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Bernard of Clairvaux

SERMONS FOR LENT
AND THE
EASTER SEASON
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An Introduction to Saint Bernard’s
*Sermons for Lent and Easter*

Wim Verbaal

In the introduction to the Cistercian Publications’ translation of Bernard’s *Sermons for Advent and the Christmas Season*, the growth of the entire liturgical collection was treated.1 First of all, the question had to be answered for what reason Bernard took up the charge of writing a completely new homily collection that could never be used by the Cistercian order because the homilies took too much liberty with respect to the Cistercian customs as expressed in the *Ecclesiastica officia*. The conclusion had to be that Bernard did not aim at a liturgical use of his collection but rather considered it to offer a continuous *lectio divina*, accompanying the reader through the liturgical year and deepening the reader’s insight into the liturgical sacralization of the year by each renewed reading.

Another problem posed itself regarding the development of the entire collection, which proved to be more complex than suggested by the editorial work of Dom Jean Leclercq. The succeeding versions corresponded to different organizing principles, and although the basic line did not change fundamentally over the years, each version demonstrated a shift of emphasis within the project. The final version (Pf) managed to bring all these former elements together, harmonizing them into a sublime unifying equilibrium and showing a clear division in four subgroups. Each of these starts with a sermon or a

cluster of sermons dedicated to the Virgin (Advent, Purification, Annunciation, Nativity, and Assumption) and ends on the human level (Paul’s Conversion, Benedict, Summer Toil, and Humbert).

As far as Bernard’s compositional directives are concerned, different underlying strands come to the surface, which can be reduced to three organizing principles that give a clear idea of Bernard’s purpose for the collection. Fundamental to them all is his concept of time. In the first place, the collection conforms to the linear time concept, both of human life from conception or expectancy (Advent) to death or commemoration (Humbert), and of the history of salvation from the desire for liberation to the victory over death, as well as to the linearity of the reading process, which expects progress during reading.

Besides, the collection gives expression to the temporal circularity of the natural and liturgical year, both in its entirety and in its details. In its totality, the collection wants to be read year after year, aiming at a continuous rumination of the liturgical year, thus obliging the reader to lift his experience onto the level that conforms to the liturgical signification of the year, thanks to the repetitive reading of the sermons. In its details, the collection demonstrates how each smaller subgroup or subunit seems to offer a circular reading, bringing the reader back to his point of departure only to realize that this starting point is no longer the same as the one he departed from.

Finally, Bernard introduced a pointed time concept, giving the reader the impression that, actually, there is no time at all. The liturgical allusions in his sermons are not limited to the occasion to which the sermon itself is dedicated, thus implying that each liturgical event includes every other one. Furthermore, as a writer Bernard feels free to handle time according to his own writing purposes, thus creating anti- or even a-chronological events.

In reading the first subgroup, composed of the sermons from Advent until the conversion of Paul, these different compositional strands all appeared and were even reinforced by the themes that seemed to be specific for this unit: desire and recognition. The vocabulary of desire abounds in the sermons for Advent, while from Christmas onward the vocabulary of acknowledgment is privileged, reaching its peak in the sermons for Epiphany and the voluntary submission of the reader to a spiritual leader.
Bernard’s most important aim in writing, however, is not to offer the reader some intellectual entertainment. He wants to educate the reader. He wants the reader to conform to the evolution as presented inside the sermons. For this reason, Bernard attacks him, he assails him, trying to get a hold on his inner capacities. Within the reading process, thus, Bernard tries to train each of the three capacities of the soul: ratio (reason), voluntas (will), and memoria (memory). Each of them has to be converted, and in the sequence of the sermons Bernard first elaborates the conversion of memory (Advent with a peak in Adv 3), then will (from Nativity to Circumcision), and finally reason (from Epiphany on).

This threefold conversion, however, can be recognized in many of the singular sermons, too, and most clearly in the Conversion of Paul. In this sermon, will is the last to be converted, after memory and reason. This sequential shift was linked to the fact that Bernard, at the end of the sermon, leaves the reader with the image of the blinded Paul, waiting for the man who will release him from his darkness and give him back the light. In fact, the conversion of reason in the sermon did not lead to the acknowledgment of insight but rather to the consciousness of its lack. The “conversion sermons,” as the entire unit from Advent to Paul was called, did not aim at true knowledge of God’s mysteries but rather at the recognition of the deficiency of man’s unconverted reason to understand God’s glorious truth. For this reason only, some glimpses of God’s glory had been allowed to his eyes, notably in the sermons for Epiphany. Inevitably, man thus became aware of his own blindness and remained stuck in his desire for liberation out of the captivity of his own defects. It can be expected that the unit of sermons following will first of all try to heal this mental blindness of the reader by giving him the recognition of insight.

The Sermons for Lent

Developing Ideas in a Growing Concept

As has been demonstrated by the sermons for Advent and the Christmas season, it is illuminating to have a closer look at the
growth and development of each group of sermons throughout the succeeding versions. Both the earliest version (B) from 1138–40 in its rather moralistic tenor and the later, purely liturgical, version (M) from around 1140 give an insight into Bernard’s search for the best composition to fit his basic intentions. The miscellaneous collection L in its two halves, exegetical (Lε) and liturgical (Lδ), on the contrary, illustrates both Bernard’s hesitations and his organizational capacities.

The sermons for Lent differ in their evolution from the preceding group in their more complex and varying constitution. The conversion sermons from Advent to Paul had formed, from the beginning, a rather coherent unit, changing only in the number of sermons dedicated to each of the liturgical events. In the sermons for Lent, however, one gets to know a more hesitant and searching Bernard. The greatest differences between the succeeding versions are caused by the separation or fusion of the Temporal and the Sanctoral on the one hand and by an apparent uncertainty about what to do with the exegetic sermons on Psalm 90, Qui habitat (QH), on the other hand.

The Monastic Prayer: The First Version (B)

In his earliest transmitted draft for a liturgical homiliary, which he probably never meant to publish, Bernard gave a place of prominence to the exegesis of Psalm 90, although he had only written the first six of his sermons. Actually, they constitute the entire Lenten cycle in this compilation, preceded only by the sermon On the Divine Will and fol-

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2 See, for a characterization of the different versions, their dating, and their basic tenors, the introduction to CF 51 with bibliography.


4 See CF 51: xxxiii–xxxiv.

5 Of these, QH I and II still constituted a unity. The group thus counted only five sermons with the future QH IV in its center. See Sancti Bernardi Opera [hereafter
lowed by the first version of his sermon on Saint Benedict. The Lenten cycle thus counted only seven sermons of a largely exegetic nature.

The opening sermon *On the Divine Will* was eliminated entirely from the final collection, although it appears in some intermediary versions where it forms part of the Lent sermons proper (Quad). In these cases it occupies the sixth position. The modern editors published the text as part of the Various Sermons (*Sermones varii*), together with some other texts that did not fit into any series.\(^6\)

The body of the sermon treats the obstacles that hinder human will from adhering to the divine will in the way the angels do. Four of these obstacles are described: our wicked affection that makes us enjoy the wrong things, the weakness of our body, our greed that makes us long for things we cannot fulfill, and our ignorance. Each of these is countered by one of the four cardinal virtues: our wrong affection by justice, our weakness by fortitude, our greed by temperance, and our ignorance by prudence. Each couple of opponents is simply mentioned, without one of Bernard’s other inventive elaborations like the *psychomachia* or the liberation of the king’s son from captivity.

The last paragraph suddenly introduces a new theme in its double exegesis of two verses of the Pater Noster: *adveniat regnum tuum* and *sanctificetur nomen tuum*. As the preceding paragraph ends with a short *peroratio* and *conclusio*, this last exegetic paragraph might have been added afterward. The reason could have been to transform the sermon into a transitional text from the preceding block of sermons around Epiphany to the exegetic sermons on Psalm 90. This can find a confirmation in the introduction of several verses of the Pater Noster in the sermons on Psalm 90. In QH 1.4 the words *Pater noster qui es in caelis* were only introduced in the final version, just as *Adveniat regnum tuum* was then added to QH 4.3. In QH 5.1, *Et ne nos inducas in tentationem* was added, while QH 15.6 took the entire opening: *Pater noster qui es in caelis, sanctificetur nomen tuum*.\(^7\)

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\(^6\) SV 6; SBoP 6/1:37–39.

\(^7\) SBoP 4:388 and 399, both in the Apparatus series.
These changes demonstrate the importance Bernard attached to the allusions to the Pater Noster. Apparently, he considered them essential for the sermons on Psalm 90 as a reading for Lent. As soon as he had eliminated the sermon On the Divine Will from his liturgical project and reintroduced the exegesis on Psalm 90, he counterbalanced its loss by the insertion of several parts of the Lord’s Prayer into the exegesis.

An important difference occurs, however. Originally, in the sermon On the Divine Will the verses of the Lord’s Prayer had received a proper exegetic treatment, even when it was very short and as a kind of appendix. Incorporated in the exegetic sequence on Psalm 90, they appear as an illustration, as an argument in the actual explanation. They lose their focused position and become more of a founding principle, which makes it possible to realize the content of the exegesis. As will be shown, this points indeed to one of the fundamental lines according to which the entire unit of Lent was organized.

The five sermons on Psalm 90, of course, have first of all an exegetic motivation. One might wonder why Bernard inserted them into B before finishing them. It could strengthen the assumption that B is nothing more than a preliminary collection, never destined for publication. But there might be more behind it. These early sermons form a nice, coherent, and formal unit, opening and closing with two sermons of almost identical length, surrounding three rather small sermons such as could have been pronounced in the chapterhouse. Starting from QH 7, the length of the new sermons increases considerably. Now, QH 7–10 make their appearance in L^A, the exegetic part, while QH 11–17 are introduced only in the final collection Pf. This might imply that, originally, Bernard perhaps did not intend to treat the entire Psalm 90 but wanted to restrict his explanation to the opening verses. Only after deciding to lift it out of his liturgical

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8 The sermons on Psalm 90 have been translated separately in CF 25. They are treated here only for the understanding they offer of the liturgical collection.

9 As mentioned, B contains the future sermons QH 1–6 together with the prologue, of which QH 1 and 2 still form one unity of seven paragraphs—of similar length as QH 6.
An Introduction to Saint Bernard’s Sermons for Lent and Easter

project and making it into a separate exegetical unit, he started to elaborate on its interpretative opportunities.\(^{10}\)

For this reason it can be important for understanding the significance of the Lenten sermons to consider the original concept of including in an early version only the first six sermons on Psalm 90 with the prologue. This early reading differs in some places significantly from the later ones, notably in the prologue and in the last sermon, besides, of course, the split of the original first sermon into two, QH 1 and 2. The opening of the prologue was almost entirely rewritten from the first to the second version. With one exception, the two versions do not differ so much as to the content, but the style was strongly heightened, putting more emphasis upon the central concern of the *consolatio* (the comfort) the abbot-writer owed to his monks in their suffering. The only true change is the first source of comfort. In the original version, the monks had to remember God in order to find relief. In the final version, Bernard changed this rather abstract allusion into the concrete reference to “him who died for you.” Instead of the distant God, Christ appears, sharing the suffering of the monks, even surpassing them in his voluntary death on their behalf.\(^{11}\)

Unlike this still rather formal adaptation, the last sermon in B later underwent a complete rewriting, making it into an entirely new sermon—QH 6. Again, the content did not change radically. Originally the four temptations were enumerated and treated with their counterparts but in a less satisfying way. The third temptation—hypocrisy—clearly is not finished. It does not get any countervirtue and its description somehow breaks off in the middle of the argument. In the final sermon (QH 6), hypocrisy is replaced by the temptation of cupidity that receives a more convincing treatment and is opposed to the knowledge of the temporality of the world. Actually, it is opposed to the truth of worldly temporality.

\(^{10}\) Bernard never felt compelled to consider biblical texts as undividable units. This is most clearly illustrated by his exegesis of only the first part of the Song of Songs. See Wim Verbaal, “Les Sermons sur le Cantique de Saint Bernard: un chef-d’oeuvre achevé?,” Collectanea 61 (1999): 167–85.

\(^{11}\) *Mortificamini, sed propter eum qui mortuus est pro vobis. Quod si abundat tribulatio vestra pro eo, abundabit consolatio vestra per eum* [QH Praef.1; SBOp 4:383].
And indeed, in his rewriting Bernard did increase the importance of truth. In QH 6, each of the four temptations is countered by a different truth. The first temptation is the novice’s fear of the flesh. It can be disarmed by pondering on the truth about our sins, the infernal pains, the heavenly promises, and Christ’s suffering for us. The second temptation, desire for vainglory, can be disarmed by the acknowledgment of our corruptibility. The third temptation, cupidity, is countered by the truth of the world’s ephemeral nature. The fourth temptation, ignorance, to which Christ was not subjected in the desert, is disarmed by truth itself.

Truth becomes an essential element in the rewritten sermons as they are inserted in the final liturgical collection Pf, a fact that gives us a hint of the underlying thought that came to organize this section. In the original sequence, Bernard elaborated primarily the confrontation of two opposing forces: the devil with his temptations and the protection God offered to his followers. Later, this element did not disappear but it got a completely new interpretation. The weapon of God was truth in its different aspects, thereby changing the more warlike confrontation into something more like an intellectual confrontation.

Just like the final collection Pf, the block of sermons for Lent closes in B with the sermon for the Feast of Saint Benedict (Ben). Once again, however, the text has undergone important adaptations from the first to the final version; these do not touch the content but seem mostly limited to a literary refining of the language. Yet one remarkable change must be mentioned: when compared to the final version in Pf, the initial text has a much stronger monastic flavor. In rewriting the sermon, Bernard eliminated almost consequentially all references to the monastic situation, including his personal involvement and that of his monks. Because of its treating a very monastic subject—Benedict being the father of monasticism—this “demonasticizing” of the sermon cannot be disposed of in a few words. It demonstrates Bernard’s desire to break out of the purely monastic circles and to reach a broader audience.

The sermon as a whole offers a nice example of Bernard’s capacity to meld texts from different origins into a new and coherent entity. Different themes succeed each other but seem loosely connected. After a short introduction that only alludes to Benedict’s name by the
wordplay on *benediction* (Ben 1), a second equally short introduction follows comparing the writer as an abbot with the father of monasticism (Ben 2). Then suddenly the reader finds himself or herself\(^\text{12}\) in a sermon treating the Palm Sunday procession. Benedict disappears, only to return as the tree from which the monks may pluck twigs to lay on the road before Christ (Ben 3). Immediately, the sermon changes perspective once more, becoming an exegesis of Psalm 1:3—*tamquam lignum quod plantatum est secus decursus aquarum*—and developing the theme of fertile and infertile trees (Ben 4–6a). Only then is the original theme picked up once again, examining Benedict’s fruits (Ben 6b–8). Suddenly, however, the writer leaves the fruits and focuses on the seeds, treating the sowing of the different orders in heaven and earth with a small digression on Lucifer (Ben 9–12). In this last part, nothing more is said about Benedict.

