had been accustomed to find already grown up? Therefore this is the voice of the ancient righteous ones, who believed the Lord Savior, whom they believed to

be consubstantial with the Father and the Holy Spirit in divinity and worshipped with due reverence in human form, and they desired to see Him consubstantial with men, so that they might see in Him whom the prophecies foretold. They desired to hear that most fitting voice of their Creator, which He uttered with His hands extended to the disciples saying, Behold, my mother and my brethren (Mark III). They wished to receive that delightful message which the same disciples received after the triumph of the resurrection, Go tell my brethren to go to Galilee, there they will see me (Matthew XXVIII);

attested by the same beloved, who said elsewhere to the same disciples, Many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it (Matthew XIII). What he says, Suckling at the breasts of my mother, cannot be understood specifically of the glorious mother of God, of whom it is truly said, Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts at which you nursed (Luke X); and of whom He Himself says in the Psalm, From the womb of my mother you have been my God (Psalm XXI); which is plainly to say, You who were my Father before the ages, since I began to be man, you are also my God. For neither Solomon nor any righteous man of his age could call the blessed Mary his mother, who was to be born in the world much later. But the Synagogue calls the substance of human nature its mother, from which it was born, and it desired the Redeemer of all to be born and nursed. Concerning whose birth, burning with great love, it further added:

[Song of Solomon 8:1] -- And I will find you outside, etc. Surely he was within, because in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John I). But so that he might also be found outside, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Ibid.). Indeed, the patriarchs saw, the prophets saw the Lord, but within, that is, in the contemplation of the spiritual mind, not in the gaze of the carnal eye. They saw him, but in an image, in the form of an angelic substance; but his very nature, which he showed through the angels as he wished, they could by no means see. Finally, the lawgiver himself, who merited to hear, "I will show you all good" (Exodus XXXIII), again heard, "You cannot see my face, for no one shall see my face and live" (Exodus XXXIII). Happy are they who merited to confer among themselves, "We have found the Messiah, which is called Christ" (John I), and again, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus, the son of Joseph of Nazareth. For it aptly applies to such, that he says: "That I may find you outside, and kiss you" (Cant. VIII). The Synagogue indeed kissed the beloved when found, in those who now, face to face, in the truth of assumed flesh, saw him, who merited to speak with him mouth to mouth.

For this is the kiss, that is, the most loving gift of that mouth, and the exchange of mutual speech, which in this song the Synagogue sought above all, thus beginning: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth. Well indeed, by wishing, she adds, "And no one will despise me anymore: for the Church was despised by external men, as if it were small and of no value, as long as it was confined to the narrowest limits of Judea; but when the Lord came in the flesh, she began to spread out through all nations, already made formidable to the world,

as if she were about to fill the whole globe and overthrow the worship of all gods; for it was proven by the fact that a war was publicly declared against her by the whole world: in which war, however, she, either by living or by dying, overcoming, became even more fearful to the whole world. The Church was also despised by unclean spirits, because they boasted that they had deceived the human race and dragged them from their heavenly homeland into this exile and multifarious distress, and that there was no person who could exist entirely free from their dominance.

But after the Mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus, came into the world, and being tempted, overcame the same enemy by whose temptation the first man was once overcome, he also went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, and at last by dying, destroyed him who held the power of death, and bringing with him the entire multitude of the preceding just from hell, led them to the joys of the kingdom which the first man had lost, and placed the sign of his victory on the foreheads of the faithful. The life of good men is no longer despised by them, because they see that they have been conquered through a man, and they grieve that the human race has been transferred to the kingdom which they lost through pride. It is also fitting to believe concerning the holy angels, that they despised the life of elected men less, after they saw God and their Lord loving the human race so much that he himself deigned to become man, to converse among men, and to die. Hence it is that before his incarnation, they patiently bore being worshipped by men; but in the Apocalypse, an angel forbids John, who started to worship him, saying, ”See that you do not do that; I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus: worship God” (Apoc. XII, 17).

Hence, rightly sighing for the advent of the same Lord Jesus, that ancient multitude of the elect said, ”Who will give you to me, my brother, that I may find you outside, and kiss you, and no one will despise me anymore? Where it is aptly added:

[Song of Solomon 8:2] -- I will apprehend thee, etc. But thus the Synagogue speaks, as Paul says, We who live, who are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep (1 Thess. IV). He, though knowing certainly that he could not endure in the flesh until the day of judgment, yet on account of the fellowship of one and the same brotherhood, joins himself to the number of those who in the advent of the Judge will be found alive in the flesh. And here, therefore, the ancient people of God speaks from the perspective of that part of itself which would see Him appearing in the flesh: I will apprehend thee, and bring thee into my mother’s house: I will receive thee with ready and faithful devotion as thou comest, and with eager desires I will embrace thy words, I will await thy promises, and after the dispensation of the flesh is completed, I will lead thee back to the heavens with joyous eyes, I will proclaim thee with a joyful voice to all. For this is the house of His mother, namely the happiness of the heavenly homeland, for the inhabitation of which human nature was created, to which, if no one had sinned, the whole human race would have passed from the delights of paradise, in which the first man was placed, without the intermediary of death.

Into this house, therefore, the Church promises to bring her Lord, not able to achieve this by her own power, but desiring it to be fulfilled through her prayers, proclaiming it to be fulfilled or predicting it to be fulfilled; just as the Psalmist could exalt Him to the heavens, who nevertheless said, I will extol thee, O Lord, for thou hast raised me up (Psalm XXIX). Which is to say openly, Because thou hast deigned to take upon thee my human frailty, rightly do I profess the praises of thy power, who hast glorified this with the unfailing delight of my mind.

[Song of Solomon 8:2] -- There you will teach me, etc. There you will teach me, in the very substance of flesh, in which I will find you outwardly and kiss you; there you will give me the precepts of your Gospel, which the prophets, the law, and the psalms promised: there you will teach me to hope for more excellent gifts than I read in the law and the prophets; or certainly to be understood more deeply: there you will teach me in that house of my mother, into which I desire to lead you with a delightful company of eyes, and at the same time with praise of words. For there he taught and teaches the Church, from that part of it which he has received to himself there. There he will teach the whole Church, when, the universal judgment having been completed, his saints will be nowhere else, but all in heaven with him. What he will teach there, he himself designates in the Gospel, when in that most sweet and extensive discourse, which he held with it last before the passion, he says among other things: These things I have spoken to you in proverbs: the hour is coming, when I will no longer speak to you in proverbs, but I will tell you plainly about the Father, that is, I will plainly show you the Father.

[Song of Solomon 8:2] -- And I will give you a cup of spiced wine, etc. The Church gives a cup of wine to the Lord when, having received His benefits, it returns great and fervent gratitude of love, and the wine itself is not pure, but seasoned as if with a mixture of noble spices when the same love is proven by the attestation of good works. Nor should we only engage in those works that show our love for the Creator, but also those that demonstrate our fraternal love, if we wish to offer a worthy and acceptable cup of our devotion to Him. This is clearly differentiated by Him when, admonishing His disciples not to show their righteousness before men to be seen by them, He immediately added three types of good action to conclude the same instruction: namely, almsgiving, prayer, and fasting; clearly indicating that our righteousness should consist in these three. For almsgiving pertains to all we mercifully do to relieve our neighbor's needs; prayer encompasses all that we perform with devoted piety to appease our Creator; fasting involves the full chastisement of the mind by which we strive to abstain from vices and worldly contagions. And because the holy Church offers not only the purity of life to her beloved but also the precious cup of death in many of her members for His love, it is fitting that after saying, "And I will give you a cup of spiced wine," it adds, "And the juice of my pomegranates.

For the pomegranates are the same as the pomegranates; they are called pomegranates because of their abundance of seeds and are known as "pomegranates" because they are especially abundant in Africa and around Carthage. Since they hold the figure of the

blessed martyrs, the reddish color itself is indicative. And well does he call it the juice of pomegranates, not a potion, wine, or strong drink, to signify the fervor of unquenchable love in the heart of the victorious army. For the juice, that is, wine taken directly from the press, is usually of greater fervor; therefore it aptly suits their most fervent virtue, who do not hesitate to pass through iron and flames for the vision of the Creator: for since this type of drink is said to not only heal the heat of the stomach and corrupted belly but also benefit the rest of the body, who does not see that the fervor of charity, the more it abounds, the more it covers, indeed even extinguishes the multitude of sins? Let then the ancient congregation of the righteous, desiring to see their creator's advent in the flesh, say, "There you will teach me, and I will give you a cup of spiced wine, and the juice of my pomegranates. As if openly declaring:

"There, that is, in the very time or place where I will have found and deserved to speak with You, and You will give me the commands and gifts appropriate for the Son of God appearing in human form to men, and I will render to You the service of an undivided heart, which is truly due to God; because surely His advent grants heavenly rest to the Church laboring in the adversities of the world, both now in hope and in the future in reality," rightly does it continue:

[Song of Solomon 8:3] -- His left hand is under my head, etc. By His left hand He designates the sacraments of His incarnation and the gifts of His presence; by His right hand, indeed, He symbolizes the rewards that the elect will receive in the future: among these is not only the vision of divine majesty, but also the glory of glorified humanity, and of the same one Mediator between God and men. Hence, the bride rightly desires His left hand to be placed under her head, while His right hand embraces her, so that now she may rest from worldly turmoil through His temporal aid and then enjoy His manifest vision perpetually. And indeed the eternal rest of the saints is never interrupted by any disturbance. Hence it is rightly said, And His right hand will embrace me, because certainly the presence of divine majesty will surround His own in the heavenly kingdom on all sides, lest any remembrance of misery or fear of an end should violate the happiness worthy of God. Hence also in the Apocalypse John says, And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away: and again: And night shall be no more. And they will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will give them light, and they shall reign forever and ever (Apoc. XXII).

