THE COMMERCium OF THE KISS WHO SAVES: A STUDY OF THOMAS THE CISTERCIAN’S COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS

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Abstract

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This dissertation is a theological study of the twelfth-century commentary on the Song of Songs by Thomas Cisterciensis entitled *In Cantica Canticorum*. It contextualizes Thomas’s style, method, and message within the broader history of Song of Songs interpretation, draws out what is more particularly “Cistercian” about Thomas the Cistercian’s interpretation, and what is unique about his vision of the Song’s meaning. In order to accomplish each of these tasks, we will take up the motif that the author himself most prizes: the *admirabile commercium*.

The *admirabile commercium* is a long-standing, patristic summary of Salvation History. This theological concept sums up Christ’s act of redemption from his Incarnation to his Passion and Resurrection as the “exchange” that occurs between divinity and humanity. More commonly, we hear this phrase: God became human so that humans might become divine. In the history of Song of Songs interpretation, beginning with Origen, the “kiss” of Song of Songs 1:1 is read as this “exchange,” or *commercium*. Although earlier exegetes did not color this “kiss” as the *commercium*, but as the embrace of the Incarnation, and later as the *amplexus Christi*. Thomas Cisterciensis, then, takes
the traditional understanding of the *commercium* and reads the “kiss” of 1:1 both as the “exchange” of redemption and the monk’s individual, spiritual experience of the *amplexus Christi*. By following this novel spin on a traditional motif throughout Thomas’s lengthy commentary, we draw a picture of Thomas’s vision of the Song of Songs as the story of the *commercium* of the Kiss Who Saves.

The dissertation is composed of four chapters. The first discusses the style, method, and content of Thomas’s *In Cantica Canticorum* as a sermon-commentary. The bulk of the discussion is a comparison of Thomas’s commentary with Bernard of Clairvaux’s *Sentences*. Chapters Two and Three respectively discuss the Bridegroom and the Bride, depicted by Thomas as Christ and the Church. Chapter Four completes our preacher’s picture with an emphasis on Thomas’s use of liturgical texts and on the liturgy as the place of the Bride and Bridegroom’s ongoing *commercium*.
To my Mother,
who sews wedding garments.
CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ................................................................. iv

Introduction ............................................................................. 1

Chapter One: Preaching the Song of Songs: Thomas, Apostle of the Kiss ........ 22

Chapter Two: The Commercium of the Kiss Who Saves ......................... 84

Chapter Three: The Human Bride of the Commercium .......................... 148

Chapter Four: The Liturgical Commercium: Experiencing the Kiss Who Saves .... 190

Bibliography ............................................................................. 240
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INTRODUCTION

The Catalan painter, Francisco Ribalta, beautifully depicted St. Bernard of Clairvaux in the arms of the Crucifix in his painting entitled “Christ and St. Bernard.”¹ Ribalta’s painting successfully attempts to capture and externalize the well-known episode of Bernard’s mystical experiences of the *amplexus Christi*, or Christ’s embrace, first popularized by haggiographical records, as in Konrad of Eberbach’s *Exordium Magnum Cisterciense*. Konrad, however, attests to this as a physical as well as a mystical event: he records the first-hand account of the monk who happened upon Bernard while he was clasped to the bosom of the Crucifix.² Thus, long before it was painted by Ribalta, this image of Bernard and of the *amplexus Christi* was known and loved.

Thomas Cisterciensis, writing for and preaching to monks who knew they were not “Bernards,”³ interprets the Song of Songs as an account of the Church’s constant

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¹ One can see this work of art in Madrid’s Museo del Prado, or, more easily, on the dust jacket of Michael Casey’s book, *Athirst for God: Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux’s Sermons on the Song of Songs*, CS 77 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1988).


³ See David Bell, ““The Commentary on the Song of Songs of Thomas the Cistercian and His Concept of the Image of God,” *Citeaux* 28 (1977): 5-25, at p. 24-25.
historical and spiritual encounter with the Bridegroom through the *amplexus Christi*.

Thomas’s *In Cantica Canticorum* reveals that desired “kiss” of the opening verse of the Song of Songs as this embrace. It is the embrace of the incarnate Word that holds the Church and therefore each monk in the arms of the Bridegroom. Thomas does not relate the account of Bernard’s embrace, but he nevertheless paints pictures of Christ’s embrace for his audience with as many metaphors, allegories, biblical images, and liturgical lyrics he can apply to the “kiss.” Thomas’s commentary invites each monk to envision themselves as clasped in the *amplexus Christi* by providing them with almost inumerable images of this embrace to contemplate.

The main image Thomas centers his interpretation on is the *commercium* of Salvation. The wondrous *commercium* is the *amplexus* on a grand scale: Christ’s birth, death, resurrection, and ascension. The embrace of Salvation, for Thomas, is the “wondrous exchange” in which God became human so that humankind might become divine. Or, to put it in terms of the Canticle, Christ’s *commercium* is the Church’s espousal. As the Bride, the Church celebrates daily the Mystery of Redemption, a liturgical celebration in which each monk experiences this “exchange” as the *amplexus Christi*.

This dissertation examines Thomas’s treatment of the Song of Songs as the story of the *admirabile commercium*. While Thomas does not rely on accounts of Bernard’s mystical experience, he does rely on the myriad of scriptural accounts of exchange and embrace, from Genesis 3 and Isaiah 55:1 to the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15, and 1 Peter 1:18-19, to give but a few examples, in order to place images of the *commercium* before the minds of the monks for contemplation. We will see that Thomas interprets the
verses of the Song of Songs in a manner that invites the monks to see that they are already clasped in the *amplexus Christi*, participants in the Church’s everlasting *commercium*, and looking forward to the completion of this exchange in God’s unmediated embrace.

**Thomas Cisterciensis and His Commentary**

J-P Migne’s *Patrologia Latina*, volume 206, columns 17-860, contain the *In Cantica Canticorum* that is the first complete commentary on the Song of Song by a Cistercian monk. The author of this unique work is simply known as Thomas Cisterciensis, as he identifies himself simply as “F. Thomas quantaluscunque monachus cisterciensis.” Much of the scholarly attention first placed on this commentary, therefore, aimed at uncovering the identity of this mysterious monk.

In part, these early studies faced the task of untangling the confusing and often misleading authorial attributions in the more than sixty scattered manuscripts bearing Thomas’s commentary, or, in some cases, parts of it. With many of the manuscripts naming Thomas differently, scholars have identified Thomas Cisterciensis variously as a Cistercian monk hailing from Cîteaux, Clairvaux, Vaucelles, and Perseigne, as the Victorine Thomas Gallus, and even later as Duns Scotus, O.F.M. Thus, the first major question was whether this Canticles commentator was actually a Cistercian. In 1937, G. 

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4 Thomas Cisterciensis, *In Cantica Canticorum*, Patrologia Latina 206, edited by J-P Migne (1855); columns 17-860. Hereafter, Thomas is cited in this manner: *ICC*, PL 206; cc#. All translations of Thomas are mine unless otherwise noted.

Théry attempted to set the historical record straight with his article, “Thomas le Cistercien: Le Commentaire du Cantique des Cantiques; pour dissiper une Équivoque.” After studying and evaluating the evidence of the manifold manuscripts, Théry concluded that our Thomas was a Cistercian monk of Vaucelles, near Cambrai.

Théry’s conclusion, however, soon set scholars to confirming whether or not Thomas Cisterciensis was indeed Thomas of Vaucelles. Thomas’s intentional self-identification as “monachus cisterciensis,” led scholars to wonder if he had been rather a monk of either the original Cistercian house, Cîteaux, or of Bernard’s beloved Clairvaux. Bruno Griesser, for one, prefers to see Cîteaux as the original center of Thomas’s activity. But the question was resolved most reasonably by Jean Leclercq in an article entitled “Les Deux Compilations de Thomas de Perseigne.”

Leclercq identifies Thomas Cisterciensis as a monk of Perseigne, a monastery in the diocese of Mans tucked in the Perseigne Forest. Leclercq came to this conclusion by studying Thomas Cisterciensis’s In Cantica Canticorum alongside the manuscript of a work entitled De Praeparatione Cordis by one Thomas of Perseigne. The unique style of

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7 Théry, “Pour dissiper un Équivoque,” see pp. 125-126.


the two works, to Leclercq’s eye, is so strikingly similar that the two works could not but be from the same mind. Thomas is named as such by Henri deLubac in his *Medieval Exegesis*,¹¹ and David N. Bell, perhaps the scholar most familiar with Thomas’s commentary, agrees that although we cannot be “absolutely certain,” the identification of Thomas Cisterciensis with Thomas of Perseigne is “beyond reasonable doubt.”¹²

The monastery at Perseigne lies in ruins today. Its doors opened in 1145, and its most famous inhabitant, Adam of Perseigne, the abbot from 1188 to 1221, may have been one of Thomas’s abbots.¹³ The dedication of Thomas’s commentary to Bishop Pontius (de Polignac) allows us to approximate the date of its composition. Pontius was abbot of Clairvaux from 1165 until 1170 when he took the episcopal *cathedra*, a seat he held until his death in April of 1189. This places the commentary’s composition sometime between 1170 and 1189.¹⁴

Thus at some point during the last third of the twelfth century, there was a contemplative monk behind the doors of Perseigne Monastery, composing one of the most unique commentaries on the Song of Songs ever written. Thomas’s commentary


¹⁴ Of course, there were arguments surrounding the dating of Thomas’s work, but these arose primarily from a mistake in identifying to whom the commentary was dedicated. For an overview of these arguments see David Bell, “The Commentary,” pp. 5-8. The passage from Thomas Cisterciensis’s dedication reads as follows: “Reverendo Patri domino PONTIO, Dei gratia Claromontensi episcopo, F. THOMAS quantusluncunque Cisterciensis monachus, se totum in exsequendis mandatis ejus impendere,” *ICC*, PL 206; c17.
first stands out amongst others for its style: he interprets the Song verse-by-verse, moving rather quickly as he goes by arranging strata of *distinctiones* in sets and sub-sets and even sub-sub-sets of threes. This makes for a confusing first read as the commentary seems to start and stop and then go whirling on again. Yet, as one reads, Thomas’s style becomes more familiar, and the reader is struck by the way in which the strata hold together. Thomas’s attention to the biblical story as a whole—a story, which, as Thomas reads it, tells of Christ’s love for the Church—is what holds his only seemingly haphazard interpretation together. Thomas meditates on the Song’s story, turning the verses of the Song again and again into images of the divine Bridegroom, Christ, seeking his human Bride, the Church, and, therefore, into depictions of Christ’s love for the individual monks. The language of Thomas’s commentary is Scripture’s language: he speaks almost entirely in the inspired biblical images, metaphors, and allegories used to convey Christ’s love. As we will see in Chapter One, this style of interpretation is characteristic of sermon-commentaries like Thomas’s *In Cantica Canticorum*.

A second striking characteristic of Thomas’s commentary is his sources, of which there are five types. Most apparent is Thomas’s use of Scripture: Bell reports some 10,000 biblical citations throughout the commentary.15 Thomas also folds passages in from liturgical books (especially from the antiphonary), from the works of fellow theologians, both ancient and contemporary, and from philosophers (amongst whom Boethius tops the list). Yet, with regard to his sources, scholars have commented most on Thomas’s use of pagan poets. Jean Leclercq touches on this fifth category, as do

Friedrich Ohly and David Bell. Bell considers Thomas’s use of pagan poets one of his “most distinctive characteristics,” and Ohly notes that his citations are “bold and daring.” We cannot treat each of these categories sufficiently in the present work, and thus are content to limit ourselves to a discussion of Thomas’s biblical, liturgical, and theological resources.

Thomas’s In Cantica Canticorum is composed of twelve books and a prologue. While a structure to the commentary as a whole is difficult to discern, we learn something from Thomas’s arrangement of the events of Christ’s life. To begin with, the prologue dramatizes the Annunciation in a manner reminiscent of the early Christmas Eve liturgy. With this introduction, Thomas invites the monks into the story told in the figures of the Song of Songs—the story of the Church being wed to Christ through the historia figurativa of the Old and New Testaments, culminating in the sacramenta, or the mysteries, of Christ’s life. The final, twelfth book of the commentary is a sermon for Christ’s Ascension: Thomas completes the sacramenta Christi. Yet all that falls between this conclusion and the account of the Annunciation in the Prologue is not ordered chronologically around the events of Christ’s life. Thomas primarily speaks about


18 It is interesting to note here that the liturgical material for the Christmas Vigil from Gregory the Great is similar as it contains a discussion between the Father and the Son about the ensuing incarnation: “In media nocte Nativitatis Domini. Antiph. Dominus dixit ad me: Filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te. Psal. Quare fremuerunt gentes, et populi meditati sunt inania? Resp. Tecum principium in die virtutis tuae in splendoribus sanctorum, ex utero ante luciferum genui te. Vers. Dixit Dominus Domino meo: Sede a dextris meis, donec ponam inimicos tuos scabellum pedum tuorum. All. Dominus dixit ad me: Filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te...,” Sancti Gregorii Magni Romani Pontificis, Liber Antiphonarius. Ordinatus per circulum anni, PL 78; c646A.
Christ’s birth and death, returning to these two *sacramenta* again and again, and punctuating these discussions with accounts of the Resurrection and Ascension. In effect, the spiritual journey Thomas espouses always moves *ad imaginem Christi crucifixi* and *ad visio Dei*, while arguing that the Word incarnate and crucified is already a vision of God.

Migne’s edition of Thomas’s commentary replicates the first printed edition, published in Paris in 1521 by Jodocus Badius Ascensius (d. 1535). As with the original printed edition, Migne retains the added Marian commentary of Jean d’Abbeville, Cardinal Algrin, which was interpolated, verse-by-verse, within Thomas’s commentary by Ascensius. After this, the commentary was printed in 1571 in Lyon and then again in Rome in 1655.

With three printed editions and over sixty manuscripts Thomas’s commentary was, at one time, rather popular. Perhaps this is because Thomas wrote his commentary on a tricky biblical book in an eminently preachable manner. Perhaps it was because his commentary was completed, and therefore offered interpretations of verses never reached by other Cistercian exegetes. Whatever the reason, it is clear that this long-neglected commentary merits attention as a unique text from within the Cistercian milieu. Moreover, as Jean Leclercq and David Bell see it, Thomas’s commentary opens a window into the life of the every day Cistercian, and that, we might add, during the

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height of the twelfth-century Cistercian romance with the Song of Songs. Thus, while Thomas is not the spiritual master Bernard was, he offers us an important and telling view of Cistercian life through the lens of his sermons and commentary on the Song.

History of Scholarship on Thomas

The history of theological scholarship on Thomas and his commentary is brief, but bountiful nonetheless. Thus, on the one hand, there are the few scholarly articles devoted solely to examining Thomas’s commentary. This group of scholarly works includes: Bruno Griesser’s two articles: “Dichterzitate in des Thomas Cistercienser Kommentar zum Hohenlied,” and “Thomas Cisterciensis als Verfasser eines Kommentars zum Hohenlied,” as well as David Bell’s three excellent articles, all compiled in Cîteaux: “The Commentary on the Song of Songs of Thomas the Cistercian and His Concept of the Image of God,” “Love and Charity in the Commentary on the Song of Songs of Thomas the Cistercian,” and “Contemplation and the Vision of God in the Commentary on the Song of Songs by Thomas the Cistercian.”

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articles are the first to offer an overview of Thomas’s work and a close reading of Thomas’s commentary. Bell is most exemplary in his attempt to identify Thomas’s various sources and to show the convergence of Victorine and Cistercian thought in his work.

On the other hand, Thomas made shorter and longer appearances in various survey studies. Maur Standaert’s article on Thomas in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* gives a good overview. However, there are also articles such as Thomas Renna’s study of the Cistercian conception of the New Jerusalem in “The Two Cities in Early Cistercian Thought,” E. Ann Matter’s discussion of the Victorine and Cistercian characteristics of the *Eulogium Sponsi de Sponsa*, as shown not only by Bernard, but also by Thomas: “*Eulogium Sponsi de Sponsa*: Canons, Monks, and the Song of Songs,” and Helmut Riedlinger’s “Die Makellosigkeit der Kirche in den lateinischen Hoheliedkommentaren des Mittelalters.” Thomas also makes appearances in longer works such as Henri deLubac’s four volume *Exégèse Médiévale*. E. Ann Matter mentions Thomas in The

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Voice of My Beloved;32 Denys Turner interestingly includes a translation of Thomas’s
first columns on the “kiss” in his compilation of Song of Song commentary excerpts
entitled Eros & Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs;33 Friedrich Ohly
spends a few pages discussing Thomas’s use of the liturgy and pagan poets in his
Hohenlied-Studien; Grundzüge einer Geschichte der Hoheliedauslegung des
Abendlandes bis um 1200;34 Richard Javelet briefly examines Thomas’s understanding of
the imago Dei in Image et Resemblance;35 Hervé Coathalem studies Thomas’s Mariology
in Le parallelisme entre la Sainte Vierge et l’Église dans la tradition latine jusqu’à la fin
du XIIe siècle;36 and, most recently, Rachel Fulton involves Thomas in her discussion of
Mary’s role as compassionate intercessor in her book entitled From Judgment to
Passion.37 Each of these studies has its merits, and appears in our present study as
relevant and necessary, but the last two most inform our study of Thomas’s commentary.

Coathalem and Fulton’s work complement each other quite well. Coathalem
begins to uncover the unique elements of the Mariology present in Thomas’s commentary

33 Denys Turner, Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs (Kalamazoo:
34 Friedrich Ohly, Hohelied-Studien; Grundzüge einer Geschichte der Hoheliedauslegung des
36 Hervé Coathalem, Le parallelisme entre la Sainte Vierge et l’Église dans la tradition latine
jusqu’à la fin du XIIe siècle, Analecta Gregoriana 74, Series Facultatis Theologicae, Sectio B, no. 27
37 Rachel Fulton, From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200
(as particularly related to the exegetical history of Mary and Eve), while Fulton emphasizes the importance Thomas places on the relationship between Christ’s humanity and Mary. Therefore, from the work of these theologians, we begin to zero in on the heart of Thomas’s commentary on the Song of Songs: Christ’s “exchange,” or commercium, with the Church as the uniting of the divine Bridegroom and the human Bride in the Incarnation and in the life of the Church.

**Our Study of Thomas’s Commentary**

The main motif of our study is Thomas’s main motif: the *admirabile commercium* of salvation history by which Christ takes the Church as his human Bride. This “wondrous exchange” of Salvation is the “kiss” of Canticles 1:1, and the foundational image of Thomas’s exegesis as a whole. Thus, Rachel Fulton’s description of Thomas’s approach to the Song of Songs as a theological *fabula*—that is, of the story of the divine Bridegroom taking a human Bride—informs our approach to Thomas’s commentary as the recounting of the *admirabile commercium*. Not only does Thomas recount this story, but he also invites the monks to make this story their own: as members of the Church and Christ’s Body, they are members of the human Bride.

Recognizing this as the base-line of Thomas’s commentary, we are also able to investigate Thomas’s Cistercian sources, which make his chosen descriptive, “Cisterciensis,” all the more true. The encyclopedic or compilatory nature of Thomas’s commentary brings to light the importance of the Cistercian Fathers on Thomas’s thought, especially that of Bernard of Clairvaux, but also including William of St. Thierry, Guerriec of Igny, Isaac of Stella, and Aelred of Rievaulx. In part, Thomas aims
to transmit the spiritual and doctrinal wealth of the Cistercian tradition. We will see this well in Thomas’s treatment of the *admirabile commercium* as it reveals a certain Christology and ecclesiology, as well as a heavy liturgical tenor.

However, unlike some of his Cistercian contemporaries, Thomas is rather reticent on spiritual and mystical subjects. For example, he hesitates to elaborate the topics on which Bernard is an expert: the soul’s contemplative and mystical union with God. In fact, Thomas tends to shy away from all topics that excel clear-cut, doctrinal concreteness.\(^{38}\) He allows the scriptural images and metaphors to speak for him instead. David Bell accordingly envisions Thomas audience as the ordinary, every day Cistercian monks who, as mentioned above, knew they were not Bernards of Clairvaux.\(^{39}\)

However, the compilatory, touch-and-go nature of Thomas’s commentary, also means that one must resist the temptation to fill the gaps left by Thomas with the thought of his fellow Cistercians. Bell calls Thomas’s commentary a “builder’s yard” of information, from which one must construct Thomas’s doctrine.\(^{40}\) To an extent, this is true, but one must be careful. For example, Thomas’s emphasis on the “exchange” between the divine Bridegroom and the human Bride centers on the Sacrament, or the Mystery, of Christ and the events of Christ’s life (His Birth, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension). These *sacramenta incarnationis*, as Thomas calls them, are the heart of the Church’s life as Christ’s human Bride. The source of this theology of redemption can be

\(^{38}\) See David Bell, “Contemplation and Vision,” pp. 220-222.

\(^{39}\) David Bell, “The Commentary,” p. 25.

\(^{40}\) David Bell, “The Commentary,” p. 11.
found in Bernard’s 20th Sermon on the Song of Songs where Bernard emphasizes “carnal love” of Christ as the starting point of the monk’s spousal love for God. As Bernard McGinn points out, this places Bernard in a “direct line with the ancient Christian understanding of the economy of salvation first made explicit in Irenaeus—God became human so that humans might become God.” 41 As we will show in Chapter Two, this is the case for Thomas, too. Yet, Thomas does not follow Bernard into the depths of “spiritualizing” one’s love for Christ. While Thomas elaborates on the fleshly “embrace” of the Bride and Bridegroom as una caro in Christ’s Birth and Passion, he does not articulate the “embrace” of spiritual unity that comes about through Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension as clearly or as fully. Thomas’s emphasis on the commercium is shifted toward the human manifestations of the exchange. The best we can do with the silences in Thomas’s commentary is to imagine we are in Thomas’s audience, hearing and seeing his interpretation of the Song by way of the images, allegories, and metaphors he provides.

Accordingly, Thomas’s ecclesiology also echoes Bernard’s, while emphasizing the Church militant as the Body and Bride of Christ, Thomas also emphasizes that the Church is made-up of each of the monks to whom he writes and preaches. The human Bride of the commercium is both each monk, and the collectivity of these monks as the corporate Bride of Christ joined to him in una caro.

The life of the human Bride, of the Church, therefore is centered on the liturgical year: the annual celebration of the Mystery of Redemption. In this, too, Thomas

represents a Cistercian milieu. As we will see in Chapter Four, Thomas echoes not only Bernard, but Guerric of Igny, Isaac of Stella, and Aelred of Rievaulx as well. For each of these Cistercian monks, the Scriptures could not be divorced from the liturgical environment in which they were heard and re-enacted. Thus, the life of Thomas’s commentary, too, arises from the liturgy, which he cites often. His citations invite the monks into the Song of salvation: “canit Ecclesia.” The life given to Thomas’s commentary is the life of the monks of Perseigne, each member of Christ’s Body and Bride.

However, the liturgical life of Thomas’s commentary also allows him to play with the sacramental and spiritual fruits given to the monk by the Church. He plays, therefore, with the images that provide, both in the greater liturgical life of the Church and in her celebration of the sacraments, access to the Mystery of Christ. Christ, for example, is the Bread from Heaven received in prayer, in contemplation, in *lectio divina*, and Who is the reality received in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

In addition to being quite Cistercian, Thomas is also thoroughly Augustinian. Thus, in drawing out the Cistercian sources of Thomas’s commentary, we necessarily turn to St. Augustine as well. In many ways, just as the other Cistercians who impacted Thomas’s work so deeply, Thomas shows his Augustinian colors. Above all, Thomas appropriates Augustine’s understanding of Christ’s Blood as the “price” paid in the “exchange” of Salvation, a theology of redemption which is also the foundation of Augustine’s ecclesiology. Thus, Augustine will appear as a formative figure in our discussions of Thomas’s Christology and ecclesiology.
Consequently, the incredible impact of these sources on Thomas helps us defend the monastic character of Thomas’s commentary. Thomas’s style seems, to some scholars, to be obviously scholastic.\textsuperscript{42} However, as Chapter One will argue, Thomas’s commentary is ordered by the love of God as Scripture expresses it, rather than by lines of theological argument.\textsuperscript{43} It is this lack of sustained arguments that is the most immediately obvious and monastic characteristic of Thomas’s work. His commentary is contemplative and ruminative, meditating on Christ’s “embrace” again and again in all the images, metaphors and colors presented by Scripture. As with Bernard’s sermons, Thomas’s commentary is characterized by the appropriation of Scripture in the manner of the Church Fathers. Although it may not look like it at first glance, Thomas’s commentary ruminates over the central mysteries of redemption with the help of Scripture’s many ways of expressing God’s love for his people.

Our study of Thomas, therefore, will be carried out not only by looking at his Cistercian and Augustinian sources, but also, and even more so, by paying careful attention to Thomas’s treatment of the scriptural text. If for Thomas the Song of Songs is the theological \textit{fabula} that recounts the \textit{admirabile commercium}, then its narrative contains the whole story of Salvation. The Song of Songs, then, is a singular book within Scripture for Thomas: its images and metaphors directly echo those of the other books and stories of the Bible that unveil the Song’s \textit{fabula} as the story of Christ and the

\textsuperscript{42} Even David Bell talks about the “scholastic verbiage” of Thomas’s commentary. See “The Commentary,” p. 11.

\textsuperscript{43} On the “ordering” of monastic and scholastic works see Bernard McGinn, \textit{Growth of Mysticism}, p. 154.
Church. Thomas’s bevy of biblical references is crucial to understanding his commentary on any verse of the Song and on the Canticle as a whole.

For Thomas, Scripture, both figuratively and literally, tells the story of God’s loving and salvific “exchange” with humankind. This “exchange” began with Adam and Eve and continues even today in the monk as a member of the Church. Thomas’s exegesis, therefore, is at once typological, allegorical, and tropological. He works through the images of the Song and of Scripture more generally, multiplying allegories and metaphors by which he both illustrates the corporate, ecclesial “exchange” of the Salvation and invites the monk to partake of this “exchange.”

Pausing for a moment to look at the antiphon employed by Thomas, “O admirabile commercium” will give us the best possible preliminary insight into Thomas’s method and content. Indeed, Thomas’s recounting of salvation history, from Adam and Eve to Christ and the Church, mirrors the chiastic structure of the antiphon itself. In his book entitled Sacrum Commercium, Martin Herz offers this illustration of the antiphon:

\[
O \text{ admirabile commercium!} \\
A \\
1. \textit{Creator generis humani} \\
2. \textit{de Virgine} \\
3. \textit{procedens homo} \\
4. \textit{largitus est nobis} \\
B \\
\textit{animatum corpus sumens} \\
\textit{nasci dignatus est} \\
\textit{sine semine} \\
\textit{suam deitatem}.^{44}
\]

This break down of the antiphon reveals the veritable exchange imaged by the words and structure of the text.\(^{45}\) The antiphon itself sets up an “X” of sorts as A1 and A2 match up

\[^{44}\text{Martin Herz, Sacrum Commercium (Munich: Karl Zink, 1958), p. 50.}\]

\[^{45}\text{Martin Herz, Sacrum Commercium (Munich: Karl Zink, 1958), p. 50.}\]
with B3 and B4 and likewise for B1 and B2 with A3 and A4. The first set of these pairings (A1/A2 with B3/B4) reveals the divine aspect of the commercium of the Incarnation, while the second set reveals the human half of the commerce. The antiphon praises the literal exchange between the human and the divine in the Incarnation in which God communicates and bestows divinity upon humankind.

For Thomas, Christ and the Church converge at the center of this “X” where Christ’s humanity binds the Church to him as Body and Bride, and where Christ’s divinity is bestowed upon the Church as a living, sacramental community. Even the manner in which Thomas writes reflects this “exchange.” This is evident in particular exegetical instances such as Thomas’s description of Confession as an embrace, by which he allows each monk to envision himself clasped in the arms of the crucified Christ, his right side meeting Christ’s left side, and his left to Christ’s right, in a moment of reconciliation. This is also apparent more generally in the greater structure of Thomas’s commentary: he begins with the Annunciation and the Incarnation, or God’s descent to humankind, and ends with Christ’s Ascension. This primarily allegorical reading of the Song is accompanied by a tropological reading: the monk, having inherited the effects of humankind’s “descent,” or fall, in the exsecrabile commercium, now “ascends” to God’s eternal “embrace” by the admirabile commercium of Christ’s humanity. Finally, Thomas’s treatment interpretation of each and every verse takes his listeners and his readers into the center of this “exchange:” Thomas moves from the letter to the

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45 Martin Herz uplifts this structuring of the antiphon in his work, Sacrum Commercium and it proves to be quite illuminative for our own study.

46 See Herz, Sacrum Commercium, p. 50.
typological and allegorical to the tropological and back again, penetrating first the allegory and then the heart of the Church from within the heart of each monk. In effect, the monk is caught up in the movement of Thomas’s commentary, which mirrors and mimics the movement of the “exchange”—descent and ascent, inward and outward. Thomas himself, as revealed by his exegetical style and content, has been drawn into the heart of this “exchange” as a member of Christ’s Bride, the Church. The four chapters that follow will show this well.

Order of the Dissertation

In recent years, scholars have turned their attention to “the other voices of Cîteaux,” as Bernard McGinn calls them, and with particular interest in their exegetical projects. More and more scholarly attention has been paid to figures such as Guerric of Igny, Isaac of Stella, and Aelred of Rievaulx. Thomas the Cistercian’s voice, too, has echoed rather recently through the halls of academia: in the last five years, there have been four presentations on Thomas at the annual International Medieval Congress in Kalamazoo, Michigan. This present study, then, continues to sound Thomas’s voice in an attempt to add him to the chorus of studied Cistercian exegetes. We take a special


48 Examples of recent scholarly efforts devoted to “the other voices” of Cistercian exegesis include: the two volumes of Guerric’s Liturgical Sermons, published in 1971; Aelred’s Liturgical Sermons, published in 2001; and the recent Sources Chrétienes volumes of Isaac’s sermons (1987). Additionally, there have been recent additions to Bernard’s repertoire with translations of his Sentences in 2000, and the final volume of his Sermons sur le Cantique just published in 2007. Denys Turner’s Eros & Allegory (1996) is an interesting survey of medieval exegesis on the Song of Songs.

interest in what Thomas tells us about his unique place within the history of Cistercian Canticles exegesis.

We begin in Chapter One, “Preaching the Song of Songs: Thomas, ‘Apostle of the Kiss’,” with a description of Thomas’s work, of his aim, method and style in commenting on the Song of Songs. We will see how important it is for Thomas to announce the good news of the *admirabile commercium* and how he announces it.\(^{50}\) Following upon a general, introductory discussion of the importance Cistercians place on preaching as a motherly and apostolic task, a comparison of the style and method of the *In Cantica Canticorum* with Bernard of Clairvaux’s *Sentences* identifies the style and nature of Thomas’s work as that of a preacher. Involved in such apostolic work, Thomas is an “Apostle of the Kiss.” A look at Alan of Lille’s *The Art of Preaching* supports this claim further as Alan prescribes a method of preaching much like that found in both Bernard and Thomas to preachers. In accord with this evidence, we are able to conclude that the *In Cantica Canticorum* is a sermon-commentary, containing sermons Thomas delivered at Perseigne.

Chapter Two begins the work of studying Thomas’s commentary as a theological work. “The *Commercium* of the Kiss Who Saves,” delineates Thomas’s Christology by uncovering the divine Bridegroom of the Song’s *fabula*. Here we encounter the patristic understanding of the *commercium* as a description of Salvation History: God became man so that man might become God. However, the commercium does not refer only to the

\(^{50}\) This task was made eminently easier by the wonderful translation of Bernard of Clairvaux’s *Sentences* by Francis Swietek, and John R. Sommerfeldt’s introduction to them: Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Parables and The Sentences*, CF 55, ed. Maureen M. O’Brien (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2000).
Incarnation, but to the whole wondrous “exchange” carried out by Christ and the sacraments of His humanity. Christ, who was born in Bethlehem, hung on the Cross, was resurrected, and ascended to Heaven, is the divine Bridegroom of the Song of Songs.

In Chapter Three we consider Thomas’s ecclesiology by delineating “The Human Bride of the Commercium”: the Church. In this venture we are aided by Thomas’s typological and tropological methods of interpretation: Mary becomes an allegory for the Church, just as the couples of the Old Testament prefigured the nuptials of the divine Bridegroom and the human Bride. Thomas’s tropological emphasis reveals that the human Bride is not simply the Church, but that She is also each and every one of the monks to whom Thomas preachers. The monks, too, are members of Christ’s Body, and therefore members of His Bride.

The fourth and final chapter, “The Liturgical Commercium: Experiencing the Kiss Who Saves” brings the divine Bridegroom and the human Bride together. The liturgical books are one of Thomas’s most important sources, and consequently, the Church’s liturgy becomes the locus of the commercium of which the Song sings. The liturgy, as Thomas sees it, offers the monks an “experience” of the Bridegroom. Consequently, Thomas’s commentary, saturated as it is with liturgical lyrics, becomes an expression of the monk’s—the Bride’s—liturgical experience of the Bridegroom. Thus, Chapter Four concludes this dissertation by showing how Thomas’s commentary facilitates the

51 Here, the work of Chrysogonous Waddell and Claire Maître on the Cistercian liturgy is crucial, and the recent translation of Aelred’s liturgical sermons is helpful as well: Aelred of Rievaulx, Aelred of Rievaulx: The Liturgical Sermons, CF 58, transl. by Theodore Berkeley and M. Basil Pennington (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2001).
fulfillment of the monk’s desire for Christ’s “kiss” by helping the monks articulate the liturgy as the place of Bride and Bridegroom’s commercium.

In sum, the dissertation’s four chapters trace Thomas’s unveiling of the Song’s fabula, and find an astonishing picture of Christ and the Church intimately bound to one another in their nuptial life in his In Cantica Canticorum.
CHAPTER ONE

PREACHING THE SONG OF SONGS: THOMAS, APOSTLE OF THE KISS

Introduction

Thomas Cisterciensis is the author of two lengthy works: De Praeparatione Cordis, and In Cantica Canticorum. The second of these is the first complete commentary on the Song of Songs by a Cistercian monk. Little else is known about this Thomas, except that he probably lived at the Monastery of Perseigne (founded in 1145 in the diocese of Mans just beyond Paris), and was writing in the last quarter of the Twelfth Century. We can tell, however, from the length, complexity, and tone of his work that he was a careful and patient theologian, attentive to the spiritual needs of the other monks at Perseigne, well educated, contemplative, and thoroughly formed by the liturgical life of the monastery. In this chapter I have chosen to call Thomas the “Apostle of the Kiss” because his commentary on the Song of Songs is composed in a sermonsal fashion aimed at announcing the enduring nuptial union of the Christ and the Church brought about by the “kiss” of the Incarnation.

At first glance Thomas’s commentary seems like a haphazard compilation of other theologians’ work presented as interpretations of the Song’s verses, but a closer look reveals a commentary that, even though it is a compilation, is uniquely orchestrated by Thomas’s understanding of the biblical story as the historia figurativa of the commercium, or the exchange, of salvation history. For Thomas, the Song is the story of
this *commercium* told in sum as a theological *fabula*. The divine Bridegroom’s search for his human Bride structures Thomas’s commentary, and therefore the mysteries or *sacramenta* of Christ’s life and the liturgy shape the work as a whole. Thus the whole of Thomas’s commentary reflects and retells the story of salvation history as an “exchange” of love based on the events of Christ’s life and the manner in which they unfold each liturgical year.

Thomas divides his commentary into twelve books as follows:

- **Book One**: Canticles 1:1-1:5a.
- **Book Two**: Canticles 1:5b -15a.
- **Book Three**: Canticles 1:15b-2:3.
- **Book Four**: Canticles 2:4-12a.
- **Book Five**: Canticles 2:12b-3:4.
- **Book Six**: Canticles 3:5-4:9.
- **Book Seven**: Canticles 4:10-5:5.
- **Book Eight**: Canticles 5:6-16.
- **Book Ten**: Canticles 6:10-7:5.
- **Book Eleven**: Canticles 7:6-8:4.
- **Book Twelve**: Canticles 8:5-14.

This twelve-fold division is given shape by both the *historia figurativa* of all of Scripture and by the *sacramenta*, or mysteries of Christ’s life. The commentary begins

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53 We might also note here that this twelve-book structure reflects the twelve-book structure of Virgil’s *Aeneid*. While the number twelve could also represent the twelve apostles or the twelve tribes of Israel for Thomas, who is no stranger to the interpretation of numbers, it seems more likely that he is reflecting the shape of the *Aeneid*, (viewed as a Christianized allegory). All based upon the allegorical framework of the *Aeneid*, the subsequent works of Martianus Capella (cited by Thomas), Boethius (also cited by Thomas), and Fulgentius, could lead one familiar with them not only to a reading of the *Aeneid* as an allegorical account of Salvation, but also to find, especially after Boethius, (whom Ann Astell understands to have been influenced by Martianus and Virgil), the story of Salvation in an allegorical form called a “romantic *fabula*.” Perhaps this influenced Thomas’s approach to the Song of Songs? Ann Astell’s *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) lays the ground work for entering into such a study of Thomas’s twelve-book structure. On the above, especially see pp. 52-3. Moreover, Thomas cites other works written by Virgil, including his *Eclogues*, commenting on which, J.
with a dramatization of the Annunciation in the Prologue in which Mary’s *fiat* is expressed by words of Canticles 1:1, while the final book, Book Twelve, describes Christ’s Ascension and ends with a return to the “kiss” of Song of Songs 1:1 as the experience of God’s presence in Heaven. All that falls between is an intricate intertestamental interpretation of the Song based on the Church’s celebration of Christ’s Birth, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension as moments of loving “exchange” in which the human Bride is drawn more tightly to her divine Bridegroom.

In this first, opening chapter we study Thomas’s exegetical style and his purpose in writing so extensively on the Song of Songs. We will show that both Thomas’s content and structure reveal that his commentary is composed of sermons on the Song of Songs and that Thomas preached on the Song of Songs to his fellow monks of Perseigne. He offered his sermons as spiritual “nourishment” for the monks by revealing what he

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W. Mackail writes: “The fourth Eclogue was accepted and proclaimed as a direct prophecy of the birth of Christ. . . . St. Augustine not only accepts this doctrine, but actually cites Virgil’s own mention of the Sybilline prophecies—the Cumaeum Carmen of the Fourth Eclogue—as authentic proof of the genuineness and validity of those earlier predictions,” *An Introduction to the Aeneid* (Glasgow: Privately printed for the Virgil Society, 1946), pp. 33-4. Thomas was clearly influenced by a Christianized, perhaps “romantic,” Cappellan and/or Boethian reading of the *Aeneid*. For more on the use of the pagan and Latin “classics” in monastic writings see Jean Leclercq’s *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, translated by Catherine Misrahi (New York: Fordham Press, 1982), pp. 116-124. Leclercq writes, “The optimistic bias produced, in consequence, a method for the interpretation of the classics: allegorism. Since all these authors said nothing but what was good and with good intentions, to discover these in the texts requires forcing and explaining . . . The same allegorical methods will then be applied to them as to the Old Testament and a Christian refurbishing of pagan texts will become the normal practice,” p. 117. Thomas himself writes: “Et Virgilius prophetans de Nativitate Christi [Eclog. IV.]: Molli paulatim flavescet campus arista/Incultisque rubens pendebit sentibus uva/Et durae quercus sudabunt roscida mella,” ICC, PL 206; c777A.

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54 Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c18C. In the Prologue’s drama we hear God, the Father, announce “praesto sum,” when speaking of His incarnation.

55 “…jam eam osculo oris sui osculatur, id est praesentia delectatur, qua perpetue fruatur, ipsa praestante, qui cum Patre et Spiritu sancto aeternaliter gloriatur. Amen.” Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c860D. The explicit echoes the Prologue, but in new color: “ipsa praestant;” the faithful are in God’s unveiled, unmediated presence.
calls the Song’s *sententia*, or its innermost meaning: God wed himself to humanity in order to bring us into his eternal embrace. Thomas relays this purpose in his dedication: so that the soul will ask confidently for the “kiss of his mouth”: “animam pulchram quae tam speciosa forma est et suavis in deliciis sponsi, ut confidenter clamet: osculetur me osculo oris sui.”\(^{56}\)

This initial though brief explanation of his goal therefore provides the proper place to begin a study of Thomas’s commentary: as the product of a monastic exegete focused on nourishing his community with Scripture’s *sententiae*. As we will learn, to nourish in this way, especially when preaching on the Song of Songs, is to help your community ruminate on their experience of Christ within the Church, on how to seek an experience of the Bridegroom. In order to show this properly, we will look at Thomas’s methods of preaching and interpreting Scripture in comparison with Bernard of Clairvaux. The two will seem to stand in stark contrast for those only familiar with Bernard’s polished, literary sermons on the Song of Songs, but looking at Thomas’s commentary next to Bernard’s *Sententiae* will illuminate Thomas’s commentary as a sermon commentary in the monastic tradition so beautifully epitomized by Bernard’s eighty-six sermons on the Song.

\(^{56}\) Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c21B.
The Case for Thomas as a Preacher

The Preacher

The role of the preacher in a Cistercian community is that of “breaking the bread received from Christ.” Bernard says as much in his opening sermon on the Song of Songs. The sermon is considered “a word communicated by Christ himself” to the community. Preaching, therefore, is a liturgical experience for both the preacher and his audience, as Christ’s presence is recognized in the ministry of the word. In view of Thomas’s own description of preaching, we recognize Thomas as an “Apostle of the ‘Kiss’.”

As with most extended, allegorical meditations on a biblical text, Thomas’s beginning is telling. He opens Book One with an interpretation of the “kiss of his mouth” as Christ’s sermon on the mount. Thus Christ’s preaching is a “kiss,” writes Thomas, meant to instruct and save: “ad erudiendum et salvandum.” Christ teaches us about the exchange of our salvation; he shows us humanity and Divinity wed. Likewise, Thomas’s treatment of the Song is meant to bare the Song’s *sententia* in what we might call the “kiss of preaching.” Or, to put it another way, Thomas extends Christ’s “kiss” by preaching the Song as the story of humanity and Divinity being wed.

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59 Thomas himself writes on the beatitudes in Book Eleven, *ICC*, PL 206; cc768A-769C.

However, the “kiss” as Christ’s preaching is not an interpretation novel to Thomas. Alcuin of York offers this same image in his *Compendium*:

May he kiss me with the kiss of his mouth; that is…may he himself come at last, who has for so long been promised…may he speak comfortingly to me in the words of his mouth: may he not, that is to say, scorn to enlighten me as I question him about the way of salvation. We read that this was brought to fulfillment in the Gospel: The disciples came to Jesus as he sat on the mount, and opening his mouth he taught them saying: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:1).61

Yet Thomas builds on Alcuin because he hears the Song praising the whole *commercium* of salvation. For Alcuin, as for other exegetes, the “kiss” of 1:1 is a prophecy of the Incarnation and, therefore, an apt image of that historical event. But Thomas expands this image by interpreting it within an ever-present anagogical vision. The “kiss” extends from the Incarnation to the unveiled presence of God in the Kingdom to come. Many of Thomas’s sermons end with Christ leading us to His unveiled presence.

Henri deLubac considers Thomas’s anagogical vision as characteristic of apostolic preaching. He sees Thomas as a “successor of the apostles,”62 for his commentary attempts to “nourish the sons of the Church”63 by preaching, as Thomas himself writes, “from the rooftops” what Christ taught in secret to his disciples.64 Thomas shows that preaching on the Song provides “nourishment” because its poetic


64 Ibid., quoting Thomas of Perseigne. Also see Thomas, *ICC*, PL 206, cc711C-D: “Oculi isti sunt praedicatoros, quia arcana Scripturarum discunt in occulto, quae loquantur in aperto, unde filios nutriant Ecclesiae.”
richness both announces the Gospel fulfillment and looks toward the Gospel’s yet half-glimpsed mystery: the embrace of God’s presence in the heavenly Church.

Bernard of Clairvaux tellingly voices a similar depiction of the preacher. He considers his role as abbot akin to that of the apostle and mother, but also of the prophet. John Sommerfeldt recalls Bernard’s comments on preaching: “‘The abbot must also be a teacher, ready with ‘useful preaching’ for his sons.’ Moreover, by ‘preaching and providing guidance, Bernard’s abbot must assume the roles of apostle and prophet.’”65 Thus Bernard characterizes the role of the preacher (and the abbot) as apostolic, prophetic, and maternal. On the “burdens” of this “abbatial motherhood,” Bernard adds (in allusions to the Song): “Despite her desire to bask in the Bridegroom’s presence, she is entrusted with the cares of begetting and rearing children.”66 This is much like Thomas who “preaches from the rooftops,” so to speak, in order to “nourish” the “sons” of the Church.

Henri DeLubac notes that the apostolic character of preaching makes preaching an important project for Thomas. Thomas recognizes the significance of the apostolic preaching as a source of the Church’s growth. Thomas writes: “the preachers . . . learn the secrets of the Scriptures . . . which are spoken in the open so as to nourish the sons of

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the Church.” 67 In DeLubac’s words Thomas recognizes that as a preacher he is “Charged with inviting humanity to the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, with ‘binding the members to the Head,’ [and] communicating ‘the fullness of the Gospel.’”68

Thomas has many further preaching metaphors, which helps his readers see how he understands the role of the preacher. Preachers, he argues, also give sight to the Church. They are the “eyes” of the Church, and offer the vision afforded by scriptural interpretation. 69 Thomas makes both the Song’s Beloved and the way to the Beloved visible; he cultivates the spiritual vision of the monk. Thomas shows how preaching, as an act of interpretation and revelation, cultivates a kind of sight that “sees” the presence of Christ in the Church. Thomas cultivates such a vision by is own methods of preaching Christ’s salvific teaching.70

In perhaps his most telling metaphor, Thomas likens preachers to the neck of the Mystical Body, which connects Christ, the Head, and the faithful, or the Body, of the


68 Henri deLubac, Medieval Exegesis, vol. 2, p. 218. Thomas Cisterciensis: “‘Soror nostra parvula est et ubera non habet. Quid faciemus sorori nostrae in die quando alloquenda est:’ . . . transivit nuptias dilecti per passionem, concepit per sancti Spiritus missionem, peperit per apostolorum praedicationem; de primo Apostolus: ‘Apparuit gratia Dei et Salvatoris nostri Jesu Christi omnibus hominibus erudiens nos’ (Tit. 2). De secundo Petrus: ‘Quasi modo geniti infantes, rationabiles, sine dolo, lac concupiscite, ut in eo crescatis in salutem’ (I Petr. 2). Jam crescebant cum diceret: ‘Venite post me, faciam vos fieri piscatores hominum’ (Marc. 1). Ad nuptias dilecti transivit, quando per passionem suam ‘despondit eam uni viro, virginem castam exhibere Christo’ (II Cor. 11). Fecundata est per sancti Spiritus gratiam septiformem, peperit; unde dictum est apostolis: ‘Praedicate Evangelium omni creaturae’ (Marc. 16).” ICC, PL 206; cc825A-D.