Thus, the sermon on Saint Benedict falls roughly into two halves, one treating the third verse of Psalm 1, the other treating Christ’s sowing after Luke 8:5. Benedict himself appears only in the opening, in a transitional sentence to introduce the exegesis of the psalm, and in the conclusion to the exegetical part. This reinforces the impression that we have to deal with an assemblage of different texts, written for different occasions and put together to fit into the first collection as the climax of a still largely monastic sequence of sermons.

In this sense, it is comprehensible that the line of thought for the Lenten cycle in this early collection B is mostly moralistic from a monastic perspective. The structuring principle, however, seems to have been dominated by a wish for exegesis with focus upon the psalms: the block opens with a sermon treating the Pater Noster, consists largely of an exegesis on Psalm 90:1–6, and closes with a sermon concentrating on Psalm 1:3. Also this emphasis on the reading of Psalms seems to point to a purely monastic context.

\[^\text{12}\] Editor’s note: Verbaal explains, “Bernard was never thinking of an audience of women while writing these sermons. I do not know if he would have agreed with opening his audience to women. I think he would have written differently for them. Anyway, nowadays of course, both men and women do read Bernard and the use of both masculine and feminine pronouns is a normal way of acknowledging that fact.”
Striving for Unity: The Second Version (M)\textsuperscript{13}

When compared to B, the second version—M—displays a much less complicated structure. The liturgical perspective is clear from the beginning. The block of sermons for Lent, made up of the sermons between those for Epiphany and those for Palm Sunday, contains five of the six sermons In Quadragesima (Quad), thus leaving no doubt about the purpose and objective of these five Quad sermons. All of them would be inserted into the final collection Pf. Only their order changed: in M they appear successively as Quad 1, 2, 6, 3, and 4. Of course, this different sequence will imply also another interpretation of the entire block.

In both collections the series opens with the same ideas on Lent as a period of anointment (Quad 1) and of conversion (Quad 2). Both are also exegetical sermons: Quad 1 starts from Matthew 6:17, Unge caput tuum et faciem tuam lava; Quad 2 takes its lead from Joel 2:12–13, Convertimini ad me in toto corde vestro, in ieiunio et fletu, et planctu, et scindite corda vestra et non vestimenta vestra, ait Dominus omnipotens, which was used as a reading during Tierce at Lent.\textsuperscript{14} Then follows in M the future Quad 6, which deals with three ways to mortify oneself vis-à-vis the world—as the passing stranger, as the dead, and as the crucified. The sermon is not a true exegesis but is built along the lines offered by different biblical quotations. The last two sermons in M take up again explicitly the theme of Lent, treating the search for Christ in its sacramental value (Quad 3) and as the fruit of mortification (Quad 4).

Thus a circular movement is visible with, at its center, the three ways of mortification. The movement starts with the ingression into Lent as a period for Christian military service.\textsuperscript{15} The central idea is offered by the unity with Christ as it is guaranteed by the anointment of his self-sacrificial love and has to be restored or strengthened by our communication in his suffering. The movement then seems to continue upon this idea of restoration of the bond between Christ’s suffering and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} SBOp 4:359, Apparatus.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Hodie, dilectissimi, sacrum Quadragesimae tempus ingredimur, tempus militiae christianaæ [Quad 1.1; SBOp 4:353].
\end{itemize}
human mortification, first concentrating on a person’s conversion: in humility (Quad 2.1), in the heart by way of the four affections (Quad 2.2–3), in the body by mortification and tears (Quad 2.4) and, finally, once again in the heart by its inner laceration (Quad 2.5–6).

This final form of mortification is elaborated in a more visible way in the middle sermon (future Quad 6), in which the three images of stranger, dead, and crucified one express an increasing degree of detachment. Only this growing detachment makes the next step possible, in which mortification receives its sacramental value because of its passionate search for the Lord (Quad 3.4). Hereafter the fruit of mortification will be the strengthened unity of the community, mirroring the unity of the body with the head (Quad 4.2) as it finds its clearest expression in the liberated prayer (Quad 4.3–4).

So the line connecting the different sermons seems to be the restoration or strengthening of unity, both inside the community and between the body of the faithful and Christ as its head. Apparently, the way to build this unity can only be by way of mortification, taking its start in the desire to share the sufferings of Christ for humanity but, finally, leading to a desire of detachment in order to be freer in praying and rising up to God. The circular movement thus implies a strong linear impulse. The end remains open in a certain sense, thus leading to the following sermons for Palm Sunday and its procession.

The sermons for Purification (Pur 1–3) that will open the sequence of Lent in the final collection Pf can already be found in M, but there they do not belong to the Temporal. They form part of the Sanctoral, in which they follow the first sermon on Annunciation (Ann 1), constituting the opening sequence for a block of sermons dedicated to the Virgin. In M the Pur sermons thus remain separated from the guiding principles in the Lent sermons.

*The Liturgical Shortcut: The Third Collection (L*B)*

In the liturgical part of the third collection, L*B, only two sermons for Lent appear: the future first sermon for Septuagesima (Sept 1)

and a sermon on the Ten Commandments and the seven obstacles to following them. This last text disappeared from the liturgical collection and ended in the separate series of sermons on various subjects as Div 22.

Sept 1 opens the Lent block in L^B and is preceded by three sermons on the water jars of the wedding feast at Cana. Sept 1 indicates a clear liturgical break within the sequence, as the theme of Lent is particularly emphasized after the introduction of the opening paragraphs, when the actual sermon starts. The body of the sermon treats the desire for fulfillment, which is resented by man while living (Sept 1.3). Yet, true realization of this desire will only be possible after the earthly Septuagesima in the heavenly Jerusalem (Sept 1.4). Seven obstacles hinder us from reaching this fulfillment available to humanity by the Ten Commandments, each of which has to be overcome by a specific spiritual exercise (Sept 1.5). The time of Septuagesima is dedicated to this training.

In its numerical elaboration at the end, the sermon parallels preceding texts in which the numerical element of the six water jars offers Bernard all kinds of exegetic opportunities. Yet, in Sept 1 this numerical accent is no longer the most obvious element of the sermon. It has submitted to the theme of desire, thus bringing in an impulse of forward movement. These dynamics are even reinforced by the obstacles that are introduced in the last paragraph, causing the forward rush to be hampered and even to halt.

The outset in Sept 1 is both intensified and elaborated in the following sermon (Div 22), which deals with the shortcut offered by Lent. Although the road is steep, it is short for those who have relieved themselves of all excess so that they may take the shortest road upward (Div 22.1–2). The greatest danger is formed by the wish to take up the burdens of life and thus to impede oneself on the way up (Div 22.4). On the contrary, the way becomes only more passable when one feels indebtedness toward the sufferings of Christ for humankind (Div 22.5–9).


17 *Initium Septuagesimae*, fratres, *hodie celebratur* [Sept 1.3; SBOp 4:346].
The desire awakened in Sept 1 thus spurs us on the steep road that leads immediately to the victory of the Word as it is expressed in the following sermon on the passion of Christ, the future HM. The order is neat and clear, showing in M how Lent for Bernard has to be a spiritual progression, leading to the recognition of Christ’s liberating passion.

The third collection, L, contains still other texts that were inserted into the final version. Here, though, they do not yet belong to the liturgical part but can be found in the exegetic half (LA), which in origin constituted a separate volume. To start with, this exegetic part opens with the enlarged exegesis of Psalm 90, in which is contained the future sermons QH 1 to 10. This coherent block begins a series of exegetic texts on Psalms and separate verses that seems to be organized roughly according to the order of the psalms themselves. The appearance of QH as the opening sequence in LA proves that Bernard by this time had left the idea of incorporating this exegesis in his liturgical collection. The reason might have been that he wanted to develop it into a separate treatise or that it just did not fit anymore into his new concept, dividing the liturgical collection into a Temporal and a Sanctoral.

The future second sermon for Septuagesima (Sept 2) also occurs in the exegetic part of L, where it takes the fortieth place. It follows a block of texts treating different fragments from the books of Wisdom. As it deals itself with the sleep of Adam (Gen 2:21-26), it seems to constitute a rupture with what precedes. Yet, the text just before (the future Div 82) offers a reading of Proverbs 4:23 dealing with vigilance of the heart, while the text following Sept 2—which will end up in the edition of the Sententiae, first series (Sent 1.13)—also deals with a verse of Genesis (Gen 48:22) and explains it in the sense of the unity of man with God as one of his members. This last line is elaborated also in the two succeeding texts of LA. Thus, the place of Sept 2 within the exegetic half is explained both by the biblical text

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18 See Verbaal, CF 51: xxxviii.
19 LA contains 94 texts, starting with QH 1 with prologue. Texts 1 (QH 1) to 22 treat the Psalms.
central to its discourse and by a more interpretative subunit around man’s unity with God.

Finally, the future Quad 5 appears in L^A at the seventy-first place. It is preceded by a large block of texts, in which the central theme is not so much formed by a biblical verse as by numerical exegesis. Texts 60 to 70 in L^A deal with a symbolic application of the number “three” on all kinds of subjects, including the three regions with their inhabitants; three testimonies in heaven, on earth, and in hell; three kinds of peaceful men; a threecold fall and resurrection; and so on. The future Quad 5 is followed by nine texts giving other numerical exegesis, in which the number “four” is emphasized, such as in the four degrees of love, four steps in our progression, and four obstacles for our confession.

The numerical structure of Quad 5 is less obvious. Careful reading, however, shows that the text can be divided into two parts, of which the first half (Quad 5.1–4) treats four different ways of experience in the battle between the body and the soul. The second half (Quad 5.5–9) deals with prayer and closes on two triple experiences in prayer (Quad 5.8 and 9).

More important than the numerical element, however, is the theme of praying which dominates the second half and which connects Quad 5 to the text immediately following it, the future Div 107. This text also deals with praying, applying to it a numerical exegesis. It distinguishes four correct praying attitudes and three intentions, starting from the two obstacles for a fruitful prayer. Thus, Quad 5 was born as a numerical meditation on praying.

**Summary**

The development of the sermons for Lent shows a much less linear evolution than was the case with the sermons for the first unit, those for Advent and the Christmas season. Bernard seems to have been wavering over the best approach for this part of the liturgical

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20 The one exception is text 61 (the future Sent 3.17), treating the four obligations in imitating Christ.
year. Initially taking his start from the opening verses of Psalm 90, it seems that he wanted to concentrate on the confrontation between vices and virtues, based upon an exegetic treatment of some psalms (B). Apparently, he then decided to leave this plan and to insert other texts, mostly explicitly written for Lent and giving a stronger expression to a forward and upward movement (M). The meditation on Psalm 90 was continued as an independent exegetic treatise and inserted into his exegetic “archive” (L\textsuperscript{A}). In the parallel liturgical “archive” (L\textsuperscript{B}), the movement as found in M was even reinforced because of the small unit dedicated to Lent. In the final collection (P\textsubscript{F}), all these texts were brought together and completed by texts that originally did not have any link to liturgy at all but rather belonged to his exegetic archive. Also, entirely new sermons, which only occur in P\textsubscript{F}, were introduced.

In spite of this seeming amalgam of texts, Bernard managed to create a coherent unit around Lent in which he developed the ideas already present in the former collections. Some of them may be shortly rehearsed. One of the basic lines in Bernard’s meditation on Lent is the necessity of exegesis. Both B and M show a strong exegetic emphasis. They differ in the sense that B is almost entirely exegetic, while in M only half of the sermons have an exegetic tenor. This importance of exegesis will remain one of the fundamental elements in composing the final sequence.

A second component that seems to reappear frequently is the confrontation of opposing elements: vices and virtues, progressions and impediments, mortifications and their fruits, etc. This component lends itself perfectly to a numerical treatment, thus helping to compose the more complex sermons into coherent unities.

Closely linked to this idea of oppositions is the basic line of progression, of movement, which can be recognized in almost every preceding collection. Much stronger than in the sermons for Advent and the Christmas season, the sermons for Lent are based upon a linear, progressive movement from a starting point of dissatisfaction and desire toward a feeling of unity and hope of fulfillment.

Finally, linking this forward movement to the idea of struggle, inherent to the multiple oppositions inside the different series, all of them lay much emphasis on the importance of praying. In B, the Lord’s
Prayer itself constitutes one of the fundamental guidelines in the succession of sermons, while in M the entire block of Lent results in the prayer ascending to heaven.

All of these different strains were taken up by Bernard and woven into the inextricable net, formed by his last collection, proving him to be once more a writer of uttermost talent and, above all, a spiritual teacher of the highest degree.

_The School of Lent_

In Pf Bernard tried to merge all the different strains he had developed over the years in his meditation on the purpose of a liturgical homiliary. It brought him to an entirely new interpretation of what Lent ought to be for a spiritual reader. All the former readings remained but were cast into a new frame. This composition gave a new and stronger emphasis to elements that had been present from the beginning and so gave a different sense to the texts without Bernard’s actually rewriting them.

_Reading Progressions: Linear Movements_

When comparing the final liturgical block of Lent with the preceding versions, it is hard to realize that its composition had not been figured out at the beginning. With few exceptions, no text has undergone a drastic rewriting. The exceptions are mostly situated in the exegesis on Psalm 90 (QH), while the others were taken out of the previous collections, almost without any internal change. They were put in a new arrangement. That was all; yet the entire concept changed radically. The old ideas were not abandoned but they were treated from a new perspective, thus opening up toward new interpretations.

What exactly did change and how did Bernard obtain the realization of his new conceptual idea? The first element, which should alert a scholar studying the growth and sense of Bernard’s liturgical collection, is the new start his sequence on Lent got in the final version. In all the preceding versions, the sermons for Lent were closely
linked to the final sermons on Epiphany. In each of them, B, M and L^B, the first sermon for Lent followed immediately after one or more sermons on the change of water into wine at the wedding of Cana. Both in the earliest one, B, and in the archival collection, L^B, the sense of the Epiphany sermons lies clearly in the search for the Truth. In the sermons for Lent, this quest was continued in a deepened meditation on the biblical Word, thus giving a prominent place to the exegesis of biblical texts in the readings of Lent.

In Pf, this recognition of the Truth still remained central to a good understanding of the sermons on Epiphany and those that follow. Yet the link to Lent was made less intimate and direct. Actually, the recognition of Christ’s divinity as demonstrated by his threefold manifestation at Epiphany was suddenly broken by Paul’s blindness. In our reading we demonstrated this to be the blindness of a man who came to realize that he misses true insight. The sermons for Lent, then, have to offer an answer to this desire of man, born out of his incapacity to grasp the Truth. From this point of view, not so much changed when compared to the previous collections.

However, after Paul’s blindness, it is not the sermons on Lent that follow. Bernard has instead inserted the sermons for the Purification of the Virgin (Pur). As shown in the introduction to the sermons for Advent and the Christmas Season, each of the four subunits within the final liturgical collection opens with a sermon or a group of sermons on the Virgin. They give a first hint at one of the central ideas that will run through the new subunit, just as the last sermon on the human level will show one of its possible concrete actualizations.

At first sight it does not seem a strange choice to let the period of Lent start with the solemnity of Purification. Mortification seems to strive for a purification of the flesh and the body. Yet when reading these three sermons it becomes almost immediately clear that Bernard is not at all occupied with Mary’s purification. Only in Pur 3.2 does he touch slightly upon the question of whether the Virgin needed at all to submit herself to Jewish custom. As a whole, however, the three sermons concentrate more on other subjects.

