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12TH-CENTURY CISTERCIAN EXEGESIS
AS A SOURCE AND BACKGROUND OF IMAGES:
A STUDY OF ITS SELECTED WRITINGS
AND VISUAL CORRELATES

Abstract. This paper considers the Cistercian way of biblical exegesis, represented in the writing of three commentators—Bernard of Clairvaux, William of Saint Thierry, and Aelred of Rievaulx—and studies of the relationship between exegetical texts and images appearing in the Cistercian milieu. Two pictorial works, the initial O[mnes amici mei], 75r, in the Cistercian Gradual from Lubiąż and the altarpiece from the Cistercian church in Doberan (Germany) represent *ostentatio vulnerum* (exposition of wounds). The initial V[idi spetiosam], 131v, from the antiphonal contains a representation of the Bride. All these images correspond with sermon 61 from Bernard's *Sermones cantica canticorum*. In fact the Bride finds her shelter in the *foramina petrae*, which are the wounds of Christ. The wounds of Christ reveal her *viscera misericordiae*—God's mercy which liberates her from her sins.

The initial Q[uamvis omnes], 29r, and initial Q[uid mirum], 20r, in the Cîteaux manuscript, and the initial V[iri galilei], 53v, in a Kamieniec gradual, contain depictions of a man fighting a beast. All these representations are inspired by *Expositio super litterae ad Romanos* of William of Saint-Thierry. He considered man who loves and appreciates God's law, but does not obey it because he is overcome by sin. Only the Son of God makes him free.

There is also a picture in the pictorial cycle on the wall of the Cistercian nuns' church in Chełmno, representing the Bride and the Bridegroom. The painting is inspired by Aelred of Rievaulx's *Expositio venerabilis abbatis de Rievaille de evangelica lectione cum factus esset Jesus annorum duodecim*. Aelred commented on the episode of Jesus' pilgrimage with his parents to Jerusalem. Aelred discovered three senses of this episode: the historical sense—Jesus follows Jewish custom, the allegorical sense—Jesus leaves the Synagogue and enters the Church, and the moral sense—Jesus-Bridegroom calls the Bride and invites her to the contemplation of his face. So this picture corresponds with the moral sense. Images interpreting biblical texts played a special role. They promoted contemplation, which was the final stage of reading in the strategy of *lectio divina*.

Keywords: Cistercian spirituality; exegesis; Bernard of Clairvaux; William of Saint Thierry; Aelred of Rievaulx; Bride; Bridegroom; book painting

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EGZEGEZA CYSTERSKA XII WIEKU JAKO ŹRÓDŁO I PODŁOŻE OBRAZÓW:
STUDIUM WYBRANYCH PISM EGZEGETYCZNYCH
I ODPOWIADAJĄCYCH IM OBRAZÓW

Abstrakt. Przedmiotem rozprawy jest przede wszystkim cysterska metoda egzegezy Pisma świętego, reprezentowana przez pisma trzech komentatorów – Bernarda z Clairvaux, Williama z Saint Thierry, oraz Aelreda z Rievaulx. W tekście rozważane są również relacje między pismami egzegetycznymi a obrazami powstałymi w środowisku cysterskim. Dwa obrazy – inicjał O[mnes amici mei], 75r, w cysterskim graduale z Lubiąża, nastawa ołtarzowa z cysterskiego kościoła w Doberanie (Niemcy) z przedstawieniem Ukrzyżowania przez cnoty przedstawiają *ostentatio vulnerum*. Inicjał V[idi spetiosam], 131v, z antyfonarza zawiera przedstawienie Oblubienicy. Wszystkie te obrazy współgrają z kazaniem 61 św. Bernarda z jego *Sermones super cantica canticorum*. Rzeczywiście Oblubienica znajduje schronienie w *foramina petrae*, czyli w ranach Chrystusa. Rany Chrystusa ujawniają jej *viscera misericordiae*, tj. miłosierdzie Boże, które uwalnia ją od grzechu.

Inicjał Q[uamvis omnes], 29r, inicjał Q[uid mirum], 20r, w rękopisie pochodzącym z Citeaux oraz inicjał V[iri Galilei], 53v, z gradułu kamienieckiego zawierają przedstawienia człowieka walczącego z bestią. Wszystkie te obrazy są inspirowane przez *Expositio super litterae ad Romanos* Williama z Saint-Thierry. Ten autor rozważał człowieka, który ceni prawo Boże, lecz nie podporządkowuje się jemu, gdyż opanowany jest przez grzech. Tylko Syn Boży może go od niego uwolnić.

Mamy również obraz pochodzący z narracyjnego cyklu obrazowego na ścianie kościoła cysterek w Chelmnie przedstawiający Oblubieńca i Oblubienicę. Obraz jest inspirowany dziełem Aelreda z Rievaulx *Expositio venerabilis abbatis de Rievall de evangelica lectione cum factus esset Jesus annorum duodecim*. Aelred skomentował epizod, gdy Jezus pielgrzymował z rodzicami do Jerozolimy. Odkrył trzy sensy tego epizodu: sens historyczny – Jezus postępuje według zwyczajów żydowskich, sens alegoryczny – Jezus opuszcza Synagogę i wchodzi do Kościoła, sens moralny – Jezus-Oblubieniec przywołuje Oblubienicę i zaprasza ją do kontemplowania swej twarzy. Tak więc sens tego obrazu odpowiada sensowi moralnemu.

