

“This long-awaited volume allows contemporary readers to appreciate the full theological creativity and monastic wisdom of one of the greatest, but less well-known, Cistercian mystics of the twelfth century. Isaac of Stella’s liturgical sermons are original, challenging, and spiritually nourishing. It is a delight to have them in a fine English translation for the first time.”

— Bernard McGinn
Naomi Shenstone Donnelley Professor Emeritus
Divinity School, University of Chicago

“This new publication, which brings to completion the whole series of his sermons, coming out forty years after the first half, benefits from two improving new factors: a better knowledge of Isaac’s life and literary output, and an updated translational technique, more attentive to the original style of the author. Such a work will undoubtedly increase the knowledge and the consequent relevance of Isaac of Stella, for ‘the soundness of his monastic teaching, the depth and breadth of his theology, and his skill with words.’ Surely, it is time for acknowledging his high place among the great authors of the first Cistercian generation, and his full and undisputable right to be called ‘the fifth evangelist of Cîteaux.’”

— Fr. Domenico Pezzini

CISTERCIAN FATHERS SERIES: NUMBER SIXTY-SIX

Isaac of Stella

Sermons on the Christian Year

Volume 2

Sermons 27–55 and Fragments 1–3

Translated by
Lewis White

Introduction by
Elias Dietz, OCSO



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Table of Abbreviations

Ant	Antiphon
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
Coll	<i>Collectanea Cisterciensia</i>
CSQ	<i>Cistercian Studies Quarterly</i>
H	Homelia
PL	Patrologia Latina
RB	Regula Benedicti
Resp	Responsory
S, SS	Sermo, Sermones
SBOp	Sancti Bernardi Opera
SCh	Sources Chrétiennes
Var	Old Latin version

Works Cited by Author

Ambrose

Bon mor	De bono mortis
De mys	De mysteriis
De of	De officiis ministrorum
Expos Luc	Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam
Hex	Hexæmeron

Anselm

Cur	Cur Deus homo
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Apuleius

Met Metamorphoses

Aristotle

Nic Eth Nicomachean Ethics
Rhet Rhetoric

Augustine

Civ Dei De civitate Dei
Conf Confessiones
Cor grat De correptione et gratia
Don per De dono perseverantiæ
Enchir Enchiridion
En in Ps Enarrationes in Psalmos
Ep Epistolæ
Gra et lib De gratia et libero arbitrio
In eu Ioann In Euangelium Ioannis tractatus
Lit gen De Genesi ad litteram
Lit gen imp De Genesi ad litteram liber imperfectus
Nup De nuptiis et concupiscentia
Op imp con Iul Opus imperfectum contra secundam responsionem
 Iuliani
Præ De prædestinatione sanctorum
Spir litt De spiritu et littera
Trin De Trinitate

Benedict

RB Regula sancti Benedicti, Regula Monachorum

Bernard

Adv Sermo in adventu domini
Asc Sermo in ascensione Domini
Conv Sermo de conversione ad clericos
Csi De consideratione
Dil De diligendo Dei
Div Sermones de diversis
Ep Epistolæ
Epi Sermo in epiphania Domini

Gra	Liber de gratia et libero arbitrio
Hum	Liber de gradibus humilitatis et superbiæ
Miss	Homiliæ super "Missus est" (in laudibus Virginis Matris)
Nat	Sermo in nativitate Domini
O Pasc	In octava Paschæ
OS	Sermo in festivitate omnium sanctorum
Pasc	Sermones in die paschæ
Pent	Sermo in die sancto pentecostes
PP	Sermo in festo SS. apostolorum Petri et Pauli
Pre	Liber de præcepto et dispensatione
QH	Sermo super psalmum "Qui habitat"
Quad	In quadragesima
SC	Sermones super Cantica Canticorum
Sent	Sententiæ

Boethius

Quo sub	Quomodo substantiæ bonæ sint
---------	------------------------------

John Cassian

Coen Inst	De coenobiorum institutis
Coll	Collationes Patrum

Cicero

Amic	De amicitia
De fini bon et mal	De finibus bonorum et malorum
Nat deo	De natura deorum

John Scotus Eriugena

Div nat	De divisione naturæ
---------	---------------------

Fulgentius

Fi	De fide
----	---------

Geoffrey of Auxerre

Col	De colloquio Simonis cum Iesu ex sermonibus Bernardi
-----	--

Gregory the Great

1 Kgs	Commentarii in librum I Regum
Eu	In euangelia
Mo	Moralia in Job

Hildebert of Tours

Car min	Carmina minora
De trib miss	De tribus missis in natale Domini

Homer

Il	Iliad
----	-------

Horace

Ars Poet	Ars poetica
Car	Carmina
Sat	Satires

Hugh of Saint Victor

Erud didasc	Eruditio didascalica
Sac	De sacramentis

Irenæus

Adv hæc	Adversus hæreses
---------	------------------

Isaac of Stella

De off	Epistola de officio missæ
Ep an	Epistola de anima

Isidore

Diff	De differentiis verborum
Etym	Etymologiæ
Lib num	Liber numerorum

Jerome

In Ier	Translatio homiliarum in Ieremiam et Ezechielem
Nom	Interpretatio Hebraicorum nominum

Lactantius

Div inst Divinarum institutionum

Leo the Great

In nat Sermo de nativitate

Origen

In Ezek In Ezechielem

In Num In Numeros

Ovid

Am Amores

Meta Metamorphoses

Persius

Sat Saturae

Peter Lombard

Sent Sentences

Plato

Rep Republic

Tim Timaios

Pliny the Elder

Nat hist Naturalis historia

Pliny the Younger

Ep Epistolæ

Plotinus

Enn Enneads

Lucius Annæus Seneca

Ep Epistolæ morales ad Lucilium

Terence

Eun Eunuchus

Virgil

Æn Æneis

William of Saint-Thierry

Cant Expositio super Cantica canticorum
Ep frat Epistola (aurea) ad fratres de Monte Dei

Introduction

The appearance of this second volume will be a welcome event both for those who have been waiting for the complete sermons to become available in English and for first-time readers of Isaac who will find here some of the most approachable of the abbot of Stella's writings. As for introducing this volume, a good first step is to point out valuable material that is already available. Most notably, there is Bernard McGinn's Introduction to volume one (CF 11)¹ and his chapter on Isaac in *The Great Cistercian Mystics*, both of which offer helpful general overviews of Isaac's works and thought.² Although somewhat dated, Louis Bouyer's chapter on Isaac in *The Cistercian Heritage* remains the most penetrating general overview of Isaac's teaching.³ The present Introduction will therefore limit itself to four purposes: first, to provide an update concerning what we know about Isaac's life; second, to revisit the problem of the unusual order of the sermon collection; third, to highlight some of the main features of Isaac's style; and, last, to facilitate access to the sermons by classifying them according to themes and levels of difficulty.⁴

¹ Bernard McGinn, Introduction to Isaac of Stella, *Sermons on the Christian Year*, vol. 1, trans. Hugh McCaffery, CF 11 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1979), ix–xxx.

