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The Bride and the Wounds – "columba mea in foraminibus petrae" (Ct. 2.14)

Abstract

The dove – as a term of endearment from the *Song of Songs* – constitutes a subtle recurring sign throughout a medieval mystical tradition that links it to Christ's wounds and therefore to human anatomy, as well as to the poetic traditions of courtly love.

The dove is a subtle recurring sign throughout a medieval mystical tradition that links birds with human anatomy. In the late thirteenth century, opening and inspecting human bodies became an established practice in European corporate institutions such as in university medical faculties (Park 13–14). Yet, the interest in human dissection developed not only out of medical practices but cultural practices, especially funerary rituals including evisceration for embalming bodies, autopsies for criminal and public health purposes, surgical intervention in Caesarean section (*sectio in mortua*), as well as the relic cults of Christian saints (Park 15).[1] As Katharine Park observes, the anatomic inspection of open bodies was *inter alia* motivated by the need to determine holiness, to prove paramystical somatic phenomena or by the desire to understand the "mysterious workings of the uterus" (Park 26), the origin of life. The anatomical practice emerged as an investigative regard into bodies that had been opened for other reasons.

Caroline Walker Bynum notes that, in the years around 1300, torture was revived in judicial procedures (Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection* 323), and that the "same period saw increased enthusiasm for boiling and dividing holy bodies in order to produce relics for quick distribution" (Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection* 322). Additionally, from "the thirteenth century on, bands of flagellants roamed Europe, tearing out of their own flesh the suffering and joy of union with Christ" (Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* 4).

Exposed open bodies (injured skin, visible internal organs, bodies cut into pieces or dissected) seem to have been very much in

1. "Among other things, these events clearly demonstrate the absence in this period of either an effective ecclesiastical prohibition or a cultural taboo regarding the opening of human bodies, even in the immediate wake of Pope Boniface VIII's famous bull of 1299, *Detestande feritatis*, which is often invoked in this connection (even though it forbade only boiling flesh off bones);" "Boniface's supplementary letter of 1303, which forbade any opening of the human body, seems to have had equally little effect" (Park 47, 281).

vogue in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Europe. However, a consonant interest began in the twelfth century. This developed at the same time as the interest in cut and opened bodies in the contexts of funerary rituals, birthing processes, autopsies for science, criminal and public health purposes, relic production, flagellation, and torture. This interest became a fascination with the imagined glorified body, or in other words, incorruptible bodies. Mystical writings and treatises for use in meditation contain descriptions of open bodies or bodily interiors that are not linked to ritual fragmentation, that are not investigative, and where the concern is not anatomy, but rather with proximity to holy figures, as well as an aesthetic and, of course, spiritual regard. The main concern was not science, but admiration and intimacy. Whereas flagellants open their own bodies in order to experience God, the writings that I will discuss here reveal divine bodies that lay open. Whereas relics emerge out of decayed, fragmented bodies, mystical writings deal with whole, glorified corporality often bearing the traces of torture.

Several of the mystical or meditational episodes that belong to this tradition anticipate the anatomic fascination with the female womb. For example, the *Legatus divinae pietatis* (*The Herald of Divine Love*) narrates the spiritual life of the late thirteenth century Cistercian (Ruh 298–300) mystic Gertrude of Helfta. She is said to have received at Christmas, the Nativity Feast (which celebrates holy parturition) a vision that offered her a glimpse into the body of Saint Mary:

> Apparuit quoque immaculatus uterus Virginis gloriosae ad instar purissimae crystalli perspicuus, per quam omnia viscera ejus divinitate medullitus pertransita et repleta refulgebant, velut aurum diversi coloris serico convolutum elucere solet per crystallum. (Gertrude of Helfta, *Legatus divinae pietatis*, 4.3.4)

> There also appeared the immaculate womb of the glorious Virgin, as transparent as the purest crystal, through which her internal organs, penetrated and filled with divinity, shone brightly, just as gold, wrapped in a silk of various colors, shines through a crystal. (trans. Hamburger 118)