Obrazy interpretujące tekst biblijny odgrywały szczególną rolę. Promowały one bowiem kontemplację, która jest ostatnim etapem lektury w strategii *lectio divina*.

Słowa kluczowe: cystersi; duchowość cysterska; egzegeza; Bernard z Clairvaux; Wilhelm z Saint Thierry; Aelred z Rievaulx; Oblubienica; Oblubieniec; malarstwo książkowe

INTRODUCTION

This fact is evident: Saint Bernard of Clairvaux read and commented on the Holy Bible. This fact is obvious but not extraordinary. Followers of Bernard also interpreted the Bible. This reading and interpreting coexists with numerous schools of biblical exegesis in the Middle Ages. This fact inspires two questions: Did a specific Cistercian school of exegesis exist? Did exegesis give momentum to Cistercian art? This paper presents the results of my research in which I tried to answer these questions.

The starting point is an article by Christopher Hughes.¹ In fact, it is a text that synthesizes the research on the relationship between exegesis and art. He believes images could accompany exegetical texts, iconography could illustrate exegetical ideas, and pictures could play an explanatory role as exegetical tools. The author mentions three models which focus on the studies of the relationship between art and exegesis. Charles Cahier (1807–1882) interpreted typologically stained glass windows in the light of exegetical texts.² Emil Male (1862–1954) found that the essentials discovered by theologians and exegetes were expressed by sculptures and stained glass.³ Erwin Panofsky, in turn, with his text on hidden symbolism inspired the search of exegetical texts as sources of images and symbols. Walter Cahn studied the relationships between architecture and exegesis. The object of his research was the architecture described in a text, and the illustrations of the Ezechiel Commentary were inspired by the exegetical solutions.⁴

But not only the texts about art and exegesis but also the work on the medieval exegetical methods should be taken into consideration. In fact, these works—articles and books—could give us the basis of our research. So we should start by describing the condition of exegesis in time and in place. There are some works of Gilbert Dahan, Jacques Verger, Pierre Châtillon and Guy Lobrichon.⁵ These scholars contributed to the knowledge of the medieval methods of reading the Bible.

¹ Christopher G. Hughes, “Art and Exegesis,” in *A Companion to Medieval Art. Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, ed. Conrad Rudolph, Blackwell Companions to Art History 2 (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 173–92.

² Charles Cahier and Arthur Martin, *Monographie de la cathédrale de Bourges: Vitraux du XIII^e siècle* (Paris: M. Poussielgue-Rusand, 1841–1844).

³ Émile Mâle, *L’art religieux du XIII^e siècle en France. Étude sur l’iconographie du Moyen âge et sur ses sources d’inspiration*, 8th ed. (Paris: Armand Colin, 1948).

⁴ Walter Cahn, “Architecture and Exegesis: Richard of St. Victor’s Ezechiel Commentary and Its Illustrations,” *Art Bulletin* 76 (1994): 53–68.

⁵ Gilbert Dahan, *L’exégèse chrétienne de la Bible en Occident médiéval, XII^e–XIV^e siècles* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1999); Dahan, *Lire la Bible au Moyen Âge. Essais d’herméneutique médiévale*, Titre Courant 38 (Genève: Droz, 2009); Dahan, “L’influence des victorins dans l’exégèse de la Bible jusqu’à la fin de XIII^e siècle,” in *L’école de Saint Victor de Paris. Influence et rayonnement du Moyen Âge à l’époque moderne*, ed. Dominique Poirel, Bibliotheca Victorina 22 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 153–77; Pierre Châtillon, “La Bible dans les écoles du XII^e siècle,” in *Le Moyen Âge et la Bible*, ed. Pierre Riché and Guy Lobrichon, Bible de tous les temps 4 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984), 163–97; Guy Lobrichon, *La Bible Au Moyen Âge*, Les Médiévistes français 3 (Paris: Picard, 2003); Jacques Verger, “L’exégèse de l’Université,” *Le Moyen Âge et la Bible*, ed. Pierre Riché and Guy Lobrichon, Bible de tous les temps 4 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984), 199–232.

It is necessary and worthwhile to mention the works on the Cistercian use of the Bible and Cistercian exegesis. There is an article by Guy Lobrichon,⁶ dedicated to the presence of the Bible in Cistercian prayers and Cistercian practice of life. The author studies the practice of Bible reading in the first years of the Order's existence, the influence of scholastic exegesis, and the use of the Bible by Bernard of Clairvaux. Jean Figuet considers the presence of biblical references in the works of Bernard.⁷ Duncan Robertson dedicated a lot of space to Bernard's work *Sermones super cantica canticorum*.⁸ There are also other mentions in the article of M. B. Pranger about Bernard as a writer.⁹

1. IN SEARCH OF EXEGETICAL METHODS: CISTERIAN EXEGESIS, ITS METHODS AND RESULTS: SEARCHING FOR AN EXEGETICAL BACKGROUND IN IMAGES

The research here proceeds in two stages. The first is a detailed examination of works of art created in Cistercian circles. It is necessary to recognize the iconography and content of this milieu. The second part discovers the background of these works and their content.