69 “Oculi isti sunt praedicatoros, quia arcane Scripturarum discunt in occulto, quae loquantur in aperto, unde filios nutriant Ecclesiae,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c711D.

70 “Vox turturis audita est in terra nostra:’ Vox praedicatoris auditae est in terra, quae nostra coepit esse dum fidei verbum recipit,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c282D. The voice of the turtle dove was heard in our land: the voice of the preachers was heard in our land, which begins to be with us while it recovers the word of faith.
Church: the neck, or preachers, transmit food from the Head, from Christ, to the Body. In a second, similar metaphor, Thomas likens the preachers to the teeth of the Church: “Notandum autem quod dentes isti sunt praedicatorum pro Ecclesia.” In both cases, Thomas makes the point that the preacher makes Scripture accessible to the faithful. If, as Thomas writes, the Old and the New Testaments are the “poma nova et vetera,” which the Bridegroom serves to the Church, the preacher is the one who prepares them. Under Thomas’s aegis, then, the Song of Songs is a “fruit” that nourishes the monks.

The Sermons

Our description of Thomas’s In Cantica Canticorum as Scriptural commentary in the form of sermons gains clarity from a comparison of Thomas’s work with the sermons preached by Bernard of Clairvaux. Thomas’s commentary exhibits a form and method strikingly similar to that of Bernard’s Sententiae, the work containing Bernard’s notes for his preached sermons. A comparison of the two, therefore, will demonstrate the affinity between Thomas’s commentary and Bernard’s patristically-rooted, pastoral interpretation of Scripture, especially suited for a monk’s contemplation.

71 “Collum sponsae sunt praedicatorum ecclesiae, praedicator et sapientia se interius induit Caput spirituale, Christus…Hoc collum istud a capite Christo…quasi cibus transfunditur.” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; 706D.

72 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c386B.

73 “Poma nova et vetera, praecepta vel promissa novi Testamenti ac veteris, quae anima servavit dilecto suo ecclesia,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c760A.
Various scholars have suggested previously that Thomas’s *In Cantica Canticorum* is composed of complete and incomplete sermons on the Song of Songs, some of which they believe he delivered orally to the monks of Perseigne. Thus, the arguments for Bernard’s *Sententiae* also identify Thomas’s work as a commentary written in the form of sermons.

Building on the work of Friedrich Ohly and Bruno Griesser, Jean Leclercq and David Bell both argue that sections of Thomas’s work are “decidedly predicant in nature,” and contain “substantial portions of material which were at some time delivered as sermons.” Leclercq’s study of Thomas’s *De Praeparatione Cordis* reveals an unmistakable similarity between this work and Thomas’s commentary: their form. Leclercq considers it “distinctively sermonical.” Agreeing with Leclercq’s assessment, Bell points to a manuscript of Thomas’s commentary in which the copyist divided the text into 156 sermons, and another manuscript in which the commentary was re-titled *Sermones in Cantica*. Such historical evidence lends credence to the hypothesis that Thomas’s commentary is primarily predicant in nature. Bell identifies twenty-six full-

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74 “Ce qui semble très probable, c’est que ce commentaire a été mis à profit par plus d’un ‘predicateur’ à court d’inspiration,” Maur Staendaert, “Thomas Cisterciensis,” c798.

75 David N. Bell, “The Commentary on the Song of Songs of Thomas the Cistercian and His Concept of the Image of God,” p. 10. See also Friedrich Ohly, *Hohenlied-Studien*, p. 197; Bruno Griesser, “Dichterzitate in des Thomas Cistercienser Kommentar zum Hohenlied,” p. 80. There is also the work of C. de Visch, but Bell makes it clear that de Visch, while on the right path, was incorrect. See Bell, “The Commentary,” p. 10 and fn36.


length sermons on the Song included in Thomas’s commentary; to these I add three more.80 Our present comparison with Bernard’s commentary will further substantiate the claims of these scholars.

We will look at Thomas’s sermons momentarily; however, in order to provide the proper context for our comparison of Thomas and Bernard, let us see first that Bernard’s Sententiae are indeed representative of his preaching. John Sommerfeldt presents Bernard’s Sententiae as a collection of material Bernard actually preached (unlike, therefore, what we refer to as his Sermons on the Song of Songs, which Steigman and Matter treat as exemplifying a particular literary genre). Sommerfeldt’s argument is based largely on Jean Leclercq’s discussion of Bernard’s Sermones. Bernard’s Sententiae, rather than his Sermones, are examples of Bernard’s actual preaching. Following Sommerfeldt we need but recount Jean Leclercq’s argument in his introductory essay to Bernard’s Sermons on the Song of Songs, “Were the Sermons on the Song of Songs Delivered in Chapter?”:

Seen as a whole, the text of the Sermons does not indicate oral delivery. The sermons are long . . . . One simply cannot imagine what period in the Cistercian horarium would have been available during which the monks could hear preached sermons, each of whose texts, if one either read it or delivered it in spoken word, would take up a full hour or more. Moreover, the text is not just long; it is hard to follow. The style is characterized by a great subtlety of phrase and thought in certain places. What audience could fully grasp the nuances? Even though he had prepared his theme by deep meditation, could

Bernard himself have delivered, extemporaneously, talks whose expression and doctrine are so perfect in content, so closely reasoned and so precise?\textsuperscript{81} Taking Leclercq’s argument to heart, Sommerfeldt turns to Bernard’s \textit{Sententiae} in order to see “how and what,” if it was not the contents of his \textit{Sermones}, that “Bernard spoke to his monks at sermon time.”\textsuperscript{82} Bernard’s “simpler language” in the \textit{Sententiae} is his first clue that these are the “what” of the sermons he delivered to his monks. In contrast to the “subtle” and “nuanced” language of Bernard’s \textit{Sermones}, “the Sentences are often mere snippets, not treatises or well-constructed literary sermons. Some seem to be notes taken by Bernard as he ruminated on Scripture . . . Perhaps some of them are notes and phrases jotted down by appreciative monks after Bernard’s talks.”\textsuperscript{83}

Jean Leclercq also demonstrates how Bernard developed the “simpler language” of his \textit{Sententiae} into literary sermons. Developing Leclercq’s comparisons of Bernard’s various \textit{sententiae} on Pharoah’s chariot and horses in Series Three of the \textit{Sentences} with his thirty-ninth Sermon on the Song of Songs,\textsuperscript{84} Sommerfeldt identifies sections from the \textit{Sententiae} such as those from Series Three, as the sermons closest “to the sermons Bernard actually delivered.”\textsuperscript{85} Series Three of Bernard’s \textit{Sententiae} is thus the section


\textsuperscript{82} John Sommerfeldt, “Bernard preached often, but the hundreds of sermons we have from his hand were not preached—certainly not in the form in which we have them. How then are we to know how and what Bernard spoke to his monks at sermon time?”, “Introduction,” \textit{Parables and Sentences}, p. 113.


\textsuperscript{84} Jean Leclercq, “Were the Sermons,” pp. xxv-xxvii.

that contains sermons most like the ones Bernard actually preached to the monks of Clairvaux. Considering both the less developed sermons of Bernard’s Sententiae, and those of Series Three, Sommerfeldt concludes that “The Sentences are surely closer to the sermons Bernard actually preached than are the artificial and artful literary compositions which are labeled his ‘sermons.’”

Following Sommerfeldt’s argument then, we argue that Thomas’s commentary is close to the sermons Bernard actually preached, and therefore Thomas’s commentary is a record of what he actually preached as well. Moreover, a comparison of the style of Bernard’s Sentences with the style of Thomas’s commentary exposes the sermonical nature of the latter. Brian McGuire’s description of Bernard’s Sentences sounds just like the scholarly descriptions of Thomas’s work: “Bernard was an artist in dividing concepts into discreet categories, and at times it can be difficult to accept the worth of his three- and four-fold distinctions,” especially, McGuire adds, when considering Bernard’s Sentences. Our juxtaposition of Bernard with Thomas will cover passages from both monks containing sermons as they would have been delivered and in various stages of preparation. Let us begin our comparison with a passage from the Sententiae. In the First Series, Bernard illuminates Canticles 1:1:


‘Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.’ There are three kinds of kisses: those of reconciliation, those of reward, and those of contemplation. The first kind of kiss is given to the feet, the second to the hand, and the third to the mouth. Through the first is received remission of sins, through the second the gift of virtues, and through the third a perception of hidden things. Or to put it another way: they are the kiss of doctrine, of nature, and of grace.88

[Osculetur me osculo oris sui (Cant. 1:1). Tria sunt oscula, reconciliatorium, muneratorium, contemplatorium. Primum ad pedes, secundum ad manum, tertium ad os sumitur. In primo accipitur remissio peccatorum; in secundo, munus virtutum; in terto, cognitio secretorum. Vel ita osculum doctrinae, naturae, gratiae.]89

Here Bernard does not offer the elaborate, literary reflection on the “kiss” of the Song that we find in his Sermons (namely sermons 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8). Rather, he simply gives the biblical passage (Song of Songs 1:1), distinguishes between three types of kisses, gives a brief elaboration of each kiss, and then moves on to distinguish each kiss anew. Thus the kiss of divine contemplation is the kiss to the mouth, which is the perception of hidden things, and becomes the kiss of grace. This is a somewhat circular interpretation, but it is so on purpose, for the kissing of these “kisses” illuminates the depth of meaning contained in the Song’s “kiss.” Note that, as in Bernard’s type of monastic exegesis, there is no argument about the “kiss;” he simply illuminates it more and more fully.

This is exactly what we find in Thomas’s commentary. In order to see how striking the similarity is, we pick up Thomas’s interpretation of the “kiss” where he echoes Bernard most directly:

88 Bernard of Clarivaux, Sentence 1.8, Parables and Sentences, trans. Francis R. Swietek.

89 Bernard of Clairvaux, Sententiae, PL 182; c749D.
…there is the kissing of the feet for the forgiveness of sins; there is the kiss to the hands, in gratitude; there is the mouth to mouth kiss, in love. In the first are the initial steps in our conversion; the second is bestowed upon those who have progressed; the third is experienced only in the perfection of reason. Or again, the first is the kiss of repentance, the second is the kiss of devotion, the third is the kiss of contemplation. Yet again, they are the Father who kisses, the Son who is kissed, and the kiss itself, the Holy Spirit. This third kiss is at once sweeter to the taste, more delicate and the hardest for our minds to comprehend….\textsuperscript{90}

[Item, est osculum ad pedes, pro peccatorum remissione; osculum ad manus, pro gratiarum actione; osculum ad os, pro dilectione. In primo, primordia nostrae conversationis dedicantur; secundum, proficientibus indugetur; tertium sola rationis perfectio experitur. Item, primum est in confessione, secundum in devotione, tertium in contemplatione. Item, Pater osculans, Filius osculatus, osculum, Spiritus sanctus. Istud tertium osculum sapit suavius, gustatur rarius, intelligitur difficilius…]\textsuperscript{91}

In this passage we see well that the structure of Thomas’s commentary resembles the structure of Bernard’s Sententiae. Thomas enumerates the “kiss” of the Song in sets of three, each time circling around to give a fuller interpretation of that “kiss.”

However, we can also tell that this passage from Thomas is more developed than the passage from Bernard. In fact, the passage from Bernard is from the First Series of his Sententiae, while that from Thomas is from one of his full sermons. Yet, the similarity is clear. Thomas’s sermon, as we begin to see in the passage above, is built out of this way of spiraling deeper and deeper into the biblical text by making distinctions about the “things” of the text. We will look into this more fully soon, but first let us identify the passages in Thomas’s commentary that were delivered as sermons.

\textsuperscript{90} Denys Turner’s translation in Eros & Allegory, p. 313.

\textsuperscript{91} Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c23A.
The twenty-six passages\(^{92}\) in Thomas’s commentary were first identifiable as sermons by their conclusions. As both Friedrich Ohly and David Bell note, these passages conclude with a doxology and an “amen,”\(^{93}\) the combination of which is a clear indicator of a sermon’s conclusion. Several of the *sententiae* in Bernard’s Third Series, end in this manner.\(^{94}\) Section 107, for example, ends with these words: “May God, who lives and reigns forever and ever, see fit to grant this felicity to us! Amen.” Section One Hundred Eleven ends in a similar manner, but with an invocation of Mary as well: “May our Lord Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, deem it proper, through the intercession of the most blessed Virgin, to increase this desire in us.”

Thomas’s conclusions tend to contain simply a doxology and an “Amen.” To the twenty-six passages identified by Ohly and Bell, I add three more, bringing the number of full sermons to twenty-nine. In Thomas’s commentary, we encounter twenty-six simple doxological conclusions (two of which were previously overlooked by Ohly and Bell) that also signal the end of Thomas’s comments on a particular verse. In addition to these twenty-six, there are three more interesting cases, which we will treat momentarily (only two of which have been previously noted by Ohly and Bell). The following are the twenty-six conclusions, in order by Book.

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\(^{92}\) David Bell, “The Commentary,” p. 9, see fn33.

\(^{93}\) For example, see the end of Book 11 (c794B) or the beginning of Book 12 (cc795C-824B). The latter of these is made up of commentary on several verses of the Song, which reads like a sermon on the assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

\(^{94}\) Sections 88, 89, 92, 98, 107, 109, 110, 111, and perhaps sections 113 and 115 as well. Section 113, for example, concludes: “So we should love him with our whole heart, with our whole mind, and with our whole strength, so that we may be worthy to attain what he promises to us.” See Swietek, *Sentences*, 113.
Book 1:
1. “So that we might see him reigning with the Father and the Holy Spirit without end. Amen.”
[“Ut videamus eum regnantem cum Patre et Spiritu sancto sine fine. Amen.”]95

Book 2:
2. “Likewise: ‘And his throne as the days of heaven’ (Ps 89:30 . . . To which Jesus Christ himself leads us, ‘to whom is honor and glory forever. Amen’..”
[“Item: ‘Et thronus ejus sicut dies coeli,’ . . . Ad quam nos perducat ipse Christus Jesus, ‘cui est honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum. Amen’.”]96
3. “standing before our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom is honor and glory forever.”
[“praestante Domino nostro Jesu Christo, cui est honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum.”]97

Book 3:
4. I will pour out my Spirit over all flesh and your sons and daughters will prophesy’ (Acts 2:17), so that your minds might be illumined by the Spirit who procedes from the Fahter, and he might be in all, just as the his Son promised, the truth, our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom is honor and glory forever. Amen.
[‘Effundam de Spiritu meo super omnem carnem et prophetabunt filii vestri et filiae vestrae,’ ut mentes nostras Spiritus qui a Patre procedit illuminet, et nos inducat in omnem, sicut ejus promisit Filius, veritatem, Dominus noster Jesus Christus, cui est honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum. Amen.]98

Book 4:
5. “First through a mirror, in measure through the truth and the vision of God, to whom is honor and glory forever. Amen.”
[“…prius per speculum, modo per veritatem et Dei visionem, cujus honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum. Amen.”]99

95 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c27C.
96 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c113B.
97 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c140B.
98 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc188A-B.
99 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc215D-216A.
6. And thus you love mercy and make judgment, and thoroughly moved walk with your God while he raises you to that glory, in which he lives with the Father and the Holy Spirit and is glorified through all ages. Amen.

[Itaque dilige misericordiam et fac judicium, solliciteque ambula cum Deo tuo donec te exaltet ad illam gloriam, in qua cum Patre et Spiritu sancto vivit et gloriatur per omnia saecula saeculorum. Amen.]\textsuperscript{100}

Book 5:
7. “Standing before him, to whom is honor and glory forever. Amen.”
[“Ipso praestante, cui est honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum. Amen.”]\textsuperscript{101}

Book 6:
8. “You transfer the vessels from the burning heat of mortality in this place, that is the holy ones to the reign of happiness. Amen.”
[“De torrente hujus mortalitatis transferas vasa, id est sanctos ad regnum felicitatis. Amen.”]\textsuperscript{102}

9. “To which Jesus Christ leads us, to whom is honor and glory forever. Amen.”
[“Ad quod nos perducat Jesus Christus, cui est honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum. Amen.”]\textsuperscript{103}

Book 7:
10. “When ‘the bud of the Lord will be in magnificence and glory, and the fruit of the earth will be lifted up, and the exultation of the survivors in Israel’ (Isai. 4:2), standing before Jesus our Lord, to whom is honor and glory, forever. Amen.”
[“Quando ‘erit germen Domini in magnificentia et gloria, et fructus terrae sublimis, et exsultatio his qui salvati fuerint de Israel,’ praestante Domino nostro Jesu, cui honor et gloria, in saecula saeculorum. Amen.”]\textsuperscript{104}

11. “so that we might rejoice with Jesus in the glory of true light. Amen.”
[“... ut cum Jesu gaudeamus in veri luminis gloria. Amen.”]\textsuperscript{105}

\textsuperscript{100} Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc227A-B.
\textsuperscript{101} Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c325B.
\textsuperscript{102} Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; 386D. My addition to Ohly and Bell.
\textsuperscript{103} Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c405D.
\textsuperscript{104} Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc457D-458A.
\textsuperscript{105} Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c466C.
12. “To that which he himself leads us, to whom is honor and glory forever. Amen.”
[“Ad quod nos perducat ipse, cui est honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum. Amen.”]106

13. “Concerning the third: ‘May the Lord open wide your heart to his law and to his precepts’ (2 Macc. 1:4). To whom is honor and glory forever. Amen.”

Book 9:
14. “To which Jesus Christ leads us: ‘to whom is honor and glory forever. Amen.’
[“Ad quam nos perducat Jesus Christus: ‘cui est honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum.’ Amen.”]108

Book 10:
15. “Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God’ (Ps 87:4), to which Christ leads us: ‘to whom is honor and glory forever. Amen.’
[“...’Gloriosa dicta sunt de te, civitas Dei,’ ad quam perducat Christus: ‘cui est honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum. Amen’.”]109

Book 11:
16. “to which our Lord Jesu Christ leads us, to whom is honor and glory forever, Amen.”
[“Ad quam nos perducat Dominus noster Jesus Christus, cui est honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum, Amen.”]110

17. “Indeed they have parched breasts, who neither expend the living milk for Christ, nor expend the mink of living devotion for God, to whom is honor and glory forever. Amen.”
[“Arentia enim habent ubera, qui nec lac vivum impendunt pro Christo, nec lac charitativae devotionis impendunt Deo, cui est honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum. Amen.”]111

106 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc532C-D. My addition to Ohly and Bell.

107 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c539A.

108 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c642C.

109 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c721C.

110 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; 742A.
18. “By which Jesus Christ leads us, ‘to whom is honor and glory forever. Amen’.”
[“Quo nos perducat Jesus Christus, ‘cui est honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum. Amen’.”]112

19. “So that they might preach the reign of heaven; to which Jesus Christ is worthy to lead us, to whom is honor and glory forever. Amen.”
[“ut praedicarent regnum coelorum; ad quod nos perducere dignetur Jesus Christus, cui est honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum. Amen.”]113

20. “Our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom is honor and glory forever. Amen.”
[“Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum, cui est honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum. Amen.”]114

21. is pushed toward the praise by which God is honored, to whom is glory and honor.
[“. . . impinguatur ad laudem qua Deus honoratur, cui est honor et gloria.”]115

22. “so that it might be reserved for all in the reign of delight; to which our Lord Jesus Christ leads us, to whom is honor and glory forever. Amen.”
[“. . . ut reservetur omnibus regni jucunditas; ad quam nos perducat Dominus noster Jesus Christus, cui honor est et gloria in saecula saeculorum. Amen.”]116

Book 12:
23. “Because under the tree he revived us through his resurrection by which we will rise again with him in glory, standing before him, ‘to whom is honor and glory forever. Amen.’
[“Quia sub arbore suscitavit nos ea resurrectione qua cum ipso resurgemus in gloria, ipso praestante, ‘cui est honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum. Amen’.”]117

111 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c752D.
112 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c764D.
113 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c769C.
114 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c774A.
115 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c785C.
116 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c794B.
117 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc808C-D.
24. “‘His face shone like the sun’ (Mtw. 17:2). In this he reigns and is glorified forever. Amen.”
[“…‘resplenduit facies ejus sicut sol.’ In hac regnat et gloriatur in saecula saeculorum. Amen.”]118

25. “Our Lord Jesus Christ leads us to that glory, ‘to whom is honor and glory forever. Amen.”
[“Ad quam gloriam perducat nos Deus noster Christus, ‘cui honor est et gloria in saecula saeculorum. Amen’. ”]119

[“. . . ipsa praestante, qui cum Patre et Spiritu saneto aeternaliter gloriatur. Amen.”]120

In addition to these twenty-six passages there are two more, as Ohly and Bell have observed, which seem to present a conclusion, but then continue on. In Book Five:

27. In a true vision of him it is said: A great happiness will be produced in the people standing before him [Christ], to whom is honor and glory forever. Amen. . . . An evil one is shown to himself, by his neighbor, by God: first for knowing the sickness, second for seeking council, third for receiving a remedy . . .

[In ejus visione vere dicetur: Facta est laetitia magna in populo ipso praestante, cui est honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum. Amen. . . . Mala ostenditur sibi, proximo, Deo: primum ad cognoscendum morbum, secundum ad quaerendum consilium, tertium ad suscipiendum remedium . . . ]121

Surprisingly, these further comments continue for another two columns. This could represent an instance in which Thomas went back and added further notes after preaching.

118 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c824B.
119 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c844C.
120 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c860D.
121 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc305D-306A.
his sermon. The way this passage concludes is similar to the conclusion of a sermon (ending in c325B) already counted by both Ohly and Bell (number 7 in the list above).

Similarly, in Book Two, in a previously unoticed passage, Thomas gives a doxology and an “Amen”: “In qua cum Patre et Spiritu sancto vivis et regnas Deus, per omnia saecula saeculorum. Amen,” but, then goes on with his comments, though only for a few more lines this time. In this extension, he delineates also in a postscript the qualities of those who rejoice with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in Heaven.

David Bell and Friedrich Ohly also identify a sermon from Book Twelve (ending in c804A) with this ending:

29. “If you approach the son: sighing for his exaltation, with the blessed Virgin interceding we will reign with him revering his majesty.”

While this passage does not include the typical doxological conclusion, if we remember Bernard’s conclusions above, we see that this is the end of another sermon.

Jean Leclercq shows that these passages do not only conclude as sermons, but that they also “begin as a sermon begins.” From the De Praeparatione Cordis, Leclercq

122 See David Bell, “The Commentary,” p.10.

123 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c136D. My addition to Ohly and Bell.

124 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc 136D-137A. “Qui sunt in primo convivio discumbunt in novissimo loco; qui sunt in secundo discumbunt in medio; qui sunt in tertio discumbunt in primo. Primi per humilitatem, secundi per veritatem, tertii per dignitatem: per humilitatem, quia se indignos coelo reputant; per veritatem, quia considerantes universa temporalia spernunt, et ad superna anhelant; propter dignitatem, quia cum Christo regnant. De primis: Peccavi super numerum arenae maris: de secundis Paulus: ‘Quae posteriora sunt obliviscens ad ea quae anteriora sunt meipsum extendens, persequor ad bravium supernae vocationis:’ de tertii: Gaudent in coelis animae sanctorum, qui Christi vestigia sunt securi.”

125 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; 804A. Book Twelve.

gives this example: “What, therefore, brothers, we say concerning the cloistered…”
[“Quid ergo, fratres, dicemus de claustralibus…”]. 127 We will discuss the beginnings of
Thomas’s sermons shortly and see that they do “begin as a sermon begins,” although not
in the manner Leclercq points out with the De Praeparatione. However, while we do not
find any such beginnings to Thomas’s commentary, we do find similar exhortative
phrases directed toward the monks: “Thus, brothers, ‘before the fall, the heart is lifted up’
(Prov. 16:18).” [Sic, fratres, ‘ante ruinam exaltatur cor’ (Prov. 16)]. 128 “And similarly
we, brothers, ought to incline the eyes…” [“Similiter et nos, fratres, debemus oculos
inclinare…”]; 129 “Thus we, brothers, are called by God…” [“Sic nos, fratres, vocamur a
Domino”]. 130

These “obviously predicant” sections of Thomas’s commentary, marked by their
conclusions and their similarity to Bernard’s preaching, permit us to agree with David
Bell that Thomas’s work “contains within its compass substantial portions of material
which were at some time delivered as sermons.” 131 In accord with the list above, we
conclude that Thomas preached on Song of Songs 1:1, 1:2, 1:11, 1:13, 2:1, 2:4, 2:6, 2:14,
2:17, 4:1, 4:3, 4:12, 4:13-14, 5:4, 5:5, 6:8, 7:4, 7:10, 7:12, 7:13, 8:1 (twice), 8:2, 8:4, 8:5
(twice), 8:7, 8:12, and 8:14.

128 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c595D.
129 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c611D.
130 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c678B.
Thomas’s Method

But what of Thomas’s commentary beyond these twenty-nine passages? By our comparison with Bernard’s *Sententiae*, the rest of Thomas’s commentary looks like the preparations for or the notes to sermons. Or, better put, it is scriptural commentary arranged in predicant form. Thomas was not simply collecting *distinctiones*, but he was also laying out sermons on the Song while offering commentary on each verse. From here, then, let us look at what Thomas himself says of his method. This examination of Thomas’s will be followed up by a brief look at the preaching precepts of Alan of Lille, a fellow Cistercian. Having gained a better grasp of Thomas’s method of commentary, Alan of Lille’s *De Arte Praedicatoria* will cement what we have been discovering about Thomas via our comparison with Bernard.

With regard to his method and goal in writing his commentary, Thomas borrows the description of his work from Bernard’s Sentence 51, but with one telling exception. Thomas makes his method clear in his dedicatory letter. “With Ruth in the field of Boaz, which means ‘in strength,’ that is in the Scriptures of Christ, who is the strength of God, after Origen and the other harvesters who came before [us], I have collected the ears, that is the meanings, wrapped within the husk of the letter.”

132 Thus, Thomas harvests the meanings wrapped in the husk of the letters, gleaning the Scripture’s nourishing spiritual *sententia* from the field of the Song. In order to do so, Thomas removes the Song verse

132 “Cum Ruth in agro Boaz, qui dicitur in fortitudine, id est in Scriptura Christi, qui est Deus fortis, post Origenem et alios praefatos messores, spicas, id est sententias palea litterae involutes satago colligere,” Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c17C.
by verse from its “husk,” explaining each verse briefly. Finally, Thomas offers various
distinctions, which are strengthened by the witness of other Scriptural passages.133

Meanwhile, in Sentence 51, Bernard writes:

On the Moabite Ruth. Ruth, the Moabite . . . in the field of Boaz—that is, in Holy Scripture—she gathers up the sheaves which have escaped the hands of the reapers. These are certain points untouched by the great doctors, which the law has ordained should remain as food for the widow, the orphan, and the stranger following behind the reapers, so that in her thoughts the soul may not depart from catholic doctrine. The great reapers are Augustine, Jerome, Gregory, and certain others who have gathered great bales of insight from Scripture. They have left us traces of these in their writings, so that through the sheaves which we collect ourselves and those which we comprehend through them our soul can feed during time of famine and survive by dipping its mouth into the wine of sorrow and consuming it along with the servants of Christ—that is, regarding itself in humility among the least who are in the Church.134

[51. De ruth Moabitide. Ruth Moabitis . . . in agro Booz, hoc est in Scriptura Sancta, colligit spicas quae messorum manu fugerant, quasdam videlicet sententiolas a magnis doctoribus intactas quas lex praecepit remanere in cibum viduae, pupilli et advenae sequentium post terga metentium ne in suis intellectibus a doctrina aberret catholica. Messores magni sunt Augustinus, Hieronymus, Gregorius et ceteri tales qui de Scriptura magnos expositionum manipulos collegerunt, ex quibus quasdam nobis scintillas in scriptis suis reliquerunt, ut et de spicis quas colligimus et de his quae per eos intelligimus tempore famis hoc ruminet et vivat anima nostra Intinguatque bucclllam suam in aceto amaritudinis, comedens cum puellis Christi, id est per humilitatem se reputans inter minimum qui sunt in ecclesia.]135

133 “Verum singulos versiculos ab integamento paleae absolvo, brevi sive compendiosa expositione. Deinde . . . multiformi disponens distinctione . . . percurrens flosculos Scripturarum . . . eorum roboro attestatone,” ibid.

134 Bernard of Clairvaux, The Parables and The Sentences, Sentence 51; translated by Swietek, p. 227.

135 Bernard’s Sententiae, in Opera Sancti Bernardi, 6/2:126, pp. 92-3.
Clearly Bernard speaks at length of “gleaning” *sententiolae* after Scripture’s great “reapers.” And, as Thomas is commenting on the Song of Songs, Thomas simply inserts a list of *messores* more particular to the Song of Songs, including Origen, Bede, Gregory, and even Bernard himself: “... post Origenis mella, Gregorii pigmenta, Bedae odoramenta, beati Bernardi balsama.”

However, Bernard does not mention the practice of *distinctio* in Sentence 51. Yet, as we saw above, Bernard interprets by making distinctions about the “things” of the biblical text. It is this similarity of form that allowed us to draw our conclusions about Thomas as a sermon writer. The difference lies in that fact that for Thomas, the gleaning of the fields of Scripture, *cum Ruth*, occurs primarily in the manner of *multiformi disponens distinctione*. Indeed, the extent to which he interprets the biblical text by multiplying, ordering, and revisiting distinctions is the most striking characteristic of Thomas’s commentary.

Maur Staendert comments that what strikes one first about Thomas’s commentary is its “extreme mobility”: “As soon as a phrase is announced, an idea advanced, a theme presented, the author employs distinctions, which are followed by

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136 It should be noted that Pauline Matarasso has said something similar about Guerric of Igny’s Sermons: “Guerric’s purpose in preaching was to unravel the mysteries of Scripture, to draw out the hidden core – what he calls the spiritual kernel in the hard shell of the literal meaning – and present it to his monks as nourishment for their spiritual life,” Pauline Matarasso, *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 127.

137 Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c17A.

138 Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c17C.
other distinctions, relayed by divisions and subdivision to no end.”¹³⁹ However, as David Bell’s articles on Thomas demonstrate, Thomas’s commentary is not simply an “encyclopedia” of material on the Song; it is not simply distinctiones ad nauseam. Rather, it contains theological ideas and doctrines, which may have to be pieced together as they are scattered throughout the commentary, but in some ways this is a good method for Thomas’s aims. His method of disponens distinctiones and “brief” explanations allows Scripture to comment on itself, and therefore Thomas’s method is not simply that of cataloguing, but of presenting theological ideas via scriptural interpretation that spiral into ever more colorful, bright, and sometimes even unexpected light. The monks to whom Thomas preached would have followed a sermon built on the echoes and reverberations of scriptural image after scriptural image easily, and see illuminated therein the ways of becoming worthy human “brides” of the divine Bridegroom.

**Distinctiones**

Let us take a closer look at the practice of interpreting Scripture by making “distinctions.” Disponens distinctiones was a popular method of interpretation during the second half of the twelfth century. Distinctiones have three characteristics that render them especially useful to the preacher.

¹³⁹ Maur Staendaert, “Thomas Cisterciensis,” c798. “Ce qui frappe de prime abord dans le Commentaire c’est, si l’on peut dire, son extrême mobilité. A peine une phrae est-elle énoncée, une idée avancée, un thème présenté, l’auteur opère des distinctions, qui se poursuivent en d’autres distinctiones, relayées par des divisions et des subdivisions à n’a pas finir.” My translation.
First, commentaries in the twelfth century were often collections of *distinctiones*, or, as Alastair Minnis puts it, commentaries were “collections of distinctions of exegetical material” related to the biblical text at hand.\(^{140}\) However, Gilbert Dahan argues that compilations of distinctions were employed not only by exegetes working on commentaries, but also by preachers working on sermons.\(^{141}\) *Distinctiones* were useful tools for the preacher at his work bench. For Thomas, whose work is a combination of commentary and sermon writing, the *distinctio* reveals the singular quality of his work.

When considering the sheer volume of *distinctiones* in Thomas’s commentary, we recognize David Bell’s observation that Thomas is a “compiler.”\(^{142}\) Bell’s own examinations of Thomas’s work focus heavily on his sources, revealing Thomas’s use of works produced by a wide range of theologians from Augustine to Bernard, Richard of St. Victor, and even Peter Abelard.\(^{143}\)

However, compilation, as we see straight away with Thomas, was not simply the effort to collect exegetical *materia*. It was also the creative art of transforming existing

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\(^{143}\) See Bell, “The Commentary,” p. 11. The best way to understand a “compilation,” is to know its various and many sources. With an author like Thomas this is a formidable task: his commentary is quite lengthy and quite learned. Thus, we must be happy to begin somewhere, and where better to start with a monk who calls himself “quantaluscunque monachus Cisterciensis,” than with his Cistercian contemporaries?
materials into new interpretations, of developing new allegories and images to transmit
the fundamental doctrine of the Church, and, in Thomas case, to present it to a monastic
audience. Thomas’s materia may not be unique, but the way in which he presents it is.
He offers the monks countless new images and allegories through which they could
contemplate and appropriate the monastic encounter with God.

Second, the distinctio is useful for preaching because it is “a point of departure in
scriptural exegesis.”\textsuperscript{144} The distinctio easily peals the “husk” from a verse to reveal its
sententiae by treating the “husk” properly. The distinctio begins with the letter of the text
by treating the keys words, which marhsall its division into sections that make the inner
meaning accessible. Each distinctio, then, contains “summaries of grammatical,
rhetorical, and metaphorical significance” according to the text or the “husk,” and which
“accompany concise statements of tropological, allegorical and anagogical sense.”\textsuperscript{145}
Thus, the highly allegorical aspect of the distinctio, arising from the letter of the text,
makes it an invaluable interpretive tool for an allegory artist like Thomas.

Third, distinctiones are useful to the preacher as a mnemonic device. Mary
Carruthers makes an interesting point about distinctiones in relation to twelfth-century
preaching. Recounting Beryl Smalley’s argument in English Friars, Carruthers reminds

\textsuperscript{144} See Allen, The Friar as Critic (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971), p. 104. Also
Philip S. Moore, The Works of Peter of Poitiers: Master of Theology and Chancellor of Paris (1193-1205)

\textsuperscript{145} Alastair Minnis, Medieval Authorship, p. 64.
us that the *distinctio* is a “precursor of the ‘picture’.”¹⁴⁶ In other words, Carruthers argues that allegories, created through the practice of making distinctions, allow the reader to create a picture in their minds, thereby helping them remember what was being taught.¹⁴⁷ We find a good example of Thomas “drawing mental pictures” for his monks in a sermon from Book One in which he lays out distinctions on the “breasts” of the Bride and Bridegroom, and then matches the pairs of *distinctiones* up to show how the “breasts” of “mercy” and “truth” align (human mercy to divine truth, and human truth to divine mercy) so that the Bride and Bridegroom may embrace each other.¹⁴⁸ This is an image that will resound with the monk and remain in his mind as he contemplates the Bridegroom.

In her recent article on mnemonic devices, Kristen Berg focuses on the second part of Carruthers’ argument: the *distinctio* is not only a helpful mnemonic device for the preacher’s audience, but for the preacher as well.¹⁴⁹ The less developed sections of Thomas’s commentary would fall under this category for the strings of *distinctiones* would also help the preacher recall how his sermon was to unfold rhetorically. As with Bernard’s *Sententiae*, then, the parts of Thomas’s sermon not delivered orally consist of


¹⁴⁷ Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 231.

¹⁴⁸ See Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; cc28B-31C.

commentary that carries a predicant tone and was written with preaching in mind.

Preaching from the text of Thomas’s commentary, a preacher would have the working outline for a sermon, which would help him draw the connections between the allegories presented and the meaning of the biblical text.

We turn now to an example of *distinctiones* from Thomas. The following is a passage from his interpretation of Canticles 4:10 (“quam pulchræ sunt mammæ tuæ soror mea sponse pulchiora ubera tua vino”) in Book Seven. It is a section that remains rather undeveloped, but this allows us to see how the layers of triplets are mutually illuminating even without any intervening explication. The layers themselves become sufficient explanation. Notice how the triplets of *distinctiones* first divide the verse from the Song and then correspond to one another as they spiral around and unfold, offering by this textual movement greater and greater illumination of one another and therefore of Canticles 4:10. I have labeled them A, B, C, then D, E, F, and so on. The passage remains untranslated in order to preserve the Latin word play.

Omnium Christo militantium mater est gratia.
A. Haec habet mammam,
B. habet uber,
C. habet mamillam.
A. De prima ut hic: *Pulchræ sunt mammæ tuæ* (Cant. 4:10)
B. De ubere in sequenti: *Pulchriora sunt ubera tua vino.* (Cant. 4:10)
C. De tertia Isaias: ‘Mamilla regum lactaberis’ (Is. 60).
A. De prima lac extrahit;
B. de secunda pinguedo effunditur;
C. de tertia mel suscipitur.

D. Unde dicitur mamma, quasi manu manans;
E. uber, quasi ungens imber;
F. mamilla, quasi manans melle.
D. Prima blanditur,
E. secunda consolatur,
F. tertia sugens dulcoratur.
D. Blanditur promissione,  
E. consolatur devotione,  
F. dulcoratur suscipientis ineffabili dulcedine supernae gloriae.  
D. Primo dicitur: ‘Lac vobis potum dedi, non escam’ (I Cor. 3);  
E. secundo: ‘Impinguasti in oleo caput meum’ (Psal. 22);  
F. dicit Salomon: ‘Comede mel, fili, quoniam bonum est’ (Prov. 24).

G. Prima potantur infirmi;  
H. secunda satiantur validi;  
I. tertia inebriantur perfecti.  
G. Unde Isaias: primis, ut potemini a lacte (Isai. 66);  
H. secundis, ut satiemini ab ubertate consolationis vestrae (Ibid);  
I. tertiis, epulemini ab introitu gloriae gentium (Ibid).  

Hi inebriantur ab ubertate domus Dei.

J. Mammae sunt pulchrae,  
K. ubera pulchriora,  
L. mamillae pulcherrimae sunt.  
J. Pulchrae lactis candore,  
K. pulchriores olei nitore,  
L. pulcherrimae materia mellis, id est florum ex quibus fit varietate.  

M. Candore innocentiae,  
N. nitore conscientiae,  
O. varietate florum excellentium; beatitudinum commemoratione.  
M. Primus est: ‘Innocens manibus et mundo corde’ (Psal. 23).  
N. Secundus dicit: ‘Gloria nostra haec est, testimonium conscientiae nostrae’ (II Cor. 1).  
O. Tertius frequenter recordatur: ‘Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam ipsorum est regnum coelorum’ (Matth. 5).

For Thomas these layers of triplets are not an artificial way of creating connections within the biblical text. Rather, they are careful, studied, and well executed illuminations of Scripture by Scripture. Thus, again to refute Standaert’s comments (that
there are simply divisions and subdivisions “à n’est pas finir”),¹⁵⁰ we see here that while Thomas moves quickly through distinctions, divisions and subdivisions, he does not merely allow them to pile up, but rather opens the same interpretation up further and further, offering greater and greater illumination of the text at hand. One could compare it to a spiral staircase built of scriptural verses; it brings one further and further into the text at hand through its various inner *sententiae*, be it allegorical, tropological, or anagogical. In this example A is further interpreted by D, G, J, and M; B by E, H, K, and N; C by F, I, L, and O. Let us rearrange the strands in order to see the development within Thomas’s interpretation more clearly. Observe the *distinctiones* following on “A,” the *mamma*:

A. Haec habet mammam . . . .
A. De prima ut hic: *Pulchræ sunt mammæ tuae* (Cant. 4:10) . . . .
A. De prima lac extrahitur . . . .

D. Unde dicitur mamma, quasi manu manans . . . .
D. Prima blanditur . . . .
D. Blanditur promissione . . . .
D. Primo dicitur: ‘Lac vobis potum dedi, non escam’ (I Cor. 3) . . . .

G. Prima potantur infirmi . . . .
G. Unde Isaias: primis, ut potemini a lacte (Isai. 66) . . . .

J. Mammae sunt pulchrae . . . .
J. Pulchrae lactis candore . . . .

M. Candore innocentiae . . . .
M. Primus est: ‘Innocens manibus et mundo corde’ (Psal. 23) . . . .

And on “B,” the *ubera*:

B. habet uber . . .
B. De ubere in sequenti: *Pulchriora sunt ubera tua vino.* (Cant. 4:10) . . .
B. de secunda pinguedo effunditur . . .

E. uber, quasi ungens imber . . .
E. secunda consolatur . . .
E. consolatur devotione . . .
E. secundo: ‘Impinguasti in oleo caput meum’ (Psal. 22) . . .

H. secunda satiantur validi . . .
H. secundis, ut satiemini ab ubertate consolationis vestrae (Ibid) . . .

K. ubera pulchriora . . .
K. pulchriores olei nitore . . .

N. nitore conscientiae . . .
N. Secundus dicit: ‘Gloria nostra haec est, testimonium conscientiae nostrae’ (II Cor. 1) . . .

And, “C,” the *mamilla*:

C. habet mamillam . . .
C. De tertia Isaias: ‘Mamilla regum lactaberis’ (Is. 60) . . .
C. de tertia mel suscipitur . . .

F. mamilla, quasi manans melle . . .
F. tertia sugens dulcoratur . . .
F. dulcoratur suscipients ineffabili dulcedine supernae gloriae . . .
F. dicit Salomon: ‘Comede mel, fili, quoniam bonum est’ (Prov. 24) . . .

I. tertia inebriantur perfecti . . .
I. tertiiis, epulemini ab introitu gloriae gentium (Ibid) . . .

L. mamillae pulcherrimae sunt . . .
L. pulcherrimae materia mellis, id est florum ex quibus fit varietate . . .

O. varietate florum excellentium; beatitudinum commemorazione . . .
O. Tertius frequenter recordatur: ‘Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam ipsorum est regnum coelorum’ (Matth. 5) . . .
In short, Thomas is doing exactly what he said he would do: gleaning Scripture’s spiritual *sententiae* in order to nourish the sons of Mother Church. Thomas provides the monks with a myriad of mutually illuminating ways to understand the “kiss of his mouth,” the ways in which they already receive this “kiss,” and how to contemplate the journey toward the “kiss” that is Christ’s presence in Heaven.

*Alan of Lille Prescribes Distinctions*

Alan of Lille, a late twelfth-century Cistercian monk, witnesses to a similar rapport between *distinctiones* and sermon writing. His *Distinctiones Dictionum Theologicalium* was compiled as a handbook, a practical aid, to those seeking to interpret the Bible.\(^{151}\) Seeing the language of the Bible as singularly figurative precisely because it was the Bible’s language, Alan set out to aid expositors by offering them the special “meanings” of biblical words.\(^ {152}\) Juxtaposed with his *De Arte Praedicatoria*, where he gives example sermonettes,\(^ {153}\) one sees how Alan intends such *distinctiones* to be helpful

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\(^{151}\) Alanus de Insulis, *Distinctiones Dictionum Theologicalium*, PL 210; cc685A-1011C.


\(^{153}\) It should be noted also that Alan follows his rubric in giving sermons. See, too, how similar it is to Thomas’s form: “Notandum, fratres charissimi, quae petat, quid petat, et a quo petat. Virgo virginum petit, osculum petit, a vero sponso, id est a Christo petit. Quod osculum? non illud a quo defluit fermentum luxuriae; sed, a quo distillat favus coelestis gratiae. Triplex autem osculum virgo petiit, quae postulatum obtinuit.

Est autem primum genus osculi, quod fit per spirituallem conjunctionem animae et Dei; secundum osculum est, quo pater osculatur Filium, est enim Spiritus sanctus Patris et Fili amor et nexus. Tertium osculum est Incarnationis, quo Christus per humanitatem assumptam, osculatus est virginem Mariam. Primum osculum est, inspirationis; secundum, spirationis; tertia, incarnationis. Primum osculum, est cordis; secundum, oris; tertia, corporis. Primum reddit favum, secundum balsamum, tertia oleum. Ante Incarnationem ergo, virgo petit osculum internae visitationis, ut per hoc servaret integre sigillum virginitatis: nec sua fuit petitione fraudata, sed interna inspiratione visitata.
to the preacher employed in the useful art of moral and doctrinal instruction. Alan wrote his De Artes around the year 1200. Thus, Thomas’s practice of distinctio is prescribed to preachers within twenty-five years of penning his commentary.

Alan’s De Artes opens with a depiction of preaching as illuminated by Jacob’s ladder. Preaching, writes Alan, is the “manifest and public instruction in faith and morals.” Preachers ascend Jacob’s ladder when they instruct us in matters of faith and descend when they instruct in morals. Furthermore, Alan argues that one’s “form of preaching” should be taken from theological authority, especially the Gospels, Psalms, Epistles of Paul, and—of most interest to us—from the Book of Solomon. In this necessity, Alan exhibits the development of a theme based on the Scriptural source and its interplay with other Scriptural passages and theological authorities such as the Fathers. This is precisely what Thomas does; his is a commentary built on on scriptural and Patristic citation. In this, while Thomas’s “form” looks like the university sermons

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Ergo primum osculum sensit, quando virginitatis sigillum non amisit, et sic per visitationem internam, se quodammodo reddidit Verbi incarnatione dignam. Sed qua dignitate? dignitate triplici: dignitate praeelectionis, dignitate electionis, dignitate subelectionis. Dignitas praeelectionis fuit, quando ab aeterno decreto praedestinationis, ad hoc fuit praeelecta, ut esset Dei mater intacta, sed postquam Spiritus sanctus eam obumbravit, ad hoc elegit ut Filium Dei conciperet, et conceptum ineffabili partu in lucem producet; subelecta etiam fuit, respectu illius humanae naturae quae verbo Dei amica fuit ineffabili amore.” From Alan’s Sermon 1: “De spirituali unitate abbatis et monachorum,” De Arte Praedicatoria, PL 210; cc197B-198B. Alan’s Scriptural text is Song of Songs 1:2, “Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.” Emphasis mine.

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155 “. . . praedicatio enim nunc in divinis instruct, nunc in moribus; quod significatur per angelos ascendentes et descendentes,” Alan of Lille, De Arte, PL 210; c112B.