Gertrude's vision responds to the interest in the one elect womb where incarnation took place.[2] It explicitly denies specific interest in

2. For other examples see Tammen, *Marianischer*, and Tammen, *Das Verborgene sehen*.

anatomy. Organs function only as undifferentiated recipients of divinity evoking spiritual pregnancy unnaturally spread all over the belly. Saint Mary's organs are compared with gold, but they are covered, wrapped in translucent silk: partially unseen, like relics. Instead of being the object of organ investigation, her womb offers one of the many examples of celestial artificiality in Gertrude's book. Veneration results in imagined luxuries. Precious materials shape the aesthetic approach to the virginal body, that is perceptible in terms of *aisthesis* (perception through the senses) but is also pleasing or beautiful (Menninghaus; Braun and Young, ed.).

Another important example of the fascination with the interior of divine bodies is the devotion to Christ's wounds. Christ's wounds confront believers with another elect, glorified body that lays open. The mystical or meditative fixation on the wounds can be traced back to Bernard of Clairvaux's "Passion-centered reading of *Song of Songs* 2.14" (Hollywood 176): "My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall, shew me thy face, let thy voice sound in my ears [...]" (Douay-Rheims-Bible); "columba mea in foraminibus petrae in caverna maceriae ostende mihi faciem tuam sonet vox tua [...]" (*Vulgata*). Bernard "follows Gregory the Great († 604) in interpreting the clefts of the rock as Christ's wounds" (Hollywood 176, 342). This interpretation, which links the *Song of Songs* with the image of Christ as a rock (1 Cor. 10.4), can also be found for example in commentaries by Haimo of Auxerre and Williram of Ebersberg.

Bernard takes the lovers of the *Song of Songs* as the soul and the Word. At the same time, he does not reject the reading that identifies the dove with Ecclesia[3] as he writes in sermon 61, 6.312: "Et si Christum et Ecclesiam dixero, idem est, nisi quod Ecclesiae nomine non una anima, sed multarum unitas vel potius unanimitas designatur" ("And if I should say Christ and the Church the same applies, except that the word Church signifies not one soul but the unity or rather unanimity of many;" trans. Walsh and Edmonds). Yet Bernard's emphasis on the relationship between Christ and the soul, his focus on religious subjectivity paves the way for a number of mystical texts and meditational treatises dealing with different forms of intimacy between the Word and the soul, Christ and his human bride – an intimacy conceived under the banner of salvatory torture and suffering.

In sermon 61, the soul's access to the wounds – the "clefts of the rock" (Ct. 2.14) – signifies redemption, refuge, preservation from sin, and satiety as well as insight. Bernard's sermon became important

3. For a history of these readings, see Astell, *The Song of Songs*.

for later authors. Even if the ornithological details borrowed from the Bible and early commentaries declined, passages such as these were influential:

> In his "passer invenit sibi domum, et turtur nidum ubi reponat pullos suos" [Ps. 83.4]; in his se columba tutatur, et circumvolitantem intrepida intuetur accipitrem. Et ideo ait: [Ct. 2.14] "Columba mea in foraminibus petrae". [...] Et revera ubi tuta firmaque infirmis requies, nisi in vulneribus Salvatoris? (6.312–14)

> Within them [the clefts of the rock] "the sparrow finds a home, and the turtle a nest where she may lay her young;" in them the dove finds safety and fearlessly watches the circling hawk. This is why he says: "My dove in the clefts of the rock." [...] And really where is there safe sure rest for the weak except in the Saviour's wounds? (trans. Walsh and Edmonds, modified)

> Foderunt manus eius et pedes [cf. Ps. 21.17], latusque lancea foraverunt, et per has rimas licet mihi sugere mel de petra, oleumque de saxo durissimo [cf. Ps. 80.17], id est gustare et videre quoniam suavis est Dominus [cf. Ps. 33.9]. (6.314)