In order to discover the Cistercian way of biblical lecture, or to reveal the Cistercian know-how in the matter of biblical interpretation, we have to again read texts written by monks, who admired and interpreted the Bible. In fact, this is a very complex task. Before our eyes and minds unfold large biblical commentaries, born out of long and hard work. We are overwhelmed by the mentality and spirituality of 12th-century people. We face the challenge of analysing the fruits of exegesis, practically to make an exegesis of exegesis.

In this situation, the most appropriate method of work could be to elaborate on some samples of exegetical writings and set apart distinctive features of texts supplied by commentators.

⁶ Guy Lobrichon, "La Bible des Maîtres du XIIe siècle," in *Bernard de Clairvaux: histoire, mentalité, spiritualité* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1992), 209–36.

⁷ Jean Figuet, "La Bible de Bernard: Données et ouvertures," in *Bernard de Clairvaux: histoire, mentalité, spiritualité* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1992), 237–69.

⁸ Duncan Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading*, Cistercian Studies 238 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011).

⁹ M. B. Pranger, "Bernard the Writer," in *A Companion to Bernard of Clairvaux*, ed. Brian P. McGuire (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 220–48.

2. THE WOUNDS: BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX AND THE DOVE IN THE CLEFT OF A ROCK

First, let us analyse a small miniature. It is a representation of the *Vir Dolorum* (Man of Sorrows) in the initial O (figure 1) in a Cistercian gradual from Lubiąż.¹⁰

It is a representation of the bare-chested Christ in semi figure, with his hands folded over his chest and face showing pain. But our attention is drawn by one specific feature. The naked Jesus with his folded hand is showing his wounds—one in his side and two in his hands. This posture, which tends to make the wound visible, can be described as *ostentatio vulnerum*. We can find another example of this kind in an altarpiece from the Cistercian church in Doberan (1330–1340).¹¹ The central quarter depicts a rare representation of Jesus being crucified by personified virtues (figure 2).

Christ hanging on the cross is executed by young women representing virtues: Obedientia, Veritas, Misericordia, Caritas, Perseverantia, Iustitia, Pax. All of them are gathered around the cross and engaged in some activities. Two of them are leaning over the bottom part of the cross and one of them is driving a nail through Christ's feet. Two women above are focused on the wound in his side. One is piercing his side with a lance and the other displays three nails in her right hand. In her left hand, she is holding a cup in which she is collecting the blood flowing from the side wound. The two women in the upper part of the image are nailing his hands to the cross. Last but not least, one woman is hovering above and putting the crown of thorns on Jesus's head. Overall, it is remarkable that the virtues, allegorically represented by female figures, are focused on Christ's wounds. In fact, the wounds are the objects of execution and torture, but at the same time, the attitude of the female figures to the wounds is full of admiration and adoration. The act of collecting the blood in the cup corresponds with this admiration.

¹⁰ Dariusz Tabor, *Malarstwo książkowe na Śląsku w XIV wieku* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2004), 108, 262; Tabor, "Rany i cierpienie Chrystusa jako droga dostępu do łaski: analiza i interpretacja niektórych przedstawień w kontekście cysterskiej duchowości i praktyki życia mniszego," in *Studia Anthropologica: pogranicza historii sztuki i kultury*, vol. 2, ed. Urszula Mazurczak (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2017), 10–11.

¹¹ Edith Fündt and Thomas Helms, *Das Kloster Doberan* (Berlin: Union, 1989), 23; Peter Strieder, *Tafelmalerei in Nürnberg 1350-1550* (Königstein in Taunus: Langewiesche, 1993), 47–48, 76–77; Annegret Laabs, *Malerei und Plastik in Zisterzienser Orden. Zum Bilderbau zwischen sakralen Zeremonien und Stiftermemoria 1250–1430* (Petersberg: Michael Imhof, 2000), 220.

In both paintings, the wounds of Christ are the central elements, they attract attention. The focus on the wounds in the images seems to coincide with the *foramina petrae*, which have been understood as the wounds of Christ. In fact, the wounds of Christ, which in Bernard's sermons were a gateway to mercy and the source of salvation, are powerfully exposed in the pieces. However, we could ask this: Could we draw a direct link between allegorically interpreted *foraminae petrae* and clearly visualized and strongly exposed wounds? However, both Bernard and the monks who looked at the pictures contemplated the wounds of Christ. Actually, the contemplation of Bernard is very sophisticated and based on the knowledge of Scripture. Could this contemplation of the Word of God guide monks to the contemplation of the picture? Today, this question remains unanswered.