² Bernard McGinn, *The Great Cistercian Mystics: A History*, The Mystical Traditions of Catholic Religious Orders, vol. 1 (New York: Crossroad, 2019), 189–202.

³ Louis Bouyer, *The Cistercian Heritage*, trans. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (London: Mowbray, 1958), 161–89.

⁴ An important new resource for study of Isaac's sermons is the two-volume Italian translation by Domenico Pezzini (see my review in CSQ 43 [2008]: 360–62). It includes a lengthy Introduction on Isaac's life, works, theology, and style: Isacco della Stella, *I Sermoni, Volume primo: Dalla Settuaigesima alla Pentecoste* (Milano: Paoline, 2006); Isacco della Stella, *I Sermoni, Volume secondo: Mariale – Santorale – Tempo ordinario* (Milano: Paoline, 2007).

Isaac's Biography

As a general sketch of Isaac's life, the section "Isaac's World" in volume one retains its usefulness (CF 11:xii–xvi). More recent studies, however, have brought new documents to light and re-examined the evidence, particularly regarding the question of Isaac's stay on the Island of Ré. According to Gaetano Raciti's earliest theory,⁵ which has been adopted in most standard presentations of Isaac's biography, Isaac spent the last years of his life in exile on Ré, a small island off the west coast of France near La Rochelle. As this theory has it, Isaac was forced into exile because of his loyalty to Thomas Becket's cause. Furthermore, Isaac's supposed persecutor in this affair was Geoffrey of Auxerre, who, as abbot of Clairvaux, was a major force in the anti-Becket faction among the Cistercians. A variation on this theory is that Isaac's exile was voluntary, motivated by a desire for greater solitude and austerity of life.⁶ In both cases Isaac is seen as a marginalized figure, who ceased to be abbot of Stella and spent his final days in his island exile.

This theory has been called into question since the discovery of part of Stella's archives in the 1980s.⁷ The evidence points to a brief stay on Ré perhaps as early as the 1150s when Isaac was a relatively new abbot. It also shows that Isaac was still abbot of Stella in his later years, and that he was fondly remembered as such in documents written after his death.⁸ Another discovery, this time of a fragment of a sermon by Isaac, confirms that at some point in his life as abbot, he was away "in exile" for perhaps less than a year, after which time he returned to Stella.

⁵ Gaetano Raciti, "Isaac de l'Étoile et son siècle," *Cîteaux* 12 (1961): 281–306; 13 (1962): 18–34, 133–45, 205–16.

⁶ Gaston Salet, ed. and trans., Introduction to Isaac de l'Étoile, *Sermons: Tome 1*, SCh 130 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1967), 22–24; Bernard McGinn, *The Golden Chain: A Study in the Theological Anthropology of Isaac of Stella* (Washington, DC: Cistercian, 1972), 19–23.

⁷ Claude Garda, "Du nouveau sur Isaac de l'Étoile," *Cîteaux* 37 (1986): 8–22.

⁸ Also, a study of the manuscript tradition shows that Isaac's *Letter on the Canon of the Mass*, his best-known work during his lifetime, was at the peak of its popularity in the late 1160s and early 1170s, a fact hard to reconcile with the theory of exile and marginalization during that same period; see Elias Dietz, "Isaac of Stella's *Epistola de canone missae*: A Critical Text and Translation," *Cîteaux* 64 (2014): 265–308.

Isaac's frequent use of hyperbole and strong metaphors in his writings should caution us from taking the word *exile* in a literal sense. There is clear evidence that Isaac was involved in the establishment of a monastery on the Island of Ré, which was assumed into Pontigny's filiation in 1156, according to traditional dates. Probably his reasons for going to Ré were connected with preparations for a foundation. As to the possibility of a forced exile, there is no evidence to back this theory. If the earlier dating of the Ré episode is correct, it had nothing to do with Isaac's support of Thomas Becket, who was still archdeacon at Canterbury in the 1150s, nor was it caused by Geoffrey, who at that time was busy taking dictation for Saint Bernard. Even if a later date is chosen, there is neither proof nor sufficient reason to suppose that Isaac or his abbey would have been singled out as objects of aggression on the part of Becket's opponents.⁹

Until further evidence comes to light, we must content ourselves with a sketchy but coherent picture of Isaac's life story. Isaac was an Englishman, born in the early 1100s, who spent a significant period of his youth as a student in France.¹⁰ By 1147 he was abbot of Stella, a reform-minded community of Black Monks that became Cistercian in the mid-1140s. The teaching found in the body of his writings that has come down to us reflects a unique synthesis of these two aspects of his life, namely, great learning and strong monastic convictions. At some point in his abbatial career he spent a brief period of time on the Island of Ré in connection with the foundation of the monastery of Châteliers. By 1169 he was no longer abbot. He probably died at Stella around that date.

⁹ For a complete re-examination of the elements of Isaac's biography, see Wolfgang Buchmüller, *Isaac von Étoile: monastische Theologie im Dialog mit dem Neo-Platonismus des 12. Jahrhunderts*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters 80 (Münster: Aschendorff, 2016); Travis D. Stolz, "Isaac of Stella, the Cistercians and the Thomas Becket Controversy: A Bibliographical and Contextual Study," Ph.D. dissertation, 2010, Marquette University; and Elias Dietz, "When Exile is Home: The Biography of Isaac of Stella," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 41 (2006): 141–65.

¹⁰ It has sometimes been suggested that Isaac was even a *magister* in the schools, because some manuscripts of his *Letter on the Canon of the Mass* attribute this title to him. However, a critical examination of the manuscripts shows that this title appears in the latest and worst manuscripts, added by scribes who knew nothing of Isaac's identity; see Dietz, Isaac of Stella's *Epistola*, 284–85.

The Sermon Collection

Collections of sermons are traditionally organized according to the church year, beginning with Advent. So it is perplexing to find that Isaac's collection begins with a series for All Saints, includes nothing for Advent and Christmas, continues with Epiphany, and then follows the usual order for the rest of the liturgical year. It is impossible to know whether this ordering was intentional on Isaac's part or even whether the sermons were gathered into an organized whole during his lifetime. He composed most of his sermons in groups, and in some cases these groups are actually treatises in their own right. None of the surviving manuscripts contains all the sermons. Bertrand Tissier, who first edited Isaac's works in the seventeenth century, seems to have had access to a manuscript with a rather complete collection,¹¹ but that volume has since been lost.