But indeed the rest granted to the faithful in the present can by no means be perfect, because the ancient enemy, death, is not yet destroyed. Hence it happens that often the blessed rest of the good, like the most pleasant sleep which makes their minds intent on divine matters almost insensible to this world, is disturbed by the attacks of the wicked, namely of those who, ignorant of the happiest rest, have rather accustomed themselves to remain awake through love of the fleeting world. And would that only those who openly belong to the world and attack the peace of the Church did so, and not even those who within her impede

her spiritual endeavors with their carnal ways. But because she indeed also generates many such as these, the Lord admonishes them not to presume to disturb the minds of the faithful devoted to the Church's prayer, or reading, or other acts of piety, when, having heard the desire of her heart, He immediately added:

[Song of Solomon 8:4] -- I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, not to awaken, etc. For such souls are rightly called daughters of Jerusalem, because they are united to the body of the holy Church through the bath of regeneration, because they aspire to the heavenly kingdom, although on the foundation of right faith, they build not gold, not silver, not precious stones, but wood, hay, and stubble. Therefore, do not awaken, he says, the beloved with the tumult of carnal disturbances, and do not make her watch from the rest of her calm devotion, with which she delights to stand before the sight of her Creator. Until she herself desires, that is, until, having duly completed the services of divine worship, she herself, urged to return to the common care of human frailty, consents. And because, after Judea has flowed to the faith of the Lord's incarnation, a multitude of gentiles followed, and hastened to be partakers of the same grace, admiring her unexpected conversion, Judea suddenly exclaims.

[Song of Solomon 8:5] -- Who is this who ascends from the desert, etc.? But the Church of the gentiles ascends from the desert, because she who had been abandoned by her Creator for a very long time, now advancing with steps of faith and good works, has reached His grace, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah, where he says, "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose" (Isaiah 35). Overflowing with delights, namely those about which the bridegroom above says, "How beautiful and how charming you are, my love, in delights!" that is, in the desires of heavenly life. Leaning on my beloved: rightly leaning on Him, without whose aid she could not only ascend to the heights but could not even rise: for both the advancement of virtues and the very beginnings of faith we can only have by the Lord's granting. Therefore Judea marveled more at this grace of the new conversion of the gentiles, since she believed that only she and those who were received into her rite through the mystery of circumcision belonged to it, as the book of the Acts of the Apostles most openly testifies. Therefore, when she said with admiration, "Who is this who ascends from the desert, overflowing with delights?" she concluded with even greater admiration, leaning on my beloved. "My beloved," she said, meaning, "the one whom I thought loved only me and was unknown to other nations"; to which He, who is our peace, who made both one, and came to preach peace to us who were far off, and peace to those who were near (Ephesians 2), responded, reminding her to remember the grace by which she herself was rescued from gravest evils and brought to the way of truth, and to rejoice in the salvation of others as well, since the author of salvation and life is rich to all who call on Him.

[Song of Solomon 8:5] -- Under the apple tree, I awakened you, etc. The apple tree most aptly symbolizes the wood of the holy cross, on which He deigned to hang for the salvation of all; about which the Church said above in praise, "As an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons." Under the apple tree, therefore, the Lord awakened the

Synagogue, which He recalled from eternal death through the faith in His Passion. Under this same tree, His mother and progenitor was also corrupted and violated, namely the major and elder portion of His people. Certainly, she who, seduced by the persuasion of her leaders, chose Barabbas over the Lord, foolishly shouting, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matthew 27). For she was also under the tree of the cross, not humbly submitting herself to this faith, but stubbornly invoking its vengeance upon her. From whose company separating the people who agreed to believe, the Lord exhorts them to retain in their heart the memory of the grace given to them, and to join works worthy of the faith received. He follows with:

[Song of Solomon 8:6] -- "Set me as a seal upon your heart," etc. Place me as a seal upon your heart, by thought; upon your arm, by action, so that charity from a pure heart, and a good conscience, and unfeigned faith (I Tim. I) may be within, and the same devotion of the heart, which the inner judge sees, may also be proven by good deeds visible to outward eyes, to the glory of the Father who is in heaven. He rightly says, Place me as a seal: for we often carry some sign tied to our finger or arm, by which we may be reminded of that thing whose memory we care to keep more frequently. Thus, the Lord also wishes us, by the present sign, always to be reminded to keep His commandments, according to what He Himself commands, saying about the law which He gave: It shall therefore be as a sign on your hand, and as a mark before your eyes for remembrance (Exod. XIII). And it comes to pass that if we continuously bear His memory in our breast, He who granted us this grace, being mindful of us eternally, may keep us happy with His presence in His heavenly kingdom, as if with the function of a seal, according to what He promises to the distinguished leader of His people, saying, I will take you, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, my servant, and I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, says the Lord (Haggai II).

To the contrary, rejecting him who turned to apostasy after faith, He says, If Coniah son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were a signet ring on my right hand, I would still pull you off (Jer. XXII). Or certainly it should be more deeply understood, because a seal, where it is placed, is usually a sign of mysteries, of precious things, and those which ought not to be profaned; as it is written about the Lord, And He seals up the stars like under a seal (Job. IX): evidently so that they may not be opened or commanded except by the permission of Him who sealed them. Hence Abraham received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which is in the uncircumcision; for by circumcision which he received in the flesh, it was signified that the faith which he had already received even before circumcision was effective for the purification of both heart and body; which faith we now have without fleshly circumcision, in which we are also justified, according to the prophet and apostle's saying, The just shall live by faith (Rom. I). Therefore, our Lord Jesus Christ should be placed as a seal upon our heart, as a seal upon our arm, so that we may know that everything He did or said in the flesh is heavenly and mysterious.

For since He Himself is the power of God and the wisdom of God, we place Him as a seal upon our heart, when we learn the things He said as if they are truly divine words of wisdom;

we place Him as a seal upon our arm, when we strive to hear and follow, as much as we can, the things He did, as if they are true examples of virtue. Again, we place the Lord as a seal upon our heart and arm, when we keep His commandments in the present for the reward of that which we are not yet able to see.

[Song of Solomon 8:6] -- For love is as strong as death, etc. This love, or jealousy, can rightly be understood both in our Lord Redeemer and in His chosen ones: for the love by which He loved us was as strong as death, because it was so great that through it He came to death for us. Hence, He says, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). The zeal by which He was zealous for us was as harsh as hell, because He could not be diverted from His concern for our salvation by any temptations of opposing enemies, just as hell cannot be mitigated by any tortures of the wretched, nor its severity be changed. This comparison indeed appears austere, but the more austere the comparison is given, the more the affection of our zealous Lord is commended. Of whom He Himself, having driven the deceitful from the temple, says to the Father, "Zeal for Your house has consumed me" (Psalms 69:9). And the greater His zeal is shown, the graver the condemnation follows us if we spurn it. But even the love of His faithful is as strong as death, because they cannot be separated from it by the bitterness of death itself. Hence, they confidently say, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? (Romans 8:35).

Their pure and God-devoted jealousy is likened to hell, because just as it never loses those whom it has once seized, so the fervency of their zealous persistence never cools at any time. It is the same zeal by which Phinehas, inflamed, struck down the fornicators in the desert; the same by which Elijah burned, when after suspending the waters of heaven, and then recalling them after three years, after slaying the prophets of Baal, and turning the heart of the people to the Lord, he said: "I have been very zealous for the Lord of hosts, for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, they have thrown down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword" (1 Kings 19:14); the same zeal Peter used when he led the lying neophytes to death; the same of which Paul speaks to the Corinthians: "I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2-3).

Appropriately, in this place, was introduced the greatness of perfect love or zeal, where Judea, marveling at the new conduct of the Gentiles, was reminded by the Lord to bring back to mind the gifts of piety that were granted to her, because clearly after the corruption of her mother and her own mother, she herself was awakened through the tree of the cross in the first resurrection to grace. Similarly, this sentence can fittingly be applied to the preceding: Remember, O Church gathered from the Jews, that you have come to life through the wood of my passion, and never forget that the greatness of love and zeal led me to death for you. Nor marvel that I have received into my faith the crowds of Gentiles, whom you see

inflamed with such great love and such great zeal to fulfill my will that it seems easier that either death could be convinced not to seize more souls from the world, or hell, not to receive those seized, than it would be for them ever to depart from my faith. Do not think you can please me with mere verbal profession alone; rather, if you wish to come to life, place the memory of my will as a seal upon your heart, place it on your arm;

and so imbue your mind with divine or brotherly love, so zealously, that the gathering of your people into the heavenly citizenry may be fully completed, so that such love, such zeal, can never be changed or diminished by any state of opposing or alluring things. Some understand the statement ”Zeal is as harsh as Hell” to refer to the envy that the synagogue often had against the Church of the Gentiles; thus it is read in the Acts of the Apostles, ”On the following Sabbath, nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting what was said by Paul” (Acts 13). This zeal is harsh as Hell because it consumes the soul it has captured with the plague of impiety. Hence it is written, ”Zeal seized the ignorant people, and now the fire consumes the adversaries. If understood this way, the Lord rightly admonishes the synagogue not to be held by this zeal against the Church when it sees it rising from the desert of vices and abounding in heavenly delights, adhering with an irrevocable mind to her Beloved, lest by envying others she loses the goods she could have had herself. Adding more on the strength of love, He says: ”Its flashes are flashes of fire, a most vehement flame,” meaning the fire within them in that same charity they internally burn; while the flames, in the execution of righteousness, shine far and wide.