> They pierced his hands and his feet, they gored his side with a lance, and through these fissures I can suck honey from the rock and oil from the flinty stone – I can taste and see that the Lord is sweet. (trans. Walsh and Edmonds, slightly modified)

The pierced body of Christ is described as pleasurable, not in the sense of sight (like Mary's womb in Gertrude's vision), but in the sense of taste. This veneration does not address visuality above all else. Safety and nurture are the soul's only concerns, and the dove, like the other birds, stands for the need for safety. Of course, entering these clefts does not imply anatomical investigation, but Bernard later points out the knowledge to be obtained by looking into the Savior's open body:

> Quidni videam per foramen? [...] Patet arcanum cordis per foramina corporis, patet magnum illud pietatis sacramentum,

> patent "viscera misericordiae Dei nostri, in quibus visitavit nos oriens ex alto" [Lk. 1.78]. Quidni viscera per vulnera pateant?" (Sermon 61, 6.314–16)
>
> Why should I not gaze through the cleft? [...] The secret of his heart is laid open through the clefts of his body; that mighty mystery of loving is laid open, laid open too "the viscera of our God's mercy, in which the morning sun from on high has risen upon us" [Lk. 1.78]. Surely his viscera are laid open through his wounds! (trans. Walsh and Edmonds, modified)

While this perspective is anything but the examination of an internist, love and mercy are located in, and associated with, the heart and viscera: they do have an anatomy. Christ's body reveals spiritual deeds. Its openness recalls the sacrifice of the Christian *Sol invictus* and transforms anatomy into an abstract cluster of redemptive acts. The imagery sheers off significantly from Bernard's starting point with the "dove, in the clefts of the rock."

The fascination with Christ's open body subsequently develops in different ways focusing various aspects of Christ's abstract and concrete anatomy and highlighting the pleasures that emerge from it. The origins of this discourse, the dove and its clefts, either disappear completely or they play a discreet yet significant role in enactments of spiritual and erotic intimacy.

Beginning in the thirteenth century, Franciscans and Dominicans took up and intensified Cistercian Passion theology and spirituality (Steer 56). Bernard would adore Christ's wounds, while St. Francis of Assisi († 1226) would receive them (Köpf 30–31) – after living a life of frequent outer and inner isolation:

> Insensibilem omnibus quae perstrepunt exterius se reddebat, et totis visceribus undique sensus exteriores recolligens ac motus animi cohibens, soli vacabat Deo; "in foraminibus petrae" nidificabat, et "in caverna maceriae" [Ct. 2.14] habitatio eius. Felici certe devotione circuibat caelibes mansiones, et in vulneribus Salvatoris, exinanitus totus, diutius residebat. (Thomas de Celano 27.71)
>
> He made himself insensible to the din of all outward things; and, collecting the outward senses from every side with all

> his might, and keeping the natural impulses in check, he occupied himself with God alone. "In the clefts of the rock" he built his nest, and his habitation was "in a hollow of the wall." Surely in felicitous devotion did he roam round lonely dwelling-places, and, wholly emptied [of himself], he rested longer in the Savior's wounds. (trans. Ferrers Howell, Shopkow, modified)

A Franciscan guide to meditation of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries (Lewis 214; Karnes 146), the *Stimulus amoris, The Goad of Love*, likewise represents the shift from Cistercian to Franciscan Passion piety, showing a greater interest in bodily details. The text was formerly attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux or to Bonaventure but scholars now regard the Franciscan James of Milan as its author. There are at least five versions of the Latin text (Eisermann 62–63). One of the first meditations reads as follows:

> O amatissima vulnera Domini mei Iesu Christi! Nam, cum ea quadam vice oculis subintrarem apertis, ipsi oculi sanguine sunt repleti, sicque nihil aliud videns coepi ingredi manu palpans, donec perveni ad intima viscera caritatis suae, quibus undique circumplexus reverti nequivi. Ideoque ibi habito et, quibus vescitur, cibis vescor ac ibi inebrior suo potu; ibi tanta abundo dulcedine, ut tibi non valeam enarrare. Et qui prius pro peccatoribus fuerat in utero virginali, nunc dignatur me miserum inter sua viscera comportare. Sed multum timeo, ne veniat partus eius, et ab illis deliciis excidam, quibus fruor. Certe, et si me pepererit, debebit me sicut mater suis lactare uberibus, lavare manibus, portare brachiis, consolari osculis et fovere gremiis. Aut certe scio, quid faciam; quantumcumque me pariat, scio quod semper sua vulnera sunt aperta, et per ea in eius uterum iterum introibo, et hoc toties replicabo, quousque ero sibi inseparabiliter conglobatus. (102–04)

> O most loving wounds of my Lord Jesus Christ! For when in a certain time I entered into them with my eyes open, my eyes were so filled with blood that they could see nothing else; and so, attempting to enter further in, I groped the way all along with my hand, until I came unto the most inward bowels of His charity, from which, being encompassed on all

> sides, I could not go back again. And so I now dwell there, and eat the food He eats, and am made drunk with His drink. There I abound with such sweetness that I cannot describe it to you. He that previously was in the womb of a virgin for sinners now deigns to carry me, unfortunate one, in his bowels. But I greatly fear that the time of being born from him approaches, when I will be deprived of the delights which I am enjoying. But of course, if he has given birth to me, he must then, like a mother, feed me with his breasts, wash me with his hands, hold me in his arms, console me with his kisses, and cherish me in his lap. Or certainly I know what I will do: Although he gives birth to me, I know that his wounds remain always open, and through them I will again enter into his womb, and entirely repeat this, until I am inseparably gathered up into him. (trans. Luongo 105–06, modified)

This passage emphasizes the life-giving qualities of Christ's passion: fertility and birth within the horrifying imagery of a salvatory framework. For the soul that fears delivery, mystical union is fragile and too brief. On the themes of dwelling in God, sweetness, breastfeeding, and pleasurable nurture ("abundo dulcedine"), James of Milan is indebted to Bernard's sermon 61. The *Stimulus amoris* shifts from the unsavoury imagery of bowels and blood to Bernardian sweetness. "[S]anguis qui in se est abominabilis," as Gertrude of Helfta experiences it (*Legatus* 3.30.13), becomes desirable. Christ's body is likewise an abstract spiritual one, as the speaker reaches the "most inward bowels of His charity".

Entering Christ does not permit anatomic exploration because the speaker is blinded by blood. This opulent flood evokes the blood piety of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. What's more, the holy body shifts from masculinity to femininity. The fluidity of Christ's sexual difference (Hollywood 187, Störmer-Caysa) may have been facilitated by the similarity between the terms *vulnera* and *vulva* (Karnes 158). James of Milan takes up the Cistercian "feminization of religious language" (Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother* 129). Neither the Cistercians nor the *Stimulus* narrator, however, seem interested in the origins of life, in the construction of the uterus, but in forms of physical and spiritual union.

To be sure, James's passage – like many contemporary vision narratives – deals with God's transgressive sexuality and gender, and has

been analyzed as such by scholars of religion and literature (Hollywood, Lewis, Störmer-Caysa, Walker Bynum). Additionally, the passage might implicitly be seen to oppose Jewish polemics against incarnation centered on the impurity of human bodies: the uterus and bowels (Cuffel 12, 14). The medieval Christians, who shared many of these views of the body with their Jewish contemporaries (Cuffel 12, 124–25), proclaimed a different corporeality for Saint Mary and Christ, while still emphasizing their humanity (Cuffel 109–17, 155). What is interesting here, however, in addition to the non-investigative entering of Christ's body, is the absence of the dove. The first-person speaker does not identify her- or himself with the "columba mea." The gestation and parturition narrative that occasionally evokes parasitism as well as the blinding flood of blood belong to a quite different register. They exclude the lyrical Eros of the *Song of Songs* with its seductive theriomorphic imagery.