Another example is a historiated initial from a Cistercian antiphonary from Lubiąż, the early thirteenth century.¹² The initial says V[idi spetiosam].

It opens the antiphon from the solemnity of the Assumption of Mary. The letter V includes a representation of a young crowned woman with a sceptre. She wears royal attire and makes a gesture of acceptance. Could we recognise in this person the bride from the Song of Songs? Is she Columba interpreted by Bernard typologically as a soul? The content of the antiphon seems to confirm the latter interpretation:

Vidi speciosam sicut columbam,
 ascendentem desuper rivos aquarum:
 cuius inaeestimabilis odor erat nimis in vestimentis eius
 et sicut dies verni circumdabant eam flores rosarum
 et lilia convallium.

This antiphon is a compilation inspired by texts taken from numerous verses of the Song of Songs, especially verses 3, 6 and 6, 1–10. Now emerges a problem: could this compilation result from an exegesis of this book? In fact the antiphon and the images are removed from their supposed biblical source.

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Bernardian commentary to the Song of Songs is considered as the most famous work of Doctor Mellifluus. In fact, this enormous text is the result of

¹² Dariusz Tabor, *Iluminacje cysterskich kodeksów śląskich XIII wieku* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2004), 88–89.

painstaking and persevering effort of reading, meditating and interpreting the Bible. In this paper, we can demonstrate his conscientiousness and perseverance, but for reasons of space it is possible to take into consideration only a few examples of exegesis.

The case in point is sermon 61 from Bernard's *Sermones super cantica Canticorum*. We will focus on paragraphs 3, 4, 5, because they all could show us how he read and understood biblical text.¹³

The starting point of this interpretation is verse 2:14 of Song of Songs: "Columba mea in foraminibus petrae, in cavernas maceriae, ostende mihi faciem tuam, sonet vox tua in auribus meis." In paragraph 3, Bernard analyses the expression *foramina petrae*. His intuitive look quickly recognises in them the wounds of Christ. What justifies this? Bernard replies, "Because Christ is a rock. So, consequently, the wounds are the proof of resurrection of Christ." He continues the interpretation and realises that the dove found her refuge in the wound: "paser invenit sibi domum et turtur nidum ubi reponat pullos suos." This first part of the paragraph concludes with the response of the dove: "In petra exaltavit me" and "Statuit supra petram pedes meas."¹⁴

In the second part of the paragraph, the commentator puts emphasis on another, which is *petra* 'rock'. He recognises the bridegroom, who is elevated onto a rock. There he finds shelter from the enemy. However, the background and guarantee of this security are the wounds of Christ. In this moment the commentator changes the perspective. He puts in the mouth of the bridegroom the words: "Peccavi peccatum grande" (I have sinned greatly). But he recalls the wounds of Christ, who suffered for our sins. The commentator concludes: if such mighty medicine was used against my illness, I don't need to be afraid in front of malignity.

The fourth paragraph starts with the statement: "Maior est iniquitas mea et, quam ut veniam merear" (My fault is so grave that I cannot be forgiven). However, the bridegroom draws mercy from the inside of the Lord, because his mercy flows from his wounds. In fact, the hands and feet of the Lord were pierced by nails. The penetrating nail reveals the will of God. In this situation the nail and the wound proclaim that God died for the world. Moreover, the nail not only pierced the hands and feet, but also his soul. And then follows the central statement of this paragraph:

¹³ Bernard de Clairvaux, "Sermon 61," in *Sermons sur le Cantique*, vol. 4, notes by Paul Verdeyen, trans. Raffaele Fassetta (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 2003), 240–59.

¹⁴ Bernard de Clairvaux, 246–48.

Patet arcanum cordis per foramina corporis
 Patet magnum illud pietatis sacramentum
 Patet viscera misericordiae dei nostri.

Only in the wounds can we recognise that the Lord is sweet and full of mercy. The bridegroom concludes: “*Maiorem enim miserationem nemo habet, nisi quam ut animam sua ponet quis proaddictis et damnatis*” (J 15:13).¹⁵

We take into consideration also paragraph 6. At the beginning, the bridegroom decides to escape from the city in order to live in the rocks. He would like to stay with Moses in the rocky cleft and to watch Lord walk. However, he can view God only from the back, because he didn’t deserve to see his face. Only one who deserves to be introduced to the Saint of Saints (*Sancta sanctorum*), could see the face of God.

Now this lamentable situation of the bridegroom changes, because he expresses his hope to watch God face to face. To prove this, he quotes psalm 15: “*Adimplebis me in laetitia cum vultu suo.*” In fact, the face of God is a true background of his hope and his joy. He concludes his consideration with the statement of two visions. The first vision is in sublimity and splendour, the second is in humility and pallor.¹⁶

Just this limited sample of Bernard’s commentary helps us to identify the most important features of his exegesis. The first observation is that all attention of Bernard’s is focused only on the selected and separated statement. In fact, the verse “*Columba mea in foraminis petrae, in cavernis maceriae, ostende mihi faciem tuam*” is not only the object of his elaboration and analysis, but also the object of his admiration and contemplation. Jean Figuet confirms that Bernard used the Bible including in his own text biblical words or sentences, simple allusions or pieces of anthology.