How, then, to account for this out-of-the-ordinary sermon collection? One approach, based on the assumption that Isaac produced a complete cycle of sermons for the church year, is to speculate that the unusual order of the sermons as found in Tissier's edition is the result of a dismembered manuscript being rebound out of order.¹² This same imagined scenario has also been used to claim that Sermon 6 was originally an Epiphany sermon, and that it only later became attached to Sermons 1–5 for All Saints. Another approach is to seek an explanation based on the available evidence. There is in fact no record that Isaac wrote sermons for Advent and Christmas, and there are no signs of such sermons in the manuscript tradition. It is significant to note that the early thirteenth-century chain of biblical commentary referred to as *Catena moralis in totam bibliam*, for lack of an original title, chose many excerpts from Isaac's writings, but none of them

¹¹ *Sermones B. Patris Isaac, Abbatis de Stella Ordinis Cisterciensis*, in Bertrand Tissier, *Bibliotheca Patrum Cisterciensium*, vol. 6 (Bono-Fonte, 1664), 1–77; repr. PL, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1855), 194:1689–1876. In fact, Tissier is the only witness for six of the sermons.

¹² This is the explanation offered by Gaetano Raciti, "Note complémentaire 32, La collection des sermons d'Isaac," in Isaac de l'Étoile, *Sermons* [40–55], Tome 3, ed. Anselm Hoste and Gaetano Raciti, trans. Gaston Salet and Gaetano Raciti, SCh 339 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1987), 315–16.

comes from these supposedly lost sermons.¹³ Moreover, concerning the question of the All Saints sermons, it has recently been pointed out that sermons 1–6 form a unified series based on a traditional constellation of topics that Isaac would have found in his main sources, namely, Augustine and Hugh of Saint-Victor.¹⁴ In conclusion, Isaac's sermons circulated mostly in small groups, which may or may not have formed a complete collection in Isaac's lifetime. The ordering of the sermons as found in Tissier's edition and all subsequent editions was that of either an early manuscript or an editorial choice on Tissier's part. In either case, the All Saints sermons are emblematic of Isaac's approach and serve well as a programmatic overture for the whole collection.¹⁵

Major Characteristics of Isaac's Style

A rich area of research opens to anyone who looks closely at Isaac's writings from a literary point of view.¹⁶ His style has been characterized as the opposite of Saint Bernard's and somewhat similar to Saint Leo's.¹⁷ Although the fine points of such comparisons are not always discernable in translation, Isaac's approach is noticeably more restrained and didactic than Bernard's (there are few digressions), and the almost liturgical quality of some of his formulations still comes through clearly in English.¹⁸ The striking images and metaphors, the interesting details from daily life, and the unexpected moments of self-revelation are traits that bring Isaac's world alive even at such great distance in time. With regard to his use of imagery there is

¹³ The oldest manuscript is from Clairvaux (Troyes, BM 1423). The work is sometimes attributed to Geoffrey of Auxerre.

¹⁴ Jean Troupeau, "Isaac of Stella's Sermons for the Feast of All Saints," *CSQ* 54 (2019): 25–56.

¹⁵ Troupeau, "Isaac of Stella's Sermons," 55.

¹⁶ The most complete presentation of Isaac's style to date is found in Domenico Pezzini, "*Eloquentia et elegantia*: On Isaac of Stella's Literary Style Illustrated through a Comparative Analysis of Modern Translations," *Studia Monastica* 55 (2013): 65–156.

¹⁷ Bouyer, *Cistercian Heritage*, 161.

¹⁸ McGinn, *Golden Chain*, 25–29.

clearly a symbolic component,¹⁹ but often his images follow basic thought patterns. Familiarity with these patterns greatly enhances one's reading experience, so they deserve mention here.

Isaac's metaphorical approach is closely linked to his way of interpreting Scripture. As André Fracheboud so perceptively remarked, Isaac interpreted the Synoptics—and the whole of the Bible for that matter—with a Johannine mentality.²⁰ He made use of the traditional four senses of Scripture,²¹ but his predominant tendency was to leap immediately to the level of mystery, sacrament, and dogma. In doing so he used an abundance of spatial images and images of movement that fall into five major categories. The following schematization may not do full justice to the richness and complexity of Isaac's art, but a cursory inventory of the main images will alert readers to their presence and importance.

Intus-foris (within/without). "The Book of Wisdom is written on the inside and the outside, so that those who come in and those who go out may find pasture. Outside is history, inside is tropology" (S 9.1). As in this passage, Isaac frequently uses the inside-outside image in terms of penetration of meaning. Sometimes he uses it to indicate that what we perceive in the outer book of creation teaches us the inner dispositions of the Creator (e.g. S 47.13). In other places it is an anthropological image: "Outwardly you are an animal, fashioned as the world is fashioned . . . but inwardly you are made in the image of God and so are capable of being deified" (S 2.13). Even more fundamentally, Isaac's use of this image flows from his deeply sacramental vision of creation and history: "nearly everything that happens outwardly in history is celebrated inwardly in mystery" (S 52.8).

Altius-subtilius (higher/deeper; subtler). Another class of images has to do with movement on the vertical axis. Isaac has a keen eye

¹⁹ See Vincent Séguret, "La signification spirituelle de la vie insulaire dans les Sermons d'Isaac de l'Étoile," Coll 56 (1994): 343–58; 57 (1995): 75–92; and Claude Garda, "Le symbole de l'eau chez Isaac de l'Étoile," Coll 59 (1997): 75–80.

²⁰ André Fracheboud, "Isaac de l'Étoile et l'Écriture sainte," Coll 19 (1957): 144–45.

²¹ See his own exposition on the sense of Scripture at the beginning of Sermon S 16; for further references see the note "Les sens de l'Écriture," in Isaac, *Sermons: Tome I*, Sch 130:343.

for geographical details in Scripture, especially for ascents and descents, to which he immediately gives a spiritual or theological interpretation.²² The many mountains in the sermons are usually associated with the wondrous exchange: “[Jesus] has descended into you, so that you, after him and through him, may ascend above yourself, even up to him who is within you” (S 1.5). Associated with the mountain theme is the image of the golden chain and the principle of concatenation: our ascent to Mount Tabor (via the purification of heart and mind) is made through five stages that correspond to the elements of the visible world and to the faculties of the human soul (S 4.6–9).²³ Christ is seen as Jacob’s ladder: “At his own discretion Christ ascends through himself to himself, now with a few, now with many, and now with no one being able to follow” (S 12.4). Finally, in addition to the descending-ascending images Isaac includes depth images like the well: the water of wisdom (Jesus’ word) “can only be drunk in a time of leisure. . . . For the well is deep” (S 1.13).