156 Ibid.
which are written in the years after Alan’s De Arte, Thomas remains closest to the theological and devotional writings of a Bernard.

The majority, however, of Alan’s De Arte provides a bevy of sermon examples, complete with scriptural authorities appropriate to audience and theme and properly exposited by distinctiones. Alan’s prescribed mode of exposition reflects Thomas’s style. In Chapter Two, “De mundi contemptu,” Alan instructs the preacher by giving an example sermonette, demonstrating thereby his preference that sermons proceed by three-fold divisions (distincta):

If the preacher wishes to invites his hearers to despise the world, let him bring before them this text: ‘Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!’ What authority so teaches the vanity of earthly things and the unworthiness of man as does this one? It shows that all things pass away and nothing endures. According to this authority we should distinguish three forms of worldly vanity. There is the vanity of what passes away, the vanity of worldly care, and the vanity of deceitfulness. According to the vanity of what passes away, all things are subject to change. On this topic St. Paul says: ‘every creature was made subject to vanity.’ The vanity of worldly care makes a man concentrate all his desire on worldly things; whence: ‘The Lord knows the thoughts of men, that they are vain.’ On the same subject, Persius, writing in comic vein, says: ‘How great a folly are the cares of mankind over their affairs!’ The vanity of deceitfulness is the telling of lies, of which it is said: ‘Everyone speaks vain things to his neighbor.’ In such a way the preacher should substantiate from the authorities every division of the subject which he proposes, otherwise every division is uncertain and unreliable.158

157 Thomas and Alan speak about the strengthening of exposition with scriptural witness in similar manners. Thomas: “quasi apis argumentosa percurrens flosculos Scripturarum, quae exposita sunt et distincta, eorum roboro attestatatione,” ICC, PL 206; c17. Alan: “Et quia pradicatio debet rationibus esse subnixa, et ab auctoritatibus roborata, consequenter annectitur: ex rationum semita, et auctoritatum fonte proveniens,” PL 210; c112C.

Thus Alan provides the proper scriptural authority and shows the preacher how to divide the text by way of distinguishing the types of worldly vanity: “distinguere triplicem mundi vanitatem.” Each of the three vanities is then briefly explained and “proven” by a theological authority, usually being another passage from Scripture. These directions echo Thomas’s self-directive: Scriptural “flowers” are offered in order to strengthen his interpretation, which was first interpreted, divided and arrayed with distinctions. This example from Alan, then, demonstrates that Thomas’s very method became the method prescribed particularly to preachers as the best method of creatively constructing sermons.

The Basic Structure of Thomas’s Sermons

It is finally time to see Thomas, the preacher, in action. We take an example from one of his shorter sermons, that on Canticles 7:12 in Book Seven. The fundamental structure of Thomas’s sermons is built on his division of the verse (later called the sermon’s theme) at hand. On 7:12 (Ibi dabo tibi ubera mea), then, Thomas shows (in what is later called the division of the theme) that he will progress by talking first about...
the breasts (*ubera*) then about where they are given (*ibi*) and by whom (*dabo*), and finally, in a tropologically toned conclusion, that they are given to you, i.e. to the monk (*tibi*). Thus, there are three parts to this sermon; each part is developed by sets of distinctions (later called subdivision) and their respective, corresponding scriptural authority. See how Thomas arrives at this final interpretation of Canticles 7:12 by knitting Scriptural verses together by way of *disponens distinctiones*:

**In cantica canticorum, Book Seven on Cant. 7:12. PL 206; cc748C-752D.**

[“THEME”:] Ibi dabo tibi ubera mea.

Ubera constat esse doctores Ecclesiae. Haec ubera Domino dat, cum et facta et dicta praedicatorum suorum in ejus exhibet obsequium, ut novos generent filios.

**PART ONE. On *Ubera.***

1. **TRIPLET OF DISTINCTIONES:** The three kinds of breasts:
   i. Sunt ubera brutorum animalium, ut equarum, quae solum suos nutriunt fetus.
      
      Et sunt quae suos nutriunt fetus, et in humanos aliquid praestant usus, ut vaccarum et ovium.
      
      Et sunt quae solummodo sunt apta nutriendis hominibus, ut mulierum.
   
   ii. In primis designantur homines tam verbis quam moribus dissoluti.
      
      In secundis, verbis ornati, sed moribus dissipati.
      
      In tertiis, tam verbis quam moribus compositi.
   
   iii. Primi enim sibi similes tantum faciunt discipulos;
      
      secundi, conversatione similes, sed verbis diversos,
      
      tertii, et verbis et moribus Deo acceptos.

2. **SCRIPTURAL FLOSCULI:**
   A: De primis: Lam. 4:3
   B: de secundis: Ezek. 23:2
   C: de tertiis: Canticles 4:5; Your breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle...

3. **COUPLETT FROM C:** The two breasts are good speech and good conduct
   i. *sermo et*
   
   ii. *conversatio.*
4. APPLICATION OF COUPLET to the opening triplet through SCRIPTURAL FLOSCULI for how the opening triplet functions according to word and deed:

D x 2 (word & deed of 1.i.): Mt. 23:15; Ps. 19:2; Juvenal, Sat. VI.238; Rom. 3:14 (but also Ps. 13:4); Romans 3:15
E x 2 (word & deed of 1.ii.) Mt. 15:8, Mt. 23:3; Lev. 19:19; Ps. 50:16-17; Ps. 28:3
F x 2 (word & deed of 1.iii.) 1 Cor. 3:2; 1 Cor. 9:16; 2 Tim 4:2; Titus 2:7

5. DISTINCTIONES:
   i. Ubera ista quae bona sunt, alii a dilecto elongant, alii dilecto locant, alii dilecto donant.
   ii. Primi sunt qui collatam sibi a Deo gratiam in nulla expendunt utilitate, secundi expendunt pro temporali communitate, tertii pro sola charitate.

6. SCRIPTURAL FLOSCULI on gratiam:
G: Mt. 25:25 (paraphrased not quoted)
H: Jn 2:14 (paraphrased, not quoted)
I: Mt. 25:27 (paraphrased, not quoted)
G¹: 2 Cor. 6:1; 1 Tim. 4:14; Prov. 11; Sir. 41:14
H¹: Matt. 10:40; 2 Kings 5; Job 15:30; Is. 33:15-16
I¹: Prov. 5:15; 1 Cor. 15:10; 1 Cor. 3:10; Rev. 22:17
G²: (Thomas notes these as prefigurations) Ex. 16:20; Gen. 38:9
H²: (prefiguration) Gen. 25:34
I²: (prefiguration) 2 Kings 4:2-7; Lk. 10:33

PART TWO. On Ibi: Ubera Ecclesiae sunt praedicatores, quos Ecclesia dat sponsa, dum eos mittit ad regimen imitando eorum doctrinam et mores, tanquam lac ex überibus sugens.
1. These breasts, namely Peter and Paul, are prefigured by Solomon in 1 Kings 6:23-6.
   i. Christ, who came to show mercy, showed the Church that this is WHERE he gives us the breasts: Peter and Paul are men of mercy.
   ii. Thus, Peter and Paul are the two cherubim made of olive wood, which represents mercy, and who are ten cubits, which represents knowledge of God.
2. DISTINCTIONES: The “cherubim” produce a 2-fold milk: knowledge and mercy. The ten cubits produce the perfection of the divine law.

3. SCRIPTURAL FLOSCULI:
B: Job 31:32, 31:18
C: Ps 119:165
4. Distinctiones: Knowledge is three-fold. (The third scientia is that of Peter and Paul)
   i. Est scientia quam sequitur poena,
      est scientia semiplena,
      est scientia plena.
   ii. Prima scit Dei voluntatem, sed non deserit iniquitatem.
      Secunda cum tractet de temporalibus, tamen retinet puritatem.
      Tertia prorsus sequitur Dei voluntatem.
   iii. Prima est ethnica, quia ethnici hoc faciunt.
      Secunda politica, quia civitates temporalia juste disponunt.
      Tertia apostolica, quia viri apostolici voluntati divinae se subjiciunt.

5. Scriptural Flosculi:
D: 2 Pet. 2:21
E: Phillip. 4:12; 1 Tim 5:17
F: Jn. 4:14; Hos. 4:1; 1 Cor. 2:2; 2 Tim. 1:12

6. But Peter and Paul, too, had to learn knowledge and mercy.
   i. O, Peter! Mtw. 26:70
   ii. O, Paul! Acts 7:58; Acts 9:1-2 (paraphrased); 1 Tim. 1:8

7. And thus those who were merciless at first, now give milk from the breast of mercy; who sinned through ignorance now give the the milk of knowledge.

8. Scriptural Flosculi:
G: 1 Sam. 10:2

9. Those who “convert” must endure the trials of the earth.

10. Distinctiones: A triplet based on G and H: What we escape in learning Christ’s mercy:
   i. Laqueus diabolicæ seductionis,
      fovea obstinationis,
      formido aeternæ animadversionis
   ii. Laqueus diabolicæ seductionis, ut incideret in tentationem;
      fovea obstinationis, ut veniat in desperationem;
      formido aeternæ animadversionis, ut sit paratus ad extremam damnationem.

11. Scriptural Flosculi:
I: Ps. 57:6; Ps. 124:7
K: Ps 112:10 (The wicked man...gnashes his teeth and wastes away); Heb. 10:27 (For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there [remains]...a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries.)

12. DISTINCTIONES: Elaboration of K in a triplet.
   i. Hi scientiam habuerunt in peccatorum conversatione, in conversorum gubernatione, in divina vocatione.
   In conversatione, cum scientiam habuerunt, et fortitudinem qua possent labores sustinere; audaciam, qua possent tyrannis resistere.

13. Return to 1 Kings 6, which also has lions, cattle, and cherubim: a TRIPLET.
   i. See Paul the lion – SCRIPTURAL FLOSCULI:
      L: Rom. 8:35; Prov. 28:1
      M: 2 Cor. 11:25
      N: Job 31:38-9

PART THREE. On tibi. Ista sunt ubera quae dabo tibi. ait sponsa.

1. DISTINCTIONES: Notandum quod dat ubera,
   i. quibus Christus nutritur in assumpta humanitate;
      et sunt quibus nutritur in fidei firmitate,
      et sunt quibus nutritur in charitate.
   ii. Prima porrigit Virgo Maria,
      secunda exhibent praedicatores in Ecclesia,
      tertia donat anima devota.
   iii. Primis nutritur caro Salvatoris,
      secundis fides Mediatoris,
      tertiis fervor amoris.

2. SCRIPTURAL FLOSCULI.
   A: From the liturgy
   B: Return to Peter and Paul as seen in Canticles 4:5 above
   C: Hosea 9:14. “Give them, O Lord, what will you give? Dry breasts.”

3. The final note from C: those who are “dry,” have neither lac vivum nor lac charitativae devotionis.

4. Doxology and Amen.160

160 See Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc748C-752D.
As a whole, the sermon resounds with the harmonious reverberations of Scripture echoing Scripture as the *distinctiones* link verse to verse. Notice how even the supporting scriptural citation leads into the next set of *distinctiones*, as preacher and congregation spiral further into Canticles 7:12. Part One, for example, circles around on itself by way of distinctions and scriptural authorities that play on and echo the word *ubera*, before leading the audience into Part Two. If you look above, you see the primary set of distinctions made about the *ubera* of Canticles 7:12 (i., ii., iii.) supported by scriptural *flosculi* (A, B, C). Of these authorities, the third (C) is Canticles 4:5, which also speaks about *ubera*. Then Thomas gives a couple of distinctions based on these *ubera*, making thereby his first link in the chain of his interpretation. This enables him to speak about the third kind of breast (1.iii.), which will be the subject of Part Two.

Essentially, everything moves on the scriptural citation, including the intervening lines of distinctions. Indeed, if one lacks the knowledge of the stories being told in the chain of scriptural citations, the depth and genius of Thomas’s interpretation is lost.

In the end, Thomas shows that the monk receives the “milk” of mercy and knowledge from the good deeds and words of the preacher, who is like a “breast.” The apostles Peter and Paul are the exemplary breasts held up by Thomas (properly speaking, his *exempla*), so that his audience not only has an example to follow, but a way of understanding the conversion they must undergo in order to know Christ and imitate his mercy. Drinking from the “breasts” of preachers like Peter and Paul, the monk gains knowledge of Christ crucified and, therefore, of mercy (as above, then, the monk experiences Christ through the preacher). The metaphorical pictures or turns of phrase being presented here by Thomas invite the monk to enter into the moral meaning of the
text. Accordingly, the monk is exhorted toward *conversio*, toward a moral “turning,” and he overflows with the “milk” of loving devotion.

This sermon presents the basic working structure and tone of Thomas’s preaching. He typically arranges his material and proceeds by threes, although at times he provides only a couplet as above, and at others he makes four or more distinctions, following upon these with sets of sub-distinctions or subdivisions. The longer sermons, naturally, are more complex, containing more divisions and subdivisions. Thus the sermons are divided and then further sub-divided, and require careful attention from their reader. However, one can always be sure of two things: 1. Thomas will proceed by linking distinctions with scriptural citation: *distinctiones-flosculi-distinctiones-flosculi*, etc.; 2. The many allegories and images created by this pattern of interpretation will tend toward the tropological, that is, toward showing the monk how to seek Christ in the life of the Church who is the Bride of Christ.

The numerous *artes praedicandi* written in the two centuries after Alan’s *Ars* term the various ways Thomas makes and arrays his *distinctiones* and scriptural citations. Thomas-Marie Charland’s *Artes Praedicandi* assesses the various structures and methods of sermon construction in the various *artes*. Charland’s work, therefore, allows us to see that Thomas proceeds by division and subdivision, by word plays based on cadence, rhyming, or syllables, by capitalizing on grammatical structures, by etymologies, and

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161 We have a good example of this in the final sermon of the whole commentary when Thomas discusses the three nuptial banquets. See ICC, PL 206; c846.

metaphors, by scriptural citations arranged by conventions such as *correspondentia*, *convolutio*, and *unitio*. Indeed, many of the examples Charland gives are strikingly similar to passages in Thomas’s commentary. Yet to describe Thomas’s work with such terms would be anachronistic. Thomas simply says he will go verse by verse, commenting by way of an arrangement of distinctions, brief explanations, and scriptural citation. We do better here to recognize the monastic roots of scholastic theology and the “university” sermon; we know that, for one, Thomas influenced the work of Hugh of St. Cher. In other words, Thomas portrays the groundwork laid by the twelfth-century monastic preachers for the later thematic, or “university,” sermons. James Murphy argues as much in his discussions of the *artes praedicandi* in *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*. Thomas ratifies the suggestion that what became an analyzed and prescribed practice was first developed amongst the monks as an extension of their *lectio divina*.

I prefer, then, to use Charland’s image of the tree to describe Thomas’s sermons. The sermon, writes Charland, arises from the scriptural verse, like a tree from its seed. The sermon’s trunk, branches, and leaves, are the way the sermon unfolds: in Thomas’s case by the spiraling sets of *distinctiones* and passages from Scripture. The fruit of the sermon, however, is the way in which it nourishes the audience. The fruit is the

163 For example, Charland’s discussion in *Artes*, p. 205, as well as Thomas’s treatment in *ICC cc500A-B*, both on *panis*.


165 See James J. Murphy’s chapter on the *artes praedicandi* in *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, pp. 269-355.

preacher’s primary concern; he tends to its cultivation as he constructs his sermon. As we know, Thomas is concerned with nourishing the monks of Perseigne with all that he can glean from the fields of Scripture. In fact, the only sense of Scripture which Thomas consistently points out by name is the “moral” sense. Thomas often begins by speaking about various points of Christian doctrine or monastic spirituality, about Christ, the Church, and the sacraments in an inseparable mélange, and then turns to give a specifically moral interpretation: “moraliter…”

Thus Thomas is best situated not in light of the later “art of preaching,” but next to one of his fellow Cistercians such as Bernard of Clairvaux. Bernard, one of the most eloquent writers of his time, also constructed sermons by listening to the ways in which words echoed throughout all of Scripture (indeed, he could not help but hear these reverberations just as Thomas could not but hear them), and arranged these echoings to produce spiritual fruit for his monks. Bernard, too, played with the sounds, cadences, and meanings of words: he was skilled, in other words, at what later came to be known as the “art” of preaching. Robert of Basevorn, writing an Ars in the fourteenth century, lauds Bernard as the pre-eminent sermon writer. To give an example of the similarities between Bernard, Thomas, and later preaching, the introduction to the first Sources

167 Also see Leclercq, “Les deux compilations,” p. 205.


Chrétiennes volume of Bernard’s Song of Songs sermons lists some of Bernard’s favorite word-plays based on sound and meaning, such as visu-usu or cordibus-corporibus.\footnote{170} Along similar lines, one of Thomas’s favorite word plays when discussing Mary is mater-materialis (or, as a second example of word-plays from Thomas, there are these from the passage cited above: mamma-manu manans; uber-imber; mamilla-manans melle.) \footnote{171} Such ways of treating the words of a biblical text were later prescribed by the many and various Artes praedicandi. With Thomas and Bernard, however, whose ears are trained to hear all the sounds of Scripture, they arise effortlessly from the text of Scripture.

Thomas, however, could hardly be considered as eloquent as Bernard. Bernard was the Doctor Mellifluus who presented his honey-like extractions of Scripture as audible images built out of the sounds of scriptural language. His aim was to make an experience of the ineffable and invisible Bridegroom possible.\footnote{172} In contrast, the reworked sermons within Thomas’s commentary simply contain large amounts of additional literary elaboration and look little like the eloquence of Bernard, which worked and reworked the subtleties of language as he developed his sermons into literary


\footnote{171} There is a beautiful article by Chrysogonous Wadell about the way Scripture echoes in the ears of the Cistercian monks: “The Liturgical Dimension of Twelfth Century Cistercian Preaching,” in Medieval Monastic Preaching, pp. 335-350.

\footnote{172} See Jean Leclercq, “L’Ecrivain,” pp. 551, 553.
works. The sections of Thomas’s commentary which were reworked remain rather unpolished and somewhat scattered: quite unlike the transformation noted by Leclercq between Bernard’s Sentences and his Sermons. Thomas remains more like the busy bee buzzing about between Scripture’s verses than the _mellifluous_ monk. In fact, even though Thomas writes with many of the plays on sounds and words like those in Bernard’s sermons, Thomas speaks in the images of Scripture. Thus, there is still something eloquent about Thomas’s style: the fluidity of allegories and images built on Scripture is an eloquence unto itself. Thomas speaks in pictures and allows them to mediate the meaning: Christ’s flesh is like fruit; mercy is milk; Christ is our Bread; the Church is a garden. This is an eloquence fully formed by the language of Scripture, and therefore an eloquence especially pleasing to the ears of Thomas’s fellow monks, attuned to every hint of scriptural allusion. The monk’s familiarity with Scripture would make Thomas’s sermons an encounter with all of Scripture as it speaks through the single verse that is the sermon’s “seed.”

The Liturgical Quality of Thomas’s Commentary

Chrysogonous Waddell considers the sermon’s liturgical quality especially characteristic of the early Cistercian preacher. Thomas exhibits this characteristic,

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173 Yet, as we noted in our comparison with Bernard’s Sentences above, Thomas’s eloquence is based on Bernard’s. While de Visch may have been wrong about other things, he was right about this: “Thomas Cistriensis monachus, eloquentiam sanctissimi Patris Bernard, et eiusdem in colligendis divinae scripturae floribus, diligentiam affectans, scritpsit ad Pontium Claromontensem Episcopum,” _Bibliotheca Scriptorum Sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis_ (Douai, 1649), p. 310.

which will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Four. However, here it is important to note that in accord with this liturgical quality, Thomas’s commentary invites the monk into the *historia salutis* as the Canticle sings it by writing sermons informed by “the unity of the liturgical year.” The unity of the liturgical year is an expression of “the unity of the whole history of salvation, the unity of the whole Mystery of Christ.” Thomas expresses his sense of this unity both by presenting sermons for particular liturgical feasts, and by articulating the meaning of one liturgical feast by recalling the other feasts of the year.

The majority of sermons based on the Song of Songs, especially from the twelfth century, are for the Marian liturgies. These sermons include Bernard of Clairvaux’s sermons for Mary’s nativity and assumption. Hugh of St. Victor, too, has a sermon for the Virgin’s assumption based on the Song of Songs, as do others, including Thomas’s Cistercian contemporaries, Gueric of Igny and Isaac of Stella.

There are a good number of sermons for other principle feasts of the liturgical year based on the Song of Songs. We could begin as early as Gregory the Great who wrote a sermon on Christ’s empty tomb in the Gospel of John (chapter 20) within which he uses Song of Songs 3:1-2 to describe the Magdalene’s love in searching for the Risen Christ. In instances such as this one, as Grover Zinn writes, the Song is the principle

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176 See Waddell, “The Liturgical Dimension,” p. 349: “The important articulations of the liturgical year were hardly ever taken in isolation; rather, one called for the others; and Advent would not have been Advent did it not point forward to the coming of Christ at the end of time.”

text of the sermon for it is one of the “settings” in which the preacher, Gregory in this case, sets his “jewels” of interpretation. Some examples of this practice from the twelfth century include Alan of Lille’s sermon on the Holy Cross arising from Canticles 8:6, Isaac of Stella preaching for Pentecost on Canticles 5:1, Guerric of Igny’s sermons for the feast of Peter and Paul based on Canticles 4:5-6 and 2:17, Bernard of Clairvaux’s fourth sermon on Christ’s Ascension and his third sermon for Pentecost, each of which include numerous citations from the whole of the Canticle.

Similar sets of sermons can be found in Thomas’s commentary on the Song. At times these are whole sermons, as in the case for his sermon on Peter and Paul and his sermon for the Ascension, both of which treat their theme fully and close with an “Amen.” At other times, these are only sections of passages that could be sermons, but also seem to contain “large amounts of literary elaboration” added later. With this in mind, we can turn to look at the parts of Thomas’s commentary that seem to offer an interpretation of the Song based on the Church’s feasts and seasons.

Several of the following passages from Thomas’s commentary either have been or will be discussed, but they should be mentioned here as well. First there is the opening sermon of Book One, which looks to have been highly elaborated after it was given, but Thomas’s basic interpretation of the “kiss” of 1:1 as the “O admirabile commercium!”

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179 Jean Leclercq, “Were the Sermons on the Song of Songs delivered in Chapter?”, pp. vii-xxx.

(especially in comparison with Guerric’s Christmas sermons), presents the passage as a Christmas homily. Additionally, passages replete with the “O Antiphons” in Book Four may very well have been written specifically for the Advent season. Thomas’s sermon for the Feast of Peter and Paul, treated above, re-sounds Guerric’s sermon on Peter and Paul. Thomas primarily uses the passage “there I will give you my breasts” (7:12), while Guerric focuses on “your breasts are like two fawns, twins of the gazelle,” (4:5) a passage used by Thomas in his conclusion of the same sermon. Likewise, Thomas’s interpretation of 5:1 (“Eat, friends, drink…”), which is Guerric’s primary text for his sermon for Pentecost, lifts hymns and antiphons from the liturgy for Pentecost. However, direct reference to the feast and the giving of the Holy Spirit by Thomas, comes in a later sermon of Book Seven on 5:2: “Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one.”

Corresponding to Alan of Lille’s sermon on the Cross, Thomas interprets Canticles 7:8 in Book Eleven of his commentary: “I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its branches.” For Thomas, the palm tree is Christ’s Cross, his seven last words are the leaves of the palm tree, and its fruit is the Eucharist. Similarly, Thomas interprets the apple tree of 8:5 as both the tree of Eden and the Cross, echoing this interpretation of the tree’s fruit as the Eucharistic fruit of the Cross in Book Twelve. Furthermore, a

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181 See Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc748B-752D.

182 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; see cc804B-808D. This sermon ends with an “Amen.”
passage from Book Five, also treated by Friedrich Ohly for its references to Hercules mixed with passages from “Pange Lingua,” could be a sermon for Good Friday.\textsuperscript{183}

Naturally, Thomas’s commentary also boasts a wealth of passages based on the Marian Liturgy, which are tied directly to Christological interpretations. Rachel Fulton takes up the example of Thomas’s depiction of Mary’s Assumption in Book Eleven.\textsuperscript{184} The “new fruits” of 7:13 are presented to Christ by Mary as her own chastity and piety. This particular passage is centered on Mary for its last two columns (out of five columns) and ends with an Amen.\textsuperscript{185} A second passage from the Song 8:5, “Quae est ista quae ascendit de deserto, deliciis affluens, innixa super dilectum suum?”, is often used as a description of Mary’s Assumption. Indeed, Thomas uses it in this manner, offering his interpretation of 8:5 in Book Twelve as a sermon for the feast of Mary’s Assumption.\textsuperscript{186} Friedrich Ohly offers further evidence of this when he deems this passage a treatment of Mary’s Assumption, taking careful note that these columns “resound” with the “words of the liturgy.”\textsuperscript{187} Indeed, it is woven together out of hymns and antiphons for the feast of the Assumption.

\textsuperscript{183} See Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc569B-580C.

\textsuperscript{184} See Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc759D-764D.

\textsuperscript{185} See Rachel Fulton, From Judgment to Passion, p. 409. Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c760A.

\textsuperscript{186} See Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc793C-803D. However, there is no “Amen” at the conclusion.

\textsuperscript{187} “So ist der ganze Kommentar von den Worten der kirchlichen Liturgie durchklungen,” Friedrich Ohly, Hohenlied-Studien, p. 195
The closing sermon of Book Twelve, however, is a sermon for Christ’s Ascension. It seems the appropriate conclusion for a Book that opened with a sermon for Mary’s Assumption. These “book ends” make the place of the Church eminently clear, as does the movement between the two. Thomas’s final sermon moves in a purely eschatological direction. His sermon on Christ’s Ascension is about the Church’s ascension to Her Bridegroom, to Christ in Heaven, where she will finally and fully receive the “kiss of his mouth.” Thomas leaves his audience longing for Christ’s kiss more ardently than when he began with verse one of chapter one.

Finally, remembering that Thomas thought of preaching as an experience of Christ’s “kiss,” we can see that his own preaching on the Song was centered necessarily on the many feasts of the liturgical seasons. This manner of preaching, that is by preaching from within the Church’s liturgical context, extends Christ’s “kiss” to his listeners. He illuminates all that the Song contains, and all that it offers the Church: the lyrical presentation of the “kiss” that is the Incarnation. Thus, Thomas’s commentary, a true textile woven of Scripture and the liturgy, presents the Song as a love story circumscribing all of salvation history. The sermons composing Thomas’s\textit{ In Cantica Canticorum} offer the Song, in the depths of its greater exegetical and liturgical richness, as the Bride’s \textit{historia salutis}.

\footnote{See Thomas Cisterciensis, \textit{ICC}, PL 206; c847D-860.}
Thomas as Exegete: The “Husk” and the Sententiae

One element of Thomas’s method remains to be seen: how he peels the sententiae, or the meaning, from the paleae, or the letter: “sententias palea litterae involutas satago colligere.”¹⁸⁹ We have already seen something of the husk and its kernel: distinctiones treat the letter as we saw above, and offer an entrée into the text’s meaning in almost inumerable ways; the sententiae lead to the text’s tropological or moral kernel, but only by way of its typological, allegorical, and even anagogical wrappings. For Thomas, these latter three are all based on the letter of the text, that is, they deal with the words of the text and multiply allegories and images so that by them, the monk sees how he is to live. However, this method of interpretation arises first from Thomas’s understanding of the biblical story as a whole as an historia figurativa. This story is still unfolding as an image of what is to come, and thus Thomas invites the monks to make this story their own by making the Song of the Bride and Bridegroom their own. He does his part by unwrapping the various allegorical and anagogical sententiae so that the monks may be nourished by their tropological “fruit.”

The historia figurativa unfolds in history, and Thomas treats the letter of the text, or the husk, accordingly. Thomas explains this method of interpretation, or of “harvesting” the fruits of the Song, with the help of Old Testament figures Ruth and Boaz. We have already seen how he does so in his Prologue, but he echoes this in Book Eleven. There, the image of Ruth gleaning allows Thomas to offer not only an image of

¹⁸⁹ Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c17.
scriptural interpretation, but also an image of the effects of working in the “fields” of Scripture.

In Book Eleven, Thomas writes:

And Boaz, that is Christ, came into that field, that is the Church, and speaking with Ruth he showed her much kindness, that is Christ to each faithful who is divinely inspired, hence in that manner he led his wife.

[Et Booz, id est Christus, ingressus est eumdem agrum, id est Ecclesiam, et colloquens cum Ruth multam ei benignitatem exhibuit, id est Christus cuilibet fideli divinitus inspirato, unde postmodum duxit eam uxorem.]\(^{190}\)

Thus, Ruth and Boaz represent the betrothal that occurred in the construction of the sacred Scriptures and still occurs in one’s scriptural study. Describing the historical seeking of the Bride, Thomas continues:

The Bridegroom is Christ; the Bride is the Church whom he kissed in the patriarchs, whom he had spoken for in the Law and the Prophets, whom he embraced extending his hands for her on the yoke of the Cross.

[Sponsus iste Christus sponsam Ecclesiam osculatus est in patriarchis, allocutus est in lege et prophetis, amplexatus est extendens manus suas pro ea in patibulo crucis.]\(^{191}\)

The Bridegroom began seeking the Bride through the writing of the Scriptures, kissing her through the revelations given via the law and the prophets, and embracing her from the Cross. Thus, for Thomas, when Christ took flesh, became incarnate and died on the

\(^{190}\) “Secundo egressu, ingressus est agrum Ecclesiae peregrinantis; inde est quod Ruth dicitur inspirata: ‘Ivit ad metendum in agrum Booz [Ruth. 2.],’ qui dicitur in fortitudine. Et Booz, id est Christus, ingressus est eumdem agrum, id est Ecclesiam, et colloquens cum Ruth multam ei benignitatem exhibuit, id est Christus cuilibet fideli divinitus inspirato, unde postmodum duxit eam uxorem….” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c744A.

\(^{191}\) Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc786B-786C.
Cross, he opened the spiritual understanding of the sacred text, allowing the Bride, in turn, to seek the Bridegroom in the texts where he has unveiled his presence. In other words “The Beloved has ‘conversation’ in the Church, in the law, and in the prophets” [“Colloquium habuit dilectus in Ecclesia, in lege, et prophetis”]. Moreover, Thomas goes on to demonstrate this with an Augustinian interpretation of the Ten Commandments, which, according to Thomas, simply teach love of God and neighbor:

Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery; second, just as it is: ‘Love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole soul, and with your whole mind.’ They were the ten precepts of the law: the last three of these pertain to the love of God, the first seven pertain to love of neighbor.

[‘Non occides, non moechaberis;’ secundum, sicut est: ‘Diliges Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo et ex tota anima tua, et ex tota mente tua.’ Sunt decem praecepta legis: quorum tria ultima ad dilectionem Dei, septem prima ad dilectionem proximi pertinent.]  

Thus the Law prefigures the teaching of Christ, containing it as a tabernacle. Knowing Christ, therefore, the scripture student hears the conversation of Bride and Beloved: “ecce colloquium sponsae et dilecti.” Accordingly, Thomas’s tropological interpretations

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192 “Osculatus est in patriarchis… In Jacob Christus, in Isaac veteres Patres, de quibus Christus natus est secundum carmem, et pro eis duos obtulit haedos; unum, scilicet carmem suam, similem carni peccati; alterum, scilicet peccata nostra quae ipse occidit, dum carmem suam pro nobis mactavit in cruce,” Ibid.

193 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c786D.

194 Ibid.

195 “In figuris ostendit facienda, sicut locutus est ad Moysen de tabernaculo faciendo: ‘Vide, inquit, omnia facias secundum exemplar quod tibi ostensum est in monte.’ Mons enim ille est Christus, in quo ostensa est forma tabernaculi spiritualis….,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc786D-787A.

196 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c787A.
intermittently take the form of conversations between the Bride and Bridegroom, such as that of Canticles 4:13 in Book Seven. ¹⁹⁷

Ruth and Boaz, thus, become an image of the divine-human relationship cultivated and consummated by the reading of Scripture. ¹⁹⁸ Thomas accordingly invites the Church (and the monk as a member of the Church), to recognize herself as a Ruth of sorts, seeking after her Bridegroom, Who has been seeking after her. Thomas invites the Church both to understand her historical betrothal and to enter actively into her continuing courtship by coming to “kiss” her Bridegroom in the pages of Scripture. Much like hearing sermons in chapter, the monk’s lectio divina was a sacramental experience of the Bridegroom, and Thomas’s approach to the Song would have encouraged them in this spiritual enterprise. ¹⁹⁹

But what does Thomas mean by the “sententiae” of Scripture? We learn what Thomas means by reflecting on Bernard’s Sententiae. Jean Leclercq refers to Bernard’s Sententiae as “brief sermons,”²⁰⁰ interpreting sententiae as points or explanations. The translation of the word sententiola in Sentence Fifty-One also runs along these lines, meaning, however, “certain points untouched by the great doctors.” However, there seems to be more to it than that. Recall that in the same Sentence Fifty-One, Bernard

¹⁹⁷ See Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc459B-466C.

¹⁹⁸ In addition to Ruth and Boaz, Thomas sees the Divine Bridegroom and the human Bride prefigured in other Old Testament couples such as Samson and Delilah, and Esther and King Assuerus. For a full treatment of this, please see Chapter Three.


²⁰⁰ Leclercq, “Were the Sermons,” p.xvi. Bernard’s real sermons were ‘intimate little talks, none of whose texts have been preserved save in resume in the form of a few sentences or ‘sermons in brief’.” Cf. Sommerfeldt, “Introduction,” Parables and Sentences, p. 113.
spokes about these “certain points” as “the sheaves which we collect ourselves” and on which “our souls can feed.” This designation of the “points” as spiritual food defines them further as the spiritual meaning contained within the verses of Scripture. Both Bernard and Thomas set out to interpret and to preach, therefore, the “spiritual meaning” of the scriptural texts before them.

Of course, we know that Thomas treats the Song as a *fabula*, therefore taking the text as one that “contains” a deeper meaning, or as one that tells a story via the figures of another. Naturally then his approach required a careful treatment of both “letter” and “spirit,” just as Christian interpretation has required of the Old Testament since Christ first shed his Light on it. However, we might notice that Thomas does not delineate levels of “meaning” (or senses) while explaining his method. In fact, sometimes he delineates three senses, and at other times he distinguishes four senses,\(^{201}\) a discrepancy that probably depends on what source Thomas happens to be quoting.\(^{202}\)

Thus we must be careful when attempting to identify or describe his exegetical methods of reading the “letter” and reading “beyond the letter.” What we can rely upon while examining Thomas’s methods of exegesis is his emphasis on the Church; this guides

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his use of the various senses or meanings. Thomas’s interpretations primarily unfold the *fabula* as the story of the Church as the human Bride, and therefore, the “tropological” aim of his commentary always comes from within this story. The tropological sense, in turn, brings the monk into this story: the soul becomes the bride of the Bridegroom insofar as the soul is within the Church. The result of this is the mélange of allegories and typologies, images and doctrines in Thomas’s commentary. Ecclesiology and eschatology, anagogy and tropology, history and allegory unite under Thomas’s pen in a way that makes the spiritual “kernel” of the Song pertinent to the monk in the very moment in which Thomas is speaking to him.

Thus we find in Thomas an interesting form of allegoresis in which the historical, moral, and anagogical senses each take an indispensable part. The historical, allegorical, moral and anagogical senses of Scripture are inseparable for Thomas. His aim to preach the story of the human Bride and divine Bridegroom on all the levels on which the faithful participate in this story is actualized by his ability to interpret the Song on each of these levels without separation. For example, in Book Twelve, speaking about the three “homes” in which the monk lives, Thomas writes: “In prima comeditur cibus materialis, in secunda agnus paschalis, in tertia rivus fluminis torrentis butyri et mellis.”

In other words, the monk lives on three different levels simultaneously, the one within which he eats material food, the second in which he feasts on the paschal lamb, and the third in which he delights in the “grapes and honey” of the Kingdom to come. While still in this world, the third of these levels is tasted in the secret places of the monk’s heart (*in

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203 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c820B.
secreto cordis), where Christ comes to dwell sweetly. But in the life to come, this will be the “kiss of his mouth,” the praesentia delectatur.

Ultimately, Thomas’s manner of exegesis shows the monks how to make their lives a figure of what is to come. This is the real tropological fruit he cultivates in writing his sermons. This fruit provides nourishment for the monks as they push further into their conversio, keep turning toward Christ through the spiraling curves of Thomas’s commentary, and continue to be conformed to Christ. Around each curve of interpretation the monk meets the Church, meets Christ, meets the Cross, meets mercy, meets his own deficiencies and virtues, meets the moment in which he becomes more like the Bride, more like Christ. The commercium of Salvation changes the monk, even at the level of hearing and reading it. Partake, Thomas urges the monks, in the reality and the “figure” of the Church’s nuptials, for the strength of the Bridegroom’s love is shown in both the Head and its members. Thus, this “Apostle to the Kiss,” as we have called him, always intends the Song to be opened so that it preaches the coming of the Kingdom, the binding of the Head and the members, so that the lives of the monks and the End for which they strive become one.

204 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; see c815C.

205 Thomas writes: “Te quoque ad coelos peracta dispensatione carnis, redeuntem, laetis ducam luminibus, laeta omnibus voce praedicabo. Domus matris ecclesiae est felicitas aeternae patriae, ubi est jam pars illa quae dicitur mater…Ibi me docebis evangelica praecepta. Vel in illa superna Ecclesia post judicium omnia nobis ostendet quae modo obscura sunt nobis,” ICC, PL 206; c774D.
Thus it is clear that Thomas understood Gregory the Great, when Gregory wrote: “From the root of history, allegory produces spiritual fruit.”206 This is precisely how Thomas treats the Song of Songs; he interprets the theological *fabula* as having an organic, living, and unified “meaning.” In this, Thomas creatively defies what deLubac saw as the medieval “specialization” of interpretation, namely, the separation of the “senses” one from the other in order to pursue a special line of interpretation. 207 Thomas himself does not specify his use of allegory and tropology; rather, he prefers to speak about the text’s spiritual *sententia*, or “deeper meaning.” This “deeper meaning,” however is the sum of the parts as Thomas maintains the depths of the scriptural text by maintaining, in a uniquely creative way, the unity of the “senses” of Scripture, each leading the reader further into the text, until the reader is more fully illumined and thereby transfigured as spiritual fruit. The ultimate “kernel” of the Song is the moral lesson that necessarily follows on what the monk learns of Christ and the Church wed as Bride and Bridegroom.

In conclusion, then, we could describe Thomas’s commentary as his presentation of the “spiritual fruit” of the Song of Songs to his monks. He writes, like Bernard, with a biblical sense much like that of the Church Fathers, meaning he treats Salvation History as a story of love, and the Song as the icon of this story.208 As an “Apostle to the Kiss,”

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or as a preacher who treats the Song as the story of the Church’s salvific espousal,
Thomas presents the “kiss of [Christ’s] mouth” to the monks who long and ask for it. In
gleaning the Song’s spiritual *sententia*, contained in the husk of the Song’s *fabula*,
Thomas illuminates the monk’s way to the Bridegroom’s eternal presence. In the next chapter, we will consider Thomas’s christological depiction of the Bridegroom.
CHAPTER TWO

THE COMMERCJIUM OF THE KISS WHO SAVES

Introduction

This chapter begins the work of building a picture of the divine Bridegroom and the human Bride in Thomas’s vision of the Song of Songs. We will focus here on a discussion of the Bridegroom—on, that is, the Christology of Thomas’s commentary. Chapter Three will discuss the human Bride in further detail, although she will be introduced here as she was the one sought and saved by the Bridegroom’s “Kiss.”

Discussing Thomas’s Christology requires a careful assemblage of passages from throughout his commentary. As we construct Thomas’s thought, we will remain in conversation with figures from the Church’s Tradition, especially Augustine and Thomas’s fellow Cistercians, as they will help us smooth-out Thomas’s unpolished and sometimes disjointed presentation of the Song’s Bridegroom. We will find a striking picture built out of the mysteries of Christ’s life that constitute the commercium of Salvation.

One might find the extent to which Thomas emphasizes the crucified Christ in a Song of Songs commentary quite surprising. However, as with Bernard before him, Thomas envisions the crucified Christ as the beloved Bridegroom. Thomas witnesses to this by emphasizing the Church as God’s long-sought, human Bride. In the Incarnation, Christ joined humanity to divinity, making it possible for humanity, in turn, to be joined
to divinity. In his death, Christ redeemed his Bride, drawing her close in the embrace of
the Cross. And, in his Resurrection and Ascension, Christ sent his Spirit to bind his Wife
ever closer to him, not just as “one flesh,” but as “one Spirit,” too. Thus Christ “draws”
his Bride after him, calling her beyond the Cross, to the Wedding Feast of the beatified,
celestial Church, where she will receive the proper, unmediated “kiss of his mouth.”

Church and Christ Wed in the Commercium

“O admirabile commercium!,” sings the Church in the opening book of Thomas’s In Cantica Canticorum. The Church, as Bride, seeks the commercium, or the “exchange”
in which divinity might come in order to be joined to humanity: “cui nostra jungeretur
humanitas.”209 The union of the Church, as human Bride, with Christ, as divine
Bridegroom, takes place in both a fleshly union and a spiritual union. This “joining” or
“wedding” of the human and divine in a fleshly and spiritual union is the commercium of
salvation for Thomas as he reads it in the figures and images of the Song of Songs.

Thomas introduces the commercium as a rather novel interpretation of the “kiss”
in 1:1 after first cataloguing familiar and traditional interpretations. As we saw in the last
chapter, Thomas follows Alcuin and suggests that the “kiss” is the Sermon on the Mount.
Alcuin’s interpretation, however, is cited frequently by all those who deem the “kiss of
his mouth” Christ’s own teaching rather than that of the prophets and angels.210 Echoing

209 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c23D.

210 Alcuin of York: “The Synagogue longs for God to be made flesh and runs to meet his arrival
with holy charity. Her voice rings out for the first time in a song of love; at that time the holy prophets had
over and again shown her how she should live and had revealed the coming of the one who, like a
bridegroom coming forth from his marriage bed (Ps 18:6), brings a new blessing to the world; but then, the
Origen and all those who followed him, including, most famously, Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas reads the “kiss” as an image of both the Trinity and the Incarnation.\textsuperscript{211} And, in a more tropological or subjective interpretation, Thomas catalogues those, again including Bernard, who read the “kiss” as the kisses the holy soul gives to Christ’s feet, hands and mouth, which move one from repentance to the ecstatic experience found during contemplation.\textsuperscript{212}


\textsuperscript{212} “\textit{Item, est osculum ad pedes, pro peccatorum remissione; osculum ad manus, pro gratiarum actione; osculum ad os, pro dilectione. In primo, primordia nostrae conversationis dedicatur; secundum, proficientibus indulgetur; tertium sola rationis perfectio experitur. Item, primum est in confessione, secundum in devotione, tertium in contemplatione,}” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c23A. Cf. St. Bernard’s third and fourth sermons on the Song of Songs: \textit{Sermons sur le Cantique I}. 

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\begin{quote}
\textit{time for prophecy being past, she began to desire the presence of her King and Savior himself, and said:}  
\textit{May he kiss me with the kiss of his mouth; that is, may he not for ever appoint angels, not always prophets for my instruction, may he himself come at last, who has for so long been promised, may the light of his presence shine upon me and, like a person offering a kiss, may he speak comfortably to me in the words of his mouth: may he not, that is to say, scorn to enlighten me as I question him about the way of salvation. We read that this was brought to fulfillment in the Gospel: The disciples came to Jesus as he sat on the mount, and opening his mouth he taught them saying: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:1). Therefore it says: May he kiss me with the kiss of his mouth – may he delight me with the touch of his presence, he whom I have heard so often promised by the prophets.” A Compendium on the Song of Songs, 1.1, in Denys Turner, \textit{Eros & Allegory}, pp. 259-263. Thomas Cisterciensis: \textit{“Haec vox Synagogae est, quae Christum in mundum venturum didicerat ab angelis, audierat a prophetis. Itaque ejus inflammata desiderio, clamat: Osculetur me osculo oris sui, hoc est ad erudiendum et salvandum me: non jam angelos, non patriarchas, non mittat prophetas; sed ipse qui venturus est veniat in propria persona. Osculum ejus est proprii oris eruditio. Veniat igitur et erudiat me proprio ore. Sed et mei oris tactum suscipiat patienter, id est me de via salutis interrogantem audire non spernat. Hoc adimpletum credimus desiderium, quando sedens in monte docebat discipulos suos, dicens ‘Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam ipsorum est regnum coelorum,’ etc. Ibi osculum dedit, quia aperiens os suum, gaudium regni coelestis apostolis promisit suis,” ICC, PL 206; c21B.}
\end{quote}
These kisses, notes Thomas, still following Bernard, mark the soul’s progression along the way of conversion to perfection. Here, as Bernard puts it, the soul has a “place…on the road to salvation.” However, Thomas also adds that the “kisses” include the life of the cenobitic monk, who is joined with his brothers in praying for one another, in being of one will together and in helping one another carry their burdens. In this, in sharing prayer and burdens, says Thomas, the monks know Christ, just as the Apostle says: “May God the Father give to you a spirit of unity amongst yourselves so that you might glorify God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as if with one mouth.” In this same line of interpretation, Thomas might have had the Rule of St. Benedict in mind. Chapter 72, on the good zeal of monks, reads:

Let the monks, therefore, practice this zeal with most ardent love….Let them bear their infirmities, whether of body or mind, with the utmost patience; let them vie with one another in obedience. Let no one follow what he thinks useful to himself, but rather to another. Let them practice fraternal charity with a chaste love.

But why does Thomas open with such a catalogue of interpretations? By intertwining his catalogue of more traditional interpretations of the “kiss” of Song 1:1 (as referring to Christ’s teaching, to the Incarnation, and to the Trinity, with added interpretations of the “kiss,” as elements of the communal Christian life), Thomas builds

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213 Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermon 3, *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, 3.1.2.

214 Ibid.

215 “... conjunctione mutua vicissitudo fraternarum orationum ... in conspiratione anhelitus, unamimitas voluntatum ... in conjunctione corporum, supportatio onerum ... ‘Deus Pater det vobis idipsum sapere in alterutrum ut unanimous uno ore glorificetis Deum et Patrem Domini nostri Jesu Christi (Rom 15:5-6)’,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c22C.

a picture of the Bride as a corporate being, or, to be more precise, as the Church. It is the Church, as we saw above, who bursts in, singing and seeking the “wondrous commerce” of the human-divine exchange at the close of Thomas’s catalogue. The *admirabile commercium*, while a long-standing theological schema, is a nuanced expression of the traditional Christological interpretation of the Song’s *osculum*.