What is the motivation of the choice and selection of some biblical passages? This is a very individual and personal choice, but in its background we can find the search of contact with Christ. So we can conclude that Bernard puts emphasis on only one verse and tries to read and analyse its content, but this isn’t just content he has in mind. Bernard wants to establish a relationship with Christ through the simple content and the profound meaning.

He does not just read only the words, but also interprets the objects. In fact, the word is the vehicle of objects. An object is for him something important, because an object, when reported by a word, reveals to him a conversation

¹⁵ Bernard de Clairvaux, 248–50.

¹⁶ Bernard de Clairvaux, 252–54.

partner. This is evident as his commentary is dialogical. Bernard hides under the guise of the bridegroom and maintains a conversation with the bride. He recognises his interlocutor under the allegory of Columba. The spiritual reality of Christ's wounds is hidden under the metaphor of the cleft. The thing, expressed by word, reveals practically the protagonists of the dialogue. The true and adequate content and significance of the Word of God could be, according to Bernard, reread and interpreted only in the dialogue.

The first partner in the dialogue is the bride, Columba, but we discover yet another partner. This partner is the Word—the Bridegroom. He has a particular ability, because he interprets words evoking other words. We observe that one verse or word is paralleled by another verse or word. “Columba mea in foraminibus petrae” is linked to the expression “In perta exaltavit me” and the sentence “Fundatus enim sum supra firmam petram.” Another example: “Pec-cavi peccatum grande” is related to “Foderunt manus eius et pedes, latusque lancea foraverunt,” which links to “Ferrum pertransivit animam eius et appropinquavit cor ilius.” Truly, as a commentator, Bernard passes freely from one word to another, from one verse to the next. We can describe his attitude towards the biblical word as surfing. He links together various biblical texts, surfing the Bible in search of a word that could bring him the understanding of a contemplated word. It is the most valuable and distinctive characteristic of Bernard's exegesis. But speaking of associations, we have to confirm that this is not a random or unmotivated association. Through associated words and sentences Bernard searches for a particular person. In fact, the connections and associations are strictly linked to Christ. It means the Bernardin exegesis is Christologically oriented, so Jesus Christ is the point of arrival and the goal of his exegetical, interpretative work. However, Christ from Bernard's commentaries is not a static figure of doctrinal definition. He is revealed in the relationship with soul, with a meditating person. So, the bridegroom—Christ—is involved in the dynamic relationship with the bride, the soul. We can affirm also that this exegesis is strictly allegorical, because the allegory and typology stay in service of Christology.

3. FIGHTING WITH EVIL: WILLIAM OF SAINT THIERRY AND THE ANTYNOMY BETWEEN LAW AND GRACE

There are other pictures created in the Cistercian milieu that could be seen as the fruits of reading and interpreting the Bible. In the manuscript from Cîteaux we find a strange initial, Q[uamvis omnes]¹⁷ (figure 4).

The initial depicts a dragon and a man who is fighting the beast trying to rip its mouth open. This is a paradigmatic image of a fight. Another picture of this kind is found in another initial in this manuscript, Q(uid mirum), 20r.¹⁸ It is a representation of a mounted man, armed with a sword and shield fighting a dragon, embedded in the letter Q (figure 5).

The third example displays aspiration and a spiritual attitude. It is the initial V(iri galilei) from a gradual of Kamieniec, 53v (Wrocław, Biblioteka Uniwersytecka IF 411).¹⁹ The little and inconspicuous looking scene shows us a human figure embedded in stalks and branches. His right leg is being devoured by a monster—a horrible mask. The man is trying to escape, raising his staff in defence.

All these images reveal one paradigm, which is fight against evil. The presentation of spiritual fight is very dispersed in Cistercian books. Is there a relationship between these images and Cistercian exegesis of the Letter to the Romans? The fighting figure could be a human being who discovers in his nature an evil element and tries to fight it. It converges with the exegetical elaborations of William of Saint Thierry, who contemplates the human condition, tainted by sin. Evidently, the books, manuscripts, *Moralia in Iob* from Cîteaux and the Kamieniec Gradual, are documents written and illuminated by Cistercians for their own spiritual needs. So the imprints of Cistercian spirituality and mentality are clearly visible. Moreover, *Moralia in Iob* by Gregory the Great is a paradigmatic book, because, indeed, its author was a master of spiritual reading—it was lectio divina for monks, even Cistercians. However, these images are separated from the exegetical text, that is, from *Expositio super litterae ad Romanos*. Apart from the spiritual fight, it is not a central topic of Cistercian spirituality.

¹⁷ Yolanda Załuska, *L'Enluminure et le scriptorium de Cîteaux* (Cîteaux: Abbaye de Cîteau, 1989), 203; Dariusz Tabor, "Cielesność człowieka jako istotny czynnik duchowości cystersów i centralna rzeczywistość cysterskich obrazów: analiza i interpretacja wybranych przykładów miniaturstwa cysterskiego XII i XIII wieku," in *Studia Anthropologica: pogranicza historii sztuki i kultury*, ed. Urszula Mazureczak (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2013), 17.