Did not the hearts of those who said, ”Were not our hearts burning within us while He spoke to us on the road, and opened the Scriptures to us” (Luke 24), prove themselves to be lamps of fire? Did our Lord not want us to be lamps of flame when He said: ”Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works” (Matt. 5)? Those are the lamps which the virgins who have them will enter the marriage chamber of the eternal kingdom with the bridegroom. These have placed His love and fear upon their hearts and arms, that is, all their thoughts and actions they have subjected to His commandments. Then indeed the lamps of the foolish will go out, because their works, by which they seemed to shine before men, will grow dim when the internal Judge comes and reveals the intentions of hearts, for they performed their good works with a view to temporary praise.

[Song of Solomon 8:7] -- Many waters could not extinguish love, etc. He calls the many waters and the rivers the onslaught of temptations, which either visibly or invisibly do not cease to attack the souls of the faithful: for they attempt to overcome them both through open adversaries of faith, and through false brethren, and through the hidden snares of the ancient enemy; yet they are not able in any way to capture with temptations the hearts that are accustomed to being rooted and grounded in love, for the firm promise of truth stands, which says: When you pass through the water, I will be with you, and the rivers will not overwhelm you (Isaiah 43); and in the Gospel about the house built upon the rock: When the flood came, it says, the river burst against that house and could not shake it; for it was

founded upon the rock (Matthew 7); and since in whatever mind the love of eternal goods abounds, soon the love of fleeting things diminishes, rightly it is added:

[Song of Solomon 8:7] -- If a man gives all the substance of his house, etc. This sentence does not require an explanation of words, as both the apostles themselves at the beginning and countless believers afterward have sufficiently proved its truth by their examples, when for the love of the truth they seemed to leave everything they possessed in this world, and appeared to lose nothing to themselves, so long as they would receive true goods in heaven. Which the Lord clearly indicated in the Gospel with two consecutive parables: "The kingdom of heaven," He says, "is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man, having found, hides, and for joy thereof goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field" (Matthew XIII). "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matthew XIII). Hence the excellent preacher said most excellently, "For the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him" (Philippians III).

But if it read, as some manuscripts have, "He will despise him," a very different sense is generated, that which the Apostle commends when he says, "If I give away all I have to the poor, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing" (I Corinthians XIII). Therefore, if a man gives all the substance of his house to the poor out of love, that is, for the sake of love, it is as if he gave nothing, and he will be despised by the judge who sees his heart empty of love. Although this seems contrary to the previous sense, it nonetheless demonstrates how high and necessary the virtue of love is; and both proceed to signify that we always carry love in our work simply like a seal.

[Song of Solomon 8:8] -- Our little sister, etc. And this is addressed by the Lord to the Synagogue, admiring the faith or reception of the Church of the Gentiles; with great dispensation, calling her their sister, that is, both His and the Synagogue's, so that the same Synagogue may recollect that the presence of its Creator was made through grace, and that it may rejoice more and more for the addition of the genuine society in grace. The sister, however, of the Lord the Savior is the entire Church gathered from both peoples, and each holy soul, not only because of the assumption of the same nature by which He also became human, but also by the grant of grace, by which He gave to those who believe in Him the power to become children of God, so that He who was the only Son of God by nature became the firstborn among many brothers by grace. Hence there is that most sweet saying of His to Mary: "Go to my brothers and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father; to my God, and your God" (John 20). Therefore, when He says, "Our little sister is immature and has no breasts," He designates the early times of the nascent Church of the Gentiles, when it was still small in the number of believing peoples, and less capable of preaching the word of God.

Read the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, which extends from the eighteenth year of Tiberius Caesar to the fourth year of Nero, and you will find that during the preaching

of the apostles, many crowds from the Gentiles believed; yet you will not find that they preached during that entire time of about thirty years. For the Church of the Gentiles was still small and was not yet sufficient to generate or nourish through doctrine the sons of Christ. Therefore, the Lord admonishes the Synagogue, using fraternal charity, to rejoice in auspicious salvation, and to offer aid to its immaturity so that it can grow. To which He also adds:

[Song of Solomon 8:8] -- What shall we do for our sister, etc.? The Lord speaks to the Church; He speaks to every chosen soul, when He admonishes it for eternal salvation, either through the hidden illumination of His Spirit or the open voice of preachers, in which address divine mercy considers the measure of our capabilities and grants its gifts according to the capacity of human understanding. So He says: "What shall we do for our sister on the day when she is to be spoken to?" As if He openly says: "Indeed, the Church of the Gentiles is small in number, and not yet sufficient to undertake the ministry of the word." What, then, does it seem to you, O Synagogue, should be done with regard to the care of her, that is, our sister, at the time when I begin to address her through my apostles and their successors? Should we entrust her, still as a little child, with the small secrets of heaven? Or should we already render her greater by growth so that, progressing well, she may be capable of perfect virtues? To her, silent and rather listening to what He Himself would want, He immediately reveals what it is proper to do, thus adding:

[Song of Solomon 8:9] -- If she is a wall, let us build on it, etc. It is customary for the Lord Himself often to be designated in Sacred Scripture by the name of a wall or door. For He is rightly called a wall because He fortifies His Church on all sides, lest it be plundered by enemies; a door rightly, because it is only through Him that we enter either the fellowship of the Church or the ramparts of the eternal kingdom. For He says of Himself, I am the door of the sheep; if anyone enters by me, he will be saved (John 10). And again, No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14). The prophet, foretelling future gifts to the Church, says of Him: A wall and a rampart will be set within it (Isaiah 26). The wall indeed is He Himself appearing in the flesh; the rampart, however, is the revelation of prophecy, which by predicting Him to be incarnate from the world's beginning, greatly aided the structure of the Church. But He who, by appearing in the flesh, deigned to make the Church His sister, also granted her the participation of His name, so that she might also be called a wall and door: a wall indeed in those who, endowed with greater knowledge and power of the Spirit, are strong enough to fortify and defend the minds of the faithful from the incursions of error by resisting the weapons of iniquity;

a door in those who, though less trained to repel the sophisms of heretics or pagans, are nevertheless wholesomely imbued with the simplicity of the Catholic faith, would open the entrance of the kingdom to those who wished by preaching, and lead them through the mystery of second regeneration into the courts of the heavenly life: just as He did not refrain from bestowing other names of virtues that undoubtedly specially pertain to Him to the more perfect members of His Bride. For instance, You are the light of the world (Matthew

10), and again, Behold, I send you out as sheep among wolves (Luke 10); although He Himself is the true light that enlightens everyone coming into this world (John 1). He is the immaculate and uncontaminated Lamb who took away the sin of the world. Therefore, if she is a wall, He says, our sister, let us build upon her silver bulwarks; as if He were openly saying, If the Church of the Gentiles is suitable in some of its members, having men apt to teach, either naturally clever or instructed by philosophical training, we should not by any means deprive them of the ministry of teaching truth, but rather assist them by giving them the sacred pages of Scriptures, so that they may more strongly and easily guard the weak from the traps either of deceiving doctrine or corrupting example.

For indeed silver bulwarks are the sacred words of divine eloquence, about which it is said above, Your neck is like the tower of David, built with bulwarks, and about which in the psalm: The words of the Lord are pure words, silver tried in a furnace, proved in the earth (Psalm 12). If she is a door, let us panel her with cedar boards; if there are those in her who know how to imbue the little ones with the word of simple doctrine, and lead them into the inner parts of holy conversation, let us propose to them the unfading examples of former just ones, by which they may more effectively fulfill the office entrusted to them: for it is often said that the virtues of the chosen are signified by cedars. Indeed, the figure of the boards expresses the width of their hearts in which they receive the memory of heavenly words; about which the prophet says, I run the way of Your commandments, for You have enlarged my heart (Psalm 119). It was fitting that the Apostle desired his listeners to be adorned with these boards, when he said: Our mouth is open to you, O Corinthians, our heart is enlarged. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections; but having the same recompense, I speak as to my children, you also be enlarged (2 Corinthians 6). Wherefore Solomon also admonishes the lover of wisdom, saying; Write her on the tablets of your heart (Proverbs 7).

Hearing these counsels or promises of her Redeemer concerning her, the Church did not wait for the Synagogue's assent or answer to whom He was speaking, but immediately sprang up and responded to Him with a devoted voice:

[Song of Solomon 8:10] -- I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers, etc. I am rightly called a wall, because I am built of living stones, because I am united by the glue of charity, because I am placed upon an immovable foundation, and because I cannot be overthrown by any battering ram of a heretic. The firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His." But there are also among us those who, endowed with greater grace, transcend the general life of the faithful by the special height of their virtues as much as a tower surpasses a wall, and who nourish the little ones and those still weak in faith with the milk of simpler exhortation, as though with breasts, and who repel all the darts of the perverse with their excellent power of speech, like a firm tower: all of which I could not have by my own freedom of will, but I received before Him, as one finding peace, by His gracious gift, that is, from the time He deigned to grant me the gift of His peace through the word of reconciliation. For neither by my own effort was I able to come before

Him, from whom I had greatly departed, nor to recover the peace I had lost; but I most gratefully accepted the peace offered freely by Him. From the time He generously granted me this gift, I immediately grew in the virtues, and I profess that I am rightly compared to a wall, and that my breasts are like the towers, since I steadfastly repel hostile forces from harming that city, and I strive to raise new peoples for it always: because I could not have done this except through the gift of the peace granted by Him, I am pleased to speak further of the power of His peace.