21 See CF 51: xlviii–li.
The most important elements introduced by these sermons are the ideas of the procession and the presentation of Christ. As far as the procession is concerned, Bernard stresses the importance to progress and not to halt, because “in the path of life, not to make progress is to regress.” This emphasis on forward movement breaks through the passivity to which the reader was brought at the conclusion of the Christmas season, sitting with Paul in order to wait for deliverance out of his blindness, preferring to be drawn by the hand than to presume leadership over those who have their eyes open but do not see anything.

The Purification sermons, however, immediately set us in motion: “Today the Virgin Mother brought the Lord of the Temple into the Temple of the Lord.” There is movement, both in a passive and in an active way. The child, the Lord of the Temple, is carried toward the temple. The Virgin Mother leads him (inducit) as if she was taking him by the hand just as Ananias will have to do with the blinded Paul. Yet huge differences are introduced, for it is not the blinded man in his incapacity to understand who asks for guidance here. It is the Lord of the Temple himself who is brought into his own temple. Human misery is replaced by divinity itself, but not in its divine, inaccessible form. God is carried as a small weeping child, having taken upon himself man’s weakness.

Actually, the entire sentence is constructed around conflicting senses. The Lord of the Temple is carried as a small vulnerable child into the temple, which is both his property to govern and the visible sign of his all-embracing power. A virgin, who is also mother, is carrying the child, and the man who assists is considered father, although the child is not his son. And this happens today, not in some far away biblical time, but now, before our eyes, and in our midst.

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23 Pl 8: semper, quod in nobis est, abiciet eligamus esse et ad manus trahi. SBOp 4:334. (“Let us beware of this vice, brothers. Always, as far as we can, let us choose to be abject and to be led by the hand,” CF 51: 202.)
25 The word *hodie* has a clear function in Bernard’s writing. Mostly, it signals the opening of a new sequence, while stressing the topicality of the subject treated. Its repetition in the opening sermons of Lent shows this double importance: what is being told is possible every current day and Lent wants to get started in order to find
In this one sentence, readers are once again confronted with their own incapacity to understand the congruency of incongruent truths. This sentence throws them back upon the situation they were confronted with in the second sermon for Epiphany (Epi 2), where they had to see God truly there, where there was no reason to see him this way. Yet in the sermon for Epiphany, God was recognized by the Magi, by the thief at the cross, and by the centurion under the cross. So, now, God is recognized in the shape of the small baby by the just man who expects him and by the widow who confesses him.

All elements of the Advent and Christmas sermons return: God taking on a human body in its most vulnerable shape, thus combining the incompatible, like his Virgin Mother; Joseph, loving and assisting the Son that is not his own; the desire for insight and recognition in Simeon the Just; and the confession of the Truth by Anna, who has lost all. From these four persons, “today’s procession” takes its start—i.e., from fertile chastity, selfless love, recognition in desire, and confession in detachment. By the insertion of the three sermons on the Purification, the sermons for Lent, though being a new start, constitute perhaps an even tighter connection to the results of the Christmas Season.

Bernard’s rearrangement of the sermons for Lent did not limit itself to the insertion of sermons from the original Sanctoral. He also brought together sermons which before had never belonged to each other. First of all, he combined two texts to comment upon Septuagesima, taking them both from his archive, one from the exegetic and one from the liturgical part. Sept 1 belonged from the beginning to Bernard’s liturgical projects. It opens with an introduction on the consolation man can find when he opens himself to the words of the Lord (Sept 1.1–2). The actual sermon then treats of the desire
for fulfillment (Sept 1.3, based on an exegesis of Wisdom 11:21), as it will only be attained after the earthly Septuagesima in the heavenly Jerusalem (Sept 1.4). On earth, seven obstacles lie in the way of this fulfillment (Sept 1.5). Sept 1 thus takes up two of the central themes from the preceding sermons: the forward movement, which is no longer seen as a procession but rather as a progression, and its impulse in the desire for fulfillment.

The content of this fulfillment is the subject of Sept 2, which originally belonged to the exegetic half of Bernard’s “archives.” In comparing Adam’s sleep (Gen 2:21–26) to Christ’s, Bernard opposes man’s bodily weakness both to Adam’s contemplative freedom and to Christ’s redeeming sleep in death. Several lines are taken from the preceding sermon. First of all, the story of Adam brings into practice what was announced at the conclusion of Sept 1: “It is because of [this] that . . . the lamentable story of human transgression is recounted from the beginning.” 29 Indeed, the new sermon deals with an episode from the beginnings of humankind, comparing man’s situation before the Fall with his present condition. Pondering over the freedom Adam enjoyed, man cannot but realize the bitterness of his actual state. This realization ought to kindle his desire for release and his gratitude for the sleep of death, by which Christ has redeemed him. Sept 2 thus becomes a sermon of desire, putting before the reader’s eyes both the initial and the actual state of humankind as well as the opportunity for restoration that Christ offered him by his death.

Sept 2 does not, however, limit itself to a description of man’s vocation to transcend his present condition. In its subject itself, the sermon focuses upon one of the basic elements of human condition: his need of sleep out of the infirmity of his existence. Man has to sleep because life is toilsome, because even the use of the senses is tiresome. Sleep is the condition of corporeal man after the Fall. Thus, Sept 2 actually deals with the first of the seven obstacles, enumerated in the last paragraph of Sept 1: the needs of this miserable body. 30

29 Sept 1.5: Unde . . . humanae transgressionis historia miserabilis ab exordio recensetur. SBOp 4:349.
30 Sept 1.5: “Our first hindrance—a heavy burden—is the compulsions of this miserable body! With its constant demands for sleep, food, clothes, and other such
That Sept 1.5 is offering the underlying idea for the entire cycle of Lent is confirmed by the sermons for Quadragesima, which follow. Quad 1 deals indeed with the second impediment, purifying the vices of the heart. Quad 2 takes the third and the fourth obstacles, prosperity and adversity in the world, together. Quad 3 fights the fifth impediment, ignorance; Quad 4 the sixth, the suggestions of the adversary; and Quad 5 the seventh, deceitful brothers.

Bernard never dedicates a sermon explicitly to one of the seven obstacles. They are only touched upon slightly or can be deduced by their opposite. Quad 5, for example, does not have deceitful brothers as its actual subject. It rather gives the writer the profile of a leader who is concerned about his monks and wants to support them by his advice and words. Quad 5 thus rather attacks the idea of deceitful brothers by offering the image of a trustworthy leader and brother. Bernard’s occupation with the spiritual health of his monks and readers is shown to originate from the knowledge of his own weaknesses. Fraternal love thus becomes effective thanks to self-knowledge, giving finally in Quad 5.8 strength to prayer in order to conquer the different obstacles (purification of the heart, weakness of the flesh, strengthening of the soul, safeguarding from the enemy), whereas knowledge and fraternal love express themselves in the prayer itself.

Now, prayer had become the central theme of Quad 4 as the most effective way to endure the mortifications of Lent, thus giving an impulse to the forward movement as it was initiated by the procession of Pur and concretized in the enumeration of the obstacles in Sept 1.5. Progressing “in the path of life” becomes synonymous with the effectiveness of one’s praying. The enemy tries to hinder this effectiveness in three ways. He either brings the mind to despair, putting the enormity of a person’s crimes before his eyes, or he seduces him into too much confidence in divine clemency, or he deprives him of his fervor, thus leaving his prayer tepid. The first two obstacles are conquered by memory, bringing to mind either divine clemency,
which soothes despair, or the proper sins committed, which strengthens humility (Quad 4.3–4).

The importance of prayer within the cycle of Lenten sermons was stressed by the insertion of Quad 5, brought into close connection with Quad 4. Besides, the insertion of Quad 5 strengthened the fundamental significance of Sept 1.5, offering something of a framework for the entire cycle from Sept 2 to Quad 5. This also explains the change within the sequence of Quad. As Quad 6 treats of three kinds of mortification (being a stranger to the world, being dead, and being crucified), it does not fit into the new scheme and has had to abandon its place as the center in the cycle. Instead, it was moved toward the last place.

Apparently Bernard thought the sermon too important to leave out. By its shift, however, the impression of the sequence of Quad changed considerably. In origin, Quad constituted something of a cyclical composition, opening with the unity between Christ and man—thanks to the ointments of Christ’s love and our participation in his suffering (Quad 1)—passing over conversion into true compunction of the heart (Quad 2) and over detachment from the world (Quad 4), and ending in a new unity with the church and God (Quad 3)—thanks to mortification and praying (Quad 4).

Now, in Pf a more linear movement replaces this circular composition: unity with the church and God (Quad 3) becomes the immediate result of the conversion of the heart (Quad 2), not leading to detachment from the world but to stronger mortification and prayer (Quad 4 and 5). This strengthened prayer pushes us into the world as stranger, dead, or crucified (Quad 6), thus giving more fervor to our prayer and the actual sense to our mortification. Quad 6 becomes the conclusion of the preceding movement, offering itself an open ending because it concludes with the exhortation to “press on with their usual battle, more than usual, so that a great victory may result, for the glory of our King, and for our salvation.”

Quad 6 thus gives the antidote against the third obstacle to fervent prayer, which had not been treated in Quad 5, but also opens up to the succeeding exegesis of Psalm 90, in which the battle with the enemy is fought and explained.

31 Quad 6.4: amplius solitae est insistere pugnae, ut magna quaedam victoria Regi nostro ad gloriam, nobis proveniat ad salutem. SBOp 4:380.
The open conclusion of Quad 6 and its exegetic continuation in QH singles out another of the new themes that have been introduced into the cycle of Lent. Indeed, the peaceful procession of Pur has changed into an advancing army. Military language and images get an increasing importance from Quad 1 and onward. The readers are exhorted to adhere closely to their Head, to follow him closely, to imitate him and not to betray him (Quad 1). They have to be watchful and to win ground upon their enemy, to attack him on his proper territory by abstaining from his means of seduction (Quad 3). The old theme of opposing virtues and vices, as it can be read in the earlier versions, did not disappear. Now it functions as preparation for the actual battle that has to be fought in the exegesis of Psalm 90.

In the final cycle it is the theme of learning that receives the emphasis. In addition to military imagery, the language of school and learning is important in the Lent cycle. Conversion in humility is opposed to the danger of overestimation of one’s self, to the danger of the inflated ego, which Bernard always associates with the teachers in the schools (Quad 2). Language of teaching reaches a peak in Quad 2 and Quad 4, thus alternating with the more military language in Quad 4 and Quad 3. Lent may thus be considered a battle. It is an intellectual battle, a war to be fought by insight and endurance. Blinded Paul has to suffer until his labor has won him the insight he desires. He will only learn this, however, from the teacher who explains the psalm of spiritual war to him. The peaceful procession offering Christ’s human weakness to the temple has become, in its military advance, an intellectual progression in order to regain the light of insight in the living Word.

Training and Retraining: Circular Movements

The shift of Quad 6 from a central to a concluding position shows an important compositional change in Bernard’s project. Instead of a circular composition, he introduced a strong, linear movement, breaking open the closed structures of the earlier collections. This intervention is remarkable in view of Bernard’s clear preference for cyclic compositions in both single texts and larger collections. As mentioned in the general introduction to CF 51, Bernard likes to give the reader vertigo by turning him around, leading him by a long
road to the idea of having arrived at the point of departure, which is no longer the same. Thus, Bernard’s replacing this favorite tactic by a more straightforward linear composition makes one wonder if Bernard did not retain the circular movement but in another less visible way.

On a smaller scale, indeed, circular movements can be recognized. Already the disposition within the sequence of Quad and the alternation of military and educational inspiration shows a tendency toward a spiraling composition. Inside the single sermons, however, another repetitive scheme closely linked to the theme of schooling becomes visible. Because schooling ought never limit itself to a training of the mind, as far as Bernard is concerned the monastic school as a school of love or charity has to take man in his entirety into account. Monastic schooling thus has to be oriented toward the totality of man’s spirit. Education demands the participation of all of man’s spiritual capacities: memory, will, and reason.

As has been demonstrated before, already in the subunit of the Advent and Christmas sermons these three capacities of the soul were involved. In the Advent sermons, Bernard concentrated upon the conversion of memory, in the Christmas sermons upon the conversion of will, and in the Epiphany sermons upon the conversion of reason. Conversion, however, did not lead to insight but rather to the recognition of failing insight, leaving the human being blinded by our own impotence. We had to wait for the Man sent by God who would open our eyes and lead the human being by the hand toward the light. The Lenten sermons will accomplish this task. They continue where the cycle of Christmas sermons stops. Their aim is not to convert but to open the eyes—i.e., to teach by training the human spirit.

Many of the educational sermons within the sequence of Lent indeed seem to take up the training of each of the three capacities of the soul. Quad 2, for example, starts at the position where the Christmas season had left the human creature: starting from Joel 2:12-13 in its liturgical form, it treats of the human’s need for conversion. Yet it does not do this in the way the Christmas sermons do.

32 CF 51: xlix–l.
Rather, it treats conversion as a movement from exterior to interior mortification, as a procession of intention—i.e., giving direction to the affectivity of the heart. In order to achieve this purpose, Quad 2 treats successively the conversion of reason (Quad 2.2–3), of memory (Quad 2.4), and of will (Quad 2.5). Reason has to be trained in order to distinguish between true and false motives for joy, sadness, fear, and love. Memory must be trained in order to make us weep in penitence over the sins in our past as well as to make us weep in longing for their future fulfillment. The will must be trained in order to submit self-will to the will of God.

This threefold scheme repeats itself in almost every succeeding sermon. In Quad 3, vigilance is demanded from memory in order to avoid falling prey to despair (Quad 3.1), from will in order to follow more devotionally the leaders Moses, Elijah, and Christ (Quad 3.2), and from reason in order to get knowledge of and insight into the true meaning of Lent (Quad 3.3). This last subject is picked up in Quad 4.1, where Bernard explains “how you should fast and what its result should be.” That Bernard first appears as a rational teacher is clear from his scholastic opening (*quo fructu et quemadmodum*). He continues in teaching the right way of love by maintaining unity, cherishing peace, and loving the brotherhood (Quad 4.2). After having thus given direction to reason, he continues in directing the will. As seen before, the end of the sermon gives direction to memory, showing which tactics of the enemy can be countered by way of memory (Quad 4.3–4).

In Quad 5, reason, memory, and will are trained in a more simultaneous way, each implying the others. Out of self-knowledge (reason) is born the fraternal love (will), which pushes Bernard to console his audience (Quad 5.1–2). He exhorts them not to consent to the suggestions of the enemy, linking closely will and consent (Quad 5.3–4). Passing on to prayer, he opposes faith in the truth of the Bible to the futility of our own experience—i.e., scriptural memory as opposed to personal (Quad 5.5). Finally, in Quad 6, memory is the driving

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33 Quad 4.1: *dignum reor aliquatenus exponere, quo fructu et quemadmodum oporteat ieiunari.* SBOp 4:368.
force in the stranger, spurning him on in desire; reason dominates in
the dead, replacing worldly desire with the desire for Christ; and will
triumphs in the crucified, inverting worldly desires into their oppo-
site out of love for Christ.