In the *Song of Songs*, the dove is a recurring motif that stands for the beloved, her singular personality, beauty, and purity in verses like Ct. 6.7–8:

> sexaginta sunt reginae et octoginta concubinae et adulescentularum non est numerus una est columba mea perfecta mea una est matris suae electa genetrici suae viderunt illam filiae et beatissimam praedicaverunt reginae et concubinae et laudaverunt eam
>
> There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and young maidens without number. One is my dove, my perfect one is but one, she is the only one of her mother, the chosen of her that bore her. The daughters saw her, and declared her most blessed: the queens and concubines, and they praised her. (Douay-Rheims-Bible)

The women's love and admiration motivates and enhances the attractiveness of the bride. The bridegroom praises an adult daughter who has always been "the only one of her mother, the chosen of her that bore her." By contrast, James of Milan, stressing the role of Christ's wound as "refuge and consolation" (Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* 14) transforms the male lover, Christ, into a mother and muses about the relationship between the mother and baby.

However, the dove is included in other texts, such as the *Rule of Life for a Recluse*, *De institutione inclusarum* (c. 1160–62), which was

written by Bernard's Cistercian fellow Aelred of Rievaulx († 1167, Karnes 120). Aelred's text, which was dedicated to his sister, a recluse and bride of Christ, includes a series of meditations that belong to the genre that explicitly encourages the meditant to imagine her- or himself within biblical scenes (Karnes 115, 131). Aelred writes about the wound in Christ's side as follows:

> Tunc unus ex militibus lancea latus eius aperuit, et exiuit sanguis et aqua. Festina, ne tardaueris, comede fauum cum melle tuo, bibe uinum tuum cum lacte tuo [cf. Ct. 5.1]. Sanguis tibi in uinum uertitur ut inebrieris, in lac aqua mutatur ut nutriaris. Facta sunt tibi in petra flumina [cf. Ps. 77.16], in membris eius uulnera, et in maceria corporis eius cauerna, in quibus instar columbae latitans et deosculans singula ex sanguine eius fiant "sicut uitta coccinea labia tua, et eloquium tuum dulce" [Ct. 4.3]. (31.671)
>
> Then one of the soldiers opened his side with a lance and there came forth blood and water. Hasten, linger not, eat the honey-comb with your honey, drink your wine with your milk. The blood is changed into wine to intoxicate you, the water becomes milk to nourish you. From the rock streams have flowed for you, wounds have been made in his limbs, holes in the wall of his body, in which, like a dove, you may hide. And while you kiss them one by one, "your lips," stained with his blood, will become "like a scarlet ribbon, and your word sweet." (trans. Macpherson, modified)

Aelred borrows from his master Bernard: the honey, the notion of nurture and gustatory pleasure, as well as notions of being hidden and taking comfort and refuge. He also quotes from the *Song of Songs* 5.1: "comedi favum cum melle meo bibi vinum meum cum lacte meo," "I have eaten the honeycomb with my honey, I have drunk my wine with my milk" (Douay-Rheims-Bible).

The two meditational treatises discussed here (Aelred's twelfth-century *Rule* and James of Milan's thirteenth/fourteenth-century treatise) anticipate a shift within vision narratives. Caroline Walker Bynum describes this shift: "Whereas the central liquids in thirteenth-century visions (even of wounds and hearts) are water, honey, and milk, the liquid in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century visions is blood, ever more copiously pooling or shed." (Walker Bynum,

Wonderful Blood 6). In Aelred the bodily fluids rapidly become tasty nurture – honey, milk, and wine – evoking the erotic consumables in the *Song of Songs* that excludes blood floods and such dominant imagery as blinding blood.

Aelred mentions the soul entering the Saviour's body, but unlike James of Milan, focuses on the surface of these internal spaces. The reader kisses the wounds – from within. The trace of Christ's suffering is not a repulsive bleeding flood; this blood makes the lips attractive. Combining passion with beauty and with valuable materials, Aelred's quotation of the *Song of Songs* 4.3 mentions a small and precious textile artifact, the "scarlet ribbon."