[Song of Solomon 8:11] -- Solomon had a vineyard in Baal-Hamon; he leased the vineyard to keepers; everyone was to bring a thousand pieces of silver for its fruit. My own vineyard is before me. You, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and those who keep its fruit two hundred. Speaking of this, the Church, or the Synagogue, which he saw to be emulated by her or, to say more gently, marveling at her conversion to the Lord, or indeed to her maidens, whom she was accustomed to call daughters of Jerusalem by this song. The Peaceful one, however, whom she names, is her spouse and beloved, the Father of the future age, the Prince of peace (Isaiah 9), whose figure Solomon presented both in the peaceful state of his kingdom and in his name itself. In whose peace the vineyard existed, because by His grace the Catholic Church was established throughout the world. It is mentioned in many passages of Scripture, but most clearly in the Gospel parable where it is written: ”The kingdom of heaven is like a man who was a householder who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard,” etc. (Matthew 20); where by the laborers of the first, third, sixth, ninth, and eleventh hour it is clearly expressed that the one and the same Church of Christ, throughout the entirety of this age, which is signified by one day’s duration, is tirelessly cultivated by the labor of spiritual teachers.

Likewise, there was a vineyard for the peaceful one in it, that is, in that peace about which He had foretold that it would be made in His presence, as if finding peace; because whoever neglects to have peace does not belong to the Church of Christ, even if he seems to confess Christ and obey His commands. For in peace is His place established. And the Apostle says, ”Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see God” (Hebrews XII); The society of this peace is set before us by the very sight and form of a most beautiful vineyard, which, to use the words of blessed Ambrose, ”first plants a living root for the imitation of our life; then, because it is of a flexible and fragile nature, it clings with tendrils, like certain arms, to whatever it grasps, and with these raises and lifts itself. The people of the Church are like this, who are planted with a root of faith and restrained by the shoot of humility, and lest they be turned away by the storms of the world and driven by tempest, they embrace those around them with tendrils and circles, as if with the arms of charity, and rest in their union. This vineyard is cultivated when we are relieved from the burden of worldly concerns. For nothing burdens the mind more than such anxiety and desire, whether for money or power.

A cultivated vineyard is supported so that it may be elevated when our affection is raised by the example of the saints, and does not lie low and despised, but each mind lifts itself to

higher things, daring to say: ”Our conversation is in heaven” (Philippians III). This vineyard has peoples, because the holy Church is gathered not from one Jewish nation, but from the peoples of all nations. The Church of the Gentiles was especially added for this reason, to teach that it could belong to this vineyard, and that Judea should not glory in the exclusivity of the divine knowledge given to it; for the Psalmist says, ”Praise the Lord, all you nations” (Psalm CXVI). And Moses himself foretold, ”Rejoice, O nations, with His people” (Romans XV). Since the Lord greatly cares for this vineyard so that it may be kept undefiled, and there is great necessity for men to participate in it, it is rightly added:

[Song of Solomon 8:11] -- He entrusted it to the keepers, etc. For the keepers of the Church are the prophets, the keepers are the apostles, the keepers are the successors of the prophets and apostles, who in different ages of the world were given to its governance by divine command; the keepers are the heavenly host of the military, who at all times during the passing of the age take care for the state of the Church, lest it be disturbed by the inbreaking of the wicked, whether men or spirits. But the man brings a thousand silver coins for the fruit of this vineyard, because whoever makes progress in acquiring the heavenly kingdom forsakes all that is of the world: for the fruit of labors done temporarily for the Lord is the reception of the eternal rest and kingdom with the Lord. Concerning which He Himself said, ”I have appointed you that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain” (John XV); that is, that you should work and receive wages, and that wage itself should never be ended. Scripture is accustomed to call a man of perfect virtue vir (man): for indeed vir takes its name from virtue, since undoubtedly a vir, that is, a soul elevated by the grace of virtue, brings a thousand silver coins for the fruit of this vineyard when he forsakes all his temporal possessions so as to be worthy to receive eternal goods.

By the term silver coins, it designates any kind of money that should be forsaken. By the number a thousand, which is perfect and complete, the entirety is usually designated, and therefore by the thousand silver coins which a man is said to bring for the fruit of this vineyard, the entirety of what the perfect forsake for the Lord is indicated; which, even if sometimes small in valuation, is certainly judged to be great and abundant in the estimation of Him who considers not the sum of the given money, but the conscience of the giving man. This is the same sentiment which above is set forth in other words, ”If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, he will utterly be contemned”: indeed, here the thousand silver coins are set for all the substance of the house which is to be forsaken; but love, which, the other charismata ceasing, embraces us perpetually in the heavenly fatherland, is itself the fruit of the vineyard by which the blessed will then be satiated, who now in the same vineyard are laboring and are hungry and thirsty for righteousness. Then follows the voice of the One at peace, as it teaches how much care He has for His vineyard, namely the Church, what He conserves eternally for those who forsake their own for Him, what special reward He intends to give to the keepers of the same vineyard, that is, the teachers.

[Song of Solomon 8:12] -- My vineyard is before me, etc. ”Truly,” he says, ”you have been proven worthy because I have entrusted my vineyard to guardians, who would cultivate it

with their words and examples alike. But you should know that I have entrusted its care to the same guardians in such a way that I, nonetheless, incessantly observe what is happening in it, with what spirit, with what industry each person works in it; I watch how many covert attacks, how many open conflicts it endures from adversaries. And what more? Behold, I am with it all days until the end of the world. But when this will have appeared, then I will render fitting rewards to everyone who works in my vineyard, or for my vineyard, or against my vineyard. For those who have dispensed all that they had or could have acquired in the world for its fruit, that is, for the hope of the heavenly inheritance, have given to the poor, will certainly attain the realization of their hope; indeed, they will receive greater gifts in the heavens than they could have hoped for, since neither eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what God has prepared for those who love Him. But those who were guardians of the same vineyard by preaching or by shining through higher deeds will be given a double reward above other just ones.

Thus, it is said to Daniel through the angel, 'And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever' (Dan. XII). And this is also what here those who contemn transient goods for the sake of eternal perception, who, due to the unanimity of hope, are deemed by the title of a single man. 'A thousand,' he says, 'are yours, O peaceful ones,' and immediately he explained what greater reward is reserved for those who maintain the state of the Church with greater industry by adding: 'And two hundred for those who keep its fruits.' For a thousand and a hundred each being a perfect number, are rightly understood to be set for the perfection and fullness of eternal retribution. Indeed, two hundred, that is, a doubled hundred, designates greater rewards for perfect doctors; of which the Apostle speaks, even of those to be begun in this life: 'Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine' (I Tim. V). Therefore, he says, 'a thousand of yours are peaceful; a thousand of yours are silver, which you have brought for the fruit, peaceful in receiving my vineyard with me,' that is, preserved in their full number. Nor is it in any way for you to fear that you might lose any of the good works you have done through forgetfulness or through the ignorance of the just judge.

For I come to consider the deeds and thoughts of men, that I may gather them with all nations and tongues, and render to each according to their own body, as they have done. Likewise, because peacemakers are called such from their habit of making peace, just as those are called peaceful who uphold the laws of peace, peacemakers are the saints of silver who contribute through truth, for they open the path to the vision of eternal peace, which is customary to be expressed by the name of the heavenly city and mother of us all, the new Jerusalem. And two hundred to those who guard its fruits; it is understood, Silver peacemakers, that the full sentence be: Your silver peacemakers are a thousand, and two hundred silver peacemakers to those who guard its fruits; for those who undergo double labor in the present, both by living soberly, justly, and piously, and by ensuring the fruits of the church do not fail and are not seized by enemies, protecting them through their preaching, surely attain double rewards in the future. Therefore, the same distributor of gifts soon

encourages his church, or any soul devoted to good deeds, to persist as much as they can in preaching the word of truth. Dwelling, he says, in the gardens of a friend, listen, make me hear your voice. As if to say openly: Since our conversation, which has extended far, now needs to be concluded, what do I ask of you most, what do I request? Hear:

Nothing is sweeter to me than for you to dwell in the gardens, that is, to place your residence in the cultivation of spiritual fruits. And do not set up a hut there, as if to leave shortly, with makeshift work; but with a fixed and unwavering mind, await my coming. For you know that I am accustomed to often descend to my garden, to the bed of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies, that is, to see, help, and reward the pursuits of good works. Then I require a gift from you, that you make me hear your voice by preaching, as much as you can, my commandments of law and promises of reward. For whenever you do these things, remember that I always listen to you, who am always present to your prayers. Also, our friends listen, namely the angels, whom I have given you as helpers against the daily battles of evil spirits, and the spirits of just men, whom, having taken from your congregation, I have already gathered to the vision of my glory, to which you will all come someday. For both are friends to you, both observe your deeds and words. They greatly rejoice when they see you acting bravely for the attainment of the blessedness they enjoy; they exult whenever some of your faithful enter there; and they hasten to welcome them with their arms. Having said these things, immediately the Church replied:

[Song of Solomon 8:14] -- Flee, my beloved, etc. This phrase can rightly be understood both concerning the triumph of the Lord's ascension and concerning those things which occur daily in the Church. For the beloved flees after speaking to the bridegroom and his sister, because, having completed the dispensation of our Redemption, he returned to the heavens. He is likened to a roebuck and to a young stag upon the mountains of spices, because he most frequently appears through the grace of compunction in the hearts of his faithful, who are mountains of spices, because, despising lowly desires, they are held by the love of heavenly things, and purged of the stench of vices, they are filled with the special fragrance of virtues, saying with the Apostle, "But our conversation is in heaven" (Philippians III); and, "We are a sweet savor of Christ" (II Corinthians II). And indeed it is fitting that at the end of this sacred song, mention is made of his ascension and the ensuing grace, because a little earlier, the joys of his incarnation had been desired by the bride, saying, "Who would give you to me, my brother, sucking the breasts of my mother? The fruit of his passion had also been brought forth, with him saying, "I raised you up under the apple tree. And again, "For love is strong as death. Therefore, flee, my beloved, she says, and be like a roebuck or a young stag upon the mountains of spices:

as if to say openly, "Since appearing in the flesh, you have deigned to confer upon me the precepts and gifts of heavenly life which I always desired, now, the task of the holy dispensation having been completed, return now to the heights, to the bosom of the Father; yet, I beseech you, do not entirely withdraw from me the light of your frequent visitation; but just as a roebuck or a young stag, which, though they are untamed animals, not accustomed to

human access, yet are often seen on the mountains, so I ask you to remember to act with me, such that although you remain in the heavens bodily and do not return to human dwellings, you nevertheless provide me with the frequent aid of your divine presence. For in this way alone can I accomplish that great command which you gave me as a final farewell, that I always inhabit the gardens of virtues, always make my voice of confession and preaching heard to you. Moreover, this sentence can also, as we have said, be not inappropriately understood concerning the daily state of the holy Church. For the beloved indeed flees from the bride inhabiting the gardens whom he was addressing, when to a mind intent on good actions, either the grace of virtues, which he used to bestow, is temporarily withdrawn, or he submits it to the storms of temptations for testing, so that she is rightly compelled to say, "How long, O Lord, will you forget me? Forever?

How long will you turn your face away from me? etc., until the end of the psalm (Psalm XII). He is compared to a roebuck and a young stag on the mountains of spices; when again, as he himself judges it opportune, he places himself in the light of his protection, either lifting the peril of besetting temptations or restoring customary gifts of virtues which seemed to have been withdrawn. For, to pass over greater and more substantial charismata, as an example, healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out demons, a sure knowledge of secrets, a bright contemplation of heavenly joys and other such things, which even in the most exceptional members of the Church can hardly always be present. For it is evident concerning our smallness, because we can by no means always persist in the sweetness of prayers in the same and indistinguishable way, to shed tears either for the awareness of our guilt or for the desire of the heavenly homeland, to sympathize with a suffering neighbor, to resist pressing temptations; so that sometimes, much striving, we cannot use these goods, and at other times, even with less effort, we achieve abundance of them. What is to be made of this, unless because now the beloved flees, now he revisits our mind, with pious provision for each (somehow), so that we might grow in the progress of virtues through the grace bestowed and learn to guard humility through the virtue removed?

He withdraws the desired effect of virtue for a time, so that it may be held more tightly when restored; he returns what was withdrawn, so that the mind, exercised by frequent renewal, may stretch more fervently toward heavenly things. Therefore, what he says, "Flee, my beloved," he speaks not by desiring; who would want to drive away from his presence someone he loves? but rather with his will burning, mindful indeed of his custom, whereby often leaving in the midst of discourse, he moved aside and withdrew, so that he could be found only by diligent and long search; mindful also of his condition, because he cannot see him continuously in this time or place of pilgrimage. What then did he add? "Become like a roe or a young stag on the mountains of spices"; he follows by desiring and supplicating much, knowing that this is the greatest happiness in the present life for him, that since he cannot endure continuous vision, at least he may be consoled by frequent visitation. Which certainly this happiness is granted only to those who, by the contempt of earthly things and desire for heavenly joys, are deemed worthy to be called spiritual mountains of spices.

Book 7

In the exposition of the Song of Songs, which we explained in five books (for we composed the first volume of this work specifically against Julian, in defense of the grace of God, which he attacked, whence he also perished with that abandoned), we followed the footsteps of the Fathers so that in the meantime we left the works of the beloved of God and men, our pope and father Gregory, untouched; thinking it would be more pleasant for readers if those things which he discussed in explanation of this volume through all his scattered works, because they are many and elaborately said, we might put all together as a single collected volume, which we are now about to do with the help of the Lord. Therefore, let it be believed that the seventh book in the Song of Songs, collected indeed by our labor, but composed by the words and mind of the blessed Gregory, so that if anyone peradventure considers our works to be rightly despicable, he may have ready for reading his sayings, whom it is clear should by no means be despised. But if anyone also reads these of ours, captivated by love, just as a great architect places a golden pinnacle on the marble buildings of our smallness. However, I have heard that Paterius, a disciple of the same blessed Pope Gregory, from the whole of holy Scripture, those things which he [Gregory] explained in parts in his works, compiled them in order into one volume: that work if I had at hand, I would much more easily and perfectly fulfill the pursuit of my intention; but because I have not yet deserved to see it, I have taken care to imitate it on my own, as I could, with the Lord's help.

Excerpts From Gregory the Great

From the book of Job XXVII - Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth. The only-begotten Son can be designated by the mouth of God, just as He is called the arm of God because the Father does everything through Him. Of whom the prophet says, "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed" (John XII)? Of whom John says, "All things were made through Him" (John I). Thus, he may also be called the mouth, as if by the name of the mouth the word is plainly spoken, just as we are also accustomed to say the tongue for words; so when we say the Greek or Latin tongue, we refer to Greek or Latin words. Therefore, the mouth of the Lord is not unreasonably understood to mean the very one through whom He speaks everything to us. Hence the prophet says, "The mouth of the Lord has spoken this" (Isaiah LVIII). Whence also the bride in the Song of Songs says to him: Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth; as if she openly says, Let me be touched by the sweetness of the presence of my only-begotten Redeemer Son.

Also, from the same book above - And Matthew, observing that the precepts were given by the Lord on the mountain, says: “Opening his mouth, He taught” (Matt. V). As if he plainly says: Then He opened His mouth, who had previously opened the mouths of the prophets. Hence also the bride, desiring His presence, says, Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth (Song I). Indeed, the holy Church has come to know as many precepts from His teaching as if she received as many kisses of His mouth. In the exposition of the blessed Job, book XXX – Because your breasts are better than wine. These are the breasts, that is, the teachers, which being fixed in the chest-box, give us drink with milk, as they themselves adhering to the secrets of the highest contemplation, nourish us with their subtle preaching. In the exposition of the blessed Job, book XXIV – Therefore the maidens have loved you. Sacred Scripture is often accustomed to use youth for the newness of life. Hence, when the bride comes, it is said, the maidens have loved you (Song I); that is, the souls of the elect renewed by the grace of baptism, who do not perish in the practice of the old life but are adorned by the conversation of the new man.

In the exposition of Blessed Job, book XVIII - I am black, but beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem. True preachers do not boast of the light of righteousness; but through the grace of humility, they confess their blackness of sins. Hence also the elect Church says, I am black, but beautiful. And John says, If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves (1 John 1). In the exposition of the Seventeenth Homily on the Gospel.-- They made me a keeper of the vineyards, etc. This holy Church speaks of its weak members. Our vineyards are indeed our actions, which we cultivate through daily labor. But having been placed as keepers in the vineyards, we do not keep our own vineyard, because while we are involved in the actions of others, we neglect the ministry of our own actions. Again in the exposition of Blessed Job, Book XXX.-- Tell me, whom my soul loves, etc. The Lord is fed when He delights in our actions; He rests at noon when, from the burning desires of the reproaches’ hearts, He finds refreshment in the good thoughts of His elect.

In the exposition of Blessed Job, as above.-- Unless you know yourself, O beautiful among women, go forth, etc. She recognizes herself as beautiful among women when any elect soul, even while placed among sinners, remembers that it is made in the image and likeness of its Creator, so that it may walk according to the order of the likeness received. If she does not know herself, she is driven out from the secret of her heart, scattered in external desires; once driven out, she follows the footsteps of the flocks, for she abandons her inner self, and is led into the broad way, following the examples of the peoples; she no longer feeds the lambs but the kids, because she intends not to nourish innocent thoughts of the mind, but to nurture the depraved impulses of the flesh.

In exposition on blessed Job, book XXXV.-- While the king was at his table, my nard gave forth its fragrance. The virtues of those who are advancing become known to other men, as if with a sweetness they exude a fragrance. It is therefore that it is said through Paul, We are the sweet aroma of Christ to God (II Cor. II). Hence, the holy Church, having perceived the fragrance of sweetness in its elect, speaks in the Canticles, saying: While the king was

at his table, my nard gave forth its fragrance; as if it were to say more clearly, As long as the king remains hidden from my sight in the concealed rest of heavenly secrecy, the lives of the elect are exercised in wondrous fragrances of virtues, so that though it does not yet see him whom it longs for, it burns more intensely with desire. For while the king is set at his table, my nard gives forth its fragrance, while the Lord is at rest in His own blessedness, the virtue of the saints in the Church administers to us the grace of great sweetness.

