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## Presence & Absence

### The presence/ absence of the Word to the Church/ soul

The Bridegroom is thus sometimes present and teaching, and sometimes He is said to be absent; and then He is desired. And either of these will suit either the Church or the dutiful soul. For when He allows the Church to suffer persecution and tribulations, He seems to her to be absent; and again, when she goes forward in peace and flourishes in faith and good works, He is understood as being present with her.

So also is it with the soul. When she is trying to understand something and desiring to know some obscure and secret matters, as long as she cannot find what she is looking for, the Word of God is surely absent from her. But when the thing she sought comes up to meet her, and appears to her, who doubts but that the Word of God is present, illuminating her mind and offering to her the light of knowledge? And again we perceive He is withdrawn from us and comes again, in every matter that is either opened or closed to our understanding.<sup>1</sup>

### The Biblical exegete is like a hunting dog

[In trying to puzzle out this difficult passage of Scripture, I am like] a man who pursues his quarry by means of the power of scent, such as a wise dog has. For sometimes it happens that when the hunter, following a hot trail, thinks that he has come close to the hidden lairs, he is all of a sudden forsaken by the track-marks.

And, having urged his hound to pursue the scent more carefully, he goes back along the same trails that he had traced before, until he finds the place where his quarry, now thoroughly aroused, has secretly betaken itself on to another trail. When the hunter finds this, he follows it up with more alacrity, more sure now of his prey and more certain that he is on the right tracks. So, when the tracks of the explanation that we thought to find have in some way failed us, we likewise hope that after a little search and after pursuing a plainer sort of explanation than appeared possible before, the Lord our God may deliver the prey into our hands.<sup>2</sup>

### The absence of the Bridegroom

The Bride then beholds the Bridegroom; and He, as soon as she has seen Him, goes away. He does this frequently throughout the Song; and that is something nobody can understand who has not suffered it himself. God is my witness that I have often perceived the Bridegroom drawing near me and being most intensely present with me; then suddenly He has withdrawn and I could not find Him, though I sought to do so. I long, therefore, for Him to come again, and sometimes He does so. Then, when He has appeared and I lay hold of Him, He slips away once more; and, when He has so slipped away, my search for Him begins anew.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 3.11 (pp.210-11)

<sup>2</sup> *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 3.13 (pp.229-30)

<sup>3</sup> *Homily on the Song of Songs* 1.7 (p.280)