Thus, the readers find themselves time and again confronted with
their underdeveloped capacities. Reason, will, and memory never
seem to have finished their training, but rather continuously need to
be retaken, retrained, and reoriented in order not to lose track and
not to change into regressive forces, causing man to fall back instead
of to progress.

This spiraling movement, however, can be recognized also in the
overall composition of the sermons for Lent. From the linear move-
ment, traced by the seven obstacles of Sept 1.5, a shift of emphasis
can be distilled. The beginning of the learning movement concen-
trates more specifically on the rational aspects, stressing the under-
standing of the body and its needs (Sept 2) and of the heart and its
vices (Quad 1). Then follow two sermons that give more attention
to memory, stressing the need for conversion to the humility of the
Christmas infant (Quad 2) and to fighting ignorance by being vigi-
lant (Quad 3). Finally, the will is trained in giving direction to prayer
(Quad 4) and in fraternal love and consolation (Quad 5). Thus, each
of the three capacities gets its own learning, which, however, always
implies both the other ones. Man remains one and indivisible.

The Beginning Is the End: Pointed Movement

Being pushed forward, the reader is at the same time turned
around in circles, continuously returning to his point of departure.
Even while realizing that no return leads him to the same place,
but that somehow a distance has grown between where he was and
where he is now, the simultaneity of this progressing in a linear way,
and this finding himself always back at the same point, cannot but
provoke a disorientation. The reader feels overwhelmed and gets lost
in the complicated interplay of forward and circling movements, giv-
ing him a kind of floating feeling as if he escaped the laws of gravity.
An increasing uneasiness as regards his submission to time strength-
ens this experience of emptiness. Indeed, Bernard manages to give
the reader the impression that his progression is not chronologically bound—i.e., that progressing in Bernard’s school of Lent does not imply a movement in time. The reader does not have an impression either of proceeding or receding. Although being put continuously into motion, he feels as if the movement is not directed along visible lines, be they linear or circular. He rather experiences an imploding movement, a kind of inward expansion, leaving him in the center of a dynamics that never transgresses his own borders.

This bizarre experience is, first of all, the result of Bernard’s joining both ends of the liturgical sequence, Christmas and Easter, Birth and Passion. This joining already constituted one of the main structural elements in the sermons for the Advent and the Christmas season. In Lent it is repeated but in a different way. There is the impression of varied repetition, of a nonidentical rehearsal. In the opening sequence for the liturgical year, the longing desire of Advent was followed by the devotional souvenirs of Christmas, which for its part led to the acknowledgement of Epiphany—i.e., that the human being’s vision still was blinded. A similar line of thought appears in the Lent series, as is very clearly illustrated by the opening sentence of Quad 4: “Because the season of the forty-day fast is near [advenit], I exhort you of your charity to undertake it with complete devotion [tota devotione suscipere moneo]. I think I should explain [dignum reor exponere] how you should fast and what its result should be.”

In the earlier sermon cycle, Advent is followed by devotion and concluded by the teaching of its results. Simultaneously, however, everything receives new significance. It is not the Nativity that is near, but “the season of the forty-day fast” (ieiunii quadragesimalis tempus). It is not the Child who has to be considered “with complete devotion,” but once again Lent itself. Neither is it necessary to get insight into the divine nature of the Child, but rather into the reasons behind Lent. Christ is replaced by Lent, by the season of fasting.

Indeed, the Christmas season reappears in the period of Lent. The Purification of the Virgin takes place forty days after the Nativity, as

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34 Quad 4.1: Quia ieiunii quadragesimalis tempus advenit, quod tota devotione suscipere moneo caritatem vestram, dignum reor aliquatenus exponere, quo fructu et quemadmodum oporteat ieiunari. SBoP 4:368.
Bernard explains in Pur 3.1, equating this first period of forty days with the period of fasting, which is near. The sacrifice brought after these forty days leading to Purification is thus the same as the one brought after the forty days of fasting. Yet, at the same time, it is not the same: “That [sc., the Easter sacrifice] will be the evening sacrifice; this [sc., the sacrifice of purification] is the morning sacrifice. The one is more joyful, but the other more complete; this one takes place at the time of his birth, the other at the fullness of his years.”

So, there is a clearly marked temporal interval between the sacrifice of purification and that of Easter, the one taking place in the morning (of both day and life), the other in the evening. Yet, as the sermon continues, the sacrifice of purification becomes ever more like the Easter sacrifice. For the reason behind this ceremony to which the Virgin Mother actually did not need to submit herself is the voluntary sacrifice of Christ. Just as Christ underwent circumcision voluntarily and will sacrifice himself voluntarily at Easter, so now he undergoes the oblation of purification voluntarily (Pur 3.2). Circumcision, Purification, Easter: they come forth from one will and actually imply one another. Fundamentally, they do not differ from each other.

Likewise, they imply the final voluntary sacrifice that has to be offered by us: “He offered himself; who are you who hesitate to offer yourself? Who will accord to me that such great Majesty condescend to accept my offering?” Christ will have to accept my offering in the same way that Simeon accepted his. The crucial term for both is suscipere, because the importance of the oblation lies not only in the one who offers but also in the one who accepts. The human person has to accept the gift of the Word who has become human. Only then will the Word accept man’s gift of himself. The oblation of Christ is the oblation of the human, both in the morning and in the evening. Christ’s self-sacrifice in humankind is humankind’s self-sacrifice in Christ, in both the past and the present, and also in

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35 Pur 3.2: Illud erit sacrificium vespertinum, istud est matutinum; istud quidem iocundius, sed illud plenius; istud enim tempore nativitatis, illud ian in plenitudine actatis. SBOp 4:343.
eternity. Only by accepting Christ in this sense will the human being realize that the procession of Purification, the journey of Lent, and the procession of Palm Sunday take place simultaneously and continuously inside himself.

**The Easter Sermons**

In Easter, the reconciliation of God and humankind is celebrated. The human creature has accepted the oblation of Christ, and his proper oblation is in its own turn accepted by the Divinity. As a consequence, all blinding ought to disappear. Man’s eyes should open to the mysteries of life and the secrets of his pains and sufferings. God has come down to meet the human being in his sufferings. The human now can see the glory of God in the suffering humanity of Christ. The blindness of Epiphany is broken by the divine splendor that radiates from a human being in his broken state. Easter is the solemnity of concordance in discord, of harmony in opposition, of life in death. Easter will be the turning point in the liturgical year—after Easter the year cannot be the same. This will be the challenge to the success of Bernard’s liturgical project.

**An Idea Taking Size**

With the block of three sermons for the Annunciation, the new subunit begins. As demonstrated in the general introduction of CF 51, this unit comprises the sermons for Holy Week and Easter, for the period from Easter to Pentecost, and for the entire summertime until the block on the Assumption of the Virgin. This series counts thirty-six sermons, which is 28 percent of the liturgical sermon collection. When compared to the earliest collection, this is a remarkable increase.

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37 CF 51: xxx–xxxi.
38 Just to recollect the distribution over the four subunits: the Christmas and the Lent season each total 29, the Easter-summer season 36, and the fall season 34 sermons—i.e., 23 (twice), 28, and 26 percent, respectively.
The oldest liturgical collection B contained only fourteen sermons for the equivalent period. But it is clear that Bernard considered this too small. M already counts sixteen sermons for the Temporal and fifteen sermons for the Sanctoral, thus coming closer to the final sum. L^B totals twenty sermons, but this number does not tell that much in view of the particular character of the collection.

The increase, however, is not a result of Bernard’s insertion of sermons for extra celebrations, thus inserting into the calendar festivities on which it was not allowed to preach according to the general chapter. As noticed, Bernard’s liturgical collection did not limit itself to the preaching festivities that were recognized by the *Ecclesiastica officia.* Certainly, in this Easter and summer unit he added sermons for nine additional celebrations: Wednesday and Thursday in Holy Week (4 HM and 5 HM), the Easter Octave (OPasc), the Rogation Days (Rog), the vigil of the feast of Peter and Paul, and the fourth and sixth Sundays after Pentecost. In addition, four sermons were added that were not linked to any celebration: *On the Altitude and Depth of the Heart* (Alt) and *On the Work of the Harvest* (Lab 1–3).

But compared to the ten additional preaching opportunities in the last subunit of the end of the year and to the six additions in the much shorter Christmas season, Bernard still seems not to have felt a strong need to enlarge his liturgical space for his literary preaching. Most of his additions fall in the liturgically empty period of the summer season. This proves Bernard’s desire to cover the entire year and to offer a continuous meditative reading, thus not limiting his collection to the purely liturgical events.

A more important means to increase the Easter and summer subunit seems to have been the rearrangement of sermons inside the official solemnities. In order to have a good understanding of Bernard’s reasons to develop this subunit, it can thus be clarifying to have a closer look at the successive versions of his collection.

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39 See CF 51: xv–xvi.
40 As the summer sermons have been published separately in CF 53, we will limit ourselves here to the sermons for Holy Week and Easter. These count exactly seven sermons each because Holy Week is concentrated around Palm Sunday and includes 4 HM, whereas 5 HM will be shown as intrinsically closer to the Easter themes. The
Ups and Downs: The First Collection (B)

In the oldest collection, B, the Easter group is not clearly demarcated. The group of Lenten sermons consists mainly of the exegesis of the opening verses of Psalm 90, the future QH 1–4. They are introduced by the sermon On the Divine Will and followed by the sermon on Saint Benedict (Ben), the future first sermon on the Annunciation (Ann 1) and the future second sermon for Palm Sunday. This last text being clearly related to the liturgical celebration, the Easter group can be considered to have started. Yet, for the two sermons in-between, it is less clear to which part of the liturgical year they belong.

The sermon on Saint Benedict—which, for this reason, we have neglected in our analysis of the Lenten group—indeed causes a problem in the interpretation of the entire collection. Actually, it causes a problem as a sermon too. First, it belongs to the longer texts within the collection.\(^{41}\) Apparently, this length is the result of one of Bernard’s more often used techniques of compiling older texts into one new sermon. Ben indeed seems to comprise several lines of thought, originally constituting distinct texts, which have been fused in order to give the actual sermon.

It opens with a first introduction, containing a word play on *benedictio*, which already refers to the central subject of the sermon (Ben 1). This is followed by what seems to be a second introduction as a meditation on the nature of the abbacy and Benedict’s exemplarity (Ben 2–3\(^a\)).\(^{42}\) After having mentioned the three loaves that Bernard wants to receive from Benedict in order to offer them to his readers, Bernard abruptly breaks off this line of thought. The text continues with a picture of all those spreading either their own garments or

\(^{41}\) With its twelve paragraphs it belongs to the group of relatively larger sermons. The length of a liturgical sermon averages around seven paragraphs, which is already longer than the normal length of a chapter sermon—normally restricted to three to five paragraphs—as can be deduced from the sermons on various subjects (Div).

\(^{42}\) That the second paragraph originally constituted a proper beginning can also be deduced from the typical opening formula: *Celebramus hodie*. 

rupture between 4 HM and 5 HM is the more remarkable when taking into account that the reader finds himself exactly halfway through the entire collection.
branches in the procession of the Lord. Suddenly, the reader sees himself transported to Palm Sunday, near but not yet celebrated.\textsuperscript{43}

The text develops briefly the idea of those looking for branches and turns in the end to Benedict as “a tree, tall and fruitful, \textit{like a tree planted near running waters}” (Ben 3\textsuperscript{b}–4\textsuperscript{a}). Now, the sermon continues for some time as an exegesis on this third verse of Psalm 1, treating first the water, then distinguishing three kinds of trees according to their fruitfulness (Ben 4\textsuperscript{b}–6\textsuperscript{a}). Benedict disappears, only to return much later. First, Benedict serves as an illustration of how to live true fruitfulness; then, Benedict’s three fruits are developed—i.e., the three virtues that had been presented earlier in the sermon as three loaves Benedict had to offer (Ben 6\textsuperscript{b}–8\textsuperscript{b}).\textsuperscript{44} Having developed the fruits of Benedict, the sermon then turns toward Christ as a tree himself, but also as he who sows. Now the act of sowing becomes the central concern of the sermon, treating respectively how man has become the sowing ground for the Trinity, the angels, the apostles, martyrs, confessors, and virgins (Ben 8\textsuperscript{c}–12). In this last part of the sermon, nothing more is said about Benedict.

Already from this short summary it becomes clear that the sermon on Saint Benedict shows us a kind of patchwork of different texts and ideas masterfully woven together by one continuous development of the plights and fruitfulness of an abbot. Two apparently distinct introductions on Benedict (on his name and on his abbacy), an exegesis of Psalm 1:3, and a separate meditation on the act of heavenly sowing are linked and spanned by the central idea of vegetative growth and fruitfulness: the tree, its fruits, and the seeds.

This heterogeneous character of the sermon is even reinforced by the liturgical references. In its primary version, Ben contained half-

\textsuperscript{43} Ben 3: “Since this charge has been entrusted to me, even though I have nothing of my own to set before you I shall ask Saint Benedict for three loaves to feed you with. May his sanctity, his righteousness, and his piety restore you. Remember, my beloved, that not all those in the Lord’s procession spread out their garments.”

\textsuperscript{44} Ben 7: “As I was saying, blessed Benedict did not think when he was still tossed about by such temptations that it was the time to bear fruit; the time did come, however, and he produced fruit \textit{in its season}. Three of these I touched on before, his sanctity, his righteousness, and his piety.”
way, at the opening of the section on Benedict’s fruits, a clear liturgical reminiscence of the Vigil of Christmas. At the end of paragraph 6, instead of the actual closure—“No matter how sharply temptation may rage, believe that you are not therefore abandoned by God. Remember that Scripture says, Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall honor me” with the quotation of Psalm 49:15 (50:15 Heb)—Bernard wrote: “No matter how sharply temptation may rage, believe that you are not therefore abandoned by God. Be firm and soon you will see God’s help above you.” 45 The final words stem from the responsory Constantes for the Vigil of Christmas. 46 Bernard may have introduced them into the sermon on Benedict with the intention of causing a liturgical disorientation in the reader, or he may have forgotten them while rewriting this text into a sermon on Benedict. However this may be, before inserting the final version of this sermon into his liturgical series, he cancelled this liturgical link and replaced it by a psalm text.

Toward the end of the sermon another liturgical incongruity appears. While talking about the act of heavenly sowing, Bernard suddenly refers to the gospel of the day: “You heard today in the gospel the Lord promising his disciples, saying, You will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” 47 The quotation comes from Matthew 19:28 and belongs to the reading at a celebration for the apostles. 48 Yet, Benedict was honored by a proper liturgy with its adapted readings. Once again, thus, this textual fragment might have belonged to another preaching from another occasion. Bernard did not feel the urge, though, to eliminate it when adapting the text for its final

45 Ben 6 (final version): et disce, quantumcumque acerba tentatio saeviat, non credere propterea derelictum esse a Domino, sed memineris scriptum esse: Invoca me in die tribulationis: eruam te, et honorificabis me. Ben 6 (primary version): et disce ian, quantumcumque acerba tentatio saeviat, non credere propterea derelictum esse a Domino, sed constans esto, et cito videbis auxilium Domini super te. SBOp 5:6 + Apparatus.