Thomas’s commentary presents the Song of Songs as the love story between the Church and Christ. The Song itself is a figurative telling of the story of salvation history as Scripture narrates it from the moment of Creation. Even the marriage of Adam and Eve prefigures the union of Christ and the Church. Of course, as traditionally accepted, the Song also tells the love story of the soul and God. However, for Thomas, because he emphasizes the epithalamium of Church and Christ, the Song is the story of the soul only insofar as she lives within the Church and by the Church’s sacramental *commercium*. As a whole, it is as if Thomas hears Origen instructing him in his interpretation; on Canticles 1:1 Origen writes: “Let it be the Church that desires to be joined with Christ.”

A careful study of Thomas’s commentary, as confusing as it can be at times, reveals the importance of the Church as Bride from the commentary’s very first lines. Moreover, for all the themes and images that fade in and out over the twelve books, the Church as Bride remains constant. The allegory of the Church as Christ’s Bride is Thomas’s primary concern for all of history, including anagogy, converges on this allegory, and, most importantly, tropology is rooted in it. In effect, then, Thomas’s

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interpretation is two-fold: the soul as bride is understood by the Church as Bride; the soul as bride is the moral interpretation of Church as Bride. Thus, the story of the Church as Christ’s Bride provides a lens through which the monk reads the story of his soul, as a member of the Church, as God’s “bride.” And, consequently, the Church, although wed to Christ, continually “desires” this union in each of the monks who seek and experience this union in the Church.

In the Prologue Thomas depicts the Father sending his Son to recall the lost souls to the heavenly Kingdom. Thus the Son comes, seeking his Bride. In light of this, Rachel Fulton accurately calls the Song of Songs Thomas’s “theological fabula,”218 or the story of the wedding of the divine Bridegroom with the human Bride. The human Bride is the Church, made divine by her incarnate, divine Bridegroom. Thomas continues to tell the story of their espousal in the Prologue with a dramatization of the Annunciation.219 Accordingly, the Father sends the Son to a virgin of the seed of David.220 This virgin, made his Spouse, will bear him new sons,221 and, quoting Virgil, Thomas adds that this is the reason that God joins himself to his human Bride: “Hanc

218 Rachel Fulton, From Judgment to Passion, p. 409.


220 It is interesting to note here that the liturgical material for the Christmas Vigil from Gregory the Great is similar as it contains a discussion between the Father and the Son about the ensuing incarnation: “In media nocte Nativitatis Domini. Antiph. Dominus dixit ad me: Filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te. Psal. Quare fremuerunt gentes, et populi meditati sunt inania? Resp. Tecum principium in die virtutis tuae in splendoribus sanctorum, ex utero ante luciferum genui te. Vers. Dixit Dominus Domino meo: Sede a dextris meis, donec ponam inimicos tuos scabellum pedum tuorum. All. Dominus dixit ad me: Filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te...” Sancti Gregorii Magni Romani Pontificis, Liber Antiphonarius, Ordinatus per circulum anni, PL 78; c646A.

221 “Fiat tibi sponsa ‘ad procreandos novos filios’,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c18C.
enim tibi ‘Connubio jungam stabili, propriamque dicabo’.” 222 Thomas quotes Isaiah 62:5, showing that God will rejoice in Mary (the virgin) just as a “bridegroom rejoices over his bride,” for Mary is the archetype of the Church and her first member. For this, for the taking of his human Bride, then, the Son is sent from Heaven: “progenies caelo demittitur.” 223 Thus, the Virgin consents in the words of Luke 1:38 (Fiat mihi), and adds: “Therefore let our king come and ‘let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth!’” In this moment Christ became incarnate, joining his divinity to the humanity of the Church. And, therefore, in this moment the Church is wed to the Bridegroom, to Christ, and made one flesh with him; thus she partakes of his divinity.

There is much yet to be said about Thomas’s admirabile commercium, but this suffices as a good framework. At this point, let us look instead at the patristic and monastic background of the commercium. Doing so will help us better understand Thomas’s treatment of the Song as the fabula of the Wondrous Exchange in which the Church is wed to Christ by the joining of humanity and divinity.

**Patristic and Twelfth Century Background of Salvation’s Commercium**

The Latin term commercium originally signified “commercial intercourse, trade, or the traffic of commerce.”224 In this regard it could refer to either the rite to trade, the wares of mercantile traffic, or even the place of trade, the marketplace. Lewis and Short

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222 Ibid.

223 Quoting Virgil again: Eclogue IV. Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c19C.

offer extensive citations of early Latin sources that use *commercium* in this sense. These sources include writings from Seneca to Ovid, writings with which Thomas shows great familiarity. Moreover, Thomas explicitly ties his usage of the term *commercium* to its commercial significance when he gives an etymology of the word *commercor* originating in the act of “trading with.” Thomas certainly takes these original meanings into account: his discussion of the sacraments, of Scripture, and even of preaching echo the wares of trade, and his relatively extensive treatment of Mary’s womb. Thus, as we will see, Thomas employs the word *commercium* in a thoroughly religious sense, utilizing its mercantile significance as an analogy for the “exchange” transacted by Christ in the redemption of humankind.

Later in Latin antiquity the word *commercium* also came to have a much broader significance. For example, it could refer to sexual intercourse, communication and correspondence (i.e. the exchange of letters), or even fellowship. Each of these, again, have their place in Thomas’s use of the term as he recounts the history of salvation with the help of the mercantile analogy for Redemption. With reference to sexual intercourse Thomas presents the union of Christ and the Church as Bridegroom and Bride wed in “one flesh.” This quite intimate, sexual undertone is strengthened by the interpretive work of Hugh of St. Victor in *De Sacramentis* where he presents Adam and Eve and their *commercium carnale* as a type of the union between Christ and the Church. Tradition

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225 See Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c23D. “Commercium dicitur a com et mercor.”

226 Ibid.
allows Thomas to put his mercantile metaphor to capacious use in his theological treatment of the text of the Song of Songs.

Interestingly, the word also came to designate more particularly forbidden or illicit commerce. Thomas reflects this negative connotation by applying the commercium to the “unhappy” exchange (exsecrabile commercium) of the Fall in Genesis 3:1-24. However, as we will see, Thomas’s description of the Fall as an unhappy “purchasing” of forbidden fruit, aids his readers in understanding the admirabile commercium of the Incarnation as the wondrous exchange between the human Bride and the divine Bridegroom.

Dante Aligheri echoes this idea in Canto 11 of Paradisio in his depiction of Saint Francis. Perhaps familiar with the early Fransiscan tractate Sacrum Commercium, we find in Dante a striking depiction of this “exchange.” The “bulk of the Sacrum Commercium,” as Nicholas Havely sums it up, “consists of Poverty’s own allegorized account of her history, from the Fall through the ministry of the Apostles to the present threats of her rival, Avarice.” Thus the Fransiscan tractate presents a new idea of the commercium, quite different from Thomas’s understanding. However, Dante’s depiction of Francis and Lady Poverty (from the mouth of St. Thomas Aquinas) returns us not only to Thomas’s ideas, but to those of the Early Church from which Thomas developed his imagery: “She [Lady Poverty],” writes Dante, “bereft of her first husband, despised and obscured eleven hundred years and more, remained without a suitor till he (Francis) came

. . . nor did it avail her to have such courage and constancy that, where Mary stayed below, she mounted on the cross with Christ.”

Thus Dante returns us to what we will now see of Thomas’s use of *commercium* as Christ redeeming His bride by embracing Her on the Cross.

In his *Liber officialis*, Amalar of Metz (d. 850) gives an interpretation of the *commercium* of the Christmas octave antiphon.

The first antiphon in the octave of the Lord, says: “O wondrous exchange.” When it says: exchange, it shows something is given, and something else is received. Christ gives his divinity, and he receives our humanity. What he gives, we care for in his nativity, and what he receives, in the octave. Members, joined to the head, we rejoice in the present generosity.


This liturgical description of the *commercium* is where Thomas’s use of the term becomes apparent.

While Thomas’s application of the Christmas antiphon “O admirabile commercium!” newly depicts the *osculum* of Song of Songs 1:1, the *admirabile commercium* is actually an image of Salvation well known within the Christian Tradition. Its rich theological history allows Thomas to apply it not only to the “kiss,” but also to the entire theological *fabula* of the Song. Thus, Thomas’s application of the *commercium*

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to the “kiss” and to the Song drinks fully from the image’s patristic roots and medieval
discussions of the *commercium*.

Both the patristic and medieval theologians think of the *commercium* in terms
greater than Christ’s birth (with reference to which we see the image first applied in
Thomas’s opening pages). The “exchange,” for them, includes all the *sacramenta* of
Christ’s life: His Birth, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension. The “exchange” describing
Christ’s nativity in Thomas’s first sermon on the Song is but the beginning of Christ’s
intimate, sacrificial and life-giving embrace, for it continues to be offered ever more fully
in his Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven.

The Church has been singing the antiphon “O admirabile commercium!” since
the mid fifth century.230 Sung during the Christmas liturgy, the antiphon praises the work
of our salvation from the Nativity to the Cross. Indeed, this is how the Fathers had begun
to use the word *commercium*: a summary of the “exchange” of Salvation in which God
became man so that humankind might become “God-like.” Already in second-century
Lyons, Irenaeus wrote about this “exchange”: “Christ gave his soul for our soul, his flesh
for our flesh, pouring out the Spirit of the Father in order to achieve union and
communion between God and man.”231 And again, in Against Heresies, Irenaeus writes:

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*admirabile commercium* comes from antiphon of the fifth-century Roman liturgy for Christmas, but it sums
up the consistent teaching of the Fathers and seems to be more directly influenced by the Council of

231 Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, translated by Dominic J. Unger, Ancient Christian
Writers (New York: Paulist Press); V.II.
The early Church developed an understanding of salvation as an “exchange” in which Christ, having taken up our flesh, died for us, poured out the Holy Spirit, and “joined” humankind to God.

Indeed, as it is recorded in early antiphonaries, “O admirabile commercium!” is set to Greek *tropaires*, suggesting the deep influence of the eastern tradition. The Greek Fathers understand the “exchange” of natures more properly as divinization. Athanasius writes: “Just as the Word became man by taking flesh, we men are divinized by being taken into the flesh of the Word.” The Greek term is *theosis*. Thomas reflects this Greek idea of “divinization,” expressly stating that the Church seeks the *commercium* so that her humanity might be joined (jungeretur) to God’s divinity.

We hear the early East echoed in the twelfth-century Cistercian West in the thought of William of St. Thierry. Thomas comes closest to William’s interpretation of the “kiss” as a *commercium* when William comments on Song of Songs 1:1, writing: “The Bridegroom is Christ with his Bride, the Church, like the kiss extended from

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232 Irenaeus, Against Heresies; I.1.


Heaven, when the Word became flesh insofar as the Word drew near her, so that he might be joined to her; in so far as he was joined to her, he was unified with her, God became man so that man might become God': “Sponsus vero Christus Sponse sue Ecclesie, quasi osculum de caelo porrexit, cum Verbum caro factum in tantum ei appropinquavit, ut se ei conjungeret; in tantum conjunxit ut uniret, ut Deus homo, homo Deus fieret.” 236 William here argues that God became man in the Incarnation so that man might become God; or, so that man might be divinized. 237

Eastern Christianity also associates the commercium with the greater plan of salvation, seeing the work of the Cross as an “exchange.” Gregory of Nyssa believed that Christ reunited humanity with God, not only by joining human and divine natures within himself, but by “taking our curse upon himself” and suffering for us. 238 Cyril declares that the whole of human nature was co-crucified with Christ, 239 a belief emphatically repeated by Origen in his homilies on John: “the whole body of Christ’s holy ones has been crucified and lives no longer with its own life” (on Jn. 10:20). 240


237 Louis Bouyer argues that William’s doctrine was “nourished on Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, and on these as much as, and even more than, on St. Augustine,” Cistercian Heritage, p. 94.

238 Ibid. Gregory Nyssen, Contra Eunomium III, 10 as translated in VonBalthasar’s Theo Drama, vol. 3, p. 328. See also Contra Eun. V.


240 Ibid. See Origen, PG 14, cc370-71. The translation in VonBalthasar: “So the resurrection of Christ, accomplished after his suffering on the cross, embraces the mystery of the resurrection of his whole body. For just as that physical body of Christ was crucified and buried, and afterward raised up, so in the same way the whole body of Christ’s holy ones has been crucified and lives no longer with its own life. For each of them, like Paul, makes his boast of nothing else but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which he has himself been crucified to the world, and the world to him.” Emphasis mine. See also Origen, Commentaire sur S. Jean, translated by Cécile Blanc, SC 157 (Paris: Cerf, 1970), p. 520-21.
Yet all the voices of the East are but a whisper in Thomas’s ears compared to that of Augustine’s voice in the West. Augustine hears the voice of St. Augustine above all others when Augustine speaks about the commercium of salvation. Augustine considers the “exchange” of salvation not only in terms of the exchange of natures that occurs in the Incarnation, but in terms of the “exchange” between the sinless Son and sinful humankind on the Cross. Such an expression of the salvific commercium resounds later in the theology of Anselm of Canterbury and again in the nuptualizing of the Cross in interpretations of the Song of Songs, especially those of the Cistercians such as Bernard of Clairvaux and our own Thomas Cisterciensis.

In Augustine’s commercium Christ “exchanges” sin for innocence on the Cross, taking the place of sinners and paying the price for their redemption. In several places in his Ennarrationes in Psalms, Augustine mentions the commercium in relationship to the Cross. For example, in his exposition of Psalm 102, Augustine writes: “He conducts this exchange, now already he releases the price, he sheds blood . . . Christ is the Purchaser, the price of blood” [Egit hic commercium, jam premium solvit, sanguinem fudit… Emptor Christus est, pretium sanguinis.] and, interpreting Psalm 147, he instructs his listeners: “Behold the exchange of our purchasing. Christ hangs on the wood” [Vide commercium emptionis nostrae. Christus pendet in lingo]. Augustine again speaks of

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242 St. Augustine, Ennarrationes in Psalms CII, PL 37; c1321. Emphasis mine; my translation.

the “exchange” with the Cross looming large in a sermon for the martyrs’s feast: “For he conducts the great exchange on the cross; there the bag of our price was released: when his side was opened with the lance of the assassin, whence the price of the whole world flowed” [Egit enim in cruce grande commercium; ibi solutus est sacculus pretii nostri: quando latus ejus apertum est lancea percussoris, emanavit inde pretium totius orbis]. 244

In Augustine’s thought the commercium of salvation is unmistakably connected to the Cross. But it is so precisely because Christ paid the price of his very Blood for our redemption on the Cross. This is the form of our new foedus (contract) with God for Christ is our “Purchaser,” our Emptor, or more precisely with Thomas, Christ is our Redemptor. Most literally put, Thomas sees Christ as our “Re-purchaser.”

Such a view of Christ as Redemptor resounds with the thought of St. Paul. 1 Corinthians 7:23 (“You were bought with a price”) and 6:20 (“You were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body”) play heavily in Thomas’s description of Salvation history as a wondrous “exchange,” as a transaction of natures, of life, of love. In addition to these passages, Thomas cites 1 Peter 1:18-19: “You know that you were ransomed . . . not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.” Together, the passages from 1 Corinthians and 1 Peter, allow Thomas to portray the “exchange” of Salvation, not only as a tender kiss, but as the transaction of love in


which, through the mystery of the Cross, we are “deified.” Commenting on the traditional use of such Pauline images, Jaroslav Pelikan notes that the heavily Eastern, though also Western “definition of salvation as deification [allows one to say], quoting 1 Peter 1:14, that Christ ascended in order to make us participants in his divinity.”

Pelikan, however, also instructs us to take careful notice of the difference between patristic and medieval discussions, concerning the “Who” and the “how” of salvation history. The discussions of the early Fathers, both Eastern and Western, arose from their primary concern to define a Christology for the young Church. Whereas, by the Twelfth Century, with such Christological doctrines already in place, the medieval theologians, beginning especially with Anselm of Canterbury, were more concerned with further specifying “how” Christ saved humankind. Accordingly, medieval theologians exhibit a deeper concern with the sacramenta of Christ’s life. Thomas, in particular, emphasizes the events of Christ’s life in his interpretation of the Song of Songs as the story of salvation history.

The twelfth-century commentators shared an interest in describing “how” the events of Christ’s life were a salvific commercium. Bernard of Clairvaux and Guerric of Igny both offer Augustinian descriptions of Salvation’s exchange beginning with Christ’s Nativity. Before them, Anselm of Canterbury, whose thought also resounds with Augustinian undertones, offers a beautiful description of the Cross as an “exchange.”

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Anselm, however, tends to be more “business-like” about the exchange of the Cross, while the Cistercian monks emphasize the Cross as a revelation of the Bridegroom’s love. No one, perhaps, does this better than Bernard who sees the crucified Christ as the Beloved in his 20th sermon on the Song of Songs. We find all of this in Thomas’s commentary, with the “price” of the commercium as the perfect expression of spousal love creatively emphasized.

In Chapter 20, Book II of Cur Deus Homo, Anselm comments on the Cross in a way that subtly suggests an “exchange”:

What, indeed, can be conceived of more merciful than that God the Father should say to a sinner condemned to eternal torments and lacking any means of redeeming himself, ‘Take my only-begotten Son and give him on your behalf,’ and that the Son himself should say, ‘Take me and redeem yourself.’ For it is something of this sort that they say when they call us and draw us towards the Christian faith.  

Clearly, for Anselm, Christ is the Redeemer and his Crucifixion “stretched the love and power of God to the utmost limit,” succeeding “where nothing else would have served God’s purpose.” Yet Thomas’s commentary evidences much less of an Anselmian approach than it evidences of a more contemporary Cistercian appropriation of Augustine’s idea of the commercium.

Bernard of Clairvaux greatly influenced Thomas’s extension of the commercium into a description of “how” Christ saves. In one of Bernard’s sermons for the octave of


Mary’s Assumption he describes the mystery, or the sacrament, of the Incarnation as the *admirabile commercium*.

In his second Sermon on the Song, Bernard speaks about the mystery of Christ’s birth. He exclaims: “Soon we will be rejoicing at the celebration of his birth!”

The Kiss, the “exchange,” which the soul wonders at and longs for is clearly that of the Incarnation. Thomas echoes this exclamation when he describes the “joining of lips” in a kiss with the words of John 1:14, “The Word was made flesh.” Yet, it is Guerric of Igny whom Thomas echoes most clearly on this note. Guerric wrote Christmas sermons on this “kiss,” one of which is entitled “On the wondrous exchange between God and Man.”

In this sermon Guerric writes about the *admirabile commercium*:

> O wonderful exchange! You take flesh and give divinity, a commerce in charity, not a contract for gain, praiseworthy for Your indulgence, profitable for our indigence . . . Emptying Yourself, You have filled us. You have poured into men all the plenitude of your divinity.

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251 Bernard is clear: “this most sacred kiss, that is, the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word,” *On the Song* 1, 2.3.7, Walsh translation. And: “. . . this was the kiss for which the holy men of old longed, the more so because they foresaw the joy and exultation of finding their treasure in him, and discovering all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in him, and they longed to receive of his fullness,” ibid.


Moreover, Guerric’s mention of “profitable exchange” in this sermon may have encouraged Thomas in his use of Augustine’s Pauline hermeneutic of the *commercium* as the “repurchasing” of humankind by the price of Christ’s Blood. Guerric expands on this idea in a second Christmas sermon:

> How great is the fullness of time which Christ brought with Him from heaven! Precious and costly as it is, Christ set it at a very low price. In two minutes, whether with a cup of cold water or with the mere intention, one may buy the kingdom of heaven. But now Christ can find few buyers among a whole multitude of rich people. For shame that we who have already begun to buy, who have already made out the bill of exchange and received the pledge of inheritance, so often renege our agreement and complaisantly repent. We complain, we murmur, as though we have been cheated in the transaction, as though the little or nothing we paid was too much. Well does Scripture prophesy concerning us: A bad bargain, says the buyer, a bad bargain! Then off he goes and boasts of it (Prov. 20:14). Will he who paid nothing for his salvation be able to boast that he has bought an immense weight of eternal glory for a light and momentary tribulation?²⁵⁴

But also note how Guerric also calls this “exchange” a *commercium charitate*, an exchange transacted by love. In this, we will see Guerric, Bernard, and Augustine all encourage Thomas: the profit is realized by love, by the wedding of humanity and divinity.

> Whether mediated by Guerric or Bernard, or by neither, Thomas certainly takes his cue from St. Augustine. When the *commercium* is placed within Thomas’s interpretation of the Song, that is, when it is placed within the *fabula* of the salvific Kiss,

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the *commercium* is extended to other moments in which divinity embraces humanity, especially in the commerce of the Cross when Christ “bought us,” not with gold or silver, but with the “ransom of His own most precious Blood.” We shall see presently that, for Thomas, the Christ of this salvific commerce is “Purchaser and Redeemer” (*Emptor, Redemptor*).

The love story of salvation history is not often told in terms of the *commercium*, at least not in medieval commentaries on the Song of Songs. At times, and as occasion permitted, such as in the sermons of Guerric of Igny, the *commercium* is more closely associated with the Incarnation through Christ’s Nativity; at others, it is tied more closely to the Cross. Yet, insofar as the Incarnation always looks forward to the Cross, the whole of Christ’s salvific work is included in the “exchange” between his humanity and divinity.

Certainly looking to both the East and the West, but especially to Augustine and St. Paul, Thomas sees all of salvation history summed up as the *admirabile commercium*, from crib to cross. Consequently, while taking his cue from the Fathers, Thomas employs the image of the *commercium* in a way unique to a Song commentary.255

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Thomas’s Business-like Exchange

However, in reference to the “exchange” of the Cross, Thomas plays on the business-like nature of Christ’s “(re-)purchasing;” not with silver or gold, but with his own Blood! In this, Thomas takes St. Paul at his word, follows St. Augustine’s emphasis on the price (pretium) of our salvation as Christ’s blood, and even echoes Bernard of Clairvaux, who writes in Sermon 62 on the Song of Songs, “How gladly she [the Bride] visits in her mind those clefts through which the ransom of his sacred blood flowed upon her!”256 Indeed, echoes Thomas, the Bride hears Christ’s voice best through his wounds, for her prayer crosses to his heart easily from his open side, and the blood that had flowed from this wound washed the Bride’s “face.”257

Thomas opens his commentary, not with professions of love or longing, but with a more “business-like” understanding of the commercium. This opening, however, is framed by the Prologue’s depiction of the Annunciation as God seeking his Bride. From here, Thomas is able to move into a depiction of the Bride and Bridegroom as Christ and the Church, wed and living as “one flesh” and “one spirit.” Such interpretive movement allows Thomas eventually to connect the crucified Christ who redeems us by his Blood with the longed-for Bridegroom of the Song’s fabula.

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257 “Foramina vulnera in pedibus et manibus unde sanguis exivit quo lavamur. Ibi volebat lavari faciem sponsae, id est conscientiam, ut munda ei praesentaretur. Maceria est caro Christi, caverna vulnus in latere, per quod vult orationem suam ad cor suum transire, quia in talibus cavernis solet vox clarius sonare,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c293D.
Thomas specifies that the word *commercium* is made up of “com” + “mercor”: “Commercium dicitur a *com* et *mercor*.”

Etymologized as such, *commercium* is the work of “trading with,” not simply as an “exchange,” but as a buying or purchasing of goods. This carries the connotation of the English word “commerce.”

Thomas enumerates three *commercia*. The first of which is wondrous, for it is the Incarnation; the other two—the *exsecrabile* and *miserabile*—serve to link the Incarnation with the Genesis account of Creation and the Fall. The *commercia* are related. Such inter-textual illumination illustrates how wondrous the Incarnation is, for it shows the depths to which Christ descends and from which humanity rises.

The three-fold commerce, *com et mercor*, entails the “accursed exchange” (*exsecrabile commercium*) in which the Devil assumed the form of a serpent, the miserable exchange in which humankind was dressed in garments of skin, and, of course, the wondrous exchange in which God assumed a living body: “Primum fuit exsecrabile…figuram serpentis assumens; secundum miserabile...tunicas pelliceas induens; tertium admirabile…animatum corpus sumens.” Let us take each in its turn.

The first *commercium* merits to be called *exsecrabile*, writes Thomas, because it was carried out by the “waylayer” (*insidiator*) of the human race. The Devil, unworthy of divinity, assumed the form of a serpent, and in this “exchange” gave iniquity for

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258 Ibid.


260 Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; cc23D-24A.
justice: “dedit pro justitia iniquitatem.” 261 Yet, while Thomas designates the Devil as the purser or *emptor* in this sinful exchange, he also says that Adam and Eve had an equal hand in it: “omnes pariter peccatum.” Hugh of St. Victor, with whom Thomas was probably familiar, also saw redemption as involving a “transaction between these three parties: mankind, God, and the devil.” 262 In Thomas’s schema, the Devil suggested the exchange, but Eve delighted in it and Adam consented to it. 263 Here Thomas quotes Proverbs 20:14 (as we saw Guerric do above), in order to show that Adam and Eve agreed to the Devil’s deal. While the words of Proverbs 20:14 are spoken by the Devil, “malum est, malum est,” Adam and Eve chime in, saying “Bonum est, bonum est.” Thus, Adam, Eve, and the Devil, according to Thomas’s narration, had “one purse:” “Unum sit marsupium omnium nostrum” (Prov. 1:14). Continuing his narration of Genesis 3, Thomas notes that into this one purse the Devil placed four contributions: the blandishments of adulation, the subtlety of temptation, the deception of false promises, and the heavy weight of enduring iniquity: “Diabolus in eo posuit, primo, blandimenta adulationis; secundo, acumen subtilis tentationis; tertio, deceptionem falsae promissionis; quarto, grave pondus permansurae iniquitatis.” 264 Thomas compares the *exsecrabile commercium* to the dealings of the Carthaginian negotiators in the Book of Ezekiel. In

261 Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c24A.
262 Hugh of St. Victor, *De Sacramentis Christiane Fidei*, I.8,4; PL 176; c307.
263 Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c24B.
264 Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; cc 24A-B.
Ezekiel, the merchants of Carthage fill the markets with money, swords, alloys, and lead, which correspond, respectively, to the Devil’s four contributions.

But what did Adam and Eve purchase in this *exsecrabile commercium*, what did they receive in exchange from the Devil? In a curious turn of phrase, Thomas says they purchase serpent teeth (*dentes serpentinos*). Thomas is referring to the curse given by God after the Fall: the woman will bruise the serpent’s head, but her heels will be bitten by the serpent, the Devil, who lies in wait for her.²⁶⁵

In the second, *miserabile commercium*, Adam dresses in tunics of skin because he disdained obedience and exchanged glory for unhappiness. In this “exchange” humankind bought thorns and thistles, or the temptations of the flesh and the thorns that pierce to the interior; they bought the trials and tribulations of working the land. Or, in short, they changed their glory into the likeness of beasts. Having already been stripped of good grace, humankind is now wounded in its natural gifts.²⁶⁶

This description of fallen humanity as being “like the beasts of burden” is standard. St. Bernard repeatedly uses it in his Sermons on the Song of Songs as in Sermon 82 where he comments on the human occupation with earthly things; humankind has become like the beasts.²⁶⁷ The soul must turn again to the Word. Thomas resounds

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²⁶⁵ “Audi dentes serpentinos: ‘Mulier conteret caput tuum, et tu insidiaberis calcaneo ejus’,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c24C.

²⁶⁶ Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c24D.

with these sentiments, continuing in his description of the *triplex commercium* with the Incarnation.

Stripped and wounded, humankind receives the third part of the *commercium*. This third “exchange” is wondrous, quotes Thomas, because “The Creator of the human race, assuming a living body, deigned to be born of a Virgin, and proceeded from man without seed, bestowing his divinity upon us.” In other words, writes Thomas, “wounded” humankind is bathed with spiritual oils and the wine of Christ’s blood.268

Here Thomas turns to the Pauline texts we mentioned above. Christ is now the “Purchaser” who bought us at “great price.” Consequently, humankind no longer works in the field of the world, but should come to the vine of the Church. “Come and eat,” exhorts Thomas: “Emite et comedite!”269

More precisely, Christ’s work in the *admirable commercium* was threefold. First, preaches Thomas, Christ freed humankind from the Devil; second, he conforms humankind to himself; and third, he enriches humankind.270 Christ did this by assuming our misery, expiating sins, bearing their weight on the wood of the Cross; by crippling the deceit of the Devil and impeding his cunning, crushing his head; and by restoring humankind to glory, dressed in new gowns. In God’s goodness (*benignitas*) he provides a way for humankind to “put-off” the “old man” and walk in the newness of life.

268 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c25A.

269 Ibid.

270 “Audi tria quae sequentur. Animatum corpus sumens, etc. Primo diabolo nos liberavit; secundo nos sibi conformavit; tertio nos suo regno ditavit,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c25D.
Thomas concludes his opening sermon with a vision of Christ in the manger. This section, too, resounds with the Christmas homilies of Blessed Guerric. Thomas, again quoting the Christmas antiphon “O admirable commercium,” extols Christ’s humility as only his birth reveals it: lying in the manger swaddled in nothing but cheap rags: “Ecce Christus involutus est vili panniculo.” 271 Similarly, Guerric writes: “Blessed is he who thinks no less of Christ so clothed [in swaddling bands]. Merchandise is not less precious wrapped in sacks.” 272 In his humble birth, Christ bestowed his divinity upon us: “Hear about the bounty: ‘Proceeding from man without seed, he bestowed his Deity upon us.” 273 In his birth, writes Thomas, Christ gave us lilies for the “dung-pit,” that is, he exchanged our corruptible body for immortality, and for the confusion of this world he gave us the glory of divine contemplation. 274

However, let us dwell for a moment on the “business deal” transacted in Eden. This “deal” involved humankind, the Devil, and God. God was not actively involved in the deal, but, in doing business with the Devil, Adam and Eve broke their covenant with God: “foederus dirupit inter creaturam et Creatorem.” 275 

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271 Thomas Cisterciensis, **ICC**, PL 206; c27B.


273 “Audi largitatem: ‘Procedens homo sine semine largitus est nobis suam Deitatem.’” Thomas Cisterciensis, **ICC**, PL 206; c27B.

274 “Ex hac nativitate dabuntur nobis pro sterquilinio lilia, pro sacco purpura, pro confusione Gloria. Pro sterquilinio carnalis foeditatis, lilia jucundae in aeternum puritatis; pro sacco corruptibilis corporis, purpura immortalitatis; pro confusione mundanae calamitatis, Gloria divinae contemplationis,” Thomas Cisterciensis, **ICC**, PL 206; c27B.

275 Thomas Cisterciensis, **ICC**, PL 206; c407C.
deformed man, and now, through the *admirabile commercium*, Christ reforms man.\(^{276}\)

Or, as Thomas puts it elsewhere, Christ carries out the “opus dignationis;”\(^{277}\) he makes us worthy of being joined to divinity.

In order to counter the *exsecrabile commercium*, humankind, God, and the Devil must be involved in the *admirabile commercium* as it is extended to the Cross. In so doing, Thomas (as a good medieval exegete) makes the snake into a typology of Judas. The Devil, writes Thomas, came into the garden, having come into the heart of Judas, and betrayed Jesus.\(^{278}\) Christ was sold for thirty pieces of silver. Augustine calls this the unhappy exchange, the *infelix commercium*.\(^{279}\) Thomas considers the “kiss” Judas gives to Christ as the venomous kiss (*osculum venenosum*). Elsewhere he talks about Judas handing Christ over for the price of 30 pieces of silver.\(^{280}\) With this kiss, Judas handed Christ over: “Juda, osculo tradis Filium hominis.”\(^{281}\)

In contrast to this three-fold “exchange” is the two-fold “exchange” of Anselm’s “satisfaction theory.” In *Cur Deus Homo* Anselm fights against the three-part drama

\(^{276}\) “Hominem formavit Deus, deformavit Diabolus, reformavit Christus,” Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c247D.

\(^{277}\) Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c499D.


\(^{279}\) St. Augustine, see Sermon 336, PL 38; c1474.

\(^{280}\) For example: “Hanc sanctam animam tradidit Pater, tradidit Christus, tradidit Judas. Pater morti exponendo, Christus Patri obediendo, Judas, donans Judaeis pro pretio,” Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c813A. My translation: “The Father handed over this holy soul, Christ by obeying the Father, Judas, by giving it to the Jews for a price.”

\(^{281}\) Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c813B.
between humankind, the Devil, and God as it is presented by Thomas. Rather, while Anselm focuses on the Cross as the locus of “exchange” as we saw above, he sees it as an “exchange” that occurred only between God and Man precisely because it was an “exchange” that could only be “transacted” by Christ, the God-Man.\textsuperscript{282} The Devil has no part in Anselm’s rehearsal of redemption because the Devil is not redeemed while humankind is. As R.W. Southern puts it, for Anselm “the Incarnation had to be shown to be necessary and glorious as the only way in which the central purpose of Creation – Man’s salvation – could be achieved.”\textsuperscript{283} And this was shown in the Cross, for Christ is the Redeemer who gives himself to humankind, so that they might be redeemed by him.

Clearly, the Devil plays an active role in Thomas’s interpretation of the Fall and even in his view of our continued temptation. In comparison with Anselm’s schema, the Devil seems to have some “dominion” over humankind in Thomas’s depiction of Redemption: Judas’s kiss of betrayal is a work of the Devil, showing that the Serpent of the Garden of Eden continued his role in salvation history even in the events of Christ’s death. Yet, for Thomas, the free and obedient choice of Christ in giving himself up for humankind (an act emphasized by Anselm) conquers the Devil, unveils his greed (thirty pieces of silver!), so to speak, and balances the “bill of exchange,” as Blessed Guerric calls it. Encouraging his listeners in such obedience, Thomas writes about the “wonder” of the Cross:


\textsuperscript{283} R.W. Southern, Anselm, p. 221.
You should marvel at the Cross, but how were the people of Israel to heal from the serpent’s wounds unless they look upon the serpent raised up on the wood? Who wishes to come after me to the supernal city, denies himself, by not doing his will but that of the Father; let him carry his cross, imitating my passion; and let him follow me, through the virtue of obedience.

[Miraris crucem, sed quomodo populus Israeliticus a serpentibus vulneratus convalesceret, nisi serpentem exaltatum in lingo aspiceret? . . . Qui vult venire post me ad supernam civitatem, neget se, non suam sed Patris faciens voluntatem; tollat crucem suam, meam imitando passionem; et sequatur me, per obedientiae virtutem.]²⁸⁴

However, with Anselm, Thomas describes both the Father and Son himself as freely handing Christ over. In his largitas the Father handed his only Son over for humankind; he re-gave us divinity for our humanity. Christ, in his charitas, gave his own life, so that sinners might be redeemed. The Father handed over the price of salvation, which was Christ, and Christ offered himself up “for us,” pro nobis. These are the very roots of Thomas’s depiction of the Bridegroom of the Song as the bloody Sacrifice upon the Cross. Christ’s Cross is the “ardent embrace” and perfect expression of love for his Bride.

The admirabile commercium of which the Church sings in Book One takes place in both Christ’s Nativity and Passion. The two events are taken together as one, for the blood taken up from Mary’s womb is the same blood spilled on the Cross. What remains to be seen is how Thomas’s emphasis on the bloody “price” of the Cross, supported as it must be by Thomas’s depiction of the Incarnation as the “exchange” between human and divine, might harmonize with more typical Song of Songs imagery of the Beloved

²⁸⁴ Thomas Cistieriensis, ICC, PL 206; c823A-B.
Bridegroom. How does Thomas “nuptialize” the “exchange” of the Cross?

**Una Caro: The Bloody Tree and the Song’s Bridegroom**

The “Vitis Mystica,” an anonymous work attributed to St. Bernard of Clairvaux, exemplifies the nuptialization of the Cross necessary to Thomas’s Christology of the Song’s Bridegroom. The “Vitis Mystica” also describes Christ’s death as the *admirabile commercium*. Whether Thomas knew the “Vitis Mystica” or not is a mystery, yet the exegetical moves Thomas’s takes in his commentary in order to depict the Cross as a nuptial exchange reflect those taken in the “Vitis Mystica” and therefore, the steps necessary for Thomas to depict the crucified Christ as the Song’s Bridegroom. We see hints of Thomas’s “nuptialization” of the cross in this anonymous twelfth-century text, which is itself replete with images from the Song of Songs. For example, the “Vitis Mystica” calls the bloody Cross the wedding chamber:

> The cross was a wedding chamber [*sedes sponsalis*] in which the True Spouse joined the church, his bride, to his own body [*sponsam suam ecclesiam sibi copulavit*]. He bought her with the outpouring of his very own sacred blood.

Thomas does not call the cross a “wedding chamber,” but he does depict it, in various other intimate expressions, as the joining of Christ and Church as Bride and Bridegroom in one flesh – the human flesh assumed by Christ in his Incarnation.

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285 “Qui dilexit nos, et tradidit semetipsum pro nobis (Ephes. V, 2). O vere admirabile commercium! tradidit se rex pro servo, Deus pro homine, creator pro creatura, innocens pro nocente,” “Vitis Mystica,” PL 184; c651B.

How then does one connect the Cross’s price of blood, that “purchasing” of human redemption, with the Song’s image of the Bridegroom? How is the “Purchaser” of Redemption the deeply-desired and long-sought Beloved? The connection lies precisely in this price paid, in Christ’s Blood, for it is, as Thomas shows, the evidence of God’s charitas. So how does Thomas portray Christ, the Redemptor, as the Bridegroom of the Church, as the image of Love par excellence in which St. Bernard and the other Song commentators so wonderfully depict him? Let us, as Maur Standaert would say, find the answer by connecting the dots of Thomas’s thematic “constellations.”

First we must consider the role of the flesh, or of humanity, in the commercium of Salvation. Quoting Bernard of Clairvaux, Pelikan puts the importance of Christ’s flesh in the “exchange” this way:

The two steps of redemption were that Christ had taken the sins of mankind on himself and that he had made expiation for them. This expiation consisted in ‘the sacrifice of his flesh,’ whose effects were then applied to the sins of those who believed in him. Redemption, then, must involve some sort of ‘quid pro quo,’ in which, as philosophical theology had also recognized, Christ was given as ‘a general sacrifice for the sin of the whole world,’ as an offering in exchange for the salvation of mankind.287

Rachel Fulton offers an example more directly tied to Thomas. When she describes Thomas’s exegetical efforts to treat the Song as a “theological fabula,” she focuses on Mary’s role as human Bride, because Mary is an example of the “reflowering” or revivification of humankind, especially in the flesh, as it is afforded by the

Incarnation. In consenting to the Incarnation, Mary consented, as Fulton puts it, to God taking “flesh from her body in her womb.” Christ and Mary became “bone of each other’s bone and flesh of each other’s flesh.” In this same statement we see Thomas’s focus on Christ’s taking flesh from a woman’s womb and becoming “bone of our bone.” This point is crucial to the plot line of Thomas’s *fabula*: the commercium involves the divine Bridegroom becoming human, even as Adam and Eve, in their “historical” nuptial as Thomas calls it, were “one flesh.” The flesh assumed from Mary’s womb is that flesh in which Christ suffered for us and that same flesh which Christ glorified, allowing it to flower with new life in his Resurrection and Ascension. The *fabula* of the Song tells the very real story of humanity and divinity wed in the commercium of Salvation, from crib to cross and beyond.

Let us consider this for a moment in terms of the Bride as the Church. When Thomas speaks about the Church as Israel, he considers her a “fleshly” wife, even a “sensual” wife. This “fleshly” wife, writes Thomas, is the mother of the Church, for the Church took her flesh from the Synagogue: “de qua carnis originem duxit.” Yet, the Church becomes the sacramental Body of her Spouse once joined to him and vivified by

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288 Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, see pp. 408-9. “…with Thomas particularly, we encounter the importance of the survival – the reflowering – not only of Christ’s own body but also, at one and the same time, of his Mother’s. Her womb-belly, as Thomas would have it, was like a ‘heap of wheat, surrounded by lilies’ (Song of Songs 7:2) because it was in her womb, with the assumption of her flesh, that Christ’s body was sown like a grain of wheat, that it might be milled on the Cross with the pains of the Passion and threshed of its bran, its mortality, in the Resurrection.” Fulton emphasizes the importance of Mary being identified with the living human flesh from which her Son assumed his humanity.

289 Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, p. 443.

290 Ibid.

291 Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c85B.
the Holy Spirit.

The Church is also meant to be a virgin Bride, without spot or wrinkle, as Thomas depicts her in many other places. Even the “flesh” of the Church must be renewed and revivified. This revivification is exemplified in Mary’s own purity, a purity that belongs to the Body of the Church as Mary represents it and as Mary herself gives life to it from her virginal womb. The Church’s purification is carried out when she is joined in the fleshly union of marriage with her divine Bridegroom, that is, with Christ. The Church is not only washed with the waters of Baptism, but with the Blood of Christ.

The union between the Church and Christ as Bride and Bridegroom is most physically evident in Christ’s Incarnation and Passion when he takes up our flesh and gives his life for her. Yet, as we will see in the next section of this chapter, this nuptial union between human Bride and divine Bridegroom, is not complete until they exist not only as “one flesh,” but as “one Spirit.” Full union, and therefore full purification and vivification of the Church as the Body of Christ, takes place when Christ carries her beyond the Cross, binds her to his glorified, resurrected body, and sends his Spirit to the Church. Still, this nuptial joining continues to be consummated as the earthly Church continually becomes (transitur) the celestial Church. The Church is the “mystical” Body of Christ, visible in the sacramental, fleshly Body of the Church and all her members or, as Thomas put it, her “children.”

Bearing these points in mind, it is easy to see the constellations illuminating Thomas’s fabula. They are the constellations of Church as Bride, of Church as the Body of Christ and Christ as her Head, of Christ pouring the same Blood out upon the Cross that he took from the Virgin’s womb, of the Cross as Christ’s vehement embrace and
expression of perfect love, and, as we will eventually see, of Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension as proof and consummation of his love for the Church and all her “children.”

Let us connect the dots.

First, a word on the Incarnation. The “price” of our redemption, Christ’s Body and Blood, was taken from Mary’s flesh. Following the passage quoted above about the Fruit of the Cross, Thomas goes on to show that this is the same Fruit of Mary’s womb: “Concerning the fruit, who is Christ, this is said to the blessed Virgin: ‘Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb’ [“De fructu, qui est Christus, dicitur ad beatam Virginem: ‘Benedicta tua in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui’. 

]”292 Interpreting 4:3, Thomas again comments on Mary, but in a way that highlights Christ’s humanity: “She also is called scarlet, because he who washed our filth was assumed from her blood” [“Ipsa quoque dicitur coccinea, quia de ea sanguis assumptus est, qui nostram lavit spurcitiam”].293 In another turn of phrase God “visited the earth of the Virgin” in the Incarnation. The Church springs from God’s “visit” to Mary’s womb.

Second, a word on the Passion. Christ also “visits” the “earth of the Church” in the Passion, enriching this “land” with gifts of grace.294 Christ suffered insulting words, the bitterness of death and the shame of the Cross for humankind.295 Correspondingly, by

292 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c730C.
293 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c399C.
294 “Audistis quomodo Deus terram Virginis visitavit, multipliciter eam locupletavit. Sed qualiter terram Ecclesiae visitavit? Visitavit in passione; inebriavit aqua et sanguine; multipliciter locupletavit dono gratiae.” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c408A. Also see c409C.
295 “. . . contumelia sermonis, asperitate mortis, confusione crucis. . .pro nobis” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c408A.
these three sufferings, the Church is freed, washed, and redeemed.

Thomas makes special mention of Christ’s Blood throughout his commentary. He cites the hymn “Lustra sex:” “Tree with sacred blood anointed/Of the Lamb for sinners slain.” Indeed, he often speaks lovingly of the Blood running from Christ’s open heart and side. Elsewhere he envisions four rivers flowing from the Cross or the “Tree of Life” (just as four rivers flow out of Paradise): Christ’s blood, the water from Christ’s side, Christ’s sweat, and Christ’s tears.

As we have seen already, Thomas emphasizes Christ’s blood as the “price” of redemption, both allegorically and historically. The Cross, from which Christ’s blood poured, is the source of Thomas’s discussions of redemption, of the saving commercium. Interpreting Song of Songs 4:3 (“Sicut vitta coccinea labia tua: et eloquium tuum dulce”), Thomas writes: “The lips of the Bride are likened to scarlet, because She was redeemed by the blood of the Lord, the prize which the Church ceaselessly preaches.” Thus the Church pleads, “may I never boast in anything but the Cross (Gal. 6:14).”

Yet, it is precisely such imagery of the Cross as “bloody Tree” that leads Thomas to his most intimate considerations of Church and Christ as Bride and Bridegroom (with

296  “Quos sacer cruor perunxit Fusus Agni corpore,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c408C

297  “Maceria est caro Christi, caverna vulnus in latere, per quod vult orationem suam ad cor suum transire, quia in talibus cavernis solet vox clarius sonare,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c336A.

298  “Ut haec ablutio toti mundo sufficeret, de corpore ejus quatuor rivi manaverunt tanquam quatuor flumina de paradiso, quae irrigant universam terram, scilicet passio Christi: sanguis, aqua de latere, aqua sudoris, aqua lacrymarum, ‘Terra, pontus, astra, mundus Quo lavantur flumine’ (Lustra sex),” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc409A-B.

regards, not only to the Cross, but to the Incarnation as well, and, as we will see presently, the Resurrection and Ascension). Interpreting 8:8, for example, Thomas teaches that the Church is “spoken for” because she is brought to the nuptials of the Beloved through Christ’s Passion.\textsuperscript{300} Supporting his interpretation with other biblical passages, as is Thomas’s style, he adds 2 Corinthians 11:2: “I promised you as a pure Bride to one husband – Christ.”\textsuperscript{301} Christ washes and redeems his Bride with the Blood of the Cross.

In yet more intimate terms Thomas illustrates the Cross as a revelation of Christ’s love for his Bride: “by the strength of his love, that is of charity, it is shown in the Head, and also in the members: in the Head, love is strong as death, he himself loved us, the members, enduring death for us.”\textsuperscript{302} Indeed, for Thomas, Christ’s Passion is the most perfect (\textit{perfectissima}) expression of his love.\textsuperscript{303}

Several times, in fact, Thomas depicts Christ’s arms outstretched and nailed to the Cross as an ardent, loving embrace:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{300} “…alloquenda est, ut transeat ad nuptias dilecti, et sic proficiat in prolis procreatione…transivit nupitas dilecti per passionem…ad nuptias dilecti transivit, quando per passionem suam ‘despondit eam uni viro, virginem castam exhibere Christo,’” Thomas Cisterciensis, \textit{ICC}, PL 206; c. 825C-D.