Internal examination or anatomic regard into the body of the Man of Sorrows, his heart or bowels, would not fit with this erotically charged discourse. The collage of Biblical references seeks to seduce readers into meditation as the text praises closeness with God. To this effect, Aelred quotes details from the laudatory speech of the *Song of Songs*, Salomon's "epithalamii carmen" (Sermon 1, 5.6), as Bernard calls it. Aelred promises attractiveness of the soul, which he identifies with the dove. In this way, he suggests godly desire. He takes the verse "My dove, in the clefts of the rock [...], shew me thy face" traditionally as the imploring words of the bridegroom. In this way, the dove figures as a term of endearment. Unlike the *Stimulus amoris*, Aelred demonstrates a concern with the bridegroom's attractiveness, disregarding the inner body of Christ which might appear unsavoury.

Another author who maintains the importance of the dove is Mechthild of Magdeburg († 1282), the beguine and later nun in Helfta. In her *Flowing Light of the Godhead, Das fließende Licht der Gottheit*, written in Low German, Mechthild adapts the language and motifs of courtly literature to religious purpose.[4] We have Mechthild's text both in Latin and in a High German translation, made by the secular priest Henry of Nördlingen in the fourteenth century (Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother* 177–78). Mechthild's writings depict forms of erotic intimacy with God, often presented as visions. Her text sometimes reads as a guide to meditation, like the lyrical passage I cite here.[5]

Inspired by the dialogic structure of the *Song of Songs* (Haug), Mechthild orchestrates a passionate conversation between God and a soul that says about itself: "Ich bin ein vollewahsen brut, ich wil gan nach minem trut" (1.44.62), "I am a full-grown bride. I want to go to my Lover" (trans. Tobin). The (earlier) dialogue between lovers op-

4. On Mechthild's authorship, cf. Nemes.

5. Cf. *Lyrische Narrationen*; Hempfer.

erates with transformed *Song of Songs* imagery:

14. Wie dú sele got enpfahet und lobet
[...] O du hoher stein,
du bist so wol durgraben,
in dir mag nieman nisten denne tuben und nahtegalen!
15. Wie got die sele enpfahet
Siest wilkomen, liebú tube,
du hast so sere geflogen in dem ertriche,
das dine vedern sint gewahsen in das himelriche.
(1.14–15.34)

14. How the Soul Receives and Praises God
[...] O you lofty Crag.
You are so nicely perforated.
In you no one can nest but doves and nightingales.
15. How God Receives the Soul
Welcome, my precious dove.
You have flown with such pains over the earth
That your feathers reach to heaven.
(trans. Tobin, modified)

Mechthild's lyrical language of intimacy, her bridal mysticism, excludes the interior of the beloved's body or anatomical investigation. Nor does she look into the painfully perforated crag (which is not bleeding in her text). Rather, her interest is in the appropriateness and beauty ("wol durgraben") of the surface of Christ's body from the outside. In terms of *aisthesis* it addresses the sense of sight. Her eye doesn't follow the birds that enter the crag. Mechthild even modifies the *Song of Songs* by adding another bird, the nightingale, the bird of courtly love poetry, and a protagonist in the pleasant green spaces of the *locus amoenus*. With the addition of this bird, Mechthild enriches the biblical verse with elements from courtly poetry,adding special emphasis to the seductive qualities in the speech.[6] This passage can also be understood as a tacit refusal to consider the ugliness in Christ's maltreated body.[7] By contrast, a contemporary text by Bonaventure, for example, the *Lignum vitae* compares the Man of Sorrows with a leprosed body ("quasi vir leprosus," 76). *The Flowing Light of the Godhead* tacitly implies that Christ's beauty is the result of redemption.