46 SBOp 5:6, Apparatus.


position.\textsuperscript{49} Apparently he did not feel any tension between Benedict the abbot and master, and the apostles. This is not surprising when his own frequent assimilation to Paul is taken into consideration.\textsuperscript{50}

These two originally liturgical references to the Vigil of Christmas and to the feast of an apostle—together with the repeated allusions to Palm Sunday—make the sermon on Saint Benedict, liturgically speaking, unstable. Its liturgical framework is fluid and causes the reader to lose ground. Yet the liturgical references add a common feature to the text: they strengthen a sensation of expectancy toward the future. Both the Vigil of Christmas and Palm Sunday lead to the great events of the liturgical year, of which the apostles are the testimonies. Benedict thus becomes somewhat of a messenger of the great things to come.

Apparently, this idea did not suit Bernard for his final project and he softened it without eliminating it entirely by cancelling the Christmas allusion. Hereby another basic idea was reinforced, the idea of movement that governs the entire sermon. By the reiterated images of Palm Sunday, the impression of progressive movement, as it was installed and elaborated in the sermons for Lent, is strengthened. It only slowly takes a different form, changing in aspect from a linear and external progression toward an outward development, from the steady trotting of the donkey to the flourishing and fructification of the trees. Simultaneously, the horizontal and linear movement of the animal has become a vertical and cyclical dynamic. The growing of the tree takes its origin at the waters, stretching its branches loaded with fruit toward heaven, from which the seeds are sown “upon all waters.” The Palm Sunday procession, passing over the branches, has become a growth toward heaven in order to fertilize the earth. Mov-

\textsuperscript{49} An additional argument for the heterogeneous origins of the sermon can be found in the different intensity of rewriting as applied to the text. When reworking the text for the final collection, Bernard apparently concentrated on the first half (the exegetical part). The second half, on the contrary, was only slightly adapted.

\textsuperscript{50} To Bernard, Saint Paul simply is the Apostle. For one of his clearest self-identifications with Paul, see the first sermon on the Song of Songs (SC 1.1): \textit{Vobis, fratres, alia quam aliis de saeculo, aut certe alter dicenda sunt. Illis siquidem lac potum dat, et non escam, qui Apostoli formam tenet in docendo. SBOp 1:5.}
ing forward means growing upward and turning back down. Linearity becomes circularity, with the one movement implying the other.

These dynamics are strengthened in the sermon that follows in B, the future first sermon on the Annunciation (Ann 1). Once again, it seems as if Bernard compiled one text out of two different ones, but the lines of fracture between the distinct texts are much harder to detect. With its fourteen paragraphs, Ann 1 is even longer than Ben. While opening with a psalm verse (Ps 84:10–11; 85:9–10 Heb), the first part develops an exegesis of a sentence by Paul (2 Cor 1:12) treating the three testimonies of human and divine glory by the Spirit (Ann 1.1–4). In the original version, this treatment was immediately followed by a first exegesis of the psalm verse, without any transition. Apparently, Bernard thought this too abrupt and inserted paragraph 5 in order to link the two explications.51 He continued with a biblical exegesis of the psalm verse, paralleling it with Adam’s situation in Paradise, his being vested in the four virtues of the psalm, and his being robbed like the man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho (Ann 1.6–8). Then, Bernard takes his reader to heaven, where he develops an allegorical dispute between the four virtues for the sake of humankind (Ann 1.9–14).

The sermon thus seems to consist of three distinct exegetical treatises, one on Second Corinthians 1:12 and two on Psalm 84:10–11. In a new setting, each gets its place, and together they give a new movement to the sermon. The treatment of Paul lays the foundation for the psalm treatment. First the human creature loses the glory that was his original honor as he descends from Jerusalem to Jericho. Then, in order to restore him the Divinity agrees to come down to the state of humankind. Unlike the somewhat unsuccessful procedure in Ben, Ann 1 shows a perfect unity with scarcely detectable junctures.

At the same time, the vertical movement in Ben is repeated in Ann 1, but in the opposite way. While in Ben the dynamics went upward to come down, now all movements go down: the human descending from Jerusalem, God coming down to take up the human state, and even bending down to write with his finger on the ground (Ann 1.12). In these dynamics, however, no mention is made of Palm Sunday.

51 SBOp 5:16, Apparatus.
or even of the Annunciation, to which it would be linked in the final versions. Apparently, Bernard thought it simply apt to constitute the transition between the solemnities for Saint Benedict and Palm Sunday, thus continuing the dynamics that characterize the sermons for Lent and that come to a rest in the Easter sermons.

This linking of Ben and Ann 1 to the Lent cycle in B seems to be confirmed by the change in exegetical nature with the following sermon, the future second sermon for Palm Sunday (Palm 2). Ben and Ann 1 both still have a strong biblical exegetical strand, based notably on psalm texts, thus continuing in a certain sense the line of the Lent sermons QH 1–4. With Palm 2, the psalm exegesis is interrupted. Instead, a block of sermons of numerical exegesis starts. Palm 2 treats of the four groups in the Palm Sunday procession. The following sermon, On the Supper of the Lord (5 HM), treats the three sacraments. This is followed by the future first sermon for Easter (Res 1), treating the three days and the seven seals of the Apocalypse (Rev 5:5), and the future third sermon for Easter (Res 3) on the sevenfold healing of Naaman (2 K 5:10). Then the numerical exegesis is momentarily abandoned when the next two sermons—the future fourth sermon for Easter (Res 4) and a sermon ending up in the series on various subjects (Div 12)—concentrate on the way of man, thus retaking the idea of movement. The Easter cycle closes in B with two numerical sermons again: Div 13 on the threefold mercy of God and the future Res 2 on the three ointments and aromatics of the women at the grave.

The oldest liturgical version thus seems to concentrate upon the restoration of man after his fall. Bernard parallels this theological item with the way the human being has gone and the way he has to go. The movement of Lent continues in Ben and Ann 1 but takes up a more vertical direction, bringing together man’s fall and descent with divine mercy, humbling itself to human state. They meet in the sacraments, such as they are exposed in the sermons that in B seem to prepare the actual Easter solemnity (5 HM, Res 1, Res 3 and Res 5) and that open up the true meaning of the human being’s destination (Div 12). He can only rise to this destination when undergoing God’s mercy in the threefold application of the balsams (Div 13 and Res 2). Important in this reading is the attention paid to the human in his fallen state. Divinity and Christ’s passion almost become secondary themes, completely submitted to man’s destiny.
Faith's Death and Resurrection: The Second Version (M)

In the second collection, almost the entire Easter cycle of B is reproduced and contains few differences from the final version. Only a few changes occur, mostly of a predictable character. By the separation of the Sanctoral from the Temporal, Ben and Ann 1 disappeared from the Easter series. Ben disappeared entirely from the collection, while Ann 1 now opens the Sanctoral, immediately preceding the three sermons for Purification. As Ann 1 does not have any intrinsic link to the Annunciation, it is clear that the Sanctoral in Bernard’s project is not in the first place concerned with the Virgin but rather in a human form with the incarnation.

In M, the Easter sermons are introduced by a new text, a first sermon for Palm Sunday (Palm 1). Then follows exactly the same series as in B: Palm 2, 5 HM, Res 1, Res 3 and Res 4. Only in the transition to Ascension did Bernard go in a completely new direction. He replaced all the sermons by new ones: Div 111, two sermons for the Octave of Easter (OPasc 1 and 2) and the Sermon for Rogation Day (Rog). Div 12 on man’s way, Div 13 on the threefold mercy of God, and the future Res 2 on the three ointments and aromatics all disappeared.

Res 4 treats the way the life of Christ actualizes itself in human existence. Bernard distinguishes all those groups in society for whom the life of Christ has not yet come into being: those for whom he is not yet born, for whom he has not yet suffered, for whom he did not already rise, for whom he did not ascend to heaven, and to whom he did not yet send the Spirit. This rather negative approach of human-kind is continued in M by Div 111, which treats notably the negative forms of faith: faith that is numb to worldly misery and thus has to be considered dead (Div 111.1), the human creature’s unbelief as regards the promises of future beatitude (Div 111.2), his lack of faith in an experienced teacher (Div 111.3), faith without good works (Div 111.4). Man has to convert from these false forms of faith and to return in a six day’s journey to the way of salvation (Div 111.5). The six days are then treated, one by one, leading finally to the glorious vision of God (Div 111.6–7).

\[52\] Div 111 in SBOp 6.1:385–89.
These six days form an easy transition to the central theme of the two sermons for the octave of Easter that follow. Bernard presents the six days indeed as six testimonies of the reviving faith. The importance of giving testimony returns both in OPasc 1, treating in its second part the sacraments as testimonies on earth, and in OPasc 2 about the testimonies in heaven and on earth. Thus the sacramental nature of the Easter cycle as developed in Palm 2, 5 HM, Res 1, and Res 3 is even reinforced by the new transition to Ascension. The moral aspect, on the contrary, seems to have lost importance.

In its eschatological sense, however, this moral aspect reappears in the Sanctoral, which has been separated from the Temporal in this collection. The series of solemnities for saints limits itself almost exclusively to sermons that will become part of the festivities for the Virgin. Within the project of M, however, they do not seem to refer primarily to Mary, as the development within the sermons seems to suggest. The future Ann 1 became the opening sermon of the Sanctoral, which might imply that the central idea of this part deals with the restoration of humankind by God’s descent from heaven, manifesting itself in fertile faith—i.e., in the good works that constitute the life of faith. The focus of these sermons is not so much Mary herself as what happened in and through her, what originated in heaven and came into being thanks to her, finding in her its culmination.

Ann 1 opens by asking for the significance of Easter (Ann 1.1–5), giving immediately both the answer (the Fall and its results on earth: Ann 1.6–8) and the solution (the incarnation as a divine decision: Ann 1.9–14). In order to make God’s descent possible, a response is awaited from the human, who must set out to prepare to host the Spirit in his own life. Thus, the prophets put the human being into movement for an inward procession into his heart (Pur 1.1–4), followed by the Light procession of unity (Pur 2.1–3) and leading to the sacrifice of his humility (Pur 3.1–3). Mary appears as the perfect embodiment of human plenitude in her virginity, her humility, and her fertility (the future sixth sermon for the Assumption, Aspt 6.1). Only thanks to

53 Aspt 6 was formerly edited as Div 46, for which reason Jean Leclercq often refers to the sermon under this title.
Mary’s humble plenitude does the incarnation mediate between God and humanity (the future second sermon for the Annunciation, Ann 2.1–2) and the Spirit descend from heaven to earth (Ann 2.3–5). The descent of the Spirit is answered by the ascent of Mary in her assumption, heralding humanity’s ultimate destiny. Almost the entire cycle of sermons for the Assumption now follows, stressing the coincidence of Mary’s ascent and the descent of Christ as the living Word—i.e., as the Word that operates (the future Asspt 1–4).

The Sanctoral cycle logically follows Easter and Pentecost, concluding the liturgical unity of the Temporal cycle. While the Temporal celebrates the completion of the unique mystery of Easter on earth, the Sanctoral focuses on its perpetual meaning for humanity, for whom Mary is the mediator. In her, the descending movement of Word and Spirit meets the ascending movement of the human as it is evoked by the word of God in the prophets and the Bible.

The divine resolution to become incarnate (Ann 1) needs, as its counterpart, human plenitude as embodied by Mary (Asspt 6). Only then can the descent of the Spirit be realized (Ann 2), meaning the immediate ascent of Mary, for her ascent corresponds to the descent of the Word (Asspt 1) into a human body (Asspt 2–3), and even into Lazarus’s grave, where the descending movement once again changes into an ascent: Christ in front of Lazarus is like Mary in front of us (Asspt 4).

The Easter sermons of the Temporal cycle concentrate on the death and resurrection of faith that takes place in the human being and have a rather theological significance. The Sanctoral in M is not to be read as an independent cycle paralleling the Temporal; rather, it forms a true sequel and continuation of what precedes it. In the Sanctoral in M, the activity of the eternal, divine truth described in the Temporal cycle is reenacted on the human level; the descending movement of the Spirit and the Word is brought together with the ascending impulse of the human. This overlap of the two movements will prove essential to the interpretation of the final collection.

**A Liturgical Summary:** The Third Collection (L)

Bernard’s numerical and liturgical archive does not offer much that is new as regards the Easter cycle. None of the sermons that would
become part of the final Easter collection can be retrieved from the exegetical half L^A. The liturgical part L^B contains two sermons that will be reused in the final collection: Res 2, which had disappeared after B, and a new sermon, Of the Lord’s Passion, for Wednesday in Holy Week (4 HM). Both form part of a larger unit that somehow summarizes the entire Lent and Easter cycles.

As mentioned in the paragraphs on Lent, the line of thought in L^B is very clear and neat. Sept 1 opens Lent in the desire of fulfillment, giving special attention to listening to the word of God and to the battle against the obstacles on the way to fulfillment. Div 22 that follows shows a shortcut in the way of Lent, when man is ready and willing to take the steepest road and the heavier weight upon his shoulders.

Continuing in this line, 4 HM analyzes vice in its different triads or trinities—i.e., according to its several threefold appearances (4 HM 5–7)—but it leads in the end to the victory of divine clemency (4 HM 8–9) as it was lived and illustrated in Christ’s passion (4 HM 10–14). Res 2 then builds upon the threefold exegesis in 4 HM, treating the threefold character of the ointments but interpreting them in the sense of the human’s resurrection to renewed life.

Next follows a sermon on the seven seals (Div 57) that resumes the apocalyptic imagery that B linked to the Easter mystery. However, here it has also a moralistic meaning, referring to man’s resurrection from vice. This is illustrated by the three women at the tomb, treated in the following sermon (Div 58), which precedes a sermon on Ascension (Div 60).

L^B thus proves how closely related are the themes of Christ’s death and resurrection and man’s rebirth from the death of vice, in which he was held captive after the Fall. The parallelism between the divine descent in the incarnation and man’s descent from Jerusalem to Jericho as it is elaborated in Ann 1 returns in L^B as the structuring theme for the entire Lent and Easter cycle. L^B, however, gives a rather straightforward view of this idea. It is far from the complicated playing with ascending and descending movements that was fundamental to the arrangement of the Sanctoral in M. In the final collection, it will be exactly this complex simultaneity that gives M its decisive significance.
Summary

The older collections prove that Bernard had a very clear view of what he wanted to express in the sermons for Easter. The entire cycle does not change that much from B to M. Neither will it change very much when reworked into the final project. Bernard’s only doubts seem to have been about the place of sermons for the Sanctoral: did he have to treat them independently as a human continuation of the disclosure of the sacramental value of the Easter mystery? Or did he rather prefer to include them inside the development of the Temporal, not separating the sacraments from their eschatological actualizations?