\textsuperscript{301} “Ad nuptias dilecti transivit, quando per passionem suam ‘despondit eam uni viro, virginem castam exhibere Christo,’” Thomas Cisterciensis, \textit{ICC}, PL 206; c825D.

\textsuperscript{302} “Fortitudo ejus dilectionis, id est charitatis, et in capite, et in membris ostenditur: in capite fortis est ut mors dilectio, quas nos ipse dilexit, ut mortem pro nobis sustineret,” Thomas Cisterciensis, \textit{ICC}, PL 206; c815C.

\textsuperscript{303} “Ecce charitatis perfectio. Sed est perfecta, est perfectior, est perfectissima. Perfecta est offensam dimittere; perfectior pro inimicis orare; perfectissima, eis benefacere. Primum fecit Christus in Maria Magdalena, secundum in hac oratione, tertium sepsum dando pro peccatoribus in sua passione,” Thomas Cisterciensis, \textit{ICC}, PL 206; 815A-B.
\end{flushright}
O with what an ardent embrace he embraced me on the Cross: that [embrace] in which water flowed from his side, blood trickled from his heart, his soul departed from his body. That salesman brings, implicitly, his riches in his coming. Hence: ‘Behold I come quickly; and my riches with me.’

[O quam vehementi amplexu amplexatus est me in cruce: in qua fluxit aqua de latere, manavit sanguis de corde, anima recessit a corpore. Dives iste institor merces suas in adventu suo implicitas attulit. Unde: ‘Ecce venio cito; et merces mea mecum est.’]304

And again, in a longer passage:

O ardent embrace, in which water poured from the side, blood from the heart, and the soul from the body! The water of regeneration, the blood of redemption, the soul in liberation. Regeneration, because it washed us; redemption, because brought out of the devil’s power; soul freed, when, having descended to hell, he freed the fathers.

[O vehemens amplexus, in quo aqua de latere, sanguis de corde, anima de corpore exivit! Aqua regenerationis, sanguis redemptionis, anima liberationis. Regenerationis, quia nos salvavit; redemptionis, quia nos a potestate diaboli exemit; anima liberationis, quando descendens ad infernos patres eduxit.]305

“That same Bridegroom, Christ,” writes Thomas, “kissed his Bride, the Church…embraced her when he extended his hands for her on the Cross” [“Sponsus iste Christus sponsam Ecclesiam osculatus est … amplexatus est extendens manus suas pro ea in patibulo crucis”].306

In passages such as these Thomas intentionally links Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross to the Song’s image of the Bridegroom’s desired embrace in 4:6 and 8:3. The Cross is an expression of love; it is a sign of the intimacy between Christ and his Church.

304 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c141C.
305 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c787B.
306 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c786C.
On the Cross, Christ pours his Blood out for his Bride, “kissing” her, as Thomas depicts it, in a gesture of complete self-giving.

Yet, in the first of these three passages, Thomas mingles this expression of love with economic connotations; the Beloved is the institor or “salesman” bringing the “price.” Thus, the “re-purchasing” of humankind with the “price” of Christ’s Blood is evidence of God’s love for humankind. From his side, writes Thomas, “love and mercy flowed.” This Blood, this love and mercy, vivifies the Body of the Church, for with Christ as her Head, they are of one flesh, una caro. The “price” and the “kiss” of the Cross are the one and same thing; they are the Blood of Christ, which binds the Church and Christ. Christ is the “Kiss who Saves.”

Thomas evidences the prominence of the Church as the Bride in his commentary by the frequency of his description of Christ as Head and the Church as his Body, our third “constellation.” Christ, in more nuptial terms, is the head of the Bride: “caput sponsae, Christus.” For example, while as Yves Congar points out, Bernard of Clairvaux rarely refers to the Church as a corporate entity (as corpus), thereby (seemingly) discloses a preference for the spiritual union of God and soul in his interpretations, Thomas stresses the “fleshly” union of Christ and the Church. With St.

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307 See Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc26A, 141C, 507D.
308 “… in secunda, de latere ejus nobis fluxit charitas et misericordia…”, Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c335D.
309 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c141D.
310 See Yves Congar, ”L’Ecclésiologie de St. Bernard,” in Analecta Sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis IX (Rome, 1953); pp. 136-190.
Augustine, Thomas wants to highlight the *humanity* of Christ on the Cross,\(^{311}\) for it was there that he most perfectly loved his *human* Bride and joined himself to the Body of the Church.

At times Thomas speaks quite explicitly about Christ being joined intimately to his Bride:

In the day, he said, of their wedding. It is the beginning of their matrimony, it is the perfection of their matrimony, it is the consummation of their matrimony. First in betrothal, second in joining together under the testimony of the Church, third in the joining together. By this order Christ joined himself to the Church. First he promised, but the third was done by this betrothal, just as the prophet Hosea said: ‘I will take you for my wife for eternity, and I will take you for my wife in justice and judgment, and mercy and steadfast love, and I will take you for my wife in faith’ (Hosea 2:19).

[In die, inquit, sponsationis suae. Est matrimonium initiatum, est perfectum, est consummatum. Primum in desponsatione, secundum in conjunctione sub testimonio Ecclesiae, tertium in copulatione. Hoc ordine junxit sibi Christus Ecclesiam. Prius se sponsavit, sed tertio facta est haec desponsatio, sicut ait Osee propheta: ‘Desponsabo te mihi in sempiternum, et desponsabo te in justitia et judicio, et in misericordia et in miserationibus, et desponsabo te in fide.’]\(^{312}\)

The result of such an intimacy is the “children” of the Church who constitute the Body of the Church. Recall the intimacy insinuated in the final lines of Thomas’s Prologue: “Fiat mihi; let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.” Put otherwise, Mary, as a type of the Church, consents, saying, “Let him take me as his Bride to bear new sons.” Indeed, the Church bears new “children,” sons of Christ, born out of the intimate

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\(^{312}\) Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c375B.
union between Bride and Bridegroom, between Body and Head, all una caro. In a passage reminiscent of Hildegard of Bingen’s Scivias, Thomas writes:

For men are conceived in the womb of Mother Church, when they return to her…In labor, the Church gives birth. Hence: ‘There were pains as if a woman in labor.’ In passing from the world to the Father, The Church gives birth...

[Concipiuntur enim homines in utero matris Ecclesiae, quando ad eam revertuntur…In laborantibus parturit Ecclesia. Unde: ‘Ibi dolores ut parturientis,’ (Ps. 47:8). In transeuntibus de mundo ad Patrem, parit Ecclesia, sicut canitur in Ecclesia: ‘Ut in novam pariat mater infantiam.’]313

313 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c699B. Given the fact that Hildegard of Bingen and Bernard of Clairvaux exchanged letters, could Thomas have been familiar with Hildegard’s Scivias, specifically with her Vision of Mother Church? Hildegard writes: “but in this that mother suffers no hurt, for she will remain forever in the wholeness of virginity, which is the Catholic faith; for she arose in the blood of the true Lamb, her intimate Bridegroom, Who was born of the untouched Virgin without any corruption of integrity,” Scivias, II.3.12. And: “Her womb is pierced like a net with many openings, with a huge multitude of people running in and out; that is, she displays her maternal kindness, which is so clever at capturing faithful souls by diverse goads of virtue, and in which the trusting peoples devoutly lead their lives by the faith of their true belief. But He Who casts the net to capture the fishes is My Son, the Bridegroom of His beloved Church, whom He betrothed to Himself in His blood to repair the fall of lost humanity,” II.3.4, Scivias, translated by Columba Hart and Jane Bishop, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1990). Rupert of Deutz and Gero of Reichersberg have similar ways of speaking about Mother Church. Rupert: “Non enim ibi mater Jesu, quia diversis quidem erroribus, sed eodem malignitatis spiritu fidem Incarnationis ejus a suis cordibus et conventibus excluserunt. Illic tantummodo harum coelestium nuptiarum solemnitas celebratur, ubi est mater Jesu, id est ubi est mater Ecclesia, videlicet ubi quotidie Christo adolescentulabas, vera Incarnationis ejus fides praedicatur. Illic vocatus adest Jesus et discipuli ejus, sponsus videlicet et amici ejus. Quatuor itaque personae sunt istae, quae in Canticis canticorum (cap. I, V1) de nuptiali loquentur amore, scilicet adolescentulae, quarum nuptiae supersunt, vel quae quotidian Christo nubunt; mater Ecclesia, quae illas parturit donec Christus formetur in eis: Christus ipse et discipuli ejus, videlicet sponsus et amici ejus. Quid ergo in his corporalibus nuptiis significatum est, quod ad istas spirituales pertinere?” In Evangeliu s. Joannis Commentariorum, PL 169; cc285C-D. And: “‘Non erit infecunda, nec sterils in terra tua. Numerum dierum tuorum implebo.’ Beati seminis fecunditatem Ecclesiae sanctae reprobrit, quam et propheta Isaias praevidens: ‘Lauda, inquit, sterils, quam non parisi: erumpe et clama quae non parturis, quia multi filii desertae magis quam ejus quae habet virum’ (Isa. 34). Nam postquam nos Angelus ille praecessit, et in coelum ascendens dona sancti Spiritus honinibus dedit, non est in hac terra, quam ille sanguine suo rigavit, quae sit infecunda verbo Dei, et sterils ab operibus bonis. In omni loco mater Ecclesia spirituales filios parit, et de mortuis vivos in vitam aeternam regenerando parturit. Cujus fecunditatis praemium breviter contingens, ‘numerum, inquit, dierum tuorum implebo,’ id est in saeculorum saecula, quae dinumerari non possunt, vitam tuam extendam et dilatabo,” De Trinitate et Operibus Ejus, 3.34, PL 167; cc688A-B. Gero: ‘sic Virgo concepiens et pariens Filium permanisit incorrupta et integra. Similiter et mater Ecclesia et ipsa Verbo Dei fecundata, filios Dei parit manens incorrupta, quia sic leviter veniet ad eam sponsus ejus Verbum Dei sicut stelllicidia roris, blande, sine strepitu stillantia super terram,” Expositionis in Psalmos Continuatio, Pars 7, Ps. LXXI, PL 194; c324B. I prefer the comparison of Hildegard with Thomas because Hildegard provides us with a picture that, even though it is entirely different from Thomas’s way of providing his audience with pictures, it is nevertheless reminiscent.
As a type of the seeking Bridegroom, Thomas sees Christ depicted as Samson, for Samson loved his wife, Delilah, even though she betrayed him. Christ loves the Church, taking on her infirmities, just as Samson, though betrayed by Delilah, endured weakness and suffering for his wife.314 Elsewhere Samson, as Christ, seeks his wife, who is the Church (“Samson, id est Christus, quaerens uxorem, id est Ecclesiam”) when he killed the lion, who in Thomas’s allegory is the Devil: “occidit leonem, id est diabolum.” Thomas likens the swarm of bees which Samson discovers in the mouth of the lion to Christ’s harrowing of hell; Christ thus eats the honey, that is, writes Thomas, the sweetness of love, as Christ incorporates the “bees,” or those harrowed, into himself: “et comedit mel, id est amoris dulcitudine eos educens sibi incorporavit.”315 This he does for all those whom he saves, sweetly incorporating them into his Body from the Cross, where the “price” of his Blood conquers the Devil.

In all of these images, (Fruit of the womb and Fruit of the Cross, Body and Head, Bride and Bridegroom), Christ and the Church are joined as one flesh; the Bridegroom is “flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone.” Thomas does not speak of Christ “purchasing” his Bride, as the “Vitis Mystica” does, but in turning to the story of salvation history, as told by the whole of the Bible, he finds images that “nuptualize” the Cross and the


315 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c575D.
Incarnation, for these are moments in which Christ’s love is shown quite clearly in his intimate, fleshly and fruitful union with his human Bride. Thus, Christ and the Church are husband and wife, Bride and Bridegroom, both historically as Adam and Eve were, but also in an allegorical and mystical way, for Christ continues to seek after and “purchase” his Bride today, to call her after him, transferring her, as Thomas writes in Book Twelve, to the nuptials of the supernal Church in Heaven above.

A final excursus into Hugh of St. Victor’s De Sacramentis Christiane Fidei serves to highlight the historical and allegorical connotations of intimacy in Thomas’s work. Thomas, as we know from the excellent work of David Bell, was greatly influenced by the Victorine school, especially by the works of Hugh and of Richard.\footnote{David Bell, “The Commentary,” p.16.} In his De Sacramentis Hugh recounts the story of salvation by making two theological distinctions about the works of God. First, there are the “works of foundation” (opera conditionis) by which Hugh means the “creation of the world and all its elements;” we see God through Creation. Second, Hugh discusses the “works of restoration” (opera restaurationis), meaning “the Incarnation of the Word and all its sacraments.”\footnote{Boyd Taylor Coolman, “Pulchrum Esse: The Beauty of Scripture, the Beauty of the Soul, and the Art of Exegesis,” in Traditio 58, 2003:175-200; p. 178. “Opus restaurationis est incarnatio Verbi cum omnibus sacramentis suis,” Hugh of St. Victor, De Sacramentis, PL 176; cc183A-B.} Thus, for Hugh, humankind, debilitated spiritually and intellectually after the Fall, is healed and illuminated by the medicine of Jesus’s humanity and its sacraments.\footnote{See Taylor Coolman, “Pulchrum Esse,” p. 178.} In Hugh’s terms,
Christ is the ultimate *simulacrum* of grace;\(^{319}\) Christ is the Mystery of God living and dying as a human being. Moreover, for Hugh, Scripture tells the story of this Mystery, for Sacred Scripture is a Christo-centric “sacramental and theophanic universe,”\(^{320}\) in which the historical narrative binds together the spiritual senses and renders God knowable.\(^{321}\)

The sections from *De Sacramentis* most pertinent to our current discussion of Thomas are those in which Hugh describes Adam and Eve as an image of both the sacrament of marriage and of the marriage between Christ and the Church. While Thomas’s commentary is not a summa of salvation history as Hugh’s *De Sacramentis* is, Thomas operates with many of the same foundational ideas about Scripture and the Sacrament of Christ. We have already seen that Thomas considers the Church and Christ to be one as Adam and Eve were – in one flesh – but the following comparison with Hugh also underscores the figurative and the historical character of the story being told in the images of the Song’s *fabula*. For Thomas, the interplay of history and Scripture’s spiritual senses is equally as important as it is for Hugh: it unveils the spiritual truth of the Song by reading it as an image of the historical narrative of the Bride and Bridegroom as told by the whole of Scripture. In its most condensed form, then, the Song sings of the sacraments of Christ and how they bring about the union between Christ and his Bride, the Church.

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\(^{319}\) See Taylor Coolman, *“Pulchrum Esse,”* p. 179.

\(^{320}\) Taylor Coolman, *“Pulchrum Esse,”* p. 182.

\(^{321}\) See Taylor Coolman, *“Pulchrum Esse,”* pp. 187-188, on the “lyre of exegesis.”
In *De Sacramentis* II.3.11, Hugh of St. Victor considers the *commercium carnale* of the sacrament of marriage, meaning the union of flesh, as an “image” of the marriage between Christ and the Church. “The office of marriage,” writes Hugh, “in the intercourse of flesh typifies that union which was made between Christ and the Church through his assumption of flesh, and thus the sacrament of Christ and of the Church could not be where carnal commerce had not been.” Thus marriage and its *commercium carnale* as a medicinal sacrament, or a “remedy” for the Fall alludes to the Incarnation. The joining of the flesh in marriage, for Hugh, is a sign of the invisible spiritual union that also occurs.

Hugh continues his discussion of marriage as follows:

The office of marriage indeed is a sacrament of communion, which is in the flesh between Christ and the Church. It is written, ‘They shall be two in one flesh,’ (Gen 2:24), and if two are in one flesh, indeed there are not two but one flesh. ‘This is,’ as the Apostle says, ‘the great sacrament in Christ and in the church’ (Eph. 5:32), to which sacrament woman cannot attain with whom carnal commerce is known not to have taken place.

Here Hugh reads the nuptials of Adam and Eve as an image of the “great sacrament in Christ and in the church.” In this description from Hugh, then, we see Thomas’s first

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323 “Officium vero conjugii sacramentum est illius societatis quae in carne est inter Christum et Ecclesiam. Scriptum est enim: Érunt duo in carne una (Gen. II); sed si duo in carne una, jam non duo sed una caro. Hoc est sacramentum quod ait Apostolus magnum in Christo et Ecclesia (Ephes. V), ad quod sacramentum pertinere non potest mulier cum qua noscitur non fuisse carnale commercium,” Hugh of St. Victor, PL 176; c482B.
“historical” nuptial – that instituted by God between Adam and Eve\textsuperscript{324} — pointing toward the “theological” union, or the spiritual nuptials between Christ and the Church.

However, for Thomas, the biblical description of marriage based on the story of Adam and Eve points to the “theological” nuptial in two ways: first as one that is a “fleshly” union, which historically occurs in the Incarnation, and secondly as a “spiritual union” signified by the Incarnation, but carried out by the sacraments of Christ’s humanity.

For Thomas the marriage of Christ and the Church was necessarily done via the Incarnation so that in becoming “flesh of our flesh,” Christ could redeem humankind in his Passion. Yet, for Thomas, this is not the whole story of the Bride and Bridegroom, for the \textit{commercium} of salvation, the joining of the divine Bridegroom to his human Bride, continues to be carried out in the sacraments of Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension. This is the “spiritual union” toward which the “fleshly union” points: in the sending of the Holy Spirit, Christ binds his Bride to himself spiritually. Becoming one flesh is the “sign” of and necessary first step to spiritual union. Together with the Incarnation and Passion, Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension complete, perfect, and consummate his marriage with the Church.

In Book Twelve, for example, Thomas teaches that there are three nuptials in the Gospel (“tres nuptias legitimus in Evangelio”) and that these three nuptials prefigure the nuptials of Christ and the Church: “Christi et Ecclesiae nuptias praefigurantes.”\textsuperscript{325} The first of these three nuptials occurred in the Incarnation, the second, in Christ’s Ascension,

\textsuperscript{324} See Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c18A.

\textsuperscript{325} Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c826C-D.
and the third will be in the general resurrection when all of humankind will be with God in patria: “Primae in incarnatione, secundae in ascensione, tertiae fient in generali resurrectione.” In a related passage from the same Book Thomas compares the Incarnation to the description in Genesis of a man taking a wife:

‘…And thus the King desires your beauty.’ And he assumes [it] from you in marriage. For of this marriage it was said: ‘On account of this a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife’ (Gen. 2, Mark 10). Christ left his father, when being equal with the Father he emptied himself by taking flesh (Phil 2); he left his mother, when the assumed flesh from her seemed to have depreciated, exposed himself to sufferings, thus he clung to his wife because he could not abandon her.

[…Et sic concupiscet rex decorem tuum.’ et te assumet in conjugium. De hoc enim conjugio dictum est: ‘Propter hoc relinquet homo patrem et matrem et adhaerebit uxori suae (Gen. 2, Marc. 10).’ Reliquit Christus Patrem suum, quando aequalis Patri se carnem assumendo exinanivit (Philip. 2); reliquit matrem, quando carnem ex ea assumtam quasi vilipendens, passioni se exposuit, adhaesit sic uxori suae quia post eam non dereliquit…]  

In this way, Thomas hears Scripture speaking about the union between Christ and the Church. Just as Adam and Eve prefigured the union of Christ and Church in the flesh, so these three nuptials, especially that of the Incarnation, prefigure the spiritual union of Christ and the Church, which arises from their fleshly union. Let us turn now to look at the completed picture of the Church’s nuptial commercium.

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326 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c826D.
327 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc826B-C.
**Unus Spiritus: The Resurrection and the Ascension**

The medieval mind, writes Jaroslav Pelikan, only rightly understands history through the Cross.\(^{328}\) Thus far we have found this to be true of Thomas; the Incarnation and Passion of Christ, taken together as the nuptial “exchange,” illuminate history as salvation history, as the long betrothal of the human Bride and divine Bridegroom. Yet there are also the other mysteries (*sacramenta*) that properly illuminate the Cross, namely Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension. Therefore, the medieval exegetical mind also worked under these revelatory lights. Thomas’s constellation grows.

The Resurrection and Ascension illuminate the Incarnation and Passion as the nuptial exchange of Bride and Bridegroom because they announce Christ’s victory, revealing Christ’s continued work of “binding” himself to his Bride in the mystical Body of the Church. Accordingly, the four *sacramenta*, or “mysteries” must be taken as the four parts of one, singular event in history. In this regard, the Ascension and Resurrection of Christ not only illuminate the Incarnation and the Passion as salvific “kiss” and “embrace,” but they also entail the historical sending of the Holy Spirit, which completes the “exchange” of salvation and binds the human Bride and divine Bridegroom in one living Body. Let us turn to these two *sacramenta* of Christ’s life and observe how they illuminate the nuptial exchange between human Bride and divine Bridegroom more fully.

We begin by returning to Thomas’s image of Christ ardently embracing his Bride from the Cross. In a description similar to those above, Thomas writes:

He also embraced her with a most pious embrace when his hands were extended on the cross, so that he might draw the Bride to himself, and might join her to himself spiritually in a tight embrace, as it was said: ‘That she might cling to God, and be made one spirit with him.’ There his left hand was under our head, namely our flesh, so that our soul, which is the head, might be supported, was given in reward...

[Amplexus est quoque eam piissimo amplexu cum manus suas in cruce extendit, ut sponsam ad se traheret, et stricto amplexu spiritualiter sibi univit, juxta illud: ‘Quod adhaeret Deo, unus spiritus cum eo efficitur.’ Ibi laeva ejus fuit sub capite nostro, scilicet caro, quae ut animam nostram, quae est caput, sustineret, datum est in pretium...]329

Notice the differences here with the passages cited above. In this passage, Christ extends his arms on the Cross, embracing his Bride in order to join himself “more tightly” to her in a spiritual embrace. He embraces her so that they might be “one spirit” (unus spiritus). The passages studied earlier celebrate the fleshly union of Bride and Bridegroom in the embrace of the Cross, in the literal opening-up of Christ’s heart, but here we see that the full union of Bride and Bridegroom lies in the union of Spirit in addition to that of the flesh. The spiritual embrace is the gift (praemium) given to the Bride in the commercium of salvation.

With this introduction of the Pauline phrase “one spirit,” we should pause and make a few careful distinctions. In the context of the Song of Songs, 1 Corinthians 6:17 often draws a more subjective and mystical interpretation from the medieval Cistercian exegete. The most famous of these exegetes is St. Bernard, but William of St. Thierry also offers an inherently subjective, mystical interpretation. In contrast with these two, we have the work of Isaac of Stella who appears closer to Thomas, for Isaac tends toward

329 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c787A.
a more ecclesial interpretation. Looking even earlier in the Tradition, Augustine, too,
sheds light on Thomas’s interpretation of *unus spiritus* as an ecclesial, corporate
vivification. This, however, should be no surprise to us given Augustine’s influence on
Thomas’s understanding of the *admirabile commercium*.

The difference between Thomas and Bernard lies in Thomas’s emphasis on the
“fleshly” union between Christ and his Bride, the Church. While the Incarnation is the
constant “starting point” for Bernard, Thomas constantly reminds his readers to rejoice in
knowing that the divine Bridegroom became “flesh of our flesh.” Thus, for Thomas
becoming “one spirit” with the Bridegroom means, in Augustinian terms, being bound
together in a Body that is vivified by the same spirit, namely, by the Holy Spirit.330

Still the tropological tones of a mystical union are not wholly absent from
Thomas’s work, even though he does not attempt the mysticism of a Bernard or a
William. In fact, as David Bell comments, Thomas remains rather reticent on the
mystical union of Bride and Bridegroom, offering only “cautious explanations.”331 “That
such things are possible is not in doubt, but the speculations which we may find in
Bernard or Richard [of St. Victor] as to their content and quality are not to be found in
Thomas. Union of the soul and God is unquestionably a reality, but those sections in
which our author considers the concept of *unitas spiritus*, or explains 1 Corinthians 6:17

330 For an example of Augustine’s thought, see Sermon 268 for Pentecost.
331 David Bell, “Contemplation and Vision,” p. 220.
Bernard’s consideration of *unitas spiritus* is carefully developed and well nuanced. A good snapshot of Bernard’s thought is found in his 74th Sermon on the Song of Songs. There Bernard discusses the “visitations” of the Word with the Bride by which the soul attains to contemplation of the Word. We must agree with Bouyer’s explanation of Bernard’s thought in Sermon 74: these “visitations” are only “short experiences, wrestling the soul away from itself for a moment, to stimulate its longing afterwards, until a final consummation is reached which can come about only in the life eternal, or more precisely, after the resurrection.” Moreover Bernard’s understanding of the short, ecstatic visitations is supported by his mystical theology of “seeing” God by way of coming to know and love Him. This theology itself is bound up in a nuanced understanding of what it means to be created in the *imago Dei*. These are elements of Bernard that we see mentioned by Thomas, but never explained in any depth.

Thomas interprets the “visits” or the “comings” of Christ as three-fold. The first of these three is the Incarnation, the second is the “coming” of Christ into the hearts of the faithful, and the third “coming” will be Christ’s coming in majesty. The second of these resonates with Bernard’s “visits.” Thomas, however, simply instructs that we must

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332 Ibid.


334 “Cum tres legimus Salvatoris adventus, tertium desiderare sponsam credimus, cum dicit: Revertere, dilecte mi. Horum trium adventuum: primus fuit in carne, secundus in corde, tertius erit in majestate,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c322C.
each await such an advent, preparing an unstained heart for Christ. Thomas only extends this instruction so far as to say that Christ’s advent into our hearts is a nuptial living together of Bride and Bridegroom in one Spirit. We open our hearts to the Lord, writes Thomas, when we receive him in love: “Aperimus Domino cum adventum ejus in corde suscipimus per amorem.”

Thus Thomas offers no reflection on how Christ comes to dwell in our hearts, no extensive reflections on contemplation, or on knowing and loving God. He mentions them, yes, but Thomas’s thoughts quickly return to the Church as Bride. He relates three nuptial banquets associated with both the contemplative or mystical “comings” of Christ in Book Twelve, but only in order to show that the soul is made a “tabernacle” which Christ visits insofar as the soul dwells faithfully within the Church. Consequently, Thomas shows that the wedding feast that sustains the monk’s journey and brings him into the embrace of the Bridegroom is that *convivium nuptiale* celebrated in this present exile as we eat the paschal lamb: the Eucharist. Again, rather than dwelling on the “spiritual” or “mystical,” Thomas returns to what sustains and joins the monks corporally to the historical and glorified body of Christ.

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335 Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c532D.


337 “Hic triplex facti convivium nuptiale; in hoc exsilio…in judicio…in regno,” Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c856D. “Ad primos venit dilectus sicut caprea et hinnulus visitans eos ut roborenture; ad secundos, ut ore virtutum et jucunditate florum, scilicet devotionum dulciter exhilarantur; tertios visitabit quando transferet eos in regnum, ut cives glorientur;” c849C.
As we said before, with Bernard the Incarnation remains the constant starting point for knowing and loving God, for eventually attaining to \textit{unitas spiritus}. But with Thomas we say also that Christ laid hold of \textit{humankind} by taking up a living body: “Nos apprehendit animatum corpus sumens.”\footnote{Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c776C.} The result of this union is Christ’s “carrying” the faithful into spiritual union with Him. By the grace of this “embrace,” one lays hold of \textit{him} in their heart: “Apprehendimus eum in corde nostro.”\footnote{Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c775C.} In other words, the spiritual union of Bride and Bridegroom (in this life) relies on the prior fleshly union of Christ and the Church.

We find the same result in another contrast with William of St. Thierry. William writes that “to believe in Christ is to go to Him by loving Him.”\footnote{William of St. Thierry, Speculum Fidei, PL 180; c383B.} Elsewhere, William writes rather simply: “Amor noster spiritus est.”\footnote{See William of St. Thierry, In Epistolam ad Romanos, PL 180; c593C, and Expositio altera super Cantica Canticorum, PL 180; c508B. See Bouyer, Cistercian Heritage, p. 122.} Such declarations arise from William’s understanding of the \textit{imago Dei}, of the Trinity, and of how the soul comes to be \textit{unus spiritus} with God. Dom Déchanet comments on such passages and their theological roots in William’s thought: “It is in the measure, and only in the measure, that we attain to the ‘unitas spiritus’ with God that love and knowledge in their human mode are transcended in an inseparable love-knowledge, which is that with which God loves Himself by knowing Himself in the life of the Trinity. This love-knowledge, which is indeed that with which the Father and the Son love Each Other by knowing Each Other in
the Holy Spirit. So, we possess it in itself only in so far as we possess the Spirit.”

Remember, also, that for William (and for Bernard) the “Kiss” of the Song is an image of the Trinity. Therefore it is in the Holy Spirit, the One shared between the “mouths” of the Father and the Son, that the soul becomes “one Spirit” with the Bridegroom for the life of the Trinity and “is communicated in the very communication of the Spirit.” In sum, we argue with Bouyer that the fully contemplative life for William is “the same thing as the perfection of love in the ‘unity of Spirit’.”

Thomas echoes much less of William’s thought than he echoes of Bernard’s. Still, contrasting Thomas with William shows yet again that Thomas focuses more on the unus Spiritus that is the result of una caro than on the subjective, contemplative attainment of mystical union. Note, however, that Thomas repeats the image of the Kiss as the Trinity. Yet such an image does not lead him into an exquisite, in-depth discussion of the unitas spiritus, as it leads William (and Bernard). Thomas, as David Bell rightly points out, “prefers to see unity of spirit as referring not to God and the human soul,” but to more corporate images such as “the charitable dwelling together of the spirituales in the love of Christ, what he calls elsewhere charitativa unanimitas.” Or, as we argue more primarily in this section of Chapter Two, Thomas prefers to discuss the unitas spiritus as the fullness of the Church’s life, namely as joined in one Body and one Spirit

343 Louis Bouyer, Cistercian Heritage, p. 123.
344 Louis Bouyer, Cistercian Heritage, p. 124.
to her divine Bridegroom. Thomas’s discussion of *unitas spiritus* arises much more directly from his image of the kiss as both the joining of divine and human spirits ("spirituum, divini et humani"), and that of the members of the Church as the Body who praises Christ with one mouth: “unanimes uno ore glorificetis Deum . . .” \(^{346}\)

With these distinctions made via the contrast of Thomas with Bernard and William, let us return to Thomas’s treatment of the *sacramenta* of Christ’s life, to the Resurrection and Ascension. Let us complete the story of Christ as the Song’s Bridegroom.

The Beloved left us corporally when he ascended to Heaven after his Resurrection, writes Thomas: “A nobis dilectus tunc corporaliter abiit, quando post resurrectionem in coelum ascendit.” \(^{347}\) Often Thomas declares that the Holy Spirit was sent after the Resurrection. \(^{348}\) But, just as often, he reveals that the Holy Spirit was sent after Christ’s Ascension into Heaven. Interpreting “Oleum effusum nomen tuum,” Thomas writes: “Therefore, the oil is said to be poured out because he was filled with the Holy Spirit, who abundantly flowed out after his [Christ’s] Ascension” [“Oleum igitur effusum dicitur, quia plenus est Spiritu sancto, quem abundanter effudit post ascensionem suam.”] \(^{349}\) These “sendings,” after both the Resurrection and Ascension, are associated with Christ’s breathing on the apostles and Pentecost; both are “pledges” of the

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\(^{346}\) Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c22D.

\(^{347}\) Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; 321D.

\(^{348}\) For example: “Butyrum misericordiae dedit Christus ante passionem; misso Spiritu sancto dedit oleum gratiae post resurrectionem,” Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c522C. In 600D Thomas repeats that the sending of the Holy Spirit is also associated with the time “after the resurrection.”

\(^{349}\) Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c36B.
Bridegroom’s love for his Bride. Both instances, however, are instances of the Bride receiving the “Kiss” of the Bridegroom in the gift of the Holy Spirit: “Osculum ejus accepit sponsa in sancti Spiritus missione.”

Let us look in particular at the “Kiss” of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. On this Thomas says more and can be compared to both St. Augustine and Isaac of Stella (a Cistercian monk nearly contemporary with Thomas). Thomas gives a Pentecostal twist to his interpretation of Song of Songs 2:8 (“Ecce iste venit saliens in montibus et transiliens colles”), while playing on the popular medieval image of Christ’s “comings” as “leaps.” Christ, the Beloved, was born of Mary, in the “leap” of the Incarnation, and lived amongst sinners. Yet, after his Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension, he sent his Spirit to us in the form of tongues of fire, so that we might see and know that the Spirit had been sent. In the first leap of the Incarnation, Christ descended to humankind that they might ascend to Him (“Dominus vero descendit ut nos ascendere faceret”), and at Pentecost, he sent his Spirit so that they might be further united with him in one Spirit. The Church was “kissed” at Pentecost by the sending of the Holy Spirit.

In this Thomas might be echoing Isaac of Stella who, in his 2nd sermon for Pentecost, writes:

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350 “Hinc est quod Dominus insufflavit apostolis…quod fit nobis in baptismo. Dabatur per manus impositionem ab apostolis: quod fit in confirmatione nobis ad fortitudinem. Datus est in die Pentecostes apostolis ad facienda miracula. Haec sunt tria oscula quae dedit dilectus sponsae in pignus amoris,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c770D.

351 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c770C.

352 See Jaroslav Pelikan, Growth of Medieval Theology, p.119. Pelikan discusses the “leaps” of Christ as an image that gained popularity through the works of Bishop Ambrose of Milan.

353 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c613C.
Today after we have abandoned wrong-doing and taken to righteousness, the Lord embraces His servant, Friend kisses friend. And if we are right in saying that the Son is the mouth of God the Father, the Holy Spirit must be the kiss of God’s mouth, and the kiss is the sign and pledge of His love and charity. For the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit Who is given to us.\(^{354}\)

Or Thomas might also be echoing St. Augustine. For Augustine, the Holy Spirit vivifies the Body of the Church. This is a tenet that Thomas seems to echo in the import of the “spiritual embrace” that joins Christ and Church in \textit{unitas spiritus}. In a sermon for Pentecost, Augustine reflects on Christ and the Church as Bride and Bridegroom by way of the analogy of the human body. He writes:

So whoever has the Holy Spirit is in the Church, which speaks the languages of all people. Whoever is outside this Church doesn’t have the Holy Spirit. The reason, after all, why the Holy Spirit was prepared to demonstrate his presence in the tongues of all nations, was so that those who are included in the unity of the Church which speaks all languages might understand that they have the Holy Spirit. \textit{One body}, says the apostle Paul, \textit{one body and one spirit} (Eph. 4:4). Consider our own bodies and their parts. The body consists of many parts, and one spirit quickens all the parts. Look here, by the human spirit, by which I am myself this human being, I bind together all parts of my body; I command the limbs to move, I direct the eyes to see, the ears to hear, the tongue to talk, the hands to work, the feet to walk. The functions of the different parts vary, but the unity of the spirit coordinates them all. Many things are commanded, many things are done; but it’s just one who commands, and one who is served. What our spirit, that is our soul, is to the parts or members of our body, that the Holy Spirit is to the members of Christ, to the body of Christ. That’s why the apostle, after mentioning one body, in

\(^{354}\) “Datur itaque per Spiritum sanctum gratia post justitiam; et servus qui dimissus est liber per Filium, efficitur Hodie amicus per Spiritum. Hodie post justitiam de injuria acceptam, osculatur Dominus servum, imo amicus amicum osculo oris sui. Si enim Filius os Patris recte intelligitur, recte Spiritus osculum oris dicitur. Osculum ergo signaculum est in posterum dilectionis et charitatis. Charitas enim diffusa est in cordibus nostris per Spiritum sanctum, qui datus est nobis. Charitas omnia operit, nihil imputat, omnia portat, omnia excusat, omnia condonat. Septies in die cadit per seipsum justificatus per Christum; septies in die erigitur per Spiritum,” Isaac of Stella, Sermon 45, PL 194; c1843C. English translation by Elizabeth Livingstone, \textit{Cistercian Heritage}.  

139
case we should take it as a dead body – One body, he says. But I ask you, is this body alive? It’s alive. What with? With one spirit. And one spirit. Yet Augustine’s point is that this is more than an analogy. The unity of the Church, as the Bride, with Christ is a “true reality.” Pentecost’s tongues of fire “confirm” the unity of the Bride and Bridegroom in one Body and in one Spirit. This is what Thomas seeks to show in his commentary. He seeks to show that convivium nuptiale of Christ and the Church moves toward its true reality as the Bride and Bridegroom are bound ever closer in the fullness of union, which consists not just in being flesh of each other’s flesh, but living in a loving, spiritual union.

Thus we might return to the concept that the soul only becomes a “worthy” Bride within the Church. Indeed Thomas echoes Origen’s work on John 10:20 again, for he describes both the individual soul and the Church as Tabernacles in Book Twelve. Origen writes:

Indeed, I think that both the temple and the body of Jesus can be seen together as a type of the Church. For the Church is being built out of living stones; it is in the process of becoming a spiritual dwelling for a holy priesthood, raised on the foundations of apostles and prophets, with Christ as its chief cornerstone. Hence it bears the name “temple”. On the other hand, it is written: You are the body of Christ, and individually members of it.

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356 Ibid.

357 Origen, Commentary on John: PG 14; cc370-371. The translation above is that as used in the Office of Readings. See also Origen, Commentaire sur S. Jean, p. 521: “…le temple et le corps de Jésus me semblent être tous deux la figure de l’Église; car, bâtie à l’aide de pierres vivantes et devenu une demeure spirituelle pour un sacerdoce saint, elle est établie ‘sur le fondemment des apôtres et des prophètes avec le Christ Jésus comme pierre angularie’ et s’appelle ‘temple’…”
Thomas witnesses to such a truth in his careful blending of allegoresis and anagogy throughout the final book of his commentary where he discusses the *unitas spiritus* in the most detail. The Church is a Tabernacle, but so is the soul of each of the faithful who come to the Church. Thus, the importance of the Church, and all her beautiful souls, being joined to Christ in both one flesh and one spirit is also highlighted by Thomas’s treatment of the human flesh, not as living stones, but as a *lectulus floridus*. We shall see that this is only a result of Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension and that it serves as both the cause and sign of the *amplexus spiritualis*, the spiritual embrace that joins Bride and Bridegroom in *unitas spiritus*.

Christ’s Resurrection, for example, reveals the purity and glory of the flesh when joined to the Spirit, or, when “divinized” and joined to the divine Bridegroom. As the Bride, then, becomes purified, her very body becomes, as Thomas depicts it, a *lectulus floridus*, or a place which engenders union with the Bridegroom. Thomas’s discussions of Christ’s Resurrection highlight the importance of the flesh becoming a *lectulus floridus*. These discussions are carried out in floral imagery because these images lend themselves to careful description of the revivification of the flesh when joined to divinity. Thus, they also emphasize the importance of both fleshly and spiritual union between Christ and the Church as Bride and Bridegroom.

Thomas often refers to the Advent antiphon “Rorate Caeli”\(^{358}\) to introduce images of reflowering and recreating. Within this context, the act of creation is a sort of gardening or planting, and the act of reconciliation, therefore, is a new sprouting of the

\(^{358}\) “Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the Just One.”

141
seeds sewn and the plants cultivated. The Savior himself appeared on earth by “sprouting forth” from the dew dropped down from the heavens and from the rain poured from the clouds. Through him the heavens and earth are reconciled and again “bud” new life.  

With regard to Christ’s Resurrection, Thomas makes the connection between the Incarnation and the reflowering of Creation in Christ’s Resurrection, especially evident in the words of Song 2:11 (“for now the winter is past, the rains are over and gone”): “In resurrectione vero carne florida. Unde: ‘Et refloruit caro mea. Ecce hiems transiit, flores apparuerunt in terra nostra.’ Vere flores. Tribus enim floribus privilegiata floruit caro Christi.” The “reflowering of our flesh” is a sign of our salvation after the Fall. In Book Twelve Thomas gives an extended description of the revivification of our flesh, which was dead and rotting due to sin. But this, too, is to explain that humankind was dead by sin, but Christ gives new life by putting off the sin of Adam in his own death, showing that humankind returns to paradise in the glorification of his own human flesh.

This resurrection, Thomas notes, is threefold: from temporal death to temporal life, from spiritual death to spiritual life; from temporal death to incorruptible light. In the first of

359 “Creatio est tanquam hortisatio vel plantatio; reconciliatio, tanquam germinatio satorum vel plantatorum. Tempore namque suo rorantibus coelis desuper et nubibus pluentibus justum, aperta est terra et germinavit Salvatorem, per quem facta est coeli et terrae reconciliatio.” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc55D-56A. Thomas, however, also uses other images for the resurrection. Among these the images in the color purple appear often: “In resurrectione purpuram explosit. Revelata enim facie speculamur gloriam Domini, etc. … Haec purpura est caro Christi glorificata, caput sponsae, Christus; capilli ejus, imitatores ejus, qui sunt quasi regis purpura, quia eis debetur resurrectionis Gloria,” ICC, PL 206; c142A. Emphasis Mine.

360 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c82C.

361 “Primis unctus est dilectus in passione, secundis in resurrectione, tertiis in ascensione. Propter prima, caro ejus non est putrefacta nec vermis corrosa…Propter secunda, nostram quam assumperat deposuit infirmitatem…In tertiis sensit supernae patriae severitatem, unde et tertio unctus est. Unctus est aromatibus in sepulcro, unxit Maria Magdalena pedes unguento, et unxit caput nardo.” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c851A.

142
these, writes Thomas, the Church grows strong, in the second the spirit is revived, and in the third, human nature reflowers.362

In this way, Thomas draws connections between the glorified flesh and the reflowering of human nature (and, when connected to Christ’s Ascension, with being “one in spirit” with the Bridegroom). Christ’s glorified flesh reveals his divinity or, in other words, his utter oneness with the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the Resurrection also points toward the “reflowering of our flesh” (because Christ was resurrected in the flesh he assumed from Mary’s womb), and the sending of the Holy Spirit in Christ’s Ascension reveals the final, (temporal) step in the Church’s betrothal: clinging to Christ in “one spirit.” The Passion, therefore, becomes the “ardent embrace” in which the Bride is carried beyond the Cross, beyond the “fleshly” union of Bride and Bridegroom, to the spiritual embrace in which the Bride is united to the Bridegroom in “one spirit.”363 Thus, Thomas can interpret 1:15b “Our bed flowers” [“Lectulus noster floridus”], as the joining of the human soul in one Spirit with God, just as, writes Thomas, humanity was joined to divinity in the pure womb of the Virgin: “anima nostra unus spiritus fit cum Deo,


363 See note 120.
tanquam humanitas conjuncta divinitatis in virginae puritatis utero.”

For Thomas, in other words, it is precisely because the human flesh becomes a *lectulus floridus* as with Mary’s womb, and then, we will see, as with the human heart and soul.

Christ’s Ascension, too, is linked to the re-flowering of our flesh. Thomas opens Book Twelve with a sermon for Mary’s assumption (“Beata Virgo ascendit”) into Heaven, which is also a figure of the Church ascending from its exile (“Ascendit Ecclesia gentium de deserto”). Turning to Fulton again, we find that Thomas’s focus on Mary’s ascension lies, as with the Incarnation, on Christ’s humanity. “Mary’s assumption,” Fulton writes, “recalls the future assumption of the elect to incorruption while recalling both Christ’s assumption of flesh from her womb and the Father’s ‘assumption’ of her Son to heaven; its purpose being to teach us how to desire her so that we may imitate her offering.”

Again, our emphasis in this chapter is not on Mary, but on Christ and thus on Thomas’s emphasis that the flesh Christ assumed from Mary, a very human flesh, resurrects and ascends to Heaven in Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension. As Thomas comments:

> Just as gold is more precious than all other metals, the flesh assumed from the Virgin, in which the plenitude of divinity dwelt in body, was more precious than that of all other creatures, in the womb ‘because the pollution of coitus did not interfere with it,’ on earth ‘because in the resurrection the flesh of Christ blossomed again more glorious than [that of] all other creatures,’ and in heaven ‘because it ascended above the cherubim to sit at the right hand of the Father.’

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364 Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c257A.
365 Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; 793C.
367 For Rachel Fulton’s translation see *From Judgment to Passion*, p. 408. “Sequitur reclinatorium
The Feast of the Ascension, as Pelikan comments, “was such a feast of celebration because ‘today our flesh has ascended into heaven together with Christ,’ so that ‘our soul can follow it with its desire’.”

In a previous section of Chapter One we saw Thomas liken Christ to Samson (so that his reader might better understand the crucified Christ as the Bridegroom of the Song). In this section we observe Thomas’s interpretation of King Assuerus from the Book of Esther as a figure of Christ. The name Assuerus, writes Thomas, means “our beautitude,” and this is what Christ is, especially in light of the fullness of union the Bride attains with Christ after this life. Thomas returns to one of his favorite phrases, *historia figurativa*, in order to interpret the story of King Assuerus. It is a figurative history; Thomas narrates:

Mardocheus, leaving from the palace and from the view of the King, that is Christ coming from the secret place of the Father in order to transfer the elect, shone with kingly vestment, with hyacinth and bronze…For then all ‘might come and rejoice over the goodness of the Lord, over the fruit, wine, and oil, and in seeing the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The King is called

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Assuerus, who is called his beatitude, or his entrance hall. His wife Esther...is the Church...

[Inde dictum est in historia figurative: ‘Mardocheus egrediens de palatio et de conspectus Regis, id est Christus veniens de secreto Patris ad transferendos electos, fulgebant vestibus regiis, hyacinthinis et aerinis...Tunc enim omnes venient et gaudebunt de bonis Domini super frumento, vino et oleo, et in videndo Patre, et Filio, et Spiritu sancto. Rex ille dicitur Assuerus, qui dicitur beatitudo ejus, vel atrium ejus. Ejus uxor Esther...est ecclesia...']

Thomas returns to the image of Christ as Assuerus (or Assuerus as Christ) in the final lines of his commentary. Here Thomas shows that the King will take (transferet) the soul who has made of herself a “worthy” Bride, much like Esther, into the supernal Church:

“Ecce Assuerus noster hoc facit nobis convivium, ecce cui sponsa in hoc epithalamio quae-rendo.”

There, and only there, in that Kingdom will the Bride partake of the true convivium nuptiale, for there, as Thomas says in his closing lines, the Bride finds the One by whom she was embraced. She may truly exclaim: ‘Let him kiss me,’” and ask to be “kissed” by “his own mouth.”