Prope-longe (near/far). Movement on the horizontal axis has to do with distance and nearness. Sin causes a fundamental separation, whereas mercy tries to bridge the gap: “Let mercy come up to the darkness and the shadow of death *to look for what has been lost*, because justice, remaining in the light, rebukes from a distance the one lost and hidden in shadows, shouting, Adam, *where are you?*” (S 51.19). In one remarkable passage Isaac describes the whole of Christian life in terms of far and near:

But a person’s life itself can be a going aside and coming near to the Lord. It is in this sense that our Lord says, “Come close to me, and I will come close to you.” To repeat: some are near God in their understanding, but far from him in their manner of life; others live close to him in manner of life, though not in understanding; still others are far from God in both their conduct and their mind; while others are close to God in both ways. Understanding brings one close to God; manner of life brings closer; lastly, understanding and life bring one as close as possible. (S 14.9; CF 11:116)

²² For a more complete treatment of the ascent-descent theme, see Hugh McCaffery, “Observations by the Translator,” Appendix to CF 11:219–32, here 227–30.

²³ This is the central subject of Bernard McGinn’s *The Golden Chain*, cited above.

Related to these images of horizontal movement is the frequent mention of going out and crossing over (*egressus, transmigratio*). Applied to Christ, this movement on the horizontal axis, as in the previous category, signifies his kenosis, the taking on of a slave's condition in order to set us free (S 33.1–5). Applied to us, it is a movement of conversion away from self toward Christ in order to meet him halfway: "let the Canaanite woman [the Church or the soul] go forth from her inner borders . . . to meet the physician who has mercifully come forth from his own borders to a foreign land to meet her, a sick person who could never approach him if he remained in his own land" (S 33.6). Applied to both it becomes an encounter: "Understand this meeting to be either the personal union in which God and humanity come together in Christ or *the great sacrament of the mysterious marriage that the apostle commends in Christ and the church*" (S 55.13).

Initium, profectus, perfectio (beginning, progress, perfection). Isaac makes extensive use of the common mnemonic device of grouping things in threes. Most often his ternary structures are progressive ones along the lines of the traditional three ways.²⁴ God's action toward us is threefold: "In God's wisdom and kindness it is truly equitable to correct the wayward [beginners], to guide those who have been corrected [those progressing], and to receive those whom he has guided [the perfect]" (S 2.21). Our relationship with God follows these same stages: we pass from being enemies to being servants, to being children and heirs (S 5.2–5). The same stages apply to our experience of conversion: "Man should come from the old self through the new self to the eternally real self; from vanity to virtue by way of truth; from waywardness by the straight way to true Life" (S 9.19). In several cases this threefold scheme provides the framework for long developments and even groups of sermons: Sermons 1–5, Sermons 52 and 53, and *The Letter on the Canon of the Mass* all share this same structure.

Totus-immensus: These various images of movement find their synthesis and completion in images of growth, infinite expansion, and immensity. The natural stages of human life become images of growth in Christ: "It is nourished in infancy, instructed in youth, and

²⁴ For several examples and a comparative table, see Elias Dietz, "Conversion in the Sermons of Isaac of Stella," CSQ 37 (2002): 254–55.

perfected at a manly age, that is, when it rises up *to the perfect man, to the measure of the age of Christ's fullness*" (Fragment 1.15). Moreover, complete growth in Christ is inseparably bound up with the whole Body of Christ: "[Christ] was extended and stretched out and hung on a cross to join in one the depths, the heights, and what lay between. . . . Christ apart from the Church is no more the whole Christ than the Church is complete if separated from Christ. Head and body go to make the whole and entire Christ" (S 11.15). And there is no limit to this growth: "Happy the soul that never forgets, never lets go of Jesus the Child! Happier still the soul that thinks on Jesus the grown Man! Happiest of all the soul that contemplates Jesus the 'ever-infinite' [*immensum Iesum*]. . . . Let God's Son grow ever greater in each of you, brothers. He has, to be sure, been formed in you, but he must grow infinite [*immensus*] in you" (S 7.15–16).

A Reading Guide to Isaac's Works

While it is true that Isaac is one of the more difficult of the twelfth-century Cistercian authors, his works cover a wide spectrum and include many approachable pieces. In order to facilitate access to Isaac's writings and to help readers navigate among them, the following three-tiered classification is proposed. The *first category* includes selections that are especially valuable as introductions to the multifaceted world of Isaac's sermons. They provide insight into Isaac's character, his ascetical teaching, and key aspects of his theological vision. The *second category* is made up mostly of groups of sermons that are best read as units. They require a more sustained effort to grasp, and a certain amount of background knowledge is needed fully to appreciate them. The *third category* includes the most difficult works, where the reader must grapple with Isaac's extended philosophical and theological reflections and brave a few long, dry, and unrewarding stretches before discovering Isaac's meaning.

Group One

Sermon 7: a delightful commentary on the passage in Luke's gospel where Jesus at the age of twelve stays behind in Jerusalem.

Sermon 14 on *acedia* gives the reader a glimpse of Isaac's personality and a good introduction to his conception of monastic life.

Sermon 18 on the parable of the sower is Isaac's most straightforward gospel commentary.

The pair of sermons 38–39 on Jesus casting out a demon (Luke 11) shows Isaac at his most perceptive about confronting the demons of inner falsehood (exaltation and pride) and outer falsehood (envy).

Sermon 47, a sermon for the feast of the Birth of John the Baptist, on humility, obedience, and abandonment to God's will.

Sermon 48, which includes Isaac's famous apology, contains a wealth of information about Isaac and the Stella community, along with a pointed lesson on *curiositas*. Sermon 49 introduces a recurring theme in the sermons, namely, the paradox of human existence as dying life and living death.²⁵

Sermon 50, a sort of catechesis on the basic Cistercian observances, is perhaps the most practical and approachable of the sermons.²⁶

Sermon 51 introduces the reader to Isaac's rich ecclesiology and Mariology.

Sermon 54, an incomplete sermon for the feast of the Birth of Mary.

Sermon 55, an example of Isaac's ecclesiology that includes a reflection on the place of contemplative monastic life in the Church.

Fragment 1 is another of Isaac's gospel commentaries, this time on the gifts of the magi at Epiphany.

Fragment 2 is a commentary on Ps 145:7, "The Lord sets the fettered free." Isaac preached this sermon upon his return from a long absence, allegorizing on "exile" as earthly life and "fetters" as worldly desires.