In exposition on Ezekiel, Homily III, part II.-- Sustain me with flowers, strew me with apples, for I am faint with love. To one who loves her spouse dearly, there is a singular consolation in the delay of life here present if, through what defers her sight of Him, the souls of others advance by her word and are inflamed with the torches of love toward the heavenly spouse. Hence in the Canticles the bride says, Sustain me with flowers, strew me with apples, for I am faint with love. For what are flowers but souls beginning the good work and spreading the scent of heavenly desire? What are the apples from the flowers, but already perfected minds of the good, who reach the fruit of a good work, from the beginning of holy propitiation? Therefore, she who languishes with love seeks to be sustained by flowers, strewed with apples, because if she is not yet allowed to see Him whom she desires, it is a great consolation to her if she can rejoice in the progress of others. Therefore, the soul languishing with holy love is sustained by flowers and apples, so that she may rest in the good work of her neighbor, who is still unable to contemplate the face of God.

In the Exposition on the Blessed Job, Book VI, according to the interpreters of the LXX. -- I am wounded by love. My soul is ailing and, having been laid low by the blind love of this exile, neither saw the Lord nor sought to see Him. But struck by the darts of His love, she is wounded in her deepest affections with a sense of piety; she burns with a desire for contemplation, and in a wondrous way, is brought to life through her wound, who previously lay dead in salvation. She yearns, she gasps, she even desires to see, whom she fled from. Thus, through the wound, she is brought back to salvation, who, for the sake of the security of inner peace, is recalled to the perturbation of her love. In the Codex of the Shepherd's Rule, under the title.-- His left hand is under my head, etc. The Church places God's left hand, that is to say, the prosperity of present life, as if under her head, which she presses with the intention of the highest love. But God's right hand embraces her, because under His eternal blessedness, she is wholly embraced with devotion. Hence also it is written, "Thy right hand, O Lord, has dashed in pieces the enemy" (Exod. XV). For the enemies of God both advance by His left hand and are broken by His right hand; because often the present life elevates the wicked, but the coming of eternal blessedness condemns them.

In the Exposition of the Gospel Homily XXVIII.-- Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping over the hills. In coming to our redemption, the Lord made, so to speak, certain leaps. Do you wish, dearest brothers, to know his very leaps? He came from heaven into the womb, from the womb into the manger, from the manger to the cross, from the cross to the tomb, from the tomb he returned to heaven. Behold, to make us run after Him, He made certain leaps for our sake out of the manifested truth in the flesh; He also rejoiced

as a giant to run His course (Psalm XVIII), so we might say to Him from the heart: "Draw me after you, and we will run in the fragrance of your ointments."

In expos. Ezechielis, Hom. I, part. II.-- Behold, he stands behind our wall. The Holy Church, openly desiring now to see the Lord under the voice of the bride, says: Behold, he stands behind our wall. For he who revealed to human eyes what he assumed from mortality, and remained invisible in himself, stood as if behind a wall to those seeking to see him openly; because he did not present himself to be seen clearly in majesty, as if he stood behind a wall, who showed the nature of humanity which he assumed; and hid the nature of divinity from human eyes. Whence it is also added there, Looking through the windows, peering through the lattice; for whoever looks through windows or lattices, is neither seen wholly, nor wholly unseen. Thus indeed the Redeemer was made before the eyes of the doubters, because if, performing miracles, he had suffered nothing as a man, God would have clearly appeared to them; and again, suffering as a man, if he had done nothing as God, he would have been thought a man. But because he both did divine things, and endured human things, he looked out to men as if through windows or lattices, so that God appeared from the miracles, while he lay hidden from the sufferings, and man was discerned from the sufferings, yet nevertheless was recognized to be beyond man from the miracles.

In expos. beati Job, lib. XXVII.-- Arise, hasten, my beloved, my beautiful one, and come. Because the holy preachings will cease with the present life, that is, rains with winter will desist, rightly is said by the voice of the bridegroom to the departing soul and hastening to the eternal summer: Arise, hasten, my beloved, my beautiful one, and come; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. For with winter passing, the rain recedes, because with the present life being completed, in which we were bound by the cloud of ignorance, the torpor of corruptible flesh, all the ministry of preaching ceases. For we will see more clearly through ourselves then what we now hear more obscurely through the voices of the saints.

"Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, etc. Whether it is the holy Church, or each individual soul chosen for the heavenly spouse, it is a friend through love, a dove through the spirit, and beautiful through the beauty of morals: when it is led out from the corruption of the flesh, without doubt winter has passed for it, because the lethargy of the present life departs. The rain also is gone and departed, because when it is led out to contemplate the omnipotent Lord in His substance, the drops of words will no longer be necessary, so that the rain of preaching should be poured. For what it could hear less, it will see more. Then flowers appear on the earth, because when the soul begins to taste some beginnings of the life of eternal beatitude, it already perceives in the flowers what it will more abundantly have in the fruit after it has departed. Therefore, it is also said there, The time of pruning has come. In pruning, indeed, the barren branches are cut off so that those which prevail may bear fruit more abundantly. Therefore, the time of our pruning will have come when we abandon the barren and harmful corruption of the flesh, so that we may reach the fruit of the soul. This fruit will be most abundant for us, the vision of God."

In the exposition on the Twenty-Fifth Homily of the Gospel.— On my bed through the nights I sought him whom my soul loves, etc. We seek the beloved on the bed when, in the slight rest of this present life, we sigh with the desire of our Redeemer. We seek through the night, because although the mind is already awake in Him, yet the eye still is dim. But the one who does not find the beloved must rise, go around the city, that is, mentally and inquisitively go through the holy Church of the elect. Seek him through the streets and squares, that is, look at those walking through narrow and wide paths, so that if one might find any traces in them, one might investigate: because there are some even in secular life who have something of virtuous action to imitate. While we are seeking, the watchmen who guard the city find us, because the holy Fathers, who guard the decrees of the Church, come to meet our good pursuits, to teach us by their word or writing: when we pass them by a little, we find whom we love, because our Redeemer, though a man in humanity among men, was nevertheless above men in divinity. Therefore, when the watchmen are passed, the beloved is found, because when we see that the prophets and apostles are beneath Him, we consider that He, by nature God, is above men. Therefore, he is sought first not to be found, so that afterward, when found, he may be held more tightly.

Additionally, in the exposition on the Blessed Job, Book Eighteen.—When the Church was seeking its Redeemer, it did not wish to set its hope on these ancient preachers; thus it says, After I had passed by them a little, I found him whom my soul loves: for it could not find Him if it had not passed by these. Similarly, in the Exposition of Ezekiel, Homily VI, part II, the bride in the Song of Songs speaks anxiously with holy desires, saying: On my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but did not find him. For she seeks her beloved on her bed when in her own rest and leisure she longs to see the Lord, already desires to go out to Him, and sighs to be free from the darkness of the present life. But she seeks Him and does not find Him, because although she desires with great love, it is still not granted to her to see whom she loves.

What is this that comes up through the desert, etc.? The holy Church of the elect, when it lifts itself with burning love in holy prayers from this world, ascends through the desert that it abandons. But how it ascends, it adds: Like a column of smoke from aromatics. Smoke arises from incense; and through the Psalmist it is said, Let my prayer be directed like incense in Your sight (Psalm 140). Smoke is accustomed to bring forth tears. Therefore, smoke from aromatics is the compunction of prayer, conceived from the virtues of love. Nevertheless, this prayer is called a small column of smoke because it seeks only heavenly things from God. Thus it progresses straight, so that it is not turned back by earthly and temporal desires for earthly pursuit. And it should be noted that it is not called a rod, but a small rod, because sometimes in the ardor of compunction, the force of love burns with such subtility that even the mind that has deserved to be enlightened cannot comprehend it. It is indeed well said, Of myrrh and frankincense. For frankincense is burned to the Lord as a sacrifice according to the law. Through myrrh, however, dead bodies are preserved so that they do not decompose by worms. Therefore, they offer a sacrifice of myrrh and frank-

incense, who afflict the flesh so that the vices of corruption do not dominate them; and they burn a fragrant incense in the sight of the Lord, the sacrifice of their love.

Thus, myrrh, because they torment themselves and in torment keep away from vices; and frankincense, because they love the vision of God, to which they ardently desire to attain, and offer themselves to Him in holy virtues. Hence it is also added there, And all the powder of the perfumer. The perfumer's powder is the virtue of good deeds. And it should be noted that the virtues of good deeds are called powders, not pigments: for when we undertake any good actions, we reflect upon them and consider with the judgment of reflection whether there is anything wrong in them, we make powder from pigments, so that we may more subtly inflame our work to the Lord through discernment and love.

In expositon of blessed Job, book VII.-- Behold the bed of Solomon, sixty mighty men, etc. The strength of the righteous is to conquer the flesh, to oppose personal pleasures, to extinguish the delight of present life, to love the harshness of this world for eternal rewards, to despise the allurements of prosperity, to overcome the fear of adversity in the heart. Therefore, sixty mighty men from the strongest of Israel encompass the bed of Solomon, because the saints each contemplate without any doubt the internal rest of desire. In exposition of blessed Job, book XIX.-- All holding swords and extremely skilled in battle. What is figured by the sword in divine Scripture, Paul has revealed, saying: And the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. But Solomon does not say, All having, but holding, because indeed the Word of God is not only marvelous to know but to do. For he has but does not hold the sword, who indeed knows divine speech but neglects to live according to it. And he cannot be skilled in battle who exercises the spiritual sword he has in no way: for he is altogether insufficient to resist temptations.