¹⁸ Załuska, *L'Enluminure*, 203; Tabor, "Cielesność człowieka," 17.

¹⁹ Tabor, *Iluminacje*, 40.

Expositio super litterae ad Romanos by William of Saint Thierry is a truly valuable work of Cistercian exegesis. It is marked by spiritual experience of its author and the Cistercian spirituality left on it a distinctive impression. However, William's commentary presents a different way of lecturing and a different method of interpretation. The analysis helps to discover this method. We take into consideration some passages from chapter 7, which makes a statement about liberty and slavery. We start from the commentary on verses 16–17 of the letter (IV, 29):²⁰ “Non enim quod volo bonum hoc facio, sed quod nolo malum, hoc ago. Si autem quod nolo illud facio, non ego operor illud, sed quod habitat in me peccatum” (Romans 7:18).

The commentary of these verses is divided into two sectors. The first sector includes two statements. The will of the human being accepts the prescripts of the Law. However, the perfection of will is disturbed, because our nature is infected by sin. The interpretative key connecting these statements is “habitat peccatum” and “sed quod habitat in me peccatum”.

The second part of the commentary concentrates on the verse 20: “Non ego operor illud sed quod in me habitat peccatum.” The topic of sin, *peccatum*, is expanded. Every human being is able to do evil, and this ability is underpinned by sin dwelling in human nature. But when the human will doesn't agree with the wrong desire, man doesn't do evil. Although the evil desire is with us at all times, we do not commit sins. The central sentence is “Non nos operamur illud, sed quod habitat in nobis peccatum.”²¹

Next, we discover that the expression “habitat peccatum” appears three times, and this is significant. In fact, the commentator puts emphasis on this expression, because it helps him to understand the sense of verse. Practically, this expression, considered so many times, brings him to the profound sense of these verses.

Now, it could be very useful to continue and analyze the commentary of verses 21–23: “Condelector enim legi dei secundum interiorem hominem. Video autem aliam legem in membris meis, repugnantem legi mentis meae, et captivantem me in legem peccati, quae est in membris mei” (Romans 7:21–23). The commentary to these verses includes a short introduction and two sectors. The introduction affirms that the human being consists of two parts: one that is liberated and serves God, and the other being a slave and serving sin.²²

²⁰ Guillaume du Saint-Thierry, *Exposé sur l'épître aux Romains*, vol. 2, bks. 4–7, ed. Paul Verdeyen, trans. and notes Yves-Anselme Baudalet (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2014), 48–50.

²¹ Guillaume du Saint-Thierry, 50

²² Guillaume du Saint-Thierry, 52–53.

The first section considers pleasure. When we experience the pleasure of God's law, we are free because we love justice. But when we do not feel the pleasure of law we fear and we are not free. The commentator uses a dynamic contradiction. The man fears punishment, but he has to come to the love of justice. Love of justice is really the pleasure of freedom. In fact, the key sentence reads "*Condelector legi dei secundum interiorem hominem.*" "*Condelector*" guides the commentator to the comprehension of these verses, because this verb conveys the sense of the verse. It is a profound attitude of the human being, who finds in himself, in his personality, a goal and the fundamental rule of life.

The second sector of the commentary focuses on the problem of liberty and captivity. The man perceives himself as a captive, because justice is not accomplished in him. Consequently, the law makes the human being a captive. However, the commentator discovers that the Son of God made us free. So the person recognizes himself as a captive, but only in the body. He is free because he feels pleasure in contemplation of the law of God.

"*Condelector legi dei*" is the expression contemplated by the commentator. So, it could be considered as a central part and a sentence key of this commentary. In fact, it appears in William's text four times. It is a kind of introductory tool that reveals the sense of this passage to the commentator.

What method of exegesis does William of Saint Thierry apply? The first examination of the text gives us an impression that his method of work is non-monastic. Really, he elaborated systematically on the whole text of the Letter to the Romans commenting on it verse by verse. He discovers the meaning of every verse trying to pull out the profound sense from the simple meaning of words and sentences. But what sense of words does William discover in his commentary? He doesn't state it clearly, but the content of his commentary convinces us that the moral and spiritual condition of the human being is the object of his desire and the goal of his striving.

Yet we discover something that is inadequate and particular in this systematic and well-ordered interpretation. William chooses and repeats some parts of biblical text—expressions, statements, sentences or words. He includes them in his text and he assigns a particular function to them. First of all, he contemplates them. For him these parts have a particular value. He uses them as keys to give the reader access to the profound meaning, to the strict and clear sense of the Biblical Word. These keys—word keys or sentence keys, have been underlined above.

4. AELRED OF RIEVAULX

We can take a look at another depiction, which is a wall painting from the western part of the Cistercian nuns's church in Chełmno (Poland), from the mid-fourteenth century (figure 6).