²⁵ Thomas Merton comments on a passage from this sermon in *The Climate of Monastic Prayer*, CS 1 (Spencer, MA: Cistercian, 1969), 137–38.

²⁶ For an analysis of part of this sermon see Domenico Pezzini, "Les quatre piliers de la vie communautaire d'après Isaac de l'Étoile (*Sermon 50,14*)," *Coll 74* (2012): 385–409.

Fragment 3, which reads something like one of Saint Bernard's *Sentences*, is a brief development on four kinds of pride.

Group Two

Sermons 1–6 on the Beatitudes form a beautiful little treatise on the stages of the spiritual life. These profound and serene pages make excellent matter for *lectio divina*.

Sermons 7–15 are a somewhat unified group.

Sermons 11 and 12 form a pair.²⁷

Sermon 13 is an independent entity.

Sermons 15 and 14 should be read in that order.

Sermons 16–17 are a treatise on conversion.

Sermons 27–29, another small treatise, speak of asceticism in an experiential key.²⁸

Sermons 30–32 for the first Sunday of Lent are a commentary on Jesus' temptation in the desert.

Sermons 40–41 are Isaac's Easter homilies.

Sermons 43–45 are for Pentecost.

Sermons 51–53 on the assumption are a remarkable exposition of Isaac's theology of Mary and the Church.

The Letter on the Canon of the Mass fits in well with this second category.²⁹

²⁷ This pair of sermons is discussed at length in Domenico Pezzini, "*Mysterium and Moralitas: A Reading of Isaac of Stella's Sermons 11 and 12 on the Healing of a Leper*," CSQ 44 (2009): 411–29.

²⁸ For a study of this group see Domenico Pezzini, "L'uomo, creatura conflittuale: un percorso di antropologia teologica in tre sermoni (27–29) di Isacco della Stella su Lc 18,31–43," *Benedictina* 59 (2012): 297–332.

²⁹ For an edition and English translation of this text, see Dietz, Isaac of Stella's *Epistola*, 288–307.

Group Three

Sermons 18–26 for Sexagesima are actually a lengthy philosophical and theological treatise on the divine nature. They contain the most demanding passages in Isaac’s sermons.

Sermons 33–37 for the Second Sunday of Lent uses Jesus’ encounter with the Canaanite woman (Matt 15) as the starting point for a treatise on predestination.

Sermon 42 for the Ascension is a good example of Isaac’s Christology and especially his doctrine of the total Christ.

The Treatise on the Soul should also be added to this third category.³⁰

Conclusion

The oft-cited designation of Isaac as “the great mystery among the Cistercians”³¹ is now long outdated. Over the six decades since Louis Bouyer coined that expression there has emerged a more balanced appreciation of the abbot of Stella. Although his life story remains sketchy, we possess more biographical elements for him than for other twelfth-century figures like Gueric of Igny. Isaac, along with the many of his generation who came to the monastery from the schools, was a man of his times, steeped in the patristic heritage but also influenced by contemporary masters like Hugh of Saint-Victor. There were probably many Cistercians of his generation whose monastic lives were enriched by the skills and knowledge they brought with them from the schools. What makes Isaac stand out is the remarkable marriage of these two worlds in his heart and mind. Although his literary output is less voluminous than that of Bernard, William, or Aelred, he deserves a place among them for the sound-

³⁰ For an edition of this text, see Caterina Tarlazzi, “L’*Epistola de anima* di Isacco di Stella: Studio della tradizione ed edizione del testo,” *Medioevo* 36 (2011): 167–278; for an English translation, see Bernard McGinn, ed., *Three Treatises on Man: A Cistercian Anthropology*, CS 24 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1972), 155–77.

³¹ Bouyer, *Cistercian Heritage*, 161.

ness of his monastic teaching, the depth and breadth of his theology, and his skill with words.

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Sermon 27

First Sermon for Quinquagesima Sunday

1. *Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the Gentiles, etc.* Brothers, may the God of our salvation make the journey favorable for us.* For behold, we too are going up to Jerusalem. For this is why we have come down to this island, the last of all lands, ordinary and hidden amid a great sea, beyond which, as the prophet said, there is no other:** so that we may go up to Jerusalem.* Yet not to the earthly Jerusalem, which *is a slave together with her children, but to the heavenly one that is above, free, the mother of all of us,** where no one is a slave, but everyone is a king. For the heavenly Jerusalem in its entirety rules forever as queen with her children, who are kings, and her husband, the king and son of the king.*

*Luke 18:31-32

*Ps 67:20

*Isa 18:2

*Isaac, SS 18–22,
24 (SCh 207:8–
114; CF 11:149–87)

*Gal 4:25–26;
Heb 11:16

*Ps 44:10, 17; 71:1

2. Birds press their entire bodies down against the ground on which they sit when they want to launch themselves upward in flight. This same skill* of nature or kind* of skill—or better, this same natural skill¹—also belongs to people and other animals. When they want to leap high into the air, they bend lower to the ground and crouch down with their entire body. In

*ars

*natura

¹ Literally, “an art of nature or nature of art, or rather a natural art.” The juxtaposition of *ars* and *natura* calls to mind Seneca’s famous dictum, *Omnis ars imitatio naturae est*, or “all art is an imitation of nature” (Seneca, Ep 65.3).

- the same way, we too, aspiring to heaven, have turned away from the civilized world; longing for fullness, we have cast away riches; striving for honors, we have truly been thrown out *like the refuse of this world*.^{*} We who used to seem as though we were something in the world—in the assembly of brothers, too, we were not regarded as nothing—behold, we have been reduced to nothing so that we might truly become something. For now, what memory—I do not even say “opinion”—remains of us in the world?^{*}
- *1 Cor 4:13
- *Bernard, Ep 118 (SBOp 7.298)
- *Ps 30:13
3. For the world has forgotten us *as though* we were dead to its heart.^{*} If only we too would completely forget the world, and it would die in our hearts and from our hearts, so that we could all truly say of the world’s spirit as well as of the physical place, *The world is dead to me, and I to the world*.^{*} If only we would stretch out toward the things in front of us with all our thoughts and eagerness, forgetting in our hearts the things that are behind us just as we have abandoned them with our hands.^{*} If only, pulled back like battering rams, we would spring forward all the more powerfully toward what lies in front of us!
- *Gal 6:14
- *Phil 3:13
4. It is of course a steep climb to get to the place we are struggling to reach; narrow too is the way we are trying to enter. It suits us, then, to be unencumbered and travel lightly. For it is difficult to scale the heights while weighed down or to enter on a narrow way while puffed up. For it would be a divine miracle for riches not to puff us up, for cares not to weigh us down, or for binging not to make us heavy. This is absolutely impossible for human weakness, but for God all things are possible.^{*}
- *Matt 19:26
5. For this reason the gospel continues, *And the Son of Man will be handed over to the Gentiles to be mocked and crucified*.^{*} Our old man, the son of the old man, was crucified with the new Son of Man at that time. As the blessed apostle said, *Our old man was crucified together with him*.^{*} This is why he still needs to be crucified in each of us, beloved, while it is still Friday for us.
- *Luke 18:32-33
- *Rom 6:6