In exposition of blessed Job, book XX.-- Everyone's sword upon his thigh, etc. Nocturnal fears are the snares of hidden temptations; the sword upon the thigh is a vigilant guard, pressing down the allure of the flesh. Therefore, lest nocturnal fear, that is, hidden and sudden temptation, creeps upon us, it is necessary that the sword placed over the thigh of our custody presses. For holy men are so certain of hope as they are always suspicious of temptation; as it is said to them, Serve the Lord in fear, and rejoice with trembling, so from hope there is rejoicing, and from suspicion trembling is born. On the same topic in the book of Pastoral Rule, title, book VI.--The sword is placed on the thigh when, by the sharpness of holy preaching, the evil suggestion of the flesh is tamed. Through the night indeed the blindness of our infirmity is expressed, for whatever adversity impends at night is not seen. Therefore, each one's sword is on his thigh because of the fears of the night, because, evidently, holy men, while fearing those things which they do not see, always stand ready for the intention of battle.

In the exposition of Ezekiel, Homily III, part II.-- King Solomon made for himself a carriage from the trees of Lebanon, etc. Nor should it be believed that Solomon, a king of such great majesty, who abounded with such immense riches that the weight of his gold could not be estimated, and silver was not valued in those days, would have made a wooden carriage for

himself. But Solomon is our peaceful one, who made a carriage for himself from the trees of Lebanon; for the trees of Lebanon, notably cedar wood, are very incorruptible. Therefore, the carriage of our King is the holy Church, which is built from the strong Fathers, as from incorruptible cedar woods with minds. It is rightly called a carriage, because it bears souls daily to the eternal banquet of its Creator; to which carriage silver columns are made, because the preachers of holy discourse shine with light. Moreover, with the silver columns, there is a golden recliner, for by what is clearly spoken by the holy preachers, the minds of the listeners find the gleam of intimate charity, in which they recline internally: for by what they hear brightly and plainly, they rest in what shines in the heart. The silver columns and the golden recliner are made, because by the light of the discourse, the clarity of rest is found in the mind. For that inner brightness now radiates the mind, so that by intention it rests there, where the grace of preaching is not required.

But to that which is shown brightly within, what manner of ascension is added, he immediately subjoins, when he says of the same carriage: He says, a purple ascent. True purple, because it is stained with blood, is deservedly seen in the color of blood; and because a great multitude of the faithful in the beginning of the nascent Church came to the kingdom through the blood of martyrdom, our King made a purple ascent in the carriage, because one reaches the bright within through the tribulation of blood. What then is to be done concerning us? What hope will there be if no one reaches the kingdom unless he possesses the highest virtues? But our consolation is also present. Let us love God as much as we can; let us love our neighbor, and likewise, we shall belong to the carriage of God, because, as it is written there, he paved the middle with charity. Therefore, have charity, and without doubt, you will reach there where the silver column is erected, and the purple ascent is held. For it is shown openly that this is said for our infirmity when he immediately adds there, Because of the daughters of Jerusalem. For the word of God, which says not sons but daughters, what else has he marked by the female sex, if not the weakness of minds?

In the explanation of blessed Job, book IX.-- How beautiful you are, my friend! etc. He speaks of her beauty, and repeats her beauty, because she has one kind of beauty in her behavior, by which she is now seen, and another kind in her rewards, into which she is then elevated through the sight of her Creator: whose members, indeed, all the elect are, because they walk simply to everything. Her eyes are called doves, because they shine with great light, because they glitter with the wonders of great signs; but how great is this miracle, which can be seen? That internal miracle is more marvelous, which cannot be seen; about which it is openly added, ”Except that which lies hidden within.” For indeed, the glory of a visible work is great, but the incomparable glory of a hidden reward is far greater. In the explanation of blessed Job, book III.-- Like a scarlet ribbon, your lips, bride, etc. A ribbon ties up the hair of the head. Thus, the lips of the bride are like a ribbon, because by the exhortation of the holy Church, all the diffuse thoughts in the minds of the listeners are bound, so that they do not disperse loosely, nor spread themselves out through illicit things, nor do scattered thoughts lower the eyes of the heart, but they gather themselves to

one intention, as a ribbon of holy preaching ties them. How rightly he also asserts it to be scarlet, because the preaching of the saints burns solely with the fire of charity.

In the explanation of blessed Job, book XXXIII.-- Your teeth are like a flock of shorn sheep, etc. We understand the teeth of the holy Church to be those who, through their preaching, crush the hardness of sinners; who are aptly compared to shorn and washed sheep, because taking up an innocent life, they have laid aside the old fleeces of their former conversation in the washing of baptism.

In the exposition of Ezekiel, Homily IV, part II.-- Just as the tower of David is your neck, etc. In the neck is the throat, in the throat is the voice. What, therefore, is signified by the neck of the holy Church, if not its sacred words? In which, when a thousand shields are remembered to be hanging, through this perfect number, the universal number is shown, because all our fortification is contained in the sacred word. For there are God's commandments, there are examples of the righteous. Therefore, in the neck of the Church, that is, in the preaching of the sacred word, which for its fortification and height is said to be like the tower of David, a thousand shields hang, because as many as the commandments there, so many are also the protections of our heart. Behold, indeed, to stand against hasty and fierce powers, we find in this tower the armor of our mind, so that from there we take the commandments of the Maker, from there we take the examples of those who precede, through which we are armed invincibly against our adversaries. And it is worth noting that it is said to be built with bulwarks: for bulwarks do what shields do, because both protect the one who fights; but there is a difference between the two, because we can move the shield for our protection wherever we wish; however, we can be defended by bulwarks, but we cannot move them; the shield is in the hand, but the bulwark is not held.

What, then, is the difference between bulwarks and shields, except that in the sacred word we partly read the miracles of predecessors and hear the virtues of good works? Thus, those miracles testify what they said about God because they would not do such things through Him unless they spoke the truth about Him. And their operations testify how pious, how humble, how kind they were. What, therefore, are their miracles, if not our bulwarks? For we can be protected by them, and yet we do not hold them in the hand of our free will; for we cannot perform such things. However, the shield is in the hand and defends, because the virtue of patience, the virtue of mercy, with preceding grace, is both in the power of free will and protects from the danger of adversity.

In the exposition of Blessed Job, Book XXIV.-- Your two breasts, etc. What are the two breasts, if not both peoples coming from Judea and the Gentiles, who are fixed in the body of the holy Church, through the intention of wisdom, deep in the heart's secret? From this people, those who are chosen are therefore compared to young goats and fawns because through humility, they understand themselves to be depraved and sinful; but running through charity, they overcome any obstacles from temporal hindrances, and with leaps of contemplation, ascend to higher things; so that they may do this, they observe the examples of preceding saints, whence they are referred to as feeding among lilies. And what is represented by the

lilies if not the life of those who truly say, We are the sweet aroma of Christ to God (II Cor. II)? Therefore the chosen ones, so that they may prevail to attain the highest things, eagerly thirst to see the Lord, spurred by the shining and fragrant life of the righteous; they burn with the flames of charity from the contemplation of Him, but since they are placed in this life, they cannot yet achieve it, and are nourished in the meantime by the examples of the preceding fathers. Hence appropriately the time of the feeding on lilies is defined there, as it is said, Until the day breathes and the shadows flee: for as long as we need to be refreshed by the examples of the righteous, until we pass the shadows of this present mortality with the eternal day breathing; when the shadow of this temporality passes, and mortality is lowered, because we perceive the inner light of that day, we no longer desire to be inflamed to His love through the examples of others. But now, because we cannot yet see Him, it is necessary that we are greatly stirred by observing the actions of those who have perfectly followed Him.

In the exposition of Blessed Job, Book XVII.-- You will be crowned from the head of Amana, etc. What is signified by the name of lions other than demons, which rage against us with the most atrocious cruelty of wrath? And because sinners have been called to faith, whose hearts were once the dens of lions, while it is believed that the Lord conquered death by their confession, he is crowned as if from the dens of lions. For the reward of victory is a crown. Therefore, the faithful offer him a crown as often as they confess that he conquered death by the resurrection. In the exposition of Blessed Job, Book XV.-- Honey and milk under your tongue. Many of the righteous, when they see some acting perversely, who should be struck with harsh rebukes, take up the sharpness of the tongue; but they hide kindness under the tongue of their mind. Whence it is said by the voice of the bridegroom of the holy Church, Honey and milk under your tongue. For those who do not wish to reveal the sweetness of their mind to the weak but strike them with a certain harshness in speaking, yet amidst harsh words secretly interject some sweetness: these evidently have sweetness not on the tongue but under the tongue; because amidst the harsh things they utter, they emit some gentle and sweet words by which the mind can be refreshed by kindness.

In the Codex of the Pastoral Rule, Title XV.-- Your shoots are a paradise of pomegranates. What is signified by pomegranates if not the unity of the faithful? For just as in a pomegranate, under one outer rind, many seeds are enclosed within, so the unity of faith encompasses the countless peoples of the holy Church, whom the diversity of merits holds within. In exposition of the blessed Job, book XXVII.-- Rise, north wind, and come, south wind. By the south wind, which is certainly a warm wind, the Holy Spirit is rightly designated, by which each person, while touched, is liberated from the numbness of his iniquity. Hence it is well said in the Song of Songs, Rise, north wind, and come, south wind, blow through my garden, and let its fragrances flow forth. For the north wind is ordered to rise, so that certainly the spirit who constrains the hearts of mortals, the adversary spirit, flees. For the south wind comes and blows through the garden so that its fragrances may flow forth because through the advent of the Holy Spirit, while the mind of man is filled by it, soon the renown of virtues is scattered, so rightly now the language of the saints, as if a

garden blown through by the south wind, says, We are the good fragrance of Christ (II Cor. II).