**Conclusion**

In these closing lines Thomas raises his reader’s eyes to the anagogical heights in which the Church hopes and for which she longs. Those heights are the summit of the...
commercial of salvation. Yet, this heavenly convivium nuptiale is only reached by partaking of the Church’s sacramental wedding feast, which celebrates both her bodily and spiritual union with Christ, her Bridegroom. It is only by Christ, therefore, who joined himself to the Church in “one flesh,” who gave that flesh for humankind, and who sent his Spirit to dwell with his Bride after his Ascension, that the human Bride is joined to Divinity. It is only by Christ’s embrace that the faithful rise to the summit of the commercial of Salvation. We cite Thomas’s trios one last time:

But the right hand, which supports, does three things: first it touches, second it draws tight, third it unifies. It touches, so that she [the Bride] might love; it draws tight so that she might adhere inseparably to God; it unites, so that she might rejoice with God in the Kingdom. In the first, God is loved above all else; in the second, she is made one spirit with him, in the third, she will be made one with him in the Kingdom as Head and Body, namely man and Christ.

[Dextera vero quae supponitur tria facit: Primo tangit, secundo stringit, tertio unit. Tangit, ut diligat; stringit, ut inseparabiliter Deo adhaereat; unit, ut in regno cum ipso pariter gaudeat. In primo, super omnia diligitur Deus; in secundo, cum eo efficitur unus spiritus; in tertio, in regno cum ipso unum erit caput et corpus, scilicet homo et Christus.]\(^{373}\)

In the true anagogical heights of the Kingdom, the Bride and Bridegroom will be joined inseparably in one spirit and in one flesh as Body and Head. O admirabile commercium, indeed. In the next chapter, we will examine Thomas’s ecclesiology, elaborating his depiction of the fabula’s human Bride.

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\(^{373}\) Thomas Cisterciensis, \textit{ICC}, PL 206; c223B.
CHAPTER THREE

THE HUMAN BRIDE OF THE COMMERCIO

Introduction

In the first chapter of this dissertation we discussed Thomas’s exegetical approach, which included the idea that Scripture, and especially the Old Testament, tells the story of salvation history as a *historia figurativa*. In Chapter Two we examined Thomas’s depiction of the Bridegroom of the Song of Songs, a depiction that is partly developed by his treatment of Scripture as a figurative story. In this third chapter, these elements of Thomas’s commentary converge anew as we consider the human Bride of Thomas’s theological *fabula*. The Bride, as we will see, is equally configured by fulfilled typologies, allegories, and anagogical types, for the *historia figurativa* tells her story, too. As we know well by now, Thomas depicts the Church as the human Bride of the Song of Songs: the Church is the human Bride joined to Christ, the divine Bridegroom. But how does Thomas speak about the Church throughout his commentary?

In order to arrive at an answer to this question, we must pay careful attention to Thomas’s exegetical style and method. To begin with, Thomas emphasizes the Church as the Bride, but he also often mentions that there are three brides, adding the soul and Mary to the Church to make-up his trio of *sponsae*. Thus, in part, we have already begun to see the human Bride of Thomas’s *fabula* by discussing the Bridegroom’s *commercium*. 
In this chapter we continue to illuminate the human Bride of Thomas’s commentary by looking at Thomas’s treatment of the Church as a “sacramental reality”—that is to say, as humanity wed to divinity, but still a part of the *historia figurativa*. Interpreting Songs of Songs 5:15, “his appearance as Lebanon, chosen as the cedar,” Thomas describes the Church’s sacramental medium. We are not surprised to see him do this in several sets of three, as he describes three tables at which the Lord, or the Beloved, refreshes the monks. The second table is that of the Church, but the first and third equally help the monk envision the Church as a sacramental reality. The following is Thomas’s list of trios:

Prima fuit in lege, secunda in *Evangelio*, tertia erit in claritate.  
Prima docet, secunda *perficit*, tertia glorificat . . .  
Prima est in littera, secunda *in spiritu*, tertia in specie.  
Prima monstrat, secunda *gustat*, tertia satiat.  
Prima . . . sub figurae nubilo, in secunda *sub sacramento*, in tertia in aperto.

The middle table allows the monks to “taste and see” how good the Lord is under the form of sacraments (understood in a diffusive manner). This means, however, that one does not see “openly,” but that one “sees” by “tasting:” the Bridegroom is mediated. Therefore, this is a greater vision than that of “seeing” God via the shadowy figures of

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374 “Tres sunt mensae in hoc monte, quibus nos reficit Dominus vel dilectus,” Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c596C.
375 Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; cc596D-597A.
376 “de secundo: ‘Gustate et videte quam suavis est Dominus!’ (Ps 33),” Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c597B.
the Old Testament. Yet, it is also not to see God clearly either; it is not to see the divine Bridegroom *in aperto* or *in specie*.\(^{377}\)

The Church militant, therefore, mediates a vision of God through the theophanic mediums of Scripture and the sacraments. She clings to and participates in the humanity of Christ. And yet, under Thomas’s rubric above, the Church is also a sacrament. As the Bride joined to the divine Bridegroom in *una caro*, the Church is made visible in her members who come together as the Body of Christ. This understanding of the Church arises from Thomas’s constant devotion to the incarnate divine Bridegroom, to the *commercium* of God becoming man for the sake of his Bride. This is the christo-centric exchange that lies at the heart of Thomas’s whole commentary. By it, therefore, we also understand Thomas’s depictions of the Church and the human Bride.

In light of Thomas’s propensity for scattering brief theological discussions across the entirety of his commentary, we will do this by way of Thomas’s interpretive style. Within the three-fold division of the human Bride, Mary becomes the key to understanding the Church as the human Bride of the Song. On the one hand, Mary provides Thomas with tropological or moral instruction for his monks. On the other hand, Mary, because she is also the historical, human Bride, becomes an allegory for the Church. In other words, Mary helps the monks understand the Church as human Bride, and their own place in the *commercium* of salvation. Hinged, therefore, between the soul and the Church, Mary illuminates Thomas’s understanding of the human Bride. Thus, by

\(^{377}\) “... de tertio: ‘Satiabor cum apparuerit gloria tua’ (Ps. 16),” Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c597B.
pairing Thomas’s treatment of Mary as the human bride and mother in the historical *admirabile commercium* with Thomas’s treatment of the Church as a “sacramental reality,” we see how the Church is the human Bride joined to the Divine Bridegroom.

Accordingly, we will look at images used in common by Thomas to describe both Mary and the Church. These images arise from scriptural discussions of bread, water, and fruit, each of which is symbolic of Christ, and each of which, therefore, is a sacramental image. These are the images through which the monk “sees” the Beloved. Each image, moreover, also finds its scriptural source in an Old Testament figure; it has its place, in other words, within Salvation’s *historia figurativa*. Thomas, however, will interpret the figures for his monks. It will be key, then, to follow the spirals of Thomas’s interpretations, moving with him through the Old Testament prefigurations, to images of Mary, and through Mary, too, as a part of the *historia figurativa*, as an image or an allegory of the Church. We will arrive, though in a roundabout way, turning again and again through various metaphors, typologies and tropological interpretations, at a profound picture of the Church, composed of her many members, as the human Bride.

What is most important to understand at the outset, then, is Thomas’s use of Old Testament figures to represent both the human Bride and the divine Bridegroom. For Thomas, God writes the story of Salvation in history itself. As we saw in Chapter One, for Thomas, Ruth and Boaz are an image of the divine-human relationship cultivated and consummated. However, in addition to Ruth and Boaz, Thomas sees the divine Bridegroom and the human Bride prefigured in other Old Testament couples such as
Samson and Delilah, and Esther and King Assuerus. For Thomas these couples also serve as “types” of Christ and the Church, becoming preachable as such precisely because of their living, historical role in the Church’s espousal. None, however, serve as such an exemplary “type” of the Church as Mary who had a singular role in the Church’s espousal as the living, historical human bride taken in the admirabile commercium.

Couples such as Ruth and Boaz reveal how the divine Bridegroom has sought his Bride through Scripture itself; Samson and Delilah reveal how ardently Christ has always loved his Bride (who has always been the Church), despite her weaknesses, her betrayals, and the failings of her “flesh;” Assuerus and Esther reveal the goodness of the “married life” of Christ and the Church, which is yet to come, though glimpsed in this life, when the Bride is worthy of her beatitude, of her divine Bridegroom. In Book Eleven Thomas, after giving several Old Testament examples, explains this method of looking at the human-divine couple that is the Church and Christ: “That Bridegroom, Christ, kissed the Bride, the Church, in the patriarchs, was ‘spoken for’ in the law and the prophets, was embraced by the Bridegroom extending his hands for her on the yoke of the cross.” In other words, the Old Testament shows that the human Bride not only existed before the Incarnation, but that Christ “kissed” his Bride, the Church, in the

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378 Thomas is not alone in utilizing such a hermeneutical device for the Song of Songs: Honorius Augustodunensis offers a long enumeration of Old Testament couples in the Prologue to his Expositio in Cantica Canticorum, PL 172; cc354ff.

379 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c262A.

380 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c85B.

381 See, for example, Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc 156B, 170C, 273D, 859.

382 See Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc786A-C.
patriarchs, in the Law and in the Prophets, finally embracing her through the Incarnation and then with his arms stretched on the Cross. Thus the Old and the New Testaments come together to reveal how long and in what manner God has sought after his human Bride.

Interestingly, there are various figures in the Old Testament, beyond Esther, Ruth, and Delilah, in whom Thomas sees the human Bride of the commercium. Thomas interprets each one, we will see, as a type of Mary, and through Mary as a figure of the Church as the human Bride. Mary holds a unique place in the story of salvation history, which is underlined by Thomas’s exegetical methods and the way he carries it out with the specific aim of explaining and praising the admirabile commercium. Unlike Esther and Ruth, Mary no longer prefigures the human bride of the commercium; rather she is the historical, human bride, wed to the Bridegroom in her fiat, and she is the mater materialis Christi. The wondrous “exchange” of the Incarnation took place within her womb, and in that moment Christ transfigured all of salvation history as it was told figuratively in the Old Testament. Yet, in that moment Christ also illuminates his mother, the source of his humanity, as an image of the Church as his true human Bride. Much as Thomas looks to Rebekah to see Mary, he looks to Mary to understand the Church.

Yet, this exegetical pattern can only be envisioned by gazing on Christ. The connection between Mary and the Church is christo-centric: it is based on Christ as the one who illuminates and transfigures, who washes and redeems, who weds himself to the Church in Mary’s flesh. The case of Mary is quite striking: the images in which her role within the story of Salvation as the human bride and mater materialis is prefigured, are
each applied to her womb, to, that is, the place in which the historical *admirabile commercium* took place. This, for Thomas, was the beginning of Christ’s transfiguration of the *historia figurativa*. These images, therefore, once applied to Mary, become figures of the *sacramenta Ecclesiae*. Mary herself becomes a figure of the Church, and the Church, built *ex sacramenta spiritualibus*, is the enduring presence of the *commercium*, in which Mary partook in a singular way, and with which Thomas is so deeply concerned: the Church, as the human Bride, wed to her divine Bridegroom in nuptials made possible by the sacrament of Christ’s humanity.

The twists and turns of Thomas’s interpretation thus follow along the lines of this basic argument: just as Mary’s womb was the historical “place” of the unique *commercium* of the Incarnation, the Church continues to be the “place” of the sacramental *commercium* between the Bride and Bridegroom. As the human bride taken in the Incarnation, and the human mother of the *Sacramentum* of Christ, Mary illuminates the Church for Thomas. She images the human Bride joined to the Divine Bridegroom, as a sacramental Bride, for the Church is already joined to her Bridegroom; they are of one flesh and one spirit.

First, we will examine the various images Thomas uses in relationship to Mary. Second, we will see how they are applied to the Church. In a third section, we will extend Thomas’s allegory of Mary as the Church, and see how Mary is also an allegory for the anagogical Church. As a “sacramental reality” the Church militant continues to look forward to the kiss of God’s unveiled presence, and thus Mary, having been

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383 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c852C.
assumed into Heaven, continues to illuminate the Church as Bride even in an anagogical context.

Mary as Type: Thomas Adds to an Ancient Approach

For centuries, beginning with Origen, God and the soul, and Christ and the Church were interpreted as the Bride and Bridegroom in the Song of Songs. For just as long, from Origen onwards, Mary was approached as a typos of the Church. However, Mary was rarely, if ever, presented as the Bride of the Song by patristic exegetes. The images, that is, did not mix. This was the work of the medieval monks. By the Middle Ages, the interpretive strands of the Church as Bride, of Mary as eccelsial typos, and of Mary as Bride, often find themselves woven together into a single, though beautifully profound, depiction of the Bride in the Canticle.

Thomas, therefore, presents Mary as the third sponsa alongside the soul and the Church. Certainly, Thomas was not alone in presenting Mary as the Bride of the Song as this was a typical interpretive move throughout the Middle Ages and especially during the Twelfth Century. Here, what is often perceived as the difficulty with Thomas, becomes the measure of the depth of his interpretation. Thomas’s mélange of images, his quick movements through levels of interpretation—here with the three sponsae—blends the interpretation into a single picture of the Bride; the three sponsae are inseparable, joined together by Christ’s humanity. The soul does not become a bride without the Church being the Bride, and Mary, as the historical bride, becomes an image of them both. In sum, the Church is the Bride, but a Bride better understood through Mary’s
motherhood and brideship, and a Bride, therefore, whom the monks better live by, better become, and better love.

Thus, the roots of Thomas’s three-fold interpretation do not find themselves simply or shallowly rooted in the medieval Marian commentaries on the Song of Songs, but they drink from the depths of the patristic understanding of Mary as an archetype of the Church. This ancient typological understanding of Mary stands upon her central role in the history of salvation as the Mother of the Lord, as *Theotokos*.

Augustine proclaimed just this to his own congregation:

> You to whom I am speaking, you are the members of Christ. Who has given birth to you? I hear the voice of your heart: it is the Mother Church, this holy, honored Church who, like Mary, gives birth and is virgin. She gives birth to nations, but they are the members of one alone, of him of whom she is the body and the spouse. In that, too, she bears the image of the Virgin Mary, because in this multitude, she is the mother of unity.384

In this sermon Augustine helps his congregation understand the Church as their Mother by comparison to Mary as Christ’s mother. The earliest illuminations of the Church by appeal to Mary focus on Mary as Theotokos, not on Mary as *sponsa*. Note that in this passage from Augustine, he makes mention of the Church as Bride, but does not extend this element of the comparison to Mary.

To give a rough outline of the interpretive history, we should begin with the biblical figures crucial to the history of interpreting Mary as *typos* of the Church. These figures are not found in the Song of Songs, but in the figure of Eve and of the woman of the Apocalypse. Both biblical women play a role in Thomas’s theological *fabula*, but we

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deal only with the first in detail here (the second will be treated at chapter’s end).

Traditionally understood as the “mother of the living,” Eve becomes a type of Mary who is the Mother of the Lord. Or, as Theotokos, Mary is Eve’s antetype. Initially, therefore, the exegetical relationship developed between Eve and Mary serves to highlight the motherhood of the Church. Eve, as Thomas puts it, transacted the exsecrabile commercium. Mary, however, is the Mother of the Redeemer who says “yes” to the admirabile commercium. In more medieval terms, however, as Mother of the Redeemer, Mary is also the bride taken by the divine Bridegroom in the admirabile commercium.

The earliest bridal imagery used in conjunction with Mary described her flesh, or her womb, as the “nuptial chamber” of the Word, who, in wedding himself to her holy humanity, became the Head and Spouse of the Church. Mary’s womb is the place of the Incarnation, as Augustine writes: “the nuptial union is effected between the Word and human flesh, and the place where the union is consummated is the Virgin’s womb.”

Centuries later, Bernard of Clairvaux puts it this way: Mary’s womb “is the Bridegroom’s

385 It is interesting to note that Hervé Coathalem argues that the ideas of Mary and the Church as Bride remained parallel for so long due to the various parallelisms set up between Mary and Eve as antetypes. See La parallelisme entre la Sainte Vierge et l’Église dans la tradition Latine jusqu’à la fin du XIIe siècle (Rome: Universitatis Gregorianae, 1954). Plus this was already in Justin’s Apology and was developed in Irenaeus’s Demonstratio.

386 Coathalem, Parallelisme, p. 52. See Thomas Cisterciensis: “Spiritus sanctus in thalamo Virginis tunicam texuit; Dei Filius textam induit,” ICC, PL 206; c454C.

Augustine and Bernard both express the unity of divinity and humanity that took place in Mary’s flesh, and which consequently takes place between Christ and the Church. Augustine, therefore, could have pointed to Mary’s espousal in his comparison above.

Ambrose of Autpért, as Hervé Coathalem reports, presents Mary as the bride of Christ by interpreting her *fiat* as consent given to her Bridegroom. Ambrose’s depiction draws from the famous contrast between Eve’s disobedient apple snatching and Mary’s obedient yes. Thus as early as the fifth century, it is the exegetical relationship between Mary and Eve that first bestows the title of bride upon Mary.

Centuries later, Bernard of Clairvaux makes this connection between Eve and Mary explicit: “Make haste now, O Eve, and come to Mary; come, O Mother, to thy Daughter! Change those words from a miserable excuse to a song of thanksgiving: ‘Lord, the woman, whom thou gavest me to be my companion, gave me to eat from the tree of life’.”

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life—that is, to give him the fruit of the *admirabile commercium*. Elsewhere, Bernard speaks similarly about Mary’s *fiat*, but this time with connotations of the Canticle:

> Open your heart to faith, O blessed Virgin, your lips to praise, your womb to the Creator. See, the desired of all nations is at your door, knocking to enter. If he should pass by because of your delay, in sorrow you would begin to seek him afresh, the One whom your soul loves. Arise, hasten, open. Arise in faith, hasten in devotion, open in praise and thanksgiving. Behold the handmaid of the Lord, she says, be it done unto me according to your word.391

This passage from Bernard rings with the language and the drama of the Song of Songs. Thomas, as we have already seen, does just this with Mary’s *fiat* in his Prologue. Consequently, Thomas brings the mother and the bride of God together during the Annunciation and Christ’s Incarnation.

Beginning in the eleventh century and on into the twelfth century, the description of Mary as bride was especially prominent in interpretations of the Song of Songs as cults devoted to Mary developed.392 Interestingly, however, some commentaries began to present Mary as both mother and bride of Christ (a combination of images that might be disturbing to a more modern audience). Longing to understand the Song of Songs as a text that reveals the “hidden life of Mary,”393 the medieval theologians read the story of the mother-bride beautifully in the images of the Song. To give but one example, there is Honorius Augustodunensis’s brilliant *Sigillum sanctae Mariae*. In adapting the Song

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392 See Hugo Rahner, *Our Lady and the Church*, p. 108. Perhaps, as scholars have argued, this is due to the wide use of the Song in marian liturgical celebrations. See, for example, Rachel Fulton’s article: “Mimetic Devotion, Marian Exegesis, and the Historical Sense of the Song of Songs,” *Viator* 27 (1996): 85-116.

from its traditional interpretation of the Church as Bride, Honorius insists that “all that is written of the Church is suitably ascribed to her [the Virgin Mary] as well.” (This is actually to reverse the patristic typology of Mary and the Church!) On Thomas’s part, however, the blending of Mother-Bride images allows him to move between moral instruction for the soul and his overarching depiction of the Church, for Mary’s fiat made her the mother of Christ in the Incarnation, but the bride of the divine Bridegroom at the Annunciation.

In these two events, Thomas sees Mary as taking up a unique position in salvation history. Let us return to Thomas’s vision of Mary as a woman within the long line of biblical women of the Old Testament, each of whom played their part in the Church’s espousal. When Thomas adds Mary to the list, already including Eve, Delilah, Ruth, Esther, and, as we will see soon, Rebekah, the Sunamite woman, and the widow of Zeraphetha, he emphasizes the humanity of the Church originating in the “flesh” of Mary, or, more generally speaking, from the human race. In this, Thomas echoes Augustine, who explains the origin of the Church as follows:

> It is flesh, very flesh, that is united to the Word; as scripture says, They are two no longer, but one flesh (Mt 19:6; see Eph 5:31). The Church was drawn from the human race, so that flesh united to the Word might be the Head of the Church, and all the rest of the believers might be the limbs that belong to the Head.

Consequently, Thomas continues to see the humanity of the Church in both the sacramentality of Christ’s humanity, and in the humanity of “the rest of the believers”—

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394 As translated by Rachel Fulton, in From Judgment to Passion, p. 249, fn 22.
395 Augustine, On Psalm 44, transl. by Maria Boulding, Expositions of the Psalms, 44.3.
that is, in the limbs of the Bridegroom’s Body. Mary’s story both recapitulates and
embodies the Church’s historical transformation from the “fleshly wife” to the one who is
“wed” to the divine Bridegroom. In a way, then, Thomas uplifts Mary as an example of
the Bride for the monks to follow because she offers what we might consider a
personification of the Church in concrete, historical terms. To look to Mary, for Thomas,
is not only to come to see the Church, but to come to be the Church.

In one of his most telling images, and one akin to that often used by early Church
exegetes, Thomas puts it this way: Mary is the bodily or motherly womb (venter
materialis) while the Church is the sacramental womb (venter sacramentalis).

Thomas uses the Old Testament figures of the Sunamite woman, the Zarephthaen widow,
and Rebekah to expound this comparison. With the “wedding-bed” of Mary’s womb,
and with her fiat as an acceptance of the “Kiss” of the Incarnation ever in his mind,
Thomas depicts the relationship of Mary and Christ in scriptural terms: by her
relationship with Eve, Mary is the good earth, Christ is the New Fruit; prefigured by
Rebekah, Mary is the water vessel, and Christ is the Living Water; Mary’s womb is the
coenaculum of the Sunamite woman in which Christ’s bed is made and His table set (2
Kings 4:1-38); recounting the story of the Zerapthean widow, Mary bakes the heap of
wheat, and Christ is the Bread of Life. Knowing these biblical stories and understanding
how they are fulfilled by the events fo the admirabile commercium is crucial to
understanding Thomas’s account of the theological fabula as the story of the Church’s
espousal. By them he shows that, as the venter sacramentalis, the Church, too, is a water

396 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; see c697.
vessel, the *coenaculum*, and a heap of wheat, bestowing the divine Bridegroom on her many members as if from her own womb.

Let us turn now to look closely at images of and images related to Mary’s “womb” in Thomas’s commentary. These will begin to define the relationship between Mary and the Church as one that centers on Christ and the exchange in which he took his human Bride.

**Old Testament Women & Mary’s Womb: Toward an Image of the Human Bride**

*Terra*

Let us begin with the image of Mary’s womb most closely associated with Eve and the fruit: the womb as “earth” or fertile soil. This is an ancient metaphor used by Irenaeus and Tertullian, Ambrose and Augustine.\(^{397}\) As with no other image, it becomes eminently clear with this one that the divine Bridegroom became one flesh with the Church in Mary’s womb. When treating this image, Thomas often turns to the text of Isaiah 45:8, also a liturgical versicle for the Advent season: “Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the Just One: let the earth be opened and bud forth a savior,”\(^{398}\) for this text both prophesies Christ’s coming and expresses the longing


\(^{398}\) Isaiah 45:8: “Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the skies rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation may sprout forth, and let it cause righteousness to spring up also; I the Lord have created it,” RSV.
of the faithful for Christ. With this in mind, Thomas invites his readers to look upon
Christ, writing:

See, the Lord gives kindness, and our land gives his fruit. For, see, the
heavens drop dew, the clouds rain, the earth buds. That is, the Holy Spirit
comes from Heaven, in the clouds is hidden the Son of God, and the earth that
is the Virgin’s womb buds [forth our Savior].

He continues, but with greater explanation:

The heavens drop dew, the Virgin was made graceful; the clouds rain,
conferring upon the Virgin the power to be fruitful; the earth buds with the
virtue and wisdom of God. In the first the Virgin was filled with grace, in the
second she was made virtuous, in the third, fruitful. Of the first it is said:
“Hail Mary, full of grace;” of the second: “the Lord is with you;” in the third:
“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.”

Clearly in these passages Thomas demonstrates that Christ is the “blessed fruit” of
Mary’s womb, that is, that Christ is the “fruit” that buds from the “earth” of her flesh.

Thomas holds this image of Mary’s womb as fertile soil in contrast with the
curse of Genesis 3:13-17: man works the land in the sweat of his brow, cultivating thorns
and thistles, having been cast from Eden and separated from God’s presence. Yet, in the
wondrous “exchange” of the Incarnation, writes Thomas in the same passage from Book
One, the Creator was born of the Virgin and bestowed his divinity upon us. Or, in
another image of cultivating the soil, Christ planted the Vine in the fertile land of Mary’s

399 “Ecce dat Dominus benignitatem, et terra nostra dat fructum suum. Ecce enim coelum rorat,
nubes pluit, terra germinat. De coelo venit Spiritus sanctus, in nube latet Dei Filius, terra est Virginis
uterus.” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c454A.

400 “Coelum rorat infundens Virgini gratiam; nubes pluit, conferens virginitati generandi
potentiam; terra germinat, Dei virtutem et Dei sapientam. In primo Virgo facta est gratiosa, in secundo
virtuosa, in terto fructuosa. In primo dicitur: ‘Ave Maria, gratia plena;’ in secundo: ‘Dominus tecum;’ in
terto: ‘Benedicta tua in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui’ (Lk 1:28).” Thomas Cisterciensis,
ICC, PL 206; c454B.

401 In Irenaeus’s [Demonstration Adam is made from “virgin soil,” but Christ is made from the
Virgin Mary.
womb, and, as Thomas shows elsewhere, this is the Vine that bears the fruit of the sacraments, both the “wine” of the Beloved’s love and the “Fruit” of His Body on the Cross.402

In yet another related image, Thomas speaks about Mary’s womb as a field (ager) when interpreting the hortus conclusus of the Song. In his distinctive way of delineating images in threes, Thomas writes: “The field to which our beloved comes is threefold. The first is the Virgin’s womb, the second is the Church, the third is the human heart.”403 The three are closely linked, for, as Thomas goes on to show: the first field is made beautiful with the flowers of virginity and grace, for Christ came into the field of the Virgin; in the second we graze on the bread of the Eucharist because Christ came from His mother’s womb into the Church, and the third field, the human heart, is that field to which Christ often returns in so far as the monks are joined to Him by the fruit of Mary’s “field” and the Church’s sacraments.404

Christ visiting the very soil of human hearts requires, writes Thomas, that the monks enter into the field of the Virgin through faith, so that they might believe in

402 See Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c736 D, for example. “Et hoc est vinum quod dignum est dilecto ad potandum, dum sic digne in ejus amore reficimur…”

403 “Triplex ager ad quem egreditur dilectus. Primus est uterus Virginis, secundus Ecclesia, tertius cor hominis.” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c742C.

404 “Primus est floridus flore virginitatis et gratiae, secundus est pascuus pane Eucharistiae, tertius sationarius verbo doctrinae. Anne floridus, de quo scripturum est: ‘Sicut lilium inter spinas, sic amica mea inter filias’ (Cant. 2:2), et iterum: ‘et flos de radice ejus ascendet?’ (Is. 11:1) … Triplex ejus egressus: primus est a Patre in agrum Virginis, secundus de matre in agrum Ecclesiae peregrinantis, teritus de praesenti calamitate, et frequenter revertitur ad agrum nostri cordis,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc742C-743A.
Christ’s Incarnation. “Purchase faith,” urges Thomas. Namely, he asks the monks to look to Mary not only as she who makes God visible by making Christ present, but also as an example of faith: believe in the Incarnation; let Christ be re-born in your heart. Thus, in the careful and intimate connections made between the ways Mary’s womb buds with the Savior and how human hearts receive Christ, Thomas subtly blends allegory and tropology. Just as the commercium is so clearly delineated in Christ as the Fruit of Mary’s flesh, the monks come to see the Fruit of the Cross as that which joins the Church, and therefore joins them, in one flesh with the divine Bridegroom. The monks, too, become that human soil made fruitful by “the dew dropped down from heaven.”

Hydria

Now let us turn to look at Mary and the image of the hydria, the water pitcher. Thomas makes great use of this image in order to interpret Canticles 5:1: “Eat, friends, drink, and be drunk with love.” Here he draws more on his understanding of the Old Testament as a historia figurativa, transfigured by the New Testament. Thomas speaks

405 “…ingrediamur agrum Virginis per fidem, ut credamus veram Christi incarnationem,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c734B.

406 We find Mary depicted as the hydria in iconography in various ways. For example, scenes of the Annunciation are often depicted with Mary and the Angel Gabriel on either side of an urn or a vase containing water and a lily. Perhaps these depictions are related to Annunciation scenes in which the Angel Gabriel happens upon Mary while she is drawing water from a well. An example of this is painted on the walls of St. Gabriel’s Church in Jerusalem, supposedly built near the well of the Samaritan Woman; a second is the mosaic floor of San Marco’s in Venice, laid in 1220. In an icon well known to Eastern Christianity, “The Life-giving Fountain,” Mary distributes the waters of spiritual and physical healing. With more specific reference to the Song of Songs, depictions of the Annunciation from the 1400s often portray the Angel coming to Mary in a closed garden with a well or a fountain.
of three water-pitchers (*hydriae*) in Book Seven: the first is Rebekah’s water pitcher, the second is that of the widow of Zarephath who fed Elijah, and the third are the vessels containing the water turned into wine at the wedding in Cana.

Both Rebekah and the Zarepthean widow are obvious candidates to Thomas. It is not only a word or an image that Thomas hears and turns toward in these stories, but the stories themselves, which reflect Mary’s brideship and motherhood in both content and imagery. First, the account of Rebekah drawing water for Abraham’s servant and the servants camels, is the account of the discovery of the woman who would become Isaac’s wife and the mother of Israel. Second, the widow of Zarephath, whose son dies and is brought back to life, gives food and drink to the prophet Elijah, finds that her supply of wheat, which is very low, feeds her household for many days. Mary is the one whom the Lord prepared for His Son. The third set of vessels, however, are those of John 2 that contain the water made into wine at the Cana wedding feast, an exchange that

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407 This is a popular and ancient typology. We find in Bernard, for example, in his exposition of Mary as Aqueduct: “Thou, O Virgin, art full of grace, full of the dew of heaven, flowing with delights, leaning upon the Beloved. Feed us today, O great Lady, feed us, thy poor mendicants, with the food of the spirit; let the whelps also eat of the crumbs that fall from the table; give not alone Abraham’s servant but his camels also to drink from thy overflowing pitcher because thou art the true Rebecca chosen and predestined for the Son of the Most High, Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who is over all things, God blessed forever. Amen.” St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons for the Seasons and Principal Festivals of the Year*, 1:3 (Westminster, MD: The Carroll Press, 1950), p.280


409 Genesis 24:14 now applies to Mary: “illa est, Domine, quam praeparasti filio domini mei,” ibid.
foreshadows the change made in each of the monks as are conformed to the Bridegroom, and joined to Him in Heaven.

Each *hydria*, writes Thomas, is rightly assigned to the blessed Mary: “Istae hydriae merito assignantur beatae Mariae, quae nobis ut comederemus et inebriaremur propinavit aquam gratiae, panem carnis in ea assumptae, vinum aeternae laetitiae.”

They are rightly applied to Mary, that is, because she pours out the water of grace, the bread of flesh (*panem carnis*) assumed in her, and the wine of eternal happiness. In other words, she “pours out” Christ.

Thomas clarifies his interpretation of the *hydriae*-carrying women by linking them to the Living Water of John 4. Mary now carries a “pitcher” full of Living Water and that pitcher is her womb, in which the Son of God, the Living Water, assumed flesh:

O young woman! O happy hydria! O saving water! O truly venerable woman, who carried such a hydria! Happy hydria, which contained such water! O saving water, which waters the whole earth! The first is the Virgin Mary, the second is her womb (*ventris aula regia*), third is the grace of God. The first is she whom you have prepared O Lord…the second is that in which Your Son assumed flesh. . .the third is the stream of the river that makes glad the City of God.

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410 “Istae hydriae merito assignantur beatae Mariae, quae nobis ut comederemus et inebriaremur propinavit aquam gratiae, panem carnis in ea assumptae, vinum aeternae laetitiae,” Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c496B.

411 “Istae hydriae merito assignantur beatae Mariae, quae nobis ut comederemus et inebriaremur propinavit aquam gratiae, panem carnis in ea assumptae, vinum aeternae laetitiae,” Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c496B.

412 “O venerabilis puella! O felix hydria! O salutaris aqua! O vere venerabilis puella, quae talem bajulat hydriam! O felix hydria, quae talem continet aquam! O salutaris aqua, quae rigat totam terram! Prima est Virgo Maria, secunda ventris aula regia, tertia Dei gratia…Prima est quam praeparasti Domine, filio domini mei, secunda in qua assumpsit cararem Filius Dei tertia est ‘fluminis impetus’ qui ‘laetificat civitatem Dei [Psal. 45],’” Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; cc496B-C.
Here Thomas depicts Mary as the young, venerable woman, her womb as the *felix hydria*, and its contents as the Saving Water—Christ. Christ, therefore, is the grace of God which even rejoices Heaven.

Thomas’s mention of the salvific water sprung from Mary’s womb leads him also to speak about the living Bread prepared therein. This deepening of his interpretation arises from his choice of the Zarepthean widow. He writes: “The living Bread come down from Heaven and given, who gives life to the world, is born of Mary’s womb” [De secunda nascitur ‘panis vivus qui de coelo descendit, et dat vitam mundo...’]. Thus, John’s discourse on the Bread of Life finds its place within Thomas’s discussion of the Saving Water, for they are, as John’s discourse reveals, one and the same. Thus what Thomas emphasizes is that the Saving Water and the Bread of Life, meaning the divine Bridegroom, has his *mater materialis* and his historical, human bride in the person of Mary.

The Zarepthean widow comes to the foreground here, for her vessel contains flour for bread making. Mary is at once the Rebekah-like water-bearer taken as bride, and the flour-toting mother whose Son dies and rises again. Thus, the *felix hydria* of Mary’s womb not only pours forth water, but, it also pours forth wheat and the bread. Mary bears the Living Water and the Bread of Life, as Thomas’s connections of this wheat and water with the Gospel of John so expertly reveal.

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413 Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c496D.

In a related interpretation of Mary as the valiant woman of Proverbs 20, Thomas emphaisze Mary as the vessel of the Incarnation. She carries the riches of the *sacramenta Christi* to the Church where the monk might “purchase” them: “For that strong woman, who ‘considered the field and bought it,’ made Divine wisdom incarnate.”

Continuing with particular attention to the relationship between Mary and the *sacramenta incarnationis*, Thomas writes again about the *admirabile commercium*:

Behold kindness. Humility follows; because he was worthy to be born from the Virgin; he descended from Heaven into Nazareth, he wished to be born in Bethlehem, he endured death in Jerusalem. This coming down was made possible by the blessed virgin mother. For this same one ‘was made as if of a broker’s ship, carrying her bread from afar,’ because she came by the virgin vessel (ship) to Nazareth in Bethlehem, which is called the house of bread. For he himself was ‘the living bread who descended from heaven.’

[Ecce benignitas. Sequitur humilitas; quia de Virgine nasci dignatus est; de coelo in Nazareth descendit, in Bethlehem nasci voluit, in Jerusalem mori sustinuit. Hic descensus, mediante Virgine, factus est. Ipsa enim ‘facta est quasi navis institoris, de longe portans panem suum,’ quia virginali navigio venit de Nazareth in Bethlehem, quae dicitur *domus panis*. Ipse enim est ‘panis vivus qui de coelo descendit.’]

In other words, Thomas shows that the Bread of Heaven was born of the Virgin Mary. Indeed, even before Thomas, “the fathers liked to think of the valiant woman as a richly-laden ship, sailing from afar and bringing victuals and great treasure.”

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416 Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c26A

417 Hugo Rahner, *Our Lady and the Church*, p. 84.

418 Ibid.
However, Thomas goes on to speak at length about the wheat and bread, incorporating passages from even further biblical passages, including Leviticus. In accord with the Zeraphean widow, it is as if Mary’s womb is also an “oven” in which the Bread of Life was “baked,” or, in which Christ conformed Himself to humankind. The “baking” of the Bread in Mary’s womb, shows Thomas, is nothing other than the “exchange” of the *admirabile commercium*. This Bread is also the sacrifice of Christ Himself, adds Thomas via reference to Leviticus 2:5. This Bread is the sacrifice of the Cross made from the finest wheat flour: “Ipse factus est nobis sacrificium de simila.” Thus, with the characters and figures of Genesis, 1 Kings, Leviticus, and the Gospel of John, Thomas concocts a profound mélange of biblical images to interpret Song of Songs 5:1: “Eat friends, drink,” as an invitation to see Mary as the source of the Christ’s humanity, and therefore to understand and wonder at the *commercium* that joined the Bridegroom to the Church, Christ’s human Bride.

Yet, there is the rest of the verse: “…drink and be drunk with love.” Here we turn to Thomas’s use of the vessels of John 2, the jars of water at the wedding in Cana. As Thomas says, Christ, himself, is the water changed into wine. Thus, he interprets Jesus’s words to the servants, as Christ saying: “I took up human misery so that it will be

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419 “... in ea coctus est panis,” Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c499D.
420 “... qui nostram refecit indigentiam,” ibid.
421 Ibid.
422 “…de sartagine, quia contra diabolum opposuit se murum pro genere humano; de craticula, quia in cruce assatus fuit pro toto mundo,” Thoms Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c499D.
423 Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c499C.
changed into glory.”

Christ undertook the “exchange” of the Incarnation so that humankind might receive glory. The monks, too, therefore, are the water that will be changed into wine through an exchange with Christ. They were “bought” so to speak by the Bread and the Wine they “purchase;” they appropriate the divine as they are conformed to Christ and taken up by him into the *admirabile commercium*.

“[Christ is] that water which irrigates the whole earth, namely the depths of the human heart.”

The water from the *hyrdria nuptiarum*, therefore, nourishes the monk toward perfection as he is conformed to Christ. In drinking of these water vessels, rivers of living water flow from him, and he himself becomes “womb-like.” Of course Mary’s womb remains the unique place of the Incarnation, but Thomas’s point is that insofar as the monks receive Christ, that is, they receive Him in order to be joined intimately to the Bridegroom, and even to become his very Body, they receive Christ in the way the Church does because they, joined to Christ through his humanity, are the Church. In this way, the monks’ hearts become “womb-like” and flow with living waters whenever they partake of the Church’s sacramental *commercium*.

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424 “Sequitur hydria quae dat immortalitatem: haec est illa multiplex hydria, in qua mutatur aqua in vinum. Sed dicuntur sex propter perfectionem, quia ‘occurremus omnes in virum perfectum et mensuram aetatis plenitudinis Christi’ (Eph. 4:13).---’Implete hydrias aqua’ (Jn. 2:7), ait, ac si diceret: In hydria mea a filio meo assumpta est humana miseria, quae postmodum mutabitur in gloriam.” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c500A.

425 Ibid. “Aqua illa…irrigans totam terram, scilicet humani cordis profunda.”

426 “Consideremus ergo defectum aquae qua genus est infectum, vini de aqua facti perfectum. In primo fuit a paradiso hominis ejectio, in secundo culpae et laboris corruptio, in tertio generis humani reparatio. De primo, ‘Tulit Eva et comedit’ (Gen. 3:19), de secundo, ‘In dolore paries filios tuos’ (Gen. 3:16), de tertio ait: ‘Et haurite nunc et ferte architriclin’ (Jn 2:8). Haec est immortalitas de hydria Mariæ. Ergo de hydria Rebeccaeg rigamini, ministri, de hydria mulieris Sareptanae comedite, amici, de hydria nuptiarum inebriamini, charissimi.” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc500C-D.

427 “Primum ut invitetis alios ad dona gratiae, secundum ut firmi sitis in virtute patientiae, tertium
In yet another depiction of Mary’s womb, Thomas speaks more explicitly about the commercium in business terms. Under this particular rubric, Mary’s womb is a sort of money mint: “The silver, that which was minted in the Virgin’s womb with the money of our misery, sufficed for the redemption of all.”428 Consequently, the monk may trade his “silver” for the “fruit of the field”429 purchased by Mary, the valiant woman. Yet, when inviting the monks to the admirable commercium, Thomas also writes: “Therefore you were bought at a great price.”430 With these words Thomas depicts the Church as what we might call the “market place” of the commercium. Even though he instructs the monks to “come and buy,” he also stresses that they were purchased in the “exchange.” They were bought with the “Silver” minted in Mary’s womb. Only within the Church’s economy does the monk enter into a true exchange with Christ. Only, that is, within the Church does the very human monk become a member of the human Bride through the sacraments of Christ’s humanity.

428 “Argentum, quod in utero Virginis impressum moneta nostrae miseriae suffecit ad redemptionem omnium,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c371B.

429 “Vir affert pro fructu ejus mille argenteos,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c836A.

Coenaculum

Thomas offers one further depiction of Mary’s womb, which recalls both the metaphor of the “wedding chamber” and the conclusion to which we just came: the monk’s heart, too, is “womb-like.” In Book Seven, Thomas exposit 5:6: “I opened the bolt of my door to my love but he had turned and gone away.” Here Thomas interprets the room being opened to the beloved as the upper room, the coenaculum, of the Sunamite woman in 2 Kings 4:8. In this woman, Mary and the human Bride are prefigured yet again, for Thomas likens Mary’s womb to this upper room: “Ecce venter Virginis est coenaculum.” Thomas, however, moving quickly as he usually does, does not dwell on this image for long. Rather, he moves on to show that the monk’s heart, too, is this upper room, which the monk prepares for the Lord, arranging the “furniture,” and putting things in order so as to welcome the Lord. The monk prepares his heart, therefore, as the Sunamite and Mary each prepared their “rooms”: “praepurate corda vestra Deo, ut dicatis: ‘Paratum cor meum, Deus, paratum cor meum’ (Psal. 107 [Ps. 108]).” Yet, even having turned to speak to his monks, Thomas continues to blur the lines of interpretation: Mary exemplifies the proper preparation of the heart when she receives Christ in her womb. Christ, repeats Thomas, assumed flesh in Mary’s womb:

431 “Pessulum ostii mei aperui dilecto meo. At ille declinaverat atque transierat,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c542.

432 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c542A.

433 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c542C.
“Ecce vir, id est Christus, transit per nos.”434 For the monk, as a member of the Church, however, Christ comes to be re-born or to dwell in the *coenaculum* of his heart.435

### The Church as the Human Bride

Having discussed Thomas’s marian typologies, and their tropological implications, we now turn to look more directly at the Church as the human Bride of the *commercium*. Here, we see that the Church is also a womb: *Habemus uterum*. Thomas uses many of the same images and metaphors for Mary in order to speak of the Church. They are, afterall, set up by Thomas as sets of “threes,” which give, in turn, deeper readings of the same text. Let us see how Thomas interprets the marian images we looked at above in an ecclesial light. In this he is like Augustine, pointing to Mary in order to elucidate the Church, in her motherhood, her brideship, and, for Thomas, in her *commercium* with the divine Bridegroom. The human Bride, therefore, is the humanity of the monks joined to the humanity of Christ in the Body of the Church: the Bride and Bridegroom wed in *una caro*.

In the previous sections of this chapter, I have attempted to array the marian typologies Thomas employs in order to set up his ecclesiological typology as it is based on the figure of Mary. We have already approached aspects of Thomas’s human Bride in ecclesiological terms, even though they have been based largely, so far, on typology and tropology. In other words, we have seen how Mary typifies the monk’s participation in

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434 Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; cc544A-B.

435 See Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c544B.
the Body of Christ, and his incorporation, therefore into the Bride. This, then, is one way of speaking of the Bride’s humanity: the faithful who make up the Church. The monks who are human soil made fruitful by “the dew dropped down from heaven,” who are the water changed into wine by Christ, who bear Christ in the coenaculum of their hearts, who, in short, participate in the Church’s “exchange,” in the the sacraments of Christ’s humanity, are the human Bride. The Church continues to have her origin (partly) in the human race.

In this section of the chapter, however, we will focus on the unity of the faithful as the ecclesiological element which Thomas most prizes. Thomas stresses again and again the importance of the Church as the unity of its members, usually via the image of the monks praying together as if with one mouth. Indeed, in his opening sermon, this corporate prayer is likened to a “kiss” bestowed by the Church on Christ. Jean Leclercq notices the same emphasis in Thomas’s De Praeparatione Cordis. 436 Expatiating on the “kiss” in Book One of his commentary, Thomas emphasizes the unity brought about between Christ and the Church as Christ not only sharing in human nature, but suffering for it. Likewise, Thomas tells his monks, citing Acts 4:32, you reflect that unity: “Multitudinis credientium erat cor unum et anima una.” 437 Therefore, the monks should be of one spirit and one faith, carrying one another’s burdens, and praying for one another. 438

437 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c22C.
438 See Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c22D.
Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c766D.
glorious mother, who is like to Mary, who is both Virgin and Mother, who
gives birth to Christ — and you are Christ’s members.\textsuperscript{440}

According to Thomas, the Church bears new members, or “new sons” in two
ways. She conceives them at the font of Baptism and whenever they return to the Church
through penance. Through these two sacraments, the Church incorporates these “new
sons” into the Body of the Church. The birth of the Church’s “sons,” in other words,
occurs through the Church’s \textit{venter sacramentalis}. Look to Mary, Thomas suggests in
interpretive trios, and see the Church’s \textit{hydria} or her heap of wheat, giving birth to Christ,
and making him present in his members.

However, it is by turning to the image of the Living Bread and the sacrament of
the Eucharist, that the unity of the Church becomes most evident. By returning now to
the images of Church as the “field” in which the faithful eat the Eucharist, and which
they enter by their faith in the Incarnation, as well as the image fo Mary’s womb as the
Zeraphathean widow’s jar of wheat, we turn to Thomas’s Augustinian treatment of the
Church as the Bread baked from the grain of the faithful.\textsuperscript{441} Here, the wheat imagery
applied to the sacrament of the Eucharist helps the monks understand the importance of
the unity of the Church as the human Bride.

In Sermon 272, Augustine asks the \textit{infantes} to reflect on the mystery of the
sacrament which they see upon the altar. The eucharistic bread which is the Body of
Christ (a body which, Augustine adds, he took from Mary’s flesh) also represents the

\textsuperscript{440} St. Augustine, Sermon 25.8, as cited by Rahner, \textit{Our Lady and the Church}, p. 41.