God's response in this text identifies the soul with the dove,

6. Another example in which a nightingale in a courtly passage is found is 1.44.30.

7. A later poetic reference to the attractiveness of the dove's red feet emphasizes the connection between the dove and Christ's passion. The color red is linked with Christ's blood, while the dove stands, as usual, for the soul. Passion means beauty. Cf. 2.17–18.10–20.

thereby suggesting that the crag functions as a shelter for the elect one, called the "dove" as a term of endearment. At the same time, the answer focuses on heaven. It gives rise to a grotesque image of oversized, non-anatomic feathers that disrupts visual harmony. The feathers' shape is due to a suffering that enables the dove to grow into the sky. Unlike Christ's, the soul's passion does not result in beauty. The incongruity of this image may also indicate the inadequacy of language and the visible when confronted with transcendence.

The availability of Christ's open body, in meditation, offers direct experience of God within the paradoxical framework of incarnated transcendence. God is both near and remote. While James of Milan's foetal speaker fears delivery, Mechthild of Magdeburg's soul requires impossible feathers to reach heaven. Bernard of Clairvaux puts it as follows in sermon 61:

> Ero quasi columba nidificans in summo ore foraminis, ut cum Moyse positus in foramine petrae, transeunte Domino merear saltem posteriora eius prospicere [cf. Ex. 33.22–23]. Nam faciem stantis, id est incommutabilis claritatem, quis videat, nisi qui introduci iam meruit non in sancta, sed in sancta sanctorum? (6.316–18)

> I shall be as the dove nesting at the highest point of the cleft, so that like Moses in his cleft of the rock, I may be able to see at least the Lord's back as he passes. For who can look on his face as he stands, on the splendour of the unchangeable God, but he who deserved to be introduced not only to the holy place but to the holy of holies. (trans. Walsh and Edmonds, modified)

Bernard's speaker does not pretend to have access to the holy of holies (yet), but – as cited earlier – there is access to Christ's immortal humanity, to God's sweetness. Later, Christ is said to be "Sublimis in regno, sed suavis in cruce" (6.318), "He is sublime in his kingdom, but sweet on the cross" (sermon 61, trans. Walsh and Edmonds, modified).

Bernard of Clairvaux's interpretation of "columba mea in foraminibus petrae" is specifically Christian, and Passion-centered. However, his primary witness concerning the idea of God's unapproachability is the Jewish prophet Moses. Being "as the dove nesting in the highest point of the cleft" protects the speaker from God's

anthropomorphic, yet terrifying majesty. The "clefts of the rock" now offer shelter from God himself, rather than from evil, "the circling hawk." This sermon oscillates between intimacy and awe, even more explicitly than the later texts discussed here.

Returning a last time to anatomy: as Park shows, female dissection raised "a broad set of issues regarding female modesty and the contemporary understanding of sight as a primary mover of the passions, especially sexual desire" (Park 69). Anatomical images of female bodies produced during the early modern period have much in common with contemporary erotic prints (Park 200). Wax Venus anatomical models from the 17th to 19th centuries combine science, eroticism, horror, and disgust (Böhme 465).

However, the religious fascination with opened bodies, especially of a male whose sex is fluid, operates differently. Spiritual intimacy begins with exposed wounds, excluding anatomical investigation. The dove that enters the wounds does not guide the sight to bodily details. In Bernard's pivotal sermon, Christ's heart and viscera reveal abstract concepts, while the body of Christ offers savoury nurture. As we have seen, this body is not explicitly erotic or pleasurable to the sense of sight, but it is pleasurable to the sense of taste. Whereas James of Milan narrates from the point of view of a (blind) foetus (omitting the dove), the lyric, erotic approach found in Aelred and in Mechthild prevents looking inside the beloved's body. This kind of regard, instead, fosters contemplation of pierced surfaces and a consideration of their beauty – even if this is not without horror.

As a term of endearment, the dove of the *Song of Songs* is a sign of intimacy in two ways. First, this dove is enclosed within the clefts that double as Christ's wounds. Second, the dove is associated with the lyricism of birds in the poetic traditions of courtly love. These allusions to the bird suggest (erotic) intimacy with God, despite his remoteness. In Bernard, however, the dove can likewise emphasize God's unapproachability.[8]

8. I would like to thank Dr Guita Lamsechi for carefully proofreading my English.

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