6. For although I am a single human being made up of body and soul, yet I find in myself two sons, the sons of two different stocks: the old son and the new, the earthly and the heavenly, the son of man and the son of God. There is the human son of man begotten carnally, in whom *what was born from the flesh is flesh*,* and the divine son of God begotten spiritually, in whom *what was born from the Spirit is spirit*, or what was born from God is a god. As it is written, *he gave power to human beings to become children of God*.*

*John 3:6

*John 1:12

7. For since we have been created anew by the Holy Spirit and the virgin mother, that is, the church, in what manner are we born if not in a wonderful, new, and divine way? We are wonderfully made new people from what was old, righteous people from sinners, spiritual from what was carnal, gods from human beings, *not born from blood, the will of the flesh, or a man's will, but from God*.*

*John 1:13;

Augustine, In eu
Ioann 3.12
(PL 35:1401); Leo
the Great, S 27.2
(PL 54:217)

*Heb 4:15

8. For just as the eternal God, having become the new man not from nothing or from some foreign material but from the old man, yet not by a man's action, but from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, appeared as the Son of Man *without any sin at all*,* so too it is no wonder—or rather, it is a wonder even more wonderful—that the old son of the old man, who also came not from nothing or from some foreign material, but from the old man himself, yet not by a man's action, but from the same Spirit and the virgin mother the church, is born again as a son of God *through the forgiveness of all his sins*.* But this son hides within us as he hid within him.* The earthly image of the earthly son,[†] the old son of the old man that is in us, is visible outwardly, in the reality of *sinful flesh*, just as it was also visible in him, but in his case in the appearance of *sinful flesh*.*

*Acts 2:38

*Song 4:1;

Ps 44:14

†1 Cor 15:49

*Rom 8:3

9. For he bestowed upon us the conception and birth that he took up for us, from us, and in us.* Thus conceived and born in the same way as he, we might also live, die, and rise again in the same way. For *those who claim to remain in him should walk just as he walked*.*

*Bernard, Pent 2.5
(SBOp 5:168)

*1 John 2:6

10. So he went up to Jerusalem so that the Son of Man whom he appeared to be outwardly could be handed over, scourged, and crucified, and on the third day raised up by the Son of God who hid within. Yet he was one single person, at once man and Son of Man, and God and Son of God. He was a man by grace and God by nature; first God, then man.

11. I too am in my person a single man and in my nature a son of man, whose image appears outwardly, but by God's grace I am a son of God, divine by an inner image and likeness.* It is thus not without reason that I said earlier that I am both single and double, and the one man that I am contains two sons of two stocks.

*Gen 1:26

12. *Abraham too had two sons in one house, one from a slave and the other from a free woman, first the former and then the latter.** For the physical always comes first, and then the spiritual.* And just as, according to the apostle, the older persecuted the younger at that time—although Sarah saw the slave woman's son *playing* with her own son, not persecuting him*—so too the older son persecutes the younger in me today.* In other words, the earlier persecutes the later, the outer persecutes the inner, the physical persecutes the spiritual, Ishmael persecutes Isaac, the slave's son persecutes the free woman's son, and the son of man persecutes the son of God. But he persecutes him by playing, flattering, caressing, and alluring him to base and forbidden behavior that is unsuitable and unbecoming to him.

*Gal 4:22

*1 Cor 15:46

*Gen 21:9

*Gal 4:29

13. *For the flesh fights and desires against the spirit in this way:** not by driving the spirit away from it but by drawing it to itself, not by getting rid of it but by attracting it. As James the apostle says, *Each person is tempted by his concupiscence, drawn away and misled by it.** Here we find the *deceptive kisses of the enemy*, which are much worse than a harsh word or blow from a friend.* So the son of man in me hates and persecutes the son of God, that is, the flesh persecutes the spirit

*Gal 5:17

*Jas 1:14

*Prov 27:6

with deadly flattery and enticements. For this reason it is written, *Their enemies are members of their own household.**

*Matt 10:36

14. But the son of God that I am, the new man, loves the old man in whom he lives and with whom he quarrels. He beats this son of man to correct him, scourges him to punish him, and hands him over to set him free. Because if the son of God sets him free, then the son of man will truly be free.* If he scourges him, he accepts him; if he scolds him, he loves him. Finally, he hands him over to suffering and death, but only to raise him up again on the third day from his liability to suffering and death. In all these ways he mercifully persecutes him without mercy until death with whips and nails, spears and thorns, blows and spittle, taunts and abuse—but he persecutes him in this way to save him rather than to kill him, out of love rather than hatred, out of kindness, with reflection—until he should completely kill him. What Sarah said thus comes to pass, *Throw out the slave girl and her son,** so that only the son of the free promise[‡] and of grace may rule as God's son in his father's house, and *God may be all in all* in abundant peace.*

*John 8:36

*Gen 21:10

‡Gal 4:28

*1 Cor 15:28

15. Therefore, after *we have gone up*, beloved, to the vision of this peace that lies within us—for this is what Jerusalem means—the Son of Man must be handed over to the foreign nations. In other words, our inner man must hand over the outer, and not without a kind of seduction, to the foreign nations, that is, to the discipline and severity of the Rule, to abstinence and vigils, to sackcloth and ashes, to labor and silence, to poverty, low esteem, and the complete authority of another person. These practices must whip and crucify the old man until they kill him completely insofar as his own opinions, will, and former habits are concerned. Dead to sin, he may thus live to righteousness in us with the son of God. That is, we ourselves, utterly *dead to sin* through repentance and raised to new life, *may thus live for righteousness.**

*1 Pet 2:24

16. And so, beloved, let us be cruel and severe toward ourselves, but toward our outer selves, so that we do not displease the cruel, severe judge with both our inner and outer selves.* *If we truly accuse ourselves, Scripture says, if we judge ourselves severely,† if we condemn ourselves harshly, we need not fear any other accuser, we will not displease any other judge, and we will not suffer any other torturer.**

*Bernard,
QH 10.3
(SBOp 4:444–45)
‡1 Cor 11:31

*Bernard, SC 55.3
(SBOp 2:113)

17. Why do we seek pleasure or rest? We are on the cross. Or rather, we used to be in the world; we are now in hell—but a hell of mercy, not of anger—and we will be in heaven. We sinned in the world, we are punished here, and we will rest there. Before, we lived amid pleasures, here among chastisements, and there in glory. Before, we lived in squalor, here in purgation, and there in rest. Why do we seek a pleasant hell? Why, then, did we abandon the easy, delightful world?