In the end, he took the second road, but with significant consequences. The increase of the summer period can be considered a result of his merging the Sanctoral and the Temporal of M. By this fusion, Mary’s importance was again linked to the sacrament of the divine descent. She remains the human counterpart of the divine resolution, but as the indispensable condition for its actualization, Bernard must have thought her inseparable from the story of the incarnation. Thus, the sermons for the solemnities linked to her feasts now open each phase in the actualization of man’s restoration. This means that the illustration of man’s return to his original glory had to be done in other ways. Bernard brought it down to a more human level, closing each phase with an example of humanity in its purer forms: Saint Paul, the converted sinner; Saint Benedict, the experienced master; Saint Paul and Saint Peter, the harvesters of the Spirit like the farmers in the fields; and finally Humbert, no saint but an all-too-human monk.

The development of the Easter sermons demonstrates how Bernard was trying to bring his different lines of thought into harmony. He wanted to stress the sacramental meaning of the Easter events, but not without concretizing them in the human life. While the sermons of Lent were treated as a linear progression of learning and training of the soul in its three qualities, in Easter all movement had to come to a rest but without losing its dynamics. The horizontal procession turned into vertical movements as already elaborated in the sermon for Saint Benedict. Faith in man had died but was called again to new life. The man had gone down from Jerusalem, but only to bring God
down, who, however, could only descend if humanity would meet
him by ascending.

Indeed, Bernard did not eschew a difficult task. The final version
had to prove him to be not only the spiritual master that he aspired
to be but also the master writer who knew how to create and to
revive by way of his words. He proved to be both, and even more.

Breaking the Seals

In the final collection the number of sermons for Easter and the
summer season increased considerably, making it much more difficult
for the reader to have an overview. The entire block of thirty-six ser-
mons can, however, be distinguished in several subunits, of which only
the first two will be treated here. Each of them, like the third subunit,
counts seven sermons, thus stressing in a numerical way the impor-
tance of the central subjects treated.54

In addition, the pattern and construction of the subunits show
that a change takes place inside the development of the liturgical
series. The sermons of the first block treat the Annunciation, Palm
Sunday, and Wednesday of Holy Week. Those of the second block
consist of the sermon for Maundy Thursday, the actual Easter ser-
mons, and the sermons for the Octave of Easter. The third block,
finally, opens with the sermon for Rogation Day, followed by the
Ascension sermons.55 The Palm Sunday unit, thus, opens with two
series of three and closes with one final sermon, while each of the
other blocks opens with a kind of introductive sermon that is fol-
lowed by the core of the treatment, respectively, four Easter sermons

54 It is unnecessary by now to stress the importance of numerical exegesis in helping
to understand the construction of Bernard’s thought. Three blocks of seven sermons,
each around the central solemnities of the liturgical year, will have to remind us to
keep in mind the several triads or trinities that reappear over and again in Bernard’s
thinking, of which the most important are Father, Son, Spirit, and memory, reason,
will.

55 The Pentecost sermons fall out of this numerical series. They only count three
texts, thus somehow summarizing and concluding the entire movement.
plus two sermons for the octave, and six Ascension sermons. This structural inversion corresponds to a change in approach as will be clear from the reading.56

Telling Stories: A Linear Experience?

The sermon for the Birth Day of Saint Benedict ends with an enumeration of those who sowed their virtues upon humanity: “The whole Trinity has sown on our land; the angels and apostles have sown, the martyrs, confessors, and virgins, all have sown.”57 Each of these categories passes before the reader’s eyes, each with the virtues its members bestowed upon humankind: the Trinity sowed the heavenly bread, truth, and love; the angels, seeds of steadfast wisdom; the apostles, wisdom of the eternal life; the martyrs, endurance; the confessors, justice; and the virgins, self-restraint. comparatively much attention is paid to the angels in their opposition to Lucifer58 and to the apostles in their devotion to the Lord because of his “words of eternal life.”59 Martyrs and confessors are taken together in one short reflection, leading up to the equation of the martyrs with Peter and of the confessors with Abraham, the first having “left everything at once,” the other putting “his worldly goods to good use.”60 The enumeration as well as the sermon closes with the virgins, mentioned in one short phrase only: “As for the holy virgins, it is clear that they sowed temperance, for they trampled lust under foot.”

It is likely that the reader will feel a bit confused by this abrupt ending. We already mentioned the probability that Bernard had been compiling different texts to make the sermon for Saint Benedict and that the last part on sowing did not fit in so easily with the preceding

56 Is it necessary to repeat that 4 HM is located halfway in the liturgical collection? The division in two halves of the entire collection reminds one of the two strains of thought elaborated in the sermons on the Song of Songs: the time of engagement and of marriage (the Sponsa) and the time of fertility and motherhood (the Mater).
58 Ben 11, SBOp 5:10–11.
59 Ben 12, SBOp 5:11–12.
60 Ben 12, SBOp 5:12.
Sermons for Lent and the Easter Season

parts. This impression is reinforced by the sudden and rough ending. One could assume that Bernard wished to end with the sowing by the confessors, thus still linking the end of his sermon to Saint Benedict. Of course, Saint Benedict may be reckoned among the virgins too, but the very concise way of treating them, actually only mentioning them, may suggest that Bernard did not want the reader to leave the sermon with the image of Saint Benedict as a virgin. There is another reason for this abrupt and unanticipated ending.

As we saw, already in the earliest version the sermon for Saint Benedict was followed by the first sermon for the Annunciation. Thus it seems as if Bernard, by his particular ending of the Benedict sermon, wanted to bridge the gap between the two sermons, announcing in a certain way the next text on the Annunciation and its principal figure—the Holy Virgin. This hypothesis, however, implies that both texts have to be understood in a continuous line, just as the sermons on Psalm 90 do. Whereas the continuity of a psalm exegesis within a series of sermons seems rather evident, the assumption of a similar continuity over a series of sermons for different occasions has far-reaching consequences. It obliges the reader to see the sermons (and thus the festivities they celebrate) joined in a linear sequence, all obedient to the same progressive development, to the same “story line.”

The sermon for Saint Benedict, while concluding the sermons for Lent, at the same time opens the story of the Annunciation. This fact seems to imply, however, that in the story Bernard wants to tell the reader the event narrated by the Annunciation sermons can only take place after the part of the story told in the sermon for Saint Benedict. This kind of sequence differs from the one imposed by the liturgical year for it implies a much stronger causality. Whereas the succession of the solemnities during the year obeys mainly the chronology of the liturgical calendar, Bernard imposes upon them an internal development in which one solemnity must, by a kind of internal law, automatically lead to the following episode in his story. In the story Bernard tells, consequently, the Annunciation can only take place after the reader has gone through the preceding episodes—i.e., after the events told in the sermons for Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, and Saint Benedict. The chronological succession of events, by which the Annunciation looks ahead to the return of the liturgical cycle of
the next year, is thus completely ignored, even annihilated. In Ber-
nard’s story, the Annunciation results from the preceding liturgical
episodes, thus turning the chronology upside down.

The cancelling of temporal linearity by the story line of his ser-
mons is one of the central issues in the following block of the An-
nunciation and the Palm Sunday sermons. The three sermons for
Annunciation actually tell one continuous story, starting in Ann 1
with the original and eternal glory of the human being, continuing
with his loss by his descent from Jerusalem to Jericho, and ending
with the allegorical lawsuit in heaven between the four divine vir-
tues (Mercy and Truth, Righteousness and Peace). Each of the vir-
tues pleads her case in front of “the Father of lights.” But as God the
Father can never judge in a way inconsistent with himself, the case
is referred to the Wisdom of King Solomon, “because all judgment,
Scripture says, was given to the Son” (Ann 1.11).

There follows the renewed pleading of Mercy and Truth, arguing
against each other, Mercy in favor of humankind, Truth in favor of
divine Justice. They can only be calmed by Peace, after which the
divine Judge “bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground,”
thus passing judgment on humankind: “Let there be a good death,
and each possess what she asks,”—i.e., “if a person not deserving of
death dies out of love” (Ann 1.12).

Truth and Mercy start their quest in search of the one who is in-
nocent and full of love, but Mercy does not find in heaven a love
great enough to die for humankind, nor does Truth find on earth a
faultless soul. On their hopeless return they are consoled by Peace,
who announces that there is only one who meets the requirements:
“May he who gave counsel bring help” (Ann 1.14). The Son under-
stands what she means and decides to descend in order to free man.
He summons Gabriel to announce to the daughter of Sion that the
King will come.

The second sermon describes the descent of the divinity. First the
question has to be answered why the Son, and not the Father or
the Spirit, descended. But as the Son is Son of the Father and the
plenitude of the Spirit rests on him, the descent of the Son implies
the descent of the Spirit and testifies to the presence of God. By this
descent of the Son, “the simple story of our restoration” (Ann 2.1)
gets its start, leading to “the new man, the true man” (Ann 2.5), who will feed “us with the bread of life and understanding,” and give “us the water of saving wisdom to drink” (Ann 2.4).

The descending movement of the second sermon encounters an ascending movement in the third sermon. This one opens with the invitation to the reader to attend the meal “set before us on the table of this wealthy Householder by the testimonies of Holy Scripture” (Ann 3.1) and consisting of mercy and righteousness. Then Bernard starts his story from its beginning. The Pharisees bring in the adulteress and argue against her, expecting Jesus to pronounce his judgment. As in the scene in heaven of Ann 1, Jesus “bent down, and having turned toward mercy—he did not think as the Jews did—he wrote with his finger, not now on tables of stone, but on the ground” (Ann 3.2). Bernard implores the Lord to bend down his heavens and to come down (Ann 3.2), thus rehearsing the event of Ann 2. As in Ann 1, the answer of Jesus leads to a peaceful solution of the insoluble problem.

Yet, the story continues after Jesus has sent the adulteress away. “But let us consider, my brothers, where these Pharisees depart from. Do you see the two old men—for they began to go away, beginning with the elders—hiding in Joachim’s orchard?” (Ann 3.4). The eldest Pharisees left Jesus first and Bernard invites the reader to follow them in order to see where they go. The reader is introduced into the garden of Joachim and is allowed to spy upon the two men trying to seduce Susanna and, when failing to do this, accusing her falsely of adultery.

Bernard’s story line takes a surprising turn. Not only do we pass from a true adultery to a seduction and false accusation, which throws doubts about the sincerity of the first one, but we also pass from the same men before Jesus to Joachim’s orchard in Babylon and thus to the time of Daniel. Time is turned upside down, as in the liturgical story line. Actually, time is submitted to a higher and more abstract linearity, in which mercy precedes righteousness. Jesus first shows mercy upon the adulteress, after which Daniel can do justice toward Susanna (Ann 3.5).

Only then Gabriel arrives in front of Mary and announces the restoration of man’s glory thanks to the descent of the Son (Ann 3.7). And once again the reader is thrown into confusion. Ann 3 starts
with Jesus showing mercy upon the adulteress and ends with the
annunciation of Jesus’ birth. Temporal linearity is broken down and
completely replaced by the a-temporality of divine acting.

This annihilation of time continues in the following block of ser-
mons for Palm Sunday. Bernard’s procedure, however, changes. He
does not confuse the reader by putting stories together in a nonchro-
nological succession. He rather returns to a linear progression similar
to that used in the sermons for Lent and in the sermon for Saint
Benedict. In a self-evident way, the reader is again confronted with
movement, thanks to the Palm Sunday procession, which was already
announced in the sermon for Saint Benedict. While in the Benedict
sermon, however, the movement truly implied movement—a linear
progression changing from a horizontal to a vertical direction—the
Palm Sunday procession leaves the reader with an impression of
immobility.

The block opens with Bernard’s assertion of the sound reasons for
the church to join the procession of “today” with the passion, even
when this conjunction is “singular and wonderful” (Palm 1.1). Pro-
cession and passion, applause and sorrow, glory and humiliation are
treated as one, taking place “in the same city, by the same people and
at the same time” (Palm 1.1). But just as in the life of Christ proces-
sion and passion are taken together, forming an indivisible unity, Ber-
nard now also emphasizes the unity of the earthly and the heavenly
processions linked in the person of Christ who enters the heavenly
Jerusalem in eternal glory as he enters the earthly Jerusalem in tem-
porary glory. The descending movement of the Son as developed in
the Annunciation sermons turns again upward, into the ascending
movement of the Son of God, both by his passion on the cross and
the still-distant ascension toward heaven.

While heaven and earth in the Annunciation sermons were mov-
ing toward each other, in the Palm Sunday sermons the proces-
sions form a parallel movement, taking place at the same moment
in heaven and on earth, in the spirit and in the church. Indeed, the
first sermon opens with the earthly procession and its connotation
of ephemeral glory, showing by the example of Christ how worldly
joy leads to the grief of the passion (Palm 1.1). However, those who
know to continue the procession in the spirit have the ability to pass
through the labor of the passion into the glorious procession that opens up heaven (Palm 1.2). The heavenly procession is welcomed by those in heaven (Palm 1.3) just as it is proceeding on earth by the dedication of the participants (Palm 1.4).

This last element is elaborated in the second sermon, in which the patience and humility of Christ are presented as his answer to the pains of the passion and the glory of the entrance. The accent slowly shifts from the simultaneous parallelism between heaven and earth to the simultaneity of the two chronologically subsequent events, procession and passion, glory and pain. The second part of this sermon then concentrates upon the obligation of change, of *commutatio*. As the procession changes into the passion and all worldly glory and joy into pain and suffering, likewise the participants in the procession have to be changed by the procession.

Bernard gives special attention to the beast carrying Christ. He likens it to those “for whom the discipline is heavy and all things burdensome, who must often be prodded and urged forward,” and he exhorts them “to change from beasts into human beings, if they can” (Palm 2.6). Only then can they be said to partake in the procession alongside the other groups. And if they cannot change, they are begged to remain where they are and to carry humbly their burden until God moves them on to something better—i.e., until their hard-headed immobility is brought into movement, putting them on the road of the procession, which leads to the immobile parallelism of heaven and earth. The linear movement of procession and time has become an inward movement of change from earth to heaven.

Time, thus, has lost its power over the human being. It has become a key to heaven, to the human’s spiritual change. And the only one who had the power to break the seals of time was the living Word. “God made all things by weight, number, and measure, but particularly at the time when *he was seen on earth and lived with humankind*, whatever he did, spoke, or suffered among us was so arranged that not the smallest detail, not one iota was devoid of sacramental content or passed without mystery” (Palm 3.1). Every day gets its power and is developed in its sacramental content. The day of the procession recapitulates the transition of glory into the passion and Christ’s answer to both: humility and patience. The day of the Last Supper
shows his human gentleness. The days of his passion, rest and resurrection are briefly treated. They are abbreviated and they still have to come, only promising the liberation from our toil.