\textsuperscript{441} See Augustine, Sermons 268, 269, 272. Translated by Edmund Hill in \textit{The Works of St.
mystery of the Church. Augustine argues on behalf of his congregation, you understand that this Bread is the Body of Christ, listen to the Apostle who says, “You are the body of Christ and his members” (1 Cor. 12:27). Thus, the Bread on the altar also represents the Church: “mysterium vestrum accipitis.” Augustine explains further, this time turning to 1 Corinthians 10:17 and Acts 4:32, both texts Thomas also employs. The one Bread represents the one Body of the Church because, just as the Bread is made out of many grains of wheat, the one Body is made up of its many members. Thus in the Bread of the Eucharist, the faithful behold Christ’s Body, the same Body born of Mary. But, because they see Christ’s Body, they also see and say “Amen” to the Church who is Christ’s Body. The Sacrament Augustine is explaining is not only the Eucharist, but the Church. The Eucharist, therefore, also presents the mystery of the Church in Her unifying exchange with Christ. They are unus panis, una caro.

Thomas offers virtually the same argument. Christ, himself, writes Thomas, is a grain of wheat, sewn in the womb of his mother, Mary. Mary “baked” the Living Bread. Yet, Thomas adds, the Living Bread is composed of many grains, which are the faithful ones in the Church: “Ipse enim est panis vivus ex multis granis, quae sunt fideles


Augustine, Sermon 272, Oeuvres, p. 399.

Ibid.

Itaque granum tritici, id est Christus, seminatum est in ventre primo, ejus adipe pascitur secundus. Ex eodem acervus tritici, id est multitudo sanctorum, crevit in tertio,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; 699B.
in Ecclesia." \(^{446}\) The Church, therefore, is the unity of the grains of wheat as the Living Bread of Christ’s Body; the Church’s “belly” (\textit{venter}), too, is a heap of wheat (\textit{acervus tritici}). \(^{447}\) While it is not as clearly laid-out as Augustine’s sermon, Thomas comes to the same conclusion: the Bread which represents Christ, therefore, also represents the Church, for, in her many members, she is the Body of Christ. With this, we arrive again at the greatest mystery for Thomas: the Church’s exchange with Christ, an exchange carried out by Christ and in Christ. The human Bride is joined to the divine Bridegroom through the Body of Christ, received from Mary’s womb, from the Church’s \textit{venter sacramentalis}, and from Christ himself.

Consequently, Thomas’s womb imagery, including the \textit{terra}, the \textit{hydria}, and the \textit{coenaculum}, are best and most properly applied to the Church. Mary, in her unique human role in the story of Salvation, reveals their applicability to the Church as a whole and in her many members. Each of the images, in fact, is tied to the sacramentality behind Christ himself as the “dwelling” of God amongst humankind. Christ represents the \textit{commercium}; he is the sacrament of the “exchange” between the divine Bridegroom and the human Bride. Thus, the images applied to Mary, the soul, and the Church as \textit{sponsae} find their culmination in images used by Christ to describe himself, such as a tent or a temple. These images, too, as employed by Thomas, point to the Church as the presence of the divine Bridegroom dwelling intimately with humankind, with his human

\(^{446}\) Thomas Cisterciensis, \textit{ICC}, PL 206; c609A.

\(^{447}\) Thomas Cisterciensis, \textit{ICC}, PL 206; c700C.
Bride. Thomas constantly constructs pictures of the Church as this intimate dwelling, for she is the human Bride.

An article by Gary Anderson, “To See Where God Dwells,” addresses the biblical images such as tent, temple, and tabernacle as images closely related to what we have been calling the *sacramenta incarnationis*. Based on early, Jewish Temple practices in which God’s presence was identified with the Temple itself (or even, Anderson adds, with its furniture: think of Thomas’s *coenaculum*), the images were shifted to Christ as God incarnate, and even to Mary as Christ’s mother after the Nestorian Christological Controversy.448

Indeed, for Thomas, these same images allow him to emphasize the incarnate relationship between Christ, the Church, and her members; a relationship which Thomas often sees epitomized in Mary as the human bride, but most fully actualized in the Church. Above all, these images point Thomas and his monks toward the exchange in which Christ “pitched his tent” in order to dwell *in una caro* with his human Bride. As a result of this “exchange,” Christ’s incarnate dwelling place continues to be the Church, the human Bride, for Christ finds a *coenaculum*, or as Thomas puts it elsewhere a “tabernacle,” prepared for him in the heart of each of his faithful members, and in the “Tabernacle,” or the “Temple,” of the Church.449 Thomas, therefore, envisions a spiritual

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449 See Thomas’s final sermon on Song of Songs 8:14, *ICC*, PL 206; cc847D-860D. Bernard of Clairvaux has a beautiful, christological way of putting this: “You have two from heaven, both Jesus the Bridegroom and the Bride Jerusalem. He, in order to be seen, ‘emptied himself taking the form of a slave and was found as man’ (Phil. 2:7). In what form or appearance, or in what garb, did he [i.e., John the Evangelist] who saw her descending see her? . . . He saw the Bride when he saw the Word in the flesh
agenda by for the monks within the Church: created in the image of God, the soul takes on the image of Christ crucified, and finally, as we will see in the final section, is formed into the image of Christ glorified. Thomas has a vision of the souls within the Church as journeying *ad imago Christi* and *ad visio Dei*.

The individual’s “tabernacle,” however, must be built within the “Tabernacle” of the Church. For this, as Thomas delineates, is how one is conformed to Christ and to Christ’s love. As a member of the Church, the monks participate in Christ’s intimate “dwelling with” his human Bride. Becoming “like” Christ, writes Thomas in his interpretation of Song 8:14, means becoming “aromatic” (like the mountain of spices) with the affections of love by being conformed to Christ’s Passion. Each member of the Church, therefore, constructs a “tabernacle” according to the mystery of Christ’s sufferings and put in order by his love. This construction occurs within the “Tabernacle” of the Church, where Christ’s sufferings are made present in his Body through Christ’s ongoing “exchange” with his human Bride.

(John 1:14), acknowledging two in one flesh. When the holy Emmanuel brought to earth the teaching of heavenly discipline, when the visible image and beautiful appearance of that heavenly Jerusalem which is our mother became known as revealed to us in and through Christ, what did we behold except the Bride in the Bridegroom as we gaze in awe upon one and the same Lord of Glory, both Bridegroom bedecked with crown and Bride adorned with her jewels? He who descended is the same one who ascends (Eph. 4:10). No one ascends to heaven save he who descended from heaven (John 3:13)—the one and the same Lord who is both Bridegroom as Head and Bride as Body,” *Sermons sur le Cantique* I, 27.7, as translated by Bernard McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 175.

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450 See Dvid Bell, “The Commentary,” pp. 20-1. See Thomas Cisterciensis: “Triplex est imago in corde: imago creationis, imago recreationis, imago similitudinis. Primus est rationis, secunda gratiae, tertia Trinitatis… In prima it et venit homo ad naturalitam rerum cognitionem; in secunda transit ad supernae civitatis speculationem; in tertia pertransit ad perfectam Dei dilectionem,” ICC, PL 206: 810C. Thomas makes it clear that only Christ is the true Image of God, man, strictly speaking, is but *ad imaginem*; see c41C. “Formamur ad imaginem Dei, conformamur imagini Christi crucifixi, reformabimur ad imaginem Christi glorificati,” c384B.

451 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc853ff.
The Heavenly, Human Bride

In Book Twelve of his commentary, as in no other other section of this work, Thomas discusses the heavenly Church. He directs his monks in their contemplation of what is beyond the sacramental “dwelling with” of the Church militant. What embrace will the Church experience when this worldly, sacramental commercium is complete? In order to help the monks picture this “kiss” for which they truly long, Thomas blends allegory and anagogy in his closing sermons, turning again to Mary as an allegory or a type of what is to come.

Rather naturally, although also prompted by various images Thomas sees shared by the Song of Songs and the Book of Revelation, Thomas turns to two figures delineated in the latter by John. Mary, as the historical human bride assumed into Heaven, is the Woman of the Apocalypse rising from the desert in Revelation 12:1-5, and the heavenly Church is the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21:2-3. However, his treatment of these characters, is also related to his idea of the commercium, the description of which he gives in Book One is taken from the Revelation 3:17-19. These verses read:

Thou sayest, ‘I am rich and have grown wealthy and have need of nothing,’ and do you know that you are the wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked one. I counsel you to buy of me gold refined by fire, that you might become rich, and might be clothed in white garments, and that the shame of thy nakedness might not appear, and to anoint your eyes with eye salve that you might see.

452 From the beginning of the Church, as Hugo Rahner points out, the fathers interpreted the woman of the Apocalypse in Revelation 12:1-5 as the Church. See H. Rahner, Our Lady and the Church: “The woman of the Apocalypse was from the beginning a much loved picture of the Church, without emphasis on the particular application to our Lady,” p. 105.
We will see that Thomas’s interpretation of the final verses of the Song of Songs in Book Twelve (in which Mary rises from the desert [Song of Songs 8:5] and the monk flees after the Beloved like a stag bounding on the “mountain of spices” [Song of Songs 8:14]), unveils what it means for the human Bride to become “rich,” “clothed in white garments,” and able truly to see. Thus, Mary, as the woman clothed with the Sun, and the heavenly Church, “prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband,” presents a picture of the human Bride in the commercium’s perfection.

However, as with Mary as an allegory for the Church militant, let us first be clear about how, for Thomas, Mary remains an image of the human Bride even in the Church’s celestial state to come. Thomas’s opening sermon of Book Twelve preaches Mary’s assumption into Heaven. Mary, writes Thomas, ascended from the desert, and is now dressed in the garments of the Sun, exalted above the angels. Mary, the historical, human bride, from whom Christ took his flesh, was assumed into Heaven. Thus, she has already moved beyond the images of the Song: Mary, in the essence and fullness of her humanity, already enjoys the Bridegroom. Rachel Fulton, therefore, rightly places Thomas’s emphasis on Mary with her “material” presence in Heaven. This shifts Thomas’s exegetical horizons to Mary as an eschatological image of the Church.

In a passage unmentioned by Fulton about Mary’s assumption, Thomas puts it this way: “Thus, by her, human nature is honored.” Not only Mary has undone the transactions of the exsecrabile commercium, but, as eschatological icon, she also

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453 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc794C-D.
454 “Sic itaque ea natura humana est honorata,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c803A.
continues to be Eve’s antitype, representing the human Bride in the new, heavenly Eden. Mary has seen the commercium through: she sits in the Bridegroom’s unmediated, pure praesentia.

Thomas makes one other helpful distinction about Mary’s assumption. He turns to Mary as the “star of the sea,” calling this world the sea: “mare est mundus.” While living in this world, writes Thomas, Mary was able to see spiritually (videbat spiritualiter) just as the members of the Church militant, the venter sacramentalis, still do. However, on the day that she was assumed, Mary began to see praesentialiter, that is she received a more substantial vision than that mediated by the things of creation, including the flesh of her Son. While the patriarchs of old longed for the “kiss” that is the vision of God incarnate, Thomas’s apostolic and anagogical emphases reflect the monk’s desire to rise to Christ’s “mouth” in a wholly different fashion: to the “kiss” of seeing God praesentialiter in Heaven.

Thomas argues that the monk will receive this vision, having ascended to the Bridegroom. The monk flees with the Bridegroom from this world to the “mountain of spices” so that the Church militant might be made one with the supernal Church, perpetually possessing glory. Thus, writes Thomas, “the Bride might simultaneously receive the wedding song and the nuptial life:” “ut simul recipiat sponsa epithalamium et

455 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; 803A.
456 “Mare est mundus, vultur quidem videt intus cadaver, id est carnem nostram glorificatam. Hanc Maria maris stella adhuc in mondo vivens videbat spiritualiter: hodie incipit videre praesentialiter, ecce Maria coelos ascendit,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c803A.
457 See Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c40D.
458 See Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c860.
nuptiale convivium.”⁴⁵⁹ The Bride finally receives that which she sought and desired, that which was signified by the words: “Osculetur me osculo oris sui.”⁴⁶⁰ The human Bride will possess that “kiss” which she once experienced and expressed in the words and images of the Song.

Accordingly, what is most important to note with regard to the closing columns of Book Twelve (as with Thomas’s commentary as a whole) are the ways in which he speaks about the nuptial life of the Bride and Bridegroom. His comments arise from the idea of “ascending” to the “mountain of spices” in Song of Songs 8:14, mountains that reflect those of Revelation 21:2-3 from which the New Jerusalem descends, arrayed for her husband. Thomas envisions the ecclesial, human Bride ascending toward the heavenly Jerusalem. In echoes of the commercium of Book One, Thomas deciphers a three-fold nuptial meeting in the “mountain of spices,” by which the Church ascends, her eyes finally and fully washed clean as she beholds what it is to be held by the divine Bridegroom.

These nuptials, according to Thomas, are prefigured in the Gospels. In the first nuptial meeting, the monk eats (Luke 14:7-11); in the second, he is clothed (Matt. 22:11); and, in the third, as “water” now changed into “wine,” he finds himself brought into the Bridegroom’s presence (John 2).⁴⁶¹ Here, with regards to Mary and the Church,  

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⁴⁵⁹ “Haec enim se debet exhibere gloriosam non habentem maculam aut rugam; ut cum sponso fugiat ab hac calamitate ad montem aromatum; ut una facta cum superna Ecclesia, perpetuam possideat gloriam...ut simul recipiat sponsa epithalamium et nuptiale convivum,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c856B-C.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ See Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc856D.
we take a closer look at the second: the Church’s proper wedding garments. For Thomas, when the monk arrives in the heavenly Jerusalem, dressed in his wedding garments, he will see Christ, dressed in the clarity of his majesty. But, second to Christ, he will see Mary, dressed in the splendor of the Sun, because she prepared the light of Christ for us, who came into the world. This is Mary as the woman of the Apocalypse: “mulier amicta sole, et luna sub pedibus ejus.”

Thus, while Thomas raises the eyes of the faithful up to the Heavenly Banquet in Book Twelve, he also directs their gaze upon Mary. Like the woman of the Apocalypse, she is dressed in the splendors of the sun, for this, writes Thomas, is her wedding garment (in reference to Matt. 22:11). She is dressed with a splendor like that of the sun because she is the mother of Christ, the Light of the world. She is dressed in his light. This apocalyptic description of Mary’s “wedding gown,” presents Mary as an image of the Church, for, as the members of the Church are “transferred” to, or born into, the supernal Church, they are all dressed with their proper wedding gowns. Each member of Christ’s Bride is illuminated with his light, according to their life of becoming a “tabernacle” constructed according to Christ’s Passion, of, that is becoming a “worthy

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462 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c858B. Also: “Apparebit Christus clarus in mejestate; Maria splendida Solis quem peperit, claritate,” cc858A-B. Emphasis mine.

463 See Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c858.

464 See Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc858A-B.

465 In addition to the sacraments of baptism and confession as above, the Church also births “sons” when the monks cross from this world to the Father: “In transeuntibus de mundo ad Patrem, parit Ecclesia.” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c699B.

466 See Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c765B: “Mater nostra cujus suxit ubera, est beata Virgo, non per naturam, sed per gratiam, per quam talem nobis fratem genuit.”
bride.” The woman dressed in the Sun, therefore, is an image of each of the faithful, but also of the Church as a whole as she ascends to the Bridegroom, dressed in the light of Christ, the Bride’s wedding gown.

However, taking a second look at the Bride in her wedding gown, we come upon Thomas’s treatment of Revelation 21:2-3: “Blessed Mother Church” dressed in a wedding gown made up of all her members, including Mary.\textsuperscript{467} Above all she is illuminated by Christ, but also by Mary, the prophets, and the apostles. She is dressed in the colors of the martyrs’ blood, the violet of the confessors, and the white of the virgins.\textsuperscript{468} Dressed so beautifully in the various lights and colors of Christ, the Church is brought to the third nuptials discussed by Thomas: the reign of Assuerus, “id est beatitudo nostra Christus.”\textsuperscript{469}

Thus, let us close our short study of Book Twelve with Thomas’s own closing words. Hear them as he did, as the images of the Song presenting the vision of \textit{praesentia}, as beheld already by both Mary and the celestial Church. Via a summary of the images in his commentary, Thomas offers this account of what the human Bride truly sees when her \textit{commercium} is complete:

Behold the One the Bride has been seeking…the One for whom the Bride labored and sweated in Her seeking, with whom she spoke so many words, to whom she sighed with desire, whom she invited into the garden, for whom she

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{467}{Augustine emphasizes Mary as a member of the Church: “The Virgin Mary is both holy and blessed, and yet the Church is greater than she. Mary is a part of the Church, a member of the Church, a holy, an eminent – the most eminent – member, but still only a member of the entire body. The body undoubtedly is greater than she, one of its members. This body has the Lord for its head, and head and body together make up the whole Christ. In other words, our head is divine – our head is God,” Sermon 25.7-8.}
\footnotetext{468}{See Thomas Cisterciensis, \textit{ICC}, PL 206; cc859A-D.}
\footnotetext{469}{Thomas Cisterciensis, \textit{ICC}, PL 206; c859D.}
\end{footnotes}
prepared a bed of flowers, from whom, since the beginning, she sought the kiss of his own mouth, by whom she is lifted up to the banquet (*ad convivium*), by whom she now lays her head down, and is embraced by his right arm, now is kissed by his mouth, that is she delights in his presence, by which she is perpetually refreshed.\(^{470}\)

**Conclusion**

What I have attempted to show in this chapter is how Thomas’s allegorical, tropological, and typological treatment of Scriptures leads him to Mary as an image of the Church as Christ’s human Bride. In a strikingly Augustinian manner, and helped by his spiraling trios, Thomas continuously illuminates the human Bride by turning to Mary as the historical, human bride, and then back to the monks who are incorporated into this history. The lines Thomas draws between Mary and the Church culminate in their relationship to the *Sacramentum* of Christ. To return to the analogy of Mary as the “money mint” and Christ as *Redemptor*, or, more precisely, Christ Himself as the “money minted” or the “price” of Redemption, Christ continues to “exchange” this “money” – himself – with his human Bride, the Church, and all of her members.

By way of conclusion to this chapter, I would like first to reiterate the argument of Chapter One. There I suggested that Thomas’s commentary is a collection of finished and unfinished sermons on the Song of Songs. What becomes more clear in this third chapter is how well Thomas directs his interpretations of the Song of Songs to the life of the Church. Thomas’s preaching and scripural commentary maintain a clear objective: to nourish the “children” of the Church because they are the Church. Far from an abstract

\(^{470}\) Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c860D.
concept to Thomas, the Church is the monks to whom he preaches. They are the ones who are singing whenever he points to a verse of the Song and says, “canit Ecclesia.” Accordingly, Thomas hopes to show the monks that, as the Church, they are Christ’s Body and therefore members of Christ’s human Bride. They are involved quite truly and quite intimately in the same exchange that Christ first carried out with his Wife in the Incarnation.

Thus, even though Thomas was writing during a period in history in which the Song of Songs became a text most often used to praise the Virgin Mary, Thomas continues to preach the Song as a text for and about the Church. Indeed, the Song of Songs celebrates the daily “wedding” of the Church and Christ as human Bride and Bridegroom. The Song, under Thomas’s exegetical pen, is opened up into so many nuptial sermons for the Bride of Christ. Christ’s *admirabile commercium* with the Church is the mystery presented under the *fabula* of the Song of Songs.

In the next chapter we will examine the *admirabile commercium* on a smaller scale: how it unfolds in the lives of the monks who partake in the Church’s nuptials through the liturgy. We will consider the monk’s liturgical life as a participation in the “exchange” of Salvation. By demonstrating the liturgy’s impact on Thomas’s commentary, we will see the ways in which the monks experience the “kisses” of the Bridegroom and how Thomas’s commentary presents the Song as a scriptural “space” in which the monks can reflect most properly on their liturgical experience of the Bridegroom.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE LITURGICAL COMMERCIUM: EXPERIENCING THE KISS WHO SAVES

Introduction

In the opening chapter of this dissertation we learned that Thomas’s vision of the Church as the Bride of Christ shapes his interpretive intentions and methods. As we have seen in the last two chapters, his sermons explain this espousal, but, even more than that, as we will see in this chapter, his commentary celebrates and praises this espousal. Christ, the “Kiss” who embraces the Church by joining himself to her in a fleshly and spiritual union, is the “Kiss” the monk seeks, and the “Kiss” he receives during the Church’s liturgy. In this fourth and final chapter, therefore, we explore the monk’s experience of the “Kiss” by examining the liturgical context for Thomas’s interpretation of the Song of Songs.

The Church’s liturgical books are one of Thomas’s five major sources for his commentary. As Friedrich Ohly writes, “the words of the ecclesial liturgy sound throughout [Thomas’s] entire commentary.” ⁴⁷¹ This means that Thomas’s audience constantly hears the Church chanting from within Thomas’s commentary where the

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annual celebration of Christ’s Mystery, of saints’ feast days and other solemnities are stitched into the lyrical expressions of the Song of Songs. This rather organic fusion of lyric and liturgy in Thomas’s interpretation frees the monks of his audience to interpret liturgical experiences of the union between humanity and divinity by the lyric of the Song.

This relationship between the Song of Songs and the liturgy accounts for what Denys Turner calls the “interpretive cycle” inherent within liturgical hermeneutics. In Eros & Allegory Denys Turner writes about this interpretive circle. The monk, says Turner, reads the Song against the background of the daily practice of the liturgical interpretation of the Scripture, exposed “to a selection of readings sufficient to reinforce the method of interpretation which he could carry over spontaneously into his own reading, whether in his lectio divina or in the more formal written commentary.”

Leclercq, too, remarks that the Song was always understood from within “an atmosphere of worship and contemplation.” Consequently, we have the “liturgical hermeneutic” opening the Song up to interpretations based on the liturgical year, to sermons fitting to the Church’s celebration of feasts and seasons.

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473 Ibid.
This hermeneutic is evident, for example, in the most famous of Song commentaries: Bernard of Clairvaux’s sermons, begun during Advent of 1135. These Sermons express the longing of the Advent Season, which is the longing of the Church for her Bridegroom. The effect of this interpretive cycle on Thomas’s commentary is seen clearly in the way the commentary resounds with the “words of the ecclesial liturgy.” Its effect on Thomas’s monk-filled audience is best put by Emero Stiegman: the Song of Songs becomes the Church’s “proleptic, lyrical Eucharist;” it becomes the monk’s best articulation of his experience of Christ.

The liturgical context of Thomas’s commentary is a context for both Thomas as the commentary’s author, and for the commentary’s audience. The liturgy first provides Thomas with the proper hermeneutical lens to read the Song as a celebration of Christ’s mysteries, and Thomas’s interpretation then allows the monks to read the Song as the proper articulation of their own liturgical experiences of the “Kiss Who Saves,” for the monk not only partakes of the Church’s corporate celebration of the liturgy, but through this celebration, he also experiences the embrace of Christ as Christ’s blood paid out for each member of the Church. The liturgy is where the “Kiss Who Saves” and the human Bride of the commercium meet.

Thus, this chapter’s discussion of the liturgical character of Thomas’s interpretation, requires that we explore three elements of the liturgical hermeneutic as it

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works in Thomas’s commentary: 1. The relationship between the theology of the
*commercium*, the use of the “O admirabile commercium!” in the liturgy, and the liturgy as a *commercium*, 2. the monk’s experience of *commercium* occurring in the liturgy, and 3. the Song of Songs in the liturgy and Thomas’s presentation of the *historia salutis.*

These three elements will show that, in the end, the liturgical quality of Thomas’s commentary allows the monks to incorporate themselves into the Bride’s *historia salutis.*

As we know from Chapter One, Thomas presents the Song as an intimate account of the Church’s *historia salutis*: his sermons read this history into the celebrations of the liturgical year. Here, we will see how this history becomes each monk’s story: how the members of the Bride meet the Bridegroom in the liturgy—that is, in the liturgical *commercium*. Reading the liturgy as a *commercium* is already to see the liturgical hermeneutic at work in Thomas. But, we will see the hermeneutic at work in Thomas’s commentary on a greater scale when we see just how well and how extensively he both brings the Church’s liturgy into his interpretation of the Song, and how extensively the Song was already a part of the Cistercian liturgy. In all of this, it is clear that for Thomas, the Song of Songs not only becomes the Church’s best expression of her love for the divine Bridegroom, but also the best scriptural text for understanding her experience of his “Kiss.”

**Two Preliminary Precautions: “Experience” and the “Liturgy”**

In the introduction to this chapter we have begun speaking about the liturgy as an experience of the Bridegroom. However, before we dive into Thomas’s use of the liturgy or further into our use of the idea of experience, we should be careful to define each one.
Both the liturgy and experience have particular meanings when speaking about twelfth-century Cistercians.

Perhaps the reader heard the Bernardian understanding of experience in the introduction to our study of Thomas and the liturgical commercium. Indeed, Thomas was writing in the wake of the theologian of experience, Bernard of Clairvaux, but this does not mean Thomas was writing with a particularly Bernardian view. For Bernard, the monastic life centers on the monk’s personal and intimate experience of God. This experience, Bernard taught the monks of Clairvaux, is discovered in liturgical acts such as prayer, contemplation, lectio divina, and the sacraments, but that no matter the medium of the experience, it is best understood through Scripture.

Scripture, for Bernard, is the “book of experience;” Scripture speaks to the monk about God and allows the monk to speak to God. Jean Leclercq accurately describes Bernard’s approach to Scripture: God seeks us “out of love . . . and wants us to seek him. He longs for us, draws us to himself, and is present to us through his powerful words and in his Word . . . We are asked to remove the cover [of Scripture] and find the hidden contents within; in this way sacred history . . . becomes our history.” In other words, as we will see happens with Thomas, the historia salutis is brought “within the experience of each person” so that one grows in knowledge and love of the Mystery

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477 See ibid.
that embraces one’s own history. Bernard attempts to facilitate this spiritual result within his monks by relating Scripture’s “moral” sense to them. For this, the Song of Songs is Bernard’s biblical book of choice: the Song not only speaks about the story of Christ and the Church, but it also speaks of God and the soul as Bridegroom and Bride. The Song of Songs, then, allows the monk to speak of God, and to make sense of his experience of God.

This way of understanding “experience,” then, does apply to Thomas’s approach. As mentioned elsewhere, Thomas knew he was not preaching to a collection of “Bernards of Clairvaux,” and he wrote accordingly. Thomas preaches in images, and as we will see in this chapter, he often depicts liturgical rites, such as the sacraments, with images of an embrace. In this way the “Kiss” of the Song becomes, for example, the embrace of confession, of the Eucharist, of reading Scripture. These images are allegories that have a tropological impact on the monk.

This “moral” interpretation of Scripture, writes Waddell, is the primary characteristic of twelfth-century Cistercian exegesis. So thorough going is the emphasis on the moral sense of Scripture and the monk’s spiritual life that it shines through in their treatment of the sacraments. Bernard, for example, is interested in the “spiritual fruit” of the Eucharist, or, as Paul Verdeyen puts it, in the human-divine encounter that the Eucharist brings about. The monk, in other words, searches for the inner spiritual fruit


481 See Bernard of Clairvaux, Opera Sancti Bernardi, I:7,1.28 and 14,1.7.

of the sacrament, just as he ruminates over the spiritual meaning of Scripture in his *lectio divina*.\(^{483}\) The sacraments, therefore, also mediate the personal and intimate experience of God sought by the monk.

Again, this applies to Thomas. He only mentions *experientia* a handful of times throughout his entire commentary,\(^{484}\) but he very clearly hopes his audience will experience the Mystery of Christ as mediated through the liturgy, through the sacraments, and through Scripture. As we have quoted Thomas saying several times already, he aims to incite a desire in the monks for the “kiss of his mouth,” for, that is, an experience of the Bridegroom. Experiencing the “Kiss Who Saves,” then, is a liturgical endeavor that takes place within the “complexus of sacred signs” comprising the Church’s liturgy.\(^{485}\)

Speaking in this manner, however, we arrive at what Chyrsogonous Waddell considers the “hazard” of studying the twelfth-century Cistercian liturgy: its “diffusive nature.”\(^{486}\) Waddell explains why one must be cautious: “If liturgy is understood as a complexus of sacred signs that somehow render present the realities to which they point, one could say that virtually the whole of the monk’s life was comprised under the rubric ‘liturgical’.\(^{487}\) For example, the monk believed not only that Christ was present and


\(^{486}\) Ibid.

\(^{487}\) Ibid.
acting during the conventual Mass, but also during the weekly Saturday evening
mandatum, when he broke his fast in refectory, when he confessed his sins and received
forgiveness, whenever he sat in the cloister and gave himself to his lectio divina, when
putting on his cowl, and when the abbot preached in chapter. The life of the monk is
liturgical in the ways that he experiences and expresses his oneness with Christ.
Consequently, the sacraments become almost as diffusive, for they, too, are sacred signs,
which render Christ “born in us, and we re-born in him.”

Aware that a study of Thomas and the liturgy could be as diffusive as the
Cistercian understanding of the liturgy and the sacraments, and wishing to avoid this
“hazard,” we narrow our study of Thomas’s commentary in a way that still remains true
to Thomas’s own objective. We limit our examination, therefore, to Thomas’s use of the
Church’s official liturgy (i.e. his citation of the Church’s liturgical texts), and his
depiction of the Eucharist, baptism, and confession via images of the Song. Thomas’s
emphasis on the divine Bridegroom taking a human Bride—taking each monk as a bride
through the Church—makes this is an appropriate swath of the liturgical elements of
Thomas’s commentary to explore in detail.

The Liturgy: Experiencing *Commercium* with the Bridegroom

The Cistercians identify the liturgy as an experience of Christ’s Mystery. Thus it is during the liturgy that the monk most fully identifies with the Bride of the Song, seeking the embrace of the Bridegroom. Described in the words of an Advent antiphon employed by Thomas throughout his commentary, the liturgy is the experience of this salvific embrace: “O Adonai, veni ad redimendum nos in brachia extento.”490 The liturgy, we might say, allows the monk to experience the *admirabile commercium* by communicating the irrevocable “price” of redemption, paid freely for the Bride. In other words, the liturgy continues to join the Bride and Bridegroom into “one flesh” and “one Spirit.” This is to experience Christ’s Mystery (*Sacramentum*), to be joined to Christ in receiving the “price” of redemption.

This experience shapes Thomas’s use of liturgical materials and his description of the liturgical sacraments as moments of intimacy. He describes the liturgy as the *lucrum animarum*. This “exchange” was carried out for humankind, to the “profit” of the soul, not to Christ’s. In another turn of phrase, Thomas says we receive the Church’s sacraments not only so that sin might diminish, but that merit might grow: “ut minuet peccatum, et augeat meritum.”491 Toward the end of Book Twelve Thomas describes the Church as the Tabernacle in the Mountains of Israel. This Tabernacle, moreover, is a Tree: it expands its branches with the leaves of preaching, the flowers of good works, and

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490 Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c322D. Quoting Jer. 27:5. One of the “Great O” antiphons for Advent.

491 Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c775C.
the fruit that is the profit of souls (*lucrum animarum*). If we take Thomas’s previous interpretations of the Song’s fruit trees into account, it seems that Thomas is again speaking of the “price” of redemption given from the Cross. Thus, as we will show in this chapter, the soul’s *lucrum* is also found in receiving the liturgical sacraments (*sacramenta Ecclesiae*), which join the monk to the Mystery (*Sacramentum*) of Christ.

The liturgical intersection of the *sacramenta Ecclesiae* and the *sacramenta Christi*, identify the heart of Thomas’s liturgical hermeneutic: the Church is the locus of the exchange between the *Sacramentum* and the Bride carried out in the *sacramenta* that “profit” the soul. Thomas’s commentary arises from and returns his readers to the liturgy with a sense of what it means to be joined substantially to the Bridegroom through the Bride’s sacramental celebration. Naturally, therefore, Thomas places the antiphon “O admirabile commercium” at the heart of his work.

**The admirabile commercium and the Cistercian Liturgy**

Chapter Two discussed the *admirabile commercium* as a long-standing theological schema and as a nuanced expression of the traditional Christological interpretation of the Song’s *osculum*. Here, we account for the liturgical context within which Thomas heard the “O admirabile commercium!.” The liturgical use of this

492 “Haec aedificatur in montibus Israel, id est apostolis videntibus Deum. Qui expandunt ramos suos (Ezech. 36), in quibus sunt folia praedicationum, flores operum, fructus, lucrum animarum. …In terto cum diceret: ‘Omnibus omnia factus sum, ut omnes lucifacerem’ (I Cor. 9),” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC. PL 206; c855D. Elsewhere: “In tribus sponsa hic commendatur: praedicatione, oratione, contemplatione. Amica enim merito dicitur, quae sponsi lucra praedicando, consulendo, ministrando quaerit; columba quae gemebunda oratione divinam sibi conciliat clementiam; formosa, quae coelesti desiderio fulgens supernae contemplationis decorem se induit,” cc 268C-D.
antiphon during the Christmas season made the theology of the *commercium* a meaningful expression of the “kiss” for Thomas. It was sung about and celebrated by he and his monks. The antiphon not only expresses a theological idea for the monks, but it also articulates the spiritual experience of seeking and receiving the Bridegroom within the Body of the Bride.

For Thomas’s audience, singing this antiphon, with the knowledge of how it sings of the “Kiss,” is to sing about the *historia salutis*. To use Leclercq’s phrase again, to sing under Thomas’s aegis is to bring the *historia salutis* “within the experience of each [monk].” In order to see this, we will first look at the sources of the hymn “O admirabile commercium!”: what is its place in the Church’s liturgy? We will see that it is undeniably related to the theological schema of the *commercium*. Thus the antiphon serves Thomas well in his attempts to help the monks enter into the re-presentation of the saving Mystery of Christ, from the crib to the cross.

**The Commercium’s Liturgical History and Interpretation**

It might at first seem difficult to trace Thomas’s liturgical sources for a few reasons. First, whoever added the footnotes to the PL edition of Thomas’s commentary most often simply notes liturgical passages as “Offic. Eccl.,” and probably used an eighteenth or a nineteenth century edition of the liturgical books. Second, and perhaps most simply, we do not have a manuscript of the liturgy from Perseigne with which to check these footnotes. We do have the master copy for the entire Cistercian liturgy in

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Dijon, but unfortunately the musical selections were removed at some historical point, so we do not have them. Third, because Thomas was writing between 1170 and 1189, he was writing while the revised edition of the Cistercian liturgical books were being circulated and instituted. The Cistercian Antiphonary went through a rather radical revision that was completed and circulated by 1180, and from that point on every manuscript in every Cistercian house was supposed to be identical. If Thomas were writing closer to 1170, he would have been writing just before the newly revised liturgical books were fully circulated amongst Cistercian monasteries, which happened by 1180. Fourthly, given Thomas’s broad use of sources, one might think he would employ other liturgical sources freely. Yet, considering his aim to make the Song preachable to other Cistercians, which means preaching to an audience that desires a certain authenticity to their liturgy, it is rather unlikely that he would do so.

Claire Maître offers us what she believes are the oldest and the best Cistercian manuscripts contemporary with Thomas’s commentary. Maître published notated fascimiles of MMS Bibliothèque Nationale, *nouvelles acquisitions latines*, 1411 and 1412. These two manuscripts are Cistercian Antiphonaries, one for the Temporal (ms. 1411) and the other for the Sanctoral (ms. 1412). Maître posits that these texts are from Northern Italy, c.1175. Given the uniformity of the Cistercian liturgical books, the origin

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494 Settling on Maître’s MMS as sufficient evidence was done with the help of Dr. Peter Jeffrey. I am very grateful for his assistance.

of the texts should not pose a problem for us; it only matters that Thomas was a Cistercian writing for Cistercians. Thus we have reliable manuscripts from the time Thomas was writing.

Manuscripts BN *nouv. acq.* 1411 and 1412 show that the “O admirabile commericum!” was sung for the Feast of the Circumcision on the Octave of Christmas (ms 1411) and for the Feast of Mary’s Purification on the Second of February (ms 1412). For the Feast of the Circumcision it was sung during Laudes, while for Mary’s Purification it was the opening antiphon sung during Vespers. Hence what will be interesting to see is how the two Feasts are interpreted as one celebration by the Cistercians (paying attention, of course, to their biblical sources: Leviticus and Luke) who thereby make real what they celebrate: the *admirabile commercium*.

Renato-Joanne Hesbert, editor of the *Corpus Antiphonalium Officii*, a side-by-side comparison of six monastic antiphonaries, offers further support to Maître’s manuscripts. Here the “O admirabile” is employed for Laudes on the Christmas Octave (or Circumcision) in all six manuscripts. The same antiphon is also used in the Rhengausensis, Fossatensis, and Lupi Beneventani manuscripts for the Feast of the Purification. Even earlier evidence of the same practice can be found in Amalar of Metz (d. 850) who describes the ninth-century liturgy of Saint Mary Major in Rome.

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Amalar places the use of the antiphon “O admirabile commercium!” on the octave of Christmas: “prima in octavis Domini, dicit, O admirabile commercium.” In his Liber officialis, Amalar interprets various liturgical feasts so as to give instructions for their celebration. With regard to the “O admirabile,” Amalar draws out the parallels between the first and last days of the Christmas octave: Christ’s nativity and circumcision. He writes: “the coming of Christ to men we venerate on the day of his birth: the coming of man to Christ, we venerate on the octave of his birth” [Christi adventum ad homines colimus in die nativitatis ejus: hominum adventum ad Christum, colimus in octavis ejus.] In other words, Amalar instructs us to celebrate Christ’s circumcision as a completion of the celebration of Christmas, of the Incarnation. Therefore, the whole liturgical celebration of this Feast could be said to underlie the commercium carried out in all the Church’s liturgical feasts, for through them the Church is joined to Her Bridegroom: “Dedit Christus suam deitatem, et accepit nostram humanitatem.” Through her liturgy, the Church celebrates the admirabile commercium of Salvation, and through this celebration continues to be joined to her Bridegroom.

This interpretation of Amalar, however, relies on liturgical developments after his time. These include the use of the “O admirabile” for the Feast of Mary’s Purification. As the Cistercians, including Thomas, teach us, Mary’s Purification continues to carry the tone of the Christmas celebration as it is the fulfillment of the levitical command

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497 Amalar of Metz, Liber officialis, 4.32, PL 105; c1223A.
498 Ibid. My translation.
499 Ibid.
alongside the circumcision of the child. With this addition, we see the liturgical air with which Thomas takes up the antiphon for his commentary on the Song of Songs more fully.

It might seem strange to speak about a Cistercian development of a liturgical rite described by Amalar of Metz. Indeed, when Bernard of Clairvaux orchestrated the Cistercian liturgical reform, he protested much of what Amalar had added to the Antiphonary during the ninth century. What Bernard and the Cistercians were after was a more “authentic” liturgy, meaning one that was more biblically based. What was then their current antiphonary had been “pieced together from many sources, and [was] ‘irreprehensible’ in text and melody.” Thus, under Bernard’s vigilance, “the revised antiphonary was now promulgated, and could not be modified in even the slightest detail without the explicit authorization of the General Chapter.”

In some cases, as Maître shows, Bernard’s revisions substantially changed antiphonal texts, but, as she also shows, this was only ever done with the “experience” of the liturgy in mind. In other words, the revisions were carried out with what the liturgy celebrates foremost in mind: the historia salutis. As the Bible tells this story, the Cistercians mainly revised (or simply deleted) texts that were not based on Scripture. Scripture was the primary source of the liturgical experience of Christ’s mysteries. Consequently, the Cistercian liturgical reform hoped to provide a more authentic liturgical experience of the Mystery of Christ. As Chrysogonous Waddell puts it: “The

Mystery of Christ as lived by the early Cistercians is something deep, something rich and living. It is only as an expression of this experience of Christ that their liturgy makes sense. Still, we find the “O admirabile commercium” used for the Feast of the Circumcision and of Mary’s Purification in the post-revision Cistercian recensions. This must be because the Cistercians heard in the antiphon an authentic representation of all that the Church celebrates. Indeed, as Thomas and other Cistercians (Aelred and Guerric) show, this antiphon helps the monks enter into the re-presentation of Christ’s Mystery in their liturgy. We will look at Aelred, Guerric, and then Thomas to see how there is a give and take between the antiphon, its biblical sources, and the way the liturgical rites become an act of exegesis. In this exegetical-performative exchange, we begin to see how the liturgy, by celebrating the Mystery of Christ, allows the monks to enter into and to partake of that Mystery. As each of these Cistercians will show, the “O admirabile commercium” antiphon offers the perfect example of this biblically based liturgical exchange. Because this antiphon sums up the commercium of Salvation, it becomes, with Thomas, the perfect vehicle for liturgically interpreting the Song of Songs, a biblical text that he already sees as an iconic and lyrical summary of salvation history.

In his Sermon for the Purification of Mary (Sermon 5), Aelred of Rievaulx draws out the connection between the Circumcision of Christ and Mary’s Purification, presenting these feasts as the conclusion of the Christmas season liturgy. Thus Aelred

folds them into the “Exchange” of the Incarnation in which divinity and humanity are joined. In other words, Aelred offers us an interpretation of the “extended” Christmas liturgy, a liturgy that therefore “extends” the *admirabile commercium* from the crib toward the cross.

The Circumcision and the Purification, writes Aelred, are together the holy observance of Leviticus 12:1-8. This observance allows us to participate in the resurrection of the Lord “on the eighth day, the morrow of the seventh day, which is called the Sabbath.” In the feasts of the Circumcision and Mary’s Purification, we celebrate the fact that Christ “raised to immortality and incorruptibility the fleshly nature which he had taken from us and for us.” In this interpretation of the feasts, which first arises from a correct understanding of the *commercium* (that Christ became human for us), Aelred arrives at the broader patristic understanding of the “exchange” by observing the antiphon’s liturgical use. With Aelred, we return to the tune of the “O admirabile commercium!” with knowledge of its biblical roots and its liturgical expression.

As we saw in the second chapter, Guerric of Igny’s Christmas sermons make use of the “O admirabile commercium!” in a way similar to Thomas’s use of the antiphon. Additionally, Guerric opens his sermon for the Purification of Mary by tying it directly back to the Christmas Feast. Perhaps even more interesting is that Guerric does so by linking together several liturgical chants from the Christmas Season. Thus, with the evidence from Aelred and that of Guerric, the Feast of Mary’s Purification is tied closely


503 Ibid.
to Christ’s Nativity. Here we see the expansion of the *admirabile commercium* described in the second chapter from the crib to the cross, from Christ’s birth, to the shedding of his Blood, and his raising humankind to immortality. Thus, once gain, as these monk-theologians extend the liturgy, they recognized the antiphon as the summary of the salvific *sacrumen Christi*. As Guerric writes:

> Wondrous exchange, indeed! Assuming our flesh, you made a gift of your divinity to us... It was our advantage and not your profit that you sought in being born of us, since you deigned to be born in order to raise us by your abasement and to glorify us by your humiliation. You emptied yourself, you filled us, because you have poured the fullness of your divinity into man.

> Prorsus admirabile commercium: ut sumens carnem largiaris dietatem... Lucra nostra non augmenta tua nascens de nobis quaesisti; qui ad hoc solum nasci dignatus es, ut nos minoratione tua proveheres, humiliatione glorificares. Tu exinanitus nos replesti; tu enim omnem tuae plenitudinem divinitatis in hominem transfudisti.

As we have seen, this “Exchange” is Thomas’s “Kiss.” It is this broader understanding of the *admirabile commercium*, provided here by the liturgy, that holds Thomas’s interpretation of the Song together. It was and is to the Bride’s profit, not the Bridegroom’s, that God became man. The entirety of the liturgical year, and the entirety of the Song for Thomas, celebrate the Mystery of this *commercium* between God and humankind. Therefore, this “kiss” is also the monk’s liturgical *lucrum.*

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The Commentary Resounds: Liturgical Texts in Thomas’s Commentary

The liturgical history of the “O admirabile commercium!” gave us an insight into the motif that Thomas made so central to his commentary. Yet, to hear fully how extensively Thomas borrowed from the liturgy, let us briefly look at some of the other liturgical texts used by Thomas. We will see how thoroughly his commentary “sounds” with “the words of the ecclesial liturgy.”505 We will see, that is, how thoroughly Thomas read the Song in accord with the liturgy as an expression of this experience of Christ.

Book Four, for example, rings with the liturgical sounds of Advent. Here, Thomas incorporates the Great “O” Antiphons, (“O Sapientia,” “O clavis David,” “O Adonai,” “O Radix Jesse,” “O oriens,” “O rex gloriae,” “O Emmanuel”),506 the “Drop down dew from above, O Heavens” [“Rorate, coeli, desuper”],507 and the “Come, O Lord, and do not delay” [“Veni, Domine, et noli tardare”],508 into his interpretation of Song of Songs 2:8 and 2:9: “Behold, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle, or a young stag.” As we saw in Chapter Two, this “leaping” is traditionally interpreted as Christ’s Incarnation. Having saturated his interpretation with these liturgical passages, Thomas returns to the words of the “O admirabile commercium”509 in a full expression of the “leaping” and “bounding” of the Savior. In carrying his interpretation out in this manner, Thomas recreates the holy

505 See Friedrich Ohly, Hohenlied-Studien, p. 196.
506 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc 222A, 238C-251A.
507 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c253, for example.
508 Thoma Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c228C, for example.
509 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206l; see c239D.
longing of the Advent season for, and hopefully within, his reader. Lifting lyrics from the liturgical celebrations of Advent therefore cultivates an attitude of prayerful expectancy in Thomas’s readers, which gives rise to a more authentic, christocentric understanding of the Song, but also to the monk’s experience of Christ in the liturgies that implore the Bridegroom to be with His Bride.

If we turn to Thomas’s use of the “O Antiphons” in Book Five, we will see Thomas teaching his listeners how these antiphons describe Christ’s advent as experienced by the monks. The monk, shows Thomas in his efforts to interpret Song 2:17, awaits the arrival of the Word into his heart.  

Focusing on the verse’s “Revertere, dilecte mi,” Thomas relates three “advents,” the second of which is in our hearts, and the third of which, “we believe,” he writes, the Bride desires: “tertium desiderare sponsam credimus, cum dicit: Revertere, dilecte mi.” When the monks sing Song of Songs 2:17, which is explained by the seven “O” antiphons, says Thomas, they invoke Christ’s advent: “invocemus eum sic: Revertere: similis esto capreae.”  

Accordingly, Thomas offers an explanation of the antiphons: “O clavis David,” “O Oriens,” and “O rex” refer to Christ’s advent into the hearts of the monks. The final “O Antiphon,” “O Emmanuel,” refers to Christ’s coming in Majesty at the end of time. It will mean, writes Thomas, “God with us” perpetually. Of course the Bride awaits this advent, but, in the meanwhile, She has the “second Advent,” which comes about as the monk is cleansed from sin,

510 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c850Aff.
511 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c322C.
512 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c323B.
illuminated by grace, and strengthened against temptation. This “second advent,” therefore, is the advent occurring during the Church’s liturgy.