18. May our abbot be a father of souls and a torturer of bodies. May he be the father of God’s son in us, his educator, mentor, and guardian *for as long as he is small*. This son will be the heir and will remain in the house as son forever.* But may our abbot be the scourger of the son of man, may he reproach him, may he be his traitor and seducer, may he strip him and finally crucify and bury him.*

*Gal 4:1;
John 8:35

*Col 3:9

19. But if our abbot overlooks us, beloved, then we will be abbots for ourselves, murderers of the son of man but guardians of God’s son, so that he may grow and become *very great*, as we read of Isaac,* and as the apostle says, *Until Christ is formed in us** and *we arrive at the perfect man, at the measure of the age of Christ’s fullness,** who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit as God, forever and ever. Amen.

*Gen 26:13

*Gal 4:19

*Eph 4:13

Sermon 28

Second Sermon for Quinquagesima Sunday

1. The Lord Jesus secretly told his disciples of his passion and resurrection beforehand, but, as the text goes on to say, *they did not understand what he was saying.** And perhaps he spoke to them secretly under the veil of this mystery, because what he says is kept secret from them: *The word was hidden from them, and they understood none of these things.**

*Luke 2:50

*Luke 18:34

2. Such is also the case for me, brothers: I surely understand nothing of the realities of the crucifixion of the son of man in me, of which I so expansively and earnestly spoke yesterday.¹* I have no idea what all my observances and my constant work will amount to, I do not know what their end will be, I do not understand what they point toward or how they will be named in the presence of him who does not need our good deeds.* For often what is noble to people is monstrous to God.*

*Isaac, S 27.5
(SCh 207:142–44)

*Ps 15:2

*Luke 16:15

*merita

3. Yet we cannot doubt that our good works* point to rewards and that all our actions are like a kind of

¹ This reference to another sermon for Quinquagesima Sunday, which would have been delivered at least a year earlier, as having taken place the day before would seem to indicate that the written texts in this collection do not closely reflect orally delivered sermons. Other examples of time references that do not fit a normal calendar of preaching include SS 28.13 and 29.13.

prophecy, as it were, foretelling the things that will come over us, either rewards or punishments. For it will be rendered *to each according to their works*.* And, *We all have to appear before Christ's judgment seat so that we may all receive based on what we have done in the body*.*

*Rev 22:12

*2 Cor 5:10

*Matt 21:31

*Matt 7:22;
25:11-12

‡Matt 20:12

*Matt 20:9-12

4. Yet I see, beloved, that tax-collectors and prostitutes enter God's kingdom* while prophets, virgins, and miracle workers are shut out.* Those who bore *the day's weight and heat*,[‡] too, received nothing more than those who worked for an hour, and they received their reward later.* Noting all of this, I confess that I do not understand at all what I am really doing in all my activities, and I do not know whether I deserve love or hatred,* even if I were to perform every good deed and withstand evil.

*Ecll 9:1; Bernard,
SC 23.13; 37.6;

42.4 (SBOp
1:147; 2:12, 35)

*Isaac, S 38.20

(SCh 207:318)

‡1 Cor 14:10;

Isaac, S 25.4

(SCh 207:118)

5. O secret word, so hidden, which can be neither silent nor known! Deeds are words.* they all cry out, *and nothing is without a voice*.[‡] But we have not yet heard what the end of this utterance will be. We therefore do not understand what the meaning of it all is, what it points to. The meaning depends on how the utterance ends.

6. Every sentence is incomplete until its end, approved of at its end, answered at its end, and judged by its end. Before the end, everything remains uncertain and in flux; before the end, what has been wickedly spoken can be corrected, what is omitted can be added, what is excessive can be trimmed, and what is well said can be spoiled. The end brings to a close, fixes, and completes all things, so that before the end we can define only recklessly what any given thing might be.

*Ecll 9:2

*Ecll 11:3;

Bernard, Div 85
(SBOp 6:326)

‡Isaac, S 23.16

(SCh 207:94)

7. All things are thus left unfinished for the future, beloved.* But a tree will lie wherever it happens to fall, be it to the right or to the left. If it falls to the south or to the north,* its place is there before the Lord, to whom nothing is past, nothing is future.[‡] Everything that we experience comprises a single point or a mo-

ment;* everything that we do in such different and varied ways is one work, whose end the Lord awaits and will judge: *The Lord will judge the ends of the earth*, Scripture says.*

*see Seneca,
Ep 49.3

8. The beginnings and middles of things are in motion, changeable, and, because of this, free from judgment. The end fixes all things, and all things are fixed by their end.* *Those who persevere until the end will be saved.*† Many people's painstaking righteousness carried out over a long period of time will be forgotten because of a change at the end.‡ Such people do not accomplish‡ anything, because they do not follow through° to the end, or, rather, they only accomplish what they follow through in doing and bring to completion. But because they have abandoned the rest, which they began but did not complete, they themselves have deserved to be abandoned.

*1 Sam 2:10;
Isaac, S 18.17
(SCh 207:22)

*see Ambrose,
Bon mor 8.35 (PL
14:566); Gregory
the Great, Eu
38.14 (PL 76:1290)
†Matt 10:22;
Isaac, S 18.17
(SCh 207:22)
#Bernard, PP 2.6
(SBOp 5:195)
‡egerunt
°peregunt

9. So *everything born of God does not sin*,* because what is born of him does not continue in sin up until the end.* Thus the spirit of the Lord did not depart from David after the day he anointed him,* because he never departed from him definitively: he came back, he continued to the end. So too, the Lord prayed that Peter's faith would not fail* and said to him along these lines, *And you, once converted, strengthen your brothers.*‡ You see that the apostle's faith, which failed so greatly that he denied three times to a slave woman that he knew someone whom he had been following for three years, is by no means said to have failed. For *once he converted* to him, he did not definitively fall away from faith.

*1 John 3:9

*perpecco
*1 Sam 16:13

*Augustine,
Cor grat 8.17
(PL 44:926)
‡Luke 22:32

10. Because of these and similar considerations, beloved, I was in no way wrong to say that I do not understand at all what I do of my own initiative or what I suffer in myself, but everything that pertains to me is completely hidden from me. We must ask you, good Jesus, to perform some sure and unambiguous sign in our presence to overturn our doubts. In this

way, you enlightened the man who was physically blind in the presence of your disciples, who were still mentally blind. Through that tangible miracle, the disciples could believe without doubt that the doubtful things they had heard would come to pass.