Time is mystery and sacramental. The last sermon in the block of Palm Sunday, the sermon for Wednesday in Holy Week (4 HM), re-emphasizes the sacramental value of time: “Stay awake, brothers! Do not let the mysteries of this time pass through you fruitlessly” (4 HM 1). Indeed, time is not just passing man by. It passes through him. As such, it has to bring about changes in man to keep him from remaining fruitless. In the sermon for Wednesday in Holy Week, the entire schooling seems to come to an end. It recapitulates the training as it was imposed upon the reader by the sermons of Lent, appealing one by one to the reader’s memory, reason, and will. Most important is his memory of the passion, which lends him patience in his deeds, humility in his manner, and love in the cause (4 HM 2). Memory thus becomes the soil on which memory helps to strengthen patience, reason to strengthen humility, and will to strengthen love. Memory, reason, and will now return during the entire sermon, each linked to the specific virtue it nurtures. Memory is linked to patience in deeds in order to meet justice, which is different for every human being and for this reason is called *singularis* (4 HM 2). Reason evokes the wonderful humility in memory of the appearance of Christ at the cross (4 HM 3). Reason leads to the conclusion that at the ground of the entire passion there must have been an immeasurable love, which brought about such voluntary suffering (4 HM 4). The importance of Christ’s sacrifice is its voluntariness: “He was offered because he willed it. Not only was he offered and willed it, but he was offered *because* he willed it” (4 HM 4). A change in will is the final aim of the entire schooling, and the way is shortened in the week of the passion where the virtues get joined and linked together. “How can the remembrance [*memoria*] of patience not keep all passion at a distance? How can the consideration [*ratio*] of humility not utterly drive out the pride of life? The worthy love that engages the mind in meditation and claims for itself the whole will [*voluntas*] quenches the vice of curiosity altogether” (4 HM 5).

“Nothing better can happen in the world than what God has done during these days; nothing can benefit the world more than that each
year it should celebrate his memorial by a perpetual observance with
the soul’s desire, and gush forth the memory of his abundant good-
ness” (4 HM 1). The eternity of the observance (ritu perpetuo) ob-
served each year (singulis annis) revitalizes memory (memoriam eructuet)
by the celebration of his memorial (celebret memoriale) and to do this
is the soul’s desire (in desiderio animae). Thus time becomes eternity in
the short period of Passion Week by the celebration of the separate
moments, when done with an ardent spirit as it is done in Bernard’s
words. His preaching was a celebrare, closely joined to the hodie, the
actual moment of reading, because it is now that the sacraments of the
liturgical year must proceed to their fulfillment in the reader.

Here our hands have handled the Word of life, and what was from
the beginning we have seen with our own eyes. This Word, because
it had united in itself pure flesh and a holy soul, freely controlled
the actions of his body, both because he was wisdom and righteous-
ness, and because he had no law in his members at war with the
law of his mind. My word is neither wisdom nor righteousness,
yet it is capable of both, and they can be either absent from it or
present with it, but being absent is easier. (4 HM 13)

Bernard’s words merely mediate between the Word and the reader.
It depends on the reader if they prove to be capable of wisdom and
righteousness, or capable of bringing the divine virtues to life within
him, so that he is no longer alone in his labor and toil but, embracing
the living Word, is directed toward God’s justice and righteousness in
the passions of life. Then only can he await divine benediction; because
that is what remains—the blessing. And nothing else awaits him after
the embrace but the kiss: Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth (4 HM
14). At this moment, the reader has become equal to the spouse. The
time of his engagement comes to a close, he is ready for the marriage.

**Perpetual Observance: A Circular Experience.**

Celebrating Easter means celebrating Bernard’s victory over time
as a writer and storyteller of the liturgical story—not at all fictitious
but the possible reality of every man. In the story he tells, chrono-
logical time is submitted to the narrative requirements of Bernard’s
story, which has to be every reader’s story. By his storytelling, following a narrative line which is perfectly logical, although it opposes the historical chronology as the reader knows it, Bernard brings about in the reader the sentiment of being lifted out of his earthly sense of time and transposed to a new temporal experience, which is no longer obedient to human reality but to the will of the writer. Time has a new meaning, wholly sacramental, because, thanks to the words we read, it evolves both on an earthly, human level and on a heavenly, divine level.

This sense of the dissolution of linear temporality, caused by the simultaneous validity of historical chronology and its narrative inversion, of earthly progressive movement and heavenly motionlessness, is even reinforced by the continuous return of earlier liturgical solemnities. Already it was announced that Bernard loved to play with liturgical allusions that did not fit the actual solemnity he was preaching. In the sermon for Saint Benedict, allusions could be found to the liturgy for the apostles and, originally, also to the Vigil of Christmas.61

In the Annunciation and Palm Sunday sermons, these allusions become more visible and important. They allude to the entire liturgical year but notably to the preceding solemnities.62 In the last block, Bernard even refers openly to some liturgical events. In the first sermon for Palm Sunday, he inserts a small attack against those heretics who denied that baptized children were saved. He takes the Innocents as the counterexample: “The One who was born as a child and chose a

61 See above and SBOp 5:6 and 11, Apparatus.
62 The liturgical allusions begin at Ann 1.14 with two texts taken from the antiphon Adorna for the Purification and from the Response Bethlehem for the third Sunday of Advent. In Ann 3, allusions to the third week of Lent (3) and to the liturgy of November (5) follow. In Palm 2.3, an allusion is made to the Response Ecce quomodo moritur of Holy Saturday, while in Palm 3.5, a text is taken from the liturgy for the Innocents. The liturgical allusions thus seem to follow a clear scheme: Purification of the Virgin, Advent, Lent, November, Holy Saturday, Innocents—i.e., purification of the soul so that it prepares itself to receive the Word (Advent) by deprivations (Lent) and mortification or even death (November, the month dedicated to the commemoration of the dead) in order to be reborn in innocence. That Bernard used his liturgical allusions in a very conscious way may be clear from his elimination of a liturgical reference to the twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost as in the first version of Ann 1.12.
vanguard of children—I mean the Innocents—does not exclude children from grace even today” (Palm 1.3). In the second sermon, he uses a quote from Psalm 90 (91), the psalm central in his Lenten sermons (Palm 2.2) and in both this same Palm Sunday sermon and the sermon for Wednesday in the Holy Week he alludes by the wordplay on *benedictio* to his sermon for Saint Benedict (Palm 2.6 and 4 HM 14).63

A similar play with liturgical allusions can be recognized in the new block of sermons, those for Easter. Once again Bernard refers to different events in the liturgical year, and once again they seem to obey a conscious scheme. Most of them, however, seem more appropriate than in the other series. There are allusions to the liturgy of the day in the sermon for Maundy Thursday and the first sermon for Easter (Res 1.7 and 13). Besides, Bernard refers in Res 1 to the liturgy of Passion Week (Pasc 1.2) and to the liturgy for the week after Easter (Res 1.13 and 18).

As the first part of Res 1 is already known from an older version, it is telling to see how Bernard deliberately changed some allusions from the first to the later sermon. He took over the references to the passion in Res 1.2 and to Easter in Res 7. He changed the allusion to the liturgy for the fourth day after Easter in Res 1.13 into one to the liturgy for the second day. Besides, he added several completely different liturgical references: to Epiphany in Res 1.1; to Christmas in Res 1.2; and another one to Easter in Res 1.13. Together with the allusions made to Lent in Res 3.2, to Christmas in Res 3.4, and to Maundy Thursday in Res 3.5, these liturgical references appear to follow a circular composition: Maundy Thursday—Epiphany—Passion Week—Christmas—Easter (twice)—second and third days after Easter—Lent—Christmas—Maundy Thursday. The allusions start and close with Maundy Thursday. Epiphany and Passion Week correspond to Lent and Christmas. In the center, thus, remains a liturgically closed block of Christmas, Easter, and Easter Week. Already, this points to the close link Bernard wants to make between Christmas and Easter, between the start and the end of the Temporal within the liturgical year.

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63 As in his liturgical allusions, these open references thus follow a scheme, this time more in liturgical chronology.
This return to the preceding liturgical events is not limited to Bernard’s use of liturgical allusions. His exegesis of the sacramental value of Easter in Res 1 brings him to an implied cyclical evolution. After having treated the Easter victory of perseverance (Res 1.1–9) and the Easter opening of the seals by the Lamb and the Lion (Res 1.10–13), Bernard invites his readers to consider thoroughly the meaning of Easter (Res 1.14). He points out three elements: Easter as resurrection (*resurrectio*), passing over (*transitus*), and entering into another state (*transmigratio*). Christ did not fall back (*recidit*), neither did he go back (*rediit*), nor turn back (*remeavit*). Christ did not return to his former way of life but he went over to a new way of life (*novitas vitae*). So the reader is expected after Easter not to fall back into his ancient life but to enter a new life.

Opposed to this new life is the return to one’s former life. After having shared the passion of Christ and having been resurrected in him, it is just impossible to combine the former life in sin with his presence in us. “Light has no partnership with darkness, nor Christ with pride, with greed, with ambition, with hatred of the brothers, with excess, with fornication. Why do you owe him less now when he is present than when he was yet to come” (Res 1.16). This return to one’s old habits proves that there has been no *transmigratio* yet (Res 1.15). Because this is not the way Christ is honored, whom “you took up [quem suscepistis]” (Res 1.16). In a short sentence, the reader is referred to his “taking up” of Christ during the sermons for the Purification, where he was invited to take up the Word as Simeon took up the child.

The sacramental value of Easter lies in the consciousness of Christ’s resurrection as a *transmigratio* into us—the readers—that ought to prevent each falling back. Those who have not yet experienced this *transmigratio*, those who still cling to their ancient habits and way of life, do not share anything with Christ, not even through reading. They did not accept the Word of life: “you have no life in you” (Res 1.17). “Recall it to mind, transgressors, seek the Lord with your whole heart” (Res 1.17). Those who did not follow have to return. Whither? They are admonished to convert in the true sense and thus to restart, to return

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64 2 Cor 6:14–15.
to the beginning of the period of Lent and go the ways of purification and mortification once more in the hope that at the end the Word can resurrect in them and the eternal life can pass over into them.

Those for whom the living Word has resurrected in their heart, however, are prompted not to diminish their zeal, not to lose anything from the spiritual exercise now at the coming of the sacred resurrection (sacrae resurrectionis adventu). They must strive always to pass over further and to grow out of themselves (transire magis et excrescere studemus) (Res 1.14). For them the time opens in which memory enflames the desire for eternal recompense. They live again in a time of Advent.

Indeed, Easter is the sacrament of victory, both over time and over oneself. For Bernard, this means that the solemnity of Easter includes the entire span of the liturgical year. It constitutes the crystallization point of the liturgical mystery. It divides those who believe in the cross, and for whom Christ resurrected and descended, from those who do not believe and who remain buried in the grave. Yet, for them too there still is the chance to revive, to open themselves unto the living Word, but for this they have to return, they must retake the road of Lent. The others, who shared the cross, who died with Christ, and for whom he resurrected, await a new life. Full of desire, they long for this new life to come. The novelty of their life after Easter is the reality of the new Advent, the hope for the Word to become life once again. Not in them, now, for they passed over; they are married to the Word already. They wait for the Word to pass over into others, to bring to life those who are still buried in the tomb of their ancient life. To Bernard, Easter is the solemnity in which the reader of the Word becomes a preacher, in which the Spouse becomes Mother.

Indeed, Bernard’s attitude toward the reader of his sermons has changed. When continuing the reading of the following Easter sermons, the reader becomes aware that many of the old problems are still addressed, but that he is now treated almost as a colleague. Bernard no longer seems to put all the emphasis upon the inner evolution of his reader. He rather points him to the inner evolution of another, and all his attention is given to those who fall back into their ancient habits and life. Thus, it is of the highest importance that the reader becomes acquainted with the remedies by which he can heal the souls who have been committed to his care. The second sermon
for Easter treats the spices necessary to anoint the dead. The third sermon treats the sevenfold leprosy, the illness, into which the poor man is always in danger of falling. The fourth sermon treats of the sick people themselves, those who do not yet live the Word of Christ. It distinguishes in a very clear way the different failures of man in his spiritual growth.

All of these sermons offer an approach from the healing side. They no longer consider the reader himself in need of the resurrection or the *transitus* to the new life. They want to train him for his new task, that of accompanying other souls upon the road toward life and in their struggle for *transmigratio* into another new life. This new task takes its origin in Easter and will lead the reader through the part of the liturgical year to come.

*God in Us: Experiencing the Point*

The Word has become life in us. It passed over into us. It prevents us from falling back into ancient habits and customs. Yet, it leads us upon the road we want. It brings us a new Advent, just as it wants to bring those who did not take it up to a new Lent. The liturgical year is no longer submitted to a linear evolution. It winds itself into itself, revivifying what is passed but will never be over, reactualizing what was conquered but will never be vanquished. Life is no linear movement from birth to death. It is a perpetual being born and dying and resurrecting from death into a newborn life.

Easter is the victory over time. The entire liturgical year is condensed into Easter. Likewise, Easter is stretched to encompass the entire liturgical year. Easter is not Christmas, but only Easter can break the seal that closes the mystery of Christmas. It is only thanks to Easter that the sacramental meaning of Christmas becomes clear. And, it is only thanks to Easter that the true Christmas is possible. Easter leads to Christmas, just as the true Christmas automatically leads to Easter. They imply one another. One cannot be without

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65 Res 2 has in many manuscripts the title *Ad abbates*, which implies that it is based on a sermon pronounced by Bernard at the general chapter of Citeaux. See SBOp 5:95, Apparatus. The abbots are, of course, the first ones to deal with the healing of souls.
the other, although it will never be clear which precedes and which follows. Likewise, the birth of Christ cannot be announced without Christ himself having written in the dust both in heaven and on earth, or Saint Benedict having been praised as the father of monks.

In reading Bernard’s liturgical sermons, the reader has been lifted out of the temporal or logical sequence of things. He has entered a new world that obeys new rules imposed by no one else but the writer. But the writer imposes upon himself no other rule than obeying the living Word—i.e., giving expression to words—which may be capable of both wisdom and righteousness. He cannot command their reception, the way they are taken up by the reader, but he knows they are “capable of both”: they can transmit the living Word and thus revivify the reader to the new life after Easter.

From now on, the reader is no longer a simple disciple of the writer. He has become his successor, another abbot, another mother, taking care of their common pupils. Therefore, he will have to become like Bernard, overseeing human history, organizing it according to the best way of having impact upon his own readers, in order to enflame their desire and will for the new life. Because nothing in past or future is without meaning; not the smallest detail, not one iota is devoid of sacramental content or passes without mystery. Everything can be a figura or even a praefigura for the perpetual truth of Christ’s sacramental life. “See if Christ seems not clearly prefigured in this event” (O Pasc 1.5).

In the first sermon for the Octave of Easter, Bernard speaks of Moses’ salvation by Pharaoh’s daughter, demonstrating how Moses functions in the history of the Old Testament as the figura of Christ. The past thus becomes actualized in the presence of the Christ’s eternal now. And similarly, we are the actualization of what was prefigured in Moses’ liberation of the Israelites: “The true liberation from slavery in Egypt was accomplished not by Moses but by the blood of the Lamb; it prefigured us who are to be liberated from our empty commerce with this world by the blood of the spotless Lamb, Jesus Christ” (O Pasc 1.5). Past and future are dissolved in the eternal presence of Christ’s truth. Even we, living readers, are no more than the actualization of what is lived before and for us by and in Christ. We live in him, since he, after Easter, has chosen to live in us.
Where time has gone, where no past, future, or present exists, where all has become one, and one has become all, where the reader does not exist anymore outside his reading and his reading has become him, where there is only one Word searching to express itself in the multitude of human words in order to revive and to die in order to be born, where Easter has become the solemnity of the human’s rebirth, of his transmigration into the new life, the life outside time—there Easter, the union of the Word and his Spouse, is celebrated.
Editorial Note

To make clear how steeped Saint Bernard was in Scripture, references to scriptural quotations and allusions are identified in the margins. For the abbreviations, see pages lxxvii–lxxviii.