In exposition of Ezekiel, Homily II, part II.-- I sleep, but my heart is awake. The sweetness of the contemplative life is very lovable, which snatches the soul above itself, reveals the heavenly things; it shows that earthly things ought to be despised, makes spiritual things clear to the eyes of the mind, hides corporeal things. Hence it is well that the Church says in the Song of Songs, I sleep, but my heart is awake. For one sleeps with a vigilant heart, who, by advancing in inner contemplation, rests from restless external work. Likewise in exposition of the blessed Job, book XXIII, as above.-- I sleep, but my heart is awake. As if saying: While I lull the external senses from the worries of this life, with a free mind I more vividly recognize internal things. Externally I sleep, but internally I am awake, because while I do not feel external things as such, I skillfully apprehend internal things.

In the exposition of the Gospel, Homily XXV.-- My soul is melted, etc. The mind of a man who does not seek the appearance of his Creator is badly hardened, because it remains cold in itself. But if it begins to burn already with the desire to follow whom it loves, melted by the fire of love, it runs. It becomes anxious with desire, all things that once pleased in the world become worthless; nothing outside the Creator is pleasing, and what previously delighted the mind, afterward becomes exceedingly burdensome. Nothing consoles its sorrow, as long as what is desired is not yet seen. The mind grieves, even light itself is wearisome; and with such a fire in the mind, the rust of guilt is melted away, and the soul, incensed as in the manner of gold, because through use its appearance was lost, through burning it shines. In the exposition of blessed Job, book XXVII.-- They found me, the watchmen who go about the city, etc. The watchmen find the seeking bride and wound her, because when the diligent teachers find any soul already seeking the appearance of her Redeemer, they wound it with the arrows of heavenly love through the word of preaching; and if any covering from the old conversation still clings to it, they strip it away, so that having been freed from such a burden, the one sought by her may be found sooner.

In the exposition of blessed Job, book XXXIV.-- His head is the finest gold. Because the head of Christ is God. Truly, nothing in metals is more shining than gold: the head of the bridegroom is called gold, because his humanity rules us with the brightness of his divinity.

In the exposition on Ezekiel, Homily VIII: ”You are beautiful, my friend, etc. Because Jerusalem is interpreted as the vision of peace, by whose name the heavenly homeland is expressed, the holy Church is called sweet and beautiful as Jerusalem, because the desire of its life is compared to the vision of intimate peace, so that in that which it loves its author, which desires to see its form, of which it is written, ’On whom the angels long to look’ (I Peter I), by the very desires of its love, it is said to be similar to the angels. As much as it is beloved by God, it strives to be as terrifying to evil spirits. How it is terrifying is shown by the following comparison, that is, as an orderly array of camps. Why is the holy Church so to be feared by its enemies, like an array of camps? This comparison is not made without great understanding, and therefore must be examined carefully. We know and it is

established that an array of camps is shown to be terrifying to their enemies when it is so tightly packed and dense that it appears to be unbroken in any place: for if it is arranged in such a way that an empty space is left through which the enemy can enter, indeed it is no longer terrifying to its enemies. And so we, when we set up our battle line against evil spirits, must by all means be united and tightly bound by charity, so that we may never be found disrupted by discord, because however good the works may be among the good, if charity is lacking, a place is opened in the line by the evil of discord, through which the enemy can enter to strike us."

Hom. IV Ezech., part. II.-- "As the rind of a pomegranate, your cheeks without your hidden things. The cheeks are the spiritual parts of the holy Church, which now shine in her with miracles, and appear venerable as in her face. For when we see many performing wonders, prophesying future events, perfectly abandoning the world, burning with heavenly desires, the cheeks of the holy Church blush like the rind of a pomegranate. But what is this, compared to what is written, 'What eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what God has prepared for those who love him' (I Cor. II)? Therefore, when he admired the cheeks of the Church, he added, 'Without your hidden things,' as if to say clearly, 'Indeed, those things which are not hidden in you are great; ineffable indeed, those which are hidden.'" In expos. beati Job, lib. XXIX.-- "Who is this that comes forth as the dawn rising? The holy Church, desiring the rewards of heavenly life, is called the dawn because, while she forsakes the darkness of sins, she shines with the light of righteousness. However, we have something more subtle to consider: the dawn and twilight indeed announce that the night has passed, yet they do not show the full brightness of day, but while they drive away the night, they embrace the coming day, holding light mixed with darkness. What, therefore, are all of us who follow the truth in this life, but the dawn or twilight? Because we already perform some things that shine, yet in some respects we still are not free from the remnants of darkness."

In expos. beati Job, lib. XXX.-- "Your nose is like the tower of David, etc. Through the nose, we discern smells and stenches; and what does the nose signify but the prudent discernment of the saints? Indeed, a watchtower is placed high so that an approaching enemy may be seen from afar. Thus rightly is the nose of the Church said to be like a tower in Lebanon, because the prudent discernment of the saints, while it carefully looks around, set high up, detects sin before it comes, and, by vigilantly noting it beforehand, avoids it strongly." In the exposition of Ezekiel, from the aforementioned, Homily XI.--Therefore, in order for the truth of preaching to be preserved, it is necessary to uphold the height of living. Hence, rightly so, it is said in the Song of Songs in the voice of the holy Church's spouse, "Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon." What kind of praise is it, my brothers, that the nose of the bride is compared to a tower? But since we always discern odors and stench through the nose, what is indicated by the nose except the discrimination of watchmen? The nose is notably said to be like the tower of Lebanon because the discretion of leaders should indeed be fortified and always consist of vigilance and loftiness of life; that is, not lying in the valley of weak action. For just as a tower is placed on a mountain for the purpose of watching so

that enemies coming from afar may be seen, so the life of the preacher should always remain fixed on high, in order that, like the sense of smell, it may discern the stench of vices and the fragrance of virtues; foresee the incursions of evil spirits from afar, and through his prudence protect the souls entrusted to him.

In the exposition of the blessed Job, book XII.--Let us see if the vineyard blossoms, if the flowers bring forth fruits. Vineyards blossom when the minds of the faithful propose good works; but they do not bear fruit if they are overcome by certain terrors and weaken from what they had proposed. Therefore, it is not enough to see if the vineyards are blossoming but if the flowers have strengthened to bring forth fruit, because it is not surprising if someone begins good, but it is very marvelous if one endures in good work with right intention. In the exposition of the blessed Job, book XXVI.--"Who is this who ascends from the desert, flowing with delights?" Clearly, unless the holy Church overflows with the delights of God's words, it cannot ascend from the desert of the present life to higher things. Therefore, it flows with delights and ascends, because, while being nourished by mystical understandings, it is daily lifted up to contemplate higher things.

In the exposition of the blessed Job, book XVIII, according to the LXX Interpreters.--"Who is this who ascends whitewashed?" Because the holy Church does not naturally possess the heavenly life, but, with the coming of the Spirit, is adorned with the beauty of gifts, it is remembered not as white but as whitewashed. In exposition of the blessed Job, book XXX.-- Place me as a seal upon your heart. Therefore, a seal is placed on things lest they be desecrated by the presumption of thieves. Thus, the bridegroom is placed on the heart as a seal when the mystery of his faith is impressed upon the custody of our thoughts, so that the unfaithful servant, indeed our adversary, when he considers the signs of faith, does not presume to break through by testing him. In exposition of the Gospel, Homily VII.--Because love is as strong as death. Just as death destroys the body, so is the charity of eternal life killed by the love of corporeal things: for he who is perfectly absorbed by it is rendered insensible to earthly external desires.

In exposition of the blessed Job, book XIX.-- Our little sister is immature and does not have breasts. As the age of each human being, so is the age of the holy Church described: indeed, she was little then, when she, fresh from birth, could not preach the word of life. Hence it is said of her, Our little sister is immature and does not have breasts, because indeed the holy Church, before advancing through the increase of virtue, could not provide the breasts of preaching to the lowliest of listeners. But the mature Church, when united with the word of God, filled with the Holy Spirit, is fruitful in the conception of children through the ministry of preaching, whom she brings forth by exhorting, delivering by converting. Of this age of hers, it is said to the Lord, The young maidens loved you. Indeed, all those churches which make up the one catholic church are called young maidens, not ancient through fault, but new through grace; not barren from old age, but appropriate in the age of the mind for spiritual fecundity.

In the exposition of Ezekiel, Homily II, Part II.-- You who dwell in the gardens, friends listen, let me hear your voice. In the gardens, the holy Church dwells; in the gardens, each soul abides, which is already filled with the greenness of hope and good works. For the hope of this age is dry, because all things that are loved here wither away hastily; and Peter the apostle warns us to hurry up, saying, To an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading. Therefore, whoever already dwells in the gardens must make their voice heard by their bridegroom, that is, emit the song of good preaching in which he whom they desire may delight. Friends listen, namely all the chosen ones; who, in order to revive to the heavenly homeland, desire the words of life. In the exposition of blessed Job, book XVII.-- Flee, my beloved, We say something flees from us whenever what we wish to remember does not come to our mind. We say something flees from us when what we wish is not held in memory. Therefore, the holy Church, after describing the death and resurrection of the Lord and his ascension, cries out to him filled with a prophetic spirit, Flee, my beloved, flee. As if to say, You who have become comprehensible in the flesh, by your divinity exceed the understanding of our senses, and remain incomprehensible to us in yourself.

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.