11. *When Jesus had drawn near to Jericho, Scripture says, a certain blind man was sitting by the side of the road, etc.* They say that Jericho means moon.†* When the one with sight had drawn near to the moon, the blind man drew near to the sun: the former to darkness, for the moon is relatively dark, the latter to the sun, which is all light and in which there is absolutely no darkness.‡ The former drew near to diminution, the latter to growth; the former to changeability, the latter to stability. And, if we may put it thus, the former drew near to foolishness, and the latter to wisdom. For the foolish person changes like the moon, but the wise person endures like the sun.*

*Luke 18:35

†Jerome, Nom

(PL 23:842A);

Gregory the

Great, Eu 2.2

(PL 76:1082)

#1 John 1:5; Isaac

SS 17.5; 22.5

(Sch 130:312–14;

207:64–66)

*Sir 27:12

12. But to be brief, however much God as the Son of God was emptied out to become a human being in the Lord Jesus, to the same degree was humanity lifted up in the Son of Man to become God. For when the time of the holy and saving incarnation, established before time, drew near, Divinity stood and saw blind humanity sitting in the darkness.* He ordered the holy angels to bring humanity to him,* and he shone his light upon it. He did this so that humanity would not beg far away from the road in its need, mentally blind and sluggish. Rather, bright and strong, it would stay on the road, exulting in the fullness of light dwelling bodily in it.* It would rejoice and glorify God, finally led back to what it was once made to be.

*Ps 106:10

*Luke 18:40

*Col 2:9

13. But, beloved, in the same way as the Savior's works were performed to redeem us, so too do we believe they were recorded to teach us. They were performed to heal us and written down to instruct us, *for whatever has been written down was written down for our instruction.** Thus, following the narrative above,

*Rom 15:4

we find that each of us is at the same time both seeing and blind, both walking forward and lying down. Accordingly, the last sermon shows that we are composite beings and twins.*

*Isaac S 27.6
(SCh 207:144)

14. For our Hittite mother, following the counsel of the wicked,* that is, the counsel of her own concupiscence and the hissing of a snake, threw our Amorite father off the road.* For when he obeyed a woman's voice rather than God's, he clearly strayed from the road, that is, from obedience, by which alone one walks in truth to life.* We have received a share from each of them. We have thus always lived badly like our mother, and, even worse, we have lain prostrate like our father: we did badly when we could see and proceeded along the road, and worse when, blind, we lay prone, begging off the road.

*Ps 1:1

*Ezek 16:3, 45

*John 14:6

15. Yet when the one with sight draws near to Jericho, the blind one is restored to the light. In short, when disobedience to God above and obedience to a woman below blinded our inner person to understanding, our outer person was enlightened for concupiscence. But when our outer person grows sick of concupiscence and begins to abandon it, our inner person naturally grows strong in understanding and is brought to growth. The inner person is a kind of man and the image of God, while the outer is a woman and an image of man.*

*Isaac, SS 4.17;
6.14 (SCh
130:140–42, 172)
†Gen 3:7
#1 Cor 2:15
*Gen 2:19

16. Scripture does not say that *the eyes of both were open* before committing sin.† Only the man, as a kind of spiritual being discerning all things,# saw what to call everything.* But the outer person is physical even before sin and has neither the vision of the Creator nor looks at creation with discernment as does the inner person, who contemplates the Creator with the eye of understanding and examines creation with the eye of reason.* With one of his eyes ruined by the beam of disobedience and the other clouded by the speck of obedience,* this raging blind person lies begging

*Isaac, SS 4.7; 9.4
(SCh 130:134,
206–8)
*Matt 7:3

by the side of the road, howling, *My wicked deeds have held me fast, and I have been unable to see.** And elsewhere, *My eye was clouded by rage.*† And as if you had asked why he was lying down and not at least walking, the blind person says, *My heart was troubled, my strength abandoned me, and even the light of my eyes is not with me.**

*Ps 39:13;
Isaac S 9.4
(SCh 130:206–8)
‡Ps 6:8

*Ps 37:11; Isaac, S
4.2 (SCh 130:130)

*Gen 3:7

17. But when it says that *the eyes of both were opened* after sinning,* what can it mean except that the inner person is dragged away with the outer person through ambition, curiosity, and pleasure, that it is made carnal with the flesh, physical with the physical, blind to God, attentive to the world, dull to knowledge, and receptive to concupiscence? The man who has lost his own eyes can only make use of* the eyes of a woman. For shame! A woman has become a man's head, a wife her husband's leader, and just as *the eyes of the wise are in their heads,** so too the eyes of a foolish man are in his wife's head, and through her his eyes are *at the ends of the earth.**

**coutitur*

*Eccl 2:14

*Prov 17:24

*John 3:31

18. For our outer man, the son of man by himself, *is from the earth* and, being earthly, *speaks earthly things.** He behaves in an earthly manner and thinks about what is earthly. Seeing and tasting the things from which he arose, he takes pleasure in the earthly. But the inner man, who had once been able to perceive with his eyes, approach with his feet, and grasp with his hand what was from the Creator, now sits blind and weak, begging for some apprehension of the truth. He seeks this truth either *from creation,** by searching for the maker *through what was made* with a cry of exertion,† as it were, or from the learned, by seeking outside himself from a teacher what he bore within written by God.‡ He can neither approach the light of truth at all unless he departs from the darkness of vanity, nor can the inner man progress unless the outer man begins to fade away. For the moon, which is what *Jericho* means,* well represents the fading away of the inner man's concupiscence.

*Isaac, Anima
(PL 1883CD);
Augustine,
Lit gen 11.34.46
(PL 34:448)

†Rom 1:20
‡Isaac, S 9.2–4
(SCh 130:206–8)

*Jerome, Nom
(PL 23:842A)

19. Therefore, at the moment and to the extent that the outer man abandons his form of concupiscence with which *he desires against the spirit*,* then and to that extent does the inner man advance to his form of concupiscence by which he desires *against the flesh*. When the flesh draws near the darkening of its light, the spirit approaches the enlightening of its darkness.* However, it is impossible to do all this without the intervention of him who would bear the former away but would bring near the latter. As the psalmist, begging, shouts to the Father, *Send your light and your truth: they have drawn me away and led me to your holy mountain and your tent*.* Let Christ lead us there, beloved, for he is the light and the truth sent to us, and lives and reigns with the Holy Spirit as God. Amen.

*Gal 5:17

*see Gregory the Great, Eu 32.2 (PL 76:1234)

*Ps 42:3

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