We analyse the fragment showing a woman with a shepherd's staff and a young man. They are placed in an idyllic landscape and, crucially, separated by a hill. We can recognise in this image the Bride and the Bridegroom from the Song of Songs.

The relationship between exegesis and Cistercian images poses many questions and creates serious problems. It is the Bride who guards the vineyard and the Bridegroom who pastures his flocks—it is a situation described in the Song of Songs, 1:6–7. The Bride asks the people about his beloved and searches for him. The relationship between the text and image provokes some questions: Does this image follow from an exegetical elaboration or is it only a pure illustration? Which commentary has been used to represent this situation? The commentary of Bernard of Clairvaux or commentary of William of Saint Thierry?

In fact, in our research of the connection between the pictures and the results of exegesis, we run into enormous problems and face hard questions.

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The works of Aelred of Rievaulx include one exegetical text, *Expositio venerabilis abbatis de Rievaille de evangelica lectione cum factus esset Jesus annorum duodecim*.²³ Significantly, it is divided into three parts corresponding to three senses of the Scripture. The first part is dedicated to the historical sense, the second pertains to the typological or allegorical sense, and the third relates to the moral sense. This disposition reveals the new attitude of the lector and interpreter towards the comprehension of the Bible. We try to review how Aelred brings out the sense of the original text.

He considered the following verse: “Cum ergo factus esset Jesus annorum duodecim, ascendentibus illis Jerusalem, secundum consuetudinem diei festi, consummatisque diebus, cum redirent, remansit puer Jesus in Jerusalem” (Luke 2:42–43).

²³ Aelred de Rievaulx, *Quand Jésus eut douze ans*, trans. Francaise de Joseph Dubois (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 1987).

Paragraph 5 belongs to the part dedicated to the historical sense. The commentator observed the Jewish customs of this time, when they wandered from their dwelling places to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. Moreover, he observes and describes the presence and attitude of the little Jesus in the environment of devout pilgrims, who are headed for the Temple. In fact, the people turned their attention to Jesus. According to his description, Jesus was adored, loved and listened to. Many of these people are astonished at his words and manners. In conclusion, the commentator gives a quotation from Song of Songs. In fact, Jesus among the Jews was loved and two of these verses prove that.²⁴

Paragraph 13 of the commentary corresponds to verse 41 of Gospel, but it belongs to the second part, which discusses the allegorical or the typological sense. This lecture changed totally the perspective and method of reading. The commentator affirms that Jesus's journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem means that he left the Synagogue and came to the Church. He is twelve, which was the age when a young Jew was allowed to participate in religious life and worship. So this age is a kind of allegory that brings the meaning of Jesus's transition from the Synagogue to the Church. In fact, he did not come to dissolve the Law, but to accomplish it. So, he would like to add to the perfection of law, the perfection of Gospel.²⁵

The fact that Jesus stayed in Jerusalem, with his parents not realizing that, as the commentator explains, shows that Jesus is in the church, so he is in some sense separated from the Jewish people. He is separated from them, but the Jews do not realize it, and they ignore his absence. In order to underline the distance between the Jewish people and the church, the commentator quotes a part of Jeremias and the Letter to Hebrews.

The arrival in Jerusalem in paragraph 20 of the third part, which reveals the moral sense, is understood mystically. So, Jesus's age of twelve is the allegory of mystical state of contemplation. Consequently, the heavenly Jerusalem signifies the highest mystical state of soul. Jesus as the Bridegroom calls the soul his Bride and invites her to the contemplation of his face. He recognises his Bride—the soul—who is chaste and purified. Consequently, these features enable her to contemplate. The commentator quotes twice the expression from Song of Songs: "Tota pulchra es."²⁶

²⁴ Aelred de Rievaulx, 57–59.

²⁵ Aelred de Rievaulx, 74–77.

²⁶ Aelred de Rievaulx, 92–97.

What particular features could we identify in the exegetical text by Aelred? First of all, we realize that this exegesis is very systematic and clearly arranged. In fact, there are two arrangements that we find in this commentary. The first one is accomplished according to the sequence of Gospel's text. The commentator reads and inspects it verse by verse. He is convinced that in every verse there is a part of meaning. The second arrangement is made according to three senses and three elements of interpretation: *historialiter*, *allegorice*, and *moraliter*—historically, allegorically and morally. The commentator believes that the interpretation of the text must be exhaustive and intrinsic. Consequently, we can distinguish practically three interpretations of the same verse. It is notable that this distinction is very precise and the discovery of sense in every part (historical, allegorical and moral) is very accurate.

However, we realize that in every part and every section, Aelred works with an easy mind. He put emphasis on different passages, chosen according to his personal predilection and also according to the spiritual needs. So, in searching for every sense he did not hesitate to invoke other books of the Bible. This freedom of interpretation and extensiveness of exegetical work are the most distinctive in the third part of the commentary. In fact, the evocation of the Song of Songs and the interpretation of the arrival in Jerusalem as a mystical relationship between a bridegroom and bride is very fascinating.