Direct scriptural quotations, even those containing a minor variation from the Vulgate text, appear in italics. Phrases and allusions taken from Scripture, but not quoted verbatim, are noted but not italicized. Psalms are cited according to the Vulgate numbering.
# Table of Abbreviations

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## Sermons for Lent and the Easter Season

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Bernard of Clairvaux

SERMONS FOR LENT
AND THE
EASTER SEASON
On the Canticle:

We have received.*

1. TODAY the Virgin Mother brought the Lord of the Temple into the Temple of the Lord.* Joseph too conveys to the Lord, not his own son, but the beloved Son of him who took good pleasure in him.* A righteous man recognized the One he was awaiting, and the widow Anna professed her faith. These four persons first celebrated today’s procession that afterward was to be celebrated with the joy of all the earth in every place and by every people. It is no wonder if it was small at the time: the One who was received there was small. No sinner had a place there. All were righteous, all were holy, all were perfect.

But are you going to save only these persons, Lord? May your body grow and your compassion grow, too. Humans and animals you will save, O Lord, when you multiply your mercy, O God.* Then in a second procession, crowds go ahead of him and crowds follow him;* he

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1 The Feast of the Purification was regarded as the end of the Christmas–Epiphany season. Bernard uses the theme of purification as an opportunity to prepare his monks for the approaching Lenten season.

2 Miseratio.
is carried not by a virgin but by a donkey. He scorns no one, not even those who have rotted like beasts in their dung.* He scorns no one, I say; rather, if they do not lack the apostles’ cloaks, if their doctrine, righteous habits, obedience, and godly love cover a multitude of sins,* he will not now judge them unworthy of the glory of his procession. What is more, we find that he has reserved for us the same glory that seems to have been bestowed on so few. Why should he not reserve for those who come later what he granted in anticipation to those of times past?

2. David, king and prophet as he was, rejoiced that he might see this day: *he saw it and was glad.* Had he not seen it, how could he have sung, *We have received your mercy, O God,* in the midst of your temple?* David received this mercy of the Lord. Simeon received it. We, too, have received it, and all those predestined for life,* for Christ [is the same] yesterday and today and forever.*

In the midst of his temple is his mercy, not in a corner or an inn, because *with God there is no respect for persons.* It stands there open, it is offered to all, and no one is beyond its reach save those who reject it. Your waters are dispersed abroad, Lord God, yet your spring is your own, and no stranger drinks of it.* Those who are yours will not see death until they see the Lord’s Christ, so that, untroubled, they may be dismissed in peace.* Why should those who possess the Lord’s Christ in their hearts not be dismissed in peace?

He is our peace,* he who dwells in our hearts through faith.* You, unhappy soul, ignorant of Jesus, the guide of your journey, how are you going to set out? *Some people have no knowledge of God.* How is this? Surely because *the light came into the world and people loved darkness more than light.* And the light, it says, *shines in darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* It is as if it said: the waters are coursing through the streets, and no stranger drinks from them; and
mercy is in the midst of the temple, yet those whom eternal damnation awaits do not approach it! *In your midst stands One whom you do not know,* you unhappy people, and so when you die before having seen the Lord's Christ you will not be dismissed in peace but will be seized instead by roaring beings prepared to devour you.*

3. *We have received your mercy, O God, in the midst of your temple.* This thanksgiving is a long way from the words of the person moaning, *Your mercy is in heaven, and your truth reaches even to the clouds.* What about this? Does it seem to you that mercy was in the midst, when only the heaven-born spirits possessed it? But when Christ was made a little lower than the angels,* when he became the mediator between God and humankind,* when, like a cornerstone,° he made peace through his blood both as to things in heaven and things on earth*—surely from then on we have received your mercy, O God, in the midst of your temple.

We were by nature children of wrath, but we have obtained mercy.* Of what wrath were we the children, and what mercy have we obtained? We were children of ignorance, of indolence, and of incarceration, and we have obtained wisdom, virtue, and redemption. The ignorance of the woman led astray had blinded us, the irresolution of the man allured and enticed by his own grasping self-interest* had enfeebled us, and the malice of the devil had held us captive once we were justly left unprotected by God.

So each and every one of us was born—first, utterly ignorant of the ways of the inhabited city;* then, weak-witted and indolent so that even had we known the path of life,* we were still shackled and held back by our own inertia; and, finally, imprisoned under the worst and cruelest of all tyrants, so that even if we had been prudent and strong, we would have been crushed by our wretched condition of slavery.

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*Jn 1:26

*Si 51:41

*Ps 35:6

*Ps 8:6; Heb 2:7,9

*1 Tm 2:5

°1 Pt 2:6

*Col 1:20

*Eph 2:3; 2 Cor 4:1

*Jm 1:14

*Ps 106:4

*Ps 15:11
Does such misery not necessitate great mercy and commiseration?* Surely if we have now been saved from this threefold wrath through Christ,* who became for us wisdom from God the Father, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption,* what great vigilance are we not going to need, dearly beloved, if—God forbid—our last state is not to be worse than our first,* because we incur his wrath again and are *children of wrath, not now by nature, but by our own free choice?*

4. Let us then embrace the mercy we have received in the midst of the temple and let us, with blessed Anna, never leave the temple.* God's temple is holy, and you are that temple, says the Apostle.* This mercy is nearby, the word is near, in your mouth and in your heart.* In short, Christ dwells in your hearts through faith.* This is the temple and this is his throne, unless for some reason he slips away from you, for *the soul of the righteous is the throne of wisdom.*

This is why I want to admonish my brothers frequently—in fact, always—and I beseech you now: let us not walk according to the flesh* lest we displease God. Let us not be friends of the world lest we become enemies of God.* Let us resist the devil and he will flee away from us,* that we may walk freely in the spirit* and our way of life be from our heart. The corruptible body weighs down the soul, enervating and enfeebling it, and the earthly habitation presses down on the mind that ponders many things* until it cannot rise up to the things of heaven. But *the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God* for someone who has overcome evil and become his servant.* What is more, in the heart we receive mercy, in the heart Christ dwells,* in the heart he speaks peace to his people, to his saints, to those who are converted to the heart.*

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ON THE FEAST OF THE PURIFICATION
OF HOLY MARY

SERMON TWO

On the Manner of the Procession
and Its Significance

1. THANKS be to our Redeemer, who has so
   generously gone before us with blessings
   of sweetness, multiplying our joys by the
   mysteries of his infancy. A short time ago we cele-
   brated his birth, his circumcision, and his epiphany.¹
   Today the feast of his presentation [in the temple]* has
dawned upon us. Today earth’s noblest fruit* is offered
to its Creator. Today an atoning sacrifice, acceptable
to God, is offered in the temple by the Virgin’s hands.
He is carried by his parents; he is awaited by the aged.
Joseph and Mary offer a morning sacrifice,* Simeon
and Anna receive it.

These four celebrated the procession that we
today call to mind with solemn joy throughout the
four corners of the earth. And because today we our-
selves are about to hold this festal procession—con-
trary to our custom on other solemnities²—I think

¹ Apparitione.
² The early Cistercians reduced the number of liturgical proces-
sions common in traditional monasteries to three and were criticized
by traditionalist monks for doing so. See Twelfth–century Statutes from
it not inappropriate to consider carefully the manner
and the order [in which we will proceed]. We will
process two by two, holding candles in our hands—
candles lighted, not by just any fire, but by fire previ-
ously consecrated in the church by a priestly blessing.
In our procession, the last shall be first and the first
last,* and we shall sing in the ways of the Lord, for
great is the glory of the Lord.*

2. We fittingly process two by two, for the holy
gospels bear witness that thus were the disciples sent
out by the Savior* with the purpose of commending
brotherly love and community life. If someone takes it
into his head to walk alone, he disturbs the procession
and not only harms himself but is a nuisance to others
as well. These are people who segregate themselves,
animals3 devoid of the Spirit.* They make no effort to
maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

Now as it is not good for a human being to be alone,* so
it is forbidden to appear empty handed before God.*
When even those whom no one hired are rebuked for
their idleness,* what do those who have already been
hired deserve if they are found idle? Faith without works
is dead!* Our works must be done with fervor and with
desire of heart, so that we may have burning lamps in
our hands.* Otherwise we have to fear that he who
says, I have come to send fire on the earth, and what do I
will but that it should burn,* may find us lukewarm and
spew us out of his mouth.* Clearly this is the holy and

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3 Animales. For Bernard's meaning, see, for example, William of Saint Thierry’s division of human beings into animal, rational, and spiritual levels of development. William of Saint-Thierry, Ep frat, The Golden Epistle, trans. Theodore Berkeley, CF 12 (Spencer, MA: Cistercian, 1971). Animales identifies those who rely on their physical senses rather than their reason or spiritual senses.
blessed fire that the Father has sanctified and sent into
the world* and that is blessed in the churches—as it is
written: In the churches, bless the Lord God.*

Our adversary,* the perverse emulator of divine
works, has his own fire, I tell you. And the fire he has,
the fire of fleshly desire, the fire of envy and ambition,
the Savior came not to kindle in us but to quench.
Those who presume to offer this alien fire at the di-
vine sacrifice, even if they have Aaron as their father,* shall die in their iniquity,*

3. In addition to what has been mentioned with regard
to the common life and brotherly love, to good works
and holy fervor, we have the greatest need of the greatest
virtue, humility. This is so that we may outdo one an-
other in showing honor,* putting before ourselves not
only our seniors but even our juniors,* for that is the
perfection of humility and the fullness of righteousness.

Since God loves a cheerful giver* and joy in the Holy
Spirit is the fruit of love,* let us sing, as it is said, in the
ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord.* Let
us sing unto the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous
things.* In all these matters, if anyone only pretends he
is making progress, even making progress from strength
to strength,* let him know that he is standing still and
not in the procession—in fact, that he is in regression;
for in the path of life,* not to make progress is to re-
gress. Nothing ever continues in the same state.* In-
deed, our progress lies in this—as I remember having
said quite often—that we should never think, “I have
grasped it,” but should always strain forward to what
lies ahead.* We should strive unceasingly to become
better, and we should leave our imperfect being con-
stantly open to the oversight of divine mercy.

4 Aaron’s sons “offered unholy fire before the Lord, such as he
had not commanded them.”
On the feast of the purification of Holy Mary

Sermon Three

On Moses’ Precept and the Offering of the Morning Sacrifice

1. TODAY we celebrate the purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary,* which was performed in accord with the law of Moses forty days after the Lord’s birth. In the law it was written that a woman who, having received seed, has borne a son is unclean for seven days;* on the eighth day she should circumcise the boy. Then, while she was intent on cleansing and purification, she was to refrain from entering the temple for thirty-three days. After that time she was to offer her son to the Lord, along with gifts.*

But does anyone fail to notice that in the very first phrase of this declaration the Lord’s mother is set free from this precept? Do you suppose that when Moses was about to say that a woman who has borne a son is unclean, that he was not afraid of incurring the sin of blasphemy against the Lord’s mother, and prefaced what he said with, having received seed?1 Unless he had

1 Suscepto semine.
foreseen that the Virgin was going to give birth without seed, what need had he to say “having received seed”?

This shows clearly that this law does not apply to the Lord’s mother, who—without having received seed—gave birth to a son. This is just as Jeremiah had foretold: the Lord would do a new thing on the earth. Do you ask what new thing? A woman, he says, will encompass a man.* She will not receive a man by another man; she will not conceive a human being in the human way, but she will enclose a man in a womb inviolate and intact. This was so that, while the Lord was coming and going,* the eastern gate—as another prophet says—might remain permanently shut.*

2. Do you suppose that her mind could not have been moved to say, “What need have I of purification? Why should I refrain from entering the temple? My womb, not knowing man, has become the temple of the Holy Spirit. Why should I, who have given birth to the Lord of the temple, not enter the temple? Nothing in this conception, nothing in this birth has been impure, nothing unlawful, nothing requiring purification. Surely not, for this child I have brought forth is the source of purification and comes to make purification for transgressions.* What will lawful observation purify in me who has been made absolutely pure by the spotless birth itself?”

Truly, O blessed Virgin, truly you have no reason for purification, nor any need of it. But had your child any need of circumcision? Be among women as one of them, just as your son was among the boys. He willed to be circumcised; does he not will far more to be offered? Offer your son, hallowed Virgin, and hold up to the Lord the blessed fruit of your womb!* Offer a sacrifice holy and acceptable to God* for the reconciliation of us all! God the Father will accept the new oblation, the most precious sacrifice, of whom he
himself said, *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*

Yet this offering, brothers, seems benign enough; he is simply presented to the Lord, redeemed by birds, and taken home again. A time will come when he will be offered, not in the temple or between Simeon’s arms, but outside the city between the arms of the cross. A time will come when he will not be redeemed by another’s blood, but will redeem others by his own,* because he is the redemption God the Father has sent to his people.* That will be the evening sacrifice; this is the morning sacrifice.* The one is more joyful, but the other more complete; this one takes place at the time of his birth, the other at the fullness of his years. What the prophet predicted you can understand as applying to both sacrifices: He was offered, because he himself willed it.* Now he was offered, not out of necessity, not because he was under an edict of the Law, but because he willed it; on the cross, too, he was offered, not because the Jews had prevailed, not because he deserved it, but because he willed it. *I will freely sacrifice to you,* Lord, because you freely offered yourself for my salvation, not for your necessity.

3. But, brothers, what do we offer or what do we render for all he has rendered to us?* He offered for us the most precious victim that he had—indeed, none more precious could exist. Let us, then, do what we can, offering him the best that we have—surely what we ourselves *are.* He offered himself; who are you who hesitate to offer yourself?

Who will accord to me that such great Majesty condescend to accept my offering? Two mites, Lord, is all I have.* I mean, my body and my soul. If only I could offer them to you perfectly as a sacrifice of praise.* It would be good for me, and far more glorious and expedient, to be offered to you than to be left to myself, for my soul is troubled within me.* Brothers, the Jews
offered dead victims to the Lord who was going to die; yet now, I live, says the Lord.\(^2\) I desire not the death of a sinner, but rather that he turn back and live.\(^*\) God does not want my death; and shall I not willingly offer him my life? This is an atoning sacrifice, a sacrifice acceptable to God, a living sacrifice.\(^*\)

At that offering we read of three persons, and in this offering, too, the Lord looks for three things. At that offering Joseph was present, the husband of the Mother of the Lord, who was thought to be his son;\(^*\) the virgin Mother herself was present; and the boy\(^3\) Jesus, who was offered up. May mature\(^4\) self-mastery, physical self-discipline, and humble self-knowledge\(^5\) be present in our offering as well! Yes, in our intention to persevere let us have a mature mind, in our self-discipline a virginal chastity, but in our self-knowledge a youthful\(^6\) simplicity and humility.

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\(^2\) *Vivo ego* was used as the psalm antiphon at Prime during Lent.

\(^3\) *Puer.*

\(^4\) *Virilis*; also in the following sentence.

\(^5\) *Constantia—continentia—conscientia.*

\(^6\) *Puerilis.*