Finally, Friedrich Ohly emphasizes how predominantly the liturgy rings throughout Thomas’s commentary by looking at Thomas’s treatment of Song of Songs 5:2. Here, as Ohly shows, Thomas thoroughly, yet clearly mixes liturgical language (antiphons, responses, and hymns), with (seven) passages from the Song of Songs, and with several passages from ancient myth, especially that of Hercules’s battles with Anteus and the Hydra,\textsuperscript{513} with passages from Vergil’s \textit{Aeneid},\textsuperscript{514} from Boethius, and from the fable of “the Fox and the Lion.” The most prominent source amongst all of those beyond the Bible and the liturgy is Thomas’s extended use of Hercules to describe the strength necessary to prevail over the devil. Thomas even uses a passage from the office for the Apostles to draw-out the comparison: “Ait Salvator: Estote fortes in bello et pugnate cum antiquo serpente et accipietis regnum aeternum [Off. Eccl. SS apostolis]. Hic pugnat Hercules cum hydra serpente.”\textsuperscript{515} Thomas also uses examples of saints who fought well to drive his point home. Saint Stephen, for example, makes an appearance for his stoning seemed sweet to him: “Sicut et Stephanus quando lapides torrentis illi dulces fuerunt [Act. 7].”\textsuperscript{516}

\textsuperscript{513} Thomas Cisterciensis, \textit{ICC}, PL 206; c574B ff.
\textsuperscript{514} Thomas Cisterciensis, \textit{ICC}, PL 206; c576B. Virgil, \textit{Aeneid} II, 48.
\textsuperscript{515} Thomas Cisterciensis, \textit{ICC}, PL 206; c576A.
\textsuperscript{516} Thomas Cisterciensis, \textit{ICC}, PL 206; c575C.
Yet, Ohly’s main observation is correct: while Thomas’s description of the Church’s battle with the Devil is carried out in the “dance” of citations from his various sources, all else is eventually drowned out by Thomas’s use of “Pange Lingua gloriosi,” a hymn for Good Friday about Christ’s victory on the Cross. Thomas returns to this hymn again and again in these columns, citing it several times. Christ’s Passion and Resurrection make sense of all the other struggles described, and strengthen the faithful in their own battles with the Devil. The ancient myth of Hercules was already a foretelling of Christ; by Thomas’s time it had become part of the “complexus of signs.” Thus, despite the number of citations from other and varied sources, Thomas’s sermon rings most clearly with the sounds and the significance of the liturgy. It is the Church’s Easter hymnody that makes sense of Song of Songs 5:2. Yet, this is also because the Song, for Thomas, already sings of Easter’s victory, which is nothing other than the admirabile commercium: “O largum Filium, ut creatura redimeretur per Creatorem!”

Thus the liturgy is where Thomas’s three epithalamia converge. The Old Testament (epithalamium #1: Adam and Eve) is the framework for Thomas’s telling of the Church’s courtship and marriage. Yet so are the ancient epics, myths, and poetics (epithalamium #2: philosophy), at least in the form Thomas would have received them: allegorized love stories about the soul’s journey to the patria. The philosophical nuptials

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517 Friedrich Ohly, Hohenlied-Studien, p. 196. Ohly makes the same observation about the beginning of Book Twelve where passages from poets, philosophers, and myths are interspersed amongst passages from the liturgy for Mary’s Assumption.

518 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc 576D, 577B, 578A, 579A, 580B, 580C.

519 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; 579C. A paraphrasal of “O admirabile commercium!”
of which Thomas speaks with reference to Martianus Cappella’s *De nuptiis*, are fulfilled and culminate in the theological nuptial of Christ and the Church (epithalamium #3).

Christ leads the Bride to the *patria*, having already joined himself to her *in via*. Christ reveals that his Bride has been espoused throughout history, unveiling all the allegories, signs, figures, and even history itself as the story of her courtship. As Thomas shows us, quite clearly in his interpretation of Song of Songs 5:2, the liturgy is the active interpretation of all allegory and the making present of all history, for the liturgy brings the monks into a more direct experience of the One whom they seek to know and to love.

It is no surprise, then, that the liturgy, as it is shaped by and as it shapes Scripture, is what most shapes Thomas’s commentary. It presents the Song as as an allegorical representation of what occurs during the liturgy—as a *fabula*—and the liturgy becomes the interpretation of the Song. Consequently, Thomas’s commentary on the Song shows the monk how to enter into the liturgy as the locus of the *commercium* described in the Song of Songs. Indeed, Thomas opens the Song from within the liturgical context in order to invite the monks into the story presented by the *fabula*, themselves singing and seeking *commercium* with the divine.
The Liturgy Sings: The Song of Songs as a Liturgical Text

The Song of Songs and the liturgy had a relationship to one another long before Thomas’s commentary: the two were brought together in the liturgy itself. Manuscripts from the twelfth century Cistercian liturgy show the Song being used during Christmas and Easter celebrations, during Marian feasts, and the feasts of other virgins and of saints like Mary Magdelene. Indeed, as Chrysogonous Waddell reports, during this time period the Cistercians were composing pieces for the liturgy based on the Song of Songs: for the feast of the Assumption they wrote the “Filiae Iherusalem” and for the feast of the Nativity, the “Fulcite me floribus.” Moreover, as both Waddell and Maître argue, the Cistercian liturgical reform caused many of the antiphons based on the Song of Songs to be moved from their position in the annual celebrations of the liturgical year to feasts more fitting to their expressions and meaning: Marian feasts. Thomas himself

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526 Ibid.

527 Ibid. And, Maître, “Antiennes.”
fills his interpretation of Song of Songs 8:5, a sermon as we saw in Chapter Three for Mary’s Assumption, with antiphons, versicles, and responses from the liturgy for this same feast.

In *From Judgment to Passion*, Rachel Fulton evidences the mutual illumination of Scripture and the liturgy in the liturgical application of the Song for Marian feasts. Fulton argues that this liturgical practice gave rise to the *historia Mariae*. As devotion to the blessed mother developed throughout the Middle Ages, the “story” of Mary, not witnessed to in the letter of Scripture, was drawn from the liturgy, especially from the liturgical use of the Song of Songs. As nowhere else in Scripture, the Song’s allegory told the story of Mary. Recited regularly in Marian liturgies,\(^{528}\) the Song was an important source for sermons on the Virgin Mary as early as the eighth century, although the Twelfth Century saw a dramatic rise in the number of such Marian sermons. This should be no surprise, for the Twelfth Century also saw the unprecedented development of Marian commentary on the Song of Songs.\(^{529}\)

Fulton cites numerous medieval theologians who played a role in the development of the Marian Song of Songs commentary and the Marian liturgy. Paschasius (d.865), for one, looked to the texts of the “contemporary liturgy, particularly the texts drawn from the Song of Songs, as a source for the *historia* of Mary’s death;”\(^{530}\) Honorius (d.1151) comments in his *Sigillum sanctae Mariae* on the principle texts for the Feast of the

\(^{528}\) Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, p. 267.

\(^{529}\) Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, p. 249.

\(^{530}\) Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, p. 248.
Assumption, which includes the Song of Songs, “read throughout the octave as the lessons at Matins, as well as providing the texts for many of the antiphons and responsories proper to the feast;”\textsuperscript{531} in the prayers of Anselm of Lucca (d.1086), the hours of the liturgical day correlate the stages of Christ’s Passion with the stages of “Mary’s own suffering and joys: the Annunciation, the Finding in the Temple, the Crucifixion, [and] the Assumption;”\textsuperscript{532} Rupert of Deutz (d.1129) felt he had discovered the most “useful” understanding of the Song of Songs from its use in the Marian liturgy.\textsuperscript{533}

However, as Fulton points out in reference to Rupert, the Song of Songs was also liturgically significant because it recalls “the central mysteries (sacramenta) of the liturgical year—the Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ . . . Accordingly, it was this mystery (sacramentum) that Rupert set out to explain through his reading of the Song . . .”\textsuperscript{534} Thus, the marian reading of the Song is a variation on its Christological theme. As we have seen with Thomas, Christ’s Incarnation is the Song’s central focus. Reading the Song as the historia Mariae, is still a way of reading it as the historia salutis. Hence, Thomas is able to flood his interpretation with liturgical texts, to preach on the feasts of the liturgical year with verses from the Song as his theme, and invite the monks to make the historia salutis part of their own experience by reading the Song.

\textsuperscript{531} Rachel Fulton, From Judgment to Passion, p. 249.

\textsuperscript{532} Rachel Fulton, From Judgment to Passion, pp. 227-78.

\textsuperscript{533} Rachel Fulton, From Judgment to Passion, p. 322.

\textsuperscript{534} Rachel Fulton, From Judgment to Passion, p. 323.
Thus, Thomas proves Jean Leclercq correct: “the monk’s entire life was led under the sign of the liturgy, in rhythm with its hours, its seasons and its feasts; it was dominated by the desire to glorify God in everything, and first of all, by celebrating His mysteries.”\footnote{Leclercq, Love of Learning, p. 233.} Indeed, Thomas shows this in the tone, style and content of his commentary: the majority of his one hundred and eight liturgical citations arise from celebrations of Christ’s birth and death.

Thomas lifts lyrics from all of the Church’s liturgical books throughout his commentary, producing a work that not only offers praise of God in itself, but also invites the reader to enter into this praise by being so inherently liturgical. Counting by the current footnotes in Migne’s edition, there are twenty-nine citations of hymns, and another seventy-nine citations of the Offices of the Church for various feast days. However, because we are counting by the footnotes, there are probably many more yet to be found.\footnote{David Bell has also noted that the footnotes to the 16\textsuperscript{th} century edition of Thomas’s text in the Migne Patrology are insufficient. See “The Commentary,” p. 8. I have found this example with regard to the “O admirabile commercium”: Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c27A. “Ut inveniamus hunc panem, transeamus usque Bethlehem, quae dicitur domus panis.” It should be noted that in the footnotes to the PL the “O admirabile” is here cited as a “cantica” for the Vespers of the Feast of the Annunciation. I have not found any Cistercian evidence for this claim.} Thomas cites the liturgies for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost, for the Feast of Peter and Paul, and the Feasts of the Blessed Virgin. In so doing, Thomas upholds the Song of Songs as the quintessential canticle of the Church; he shows that it sings the whole story of Salvation in sublime images and figures of love. And, thus, in so doing, Thomas also unveils the Song of Songs as a text appropriate to the preaching of every liturgical feast, but especially to those that celebrate the mysteries
(sacramenta) of Christ’s life: Advent, Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and his Ascension.

As this chapter continues to unfold, we will see how the cycle of liturgical hermeneutics provides the interpretive context for Thomas to ask his audience to appropriate the Song as an expression of their experiences of the Bridegroom—to invite the monks to “shout” for Christ’s “kiss.” They will receive it, he shows, not only through Scripture, a process which we have already seen is a natural one of reading the Song with reference to the liturgy and salvation history, but also through the sacraments as two liturgical loci of the Church’s commercium, the wondrous “exchange” between humanity and divinity, between Bride and Bridegroom.

The Liturgical Hermeneutic & the Sacraments:

The enduring liturgical tone of Thomas’s commentary is perhaps its most Cistercian quality. In part, this is because it draws out Thomas’s reliance on the whole of the biblical text (just think of Bernard’s impetus for liturgical reform). A number of other Cistercian monks were praised for the inherent and abiding liturgical tone of their Scriptural commentaries, including Aelred of Rielvaux and, as we saw above, Guerric of Igny. Writing on Guerric, Louis Bouyer comments that Guerric’s work is “the most illuminating explanation of the entire Bible by the passages selected in the Liturgy and executed in accordance with the combinations which the Liturgy has made of them, and the most extensive illustration of the Liturgy itself by the whole of the Biblical
background which it recalls."537 As we just saw, Thomas accomplishes the same biblical-liturgical illumination of the Song of Songs.

Yet, we must recognize here that Scripture is not the only liturgical element that shapes biblical interpretation. The sacraments, too, are a part of one’s liturgical hermeneutic; they are part of the cycle of interpretation. This is clear in Aelred and Guerric, as it is in Bernard, too. Thomas certainly followed suit. He makes it quite clear that the liturgical commercium of the Church is carried out, not only in the active interpretation of Scripture during the liturgy, not only by “crossing-over” via allegory and anagogy into the narrative of Salvation History, but also in the monks becoming the Bride during the liturgy, through partaking of her sacraments, wherein they are joined to the Bridegroom. As Chrysogonous Waddell says, the Cistercian monks “live” the Mystery of Christ in the liturgy because they enter into his Mystery there. The intersection of these liturgical elements of interpretation lies, therefore, in the liturgy as the “place” where the monk experiences the Mystery of Christ, where, in Thomas’s terms, he receives the lucrum animarum.

Aelred of Rievlaux, for example, poignantly depicts the connection between the sacramenta Ecclesiae, Scripture and the Sacramentum Christi within the liturgy:

Because it is expedient for us always to be mindful of his benefits, which he bestowed on us through his bodily presence and because he knew that our memory is impaired by forgetfulness, our intellect by error, our zeal by cupidty, he kindly provided for us. Not only do the Scriptures recount his benefits to us. These benefits are also re-presented for us by certain spiritual actions. Thus, when he gave his disciples the sacrament of his Body and Blood he told them: Do this in memory of me. It is for this reason, brothers,

537 Louis Bouyer, Cistercian Heritage, p. 191.
that these feasts have been instituted by the Church. By re-presenting now his birth, now his passion, resurrection, ascension, that wondrous devotion, that wondrous sweetness, that wondrous charity, which he showed for us in all these, will always be fresh in our memory. These feasts should also be an occasion of great growth in our faith when we hear with our ears and almost see beneath our eyes what Christ suffered for us; also what he gives us in this life and what he promises us after this life.538

As we can see in this passage from Aelred, Basil Pennington is quite right when he points out that “Aelred had a great appreciation for the power with which the liturgy with its feasts and its sacraments can make Christ and his mysteries present to us.”539 One should point out, however, that Aelred also shows a great appreciation for the source of the liturgy’s power: Christ himself and, consequently, the Church’s re-presentation of Christ’s suffering in the sacraments: “Not only do the Scriptures recount his benefits to us.”

Christ, as Thomas emphasizes, teaches the monk to see. Christ taught the Church how to “read” him, and therefore how to “see” him in the re-presentations of his life and death. Christ taught us how to read Scripture: he illuminated the figures of the Old Testament, and opened the allegories by his Spirit.540 It is by this same “spiritual” sight that Christ teaches us to “read” the Sacraments, to see “the price of our redemption” transacted in liturgical acts. Thus Scripture and the Sacraments are both part of the liturgical hermeneutic: illuminated by Christ, they illuminate Christ.

540 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; see cc397D, 473A, 766C, 804D, 810A, 834D.
Thomas writes his commentary accordingly. His treatment of the Sacraments is thoroughly scriptural and entirely christocentric—it is liturgical. From the opening of Book One Thomas asks his listener to “cross over” (*transeamus*) with him in order to truly see the transaction of the *commercium*. As Aelred said, the liturgy allows the monk to move beyond “what is seen with the eyes, heard with the ears, or perceived with the other senses.” Likewise, in asking his listeners to “come and see,” Thomas hopes they might discover Christ in this bread, by “crossing over” to Bethlehem, to that “house of bread,” to see Jesus, the Bread from Heaven, lying in the manger as food for us.541 The liturgical commerce of the Church (v. the world), writes Thomas, is where the monk properly “sees, buys, and eats,” “crossing over” to Bethlehem,542 to Golgotha, and to the foot of the New Jerusalem. Thus the monk enters into the praise of God being sung in Heaven,543 and, as Thomas shows in his Prologue, the monk thus participates in the union for which he was made.

Let us turn now to see how Thomas envisions the sacraments of the Church as the moments of “exchange” or “embrace” as the Bride (the Church as a whole and the monk) seek *commercium* with the Bridegroom. In this final section of this final chapter, we will see that, for Thomas, the monk experiences the embrace Christ extended on the Cross, as Christ’s blood paid out for each member of the Church, through the Church’s

541 “Ut inveniamus hunc panem, transeamus usque Bethlehem, quae dicitur domus panis,” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c27A.

542 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c25B.

543 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c850Bff.
corporate celebration of the liturgy. The liturgy is where the “Kiss Who Saves” and the human Bride of the commercium meet.

**Sacramenta and Sacramentum: The Human Bride Experiences the Bridegroom**

We noted the “hazard” of studying twelfth-century liturgical and sacramental thought at the outset of this chapter. Here we run headlong into the “diffusive nature” of the sacramenta, a “hazard” that is further complicated by Thomas’s inconsistent terminology. He speaks variously about the sacramenta Christi, the sacramenta incarnationis, the sacramenta Christianae fidei, the sacramenta ecclesiastica, the sacramenta Ecclesiae, and from time to time about the sacramenta of the Old Testament.

In the section that follows, we will differentiate between the various sacramenta Christi and Ecclesiae, showing that they fall either on the side of sacramenta, or the mysteries, of Christ’s life, or on the side of the liturgical sacraments celebrated by the Church, which re-present the former. Consequently, we will also see that the two visions of the sacramenta are inseparable. The monks experience Christ, the Song’s “Kiss Who Saves,” by receiving him in the Church’s liturgical sacraments. The liturgy is the locus of the “profitable exchange” that is the admirabile commercium. In the liturgy, the monks are joined to Christ and receive the irrevocable price paid for their salvation: Christ’s Blood – God’s charitas – poured out for his Bride.

Thomas himself notes one more “hazard” in dealing with the sacraments: articulating the work of the Holy Spirit. We noted in the last chapter that Thomas is hesitant to speak about the spiritual union between the Bride and Bridegroom. Here, then, let us take note that Thomas speaks much more frequently about the liturgical
sacraments as the Bride’s access to the incarnate Bridegroom who embraced her from the
Cross. From here, Thomas is rarely disposed to speak about the spiritual union that also
occurs through the sacraments by the work of the Holy Spirit, but rather about the moral
effect of receiving the sacraments, the *conversio* coupled to an experience of the
Bridegroom in his Passion.

**Sacramentum Christi:**

We begin with the *Sacramentum Christi*, which Thomas speaks of in terms of the
*sacramenta Christi*, the *sacramenta incarnationis*, and the *sacramenta Christianae fidei*.
The *sacramenta Christi* refer to the “mysteries” or the events of Christ’s life. In Chapter
Two we spoke specifically about Thomas’s treatment of Christ’s Birth, Death,
Resurrection, and Ascension: four events which together reveal Christ as the Redeemer
and Bridegroom of the Song. However, Thomas enumerates the *sacramenta* several
times within his commentary, adding to these four.

For example, in one place Thomas speaks of the four “doors” which we open into
the sacraments of Christ: the Virgin’s womb, the Savior’s side, the grip of hellish
plunders, and the entrance to the Heavenly Homeland.\(^\text{544}\) These “doors” were opened by
Christ’s birth, in his Passion, in his Anastasis and Resurrection, and in his Ascension.\(^\text{545}\)

\(^{\text{544}}\) “Item quatuor istas portas inveniumus in sacramentis Christi, omnes in bonam partem
acceptas. Prima est orientalis, secunda occidentalis, tertia aquilonis, quarta meridionalis. Prima est uterus
Virginis, secunda est latus Salvatoris, tertia est tenacitas rapinae infernalis, quarta est ingressus patriae
coelestis.” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c754D. Emphasis mine.

\(^{\text{545}}\) “…Istae portae clausae fuerunt in prophetis, quia obscure ab eis praedictae, sed jam, coruscante
Evangelio, sunt apertae. Prima aperta est in Christi nativitate; aperta, dico, non virginitatis corruptione, sed
nativitatis Christi manifestatione; secunda aperta est in ejus passione, tertis in descensu Christi ad infernos
Thus, he repeats the four *sacramenta*, and adds Christ’s descent into Hell to his Resurrection. Elsewhere Thomas enumerates what calls the seven *sacramenta fidei Christianae*: Christ’s “nativity, baptism, passion, resurrection, descent into hell, ascension, and the sending of the Holy Spirit.”\(^{546}\) Here Thomas adds Christ’s baptism and Pentecost to the list.

Thomas’s varied enumerations of the *sacramenta Christi* and his mention of the *sacramenta fidei Christianae*, return us to Hugh of St. Victor’s *De Sacramentis Christiane Fidei*. There, Hugh’s discusses the *opera restaurationis* as the work of the Incarnation and the other sacraments of Christ’s humanity.\(^{547}\) Christ, himself, was a Sacrament – his humanity manifested his divinity – and the events of his life served as theophanic moments of the mystery that God wed himself to humankind in such an intimate fashion.\(^{548}\) Thomas’s enumerations give his readers a clear picture of the life or the mystery of God made man, that is of the “sacraments” of Christ’s humanity and the Incarnation.

Thomas gives a great example of this in the way he speaks about Christ’s baptism. This is an especially interesting case because Baptism becomes one of the Church’s liturgical sacraments. Thomas describes Christ’s baptism as an example of


\(^{548}\) “Christus humanitatem suam prius demonstravit, ut post manifestaret divinitatem, et ubique lux lucem praecedat,” Hugh of St. Victor, *De Sacramentis*, PL 176; c196A.
Christ “humbling himself” (*humilians se*) in order to be with us. Christ partakes of a sacrament in order to reveal the Mystery that he is. The sacrament points to a greater Sacrament. Moreover, Christ manifests the profound humility of God’s condescension by participating in the sacraments.\(^{549}\) Thus, as Thomas points out, Christ’s baptism is a sign of Christ being “for” and “with” humankind as first shown by Christ’s Nativity. Christ’s baptism illuminates and encapsulates the purpose of the *sacramenta Christi*.

We conclude our discussion of the *sacramenta Christi* by looking at two examples from Thomas of the Mystery of Christ as the sum of the *sacramenta* of his humanity. Speaking of Christ’s nativity, Thomas writes:

> “Great,” said the Apostle, “is the mystery of [our] religion, that was manifested in the flesh, was justified in the spirit, appeared to the angels, was preached to the nations, believed in the world, assumed in glory” (1 Tim. 3:16). Behold Christ in the manger, who is called the sacrament made manifest in the flesh, in the stable.

[“Magnum,” ait Apostolus, “pietatis sacramentum, quod manifestatum est in carne, justificatum est in spiritu, apparuit angelis, praedicatum est gentibus, creditum est mundo, assumptum est in gloria” [I Tim. 3.]. Ecce Christus in praesepio, qui dicitur sacramentum quod manifestatum est in carne, in praesepio.\(^{550}\)]

Here Thomas speaks of the whole “mystery” of Christ’s life by which God made himself manifest to us, becoming human so that we might believe in him and be saved by him, and eventually be taken-up into his glory. The story of this manifestation is most fully

\(^{549}\) “Sedit nobiscum participatione sacramentorum se humiliando . . . Secundum nobis ostendit, quando baptizatus est a Joanne (Matth. 3), qui et in praesepio jacuit (Luc. 2), pro nobis humilians se.” Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c398A.

\(^{550}\) Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; cc772B-C.
understood through the major events of his life: his Birth, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension.

In closing, Thomas gives us one other way of thinking of the Sacrament of Christ. Christ himself, as Thomas describes him, is a sacrament because he mediates God’s presence by the work of the Holy Spirit, so that humankind might be joined to Divinity:

A great mystery is revealed today . . . the Holy Spirit has woven a tunic in the Virgin’s ‘wedding chamber’; the Son of God was dressed in a woven cloth . . . the Holy Spirit wove a wondrous work of art; the Son of God was dressed in a woven cloth, so that a union of divinity and humanity might be made.

[Magnum mysterium declaratur hodie . . . Spiritus sanctus in thalamo Virginis tunicam texuit; Dei Filius textam induit . . . Spiritus sanctus texuit mirabili artificio; Dei Filius textam induit, ut fieret divinitatis et humanitatis unio.] 551

Thomas describes the *sacramenta incarnationis* in nuptial terms through Song of Songs 8:3 and 1:1: “His left hand, that is the sacraments of the incarnation and the gifts of his presence . . . His left hand is placed under the head of the Bride, so that these spiritual gifts might sustain her interiorly . . . It should be noted that the Bride first seeks the kiss, second comes to the colloquium of Christ, third hastens hereupon to the embrace.” 552 Thomas interprets these passages to reveal that the Sacrament of Christ is the Mystery of the Incarnation—the Sacrament, that is, of God become human in order to be wed to his human Bride.

551 Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; cc454B-C.

552 “‘Laeva ejus sub capite meo, et dextera illius amplexabitur me.’ Laeva ejus, id est sacramenta incarnationis et praesentiae ejus dona . . . Laeva ista sub capite sponsae ponitur, ut interius his donis spiritualibus sustentetur . . . Notandum quod sponsa prius petet osculum secundo venit ad Christi colloquium, tertio hic festinat ad amplexum. Primo enim dixit: ‘Osculetur me osculo oris sui’ [Cant. 1.] . . . Laeva ejus sub capite meo, et dextera illius amplexabitur me; ecce complexus.” Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; cc786A-B.
Let us see now, therefore, how this great Sacrament continues to join humanity and divinity through the *sacramenta Ecclesiae*. How do these sacraments mediate the Bridegroom’s embrace? How do they make the liturgy the locus of exchange, of experiencing the “Kiss Who Saves”?

*Sacramenta Ecclesiae*

The traditional understanding of the *sacramenta Ecclesiae* is as the sacraments that poured forth from Christ’s side on the Cross. The Church’s sacraments receive their source and their efficacy from Christ’s Passion. These sacraments join the Bride to the Bridegroom (in *una caro*) precisely because they mediate the “price” or the “gift” of Christ’s Blood. Consequently, demarcation between the proper Mystery of Christ’s life and the sacraments that communicate this Mystery becomes clearer. The *sacramenta Christi* are the great Mystery of Christ in which Christians believe, and in which they partake through the *sacramenta Ecclesiae*.

The nuptial exchange between God and humankind made manifest as the union of Christ and the Church continues in the *sacramenta Ecclesiae*. The *sacramenta Ecclesia* are the liturgical acts of the Church in which the effects of Christ’s Passion are made present to Christ’s Bride because she is joined to Christ’s Body in *una caro*.

Accordingly, Thomas describes the *sacramenta Ecclesiae* as the embraces through which

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553 See, for example, the works of St. Augustine: *In Johannis Evangelium Tractatus*, XV.8, PL35; c1513. Also: *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, Ch. 39, PL 42; c275. From the Tractates: “…quoniam de Christo in cruce dormiente futura erat Ecclesia de latere ejus, de latere scilicet dormantis; quia et de latere in cruce pendentis lancea percusso (Joan. XIX, 34) Sacramenta Ecclesiae profluerunt.”
the monks experience the Mystery of Christ and receive the “price” of their redemption.

Listen to Thomas speak about the sacraments as Christ’s “gifts” to his Bride:

As lovers are accustomed to present precious ornaments to their brides, so that they might make their love more fervent, thus Christ does for the Church. He purifies her with the washing of baptism, strengthens her with the sacrament of his body and his blood...

[Item, solent amatores sponsis suis pretiosa ornamenta praestare, ut earum erga se amorem ferventius accendant. Sic Christus Ecclesiae. Eam namque baptismatis lavacro mundat, corporis sui et sanguinis sacramento confirmat, et roborat.]554

And, if this “gift” of Christ’s Body and Blood is that of the Lover to the Bride, then, as Thomas also shows, this “gift” is also a “kiss.”

In return, the Bride “kisses” her Bridegroom in an act of thanksgiving (actionem gratiarum).555 Thus the lovers, so to speak, embrace in the giving and receiving of the sacraments. After all, as Thomas shows in his Prologue, the human Bride was made for this embrace: that she might know and glorify God by giving thanks for this embrace.556

In Book One, he describes the kiss of thanksgiving as the kiss given by the Bride to the “hand” of the Bridegroom.557 In this way, Thomas describes the sacramenta Ecclesiae not only as gifts given from a lover to his spouse, namely, by Christ to the Church, but as

554 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc127B-C.

555 “Sequitur: Ut deosculer te. Est osculum propter delicti remissionem; est osculum ob desideratae rei aperationem, et est osculum in gratiarum actionem. Primum est ut dimittantur peccata; secundum, ut conferantur spiritualia dona; tertium manifestat quantum accepta sint dona.” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc771B-C.

556 “... et qui ad secundum, ‘cum cognavissent Deum, non sicut Deum glorificaverunt, aut gratias egerunt’.” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c18A.

557 “... osulum ad manus, pro gratiarum actione...” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c23A.
liturgical acts which constitute an “exchange” in which the Church makes her own “gifts” of love to her Bridegroom.

At times, although without ever enumerating them, Thomas says that there are seven *sacramenta ecclesiastica*.558 Speaking of the sacraments generally, Thomas tends to point out that they both constitute the Church559 and are the way by which we enter into the Church,560 that fructify the Church,561 renew the Church,562 regenerate the members of the Church,563 and bear the Church “new sons.”564 Thomas speaks at length about three ecclesial or liturgical sacraments: Baptism, the Eucharist, and Penance or Confession. Thomas centers his treatment of each of these sacraments on Christ’s Passion, illuminating it as their source and their “gift.” Let us take each of these

558 “Dedit priusquam abiret, unde virutum sumeret incrementa, dedit unde contra vitia sumeret antidota, septem videlicet ecclesiastica sacramenta.” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c839D.

559 See, for example, the “Garden of the Church” as the “Garden of the Sacraments” in Thomas’s interpretation of Song of Songs 4:12. ICC, PL 206; c452. Cf. fn61.

560 “Portae Sion sunt Ecclesiae sacramenta, per quae Ecclesiam intramus.” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c755D.

561 “Fecundat virginitatem, fecundat humanam mentem, fecundat Ecclesiam Dei militantem. Virginitatem incarnatione divinitatis, hominis mentem germine virtutis, Ecclesiam sacramentis.” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c516D.

562 “Ecclesia sacramentis renovatur.” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c690C.

563 “Fecundat virginitatem, fecundat humanam mentem, fecundat Ecclesiam Dei militantem. Virginitatem incarnatione divinitatis, hominis mentem germine virtutis, Ecclesiam sacramentis. Primum ad redemptionem, secundum ad renovationem, tertium ad regenerationem.” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c516D.

564 “Tres sunt filii. Filius irae, filius adoptionis, filius gratiae. Primus est genitus, secundus regeneratus, tertius unigenitus. Genitus ex sanguinibus et voluntate viri (Joan. 1), et voluntate carnis. Regeneratus, quia natus est ex Deo per sacramentum poenitentiae et baptismatis. Unigenitus patris et filius Virginis, De primo Apostolus: ‘Omnes natura sumus filii irae’ (Ephes. 2); de secundo: ‘Accepsitis spiritum adoptionis, in quo clamamus: Abba, Pater’ (Rom. 8), nam ‘Spiritum sanctum in filios adoptionis effudit’ (Praefat. miss. in Pentec.).” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc263A-B.
sacraments in turn in order to see how they bring the Bride (and the monk) into the sacramental embrace of the “Kiss Who Saves.”

Thomas interprets various images from the Song as references to Baptism. First, he reads the “pools of Heshbon” in Canticles 7:4 as the “pools of baptism”: “The second pool is baptism, which we speak of as initiation, because it is an entrance into all of the sacraments, and in it all the faithful are initiated. Its water is material, but holy.”

Accordingly, Thomas then speaks about the “pool” of Christ’s body, showing, thereby how Baptism is a sacramental embrace; how, that is, it bestows the “price” of redemption. Christ’s crucified body is the “pool” from whence water and blood flowed, and therefore, it is from this pool that the other sacraments receive their efficacy: “Tertia piscina est Christi corpus. Haec habet aquam materialem quae de latere ejus exivit (Jn. 19:34), et sanguinem qui perfecte abluit. Hanc diximus sacramentalem, quia ab ea multa alia sacramenta sumunt efficaciam.”

However, here Thomas not only mentions the efficacy of Baptism, but that of the many other sacraments (*multa alia sacramenta*). Thomas extends his metaphor of Christ’s body as a “pool,” writing: “The water of our sin was moved, in place of which we receive the water of grace.” The salvific “exchange” pours from the five wounds

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565 “Secunda piscina est baptismus, quam diximus initiale, quia est initium omnium sacramentorum, et in ea omnes initiantur fideles. Eius aqua materialis est, sed sanctificata.” Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c712C.

566 “Tertia piscina est Christi corpus. Haec habet aquam materialem quae de latere ejus exivit (Joan. 19), et sanguinem qui perfecte abluit. Hanc diximus sacramentalem, quia ab ea multa alia sacramenta sumunt efficaciam.” Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; cc713A-B.

567 “Et mota est aqua nostrae culpae, pro qua accepmus aquam gratiae.” Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; 713B.
on Christ’s crucified body; from the porticoes of grace: “Haec quinque porticus habet, scilicet quinque vulnera pedum, manuum, lateris.” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c713B. Thus, the fallen human being, described by Thomas in Book One as “wounded” and “blind,” is washed and illuminated by the waters of Christ’s body.569 In Baptism the monk experiences the salvific effect of Christ’s Passion.

In a passage similar to that about the pools of Heshbon, Thomas discusses the “Garden of the Church.” The Church, he says, is a “garden of sacraments.” He continues, showing the relationship between the garden, Christ, and his Passion, writing:

This same garden is surrounded by a wall that is Christ. . . In it [this garden] is the font of baptism . . . This font is signified by that sign by which the first born of Egypt were killed, and Israel was liberated, namely by the Lord’s passion, without which baptism would not have come about. “For when we are baptized in Christ Jesus, we are baptized into his death.”

[Iste hortus est conclusus muro qui est Christus. . . In eo est fons baptismi . . . Hic fons signatur illo signaculo, quo primogenita Aegypti moriuntur, et Israel liberatur scilicet passio Domini, sine quo baptismus non prodest. “Quicunque enim baptizati sumus in Christo Jesu, in morte ipsius baptizati sumus.”]570

Thomas makes it eminently clear that the sacrament of Baptism is efficacious because it originates from Christ’s Passion. Indeed, Baptism, he shows, is a participation in Christ’s death, without which one could not enter into the “Garden” of the Church, and be “enclosed” there by Christ’s Body, joined to Christ as his Bride is. In his most intimate terms, Thomas considers Baptism a “kiss.” Whenever her sins are remitted, as Thomas

568 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c713B.
569 See Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c713B-714A.
570 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc453C-D.
shows, the Bride receives the “kiss” of the Holy Spirit\textsuperscript{571} and consequently enters into the embrace first bestowed from the Cross.

The sacrament of the Eucharist is also an intimate experience of the Mystery of Christ. With reference to this sacrament, we can hear the two sources used by Thomas that we turn to most frequently in this study: Bernard of Clairvaux and Augustine of Hippo. Thomas would have heard about the intimacy of the Eucharist from Bernard in these words: “What does it mean to eat his flesh and drink his blood but to communicate with his sufferings? . . . Therefore this refers to the undefiled Sacrament of the Altar, where we receive the body of the Lord.”\textsuperscript{572} Meanwhile, it was argued that the sense of intimacy in Augustine’s \textit{Confessions} “comes from the intimacy provided by the body and blood of the Lord.”\textsuperscript{573} In Book Nine, Augustine refers to the Eucharist as the “sacrifice of the price of our redemption.”\textsuperscript{574} Additionally, and even earlier than Augustine, Tertullian’s description of the Eucharist also resounds in Thomas’s treatment of this sacrament. Tertullian connects the Mystery of Christ with the \textit{sacramenta Ecclesiae} when he calls the Eucharist a “holy exchange,” a \textit{sancta commercia}.\textsuperscript{575}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[571] See Thomas Cisterciensis, \textit{ICC}, PL 206; c771C. “Osculum ejus accepit sponsa in sancti Spiritus missione. Spiritus sanctus ad tria datus, scilicet ad peccatorum remissionem, ad fortitudinem, ad miraculorum operationem.”
\end{footnotes}
These three theologians summarize Thomas’s treatment of the Eucharist as a participation in the *admirabile commercium*. Thomas most often speaks about the Eucharist in terms of a sacrifice, drawing on the images of bread in the Old and New Testaments in order to do so. His inter-testamental exegesis associates the Old Testament “bread” with the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, yet Thomas also associates the bread with Christ more generally. Christ is the Bread come down from Heaven: He is the monk’s nourishment in the Eucharist, in Scripture, in prayer, in, that is, the spiritual effects of the liturgical life. Thomas writes poignantly of the Eucharistic cup along similar lines, describing the drinking of this “wine” as being refreshed, not specifically by the Blood of Christ, but rather by the Beloved’s love.\(^{576}\)

In a more specific treatment, the three-fold sacrifice of the Eucharist, as styled by Thomas’s exegetical method of gathering from various scriptural sources, the monk receives the “boy” who, as foretold by Isaiah, carried our burdens, bore our weaknesses, and who conquered death in the biblical “breads.”\(^{577}\) Elsewhere he writes: “Primus panis est eucharistiae . . . Primus vivificat . . . De primo: ‘Panis quem ego dabo, caro mea est

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\(^{576}\) Thomas Cisterciensis, *ICC*, PL 206; c736D. “Et hoc est vinum quod dignum est dilecto ad potandum, dum sic digne in ejus amore reficiurum.”

pro mundi vita’ (Joan. 6:52).”\textsuperscript{578} In these descriptions, we hear about the “exchange” of the \textit{Sacramentum Christi}, about the entire \textit{admirabile commercium} made present as a life-giving nourishment in the Eucharistic sacrifice. In eating this “bread,” the monk receives the Blood of Christ and the price of his redemption.

Returning to the image of the Garden, Thomas depicts the Eucharist more clearly as the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ via the allegory of eating the Garden’s Fruit. This, too, becomes an image of intimacy. See how it develops during Thomas’s interpretation of Canticles 5:15 (“His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars”):

There are three tables on this mountain [of Lebanon] . . . The first is in the letter, second in the spirit, third in appearance. The first shows, the second tastes, the third satisfies. The first is the paschal lamb eaten under the shadow of figures, the second [is eaten] under the sacrament, the third in the unconcealed. Of the first it is said: “In that same house you will eat it” (Ex 12:46); of the second: “Taste and see how sweet the Lord is!” (Ps. 34:8); of the third: “I will be satisfied when he appears in your glory” (Ps. 17:15). The middle table [of the sacraments] is of our time. The Bridegroom invites the Bride to [this table] in [the words of] the Song, thus: “Come my beloved into my garden and eat the fruit of his fruit trees” (4:16).


Thus Thomas’s interpretation of 5:15 reveals the words of 4:16 to be the Beloved’s

\textsuperscript{578} Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c385A.

\textsuperscript{579} Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc596C-597A-B.
invitation to partake of the Eucharist; to “see how sweet the Lord is” by receiving the “fruit” that is his Body. Yet, we also see in this passage a more general treatment of this sacramental “fruit”: the monk also sees Christ under the sacramental shadows of the Old Testament, and looks forward to being satisfied by God’s unveiled presence in Heaven. Earlier, in Book Seven, Thomas shows that the Beloved comes into the “Garden” of the Sacraments, namely into the Church by her sacramenta, generally and specifically speaking: “Descendi in hortum meum.”580 Thus the Bride and Bridegroom meet in the sacramenta Ecclesiae. “Apprehendimus,” writes Thomas, “in sacramento.”581 However, as Thomas consistently shows, this “taking hold” of the Bridegroom in the sacraments only occurs because of the sacrifice offered in the “price” of Redemption, because of the Mystery of the Bridegroom’s Passion. The sacraments mediate the effects of Christ’s death, bringing the Church and Christ together in the moment of their historical yet transcendental nuptial union.

Thomas describes the experience of “taking hold” of the Bridegroom beautifully in his treatment of the sacrament of Confession. Here Christ is “apprehended” both in the sacrament and in the monk’s heart. Confession is the “kiss of the feet” in Book One,582 but it is also the embrace of reconciliation given to the soul through the remission of sins:


581 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c775C.

582 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c23A.
“Osculatur dilectus animam remissione peccatorum reconciliando.”

In a fuller treatment of Confession, Thomas references the parable of the prodigal son who was greeted by his father with a kiss. Thomas’s treatment of this parable furthers his delineation of Confession’s “kiss”: “First he sees him at a distance by inspiration, second he ran to him seeking the contrition of the heart, he kissed him through confession, he clasped his neck in forgiveness.

The “prodigal” monk, too, experiences this embrace. Thomas preached a short sermon on Song of Songs 1:1(b): “Because your breasts are better than wine,” in which his exegesis and the form of his sermon come together to depict the embrace of Confession. In this sermon the Bride and the Bridegroom both have two breasts. The Bride’s breasts are mercy (the left breast) and truth (the right breast); the Bridegroom’s are truth (the right breast) and mercy (the left breast). During the act of confession, when, as Thomas puts it, the Bride seeks the Bridegroom’s kiss, the Bride’s breasts align with the Bridegroom’s and truth and mercy meet (human truth with divine mercy, and human mercy with divine truth):

“Therefore, when the Bride seeks the kiss, she sees that these breasts [of the Bridegroom] come opposite her own as the bodies draw close together, so that the left [breast] of the Bridegroom is against [Her] right [breast], and His right [breast] against Her left. The right [breast] of both is truth, the left is mercy. And thus the three human truths meet the three mercies of God. The right breast of the Bride meets the left breast of the Bridegroom. The truth of confession, therefore, meets the first mercy of God, namely His purifying mercy. For in the truth of confession, the remission of sins is obtained, which

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583 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c787B.

584 “Primo vidit a longe per inspirationem, secundo occurrit ei quærens cordis contritionem, osculatus est eum per confessionem, irruit super collum ejus injungens satisfactionem.” Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c440B.
is of the first mercy.”

[“Cum igitur sponsa petit osculum, videt haec ubera sibi obviare in appropinquatione corporum, ut sit sinistra sponsi contra dexteram, et dextera contra sinistram. Utrouque dextera est veritas, sinistra misericordia. Itaque tres veritates humanae tribus Dei misericordiis obviant. Dexterum uber sponsae sinistro uberi sponsi. Veritas igitur confessionis obviat primae misericordiae Dei, scilicet speciosae. In veritate enim confessionis, peccatorum habetur remissio, quod est primae misericordiae.”]585

This depiction of the sacrament allows the monk to imagine the embrace that occurs when confessed truths are met with God’s mercy—when, that is, the effects of Christ’s Passion are received.

As mentioned before, Thomas emphasizes the moral effects of the liturgical sacraments, and particularly so with Confession because this liturgical act arises from an examination of oneself and an act of contrition. Only when the monk recognizes his “prodigality,” recognizes, that is, his dissimilitude from Christ, and washes his heart with the tears of confession (fons lacrymosae confessionis),586 can he receive the Bridegroom’s merciful embrace of forgiveness. Thus the monk’s face, writes Thomas, meaning the monk’s conscience, is also washed in confession with the blood from Christ’s side.587 The proper moral response is a conversion of heart, that is, a growth in virtue and charity that conforms the monk more perfectly to Christ. This response is made manifest not only in other acts of contrition and confession, but in the many ways the monk sincerely acknowledges the extent of God’s merciful love for humankind,

585 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; cc29D-30A.
586 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; c497D.
587 Thomas Cisterciensis, ICC, PL 206; 519D.
including acts of prayer, devotion, and thanksgiving. The monk recognizes that the “breasts” of the Bridegroom are meliora; they are better than his own. Having been washed by Christ’s blood and by the font of his own tears, the pure and sincere heart of the monk is prepared for the delight of the monk’s spiritual life: Christ’s rebirth within his heart.

The monk familiar with Thomas’s interpretation of Song of Songs 1:1(b) now hears his own experience of Confession in this verse. Hearing about the Bridegroom’s “breasts,” the monk calls to mind the many times the Bridegroom has embraced him, and is spurred on in his spiritual and moral growth. He knows that in receiving Christ’s embrace in confession, he experiences the mercy of the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection. The monk seeks Christ’s “kiss” again and again, not only in the liturgical sacrament of Confession, but now in these words of the Song: “Osculetur me osculo oris sui quia meliora sunt ubera tua vino.”

Thomas’s skillful interpretation makes this verse of the Song ring with liturgical undertones. Indeed, Thomas’s description of each sacrament as an intimate experience of Christ’s Mystery returns us to Emero Stiegman’s comment: for the twelfth-century

Cistercian monks, the Song of Songs is “a proleptically eternal, lyrical Eucharist.” 589

The combination of the monk’s liturgical experiences with his lectio divina invites such a description of the Song of Songs. Without the cyclical nature of his liturgical hermeneutic, Thomas could not begin with the text of the Song, arrive at a depiction of the Eucharist as Christ’s Sacrifice, and thereby provide the monks with an image for ruminating on their liturgical experience of Christ’s Mystery. Thomas provides the monks with an interpretation of the Song that evokes their experience of receiving Christ in the sacraments, that gives sound to their experience of the Mystery of Christ.

To reverse the cycle of interpretation for a moment, Thomas’s interpretation also appropriates the Song of Songs as a “lyrical Eucharist.” In terms more familiar to Thomas, the Song becomes the lyrical experience of the “Kiss who Saves.” Suffused with liturgical texts and liturgical rites, Thomas’s interpretation of the Song reflects the monk’s liturgical experience, an experience as we saw above, already itself saturated with passages from the Song. After hearing Thomas, reading the Song becomes a sacramental experience, and this lyrical experience of the “Kiss” is precisely what Thomas intends to cultivate within his monks.

Conclusion

The liturgy is the life source of Thomas’s commentary. His expert, monastic mingling of scriptural interpretation with the Church’s liturgical sources presents the Song as both an explanation of and a reflection on the monk’s experience of Christ’s Mystery. Indeed, Thomas often puts the words of the Canticle in the mouth of the Church—*est vox Ecclesiae, canit Ecclesia*—making the Song of Songs the expression of her experience of the Bridegroom.590 Yet, this is to make it the voice of the monk singing as well. This is the life given to Thomas’s commentary. This life is none other than the life of the Church, lived in union with the Sacrament that is Christ, a life given by the irrecoverable “price” of the Bridegroom’s Blood. The liturgy is the *commercium* that brings the embrace of the Bridegroom, and this *commercium* is the life of the Bride, the rhythm of the monk’s entire life as orchestrated by his desire to glorify God by celebrating the *sacramenta incarnationis*. Thomas’s *In Cantica Canticorum* is a sustained liturgical reflection on the Song’s expression of the *historia salutis*—the mystery of God’s love—made present anew through the Bride’s worship and her sacraments.

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