However, in the text of the commentary we discover something which is present in every part and every section. This is the person of Christ. He is present in the historical commentary, in the allegorical interpretation and in the moral or mystical reading. So Aelred tried to discover the presence of Christ in every section of the exegesis. Jesus Christ is the principal goal of his exegetical effort.

5. PICTURES AND EXEGESIS

Could we find and identify the pictures that have been inspired by the exegetical texts of Cistercian masters? Is it possible to recognize some pictures as the results of reading and interpreting biblical texts? In fact, it is very difficult to find direct links between the commentaries and the pictures even painted in the Cistercian milieu. This part of paper is an attempt at discovering paintings that correlate with exegetical texts. This correlation is just clear and evident. In fact, the background of the analyzed pictures, created by Cistercian culture and used in Cistercian spiritual practice is the Cistercian way of Bible

reading and exegesis. Now we need to make the following assertion: the images in the miniature of a biblical topic do not result from a simple reading and illustration of sacred texts, but they follow from interpretation of the Bible and the work of exegetes. Consequently, these images do not relate directly with the Bible, but rather with exegetical texts.

However, we need to answer a fundamental question: why did the readers of exegetical texts need images? Why did the readers and interpreters of the Bible seek pictures and regarded them highly in Cistercian prayer, celebration and spiritual practice? These questions identify another problem and theme of future, namely the problem of images in exegesis and the problem of representative arts, which were inspired by the interpretation of the Bible.

Now it will be very rewarding to prepare and formulate a hypothesis which could guide us to the solution. It seems very probable that the solution comes from the strategy of *lectio divina*. The personal reading of the Bible by monks, also by Cistercians, has a principal goal: the vision of the divine person. In fact, the contemplation is the final stage of divine reading. Also, the exegesis in the systematic and scholastic way, preparing a monk for studies, discussion and preaching, in the final result promotes the preferred attitude of a monk and his desired state—the vision of a divine person, especially Jesus Christ in his human and divine nature.

We also need to study some approaches towards the visuality in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Hughes of Saint Victor in his *Didascalion* emphasizes the difference between *lectio* and meditation. The first step is only preparation, but the next activity is the core of prayer—it means contact and communion with God. This relationship with divinity presupposes a vision. Robert Grosseteste considered sight as the most important human faculty and called it the center of cognition and the center of knowledge. Suzane Lewis discovered the role of images in the spiritual life and Bible reading.²⁷ At that time, reading and interpreting the Apocalypse of St. John needed some support. It was very difficult to pass from the simple reading (*lectio*) of this mysterious book to the contemplation of the interpreted objects (*contemplatio*). Therefore, the image mediates between these stages, making it possible to experience the same mystical state which St. John experienced.

²⁷ Suzanne Lewis, *Reading Images. Narrative Discourse and Reception in the Thirteenth Century Illuminated Apocalypse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 235–36.

CONCLUSION

Having examined the writings of three Cistercians exegetes—Bernard, William and Aelred—we can highlight the common features of their exegesis: very personal and individual. Practically, the exegete stays lonely before the text of the Bible and tries to understand it. He surfs freely in the ocean of the text and makes a very individual and personal choice of the passage—verse, statement, word. The associations that he builds help him to find the sense of the word. But the highest and the most desirable sense is Christ—the object of search and an ultimate goal.

However, we notice another phenomenon. Although William and Aelred follow the Bernardian method of reading with large personal freedom, they apply various ways of reading and interpreting. Their exegesis is very systematic, well-ordered and strongly orientated to achieve the full sense of the Word. It is especially evident in the work of Aelred, who discovers the triple sense of the same passage—historical, allegorical and moral. This means that Cistercian exegesis was influenced by the contemporary trends of exegesis. In fact, school exegesis was in use in Cistercian communities.

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FIGURES



Figure 1. The initial O[mnes amici] depicting the Man of Sorrows, 75r.
A gradual from the Cistercian abbey in Lubiąż, Poland, 1300–1320
(Wrocław, Biblioteka Uniwersytecka I F 401)



Figure 2. Altarpiece depicting Christ crucified by personified virtues. The Cistercian abbey in Doberan, Germany, c. 1360
([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Christ_crucified_by_virtues_\(Doberan_Minster\)\)](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Christ_crucified_by_virtues_(Doberan_Minster))))



Figure 3. The initial V[idi spetiosam] depicting Ecclesia Sponsa. An antiphonary from the Cistercian abbey in Lubiąż, Poland, 1200–1210 (Wrocław, Biblioteka Uniwersytecka, I F 399)



Figure 4. The initial Q[uamvis omnes], depicting Saint Gregory the Great. *Moralia in Iob*, 29r. Cîteaux, 1st quarter of 12th century (Dijon, Bibliothèque Municipale 173)



Figure 5. The initial Q[uid mirum], depicting St Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, 20r. Cîteaux, 1st quarter of the 12th century (Dijon, Bibliothèque Municipale, 173)



Figure 6. Bridegroom and bride in the pasture, Song of songs 1:6–7. Wall painting in the Abbey of Cistercian nuns, Chełmno, Poland, c. 1350
(photo by Andrea Jemolo, available from Bridgeman Images)